

A 100,000 Dollar Trance

by Eugene Shade Bisbee, 1864-1933

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A HALF dozen greeting voices rang out from the group who were toasting themselves before the blazing fireside of the Bohemian Club, as Lloyd entered and approached them with his easy stride.

"Heard the news, haven't you, Lloyd?" asked one of the toasting group.

"I can't say—which news, Barton?" returned the other, at the same time accepting a hot toddy from the hand of an attendant.

"Of course I mean the news about our distinguished guest for the evening, Dr. Goode."

"I heard he was to be here, if that's what you mean; anything else?"

"Only that we are to have something entirely new on hypnotism, psychology, and occultism—what you will—in fact, our eyes are to be profoundly opened, if the word of our distinguished friend and president is to be taken; for Norris says the learned doctor will spring a few things on us that will put us to thinking."

"Coals to Newcastle, my dear boy—an old story—all the fellows have it, and are on the *qui vive* to catch the first news. I just came from the HOLLAND, and Claridge and Wentworth had me collar and elbow for an hour about it; 'twas all I could do to get away at all. Time the old fellow was here, isn't it?"

Lloyd glanced at the clock over the fireplace, handed his emptied glass to the servant, and then, first looking inquiringly about the room, dropped into a rocker, drew a cigarette from his pocket, struck a match, and settling himself comfortably, was at once one of the waiting assembly, all alert for the next comer.

His last inquiry was answered by the appearance of the man in question—Dr. Goode—who came in with Norris, the genial president of the club, and with a nod to the group passed on toward the library.

The Bohemian Club was an organization of talented men in varied walks of life, who had, for mutual advantage and pleasure, leagued themselves together into one of these gregarious associations which find so much favor in big cities. Hidden away in the very heart of the metropolis, the club was as much apart from its noise and traffic as if it had been ensconced beneath the green foliage of some South Sea isle; within its portals were to be found treasures no other could boast; pictures hung upon its walls which bore signatures world-famous in the new and reigning school; and, best of all, these very men were to be found beside the cheery fireside. Original manuscripts of celebrated books, and scores of operas, popular songs, masterpieces of sculpture, volumes of prose and poetry, all bearing their authors' signatures, filled the rooms, until the cozy place was a veritable museum of autographical treasure. No great man became its guest who did not leave with the club some such impress of his visit, and none touched our shores who failed to share its hospitality. Its membership was limited to a score, but upon the occasion of its monthly dinners, each member was entitled to a card of invitation for one friend; and the character of the entertainment offered was of such a nature that these cards were most eagerly sought.

On this particular night there was not a single vacant chair when the president opened the festivities with the formal "Gentlemen, I greet you," in a small "sherry-and-bitters," which was drunk by all standing. Then for an hour or more the thirty odd of us devoted ourselves to one of the club's famous dinners, spiced by a merry story, half overheard here and there, told by some one to his neighbor, and the occasional response to an impromptu toast suggested à propos by another. Finally, when the last course had been served and the brandy and coffee gave place to sparkling champagne, our president arose, and, smilingly bowing to us all first, and then toward the guest upon his right, said, "Gentlemen, allow me to present to you one whose name alone, long since become a by-word in the scientific world, honored us by his presence to-night, Dr. Richardson Goode, of London."

A burst of applause greeted his words, as Dr. Goode arose and faced the company. The appearance of the man would have claimed attention anywhere: tall and powerfully made, he dominated the assembly not merely by his figure, but by a face whose most striking feature was a pair of piercing gray eyes that gleamed from beneath bushy black brows. To add to this impression of strength, the smooth-shaven face was deeply lined, the jaw was square and determined; in fact, his whole presence was both massive and imposing.

As his eyes wandered with an amiable gleam from face to face until they fell on my own, I seemed to feel that they were looking right *into* me rather than merely at me, and I recall wondering at the time if others felt their influence in the same way. But there was small time for such speculation then, for, in a full, deep voice, that eminently became the man, he began a talk on the new developments of hypnotism, that, as he warmed to his subject, became so intensely interesting as to rivet the entire attention of his audience and hold them spellbound. Of course we had all seen and read of experiments in this subtle science, but none of us had ever heard of such marvelous results as Dr. Goode claimed not only to have witnessed, but to actually be able to accomplish himself.

Receiving our silent acknowledgment of the fact that many things could be achieved through hypnotic suggestion, he went so far as to state that it was entirely possible to cause any disease to actually manifest itself upon a subject to whom it had been suggested, while under the spell of the operator, that he had the disease. He claimed that the entire physical organism of man was so influenced by the brain that results suggested would speedily follow the trial. A man to whom liquor was a most nauseating dose, drank it greedily and with most evident enjoyment when told by the doctor that he was very fond of it.

This we could not gainsay, but if his assertions had up to this point met with no open opposition, so much cannot be said for the startling one which we were called upon to accept in childlike faith a moment later, and there were many incredulous smiles and a few open laughs and cries of "No, doctor, that's too much," and, "Come, come, now, go it gently, doctor," to which he only smiled patronizingly, at once taking another tack.

At this point his eyes wandered about the company, until presently he was looking intently at, and, to all appearances, addressing himself solely to, me. As I listened, I found his words grow confusing; I wondered if the champagne or the heat of the room had made me drowsy. Then gradually, as I looked into those gleaming, deep-set eyes, his voice grew faint and far away, the objects in the room faded until I could see nothing clearly except that massive, smooth-shaven face with the lamplight shining full upon it. Finally that, too, receded, until, as I tried uselessly to arouse myself from what I felt to be a most unbecoming position, I saw only two burning coals of fire gleaming at me from apparent space; then I knew no more.

Whether my unconscious state had lasted ten minutes or as many years I never could have told, but later, from the others, I learned that I had been asleep about five minutes. It was with no surprise, however, that I found myself again looking at the master of this art, and when I heard him say, "Now, Mr. Brooke, let me have that cheque, please."

I found I held a paper in my hand, which I passed up to him without an instant's hesitation. He read aloud a cheque payable to himself and bearing my signature; it was for a large sum and drawn on the bank in which I was a partner. My amazement must have shown itself in my face, for he smilingly passed it back to me and asked me if it was my signature. I was bound to acknowledge it. "But where did I get the pen and ink, doctor?" I cried, thinking I had him.

"Oh, you went into the library and wrote it," he answered—a statement in which he was upheld by the entire assembly.

Norris here interrupted with a question which brought us all back to that assertion of the doctor's which had met with such skeptical reception. This was nothing more nor less than the claim that his was the power to so thoroughly infuse the mind of a subject with a certain idea as to make that idea become a fixed fact, and the desired result follow; which assertion was crowned by the statement that the brain having sole control of the physical being, if he should suggest to some young man, the subject of hypnotic trance, that he was an old man, decrepit and feeble, his subject would become so thoroughly imbued with the idea that physical transformation would follow, and a young man would grow old before our very eyes.

"I don't mind laying any reasonable wager against such a power, doctor," said our president.

"Very well," answered the doctor, "I am quite ready to accept your proposition, providing a subject can be secured who is willing to assume the risk, for I tell you frankly I do not believe that I can restore to him his youth. We may fell the sturdy oak, but who can restore it? We may destroy the most magnificent works of Nature, but who has the power to create even the most insignificant?"

A soft, musical voice broke gently in upon him, saying, "Gentlemen, I'll make you both a proposition; I am ready to have Dr. Goode try his powers on me, with one proviso, that the winner give me his winnings."

The voice belonged to Lloyd, and the attention of the entire company was attracted by his offer. One of the brightest stars among the younger journalists, his many exploits in that enterprising profession were well known to his friends and indeed to the public, but it seemed beyond belief that he would run the risk of losing his youth and strength at one blow for the sake of journalistic fame or even for a fortune, large or small. Yet the desire of the company for the experiment was at such a heat that cries of "Bravo! Good for Lloyd!" rang out, for a full minute drowning Norris's attempted reply. When finally he could make himself heard, he said, "Well, doctor, for my part, I will accept Mr. Lloyd's offer, and if I lose the wager, will present him with whatever sum you may mention."

"This is perfectly agreeable to me, Mr. President; and since the gentleman assumes such a risk of living fifty years in half as many minutes, I would suggest that we make the sum a large one for the sake of the beneficiary; would \$100,000 be satisfactory?"

Ordinarily the sum named might have excited comment, but as the doctor's wealth was reported fabulous, while Norris was known to be a triple millionaire, the size of the wager seemed nothing extraordinary, and it was accepted in a moment.

"And now, gentlemen," proceeded Dr. Goode, "I must ask absolute quiet and perfect attention; you must all aid me by remaining as nearly passive as possible. As for you, Mr. Lloyd, you must give yourself quite entirely to me and not endeavor to thwart me; though," this with a confident smile, "you cannot do that if you will."

Then followed a discourse upon the power of the brain over the body, a discourse so interesting, so impressive, in short, so magnetic, that Lloyd was almost forgotten, when our attention was restored to the subject of the experiment

by the doctor saying, "Now, my friend, you are not feeling very well, but it will not last long; you will soon gain more strength, but, at your age, you cannot hope to recover as rapidly as in your youth; let me see, how old did you say you were? Oh, yes; seventy on your last birthday, so it was. Well, well, that's a very good old age, though your beard is not very white yet."

I sat directly opposite Lloyd, and when the doctor made this remark about the beard, I noted that the young journalist *had* a beard, which rather confused me, for I had always thought he wore only a moustache. Meantime, Dr. Goode kept talking to him in a monotonous tone. Lloyd's eyes were closed, and he lay back in his chair as if in sleep.

I cannot recall distinctly what the doctor said, but as I looked I fancied a change crossed the features of the subject; he surely did not look so young as he used. I was watching him closely, forgetful of everything save the fact that some strange fascination kept my eyes on his face. Yes, beyond a doubt, there had been some change taking place in not only his face, but his whole body, something I felt but failed to grasp. As I struggled to define the change, much as one endeavors to recall an indistinct dream, I was suddenly aware of the doctor's voice saying, "You are quite bald, aren't you, Mr. Lloyd?" and saw that person put his hand up to his head. It was actually bald, with a heavy fringe of snow-white hair ending just above his ears! I saw it distinctly, but, as I recalled afterward, it gave me no shock, but rather came as a natural sequence of the whole evening's occurrences. Then the deep voice again monotoned.

"Will you kindly step over to the mirror, Mr. Lloyd?"

And still unmoved, I saw that it was an old man who left the chair and tottered around the table to the mirror over the fireplace! He smiled as he moved, but looked at none of us. When he reached that point and looked at his reflection in the glass, he turned around, and, with a cackling chuckle to the company, said, "Well, Mr. Norris, the experiment has been rather a success, don't you think?" and Norris, without a word, rose from his chair, stepped into the library for a moment, returned, and handed him a cheque. If I thought anything of his silence, it was that he was too agitated for words.

Lloyd put the cheque in his pocket, chuckled after the manner of an old man, and in a cackling voice said, "Now I hope you will excuse me, gentlemen; I'm not feeling very strong, ha! ha! ha! I'll have to get you to identify me in the morning, Mr. Norris."

He ambled across the room, the door closed behind him; he was gone. With his departure the nature of the monstrous experiment we had just witnessed seemed, for the first time, to burst upon us. In a moment all our excited interest was transformed into a sickening horror, and with a common impulse we rushed panic-stricken out of the door and into the night.

We never saw Lloyd again, but we heard from him. Just a month after, our president arose at our dinner, and, drawing a letter from his pocket, said, "Gentlemen, I have a letter here from our late friend, Lloyd; it came to-day, and fully explains itself; it is as follows:

"Caracas, Venezuela, Jan. 20, 18—.

"Fellow-Members of the Bohemian Club:

"In writing to inform you of the death of Dr. Richardson Goode, of London, on his way to this place to join me, I am able to add a line which will explain to you the remarkable experiment of which you were witnesses less than a month ago. During my last visit to London, I met the late doctor at a lecture, and, becoming deeply interested in his wonderful powers, cultivated his acquaintance with a view to perfecting myself in the art. To some extent, I succeeded, and have, on several occasions—notably, the last time we dined together at the Bohemian Club—been of considerable assistance to him in influencing his subjects when he was experimenting on several simultaneously. The doctor learned his profession by long years of deep study in India, and I think you will agree with me when I say that he learned it well.

"Knowing his power as I did, an idea flashed across me. I needed money; journalism was too tedious a road to wealth; I wrote to Dr. Goode and made him a proposition. Being not over-scrupulous, he accepted it on half shares, and at once sailed for New York. The result of his trip and consequent introduction to the Bohemian Club you all know.

"My dear boys, it was a put-up job; he did not hypnotize me at all; I did not grow old; he hypnotized you—every one of you, with my humble aid—and made you believe you saw it all— my aging, the tottering across the room, the bald head and cackling laugh; yes, you saw it all during hypnotic sleep! I was forced to leave you rather abruptly, owing to the waning power of the doctor over so many. Of course I needed no identification at the bank, since I had changed none, and I readily cashed the cheque and sailed for this place. But I shall leave here at once; I have made my fortune now, and intend to run no risk of prison bars, for I have bought a fine plantation in a near-by country where extradition does not obtain, and shall settle down and become an ideal cocoa planter. I dare say I shall marry one of the many beautiful señoritas of the country, and if any of you boys ever find your way down here and should run across me, you will find no heartier welcomer or more hospitable host than

"Your late companion,

"Greville Lloyd."

