

THE SOLITARY HOUSE

A Mystery Story By E. R. PUNSHON

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THIS STARTS THE STORY Keith Norton, teamster, makes himself at home at the Solitary House and there receives visitors. The first, a girl, asks for her sister, searches the house, and faints at the sight of something unknown to her.

AND HERE IT CONTINUES

THE nurse wanted some food warmed, and as she could not leave her patient, who was in a very disturbed and excited state, she said, Keith offered to undertake the task. He did not know much about cooking, but he managed very successfully, and when he had taken what he had prepared upstairs he went and sat in the hall so as to be at hand if anything else was wanted.

It seemed to him this new development made the situation even more complicated than before. If the injured girl had lost her memory as the nurse declared, she would not be able to explain anything. True, she would also not contradict his claim to be her brother, but what was he to do with a strange girl, of whom he knew nothing and who had lost her memory, to look after, with a store of hidden treasures to protect, and with near at hand some strange lurking hostile creature prowling and ready to make a fresh murderous attack at the first opportunity? He did not know in the very least what action to take.

And then suppose the missing Mr. Wentworth made his appearance, as presumably he might do at any minute? Keith found himself whistling softly at the thought. Apparently Mr. Wentworth, whoever he might be, had offended or injured the unconscious girl upstairs in some very grave manner to judge from the contempt she had shown toward Keith when taking her to the street, and yet she could not know Wentworth personally, or the mistake she had made would have been impossible. Possibly, then, Wentworth would not recognize her either, or even he might not know anything about her.

Keith gave up trying to find any ray out of the extraordinary position in which he found himself. It did not appear to him that he could possibly extricate himself from the situation in which he was entangled, and he decided that there was nothing for it except to wait quietly the course of events, and meanwhile do what he could to help an unfortunate girl thrown so strangely into his care. If he recovered, things would no doubt be clearer.

That much decided, he felt more cheerful, and he was kept fairly busy for the rest of the day by the nurse, who appeared to have many requirements both for herself and for her patient, and of whom he expected him to satisfy them all.

Fortunately she was able to report her patient as being much calmer now and inclined to sleep. Late in the afternoon the doctor came back. He was in a great hurry, he explained, as he had a number of very important cases on his hands. On the whole he seemed fairly satisfied with his patient's physical condition, but less so with her mental state, which apparently bothered him a good deal.

"Not that loss of memory is an unusual result of bad concussion," he said, "but there are a number of cases that are very unusual and that I hardly understand as yet. Miss Wentworth's loss of knowledge of her identity is very complete, but otherwise her faculties do not seem injured, and yet she is in a most unstable and nervous condition without there being anything apparent to account for it. It was as if she had a certain private trouble," answered Keith cautiously, thinking of what she had said about her missing sister, "but not any shock exactly that I know of."

The doctor asked one or two more questions, to which Keith replied as best he could, but necessarily vaguely since he knew so little. This vagueness and hesitation the doctor evidently felt and resented, for he remarked shortly that he could do little if he did not receive absolute confidence. Keith managed to soothe him to some extent by professions of the most complete confidence, and the doctor, after repeating some of the instructions he had given the nurse and emphasizing especially that the patient was to be kept quiet and that all excitement of any kind was to be most carefully avoided, hurried off in his car.

Later the nurse came down to say that Miss Wentworth was in a sound sleep, and that she thought she would take the opportunity to get herself some tea. She seemed a very talkative person, and she mentioned casually as she chatted on that she had found the name "Esme" marked on some of the girl's clothing.

"Very pretty name, too," said the nurse, "but, lor', sir, when I said it the poor young lady didn't know it for her own. She might be just a newborn baby, so she might."

Keith was very well able to give this undertaking, and he went accordingly into the room where the injured girl was lying. She was still very pale, and her eyes looked strangely bright against the pallor of her countenance, but her appearance was not now that of death. Her character which had so alarmed him before. She was very weak still, and when she spoke her voice was no more than a whisper.

"How are you feeling?" he asked, standing over her.

"I don't know," she murmured, "my

head aches * * * are you * * * is it you they say is my brother?" "Yes," he answered.

"I don't remember you," she said distrustfully. "I don't remember you at all. I thought if you were my brother I would remember you, but I don't."

"You mustn't worry," he answered. "It will all come back to you very soon. You see you've had a fall, and the doctor says that people often forget things when they have had a fall."

"Forget who they are?" she asked. "Yes," he answered; "it's quite common; nothing to worry about at all. You will remember everything in time; only you must be patient and keep as quiet and restful as you can. It's only the effect of your fall, you know."

She gazed herself a little on the bed and looked at him very intently and searchingly. He thought to himself that hers were the dearest, clearest, most penetrating eyes he had ever seen, and now that he had no longer that expression of hard scorn they had shown toward him before, he saw also that

the name in the hope that it might arouse some dormant recollection, he thrilled in every pulse of his being to hear it come so softly from her lips.

"I think you had better go now, sir," interrupted the nurse. "Miss Wentworth is not strong enough to talk any longer."

"I am very tired, so tired," she admitted. She put out her hand. "Good-by—Keith," she said.

"Good-by, Esme," he answered, and took her hand and held it for a moment in both his, with a warmth that was perhaps a little more than brotherly.

She seemed in some obscure way to feel it, for she withdrew her hand a little quickly and then, as though repining her brusqueness, gave him a smile that seemed to him like a divine enchantment. He took the memory of it very clearly with him as he left the room.

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helped her as far as he could to get what was necessary. He promised also to leave his own door open and to be ready to answer any call.

"They do say that there wood," the nurse observed—"but such like stories are all rubbish, that's what I say. I was never one to listen to 'em, either."

She seemed indeed very contemptuous of the stories that were told about File's Wood and very emphatic in declaring that no one of any sense paid them any attention.

"Though it's all along of such talk," she added, "that the house here was empty so long as it was."

"Oh, was it empty long?" Keith asked.

"Years," answered the nurse. "The gentleman that had it before you appeared one day, and after that no one would live here. Folks say he went for a walk in the wood and from that hour he was never seen or heard of

all up at once, or if the Wentworth man comes back at any time. And if the poor child doesn't recover her memory and if no one turns up here—well, what on earth am I to do? I would like to get a good deal," he mused, "there never was quite such a predicament as this I've got into."

But thinking about it made it no better, and at last from sheer exhaustion he fell asleep and dreamed that Esme smiled at him and called him "Keith" once more in her low sweet voice that changed suddenly into a cry so loud and shrill that he leaped from the bed with it still ringing wildly in his ears.

He dashed from the room into the passage. The door of the sick room was open, and by the dim light of the turned-down lamp he could see the nurse, half dressed, lying on the floor in a faint and Esme sitting up in bed looking very frightened and upset.

"What's the matter?" he said. "I don't know, I don't know," she faltered. "I was asleep and some one screamed, and I woke up and the nurse fell down like that. Oh, dear, what can have happened?"

She was trembling violently and was plainly very much alarmed, and Keith told her to lie down again and did his best to soothe her. He was very angry that she had been disturbed and startled in such a manner by the very person put there to shield her against disturbance, and to revive the prostrate nurse he adopted the drastic procedure of pouring a jug half full of water over her. She sat up at once, gasping and shivering.

"Oh, oh," she moaned, "oh, oh." "What on earth * * * ?" demanded Keith angrily.

"It was the devil," she whispered, "the devil himself—he opened the door and looked straight at me."

"Nonsense," said Keith; "don't talk such rubbish."

"Well, he did," the nurse muttered; "he opened the door and looked at me—I saw him as plain as ever I saw anything."

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(CONTINUED TOMORROW)

ON BLANK STREET

On Blank street, while walking along in my ease I saw the good housewife buy celery, peas, Potatoes, tomatoes, French pastry, string beans, Suspenders, pearl buttons, beef, mutton, fresh greens, Silk neckties, silk stockings, grapes, handkerchiefs, prunes, Gold watches, pink slippers, sweet chocolate, spoons, Near leather suitcases, umbrellas, fresh fish— In fact, nearly everything housewives could wish.

On Blank street the vendors were busy as bees; Some red as their beets and some strong as their cheese; All races, all colors, all creeds were arrayed In commerce's line in the army of trade. Some shouted like prophets, like troopers some swore; Some shouted for profit, some shouted some more. As thick and as worried as chicks in a pen, All sorts and conditions of women and men.

On Blank street the boys play all over the place. Their tongues running Babel the liveliest race. They clutch at your coat and get under your feet And give you heart-failure while crossing the street. The Lamp of Old Glory they're building anew! A melting pot?—maybe—but surely a stew! In the great race of life every kid has a show— But Blank street's a bit of a handicap, lo!

GRIF ALEXANDER.

DOROTHY DARNIT—She Got the Answer, All Right

"I'M NOT SURE—BUT THIS LOOKS LIKE JAM—"

"SMELLS LIKE JAM—"

"TASTES LIKE JAM—"

"IT WAS—"

again, and there's some do say it was the devil got him, but of course that's just silly talk and I'm sure I don't believe a word of it."

Though she was so sure she did not believe the story, she appeared somewhat inclined to dwell upon it, and she very plainly and thoroughly approved of the careful way in which Keith secured all doors and windows for the night. About eleven she retired, reporting before she did so that her patient was still asleep; and Keith, undressing no more than to remove his coat, lay down on his bed, with the door of his room open so as to be ready for any summons.

He was very tired, but his mind was full of so many and such disturbing thoughts that he felt no inclination to sleep, and he lay awake for hours, perceiving, but for all his hard thinking he could see nothing it was possible for him to do except to wait what should happen next.

"But it's a jolly awkward position," he said to himself, "and if poor little Esme gets her memory back it will be

As the picture ran on, Peggy saw a huge man come dashing down a steep hill dragging behind him a jouncing, swaying two-wheeled cart in which sat a young girl. The huge man was the Mighty Bronze Genie and the girl was quickly the picture told the who's story of her visit to Story Book Land, her greeting by Red Beard, her dining of the wedding feast, the arrival of Red Beard's horsemen with Cinderella and the other captive heroines, the choice of herself as the first bride

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"Seven-league boots!" exclaimed Peggy to herself. Afterward she learned that they were not really seven-league boots, but were seventy-foot boots, for with every step he took he could go that far.

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"Run, Genie! Run, Billy!" she screamed. Strange to say, the Genie and Billy seemed to hear her, for they jumped up in a hurry and looked back at the coming Turk. Billy vaulted to Bally Sam's back, while the Genie, reaching out his arms, most astonishingly picked Peggy out of the audience, drew her into the picture and set off in wild flight before Red Beard.

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Dreamland Adventures

By DADDY

"RED BEARD'S BOOTS"

(In this story Peggy has a rollicking adventure in a region where every child loves to go—Morieland. And there she meets again characters with whom she became acquainted in last week's story.)

THROUGH THE SCREEN

PEGGY was at a moving-picture show. It was rather a sleepy film, and she was nodding a bit over it when all of a sudden a scene flashed upon the screen that made her cry out in amazement. There was Red Beard's castle, and sitting upon the lawn in front of it was Red Beard himself, surrounded by his slaves and attendants. His piggy eyes were squinting right at Peggy. Just as he had squinted when he had told her that she was to be one of his ten brides. Even in a picture he looked so evil she couldn't help shuddering.

As the picture ran on, Peggy saw a huge man come dashing down a steep hill dragging behind him a jouncing, swaying two-wheeled cart in which sat a young girl. The huge man was the Mighty Bronze Genie and the girl was quickly the picture told the who's story of her visit to Story Book Land, her greeting by Red Beard, her dining of the wedding feast, the arrival of Red Beard's horsemen with Cinderella and the other captive heroines, the choice of herself as the first bride

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BRUNO DUKE, Solver of Business Problems

By HAROLD WHITEHEAD, Author of "The Business Career of Peter Flint," etc.

THE PROBLEM OF THE OUTSIDE COMPETITION

A Hard Nut to Crack IT WAS 10:30 o'clock before Merriweather Jackson was at liberty the next morning. Two salesmen called to see him. I was glad to see that, although he was quite free and easy with them, he did not let them sway his judgment. It showed that he was a good business man, and could be relied on to act reasonably in trying out any suggested plan for meeting Easterly's serious competition.

When he finally disposed of the routine business we adjourned to his own office.

I began the session by saying: "Last night, Mr. Jackson, you told me that you put on your spring fashion sale a week ahead of Easterly's—and the society women all waited to see what Easterly had. What did you do the second fall?"

"Ah," he gave a sarcastic laugh. "I thought I'd be real clever. I planned my fall opening to be a week after Easterly's. I advertised it well, too. Easterly's only sent out their usual 'invitation' to their fall display. They brought several manikins with them as usual, and, of course, all the