

MEDAL.

Sam was the last person one would think might be interested in the occult, palmistry, and the Tarot cards, yet he always hovered round fair grounds and garden fetes looking for that little, square tent with the front flap open showing a table covered with a coloured cloth on which there invariably glowed a dim light.

Seated at the table would be the mysterious figure of the "seer". She would sometimes be wearing a turban on her head but, at other times, she would look so ordinary that Sam doubted her ability to do more than play whist at the local church hall. Yet, he always went into the tent with a piece of silver in his hand. Sam was a short, stocky man with a square chin, mild hazel eyes, half hidden by horn rimmed glasses, and a head of silvery curly hair. Yes, he always went into the fortune telling tent.

This, was not he used to say, that he wanted to know what Life had in store for him, as he was at the time I am telling you of, about sixty years old, fairly happily married with four grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren. No, he would say, he was just interested in the science of the Tarot cards and crystal ball. Each time he consulted the "seer", he was told that he should "let his left hand know a little more of what his right hand was doing."

"My left hand knows enough to earn my bread and butter," he would laugh, "and my right hand, enough to keep me out of mischief."

Then two years ago there was the usual spring fete being held in a local park; so, of course, he was drawn as usual to the little tent with its cloth covered table. He sat on the warm grass waiting for his turn to come, and as he was number three, did not have long to wait. He never minded waiting in queues, as he said one could always watch the world go by. When his turn came, he went inside, put his money on the table and looked up to find that the "seer" was a man. A sandy haired man with washed out blue eyes. Sam sat down rather heavily as the surprise at finding a man there had put him slightly off balance. The man smiled with his mouth but not with his eyes. Sam supposed he must be tired after a long day in the "hot" seat.

"Cards, crystal ball, or hand?" he inquired of Sam.

"Er...er... Crystal ball and cards, please." said Sam.

The man uncovered the crystal ball, which he passed to Sam, telling him to hold it for a few moments. He then covered Sam's hands with a black cloth. He spread his own hands out on the table and closed his eyes.

Sam's thoughts were going a little hay-wire...

"A man! A man telling fortunes and reading a crystal ball! Oh, well.... He might have a different approach"

This was something new to Sam, and it interested him. After a while, the man opened his eyes, took the ball from Sam, keeping it covered for a moment. He then removed the black cover and began to turn the crystal ball slowly round and round. He nodded once or twice as if in agreement with his own thoughts, his light blue eyes flickering up at Sam.

"You do not let your right hand know what your left hand is doing. It might be advisable to do so sometimes. It might add spice to your days. You are a person who likes variety - a little of the unusual in your routine. Today is a day you should take note of. Something will give you time for thought."

He went on to tell Sam all the things he had heard many times before. Sam nodded his head up and down; then shook it from side to side as he half listened to what was being said to him. The man sat back in his chair with an air of finality, clasping his hands in front of his chest.

"That is all for today. Don't forget to let your right hand know a little of what your left

hand does once in a while. You may be very pleasantly surprised one day at what might happen. Good afternoon!"

Sam rose from his chair, thanked the man and walked out into the bright sunshine.

His mind wandered back to the day some forty years ago when he made a complete turnabout in his ideas. That day he was going to see Bella, a girl he knew. He had stepped out of the house in his usual confident way, stopped at the gate, squared his shoulders, and turned left, instead of his usual right turn. He decided to walk the two miles to Bella's house. Through the small park at the bottom of the road, on through the children's play ground, past a row of shops to the house where Bella lived with her mother. The day was warm and sunny and he reflected that the exercise would do him good. Sam decided that he would make a change, and he knew he had enough time to spare. He turned into the park gates and walked besides the stream that ran and rippled its way under an ornamental bridge, taking with it sticks and leaves and pieces of paper. He dropped an empty match box over one side of the bridge, then moved quickly to the other side. His eyes lit up like a small boy as he saw the match box come sailing through to the other side.

"Fascinating, isn't it?"

It was a woman's voice. He started at the sound. He had not expected to find anyone near him, since when he came on the bridge there was no one in sight.

"I thought I was alone," he said, "When I came there was no one around just here. Every one is at the fair."

"I get the call, you see," she said, "especially if it is something unusual. You are a little unusual yourself today, aren't you?"

Sam gave her a sidelong look to see if she was laughing at him, but she only gave a small, faint smile.

"This is the day of the right hand," he said, placing both hands on the wall. Then, to his own surprise, began to tell her the things his friends had told him - that he should let his right hand know a little more of what his left hand does - and that he should be a little more flexible in his ideas.

She listened quietly, and as she did so put her hand over the top of the wall close to the hand nearest her, nearly touching it. Sam's hand began to tingle and feel hot. He drew it away quickly, putting it in the pocket of his jacket. Then, with his other hand he felt something hard and metallic on the wall, a small round object. His hand closed over it, and as he drew it out she saw it and whispered.

"I put it there." she said, "I want you to have it. It is all I have left now."

Sam noticed that she wore no jewellery of any kind, no ring, no watch.

She saw him looking at her hands.

"I have no jewellery at all now. They took it away from me when I was so ill."

Not knowing what to say, he just leaned on the bridge looking into the stream. He opened his hand to study the medallion. It was made of silver, and just discernable through the dirt, bore an inscription "Marion Wells, 1946" It appeared to be an award for dancing.

The noise of the fair ground, the children shouting, and the organ playing on the far side of the park were lost to Sam. He was wondering how this medallion had remained undiscovered in the wall, if, as she had said, she had put it there long ago, and why it had not been found by children playing on the bridge.

The woman moved a little nearer to Sam, who then straightened his back, and half turned, ready to leave the park when she spoke again.

"Yes, I used to come here with my baby in his pram. I lived in a small flat over there," indicating a distant block of flats, "but flats are not for babies. My baby kept on crying, so other people complained about him. That is why I brought him here so often. One day in winter I came here when it was very cold. I came on to this bridge to watch the children playing at

dropping sticks and pieces of paper into the water on one side of the bridge, and running to the other side to see them all come out on the other side.

After a while they all went away leaving me alone. My baby started to cry and it gave me a headache. I took him out of his pram to keep me warm. I took the medal from round his neck where I kept it for good luck, and put it in the wall where you have just found it. Then, as I was looking into the cold water I dropped him into it, but when I ran to the other side to get him I could not find him. He didn't come out the other side like the sticks and leaves. I can't find him anywhere. Help me! Oh, please help me!"

The woman was sobbing wildly now, her eyes and cheeks wet with tears as she clung to Sam's arm. He released her hand from his arm and turned to leave her. He walked a few steps then turned back again. There was no one there! The woman had vanished! Sam walked back to the bridge with shaking legs. Had he been dazzled by the brilliance of the sun into imagining things? He threw a stick into the water and watched it sail away through the tree lined stream. As he turned homewards he thrust his hand into the pocket of his jacket, and found a silver medallion tarnished, and dirty with age dated some fifteen years earlier, bearing the name of "Marion Wells".

When he later made inquiries about the medal he found out that Marion Wells has been a dancer, winning both gold and silver medals. Her life had been very tragic; she had suffered a mental breakdown after having a baby.

Some days later, Sam went back into the park and after strolling along by the stream, found the deepest part of it where it was covered with thick foliage and roots of trees. Here he threw the medal into the stream where the water gently covered it from view. This day, forty years on, leaning over the bridge looking into the water, Sam seemed to feel a presence around him and a soft, weeping, which sent a shiver down his spine.

"Help me! Oh, please help me!"