

Strictly Personal

A Short Short Story complete on this page

By Heywood Broun

ILLUSTRATED BY C. C. BEALL

THIS is Janice! Janice! Janice! I want to speak to Thomas! Thomas! Thomas!"

Tom Alvord began to pay attention. So far the séance had been dull and obviously a fake. But that voice! It was extraordinarily like her. Of course, she had never called him Thomas, but there was that curious half-suggestion of a stammer which had been regarded by millions of moviegoers as one of the most fascinating phases in the work of Janice Beresford. It had fascinated him in that first picture, when they met. After that they never acted together. How could they? They were both too famous.

"There's the catch," Alvord thought to himself. "This medium must have heard the voice of Janice and she can hardly have failed to recognize me." Once again the stillness of the room was broken by the insistent repetition of "Thomas! Thomas! Thomas!"

"Our visitor," said the medium in pure Flatbush tones, "is looking for a gentleman named Thomas. Is there any party of that name in the circle? Janice can't wait around long. If Thomas is here let him speak to her."

Alvord gulped and then he said, "Hello, Janice."

Much more faintly this time, from somewhere high above his head, there came a well-remembered voice: "Thomas—Thomas—Tom!" And that last "Tom!" slashed through his skepticism. It was a whisper and it was the voice of Janice. Or it was a superb imitation. He must ask a question which would make all things sure. And suddenly he grew very excited. Wouldn't it be extraordinary if he, Thomas Alvord, should be the first person to establish definitely the possibility of communication with the dead? That would be a story for the first page of every paper in America. What was he talking about? America! Why, all over the world they would print column after column about Thomas Alvord, the great motion-picture star, who was prepared to prove that the dead return to their dear ones.

One convincing piece of evidence would be enough to prove the entire case. Some one little thing known to him and Janice alone. There couldn't be any trickery about that. But it would have to be something known just by them and not by another soul in all the world. Something strictly personal.

There was that stray remark which led to his proposal. . . . Yes, he'd ask her just how it happened that he proposed to her that afternoon on the quiet drive near Hollywood. But suddenly he remembered it wouldn't do. He'd given that story out in an interview with

Louella Parsons for her syndicated movie gossip column. It would have to be something more intimate.

How about that funny little thing that she had said in the hotel room on their honeymoon when they called the bellboy about the beds? Oh, yes, he remembered. She had laughed and said, "Even though we are twin stars we don't want twin beds!" No! No! Skolsky printed that in one of his Tintypes three years ago.

It would have to be something more sacred and more personal. Something about the child. There was that discussion before little Janice was born. They had been arguing as to whether the baby would be a boy or a girl and she had said, "Let's just call it 'ots-

bots' and that will do in either case."

He had almost framed a question to cut through the stillness of the room when it came to him in a flash that they had both told that story to the feature writer from Chicago. He was the fellow who insisted that he didn't want any of the regular publicity stuff but something special which would give the joint interview an intimate flavor.

THOMAS ALVORD thought hard. He could feel the strain, the silence. Everybody in the room was waiting. The world was waiting.

Across the room a clock ticked. That was the only sound. It reminded him of the final sequence in the Civil War film he did in the summer of 1933.

"And a blamed good picture," he thought to himself. . . .

But he must ask his question. A sense of fear swept through him. It was like stage fright. He was the principal actor in a gigantic drama and here at a crucial moment he had forgotten his lines. He must improvise.

Perhaps he imagined it but there was a very dim suggestion of choral voices singing an old spiritual. He couldn't remember the name but there was something in it about "Jordan is a wide river." Yes, the Jordan was a wide river and he could not cope with the current and reach the other side.

"You could make a picture out of this situation right here," he thought. A great picture. The Jordan is a Wide River! A little too long as a title. Wide River might do, but what could he say? It was his cue. His question ought to deal with something deeply intimate. But what? Nothing came to his mind. Even in Jordan River there was no privacy for goldfish.

ALL the waters of the earth and under the earth were roaring past his ears. He must speak. No, he must shout, for a paralysis had seized him. With a loud voice he tore the silence which crowded against his throat. To his intense surprise he shouted, "What will be my next picture?" And he knew the answer. Magnificent Productions knew the answer. All the readers of fan magazines knew the answer.

The voice said, "Your next picture will be called He Learned About Women." The voice had become tired. It trailed away, fainter and fainter, as if someone were running down a long corridor and calling back over her shoulder, "Thomas! Thomas! Tom!" The medium groaned several times and then announced that the séance was ended.

Alvord hurried out of the brownstone house. He had gone half a block when a young man touched him on the arm.

"My name is Randall," he said. "I am a reporter from the Daily Star. We had a tip at the office that you were going to a séance at the house of Madame Alvarez. The city editor sent me. It's a little impertinent, I suppose, but you can understand that we have to pry into the private lives of you public people and the paper wants to know if by any chance you received any communication from Miss Janice Beresford."

"No offense," said Alvord. "I understand your job and the interest of your paper. But, you see, old man, I really can't say anything. You know even we public people, to use your phrase, have some things which are personal and sacred."



"Our visitor is looking for a gentleman named Thomas"

While the World Watches

President Roosevelt's remedies for our national ills are more than a mere spectacle to the rest of the world. The health of all the nations is at stake; and they look on with the intense concern born of self-interest. Winston Churchill, from a background of vast experience in statecraft, voices his praise, criticism and admonition of our President, painting a vivid picture of the man and his achievements as they appear to the English eye

By Winston Churchill

THE life and well-being of every country are influenced by the economic and financial policy of the United States. From the cotton spinners of Lancashire to the ryots of India; from the peasantry of China to the pawnbrokers of Amsterdam; from the millionaire financier watching the ticker tape to the sturdy blacksmith swinging his hammer in the forge; from the monetary philosopher or student to the hard-headed business man or sentimental social reformer—all are consciously or unconsciously affected.

For in truth Roosevelt is an explorer who has embarked on a voyage as uncertain as that of Columbus, and upon a quest which might conceivably be as important as the discovery of the New World. In those old days it was the gulf of oceans with their unknown perils and vicissitudes. Now in the modern world, just as mysterious and forbidding as the stormy waters of the Atlantic, is the gulf between the producer with the limitless powers of science at his command, and the consumer with legitimate appetites which need never be satiated.

Plenty has become a curse. Bountiful harvests are viewed with a dread which in the old times accompanied a barren season. The gift of well-organized leisure which machines should have given to men has only emerged in the hateful spectacle of scores of millions of able and willing workers kicking their heels by closed factories and subsisting upon charity or, as in England, upon systematized relief. Always the peoples are asking themselves: "Why should these things be? Why should not the new powers man has wrested from nature open the portals of a broader life to men and women all over the world?" And with increasing vehemence they demand that the thinkers and pioneers of humanity should answer the riddle and open these new possibilities to their enjoyment.

A single man whom accident, destiny, or Providence has placed at the head of one hundred and twenty millions of active, educated, excitable and harassed people, has set out upon this momentous expedition. Many doubt he will succeed. Some hope he will fail. Although the policies of President Roosevelt are conceived in many respects from a narrow view of American self-interest, the courage, the power and the scale of his effort must enlist the ardent sympathy of every country, and his success could

not fail to lift the whole world forward into the sunlight of an easier and more genial age.

There is, therefore, a widespread desire to look at this man in the midst of his adventure. Trained to public affairs, connected with the modern history of the United States by a famous name, at forty-two he was struck down with infantile paralysis. His lower limbs refused their office. Crutches or assistance was needed for the smallest movement from place to place. To ninety-nine men out of a hundred, such an affliction would have terminated all forms of public activity except those of the mind.

He refused to accept this sentence. He fought against it with that same rebellion against commonly adopted conventions which we now see in his policy. He contested elections; he harangued the multitude; he faced the hurly-burly of American politics in a decade when they were exceptionally darkened by all the hideous crimes and corruption of gangsterdom which followed upon prohibition; he beat down opponents in this rough arena; he sought, gained and discharged offices of the utmost labor and of the highest consequence.

The Man of the Hour Emerges

As governor of New York State his administration, whatever its shortcomings, revealed a competent, purposeful personality. He stooped to conquer. He adapted himself to the special conditions and to the humiliations which had long obstructed entry of the best of American manhood into the unsavory world of politics. He subscribed to the Democratic ticket and made himself the mouthpiece of party aims without losing hold upon the larger objectives of American public life.

World events began to move. The Hoover administration could only gape upon the unheard-of problems of depression through glut. The long ascendancy of the Republican régime was clearly drawing to its close. The presidency of the United States awaited a Democratic candidate. Five or six outstanding figures presented themselves, in busy, scheming rivalry.

In the general opinion of many of the shrewdest leaders of his party, Roosevelt was the weakest of these contestants. And there are still those who consider that in hard common sense and



"His success could not fail to lift the whole world forward into the sunlight of an easier and more genial age"

genuine statecraft Roosevelt's former leader, Governor Al Smith, was unquestionably the strongest. But Roosevelt pulled his wires and played his cards in such a way that Fortune could befriend him. Fortune came along, not only as a friend or even as a lover, but as an idolater. There was one moment when his nomination turned upon as little as the spin of a coin. But when it fell there was no doubt whose head was stamped upon it.

He arrived at the summit of the greatest economic community in the world at the moment of its greatest embarrassment. Everybody had lost faith in everything. Credit was frozen. Millions of unemployed without provision filled the streets or wandered despairing about the vast spaces of America. The rotten foundations of the banks were simultaneously undermined and exposed. A universal deadlock gripped the United States. The richest man could not cash the smallest check. People possessing enormous intrinsic assets in every kind of valuable security found themselves for some days without the means to pay a hotel bill or even a taxi fare. We must never forget that this was the basis from which he started: Supreme power in the ruler and a clutching anxiety of scores of millions who demanded and awaited orders.

Since then there has been no lack of orders. Although the dictatorship is veiled by constitutional forms, it is none the less effective. Great things have been done, and greater attempted. To compare Roosevelt's effort with that

of Hitler is to insult, not Roosevelt, but civilization. The petty persecutions and Old World assertions of brutality in which the German idol has indulged only show their smallness and squalor compared to the renaissance of creative effort with which the name of Roosevelt will always be associated.

The President's second momentous experiment is an attempt to reduce unemployment by shortening the hours of labor of those who are employed and spreading the labor more evenly through the wage-earning masses. Who can doubt that this is one of the paths which will soon be trodden throughout the world? If it is not to be so, we may well ask what is the use to the working masses of invention and science? Are great discoveries of organization or processes only to mean that fewer laborers will produce more than is required during the same long hours, while an even larger proportion of their mates are flung redundant upon the labor market?

Our Most Important Problem

If that were so, surely the poor English Luddites of a hundred years ago were right in attempting to break up the new machines. Through the establishment of shorter hours alone the wage-earners can enjoy the blessings of modern mass production; and indeed without shorter hours these blessings are but a curse.

Thus the Roosevelt adventure claims sympathy and admiration from all of those in England and no doubt in for-