

The Blue Circle

By ELIZABETH JORDAN

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THE BLUE CIRCLE

SYNOPSIS—Incapacitated mentally by shock, as a result of experiences during the World War, Renshaw makes a proposition to David Campbell, wealthy, elderly man of leisure, that for a year he assume responsibility for him (Renshaw)—practically "buy" him. Doctor Stanley, life-long friend of Campbell's, indorses the proposition, which Campbell, with some natural misgivings, accepts. The arrangement is that the young man become an inmate of the Campbell household, with the nominal duty of secretary. Renshaw meets Verity, Campbell's granddaughter, and gets the impression that she does not like him. Jenks, the butler, Renshaw also feels, is distinctly hostile. Renshaw has a feeling that the servants are spying on him. Jenks warns him that there are "queer things" going on in the house.

CHAPTER II—Continued

Something did happen—a very small thing and not at all disturbing. It was merely the sudden appearance on the wall facing him of a small blue circle of light. It did not dance. It did not even move. It merely faced and regarded him, rather like a watchful eye.

He glanced across the room, but without much interest. Of course, he reasoned, there was some wholly natural explanation of the circle. He would forget it. He would give his nerves time to quiet down before he tried to sleep. He would resolutely think of other things—of scenes and episodes of his boyhood. But the effort, occasionally successful in the past, did not calm him now. He found himself waiting for something. Deep within him was a conviction, that something was about to happen.

After an hour or two of this he went to bed. Simultaneously the blue circle vanished. But sleep was slow in coming, perhaps because of that hour of sleep before dinner. The household must be sleeping, he reflected, for it was now well past midnight. Yet he began to hear sounds in the corridor, odd sounds, not easily explained—probably, yes undoubtedly, those sounds to which Jenks had referred.

He stiffened and swore softly to himself. The expectation that something would happen, born of Jenks' warning, was filling him with a sick foreboding, was actually bringing out perspiration upon his face. Yes, his face was damp, and through his big body ran a sudden tremor. He ground his teeth in self-disgust; but his brain, still his alert and willing servant, hastened to bolster his dying self-respect.

It was not because he was afraid of anything that might happen to him that he sweated and trembled. That, at least, he could truthfully claim. The worst that could happen to him had occurred two years ago. It was the possible call to action which made him shake; the suggestion that what was going on, whatever it was, might demand initiative on his part.

He lay still and listened. The noises in the corridor were increasing, and if they were what Jenks had meant he had chosen the right word for them. They were "odd" noises. That quality in them was what had first attracted his attention. They were not footsteps. They were, quite plainly by this time, such sounds as might have been made by the dragging of a heavy body along the floor, and they were accompanied by what sounded like the breathing of a huge, exhausted animal. Yet an exhausted animal would hardly be dragging itself along the corridors of Tawno Ker at twenty minutes past twelve o'clock at night.

"There's some queer things going on in the old house, sir. If you hear odd noises during the night, it is best to pay no attention to them."

That was indefinite in itself, but definite enough as far as he, Renshaw, was concerned. In different words, but quite as plainly, Campbell had said the same thing. It was not Renshaw's business to investigate odd noises at Tawno Ker. On the contrary, it seemed plain that he was expected to ignore them. Everything would be explained to him in due time, and in the interval if Campbell wished his assistance he would ask for it. Renshaw's present cue was discretion—which certainly did not mean that he was expected to get out of bed and go chasing around in drafty corridors at midnight.

His reflections having reached the gratifying conclusion to which he had directed them, he threw back the bed-clothing and set his feet on the floor. All these things being so, the fact remained that he must see what was in that corridor.

He sprang to the door and threw it open. But, quick as he was, the thing outside, which had seemed to move so clumsily and with such effort, was quicker. His glance swept the length of the corridor, but this time there was not even the flutter of a disappearing garment, to reward him. The house was utterly still.

He shrugged his shoulders, closed the door, and got back into bed. Before he did so he turned the key in the lock of the door. The whole thing might be a trick of his infernal nerves—though he knew better. But, at least, he would have a stout lock between himself and that corridor.

Chapter III

We-Wee and Leon.

When Renshaw awoke, the October day was sending its comforting light through his windows. He turned over and blinked drowsily. His first sensation was one of physical well-being, new and agreeable. His next was incredulity. He had slept—had actually slept for hours! His third, the companion of memory, was a slow-growing, deep-rooted, and sardonic amusement at his own expense.

What an ass he had been the night before! In the light that was coyly picking out the pattern of the oriental rug upon the polished floor, his doubts and forebodings about Tawno Ker scurried out of sight like frightened chickens. He almost doubted that he had had them. There was no question whatever, he told himself, that he had imagined most, if not all, of the occurrences that had disturbed him. That dragging thing on the floor, for example—

He sat up, blinked again, and yawned widely. His big room was wonderfully cheerful, and part of its brightness, he now discovered, was due to the coloring that still lingered on some of the maple trees whose branches almost touched his windows. He got out of bed, turned on a cold bath, and made his morning toilet with an increasing sense of acquiescence in the fact of living.

As he shaved, his lips almost puckered into a smile at the new expression of the face that confronted him in his mirror. At last he had taken in the fact, so hard to grasp the day before, that he had cast from his



It Was Merely the Sudden Appearance on the Wall Facing Him of a Small Blue Circle of Light.

shoulders the Atlas-like weight they had been carrying. His future, for a year, was assured. He was a being without responsibility. In this environment, so isolated, yet so home-like and so peaceful, he could accept his cure. At the end of the year—for the first time he told this to himself with entire conviction—he would be a well man, and would know he was! And what the deuce was the good of being a well man if one didn't know he was well?

He went down to breakfast with a vigor in his steps that was not wholly assumed. At the foot of the staircase he paused, not quite certain whether to turn into the living room or go on to the dining room. Breakfast might not be ready. He had not remembered, the night before, to ask at what hour it was served. As he hesitated, the complacent personality of Jenks came toward him from the rear of the hall. Renshaw nodded.

"Good morning, Jenks. What's the breakfast hour here?"

"Breakfast's on now, sir." Jenks followed Renshaw into the room, where a young footman the latter had not seen before was arranging chafing dishes on the sideboard. This youth suspended his labors, and in response to an eye-flash from Jenks hastened to draw out a chair for the newcomer.

"We follow the English plan, sir," Jenks observed, with a steadfast eye on the movements of his subordinate. "The members of the family come in when they like and help themselves from the hot dishes on the sideboard. But if you don't find just what you want, sir, James, here, will fetch it from the kitchen."

Renshaw nodded again. "Thanks," he said, and strolled over to the row of silver dishes whose contents shimmered above spirit-lamps. He lifted

the lid of each in turn, finding a cereal in one, scrambled eggs and bacon in another, and kidneys in a third. He helped himself to eggs and bacon and returned to the table, where James poured his coffee, lifted the cover of the muffin dish, and set a plate of orange marmalade within convenient reach.

"Anything else, sir?"

"Nothing, thanks. I'll help myself." James faded away as unobtrusively as a mist before the sun. His manner and service had been perfect. But, notwithstanding Renshaw's seeming absorption in his breakfast, the secretary had been conscious of one thing: not once, while James remained in the room, had the footman removed his eyes from him. They were young eyes—round and clear and rather boyish. They were discreet eyes, which dropped humbly before a superior and which could not meet directly the all-seeing gaze of Jenks. But they were observant eyes, nevertheless, and undoubtedly they had taken in every detail of the new man's dress, manner, and general appearance.

Even as the reflection came to Renshaw, the explanation came with it. Some one, probably Annie, judging by the flutter of that tell-tale garment, had returned after the first alarm and listened at the side door of the living room when he, Renshaw, had made his unusual proposition. That person had overheard his entire conversation with Campbell, and had grasped the terms under which Renshaw had been taken on. Those terms were sufficient to intrigue any mind, and the gossip they afforded must be nothing short of a heaven-sent blessing to a group of servants in a country house that was miles from anywhere.

He drank the last of his coffee. His appetite had improved with his spirits, and he had eaten a surprising amount of eggs and bacon.

Evidently the Campbells breakfasted late. It was half after eight when he left the dining room, and none of the family had yet appeared. He went out for a stroll in the grounds. There were suggestions of a big estate here—wide, unexplored spaces at the right and left and in the rear. He followed some of them—to flower-gardens whose sweet alyssum and dying chrysanthemums were their sole remaining blooms, to vegetable gardens near the rear of the house, and, finally, to the discovery of a secret walled garden far off at the left, whose entrance was down a flight of stone steps.

He descended the steps with a sensation of expectancy. He liked secret gardens. They had been a fact of his in that remote period when he had been a living man. He was in the depths of it, bending over an old sundial and trying to make out its almost obliterated inscription, when a small hand crept confidently into his. He started, then flushed and stared half-respectfully, half-curiously, at the owner of the hand.

It was a very tiny owner, almost a baby. It could not have been much more than thirty months old. It wore a blue "bunny suit" of coat, trousers, cap and leggings, and the cap was drawn so far over its face and ears that only a pair of wide gray eyes, a dot of a nose, and a button of a mouth were visible. As Renshaw stared, the mouth widened into a smile that revealed two deep dimples.

"Hello!" exclaimed Renshaw, in natural surprise.

"Do' morning!" The conversation languished, and the lady, unembarrassed by the fact, filled the pause by lifting her feet and swinging on the gentleman's hand. Renshaw stiffened to meet the strain, and then, after some hesitation, entering the spirit of the game, exerted his strength and lifted her high above the ground. She yelped in ecstasy, and he put her down. With arms stretched and violently waving, she danced on the path before him.

"Den."

He did it again, this time lifting her higher.

"We-wee dump," she remarked at last.

He did not understand. She pointed to the sun-dial and entered upon a brisk pantomime, which he regarded with an interest deep but unintelligent. She waved both arms increasingly, almost with violence. She bounded into the air like a rubber ball. She whirled in dizzy circles. She appeared to tie herself into knots. And as she did these things she repeated over and over in passionate accents her original refrain: "We-wee dump!"

Nothing alarming, of course, about the Blue Circle, but what on earth does it mean?

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

In the Great Race

Anyone who can catch up can keep up; anyone who can keep up can forge ahead.—Boston Transcript.

Lack of Opportunity

Woman Witness—"I did not assault her, but I would have done so if I could have got at her."

THE BLUE CIRCLE

By Elizabeth Jordan

(© by The Century Co.)

"COLD AS STONE"

SYNOPSIS—Incapacitated mentally by shock, as a result of experiences during the World War, Renshaw makes a proposition to David Campbell, wealthy, elderly man of leisure, that for a year he assume responsibility for him (Renshaw)—practically "buy" him. Doctor Stanley, life-long friend of Campbell's, indorses the proposition, which Campbell, with some natural misgivings, accepts. The arrangement is that the young man become an inmate of the Campbell household, with the nominal duty of secretary. Renshaw meets Verity, Campbell's granddaughter, and gets the impression that she does not like him. Jenks, the butler, Renshaw also feels, is distinctly hostile. Renshaw has a feeling that the servants are spying on him. Jenks warns him that there are "queer things" going on in the house. That night he is disturbed by the appearance on the wall of his room of a small blue circle of light. Mysterious noises in the corridor outside his door cause him to investigate, but he discovers nothing unusual.

CHAPTER III—Continued

"And all the poor child wants," said a voice in critical accents, "is to be put on that sun-dial so she can jump down."

Renshaw turned so suddenly that he almost upset the infant, who at that instant appeared to be engaged in a final impersonation of a whirling dervish. She interrupted this to hurl herself upon the neck of the newcomer, who fell on her knees just in time to receive the embrace.

"Is that all she wants?" Renshaw regarded the pair.

Miss Campbell, in a short tweed walking-skirt, a scarlet blazer and a tam-o'-shanter to match it, was even lovelier in this perfect setting of her secret garden than she had been in the glory of her warpaint the night before.

"What else did you think she wanted?"

Verity lifted the baby and stood her on the flat top of the sun-dial.

"I got a general impression that it included the earth and neighboring planets—"

He broke off with a gasp. The young person on the sun-dial had fung herself into space. As far as he was concerned, she would have remained there till she hit the solid earth, for he was stunned by the suddenness of the thing; but the arms of Miss Campbell opened with accustomed precision, and the intrepid infant landed in them with a force that almost knocked the girl over backward.

"Great heavens!" cried Renshaw, as he caught and steadied the victim.

"Are you hurt?"

Verity detached herself with dignity from the grasp of his hand on her arm.

"Of course not. That's part of the game," she patiently explained. "You don't know much about children, do you?"

"She's a peach," Renshaw admitted, and wondered at himself. It was so long since he had felt that anything human was a peach. "Who is she?"

"Tell the gentleman who you are."

Verity, again on her knees, was addressing the acrobat, and incidentally, by holding her close, discouraging any further flights till she could catch her breath.

"We-wee," declared the baby.

"Dump."

"Now you know." The girl smiled, not at the young man, but at the child. Her words to him were tossed over her shoulder as indifferently as she might toss crumbs to a bird.

"Is that her name?"

"She thinks it is, so it will do."

"Dump," remarked We-wee with much firmness.

"No, darling. We-wee has jumped enough for one day."

The modulations of Verity's voice as she spoke were wonderfully tender and caressing. Her next words, however, were addressed to him, and it seemed impossible that they were uttered by the same voice. They fell on the raw surfaces of his self-consciousness like broken icicles.

"My grandfather asked me to give you a message, if I happened to meet you in the grounds," she said. "He has gone to his study, and he will be glad to see you there at your convenience."

Renshaw thanked her, but her eyes drifted past him as detachedly as if he were a pebble in her path. He felt a new uprush of resentment. It was clear that she despised him, and no doubt it was as natural as it was clear. But she needn't show it so plainly! She was as hard as nails, this girl, and as cold as stone. She was the type of girl he had always disliked—self-sufficient, icy and intolerant.

His eyes, as he looked at her, offered a full equivalent for the expression hers had held the night before. He raised his cap in a salute that included both ladies, and strode down the path and up the garden steps with the swing and lightness he had practiced of late.

There was some reflection of these in his spirits. The encounter with the fascinating little beggar in the bunny suit had added to his new sense of well-being. The way she had taken to him was rather nice.

He forgot the beautiful Miss Campbell as absolutely as if she had not

study in Tawno Ker his new master awaited him, together with his first intimation of what his duties were to be. His steps slowed down, and the lines of his face, already relaxed, smoothed out still more. Into the empty foreground of his life a definite figure stepped, not the figure of his master, nor the figure of that master's granddaughter, but an adorable little figure in a blue bunny suit—the child who, in the new life he was taking up, was his first friend.

He found Campbell in the latter's study—a comfortable workroom opposite the dining room, at the rear of the wide central hall.

The old man greeted him pleasantly, but with a suggestion of constraint. Faced by the need of putting his new acquisition to work, he was increasingly conscious of the difficulties and embarrassments that might attend that effort. His subconscious resentment against Stanley had grown. His old friend, he had reasoned, had let him in for a lot of trouble and mighty little, if any, comfort.

But Renshaw's appearance was reassuring. He was normal, steady-eyed, ready for duty. His quiet greeting and his strong clasp of the hand that Campbell mechanically extended brought additional comfort. The old man, always susceptible to the atmosphere of others, and as varying as a weather-cock in his own moods, felt a weight drop from his shoulders.

"I hope I haven't dragged you into the house too soon," he said, more naturally; "but there are some pressing letters here—"

"I'm glad that, sir. The more the better. Shall I take this desk?"

"Can you use a typewriter?"

"Yes, sir."

"That's good. All right, then. Sit down there for the present. We'll fix up something else later. There's a little room off this, here at the side, that I may turn over to you—"

Campbell checked himself. Under the influence of this chap's splendid figure, handsome face and quiet manner he was going too fast. He must

not forget that yesterday he had momentarily thought the fellow a madman. Renshaw, his dark eyes on the other's face, read his thoughts, and felt again the sense of sardonic appreciation that was his nearest approach to humor. He sat down in a business-like way, opened the right-hand drawer of the desk, and, finding it full of stationery, helped himself to pencils, a notebook and a generous supply of typewriter sheets. Campbell leaned back in his chair, put the tips of his fingers together in an attitude that Renshaw soon learned was characteristic, and appeared to reflect. Subsequently the new secretary discovered that this attitude usually preceded one of Campbell's half-dozen daily "cat-naps" or his most energetic mental efforts. The trouble was that one was never sure when his manifestation would follow it.

"You don't take shorthand notes, do you?" Campbell inquired at last.

"No, sir. It's only by a happy chance that I can run a typewriter. I learned it lately to—kill time."

"You'll kill a great deal of time with it here," Campbell prophesied, with a care-free chuckle. "I am rather glad you don't know shorthand," he confessed. "I am not up to much dictation. I will tell you what to say, and you will put it in your own words."

"Very well, sir."

Campbell, his eyes still on his thin old fingers, abruptly began his task.

"Write to Stanley and tell him to come down for this week-end. It is time the old fraud looked me over. I believe he is afraid I may live longer than he does, so he has decided to let me die of neglect. Ask him if that theory is correct."

"Tell S. B. Miller his plumbing is a disgrace to his profession. If we have any more trouble with those bathrooms I'm going to sue him. Tell the Reverend H. B. Sheppard that I will contribute a thousand dollars toward his project if he can get each of nine other men to give the same amount. I know he can, but the effort will keep him busy for a week or two and I'll have some peace. Tell Jarvis & Com-

pany to get their feet out of my study. I discovered that they are dead-end but I like to compare their prices with the prices of their competitors."

"Tell H. C. Cohen I want him to come down early in January and let me with my income-tax statements, want it off my mind. He charges a hundred dollars and he oozes oil as he talks, but he saved me at least a thousand last year by showing me my rights, though my native land is rapidly taking all I've got. Tell William Shipman his proposition does not interest me at present. It would not interest any intelligent human being any time, but we'll let him find that out."

Tell George Bolton I will contribute five thousand dollars to the Princeton fund, and advise him to get after some of the rest as vigorously as he is chasing me up. Three of my classmates are still alive, but he appears to think they're dead. Tell him Stanley's more alive than I am. Tell Brown & Rotson to send a man down with samples and I hope they'll show more discretion about it than they did last spring. After all, I am a country gentleman and not a moving-picture advertisement for their firm. Got that?"

Renshaw said he had, and took advantage of the momentary pause to wipe his brow. An early suspicion that his new job was to be something of a sinecure had perished and was not reborn. It became clear that the old man's correspondence was much in arrears. He gave instructions for letter after letter with increasing zest and rapidity. At the end of two hours of steady note-giving his voice lost its assurance and took on a suggestion of the languor of a phonograph that is running down.

"How many letters have I given you?" he asked.

Renshaw fumbled vaguely among the mass of notes before him.

"Not more than seven or eight hundred, I should say."

Campbell cackled.

"I deplore this modern tendency to exaggeration. You've got just enough work for a husky young man to do comfortably before lunch. Go to it. I will leave you in possession of the study. But first telegraph the offices of the Scandinavian line and reserve an outside stateroom on the Frederick, sailing November twenty-second, for—"

for— he hesitated an instant only—"for Madame H-v-o-e-s-i-e-f," he ended slowly, spelling out the name. "That will be all this morning. If time hangs too heavily on your hands I may give you some more this afternoon."

He rose from his chair, stiffly as was his habit, stood still an instant to give his old legs time to accustom themselves to the effort of walking, and then went toward the door. There, with fingers already on the knob, he paused.

"Mr. Renshaw," he began, and stopped.

Renshaw, who had risen when he did, waited in silence. Campbell took a step as if to cross back to him, and Renshaw saved him the journey by joining him at the door. The old man's manner had completely changed. His brisk assurance was gone. He looked and evidently felt uncomfortably self-conscious.

"Mr. Renshaw," he began again, "our household, as I have already told you, is in some respects—a little unusual at present. Possibly Doctor Stanley—ah—prepared you for this fact—"

"Both Doctor Stanley and you yourself, sir, mentioned it," the secretary reminded him.

"Just so. Well—ah—the point is that, as the matter concerns others, I am not able to go into details about it for the moment, much as I dislike any atmosphere of secrecy. So I must count on your discretion to—ah—"

It was clear that for once David Campbell, so fluent up till now, was at a loss for words. Renshaw helped him out.

"To ignore anything I don't understand?" he suggested. "That's the idea, isn't it?"

The face of Campbell brightened, but his eyes did not meet the young man's. It was clear that the mystery of the household, whatever it might be, was distasteful to the master of the household. It also seemed clear that his predominating feeling about it was one of annoyance and not one of anxiety or strain.

"Exactly," he said, with an air of relief. "Please ignore it."

"You may be sure that I shall do so, as far as I can. And, in any event, I shall ask no questions. But—Mr. Campbell—it was Renshaw who was self-conscious now. His face had taken on the deep, unbecoming flush his new master had already seen there. "There's one point on which I should like your instructions. Am I to understand that I am not to report to you anything unusual I may see or—"

—or hear? May I assume that you know about it?"

"Campbell's self-consciousness gave place to an expression of surprise, mingled with doubt.

"Do you mean that you have already heard or seen anything unusual?" he quickly asked.

"Evidently there is something mysterious going on in the old house. What's the true inwardness?"

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Teach Politicians

A school to teach politicians a "useful trade" has been established in London. The object of the institution, as announced in a billiard parlour, is to teach politicians a "useful trade."

He forgot the beautiful Miss Campbell as absolutely as if she had not