

Two Singular Men

By W. C. Morrow

The first of these was a powerful Italian, topped with a dense brush of rebellious black hair. The circumstances leading up to his employment in the Great Oriental Dime Museum as the "Marvellous Tuft-nosed Wild Man, Hoolagaloo, captured on the Island of Milo in the Aegean Sea, after a desperate struggle," were these:

He had been a wood-chopper, possessed of prodigious strength and a violent temper. One day he and a companion in the mountains fell out and fought. The Italian then had to walk twenty miles to find a surgeon, being in great need of his services. When he presented himself to the surgeon his face was heavily bandaged with blood-soaked cloths. He began to fumble in his pockets, and his face betrayed deep anxiety when he failed to find what he sought.

"What is the matter?" asked the surgeon, "and what are you seeking?"

The man uncovered his mouth and in a voice like the sound of an ophicleide, answered:

"Mina nosa."

"Your nose!"

"Aha. T'ought I bring im, butta no find."

"Brought your nose in your pocket!"

"Dunno—may be losta. Fella fighta me; cut offa da nose."

The surgeon assured him that the severed nose would have been useless.

"But I wanta da nose!" exclaimed the man, in despair.

The surgeon said that he could make a new one, and the man appeared greatly relieved in mind. A removal of the bandages disclosed the fact that a considerable part of his nose was gone. The surgeon then proceeded to perform the familiar rhinoplastic operation, which consists in making a V-shaped incision through the skin of the forehead immediately above the nose, loosening it and bringing it down with a half-turn, to keep the cuticle outward, and covering the nose-stump with it. In preparing for this he made an interesting discovery. The place for the man's nose was long and his forehead low, so that in order to secure sufficient length for the flap he had to encroach on the hair-covered scalp. There was no help for it. With some misgivings the surgeon shaved the hair and then performed the operation with admirable success.

His fears, however, in time were realized. All around the end of the nose there appeared a broad line of black hair. When the skin was in its normal position above the forehead the hair on the upper edge of it had grown downward; but as the skin was inverted in its new position the hair, of course, grew upward, curving towards the eyes. It gave the man a grotesque and hideous appearance, and this made him furious. The surgeon, having a quick wit and a regard for the integrity of his bones, introduced him to Signor Castellani, proprietor of the Great Oriental Dime Museum, and that enterprising worthy immediately engaged him. And thus it was that the man became the greatest curiosity in the world.

Among his companions in the museum were the Severed Lady, who apparently was non-existent below the waist; the Remarkable Tattooed Lady, who had been rescued from Chinese pirates in the Coral Sea, and some others. To them the tuft-nosed man was known as Bat—surmised to be a contraction of Bartolommeo.

The other singular man with which this narrative is concerned was a small, delicate, mild-mannered, impecunious fellow, who made a living writing for the press. He and Castellani were

friends, and he was on excellent terms with the “freaks.” But as this narrative is to tell the secrets of the museum, it should be explained that the real object of the young man’s deepest admiration was Mademoiselle Zoë, the Severed Lady, billed also as the Wonderful French Phenomenon. She was known in private life as Muggie (formerly Muggy, and probably originally Margaret), and she was the only daughter and special pride of Castellani. Zoë was rosy-cheeked, pretty, and had a freckled nose. The impecunious writer was named Sampey. Sampey secretly loved Zoë.

As the Severed Lady, Mademoiselle Zoë’s professional duties were monotonous. They gave her abundant opportunities for observation and reflection, and, being young and of the feminine sex, she dreamed.

What she observed most was eyes. These were the eyes that looked at her as she rested in her little swing when on exhibition. Her gilt booth was very popular, for she was pretty, and some kind-hearted visitors at the show pitied the poor thing because she ended at the waist! But far from being depressed by the apparent absence of all below the lower edge of her gold belt with its glittering diamond buckle, she was cheerful, and now and then would sing a little song. Her sweetness of manner and voice and the plumpness of her rounded arms and shoulders were what had won Sampey’s heart and made him all the more zealous in his useful occupation of devising the names which Castellani bestowed on his freaks.

Hoolagaloo had suffered a turning of the head by his good fortune. He imagined that because he was monstrous he was great. That made him arrogant and presumptuous. He, too, loved Zoë. Thus it came about that rivalry was established between Sampey and the Wild Man of Milo. How was it with Zoë? Which loved she?—or loved she either? Observing and reflecting, she dreamed. As it was eyes only that she saw, it was of eyes only that she dreamed.

“Ah,” sighed this innocent girl, “that I could see in reality the eyes of my dreams! So many, many eyes stare at me in my booth, and yet the eyes of my dreams come not! Blue eyes, brown eyes, black eyes, hazel eyes, gray eyes, all of every shade, but not yet have come the eyes I so long to see! Those which do come are commonplace; their owners are commonplace—Just ordinary mortals. I’m sure that princes, knights, and heroes *must* have the eyes that beam on me as I sleep. I’m sure, indeed, that such eyes will come in time, and that by such a sign I shall know my hero, my master, my love!”

She cautiously asked the Wild Man of Milo about it one day, but his answer was a coarse guffaw; then, seeing that he had made a mistake, he kissed her. The hair of his tufted nose thus got into her pretty blue eyes, and she shuddered.

Then she went to Sampey, who was wise, cool, and politic. He listened, amazed, but attentive. The opportunity of his life had come. When he had gathered up his dismayed and scattered wits, he gravely answered:

“Muggie, these eyes that appear in your dreams—is it a particular color or a certain expression which they have?”

“Color,” she answered.

“What color?”

“A soft, pale, limpid amber.”

She said it so innocently, so earnestly, so sweetly, that he could doubt neither her sincerity nor her sanity. Thus the crisis had fallen upon him and had nearly crushed him.

Nevertheless, he set his wits at work. Pondering, analyzing, ransacking every nook in the warehouse of his mental resources, he fought bravely with despair. Presently a bright ray of intelligence, descended Heaven knows whence, swept across his thought-pinned face. This

bright beam, growing more and more effulgent, mounting higher and higher till it illuminated all his faculties, finally lighted up his way to become one of the two singular men of this narrative.

“I see,” he said, trying to veil the glow of triumph in his face, “that you have not wholly mastered the problem of the eyes. True, it is only heroes that have amber eyes. But such eyes are a badge of heroism sent by heaven; and, though a man may not have been heroic in any outward sense, when the essence of true heroism is breathed into him his eyes, without his knowledge of the fact, may assume the amber hue of your dreams. Sometimes, in the development of the spirit of heroism, this color is only transient; in time it may become permanent. Muggie, these dreams indicate your destiny. You should marry none but a hero, and when he comes you will know him by his amber eyes.” With this Sampey sighed, for Muggie was looking earnestly into his gray eyes.

Had he thus, in blind self-sacrifice to the whim of a foolish girl, cast himself into a pit? If so, what meant his light step and cheerful smile as soon as she was out of sight.

Mademoiselle Zoë, the Severed Lady, swung in half-person and sang her little song on a night a week or two afterwards, just as she had sung and swung many a night before. Wondering eyes of every kind were staring at her, and presently her foolish little heart gave a great bound. There before her, regarding her with infinite tenderness, was a divine pair of soft, pale, limpid amber eyes! (A woman in the audience happened also to see this extraordinary spectacle, and it frightened her so badly that she fainted, thinking she had seen a corpse.)

The amber eyes instantly disappeared, along with their owner, one Sampey. A thumpy little heart in a round, plump body knew that it was he; knew, therefore, that her destiny was come, and, most extraordinary of all, in the shape of her good father’s literary bureau! Yet what a shock there was next day, when the hero of her dreams came to her with his ordinary pale-gray eyes, blurred somewhat and inclined to humidity!

“Sampey!” she exclaimed in dismay, tumbled thus rudely from the clouds.

“Muggie!”

“Your eyes last night—then you were a hero; but to-day—

“A hero!” innocently echoed Sampey.

“Why, yes! Last night you had amber eyes, such beautiful eyes—the hero-eyes of my dreams!”

“My dear child, you certainly were dreaming.”

“Oh, no! I saw them! My heart jumped so! I knew you—I knew you—and your eyes were amber!”

Sampey smiled sadly and a little complacently, and with great modesty said:

“I can’t doubt you, my dear child, but I assure you that I was unconscious of my amber eyes. I wish that I could feel at liberty to confess to you that lately I had strange whisperings of heroism in my soul—but that would be boasting, and true heroism is always modest. Still, I ought not to be surprised that you discovered the actual presence before I was aware even of its existence; but such, indeed, my dear, is the peculiarity of the true hero—he is ever unaware of his own heroism.” He took her hand languishingly and squeezed it. She blushed and fled.

Signor Castellani, besides being wealthy, was a man of business. His daughter should marry a man who had money sufficient to insure his worth. With perspicacity rare in a man, he had observed that the two singular men of this narrative admired his daughter. Now, Bat, being a freak, was making money rapidly, while Sampey was only a poor literary bureau! Castellani felt the need of a partner. Why should not a partner be a son-in-law? Surely Bat was much more desirable than Sampey!

Sampey was wise and Bat was foolish. On the other hand, Bat was courageous and Sampey was timid. Bat had the courage of a brute. Sampey knew that there were certain ways of frightening brave brutes—he had even seen a prize-fighter join a church. He prepared for Bat.

One day he entered the museum between exhibitions and sought the Wild Man of Milo. That worthy was leisurely smoking a cigarette in a quiet corner, and was making the smoke curl up gracefully over the hairy tuft on his nose. Sampey was paler than usual and a little nervous, for the business of his visit was tinged with hazard. Bat, who happened to feel good-natured, gave the first greeting.

“Hey!” he called out.

Sampey went straight to him.

“You like da show, ha, Samp? You come effery day. Good place, ha, Samp?”

“A very good place, Bat,” quietly answered Sampey, who tried hard to appear indifferent as he fumbled nervously in his pocket.

“Signor Castellani, he biga mon, reecha mon, gooda mon. You like im?”

“Very much.” Sampey was acting strangely.

Bat’s eyes twinkled a little dangerously.

“You like da gal, too, ha, Samp?”

“The—ah—the tattooed woman? Yes, very well, indeed.”

“Ha, you sly Samp! I spik about da leetle ploompa gal—da Mug.”

“Oh! Muggie? Castellani’s daughter?”

“Ha.”

“Well, I don’t know her so very well.”

“You don’ know da Mugga?” Bat’s look was becoming dangerously fierce.

He straightened himself up from his lounging posture, and his big muscles swelled. “You don’ know da Mugga! You tink I no see. You loafer da Mugga! You wanta marry her! You tink ’er reecha, pooty. You miseraba sneaka!” Here Bat, who had worked himself into a fury, swore an eloquent Italian oath.

Sampey’s time had come. The two men were alone, Bat furious and desperate with jealousy; Sampey fearful, but determined; brutality against wit, strength against cunning, fury against patience, a bulldog matched with a mink, a game-cock pitted against an owl.

Sampey pretended to have dropped something accidentally. He stooped to pick it up, and some seconds lapsed before he pretended to have found it. While he was searching for it he approached nearer to Bat, and when he straightened up he brought his face very close to Bat’s, and suddenly raised his eyes and stared steadily into those of the Wild Man of Milo.

Bat meanwhile had kept up an insulting tirade, his evident purpose being to force the gentle writer into a fight. But when Sampey raised his eyes and fixed them in a peculiar stare, Bat regarded him every moment in speechless wonder, and then sprang back with a livid face, and in terror cried out:

“Santa Maria!”

For half a minute he gazed, horrified, at the sight which confronted him, his mouth open, his eyes staring—fascinated, terror-stricken, and aghast. Sampey, the gentle, usually dove-eyed, was now transformed. Those were not the accustomed gray eyes with which Bat was familiar, nor yet the limpid, amber eyes which had set poor Zoë’s heart bounding; Sampey gazed upon his victim with eyes that were a fierce and insurrectionary scarlet!

Bat, contumelious now no longer, dashed wildly away. He spread his wonderful tale. Castellani, whom it finally reached, frowned, thinking Bat was drunk. The Tattooed Lady

laughed outright. Zoë wondered and was troubled; but that night, just before the curtain of her gilt booth was drawn at the close of the exhibition, there stood her hero Sampey, gazing tenderly at her with eyes of a soft, pale, limpid amber. And she slept soundly after that.

When Sampey visited the museum the next day, he was eyed with considerable curiosity by the freaks. Castellani asked him directly what Bat meant by his stories. Sampey had expected this question, and was ready for it. After binding the showman to everlasting secrecy, he said:

“I have made a great discovery, but it is impossible for me to go into all its details. It must be sufficient at present for me to say that after many years of scientific experiment I have learned the secret of changing the color of my eyes at will.”

He said this very simply, as though unconscious of announcing one of the most extraordinary things to which the ages have given birth.

But Castellani was a study. Some great shock, resembling apoplexy, seemed to have invaded his system. Being a shrewd business man, he presently recovered his composure, and then in the most indifferent manner remarked that a person who could change the color of his eyes at will ought to be able, perhaps, if he should get started right, to make a little money, possibly, out of the accomplishment; and then he offered Sampey forty dollars a week to pose as a freak in the Great Oriental Dime Museum. Sampey, who knew that the Wild Man of Milo’s salary was two hundred dollars a week (which, although large, was well earned, seeing that everybody had to pull the tuft on his nose to be sure that it grew there), asked time to consider the splendid offer, which to him was a fortune.

There was the certainty of losing Zoë when she should learn that his amber eyes were not really heroic. He went to a retired showman and asked him what salaries might be commanded by a man with a hair-tufted nose and a man who could change the color of his eyes to any other color at will. This showman answered:

“I’ve seen Castellani’s man with the tuft. He gets two hundred dollars a week. That is pretty high. If you can bring me a man who can change the color of his eyes to any other color, I will pay him a thousand dollars a week and start in the business again.”

Sampey slept not a wink that night.

Meanwhile a change had taken place in Zoë: she had suddenly become more charming than ever. Her gentleness and sweetness had become conspicuously augmented, and she was so kind and sweet-mannered to all, including the Wild Man of Milo (whom she had formerly avoided through instinctive fear), that Bat took greater heart and swore to win her, though he might have to wade through oceans of Sampey blood. Mark this: Stake not too much on a woman’s condescension to *you*; it may come through love for another.

Zoë was innocent, honest, and confiding. Innocence measures the strength of faith. The charm of faith is its absurdity. Zoë believed in Sampey.

Sampey, grown surprisingly bold and self-reliant, named his terms to Castellani—a half-interest in the business—and Castellani, swear and bully and bluster as he might, must accept. This made Sampey a rich man at once. Castellani, exceedingly gracious and friendly after the signing of the compact, proposed a quiet supper in his private apartments in celebration of the new arrangement, and presently he and Zoë and Sampey were enjoying a very choice meal. Zoë was dazzlingly radiant and pretty, but a certain strange constraint sat between her and Sampey. Once, when she dropped her napkin and Sampey picked it up, his hand accidentally touched one of her daintily slipped feet, and his blushes were painful to see.

While they were thus engaged, Bat, without ceremony, burst in upon them, his face aglow and his eyes flashing triumph. He carried in his hand a small box, which he rudely thrust under their noses. When Sampey saw it he turned deathly pale and shrank back, powerless to move or speak.

“I ketcha da scound!” exclaimed Bat, shaking his finger in the cowering Sampey’s face. “I watch im; I ketcha da scound! He play you da dirtee tr-r-ricks!”

The Wild Man of Milo placed the box on the table and raised the lid. Within appeared a number of curious, small, cup-shaped trinkets of opaque white glass, each marked in the centre with an annular band of color surrounding a centre of clear glass, the range of colors being great, and the trinkets arranged in pairs according to color. There were also a vial labelled “cocaine” and a small camel’s-hair brush.

“You looka me,” resumed Hoolagaloo, greatly excited. “I make mine eye changa colah, like da scounda Samp.”

With that he dipped the brush into the vial and applied it to his eyes. Then he picked up two of the curious little glass cups, and slipped them, one at a time, over his eyeballs and under his eyelids, where they fitted snugly. They were artificial eyes which Sampey had made to cover his natural eyeballs on occasion. Bat struck a mock-tragic attitude and hissed:

“Diavolo!”

By a strange accident he had picked out two which were not mates. One of his eyes was a soft, pale, limpid amber and the other a fierce and insurrectionary red. These, with his tufted nose and his tragic attitude, gave him an appearance so grotesque and hideous that Zoë, after springing to her feet and throwing her arms wildly aloft, fell in a dead faint into Sampey’s arms.

Bat gloated over his rival; Castellani was dumbfounded. Presently Sampey’s nerve returned with his wits.

“Well,” he remarked, contemptuously, drawing Zoë closer, and holding her with a tender solicitude—“well, what of it?”

His insolence enraged Hoolagaloo. “H—hwat of eet! Santa Maria! Da scound! Ha, ha! Da gal no marry you now!”

Sampey deliberately moved Zoë so that he might reach his watch, and after looking calmly at it a moment he said:

“Muggie and I have been married just thirty hours.”

The announcement stunned the Wild Man. Castellani himself had a hard mental struggle to realize the situation, and then, with his accustomed equanimity and his old-time air of authority, he said:

“Well, phat is oll the row aboot, annyhow? D’ye want to shpile th’ mon’s thrick, Misther Bat? An’ thin, Misther Bat, it’s a domned gude wan, it is; an’ more’n thot, me gintlemanly son-in-law is me partner, too, Misther Bat, I’d have ye know, an’ he’s got aut’ority in this show.”

That finished the Wild Man of Milo. He staggered out, shaved his nose, bought an axe, and fled to the mountains to chop wood again, leaving the Mysterious Man with the Spectre Eyes to become the happiest husband and the most prosperous freak and showman in the world.