

Minister Island

The Romance of a New Yorker's Adventures in Queer Company
By Charles Wadsworth Camp

CHAPTER I. The Haunting Fear.

JAMES MILLER had looted southward from New York for the winter on his doctor's orders. He had decided on Captain's Island, off the Florida coast, as his abiding place, because his chum, Anderson, and the latter's wife, Molly, were wintering there. Miller picked up a small cruising launch, the Dart, at Allairville, hired a "native" named Tony to run it for him, and set out for Martinburg, the nearest mainland town to Captain's Island.

At Martinburg he began to notice that folk looked queer when Captain's Island was mentioned. His boatman, Tony, all but refused to go thither with him. And, when at last he arrived off the island at nightfall, Anderson met him at the door with the face of one who has seen a ghost.

Miller managed to draw from his friend the fact that the island had a bad name. It had once been a pirate resort, and there were pirate built houses still standing. Also there was a tale of an Arab girl killed there by a pirate or by a slaver, and of ghostly apparitions. The place was full of snakes, too.

At the island's far end was a camp of oystermen. A lank, mysterious fisherman in a rotten looking tub lived on the lagoon. A Northerner named Morgan and his daughter—a girl who was called "queer"—were the Andersons' nearest neighbors.

Anderson frankly said that he and his wife were afraid. The big old coquina house they occupied seemed uncanny. Their servants had refused, point blank, to clean the place. Jake, their native man-of-all-work, was equally scared.

And a day or two earlier Mrs. Anderson's pet cat had been found mysteriously killed on the pier in the strip of woodland separating the coquina house from Morgan's dwelling. Anderson thought the snakes must be getting over the fence from the outside's presence and waxing dangerous.

Miller announced that he would stay on board the Dart that night, promising to come to the coquina house next morning.

Convinced that he could not sleep, Miller lay brooding over Anderson's story, attempting to get the details of this night more and more with Anderson and Molly. Toward morning, however, he must have dropped off, for when he opened his eyes the low sun was shining through the port. The charnel house atmosphere had been dissipated. The Dart lay on an even keel. Tony was up. The welcome odor of coffee entered the state-room.

Slipping on his bathrobe, Miller hurried to the deck, jumped overboard, and, anchoring the boat near the inlet, it was on the point of vanishing him.

When he was dressed Tony brought him his coffee. He sat on the deck, gazing intently at his surroundings, almost gleefully aware of the retreat of last night's fears.

He could see the fisherman's boat near, anchoring a mile away, close to the shore of the island. It was, Anderson had said, low, filthy, and its deck was empty, its owner nowhere to be seen.

Miller's eyes followed the tangled shore line in the hope of glimpsing the coquina house. But the thicket was unbroken, and the white sand mounds of white sand which stretched eastward from near the river end of the island and evidently separate the river and the inlet. From the inlet Miller knew a faint opening to the sea somewhere down there. Probably the inlet made a sweep to the east and ran out between the mounds and the inlet.

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The sun was higher now in a clear sky behind the dunes. The white grains and the polished sea shells here and there glistened like jewels in its rays. On the summit tufts of long, slender grass waved languidly in a light breeze.

Tony came up and took the cup and saucer. He was about to descend when he paused with a long intake of breath. That same pallor came into his face that some fixed terror into his eyes as he stared across the dunes.

"What are you gaping at now?" Miller asked good-naturedly. The light opened. Tony whispered: "Look! In—in white!"

During that outbreak of yesterday there had been, Miller remembered, a woman about a woman in white, presumably the shade of the Algerian. He smiled.

"Come, Tony! Not by broad daylight. You only make yourself ridiculous!"

"Look!" Tony repeated. He pointed. Miller gazed across the dunes, something in his eyes. He wanted to see something white; something that moved—a woman or a girl.

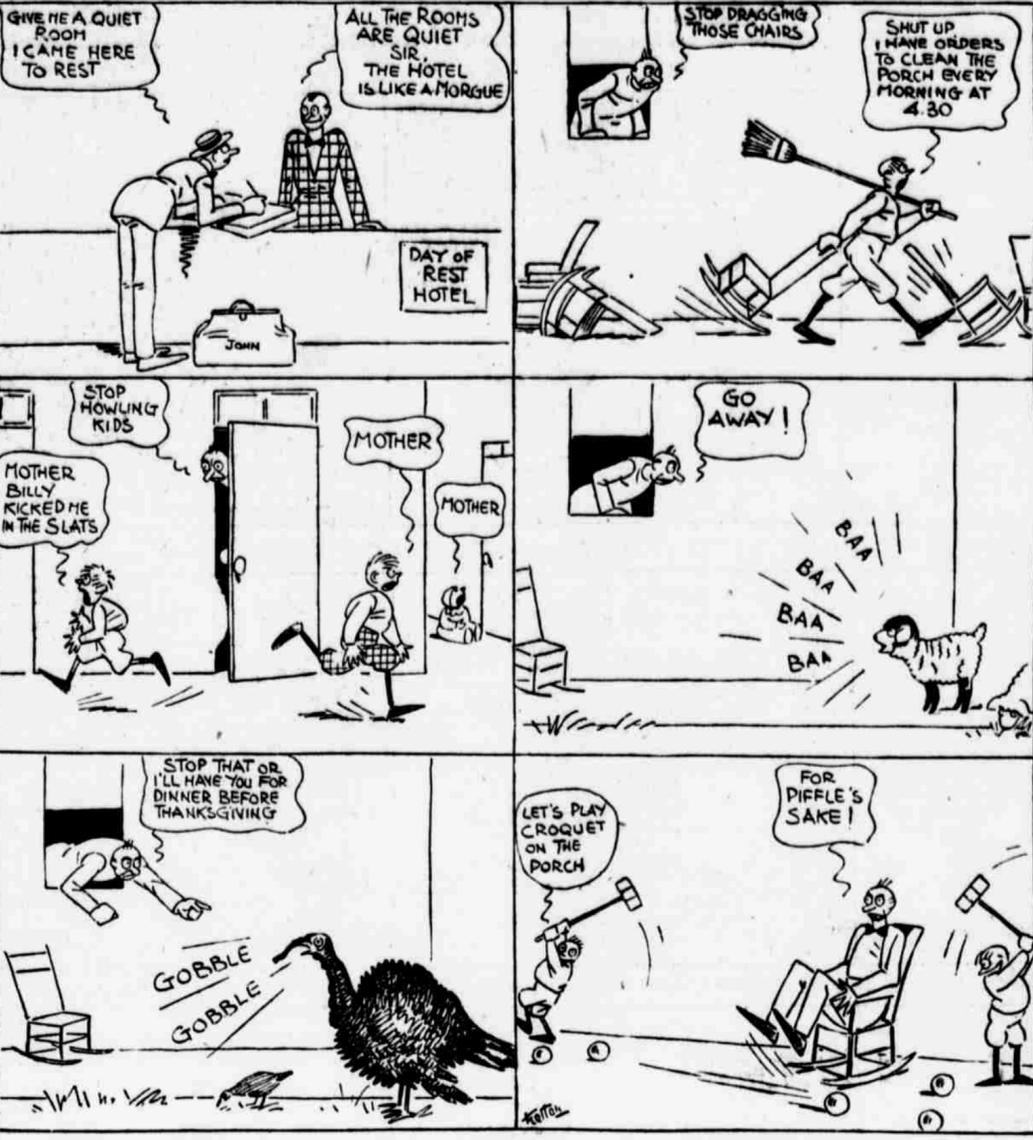
He sprang up. Laughing, he jumped to the lower deck and drew in the dingy.

"There's one ghost I'll lay for you, Tony."

"Don't go," the native begged. Miller stepped into the boat, pushed off, and with a few strong strokes reached the dunes. He was curious. Who was this early morning adventurer in white who moved across an empty shore? It might be the girl of whom Anderson had spoken—that "queer" girl about whom he had maintained so puzzling a reserve.

The Day of Rest

By Maurice Ketten



realized more than ever that she was very lovely.

"But you—why did you follow me?" she asked.

He considered. He had no convincing answer.

"Perhaps it was because I wanted to see you," he said.

"I don't know," she whispered.

"You will see me," he said, and released her hand.

She ran lightly away from him. Once she glanced back, then she was lost to sight among the dunes.

CHAPTER II. Jake's Premonition.

ANDERSON in his pockets, Miller gazed across the rolling sands. He moved once or twice, seeking a less obstructed view, hoping to see the girl's graceful figure again. At last he filled his pipe and smoked thoughtfully, questioning the whole extraordinary encounter until a sense of its unreality swept him. But this he fought back. It was not what he wished. Granted that his pursuit had been arbitrary and inexplicable even to himself, he desired it to remain a thing accomplished, a corner stone, a command in his last words to her, and, looking into her eyes, had read obedience?

Miller couldn't smile in the face of this tragic conviction that had come to him at his first glimpse of Anderson spoiled his meeting with this other friend. He tried to throw the feeling off. But Jake, when he spoke to him, added to it. In response to his cheery greeting, Jake whispered:

"Thank God, you're here, Mr. Miller. Make them go away. There's death on the island. You feel it. If we don't leave it's going to find some of us."

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After luncheon he anxiously awaited Molly and Anderson, but it was 4 o'clock before he saw a rowboat put out from shore. Even at that distance he recognized his friends and the man, Jake, at the oars. He stood at the rail until Tony had grasped the painter and helped them to the deck.

Molly's appearance shocked Miller more than Anderson's had done the day before. She was scarcely thirty, and he had always known her as a level-headed, light-hearted woman, unacquainted with life's darker aspects, and determined, as far as possible, to hold them at arm's length. Yet to-day she looked old. There were gray lines in her hair. Her manner was nervous. She appeared too slender for her clothes.

Miller fostered her illusion by leading a reluctant conversation to friends in New York, to happy experiences they had shared there.

Afterwards they prepared to leave with a reluctance that touched him. Miller glanced at Tony and Jake forward. He realized immediately his mistake in leaving the two alone together. They sat there, staring at the island. Their faces were pale.

When he called sharply Jake arose and stepped into the boat with the air of a somnambulist, while Tony, indifferently, almost clumsily, approached the task of losing the painter.

Miller lowered his voice to a halting whisper.

"There's something more you can tell me about her?"

"You haven't seen her?" Anderson asked quickly.

Miller couldn't go the whole way. Either a sense of discomfort caused by his attitude towards the girl, or a desire to isolate the knowledge of the adventure to its two protagonists, made him glide over Anderson's question.

"I'm only more curious since I've seen the place. You can't blame me. Such a girl as you describe, wandering about this lonely island! Since you think it best I'll wait and see for myself. But her father—Morgan—hell run out and do the honors!"

"Of course," Anderson said, "unless that girl—"

"Always that girl!" Miller said irritably. "Why do you make such an enigma of her?"

"Because," Anderson answered simply, "that is what she is—an enigma; a mystery; and after all, I couldn't tell you much beyond that."

CHAPTER III. The Snake's Strike.

IT was clear and still that night. Although he was not entirely free from the oppressive, indefinable sensations of the previous evening, Miller slept better. Tony, on his part, behaved in the same disturbed manner, sitting silent and motionless in the kitchen doorway until Miller was in bed, then continuing his lamp with evident reluctance.

The daylight, however, brought Miller's cheerfulness back to him. He was early on deck, scanning the dunes expectantly; but the girl did not come to the beach that morning. Miller was sorry. He grew discontented.

Scientific Sprague

By FRANCIS LYNDE

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A small gasoline launch rounded the end of the island at eight o'clock. Miller reawakened to a sense of interest as it chugged noisily in the direction of the Dart. It probably held Morgan. By detaching himself he might learn something of the girl's personality from her father. Why not, indeed, say to Morgan: "I met your daughter on the beach yesterday?" But he remembered he shared the secret of those early morning excursions with her. Moreover, his effort with Anderson had convinced him that he could not speak casually of her.

Morgan was a small man, past fifty, with a stout, pleasant face and a ready smile. He stepped aboard, introducing himself eagerly.

"Please be frank if you don't care to be disturbed. I thought I'd run over and see. I live in the house at the end of the island. My name's Morgan."

"I'm glad you've come," Miller answered warmly. "I hoped some one from that beautiful house would."

"I suppose you're cruising up the coast," Morgan said.

"Yes—anchored here night before last. I find it so attractive I'm in no great hurry to go on."

Morgan remained, chatting, for only a few minutes. Miller pressed him to stay, for the little man amused him with his genial air and a dry humor. Morgan, however, refused, saying he had promised to go to Sandport with Anderson that morning.

As he watched the launch disappear around the bend Miller lost patience with himself. Why had he found it impossible to speak to the girl's father? That afternoon, at least, he would take himself in hand. He would open a campaign. He would call on the Andersons early, and afterward, when he had had time to think, he would take the girl to see him at the plantation house, and he recalled the shrinking obedience in her eyes. If he did not get to her first time in two months no reminders of Captain's Island.

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"Because," Anderson answered simply, "that is what she is—an enigma; a mystery; and after all, I couldn't tell you much beyond that."

Miller turned toward the veranda, but Molly seemed to prefer the clearing. She made excuses for lingering there, sitting out the same view of the inlet which Jake had achieved by cutting away a few of the thickest trees, and describing the canvases which Anderson had placed, but had been unable to carry through.

"Why, when the axe was working," Miller asked, "didn't you tear out that mass of undergrowth which threatens to swallow the house from the rear?"

"Jake's been afraid to go in," she answered. "He says he knows it's full of snakes. Looks as though it might be a good idea. We haven't dared take the responsibility of felling him to work there against his own judgment."

"Might I see the house?" he asked. "I acknowledge you and Andy have some reason. Its exterior has a frowning, inhospitable air."

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