The Guinea Pig

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Abstract

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WHEN THE managing editor of the Herald stepped into Casey’s Bar and Grill for his afternoon pick-me-up, the first thing he observed was one of his reporters, Pete Kemble, staring gloomily at the olive in a Martini. While the editor watched, Pete absently ate the olive, drank the Martini, and beckoned to the bartender.

“When did you get back?” asked the managing editor, seating himself on the stool next to the reporter.

“About fifteen minutes ago.” Pete did not look up. He inspected the empty glass before him.

“Are you drunk?”

“Not yet.”

“What do you mean ‘not yet’?”

“I haven’t had a drop for two days. But I’m going to get plastered as soon as I can.”

“Why?”

Pete sat up and looked at the managing editor for the first time. “Let’s go sit in one of the booths,” he said.

The editor picked up his drink and followed. When they were seated, Pete leaned across the narrow table.

“You remember that story you sent me on last Monday?”

“I sent you to Ashton. So?”

“What for?”

“What for? To interview Dr. McGillivray, that’s what for. Didn’t you see him?”

“Sure. You wanted to know about his experiments, didn’t you?”

The managing editor sighed patiently. “Yes,” he said, “I wanted to know about his experiments with mental telepathy. You know damn well what I wanted to know, and I still want to know it. So let’s have it.”

Pete leaned back. “I drove to Ashton Tuesday,” he said. “That’s fine,” commented the editor sarcastically.

“I inquired of a young lady where I could find Dr. McGillivray. You know, there’re some nice-looking girls on that university campus.”

“Yes,” said the managing editor, who was married, “I
know. Get on with your story."

"I went to the building she pointed out, but it was the wrong one. I ended up in a physicist's office. He told me where to go, and showed me some card tricks, too."

"Dammit," said the managing editor, "will you get to the point?"

"So I went to Dr. McGillivray's office. He was at chapel. Compulsory for students, so his secretary said, and he likes to go too. I said that was kind of silly, and she said why, and I said . . ."

"I can guess what you said," interrupted the editor. "Kemble, did you tell Dr. McGillivray he was a quack?"

"Now why should I tell him that?"

"When I told you he was studying mental telepathy, you said he must be a quack, and off his rails, and that people who believed in mental telepathy were crackpots."

"Well, I didn't tell him that."

"Then what the hell did you tell him?"

"Well, I waited for him in the office . . ."

Pete squirmed on the hard chair in the psychology office. As he looked again at his watch, the door opened and a tall man with a small white goatee came in.

"Dr. McGillivray," said the secretary coldly, "this gentleman is here to see you."

"Why, yes. Come in, won't you?"

Pete followed the scientist into his office. "My name's Kemble," he began. "I'm a reporter for the Herald and I . . ."

"Oh, yes. I had a letter from the paper. You want to know about these mental telepathy experiments, don't you?"

Dr. McGillivray handed Pete a typewritten manuscript. A sentence leaped out at him. "The coefficient of correlation," it stated, "and the sigma-relationship of the following statistical table can be shown by a time continuum."

"Ah—Dr. McGillivray," asked Pete, "do you suppose you could just explain some of this to me in non-technical language?"

"Surely," beamed the psychologist. "I'll tell you. Suppose you take part in one of these experiments. We'll see if you have any extra-sensory perception."
“Extra . . . ?”
“Mental telepathy, in other words. Right this way.”

Pete suspiciously followed Dr. McGillivray into a small bare room containing only a chair and table. “I will be in the next room,” said the scientist, “turning over thirteen cards, one by one. Here is a list of the thirteen cards. About every thirty seconds, mark the card you feel has just been turned over. The first will be marked 1, and the second one 2, and so on. All right?”

“Yeah.”

This is a bunch of baloney, thought Pete, as he marked a 1 next to the king of spades. The old guy’s crazy. Mental telepathy! Just a fraud, just like all these psychiatrists. He put a 3 by the ace of diamonds. If these characters would just keep their feet on the ground, like me (a 5 by the three of spades) they’d be a lot better off. College professors! Just crackpot visionaries. 8 by the ten of hearts. 9-10-11-12. 13 by the queen of clubs.

The door opened, and the professor bustled in. He picked up the list and looked at it in amazement.

“Why, Mr. Kemble!” he exclaimed. “This is almost perfect! You’ve only transposed two cards.”

“Huh? But . . .”

“The cards are in there on the table, in the order I turned them over. Go look at them.”

Pete did so. He compared the cards with the list. Dr. McGillivray was right.

* * *

“. . . so I talked to him most of the rest of the morning. He told me all about his figures.”

The managing editor laughed raucously. “So we’ve got a mental telepathist on the Herald, have we? Tell me what I’m thinking about.”

“Listen,” Pete said, “the guy’s a fraud.”

“How do you know?”

“I went downtown that night and got in a poker game with some college students. And I lost forty bucks.”

“You couldn’t read their minds?” The managing editor brayed again.
"So I decided to find out what kind of a con game the guy was pulling . . ."  

* * *

Two days later, Pete gave up. He had faithfully struggled through every word of the thick manuscript Dr. McGillivray had lent him. This had entailed going through the better part of Webster's Unabridged. But there were no holes in the scientist's experiments.

He had talked to the students who had served as guinea-pigs for Dr. McGillivray. All knew there was no possibility of fraud. The psychologist's colleagues were equally convinced.

When he had learned all this, Pete went to the largest saloon in Ashton and got very drunk. He told his sorrows to the bartender.

"But the guy has to be a fraud," Pete wept. "Only crack-pots believe in mental telepathy. 'S like believin' in ghosts."

"Sure, Mac," said the bartender. And he went away to polish some glasses...

* * *

". . . so I came home."

"And you still think he's pulling something?" asked the managing editor.

"Jeez, I don't know. I wish I knew."

"Well, you better get the story written. We may use it tomorrow. I got some pictures of McGillivray."

"Telepathy! It's ridiculous. He must be a fraud."

Suddenly Pete looked up and squinted furtively at the managing editor.

"How about a game of poker tonight?"

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No death

They, with their timely tears,
Packed him in an oak box;
Tucked him in a cold, damp bed;
Returned him to the parental womb.

* * *

Rain dripped from the dried flowers,