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The Story of a Patriot

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TO MY WIFE

Who is the creator of the most charming character in this story, "Mrs. Godd," and who positively refuses to permit the book to go to press until it has been explained that the character is a Grecian Godd and not a Hebrew Godd, so that no one may accuse the creator of sacrilege.

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Section 1



Now and then it occurs to one to reflect upon what slender threads of accident depend the most important circumstances of his life; to look back and shudder, realizing how close to the edge of nothingness his being has come. A young man is walking down the street, quite casually, with an empty mind and no set purpose; he comes to a crossing, and for no reason that he could tell he takes the right hand turn instead of the left; and so it happens that he encounters a blue-eyed girl, who sets his heart to beating. He meets the girl, marries her—and she became your mother. But now, suppose the young man had taken the left hand turn instead of the right, and had never met the blue-eyed girl; where would you be now, and what would have become of those qualities of mind which you consider of importance to the world, and those grave affairs of business to which your time is devoted?

Something like that it was which befell Peter Gudge; just such an accident, changing the whole current of his life, and making the series of events with which this story deals. Peter was walking down the street one afternoon, when a woman approached and held out to him a printed leaflet. “Read this, please,” she said.

And Peter, who was hungry, and at odds with the world, answered gruffly: “I got no money.” He thought it was an advertising dodger, and he said: “I can’t buy nothin.”

“It isn’t anything for sale,” answered the woman. “It’s a message.”

“Religion?” said Peter. “I just got kicked out of a church.”

“No, not a church,” said the woman. “It’s something different; put it in your pocket.” She was an elderly woman with gray hair, and she followed along, smiling pleasantly at this frail, poor-looking stranger, but nagging at him. “Read it some time when you’ve nothing else to do.” And so Peter, just to get rid of her, took the leaflet and thrust it into his pocket, and went on, and in a minute or two had forgotten all about it.

Peter was thinking—or rather Peter’s stomach was thinking for him; for when you have had nothing to eat all day, and nothing on the day before but a cup of coffee and one sandwich, your thought-centers are transferred from the top to the middle of you. Peter was thinking that this was a hell of a life. Who could have foreseen that just because he had stolen one miserable fried doughnut, he would lose his easy job and his chance of rising in the world? Peter’s whole being was concentrated on the effort to rise in the world; to get success, which means money, which means ease and pleasure—the magic names which lure all human creatures.

But who could have foreseen that Mrs. Smithers would have kept count of those fried doughnuts every time anybody passed thru her pantry? And it was only that one ridiculous circumstance which had brought Peter to his present misery. But for that he might have had his lunch of bread and dried herring and weak tea in the home of the shoe-maker’s wife, and might have still been busy with his job of stirring up dissension in the First Apostolic Church, otherwise known as the Holy Rollers, and of getting the Rev. Gamaliel Lunk turned out, and Shoemaker Smithers established at the job of pastor, with Peter Gudge as his right hand man.

Always it had been like that, thru Peter’s twenty years of life. Time after time he would get his feeble clutch fixed upon the ladder of prosperity, and

then something would happen—some wretched thing like the stealing of a fried doughnut—to pry him loose and tumble him down again into the pit of misery.

So Peter walked along, with his belt drawn tight, and his restless blue eyes wandering here and there, looking for a place to get a meal. There were jobs to be had, but they were hard jobs, and Peter wanted an easy one. There are people in this world who live by their muscles, and others who live by their wits; Peter belonged to the latter class; and had missed many a meal rather than descend in the social scale.

Peter looked into the faces of everyone he passed, searching for a possible opening. Some returned his glance, but never for more than a second, for they saw an insignificant looking man, undersized, undernourished, and with one shoulder higher than the other, a weak chin and mouth, crooked teeth, and a brown moustache too feeble to hold itself up at the corners. Peter's straw hat had many straws missing, his second-hand brown suit was become third-hand, and his shoes were turning over at the sides. In a city where everybody was "hustling," everybody, as they phrased it, "on the make," why should anyone take a second glance at Peter Gudge? Why should anyone care about the restless soul hidden inside him, or dream that Peter was, in his own obscure way, a sort of genius? No one did care; no one did dream.

It was about two o'clock of an afternoon in July, and the sun beat down upon the streets of American City. There were crowds upon the streets, and Peter noticed that everywhere were flags and bunting. Once or twice he heard the strains of distant music, and wondered what was "up." Peter had not been reading the newspapers; all his attention had been taken up by the quarrels of the Smithers faction and the Lunk faction in the First Apostolic Church, otherwise known as the Holy Rollers, and great events that had been

happening in the world outside were of no concern to him. Peter knew vaguely that on the other side of the world half a dozen mighty nations were locked together in a grip of death; the whole earth was shaken with their struggles, and Peter had felt a bit of the trembling now and then. But Peter did not know that his own country had anything to do with this European quarrel, and did not know that certain great interests thruout the country had set themselves to rouse the public to action.

This movement had reached American City, and the streets had broken out in a blaze of patriotic display. In all the windows of the stores there were signs: "Wake up, America!" Across the broad Main Street there were banners: "America Prepare!" Down in the square at one end of the street a small army was gathering—old veterans of the Civil War, and middle-aged veterans of the Spanish War, and regiments of the state militia, and brigades of marines and sailors from the ships in the harbor, and members of fraternal lodges with their Lord High Chief Grand Marshals on horseback with gold sashes and waving white plumes, and all the notables of the city in carriages, and a score of bands to stir their feet and ten thousand flags waving above their heads. "Wake up America!" And here was Peter Gudge, with an empty stomach, coming suddenly upon the swarming crowds in Main Street, and having no remotest idea what it was all about.

A crowd suggested one thing to Peter. For seven years of his young life he had been assistant to Pericles Priam, and had traveled over America selling Priam's Peerless Pain Paralyzer; they had ridden in an automobile, and wherever there was a fair or a convention or an excursion or a picnic, they were on hand, and Pericles Priam would stop at a place where the crowds were thickest, and ring a dinner bell, and deliver his super-eloquent message to humanity—the elixir of life revealed, suffering banished from the earth, and all

inconveniences of this mortal state brought to an end for one dollar per bottle of fifteen per cent opium. It had been Peter's job to handle the bottles and take in the coin; and so now, when he saw the crowd, he looked about him eagerly. Perhaps there might be here some vender of corn-plasters or ink-stain removers, or some three card monte man to whom Peter could attach himself for the price of a sandwich.

Peter wormed his way thru the crowd for two or three blocks, but saw nothing more promising than venders of American flags on little sticks, and of patriotic buttons with "Wake up America!" But then, on the other side of the street at one of the crossings Peter saw a man standing on a truck making a speech, and he dug his way thru the crowd, elbowing, sliding this way and that, begging everybody's pardon—until at last he was out of the crowd, and standing in the open way which had been cleared for the procession, a seemingly endless road lined with solid walls of human beings, with blue-uniformed policemen holding them back. Peter started to run across—and at that same instant came the end of the world.

Section 2



One who seeks to tell about events in words comes occasionally upon a fundamental difficulty. An event of colossal and overwhelming significance may happen all at once, but the words which describe it have to come one by one in a long chain. The event may reveal itself without a moment's warning; but if one is to give a sense of it in words, one must prepare for it, build up to it, awaken anticipation, establish a climax. If the description of this event which fate sprung upon Peter Gudge as he was crossing the street were limited to the one word "BANG" in letters a couple of inches high across the page, the impression would hardly be adequate.

The end of the world, it seemed to Peter, when he was able to collect enough of his terrified wits to think about it. But at first there was no thinking; there was only sensation—a terrific roar, as if the whole universe had suddenly turned to sound; a blinding white glare, as of all the lightnings of the heavens; a blow that picked him up as if he had been a piece of thistledown, and flung him across the street and against the side of a building. Peter fell upon the sidewalk in a heap, deafened, blinded, stunned; and there he lay—he had no idea how long—until gradually his senses began to return to him, and from the confusion certain factors began to stand out: a faint gray smoke that seemed to lie upon the ground, a bitter odor that stung the nostrils and tongue, and screams of people, moaning and sobbing and general uproar. Something lay across Peter's chest, and he felt that he was suffocating, and struggled

convulsively to push it away; the hands with which he pushed felt something hot and wet and slimy. and the horrified Peter realized that it was half the body of a mangled human being.

Yes, it was the end of the world. Only a couple of days previously Peter Gudge had been a devout member of the First Apostolic Church, otherwise known as the Holy Rollers, and had listened at prayer-meetings to soul-shaking imaginings out of the Book of Revelations. So Peter knew that this was it; and having many sins upon his conscience, and being in no way eager to confront his God, he looked out over the bodies of the dead and the writhing wounded, and saw a row of boxes standing against the building, having been placed there by people who wished to see over the heads of the crowd. Peter started to crawl, and found that he was able to do so, and wormed his way behind one of these packing-boxes, and got inside and lay hidden from his God.

There was blood on him, and he did not know whether it was his own or other peoples'. He was trembling with fright, his crooked teeth were hammering together like those of an angry woodchuck. But the effects of the shock continued to pass away, and his wits to come back to him, and at last Peter realized that he never had taken seriously the ideas of the First Apostolic Church of American City. He listened to the moans of the wounded, and to the shouts and uproar of the crowd, and began seriously figuring out what could have happened. There had once been an earthquake in American City; could this be another one? Or had a volcano opened up in the midst of Main Street? Or could it have been a gas-main? And was this the end, or would it explode some more? Would the volcano go on erupting, and blow Peter and his frail packing-box thru the walls of Guggenheim's Department-store?

So Peter waited, and listened to the horrible sounds of people in agony, and pleading with others to put them out of it. Peter heard voices of men giving orders, and realized that these must be policemen, and that no doubt there would be ambulances coming. Maybe there was something the matter with him, and he ought to crawl out and get himself taken care of. All of a sudden Peter remembered his stomach; and his wits, which had been sharpened by twenty years' struggle against a hostile world, realized in a flash the opportunity which fate had brought to him. He must pretend to be wounded, badly wounded; he must be unconscious, suffering from shock and shattered nerves; then they would take him to the hospital and put him in a soft bed and give him things to eat—maybe he might stay there for weeks, and they might give him money when he came out.

Or perhaps he might get a job in the hospital, something that was easy, and required only alert intelligence. Perhaps the head doctor in the hospital might want somebody to watch the other doctors, to see if they were neglecting the patients, or perhaps flirting with some of the nurses—there was sure to be something like that going on. It had been that way in the orphans' home where Peter had spent a part of his childhood till he ran away. It had been that way again in the great Temple of Jimjambo, conducted by Pashtian el Kalandra, Chief Magistrian of Eleutherinian Exoticism. Peter had worked as scullion in the kitchen in that mystic institution, and had worked his way upward until he possessed the confidence of Tushbar Akrogas, major-domo and right hand man of the Prophet himself.

Wherever there was a group of people, and a treasure to be administered, there Peter knew was backbiting and scandal and intriguing and spying, and a chance for somebody whose brains were "all there." It might seem strange that Peter should think about such things, just then when the earth had opened up

in front of him and the air had turned to roaring noise and blinding white flame, and had hurled him against the side of a building and dropped the bleeding half of a woman's body across his chest; but Peter had lived from earliest childhood by his wits and by nothing else, and such a fellow has to learn to use his wits under any and all circumstances, no matter how bewildering. Peter's training covered almost every emergency one could think of; he had even at times occupied himself by imagining what he would do if the Holy Rollers should turn out to be right, and if suddenly Gabriel's trumpet were to blow, and he were to find himself confronting Jesus in a long white night-gown.

Section 3



Peter's imaginings were brought to an end by the packing-box being pulled out from the wall. "Hello!" said a voice.

Peter groaned, but did not look up. The box was pulled out further, and a face peered in. "What you hidin' in there for?"

Peter stammered feebly: "Wh-wh-what?"

"You hurt?" demanded the voice.

"I dunno," moaned Peter.

The box was pulled out further, and its occupant slid out. Peter looked up, and saw three or four policemen bending over him; he moaned again.

"How did you get in there?" asked one.

"I crawled in."

"What for?"

"To g-g-get away from the—what was it?"

"Bomb," said one of the policemen; and Peter was astounded that for a moment he forgot to be a nervous wreck.

"Bomb!" he cried; and at the same moment one of the policemen lifted him to his feet.

"Can you stand up?" he demanded; and Peter tried, and found that he could, and forgot that he couldn't. He was covered with blood and dirt, and was an unpresentable object, but he was really relieved to discover that his limbs were intact.

“What’s your name?” demanded one of the policemen, and when Peter answered, he asked, “Where do you work?”

“I got no job,” replied Peter.

“Where’d you work last?” And then another broke in, “What did you crawl in there for?”

“My God!” cried Peter. “I wanted to get away!”

The policemen seemed to find it suspicious that he had stayed hidden so long. They were in a state of excitement themselves, it appeared; a terrible crime had been committed, and they were hunting for any trace of the criminal. Another man came up, not dressed in uniform, but evidently having authority, and he fell onto Peter, demanding to know who he was, and where he had come from, and what he had been doing in that crowd. And of course Peter had no very satisfactory answers to give to any of these questions. His occupations had been unusual, and not entirely credible, and his purposes were hard to explain to a suspicious questioner. The man was big and burly, at least a foot taller than Peter, and as he talked he stooped down and stared into Peter’s eyes as if he were looking for dark secrets hidden back in the depths of Peter’s skull. Peter remembered that he was supposed to be sick, and his eyelids drooped and he reeled slightly, so that the policemen had to hold him up.

“I want to talk to that fellow,” said the questioner. “Take him inside.” One of the officers took Peter under one arm, and the other under the other arm, and they half walked and half carried him across the street and into a building.

Section 4



It was a big store which the police had opened up. Inside there were wounded people lying on the floor, with doctors and others attending them. Peter was marched down the corridor, and into a room where sat or stood several other men, more or less in a state of collapse like himself; people who had failed to satisfy the police, and were being held under guard.

Peter's two policemen backed him against the wall and proceeded to go thru his pockets, producing the shameful contents—a soiled rag, and two cigarette butts picked up on the street, and a broken pipe, and a watch which had once cost a dollar, but was now out of order, and too badly damaged to be pawned. That was all they had any right to find, so far as Peter knew. But there came forth one thing more—the printed circular which Peter had thrust into his pocket. The policeman who pulled it out took a glance at it, and then cried, “Good God!” He stared at Peter, then he stared at the other policeman and handed him the paper.

At that moment the man not in uniform entered the room. “Mr. Guffey!” cried the policeman. “See this!” The man took the paper, and glanced at it, and Peter, watching with bewildered and fascinated eyes, saw a most terrifying sight. It was as if the man went suddenly out of his mind. He glared at Peter, and under his black eyebrows the big staring eyes seemed ready to jump out of his head.

“Aha!” he exclaimed; and then, “So I’ve got you!” The hand that held the paper was trembling, and the other hand reached out like a great claw, and fastened itself in the neck of Peter’s coat, and drew it together until Peter was squeezed tight. “You threw that bomb!” hissed the man.

“Wh-what?” gasped Peter, his voice almost fainting. “B-b-bomb?”

“Out with it!” cried the man, and his face came close to Peter’s, his teeth gleaming as if he were going to bite off Peter’s nose. “Out with it! Quick! Who helped you?”

“My G-God!” said Peter. “I d-dunno what you mean.”

“You dare lie to me?” roared the man; and he shook Peter as if he meant to jar his teeth out. “No nonsense now! Who helped you make that bomb?”

Peter’s voice rose to a scream of terror: “I never saw no bomb! I dunno what you’re talkin’ about!”

“You, come this way,” said the man, and started suddenly toward the door. It might have been more convenient if he had turned Peter around, and got him by the back of his coat-collar; but he evidently held Peter’s physical being as a thing too slight for consideration—he just kept his grip in the bosom of Peter’s jacket, and half lifted him and half shoved him back out of the room, and down a long passage to the back part of the building. And all the time he was hissing into Peter’s face: “I’ll have it out of you! Don’t think you can lie to me! Make up your mind to it, you’re going to come thru!”

The man opened a door. It was some kind of storeroom, and he walked Peter inside and slammed the door behind him. “Now, out with it!” he said. The man thrust into his pocket the printed circular, or whatever it was—Peter never saw it again, and never found out what was printed on it. With his free hand the man grabbed one of Peter’s hands, or rather one finger of Peter’s

hand, and bent it suddenly backward with terrible violence. "Oh!" screamed Peter. "Stop!" And then, with a wild shriek, "You'll break it."

"I mean to break it! mean to break every bone in your body! I'll tear your finger-nails out; I'll tear the eyes out of your head, if I have to! You tell me who helped you make that bomb!"

Peter broke out in a storm of agonized protest; he had never heard of any bomb, he didn't know what the man was talking about; he writhed and twisted and doubled himself over backward, trying to evade the frightful pain of that pressure on his finger.

"You're lying!" insisted Guffey. "I know you're lying. You're one of that crowd."

"What crowd? Ouch! I dunno what you mean!"

"You're one of them Reds, aint you?"

"Reds? What are Reds?"

"You want to tell me you don't know what a Red is? Aint you been giving out them circulars on the street?"

"I never seen the circular!" repeated Peter. "I never seen a word in it; I dunno what it is."

"You try to stuff me with that?"

"Some woman gimme that circular on the street! Ouch! Stop! Jesus! I tell you I never looked at the circular!"

"You dare go on lying?" shouted the man, with fresh access of rage. "And when I seen you with them Reds? I know about your plots, I'm going to get it out of you." He grabbed Peter's wrist and began to twist it, and Peter half turned over in the effort to save himself, and shrieked again, in more piercing tones, "I dunno! I dunno!"

“What’s them fellows done for you that you protect them?” demanded the other. “What good’ll it do you if we hang you and let them escape?”

But Peter only screamed and wept the louder.

“They’ll have time to get out of town,” persisted the other. “If you speak quick we can nab them all, and then I’ll let you go. You understand, we won’t do a thing to you, if you’ll come thru and tell us who put you up to this. We know it wasn’t you that planned it; it’s the big fellows we want.”

He began to wheedle and coax Peter; but then, when Peter answered again with his provoking “I dunno,” he would give another twist to Peter’s wrist, and Peter would yell, almost incoherent with terror and pain—but still declaring that he could tell nothing, he knew nothing about any bomb.

So at last Guffey wearied of this futile inquisition; or perhaps it occurred to him that this was too public a place for the prosecution of a “third degree”—there might be some one listening outside the door. He stopped twisting Peter’s wrist, and tilted back Peter’s head so that Peter’s frightened eyes were staring into his.

“Now, young fellow,” he said, “look here. I got no time for you just now, but you’re going to jail, you’re my prisoner, and make up your mind to it, sooner or later I’m going to get it out of you. It may take a day, or it may take a month, but you’re going to tell me about this bomb plot, and who printed this here circular opposed to Preparedness, and all about these Reds you work with. I’m telling you now—so you think it over; and meantime, you hold your mouth, don’t say a word to a living soul, or if you do I’ll tear your tongue out of your throat.”

Then, paying no attention to Peter’s wailings, he took him by the back of the collar and marched him down the hall again, and turned him over to one of the policemen. “Take this man to the city jail,” he said, “and put him in the hole,

and keep him there until I come, and don't let him speak a word to anybody. If he tries it, mash his mouth for him." So the policeman took poor sobbing Peter by the arm and marched him out of the building.

Section 5



The police had got the crowds driven back by now, and had ropes across the street to hold them, and inside the roped space were several ambulances and a couple of patrol-wagons. Peter was shoved into one of these latter, and a policeman sat by his side, and the bell clanged, and the patrol-wagon forced its way slowly thru the struggling crowd. Half an hour later they arrived at the huge stone jail, and Peter was marched inside. There were no formalities, they did not enter Peter on the books, or take his name or his finger prints; some higher power had spoken, and Peter's fate was already determined. He was taken into an elevator, and down into a basement, and then down a flight of stone steps into a deeper basement, and there was an iron door with a tiny slit an inch wide and six inches long near the top. This was the "hole," and the door was opened and Peter shoved inside into utter darkness. The door banged, and the bolts rattled; and then silence. Peter sank upon a cold stone floor, a bundle of abject and hideous misery.

These events had happened with such terrifying rapidity that Peter Gudge had hardly time to keep track of them. But now he had plenty of time, he had nothing but time. He could think the whole thing out, and realize the ghastly trick which fate had played upon him. He lay there, and time passed; he had no way of measuring it, no idea whether it was hours or days. It was cold and clammy in the stone cell; they called it the "cooler," and used it to reduce the temperature of the violent and intractable. It was a trouble-saving device; they

just left the man there and forgot him, and his own tormented mind did the rest.

And surely no more tormented mind than the mind of Peter Gudge had ever been put in that black hole. It was the more terrible, because so utterly undeserved, so preposterous. For such a thing to happen to him, Peter Gudge, of all people—who took such pains to avoid discomfort in life, who was always ready to oblige anybody, to do anything he was told to do, so as to have an easy time, a sufficiency of food, and a warm corner to crawl into! What could have persuaded fate to pick him for the victim of this cruel prank; to put him into this position, where he could not avoid suffering, no matter what he did? They wanted him to tell something, and Peter would have been perfectly willing to tell anything—but how could he tell it when he did not know it?

The more Peter thought about it, the more outraged he became. It was monstrous! He sat up and glared into the black darkness. He talked to himself, he talked to the world outside, to the universe which had forgotten his existence. He stormed, he wept. He got on his feet and flung himself about the cell, which was six feet square, and barely tall enough for him to stand erect. He pounded on the door with his one hand which Guffey had not lamed, he kicked, and he shouted. But there was no answer, and so far as he could tell, there was no one to hear.

When he had exhausted himself, he sank down, and fell into a haunted sleep; and then he wakened again, to a reality worse than any nightmare. That awful man was coming after him again! He was going to torture him, to make him tell what he did not know! All the ogres and all the demons that had ever been invented to frighten the imagination of children were as nothing compared to the image of the man called Guffey, as Peter thought of him.

Several ages after Peter had been locked up, he heard sounds outside, and the door was opened. Peter was cowering in the corner, thinking that Guffey had come. There was a scraping on the floor, and then the door was banged again, and silence fell. Peter investigated and discovered that they had put in a chunk of bread and a pan of water.

Then more ages passed, and Peter's impotent ragings were repeated; then once more they brought bread and water, and Peter wondered, was it twice a day they brought it, or was this a new day? And how long did they mean to keep him here? Did they mean to drive him mad? He asked these questions of the man who brought the bread and water, but the man made no answer, he never at any time spoke a word. Peter had no company in that "hole" but his God; and Peter was not well acquainted with his God, and did not enjoy a tete-a-tete with Him.

What troubled Peter most was the cold; it got into his bones, and his teeth were chattering all the time. Despite all his moving about, he could not keep warm. When the man opened the door, he cried out to him, begging for a blanket; each time the man came, Peter begged more frantically than ever. He was ill, he had been injured in the explosion, he needed a doctor, he was going to die! But there was never any answer. Peter would lie there and shiver and weep, and writhe, and babble, and lose consciousness for a while, and not know whether he was awake or asleep, whether he was living or dead. He was becoming delirious, and the things that were happening to him, the people who were tormenting him, became monsters and fiends who carried him away upon far journeys, and plunged him thru abysses of terror and torment.

And yet, many and strange as were the phantoms which Peter's sick imagination conjured up, there was no one of them as terrible as the reality which prevailed just then in the life of American City, and was determining the