

What Happened to Hoag

BY

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UP to the present Hoag has been profoundly disturbed by two things—A System and a Shadow. The system was organized to take him in. The shadow refused to be incorporated. And it was the audacity of his shadow that set Hoag thinking on psychic presentments. In the instalment now running we trace Hoag from the Influence of the Shadow to the Power of the Screen

X.

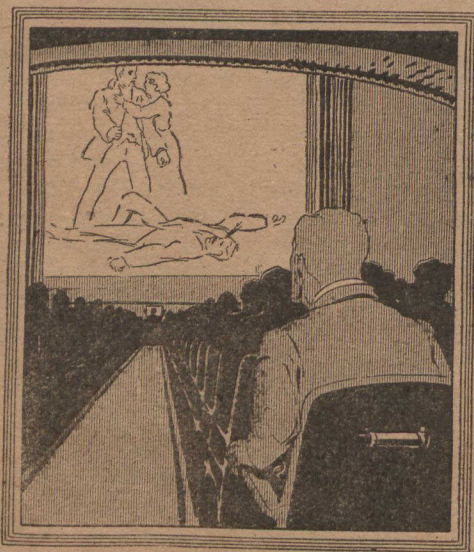
HIS FIRST MOVIE

HOAG must be borne in mind as to two very distinct and contradictory types of man.

Almost Incurably Conventional; Quite Violently Impressionistic.

Under the first head he arranged most of his ethics. As a rule he never did a kind act that was not dictated by some old-fashioned motive for doing it.

Under the second head, Hoag became an astounding actor. Yet he knew no more about drama than the average man, had never studied acting, could not follow the critics when they compared Irving and



Robertson, and was as likely to be seduced by a musical comedy as by Shakespeare, if ever he could have been kidnapped into a musical comedy.

With this double-role definition in mind, we follow Mr. Hoag to his first movie. His interest in the screen, as you remember, was aroused in an amateur, scientific way when he considered it among all the new popular inventions. But he had always studied the phenomenon in the abstract. He had never gone to a movie. His second impulse, the one that led him to break his habit and go, was the sudden seance with his shadow in the office of Helen Munro, recorded in a previous instalment.

He purposely picked out a main street show that looked like a thriller, but spent no time scanning the posters because he wanted to give this thing a complete chance to work on his imagination. He shut out of his mind all preconceived notions of drama, since he did not suppose that really good actors ever appeared on the screen.

A gaudy patch of color lured him into its glare as an arc lamp attracts June bugs. He passed from the high-lights of the vestibule into the thick gloom of a back seat, and found himself at once a mere corporeal shadow along with hundreds of others in a long, narrow box, concentrating his vision

(Continued from last week.)

on a crackling, sputtering white and black spectacle that was no more like a stage than a motor car is like a parlor. That sheet with the sandpappy splotches of light and the scurrying, rushing figures, was just a huge patch of some city like the one he lived in, flung upon the screen by a hand of giant magic and set going at the speed of an express train.

Hoag's first impulse was to gasp. Then he laughed at the infinite burlesque, without any notion at first of what the scenario was all about. He was like the blind man recorded in Scripture—he saw men as trees walking. They were twice life size—like a shadow might be. They moved with incredible speed and strength. They seemed to come from nowhere and to depart mysteriously nowhither. They never stood or sat still. There was no rest. Every second of the time was occupied with ceaseless motion. One scene swung into another as a busy street-corner changes at the wand of a traffic squad man.

And the story was almost nothing. Yet everybody seemed capable of extraordinary things. The woman who fled, the villain who pursued her and the hero who chased the villain were all equally endowed with remarkable powers of action. These people were not fettered by the limitations of human bodies. They had the astonishing freedom of the gods.

When he rose to leave at the end of the reel, Hoag felt as though his head must bump the low ceiling; that he must almost step over the people next to him; that he was himself some such person as those on the screen.

But note what happened to Hoag as a result.

XI.

HIS FELLOW-MAN

MR. HOAG not only seemed to himself to possess super-strength; he had also an overwhelming sense of benevolence. The amazing knight-errantry of the screen was for the time being his. He had not only seen, but had become part of a great miracle. And the street as he saw it was a vast movie that seemed, somehow, to be going much too slow. He hit up a tremendous clip, dodging about and among and almost over people who seemed like creeping mannikins. He had no intention of going home. Mrs. Bartop must be respected. In fact, if he arrived by two a.m. it would be time enough.

People in this condition are sure to get experiences. The world is full of ethical opportunities. Time and again Hoag had shuffled dejectedly home when he had seen nothing to arouse his ethical action and when the misery he encountered only plunged him into deeper gloom. It was all changed now, as in the twinkling of an eye.

For the best part of a mile Hoag sped up street bumping into all manner of people and leaping across corners in front of motor cars and trolleys. He was conscious of no absurdity. Everybody else seemed to him absurd. He felt as though he could have gone scurrying clean across the city like a super-ghost, and on out over the hills without any sense of fatigue. That was the merely physical side of his impulse. He knew it was foolish.

Now that he was up in the slower end of the main street not far from a residence section he began to slow up. The street seemed to be almost deserted. He wondered where he had better go next. Not home. No. Mrs. Bartop would be frightened. He must do something. Surely a city of that size could provide him with an opportunity at eleven p.m.

And it did. Past one hotel putting out its bar lights, Hoag swung along towards another; and between the two in a shady part of the street where nobody else was walking, one of the doorways suddenly gave birth to something that looked like a man. The person seemed also to be in a strange world to which he had as yet become unaccustomed, for he staggered across to a lamp post, reeled back to the wall and over to a telephone pole; and when Hoag came up to him there he was clinging to the pole, clothes awry, hat over one ear, eyes blinking and blazing up at Hoag, to whom he spoke in thick, disjected words.

The moment Hoag stopped the man detached himself from the pole and fastened himself to his coat-lapel.

"Shwanta go to bunk, pardner? Where the hell's a room? No, I don't want no dime fer a bed. 'M no pave artist. Shwanta a place t' bunk. Git me, Steve?"

The words came in a wave of smell that seemed to belong to another world. And there was no particular room in creation that the man seemed to belong to. Hoag queried him about all the kinds of shelter he could think of, but as they all seemed

