

War Of the Worlds II - part 1

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Eleven years after the Martians first invasion - a meeting in Harrods.

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Saturday January 13th 1908 - the day after the warning

I had a routine back then. Since the death of my wife and unborn child during the Martian invasion eleven years previous I had needed structure in my life outside of work.

On a Saturday I started off my day with some manual relief of my morning tumescence prior to getting out of bed. It wasn't the only time I would do so, but I made sure that it was a regular part of my weekends itinerary. Then up for squats and push ups. It's important to stay fit and supple, especially as you move into your fifth decade. And just as important to keep your pipes clean and prevent potentially nasty build up and clogging.

Following my mornings ablutions I liked to take the number twenty three omnibus into the center of London, enjoying the upstairs view down from Wood Green to Oxford Circus. There were still to this day patches of the red weed in Haringay and Finsbury Park, but there were always people out with saws and axes to cut it down, and often bonfires of the evil stuff burning bright - the only way to kill the alien vegetation for certain.

I would make my purchase of The Times from the Newspaper & Tobacco Vendor at the corner of Piccadilly and Regents Street and go for a walk along Piccadilly. Past The Ritz and Green Park on my left, around Wellington Arch, along Knightsbridge past Hyde Park and finally to Harrods.

There, at exactly noon. I would enter through the vestibule and climb to the top floor restaurant where a small corner table was reserved for me. There I would sit quietly for two hours drinking two pots of Lady Grey tea, each cup sweetened with half a tablespoonful of sugar crystals, eating smoked cod and cucumber sandwiches and reading my copy of The Times. I was a creature of habit.

I remember that it had been more of a trudge that particular Saturday, due to the driving sleet and the strange electrical charge in the air. However, in my medical opinion, it was vital for ones constitution

to walk at least four miles a day, come sun, rain, sleet or snow. By the time I reached Harrods I was not in the best of humour therefore - wet and cold. I took a deep breath and shook myself like a long haired dog, throwing droplets of water far and wide in the entrance vestibule. The commissionaire shouted at a young uniformed boy, who disappeared and re-appeared quickly holding out a warmed towel with which I dried my hands, face, hair, walking cane, top hat and outer garments as best I could.

"This must be the greatest establishment in the greatest city in the greatest country," I said, smiling at the young boy. I ruffled his hair and gave him a ha'penny.

"Thank you kindly Sir," he beamed and scampered off.

I passed a few words with the commissionaire before heading up the four flights of stairs to the restaurant.

A waiter whom I knew only as James showed me to my table, and my first pot of Lady Grey arrived before I had even unfolded my Saturday broadsheet. I left it in the pot to brew a bit longer as I looked with a mixture of dismay and scorn at the headline.

"Martians Wait On The Moon To Invade Us Again! Outcry in Parliament. "

It had been almost twelve years since the Martians and their fighting machines had first arrived, and then themselves fallen prey to the common cold, a constantly mutating virus that makes the rounds every year, killing the most elderly, the youngest and the most feeble, but generally just making us Homosapiens miserable for a week or so.

The reconstruction of parts of London had been ongoing since, and was all but finished. However, every other week there was someone trumping in public about how, and often when, the invaders were going to return. Mostly based on biblical mumbo-jumbo. Some ambiguous text from the Acts of Revelations or some such nonsense about the end times written by a schizophrenic goatherd eighteen hundred years previously in a cave in ancient Judea. Or else it was an obscure verse from the writings of Nostradamus. Just as much hokum as the biblical rantings. How any intelligent being could base their lives around such writings was beyond my ken.

I glanced over the first few paragraphs. This was different. This wasn't just Sunday morning rabid preachers for a change, this was based on science and observations from a descendant of one of the greatest minds the world has ever known.

I started again, taking in the details this time, until I was distracted by a small commotion coming from

the doorway into the restaurant between a short burly man and the Maitre D'. Normally I wouldn't give a second glance while so engrossed, but something caught my eye... and ear.

The most exquisite creature faced into the room while her male companion discussed matters passionately with the Maitre D' in English but with an unusual accent. The young lady looked around with an air of detachment about her, as if she was absolutely convinced that her companion would resolve the matter to her satisfaction.

The flashes of colours in her garments made her stand out against the dark and dowdy matronly women common in Harrods like a bird of paradise amongst a murder of crows.

Unlike the traditional ladies that one saw transitioning into the twentieth century AD, this young filly was wearing no bustle, and was not afraid to show her toned legs, albeit through tight fitting cocoa brown leather breeches with a red cord straight down the seam accenting beautifully the curve of her hip, moving up to a cinched waist. I could glimpse between the tables something akin to slightly loose patterned riding boots, with a three inch heel and pointed toe. I was to subsequently learn that these were of a style fashionable with the southern cow herders of our ex-colonial cousins in the 45 states of America. This particular pair had been made especially for her from the softest Italian leather.

She wore a bright red satin waistcoat below a brown long tailed coat and on top of a tight white bodice. When she pushed back the coat and waistcoat provocatively with both hands, placing them on her sides, it showed her exquisite waist and brought ones eye naturally up to her pert bosom.

Already she had all of the male clientele in the restaurant in the palm of her hand. And the women were now noticing the men noticing the woman. Conversation had stopped. You could have heard the proverbial pin drop.

She took off her red leather top hat, complete with driving goggles, and shook her long straight brown hair from its confines. There was an audible sigh amongst her band of admirers, and they were not only masculine sighs.

She removed a monocle from her waistcoat pocket and viewed through it around the room. I could tell from my corner of the room that it was not a lens, so purely for effect. And what an effect it was.

It was no exaggeration that every woman wanted to be her. And every man was busy with breaking the tenth of the biblical commandments and coveting their neighbours' ass.

And I include myself in that statement. I was busy picturing my fingers running through those long luscious locks, massaging her scalp as I lowered her eager mouth to my erect throbbing ...

I shook my head and looked at my fellow diners. Captivated is not too strong a word. I guess those luscious scarlet painted lips were giving us all a moments quiet contemplation. The world seemed to slow as the point of her tongue slid across them and she batted her baby blues. There was another collective sigh as held breaths were expelled.

Then I realised that this delicious apparition was looking at me. She licked her lips again, replacing her monocle in its pocket. I so wanted to believe this time that the lick of those lips was purely for my benefit. I was vaguely subconsciously aware of wives and matrons trying to regain the attentions of their errant spouses.

She smiled, the corners of her mouth curled up towards heaven. Her eyes sparkled with happiness, and I could hear her giggle as her bosom twitched.

She lifted her lace gloved right hand and snapped her fingers. The commotion behind her ceased immediately. Her male companion turned quietly and joined her.

She turned her head slightly and spoke softly, never taking her eyes off of me. The smile still played over her sweet lips. She dismissed the man with a nonchalant wave and strode purposefully towards me past the other diners some of whom followed her with their eyes the whole way. He in turn walked out of the restaurant and stood like a bar-room bouncer ready to refuse entrance to any miscreants, drunkards or buffoons.

I could feel my heart beat faster and my trousers tighten somewhat as she walked towards me. I took a sip of tea to wet my mouth before she arrived at my table and cleared my throat into my clenched fist. I rose to greet her.

Looking down at her five foot six or so from my six foot two - it was well nigh impossible not to notice the effects of her bustier, pushing her heaving bosoms towards me, making me want to nuzz.... I had to pull myself together. 'You're a doctor for God's sake! Where's your dignity and damned professionalism?' I asked myself.

I bowed slightly, feeling the warmth of a blush pass across my cheeks. I realized that I may be a doctor, but I am also most assuredly a man, with a mans needs and desires. But also a gentleman - and I would act like one. I raised my gaze to make eye contact.

"Please forgive me," I said, looking into her kohl-rimmed eyes. They sparkled with mischief and the knowledge that I was already wrapped around her little finger. This was a young woman who was well used to using her exquisite feminine guiles to get her own way. "How may I be of assistance?"

They say that the eyes are the gateway to the soul. At that moment I hoped that was not true, or else this beautiful young woman was gazing into the pits of depravity, at scenes of my erection playing between those beautiful pert mounds and covering her throat and face and lips with my hot manseed, before wiping the last drops on her eager little tongue. The corner of her mouth curled up in a playful grin, in such a way that I did indeed wonder if they were correct in what they said.

She winked up at me and then blatantly dropped her gaze to my crotch. She lifted her eyes slowly back to mine, obviously making a judgement. I didn't know if I should feel vindicated or violated.

Her soft voice could easily be heard above the traffic four floors below. Almost total silence had returned to the room, every ear turned to hear us. She bit her bottom lip suggestively and blinked up at me through her raven black curled eyelashes.

"Mmmm sei bello. Now, Doctor, we are even. There is nothing to forgive. Would it be possible to get down to serious business?" she asked in immaculate English. I could feel myself blush and harden at the same time, the effects of her soft accented voice and her admonishing words having markedly differing effects.

"Ahem," I coughed, somewhat flustered. "Of course, Miss, would you care to discuss this serious business here, or do you have somewhere else in mind?" I said waving generally, taking in the restaurant. There was an embarrassed shuffle as people tried to look away and pretend not to have been listening. "Please remember you have interrupted me at my luncheon. Would you care to join me and we can discuss matters whilst we eat? What do you say, Contessa Vanessa?"

She smiled a heart stopping smile, which showed her beautiful white teeth - a rarity in these isles - wrinkled her sweet little nose and brought back the humour to her eyes. Her beautiful winter Mediterranean skin tones glowed. "I wondered if you would know of me." I offered her my hand and I politely guided her to the seat opposite my own, pushing her chair in for her. I sat back down in my own seat and waited until she had ordered herself some Chinese black tea. She told me that her companion/chaperone would not be joining us at present before explaining.

"I may not frequent such high brow circles as I did in my younger years, but it would appear that you are the darling of the broadsheets this morning after clashing with the Prime Minister yesterday in The House," I said. "Front page news in The Times you see. We don't see so many foreigners over here in England since the invasion, especially not in February. And especially not as eye-catching and vociferous as yourself. So I put the clues together and made the assumption that you are in fact Contessa Vanessa Vincenti, descendant of the 16th century scientific genius and religious heretic, Galileo."

I felt rather pleased with myself as I received a small burst of glove covered applause for my mental dexterity. "I prefer Signorina Vanessa," she stated simply.

"So what can I help you with Signorina?" I asked. "I am no world renowned astronomer like yourself, so I'm not entirely certain what assistance I can give you."

I was hoping that she would not realize what a mistake she had made, agree with me and just get up and leave me at this point. "First let me say that I realize I am not the only person at this table who is the descendant of a world famous scientist, Doctor Stein."

"These days we pronounce it 'steen ' due to my Scottish heritage down my mothers side," I explained as I had to many students, trainees and patients over the years.

"Of course Dr Stein, forgive my ignorance," she offered. I, of course, shook my head and got slightly flustered as if to convey that I understood and forgave her ignorance without a second thought, and it was something that I had to put up with at fairly regular intervals.

But I was also thinking to myself that this well travelled woman had obviously read my name somewhere, rather than being told about me in person. Whether in private correspondence or in a newspaper or journal I did not yet know.

"Secondly," she continued, "I assume you haven't finished reading the article in your newspaper, or you might be able to surmise my reason for being here, and seeking out you, and you alone."

"You have a need for my special apparatus and skills on a Saturday?" I asked. "But it's the weekend!" I all but blurted out.

"Indeed Dr," she explained. "Your Prime Minister, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman wishes a private audience tomorrow with myself and King Edward to discuss my findings and theories in relation to the possibility of an imminent Martian invasion."

I looked at her, obviously not understanding the merit of what she said. Seeing my confusion she continued.

"I wish to propose to you..."

"I'm sorry Signorina but I will have you know I have only been a widower for nigh on twelve years and am not yet ready to"

She looked embarrassed. "My apologies Dr Stein, I meant not to insult you. Only sometimes my English lets me down. I meant that I have a proposition for you." My eyes were drawn to the pulse on her neck and I felt the need to kiss it gently.

I had forgotten that English was not her first language. That was unfortunate - my retort had been automatic, having spent the last dozen or so years fending off aged spinsters and would-be gold diggers and social climbers. Even discounting her court credentials, here in front of me was the most vivacious, eloquent, learned, travelled, respected, sexy little strumpet I had ever laid eyes on. It took all of my strength to not fall down on my knees and beg her to let me kiss her quim.

And she knew it. She knew how to play me - like most weak willed men I suppose. A little décolletage, a coy smile and a flash of long eyelashes and we simple brutes fell all over ourselves to do her bidding. I guess in this case that it had the opposite effect on me. I was damned if I'd give in to temptation, even though at that precise moment I was mentally unlacing her bodice to release those pert young titties, which I would then shower in kisses.

I'm afraid that I got a bit angry with myself there and sat up straight, harrumphing at myself. The Contessa was visibly taken aback. Was this a slight chink in her impossibly perfect armour?

I cleared my throat and sipping my tea I observed her. I could see beneath the previously relaxed and in-command countenance a young woman who was used to getting her way, whether due to her station in life or her impeccable beauty and charm. But her eyes were flashing and her cheeks reddening under her foundation. Whether rage or hysteria I knew at least my part of the proposition she had in mind.

"Let me guess," I said, leaning forward, trying to keep a smile from my lips. "Your claims of an imminent invasion were robustly contested during your speech in the House of Commons yesterday, due to the fact that every soothsayer this side of the English Channel has been trying to make money under bogus claims. Whether the Martians have spoken with them personally, or their god has given them a signal, it normally comes down to 'how much money'. But I can imagine in this case it boiled down not to money, in their eyes, but the fact that you are a flamboyant, foreign woman - and what would you know? Only here for the fame and glory - what right do you have to be here in our hallowed halls? Hear, hear!" I toasted sarcastically with my cup of tea.

"Bravo, well said that man!" she toasted in reply, equaling my sarcasm and adding a small splash of vitriol.

"And then your hot-headed Italian nature boiled passionately over in front of the stiff upper lipped

gentry in their mahogany pews, giving them that British feeling of superiority over our over-emotional foreign cousins. Hear, hear!" I clinked China cups with her.

"Is it that obvious?" she asked, obviously downhearted.

I grinned slightly, saying nothing. "And, I'll wager, with your private meeting due tomorrow, the Sabbath, you wish a course of Granville's electromechanical treatment to relax you and overcome your natural Mediterranean tendency towards hysteria?" I enquired, trying to keep the hope out of my voice.

She lifted her head and looked across the table at me wide-eyed. She took my left hand in both of hers. "Please Doctor, I implore you. I need to let them know the gravity of the situation, so they have to take me seriously. "

Taking my hand back from her, I took a packet of my favourite Sweet V pre-rolled filterless cigarettes from my inside pocket along with a box of Lucifer matches. I offered the Contessa one, lit it for her then took one myself. I inhaled deeply, the smoke opening up my airways and making me breath easier. The nicotine in the tobacco focused me and relaxed me at the same time. The Contessa pretended to smoke.

I exhaled a cloud of Russian cigarette smoke slowly out of my nose. I thought for a minute.

"Signorina Vanessa, I will do what you ask, and more." I had to wave her to not get too excited whilst I continued. "But there is a price.

"I recommend two courses for a better effect, one later this afternoon and one tomorrow morning prior to your meeting with the Prime Minister and the King. For these there is no charge - I will meet the cost myself for the sake of mankind, however, I am a man of habit. I have set routines for my weekends which are important to me. This now means that I have not only had my luncheon interrupted, but will not now see my afternoon matinee at the Seven Sisters, nor will I make it to the Cathedral tomorrow for morning mass. I find this personally vexing."

She took a small cheque book from her inside pocket, and a fountain pen.

"Anything you want. And more. Any amount at all. I can only apologise for the inconvenience I have caused you," she stated frankly, a slight flaw in her spoken English. I had the feeling that she was both relieved and anxious at the same time. But also a woman who has been used to paying her way out of any inconvenience.

I finished my cigarette and stubbed it out in the ashtray.

"You can put your chequebook away Contessa," I said. "I don't want your money."

She looked at me, confused. I don't believe she had ever had someone turn down her offer of cold hard cash. Everyone could be bought, couldn't they? Just wave a big enough cheque at them.

She looked both beautiful and helpless at that moment. Such depravities were lurching through my mind at that instant, unbidden. And all of them with her naked or well on the way to it. It may have shown in my demeanor.

Instead of appearing shocked, she whispered, "Anything." She re-iterated. "Anything you want, my good Sir."

She took her pen, wrote my name in her finest script, and in the space where one would normally put the amount she wrote 'Anything' and then dated it and signed with a flourish. She ripped it from her book and handed it to me.

"Absolutely anything," she re-stated. She smiled, and my legs went weak. I had to get a grip of myself. I put my left hand under the table and deliberately nipped my leg.

I then folded the cheque up and put it in my waistcoat pocket for later. I wanted to hand it back immediately in exchange for a stroke of her chest. Just to ease those delicious breasts out from their captivity and put my face between them and kiss them and tease her pointy little In Harrods? That just wasn't cricket! I pinched my leg harder.

I took the cheque back out of my pocket, sighed and handed it back, to a look of pleasant amazement. "Already?" she asked. I blushed.

"My price is that you prove your theory to me," I said, seeing in my minds eye my fantasies disappearing as if in a puff of smoke.

With that thought I lit another cigarette and offered the packet across the table. I inhaled deeply and exhaled slowly.

The Contessa ignored the cigarettes; she had not taken her eyes off of me, obviously sizing me up. The cheque still sat in no-mans land in the middle of the table.

She eventually broke the silence. "It was my intention to offer you the chance to see my proof this

evening. I know you are not an astronomer, but you are a scientist, and scientific reasoning is important to me. You are also known to be a man of honesty and integrity. You are welcome to join me at the Royal Observatory at Greenwich this evening, if this does not clash with your routine, and I can let you see with your own eyes."

"How soon do you think they will come?" I asked.

"I don't know. Come and see for yourself," she said, begging me with her eyes.

"You know where my office is? On Harley Street?" I asked.

"I do - We checked there for you first before coming here," the Contessa confirmed.

"Meet me there in two hours," I said, standing. I took her hand and, bowing, kissed the back of it as she pushed her chair back and stood.

"Thank you. Two hours," she said, then turned and walked away, her brown coat over her arm. I watched her every step - a callipygian delight. I was aware of a very strong pulse in my crotch as she turned around and smiled at me knowingly. She disappeared out of the door and her chaperone joined her.

I sat down and exhaled the breath that I had unknowingly been holding.

The cheque still sat on the table. What had I let myself in for?