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SF PERUSALS

The Man in the Bowler Hat

A Terribly Exciting Affair

by A. A. Milne

A Samuel French Acting Edition



New York Hollywood London Toronto

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THE MAN IN THE BOWLER HAT

CHARACTERS

JOHN
MARY
HERO
HEROINE
CHIEF VILLAIN
BAD MAN

The Man In The Bowler Hat

The Scene is MARY'S *sitting room—the most ordinary sitting room in the world.* JOHN *and* MARY, *two of the most ordinary people, he in the early forties, she in the late thirties, are sitting in front of the fire after dinner. He, as usual, is reading the paper; she, as usual, is knitting. They talk in a desultory way.*

MARY. Did I tell you that Mrs. Patchett has just had another baby?

JOHN. *(Not looking up from his paper)* Yes, dear, you told me.

MARY. Did I? Are you sure?

JOHN. Last week.

MARY. But she only had it yesterday. Mr. Patchett told me this morning when I was ordering the cauliflower.

JOHN. Ah! Then perhaps you told me she was going to have one.

MARY. Yes, I think that must have been it.

JOHN. This is the one that she was going to have?

MARY. It weighed seven pounds exactly.

JOHN. Of course, being a grocer, he would have the scales ready. Boy or girl?

MARY. Boy.

JOHN. The first boy, isn't it?

MARY. The second.

JOHN. *(Sticking to it)* The first one that weighed seven pounds exactly.

(They are silent again—he reading, she knitting.)

MARY. Anything in the paper tonight?

JOHN. *(Turning over the paper)* A threatened strike of boiler-makers.

MARY. Does that matter very much?

JOHN. It says here that the situation is extremely serious.

MARY. Tell me about it.

JOHN. *(Not very good at it)* Well, the—er—boiler-makers are threatening to strike. *(Weightily)* They are threatening not to make any more—er—boilers.

MARY. Kitchen boilers?

JOHN. *(With an explanatory* gesture) Boilers. They are threatening not to make any more of them. And—well—that's how it is. *(Returning to his paper)* The situation is extremely serious. Exciting scenes have been witnessed.

MARY. What sort of scenes?

JOHN. Well, naturally, when you have a lot of men threatening not to make any more boilers . . . and—er—a lot of other men threatening that if they *don't* make any—well, exciting scenes are witnessed. *Have* been witnessed by this man, this special correspondent.

MARY. *(After a pause)* It's a funny thing that nothing exciting ever happens to *us.*

JOHN. It depends what you mean by exciting. I went round in 95 last Saturday—as I think I told you.

MARY. Yes, but I mean something really thrilling—and dangerous. Like a novel—or on the stage.

JOHN. My dear Mary, nothing like that ever happens in real life. I mean it wouldn't happen to *us.*

MARY. Would you like it if it did?

(He says nothing for a moment. Then he puts down his paper, and sits there, thinking. At last he turns to her.)

JOHN. *(Almost shyly)* I used to imagine things like

that happening. Years ago. Rescuing a beautiful maiden and—and all that sort of thing. And being wrecked on a desert island with her. . . . *(He turns away from her, staring into his dreams)* Or pushing open a little green door in a long high wall, and finding myself in a wonderful garden under the bluest of blue skies, and waiting, waiting . . . for something. . . .

MARY. I used to imagine things too. People fighting duels because of me. . . . Silly, isn't it? Nothing ever really happens like that.

JOHN. *(Still with his thoughts)* No. . . .

(At this moment a STRANGE MAN *comes in. Contrary to all etiquette, he is wearing a Bowler Hat and an overcoat, and has a half-smoked cigar in his mouth. He walks quickly across the room and sits down in a chair with his back to the audience.* JOHN *and* MARY, *deep in their thoughts, do not notice him.)*

MARY. *(Looking into the fire)* I suppose we're too old for it now.

JOHN. I suppose so.

MARY. If it had only happened once—just for the memories.

JOHN. So that we could say to each other— Good lord! what's that?

(It was the crack of a revolver. No mistaking it, even by JOHN, *who has never been much of a hand with revolvers.)*

MARY. *(Frightened)* John!

(There is a scuffling noise outside the door. They look eagerly towards it. Then suddenly there is dead silence. The MAN IN THE BOWLER HAT *flicks some of his cigar ash onto the carpet—*MARY'S *carpet.)*

JOHN. Look!

(Very slowly the door begins to open. Through the

crack comes a long, sinuous hand. The door opens farther, and the hand is followed by a long, sinuous body. Still the MAN IN THE BOWLER HAT *says nothing. Then the door is closed, and leaning up against it, breathing rather quickly, is the* HERO, *in his hand a revolver.* JOHN *and* MARY *look at each other wonderingly.)*

JOHN. *(With a preliminary cough)* I—I beg your pardon?

HERO. *(Turning quickly, finger to his lips)* H'sh!

JOHN. *(Apologetically)* I beg your pardon!

(The HERO *listens anxiously at the door. Then, evidently reassured for the moment he comes towards them.)*

HERO. *(To* JOHN*)* Quick, take this! *(He presses his revolver into* JOHN'S *hand.)*

JOHN. I—er—what do I—

HERO. *(To* MARY*)* And you! This! *(He takes another revolver from his hip pocket and presses it into* MARY'S *hand.)*

MARY. Thank you. Do we—

HERO. *(Sternly)* H'sh!

MARY. Oh, I beg your pardon.

HERO. Listen!

(They ALL *listen.* JOHN *and* MARY *have never listened so intently before, but to no purpose. They hear nothing.)*

JOHN. *(In a whisper)* What is it?

HERO. Nothing.

JOHN. Yes, that's what *I* heard.

HERO. Have you got a— *(He breaks off and broods.)*

MARY. A what?

HERO. *(Shaking his head)* No, it's too late now.

JOHN. *(To* MARY*)* Haven't we got one?

MARY. I ordered one on Saturday, but it hasn't come.

HERO. You wait here—that will be best. I shall be back in a moment.

JOHN. What do we do?

HERO. Listen. That's all. Listen.

JOHN. *(Eagerly)* Yes, yes.

HERO. I shall be back directly.

(Just as he is making for the window, the door opens and the HEROINE*—obviously—comes in. They stand gazing at each other.)*

HEROINE. Oh! *(But with a world of expression in it.)*

HERO. Oh! *(With even more expression.)*

HEROINE. My love!

HERO. My beautiful!

(They meet and are locked in an embrace.)

JOHN. *(To* MARY*)* I suppose they're engaged to be married.

MARY. Oh, I think they must be.

JOHN. They've evidently *met* before.

HERO. *(Lifting his head for a moment)* My Dolores! *(He bites her neck again.)*

JOHN. *(To* MARY*)* I think this must be both "How do you do" *and* "Goodbye."

MARY. *(Wistfully)* He is very good-looking.

JOHN. *(Casually)* Oh, do you think so? Now *she's* pretty, if you like.

MARY. *(Doubtfully)* Ye-es. Very bad style, of course.

JOHN. *(Indignantly)* My dear Mary—

HEROINE. *(To* HERO*)* Quick, quick, you must go!

HERO. Never—now that I have found you again.

HEROINE. Yes, yes! My father is hot upon your tracks. He will be here at any moment in his two-seater.

HERO. *(Turning pale)* Your father!

HEROINE. I walked on ahead to warn you. He has come for—IT!

JOHN. *(To* MARY*)* What on earth's IT?

HERO. *(Staggering)* IT!

HEROINE. Yes.

JOHN. *(To* MARY*)* Income-tax collector.

HERO. The Rajah's Ruby!

MARY. Oh, how exciting!

HEROINE. Yes, he knows you have it. He is determined to wrest it from you.

HERO. Never!

JOHN. Well done! Bravo! *(Offering his cigarette case)* Would you care for a— *(But the* HERO *spurns it.)*

HEROINE. There is no mischief he might not do, if once it were in his possession. Three prominent members of Society would be ruined, there would be another war in Mexico and the exchange value of the rouble would be seriously impaired. Promise me you will never give it up.

HERO. I promise.

HEROINE. I must go. I am betraying my father by coming here, but I love you.

JOHN. *(To* MARY*)* She does love him. I thought she did.

MARY. How could she help it?

HERO. I adore you!

JOHN. You see, he adores her too. It certainly looked like it.

MARY. I still don't think she's very good style.

HEROINE. Then—goodbye!

(They embrace again.)

JOHN. *(After a decent interval)* Excuse me, sir, but if you have a train to catch—I mean if your future father-in-law's two-seater is any good at all, oughtn't you to be—er—

HERO. *(Releasing* HEROINE*)* Goodbye! *(He conducts her to the door, gives her a last long lingering look, and lets her go.)*

MARY. *(To herself)* Pretty, of course, in a kind of way, but I must say I don't *like* that style.

(The HERO *comes out of his reverie and proceeds to business.)*

HERO. *(Briskly to* JOHN*)* You have those revolvers?

JOHN. Yes.

HERO. Then wait here, and listen. More than one life depends upon it.

JOHN. How many more?

HERO. If you hear the slightest noise—

JOHN. *(Eagerly)* Yes!

HERO. H'sh!

(He goes to the window, waits there listening for a moment, and then slips out. . . . JOHN *and* MARY *remain, their ears outstretched.)*

JOHN. *(With a start)* H'sh! What's that?

MARY. What was it, dear?

JOHN. I don't know.

MARY. It's so awkward when you don't quite know what you're listening *for.*

JOHN. H'sh! We were told to listen and we must listen. More than one life depends on it.

MARY. All right, dear.

(They continue to listen. A little weary of it, MARY *looks down the barrel of the revolver to see if she can see anything interesting.)*

JOHN. *(Observing her)* Don't do that! It's very dangerous to point a loaded revolver at yourself. If anything happened, it would be too late to say afterwards that you didn't mean it.

MARY. Very well, John— Oh, look!

(Again the door opens quickly, and a sinister gentleman in a fur coat inserts himself into the room. We recognize him at once as the CHIEF VILLAIN. *Very noiselessly, his back to* JOHN *and* MARY, *he creeps along the wall towards the window.)*

JOHN. *(In a whisper)* Father-in-law.

MARY. Do we— *(She indicates the revolver.)*

JOHN. *(Doubtfully)* I—I suppose— *(He raises his gun hesitatingly.)*

MARY. Oughtn't you to say something first?

JOHN. Yes—er— *(He clears his throat warningly)* Ahem! *(The* CHIEF VILLAIN *continues to creep towards the window)* You, sir!

MARY. *(Politely)* Do you want anything, or—or anything?

(The CHIEF VILLAIN *is now at the window.)*

JOHN. Just a moment, sir.

(The CHIEF VILLAIN *opens the window and steps out between the curtains.)*

MARY. Oh, he's gone!

JOHN. I call that very bad manners.

MARY. Do you think he'll come back?

JOHN. *(With determination)* I shall shoot him like a dog if he does. *(Waiving aside all protests)* Like a dog.

MARY. Yes, dear, perhaps that *would* be best.

JOHN. Look out, he's coming back.

(He raises his revolver as the door opens. Again the CHIEF VILLAIN *enters cautiously and creeps towards the window.)*

MARY. *(In a whisper)* Shoot!

JOHN. *(Awkwardly)* Er—I suppose it *is* the same man?

MARY. Yes, yes!

JOHN. I mean—it wouldn't be quite fair if— *(He coughs warningly)* Excuse me, sir!

(The CHIEF VILLAIN *is now at the window again.)*

MARY. Quick, before he goes!

JOHN. *(Raising his revolver nervously)* I ought to

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