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Author: Robert Zacks

Illustrator: William Ashman

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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK DON'T SHOOT ***



Don't Shoot

By ROBERT ZACKS

Illustrated by ASHMAN

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***A man has to have a place to confess a horrible
sin ... and this is as good as any other!***

I can no longer keep my terrible secret, although the thought of what will happen to me, when I tell my story, gives me a trembling from head to toe. Without doubt, word will flash to the proper authorities and stern-faced men with sympathetic eyes will bring straitjacket and sedatives, and hunt me down to tear me from Mary's clinging arms. A padded cell will be made ready for another unfortunate.

Nevertheless what we have just read in the newspapers has made us fearfully agree that I must tell all, regardless of my own fate. So let me say this:

If it is true that an expedition is being organized in London to go to the cold and rocky wastes of the Himalayas for the purpose of investigating that astonishing primeval creature called 'The Abominable Snowman,' then I am forced to tell you immediately ... *the Abominable Snowman is none other than Mr. Eammer, the famous movie magnate.*

And I am the one responsible for this amazing situation. I and my invention which Mr. Eammer had hired me to develop, an invention which would put 3-D and Cinemascope and the new Largoscope process so far behind in the fierce Hollywood battle for supremacy that Mr. Eammer would at last have complete control of the industry, and, for that matter, television also.

You will say this is impossible because one or two glimpses of the Abominable Snowman have shown it to be an apelike creature?

And the animal's body is covered with thick, coarse hair?

Well, did you ever see Mr. Eammer lounging beside his elaborate Beverly Hills swimming pool? He looks as if he's just climbed down from a tree. The last young movie lovely an agent had brought around to talk contracts took one look, screamed and fainted. It is said she was hysterical for two days.

But let me tell how it all started. Remember those awful days when television, like a monster with a wild pituitary gland, grew until it took the word 'colossal' away from filmdom? What a battle! Like two giant bears rearing up face to face, roaring, screaming, swapping terrible blows of mighty paws, the two industries fought, with the film industry reeling bloodily, at first, then rallying with 3-D, then Cinemascope, and television pressing home the fierce attack with color TV.

And who was caught in the middle of all this, without *any* protection? Mr. Eammer. Why? Well, let me give you some background on that character. When talkies killed the era of silent films, Mr. Eammer nearly got shaken loose in the change. He'd scornfully dismissed the new development.

"Ha," he'd said. "People come to my movies for one of two things. To fall asleep, or to look at the pretty girlies."

When the movie industry began to look for good stories and material that stimulated the mind as well as the emotion, Mr. Eammer had jeered. "Ha. People are stupid, people are sheep. They don't want to think, they just want to see the pretty girlies."

Six months later, Mr. Eammer had sent emissaries to England to try to hire this guy Billy Shakespeare. "Offer him anything," ordered Mr. Eammer grimly. "Tell him we'll fill the water cooler in his office with gin, he can pick any secretary he likes from among our starlets, and ... and ..." he swallowed, then recklessly added, "we'll even give him screen credit."

Of course the men he'd sent out searching knew Billy Shakespeare had kicked off, though they weren't sure whether it was last year or ten years ago. But it was a fine trip on the expense account and after a few weeks of riotous searching in London's gayer areas, they wired that Shakespeare had caught a bad cold, the penicillin had run out and he'd not lasted the night.

But Mr. Eammer pulled out of his situation. He bought up just the right to use the titles of great classic novels, ignored the contents, and had entirely different stories written.

"Not enough girlies in their versions," he explained, frowning. "Them hack writers don't have stuff with real interest to it."

By the time the customers were in the packed movie houses, they were so stunned with the spectacle of unclad femininity that they'd completely forgotten what they'd come to see. Half of them had never read the classics anyway.

So the dough rolled in and Mr. Eammer's estate was photographed in color and published in "Beautiful Homes" magazines, and high school newspapers sent nervous young reporters to ask advice for graduates yearning to get into the movie business. How, they asked humbly, could they carve a place for themselves?

Mr. Eammer beamed and said, "Girlies. Use plenty of girlies. It gets them every time."

The printed interview, as approved and edited by high school faculty advisors, did not contain this advice.

But the girlies weren't enough to save Mr. Eammer when television hit the movies on its glass jaw. He didn't believe what was happening, until it was too late. When his studio started hitting the skids, he hastily withdrew funds and liquidated assets and rented a number of safe-deposit boxes. Then he sat back and let his creditors scream a symphony of threats.

It was at that time that Mr. Eammer heard that I, a young physicist interested in optics, had stumbled across an oddity which might revolutionize the movie industry. He'd heard of this through Mary, whom I love with all my heart, and who will sometimes embarrass me by proudly telling people how intelligent I am.

As Mr. Eammer's secretary, she let him know all about me, just as she let me know all I have just told you about him. Mary is not a reticent person; she is too loving of her fellow man to withhold even the slightest information and perhaps I should have kept my astonishing discovery to myself.

In any case the phone rang in my very small laboratory one day and Mary's excited voice said, "Joe, darling. It's me. I told him about your invention. Come down right away."

"Who?" I said. "Where? What are you talking about?"

"To the studio," she said impatiently. "To see my boss, Mr. Eammer. He says if your invention is...."

"Now wait a minute," I shouted with indignation. "I told you not to tell *anybody* about it. It's not perfected. In fact, I don't understand how it works exactly."

"Stop being so modest," she said firmly. "I know you. You're a genius and genius is never, never satisfied. I read all about it. You want us to get married, don't you?"

"Yes," I said, sudden longing surging through my heart.

"Can we afford to? No. So come on down. Anyway, I already told him. Don't make me into a ... a liar," begged Mary. "If he likes your invention, maybe he'll buy it."

The things we do for the women we love. I went there in fear and was trembling with good reason. Not knowing quite how my invention operated, it could be stolen from me, because it might not be patentable. It was more *discovery* than *invention*.

Oh, I can tell you, I went to see Mr. Eammer in a cold sweat of fear that I might be losing my hold on the strange and accidental phenomena across which I'd stumbled.

I got quite a greeting.

When I walked into his elaborate outer offices, the workers were sitting hushed in fear before their desks. From within his private offices I could hear bellowing and the sounds of things smashing.

Mary hurried over to me, her warm, brown eyes pleading. Before she could say anything, I heard Mr. Eammer say in a shout, right through the partly opened door, "Well, what have you done about it?"

A trembling voice said, "Sir, I've cut staff fifty per cent."

"Stupid!" roared Mr. Eammer's voice. "Who's talking about that? Did you ask Peterson of World Studios if he'll license us to use his new Largoscope system?"

"Y-yes." A moment of terrified silence. "He s-said your outfit could use his Largoscope on only one occasion. When they f-film your funeral."

There was a gasp, then the door opened and a perspiring, harried, bald-headed man lurched out. With glazed eyes, he made a beeline for the outer door.

"Let's go in," said Mary eagerly "He'll be so glad to see you."

I looked at her incredulously, but she took my arm and dragged me inside. There Mr. Eammer sat twitching and shuddering, his head in his pudgy hands.

He looked dully at us from tiny eyes. "Everybody hates my genius," he said, wagging his head from side to side. "Everybody envies me. The wild dogs are gathering to pull down the noble elk."

As he glared at us, Mary said swiftly, "Yes, sir."

"The wounded lion," whispered Mr. Eammer dramatically, tears of self-pity coming to his eyes. "Surrounded by jackals and laughing hyenas. I am dying of my wounds." He uttered a wail. "Everybody's got a new filming system but me." He drew a deep breath. "Who the hell are you?" he demanded.

"He's...." began Mary.

"Wait a minute," he said. He grabbed a phone from the six on his desk. "Hey. Publicity.... Hey, Mike. I want rumors spread about Largoscope. Top doctors say it'll ruin the eyes, make you stone blind." He paused, his face purpling. "Okay, if you can't do it, then get another job. You're fired."

He slammed the phone down. "No cooperation from anybody," he said heavily. "Surrounded by incompetents." He glared at me. "Who the hell are you?"

"I'm ..." I began.

At this moment, the door opened and in came a man with a sheaf of papers and a film of sweat on his forehead. "I hate to interrupt, Mr. Eammer," he said doggedly, "but I got your note on the Lolita Vaughn contract we drew up. I knew there must be some mistake, so...."

"Mistake, what kind of mistake?" snapped Mr. Eammer. "I want you to tear the contract up. I said we aren't going to sign after all. I got a bigger name for the picture than her."

The man winced. "Well," he said. "I ... I was just wondering. I mean, after all, we talked her into turning down that fat part in the new Broadway show that opened last night. It's a smash hit, I read today...."

"Tough," shouted Mr. Eammer. "My heart bleeds. Did I know when I made that promise that I could get a big star at such a cheap price? I acted hastily, I made a mistake, so I corrected that mistake." He looked stern. "Would it be fair to the stockholders if I took Lolita under these conditions?"

"But *you* own all the stock!"

"That's what I said, you fool!" roared Mr. Eammer. "Get out of here."

As the man fled, I stared at Mr. Eammer in horror and disgust. Never would I trust a man like this, was my thought.

He glared at me. "Who the hell are you?" he snarled. "I keep asking you and you stand there like a dummy."

"He's the scientist I told you about," said Mary. "He's a genius. He has a new invention that will make Largoscope obsolete."

"This?" said the producer with incredulity. "This beanpole is a scientist? I don't believe it." He stared morosely at me, shaking his head. "He looks like an elevator operator who can't figure out what button to push."

"I beg your pardon!" I said with indignation. "I am a graduate of M.I.T. I graduated *summa cum laude*."

"Anybody can pick up a few words of French," he sneered. "If you're such a genius, how much money have you got, hah?" As I looked at him numbly, my jaw hanging open, he tapped his chest with a sausagelike forefinger. "Now *I* am a genius, see? I'm the guy who hires *you*. Now that we got that straight, what's this nonsense about you being smart enough to figure out a new invention that will make Largoscope obsolete?"

The weary cynicism in his gross face enraged me. If ever I had an immediate yearning to crush a man, to make him say 'uncle,' to have him beg and yearn, it was at that moment and toward this insufferable moron.

Within half an hour, we had driven back to my small laboratory. He peered suspiciously at the involved maze of wiring and electronic equipment. I pointed to the small un-roofed cabinet on my long work-table. It was two feet deep and the four walls, which were three feet long, were studded with small tubes I'd rather not describe, since I've developed them myself and they produce a new kind of ray.

"That's my camera," I said.

"It looks more like a diathermy machine or a sweatbox for reducing," he said skeptically. "How's it operate?"

I set a few dials and went to find Susie, my white cat. "Here pussy, pussy," I said tenderly.

"The man's gone nuts," said Mr. Eammer in disgust.

"Take it easy," I snapped. "That's how I made my strange discovery. I was doing a test on the effect of a new kind of radiation on fabrics. And Susie, my cat, walked over the equipment. First she stepped on a dial, turning it accidentally to full power, then she wandered into the box."

"So what?"

"Watch and see," I said.

I got Susie and she complacently allowed herself to be put into the box. I placed Mary at the dials with instructions and took Mr. Eammer to the next room and pointed to a huge circle chalked on the floor. The movie magnate waited impatiently.

"Mary," I shouted. "Okay. Turn dial number one to full force."

We heard a click.

Then Mr. Eammer yelped and cowered behind me. Because in front of us, within the chalked circle, appeared a giant eight-foot-tall cat, an enormous duplicate of Susie. Susie was licking her paw with a tongue that was nearly two feet long.



"Don't be afraid," I said proudly. "It's just an image. Look." I stepped forward and ran my hand through the air where the giant figure of Susie ignored me. My hand disappeared into the image, and I felt the usual puzzling tingle, as if I were getting a shock. And Susie, from the next room, uttered a faint meow and stopped licking her paw as if she, too, felt something.

"But ... but there's no *screen*," Eammer said. "And ... and it looks *real*. It's got three dimensions like an actual body." He cautiously approached, his hands shaking with excitement. He tip-toed around behind the cat image. He choked, "It's like a real, living cat all around."

"You haven't seen anything yet," I said happily. "Watch this. Mary," I yelled again. "Turn dial number two very slowly."

As we stared, the image of the three-dimensional Susie shrank from eight feet all the way down to a three-dimensional miniature cat the size of a thimble.

Mr. Eammer looked as if he might faint.

"Good-by, Largoscope," I said grimly. "This will make all 3-D and large screen systems obsolete. It will revolutionize television, too. People will sit home and see actual *figures*, three-dimensional figures of real people. There will be no screens at all. The effects of depth and solidity, as you see, are perfect...."

Suddenly Susie in the next room gave a yelping meow and Mary gasped. We jumped, then ran inside. Mary was wringing her hand. There was a little smoke in the room.

"My hand hit a wire," said Mary, embarrassed. "I guess I caused a short circuit or something. I'm sorry. All this smoke." She put her hands to her eyes, rubbing.

"Susie all right?" I said.

"I guess so," she said. "She moved so fast I could hardly see...."

"My dear fellow." Mr. Eammer was most cordial. He put his arm around my shoulders. He was beaming at me. He was offering me a fat cigar. "What a wonderful invention. You are indeed a genius and I offer you my humblest apologies."

"I accept them," I said, pushing him away with distaste. "You may leave now, Mr. Eammer."

"Leave? Not until we've signed a contract, my friend. I want that invention."

"Mr. Eammer, that invention isn't perfected yet. I don't even know how it works. The principles are beyond me. It is something new in the world of physics and optics, and...."

"That's all right," he cried. "I'll give you six months. A year. More. But I want it...."

"No. I'm afraid I don't trust you," I said.

Far from being offended, he was delighted. He laughed as if I'd said something witty. "Of course you don't," he said. "You don't trust me and you don't like me. But just listen to my offer."

Right then and there Mr. Eammer made an offer that had my head swimming. He would, first of all, deposit in an account in my name the sum of one million dollars—free of taxes. Second, he would include in the contract a stipulation that I'd get fifty per cent of all royalties. Third—and *very* important to me—in the event that the patent he would apply for in my name was refused, or if it was broken by further research, I could keep the million dollars.

"And last," said Mr. Eammer, his nostrils flaring as he closed in for the kill, "I'll make your girl friend, Mary, a big movie star."

Mary's eyes widened. She clasped her hands before her, nervously. "Me?" she whispered. "B-but I can't act."

"What's that got to do with it?" Mr. Eammer asked impatiently. "You just got to hold still when the male lead grabs you. Leave it all to him, he knows what to do."

"No," I cried, appalled. "I don't want anybody else kissing Mary."

"Neither do I," said Mary, blushing.

"You're absolutely right." Mr. Eammer uttered a deep sigh. "Such deep love, such clean emotion, it cuts my heart out, honestly. Okay, we'll give the script a scrubbing. Nobody'll put a finger on her."

"I don't think I'm interested," said Mary regretfully.

Mr. Eammer was staggered. He recovered immediately and said hastily, "Smart girl. What intelligence. It's no life for you."

"But, Mary," I said, kind of liking the idea of my Mary on the screen; of being sole owner of her sweetness with millions of people knowing nobody could kiss this girl but myself. "It's such a rare opportunity. Every girl wants to be a movie star. Do it!"

"Sure," cried Mr. Eammer. "Don't be a dope. How many girls get a chance like this?"

Mary whispered, her eyes shining, "Well, all right, dear, if you insist."

"You have a deal, Mr. Eammer," I said quickly.

Mary typed the contract on my portable as dictated by Mr. Eammer.

"Put in a clause," I said cautiously, remembering his ethics, "that the contract is effective only when the million is deposited in my account."

Mr. Eammer frowned. "Put in a clause for me, too," he said. "He can't draw on the million without a signed receipt from me saying he's delivered all his blueprints and technical notebooks on the invention—and a full-size camera model, big enough to hold people."

"I agree," I said. "I'll have it built and delivered immediately."

I shook Mr. Eammer's clammy hand and he departed with Mary to get the million dollars out of his secret safe-deposit boxes.

I stared dreamily after them, mentally spending that money on all the wonderful things I'd always wanted. A scintillometer. A centrifuge. Maybe I could even build my own private cyclotron. And I could visualize Mary cooking dinner in a little white cottage with a picket fence.

Within the week, I had delivered the full-size camera to Mr. Eammer's studio. As he left me, whimpering with joy and carefully locking the iron doors of the room he'd set aside for my equipment, I stared at the signed receipt in my hand. A million dollars. I was rich.

At this moment, Mary appeared at the studio gate and ran toward me, her face deathly pale.

"What's the matter?" I cried.

"Remember how we couldn't find Susie all week?" she gasped. "Well, I just found her."

Mary held out her fist, opened her fingers and I recoiled in astonishment. In her palm was Susie, my cat. But a Susie that was one inch long ... the smallest, tiniest cat I'd ever seen. She was alive and seemed healthy as she licked her white fur and uttered a meow I barely could hear.

My throat was so dry I could hardly get the words out. "Good Lord. The invention. Something went wrong. It not only sends the *image* in three dimensions without a screen to receive it; it also transmits the *actual body itself* through space. *I've created a matter transmitter.*"

"But ... but why is Susie so small?" wailed Mary.

"Apparently it transmits whatever size the image is set at. Remember we had reduced the image of Susie and at that time you short-circuited the wires? That short circuit is what did it. If Susie's image had been large at that moment, we would have had an eight-foot-tall cat on our hands...."

I paused appalled, my eyes clinging to the incredible one-inch cat now peering over the edge of Mary's hand at the ground below. It shrank back fearfully.

"My God," I whispered. I turned and, with Mary close behind me, made a beeline for Mr. Eammer.

We finally found him and got him alone. Mary opened her palm and, without a word, showed him Susie. Mr. Eammer's eyes bulged and his jowls turned ashen. Susie scratched her ear with her miniature rear left foot and I idly wondered just how small Susie's fleas were.

"I warned you," I said grimly, "that I didn't know how this thing worked or the principles behind it. This is what's liable to happen whenever there is a short circuit in the camera box. I don't know *why* it happens, but it's too dangerous to use. If you want to call off our deal...."

"No, no, no," said Mr. Eammer rapidly. A cunning look came over his face. "I'm sure you can work the bugs out of it, can't you? I'm sure you're anxious to do more research on it?"

"Indeed, I am," I said warmly. "You are a man with the true scientific spirit."

"Go right to work," he said urgently, his fascinated eyes never leaving Susie. "Work night and day, day and night. I'll never leave your side. We must learn how this gadget works."

That's what we did. Making Susie comfortable in a matchbox, we set to work in the dead of night when no inquisitive eyes might see our strange experiments.

Mary made us pots of steaming coffee and Mr. Eammer paced helpfully back and forth uttering unclear mumbles, as I toiled the long, wearying hours.

It did not take long for me to gain an empirical understanding of what I had, by which I mean that, like electricity in its early days, the mysterious force could be utilized, made to perform, without complete understanding of its basic nature.

The night came when I had full control of the machine. We stood staring at it in awe. We had made Susie her normal size again. We had enlarged the image of an old shoe, recklessly aimed the projector out toward the country and flicked the short circuit switch that sent it out in space as solid matter.

After three breathless days, we read the puzzled report in the newspapers. A shoe eight feet long and three feet high had been found in the backyard of a summer cottage. It was a three-day wonder, until somebody advanced the theory that it was obviously a prop of some kind of musical comedy movie.

I looked at my machine with the sense of having created one of the greatest wonders of science. My voice was trembling with pride as I said to Mary and Mr. Eammer, "The things that can be done with this invention. The incredible things...."

"Yes," said Mr. Eammer, gloating. "And it's mine, all mine."

"You'll be the biggest man in the movie industry," I said solemnly. "You made a good investment."

Mr. Eammer gave me a strange smile. "You are a great inventor, my boy, but you have a small imagination. *Biggest* man in Hollywood, did you say? The *only* man in Hollywood, you mean. Why, do you realize what I can do with this machine? I can own Hollywood, Television, Broadway. And I'll make a list of people I don't like that I'll get even with. Why, I can be Master of the Entertainment World...."

The blinding realization of what I had done flared in my numbed brain. I had given a tremendous scientific weapon to a ruthless moron. And there was nothing I could do, because he had my blueprints locked in his safe....

I stepped forward and with full force hit Mr. Eammer on the jaw.

As he sagged, I grabbed him and shoved him into the transmitter. "Look out," cried Mary. "He's getting up."

"No," he said in a strangled voice as he struggled to his knees. "No. I'll ... *I'll fix you....*"

I turned the dials full power, hit the directional switch with my open palm and closed my eyes.

Mr. Eammer's voice cut off abruptly. When I opened my eyes, he was gone.

"Thank heaven," gasped Mary in relief.

I immediately made computations and my figures showed that Mr. Eammer must have been transported to the Himalayas.

That's the area where the Abominable Snowman had been sighted. That is why I must speak now, regardless of any opinions about the state of my sanity. I would not want Mr. Eammer shot by mistake, as he comes rushing toward a party of explorers.

It's all right to bring him back now. I've smashed the machine beyond repair and, since Mary was Mr. Eammer's private secretary, she knew where to get the combination of his safe, so we were able to destroy my blueprints and technical notebooks.

I've turned the million dollars over to Mr. Eammer's lawyers and they are now fighting off the creditors, who all think Mr. Eammer is deliberately hiding from them.

Whatever you do, please don't take a shot at the Abominable Snowman.

It is Mr. Eammer.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK DON'T SHOOT ***

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