

Ralph 124C 41+, Part 1

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(Note. This story, which plays in the year 2660, will run serially during the coming year in MODERN ELECTRICS. It is intended to give the reader as accurate a prophesy of the future as is consistent with the present marvelous growth of science, and the author wishes to call especial attention to the fact that while there may be extremely strange and improbable devices and scenes in this narrative, they are not at all impossible, or outside of the reach of science.)

HELLO, Edward!”

“Hello, Ralph!”

“Would you mind running over to the laboratory to-morrow A. M.? I have something interesting to show you. Look!”

He stepped to the side of his Telephot, so that his friend could see the strange apparatus standing on a table about ten feet distant from the Telephot.

“What is it?” inquired Edward, stepping closer to his Telephot face-plate, and catching himself, added, “Oh, I know, it is your famous”–

At this juncture, by one of the pranks of “Central,” Edward’s face disappeared from Ralph’s face-plate and his voice was cut off simultaneously. Some one in “Central” had disconnected the line. For a few minutes Ralph tried to have the connection re-established but finally gave up in disgust, saying unkind things about the Teleservice Co. As he was just about to hang up the receiver, a soft light suddenly appeared on the face-plate of his instrument, and immediately after, the face of a strange beautiful young girl. Inasmuch as it was 4 o’clock in the afternoon, he was surprised to see a lamp burning on the table behind her, and by closer inspection also to notice the evening gown of the young lady.

She was as startled as he and both exclaimed simultaneously: “Oh!”

Ralph, catching his breath, could only stammer, “A thousand pardons for intruding; it seems”Central” made a mistake as usual.”

Her reply startled him still more:

“Pardon Monsieur, je ne comprends pas!”

“Aha,” thought Ralph, “she is French, I’ll fix that in a hurry.”

He quickly turned the small shining disk of the language-rectifier on his instrument, till the pointer rested on “French.” He then repeated his question.

“Yes, is it not annoying,” he heard her say in perfect English, thanks to the rectifier; but realizing that this was hardly a very polite answer, she added: “but sometimes wrong connections are so delightful!”¹

He bowed in acknowledgment of this.

“What a strange place you have,” she was looking over the many curious devices of Ralph’s laboratory as far as the focus of the face-plate allowed.

“May I ask where your delightful laboratory is located?”

“New York,” he said pleasantly. “Just think of it, you would never guess where I am,” she laughed as she spoke.

“Oh that is not such a terrible hard guess. To begin with, before I rectified your speech, you spoke French, hence you are probably French. Secondly, you have a lamp burning in your room although it is only 4 o’clock in the afternoon here in New York. You also wear evening dress. It must be evening where you live, and inasmuch as the clock on your mantelpiece just points to 9, I would say you are in France, as New York time is five hours ahead of French time.”

“How clever. Only not quite right. I am not French, nor do I live in France. I live in Western Switzerland and I am Swiss. Swiss time, you know, is almost the same as French time!”

Both laughed. Suddenly she said: “Your face looks so familiar to me, it seems I must have seen you before.”

“That is possible,” he admitted, embarrassed. “You probably saw some of my pictures.”

“How stupid of me,” she exclaimed, “why of course I should have recognized you immediately; you are the great American inventor, Ralph 124C 41+!”

He again smiled his acknowledgment.

“How interesting your work must be and just think how perfectly lovely that I should be so fortunate to make your acquaintance in this manner, you, who deny yourself always to the fair sex!”

Suddenly she seemed to have a brilliant idea :

¹Note on telegraph romances, cited in The Appendix article, from Mark Goble’s book.

“Would you think me very forward if I asked you for your autograph?”

“Not at all, but I must then ask you for something in return.”

“Which is?”

“Your name and address, since you have the advantage in knowing mine already!”

“This is hardly fair, but since you make it a condition I must submit. My name is Alice 212B 423, address Ventalp, Switzerland!”

“Thank you,” Ralph replied simply.

He then attached his Telautograph to his instrument while Miss 212B 423 did the same. When both instruments were ready, he signed his name on his Telautograph and he saw his signature appear simultaneously on the distant machine in Switzerland.

“Thank you so much, I am so delighted with your autograph, and,” she added proudly, “from what I know of you this must be the first you ever gave to a lady. Am I right?” she added whimsically.

“You are perfectly correct, and what is more, it affords me a very great pleasure indeed to present it to you, since you seem so anxious to have it.”

“How exquisite,” she held the autograph up, “I have never seen an original signature with the ‘+’ behind the name; only the ten most famous men, I believe, are allowed to have it on our planet, and to think it is my good fortune to have such a famous autograph, and from you!”

Looking up she noticed his extreme embarrassment, and quickly changed the subject.

(To be continued.)