

## **An excerpt from the unpublished memoir of Dr. Mads Mikkelsen**

*Illegally serialised in the Assiniboia Tribune November 11, 1932. A lawsuit is pending.*

My father was a sentimental man. He had the heart of a poet though he spent his entire life as a dairy farmer. He told me of the advent of Halley's Comet in 1835. The superstitious and god fearing of course thought the world was ending and behaved as the fearful often do. My father, who could not have been more than four at the time and already with cow s\*\*t on his boots turned his wondering eyes to the heavens and took in the glory that was the comet. 75 years later and in failing health he once again turned rheumy eyes dimmed by cataracts to the heavens to take in the return of the comet. Although words failed him so that he was unable to articulate his thoughts he claimed the comet was different somehow.

And how different! It came bearing terrible, wondrous gifts that changed the very nature of those it shone upon. Man, woman, animals and plants could be changed. There was no science to what or who was affected nor rhyme or reason. Half a set of identical twins was affected but entire countries saw no effects. Some of those affected received gifts that made them gods among us. Others were struck down with curses that made their continued existence impossible. I was in Ebeltoft on vacation when the comet's effects became manifest. There was a young girl, no more than fourteen who overnight gained a glowing radiance and a pair of magnificent feathered wings which sadly did not grant her flight. The villagers, already fearful because of the comet, and despite its isolation already aware of the terrible calamity in London that had claimed the life of our beloved Frederick VIII among so many others, did not recognize the girl as one of their own and thinking her the angelic being she resembled pressed her beseeching for divine favour. Another "gift" of the comet had been the loss of her voice which had been replaced by a beautiful trilling so she could not speak.

The crowd pressed her begging for favours which she could not deliver. All she could do was flap her useless wings and spread her arms beseechingly as she trilled her plaintive song. I tried to intervene but the crowd was too frenzied and pressed on until the poor creature was crushed. It was only after she was dead and her glow gone that the crowd recognized her as one of their own. I still have a long white flight feather spotted with golden blood that I removed from her crumpled body. Similar stories came from around the world. And not just tales of false divine beings but tales of monsters that ate human flesh and drank souls. In some nations every wondrous man and woman was tracked down and burnt as witches. In other more "civilized" nations these wondrous men and women were swept up by the state and hoarded. Omens of war were on the wind and all sorts of war goods were being stockpiled. Why not wondrous men and women? Nowhere were they allowed to be left alone.

Some of the men and women who became wondrous were indistinguishable from ordinary men and women. Others though became taller, fatter, gained extra or new limbs. Some grew smaller. And some became truly monstrous. Some of these monsters died of their own account, others were slain as myths come alive and others yet were stockpiled by war hungry states. Those who were indistinguishable from the hoi polloi were wise to keep themselves hidden.

Foolish poets write of the glory of war but the reality was so much worse. Relations between nations had become tense and fraught with danger after the Terror that was St. George's Chapel finally came to a head when Archduke Francis Ferdinand of Austria was assassinated by a Serbian Man of Wonder. The nations choose sides, each thinking themselves right. I was foolish as well and believed the stories of glory. Our nation was unhappy with Britain and did not believe the stories of Scottish nationalists and somehow thought the whole affair had been engineered to slay our ailing 67 year monarch. Rumours abounded that a scheming Princess Louise had faked her terminal illness in order to assassinate everyone standing between her and the throne!

Denmark joined Germany and Austria in their war along with many nations including Zululand and Ethiopia. I fought as an infantryman and had firsthand experience of the horrors of that conflict. Oh, it was not just the Men and Women of Wonder science played a role as well as did of course our old friends General Stupid and General Conservatism. It took a few years for the human generals to understand and best utilize the strategic advantages that science and wonder offered. On the science side I knew Fritz Haber who won the 1918 Nobel Prize for his contributions to the Haber-Bosch process used to synthesize ammonia which greatly increased the amount of food produced by farmers through increased access to fertilizers.

He also worked on poison gas, which is the reason why I can no longer go for long walks. He was a man of great intellect and greater amorality. The gas, he said was no crueller than the flying pieces of iron, and left fewer mutilations. As I remember the brigades of the blind and cough blood into my handkerchief I smile at this conceit. I remember also beautiful Clara Immerwahr, feminist, pacifist and a gentle soul. I remember hearing the news that tired of being shackled to such a monster she shot herself through the heart with Haber's service pistol.

I recall the glory that was wondrous men and women soaring through the skies and how the rest of us joined them in von Zeppelin's invention and the Wright brother's fragile toys. At first the men of wonder were used as blunt objects which slaughtered men in great numbers. We learned how to counter them though with traps and massed gunfire and the slaughter was returned. Then they switched to stealthy attacks at night and slaughtered even more. I could fill a library with the horrors I saw personally but my hand shakes too much, though not with palsy, to continue.