

An Extraordinary Wedding

By Edward Page Mitchell

I

Professor Daniel Dean Moody of Edinburgh, a gentleman equally well known as a profound psychologist and as an honest and keen-eyed investigator of the phenomena sometimes called spiritualistic, visited this country not many months ago and was entertained in Boston by Dr. Thomas Fullerton at his delightful home on Mount Vernon Street. One evening when there were present in Dr. Fullerton's parlors, besides himself and his Scotch guest, Dr. Curtis of the medical school of the Boston University, the Reverend Dr. Amos Cutler of the Lynde Street Church, Mr. Magnus of West Newton, three ladies, and the writer, the conversation turned to subjects of an occult character.

"There once lived in Aberdeen," said Professor Moody, "a medium named Jenny McGraw, of slender intellectuality, but of remarkable psychic strength. Two hundred years ago you good people of Boston would have hanged Jenny for a witch. I have seen in her cottage materialization for which I could not and cannot account by any hypothesis of deception or of hallucination. I have seen forms come forth, not from any cabinet or trick closet, but extruded before my eyes from the person of Jenny herself, hanging nebulous in the air for a moment and then slowly taking corporate shape. That there was no vulgar trick about this I am willing to stake my scientific reputation. One night Plato himself, or an eidolon claiming to be Plato, emerged from Jenny McGraw's bosom and conversed with me for full fifteen minutes upon the duality of the idea, the medium, in the meanwhile, remaining entranced."

Dr. Fullerton exchanged a significant glance with his wife. Their guest intercepted it and said:

"You don't believe me? No wonder."

"Not that," rejoined Dr. Fullerton. "Your testimony as a scientific observer is worthy of all possible respect. But what became of Jenny McGraw?"

"She was a dull, unsympathetic young woman, hardly to be classed as a rational being. So far from becoming interested in these wonderful manifestations exhibited through her organization, she was excessively annoyed by them, and I believe she finally left Scotland to escape the troublesome spirits and the still more troublesome mortals who flocked to her cottage and sadly interfered with her washing, ironing, and baking."

"A Yankee girl," said Mr. Magnus, "would have turned such powers to account and have made her fortune."

"Jenny McGraw," replied Professor Moody, "whom I believe to be the only medium in the world capable of producing materializations in the broad light and independently of her surroundings, was thrifty enough, like all Scotchwomen, but she hadn't the intelligence to recognize the opportunity. She was frequently advised to go before the public. Advice is wasted on the Scotch. I don't know where she is at present."

Dr. Fullerton again glanced at his wife. Mrs. Fullerton arose and touched a bell.

The door soon opened, and there appeared a lumpy, red-haired domestic, who curtsied awkwardly as she entered the room.

"Did ye rang, ma'am?" she asked.

"Jenny," said Mrs. Fullerton, "here is an old friend of yours from Scotland."

The girl showed no sign of surprise. Scarcely a shade of recognition passed over her stupid countenance as she walked sullenly up to the professor and sullenly took his extended hand.

"I didna ken ye was cam to America, Maister Moody," she said, and looked around as if she would be glad to escape the learned company.

"Now, with your permission, Mrs. Fullerton," said the professor, looking over Jenny McGraw's shoulder toward his hostess, "we will ask the young woman if she will kindly assist us in an investigation which we purpose to make."

Jenny looked up suspiciously and turned her small, dull eyes from her master to her mistress, and from her mistress to the door.

"I'm na ower fond of sic investigatin'," she stolidly remarked, "an' it gies me a pain in the breast to brang oot the auld ghaists, as ye na doot remember wull, Maister Moody."

For a long time the girl stubbornly refused to renew her relations with the mysterious yonder. I have forgotten what argument or plea it was that at last won her to a reluctant consent. I have not forgotten what followed.

The room was as light as the full blaze of five gas jets could make it. Under this blaze, and surrounded by the partly amused, partly skeptical company, Jenny was seated in a Turkish easy chair. She did not form an attractive picture, short, squat, sandy, freckled, and peevish-eyed as she was. "Good Lord!" I whispered to a neighbor. "Do glorified spirits choose such a channel as that when they wish to come back to us?"

"Hush!" said Professor Moody. "The girl is passing into a trance."

The swinish eyes opened and closed. A sluggish convulsion fluttered across the flabby cheeks. A sigh or two, a nervous twitching of her chair, breathing heavily.

"Ineffectively simulated coma," whispered Dr. Curtis to me, "and *not* the work of an artist. This is a farce."

For fifteen or twenty minutes we sat in patience, the stillness broken only by the rough respiration of the girl. Then one or two of the party began to yawn, and the hostess, fearing that the experiment was becoming a bore, moved as if to break up the circle. But Professor Moody raised his hand in protest. Before he dropped it he made a rapid gesture which directed all our eyes toward Jenny McGraw.

Her head and bust seemed to be enveloped in a dim, thin film of opalescent vapor, which floated free about her, yet was fixed at one point, as a wreath of blue smoke hangs at the end of a good cigar. The point of attachment appeared to be in the neighborhood of Jenny's heart. She had stopped breathing loudly, and was as pale as the dead; but her face was no whiter than that of Dr. Curtis. I felt his hand groping for mine. He found it and clutched it till it was numb.

While we watched, the vapor that proceeded from Jenny's bosom grew in volume and became opaque. It was like a dark, well-defined cloud, floating before our eyes, here gathering itself in and extending itself there, till at last the shape was perfect.

You have seen a dim, meaningless object under a lens gradually define itself as it was brought into focus, and suddenly stand out clear and sharp. Or, better, you have seen at a shadow pantomime a vague, amorphous cloudiness intensify and take shape as the person approached the screen, until it became a perfect silhouette. Now, imagine the silhouette stepping forth into your presence a solidified fact, and you get some idea of the marvelous transition by which this shadow from a world we know not of stepped forth into the midst of our little company.

I looked across the room at the Reverend Dr. Cutler. He was clasping his forehead with both hands. I have never seen a more striking picture of mingled horror, terror, and perplexity.

The newcomer was a man of twenty-eight or thirty, of fine features and dignified bearing. He made a courteous bow to the assemblage, but when he saw that Professor Moody was about to speak put his finger to his lips and glanced back uneasily at the medium. I fancied that an expression of disgust stole over his handsome countenance when he perceived how unlovely was the gateway through which he had returned to earth. Nevertheless, he kept his eyes fixed upon Jenny McGraw's pallid face and folded his arms as if waiting.

We were now thoroughly under the spell of this mysterious happening. With eager expectation, but without surprise, we saw again the phenomena of the cloud, the shadow, the concentration, and the presence.

Slowly out of the white mist and nebulous shadow there took form the most beautiful woman that mortal eyes ever beheld. It *was* a woman—a living, breathing woman, her magnificent lips slightly parted, her bosom rising and falling beneath a garment of wonderfully woven texture, her glorious black eyes shining upon us till our heads swam and our thoughts reeled. It would be easier to fathom the secret of her being than to describe the unearthly beauty that startled and awed us.

The first comer unfolded his arms, and with the tenderness of a lover and the deference due a queen, took the shapely white hand of the marvelous lady and led her forth to the middle of the room. She said no word, but suffered herself to be guided by his hand, and stood like an empress scanning our faces and habiliments with a puzzled curiosity in which it was possible to detect the slightest trace of disdain. He spoke at last in a low voice.

"Friends," he slowly said, "a great love carried one who was lately a mortal into the presence of a goddess. A greater good fortune befell him than his small sacrifices had earned. I cannot speak more plainly. Hear our entreaty and grant it without questioning. There is here a servant of the church, duly qualified to pronounce the only words that can crown a love like mine. That love reached back over centuries to meet its object, and was sealed by a willing death. We come from another world to ask to be joined in wedlock according to the forms of this world."

Strange as it may seem, the preceding events had so attuned our consciousness to the spirit of the surroundings that we heard this extraordinary speech without amazement. And when Mr. Magnus of West Newton, who would preserve his cool, matter-of-fact manner in the company of archangels, audibly whispered, "Eloped, by Jove, from the spirit land!" His words jarred harshly in our ears.

The Reverend Dr. Amos Cutler displayed most strikingly the effect of the glamor that had been thrown over our nineteenth-century common sense. That pious man rose from his chair with a dazed and helpless look in his face, and, like one walking in his sleep, advanced toward the couple.

Raising his hand to command silence, he solemnly and deliberately asked the questions that by usage of the church are preliminary to the marriage rite. The man responded in a clear, triumphant tone. The bride answered only by a slight inclination of her beautiful head.

"Then," continued Dr. Cutler, "in the presence of these witnesses, I pronounce you man and wife. And God forgive me," he added, "for lending myself to the Devil's works by the sacrilege of this act."

One by one we passed up to take the bridegroom's hand and salute the bride. His hand was like the hand of a marble statue, but a radiant smile brightened his face. At a whispered suggestion from him, she bent her regal head, and allowed each one of us to kiss her cheek. It was soft and blood-warm.

When Dr. Cutler saluted her she smiled for the first time and, with a rapid, graceful movement detached from her black hair a great pearl and put it in his hand. He gazed at it a moment and, then on a sudden impulse, flung it into the open grate. In the hot blaze, Dr. Cutler's wedding fee whitened, calcined, crumbled, and disappeared.

Then the bridegroom led his wife back to the chair where the medium still sat entranced. He clasped her close in his arms. Their melting forms interblended in shadowy vapor, and, fading slowly away, this newly married couple found their nuptial pillow in the bosom of Jenny McGraw.

II

One day after Professor Moody had left Boston, I went to the Atheneum Library in search of certain facts and dates regarding the Franco-Prussian war. While turning over the leaves of a bound file of the London *Daily News* for 1871 my eyes happened to fall upon the following paragraph:

The Vienna *Freie Presse* says that at four o'clock in the afternoon of July 12 a young man of good appearance shot himself through the heart in the east corridor of the Imperial Gallery. It was at the hour of closing the gallery, and the young man had been warned by an attendant that he must depart. He was standing motionless before Herr Hans Makart's fine picture of "Cleopatra's Barge," and paid no heed to the admonition. When it was repeated more emphatically he pointed in an absent manner to the painting, and having remarked, "Is not that a woman worth dying for!" drew a pistol and fired with fatal effect.

There is no clue to the suicide's individuality except that afforded at the Golden Lamb Hotel, where he was registered simply as "Cotton." He had been in Vienna several weeks, had spent money freely, and had frequently been observed at the Imperial Gallery, always before this picture of Cleopatra. The unfortunate youth is believed to have been insane.

I made a careful copy of this brief story, and sent it, without comment, to the Reverend Dr. Cutler. A day or two later he returned it with a note.

"The events of that night at Dr. Fullerton's," he wrote, "are to me as the events of a dimly remembered dream. Pardon me if I say that it will be a kindness to let me forget them altogether."