

THE TOP OF HER BENT.

Spiritual Manifestations and Strange Apparitions.

A Specter Which Seemed to Gaze Out of Eyeless Sockets

Became a Denizen of the Palace and Disported as Freely as the Royal Mistress.

Once upon a time there was a Princess who believed so ardently in the supernatural that at last she thought and talked of nothing else, and occupied herself solely discussing dreams and spiritual manifestations, and she surrounded herself with people only who had seen visions and whose strange dreams had (or had not) come true, and who had received spiritual manifestations and seen apparitions—or at least whose second cousins and great aunts had witnessed the extraordinary.

Now the Princess dwelt in a palace which had once been a place of luxury and delight, where people could move about fearlessly during all the twenty-four hours of every day and night. But now that this Princess reigned in it, it was haunted by spirits, and, go where one might, some intangible presence or some eerie appearance filled every nook and corner of it. One day the Lord Chamberlain met a Shadovv lady in blue on the staircase, who seemed to gaze at him out of eyeless sockets. The Lord Chamberlain did not fail to relate his adventure, and the next day the first maid of honor encountered the same lady in the picture gallery. Then she was seen by the chief page; then by the mistress of the robes. Soon she had been seen by the Princess herself, and thenceforth the eyes blue lady became a denizen of the palace and walked there as freely as its royal mistress. Next, a phantom coach was heard at midnight to drive up to the palace portals and a phantom head rang furiously at the great bell. No eye saw this vision. The curiosity of those who peeped remained ungratified. But the sounds were heard by many, and those who heard shuddered and clung to each other in dismay.

Soon unusual things happened in the palace with regularity and frequency. Nightly a cold and terrible hand was laid upon the cheek of the Lord Chief Justice after he had extinguished his light. Nightly also a rustling silk gown passed through the chamber of the Generalissimo of the Army. On Sundays, at 2 in the early morning, a hysterical laugh was laughed at the bedside of the Princess herself, and at an hour before cock-crow every month when the moon began to wane, feet scuffled, a heavy body fell, and a deep and dreadful groan was uttered in the apartment of the poet laureate. An intangible monk seemed to inhabit the library; an invisible but bloody presence was felt to invade the ball room. Men shunned the smoking room at the going down of the sun, because at the apartment was permeated by the faint and exquisite aroma of a tobacco no mortal had ever inhaled. The grand piano in the drawing room was constantly played upon, and when the Princess and her suite entered in haste—although but that instant the room had been ringing with melody—the piano would be found closed and the apartment void. Children scampered up and down the wide staircases, when there were no children within a mile of the palace. Dogs whined at closed doors, and, lo! when one rose to admit the creature, no dog was to be found. In short there was no end to the extraordinary occurrences which took place in the Princess' palace daily. The Princess grew thin and haggard, and her large and luminous eyes looked as if they would fall out of her head. And her whole court grew meager and pallid also, and none spoke above his breath, and the women clustered together in twos and threes, and when any one entered a room, the occupants would ask at once, "What have you seen? What have you experienced? What did you dream last night?"

Then some who had formerly held high offices at the court, but who had been displaced because they were incredulous of the Princess' second sight, and because they had declared that he only who desired to see ghosts saw them, for that ghosts *per se* existed not, drew together in consultation and agreed that something must be done. "Let us prevail upon the Princess to marry. Marriage is a healthy state," said one.

This proposition was received with unanimity, and an audience of the Princess being obtained, two gentlemen, who had once been respectively Prime Minister and Chief Court Physician, were admitted into her Royal Highness' august presence. They found their royal mistress—who was herself as slender as a lily and very wan—surrounded by her maids of honor, lean and terrified damsels, and by her Ministers of State—cadaverous and melancholy personages. The whole assembly looked as if it were smitten by some painful nervous sickness; each one glanced hither and thither, as though devoured by some dread expectancy—all started at every sound, and their breasts heaved with inexplicable emotions and their bony hands were clinched convulsively.

For very pity the ex-chief physician could have wept. But he restrained himself, while the ex-Prime Minister explained his errand, begging respectfully to inform the Princess that, while she was striving to grasp the supernatural, the natural was falling into decay—that the army and navy were becoming disorganized, foreign Powers were growing aggressive, literature was neglected and art and science forgotten, social evils were unremedied, and the whole realm was becoming disaffected.

Then the Princess said, sighing, "What would you have me do?" Then the ex-Prime Minister replied with caution, "Madam, we would have your Royal Highness bend your mind from the immaterial to the material. To one so widely read as your Royal Highness we need not to quote the wise man's words: 'Our business is not to know all things, but those which concern our conduct.'"

"But how can we tell what truths

may not be revealed to us through spiritual investigation?" said the Princess.

"Madam, truth will reveal itself in its own good time," rejoined the ex-Prime Minister.

"Not so," said the Princess. "Does not the pearl remain hid until the diver plunges into the sea? I have deeply explored spiritual phenomena, and there have been vouchsafed to me visions so translucent that they were indiscernible to any but the most highly spiritualized, and many other wondrous experiences have been accorded to me, the servocableness of which will doubtless be revealed in days to come."

"Madam," interrupted the ex-chief physician, "does not your Royal Highness know that the senses respond to impressions from within as well as to impressions from without?"

"Sir, what did you mean by that?" inquired the Princess, frowning.

"Madam," said the ex-chief physician, boldly, "I mean that in the brain messages may be transmitted from the ideational centers to the sensory ganglia, and that these messages from within produce a similar effect to the impressions caused by external stimuli; hence, at the suggestion of the ideational centers, sights may be seen and sounds heard, nay, even tastes, odors and tactual impressions perceived which are not objective at all, but purely imaginary."

"Do you mean, sir," cried the Princess, "that you think I invent the spiritual manifestations in which I rejoice?"

"That which your Royal Highness so aptly suggests is what your Royal Highness' humble servant is fain to think," said the ex-chief physician with a low bow.

"If my chief executioner were not confined to his bed, and very ill from the effects of an awful vision which was given to him last night, in which he saw all the executioners of all time warring war against all the executed, and the executed, forming a mighty army, with their heads beneath their arms, subduing them, I would have you beheaded," said the Princess.

The ex-chief physician bowed again, and the ex-Prime Minister hastened to say that, putting aside all explanations that might be offered as to the objectivity or subjectivity of spiritual manifestations, he would come to the point of declaring that he and all the rest of her Royal Highness' faithful subjects earnestly desired that the Princess might show herself more gracious towards them, and to this end, trusting that the indulgence of pure and healthy domestic joys would render her more mindful of the mundane needs of her people, they humbly entreated their royal mistress to enter forthwith into the holy bonds of wedlock.

At this the Princess blushed, for she was but a woman, notwithstanding her predilection for the supernatural.

"But I do not wish to marry," she said.

"Nevertheless, we venture to implore your Royal Highness to reconsider the matter," said the ex-Prime Minister.

"But whom should I marry? Who could I marry?" said the Princess.

"Madam," began the ex-Prime Minister, "there is the Prince of—"

But the Princess cut him short.

"A Prince is ought to me," she said. "What have I in common with ordinary mortals who have no cognizance with the spirit-world, who are too gross and carnal to discern the invisible or to apprehend the impalpable, and whose organizations are too coarse to receive incorporeal manifestations? Nay, my lord, if you would have me wed, you must find for me a husband so completely *en rapport* with the spirit world that he shall pass through the crucial test, wherewith I shall try him, and retain not only my esteem and confidence but my adoring reverence."

At these words the ex-Prime Minister and the ex-chief physician drooped their heads dejectedly, while a faint murmur of applause arose from the thin lips of the courtiers. But a child, who was seated on a stool at the Princess' knee, the orphan son of her dearest friend asked, "Godmother, what is the test?"

All listened for the answer. But the Princess was moody and would not explain.

"When the time comes you will know," she said.



"WHAT IS YOUR TITLE TO SEEK MY HAND?"

Then the two ex-officers retired, sad and desponding, and the Princess withdrew into a dim chamber, where daily at that hour was heard the music of unseen violins, played high in the air by phantom fiddlers.

The ex-Ministers rubbed their heads and thought. What was this crucial test wherewith the Princess should try her would-be husband? And who would be found to submit himself to the ordeal! The two good gentlemen were sorely perplexed. But a rich princess need not remain single long, and, as in the legends of fairyland, suitors quickly presented themselves, each one confident that the test, however hard it might be, was no harder a nut than he could conveniently crack.

Upon each suitor when was brought before her the Princess turned her eyes languidly.

"What is your title to seek my hand?" she said then.

And one offered her a pack of cards and bade her name the card that should spring from among its fellows. And another proffered a lighted Chinese lantern out of the Lord High Chamber-

lain's hat. And another caused his limbs to be tied with cords in many knots and had himself shut up within a small space with a cigarette paper laid upon his knees, and lo, in a moment the curtain was withdrawn and the cigarette was rolled and between the lips of him who still sat there bound with knotted chords. But the Princess only smiled and said, "That is mere sleight of hand and any juggler can do as much."

Then others came relating how in the stillest hours of night, in locked chambers, friends who were at a great distance appeared to them, and how they had learnt afterward that at that moment the friend had died, and telling of warning voices which had kept them from starting on some fateful journey, and of prophetic dreams which had been realized, and of strange coincidences and marvelous presentiments and eccentric exhibitions of psychic phenomena. But the Princess still smiled and said, "These are only the normal displays of spiritual force and lowest servants in my scullery have had manifestations as marked and as unusual."

And some of the suitors went away crestfallen. But some pleaded to be allowed to undergo the test, and to these the Princess said, "Tell me of what I am thinking. This is not the test, but if you can tell that, you will have accomplished something."

Then each strove to read the royal lady's thought and one guessed one thing and one another. But none could divine, for the Princess was always thinking that each of her suitors was more tedious and unacceptable than the one that came before.

At last there arrived a young and handsome professor of mental physiology.

"Madam," said he, "there is no need that I should try your patience by exhibiting tricks of legerdemain. All juggleries can I perform. But they are nothing to me, since I can set the Thames on fire, draw blood from a stone, run the gauntlet of criticism, pick a quarrel, nurse revenge, put a rod in pickle, break my mother's heart, teach my grandmother to suck eggs, catch a weazel asleep, get out of bed on the wrong side, raise the wind, play with fire, kill two birds with one stone, keep myself close, laugh on the wrong side of my mouth, save my breath to cool my porridge, keep a secret, steal a kiss, hug the shore, hatch a plot, drive a bargain, swallow an indignity, make a mountain out of a molehill, reduce an argument to an absurdity, double my pace, make money fly, find a verdict, preserve my temper, mince matters, create confusion, magnify my own importance, rivet your attention, take the bull by the horns, and lose myself in a crowd. I can also play upon the imagination and fool a woman to the top of her bent. Madam, your Royal Highness doubtless perceives that my relation, with the unseen powers are extraordinary. May it be that to your Royal Highness' most humble servant shall be vouchsafed to pass the crucial tests which shall be the key to so great ecstasies?"

Then the Princess regarded him with favor, and she said, "Sir, how did you obtain this *recueillement* with the Supernatural?"

And the Professor made answer, "Madam, I have obtained it by the most careful and incessant cultivation of a certain part of the brain, within which lies the power of being in touch with the unapproached and the unapproachable. In most human brains these supra-normal ganglia are merely rudimentary, and to few is it given so to develop these high convolutions that their mystic powers are declared. But before these few are spread the marvelous mysteries of the other world, of which grosser creatures know nought, and which they—in their ignorant and undeveloped state—desire."

"Professor," said the Princess, earnestly, "how can I attain this supra-normal development?"

"Madam," said the Professor, "by perpetually dwelling upon the supra-normal idea, the supra-normal nerves are set in motion and the supra-normal grooves become fixed, and presently the supra-normal ganglia dominate the whole existence. The rest of the mind may be dormant. The senses may be dulled and the intellect atrophied. But the supra-normal groove will deepen and the supra-normal nerves will work with more and more activity, till the highest state shall be achieved—even constant communion with the unperceived and the imperceptible. But if I mistake not madam, your Royal Highness has already reached this ultimate state."

"I have thought of the Supernatural and of nothing else for many years," said the Princess.

"And you have perceived?" said he, tentatively.

"Many wonderful things have been manifested to me," said she. "Only this morning the idea of a Strangled Abbott accompanied me from the moment of waking until noon. I did not see it, neither did I hear its last gurgling breath, nor yet did I feel it. But it was given me to apprehend that it was there by a subtle and indescribable sense, which is vague and mystic, and yet sharp and powerful as a Damascus blade."

"The supra-normal is ever wonderful," murmured the Professor.

"Yet there are some who call my delicate perceptions abnormal, who attribute my visions to a diseased and morbid fancy, who impress upon me the manifestations I have received are entirely subjective," said the Princess.

"Those are the coarse and groveling natures which can not soar to the cultivation of the supra-normal faculties," said the Professor with warmth. "The supra-normal faculties of such are more rudimentary than those of the brutes, for even dogs bark at we know not what, and howl dismally when death draws near."

"Then you do not think that my delight in spiritual communion evidences an unsound mind?" said the Princess.

"A thousand times, no!" cried the Professor, with much energy. "I believe that it indicates the evolution of a sixth sense, which shall be but in the fourth dimension, discover the chemical properties of spirit, and beside which the functions of the normal senses and the action of the normal

brain shall seem like sight and hearing and intelligence in a mouth and in a babe. To your Royal Highness is it permitted to be one of the pioneers of this new, splendid and unimaginable development?"

The Princess who had indefinitely prolonged this conversation for even to a lady whose supra-normal faculties are acute it is not altogether disagreeable to be *en rapport* with a handsome young man. But at this juncture the Prime Minister came forward and begged respectfully to inquire whether the Princess would graciously deign to inform him if she intended to apply the crucial test to the last arrived suitor.



"TELL ME OF WHAT I AM THINKING?"

Then the Princess, turning her large and sparkling eyes upon the Professor, said, "Tell me of what I am thinking. This is not the test, but if you can tell that, you will have accomplished something."

"Madam," said the Professor, bold, "it becomes not me to read your Royal Highness' thoughts aloud. But should an oracle reply to your Royal Highness' command, would it not say, 'Sweet is the rapture of mutual understanding and the lasting companionship of equal minds is beyond praise?'"

Then the Princess' pale cheeks flushed red, for she had indeed been thinking that if she could bestow her hand upon any one, it would be upon this handsome and sympathetic professor, whose mind seemed to be a counterpart of her own. So she said with confusion, "That will pass, Professor. My thoughts were possibly of some seductive theme."

"Then may I hope that your Royal Highness will impart to me what is the crucial test?" said he.

"It is a hard thing," returned she, sighing, for she was reluctant to risk losing the Professor's society.

"Nevertheless, I will overcome it," said he.

Then the Princess groaned within herself, not daring to believe that the Professor should succeed. But at last she said, "Professor, if upon a certain day, in my sight and in the sight of all my court, you, by your own volition, be snatched away wholly and taken utterly out of our fleshy cognizance; and if, returning to us, you be etherealized as no mortal man has ever been, and if you have had discernments such as no human senses have ever opened unto, then shall I know that our relations with the Supernatural are complete, and then shall I trust in you completely and adore you with the utmost reverence. This is the test."

Then all gazed at the Professor, expecting that he should be daunted. But he said, "Madam, be it as your Royal Highness desires. In eight days will I be ready to undergo the test, and then will I, in your Royal Highness' sight, and in the sight of all the court—banish wholly from your fleshy cognizance, and returning after a space, I will be fair and spiritualized beyond thought, and my knowledge shall transcend all human discrimination. Now retire, we all and let us spend our days fasting and in contemplation, so that our grosser parts may be dulled, and our supra-normal faculties intensified to the uttermost. And beware, madam, lest by the indulgence of the smallest normal thought your Royal Highness' supra-normal thought your Royal Highness' supra-normal faculties be but for an instant diminished, for if your Royal Highness' supra-normal faculties should abate their keenness and their expectancy only for the twinkling of an eye, it is most sure that some portion of the mystic drama will escape your Royal Highness' apprehension and in this case, should the veil of the universe be rent asunder and the spirit-chorus come to meet you, your Royal Highness would be deaf and blind to these inconceivable glories. And I, madam, he added, in a voice audible to the Princess alone, "I should be cruelly disappointed. For I think that your Royal Highness has developed a mental possibility and a cerebral convolution hitherto unknown among men, and if I find that I am mistaken, if I am compelled to own that your Royal Highness' faculties are but normal and undeveloped—truly, madam, if I find this to be so, my fate will be indeed bitter, and I shall be of all men the most wretched. I shall have passed through the crucial test and I shall be etherealized beyond compare. But if my royal mistress stand without, of what avail will it be that my supra-normal powers are unimpeachable? For without you, madam, your Royal Highness' faithful servant ceases to exist."

Then all withdrew, and upon the eighth day, when the sun was low, the court reassembled, and the Professor stood in the midst, clothed in a strange garment, whose texture might not be discovered nor its hues named, and an ineffable smile was upon his lips. And the courtiers were lean and pale and heavy-eyed, for they had fasted greatly and endured much contemplation, and the pallor and emaciation of the Princess was more than all of theirs. But the Princess' godson was comely and well nourished.

Then the Professor, standing in the sight of the Princess and of all the court, raised his hands and cried with a loud voice, and immediately they saw him not, neither did they see him behold him during the time that they might have counted two score. Then a voice said, "Welcome, O my Princess," and again they saw the Professor standing in their midst. And he said, "Madam, did I not see that time hath laid no hand upon your Royal Highness' countenance, I should say that my absence had endured for centuries. For that which no human language

can utter has been revealed to me, and the unexpressible and indescribable has been shown to me, and the knowledge of the supernatural has transfused me and etherealized me as no mortal man hath ever been heretofore; and this year Royal Highness' intensified supra-normal faculties can well perceive."

And the Princess gave her hand to the Professor, and promised to rely upon him for evermore and to adore him with reverence.

But the Princess' godson said, "The Professor never disappeared at all. He stood there the whole time, and I saw him snap his fingers and wink."

Then the Professor said mildly: "Doubtless, my child, you thought you saw me standing there. But you looked with the eyes of your body, and so brief was my absence that it seemed to you I had never gone—as, when you spin a top with a red spot, so rapid is the movement of the top that the red spot seems ever in sight."

And the Professor took the Princess' hand and led her away to the banquetting hall, and the next day the nuptials were celebrated with great pomp, and the Professor ruled the Princess and her dominions from that time, and there was prosperity in that land.

But the Princess caused her godson to be whipped and commanded that he should be sent to a haunted school.

—The In a Million.

As we get down in the neighborhood of Cape Hatteras, says a writer in the New York Sun, it came on to blow great guns, and the seas were tremendous. The steamer pitched and tossed and rolled in a way to frighten everybody, and about mid-afternoon a sleek-looking young man pitched across the cabin to the side on which I was sitting and asked:

"Do you think we can pull through?"

"It is doubtful."

"Good chance of going down, eh?"

"Best in the world."

"Well, I have a few dollars in counter-fort money with me—and I guess I'll throw it overboard!"

He pitched across to his state-room and probably got rid of it. In about half an hour he came for me again and asked:

"What do you think of it now?"

"Seems to be laboring heavily, and I am expecting to hear that she has sprung a leak."

"Is that so? I have two or three packs of cards in my valise. That might count against me in the other world, and I guess I'll leave 'em out."

He was gone about a quarter of an hour this time, and as he staggered up to the sofa again the steamer almost stood on end.

"It's growing worse, isn't it?" he inquired.

"Much worse."

"And we ought to prepare for death?"

"We had."

"I believe I have two or three bogus bonds with me belonging to a friend who sometimes works a confidence game. I guess they'll have to go, too."

When he was gone I shifted my position and it was half an hour before he found me again. The steamer was rolling and pitching and he was very white as he inquired:

"What are the chances now?"

"One in a million."

I did not see him again until we were nearing Wilmington. Then I caught him trying to work the three-card rickety on a South Carolina planter, and I called him aside:

"You seem to have recovered all your cheek, my friend?"

"I have—yes."

"While you thought there was danger of our going down you were very penitent?"

"Just so."

"I thought you threw overboard everything belonging to your profession."

"Not quite. I was going to, but when you said we had one chance in a million, I took it and saved Monte, and if you'll let me alone I'll pull \$50 out of that old cottonseed before we make the wharf."

—A Peculiar Thief.

A young man acting as scullion in a cigarette establishment (according to a Parisian correspondent) has just been arrested for theft under very peculiar circumstances. He was led astray by his mania for gorgeous costumes, with which he arrayed himself in the seclusion of the garret wherein he reposed after the labors of the day. In order to satisfy his taste for sumptuous apparel he was in the habit of—as opportunity offered—of taking money from the treasurer's room, and when the discovery was made it was ascertained that upward of \$1,000 had been spent on "fine fashions." Among the articles which, for security he had stowed away in a box in a coal-hole, were a coat of red velvet, richly brocaded, a large ring, a crozier, richly brocaded, a graph in which the scullion was depicted in papal attire, his head surmounted by a tiara.

Judging from the number of "cordial" receptions given to the Shah of Persia, it is no wonder that he is reported to be always full of good spirits.—Baltimore American.

What Happened to a General

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