

Chapter 3

Professor Muller, the Great Scientist and Mathematician

CONSTANCE—THE VICTIM—HOW A FLYING SOUL BECOMES AN IMMORTAL SPIRIT.

In the college buildings occupied by the professors and employees attached to the university of which I became a student, resided a mathematical teacher, whom I shall designate Professor Muller. This gentleman held a distinguished place in the ranks of science, and was also one of the secret society associated with myself and Professor von Marx. He was a sullen, cold, ungenial man, and though esteemed for his scientific attainments, and regarded by our society as a powerful mesmeric operator, he was generally disliked, and was particularly repulsive to the "sensitives" whom he occasionally magnetized. Professor von Marx had always carefully isolated me from every magnetic influence but his own, and though I was consequently never required to submit to the control of Herr Muller, his very presence was so antipathetic to me that it was remarked my highest conditions of lucidity could never be evolved when he was by. He did not often attend the seances, however, in which I was engaged, although he belonged to our group, as well as others to which I was not admitted. Professor Muller's chief interest in my eyes was his relationship to a charming young lady, some years older than myself, but one for whom I cherished a sentiment which I can now only liken to the adoration of an humble votary for his saint; and truly Constance Muller was worthy to be enshrined in any heart as its presiding angel.

She was beautiful, fair, and fragile-looking as a water lily; gentle, timid, and shrinking as a fawn; and though residing with her stern, unloving uncle in the college buildings, and fulfilling for him the duties of a housekeeper, few of the other residents ever saw her except in transitory, passing glances, and none of the members of the university, save one, enjoyed the privilege of any direct personal intercourse with her. That solitary and highly-favored individual was myself.

I had made the acquaintance of the lovely lady on several occasions, when I had been sent from my friend, Herr von Marx, on messages to her uncle; and deeming, I presume, that my boyish years would shield our intercourse from all possibility of scandal or remark, the lonely fairy had deigned to bestow on me some slight attention, which finally ripened into a friendship equally sincere and delightful.

Constance Muller was an orphan, poor, and dependent on her only relative, Herr Muller. Young as I was, I could perceive the injustice, no less than the impropriety, of a young lady so delicately nurtured and possessed of fine sensitive instincts, being brought into such a scene,

and subjected to such a life as she led in the university. She made no complaint, however, simply informing me that by the death of her father, a poor teacher of languages, she had become solely dependent upon her uncle, and though she hoped eventually to induce him to aid her in establishing herself as a teacher of music, she was too thankful for his temporary protection to urge her choice of another life upon him, until she found him willing to promote her wishes.

As for me, I listened to her remarks on this with strange misgivings. My own secret convictions were that the stern student of the occult had brought this beautiful young creature to the college with ulterior motives, in which his devotion to magical studies formed the leading idea. I may as well record here as at any other point of my narrative that, although I was deeply interested, nay, actually infatuated with the pursuits in which my clairvoyant susceptibilities had inducted me, I was never, from their very first commencement, satisfied that they were legitimate or healthful to the minds that were engaged in them. I felt the most implicit faith in the integrity and wisdom of Professor von Marx, as well as entire confidence in his affection for and paternal care of me; but here my confidence in any of my associates ended.

Somehow they all seemed to me to be men without souls. They were desperate, determined seekers into realms of being with which earth had no sympathy, and which in consequence abstracted them from all human feelings or human emotions.

Not one of them, that I can remember, ever manifested any genial qualities or seemed to delight in social exercises. They were profound, philosophic, isolated men, pursuing from mere necessity, or as a cloak to the stupendous secrets of their existence, some scientific occupation, yet in their innermost natures lost to earth and its sweet humanities; living amongst men, but partaking neither of their vices nor their virtues.

In their companionship I felt abandoned of my kind. Bound, chained, like a Prometheus, to the realms of the mysterious existences whom these men had subdued to their service, I often fancied myself a doomed soul, shut out forever from the tender and trustful associations of mortality, and swallowed up in an ocean of awe and mysticism, from which there was none to save, none to help me.

If the knowledge I had purchased was indeed a reality, there were times when I deemed it was neither good nor lawful for man to possess it. I often envied the peaceful unconsciousness of the outer world, and would gladly have gone back to the simple faith of my childhood, and then have closed my eyes in eternal sleep sooner than awaken to the terrible unrest which had possessed me since I had crossed the safe boundaries of the visible, and entered upon the illimitable wastes of the invisible.

And now, methought, Constance, the fair, gentle, and loving-hearted orphan, Constance, who so yearned for affection that she was content in her isolation to cling even to a young boy like me, was to become their victim; be inducted into the cold, unearthly realms of half-formed spiritual existences; lose all her precious womanly attributes, and with fixed, wild glances piercing the invisible, stare away from the faces of her fellow-mortals to the grotesque lineaments of goblins, the forms of sylphs, and the horrible rudiments of imperfect being that fill the realms of space, mercifully hidden from the eyes of ordinary mortals. Constance, I knew, longed for this knowledge, and whether prompted by the suggestions of her remorseless relative, or fired with the sphere of influence which he projected from his resolved mind, I could not tell; certain it was that she had obtained some clew to the pursuits in which I was engaged, and was perpetually plying me with questions and attempts to elicit information concerning them.

To this, though I felt as if I were betraying the interests of my beloved master, I invariably returned answers clothed in discouraging words and hints of warning. All would not avail. On a certain evening when I was myself off duty, but when a special meeting to which I did not belong was held by the brothers, I saw Professor Muller cross the college grounds, supporting on his arm the closely-veiled and ethereal form of Constance. I saw them enter a coach which was waiting for them at the gate, and running hastily in their track, I heard the professor direct the driver to set them down in that remote quarter of the town where the meetings of the Brotherhood were held. "Gone to the sacrifice!" I mentally exclaimed. "Constance, thou art doomed! sold to a world of demons here and hereafter—if indeed there is a hereafter." Two evenings after this, as I was taking my solitary walk in the college grounds, a quick step pursued me; a hand was laid lightly on my shoulder, and looking up I beheld Constance Muller, a transfigured being. Her eyes gleamed with a strange, unearthly light; her head seemed to be thrown upwards as if spurning the earth and seeking kindred with the stars; her cheek burned with a deep hectic flush, and a singular air of triumph sat on her beautiful lips as she thus accosted me: "Thou false page! how long wouldst thou have kept the mistress, to whom thou hast sworn fealty, imprisoned in the darkness of earthly captivity, when realms of light and glory and wonder were waiting for her to enter in and possess?"

"O, Constance! where have you been?"

"Where I shall some day meet you, my young paladin—in the land of light, for an entrance to which my soul has yearned ever since I could look up from the chill world of materialism, and feel that it must be vitalized and fired by a world of Spiritualism. Yes, Louis, I know now the secrets of your nightly wanderings—and I, too, can traverse space. I, too, can commune with the soul of things, and in enfranchised liberty the inner self of Constance can roam the spheres of infinity and pierce the secrets of eternity."

"Alas!" I murmured, and then, unable to explain even to myself the unspeakable grief that filled my heart, I hung my head, and walked on silently by the side of the poor enthusiast.

For several weeks Constance Muller lived in the ecstasy of a pioneer who has discovered a new world, and deems himself its sovereign. I never could convey to her, in language, my own deep sense of man's inaptitude to commune with worlds of being at once foreign and repulsive to his mortality; but she saw, and in her wonderfully sympathetic nature appreciated the emotions I could not shape into words. In the glory of triumphant power over and through the invisible, however, the neophyte could not share the thoughts which some years of experience had forced upon me as convictions; but, ah me! why should I have wished to hasten the eclairsissement? It came soon enough, or rather, too soon, too soon!

I was never present at the seances in which Constance took part, nor were any of the other "lucid subjects" known to me, hence I never knew what transpired. The Brothers had many phases of spiritual communion among them, and though, thanks to the indulgent care of my teacher, I learned more than any of the other "sensitives" were permitted to know during their terms of initiation, I was aware that there were vast theatres of transcendental knowledge to be traversed, into which few if any mortals had been as yet fully inducted.

To every seance a formulae was attached in the shape of oaths of secrecy, so tremendous that those who were sincere in their belief were never known to break them. That any part of the weird services conducted in these meetings should be subsequently revealed to the world is the best proof that the neophytes have ceased to be sincere or to regard their vows of silence as binding. At the time of which I write, I was deeply in earnest, and regarded the

knowledge I had acquired as the most sacred that could be communicated; hence I never questioned Constance concerning her experiences, although I too well divined their nature.

As months glided on, I found most certainly that the spirit of this poor victim had been trained to become a "flying soul," and was, at most of the seances she attended, liberated for some purposes which I could only guess at.

Whatever these were, they soon began to affect her health and spirits. She pined away like a flower deprived of light and air. Frailer and more ethereal grew that slight, sylph-like form; more wan and hollow waxed the once tinted cheek and lips day by day.

Her large, blue eyes became sunken and hollow, and her curling locks of pale gold seemed like a coronet of sunbeams, already entwined to circle the brow of an eternal sleeper. At every seance she attended, her spirit, attenuating like a thread of long-drawn light, invariably floated away, as its first and most powerful attraction, to whatever place I happened to be in; sometimes poring over my books in my quiet little chamber; sometimes dreamily watching the ripples of the dancing fountain which played in the college square; not unfrequently wandering in the arcades of the thick woods that skirted the town; and at times stretched on the grass, watching, but never entering into, the merry sports of the youths of my own age, with whom, as companions, I had lost all sympathy. At home or abroad, alone or in the midst of a crowd, wherever I chanced to be, when the enfranchised soul of the beautiful Constance broke its prison bonds and went free, save for the magnetic spell of her operators, it invariably sought me out, and like a wreath of pale, sunlit mist, floated some two feet above the ground in bodily form and presentment before me. Accustomed to the phenomenon of the "double goer," this phantom neither surprised nor disturbed me.

My spiritual experiences enabled me to perceive that during the few moments that the spirit of the "sensitive" was passing into the magnetic sleep, and before her magnetizers had yet full control of her, the instinctive attractions of her nature drew her to the boy whom she had already discovered to be her worshipper, the only being, perhaps, to whom she was drawn by the ties of affection, with which her loving nature was replete. All this I knew, and should have rejoiced in had not the phantom of the victim presented unmistakable tokens of being a sacrifice, and that an unpitied one, to the dark magicians with whom she was so fatally associated.

In the vision of the "flying soul" of Constance, there was no speculation in the fixidity of the lustrous eyes; the form reposed as if on air, and the long, sunny curls would almost sweep the ground at my feet; but the look of hopeless sorrow and blank despair, which had grown to be a permanent expression on her waking features, was even more piteously depicted on the magnetic shade. She did not see me, touch, or know me, but the bruised spirit fled unconsciously to the shelter of the only presence that would, if it could, have saved her, and then passed away, to do the bidding of the remorseless men that had possessed themselves, as I then thought, of her helpless soul.

One evening, when we had been strolling out together, and had sat on a lone hill side, watching the sinking sun setting in gorgeous, many-colored glory over the outstretched gardens, meadows and plains beneath, Constance broke a long silence by exclaiming in low yet passionate tones: "Louis, you think the men who have entrapped us, both body and soul, in their foul, magical meshes, are good and pure, even if they are cold and ungenial in their devotion to their awful studies. Louis, you are mistaken. I bear witness to you as the last, and perhaps the only act by which I may ever more serve you on earth, that some of them are impious, inhuman, and, oh, heaven, how monstrously impure!"

"Constance, you amaze me!"

"Do not interrupt me, Louis. I am injured past all reparation. You may be snatched from the vortex which pollutes the body and blasts the soul; but for me, oh, would the end were come!"

The indescribable tone of anguish in which this lament was uttered, pierced me to the quick.

I threw myself at the feet of the beautiful lady, protesting I would die to save her. For her sake, to do her good or even to pleasure her, I would crush the whole nest of magicians as I would so many wasps. I would kill them, denounce them to the authorities—anything, everything she bid me do. All I asked was to be permitted to save her.

To this wild rhapsody the low tones of the gentle Constance only responded in stifled whispers, entreating me to be still, calm, patient, and to be assured that neither I nor any other living creature could be of the slightest assistance to her. "I have seen the end," she added, when she had succeeded in calming me, "and I know that, impatient as I am for its coming, it will not be long delayed. I shall enter into the realms of light and glory, for these dreadful men have only abused my helpless spirit so long as it is imprisoned in my weak body and its connecting forces; they have not touched its integrity, nor can they maintain their hold upon it one instant after it has severed the chain which binds the immortal to the mortal. When that is broken I shall be free and happy."

"Constance?" I cried, "is it then given you to know what new form you will inhabit? Surely one so good and true and beautiful can become nothing less than a radiant planetary spirit!"

"I shall be the same Constance I ever was" she replied, solemnly. "I am an immortal spirit now, although bound in material chains within this frail body, and in magnetic chains still more terrible to the power of you base, bad men."

"Constance, you dream! Death is the end of individuality. Your spirit may be, must be, taken up by the bright realms of starry being, but never as the Constance you now are."

"Forever and forever, Louis, I shall be ever the same. I have seen worlds of being those magicians cannot ascend to—worlds of bright, resurrected human souls upon whom death has had no power save to dissolve the earthly chains that held them in tenements of clay. I have seen the soul world; I have seen that it is imperishable. Louis, there are in these grasses beneath our feet spiritual essences that never die. In my moments of happiest lucidity, that is"—and here a strong shudder shook her frame—when I could escape from my tormentors and the world of demons amongst whom they delight to roam, then, Louis, my soul winged through space and pierced into a brighter interior than they have ever realized, aye, even into the real soul of the universe, not the mere magnetic envelope which binds spirit and body together. Louis, in the first or inner recesses of nature is the realm of force, comprising light, heat, magnetism, life, nerve, aura, essence, and all the imponderables that make up motion, for motion is force, composed of many subdivisible parts. Here inhere those worlds of half-formed, embryonic existences with which our tormentors hold intercourse. They are the spiritual parts of matter, and supply to matter the qualities of force; but they are all embryonic, all transitory, and only partially intelligent existences. Nothing which is imperfect is permanent, hence these imperfect elementary spirits have no real or permanent existence; they are fragments of being—organs, but not organisms—and until they are combined

into the organism of manhood, they can outwork no real individuality, hence they perish—die, that we may gather up their progressed atoms, and incarnate their separate organs as the complete organism of man."

"And man, himself, Constance?"

"Man as a perfected organism cannot die, Louis. The mould in which he is formed must perish, in order that the soul may go free. The envelope, or magnetic body that binds body and soul together, is formed of force and elementary spirit; hence this stays for a time with the soul after death, and enables it to return to, or linger around the earth for providential purposes until it has become purified from sin; but even this at length drops off, and then the soul lives as pure spirit, in spirit realms, gloriously bright, radiantly happy, strong, powerful, eternal, infinite. That is heaven; that it is to dwell with God; such souls are his angels."

"Constance, you speak with assurance. How know you this—not from the Brotherhood?"

"The Brotherhood, Louis! Why, they are but groping through the thick darkness of the material world. and just penetrating the realms of force.

"I tell you those realms are only peopled with shadows, ghosts, phantoms.

"The hand is not the body, the eye is not the head; neither are the thin, vapory essences that constitute the separate organs of which the world of force is composed, the soul. Mark me, Louis! Priests dream of the existence of soul worlds, the Brotherhood of the beings in the world of force. The priests call the elementary spirits of the mid-region mere creations of human fancy and superstition. The Brothers charge the same hallucination upon the priests. Both are partly right and partly wrong, for the actual experiences of the soul will prove that beings exist of both natures, and that both realms are verities, only the elementary spirits in the realms of force are like the earth, perishable and transitory, and the perfected spirits in the realm of soul are immortal, and never die. Louis, I have seen and conversed with both, and I know I do not dream. Here, miserable that I am, I am bound to earth; my soul is imprisoned by the chains of force; I am compelled to minister to the insatiate curiosity of the spirits who cannot ascend beyond those mid-regions, and oh! the horror of that bondage would have bereft my soul of reason, had it not been redeemed by foregleams of the more holy and exalted destiny reserved for the soul in the blest sphere of immortality. Dear boy, ask me no more, press me no further. My sweet brother, dearly, fondly loved by Constance! when I am an enfranchised spirit, I will come to thee, and prove my words by the very presence of an arisen, immortal soul. Remember!"

During the months succeeding this memorable conversation, I only encountered the "flying soul" of the dying Constance once.

I understood that this recession of her spirit was from no decrease of the experiments, whatever they might be, that she suffered, nor yet from any cessation of her attraction to myself, but the bonds of earth were loosening, the vital forces waning, and I knew that the pale phantom was losing the earthly essence necessary to become visible even in the atmosphere of invisible forces. My beautiful saint would soon be taken from me, my earthly idol would be shattered; and oh! were it possible to believe her words, and think that she could still live in a brighter and better state of being, I might have been comforted; but driven from this anchor of hope by the emphatic teachings of the Brotherhood and their spirits, I beheld my earth angel melting away into blank annihilation, with an anguish that admitted of no alleviation, a pain at my heart almost insupportable.

I had been away for some months in England, pursuing studies of which I shall speak more presently. Professor von Marx had been my companion, and we had just returned, when one night, as I was about to retire to rest, and proceeded to draw the curtain which shaded my window, something seemed to rise outside the casement, which intercepted the light of the moon. The house in which I dwelt was on the borders of a beautiful lake, and too high above: it to allow of any stray passenger climbing up to my casement. There was no boat on the waters, no foothold between them. and he terrace, which was far below my window. I had been gazing out for some time on the placid lake, illumined by the broad path of light shed over it by the full moon, and I knew that no living creature was near or could gain access to my apartment; and yet there, standing on air against the casement, and intercepting the rays that streamed on either side of her on the mosaic floor of my chamber, stood the gracious and radiant form of Constance Muller.

Radiant, shining, and glorious she now appeared, her sweet eyes looking full of penetrating intelligence into mine, her sweet smile directed towards me, and a motion of her hand like the action of a salute, indicating that the apparition saw and recognized me, and was all beaming with interest and intelligence. By a process which was not ordinary motion, the lovely phantom seemed to glide through the window and appear suddenly within a few feet of the couch, to which, on her first appearance, I had staggered back. Slightly bending forward, as if to arrest my attention, though without the least movement of the lips, her voice reached my ear, saying: "I am free, happy, and immortal." Swiftly as she had appeared, the apparition vanished, and in its place I beheld the visionary semblance of the old-fashioned room in the college building occupied by Constance Muller. On a couch which I well knew, lay the form of the once beautiful tenant, pale, ghastly, dead! The form was partly covered over with a sheet, but where the white dressing-robe she wore was open at the throat I observed clearly and distinctly two black, livid spots, like the marks of a thumb and finger.

The face was distorted, the eyes staring, and I saw she had been murdered.

Ghastly as was the scene I looked upon, a preternatural power of observation seemed to possess me, impelling me to look around the apartment, which I perceived was stripped of many things I had been accustomed to see there. The harp was gone, and so was the desk and books at which I had so frequently seen her seated. Looking with the piercing eye of the spirit behind as well as upon the couch where the body lay, I saw the black ribbon and gold locket which Constance had always worn around her neck, lying on the ground as if it had been dropped there.

If there was any meaning in this vision, it would appear that this object was the point aimed at, for I had no sooner beheld it and the exact position in which it lay than the whole phantasmagoria passed away, and once more the shining image of a living and celestially beautiful Constance stood before me.

Again the air seemed to syllable forth the words: "I am free, happy and immortal," and "I have kept my promise," when again, but this time far more gradually, the angelic vision melted out, leaving the pattern of the mosaic on the floor, gilded only by the bright moon-beam, and the diamond panes of the casement, shadowed only by the white jasmine that was trained over the house.

Moonlight reigned supreme, the shadow was gone; but ah me! it had been the shadow of an eternity of sunbeams. Never did I realize such a profound gloom, such an insufferably thick atmosphere, such "darkness made visible," as the absence of this radiant creature left behind. Whilst she stayed it seemed as if sorrow, evil, or suffering had never had an exist-

ence; life and being throughout was a mighty ecstasy: and now she had taken all the joy and sunlight out of the world, and that—forever.

The recital of the previous night's vision, every item of which I faithfully related to Professor von Marx the next morning, found in him a grave, attentive, but still unmoved listener.

He did not seem to doubt but that Constance Muller was dead. He made no remarks upon the appearances which I passionately declared, inferred that she had suffered death by violence. To all this he simply said: "We shall see;" but when I strove to convince him that the apparition of a soul after death, and that with all the signs of life and tokens of intelligence, must prove a continued existence, he seemed roused to his usual tone of dogmatic assertion. He repeated what he had often insisted upon before—namely, that the life emanations called "soul" did often subsist for a short period after death, and appear as an organic form, but he still maintained that was no proof of immortality, since such essences soon disintegrated, and became as scattered and inorganic as the body they had once inhabited.

When I urged the words I had heard from the beautiful phantom, he insisted they were the reflections of my own thoughts, associated with the appearance of one who believed in idle superstitions, and to my plea that the dress of pure, glistening white in which the figure was arrayed could be no reflex of my mind, whilst the buoyant happiness that sparkled on her angelic face bore little or no resemblance to the sad, faded original, he replied that as the essence was pure and unalloyed by the earthy, so when I beheld the essence actually disengaged from the earthy, I should see it clothed in an image of its own beauty, light and purity. I was silenced, but not convinced. Two days later Professor von Marx stood with me knocking at Herr Muller's chamber door. The professor himself opened it, and anticipated all we might have to say by informing us, gravely, that he had been unfortunate enough to lose his niece "by a sudden attack of putrid fever," which had compelled her speedy interment, the ceremony of which he had been just attending

"I knew that Fraulein Muller was no more," replied my teacher, in a voice which, despite his philosophy, was something moved and broken, "and I called thus early, not to condole with you, for I know your resolved stoicism, but to ask if you are willing to let my dear young friend here make purchase of your niece's harp. You know the young people were much attached to each other, and Louis is anxious to possess this souvenir of his beloved friend." I could not speak; a choking sensation was in my throat, and I was astonished at the cool invention by which Herr von Marx was trying the truth of my clairvoyance; but I listened breathlessly for the reply.

"I had her harp, desk, books and other matters which might have been rendered unsalable by the contagion of the fever, removed," replied Herr von Muller, with a slight shade of confusion in his manner. "I did not want a crowd of persons hovering around the sufferer in her dying moments, hence I had the apartment cleared in an early stage of her disease."

"Is there nothing my young friend could procure from this much venerated spot?" persisted my crafty ally.

"I do not well know," replied the other, completely thrown off his guard; "but if you desire it, you can step in and inspect the apartment."

Following the two strangely matched associates into the desolate shrine from which the saint had been removed, I gazed around only to see a perfect facsimile of the scene I had beheld in vision. It was evident the quick; furtive glances of Professor von Marx were di-

rected towards the same end as my own. Suddenly he stopped before a dark picture hanging on the wall, and standing in a line between me and Herr Muller, directed his attention to something which he pretended to call remarkable in the painting, thus giving me the opportunity to cross the room hastily, draw out a couch in the corner, and gather up from behind it a black ribbon and gold locket, which had lain there apparently unnoticed till then. Professor von Marx never lost sight of me for an instant, and no sooner saw me secrete my treasure in my bosom than he said abruptly: "Come, Louis, I don't like the atmosphere of the place. Herr Muller is right; the contagion of death lingers around; there is nothing left here now that you can desire to have. Let us go."

As we returned to our lodgings the professor silenced my deep and angry murmurs against the man we had just left by a variety of sophistries with which he was always familiar. One of these was the total indifference with which all the Brotherhood regarded the lives of those who were not of their order. It mattered little, he said, how poor Constance's thread of being was finally cut short, since it was evidently too attenuated to spin out to any much greater length than it had already attained; and finally, if I would persist, he said, in indulging in unrestrained and pernicious bursts of passion, I should mar the necessary passivity and equilibrium so essential to pure clairvoyance, and he should lose the best "lucid" in the world.

Before we parted for the night the professor asked me if I had ever seen or heard of Zwingler, the Bohemian.

"Who is he?" I asked, indifferently.

"You have never seen or heard of Zwingler? Then," he rejoined, "you have something to learn, another lesson to take, one, I think, that will help to dissipate your faith in the myth of immortality, and throw some light on the question of apparitions.

"Come with me tomorrow, Louis, to Sophien Stradt. There I will introduce you to Zwingler, and in his person to one of the phenomenal wonders of the age; and Louis," he added, after a moment's pause, as we shook hands at parting, "carry that ribbon and locket somewhere about you--poor Constance's jewel, I mean. We may find a singular use for it. Good night."

