

Chapter 14

Mr. Dudley's Diary Continued

**MORE MAGICAL SEANCES—THE CHEVALIER'S RETURN,
BUT WITHOUT HIS OWN IDENTITY—SWALLOWED UP
IN THE SPIRIT OF PROFESSOR VON MARX.**

May 18, 18—. Many weeks elapsed before I had an opportunity of making another entry in my diary. Meantime spring had almost ripened into summer, and the ward in whom I had become so strangely and involuntarily interested, was restored to life and partial strength, and at the request of my pitying wife and daughters, became established as an inmate of my own home. These dear members of my family, although unyielding in their prejudices against my "magical practices," had always manifested a deep interest in the young Chevalier de B _____; in fact, they had so won upon his reticent nature by their kind and womanly attentions, that he was completely familiarized amongst them, and proved an ever-welcome visitor in my wife's salon. His high intellectual culture, passionate love of music, exquisite voice, and skillful performance on several instruments of music, completed the charm with which nature had endowed him, and few persons could have supposed that there was any subject of divided opinion between the ladies of my household and their fascinating visitor.

On the sad day when I brought the wasted form of their favorite to rest for a while beneath my roof, my wife insisted upon his being given up to her tender care. The time came at last, however, when this gentle nurse, no less than all his other attendants, myself included, began to regard his convalescence with a mixture of equal astonishment and perplexity.

We could not disguise from ourselves the startling fact, that the unfortunate Chevalier, whilst regaining his usual composure and lucidity of manner, had obviously lost sight of his own identity. That his external appearance should long retain traces of the terrible sufferings he had undergone was naturally to be expected; but the look of mature age which overspread his haggard face and worn form, did not pass away with returning strength.

Although little more than twenty years of age, he might have been taken for a man of forty. His voice, naturally sweet and melodious, assumed a deeper tone, and his accent, strongly marked by his mother's native Italian, now betrayed the same German intonation peculiar to his adopted father's. Day by day some fresh token of a wandering mind, fixing itself into the very self-same grooves of identity that had distinguished Professor von Marx, became more and more strikingly apparent. He would frequently perplex his kind nurses

by entreating them to tell him where Louis was, and why he had deserted his unfortunate father now that he was so weak and helpless. At times he would startle me with the same supplication, always addressing me as his "dear old friend, John," and speaking of himself as if he had been the real Felix von Marx. Sometimes he would ask whether there was no letter yet from Louis, and speculate, with an anxiety distressing to witness, on the causes which prevented his hearing from him.

I was greatly embarrassed how to answer him, but he would generally save me the trouble by running off from the subject in his wandering way, saying: "I know I have been very ill, distraught I believe in my mind, but I am nearly well now and able to understand all you may have to say to me. Tell me then, about my darling. You know I left him at R _____, and thought to have joined him just as I was taken ill. How long is it since then? Tell me, John!" I would commonly answer him in the same strain, saying, Louis had gone on a visit to our mutual friend, Lord V _____, and that he had only been ill a week or two. Louis would soon return, etc., etc. Sometimes these stereotyped replies would quite satisfy him, though repeated many times a week; at others he would try to think, and murmur dreamily, "I thought it was a very long time ago, and that I had been travelling through many strange countries, of which I have no distinct recollection."

As time wore on, the impression that he was Felix von Marx deepened upon him, but the strangest part of all was, not alone his perfect assumption of all the professor's peculiar traits of character, but his entire renunciation of all ideas and habits which had formerly distinguished himself. The Chevalier's accomplishment in and love of music gave place to the professor's indifference, amounting to dislike of the art. Even the sweet voices of my daughters, which the young man had been accustomed to join, and listen to with rapt delight, now displeased him, and he would hastily quit the room when they began to sing. He would accompany us in riding or driving as far as his feeble strength permitted, but he shrank away with dislike, almost fear, from the presence of strangers or visitors, and desired only to spend his time in solitude and deep abstraction. He frequently spoke of his intention to go and seek Louis, but he seemed unable to fix his mind upon a permanent idea, and was easily persuaded that the same week or two since he had been taken ill, was all that had elapsed, and that Louis was coming home to-morrow or next day. As if to compensate me for the deep anxiety I suffered on my poor ward's account, a change arose in the feelings of my family which brought me unmitigated satisfaction.

The strange tidings from America about the marvels of spirit communion, came faster and thicker, and wonderful narratives were in circulation, concerning the system of telegraphy by which the world of spirits was bringing assurance of their continued existence to the minds of their earthly friends. Although the report of these marvels formed a prominent theme of discussion at many a fashionable assemblage and amongst our numerous visitors, I never promoted or made the slightest allusion to them in my own family; perhaps I never should have done so, had I not one day been timidly sounded by my youngest darling, Blanche, who, after beating about the bush for a considerable time in her own pretty, insinuating way, proceeded to pour out a remarkable narrative, the sum of which was as follows:

It seemed that my daughter's German maid had lately been much disturbed by unaccountable noises, which kept her awake of a night, and finally induced her to ask the house-keeper to change her sleeping apartment. On mentioning the cause of her request, the house-keeper gravely informed her she would obtain no relief from a change of rooms, as she herself as well as several of the other domestics had experienced the same strange annoyances; that the sounds in question were to be heard all over the house, in a word, according to the gouvernante's theory, the strange sounds were the new thing that had come across the

ocean from America, and no one could prevent or hinder them. When this piece of philosophy began to be discussed in the servants' hall, it turned out, as the housekeeper had said, that strange knockings and odd motions of furniture, had been noticed all over the house. Some of the servants attributed the trouble to the goblins that their master and Professor von Marx had been so busy in raising; others, to the work of the late professor's ghost; but all agreed that they had something to do with the poor young Chevalier, as they were most frequently heard around the apartments occupied by him and his Arab servant, and they finally agreed to refer the whole matter to Lady Emily L_____, my wife's sister, a staid widow lady, now on a visit amongst us, and one whose strong sense constituted her a high authority in such occult difficulties.

When Lady Emily heard the various statements concerning the disturbances now prevalent, she did not, as had been expected, deny their credibility or rebuke the narrators for their superstitious opinions, but she quietly informed the housekeeper and German maid, that her neices as well as herself had experienced the same disturbances; that she had lately been much occupied in reading accounts from America on similar phenomena, and certain tracts on the subject had explained the method by which mortals could put themselves in safe and direct communication with these haunting spirits; she ended by advising that her neices and herself, assisted by the worthy housekeeper and two of the most intelligent of the ladies' maids, should form a circle on the improved American fashion and see what would come of it.

At first the bold investigators nearly scared themselves into fits by their rash experiment, for no sooner had they seated themselves on the prescribed plan around their circle-table, than that hitherto well-bred and inanimate article of furniture, began to leap, dance, slide, kick, and behave in such a generally frantic manner, that the astounded sitters retreated from it in horror, and ended by summoning a footman to carry the demoniac piece of furniture away into parts unknown.

After recovering from the first shock of this astounding exhibition, the pioneers returned to the charge with another table, and then another and another. At last, finding that as soon as they put themselves in position, every article they laid hands on behaved in the same unruly manner, they concluded to consult some of their acquaintances who, as report alleged, had already taken their first degrees in the mystery of spirit rappings and were known to be holding nightly circles with immense success.

From this point it is unnecessary to trace the unfoldments of the great secret with which my Blanche had come charged. Her gentle mother—at first strenuously opposed to such terrible doings—had finally been initiated as one of the sisters, and become classified as an excellent impressional and seeing medium. My eldest daughter, Sophie, was the writing and drawing medium of the band, and had already filled up several quires of foolscap with "communications from the seventh sphere." Blanche was a tipping, rapping, personating, singing, playing, and every other sort of a medium. Lady Emily and the housekeeper were "developing mediums," and two German, one Spanish, and one French lady's maid, were rapping and seeing mediums. In short, I was informed that my entire household had become hand-and-glove with the spirit-world; that circles in our own family, as well as in those of several of our acquaintances, were in full headway, and that they had at length thought it fit and proper that they should ask my permission to carry on their investigations, as well as my advice as to their best modes of procedure.

Without even hinting to my fair informant that I deemed her application came a little late in the day, much less apprising her that a certain cousin Harry, an Oxford B. A., had kept

me fully informed of the whole matter from first to last, I assumed a grave air, declared the thing had become serious and must be immediately, looked into; that it was my duty as a county magistrate and the father of a family to take the whole thing into custody and join the next seance they were to hold, which turned out to be that very night. It would be unnecessary to pursue this subject further at the present time, save to state, that I found several good test mediums in my family, as my dear little Blanche had stated; that then and for some two or three years subsequently, my dear ones enjoyed a heaven upon earth in the bright and consoling communion of loved ones gone before, and that it colored their whole lives and tintured their opinions with a liberal element, which has happily never failed to exert its elevating influence over them.

One day, when I was more than ordinarily concerned at the increasing hallucination of the Chevalier, I determined to ask our spirit friends what course they would recommend me to pursue with him. It seemed to us all, a remarkable circumstance that amongst the number and variety of spirits that had identified themselves through our mediums, Felix von Marx had never manifested. I had often asked for him, but without success, and what was still stranger, none of our spirit friends seemed able to give any account of him. They all concurred in stating that they believed he was "still in the earth sphere." Presenting my special request for advice to one of our trusted spirit guides, we received the following message: "Bring the Chevalier here." I was doubtful whether he would come; the spirits were sure of his compliance.

The matter was soon decided, for I tendered my invitation to the Chevalier, who at once, and with something of his old yielding manner, rose and followed me without a word. No sooner had he taken the place assigned him at the circle, than a letter came fluttering through the air, passing his face and falling on his hand. On opening the sheet we found written in ink not yet dry, the words, "Send for Ernestine—you know who, for you have been writing to her this morning." The letter was unsigned, but addressed to "John C. Dudley, Esq., _____ Square, London." Now, although I had long since given up being astonished at anything, I was considerably startled now; first, at the only direct writing I had ever received from a spiritual source; next, at the intelligence conveyed. The truth is, in a recent conversation with my ward, he, under the fixed impression that he was Felix von Marx, stated that in the early days of his married life he had purchased and presented to his wife a piece of valuable land, the lease of which would run out just about this time, and as she would be liable to lose her interest in it unless she took certain legal steps which he referred to, so he wished I would do him the favor to write and advise her of what was requisite to be done.

Never was I more completely astounded than by this address. I knew, if I knew anything, that the Chevalier was entirely ignorant that his father had ever been married, whilst the information he gave about the property was equally unknown to me. Directly after Professor Marx's decease I had inquired for the address of his widow, the Princess Ernestine, and informed her of her loss, at the same time mentioning the disposition her late husband had made of his property. The princess by letter, expressed her entire approval of the professor's will, and when I again wrote to her to inquire whether any such business transaction as that the Chevalier had described, really took place, she entered into a full account of the matter, described it in the same terms as those employed by the Chevalier, and announced her intention of seeing me when she came to London, which, she added, she expected to do in a few days on special business.

She gave as her town address a certain hotel in Bond street, and it was a note addressed to her Highness at that hotel that I had actually been engaged in writing in the morning. I had been interrupted before I could finish my letter, and having put it in my desk under lock and key, I had the best reason to believe no human being was cognizant of its existence,

although, as I now found to my astonishment, there were other eyes than those of humanity on our most secret actions.

Our seance soon closed, and this was the first and last time the Chevalier ever joined us; in fact, after he had taken his place amongst us, his entire absence of mind rendered all that passed a complete blank to him.

The next day I drove to the hotel to which the Princess von Marx's letters were to be directed, and on reaching it, learned to my great surprise and gratification, that she had already arrived, although she was not prepared to receive visitors. Sending up my card, with the pressing request that she would favor me with an interview, I found myself admitted to the illustrious lady's presence before I had well made up my mind how to prefer the strange request I had to make to her. I found her Highness composed enough to compensate for my blundering ways, so I let her rattle on until it suddenly occurred to me I ought to have opened the interview by condoling with her on her widowed condition.

Before I had got half through the speech I deemed it proper to make on this point, the princess interrupted me with a grave assurance that she quite appreciated the depth of my sympathy, but for her part, her chief concern was in the idea that poor Felix must be such an unprogressed spirit, in fact, she could not rest until she had learned something of what sphere he was in. Unprogressed spirit, spheres, and all that sort of thing! What did I hear? Why, this was the Spiritualistic dialect to which I was now becoming thoroughly accustomed, and if my ears did not deceive me, the Princess Ernestine must be a Spiritualist. A few leading questions soon settled that point. The princess was a Spiritualist, an ardent one, of course—nay, she had actually made a visit to London for the sole purpose of consulting a celebrated American medium who had lately arrived in the city. Thus was my way made clear for me, and my difficult mission more than half accomplished. As delicately as I could, I explained to her the singular and tenderly intimate tie which had bound her late husband to his young protegee.

I then proceeded to detail the awkward dilemma in which I and my whole family were placed, by the strange hallucination of my ward, whom the princess pronounced at once to be "obsessed" by that violent and determined late spouse of hers. Interrupting me before I could explain the object of my mission, this very impulsive lady launched out into the peculiar nature of obsession, the special tendencies of that very obstinate person, Felix von Marx and the certainty that there was but one way of exorcising him, or in other words, getting rid of him, and that was by boldly confronting him in her own person. She naively enough assured me, if it were von Marx's spirit that possessed the victim, there was no surer way of disposing of him, than to bring him face to face with his wife; adding, she was quite satisfied he couldn't stay in her presence a single moment, but would only be too glad to relinquish his prey, after which, of course, he would retire to the particular sphere to which he belonged.

"You see, my dear friend," urged the lady, in a torrent of eloquence which proved how deeply she was immersed in the subject under consideration, "von Marx cannot be anything less than the most obstinate of all spirits, just as he was the most determined of all men. Now, my plan is this: I'll present myself before him, announcing my intention of remaining there for life if it be necessary. Of course, he will go, he cannot but choose to do so, and thus your friend will be delivered from his tormentor and I shall have my chance to retaliate; that is, of course, I don't mean that, only to aid this most unprogressed of spirits to make atonement for past offences."

When the lady had talked herself out, I at last had an opportunity of putting in a mild

suggestion. I availed myself of it, by informing her my principal object in soliciting her interference was, with a view of finally testing the truth of the sad proposition as to whether the young man was or was not obsessed by the spirit of his adopted father.

As the Chevalier was not only a stranger to the person of the princess, but had never even heard of her, it occurred to me, any intelligence that might be manifested by bringing him suddenly into her presence, must prove decisive of the real condition of his mind

Of course Madame had ulterior designs, to which my proposition was but subordinate. However, I mentally determined to let matters shape themselves, provided I could only succeed in procuring the interview and testify its results as above suggested. As the princess was perfectly willing to accede to any arrangement that could favor the design which now possessed her, namely, that of helping her late husband "to become a progressed spirit," it was agreed that she should accompany me back to my residence that very evening, so that by taking the Chevalier, as well as the whole of my family by surprise, we might make any test of intelligence all the more confirmatory.

After an early dinner, which I partook of *tete-a-tete* with my old flame, but in which anxiety for my ward colored our whole conversation, the princess was good enough to take a seat in my carriage and accompany me to my house, which we reached about eight o'clock in the evening. Ushering my fair visitor into my library, which led out by French windows on to a broad stone terrace overlooking the garden, I went out in search of my wife, to whom I proposed to mention the fact of the princess's arrival. Just as I had passed on to the terrace, my wife and the Chevalier, with whom she had been walking, approached, and I immediately returned for the princess, whom I thus allowed to encounter the Chevalier without a moment's preparation on either side. The pale and haggard face, bent form, and pleading eyes of the unfortunate young man, would have commanded pity from the least interested observer, but when the singular and almost preternatural resemblance that existed between the professor and his protegee is remembered, the start and faint cry of the princess on beholding such an apparition, might easily be understood.

As to the Chevalier himself, the wild glare which lit up his eyes and the look of horror which transfigured his whole expression, fixed us all in anxious expectation. The deep flush which at first mantled his worn cheek, turned to a frightful pallor as he exclaimed in accents of deep agitation: "Ernestine! Ernestine! in the name of heaven and our dead child, why have you come hither to torment me?"

"Is it you, Felix?" the lady murmured, in low and trembling accents.

"Is it Felix von Marx?" he asked, in those tones of bitter scorn which I had so often heard from the professor, but never before from the gentle lips of his son. "Is this poor, shivering wreck the Felix whom you took on that bright, fatal summer day, O Ernestine! when I sold you my peace and liberty for a mess of pottage?"

I had heard from von Marx that this very expression, wrung from him in one of his most acrimonious matrimonial disputes, had been more violently resented by his lady than any other reproach that had ever fallen from his lips. To hear it now repeated by one who was not even in existence when it had been first uttered, and who never by any possibility could have heard it applied in such a connection, was so startling to myself, my wife, and the princess, that the insult it conveyed, passed us all unnoticed; meantime the Chevalier, assuming a more dignified and less passionate tone, now addressed the lady with grave courtesy and begged her to retire with him for a few moments, then bowing to

me and my wife, he motioned the lady with an air of deep respect to accompany him to the end of the terrace where he seated her, standing leaning against the stone balustrade to the end of the interview.

As they retired, my wife, who was by this time thoroughly convinced my theory of obsession was correct, remarked in a frightened whisper how strange it was that throughout the whole scene the young man should have spoken in the Russian language. Now, we were both aware that though von Marx spoke this tongue with perfect facility, he had in vain tried to induce his son to learn it. Its harsh, guttural tones were so distasteful to him, that he always declared he could not study it, yet he had used it in addressing the princess, and that with the fluency and correctness of a native. Madame von Marx assured us also that he had maintained their protracted conversation entirely in that language.

What the substance of that interview was we never heard. The lady wept abundantly as it proceeded, and when at last the Chevalier bowing to her profoundly, passed us and retired, Madame, whom we immediately rejoined, was so much affected, that it was some time before she could recover her composure. She begged us not to press her for details, but assured us "that weird stranger" had spoken to her of matters which none beside God and her late husband could have known, and that had she not previously been convinced of the truth of Spiritualism, the unmistakable presence of Felix von Marx's spirit in a human body, whilst his own was mouldering in the grave, must have converted her. We decided that it would not be safe to subject our visitor to a renewal of these exciting scenes, hence the princess determined not to see him again: besides, the test which we had sought, was fully rendered, and now the only question that remained was what steps we should pursue to release the victim from his terrible and unnatural bondage.

If my readers can apprehend the scope of my strange narrative, if they do not deem it an idle and senseless fabrication rather than a statement put on record for the sake of illustrating one of the most momentous and solemn of problems in mental science, they will perceive with what stupendous difficulties my path was now environed.

My good name had already been injuriously associated with vague and, of course, utterly unfounded rumors concerning the nature of the occult practices in which I was known to be interested. Despite the extreme reticence of my wife and daughters on the subject of our spiritual investigations, the tidings had gone abroad that I had succeeded in perverting them from the faith of their fathers and "inveigling them into the absurd and blasphemous pretensions of the new sect calling themselves Spiritualists."

These pernicious reports were sufficiently calculated to prejudice us in the opinion of our large circle of acquaintance and painfully affect the sensitive natures of my dear ones at home.

The sudden death of the celebrated Professor von Marx had excited much injurious comment, and sufficed to cast an ill odor on all who were supposed to be engaged in the occult pursuits to which whispered rumor attributed his mysterious demise; but the most distressing of all my perplexities was the condition of my unhappy ward. Here was a young foreigner of high birth, distinguished appearance, and heir to property of which I had been left sole trustee. This gentleman had first disappeared and then reappeared under the most mysterious circumstances, and the deep seclusion in which I was now said to hold him, served to swell the tide of prejudice that was mustering against me. The faithful Arabian who attended on my ward could speak no English, but my other domestics converted even this circumstance into evil testimony, alleging that he was stricken dumb to all but his master under the influence of a spell.

The strange sounds and sights that had of late possessed my house, and the report that the Chevalier was obsessed by demons, were other items of public gossip against which I found it impossible to make headway.

My lawyers urged an immediate settlement of Professor von Marx's estate, but my ward was in no condition to assist me in doing so. Meantime my large circle of very dear friends testified by the frequency and length of their visits, the deep interest they took in my private affairs. They manifested this disposition more especially by their reiterated inquiries for my "charming ward," and their pressing requests that Mrs. Dudley would bring him with her to this assembly or that soiree, nay, at times they propounded the direct question to my wife and daughters, why the Chevalier never appeared in public any more. To all these impertinences my poor girls could only plead their guest's ill health and his inconsolable grief for the loss of his friend.

At length a rumor began to spread, from what source I know not, that Professor von Marx was not really dead, but that his pupil was, and a hint was even dropped upon the propriety of exhuming the body to ascertain its identity.

The poor princess, shocked at the various evil reports that were in circulation, fled away to the Continent, postponing her intention of helping her late husband's spirit out of purgatory, until matters were more favorable for the experiment. My dear wife and children bore up more bravely under our various trials than I had a right to expect; still we all realized that though the ominous words "witchcraft" and "magic" were gone out of fashion, and we could no more become obnoxious to the sorcerer's doom of fire and fagots, there were yet two words of scarcely less evil import whispered against us, and these were "Spiritualism" and "infidelity," whilst the fire and fagots of public opinion might be made scarcely less scorching than the flames of the ancient auto-da-fe.

I am now writing not so much for my own time or generation, as for myself and posterity. I wish to leave a record behind me which will serve as a mile-stone on the road of Spiritualistic discovery which later generations will assuredly traverse. I wish, too, in thus recalling the bitter experiences I have passed through, to analyze some of the mysteries of their causation, and endeavor to profit by the lessons they have afforded me through a candid examination of their different points. Let me add then, to this page of confession, that the most insoluble problem that now beset me, I found lurking within the depths of my own consciousness, that is to say. I felt entirely uncertain concerning the propriety, or even the righteousness of my own past course. What had my researches into these awful realms of spiritual existence, brought to me and mine? I asked.

Visions of horror, scenes which make the blood curdle to remember; phantoms from realms of which I knew nothing, and association with beings whose nature was revolting to my poor, weak humanity. My friend, too, was dead, and in the midst of all the revelations which the weird phenomena around me brought, I could learn no tidings of his immortal being, except such as filled me with new horror and dismay. The dreadful hallucination of the young Chevalier, that is, if hallucination it was, rather than a still more fearful reality--all this, added to my own doubts, fears, and present struggles with public opinion, formed such an array of calamity that, light-hearted and trusting as I generally was, I felt as if I must soon sink beneath my burdens, unless indeed, something came to help me endure, or relieve me from them.

It was in the depth of this Gethsemane that my dear girls became mediums, and furnished to their afflicted parents just the very bread of life for which they were famishing.

The proofs of immortality these happy, blessed seances of ours brought us, were irresistible and conclusive. The tokens of spirit presence, guardianship, and continued protection became to our wounded spirits a perpetual strength and consolation.

Wise, reasonable, just philosophy was rendered us for the difficulties by which we were surrounded. Professor von Marx's excessive absorption in occult practices was represented as the cause of the great wrong he had done to his beloved protege, rendering him a mere parasite on another's life, and filling him with a foreign magnetism which destroyed his individuality, and made him a mere fragile, helpless instrument of another's will. It was to this cause that our spirit friends attributed the Chevalier's desperate attempt at suicide and his present obsession.

As to the shafts which public opinion leveled against us, we were warned that the path of the reformer and the innovator ever runs in the grooves of martyrdom, and that if we would be found worthy to become participants in new revelations of truth, we must endure the fires of persecution from the disciples of the old. We were promised a speedy deliverance from all the pains and penalties that now beset us, although the way was not yet clearly mapped out; and thus when I began to compare the sufferings which ignorance and misrepresentation put upon us with the vast boon of knowledge, consolation, and exalting communion which we enjoyed by the new revelation vouchsafed to us, I concluded the jewel we had obtained was more than worth the cost, and we who were recipients in this precious truth, whilst we felt the necessity of shielding it from vulgar comment, and reserving our pearls lest the swine of calumny and prejudice should destroy them, still united in the resolve that we would continue to bear our cross so long as we realized that Calvary was the footstool of Paradise.

