

The Sorceress' Trick, and How She Was Caught

Classification Of Men—The Superstitious Element In Man—The Old Cults Continued In The New—Fire Worship—The Sorcerers—My Legal Friend's Story A Laughable One Indeed—The Despondent Old Maid, Though Engaged To Be Married—An Aunt Arrives In "The Nick Of Time"—They Hunt Up A Fortune Teller— Mrs. Seymour, The Sorceress, And Her Pretty Little "Oratory"—The "Prie-dieu"— The Old Maid Marries—Mrs. Seymour's Plan For Insuring The Affection Of Husbands—Her Powers As A Charmer—The Sacred Box And Its Five Thousand Dollars Contents—Mrs. Seymour Is Lost Sight Of—Search For Her In Brooklyn And At Boston—The Charmed Box Opened By Mr. And Mrs. —, And The Contents Found To Have Changed Form Materially— My Legal Friend And I Look After Matters A Portion Of The Transformed Valuables Found— A Mrs. Bradley, A "Medium" In Boston, Proves To Be The Identical Mrs. Seymour— The High-Toned Devotees Of Boston—Sudden Proceedings Taken— Mrs. Seymour And Her Husband Come To Terms—Results—Respectable Victims Of The Sorcerers Numerous—The Dupes In The "Athens Of America."

by George McWatters

WHAT the human race might have become without the love of the mysterious or marvellous in its composition, would be a pretty subject of speculation for the philosophers, but one which human genius will prove perhaps ever unable to solve. There are three classes of human beings, —or so I am apt to divide them in my "philosophy,"—the good, and in different degrees, sensible; the crafty; and the simple and weak, neither positively good or bad. These latter two divisions comprehend the vast majority of mankind, made so, to a great extent, by the institutions which the race has, in its ignorance, wrought out for itself, and by which it is constantly cursed, until one by one it outgrows, along the course of the ages, these outrages upon itself which itself has imposed. This process of outgrowing we call *progress*, and so it is, perhaps; but it would be more satisfactory progress if, when it overrides or abates one wrong or malicious incumbrance upon a race, it could or would also avoid the establishment of another equally bad. The love of the mysterious is, to a great extent, the religious element in man. Some writers hold that it is such to the full extent; but I am not about to decide that, even for myself alone, much less for others. True it is, however, that in all historic time this element, or whatever else one is pleased to call it, has been the medium through which the intellectual and tyrant forces in the race have subjected the weaker to their sway. The ancient oracles played upon the superstitious in men in the government of whole races and nations, and to-day the oracles of old are reproduced among us in a thousand ways, and the religions of the past, in their symbolizations, exist among us, and exert their influence, almost unconsciously to the masses.

For example. That beautiful cult, or religion of old, —sun-worship, —is traceable in modern institutions, and the old fire-worship, so wondrous, still lives in that word Purity (from the Greek word *pur*, fire), which is the expression of our highest or deepest sense of all that is morally perfect; and in the very steeples of our churches is the old fire-worship symbolized; for the steeple is but a representation of the old obelisks, which were themselves but symbols of the tall shafts of fire which shot up from the top of some mountain, like Sinai, when the worshippers built thereon the vast *bon-fires*, —or good, i.e., *holy*, —fires to which the vast assemblages

poured forth their devotions. And in even the names of the days of the week we preserve the memories of the old superstitions, and to some extent the superstitions themselves—Sun-day, day devoted to the worship of the sun, and so on. In Thurs-day, or Thor's-day, we are kept in mind of the old Scandinavian god, as potent in the estimation of his worshippers as the Jehovah of the Hebrews was to them, though a somewhat different character.

Through all grades, and shades, and degrees the superstitious element of to-day finds itself fed. The sublime and the ridiculous still exists as of old, and the advertising columns of the public journals tell but too plainly and painfully of the susceptibility of the masses to the deceits and frauds to which the superstitious element in them subjects them. The sorcerers are not yet extinct, and the prophets, as good as most of those of ancient days, and magicians as expert as those whom the greater magician, Moses, outwitted, are still to be found; and I suspect these excel those of ancient times in one important, the most important art—that of money-getting. But they have an advantage over their prototypes in that they have the influence of the public journals of these days to widely proclaim themselves—to make their pretensions heard by a larger audience. I suspect that many a reader of this would be surprised to learn, could he be statistically informed, how vast is the number of the victims of modern sorcery. These are not confined to the lower orders, as many an intelligent and educated man, who has not made the special matter of remark here a study, might quite sensibly suspect. None of the conventional grades of society, whether the same be measured by money, by the education of books, or what is called “blood,” or high hereditary social position, is lacking in them; and it is remarkable that the victims from the educated circles are as much more intense, generally, in their superstitions, as their superiority in other respects to the uneducated is marked and distinguished. I suppose this may be accounted for thus: Being once led into superstition, the man of letters resorts to his pride of intellect to sustain himself in it, and deepen his convictions; for although we cannot exactly believe whatever we please, —for the character of evidence must be a matter of some consideration with us, must have weight with us, —yet when we are led on to a certain point, and have averred our belief in any absurdity, we are disposed to admit its logical consequences, however wide apart from good sense they may be.

In this narrative I have first to deal with parties of high social position—of education, and much refinement, of course, —but descended from a long line of ancestors more or less noted for their inclination to believe everything which came to them under the similitude of religion or superstition of any kind—anything which seemed to them inexplicable; anything, in other words, mysterious to them.

A lawyer of my acquaintance—in fact an old friend, who had employed me many times before, especially in the ferreting out of legal evidence in criminal matters—came one day into my office with a broad grin on his face. I was in pretty good humor, and was beguiling an hour or two, —while I was awaiting the advent of a party who I hoped would bring me some valuable news of the working of a little plot of mine in the investigation of a case, —with Dickens's Martin Chuzzlewit. Of course I was in good humor, enjoying that rare word-painter's faithful pictures of American society as he found it; and my friend, the lawyer, was of course enjoying himself, otherwise why that irresistible grin, which, in my mood, stirred me up to outright laughter as he entered?

“What’s up?” I said. “Deliver yourself *instanter*; for I want to hear the fun.”

“O, ho,” he replied, “I’ve the jolliest affair to tell you of that ever occurred in the line of my experience. I am counsel, advocate, and judge in the matter, and expected to be constable, jury, and executioner, all in one; for the whole thing, involving love and lovers, ‘potions and pills,’ quacks, schemers, thieves, and everything else, is left in my hands, and I’ve come over to divide the honors with you—”

“Well, well; after your long opening, suppose you come down to the points in the matter— ‘judge,’ ‘executioner,’ or whatever you please to call yourself in the premises.”

“To begin, then, you must know that there’s a part of the business which you must *not* know at present, and that is, the *names* of the people I am about to tell you of. These people occupy a very high position in society, and their case is the funniest thing in the world, considering their rank, life-time associations, and the man’s official position in the world, or rather the one which he has held, —a very high one under the government. You must understand that he is old and wealthy, and that his wife is a young woman, comparatively speaking, though she had arrived at that degree of maturity before marriage which entitles a lady to the honors of an old maid. She is extremely well educated, comes of a good family, and has been a successful teacher in her day in a ladies’ seminary. All things considered, she is, in the general way, rather the superior of her husband. This much to begin with, to give you a sort of inkling of how extraordinary the case is; for if they were simply a couple of fools, or ordinary people, the matter wouldn’t have any spice in it.”

“Well,” I broke in as he paused, “go on, and satisfy my curiosity, counsellor, now that you’ve whetted it up.”

“Be patient,” said he, “and I will, but I am always choked with the comicality of the affair when I picture it to myself; and I was only stopping to gather a little dignity, to go on reciting the serious thing to you. The parties are very rich, and it’s only a matter of some five thousand dollars anyhow—a bagatelle for them. They are ugly about it, considering the way they, or rather she, was duped,”—and here the lawyer fairly roared, as he slapped his hand upon his knee, over the thought of such people’s being “taken in and done for” by the arts which usually prevail mostly among the ignorant. But there is no telling what the superstitious element in the mind may not lead to.

My friend went on to say, then, that about the time of the marriage of the old maid in question with the rich old man, she had, in brooding over her future, gotten it into her head in some way, that perhaps his affection, —of which she felt pretty contentedly sure for the time, however, — might wane and grow less, and she become but a slave to the old man and his money. Brooding over this, she got quite melancholy and “nervous.” She really loved the old man, who was not only a man of ability and honors, but was very kind of soul. Of course, too his great wealth was no objection to a woman who could appreciate the value of a comfortable home, or enjoy the refinements of a luxurious one.

“I would not wish to intimate,” said the lawyer, “that she took this matter of wealth into consideration, even lightly; for I like to assure myself once in a while that there are to be found a few women in this populous vale of tears, who have considerations superior to the thought of wealth; and, verily, this woman *looks* to me like one of those.”

But the woman got nervous. If his affection should fail, why, she would become only a prettily-dressed bird in a handsome cage, with enough to eat and drink, but without loving companionship; excluded, in fact, from the society of her old and poorer friends, and, to use a religious phrase, unhappy enough to be practically “without God in the world.” She hardly dared to mention to any of her particular friends the dreadful thought that was [gnawing] at her heart, and growing fiercer every day, for fear they would ridicule her.

“Ladies having passed a certain age are supposed to be peculiarly sensitive on matters touching love and marriage, you know,” said my friend, with a very knowing wink in his eye.

No, she had no friend to pour out her soul to on the very point, of all things, the most dear to her. Her “intended” had exhibited some peculiarities of character which she did not understand, and now, while she was brooding over her especial grief, he was naturally enough more, eccentric than ever. Possibly he, too, was undergoing fears, —fears that when he grew older, and older—and he was far in advance of her in years, —that her affection would wane, and then all that would bind her to him would be his money. Perhaps he had caught her disease unconsciously. Withal the condition of things generally between them, in their silent hearts, must have been anything but pleasant to both of them. The lady prayed for light to know her duty to herself and her coming lord, —in fact, to be taught from on high whether she would, be doing a wrong or not to him, to marry him, —for her fever had burned on beyond the point of simple selfishness. The great question of duty and right had seized hold of her mind, and she had become religiously morbid thereon. But one thing she thought she knew for a certainty—that she not only loved him now, but would continue to love him, always. So she reflected that she should do no wrong to him in marrying; and she finally got to the resolution that she would patiently bear his coldness and neglect, and even his tyranny, if he should display anything of the last, as a good Christian woman ought to, —and the time set for the wedding was last drawing near. But she found this resolution of Christian fortitude under the condition of unrequited love rather more than a good human nature could bear, or ought ever to be asked to bear; and it got to be an awful burden to her, meek and lowly though she was.

As the time grew shorter before the wedding, the lady’s wakeful hours at night grew longer and more burdensome, and her friends began to notice their telling effect upon her countenance, and whole constitution, in fact. Such of them as were indelicate enough (and who ever knew many ladies, especially, who are not inclined to be indelicate at times on matters of love and marriage, or rather towards those indulging the one and contemplating the other?), —such, my friend went on to say, got to poking fun at her a little; said the condition she contemplated must be terrible, indeed, since it wore upon her so much, etc. —all of which did not seem to amend matters much.

But finally, only three or four days before the time set for the wedding, and not over an hour after her old lover had called, and rolled away in his carriage, —he having seemed very gloomy that day, too, —an old aunt of the lady came, —came from New Orleans to pass a few days with

her niece, —and she found the latter in tears. She had heard of her niece’s prospective marriage; and as she was a demonstrative old lady, and very sympathetic, she both pitied her niece, and spared no pains in attempting to console her, and finally won her great secret.

“La, me!” exclaimed the old aunt; “do tell—*is* that *all* that’s troubling you so? Now, do take heart. I tell you we can get that sore spot fixed up, —cured in a mighty short time. I understand all about it. Fact is, I’ve had such an experience myself in my day, and I’ve known others have the like, and I got it all made right, and they did too, if there’s any believin’ folks; but some folks are curious creatures— that’s true, Mary,” (for that’s the niece’s first name); and she went on to tell her “as how” she didn’t believe in witchcraft, or in seers, or “clair-ry-voy-ants” (as she called them), or in fortune-tellers, “either with the cards or without them,” nor “in them as sees into things through crystals, and such like,” as a general thing. But she did believe that some folks had a magic about them, by which they could peer into the future, and prevent things happening that might otherwise occur. She was a very garrulous old lady, it would seem, and overwhelmed her niece with instances enough, which she had “known” to prove valuable, of the mysterious “power of some people,” to establish a general rule in favor of all seers’ pretensions.

The niece was just in the mood to believe in anything that seemed likely to bring her any relief, and asked her aunt for her advice in the premises, which was given, of course, and was to the effect that they should find out a *good* fortune-teller, and visit her next day. But the time was short, and they had no acquaintances of whom they could inquire. The aunt sighed deeply over the fact that New Orleans was so far off; “for if it wasn’t, we would go and visit old Aunt Betsy”—an aged negro woman—right off. She’s always sure and certain. I’ve tried her a hundred times.”

“What, aunt! a hundred times?” asked Mary.

“Yes, yes, a full hundred times.”

“Why, aunt, then I am afraid you do believe in fortunetellers.”

“No, no; I don’t. I told you that I don’t, generally speaking; but Aunt Betsy is a wonder, if she *is* black. *She* ain’t any the worse for that, I tell you, no matter what the rest of the blacks are.”

Any one acquainted with the character of the people, who, at the South, put their trust in prophetic old negroes and negresses, need no further hint as to the superstitious character of Mary’s aunt. They are a peculiar class, the like of whom is not to be found in all the world besides. They are weaker than the idolaters of the East, and are generally a sensuous, if not sensual, class, they who worship these old negroes, and there are a great many of them. The aunt was not only superstitious, but enthusiastic—one of those magnetic creatures, who, at times, exercise a good deal of influence—a sort of “psychologic” power over others; and in Mary’s state of mind, she was not much disposed to resist the aunt’s advisory suggestions. She needed sympathy at the time, and was willing to accept it in whatever form presented.

With no one to inquire of as to a “successful fortuneteller,” the aunt and Mary consulted the newspapers, determining to select among the advertisements the name of the “medium,” or

“sight-seer,” or “clairvoyant,” or what not, who appeared to reside in the most respectable quarters; and they were not long in determining, through the columns of the Herald, upon a Mrs. Seymour, then residing in Grand Street. This “Mrs. Seymour” was the wife of a crafty Irishman, of much intelligence, and extremely good address, by the name of Brady. This man was capable of concocting dark designs; and although his wife was also a cunning person, and was not lacking in real skill and strategy, yet it was generally supposed, as I learned on investigating this case, that he was the subtle “power behind the throne” when any great cheat or curious deviltry was performed by her. But she was a “canny” woman, after all, and as mild and attractive, when she pleased to be, as she was sharp and unscrupulous. Long experience had given her great facility in necromantic arts, and the smoothness of her tongue was something remarkable. It is supposed by most people, who are unacquainted with these sorcerers, that they are both illiterate and unintelligent. They are usually ignorant of books; but they are by no means lacking in intelligence, cultivated and sharpened by a discipline which books can hardly give.

“Mrs. Seymour” was the assumed name of the wife—her advertising *sobriquet*—a name well chosen, since, unlike her real name, it did not suggest her Irish origin, and therefore forbid Irish servant girls from visiting her, and leaving with her a dollar or two dollars a time for advice on the subject of their lovers, marriages, or a “new place” to work. The Irish in this country, at least, have no respect for sorcerers of Irish birth. The name, too, sounds not unaristocratic; something substantial about it; has not the appearance of being assumed, like those of “Madame Leclerque,” “Madame Duponleau,” and other high-sounding aliases of some fat, dumpy English or Welsh woman, or some dark weazen-faced Polish hag, whose real name is perhaps Johnson, Jones, or Thomascowitch.

“Mrs. Seymour” was a middle-sized woman, not ugly of features, not handsome, with a sort of mobile face, which could easily assume any expression which her subtle, crafty mind might suggest. Her house was a decent abode, pretty well furnished; and, in this respect, far above the character of the houses which most “mediums” and fortune-tellers inhabit, presenting a cosy, inviting appearance in the parlor. Mr. Brady, a man of wholesome face and good address, was usually at home to aid in entertaining visitors, especially ladies, who called upon “Mrs. Seymour” professionally.

To “Mrs. Seymour” went the aunt and Mary, and at first had a “sitting” with her, in order to test her capacity at fortune-telling. On entering the house, they had first encountered the shrewd Mr. Brady, who probably at once suspected that the younger woman was revolving matrimonial matters in her mind, and having opportunity to speak with his wife in private before she entered the room, told her, probably, his suspicions. At all events, Mrs. Seymour had hardly sat down, and thrown herself into her accustomed trance, before she told Mary that she had come there upon a question of marriage, and that there were troubles in the way, and invited her to free her mind. The simple-hearted Mary and the credulous aunt were taken aback at once by Mrs. Seymour’s sudden approach to the very subject on their minds, and the aunt exclaimed, “There, Mary, I told you so!”

The ladies did “free their minds” immediately, and Mrs. Seymour begged to be excused for a few moments. She said it was a case involving nice points, and she wished to act cautiously; that in cases of the kind, where the happiness of parties hung for life upon a decision which must be so

soon made, she was in the habit of taking counsel of her “heavenly Father,” and in her private oratory to approach him in prayer. She started from the room, and then suddenly returned, and said, “Ladies, perhaps you would like to see a beautiful ‘*prie-dieu*,’ which I have in my oratory; a beautiful present to me by the Duke of Argyle, when I was visiting Scotland, in honor of a successful clairvoyant discovery which, with the help of Almighty God, I was enabled to make for him.”

The ladies followed her up to the little “hall bedroom,” so customary in certain New York houses, and which was quite neatly fitted up. There was the *prie-dieu*, —a thing which these ladies had never seen, or indeed heard of before. They asked “Mrs. Seymour” what it was for; and she explained to them that it was a chair to pray in, and showed them how to kneel and sit, and where to put the prayer-book.

Duly they withdrew, greatly edified by the pious, good lady’s conduct, while she tarried for a while to “pray,” and came down at last to the parlor with a very saintly countenance on—quite “illuminated” in fact. She had been inspired with counsel how Mary was to proceed with her coming husband, in order to increase and secure forever his love. Mrs. Seymour had learned all she needed to know from Mary’s full confession, spiced with suggestions by the garrulous aunt.

She had learned that Mary’s coming husband was very rich; and she began by saying, that on entering into married life, any great disparities between the parties—in riches, age, accomplishments, etc.—were apt to prove disastrous in the end. The rich husband, for example, would taunt his poor wife sometimes with her poverty, and the young wife might throw the fact of age and infirmity in the face of her old husband, or either accuse the other of ignorance. All these things would bring severe troubles in the end. But the greatest trouble frequently came from disparity in social position—where a man or woman of high station had married a partner of low station. In this case she was glad to see that this trouble would not exist. The parties were of equal rank in respectability and social surroundings. The husband’s great riches were the only thing to fear. Better marry a poor husband, and plod on with him, and make one’s own fortune, than marry a rich man whose love might soon cool.

There would come a domestic bell between the parties: among low people, quarrelling, and absolute fighting, now and then; among people of higher grade, a genteel indifference, —no ugly words, but cold, cruel demeanor, etc., —worse, a great deal, than actual physical violence through which the angry passions would exhaust themselves, and after which repentance and “making up” were frequent. But in the other case, —in the higher grade, —no such thing would occur as “making up,” and the most luxuriant home would become a prison, or a grave rather, of the affections—a horrible life to lead, out of which there was no escape for parties who valued public opinion, or who, as in the case of a dependent wife, had no haven of peace to resort to, no means of support—and much more said Mrs. Seymour, in her grave, effective way.

So solemn was she that the timid, fearful Mary cried, and the old aunt became all of a tremor, and poured forth torrents of caressing words upon poor Mary. But Mrs. Seymour relieved their distress to great extent, by informing them that when at prayer, the “dear Almighty God” (to use her own expression) had favored her with a vision, which she had interpreted. There were many ways, she said, to preserve a husband’s or wife’s love. All these ways were well known to the

scientific. They were always effective, were these various means, when properly applied. She could have told them at once, without resorting to counsel with her “heavenly Father,” of what would probably be effective in this case; but she was glad she had resorted to prayer first, because, although she would have taken very much the same course pointed out in the vision, yet she might not have been so thorough in her counsel, and would not have felt such certainty or confidence in it. The ladies lifted up their hands again, and hung with confiding delight, and with believing smiles upon their faces, upon every word Mrs. Seymour uttered. She told them, that in answer to her prayer, she saw a group of angels descending from the heavens. They wore beautiful robes of various colors. Here she stopped to tell them that it was a popular fallacy to suppose that the angels all wore white robes; that such a uniform would be inconsistent with Nature’s usual course; that the God of Nature loved variety, —infinite variety, —and therefore he had exemplified it all through his works. The ladies were delighted with Mrs. Seymour’s eloquent words, and she went on to tell them that she saw these angels decorating each other with amulets, and souvenirs, and ornaments of all kinds, beautiful brilliants more dazzling than earthly diamonds, etc., and she noticed that each ornament was blessed by a beautiful priestess before it was passed from one angel to the other, and when the latter assumed it she observed that his or her face lighted up with a new and glorious expression of love for the gems; that these angels were of apparently different degrees of age, which suited Mary to hear, of course.

Thus Mrs. Seymour went on with her pious rigmarole, which she managed, by her cunning imagination, to make very charming, and finally said that, though the vision was easy enough of interpretation, yet, in this case of great importance, she had prayed for an interpretation, and was at once “impressed” with this solution. It would be wise for Mary, she said, to put off all care from her mind, from the present moment, with the belief that she should be happy with her husband, as would be the case if she followed the advice; she would retain his love, forever. Marry him on the day appointed, be cheerful and kind, and have no unpleasant forebodings, as she need have none, and then, as fast as she could collect together all valuables which he had been in the habit of wearing on his person, as ornaments, or carrying in his pocket, such as watches, jewelry of all kinds, especially of the rich kinds, such as diamonds, and all the money which he had *actually handled* (for it was necessary, she said, that he must have touched it, and it would not do for her to get a draft from him, and go to the bank and draw it herself, unless she should afterwards put it in his hands, and naively ask him to count it for her), —all these things she was to get, and the more of them and the greater their value, the surer would be the spell which was to be worked. These things, as she procured them, she was from time to time to bring to Mrs. Seymour, who would operate with them as in the vision directed. The lady would then take them home and put them in a box, and then Mrs. Seymour would visit her house and charm the whole box, which the lady would keep, for a few weeks, as near herself as she could all the while without inconvenience, and the spell would thus be worked. The ladies looked in wonder, and believed. Mrs. Seymour charged them fifty dollars for her counsel; but the ladies not chancing to have so much in their purses, she consented to take twenty-five then, and wait till after the marriage, and when Mary should bring the first article to be charmed, for the other twenty-five dollars. This was all fair, and pleased the ladies, who went away happy, it seems.

The marriage took place. The old man having some estates in Canada, which needed looking after, made his bridal tour in the now Dominion of Canada; and with Quebec as his central point, travelled about the province for some three weeks, with his new wife.

He was very happy, and so was Mary. They returned to New York duly, and in the course of a few weeks Mary, now Mrs. Mary, visited Mrs. Seymour, with her first batch of articles to be charmed. These were a watch, a very elegant one, profusely ornamented with diamonds, which had belonged to the old gentleman's former wife, but which Mrs. Mary had discovered that he had sometimes carried, and a large diamond ring which he had once worn, but which, on account of an injury to the finger which it fitted, he had laid aside, with some trinkets of value. Taking these to her "oratory," Mrs. Seymour pretended to have charmed them, and then brought them back to Mrs. Mary, and told her to get a box of suitable size, and place them in it, also the other things that she should bring, to get them charmed. While Mrs. Mary was consulting with her in regard to the box she should get, Mrs. Seymour happened to think of one which she had, and which she would as lief give to Mrs. Mary as not, and she went to her side-board drawer and brought a little square-shaped enamelled *papier-mache* box, neat, but cheap; she said this would do, and it could be sealed so easily when it should be filled. Mrs. Mary wished to pay her for it, but Mrs. Seymour would not allow her to do so; and the box, with the watch, etc., in it, went off with Mrs. Mary, who had paid Mrs. Seymour the other twenty-five dollars. Mrs. Mary followed Mrs. Seymour's counsels as speedily as she could, and was soon at the latter's house with the other matters of jewelry, this time bringing a very valuable brooch, which was once the property of the former wife; and Mrs. Mary had a piece of her own cunning to tell Mrs. Seymour.

In order that the brooch might come under the rule of having been worn on the person of the husband, she had pinned it on to his night-shirt when he was asleep, and laid awake and watched it there for an hour or more. Mrs. Seymour rewarded this piece of stratagem with her august approval, and told Mrs. Mary that it would do just as well to lay the things under his pillow, and if she found anything more which he had not worn, to put it there. She suggested that whole sets of silver spoons could be placed there at any time; which was a happy thought for Mrs. Mary, who wished to get all the value she could into the box, and she told Mrs. Seymour that there was in the house, but never used, a set of gold spoons, a present from some of her husband's rich relatives. In time these were in the box. But to make the matter sure as to value, Mrs. Mary begged of her husband the sum of two thousand dollars one day, when he had sold a piece of real estate in Brooklyn, and realized some ten thousand dollars advance over cost. This money was charmed and put into the box, and finally Mrs. Seymour was slyly taken in a carriage to the house by Mrs. Mary, in order to put on the finishing stroke, and seal up the box. She took her wax and a peculiar seal with her; and Mrs. Mary and she, being duly closeted, the box was nicely sealed up, with all the valuables in it, money and all, amounting to about five thousand dollars. Mrs. Seymour then wished to be left alone in the room for a few moments, while she prayed, and invoked a peculiar charm on the box. Mrs. Mary, of course, consented. Presently Mrs. Seymour came out of the room, handed her the box, and went with her to the bedroom to see it properly deposited in its hiding-place, —all this while the gentleman was growing better and better, kinder and kinder, to his wife; and he was "splendid" to begin with, she said. But this increased affection was attributed to the charms. What would it not become if these remained near her there in the box for two months, as Mrs. Seymour directed?

After two months, Mrs. Seymour would call, if Mrs. Mary had no occasion to call her before, which she was to do, if her husband showed any signs of failing affection, and would then open the box for Mrs. Mary; for it was necessary, as a part of the work, that she should open the box in such a way as not to break the spell. The two months went past, and Mrs. Seymour did not call. Mrs. Mary sent for her to come, but found that she had left that house—gone to Brooklyn to live, somewhere. She tried to hunt her up, but unavailingly; at last, after some three months and a half had passed, she heard she was in Boston, and Mrs. Mary made an errand on there, her indulgent husband accompanying her, and there she privately sought for Mrs. Seymour. But she could not find her, and so let matters rest. But, eventually, her husband telling some relative visiting him, about the gold spoons, and seeking them to show him, failed to find them; and Mrs. Mary got very nervous over it, and at last told him that they were not stolen, as he suspected, but where they were; and after much mental struggle, told him how they came there. He was delighted with her great desire to preserve his love, for it was a most genuine case of deep affection on his part; but he gently laughed at her, nevertheless, and declared that Mrs. Seymour was a great cheat: that she had, by her chicanery, won the fifty dollars; “and she found you and your aunt such easy disciples,” said he, “the great wonder is, that she did not abstract more money from you. But we’ll open the box now, and get the spoons, and you’ll do what you please with the rest;” and they opened the box, breaking the peculiar seals, and found nothing but a few small stones and bits of iron, done up in cotton-wool, to keep them from rattling, and weighing, perhaps, as much as the contents supposed to be there.

It was evident then to the old gentleman, that the woman must have brought a box with her on her last visit to the house, a facsimile of the one which Mrs. Mary had filled with valuables and money. The things were of such a nature, that the old gentleman said it was of no use to try to hunt up Mrs. Seymour and get them back. She would deny all; besides, there was the risk of his wife’s being exposed in her foolish credulity, and he wouldn’t have that known for ten times the value of the property lost, he said. So they agreed to let it pass.

But the thing preyed on Mary’s mind. She wrote to her aunt, —who had then gone away, —a doleful story, and upbraided her partly for her connection in the matter. The poor old aunt was sadly affected, and insisted that some step ought to be taken to find Mrs. Seymour, and to punish her; and Mary felt so too, and talked about it till the old gentleman thought he would take some step about it, and he consulted me. I have devised some plans; but they are good for nothing, and I’ve come over to tell you the funny story, and see what you think of it.”

Such was the substance of the lawyer’s tale: and we had a good laugh over it, and contrived together what might be done. I told him it was a hopeless case, pretty much, unless we could find Mrs. Seymour, and these things in her possession, which it was absurd to expect, unless, by inquiring of the parties who suffered the loss, I could learn more about the things taken. We both resolved that the watch was too valuable to be destroyed, and there might be other things saved, and sold, perhaps, here and there. Accident might give a clue to the whereabouts of Mrs. Seymour and the things.

The lawyer visited the parties, and got their consent to take me into the case, and I visited them—learned what things were taken; examined the box, and found on it a peculiar mark, which I copied exactly; and I also got an accurate description of the watch, with the maker’s

name, the number of the watch, and so forth. This was a superb affair for a lady's watch, and was worth, at least, with its chain and diamonds, eight hundred dollars. I concluded that it was not probably destroyed. It had perhaps been sold or pawned; and I made close search in many jewelers' establishments and pawn shops for it in New York, and not finding it, advertised for it in the Boston and Philadelphia papers, stating that the subscriber had such and such a watch, and would give a thousand dollars for its mate, "No. 1230," if in good condition, and added that it was known to be in this country. I signed "Henry Romaine Brown, Agent for the Earl of Derby," and made an address in Liverpool, England, and in New York. The object of this the reader can readily see. I soon got a letter from Baltimore, and in consequence found the watch. It had passed through several hands to the owner, the wife of a Mr. Hurlbut, a large merchant. He had answered the advertisement out of respect to the Earl of Derby (!), with no suspicion whatever that the watch had been stolen. Mr. Hurlbut required the property to be thoroughly proven as that of the old gentleman in New York, which it was fortunately easy to do, as the bill of it from the importing house had been saved. Still it was necessary to prove the theft, for it might have been sold; and here was a chance for a lawsuit, which the New York man did not want.

But Mr. Hurlbut was willing to advance some money, while he held on to the watch, to ferret out Mrs. Seymour. "Perhaps she could settle the matter, or had some relatives who could," he said. My client, too, took courage, and resolved to spend some money in the matter, and I went to work to find Mrs. Seymour. Meanwhile, through the peculiar mark on the bottom of the box, I managed to find out where Mrs. Seymour had purchased it, and learned, as I supposed before, that she had bought two on the same occasion; and, fortunately, I found that she had, when selecting the boxes, occupied a good deal of time, giving the clerk a great deal of vexation, and he felt sure he should know her. Besides, she had offered a counterfeit bill in payment for them; and when informed that the bill was bad, had declared her surprise, and rummaged her purse for good money, without finding enough into twenty-five cents, which she said she would call and pay next day, and so was allowed to take away the boxes. So the clerk thought he should surely know her, although the lady did not call the next day. I tracked Mrs. Seymour from her place in Grand Street, where her sign still remained, and business was carried on by a younger medium, who assumed her name, and divided the spoils with her, probably, over to Brooklyn, down to Philadelphia, where she sold the watch, and up to Boston.

Brady, her husband, had gone the rounds with her. I searched every possible place in Boston, and engaged a detective there. I had been able to secure several photographs of the woman, and of her husband, in New York; and with one of these, the Boston detective was able to make her out, he thought, one day. He followed the woman, and at last abandoned the "game," when he found that she was in company with people of high character, and entered with them one of the finest residences in Vernon Street; and, moreover, was told by a servant of the house that she was a Mrs. "*Bradley*" from Portland, Me. He concluded that he was mistaken. We finally learned Brady was not like "Seymour," an assumed name, and that the husband had wealthy relatives in Boston; and then conceiving that the detective might not have been mistaken in supposing he recognized "Mrs. Seymour," we laid siege to the Vernon Street house, till we satisfied ourselves that "Mrs. Bradley" and "Mrs. Seymour" were one and the same. But how did she get there? Boston is full of people, in high rank, who are spiritualists, and who keep "mediums" for themselves, and do not visit the advertising mediums, to be found there in such numbers, even to this day.

We traced Brady out too, and found him a chief clerk in a house on Washington Street, in which his brother was a partner. My friend, the detective, made his acquaintance, and managed to learn from him that he was worth several thousand dollars. He had two building lots in New York, which he had bought for a song, some four years before, but which would be worth, he said, fifty thousand dollars in less than ten years. My friend, the detective, wished to buy these, and they got on such good terms that Brady, in the course of a few days, accepted his invitation to “go down to York,” on his, the detective’s, expense, and when there showed him the lots, and told him confidentially that they stood in his wife’s name, as he had failed in business some years before.

We thought we had enough materials together to commence the attack, and my friend, the lawyer, managed to bring a suit in such a way that the building lots were attached, and then wrote me at Boston to “go ahead.” I proceeded at once to the house in Vernon Street, and inquired for Mrs. Bradley. She had, meanwhile, moved her quarters to the residence of a distinguished clerical gentleman in Hancock Street, whose wife was a spiritualist, and a “medium” besides. I called upon Mrs. Bradley there, and having a private “séance” with her as a “medium,” until I thought I had studied her enough, told her that I was very much pleased with the communication she had brought me from my “deceased wife”(who was then living in New York, one of the healthiest and jolliest women in the land, and likely to live, perhaps, till the “spirits” are all dead); and that now I had a communication to make to her; and that I did not wish to disturb her peace, or expose her conduct in life, and should not do so if she kept quiet. She wanted to know “what in the name of goodness” I talked to her in that way for. I told her it wasn’t I that was talking, that I was only the “medium” through whom Mrs. Mary (using the full name now), of New York, was speaking, and that she had come to ask her what she did with that little charm box, and its contents, for which she substituted the box of stones and iron. “Mrs. Bradley,” *alias* “Seymour,” turned pale as a sheet, and *tried* to swoon. She was a little too quick in the play, and hadn’t declared, as her true rôle was, that she didn’t know what I meant; so she waked up, and declared it; and I told her to be tranquil; that we had got the property all attached; knew where the watch was, and had her properly identified on the day she bought the *two* boxes at such and such a store. I looked her calmly in the eye while I said this; and she was not at a loss to discover that I knew what I was saying.

“Now madam,” said I, “all that we want is, that you save us the trouble and time of a suit. We shall arrest you, and have you taken to New York, and tried criminally, as well as prosecute the civil suit, unless you are willing to settle the matter quietly; and I can’t give you any time. An officer is awaiting my call close by here;” (indeed, he was in the porch of the house at the time) “and unless you are willing to get your bonnet and shawl, and accompany me at once to Mr. Brady, and settle this matter, we will arrest you, and take you where you’ll be kept safe till we get a requisition for you from the governor of New York.”

“Mrs. Seymour” had had, as I knew before, more or less to do with legal matters, and she saw the force of things at once. She accompanied me to the store where her husband was engaged, the officer following at a proper distance; and I managed to cool the husband’s assumed wrath when I came to tell him of the charges against her, he asseverating her virtue and innocence in terms that savored of Milesian profanity.

“Mr. Brady,” said I, “I am glad to see a man so brave a champion of his wife; but you are only making matters worse. *She* don’t deny the charges; the property is under attachment, and the officer is at hand, and she will be arrested in less than five minutes” (taking out my watch to look at the time), “unless you cool down and come to terms. You, too, know all about the business, and would probably prefer to escape arrest also—wouldn’t you?”

He looked at me for an instant, then at his wife, and said, —

“Well, I suppose we’ll have to give in for now; but I’ll carry the matter under protest, up to the United States Supreme Court before I’ll be trampled on.”

This boast seemed to relieve him, and we all left the store and went to my friend’s, the detective’s, office on Tremont Street, where the preliminaries of a settlement were entered into. The watch we wanted back at any rate; the rest of the jewelry was scattered here and there, only that Mrs. Seymour had preserved a nice string of pearls, worth some three hundred dollars. There was not much “higgling” over the estimate of value of the various articles, and the two thousand in money, of course, went in at its value. In all, the bill footed up about thirty-six hundred and fifty dollars, besides five hundred—(which was too little) —for the expenses we had been at. Suffice it that those building lots in New York changed hands soon after, “in due legal form,” and that a thousand dollars in money besides left Brady’s pocket, and found its way where it could pay “expenses,” etc. The building lots have sold since for far more than Brady’s estimate of “fifty thousand dollars in ten years.” The old gentleman and his wife Mary were delighted with my success: of course. Mr. Hurlbut delivered up the watch for the price he paid for it, which it was proper he should ask, inasmuch too, as Brady had given us the money, or its equivalent for it, and more too, and Mrs. Mary said she should carry it till her dying day, “to ward off mediums and sorcerers, as the Puritans nailed horse-shoes to door-posts as protection against witches”; and I venture she’s faithfully wearing it now for that purpose, and as a souvenir of the old gentleman, her good husband, who is now dead. I was so much pleased with the cunning and skilful address of Mrs. Seymour, that I cultivated her acquaintance, and by “close study” managed to learn a good deal of her art, and came to a knowledge of the great extent to which mediums are consulted by people of the first classes; and was astonished to find how readily they fall, through the superstitious element in their composition, victims to the sorcerer’s arts. It would require volumes to cite the instances which occur yearly in New York city alone. Boston is not a whit behind in this, notwithstanding she boasts herself the Athens of America; but, perhaps, she so boasts because she worships so many different idols—has as many gods as the Greek mythology embraced. In proportion to her population her dupes of superstition are more numerous than those of New York.

McWatters, George. *Knots Untied: Or, Ways and By-Ways in the Hidden Life of American Detectives*. Hartford: Burr and Hyde, 1871 (848 pages).

