

(editor's note: This paper was transcribed from a handwritten cursive copy with various difficulties. For a perfect rendition, the reader might wish to consult the original, itself a copy, in the volume entitled *Literary Club Papers I*, 1885 – 1886 Oct 3, '85 to May 29, '86) The original is very badly faded.

A Visitation

Some time since, I was invited down into the country to pay a visit to one of my old college friends. My friend, George Rivers lived in an old place left him by his adopted father who had died a very short time previous. The friendship, or rather affection existing between the two had always been very strong, and as the old man had no relatives, it was natural that he should leave the whole of his estate, by no means a small one, to his adopted son.

I had not seen George for several years as he had spent most of his time after leaving college, in travel abroad, and had been at home but little more than a year when old Mr. Rivers died.

The death of the old man was quite unexpected, being the result of an accident with which he had met while driving. The particulars of his death I had never heard, and beyond the fact that he had left his entire fortune to the young man, my knowledge of him was very slight. George has not been very communicative on family subjects, while at college and none of us had been at all inquisitive.

I was somewhat surprised at receiving an invitation to make a visit at the house at such a time, so soon after the old man's death but as my invitation was quite pressing, and as it was not in my busy season, I wrote that I should arrive at the little station nearest his place on the evening train a few days later.

When I arrived at the station, I was met by the family carriage, a rather old-fashioned affair, in charge of a more old-fashioned coachman, who was to take me to my destination. I had expected George to meet me, but as the coachman told me that his master had been called away that morning on business from which he had not yet returned, I settled myself back in my carriage and prepared for the long ride of some six or seven miles.

It took about an hour for us to reach our destination, during which time I enjoyed several quiet naps, interrupted from time to time by the roughness of the road. George met me at the door, and led me into the library, apologizing for not meeting me at the station. After a little preparation we had dinner which was served in a large dining room furnished in a very old-fashioned

style. In fact, the house itself and everything about it seemed old fashioned but comfortable.

The house was surrounded by old trees which kept the sun out, and rendered the place a little damp and gloomy. It was very plain that old Mr. Rivers had taken very little interest in keeping up his house of late years. And George had been in charge too short a time to bring about many changes. When we returned to the library, I noticed a portrait in the oil hanging over the fireplace which I at once assumed to be that of Mr. Rivers. As I am very fond of studying faces, and the little I had heard of the old man interested me, I looked at this portrait carefully.

It was the face of a very handsome man whose clean-shaven features and piercing black eyes indicated great force of character. As George observed my scrutiny of the picture, he remarked that it was the picture of his adopted father painted by his daughter. As I had never heard of a daughter, I expressed some surprise at this information.

“Yes,” said my friend, “he had a daughter and it is about her that I wish to talk to you tonight. Take a cigar and I will tell you the story.”

Full of curiosity, I did as he directed, drawing my chair up to the fire which was lighted in the evening on account of the dampness.

“You seemed somewhat surprised at the fact that the old man had a daughter of whom you had never heard. Well, I had never heard much of her myself at the time I was in college, and as I went abroad at once, after leaving Cambridge, I had no opportunity of extending my knowledge. When I returned home about a year ago, I became better acquainted with Mr. Rivers, and also with the old family servants who had been about the house for years. I had always heard that there had been a daughter but no more, and supposed that she had died quite young, so that I never bothered my head about her. After I had been here a short time, I could see, more plainly from the actions of the servants than from anything else, that there was some mystery connected with the house. What it was I could not find out as of course I did not like to question the servants, and Mr. Rivers himself was out of the question. I soon came to understand that the daughter had been the cause of great grief to the old man, and that her name was never to be spoken in her (*sic*) presence when I knew that much you may believe that it was very easy for me to surmise the rest. That she had been concerned in some unfortunate love affair was quite plain. But of the nature of this affair, and of the fate of

the daughter, I could learn nothing. Mr. Rivers had never mentioned her to me, and I'm the only occasion I ventured to approach the subject, he shut me up very quickly.

“Things went on in this way until I was sent for to come to my uncle, - you know I always called him uncle although we were not at all related, - who had received injuries that resulted in his death. I arrived at the farmhouse where he was lying, but a short time before his death. He recognized me, and, with great difficulty attempted to speak to me of something that was on his mind. But he could only utter a few words which I took to be ‘Find Eleanor, - my daughter.’ I assured him that I understood him, and that if she could be found, it would be done.

“With this the old man seemed to be content, and after a short time breathed his last.

“As soon as the old man was in his grave, I set about the quest for the missing daughter. Of course I interviewed the servants, and have been able to collect a good deal of information but nothing as yet that leads me to hope for a successful conclusion to my search. It seems that the old man was very devoted to his daughter, whom he raised to be a companion to him in his old age. I suppose he expected her to marry someday, but he never allowed the thought of a separation to suggest itself.

“About the time the girl came to be a woman, this was over twenty years ago, a young fellow came down here sketching. He was very good-looking, and at the same time really clever, both with the pen and the brush. As the old man was always anxious that his daughter should have all the accomplishments that money could procure, he engaged the young man to teach her painting. She had taken some lessons before, while at school, and had shown considerable talent, and under the young man's instructions she improved rapidly. Under his care she painted that portrait of her father there. On the wall behind us just opposite this picture I am told that there formerly hung a portrait of the girl herself painted by the young teacher when he first came down here.

“It was the talent shown in painting the girl's portrait that induced the old man to engage him as her instructor. This portrait of the girl I never saw, as it was afterwards destroyed by the old man.

“Well, as was natural, the acquaintance between the young man and the girl,

who had very little society here, soon ripened into something stronger than friendship. The old man did not know anything of this at first, and seemed utterly unsuspecting; it was only when he noticed the girl's abstraction and preoccupation of manner that he began to suspect what had been taking place. About this time he began making inquiries in the city about the young man, and soon found that his record was not as clear as it might have been. The young man had been very dissipated and had led a very fast life for a time in the course of which he had been engaged in a number of quarrels which brought him into unpleasant prominence. Besides, he was nobody in particular, and this was a very strong point against him in the estimation of my uncle, who was always a great believer in family.

Well, matters finally came to a crisis when the young man asked for the hand of the daughter. My uncle, in great indignation forbade him the house, telling him of his knowledge of his past life, and reproaching him bitterly with what he considered his baseness in taking advantage of his position as instructor to insinuate himself into his daughter's affections.

The young man expressed great regret for his past actions, and promised improvement in the future, offering his good behavior while in the neighborhood as proof of his reform. But neither his arguments nor the daughter's were of any avail. In a towering rage, my uncle drove the young artist from his house, and his sight forever, for that night the lovers took matters into their own hands, and eloped in the good old style.

They wrote to my uncle from the city telling him of their marriage, and imploring his forgiveness, but he sent them back his curse, threatening to follow their path wherever they might go, with the stories of the husband's past. After several imploring letters from her, which proved of no avail, she finally wrote him that they expected to leave for Europe where, under a new name her husband hoped to gain a livelihood, by his profession. At this the old man became very much depressed, and gave out that his daughter was forever dead to him, forbidding even the mention of her name in his presence. The picture of her that hung behind us he destroyed as being the portrait of the daughter who had deserted him, painted by the cause of all his trouble. I firmly believe that, in time, the old man would have received them back but the fact that they changed their name to avoid his pursuit so angered him that he gave them up forever. His threat of following them with the stories of the husband's past, he probably never dreamed of carrying into execution, but this was undoubtedly what influenced them in their decision to live abroad under an assumed name.

It is this change of name, as well as the destruction of the only portrait we ever had that renders the search so difficult. The old servants who were here at the time did not seem to be able to give even a fair description of the daughter. All I know is that she was dark, with very striking eyes, such as you see in the portrait of a father there. I expect to start for Europe in a short time, however, keeping in mind the lost Eleanor, although I despair of our hearing from her. Too much time has elapsed and I have no clue whatever to their movements after leaving this country.

It is an account of my early departure that I sent for you. I want you to take charge of my estate while I am away, and to arrange some matters for me before I go. There is considerable business to be done here, and I thought I should rather trust it to you and to any one about here.

Well, as I suppose you are pretty tired with your ride and my long story, let us go to your room where I hope you will get a good night's rest so that we can talk business in the morning."

With these words my friend led me to my room, a large, comfortable apartment in the front of the house. It had the appearance of having been fitted up for occupation by a woman rather than for a man. "This" said my friend "was the sleeping room of the daughter of whom I have been telling you. After her flight my uncle closed it up for some time, and never allowed anything to be changed in it. Of late years however it has been used once or twice as a guest chamber. As the visits that we have are very rare, it is rather damp and close from being so little used, so that I have had a fire made for you." After a few more remarks, my friend left me to myself.

As I was quite weary, I at once prepared to retire but as soon as I got into bed, I found sleep almost impossible. The strange story that I had heard occupied my thoughts, and I could not help examining with my eyes the various objects scattered about the room. The bright fire threw a dim light over everything, lighting up the farthest corners of the room with their glow.

The fact that this had been the room of the unfortunate girl whose story I had just heard, would not leave my thoughts. Every object derived additional interest from the associations of the past. She too had slept here years before, and perhaps her eyes had rested upon the picture just opposite me in its curious carved frame so like the frame of the portrait of old Mr. Rivers hanging in the library below. From this my thoughts wandered to her

personal appearance. What did she look like? Was she pretty? She must have been pretty if a young artist fell in love with her, although artists' tastes are something peculiar. However, the old man was quite handsome although of course this was by no means conclusive evidence with regard to the daughter's looks.

Musing thus, I gradually became sleepy, and finally everything became quite indistinct; so much so that I could hardly see the details of the picture with the curious frame just opposite me. The picture was an ordinary landscape and only got my eye on account of the frame matching, in its curious carving, the old man's portrait. It was upon this picture however that my drowsy gaze was resting as I turned to seek a more comfortable position before going to sleep.

Now I am not the least bit a believer in Spiritualism nor in the visits of the spirits of the departed to the scenes of their former life upon this earth. But I leave it to any one who hears my story if, under the circumstances I am about to relate would not have startled the most skeptical.

As I turned slightly in my bed to seek a more comfortable position as I said before, my eyes alighted upon the landscape hanging opposite me. But instead of a landscape, what did I see? Looking me straight in the eyes straight from the frame of which I spoke, and just in the place where before had been the landscape, appeared the face of the most lovely woman. I caught but a moment's glance at the face, but every feature, every detail fixed itself is firmly in my mind as if I had been studying the face for hours. The face was one of extreme beauty, lighted up by the splendor of the luminous dark eyes looking directly into my own from beneath a wreath of dark hair. The lips were half-parted into a smile of infinite sweetness, which did not however prevent the face from having a touch of sadness. As I said, I saw the face but an instant, as it disappeared as quickly as it came; but that instant was sufficient to arouse me completely from my slumbers. I sprang from my bed and ran up to the wall where I had seen the face, anxious to explain the phenomenon if possible. I could see nothing but the landscape, and even that indistinctly, as the fire was rapidly dying away. I then lighted the candles and examined the wall more carefully, but all with no result. Finally, I sat down, completely exhausted with excitement and anxiety and began to think the matter over.

I was satisfied that it was no hallucination; the face was too distinct, and my recollection too vivid for that. It could not have been a dream, as I was not

asleep, just a trifle drowsy. What, then, was it? As I said before, I am not in the least it of a spiritualistic turn of mind, but at that time, but one possible explanation seemed to solve the question. Of the truth of that explanation I was strongly convinced. From being a thorough skeptic, I had become a profound believer. I had often scoffed at people who claimed to have had personal experience, but for the first time in my life I saw how convincing such experience is, and how little effect ridicule can have upon it. There was not the slightest doubt in my mind that I had seen the spirit of Eleanor Rivers, returning to visit the scenes of her former life upon this earth.

Although convinced of this, I determined to say nothing of the matter to my host. He would simply laugh at the whole adventure, attributing it all to an idle dream, brought about by the story he had told me and the room that I was occupying. I determined, therefore, to keep the matter to myself.

It can readily be imagined that I was decidedly upset by this separation. I soon discovered that I could not hope to get any sleep for some time. I therefore lighted a cigar, stirred up the fire, and settled myself for a reverie. I sat up until daybreak, when I finally became sleepy, and, returning to my bed gained a few hours' sleep before I was called to breakfast.

At breakfast I said nothing of the adventure of the night before. During the day we arranged the preliminaries of the settling of the estate, and that night I departed for home, as I was suddenly called back on business.

I did not get to finish my visit that summer, but arranged all the necessary business by mail. In the fall, Rivers started for Europe, on what, I was convinced was a fruitless errand knowing as I did that the object of his search was dead. Of this conviction I informed him, but he felt that he should make some effort to carry out the wishes of his adopted father; besides, even if dead, she might have left a child, whom he should take care of. At any rate, the trip would do him good.

Rivers stayed abroad two years. During that time he prosecuted his search but with little success. He kept me constantly informed of his progress, which was small. He had come upon the trace of a couple which might have been the ones he sought but his own data were so slight that he could feel no certainty. Both had died years before leaving a child of which nothing could be learned. All that he heard was in the shape of the most vague rumors of the most unsatisfactory sort. The child, if it was the child of the lost Eleanor, had probably died too. Finally, the search was given up in despair.

George had, however, been more successful in another way. He had found a wife abroad, a young English girl in he had met on the continent. In time he wrote to me, asking me to go down to the old house and prepare it for his bride whom he was bringing home.

I went down to the old place, and soon had it all in order for its occupants. I slept in my old room and nothing strange occurred until the night before their arrival when exactly, under the same circumstances, and in the same spot, the face appeared to me again. This time I was not so surprised as I had expected the apparition before but I again made the same careful examination of the wall and the picture with no more result than on the occasion of my former search. There was no doubt in my mind as to the supernatural character of my visitor.

George and his wife arrived on the evening train. As they drove up to the house, I was on the steps to meet them. Rivers introduced me to his wife who, however was so muffled up that I could not see her face. She at once retired to her room in order to prepare for dinner. George and I soon met in the library where we engaged in conversation about his trip while we waited for his wife to appear.

Presently we heard her coming down, and as she entered the room with a slightly timid manner induced by my presence, I turned. There before me, standing in the doorway was the original of the spirit I had seen on two occasions in the room overhead. The thought flashed through my mind in an instant that this could not be Eleanor Rivers but her lost child. There could be no mistake. There were the same eyes, the same mouth, with just the same sweet smile under the same dark hair.

The whole thing flashed through my head in an instant. George had found the daughter, fallen in love with her, and made her his wife. He had kept this part of the secret hidden from me thinking to surprise me. All this flashed through my mind in much less time than it takes to tell it. Seeing that my companions noticed my agitation, and thinking that they understood its cause, I cried, "Oh, George, your secret is out." "What secret." asked George in evident astonishment. He was plainly trying to keep the imposition. "Do not try to deceive me. I knew her at once." "Why man, you never saw my wife before. What do you mean?" "No, but I know that the daughter of Eleanor Rivers is at this moment standing before me."

At this remark both George and his wife cried out in astonishment. It was dawning upon me that after all George was ignorant of the identity of his wife. In reply to requests for an explanation, I stated that I was certain that George's wife, whose name as it happened, was Eleanor, was the daughter of that Eleanor Rivers whom George had gone abroad to seek. When asked my reasons for believing so, I told the story of my visitor. Although my auditors were incredulous, Mrs. Rivers brought from her room a portrait in ivory of her mother who she had never seen. It was the face of Eleanor Rivers as I had seen it. George's wife said that she had always understood that she was the daughter, by a first wife of the English gentleman who had raised her, and that his present wife was a step-mother of whom, however she was very fond.

There is no need of prolonging my story. By means of the telegraph, we learned that Eleanor had been adopted from a foundling asylum, and that her foster parents had kept her in ignorance of this fact for fear it might annoy her. Her own father and mother had died long since. The portrait in ivory had been painted by the husband, and it was fastened to the child's clothing when she was brought to the asylum by the poor neighbors who had cared for the dead Eleanor in her last illness.

But one more point remains to be explained and that is the reason for my change of feeling on the subject of spiritualism. For from being a profound believer, I have again become a skeptic. We examined the room upstairs, and finally discovered that old man Rivers in his indignation had not, as had been supposed, destroyed the portrait of his daughter, but had employed an inferior artist to paint a landscape over it, thus completely obliterating the face except from one point of view. The landscape, when looked at from this point became invisible, and the face could be distinctly seen in its stead.

It was this that I had seen on the occasion of the supposed visitation.

Charles Theodore Greve