

Missus Mooney's
HALFPENNY DREADFULS PRESENTS
**HOW SWEET THE SPIRIT
OF THOSE DEPARTED**

A SCINTILATING TALE OF WOE



A PENNYDREADFUL BY CONNIE SPEARS

Edited by Missus Eugenia Mooney for HalpennyDreadfuls.com

How Sweet The Spirit of Those Departed

By Connie Spears

Miss Euphemia Bennett walked briskly through the front door of the Bury Street home she shared with her Mother and Father. She handed her hat and coat to the housekeeper.

“Father!” She called out, “Father, where are you?”

Dr. Phineas Bennett walked out of his study, “Why are you bellowing so, Euphemia? Really, it’s not ladylike.”

“And when have you ever known me to be ladylike father?” Euphemia retorted.

“Always Miss Bennett, but precocious as well!” The voice coming from behind her father was that of Edmund Jones, Dr. Bennett’s closest friend.

“Better precocious than simpering and histrionic, I think, Mr. Jones.” she quipped and all three laughed as she took her father’s arm and led them to the parlour.

As they entered the room, Mrs. Harriet Bennett, Euphemia’s mother rang the bell to have tea brought in. As everyone settled, Euphemia expounded on the scintillating adventures of her day at the British Museum and Bloomsbury Square.

Mrs. Bennett looked at her daughter with disdain. “Why can you not do things other young ladies do, such as learn the piano or sew?”

Euphemia looked at her father beseechingly as she poured tea into the china cups the housekeeper had placed on the table in front of her.

“Mrs. Bennett, please do not discourage Euphemia’s interest in expanding her mind.” Dr. Bennett implored his wife.

“You give her far too much freedom dear husband. She will never find a husband until she can behave like a proper young lady.” Mrs. Bennett voiced adamantly.

Dr. Bennett grimaced as a fit of coughing wracked his body. Euphemia jolted up and rushed to assist her father.

“Bring me some brandy Effie” choked her father.

She crossed the hall to her father’s study and brought back a small crystal glass of brandy. He took a small sip of it and leaned back in his seat as the coughing fit subsided.

With that Edmund rose from his seat, “I will leave you now, feel better my friend and I will call on you in a few days.” Brief handshakes between the two friends commenced and Mr. Jones headed for the door where he was met by the Bennett’s housekeeper Esther with his hat and coat.

Turning to her husband Mrs. Bennett gently insisted they both retire to bed.

Dr. Bennett rose “Perhaps an early night is in order, I am feeling a bit worn out” He kissed Euphemia on the head “Never stop being curious my child, it suits you well.”

Euphemia reached out to her father and grasped his hand “Good Night father, sleep well.”

The next morning a blood curdling screech rang through the house. Euphemia startled from her sleep, quickly rose from her bed. The continued loud shrieking of the housekeeper overwhelmed her with trepidation as she grabbed her dressing gown and followed the horrid sound to her father’s room.

“What is it? What is wrong for heaven’s sake?” Euphemia shouted at the housekeeper as she moved toward her father’s room.

The housekeeper stood wringing her apron in her hands. “It’s Dr. Bennett, Miss Euphemia. He won’t wake and looks very queer indeed.”

Euphemia pushed past the distraught housekeeper into her father's room. She was aghast to find her father laying inert, pallid; his bed clothes sodden. Suddenly his body fell into a paroxysm, startling both women.

"Esther run...run and fetch a physician, quickly!" snapped Euphemia.

With that the housekeeper ran past Mrs. Bennett who had now entered the room. The sight of her husband caused her to swoon as she barely made it to the chair at the end of the bed. Euphemia looked over at her mother who was now as pale as an apparition.

"Whatever is wrong with him?" her mother gasped.

"I don't know mother, but he is very ill, of that you can be sure." Euphemia remarked as she wiped her father's feverish face.

Both she and her mother waited for the return of the housekeeper and the physician for what seemed like an eternity. Esther returned with Dr. Dunrite, the acting physician in their borough. After a brief examination of Mr. Bennett, the Doctor was unable to administer any elixirs that eased the condition, nor did he have any explanations as to what the issue might be. Euphemia thanked the Doctor for his time and showed him out.

At a quarter past two that afternoon Esther stopped all the clocks in the home to mark the passing of Dr. Bennett. She then covered all the mirrors with black cloth and drew the window curtains to the outside world.

The next day, Euphemia, in despair made the short journey to call upon the photographer for one final photograph of her father.

A few days later the photographer and his assistant arrived, and Mr. Bennett's body was placed into his study by the pair. Mrs. Bennett and Euphemia watched as the photographer and his assistant fastidiously positioned Dr. Bennett in order to take his image.

When the sullen task was completed and Esther finally saw the gentlemen out she closed the front door to the house and headed off to the market.

Despite Mr. Bennett's death the household was expected to run as it always had.

All was quiet for the time being. Euphemia sat with her disconsolate mother by her side. "Mother please, have something. You must keep up your strength." Pouring a cup of tea Euphemia added a heaping spoon of sugar and encouraged her mother to take a drink.

By late afternoon news of Dr. Bennett's death made the rounds, as neighbours and friends began to call at the house. Esther was kept busy turning most away but graciously accepting condolences on behalf of the family. She did however show in Mr. Bennett's dear friend Mr. Jones along with a young lady caller into the parlour.

"Mrs. Bennett, Miss Bennett, I am so very sorry and came as soon as I received the news. Does the physician not know what caused his death?" Mr. Jones asked.

Euphemia shook her head solemnly and recounted the physician's visit and his confusion at what had caused the untimely death. "As you know Mr. Jones, Father simply complained of fatigue that evening; we never dreamt to wake to this nightmare."

Cora Griffiths, Euphemia's best friend, went immediately over to her and hugged her tightly. "Oh Effie! I am heartbroken for you; I am so sorry!"

A short time later Cora rose to leave, she turned to her dear friend, "Effie, if you need anything, please don't hesitate to ask."

Euphemia walked her friend to the door, Mr. Jones followed. "Cora, do you still attend the Spiritualist meetings? " he queried.

Euphemia was helping Cora with her coat. Cora could see she was pondering the possibilities of attending a meeting with her.

"Do you think perhaps if I went, I might hear from my father, perhaps he could tell me what happened to take him from us." Euphemia asked the pair.

Cora nodded, "Of course you are welcome, but we cannot be sure who will choose to cross over from the other side and speak to us. Your father may not appear."

"I understand Cora" said Euphemia, "but I would still like to attend."

“Very well, I will be in touch. Effie, do take care of yourself, and again, am very sorry about your father.” said Cora sympathetically as she gave Euphemia another hug.

Mr. Jones followed behind the two young women, “I too will bid you a good evening. Please let me know if there is anything I can do to help. I am at your service.” Holding the door for Cora, the two left.

As Cora and Mr. Jones made their way down the steps to the walkway in front of the Bennett house Mr. Jones asked Cora more about her friend within the Spiritualist community who was purported to be a medium. “Tell me Miss Griffith...how does this work?”

Cora became quite animated as she explained “Oh Mr. Jones it is truly amazing. She is able to communicate with the dead and deliver messages from the beyond. It’s quite thrilling and terrifying at the same time!”

Her spirited explanation caught Mr. Jones’ attention. “Well, you have certainly piqued my interest. I would like to accompany Miss Bennett and yourself, should you attend one evening.”

Excited at the prospect Cora responded, “Oh of course! You would be more than welcome. I will let you know when she is next holding a Circle. Goodnight Mr. Jones”

“Good night Miss Griffiths, until then.” Mr. Jones turned and walked into the night.

A few days later, Euphemia found herself, along with Cora and Mr. Jones, standing in the foyer of the home of Mrs. Adelia White. The servants took their wet coats and hats as they waited with several other people to be escorted into the parlour.

The atmosphere was electric, everyone filled with both dread and anticipation of what the evening might hold. The double doors to the parlour opened and they were invited in by a tall man in a dark suit. The group gathered closer together as they moved into the room. The parlour was dimly lit with candles and gas lighting. There was a large round wooden table in the centre of the room.

“Please take a seat” the tall man gestured as everyone took their place around the

large table. Euphemia noticed a scent wafting through the room. "Cora, what is that fragrance?"

Cora leaned in close and whispered, "Mrs. White likes to use incense to help set the mood and relax everyone."

It seemed a very long time had passed when suddenly the curtains at the opposite end of the room opened and Mrs. White, dressed completely in black entered the room. She nodded a greeting to the group and sat in the sole unoccupied seat.

The medium looked around at each person seated at the table, she closed her eyes for a moment. She opened her eyes and addressed the group. "Thank you for coming and sharing your energy with us tonight. This evening we will be speaking to those who have crossed over to the other side. They may be gone in body, but in Spirit they are still very near to us. As I will reach through the veil and bring your loved ones close to you some of you may be very disturbed by what you hear and see this evening but know that they come with love and in peace. I ask that you keep yourselves calm; it is important that you do not break my trance once I have begun. Please only answer questions that myself or those who join us from Spirit ask of you. I will ask you all now to join hands."

Euphemia, Cora and Edmund joined hands with the others around the table. The room fell silent as a chill draft wafted through the room causing the flames on the candles to dance, throwing eerie patterns on the walls and the faces of those seated around the table. Euphemia gripped Cora's hand tighter, Cora smiled back at her friend.

The Medium took three long deep breaths and closed her eyes. "Spirits that were, we ask that you come forward this evening and speak with us. We call you with love that you may see your way to speaking with us."

The room was ethereal in its silence. One of the women shrieked as a loud crack of thunder shook the room and lightning flashed behind the heavily curtained windows causing everyone at the table to jump.

"Silence! Please!" Mrs. White called out. "There is someone here with us. It is a woman, she passed with a disorder of the lungs, consumption, she laboured to breathe at the end of her life."

A man near Cora spoke, "That could be my wife Ruth, she died young, she suffered so."

He became teary.

“Is that who you are, are you Ruth?” asked the medium.

A shiver passed through Euphemia as she heard the faintest sigh to her left.

“Yes,” Mrs. White said, “It is Ruth. Do you have a question for her Sir?”

The man began to cry softly, “Ruth, if you can hear me, we have lost your ring. I want to make sure that Sophia receives it, but we cannot find it. Can you tell me please where it is?”

Mrs. White tilted her head to the side as if straining to hear something, “Ruth says the ring you seek is in a box in the very back of a drawer in her dressing table. A velvet box.”

The man thought for a moment and responded, “I have checked that drawer.”

The medium nodded, “Ruth asks that you check again please.”

The man replied that he would and thanked her for the message.

Euphemia looked at her companions incredulously. “This can’t be!” she whispered.

Cora nodded excitedly, “Oh Effie isn’t she amazing?”

Euphemia was unsure, she looked at Edmund who was very pale. “Are you alright Mr. Jones?”

“Please remain silent unless spoken to,” asked Mrs. White. The medium looked directly at Euphemia. “You are here because of a very tragic loss, sudden.”

Euphemia was shocked. "Yes Mrs. White. I recently..."

The medium cut her off. "Do not tell me, Spirit will provide all the answers." She looked around the room and then back at Euphemia. Once again, she tilted her head, listening. "I have a gentleman here for you young lady, he is tall, striking, a physician I believe." Euphemia gasped. The flame of the candle closest to her shot up into the air, crackling loudly.

"He tells me he died suddenly, painfully. He wants you to know there was nothing you could have done to save him." the medium drew her words out in the most dramatic manner.

Euphemia looked again at her companions, Mr. Jones was pale, his eyes wide.

"He tells me he did not die of natural causes," she continued. "He tells me you must get justice for his murder" at this announcement Mrs. White raised her voice to a loud high-pitched tone startling everyone at the table.

With this Edmund shot out of his seat almost toppling the candle closest to him and once again startling all the guests in the room.

"This is a joke Madam! I do not believe anything you have said here tonight. No one would murder my friend; he was loved by all!" Mr. Jones retorted as he headed to the door of the parlour. "I cannot continue to be a part of this charade; ladies, we should leave."

Cora and Euphemia stood. Cora began to make her way toward Mr. Jones when Euphemia refused to follow. Instead she blurted out "But how? Please ask him how he was murdered!"

The candle in the centre of the table was extinguished by a cold gust of wind that seemed to come from nowhere.

"Poison." was the single word spoken by the medium. Euphemia heard a small shriek as the room began to spin and turn black.

She awoke to smelling salts and the look of worry on her mother's face. "Oh, My Dear, you had me so worried!"

Cora rushed to her friend's side. "Effie, are you well? You fainted! Thank heavens for Mr. Jones. He dashed back when he saw you begin to fall and caught you before you sank to the floor. He then scooped you up and carried you to his carriage!"

Mrs. Bennett waved Cora away with the cloth in her hand, "I told you not to go to that woman's house! She is a charlatan and look what came of it?"

Euphemia sat up, "But Mother, what she said! She said Father had been murdered! Poisoned! How can we just ignore that? We must call the police and report this!"

Mr. Jones answered in a most matter of fact way. "Miss Bennett, I am sure the police will put little stock in the ravings of a woman who claims to speak with the dead. What she did tonight was nothing short of horrible theatrics contrived to strike fear and nothing more."

Esther brought in a tray of hot tea and biscuits. "Miss Euphemia, please have some tea and biscuits, calm yourself." The housekeeper poured a cup of tea, sugared it well and placed it in the still trembling hands of Euphemia.

Cora sat next to her friend and placed her arm around Euphemia's shoulder and suggested, "Perhaps something a little bit stronger. What about a small glass of Brandy to boost your fortitude Effie?"

Mrs. Bennett nodded at Esther who headed for Dr. Bennett's office. Mr. Jones moved quickly towards them, "Perhaps what Miss Bennett needs more than anything is a rest. Esther, will you take her to her room and settle her in for the night?" Euphemia nodded, "Yes, I think Mr. Jones is right. I am very tired and just want to lie down. Thank you, Mr. Jones, for your assistance tonight." She rose from the sofa, bid them all a good night and headed for the stairs.

Edmund bowed "Of course Miss Bennett. Goodnight Ladies, I will excuse myself for now, I am also quite weary." he picked up his coat and hat and left the house.

That night Euphemia had trouble sleeping. She rose from bed, put on her dressing gown, took up the chamber stick and crept down the stairs towards her father's study. She opened the heavy wooden door slowly and crept softly inside. She shut the door behind her and used the candle to light the way to her father's desk.

She lit the lamp and the room brightened softly. She sat in the chair opposite her father's. They had spent many evenings talking here. Dr. Bennett often expounded on the different scripts used to heal the ill. He was always willing to teach her, never seeing her as member of the weaker sex, but intelligent and willing to learn.

"Oh Father, I miss you terribly. I cannot believe you are gone." Euphemia cried softly as she moved about the room, touching books and the paperweight on his desk. She could almost feel her father there in the room with her. She sat in his chair and opened the large middle drawer. There she saw a large leather-bound book, which she placed on the desk. She opened the book and began to flip through the pages, quickly realizing it was her father's journal. She came across a page that had an entry she found strange.

"Met with E tonight, tried to explain how important it was to keep things quiet. That no one must know what we are doing. Our very lives depend on it."

Whoever was "E" she wondered and what was this secret? What could her father possibly be involved in that could be so dangerous? She heard footsteps coming and wondered who would be up so late.

She saw a shadow under the door and quickly extinguished the lamp and hid under the desk. She heard the door open and saw the flicker of candlelight coming closer to where she was concealed.

The footsteps moved past her to the small tea cart her father used as a bar in his study.

The figure was wrapped in a blanket and reached out to pick up the crystal brandy decanter, turned and left the room, quietly closing the door with a soft click.

Euphemia came out from under the desk and quickly made her way in the dark to the door. When she stepped into the corridor, she saw Esther heading for the kitchen and followed. Esther was at the sink pouring the brandy down the drain.

“Esther, what are you doing?” Euphemia remarked sharply.

The housekeeper was so startled that she dropped the decanter, shattering it in the sink. She clutched the blanket tightly around her. “Oh Miss Euphemia, you scared me to death!”

Euphemia wanted answers and continued to question Esther. “What were you doing Esther? Why were you pouring out father’s brandy?”

“Well Miss, I didn’t think anyone would drink it now.” Esther said sheepishly, eyes diverted to the floor.

Euphemia looked at her quizzically “But why do that in such a clandestine way in the night?”

The young woman was pale in the dimly lit room and stammered as she replied. “Well Miss, I-I couldn’t sleep, so I thought I would just do some odds and ends around the house.”

Euphemia looked doubtfully at the woman, then it struck her, “Where did the Brandy come from Esther, who brought it?”

Esther replied “Why, it was Mr. Jones, Miss.”

Was this the ‘E’ her father mentioned in his journal? Could it be Edmund, or was it

Esther, or was it someone else entirely? The number of possibilities was growing exponentially in Miss Bennett's mind and she asked the housekeeper her thoughts, "Do you think the medium was correct Esther, do you think my father was murdered?"

The young woman began to tremble, "I wouldn't know about anything like that Miss." She was visibly shaken.

Euphemia pushed, "I think you might Esther. I think you might know more than you are telling me." Then Esther began to cry. "What is it Esther, you can tell me anything," trying her best to convince the housekeeper to talk.

Esther sat, distraught, at the kitchen table. "Mr. Jones did bring the brandy, this is true, but Miss Cora brought a powder to the house a few days later. She said that Dr. Bennett had been feeling unwell and that you asked her to get him a script. She said I should put it in his brandy because he would not take it on his own."

Euphemia reached for the counter to steady herself. "Miss Cora?"

Esther nodded, "Yes, Miss. I am ever so sorry, now I am afraid that is what made him ill Miss. Maybe I was wrong to do as Miss Cora asked"

"I am afraid you may have been very wrong, Esther." Miss Bennett's head was spinning from the information she had just pried from Esther.

The following day Euphemia sent a note off to both Cora and Mr. Jones asking them to meet her at her home at 2 pm that afternoon. She greeted Cora and Mr. Jones at the front door upon their arrival. "Thank you for coming, please come into the parlour."

They followed her into the room where the table was set with a tray of tea, biscuits and a decanter of brandy with small crystal glasses. "Please sit down," she gestured to the sofa. The two sat, looking around at the crates strewn about the room.

"I am glad you came to visit today; I have been quite lonely since mother has gone to stay with her sister. I too will be following in a few weeks, once the house is rented. We

need to move away from here, it is too difficult to live here now." Effie wiped a tear from her face with the back of her hand.

Cora was shocked, "Leaving? But whatever will I do without you?"

Effie smiled, "Oh, I wouldn't worry about that dear Cora."

Mr. Jones leaned forward, "I too am sad to see you leaving. However, I understand how hard it is to lose your father, we were very close."

Euphemia began pouring them each a cup of tea, she stopped before pouring the third cup. "Would anyone prefer brandy? It was my Father's favourite; we shall remember him."

Esther came into the parlour, "Miss Euphemia, I am going to the shops now like you asked."

Euphemia nodded. 'Thank you. Please make sure the doors are locked when you leave Esther, there have been strange goings on in the neighbourhood lately.'

"Yes Miss." she replied and left.

Euphemia returned her attention to her guests
"Brandy?"

"No, thank you." Cora and Edmund both replied simultaneously.

"Tea then," Effie quipped. The trio descended into idle chatter, drinking tea and eating biscuits. Miss Bennett finally found the right moment and interjected "Cora, I was at the apothecary yesterday and Mr. Williams said you had been in about a fortnight ago. I

hope you weren't ill?"

Cora paled. "I was fetching a remedy for my mother; she was feeling under the weather."

Euphemia nodded. "Esther said you came by the house with a script for my father. I did not know he was ill. It seems odd that you would know, and I would not. Esther did as you asked and put the powder in my father's brandy."

Cora became visibly shaken and sipped her tea; the cup clattered onto the saucer in her trembling hands. "Oh Effie! I am so, so sorry, you just don't understand, I had to fix this, fix what he," she pointed at Edmund, "And your father were doing! It was a sin! It would have destroyed your family!" she sobbed.

Suddenly understanding, Edmund stood "How dare you!" he raged at Cora. "You killed him? You had no business meddling in my private life! I will call the constable right now; you will rot in prison if they don't hang you!" he headed for the door.

"Don't bother, Mr. Jones. The doors are locked, and you will not be able to leave," Euphemia explained.

He turned, "You cannot keep me in here, this is outrageous!"

"I would like to know exactly what was going on with you and my father that made Cora become a murderer. That's what you are Cora, a murderer." Euphemia stated coldly. Cora flinched at the word.

Edmund's shoulders sagged as he sat in the chair. "I loved your father, and he loved me. He would never have left you or your mother, and I understood and agreed to that. We kept things a secret hoping to save everyone from the embarrassment, whilst we spent furtive time together." He placed his head in his hands and began to weep. "I am sorry."

"See Effie! What did I tell you! The egregious behaviour of your father and Mr. Jones needed to stop! I did it for you!" Cora beseeched.

“Killing my father was for me? Perhaps I can return the favour, but first, let’s have a brandy to settle our nerves.” She poured out three glasses, handing one to each of her guests. “I will save your family from the embarrassment of their daughter being hanged for murder. Please drink, calm yourself. Oh, don’t worry, it is not my father’s brandy.”

Cora and Edmund waited for Euphemia to drink before sipping from their own glasses.

Effie continued...“What makes me upset Cora, is that you elicited the help of the poor, unwitting Esther; with no idea she was the henchman in your murderous plot.” Miss Bennett continued to elicit the details of her conversation with Esther and how she had told her everything she knew. The powder from Cora and how to administer it to Dr. Bennett.

Somewhere in Euphemia’s recitation, Cora became excited and attempted to stand. She then placed her hand on her stomach, “I am feeling particularly unwell Euphemia and would like to go home.” She stumbled and fell to the sofa contorting in a seizure.

Edmund looked over at Euphemia with an intense look of horror upon his face as he slumped back in his chair, “What have you done Euphemia?” He attempted to wipe his brow, which was now feverish and sweating.

“I have done just what the medium said father wanted. I have brought justice to his murder.” Euphemia sat and watched as the two writhed in pain as seizures overtook their bodies.

Miss Bennett continued to sip her brandy as she wrote a letter that would be found on the tea tray explaining what had happened. The whole sordid story of how her dear friend had purchased strychnine at the apothecary after discovering her father’s secret. How her father had been living a double life with Mr. Edmund Jones and how she, Euphemia, had enacted her revenge, reciting the fact she knew she would certainly go to jail if not death for enacting that revenge. As her pain grew it made it impossible to

continue writing. Her greatest regret was her mother would likely be committed to an asylum in grief, and poor Esther would be the one to find the three of them, but it was how it had to be.

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