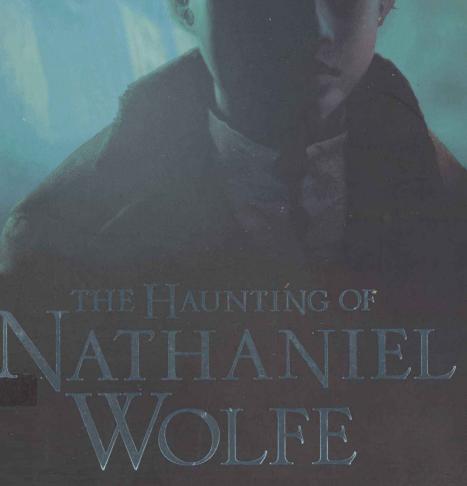
BRIAN KEANEY



TALKING TO THE DEAD...



BRIAN KEANEY

ORCHARD BOOKS

338 Euston Road, London NW1 3BH Orchard Books Australia Level 17/207 Kent Street, Sydney, NSW 2000

First published in 2008 by Orchard Books A paperback original Text © Brian Keaney 2008

ISBN 978 1 84616 520 7

The right of Brian Keaney to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted by him in accordance with the Copyright,

Designs and Patents Act, 1988.

All rights reserved.

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

13579108642

Printed in Great Britain by CPI Cox & Wyman, Reading, RGI 8EX

Orchard Books is a division of Hachette Children's Books, an Hachette Livre UK company.

www.hachettelivre.co.uk

THE HAUNTING OF NATHANIEL WOLFE

NATHANIEL WOLFE

BRIAN KEANEY

ORCHARD BOOKS 338 Euston Road, London NW1 3BH Orchard Books Australia Level 17/207 Kent Street, Sydney, NSW 2000

First published in 2008 by Orchard Books
A paperback original
Text © Brian Keaney 2008

ISBN 978 1 84616 520 7

The right of Brian Keaney to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted by him in accordance with the Copyright,

Designs and Patents Act, 1988.

All rights reserved.

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

13579108642

Printed in Great Britain by CPI Cox & Wyman, Reading, RGI 8EX

Orchard Books is a division of Hachette Children's Books, an Hachette Livre UK company.

www.hachettelivre.co.uk

CONTENTS

1.	Talking to the Dead	7
2.	The Mug-Hunter	22
3.	The Woman in White	32
4.	Shallow Jack	46
5.	Cat and Mouse	60
6.	Below Stairs	73
7.	Copperplate Handwriting	85
8.	A Conspiracy Unmasked	99
9.	An Accident in the Parlour	108
10.	Listening at the Keyhole	117
11.	The Oracle of the East End	126
12.	The Layer-Out	143
13.	Chiselling Charlie	162
14.	William Monkton	168
15.	Flown the Coop	180
16.	Face to Face	190
17.	Underground	196
18.	A Very Important Person	208
19.	Free and Easy	222



1. TALKING TO THE DEAD

It was a grimy March day and the smoke from hundreds of chimneys mingled its sooty breath with the mist that came drifting up from the river. By late afternoon the air had grown so thick it seemed to curdle in your lungs. People went about their business wrapped and muffled, coats buttoned up to their throats, scarves held over their mouths.

The fog transformed London. Instead of a lively, bustling city, it became a sinister and treacherous netherworld. People appeared out of the murky haze then disappeared again as it closed around them like a sea. Sounds were magnified in the gloom, even the steady chewing of a cab horse echoing dully in the lifeless air.

By seven o'clock it was dark and bone-chillingly cold. The line of people outside the William Wilberforce Memorial Hall in Wapping shivered as they shuffled slowly forwards, one by one. They never came in pairs – for these were solitary individuals. Each of them had lost a loved one. That was why they were here. They had been drawn to this place by posters stuck up all over the East End:

Wednesday 3rd March 1862
Cicero Wolfe
Medium
Clairvoyant
Summoner of Spirits
The dead will speak from beyond the grave.

Nathaniel sat on a stool inside the door of the hall, collecting the entrance fees. The customers seldom looked him in the eye. They were always a bit ashamed to be attending an event like this. You weren't supposed to seek contact with the dead, everyone knew that. But these were desperate people. There was a hole in the life of each and every one of them – a space that had once been occupied by a husband or wife, son or daughter, brother or sister, fiancé or sweetheart. They longed so badly to hear that missing voice, they no longer cared what other people thought. Even if friends and family disapproved, they had made up their minds. The flowers and cards of well-wishers had not helped

them, nor had time healed their pain. Now they were putting their faith in Cicero Wolfe.

Nathaniel had seen it all before, of course. His father had been holding seances for nearly four years and at first there had been no more than a trickle of customers. Gradually, however, word had got round and in the last twelve months the audiences had been growing. Mortality was on everybody's mind these days. Queen Victoria had started it. After her beloved Prince Albert had passed away, she'd locked herself in the palace, refusing to see a soul. Her country and empire no longer interested her. She was lost in thoughts of the world to come. Everyone was talking about her odd behaviour. Perhaps that was why more and more people were plucking up the courage to consult a medium. Death was becoming fashionable.

The hall was full tonight. When there wasn't a single empty seat Nathaniel shut and bolted the doors. A buzz of expectation settled upon the crowd. They were ready to see the man who had promised so much. But Cicero did not come out immediately. He liked to make them wait. That was the first rule of a showman: make them laugh, make them cry but always make them wait. At last, however, the curtains twitched and he stepped onto the stage. Immediately, the hall fell silent.

He was in his early forties, good-looking, with

a full head of thick black hair. (Only Nathaniel knew about the special preparation his father purchased from the chemist to disguise the grey at his temples.) He was a strong man, built like a bull with a barrel chest and muscular arms. He wore a long, black top-coat and matching trousers, grey waistcoat, white shirt and stiff collar – the uniform of a professional man, a doctor perhaps, or a lawyer. The clear light of day would have revealed a certain shabbiness about his clothes, but in the pale yellow glow of the gas lamps, he looked eminently respectable.

'Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to an evening of hope,' he began. 'I say an evening of hope because that is what I bring. Like many of you, I know how cruel it is when a loved one is snatched away. I, too, have suffered such a loss.' When he said this he put his hand to his heart and lowered his eyes, as though feeling the pain of bereavement all over again. 'Believe me, ladies and gentlemen, after my own dear wife was taken from me I raged against heaven. But not any more. For I have discovered a sacred truth that I will share with you. It is this.' He paused, leaned forwards and in a stage whisper, added, 'The dead have not forsaken us. They are always among us. Even tonight, in this very room.'

There was a gasp from the audience as he said this and one or two of them craned their necks to look about them, as if they expected to see spirits hovering in the corners of the building.

'There is so much they are longing to say,' he continued in his normal voice, 'and tonight, through me, they will speak. That is my promise.'

He held them in the palm of his hand, as he always did. This was what he was good at. Not that it was difficult, for these were people who wanted to be convinced. Nevertheless, Cicero knew exactly what to say and when to say it. 'In a moment, ladies and gentlemen, I shall sit down on this chair and make myself available to those spirits who are here tonight. But before I do so, I must request that during the seance, there is complete silence. Remember, it is as difficult for the dead to break through as it is for us to hear them. We must all assist in the process by concentrating. Focus your minds on whomever you wish to speak to. Try to think of them as they were when they were hale and healthy, for that is how they are now on the other side. Let us begin.'

He sat down on the red velvet armchair in the middle of the stage. For a long time nothing happened and the expectation in the room grew deeper. Then suddenly his face began to change. He grimaced horribly like someone in the most appalling agony. His eyes rolled in his head and he slumped back in the chair like a dead man. A moment later he

sat bolt upright again and began to speak. But not in the strong baritone voice with which he had introduced himself, for it was no longer Cicero Wolfe talking. 'I have a message for someone in the room,' he intoned in a thin quavering treble. 'Are you there, Elizabeth?'

A woman in the third row sprang to her feet. She was younger than most other people in the audience. The majority were elderly widows or widowers, but she looked no more than thirty. Yet grief had done its work on her features and she was certainly not out of place in such a company. 'Is that you, Jack?' she demanded, her voice trembling with emotion.

'Of course it's me.'

Nathaniel went over to the end of the row and signalled for her to come out. She looked stunned and moved like a sleepwalker as he led her up the steps and onto the stage. 'Ask him what his message is,' Nathaniel whispered.

'What do you want to say to me, Jack?' the woman asked.

'You must stop worrying about me, Elizabeth,' the spirit-voice continued. 'I am at peace now.'

The woman nodded, her eyes filling up with tears. 'Jack, what shall I say to Mr Mayhew?'

There was a moment's hesitation, then the voice

spoke again. 'What did I always say when I was alive?'

Elizabeth frowned. Then she nodded, eagerly. 'You said he loved nothing so much as the sound of his own voice. You said that for all his money he was just a great big windbag.'

'Exactly.'

'So you think I should turn him down, Jack?'

'You know what I think, Elizabeth.'

Elizabeth nodded. For the first time that evening she smiled and her face was transformed. Suddenly she looked young again. 'I'll tell him no, then.'

Nathaniel led Elizabeth back to her seat and a moment later another voice began to speak, thin and high – a woman's voice. 'Where is Gabriel?' it demanded.

A very tall, white-haired man with an enormous nose stood up at the back of the hall. 'I'm here, Lily,' he called out, excitedly.

Nathaniel led him up onto the stage where he stood as straight as a ramrod, despite his years. 'What is your message for me?' he demanded.

'Stop dwelling on the past, Gabriel,' Lily told him. 'You must concern yourself with the present.'

'But the boys won't speak to me any more, Lily. They've turned against me,' he complained. 'You know why that is, Gabriel.'

'I don't see why I should have to apologise.'

'You were always too proud, Gabriel.'

'So I have to go down on my knees to my own sons!' he continued, bitterly.

'You will have to leave your pride behind some day, Gabriel. There is no room for such things on the other side. Now is the time to make a start.'

Gabriel went back to his seat with his head bowed, looking a great deal more humble than when he had first walked onto the stage.

Nathaniel had to admit that Cicero was good. More than good. He was brilliant. If Nathaniel hadn't known otherwise, he might even have believed it himself. But it was all a fraud and Nathaniel was far from happy at his own part in the deception. Unfortunately, he had little choice. To say no to Cicero would have been to take his life in his hands – perhaps literally. Underneath the gentlemanly exterior, Cicero was entirely ruthless. He got his own way by bullying and if that didn't work, by violence – especially when he had a drop of gin inside him.

Ever since the death of his wife, Cicero had been inclined to take comfort in alcohol whenever things got difficult. That was what had brought about the end of his music-hall career – getting drunk, turning up late, forgetting his lines. When Nathaniel's mother