

## 32. EUSAPIA PALLADINO

Eusapia Palladino was born in 1854 in the province of Bari. She lost both her parents while she was young and was brought up by relatives who knew nothing about schooling.

She was something of a tomboy and was illiterate and unsophisticated. However, she had lots of **charm** and a **strong character**, and when she moved to Naples she was taken on as child minder by the **Migaldi** family. It was a period when people were very superstitious and easy to dupe. Spiritism sessions were really popular, and mediums and magicians attracted huge audiences who reacted with a mix of enthusiasm and fear.

The Migaldis got very interested in spiritism and, one day, Eusapia joined one of their séances. The table started moving immediately, and the family put it down to their childminder.

Eusapia became more and more popular. She gave up child-minding, and became a professional **medium**. She managed to convince some excellent scientists that the paranormal existed, and none of them saw through her tricks. Her séances usually featured **shaking tables, sudden gusts of wind, strange lights or flames, ghosts and human limbs that hit or stroked the participants. Valuable objects belonging to the participants mysteriously vanished** as well.

Eusapia's popularity started to wane when the journalist **Eugenio Torelli Voilleir** published various articles explaining some of the **tricks** she used. He noticed, for example, that when the lights were down, she always got the person on her left to hold her arm, while she held onto the person sitting on her right. She would then pretend to sneeze, yawn or fall, and quickly lift her right hand replacing it with her left, leaving one arm free to create the special effects.

Eusapia also ran spiritism sessions in **America**. **Hugo Musterberg**, a teacher at Harvard, attended one to try and find out how the woman managed to get objects to move. The teacher sat on her left, rested his foot on hers and didn't let her arm go for a moment. The séance lasted for hours but in the end the teacher realised that Eusapia moved the table simply by slipping her foot out of her boot and pushing the table leg.

In another session three conjurers hid under the table to keep an eye on what Eusapia did. Once all her tricks had been revealed, Eusapia lost the status she had acquired over her forty years in the public eye, scrutinised by leading experts in the fields of science and magic. Nonetheless, she carried on doing sessions **until a few days before her death** in Naples in May 1918.