

SMOKE & MIRRORS

A sham psychic photographer discovers his supposed talents for contacting the dead are real.

INT. PHOTOGRAPHY STUDIO. EVENING

A photography studio in Victorian England. A middle aged MAN and WOMAN in black mourning garb pose solemnly for the camera.

LEON, the tall and pale photographer, adjusts the curtain behind them before taking his place behind the camera obscura.

INT. CONSULTING ROOM. EVENING

Leon handles the death portrait of a young man. The woman places items on the table before them. A mini bible, a pair of cuff links, a jar labelled 'peanut butter'. Leon picks up the jar, examining it.

WOMAN

You said personal items? He had this every morning.

LEON

I think we have enough to proceed.

INT. DARK ROOM. EVENING

Leon pulls out a tin box labelled 'Men' and sifts through the photographic plates inside. He holds one up to the light, comparing it to the death portrait. Satisfied, he places the plate in a tray and begins to pour a solution on it.

INT. PHOTOGRAPHY STUDIO. EVENING

Leon slides the wet plate into the camera obscura and pulls out the case. He pulls the cloth over his head and the camera. The couple stare into the lens. The camera whirs and the flash lamp flares, startling them.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. CONSULTING ROOM. EVENING - NEXT DAY

Close on the portrait of the couple in the studio, with a ghostly image of a young man's face floating above them.

The woman is crying as she gazes at it.

WOMAN

That's him. I'd know him anywhere.

The man reaches for the photograph. He traces his fingers over the young man's face.

He extends a hand to Leon.

MAN

You have our gratitude, Sir.

Leon bows his head respectfully. The man pulls out a cheque book and begins to make one out.

EXT. FRONT DOOR. EVENING

Carrying a lantern, Leon shuts the door behind them and lowers the shade. On it is painted 'Leon Alderdice - Psychic Photographer'.

The lantern light diminishes and the shade goes dark. A lace clad finger reaches out, and traces the lettering of Leon's name.

INT. DRAWING ROOM. NEXT EVENING

In the drawing room of a large and wealthy household. A flash lamp flares on a posing group. Their plaque reads 'The Spiritualist Association of Great Britain (1898)'.

Leon covers his camera with its cloth and approaches the hostess, LADY CUTTERLY.

LADY CUTTERLY

Leon, my darling. You've become positively pale since I saw you last!

LEON

Not enough beef stock I wager, Lady Cutterly. Have you seen Ruth?

LADY CUTTERLY

Who my dear?

LEON

I mean Miss Winters.

LADY CUTTERLY

Is she the singer?

LEON

No. No, you must know her.

LADY CUTTERLY

Oh, this recent influx of spiritualists from America has me forgetting my own name, dear. Excuse me, the séance is about to start.

She seats herself a nearby table encircled by the group. A female MEDIUM in the centre rolls her head and moans.

Table taps come from under the table and lights flicker on the wall. The onlookers are entranced. Leon searches the room, impatiently.

A lace cuffed hand grabs Leon's shoulder. He turns, alarmed, and then smiles. It's RUTH, pale and golden, smiling gently.

LEON

Miss Winters?

RUTH

Leon. I mean, Mr Alderdice.

LEON

I didn't think you'd come.

RUTH

I wasn't sure I even could.

She smiles.

RUTH (CONT'D)

But I managed to.

She watches the séance and Leon gazes at her. He takes her hand.

LEON

Miss Winters. Ruth... You know it's so, don't you?

Ruth stares at him. The medium begins to wail.

RUTH

Leon...

He kisses her hand passionately and Ruth gasps with pleasure. The medium's wailing intensifies and suddenly she is stock still.

MEDIUM

She is here!

The candles flicker and a gust of wind disturbs the table. Ruth's face drops and she steps back. The wall lamps flare and pop into darkness.

The ladies scream and scuffling is heard. Candles are lit. The room is in confusion, all the furniture is tipped to the side. The medium is face down on the table.

Leon turns to Ruth but she is gone, just a shred of lace is in his hand.

LADY CUTTERLY

Leon! Please!

Leon rushes to Lady Cutterly's side and they help up the medium. She looks up into Leon's face.

MEDIUM

Yours. Yours is the heart she will
take. You won't get it back.

She faints.

EXT. FRONT DOOR. NIGHT

Leon unlocks the front door and shuts it behind him. A figure dashes across it and the lamp above the door flickers.

INT. BEDROOM. NIGHT

Leon undoes his jacket and vest. He pulls the piece of lace out of his pocket and inhales it's scent with satisfaction. He places it on the bedside table next to a candle and leaves the room. The candle light flickers.

INT. DARK ROOM. NIGHT

Leon examines the plate of the spiritual society and catalogues it. He holds it up to the light and spots a figure in its reflection. A lace cuffed hand grabs his shoulder and he turns, startled. It's Ruth. She seems dazed.

LEON

Ruth! How did you get in here?
Where have you been?

RUTH

I couldn't stay. I was terrified.

Leon embraces her.

LEON

Oh Ruth. I've explained it to you.
None of it was real. Just smoke and
mirrors.

RUTH

Smoke and mirrors. Have you ever
seen smoke in a mirror?

She gazes at several portraits which are strung from the ceiling. Blurry, ghostly images stare out from each.

RUTH (CONT'D)

Like your portraits. They look like
wispy bits of lace thrown in the
air. Left to land where they will.

LEON

Well, they bring the families
comfort.

RUTH

Comfort. Who comforts those who are
gone?

Leon takes her hand.

LEON

They don't matter. What matters is
us. When can we be married?

RUTH

You want me?

LEON

Ruth, my heart is yours. You must
never doubt that.

RUTH

Your love keeps me here. You must
realise that? You're the only one
that can.

LEON

What do you mean?

She gazes at him. Her eyes darken and colour rushes into her
cheeks. She appears to be gaining strength. Leon steps back,
but Ruth holds tight to his hand. Leon clutches his heart in
pain. Ruth lets out a long, slow breath.

RUTH

Very well, Leon. I will take your
heart. But I warn you. I shan't
give it back.

The lamp in the corner flares and dips into darkness.

LEON

Ruth!

A candle is lit and Leon relights the lamp. He looks for
Ruth, but she is gone. A piece of lace lies on the floor
where she stood.

INT. HALLWAY. NIGHT

Leon walks quickly down the hallway with a candle.

LEON

Ruth!

INT. DINING ROOM. NIGHT

Leon opens the door and scans the room with the candle.

INT. BEDROOM. NIGHT

The bedroom door opens and Leon approaches the bedside table. The piece of lace is now missing.

INT. PHOTOGRAPHY STUDIO. NIGHT

Leon drags a heavy chair to the centre of the studio. He sets a mirror on it and adjusts the camera to be visible in the mirror.

A wet plate is slid in, and its case discarded.

Leon holds up the flash lamp and looks his terrified reflection in the eye.

The camera whirs and the flash lamp flares.

MATCH CUT TO:

Close on: Leon and the camera staring into the portrait. A translucent image of Ruth stands next to him, her lace clad hand grips his heart.

FADE TO BLACK.