

Cedars” after the long rows of cedar trees that Alex Miller had planted around the home. As Mittie added rooms to the mansion, she also added family, beginning with her father, who lived with her until his death. Sisters and cousins came and stayed for extended periods of time, and Mittie found the years passing in a peaceful, productive way.

In 1899, Mittie’s two oldest children, Irene and McVeigh, left home to attend West Virginia University in Morgantown. The two were joined a year later by their younger brother, Lawrence, and all three graduated from the University in 1902. McVeigh, who had lived in Charleston since his graduation, returned to Morgantown in 1903 on what turned out to be a fateful trip.

According to Mittie, there was a notorious problem with the Morgantown water system at that time and those who drank unboiled water risked exposure to typhoid fever germs. Though he’d been warned against it, McVeigh drank tainted water while staying at his old fraternity house and fell violently ill with typhoid fever. After battling the disease for several weeks, he died on March 15, 1903. Lawrence fell ill with the same infection just three months later, and after hovering between life and death for more than a month, he made a full recovery.

After McVeigh’s death and Lawrence’s protracted illness, the Miller family never regained their peace and happiness. Mittie returned to The Cedars to finish her latest novel and Alex resumed his Senate duties in Charleston, but each struggled to find meaning in the old routines. Shaken by the death of his oldest son, Alex began drinking heavily, while Mittie experienced what she described as a shattered mental and physical state that endured for many months.

For more than two years she wrote nothing, keeping herself hidden away at The Cedars. It seemed nothing could assuage her grief until she met a woman whose spiritual guidance changed her life. A resident of Huntington, Mrs. Elizabeth Blake was a spiritual medium whose reputation had spread throughout the southern part of the state. According to Mittie, it was this woman who brought her the first real comfort she experienced after her son’s death, with the result that Mrs. Elizabeth Blake became a valued friend of the Miller family.

With the help of her spiritual guide and a series of psychic communications, presumably with McVeigh, Mittie began to take command of her life again. She found her first happiness in years in undertaking a European tour with her daughter Irene. But this respite from melancholy came to end when Mittie discovered her husband had been engaging in numerous affairs that eventually ended the marriage.

When the Millers were divorced in 1908, Mittie ended up with what she felt was the worst of the bargain. She retained ownership of The Cedars, but could no longer afford to live at the estate. Though she’d earned more