

"A dreadful woman," observed Mrs. Baxter half an hour later, as the two strolled back up the garden path, after seeing Mrs. Stapleton wave a delicately gloved hand encouragingly to them over the back of the throbbing motor. "I suppose she thinks she believes it all," said Maggie. "My dear, that woman would believe anything. I hope poor Laurie was not too much distressed." "Oh! I think Laurie took it all right." "It was most unfortunate, all that about death and the rest.... Why, here comes Laurie; I thought he would be gone out by now!" The boy strolled towards them round the corner of the house, tossing away the fragment of his cigarette. He was still in his dark suit, bareheaded, with no signs of riding about him. "So you've not gone out yet, dear boy?" remarked his mother. "Not yet," he said, and hesitated as they went on. Mrs. Baxter noticed it. "I'll go and get ready," she said. "The carriage will be round at three, Maggie." When she was gone the two moved out together on to the lawn. "What did you think of that woman?" demanded Laurie with a detached air. Maggie glanced at him. His tone was a little too much detached. "I thought her quite dreadful," she said frankly. "Didn't you?" she added. "Oh yes, I suppose so," said Laurie. He drew out a cigarette and lighted it. "You know a lot of people think there's something in it," he said. "In what?" "Spiritualism." "I daresay," said Maggie. She perceived out of the corner of her eye that Laurie looked at her suddenly and sharply. For herself, she loathed what little she knew of the subject, so cordially and completely, that she could hardly have put it into words. Nine-tenths of it she believed to be fraud—a matter of wigs and Indian muslin and cross-lights—and the other tenth, by the most generous estimate, an affair of the dingiest and foulest of all the backstairs of life. The prophetic outpourings of Mrs. Stapleton had not altered her opinion. "Oh! if you feel like that—" went on Laurie. She turned on him. "Laurie," she said, "I think it perfectly detestable. I acknowledge I don't know much about it; but what little I do know is enough, thank you." Laurie smiled in a faintly patronizing way. "Well," he said indulgently, "if you think that, it's not much use discussing it." "Indeed it's not," said Maggie, with her nose in the air. There was not much more to be said; and the sounds of stamping and whoaing in the stable-yard presently sent the girl indoors in a hurry. Mrs. Baxter was still mildly querulous during the drive. It appeared to her, Maggie perceived, a kind of veiled insult that things should be talked about in her house which did not seem to fit in with her own scheme of the universe. Mrs. Baxter knew perfectly well that every soul when it left this world went either to what she called Paradise, or in extremely exceptional cases, to a place she did not name; and that these places, each in its own way, entirely absorbed the attention of its inhabitants. Further, it was established in her view that all the members of the spiritual world, apart from the unhappy ones, were a kind of Anglicans, with their minds no doubt enlarged considerably, but on the original lines. Tales like this of Cardinal Newman therefore were extremely tiresome and upsetting. And Maggie had her theology also; to her also it appeared quite impossible that Cardinal Newman should frequent the drawing-room of Mr. Vincent in order to exchange impressions with Mrs. Stapleton; but she was more elementary in her answer. For her the thing was simply untrue; and that was the end of it. She found it difficult therefore to follow her companion's train of thought. "What was it she said?" demanded Mrs. Baxter presently. "I didn't understand her ideas about materialism." "I think she called it materialization," explained Maggie patiently. "She said that when things were very favorable, and the medium a very good one, the soul that wanted to communicate could make a kind of body for itself out of what she called the astral matter of the medium or the sitters." "But surely our bodies aren't like that?" "No; I can't say that I think they are. But that's what she said." "My dear, please explain. I want to understand the woman." Maggie frowned a little. "Well, the first thing she said was that those souls want to communicate; and that they

begin generally by things like table-rapping, or making blue lights. Then when you know they're there, they can go further. Sometimes they gain control of the medium who is in a trance, and speak through him, or write with his hand. Then, if things are favorable, they begin to draw out this matter, and make it into a kind of body for themselves, very thin and ethereal, so that you can pass your hand through it. Then, as things get better and better, they go further still, and can make this body so solid that you can touch it; only this is sometimes rather dangerous, as it is still, in a sort of way, connected with the medium. I think that's the idea." "But what's the good of it all?" "Well, you see, Mrs. Stapleton thinks that they really are souls from the other world, and that they can tell us all kinds of things about it all, and what's true, and so on." "But you don't believe that?" Maggie turned her large eyes on the old lady; and a spark of humor rose and glimmered in them. "Of course I don't," she said. "Then how do you explain it?" "I think it's probably all a fraud. But I really don't know. It doesn't seem to me to matter much—" "But if it should be true?"

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