

# Though One Rose from the Dead

BY W. D. HOWELLS

YOU are very welcome to the Alderling incident, my dear Acton, if you think you can do anything with it, and I will give it as circumstantially as possible. The thing has its limitations, I should think, for the fictionist, chiefly in a sort of roundness which leaves little play to the imagination. It seems to me that it would be more to your purpose if it were less *pat*, in its catastrophe, but you are a better judge of all that than I am, and I will put the facts in your hands, and keep my own hands off, so far as any plastic use of the material is concerned.

The first I knew of the peculiar Alderling situation was shortly after William James's "Will to Believe" came out. I had been telling the Alderlings about it, for they had not seen it, and I noticed that from time to time they looked significantly at each other. When I had got through, he gave a little laugh, and she said, "Oh, you may laugh!" and then I made bold to ask, "What is it?"

"Marion can tell you," he said. He motioned towards the coffee-pot and asked, "More?" I shook my head, and he said, "Come out, and let us see what the maritime interests have been doing for us. Pipe or cigar?" I chose cigarettes, and he brought the box off the table, stopping on his way to the veranda, and taking his pipe and tobacco-pouch from the hall mantel.

Mrs. Alderling had got to the veranda before us, and done things to the chairs and cushions, and was leaning against one of the slender fluted pine columns like some rich, blond caryatid just off duty, with the blue of her dress and the red of her hair showing deliciously against the background of white house-wall. He and she were an astonishing and satisfying contrast; in the midst of your amazement you felt the divine propriety of a woman like her want-

ing just such a wiry, smoky-complexioned, black-browed, black-bearded, bald-headed little man as he was.

Before he sat down where she was going to put him, he stood stoopingly, and frowned at the waters of the cove lifting from the foot of the lawn that sloped to it before the house. "Three lumbermen, two goodish-sized yachts, a dozen sloop-rigged boats: not so bad. About the usual number that come loafing in to spend the night. You ought to see them when it threatens to breeze up. Then they're here in flocks. Go on, Marion."

He gave a soft groan of comfort as he settled in his chair and began pulling at his short black pipe, and she let her eyes dwell on him in a rapture that curiously interested me. People in love are rarely interesting—that is, flesh-and-blood people. Of course I know that lovers are the life of fiction, and that a story of any kind can scarcely hold the reader without them. Yet lovers in real life are, so far as I have observed them, bores. They are confessed to be disgusting before or after marriage when they let their fondness appear, but even when they try to hide it, they are tiresome. Character goes down before passion in them; nature is reduced to propensity. Then, how is it that the novelist manages to keep these, and to give us nature and character while seeming to offer nothing but propensity and passion? Perhaps he does not give them. Perhaps what he does is to hypnotize us so that we each of us identify ourselves with the lovers, and add our own natures and characters to the single principle that animates them. But if we have them there before us in the tiresome reality, they exclude us from their pleasure in each other and stop up the perspective of our happiness with their hulking personalities, bare of all the iridescence of potentiality which we could have cast about them. Something of this

iridescence may cling to unmarried lovers, in spite of themselves, but wedded bliss is a sheer offence.

I do not know why it was not an offence in the case of the Alderlings, unless it was because they both, in their different ways, saw the joke of the thing. At any rate, I found that in their charm for each other they had somehow not ceased to be amusing for me, and I waited confidently for the answer she would make to his whimsically abrupt bidding. But she did not answer very promptly even when he had added, "Wanhope, here, is scenting something psychological in the reason of my laughing at you."

Mrs. Alderling stood looking at him, not me, with a smile hovering about the corners of her mouth, which, when it decided not to alight anywhere, scarcely left her aspect graver for its flitting. She said at last in her slow, deep-throated voice, "I guess I will let you tell him."

"Oh, I'll tell him fast enough," said Alderling, nursing his knee, and bringing it well up toward his chin, between his clasped hands. "Marion has always had the notion that I should live again if I believed I should, and that as I don't believe I shall, I am not going to. The joke of it is," and he began to splutter laughter round the stem of his pipe, "she's as much of an agnostic as I am. She doesn't believe she is going to live again, either."

Mrs. Alderling said, "I don't care for it in my case."

That struck me as rather touching, but I had no right to enter uninvited into the intimacy of her meaning, and I said, looking as little at her as I need, "Aren't you both rather belated?"

"You mean that protoplasm has gone out?" he chuckled.

"Not exactly," I answered. "But you know that a great many things are allowed now that were once forbidden to the True Disbelievers."

"You mean that we may trust in the promises, as they used to be called, and still keep the Unfaith?"

"Something like that."

Alderling took his pipe out, apparently to give his whole face to the pleasure of teasing his wife. "That 'll be a great comfort to Marion," he said, and he threw back his head and laughed.

She smiled faintly, vaguely, tolerantly, as if she enjoyed his pleasure in teasing her.

"Where have you been," I asked, "that you don't know the changed attitude in these matters?"

"Well, here for the last three years. We tried it the first winter after we came, and found it was not so bad, and we simply stayed on. But I haven't really looked into the question since I gave the conundrum up twenty years ago, on what was then the best authority. Marion doesn't complain. She knew what I was when she married me. She was another. We were neither of us very bigoted disbelievers. We should not have burned anybody at the stake for saying that we had souls."

Alderling put back his pipe and cackled round it, taking his knee between his hands again.

"You know," she explained, more in my direction than to me, "that I had none to begin with. But Alderling had. His people believed in the future life."

"That's what they said," Alderling crowed. "And Marion has always thought that if she had believed that way, she could have kept me up to it; and so when I died I should have lived again. It is perfectly logical, though it isn't capable of a practical demonstration. If Marion had come of a believing family, she could have brought me back into the fold. Her great mistake was in being brought up by an uncle who denied that he was living here, even. The poor girl could not do a thing when it came to the life hereafter."

The smile now came hovering back, and alighted at a corner of Mrs. Alderling's mouth, making it look, oddly enough, rather rueful. "It didn't matter about me. I thought it a pity that Alderling's talent should stop here."

"Did you ever know anything like that?" he cried. "Perfectly willing to thrust me out into a cold other-world, and leave me to struggle on without her, when I had got used to her looking after me. Now I'm not so selfish as that. I shouldn't want to have Marion living on through all eternity if I wasn't with her. It would be too lonely for her."

He looked up at her, with his dancing eyes, and she put her hand down over

his shoulder into the hand that he lifted to meet it, in a way that would have made me sick in some people. But in her the action was so casual, so absent, that it did not affect me disagreeably.

"Do you mean that you haven't been away since you came here three years ago?" I asked.

"We ran up to the theatre once in Boston last winter, but it bored us to the limit." Alderling poked his knife-blade into the bowl of his pipe as he spoke, having freed his hand for the purpose, while Mrs. Alderling leaned back against the slim column again. He said gravely: "It was a great thing for Marion, though. In view of the railroad accident that didn't happen, she convinced herself that her sole ambition was that we should die together. Then, whether we found ourselves alive or not, we should be company for each other. She's got it arranged with the thunder-storms, so that one bolt will do for us both, and she never lets me go out on the water alone, for fear I shall watch my chance, and get drowned without her."

I did not trouble myself to make out how much of this was mocking, and as there was no active participation in the joke expected of me, I kept on the safe side of laughing. "No wonder you've been able to do such a lot of pictures," I said. "But I should have thought you might have found it dull—I mean dull together—at odd times."

"Dull?" he shouted. "It's stupendously dull! Especially when our country neighbors come in to 'liven us up.' We've got neighbors here that can stay longer in half an hour than most people can in a week. We get tired of each other at times, but after a call from the people in the next house, we return with rapture to our delusion that we are interesting."

"And you never," I ventured, making my jocosity as ironical as possible, "wear upon each other?"

"Horribly!" said Alderling, and his wife smiled contentedly, behind him. "We haven't a whole set of china in the house, from exchanging it across the table, and I haven't made a study of Marion—you must have noticed how many Marions there were—that she hasn't thrown at my head. Especially

the Madonnas. She likes to throw the Madonnas at me."

I ventured still farther, addressing myself to Mrs. Alderling. "Does he keep it up all the time—this *blague*?"

"Pretty much," she answered passively, with entire acquiescence in the fact if it were the fact, or the joke if it were the joke.

"But I didn't see anything of yours, Mrs. Alderling," I said. She had had her talent, as a girl, and some people preferred it to her husband's,—but there was no effect of it anywhere in the house.

"The housekeeping is enough," she answered, with her tranquil smile.

There was nothing in her smile that was leading, and I did not push my inquiry, especially as Alderling did not seem disposed to assist. "Well," I said, "I suppose you will forgive to science my feeling that your situation is most suggestive."

"Oh, don't mind *us*!" said Alderling.

"I won't, thank you," I answered. "Why, it's equal to being cast away together on an uninhabited island."

"Quite," he assented.

"There can't," I went on, "be a corner of your minds that you haven't mutually explored. You must know each other." I cast about for the word, and added abruptly, "by heart."

"I don't suppose he meant anything pretty?" said Alderling, with a look up over his shoulder at his wife; and then he said to me, "We do; and there are some very curious things I could tell you, if Marion would ever let me get in a word."

"Do let him, Mrs. Alderling," I entreated, humoring his joke at her silence.

She smiled, and softly shrugged, and then sighed.

"I could make your flesh creep," he went on, "or I could if you were not a psychologist. I assure you that we are quite weird at times."

"As how?"

"Oh, just knowing what the other is thinking, at a given moment, and saying it. There are times when Marion's thinking is such a nuisance to me, that I have to yell down to her from my loft to stop it. The racket it makes breaks me all up. It's a relief to have her talk, and I try

to make her, when she's posing, just to escape the din of her thinking. Then the willing! We experimented with it, after we had first noticed it, but we don't, any more. It's too dead easy."

"What do you mean by the willing?"

"Oh, just wishing one that the other was there, and there he or she is."

"Is he trying to work me, Mrs. Alderling?" I appealed to her, and she answered from her calm:

"It is very unaccountable."

"Then you really mean it! Why can't you give me an illustration?"

"Why, you know," said Alderling more seriously than he had yet spoken, "I don't believe those things, if they are real, can ever be got to show off. That's the reason why your 'Quests in the Occult' are mainly such rubbish, as far as the evidences are concerned. If Marion and I tried to give you an illustration, as you call it, the occult would snub us. But is there anything so very strange about it? The wonder is that a man and wife ever fail of knowing each what the other is thinking. They pervade each other's minds, if they are really married, and they are so present with each other that the tacit wish should be the same as a call. Marion and I are only an intensified instance of what may be done by living together. There is something, though, that is rather queer, but it belongs to psychomancy rather than psychology, as I understand it."

"Ah!" I said. "What is that?"

"Being visibly present when absent. It has not happened often, but it has happened that I have seen Marion in my loft when she was really somewhere else, and not when I had willed her or wished her to be there."

"Now, really," I said, "I must ask you for an instance."

"You want to heap up facts, Lombroso fashion? Well, this is as good as most of Lombroso's facts, or better. I went up one morning, last winter, to work at a study of a Madonna from Marion, directly after breakfast, and left her below in the dining-room, putting away the breakfast things. She has to do that occasionally, between the local helps, who are all we can get in the winter. She professes to like it, but you never can tell, from what a woman says;

she has to do it, anyway." It is hard to convey a notion of the serene, impersonal acquiescence of Mrs. Alderling in taking this talk of her. "I was banging away at it when I knew she was behind me looking over my shoulder rather more stormily than she usually does; usually, she is a dead calm. I glanced up, and saw the calm succeed the storm. Then I kept on, and after a while I was aware of hearing her step on the stairs."

Alderling stopped, and smoked definitively, as if that were the end.

"Well," I said, after waiting a while, "I don't exactly get the unique value of the incident."

"Oh," he said, as if he had accidentally forgotten the detail, "the steps were coming up."

"Yes?"

"She opened the door, which she had omitted to do before, and when she came in she denied having been there already. She owned that she had been hurrying through her work, and thinking of mine, so as to make me do something, or undo something, to it; and then all at once she lost her impatience, and came up at her leisure. I don't exactly like to tell what she wanted."

He began to laugh provokingly, and she said, tranquilly, "I don't mind your telling Mr. Wanhope."

"Well, then, strictly in the interest of psychomancy, I will confide that she had found some traces of a model that I used to paint my Madonnas from, before we were married, in that picture. She had slept on her suspicion, and then when she could not stand it any longer, she had come up in the spirit to say that she was not going to be mixed up in a Madonna with any such minx. The words are mine, but the meaning was Marion's. When she found me taking the minx out, she went quietly back to washing her dishes, and then returned in the body to give me a sitting."

We were silent a moment, till I asked, "Is this true, Mrs. Alderling?"

"About," she said. "I don't remember the storm, exactly."

"Well, I don't see why you bother to remain in the body at all," I remarked.

"We haven't arranged just how to leave it together," said Alderling. "Marion, here, if I managed to get off first, would

have no means of knowing whether her theory of the effect of my unbelief on my future was right or not; and if *she* gave *me* the slip, she would always be sorry that she had not stayed here to convert me."

"Why don't you agree that if either of you lives again, he or she shall make some sign to let the other know?" I suggested.

"Well, that has been tried so often, and has it ever worked? It's open to the question whether the dead do not fail to show up because they are forbidden to communicate with the living; and you are just where you were, as to the main point. No, I don't see any way out of it."

Mrs. Alderling went into the house and came out with a book in her hand, and her fingers in it at two places. It was that impressive collection of Christ's words from the New Testament called "The Great Discourse." She put the book before me first at one place and then at another, and I read at one, "He that believeth on me shall never die," and at the other, "Except ye believe in me ye shall all likewise perish." She did not say anything in showing me these passages, and I found something in her action touchingly childlike and elemental, as well as curiously heathenish. It was as if some poor pagan had brought me his fetish to test its effect upon me. "Yes," I said, "those are things that we hardly know what to do with in our philosophy. They seem to be said as with authority, and yet somehow we cannot admit their validity in a philosophical inquiry as to a future life. Aren't they generally taken to mean that we shall be unhappy or happy hereafter, rather than that we shall be or not be at all? And what is believing? Is it the mere act of acknowledgment, or is it something more vital, which expresses itself in conduct?"

She did not try to say. In fact, she did not answer at all. Whatever point was in her mind she did not or could not debate it. I perceived, in a manner, that her life was so largely subliminal that if she had tried she could not have met my question any more than if she had not had the gift of speech at all. But in her inarticulate fashion she had

exposed to me a state of mind which I was hardly withheld by the decencies from exploring. "You know," I said, "that psychology almost begins by rejecting the authority of these sayings, and that while we no longer deny anything we cannot allow anything merely because it has been strongly affirmed. Supposing that there is a life after this, how can it be denied to one and bestowed upon another because one has assented to a certain supernatural claim and another has refused to do so? That does not seem reasonable, it does not seem right. Why should you base your conclusion as to that life upon a promise and a menace which may not really refer to it in the sense which they seem to have?"

"Isn't it all there is?" she asked, and Alderling burst into his laugh.

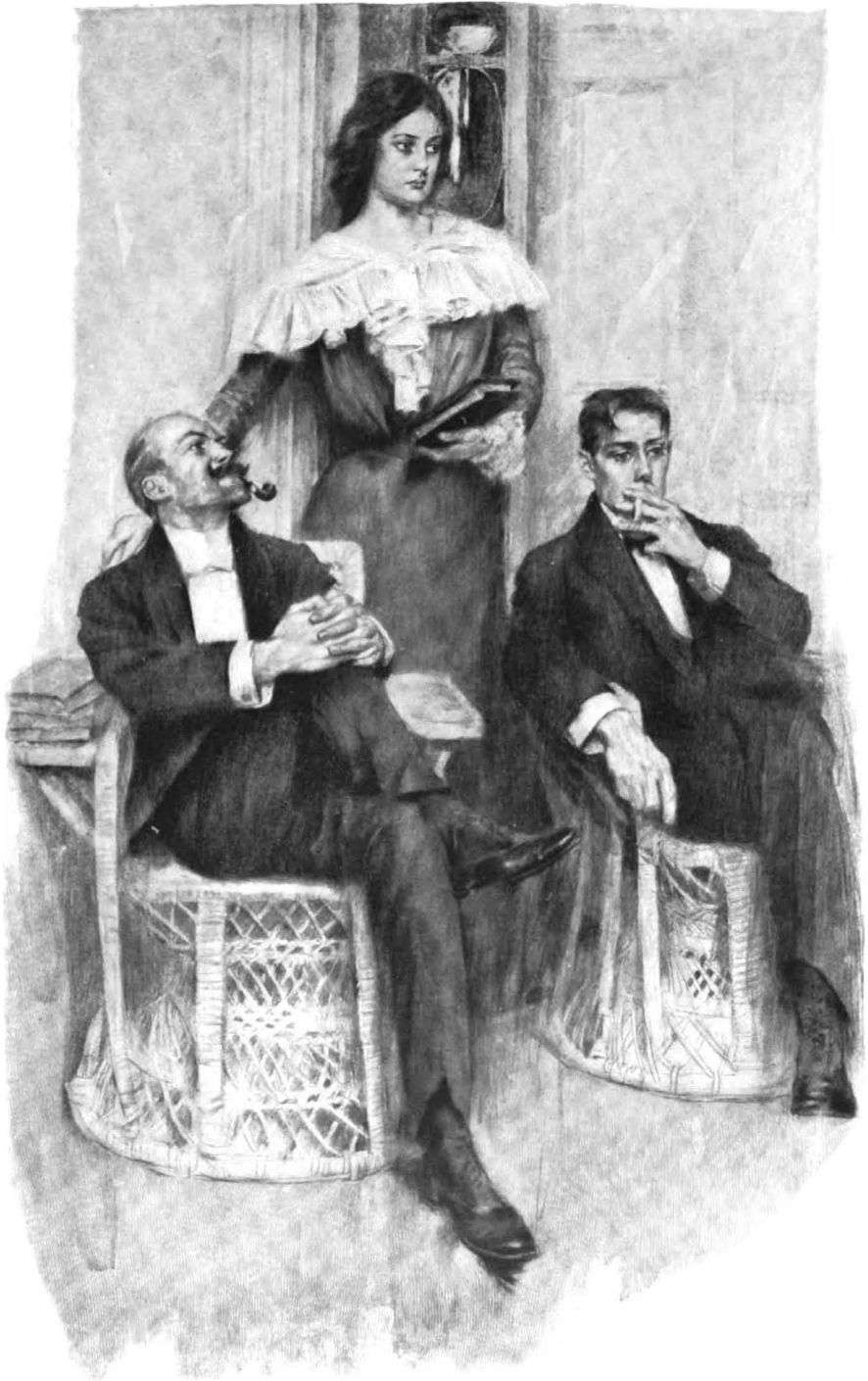
"I'm afraid she's got you there, Wan-hope. When it comes to polemics there's nothing like the passive obstruction of Mrs. Alderling. Marion might never have been an early Christian herself—I think she's an inexpugnable pagan—but she would have gone round making it awfully uncomfortable for the other unbelievers."

"You know," she said to him, and I never could decide how much she was in earnest, "that I can't believe till you do. I couldn't take the risk of keeping on without you."

Alderling followed her indoors, where she now went to put the book away, with his mock addressed to me, "Did you ever know such a stubborn woman?"

## II

One conclusion from my observation of the Alderlings during the week I spent with them was that it is bad for a husband and wife to be constantly and unreservedly together, not because they grow tired of each other, but because they grow more intensely interested in each other. Children, when they come, serve the purpose of separating the parents; they seem to unite them in one care, but they divide them in their employments, at least in the normally constituted family. If they are rich and can throw the care of the children upon servants then they cannot enjoy the relief from each other that children bring to the mother who nurtures and teaches



Half-tone plate engraved by L. C. Faber

MRS. ALDERLING CAME OUT WITH A BOOK IN HER HAND

them and to the father who must work for them harder than before. The Alderlings were not rich enough to have been freed from the wholesome responsibilities of parentage, but they were childless, and so they were not detached from the perpetual thought of each other. If they had only had different tastes, it might have been better, but they were both artists, she not less than he, though she no longer painted. When their common thoughts were not centred upon each other's being they were centred on his work, which, viciously enough, was the constant reproduction of her visible personality. I could always see them studying each other, he with an eye to her beauty, she with an eye to his power.

He was every now and then saying to her, "Hold on, Marion," and staying her in some pose or movement, while he made mental note of it, and I was conscious of her preying upon his inmost thoughts and following him into the recesses of his reveries, where it is best for a man to be alone, even if he is sometimes a beast there. Now and then I saw him get up and shake himself restively, but I am bound to say in her behalf that her pursuit of him seemed quite involuntary, and that she enjoyed it no more than he did. Twenty times I was on the point of asking, "Why don't you people go in for a good long separation? Is there nothing to call you to Europe, Alderling? Haven't you got a mother, or sister, or something that you could visit, Mrs. Alderling? It would do you both a world of good."

But it happened, oddly enough, that the Alderlings were as kinless as they were childless, and if he had gone to Europe he would have taken her with him, and prolonged their seclusion by the isolation in which people necessarily live in a foreign country. I found I was the only acquaintance who had visited them during the year of their retirement on the coast, where they had stayed, partly through his inertia, and partially from his superstition that he could paint better away from the ordinary associations and incentives; and they ceased, before I left, to get the good they might of my visit because they made me a part of their intimacy instead of making themselves part of my strangeness.

After a day or two, their queer experiences began to resume themselves unabashed by my presence. These were mostly such as they had already more than hinted to me: the thought-transferences, and the unconscious hypnotic suggestions which they made to each other. There was more novelty in the last than the first. If I could trust them, and they did not seem to wish to exploit their mysteries for the effect on me, they were with each other because one or the other had willed it. She would say, if we were sitting together without him, "I think Rupert wants me; I'll be back in a moment," and he, if she were not by, for some time, would get up with, "Excuse me, I have got to go to Marion; she's calling me."

I had to take a great deal of this on faith; in fact, none of it was susceptible of proof; but I have not been able since to experience all the skepticism which usually replaces the impression left by sympathy with such supposed occurrences. The thing was not quite what we call uncanny; the people were so honest, both of them, that the morbid character of like situations was wanting. The events, if they could be called so, were not invited, I was quite sure, and they were varied by such diversions as we had in reach. I went blueberrying with Mrs. Alderling in the morning after she had got her breakfast dishes put away, in order that we might have something for dessert at our midday dinner; and I went fishing off the old stone crib with Alderling in the afternoon, so that we might have cunners for supper. The farmerfolks and fisherfolks seemed to know them and to be on tolerant terms with them, though it was plain that they still considered them probational in their fellow-citizenship. I do not think they were liked the less because they did not assume to be of the local sort, but let their difference stand, if it would. There was nothing countrified in her dress, which was frankly conventional; the short walking-skirt had as sharp a slant in front as her dinner-gown would have had, and he wore his knickerbockers—it was then the now-faded hour of knickerbockers—with an air of going out golfing in the suburbs. She had stayed on with him through the first

winter in the place they had taken for the summer, because she wished to be with him, rather than because she wished to be there, and he had stayed because he had not found just the moment to break away, though afterwards he pretended a reason for staying. They had no more voluntarily cultivated the natural than the supernatural; he kindled the fire for her, and she made the coffee for him, not because they preferred, but because they must; and they had arrived at their common ground in the occult by virtue of being alone together, and not by seeking the solitude for the experiment which the solitude promoted. Mrs. Alderling did not talk less nor he more when either was alone with me than when we were all together; perhaps he was more silent and she not quite so much; she was making up for him in his absence as he was for her in her presence. But they were always hospitable and attentive hosts, and though under the peculiar circumstances of Mrs. Alderling's having to do the housework herself I necessarily had to do a good many things for myself, there were certain little graces which were never wanting from her hands: my curtains were always carefully drawn, and my coverlet triangularly opened, so that I did not have to pull it down myself. There was a freshly trimmed lamp on the stand at my bed-head, and a book and paper-cutter put there, with a decanter of whiskey and a glass of water. I note these things to you, because they are touches which help remove the sense of anything intentional in the occultism of the Alderlings.

I do not know whether I shall be able to impart the feeling of an obscure pathos in the case of Mrs. Alderling, which I certainly did not experience in Alderling's. Temperamentally he was less fitted to undergo the rigors of their seclusion than she was; in his liking to talk, he needed an audience and a variety of listening, and she in her somewhat feline calm, could not have been troubled by any such need. You can be silent to yourself, but you cannot very well be loquacious, without danger of having the devil for a listener, if the old saying is true. Yet still, I felt a keener poignancy in her sequestration. Her beauty had even greater claim to regard

than his eloquence. She was a woman who could have commanded a whole roomful with it, and no one would have wanted a word from her.

I am not able to say now how much of all this is observation of previous facts and how much speculation based upon subsequent occurrences. At the best I can only let it stand for characterization. In the same interest I will add a fact in relation to Mrs. Alderling which ought to have its weight against any undue appeal I have been making in her behalf. Without in the least blaming her, I will say that I think Mrs. Alderling ate too much. She must have had naturally a strong appetite, which her active life sharpened, and its indulgence formed a sort of refuge from the pressure of the intense solitude in which she lived, and which was all the more a solitude because it was *solitude à deux*. I noticed that beyond the habit of cooks she partook of the dishes she had prepared, and that after Alderling and I had finished dinner, and he was impatient to get at his pipe, she remained prolonging her dessert.

At the risk of giving the effect of something sensuous, even sensual, in her, I find myself insisting upon this detail, which did not lessen her peculiar charm. As far as the mystical quality of the situation was concerned, I fancy your finding that rather heightened by her innocent *gourmandise*. You must have noticed how inextricably, for this life at least, the spiritual is trammelled in the material, how personal character and ancestral propensity seem to flow side by side in the same individual without necessarily affecting each other. On the moral side Mrs. Alderling was no more to be censured for the refuge which her nerves sought from the situation in over-eating than Alderling for the smoking in which he escaped from the pressure they both felt from one another; and she was no less fitted than he for their joint experience.

### III

I do not suppose it was with the notion of keeping her weight down that Mrs. Alderling rowed a good deal on the cove before the cottage; but she had a boat, which she managed very well, and which



she was out in, pretty much the whole time when she was not cooking, or eating or sleeping, or roaming the berry-pastures with me, or sitting to Alderling for his Madonnas. He did not care for the water himself; he said he knew every inch of that cove, and was tired of it; but he rather liked his wife's going, and they may both have had an unconscious relief from each other in the absences which her excursions promoted. She swam as well as she rowed, and often we saw her going down waterproofed to the shore, where we presently perceived her pulling off in her bathing-dress. Well out in the cove she had the habit of plunging overboard, and after a good swim, she rowed back, and then, discreetly waterproofed again, she climbed the lawn back to the house. Now and then she took me out in her boat, but so far as I remember, Alderling never went with her. Once I ventured to ask him if he never felt anxious about her. He said no, he should not have been afraid to go with her, and she could take better care of herself than he could. Besides, by means of their telepathy they were in constant communion, and he could make her feel at any sort of chance, that he did not wish her to take it, and she would not. This was the only occasion when he treated their peculiar psychomancy boastfully, and the only occasion when I felt a distinct misgiving of his sincerity.

The day before I left, Mrs. Alderling went down about eleven in the morning to her boat, and rowed out into the cove. She rowed far toward the other shore, whither, following her with my eye from Alderling's window, I saw its ridge blotted out by a long low cloud. It was straight and level as a wall, and looked almost as dense, and I called Alderling.

"Oh, that fog won't come in before afternoon," he said. "We usually get it about four o'clock. But even if it does," he added dreamily, "Marion can manage. I'd trust her anywhere in this cove in any kind of weather."

He went back to his work, and painted away for five or six minutes. Then he asked me, still at the window, "What's that fog doing now?"

"Well, I don't know," I answered. "I should say it was making in."

"Do you see Marion?"

"Yes, she seems to be taking her bath."

Again he painted a while before he asked, "Has she had her dip?"

"She's getting back into her boat."

"All right," said Alderling, in a tone of relief. "She's good to beat any fog in these parts ashore. I wish you would come and look at this a minute."

I went, and we lost ourselves for a time in our criticism of the picture. He was harder on it than I was. He allowed, "*C'est un bon portrait*, as the French used to say of a faithful landscape, though I believe now the portrait can't be too good for them. I can't say about landscape. But in a Madonna I feel that there can be too much Marion, not for me, of course, but for the ideal, which I suppose we are bound to respect. Marion is not spiritual, but I would not have her less of the earth earthy, for all the angels that ever spread themselves 'in strong level flight.'"

I recognized the words from "The Blessed Damozel," and I made bold to be so personal as to say, "If her hair were a little redder than 'the color of ripe corn' one might almost feel that the Blessed Damozel had been painted from Mrs. Alderling. It's the lingering earthiness in her that makes the Damozel so divine."

"Yes, that was a great conception. I wonder none of the fellows do that kind of thing now."

I laughed, and said, "Well, so few of them have had the advantage of seeing Mrs. Alderling. And besides, Rossettis don't happen every day."

"It was the period, too. I always tell her that she belongs among the later eighteen sixties. But she insists that she wasn't even born then. Marion is tremendously single-minded."

"She has her mind all on you."

He looked askance at me. "You've noticed—"

He suddenly flung his brush from him, and started up, with a loudly shouted, "Yes, yes! I'm coming," and hurled himself out of the garret which he used for his studio, and cleared the stairs with two bounds.

By the time I reached the outer door of the cottage, he was a dark blur in the white blur of the fog which had swal-

lowed up the cove, and was rising round the house-walls from the grass. I heard him shouting, "Marion!" and a faint mel-low answer, far out in the cove, "Hello!" and then "Where are you?" and her answer, "Here!" I heard him jump into a boat, and the thump of the oars in the rowlocks, and then the rapid beat of the oars, while he shouted, "Keep calling!" and she answered, "I will!" and called, "Hello! Hello! Hello!"

I made my mental comment that this time their mystical means of communication was somehow not working. But after her last hello, no sound broke the white silence of the fog except the throb of Alderling's oars. She was evidently resting on hers, lest she should baffle his attempts to find her by trying to find him. I suppose ten minutes or so passed, when the dense air brought me the sound of low laughing that was also like the sound of low sobbing, and then I knew that they had met somewhere in the blind space. I began to hear rowing again, but only as of one boat, and suddenly out of the mist, almost at my feet, Alderling's boat shot up on the shelving beach, and his wife leaped ashore and ran past me up the lawn, while he pulled her boat out on the gravel. She must have been trailing it from the stern of his.

#### IV

I was abroad when Mrs. Alderling died, but I heard that it was from a typhoid fever which she had contracted from the water in their well, as was supposed. The water-supply all along that coast is scanty, and that summer most of the wells were dry, and quite a plague of typhoid raged among the people drinking the dregs. The fever might have gone the worse with her because of her overfed robustness; at any rate it went badly enough. I first heard of her death from Minver at the club, and I heard with still greater astonishment that Alderling was down there alone where she had died. Minver said that somebody ought to go down and look after the poor old fellow, but nobody seemed to feel it exactly his office. Certainly I did not feel it mine, and I thought it rather a hardship when a few days after I found a letter from Alderling at the club quite piteously beseeching me to come to him. He had

read of my arrival home in a stray New York paper, and he was firing his letter, he said, at the club with one chance in a thousand of hitting me with it. I hesitated a day out of self-respect, or self-assertion, and then, the weather coming on suddenly hot, in the beginning of September, I went.

Of course I had meant to go, all along, but I was not so glad when I arrived, as I might have been if Alderling had given me a little warmer welcome. His mood had changed since writing to me, and the strongest feeling he showed at seeing me was what affected me very like a cold surprise.

If I had broken in on a solitude in that place before, I was now the intruder upon a desolation. Alderling was living absolutely alone except for the occasional presence of a neighboring widow—all the middle-aged women there are widows, with dim or dimmer memories of husbands lost off the Banks, or elsewhere at sea—who came in to get his meals and make his bed, and then had instructions to leave. It was in one of her prevailing absences that I arrived with my bag, and I had to hammer a long time with the knocker on the open door before Alderling came clacking down the stairs in his slippers from the top of the house, and gave me his somewhat defiant greeting. I could almost have said that he did not recognize me at the first bleared glance, and his inability, when he realized who it was, to make me feel at home, encouraged me to take the affair into my own hands.

He looked frightfully altered, but perhaps it was the shaggy beard that he had let grow over his poor, lean muzzle that mainly made the difference. His clothes hung gauntly upon him, and he had a weak-kneed stoop. His coat sleeves were tattered at the wrists, and one of them showed the white lining at the elbow. I simply shuddered at his shirt.

"Will you smoke?" he asked huskily, almost at the first word, and with an effect of bewilderment in his hospitality that almost made me shed tears.

"Well, not just yet, Alderling," I said. "Shall I go to my old room?"

"Go anywhere," he answered, and he let me carry my bag to the chamber where I had slept before.

It was quite as his wife would have arranged it, even to the detail of a triangular portion of the bedding turned down as she used to do it for me. The place was well aired and dusted and gave me the sense of being as immaculately clean and fresh as Alderling was not. He sat down in a chair by the window, and he remained while I laid out my things, and made my brief toilet, unabashed by those incidents for which I did not feel it necessary to banish him, if he liked staying.

We had supper by-and-by, a very well-cooked meal of fried fresh cod and potatoes, with those belated blackberries which grow so sweet when they hang long on the canes into September. There was a third plate laid, and I expected that when the housekeeper had put the victuals on the table, and brought in the tea, she would sit down with us, country-fashion, but she did not reappear till she came with the dessert and coffee. Alderling ate hungrily, and much more than I had remembered his doing, but perhaps I formerly had the impression of Mrs. Alderling's fine appetite so strongly in mind that I had failed to note his. Certainly, however, there was a difference in one sort which I could not be mistaken in, and that was his not talking. Her mantle of silence had fallen upon him, and whereas he used hardly to give me a chance in the conversation, he now let me do all of it. He scarcely answered my questions, and he asked none of his own; but I saw that he liked being talked to, and I did my best, shying off from his sorrow, as people foolishly do, and speaking banalities about my trip to Europe, and the Psychological Congress in Geneva, and the fellows at the club, and heaven knows what rot else.

He listened, but I do not know whether he heard much of my clack, and I got very tired of it myself at last. When I had finished my blackberries, he asked mechanically, in an echo of my former visit, with a repetition of his gesture towards the coffee-pot, "More?" I shook my head, and he led the way out to the veranda, stopping to get his pipe and tobacco from the mantel. But when we sat down in the early falling September twilight outside, he did not light his pipe, letting me smoke my cigarette alone.

"Are you off your tobacco?" I asked.

"I don't smoke," he answered, but he did not explain why, and I did not feel authorized to ask.

The talk went on as lopsidedly as before, and I began to get sleepy. I made bold to yawn, but Alderling did not mind that, and then I made bold to say that I thought I would go to bed. He followed me indoors, saying that he would go to bed, too. The hall was lighted from a hanging-lamp and two clear-burning hand-lamps which the widow had put for us on a small table. She had evidently gone home, and left us to ourselves. He took one lamp and I the other, and he started up stairs before me. If he were not coming down again, he meant to let the hanging-lamp burn, and I had nothing to say about that; but I suggested concerning the wide-open door behind me, "Shall I close the door, Alderling?" and he answered without looking round, "I don't shut it."

He led the way into my room, and he sat down as when I had come, and absently watched my processes of getting into bed. There was something droll, and yet miserable, in his behavior. At first, I thought he might be staying merely for the comfort of a human presence, and again, I thought he might be afraid, for I felt a little creepy myself, for no assignable reason, except that Absence, which he must have been incomparably more sensible of than I. From certain ineffectual movements that he made, and from certain preliminary noises in his throat, which ended in nothing, I decided that he wished to say something to me, tell me something, and could not. But I was selfishly sleepy, and it seemed to me that anything he had on his mind would keep there till morning, at least, and that if he got it off on mine now, it might give me a night of wakeful speculation. So when I got into bed and pulled the sheet up under my chin, I said, "Well, I don't want to turn you out, old fellow."

He started, and answered, "Oh!" and went without other words, carrying his lamp with him and moving with a weak-kneed shuffle, like a very old man.

He was going to leave the door open behind him, but I called out, "I wish you'd shut me in, Alderling," and af-

ter a hesitation, he came back and closed the door.

## V

We breakfasted as silently on his part as we had supped, but when we had finished, and I was wondering what he was going to let me do with myself, and on the whole what the deuce I had come for, he said in the longest speech I had yet had from him, "Wouldn't you like to come up and see what I've been doing?"

I said I should like it immensely, and he led the way up stairs, as far as his attic studio. The door of that, like the other doors in the house, stood open, and I got the emotion which the interior gave me, full force, at the first glance. The place was so startlingly alive with that dead woman on a score of canvases in the character in which he had always painted her, that I could scarcely keep from calling out; but I went about, pretending to examine the several Madonnas, and speaking rubbish about them, while he stood stoopingly in the midst of them like the little withered old man he looked.

I glanced about for a seat, and was going to take that in which Mrs. Alderling used to pose for him, but he called out with sudden sharpness, "Not that!" and without appearing to notice, I found a box, which I inverted, and sat down on.

"Tell me about your wife, Alderling," I said, and he answered with a sort of scream:

"I wanted you to ask me! Why didn't you ask me before? What did you suppose I got you here for?"

With that he shrank down, a miserable heap, in his own chair, and bowed his hapless head and cried. It was more affecting than any notion I can give you of it, and I could only wait patiently for his grief to wash itself out in one of those paroxysms which come to bereavement and leave it somehow a little comforted when they pass.

"I was waiting, for the stupid reasons you will imagine, to let you speak first," I said, "but here in her presence I couldn't hold in any longer."

He asked with strange eagerness, "You noticed that?"

I chose to feign that he meant in the pictures. "Over and over again," I answered.

He would not have my feint. "I don't mean in these wretched caricatures!"

"Well?" I assented provisionally.

"I mean her very self, listening, looking, living—waiting!"

Whether I had insanity or sorrow to deal with, I could not gainsay the unhappy man, and I only said what I really felt: "Yes, the place seems strangely full of her. I wish you would tell me about her."

He asked, with a certain slyness, "Have you heard anything about her already? At the club? From that fool woman in the kitchen?"

"For heaven's sake, no, Alderling!"

"Or about me?"

"Nothing whatever!"

He seemed relieved of whatever suspicion he felt, but he said finally, and with an air of precaution, "I should like to know just how much you mean by the place seeming full of her."

"Oh, I suppose the association of her personality with the whole house, and especially this room. I didn't mean anything preternatural, I believe."

"Then you don't believe in a life after death?" he demanded with a kind of defiance.

I thought this rather droll, seeing what his own position had been, but that was not the moment for the expression of my amusement. "The tendency is to a greater tolerance of the notion," I said. "Men like James and Royce, among the psychologists, and Shaler, among the scientists, scarcely leave us at peace in our doubts, any more, much less our denials."

He said, as if he had forgotten the question, "They called it a very light case, and they thought she was getting well. In fact, she did get well, and then—there was a relapse. They laid it to her eating some fruit which they allowed her."

Alderling spoke with a kind of bitter patience, but in my own mind I was not able to put all the blame on the doctors. Neither did I blame that innocently earthy creature, who was of no more harm in her strong appetite than any other creature which gluts its craving as simply as it feels it. The sense of her presence was deepened by the fact of those childlike self-indulgences which

Alderling's words recalled to me. I made no comment, however, and he asked gloomily, as if with a return of his suspicion, "And you haven't heard of anything happening afterwards?"

"I don't know what you refer to," I told him, "but I can safely say I haven't, for I haven't heard anything at all."

"They contended that it *didn't* happen," he resumed indignantly. "She died, they said, and by all the tests she had been dead a whole day. She died with her hand in mine. I was not trying to hold her back; she had a kind of majestic preoccupation in her going, so that I would not have dared to detain her if I could. You've seen them go, and how they seem to draw those last, long, deep breaths as if they had no thought in the world but of the work of getting out of it. When her breathing stopped I expected it to go on, but it did not go on, and that was all. Nothing startling, nothing dramatic, just simple, natural, *like her!* I gave her hand back, I put it on her breast myself, and crossed the other on it. She looked as if she were sleeping, with that faint color hovering in her face, which was not wasted, but I did not make-believe about it; I accepted the fact of her death. In your 'Quests of the Occult,'" Alderling broke off, with a kind of superiority that was of almost the quality of contempt, "I believe you don't allow yourself to be daunted by a diametrical difference of opinion among the witnesses of an occurrence, as to its nature, or as to its reality, even?"

"Not exactly that," I said. "I think I argued that the passive negation of one witness ought not to invalidate the testimony of another as to this experience. One might hear and see things, and strongly affirm them, and another absorbed in something else, or in a mere suspense of the observant faculties, might quite as honestly declare that so far as his own knowledge was concerned, nothing of the kind happened. I held that in such a case counter-testimony should not be allowed to invalidate the testimony for the fact."

"Yes, that is what I meant," said Alderling. "You say it more clearly in the book, though."

"Oh, of course."

He began again, more remotely from the affair in hand than he had left off, as if he wanted to give himself room for parley with my possible incredulity. "You know how it was with Marion about my not believing that I should live again. Her notion was a sort of joke between us, especially when others were by, but it was a serious thing with her, in her heart. Perhaps it had originally come to her as a mere fancy, and from entertaining it playfully, she found herself with a mental inmate that finally dispossessed her judgment. You remember how literally she brought those Scripture texts to bear on it?"

"Yes. May I say that it was very affecting?"

"Affecting!" Alderling repeated in a tone of amaze at the inadequacy of my epithet. "She was always finding things that bore upon the point. After a while she got to concealing them, as if she thought they annoyed me. They never did; they amused me; and when I saw that she had something of the sort on her mind, I would say, 'Well, out with it, Marion!' She would always begin, 'Well, you may laugh!'" and as he repeated her words Alderling did laugh, forlornly, and as I must say, rather blood-curdlingly.

I could not prompt him to go on, but he presently did so himself, desolately enough. "I suppose, if I was in her mind at all in that supreme moment, when she seemed to be leaving this life behind with such a solemn effect of rating it at nothing, it may have been a pang to her that I was not following her into the dark, with any ray of hope for either of us. She could not have returned from it with the expectation of convincing me, for I used to tell her that if one came back from the dead, I should merely know that he had been mistaken about being dead, and was giving me a dream from his trance. She once asked me if I thought Lazarus was not really dead, with a curious childlike interest in the miracle, and she was disheartened when I reminded her that Lazarus had not testified of any life hereafter, and it did not matter whether he had been really dead or not when he was resuscitated, as far as that was concerned. Last year, we read the Bible a good deal

together here, and to tease her I pretended to be convinced of the contrary by the very passages that persuaded her. As she told you, she did not care for herself. You remember that?"

"Distinctly," I said.

"It was always so. She never cared. I was perfectly aware that if she could have assured life hereafter to me, she would have given her life here to do it. You know how some women, when they are married, absolutely give themselves up, try to lose themselves in the behoof of their husbands? I don't say it rightly; there are no words that will express the utterness of their abdication."

"I know what you mean," I said, "and it was one of the facts which most interested me in Mrs. Alderling."

He took up the affair at a quite different point, and as though that were the question in hand.

"That gift, or knack, or trick, or whatever it was, of one compelling the presence of the other by thinking or willing it, was as much mine as hers, and she tried sometimes to get me to say that I would use it with her if she died before I did; and if she were where the conditions were opposed to her coming to me, my will would help her to overcome the hinderance: our united wills would form a current of volition that she could travel back on against all obstacles. I don't know whether I make myself clear?" he appealed.

"Yes, perfectly," I said. "It is very curious."

He said in a kind of muse, "I don't know just where I was." Then he began again, "Oh, yes! It was at the ceremony—down there in the library. Some of the country people came in; I suppose they thought they ought, and I suppose they wanted to; it didn't matter to me. I had sent for Doctor Norrey, as soon as the relapse came, and he was there with me. Of course there was the minister, conducting the services. He made a prayer full of helpless repetitions, which I helplessly noticed, and some scrambling remarks, mostly misdirected at me, affirming and reaffirming that the sister they had lost was only gone before, and that she was now in a happier world.

"The singing, and the praying and the preaching came to an end, and then

there was that soul-sickening hush, that exanimate silence, of which the noise of rustling clothes and scraping feet formed a part, as the people rose in the hall, where chairs had been put for them, leaving me and Norrey alone with Marion. Every fibre of my frame recognized the moment of parting, and protested. A tremendous wave of will swept through me and from me, a resistless demand for her presence, and it had power upon her. I heard her speak, and say, as distinctly as I repeat the words, 'I will come for you!' and the youth and the beauty that had been growing more and more wonderful in her face, ever since she died, shone like a kind of light from it. I answered her, 'I am ready now!' and then Norrey scuffled to his feet, with a conventional face of sympathy, and said, 'No hurry, my dear Alderling,' and I knew he had not heard or seen anything, as well as I did afterwards when I questioned him. He thought I was giving them notice that they could take her away. What do you think?"

"How what do I think?" I asked.

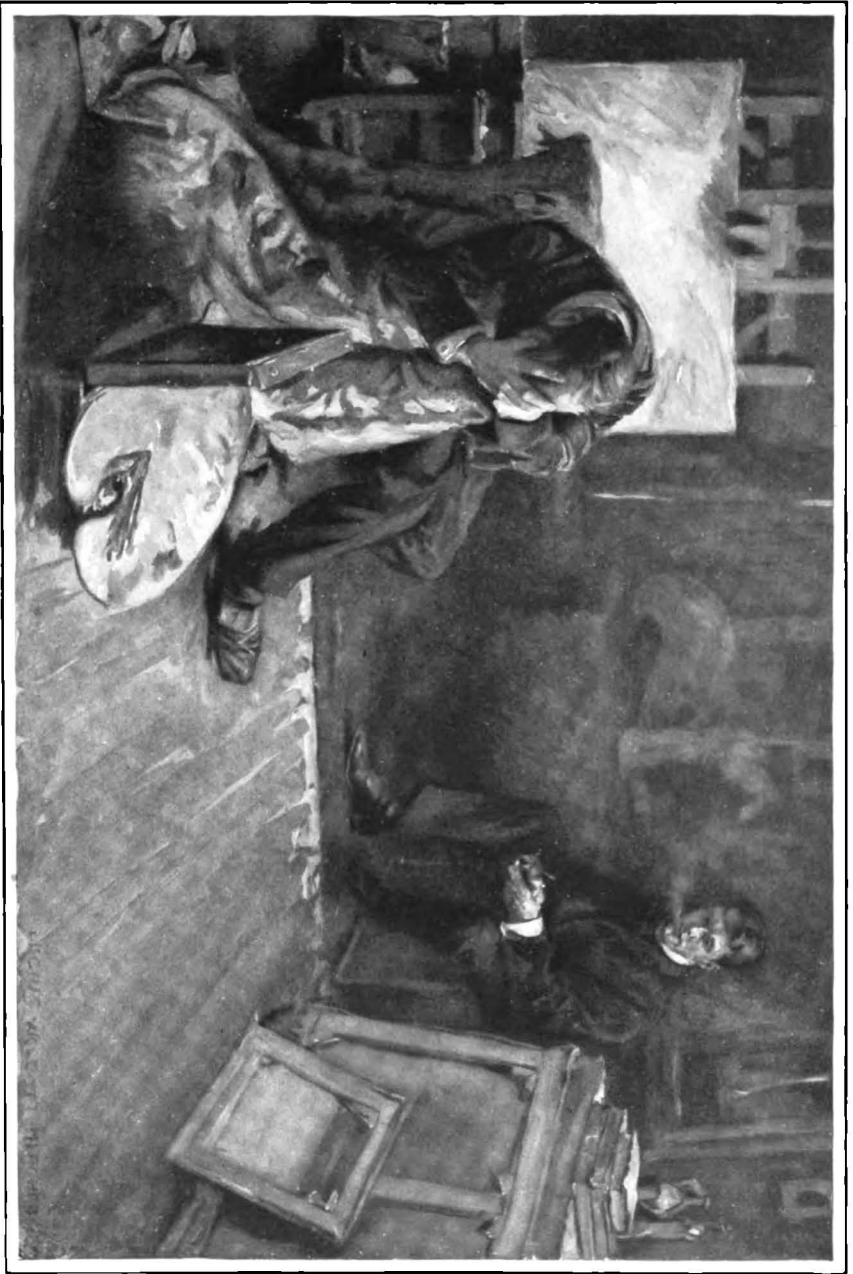
"Do you think that it happened?"

There was something in Alderling's tone and manner that made me, instead of answering directly that I did not, temporize and ask, "Why?"

"Because—because," and Alderling caught his breath like a child that is trying to keep itself from crying. "because I don't." He broke into a sobbing that seemed to wrench and tear his poor little body, and if I had thought of anything to say I could not have said it to his headlong grief with any hope of assuaging it. "I am satisfied now," he said, at last, wiping his wet face, and striving for some composure of its trembling features, "that it was all a delusion, the effect of my exaltation, of my momentary aberration, perhaps. Don't be afraid of saying what you really think," he added scornfully, "with the notion of sparing me. You couldn't doubt it or deny it more completely than I do."

I confess this unexpected turn struck me dumb. I did not try to say anything, and Alderling went on.

"I don't deny that she is living, but I can't believe that I shall ever live to see her again, or if you prefer, die to



HE BROKE INTO A SOBBING THAT SEEMED TO WRENCH AND TEAR

see her. There is the play of the poor animal instinct, or the mechanical persistence of expectation in me, so that I can't shut the doors without the sense of shutting her out, or put out the lights without feeling that I am leaving her in the dark. But I know it is all foolishness, as well as you do, all craziness. If she is alive it is because she believed she should live, and I shall perish because I didn't believe. I should like to believe, now, if only to see her again, but it is too late. If you disuse any member of your body, or any faculty of your mind, it withers away, and if you deny your soul, your soul ceases to be."

I found myself saying, "That is very interesting," from a certain force of habit, which you have noted in me, when confronted with a novel instance of any kind. "But," I suggested, "why not act upon the reverse of that principle, and create the fact by affirmation which you think your denial destroys?"

"Because," he repeated wearily, "it is too late. You might as well ask the fakir who has held his arm upright for twenty years, till it has stiffened there, to restore the dry stock by exercise. It is too late, I tell you."

"But, look here, Alderling," I pursued, beginning to taste the joy of argument. "You say that your will had such power upon her after you knew her to be dead that you made her speak to you?"

"No, I don't say that now," he returned. "I know now that it was a delusion."

"But if you once had that power of summoning her to you, by strongly wishing for her presence, when you were both living here, why doesn't it stand to reason that you could do it still, if she is living there and you here?"

"I never had any such power," he replied, with the calm of absolute tragedy. "That was a delusion too. I leave the door open, night and day, because I must, but if she came I should know it was not she."

Of course you know your own business, my dear Acton, but if you think of using the story of the Alderlings—and there is no reason why you should not, for they are both dead, without kith or kin surviving, so far as I know, unless

he has some relatives in Germany, who would never penetrate the disguise you could give the case—it seems to me that here is your climax. However, you shall be the judge of what it is best for you to do, when you have the whole story, and I will give it you without more ado, merely premising that I have a sort of shame for the aptness of the catastrophe.

I stayed with Alderling nearly a week, and I will own that I bored myself. In fact, I am not sure but we bored each other. At any rate when I told him, the night before I intended going, that I meant to leave him in the morning, he seemed resigned or indifferent, or perhaps merely inattentive. From time to time we had recurred to the matter of his experience, or his delusion, but with apparently increasing impatience on his part, and certainly decreasing interest on mine; so that at last I think he was willing to have me go. But in the morning he seemed reluctant, and pleaded with me to stay a few days longer with him. I alleged engagements, more or less unreal, for I was never on such terms with Alderling that I felt I need make any special sacrifice to him. He gave way, suspiciously, rather, and when I came down from my room after having put the last touches to my packing, I found him on the veranda looking out to seaward, where a heavy fog-bank hung.

You will sense here the sort of patness which I feel cheapens the catastrophe; and yet as I consider it, again, the fact is not without its curious importance, and its bearing upon what went before. I do not know but it gives the whole affair a relief which it would not otherwise have.

He was to have driven me to the station, some miles away, before noon, and I supposed we should sit down together, and try to have some sort of talk before I went. But Alderling appeared to have forgotten about my going, and after a while, took himself off to his studio, and left me alone to watch the inroads of the fog. It came on over the harbor rapidly, as on that morning when Mrs. Alderling had been so nearly lost in it, and presently the masts and shrouds of the shipping at anchor were sticking



up out of it as if they were sunk into a body as dense as the sea under them.

I amused myself watching it blot out one detail of the prospect after another, while the fog-horn lowed through it, and the bell-buoy, far out beyond the lighthouse ledge, tolled mournfully. The milk-white mass moved landward, and soon the air was blind with the mist which hid the grass twenty yards away. There was an awfulness in the silence, which nothing broke but the lowing of the horn, and the tolling of the bell, except when now and then the voice of a sailor came through it, like that of some drowned man sending up his hail from the bottom of the bay.

Suddenly I heard a joyful shout from the attic overhead. "I am coming! I am coming!" Alderling called out through his window, and then a cry came from over the water, which seemed to answer him, but which there is no reason

in the world to believe was not a girlish shout from one of the yachts, swallowed up in the fog. His lunging descent of the successive stairways followed, and he burst through the doorway beside me, and ran bareheaded down the sloping lawn.

I followed, with what notion of help or hinderance I should not find it easy to say, but before I reached the water's edge—in fact I never did reach it, and had some difficulty making my way back to the house,—I heard the rapid throb of the oars in the rowlocks as he pulled through the white opacity.

You know the rest, for it was the common property of our enterprising press at the time, when the incident was fully reported, with my ineffectual efforts to be satisfactorily interviewed as to the nothing I knew. The oarless boat was found floating far out to sea after the fog lifted.