The Visits

Henry James

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The other day, after her death, when they were discussing her, someone said in reference to the great number of years she had lived, the people she had seen and the stories she knew: "What a pity no one ever took any notes of her talk!" For a London epitaph that was almost exhaustive, and the subject presently changed. One of the listeners had taken many notes, but he didn't confess it on the spot. The following story is a specimen of my exactitude — I took it down, *verbatim*, having that faculty, the day after I heard it. I choose it, at hazard, among those of her reminiscences that I have preserved; it's not worse than the others. I will give you some of the others too — when occasion offers — so that you may judge.

I met in town that year a dear woman whom I had scarcely seen since I was a girl; she had dropped out of the world; she came up but once in five years. We had been together as very young creatures, and then we had married and gone our ways. It was arranged between us that after I should have paid a certain visit in August in the west of England I would take her — it would be very convenient, she was just over the Cornish border — on the way to my other engagements: I would work her in, as you say nowadays. She wanted immensely to show me her home, and she wanted still more to show me her girl, who had not come up to London, choosing instead, after much deliberation, to go abroad for a month with her brother and her brother's coach — he had been cramming for something — and Mrs Coach of course. All that Mrs Chantry had been able to show me in town was her husband, one of those country gentlemen with a moderate property and an old place who are a part of the essence in their own neighbourhood and not a part of anything anywhere else.

A couple of days before my visit to Chantry Court the people to whom I had gone from town took me over to see some friends of theirs who lived, ten miles away, in a place that was supposed to be fine. As it was a long drive we stayed to luncheon; and then as there were gardens and other things that were more or less on show we struggled along to tea, so as to get home just in time for dinner. There were a good many other people present, and before luncheon a very pretty girl came into the drawing–room, a real maiden in her flower, less than twenty, fresh and fair and charming, with the expression of some one I knew. I asked who she was, and was told she was Miss Chantry, so that in a moment I spoke to her, mentioning that I was an old friend of her mother's and that I was coming to pay them a visit. She looked rather frightened and blank, was apparently unable to say that she had ever heard of me, and hinted at no pleasure in the idea that she was to hear of me again. But this didn't prevent my perceiving that she was lovely, for I was wise enough even then not to think it necessary to measure people by the impression that one makes on them. I saw that any I should make on Louisa Chantry would be much too clumsy a test. She had been staying at the house at which I was calling; she had come alone, as the people were old friends and to a certain extent neighbours, and was going home in a few days. It was a daughterless house, but there was inevitable young life: a couple of girls from the vicarage, a married son and his wife, a young man who had 'ridden over' and another young man who was staying.

Louisa Chantry sat opposite to me at luncheon, but too far for conversation, and before we got up I had discovered that if her manner to me had been odd it was not because she was inanimate. She was on the contrary in a state of intense though carefully muffled vibration. There was some fever in her blood, but no one perceived it, no one, that is, with an exception — an exception which was just a part of the very circumstance. This single suspicion was lodged in the breast of the young man whom I have alluded to as staying in the house. He was on the same side of the table as myself and diagonally facing the girl; therefore what I learned about him was for the moment mainly what she told me; meaning by 'she' her face, her eyes, her movements, her whole perverted personality. She was extremely on her guard, and I should never have guessed her secret but for an accident. The

accident was that the only time she dropped her eyes upon him during the repast I happened to notice it. It might not have been much to notice, but it led to my seeing that there was a little drama going on and that the young man would naturally be the hero. It was equally natural that in this capacity he should be the cause of my asking my left–hand neighbour, who happened to be my host, for some account of him. But "Oh, that fellow? he's my nephew," was a description which, to appear copious, required that I should know more about the uncle.

We had coffee on the terrace of the house; a terrace laid out in one quarter, oddly and charmingly, in grass where the servants who waited upon us seemed to tread, processionally, on soundless velvet. There I had a good look at my host's nephew and a longer talk with my friend's daughter, in regard to whom I had become conscious of a faint, formless anxiety. I remember saying to her, gropingly, instinctively: "My dear child, can I do anything for you? I shall perhaps see your mother before you do. Can I for instance say anything to her *from* you?" This only made her blush and turn away; and it was not till too many days had passed that I guessed that what had looked out at me unwittingly in her little gazing trepidation was something like 'Oh, just take me away in spite of myself!' Superficially, conspicuously, there was nothing in the young man to take her away from. He was a person of the middle condition, and save that he didn't look at all humble might have passed for a poor relation. I mean that he has rather a seedy, shabby air, as if he were wearing out old clothes (he had on faded things that didn't match); and I formed vaguely the theory that he was a specimen of the numerous youthful class that goes to seek its fortune in the colonies, keeps strange company there and comes home without a penny. He had a brown, smooth, handsome face, a slightly swaggering, self–conscious ease, and was probably objected to in the house. He hung about, smoking cigarettes on the terrace, and nobody seemed to have much to say to him — a circumstance which, as he managed somehow to convey, left him absolutely indifferent. Louisa Chantry strolled away with one of the girls from the vicarage; the party on the terrace broke up and the nephew disappeared.

It was settled that my friends and I should take leave at half–past five, and I begged to be abandoned in the interval to my devices. I turned into the library and, mounted on ladders, I handled old books and old prints and soiled my gloves. Most of the others had gone to look at the church, and I was left in possession. I wandered into the rooms in which I knew there were pictures; and if the pictures were not good there was some interesting china which I followed from corner to corner and from cabinet to cabinet. At last I found myself on the threshold of a small room which appeared to terminate the series and in which, between the curtains draping the doorways, there appeared to be rows of rare old plates on velvet screens. I was on the point of going in when I became aware that there was something else beside, something which threw me back. Two persons were standing side by side at the window, looking out together with their backs to me — two persons as to whom I immediately felt that they believed themselves to be alone and unwatched. One of them was Louisa Chantry, the other was the young man whom my host had described as his nephew. They were so placed as not to see me, and when I recognized them I checked myself instinctively. I hesitated a moment; then I turned away altogether. I can't tell you why, except that if I had gone in I should have had somehow the air of discovering them. There was no visible reason why they should have been embarrassed by discovery, inasmuch as, so far as I could see, they were doing no harm, were only standing more or less together, without touching, and for the moment apparently saying nothing. Were they watching something out of the window? I don't know; all I know is that the observation I had made at luncheon gave me a sense of responsibility. I might have taken my responsibility the other way and broken up their communion; but I didn't feel this to be sufficiently my business. Later on I wished I had.

I passed through the rooms again, and then out of the house. The gardens were ingenious, but they made me think (I have always that conceited habit) how much cleverer *I* should have been about them. Presently I met several of the rest of the party coming back from the church; on which my hostess took possession of me, declaring there was a point of view I must absolutely be treated to. I saw she was a walking woman and that this meant half a mile in the park. But I was good for that, and we wandered off together while the others returned to the house. It was present to me that I ought to ask my companion, for Helen Chantry's sake, a question about Louisa — whether for instance she had happened to notice the way the girl seemed to be going. But it was difficult to say anything without saying too much; so that to begin with I merely risked the observation that our young friend was remarkably pretty. As the point admitted of no discussion this didn't take us very far; nor was the subject much enlarged by our unanimity as to the fact that she was also remarkably nice. I observed that I had had very little chance to talk with her, for which I was sorry, having known her mother for years. My hostess, at this, looked vaguely round, as if she had missed her for the first time. "Sure enough, she has not been about. I

daresay she's been writing to her mother — she's always writing to her mother." 'Not always,' I mentally reflected; but I waited discreetly, admiring everything and rising to the occasion and the views, before I inquired casually who the young man might be who had sat two or three below me at luncheon — the rather good–looking young man, with the regular features and the brownish clothes — not the one with the moustache.

"Oh, poor Jack Brandon," said my companion, in a tone calculated to make him seem no one in particular.

"Is he very poor?" I asked, with a laugh.

"Oh dear, yes. There are nine of them — fancy! — all boys; and there's nothing for anyone but the eldest. He's my husband's nephew — his poor mother's my sister–in–law. He sometimes turns up here when he has nothing better to do; but I don't think he likes us much." I saw she meant that they didn't like *him*; and I exposed myself to suspicion by asking if he had been with them long. But my friend was not very plastic, and she simplified my whole theory of the case by replying after she had thought a moment that she wasn't clear about it — she thought he had come only the morning before. It seemed to me I could safely feel a little further, so I inquired if he were likely to stay many days. "Oh dear, no; he'll go to–morrow!" said my hostess. There was nothing whatever to show that she saw a connection between my odd interest in Mr Brandon and the subject of our former reference; there was only a quick lucidity on the subject of the young man's departure. It reassured me, for no great complications would have arisen in forty–eight hours.

In retracing our steps we passed again through a part of the gardens. Just after we had entered them my hostess, begging me to excuse her, called at a man who was raking leaves to ask him a question about his wife. I heard him reply "Oh, she's very bad, my lady," and I followed my course. Presently my lady turned round with him, as if to go to see his wife, who apparently was ill and on the place. I continued to look about me — there were such charming things; and at the end of five minutes I missed my way — I had not taken the direction of the house. Suddenly at the turn of a walk, the angle of a great clipped hedge, I found myself face to face with Jack Brandon. He was moving rapidly, looking down, with his hands in his pockets, and he started and stared at me a moment. I said "Oh, how d'ye do?" and I was on the point of adding 'Won't you kindly show me the right way?' But with a summary salute and a queer expression of face he had already passed me. I looked after him an instant and I all but stopped him; then one of the faintest voices of the air told me that Louisa Chantry would not be far off, that in fact if I were to go on a few steps I should find her. I continued and I passed through an arched aperture of the hedge, a kind of door in the partition. This corner of the place was like an old French garden, a little inclosed apartment, with statues set into the niches of the high walls of verdure. I paused in admiration; then just opposite to me I saw poor Louisa. She was on a bench, with her hands clasped in her lap, her head bent, her eyes staring down before her. I advanced on the grass, attracting her attention; and I was close to her before she looked at me, before she sprang up and showed me a face convulsed with nameless pain. She was so pale that I thought she was ill — I had a vision of her companion's having rushed off for help. She stood gazing at me with expanded eyes and parted lips, and what I was mainly conscious of was that she had become ten years older. Whatever troubled her it was something pitiful — something that prompted me to hold out my two hands to her and exclaim tenderly "My poor child, my poor child!" She wavered a moment, as if she wanted to escape me but couldn't trust herself to run; she looked away from me, turning her head this way and that. Then as I went close to her she covered her face with her two hands, she let me lay mine upon her and draw her to my breast. As she dropped her head upon it she burst into tears, sobbing soundlessly and tragically. I asked her no question, I only held her so long as she would, letting her pour out the passion which I felt at the same time she made a tremendous effort to smother. She couldn't smother it, but she could break away violently; and this she quickly did, hurrying out of the nook where our little scene — and some other greater scene, I judged, just before it — had taken place, and leaving me infinitely mystified. I sat down on the bench a moment and thought it over; then I succeeded in discovering a path to the house.

The carriage was at the door for our drive home, but my companions, who had had tea, were waiting for our hostess, of whom they wished to take leave and who had not yet come in. I reported her as engaged with the wife of one of the gardeners, but we lingered a little in the hall, a largeish group, to give her time to arrive. Two other persons were absent, one of whom was Louisa Chantry and the other the young man whom I had just seen quitting her in the garden. While I sat there, a trifle abstracted, still somewhat agitated by the sequel to that

incident and at the same time impatient of our last vague dawdle, one of the footmen presented me with a little folded note. I turned away to open it, and at the very moment our hostess fortunately came in. This diverted the attention of the others from the action of the footman, whom, after I had looked at the note, I immediately followed into the drawing–room. He led me through it and through two or three others to the door of the little retreat in which, nearly an hour before, I had come upon Louisa Chantry and Mr Brandon. The note was from Louisa, it contained the simple words 'Would you very kindly speak to me an instant before you go?' She was waiting for me in the most sequestered spot she had been able to select, and there the footman left us. The girl came straight at me and in an instant she had grasped my hands. I became aware that her condition had changed; her tears were gone, she had a concentrated purpose. I could scarcely see her beautiful young face — it was pressed, beseechingly, so close to mine. I only felt, as her dry, shining eyes almost dazzled me, that a strong light had been waved back and forth before me. Her words at first seemed to me incoherent; then I understood that she was asking me for a pledge.

"Excuse me, forgive me for bringing you here — to say something I can't say before all those people. *Do* forgive me — it was so awfully kind of you to come. I couldn't think of any other way — just for two seconds. I want you to swear to me," she went on, with her hands now raised and intensely clasped.

"To swear, dearest child?"

"I'm not your dearest child — I'm not anyone's! But *don't* tell mamma. Promise me — promise me," she insisted.

"Tell her what? — I don't understand."

"Oh, you do — you do!" she kept on; "and if you're going to Chantry you'll see her, you'll be with her, you may see her before I do. On my knees I ask you for a vow!"

She seemed on the point of throwing herself at my feet, but I stopped her, I kept her erect. "When shall *you* see your mother?"

"As soon as I can. I want to get home — I want to get home!" With this I thought she was going to cry again, but she controlled herself and only pressed me with feverish eyes.

"You have some great trouble — for heaven's sake tell me what it is."

"It isn't anything — it will pass. Only don't breathe it to mamma!"

"How can I breathe it if I don't know what it is?"

"You do know — you know what I mean." Then after an instant's pause she added: "What I did in the garden."

"*What* did you do in the garden?"

"I threw myself on your neck and I sobbed — I behaved like a maniac."

"Is that all you mean?"

"It's what I don't want mamma to know — it's what I beseech you to keep silent about. If you don't I'll never, never go home. Have *mercy* on me!" the poor child quavered.

"Dear girl, I only want to be tender to you — to be perfect. But tell me first: has anyone acted wrongly to you?"

"No one — *no* one. I speak the truth."

She looked into my eyes, and I looked far into hers. They were wild with pain and yet they were so pure that they made me confusedly believe her. I hesitated a moment; then I risked the question: "Isn't Mr Brandon responsible for anything?"

"For nothing — for nothing! Don't blame *him*!" the girl passionately cried.

"He hasn't made love to you?"

"Not a word — before God! Oh, it was too awful!" And with this she broke away from me, flung herself on her knees before a sofa, burying her face in it and in her arms. "Promise me, promise me, promise me!" she continued to wail.

I was horribly puzzled but I was immeasurably touched. I stood looking a moment at her extravagant prostration; then I said "I'm dreadfully in the dark, but I promise."

This brought her to her feet again, and again she seized my hands. "Solemnly, sacredly?" she panted.

"Solemnly, sacredly."

"Not a syllable — not a hint?"

"Dear Louisa," I said kindly, "when I promise I perform."

"You see I don't know you. And when do you go to Chantry?"

"Day after to−morrow. And when do you?"

"To−morrow if I can."

"Then you'll see your mother first — it will be all right," I said smiling.

"All right, all right!" she repeated, with her woeful eyes. "Go, go!" she added, hearing a step in the adjoining room.

The footman had come back to announce that my friends were seated in the carriage, and I was careful to say before him in a different tone: "Then there's nothing more I can do for you?"

"Nothing — good−bye," said Louisa, tearing herself away too abruptly to take my kiss, which, to follow the servant again, I left unbestowed. I felt awkward and guilty as I took leave of the company, murmuring something to my entertainers about having had an arrangement to make with Miss Chantry. Most of the people bade us good−bye from the steps, but I didn't see Jack Brandon. On our drive home in the waning afternoon my other friends doubtless found me silent and stupid.

I went to Chantry two days later, and was disappointed to find that the daughter of the house had not returned, though indeed after parting with her I had been definitely of the opinion that she was much more likely to go to bed and be ill. Her mother however had not heard that she was ill, and my inquiry about the young lady was of course full of circumspection. It was a little difficult, for I had to talk about her, Helen being particularly delighted that we had already made acquaintance. No day had been fixed for her return, but it came over my friend that she oughtn't to be absent during too much of my visit. She was the best thing they had to show — she was the flower and the charm of the place. It had other charms as well — it was a sleepy, silvery old home, exquisitely grey and exquisitely green; a house where you could have confidence in your leisure: it would be as genuine as the butter and the claret. The very look of the pleasant, prosaic drawing−room suggested long mornings of fancy work, of Berlin wool and premeditated patterns, new stitches and mild pauses. My good Helen was always in the middle of something eternal, of which the past and the future were rolled up in oilcloth and tissue paper, and the intensest moments of conversation were when it was spread out for pensive opinions. These used to drop sometimes even from Christopher Chantry when he straddled vaguely in with muddy leggings and the raw materials of a joke. He had a mind like a large, full milk−pan, and his wit was as thick as cream.

One evening I came down to dinner a little early and, to my surprise, found my troubled maiden in possession of the drawing−room. She was evidently troubled still, and had been waiting there in the hope of seeing me alone. We were too quickly interrupted by her parents, however, and I had no conversation with her till I sat down to the piano after dinner and beckoned to her to come and stand by it. Her father had gone off to smoke; her mother dozed by one of the crackling little fires of the summer's end.

"Why didn't you come home the day you told me you meant to?"

She fixed her eyes on my hands. "I couldn't, I couldn't!"

"You look to me as if you were very ill."

"I am," the girl said simply.

"You ought to see some one. Something ought to be done."

She shook her head with quiet despair. "It would be no use — no one would know."

"What do you mean — would know?"

"No one would understand."

"You ought to make them!"

"Never — never!" she repeated. "Never!"

"I confess *I* don't," I replied, with a kind of angry renunciation. I played louder, with the passion of my uneasiness and the aggravation of my responsibility.

"No, you don't indeed," said Louisa Chantry.

I had only to accept this disadvantage, and after a moment I went on: "What became of Mr Brandon?"

"I don't know."

"Did he go away?"

"That same evening."

"Which same evening?"

"The day you were there. I never saw him again."

I was silent a minute, then I risked: "And you never will, eh?"

"Never — never."

"Then why shouldn't you get better?"

She also hesitated, after which she answered: "Because I'm going to die."

My music ceased, in spite of me, and we sat looking at each other. Helen Chantry woke up with a little start and asked what was the matter. I rose from the piano and I couldn't help saying "Dear Helen, I haven't the least idea." Louisa sprang up, pressing her hand to her left side, and the next instant I cried aloud "She's faint — she's ill — do come to her!" Mrs Chantry bustled over to us, and immediately afterwards the girl had thrown herself on her mother's breast, as she had thrown herself days before on mine; only this time without tears, without cries, in the strangest, most tragic silence. She was not faint, she was only in despair — that at least is the way I really saw her. There was something in her contact that scared poor Helen, that operated a sudden revelation: I can see at this hour the queer frightened look she gave me over Louisa's shoulder. The girl however in a moment disengaged herself, declaring that she was not ill, only tired, very tired, and wanted to go to bed. "Take her, take her — go with her," I said to her mother; and I pushed them, got them out of the room, partly to conceal my own trepidation. A few moments after they had gone Christopher Chantry came in, having finished his cigar, and I had to mention to him — to explain their absence — that his daughter was so fatigued that she had withdrawn under her mother's superintendence. "Didn't she seem done up, awfully done up? What on earth, at that confounded place, did she go in for?" the dear man asked with his pointless kindness. I couldn't tell him this was just what I myself wanted to know; and while I pretended to read I wondered inextinguishably what indeed she had 'gone in' for. It had become still more difficult to keep my vow than I had expected; it was also very difficult that evening to converse with Christopher Chantry. His wife's continued absence rendered some conversation necessary; yet it had the advantage of making him remark, after it had lasted an hour, that he must go to see what was the matter. He left me, and soon afterwards I betook myself to my room; bed–time was elastic in the early sense at Chantry. I knew I should only have to wait awhile for Helen to come to me, and in fact by eleven o'clock she arrived.

"She's in a very strange state — something happened there."

"And *what* happened, pray?"

"I can't make out; she won't tell me."

"Then what makes you suppose so?"

"She has broken down utterly; she says there was something."

"Then she does tell you?"

"Not a bit. She only begins and then stops short — she says it's too dreadful."

"Too dreadful?"

"She says it's *horrible*," my poor friend murmured, with tears in her eyes and tragic speculation in her mild maternal face.

"But in what way? Does she give you no facts, no clue?"

"It was something she did."

We looked at each other a moment. "Did?" I echoed. "Did to whom?"

"She won't tell me — she says she *can't*. She tries to bring it out, but it sticks in her throat."

"Nonsense. She did nothing," I said.

"What *could* she do?" Helen asked, gazing at me.

"She's ill, she's in a fever, her mind's wandering."

"So I say to her father."

"And what does *she* say to him?"

"Nothing — she won't speak to him. He's with her now, but she only lies there letting him hold her hand, with

her face turned away from him and her eyes closed."

"You must send for the doctor immediately."

"I've already sent for him."

"Should you like me to sit up with her?"

"Oh, I'll do that!" Helen said. Then she asked: "But if you were there the other day, what did *you* see?"

"Nothing whatever," I resolutely answered.

"*Really* nothing?"

"Really, my dear child."

"But was there nobody there who could have made up to her?"

I hesitated a moment. "My poor Helen, you should have seen them!"

"She wouldn't look at anybody that wasn't remarkably nice," Helen mused.

"Well — I don't want to abuse your friends — but nobody was remarkably nice. Believe me, she hasn't looked at anybody, and nothing whatever has occurred. She's ill, and it's a mere morbid fancy."

"It's a mere morbid fancy—!" Mrs Chantry gobbled down this formula. I felt that I was giving her another still more acceptable, and which she as promptly adopted, when I added that Louisa would soon get over it.

I may as well say at once that Louisa never got over it. There followed an extraordinary week, which I look back upon as one of the most uncomfortable of my life. The doctor had something to say about the action of his patient's heart — it was weak and slightly irregular, and he was anxious to learn whether she had lately been exposed to any violent shock or emotion — but he could give no name to the disorder under the influence of which she had begun unmistakably to sink. She lay on the sofa in her room — she refused to go to bed, and in the absence of complications it was not insisted on — utterly white, weak and abstracted, shaking her head at all suggestion, waving away all nourishment save the infinitesimally little that enabled her to stretch out her hand from time to time (at intervals of very unequal length) and begin "Mother, mother!" as if she were mustering courage for a supreme confession. The courage never came; she was haunted by a strange impulse to speak, which in turn was checked on her lips by some deeper horror or some stranger fear. She seemed to seek relief spasmodically from some unforgettable consciousness and then to find the greatest relief of all in impenetrable silence. I knew these things only from her mother, for before me (I went gently in and out of her room two or three times a day) she gave no sign whatever. The little local doctor, after the first day, acknowledged himself at sea and expressed a desire to consult with a colleague at Exeter. The colleague journeyed down to us and shuffled and stammered: he recommended an appeal to a high authority in London. The high authority was summoned by telegraph and paid us a flying visit. He enunciated the valuable opinion that it was a very curious case and dropped the striking remark that in so charming a home a young lady ought to bloom like a flower. The young lady's late hostess came over, but she could throw no light on anything: all that she had ever noticed was that Louisa had seemed 'rather blue' for a day or two before she brought her visit to a close. Our days were dismal enough and our nights were dreadful, for I took turns with Helen in sitting up with the girl. Chantry Court itself seemed conscious of the riddle that made its chambers ache; it bowed its grey old head over the fate of its daughter. The people who had been coming were put off; dinner became a ceremony enacted mainly by the servants. I sat alone with Christopher Chantry, whose honest hair, in his mystification, stuck out as if he had been overhauling accounts. My hours with Louisa were even more intensely silent, for she almost never looked at me. In the watches of the night however I at last saw more clearly into what she was thinking of. Once when I caught her wan eyes resting upon me I took advantage of it to kneel down by her bed and speak to her with the utmost tenderness.

"If you can't say it to your mother, can you say it perhaps to *me* ?"

She gazed at me for some time. "What does it matter now — if I'm dying?"

I shook my head and smiled. "You won't die if you get it off your mind."

"You'd be cruel to him," she said. "He's innocent — he's innocent."

"Do you mean *you're* guilty? What trifle are you magnifying?"

"Do you call it a trifle—?" She faltered and paused.

"Certainly I do, my dear." Then I risked a great stroke. "I've often done it myself!"

"*You*? Never, never! I was cruel to him," she added.

This puzzled me; I couldn't work it into my conception. "How were you cruel?"

"In the garden. I changed suddenly, I drove him away, I told him he filled me with horror."

"Why did you do that?"

"Because my shame came over me."

"Your shame?"

"What I had done in the house."

"And what had you done?"

She lay a few moments with her eyes closed, as if she were living it over. "I broke out to him, I told him," she began at last. But she couldn't continue, she was powerless to utter it.

"Yes, I know what you told him. Millions of girls have told young men that before."

"They've been asked, they've been asked! They didn't speak *first* ! I didn't even know him, he didn't care for me, I had seen him for the first time the day before. I said strange things to him, and he behaved like a gentleman."

"Well he might!"

"Then before he could turn round, when we had simply walked out of the house together and strolled in the garden — it was as if I were borne along in the air by the wonder of what I had said — it rolled over me that I was lost."

"Lost?"

"That I had been horrible — that I had been mad. Nothing could ever unsay it. I frightened him — I almost struck him."

"Poor fellow!" I smiled.

"Yes — pity him. He was kind. But he'll see me that way — always!"

I hesitated as to the answer it was best to make to this; then I produced: "Don't think he'll remember you — he'll see other girls."

"Ah, he'll *forget* me!" she softly and miserably wailed; and I saw that I had said the wrong thing. I bent over her more closely, to kiss her, and when I raised my head her mother was on the other side of the bed. She fell on her knees there for the same purpose, and when Louisa felt her lips she stretched out her arms to embrace her. She had the strength to draw her close, and I heard her begin again, for the hundredth time, "Mother, mother—"

"Yes, my own darling."

Then for the hundredth time I heard her stop. There was an intensity in her silence. It made me wildly nervous; I got up and turned away.

"Mother, mother," the girl repeated, and poor Helen replied with a sound of passionate solicitation. But her daughter only exhaled in the waiting hush, while I stood at the window where the dawn was faint, the most miserable moan in the world. "I'm dying," she said, articulately; and she died that night, after an hour, unconscious. The doctor arrived almost at the moment; this time he was sure it must have been the heart. The poor parents were in stupefaction, and I gave up half my visits and stayed with them a month. But in spite of their stupefaction I kept my vow.

THE END