The dusk was falling. I had to wait in the lofty drawing-room with three long windows from floor to ceiling that were like three luminous and bedraped columns. The bent gilt legs and backs of the furniture shone in indistinct curves. The tall marble fireplace had a cold and monumental whiteness. A grand piano stood massively in a corner with dark gleams on the flat surfaces like a somber and polished sarcophagus. A high door opened—closed. I rose.

She came forward all in black with a pale head, floating towards me in the dusk. She was in mourning. It was more than a year since his death, more than a year since the news came; she seemed as though she would remember and mourn for ever. She took both my hands in hers and murmured, ‘I had heard you were coming.’ I noticed she was not very young—I mean not girlish. She had a mature capacity for fidelity, for belief, for suffering. The room seemed to have grown darker as if all the sad light of the cloudy evening had taken refuge on her forehead. This fair hair, this pale visage, this pure brow, seemed surrounded by an ashy halo from which the dark eyes looked out at me. Their glance was guileless, profound, confident, and trustful. She carried her sorrowful head as though she were proud of that sorrow, as though she would say, I—I alone know how to mourn for him as he deserves. But while we were still shaking hands such a look of awful desolation came upon her face that I perceived she was one of those creatures that are not the playthings of Time. For her he had died only yesterday. And by Jove, the impression was so powerful that for me too he seemed to have died only yesterday—nay, this very minute. I saw her and him in the same instant of time—his death and her sorrow—I saw her sorrow in the very moment of his death. Do you understand?

‘Intimacy grows quickly out there,’ I said. ‘I knew him as well as it is possible for one man to know another.’

‘And you admired him!’ she said. It was impossible to know him and not to admire him. ‘Was it?’

‘He was a remarkable man,’ I said unsteadily. Then before the appealing fixity of her gaze that seemed to watch for more words on my lips I went on, ‘It was impossible not to...’

‘Love him,’ she finished eagerly, silencing me into an appalled dumbness. ‘How true! how true! But when you think that no one knew him so well as I! I had all his noble confidence. I knew him best.’

‘You knew him best,’ I repeated. And perhaps she did. But with every word spoken the room was growing darker and only her forehead smooth and white remained illumined by the unextinguishable light of belief and love.