

## **CHAPTER XXXIV - MY LORD'S MIND**

HERE, my old-vagabond-Vimpany, is an interesting case for you--the cry of a patient with a sick mind.

Look over it, and prescribe for your wild Irish friend, if you can.

You will perhaps remember that I have never thoroughly trusted you, in all the years since we have known each other. At this later date in our lives, when I ought to see more clearly than ever what an unfathomable man you are, am I rash enough to be capable of taking you into my confidence?

I don't know what I am going to do; I feel like a man who has been stunned. To be told that the murderer of Arthur Mountjoy had been seen in London--to be prepared to trace him by his paltry assumed name of Carrigeen--to wait vainly for the next discovery which might bring him within reach of retribution at my hands--and then to be overwhelmed by the news of his illness, his recovery, and his disappearance: these are the blows which have stupefied me. Only think of it! He has escaped me for the second time. Fever that kills thousands of harmless creatures has spared the assassin. He may yet die in his bed, and be buried, with the guiltless dead around him, in a quiet churchyard. I can't get over it; I shall never get over it.

Add to this, anxieties about my wife, and maddening letters from creditors--and don't expect me to write reasonably.

What I want to know is whether your art (or whatever you call it) can get at my diseased mind, through my healthy body. You have more than once told me that medicine can do this. The time has come for doing it. I am in a bad way, and a bad end may follow. My only medical friend, deliver me from myself.

In any case, let me beg you to keep your temper while you read what follows.

I have to confess that the devil whose name is Jealousy has entered into me, and is threatening the tranquillity of my married life. You dislike Iris, I know--and she returns your hostile feeling towards her. Try to do my wife justice, nevertheless, as I do. I don't believe my distrust of her has any excuse--and yet, I am jealous. More unreasonable still, I am as fond of her as I was in the first days of the honeymoon. Is she as fond as ever of me? You were a married man when I was a boy. Let me give you the means of

forming an opinion by a narrative of her conduct, under (what I admit to have been) very trying circumstances.

When the first information reached Iris of Hugh Mountjoy's dangerous illness, we were at breakfast. It struck her dumb. She handed the letter to me, and left the table.

I hate a man who doesn't know what it is to want money; I hate a man who keeps his temper; I hate a man who pretends to be my wife's friend, and who is secretly in love with her all the time. What difference did it make to me whether Hugh Mountjoy ended in living or dying? If I had any interest in the matter, it ought by rights (seeing that I am jealous of him) to be an interest in his death. Well! I declare positively that the alarming news from London spoilt my breakfast. There is something about that friend of my wife--that smug, prosperous, well-behaved Englishman--which seems to plead for him (God knows how!) when my mind is least inclined in his favour. While I was reading about his illness, I found myself hoping that he would recover--and, I give you my sacred word of honour, I hated him all the time.

My Irish friend is mad--you will say. Your Irish friend, my dear fellow, does not dispute it.

Let us get back to my wife. She showed herself again after a long absence, having something (at last) to say to her husband.

"I am innocently to blame," she began, "for the dreadful misfortune that has fallen on Mr. Mountjoy. If I had not given him a message to Mrs. Vimpany, he would never have insisted on seeing her, and would never have caught the fever. It may help me to bear my misery of self-reproach and suspense, if I am kept informed of his illness. There is no fear of infection by my receiving letters. I am to write to a friend of Mrs. Vimpany, who lives in another house, and who will answer my inquiries. Do you object, dear Harry, to my getting news of Hugh Mountjoy every day, while he is in danger?"

I was perfectly willing that she should get that news, and she ought to have known it.

It seemed to me to be also a bad sign that she made her request with dry eyes. She must have cried, when she first heard that he was likely to sink under an attack of fever. Why were her tears kept hidden in her own room? When she came back to me, her face was pale and hard and tearless. Don't you think she might have forgotten my jealousy, when I was so careful

myself not to show it? My own belief is that she was longing to go to London, and help your wife to nurse the poor man, and catch the fever, and die with him if he died.

Is this bitter? Perhaps it is. Tear it off, and light your pipe with it.

Well, the correspondence relating to the sick man continued every day; and every day--oh, Vimpany, another concession to my jealousy!--she handed the letters to me to read. I made excuses (we Irish are good at that, if we are good at nothing else), and declined to read the medical reports. One morning, when she opened the letter of that day, there passed over her a change which is likely to remain in my memory as long as I live. Never have I seen such an ecstasy of happiness in any woman's face, as I saw when she read the lines which informed her that the fever was mastered. Iris is sweet and delicate and bright--essentially fascinating, in a word. But she was never a beautiful woman, until she knew that Mountjoy's life was safe; and she will never be a beautiful woman again, unless the time comes when my death leaves her free to marry him. On her wedding-day, he will see the transformation that I saw--and he will be dazzled as I was.

She looked at me, as if she expected me to speak.

"I am glad indeed," I said, "that he is out of danger."

She ran to me--she kissed me; I wouldn't have believed it was in her to give such kisses. "Now I have your sympathy," she said, "my happiness is complete!" Do you think I was indebted for these kisses to myself or to that other man? No, no--here is an unworthy doubt. I discard it. Vile suspicion shall not wrong Iris this time.

And yet----

Shall I go on, and write the rest of it?

Poor, dear Arthur Mountjoy once told me of a foreign author, who was in great doubt of the right answer to some tough question that troubled him. He went into his garden and threw a stone at a tree. If he hit the tree, the answer would be--Yes. If he missed the tree, the answer would be--No. I am going into the garden to imitate the foreign author. You shall hear how it ends.

I have hit the tree. As a necessary consequence, I must go on and write the rest of it.

There is a growing estrangement between Iris and myself--and my jealousy doesn't altogether account for it. Sometimes, it occurs to me that we are thinking of what our future relations with Mountjoy are likely to be, and are ashamed to confess it to each other. Sometimes--and perhaps this second, and easiest, guess may be the right one--I am apt to conclude that we are only anxious about money matters. I am waiting for her to touch on the subject, and she is waiting for me; and there we are at a deadlock.

I wish I had some reason for going to some other place. I wish I was lost among strangers. I should like to find myself in a state of danger, meeting the risks that I used to run in my vagabond days. Now I think of it, I might enjoy this last excitement by going back to England, and giving the Invincibles a chance of shooting me as a traitor to the cause. But my wife would object to that.

Suppose we change the subject.

You will be glad to hear that you knew something of law, as well as of medicine. I sent instructions to my solicitor in London to raise a loan on my life-insurance. What you said to me turns out to be right. I can't raise a farthing, for three years to come, out of all the thousands of pounds which I shall leave behind me when I die.

Are my prospects from the newspaper likely to cheer me after such a disappointment as this? The new journal, I have the pleasure of informing you, is much admired. When I inquire for my profits, I hear that the expenses are heavy, and I am told that I must wait for a rise in our circulation. How long? Nobody knows.

I shall keep these pages open for a few days more, on the chance of something happening which may alter my present position for the better.

My position has altered for the worse.

I have been obliged to fill my empty purse, for a little while, by means of a bit of stamped paper. And how shall I meet my liabilities when the note falls due? Let time answer the question; for the present the evil day is put off. In the meanwhile, if that literary speculation of yours is answering no better than my newspaper, I can lend you a few pounds to get on with. What do you say (on second thoughts) to coming back to your old quarters at Passy, and giving me your valuable advice by word of mouth instead of by letter?

Come, and feel my pulse, and look at my tongue--and tell me how these various anxieties of mine are going to end, before we are any of us a year older. Shall I, like you, be separated from my wife--at her request; oh, not at mine! Or shall I be locked up in prison? And what will become of You? Do you take the hint, doctor?