

§ 12

My mind leaps from that to the moment in the afternoon, when torn by intolerable distresses and anxiety I knocked and rang, and again knocked at the door of the house she occupied in South Street, with the intention of making one last appeal to her to live--if, indeed, it was death she had in mind. I had let her go from me and instantly a hundred neglected things had come into my head. I could go away with her, I could threaten to die with her; it seemed to me that nothing in all the world mattered if only I could thrust back the dark hand of death to which she had so manifestly turned. I knew, I knew all along that her extorted promise would not bind her. I knew and I let the faintest shadow of uncertainty weaken and restrain me. And I went to her too late. I saw instantly that I was too late when the door opened and showed me the scared face of a young footman whose eyes were red with tears.

"Are you Doctor----?" he asked of my silence.

"I want----" I said. "I must speak to Lady Mary."

He was wordless for a moment. "She--she died, sir," he said. "She's died suddenly." His face quivered, he was blubbering. He couldn't say anything more; he stood snivelling in the doorway.

For some moments I remained confronting him as if I would dispute his

words. Some things the mind contests in the face of invincible conviction. One wants to thrust back time....

CHAPTER THE TWELFTH

THE ARRAIGNMENT OF JEALOUSY

§ 1

I sit here in this graciously proportioned little room which I shall leave for ever next week, for already your mother begins to pack for England again. I look out upon the neat French garden that I have watched the summer round, and before me is the pile of manuscript that has grown here, the story of my friendship and love for Mary and of its tragic end, and of all the changes of my beliefs and purposes that have arisen out of that. I had meant it to be the story of my life, but how little of my life is in it! It gives, at most, certain acute points, certain salient aspects. I begin to realize for the first time how thin and suggestive and sketchy a thing any novel or biography must be. How we must simplify! How little can we convey the fullness of life, the glittering interests, the interweaving secondary aspects, the dawns and dreams and double refractions of experience! Even Mary, of whom I have labored to tell you, seems not so much expressed as hidden beneath these corrected sheets. She who was so abundantly living, who could love like a burst of sunshine and give herself as God gives the world, is she here at all in this pile of industrious inexpert writing?

Life is so much fuller than any book can be. All this story can be

read, I suppose, in a couple of hours or so, but I have been living and reflecting upon and reconsidering the substance of it for over forty years. I do not see how this book can give you any impression but that of a career all strained upon the frame of one tragic relationship, yet no life unless it is a very short young life can have that simplicity. Of all the many things I have found beautiful and wonderful, Mary was the most wonderful to me, she is in my existence like a sunlit lake seen among mountains, of all the edges by which life has wrought me she was the keenest. Nevertheless she was not all my life, nor the form of all my life. For a time after her death I could endure nothing of my home, I could not bear the presence of your mother or you, I hated the possibility of consolation, I went away into Italy, and it was only by an enormous effort that I could resume my interest in that scheme of work to which my life is given. But it is manifest I still live, I live and work and feel and share beauty....

It seems to me more and more as I live longer, that most poetry and most literature and particularly the literature of the past is discordant with the vastness and variety, the reserves and resources and recuperations of life as we live it to-day. It is the expression of life under cruder and more rigid conditions than ours, lived by people who loved and hated more naïvely, aged sooner and died younger than we do. Solitary persons and single events dominated them as they do not dominate us. We range wider, last longer, and escape more and more from intensity towards understanding. And already this astounding blow begins to take its place among other events, as a thing strange and terrible

indeed, but related to all the strangeness and mystery of life, part of the universal mysteries of despair and futility and death that have troubled my consciousness since childhood. For a time the death of Mary obscured her life for me, but now her living presence is more in my mind again. I begin to see that it is the reality of her existence and not the accidents of her end that matter most. It signifies less that she should have flung out of life when it seemed that her living could only have meant disaster to herself and to all she loved, than that all her life should have been hampered and restricted. Through all her life this brave and fine and beautiful being was for the most part of her possibilities, wasted in a splendid setting, magnificently wasted if you will, but wasted.

§ 2

It was that idea of waste that dominated my mind in a strange interview I had with Justin. For it became necessary for me to see Justin in order that we should stamp out the whispers against her that followed her death. He had made it seem an accidental death due to an overdose of the narcotic she employed, but he had not been able to obliterate altogether the beginnings of his divorce proceedings. There had been talk on the part of clerks and possible witnesses. But of all that I need not tell you here; what matters is that Justin and I could meet without hatred or violence. I met a Justin grey-haired and it seemed to me physically shrunken, more than ever slow-speaking, with his habit of attentive silences more marked and that dark scar spread beyond his brows.

We had come to our parting, we had done our business with an affectation of emotional aloofness, and then suddenly he gripped me by the arm. "Stratton," he said, "we two---- We killed her. We tore her to pieces between us...."

I made no answer to this outbreak.

"We tore her to pieces," he repeated. "It's so damned silly. One gets angry--like an animal."

I became grotesquely anxious to assure him that, indeed, she and I had been, as they say, innocent throughout our last day together. "You were

wrong in all that," I said. "She kept her faith with you. We never planned to meet and when we met----. If we had been brother and sister----. Indeed there was nothing."

"I suppose," he said, "I ought to be glad of that. But now it doesn't seem to matter very much. We killed her.... What does that matter to me now?"

§ 3

And it is upon this effect of sweet and beautiful possibilities, caught in the net of animal jealousies and thoughtless motives and ancient rigid institutions, that I would end this writing. In Mary, it seems to me, I found both womanhood and fellowship, I found what many have dreamt of, love and friendship freely given, and I could do nothing but clutch at her to make her my possession. I would not permit her to live except as a part of my life. I see her now and understand her better than when she was alive, I recall things that she said and wrote and it is clear to me, clearer perhaps than it ever was to her, that she, with her resentment at being in any sense property, her self-reliant thought, her independence of standard, was the very prototype of that sister-lover who must replace the seductive and abject womanhood, owned, mastered and deceiving, who waste the world to-day. And she was owned, she was mastered, she was forced into concealment. What alternative was there for her? What alternative is there for any woman? She might perhaps have kept her freedom by some ill-paid work and at the price of every other impulse in her swift and eager nature. She might have become one of those poor neuters, an independent woman.... Life was made impossible for her and she was forced to die, according to the fate of all untimely things. She was destroyed, not merely by the unconsidered, undisciplined passions of her husband and her lover, but by the vast tradition that sustains and enforces the subjugation of her sex. What I had from her, and what she was, is but a mere intimation of all that she and I might have made of each other and the world.

And perhaps in this story I have said enough for you to understand why Mary has identified herself with something world-wide, has added to herself a symbolical value, and why it is I find in the whole crowded spectacle of mankind, a quality that is also hers, a sense of fine things entangled and stifled and unable to free themselves from the ancient limiting jealousies which law and custom embody. For I know that a growing multitude of men and women outwear the ancient ways. The blood-stained organized jealousies of religious intolerance, the delusions of nationality and cult and race, that black hatred which simple people and young people and common people cherish against all that is not in the likeness of themselves, cease to be the undisputed ruling forces of our collective life. We want to emancipate our lives from this slavery and these stupidities, from dull hatreds and suspicion. The ripening mind of our race tires of these boorish and brutish and childish things. A spirit that is like hers, arises and increases in human affairs, a spirit that demands freedom and gracious living as our inheritance too long deferred, and I who loved her so blindly and narrowly now love her spirit with a dawning understanding.

I will not be content with that compromise of jealousies which is the established life of humanity to-day. I give myself, and if I can I will give you, to the destruction of jealousy and of the forms and shelters and instruments of jealousy, both in my own self and in the thought and laws and usage of the world.

THE END