



## C H A P T E R 29

TOMORROW WILL BE THE 5TH OF JUNE (1906), A DAY WHICH MARKS the tragedy of my life—the death of my wife. It occurred two years ago, in Florence, Italy, where we had taken her in the hope of restoring her broken health.

The writing of this autobiography, which was begun in Florence in the beginning of 1904, was soon interrupted because of the anxious times, and I was never moved to resume the work until January, 1906, for I did not see how I was ever going to bring myself to speak in detail of the mournful and lonely experiences of that sad interval and of the twenty-two months of wearing distress which came before it.

Mrs. Clemens had never been strong, and a thirteen months' journey around the world seemed a doubtful experiment for her, but it turned out to be a safe one. Her health seemed improved, although there was burning summer heat in Australia, New Zealand, and Tasmania. It was still summer when we sailed from Melbourne on the 1st of January, '96. It was very hot in Ceylon, of course, as it always is. It was still summer to us all over India until the 17th of March, when an English physician in Jeypore told us to hurry to Calcutta and get out of India immediately, because the warm weather could come at any time now and it would be perilous for us. So we suffered through the "cold

weather," as they called it there, clear from Rawal Pindi to Calcutta, and took ship for South Africa—and still Mrs. Clemens's health had steadily improved. She and Clara went with me all over my lecture course in South Africa, except to Pretoria, and she never had a day's illness.

We finally finished our lecture expedition on the 14th of July, '96, sailed for England the next day and landed at Southampton on the 31st. Two weeks later Mrs. Clemens and Clara sailed for home to nurse Susy through a reported illness and found her in her coffin in her grandmother's house.

The now smaller family presently joined me in England. We lived in London, in Switzerland, in Vienna, in Sweden, and again in London, until October, 1900. And when at that time we took ship, bound for home, Mrs. Clemens's health and strength were in better condition than they had ever been since she was sixteen years old and met with the accident which I have before mentioned.

We took a house in New York, just off Fifth Avenue, for a year, and there the overtaxing of Mrs. Clemens's strength began. The house was large; housekeeping was a heavy labor—as indeed it always is in New York. Social life was another heavy tax upon her strength. In the drive and rush of the midwinter New York season my correspondence grew beyond my secretary's strength and mine, and I found that Mrs. Clemens was trying to ease the burden for us. One day I wrote thirty-two brief letters with my own hand, and then found, to my horror, that Mrs. Clemens had written the same number. She had added this labor to her other labors and they were already too heavy for her.

By the following June this kind of life, after her nine and a half years of peaceful and effortless life in Europe, began to exhibit effects. Three months' rest in the Adirondacks did her a great deal of good. Then we took a house in Riverdale-on-the-Hudson. It was a large house, and again the housekeeping burden was heavy. Early in 1902 she was threatened with a nervous breakdown, but soon the danger seemed past.

At the end of June we secured a furnished home near York Harbor for the summer. We went sailing in the lovely weather on Mr. Rogers's fast steam **yacht**. But she could not rest. She was never intended to rest.

She had the spirit of a steam engine in a frame of flesh. It was always taxing that frame with its tireless energy; it was always exacting of it labors that were beyond its strength. Soon her heart began to alarm her. Her alarm increased rapidly. Within two weeks she began to dread driving out. This was the condition of things all through July.

At seven on the morning of August the eleventh I was awakened by a cry. I saw Mrs. Clemens standing on the opposite side of the room, leaning against the wall for support, and gasping. She said, "I am dying."

I helped her back to the bed and sent for Doctor Leonard, a New York physician. He said it was a nervous breakdown and that nothing but absolute rest, staying alone, and careful nursing could help her. That was the beginning. During the next twenty-two months she had for society physicians and trained nurses only, broadly speaking.

The next sixty days were anxious ones for us. Clara stood a daily watch of three or four hours, and hers was a hard office indeed. Daily she sealed up in her heart a dozen dangerous truths and thus saved her mother's life and hope and happiness with holy lies. She had never told her mother a lie in her life before, and I may almost say that she never told her a truth afterward. It was fortunate for all of us that Clara's reputation for truthfulness was so well established in her mother's mind. It was our daily protection from tragedy. I was never able to get a reputation like Clara's. It would have been useful to me now, but it was too late to begin the labor of securing it, and I furnished no information in the bedroom. But my protection lay in the fact that I was allowed in the bedroom only once a day, then for only two minutes. The nurse stood at the door with her watch in her hand and turned me out when the time was up.

Toward the end of October (1902) we took Mrs. Clemens to Italy with her nurse. We took our patient to the Villa di Quarto. She had been ill many times in her life but her marvelous powers of recovery always brought her out of these perils safely. We were full of fears all the time but I do not think we ever really lost hope. At least not until the last two or three weeks. It was not like her to lose hope. We never

expected her to lose it—and so at last when she looked me in the eyes and said, “You believe I shall get well?” it was a form which she had never used before and it was a betrayal. Her hope was perishing, and I recognized it.