



CHAPTER 32

Stormfield, Christmas Eve*
11 a.m., 1909

JEAN IS DEAD!

Has anyone ever tried to put upon paper all the little happenings connected with a dear one—happenings of the twenty-four hours coming before the sudden and unexpected death of that dear one? Would a book contain them? Would two books contain them? I think not. They pour into the mind in a flood. They are little things that have always been happening every day, and were so unimportant and easily forgettable before—but now! Now how different! How precious they are, how dear, how unforgettable!

Last night Jean, full of splendid health, and I the same, from the effects of my Bermuda holiday, walked hand in hand from the dinner table and sat down in the library and talked and planned and discussed, cheerily and happily (and how unsuspectingly) until nine—which is late for us—then went upstairs. At my door Jean said, “I can’t kiss you good night, Father: I have a cold and you could catch it.” I bent and

*Jean Clemens died early in the morning of December 24, 1909. Two days later Mark Twain showed the following account to Albert Bigelow Paine (his friend and biographer) and said, “If you think it worthy, some day—at the proper time it can end my autobiography. It is the final chapter.” He died four months later, on April 21, 1910.

kissed her hand. She was moved—I saw it in her eyes—and she impulsively kissed my hand in return. Then with the usual gay “Sleep well, dear!” from us both, we parted.

At half-past seven this morning I woke and heard voices outside my door. I said to myself, “Jean is starting on her usual horseback flight to the station for the mail.” Then Katy, who had been in the service of our family for twenty-nine years, entered, stood shaking and gasping at my bedside a moment, then found her tongue:

“Miss Jean is dead!”

Possibly I know now what the soldier feels when a shot is fired through his heart.

In her bathroom there she lay, the fair young creature, stretched upon the floor and covered with a sheet. And looking so peaceful, so natural, and as if asleep. We knew what had happened. She was an **epileptic**: she had been seized with a fit and heart failure in her bath. The doctor had to come several miles. His efforts, like our own previous ones, failed to bring her back to life.

Four days ago I came back from a month’s holiday in Bermuda in perfected health; but by some accident the reporters failed to perceive this. Day before yesterday, letters and telegrams began to arrive from friends and strangers which indicated that I was supposed to be dangerously ill. Yesterday Jean begged me to explain my case through the newspaper wire services. I said it was not important enough; but she was distressed and said I must think of Clara. Clara would see the report in the German papers, and as she had been nursing her husband day and night for four months and was worn out the shock might be dangerous. There was reason in that; so I sent a humorous paragraph by telephone to the wire service denying the “charge” that I was “dying” and saying, “I would not do such a thing at my time of life.”

Jean was a little troubled and did not like to see me treat the matter so lightly! but I said it was best to treat it so, for there was nothing serious about it. This morning I sent the sorrowful facts of this day’s tragedy to the wire service. Will both appear in the evening’s papers?—the one so light, the other so sad.

I lost Susy thirteen years ago; I lost her mother—her incomparable mother! five and a half years ago; Clara has gone away to live in Europe; and now I have lost Jean. How poor I am, who was once so rich!

Seventy-four years old, twenty-four days ago. Seventy-four years old yesterday. Who can estimate my age today?

I have looked upon her again. I wonder I can bear it. She looks just as her mother looked when she lay dead in Florence so long ago. Death is more beautiful than sleep.

I saw her mother buried. I said I would never endure that horror again; that I would never again look into the grave of anyone dear to me. I have kept to that. They will take Jean from this house tomorrow and bear her to Elmira, New York, where lie those of us that have been released, but I shall not follow.

Jean was there when my ship came in only four days ago. She was at the door, smiling a welcome, when I reached this house the next evening. We played cards and she tried to teach me a new game called "Mark Twain." She wouldn't let me look into the next room, where she was making Christmas preparations. She said she would finish them in the morning. While she was out for a moment I stole a look. The un-completed surprise was there: in the form of a Christmas tree decorated with silver in a most wonderful way; and on a table were the many bright things which she was going to hang upon it today.

All these little things happened such a few hours ago—and now she lies dead, and cares for nothing any more. Strange—marvelous—unbelievable. I have had this experience before, but it would still be unbelievable if I had had it a thousand times.

"*Miss Jean is dead!*"

That is what Katy said. When I heard the door open behind the bed I supposed it was Jean coming to kiss me good morning....

I have been to Jean's room. Such a lot of Christmas presents for servants and friends! They are everywhere; tables, chairs, the floor—everything is occupied and over-occupied. It is many and many a year since I have seen the like. In that ancient day Mrs. Clemens and I used

to slip softly into the nursery at midnight on Christmas Eve and look the display of presents over. The children were little then. And now here is Jean's room looking just as that nursery used to look. The presents are not yet marked—the hands are forever idle that would have marked them today. Jean's mother always worked herself down with her Christmas preparations. Jean did the same yesterday and the days before, and the tiredness may have cost her her life.

In the talk last night I said I found everything going so smoothly that if she were willing I would go back to Bermuda in February again for another month. She was anxious that I should do it, and said that if I would put off the trip until March she would take Katy and go with me. We shook hands upon that and said it was settled. I had a mind to write to Bermuda by tomorrow's ship and secure a furnished house and servants. I meant to write the letter this morning. But it will never be written now.

Why did I build this house, two years ago? To shelter this vast emptiness? How foolish I was. But I shall stay in it. The spirits of the dead bless a house for me. It was not so with other members of my family. Susy died in the house we built in Hartford. Mrs. Clemens would never enter it again. But it made the house dearer to me. I have entered it once since, when it was empty and silent, but to me it was a holy place and beautiful. It seemed to me that the spirits of the dead were all about me and would speak to me and welcome me if they could. Clara and Jean would never enter the New York hotel which their mother had frequented in earlier days. They could not bear it. But I shall stay in this house. It is dearer to me tonight than ever it was before. Jean's spirit will make it beautiful for me always. Her lonely and tragic death—but I will not think of that now.

There was never a kinder heart than Jean's. From her childhood up she always spent the most of her allowance on charities of one kind and another. After she had her income doubled she spent her money upon these things with a free hand.

She was a faithful friend to all animals and she loved them all, birds, beasts and everything—even snakes—this she acquired from me.

She knew all the birds. She founded two or three societies for the protection of animals, here and in Europe.

She thought all letters deserved the civility of an answer. Her mother brought her up in that kindly error. She could write a good letter and was swift with her pen. She had but an indifferent ear for music, but her tongue took to languages with ease. She never allowed her Italian, French and German to become neglected.

Christmas Day. Noon. Last night I went to Jean's room several times and turned back the sheet and looked at the peaceful face and kissed the cold brow and remembered that heart-breaking night in Florence so long ago, in that silent vast villa, when I crept downstairs so many times and turned back a sheet and looked at a face just like this one—Jean's mother's face—and kissed a brow that was just like this one. And last night I saw again what I had seen then—that strange and lovely thing—the sweet, soft face of early maidenhood restored by the gracious hand of death.

Christmas Night. This afternoon they took her away from her room. As soon as I might, I went down to the library and there she lay in her coffin dressed in exactly the same clothes she wore when she stood at the other end of the room on the sixth of October last, as Clara's chief bridesmaid. Her face was glowing with happy excitement then; it was the same face now, with the dignity of death and the peace of God upon it.

December 26. 2:30 p.m. It is the time appointed. The funeral has begun. Four hundred miles away, but I can see it all just as if I were there. The scene is the library in the Langdon home. Jean's coffin stands where her mother and I stood, forty years ago, and were married; and where Susy's coffin stood thirteen years ago; where her mother's stood five and a half ago; and where mine will stand, after a little time.

Five o'clock. It is all over.

When Clara went away two weeks ago to live in Europe, it was hard but I could bear it, for I had Jean left. I said we would be a family. We said we would be close comrades and happy—just we two. That fair dream was in my mind when Jean met me at the ship last Monday;

it was in my mind when she received me at the door last Tuesday evening. We were together; *we were a family!* the dream had come true—oh, preciously true, contentedly true, satisfying true! and remained true two whole days.

And now? Now Jean is in her grave!

In the grave—if I can believe it. God rest her sweet spirit!