

Heart of Darkness Closing: Annotation

¹“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. ²The bent gilt legs and backs of the furniture shone in indistinct curves. ³The tall marble fireplace had a cold and monumental whiteness. ⁴A grand piano stood massively in a corner with dark gleams on the flat surfaces like a somber and polished sarcophagus. ⁵A high door opened—closed. I rose.

⁶“She came forward all in black with a pale head, floating towards me in the dusk. ⁷She was in mourning. ⁸It 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. ⁹She took both my hands in hers and murmured, ‘I had heard you were coming.’ ¹⁰I noticed she was not very young—I mean not girlish. ¹¹She had a mature capacity for fidelity, for belief, for suffering. ¹²The room seemed to have grown darker as if all the sad light of the cloudy evening had taken refuge on her forehead. ¹³This fair hair, this pale visage, this pure brow, seemed surrounded by an ashy halo from which the dark eyes looked out at me. ¹⁴Their glance was guileless, profound, confident, and trustful. ¹⁵She 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. ¹⁶But 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. ¹⁷For her he had died only yesterday. ¹⁸And by Jove, the impression was so powerful that for me too he seemed to have died only yesterday—nay, this very minute. ¹⁹I 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. ²⁰Do you understand? ²¹I saw them together—I heard them together. ²²She had said with a deep catch of the breath, ‘I have survived’—while my strained ears seemed to hear distinctly, mingled with her tone of despairing regret, the summing-up whisper of his eternal condemnation. ²²I asked myself what I was doing there, with a sensation of panic in my heart as though I had blundered into a place of cruel and absurd mysteries not fit for a human being to behold. ²³She motioned me to a chair. ²⁴We sat down. ²⁵I laid the packet gently on the little table and she put her hand over it... ²⁶‘You knew him well,’ she murmured after a moment of mourning silence.

²⁷ “ ‘Intimacy grows quickly out there,’ I said. ²⁸‘I knew him as well as it is possible for one man to know another.’

²⁹ “ ‘And you admired him!’ she said. ³⁰‘It was impossible to know him and not to admire him. ³¹Was it?’

³² “ ‘He was a remarkable man,’ I said unsteadily. ³³Then 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...’

³⁴ “ ‘Love him,’ she finished eagerly, silencing me into an appalled dumbness. ³⁵ ‘How true! how true! ³⁶But when you think that no one knew him so well as I! ³⁷I had all his noble confidence. ³⁸I knew him best.’

³⁹ “ ‘You knew him best,’ I repeated. ⁴⁰And perhaps she did. ⁴¹But 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.