

The Moving Finger



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF EDITH WHARTON

Born into a wealthy family of real estate moguls in New York City, Edith Wharton spent much of her childhood living in Europe, where she became fluent in French, German, and Italian. Wharton rejected the prescribed gender roles of her time, preferring to read books from her father and his friends' libraries rather than concerning herself with fashion or socializing in high society. She was also a natural storyteller, publishing poems anonymously or under pseudonyms because writing wasn't considered a suitable activity for women in the 19th century. Around the age of 18, however, Wharton took a break from writing to become a socialite and debutante—the most acceptable path for women of her social class. In 1885, she married Edwin Robbins Wharton, a wealthy man whose lifelong struggle with depression hindered Wharton's passion for international travel. Wharton had an affair with journalist Morton Fullerton, whom she viewed as her intellectual equal, and divorced Edwin in 1913 after 28 years of marriage. Over the years, Wharton developed a strong interest in architecture and interior design, purchasing and renovating numerous homes in the U.S. and abroad. She didn't publish her first novel, *The Age of Decision*, until the age of 40, but she quickly became a prolific and critically acclaimed author. Wharton went on to publish over a dozen more novels, as well as several novellas, short story collections, poetry collections, and nonfiction books. Much of her writing focuses on a critique of the upper-class society in which she was raised. Wharton won the 1921 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction for *The Age of Innocence*, making her the first woman to receive the award. She died of a stroke in 1937.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

"The Moving Finger" was written and set in the late 19th century, when early feminism was taking shape. A few decades prior, the 1848 Seneca Falls Convention (the first women's rights convention in history) took place. This was a landmark event wherein women's rights activists came together to debate women's suffrage and discuss societal gender roles. Opening up a dialogue about women's rights led to a widespread cultural shift in the U.S., as women were increasingly seen as equal (rather than inferior) to their male counterparts. This contemporary context was important for Edith Wharton, who was pressured to publish her early work anonymously because writing was seen as an unacceptable pursuit for women at the time. The national dialogue about women's rights and gender roles made the public more

accepting of female voices in art and literature, enabling Wharton to begin publishing her writing under her own name as an adult. This context is also specifically relevant to "The Moving Finger," as the story subtly condemns the objectification of women both in art and within personal relationships—subject matter that would likely not have been taken seriously a few decades prior.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

"The Moving Finger" is a work of Dark Romanticism, a subgenre of the 19th-century Romantic movement that focuses on tragic and macabre themes and tends to feature ghosts or demons. Edgar Allan Poe is widely regarded as the preeminent writer of Dark Romantic fiction, and his short story "The Oval Portrait" (1842) is similar to "The Moving Finger" in that it features a woman who's objectified under a male artist's gaze. Oscar Wilde's Gothic novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) is also thematically similar: much like Mrs. Grancy's portrait makes her husband feel insecure about growing old in "The Moving Finger," Dorian Gray's youthful portrait seems to taunt him about his own mortality. Additionally, "The Moving Finger" can be read as an early feminist work, as it implicitly critiques men's objectification of women's beauty. In this way, it's similar to novels like Charlotte Perkin Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892) and Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899).

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** The Moving Finger
- **When Published:** 1899
- **Literary Period:** Romanticism
- **Genre:** Short Story
- **Setting:** Late 19th-century New York
- **Climax:** The narrator discovers the shrine that Claydon built around Mrs. Grancy's portrait
- **Antagonist:** Claydon
- **Point of View:** First Person

EXTRA CREDIT

Fixer Upper. In 1893, Edith Wharton and her husband bought and moved into Land's End, a lavish oceanside estate in Newport, Rhode Island. Wharton was an avid architectural enthusiast and decorator, and she and her friend Ogden Codman (an interior designer) renovated the mansion in an understated style that rejected the typical opulent aesthetic of the time.



PLOT SUMMARY

When Mr. Grancy's second wife, Mrs. Grancy dies, the unnamed narrator (a friend of the Grancys) is shocked. Mrs. Grancy was her husband's support system and his sole source of happiness. Mr. Grancy's first wife was self-centered and controlling, which made him miserable; when she died, and Mr. Grancy married the second Mrs. Grancy, he was finally happy again. All of Mr. Grancy's friends thought that Mrs. Grancy was the perfect match for Mr. Grancy, and they marveled at how beautiful she was. It seemed that Mrs. Grancy revitalized Mr. Grancy, and in return, he brought out her youthful beauty.

Soon after his second marriage, Mr. Grancy commissioned his friend Claydon, an artist, to paint a **portrait** of Mrs. Grancy. The painting glorified her beauty, portraying her exactly as Mr. Grancy saw her. Soon after, the Grancys moved out of their New York City townhouse to a rural estate, where their friends gathered every Sunday in the Grancys' library. Mrs. Grancy's portrait hung in this room, and the others noticed that Claydon seemed to be in love with the portrait, gazing up at it whenever Mrs. Grancy spoke.

It was three years later, when the narrator is living in Rome, that he hears of Mrs. Grancy's unexpected death. A few months later, Mr. Grancy meets up with the narrator while passing through Rome on his way to a new job as Constantinople's secretary of legation. He puts on a brave front, but the narrator can tell that he's grieving.

Five years later, when the narrator and Mr. Grancy have both returned to the United States, Mr. Grancy invites the narrator and their old friends over. However, Claydon mysteriously tells the narrator that he never wants to visit Mr. Grancy's house again. Confused, the narrator decides to go to visit Mr. Grancy alone, and he's surprised to see how much Mr. Grancy has aged. The house seems haunted by Mrs. Grancy's memory, and the narrator is shocked when he sees that that Mrs. Grancy's likeness in her portrait looks older. Mr. Grancy tells the narrator that he had Claydon alter the painting for him, so that Mrs. Grancy can age alongside him.

Over the next decade, Mr. Grancy falls ill and slowly deteriorates, almost dying one summer. When the narrator visits him during this time, he finds that Mr. Grancy has had Claydon alter the portrait again, making Mrs. Grancy look even older and as though she knows her husband is going to die. A few weeks later, Mr. Grancy dies and leaves Mrs. Grancy's portrait to Claydon in his will.

A couple years later, the narrator attends Claydon's latest art exhibition. When he goes into a curtained room off of Claydon's studio, he finds Mrs. Grancy's portrait hung on the wall, surrounded by fine collectibles arranged like a shrine. Claydon has restored to the painting to its original youthful portrayal of Mrs. Grancy, and he tells the narrator that Mrs. Grancy belongs

to him now.



CHARACTERS

Mr. Ralph Grancy – Mr. Grancy is Mrs. Grancy's husband. He's an affluent diplomat and a sociable man with a close circle of friends whom he often entertains at the Grancys' home. After his first marriage to a cruel, controlling woman, Mr. Grancy's happiness and confidence is only revived when he marries the second Mrs. Grancy. It's gradually revealed, however, that Mr. Grancy's feelings for her are based more on possessiveness and obsession than on genuine love. Mr. Grancy commissions his friend Claydon to paint a **portrait** of Mrs. Grancy, which he becomes obsessed with after Mrs. Grancy unexpectedly dies at a young age. Emotionally and physically devastated by grief, Mr. Grancy calls on Claydon to alter the portrait, making Mrs. Grancy's likeness look older to match his own deterioration. This horrifies the narrator, one of Mr. Grancy's closest friends, who thinks that Mr. Grancy is defacing Mrs. Grancy's memory in an effort to keep her with him as he ages. After this, Mr. Grancy falls ill, and Claydon ends up changing the painting once more, making Mrs. Grancy appear even older and as though she knows her husband is going to die. Mr. Grancy does end up dying from his illness, and he leaves Mrs. Grancy's portrait to Claydon in his will. Mr. Grancy's character is a case study in how grief can destroy a person from the inside out, and how a person's controlling nature can, in turn, end up possessing them.

Mrs. Grancy – Mrs. Grancy is Mr. Grancy's second wife, a colleague's sister whom he meets while working abroad. She and Mr. Grancy seemingly have a happy relationship, though it gradually becomes clear that Mr. Grancy wants to possess and control Mrs. Grancy. All of Mr. Grancy's friends, including the unnamed narrator, are fixated on Mrs. Grancy's physical appearance, to the point that the reader never learns anything about her besides the fact that she's beautiful. Mr. Grancy commissions his friend Claydon, an artist, to paint a **portrait** of Mrs. Grancy, which captures the striking youthfulness and beauty that Mr. Grancy's friends believe he brings out in his wife. Claydon becomes obsessed with the painting, to the point that he ignores the real Mrs. Grancy in favor of staring at the portrait while she speaks. After Mrs. Grancy unexpectedly dies in her thirties, Mr. Grancy, too, becomes obsessed with his memory of Mrs. Grancy and with the portrait. He calls on Claydon to alter the painting, making Mrs. Grancy appear older so that she doesn't get left behind as he ages without her. But at the end of the story, after Mr. Grancy has passed away and left the painting to Claydon in his will, Claydon restores the painting back to its original form and creates a sort of shrine around it, claiming that Mrs. Grancy now belongs to him. It's vaguely implied that Claydon and Mrs. Grancy may have had an affair, but this is left ambiguous. In fact, the reader never finds

out anything definitive about Mrs. Grancy beyond the male characters' obsession with her looks and possessiveness over her. Her character is thus an example of how an overemphasis on a woman's beauty can unfairly overshadow her other qualities.

The Narrator – The unnamed narrator is one of Mr. Grancy's friends. He's an observant, insightful man who frequently praises Mr. Grancy's second wife, Mrs. Grancy, for her beauty and admires the couple's seemingly happy relationship. Although the narrator doesn't quite know how to comfort his Mr. Grancy after Mrs. Grancy's unexpected death, he proves to be a loyal friend and visits Mr. Grancy often. He's shocked and offended, however, when he finds out that Mr. Grancy called on their artist friend Claydon to alter Mr. Grancy's beloved **portrait** of Mrs. Grancy, making her likeness look older to match Mr. Grancy's own aged appearance. The narrator sees this as a betrayal—a desecration of Mrs. Grancy's beauty. Nevertheless, he stays friends with Mr. Grancy through an illness that ultimately kills him, and he carries out his duty as one of the executors of Mr. Grancy's estate. At the end of the story, after Mrs. Grancy's portrait has been left to Claydon, the narrator is disturbed when he finds out that Claydon has restored the painting back to its original youthful portrayal of Mrs. Grancy and has created a sort of shrine around her. Though the story doesn't contain much information about the narrator, he's the lens through which the reader witnesses Mr. Grancy's deterioration and he sees how the men closest to Mrs. Grancy obsess over and objectify her—even after her death.

Claydon – Claydon is Mr. Grancy and the unnamed narrator's friend. He's an artist whom Mr. Grancy commissions to paint a **portrait** of his second wife, Mrs. Grancy. Claydon quickly becomes obsessed with the painting, seemingly falling in love with it rather than with Mrs. Grancy herself. After Mrs. Grancy unexpectedly dies a few years later, Mr. Grancy calls on Claydon to alter the painting, aging Mrs. Grancy's likeness so that he doesn't have to grow old by himself. Doing so plagues Claydon with guilt—and after Mr. Grancy passes away and leaves him the portrait, Claydon restores it back to its original form and creates a shrine around it in his studio. It's vaguely implied that Claydon and Mrs. Grancy may have had an affair, but this is left ambiguous. At the end of the story, the narrator discovers Claydon's shrine, and Claydon tells him that Mrs. Grancy belongs to him now. His years-long obsession with his own romanticized vision of Mrs. Grancy's beauty, which seems to overshadow the woman herself, is a testament to how possessiveness and control can be mistaken for love.

a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



LOVE, OBSESSION, AND CONTROL

In “The Moving Finger,” Mr. Grancy and Claydon are enamored with the same woman: Mr. Grancy's wife. But although these men believe that they're in love with Mrs. Grancy, their affections are actually based in an obsessive desire to possess and control her. Edith Wharton's complicated portrayal of these two men suggests that although love and obsession are very different feelings, the line between the two is blurry, and people often mistake one for the other. Furthermore, the story illustrates that when someone obsessively tries to control another person, their obsession itself can end up controlling them.

Initially, it seems that Mr. and Mrs. Grancy's relationship is genuinely loving. The unnamed narrator explains that “Mrs. Grancy's niche was her husband's life” and compares her to a tree that “gave [Mr. Grancy] rest and shade at its foot and the wind of dreams in its upper branches.” Mrs. Grancy is a source of support, comfort, and inspiration in Mr. Grancy's life, and Mr. Grancy also makes Mrs. Grancy happy: she appears to light up with love and joy in her husband's presence. All of the Grancys' friends pick up on this as well, and they admire the couple's relationship as something to aspire to.

But while Mr. and Mrs. Grancy seem to adore each other, Wharton plants clues throughout the story that Mr. Grancy's feelings are rooted in obsession rather than genuine love. The Grancys are happy on the surface, and Mrs. Grancy certainly brings value to Mr. Grancy's life, yet there's no mention of how Mr. Grancy tangibly benefits Mrs. Grancy in return. It seems that their marriage isn't necessarily based on love and mutual support, but on what Mr. Grancy can get out of the relationship. Indeed, although Mr. Grancy's friends admire the couple's seemingly happy relationship, Mr. Grancy's affections for Mrs. Grancy seem to be rooted in obsession and possessiveness rather than genuine love or respect. After he commissions his friend Claydon to paint a **portrait** of Mrs. Grancy, he tells her, “You're my prisoner now—I shall never lose you. If you grew tired of me and left me you'd leave your real self there on the wall!” The Grancys' friends view the couple's relationship as romantic and idyllic, but Mr. Grancy actually thinks of Mrs. Grancy as his “prisoner” rather than his partner or his equal—a dynamic that's obsessive and controlling rather than healthy and loving.

Even after Mrs. Grancy unexpectedly dies at a young age, Mr. Grancy remains obsessed with her and becomes fixated on controlling her memory. In his grief, Mr. Grancy is only able to regain his happiness when he resorts to imagining that Mrs. Grancy is still alive and “interested in what [he] was doing.” His memory of his second wife isn't centered around anything substantive about her, like her personality, but rather how she



THEMES

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served and validated him. Mr. Grancy even calls on Claydon to alter Mrs. Grancy's portrait in order to make Mrs. Grancy look older, so that Mr. Grancy doesn't have to feel alone as he ages—a prospect that terrifies him. Rather than honoring his wife's memory, Mr. Grancy wants to control and alter it: he's so distraught at the idea of no longer having someone to control that, in the absence of the real Mrs. Grancy, he resorts to keeping the painting of Mrs. Grancy as his "prisoner" by making her age alongside him. Again, although Mr. Grancy seems devoted to Mrs. Grancy, the root of his devotion is obsession and dependency, not genuine love.

Claydon, too, is enamored with Mrs. Grancy. But, like Mr. Grancy, Claydon doesn't love her for who she is—he's merely fixated on her image. This is clearest when, after Claydon paints Mrs. Grancy's portrait, he becomes obsessed with the painting. Another friend of Mr. Grancy comments that Claydon "had been saved from falling in love with Mrs. Grancy only by falling in love with his picture of her." This suggests that, just like Mr. Grancy, Claydon is fixated on a romanticized *idea* of Mrs. Grancy—he's obsessed with the image he painted of her, not genuinely in love with who she is. And, also like Mr. Grancy, Claydon's seemingly innocent affections are revealed to be more sinister after Mrs. Grancy's death. Claydon feels like he's "commit[ed] murder" after fulfilling Mr. Grancy's request to make Mrs. Grancy's portrait look older. His opposition to Mr. Grancy's wishes for his wife's portrait suggest that Claydon, too, feels that he's a gatekeeper of sorts over Mrs. Grancy's memory—he still wants to control how others see her. After Mr. Grancy passes away and leaves the painting to Claydon, Claydon changes the portrait back to its original youthful portrayal of Mrs. Grancy and tells the narrator, "now she belongs to me." The narrator thinks that "it was the woman [Claydon] had loved and not the picture," yet Claydon's possessive language again suggests that his fixation on Mrs. Grancy isn't based in love at all, but in obsession and control.

Mr. Grancy and Claydon are both fixated on Mrs. Grancy and set on controlling her, yet their mutual obsession with possessing her is ironically what possesses *them*, plaguing both men and motivating virtually all of their actions in the story. Thus, story's title, "The Moving Finger," perhaps alludes to Mrs. Grancy's influence: a pointing "finger" that directs Mr. Grancy and Claydon even from beyond the grave. With this, Wharton implies that possessiveness is no substitute for genuine love—and that, when one person is obsessed with controlling another, that obsession can, in turn, end up controlling them.



BEAUTY AND OBJECTIFICATION

In "The Moving Finger," Mr. Grancy—and all of his close friends—are enchanted by his wife's beauty. The narrator (one of the Grancys' friends) continually praises Mrs. Grancy's lovely features, and Mr. Grancy even commissions his friend Claydon to paint a **portrait**

of her. But while the male characters' adoration of Mrs. Grancy's appearance is meant to compliment and honor her, their attention actually ends up objectifying her and erasing her other good qualities. Through the men's treatment of Mrs. Grancy, the story critiques the male tendency to objectify women and value them solely for their physical appearance.

The story's men portray Mrs. Grancy's beauty as a positive—even virtuous—characteristic that endears her to them. The narrator first describes Mrs. Grancy as a beautiful flower or tree that Mr. Grancy planted and cultivated. Introducing her character in this way implies that Mrs. Grancy's beauty is her most important trait, and that it's what Mr. Grancy tries to encourage and bring out in his wife. Through her beauty, Mrs. Grancy gives the men around her "what such a woman gives by merely being." The narrator even claims that Mrs. Grancy's beauty has the ability to "clear[] new ground, open[] fresh vistas, reclaim[] whole areas of activity that had run to waste," restoring the confidence and happiness that Mr. Grancy lost during his miserable first marriage and opening up new perspectives for him. In this way, Mrs. Grancy's physical appearance is praised as something virtuous and inspirational—it's of great value to her husband and to the Grancys' friends (like the narrator) who spend time at their home.

Yet for all the narrator's glorification of Mrs. Grancy's physical attributes, the reader never finds out anything substantive about her—the male characters focus on her appearance, which overshadows her personality and intellect. While the narrator certainly intends his praise of Mrs. Grancy's appearance to be complimentary, it's significant that virtually every description of her is centered on her beautiful, youthful appearance. This sends the message that Mrs. Grancy's physical beauty is the most important thing about her—and perhaps the *only* thing worth knowing about her. Indeed, although the men who spend time around Mrs. Grancy enjoy her presence and marvel at her beauty, this seems to come at the cost of them knowing anything deeper about her. In other words, they objectify her looks more than they genuinely appreciate who she is. The objectification of Mrs. Grancy is clearest when Mr. Grancy commissions his friend Claydon to paint Mrs. Grancy's portrait: Claydon's painting of Mrs. Grancy portrays her the way Mr. Grancy and Claydon see her (and the way they want others to see her), rather than showing how Mrs. Grancy sees *herself* or who she really is. Although the painting is intended to honor Mrs. Grancy, it's really an objectified version of her presented through the male gaze.

Claydon takes this focus on Mrs. Grancy's beauty to the extreme: he falls in love with his objectified vision of her rather than with the woman herself. The narrator says that "when Mrs. Grancy was in the room [...] Claydon, averted from the real woman, would sit as it were listening to the picture." This image of Claydon, gazing adoringly at Mrs. Grancy's portrait while

ignoring Mrs. Grancy herself, confirms that Claydon objectifies Mrs. Grancy: he values his own artistic vision of her beauty more than he values Mrs. Grancy herself. Indeed, another one of Mr. Grancy's friends comments that "Claydon had been saved from falling in love with Mrs. Grancy only by falling in love with his picture of her." Years later, after Mr. Grancy's death, he leaves the portrait to Claydon in his will. Claydon proceeds to reverse the alterations that Mr. Grancy had him make to the painting over the years, restoring it back to its original youthful portrayal of Mrs. Grancy. He then hangs the painting in a room full of other beautiful objects, creating a shrine of sorts with treasures "heaped [...] at the feet of the woman he loved." Claydon tells the narrator that he "turned [his] real woman into a picture." But the narrator (and the reader) can see that Claydon's shrine to Mrs. Grancy is possessive rather than flattering—it's a violation of her and Mr. Grancy's relationship, and it's likely not what Mrs. Grancy would have wanted to become of her portrait. Claydon's fixation on his own vision of Mrs. Grancy's beauty obscures who she really was, which objectifies her rather than honoring her.

As a female writer at the turn of the 20th century, it's likely that Edith Wharton was acutely aware of male contemporaries who portrayed women as men wanted to see them—not necessarily as they actually were. "The Moving Finger," then, perhaps reflects Wharton's own frustrations with real women being objectified and portrayed two-dimensionally, their personalities and intellect diminished under a male gaze that only saw their physical beauty.



GRIEF AND LONELINESS

"The Moving Finger" begins with the unnamed narrator learning that Mrs. Grancy has died. He describes the loss as a "shock" and an "an immense

blunder of fate" that leaves behind a void in the lives of everyone who knew her. This is especially true for Mr. Grancy, who is completely devastated by his wife's death and whose entire life gradually disintegrates as he mourns her: his grief affects his mental well-being, his physical health, and even his personal relationships. Mr. Grancy's years of suffering show that grief can be a powerful and isolating force that has a corrosive effect on people not only emotionally, but physically and interpersonally—essentially destroying the grieving person from within.

Mr. Grancy's life is completely uprooted when Mrs. Grancy suddenly and unexpectedly dies, and his mental health suffers as a result. After Mrs. Grancy passes away, Mr. Grancy falls into a deep depression. He moves from the U.S. to Turkey, leaving all of his friends behind and throwing himself into a new job in international diplomacy as a way of distracting himself from his grief. The narrator, however, sees that Mr. Grancy's tough exterior during this time is contrived, and that it actually "testifie[s] to his inner weakness"—inside, Mr. Grancy is

suffering immensely. Five years later, once Mr. Grancy has returned to the U.S., he confides in the narrator that he was indeed miserable during these "first black months." To feel okay again, he admits that he resorted to imagining that Mrs. Grancy was still alive and present with him. The narrator describes this presence as a "ghost" haunting Mr. Grancy—Mr. Grancy is unable to emotionally cope without his wife by his side, and he's willing to deny reality if it means feeling like she's still in his life.

In addition to the mental strife that Mr. Grancy experiences as a result of his grief, his personal relationships are also affected, leaving him even more alienated and lonely. Although Mr. Grancy returns to the U.S. and is able to get back in touch with his old friends and revive their traditional Sunday gatherings, he spends most of his time isolated at home in his study. His friends don't seem able or willing to truly understand what he's going through. The narrator, for instance, is relieved when he parts ways with Mr. Grancy. He doesn't think that friendship adequately "perform[s], in such cases, the office assigned to it by tradition," meaning that friendship, for all its promises of support and loyalty, tends to fall apart in the face of tragedy and upheaval. The narrator also feels a hint of dread at the thought of going to visit Mr. Grancy again, reflecting that "we are apt to feel that our friends' sorrows should be kept like those historic monuments from which the encroaching ivy is periodically removed." The narrator's thoughts suggest that others tend to be repelled by a grieving person, as they're unsure of how to support them and want to keep their friend's suffering at a distance. In this way, grief can cause interpersonal damage, further isolating the grieving person and plunging them deeper into loneliness and sorrow.

Mr. Grancy's mourning also devastates his body and his health, showing that grief can have physical effects. After his initial grieving period, Mr. Grancy's "body showed its scars. At five-and-forty he was gray and stooping, with the tired gait of an old man." Though still a relatively young man at 45, Mr. Grancy's emotional pain has rapidly aged him. He falls seriously ill soon after this, as though he's literally sick with grief—a physical change that seems to be a manifestation of his inner suffering. And as Mr. Grancy grows older and sicker, he imagines that his beloved **portrait** of his young wife (which his friend Claydon painted nearly a decade ago) is lonely, just like he is. Afraid of Mrs. Grancy being "left behind" as he ages while she stays "unchangeably young," Mr. Grancy calls on Claydon to alter the portrait, making Mrs. Grancy appear older. The reader can see, however, that the reasoning Mr. Grancy gives for changing the portrait is just an excuse: as Mr. Grancy physically deteriorates, he wants his wife to deteriorate alongside him, so that *he* won't be alone in his suffering. In this way, the decline in Mr. Grancy's physical health exacerbates the decline in his mental health, leading him to further deny reality and unhealthily cling to someone who's no longer there.

As Mr. Grancy's illness worsens, he calls on Claydon to alter

Mrs. Grancy's portrait a second time, making her look even older and giving her an expression that looks as though she knows her husband is going to die. From this point on, the portrait becomes something of a self-fulfilling prophecy. As Mr. Grancy becomes more and more obsessed with keeping Mrs. Grancy in alive, changing the painting to reflect the changes in himself, he grows weaker and sicker until he dies of his illness—just as Mrs. Grancy's likeness seemed to predict he would. Mr. Grancy's sorrow and loneliness in the wake of Mrs. Grancy's death turns him into a shell of his former self, a man so sick with grief and stuck in his past that he is destroyed from the inside out.



SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



THE PORTRAIT

The portrait that Mr. Grancy's friend Claydon paints of Mrs. Grancy symbolizes how the male gaze objectifies women and cheapens love. Mr. Grancy and his male friends value Mrs. Grancy solely for her physical appearance, and the portrait of her that Mr. Grancy commissions Claydon to paint is meant as a tribute to her beauty. However, Claydon's painting of Mrs. Grancy portrays her as Mr. Grancy and Claydon (who both claim to be in love with Mrs. Grancy) see her—not necessarily how anyone else sees her, or how she sees herself. In this way, the painting objectifies her, in the sense that it glorifies the men's romanticized idea of her rather than who she really is.

Furthermore, the male characters' obsession with the painting overshadows Mrs. Grancy herself—that is, her personality and intellect. For instance, Mr. Grancy tells Mrs. Grancy that having her portrait means that she's now his "prisoner." That is, he feels that capturing Mrs. Grancy's beauty is the same as capturing the woman in her entirety; there is nothing more to her than her appearance. Claydon, too, is so fixated on this image of Mrs. Grancy that, even when she's in the room, he stares at his portrait of her rather than at Mrs. Grancy herself. The portrait thus represents how placing too much emphasis on a woman's beauty can go beyond flattery, objectifying the woman to the point that her other qualities are unfairly overlooked.

After Mrs. Grancy's death, Mr. Grancy has Claydon alter the portrait twice to make Mrs. Grancy's likeness look older. He seemingly does this because he wants to keep Mrs. Grancy as a "prisoner" even after she's gone; he's afraid of being alone and growing old without her. In this way, the portrait represents how a relationship like the Grancys', which seemed loving to others, can actually be rooted in one person's desire to possess and control the other. The portrait becomes a way for Mr.

Grancy to feel like he owns Mrs. Grancy, rather than a way for him to revere and honor her memory.




QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Cambridge University Press edition of *Stories of Ourselves: Volume 1* published in 2018.

Part I Quotes

●● We had seen [Mr. Grancy] sinking under the leaden embrace of [his first wife's] affection like a swimmer in a drowning clutch; but just as we despaired he had always come to the surface again, blinded, panting, but striking out fiercely for the shore. When at last her death released him it became a question as to how much of the man she had carried with her. Left alone, he revealed numb withered patches, like a tree from which a parasite has been stripped. But gradually he began to put out new leaves; and when he met the lady who was to become his second wife—his one real wife, as his friends reckoned—the whole man burst into flower.

Related Characters: The Narrator (speaker), Mrs. Grancy, Mr. Ralph Grancy

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 71

Explanation and Analysis



The narrator recalls his friend Mr. Grancy's first marriage to an egotistical, controlling woman. He describes Mr. Grancy as "drowning" under his first wife's influence, yet Mr. Grancy refused to divorce her and was only "released" from her when she died. Mr. Grancy later confides in the narrator that he feels like he needs a romantic partner to complete him, and this quote confirms that he chose to endure his wife's cruelty rather than choosing not to have a wife at all. This sets up Mr. Grancy's character as someone who is perhaps unhealthily invested in his romantic relationships, as he seems to conflate possessiveness and control with genuine love. He allows himself to be drained and "withered" by a "parasite," as long as that parasite gives him some level of companionship.


It's also important that Mr. Grancy is only able to find happiness and "burst into flower" again once he remarries. While his relationship with the second Mrs. Grancy certainly seems to be more loving than his relationship with his first wife, Mr. Grancy is still depending on another person to make him feel stable, confident, and complete.

This again suggests that Mr. Grancy—despite being a strong leader in his friend group—has an inner weakness that makes him overly dependent on his romantic partner. This is perhaps why Mr. Grancy becomes obsessed with and possessive of Mrs. Grancy, particularly after her death: he's afraid of being alone.

●● The picture was at its best in that setting; and we used to accuse Claydon of visiting Mrs Grancy in order to see her portrait. He met this by declaring that the portrait *was* Mrs Grancy; and there were moments when the statement seemed unanswerable. One of us, indeed—I think it must have been the novelist—said that Claydon had been saved from falling in love with Mrs Grancy only by falling in love with his picture of her; and it was noticeable that he, to whom his finished work was no more than the shed husk of future effort, showed a perennial tenderness for this one achievement.

Related Characters: The Narrator (speaker), Mr. Ralph Grancy, Mrs. Grancy, Claydon

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 73

Explanation and Analysis

After Mr. Grancy commissions his friend Claydon to paint Mrs. Grancy's portrait, Claydon becomes obsessed with the painting. While the narrator and Mr. Grancy's other friends seem to find this amusing, this passage raises a red flag for the reader, as it suggests that Claydon is fixated on his own romanticized depiction of Mrs. Grancy. He's enchanted with her beauty, yet he's only "in love with his picture of her," not with the woman herself.

Claydon's assertion that "the portrait *was* Mrs. Grancy" reveals that he thinks his portrait of Mrs. Grancy has captured all there is to know about her—and, in this way, he feels that he has some ownership over her as the artist. Yet the portrait doesn't convey anything about Mrs. Grancy other than her physical appearance, and Claydon's focus on it objectifies Mrs. Grancy's beauty without bothering to dig deeper and get to know who Mrs. Grancy really is. To Claydon, Mrs. Grancy is an artistic "achievement" rather than a full person in and of herself—and, throughout the story, Wharton subtly implies that viewing women in this way does them a great disservice.

Part II Quotes

●● The instinctive posture of grief is a shuffling compromise between defiance and prostration; and pride feels the need of striking a worthier attitude in face of such a foe. Grancy, by nature musing and retrospective, had chosen the role of the man of action, who answers blow for blow and opposes a mailed front to the thrusts of destiny; and the completeness of the equipment testified to his inner weakness. We talked only of what we were not thinking of, and parted, after a few days, with a sense of relief that proved the inadequacy of friendship to perform, in such cases, the office assigned to it by tradition.

Related Characters: The Narrator (speaker), Mrs. Grancy, Mr. Ralph Grancy

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 73

Explanation and Analysis

After Mrs. Grancy unexpectedly dies at a young age, Mr. Grancy travels abroad to begin a new job as Constantinople's secretary of legation. He meets up with the narrator, who's currently living in Rome, and the narrator observes that Mr. Grancy seems to be hiding his grief behind "pride" and "action." That is, he chooses to put on a brave front and throw himself into his work rather than succumb to his sorrows. However, the narrator thinks that "the completeness of the equipment testified to [Mr. Grancy's] inner weakness"—in other words, Mr. Grancy is trying too hard to pretend he's okay, to the point that his efforts only expose how heartbroken he really is. This is a testament to the devastating effect grief can have on a person's emotional well-being, as the narrator recognizes that a grieving person like Mr. Grancy can only choose between "defiance" (denying his emotions) and "prostration" (allowing himself to be defeated by his emotions).

The narrator also admits that he's relieved to part ways with Mr. Grancy, as he's seemingly unsure of how to comfort his friend during such a difficult time. He reflects on "the inadequacy of friendship to perform, in such cases, the office assigned to it by tradition." In other words, friends are traditionally seen as an emotional support network, particularly for people who are suffering—but the narrator finds that he doesn't know how to support Mr. Grancy in the way that his grieving friend needs. In addition to Mr. Grancy's emotional pain, then, his personal relationships also suffer due to his grief; it drives a wedge between him and the narrator, one of his oldest friends.

“I wondered whether Grancy, under the recovered tranquillity of his smile, concealed the same sense of [Mrs. Grancy’s] nearness, saw perpetually between himself and the actual her bright unappeasable ghost. He spoke of her once or twice, in an easy incidental way, and her name seemed to hang in the air after he had uttered it, like a chord that continues to vibrate. If he felt her presence it was evidently as an enveloping medium, the moral atmosphere in which he breathed. I had never before known how completely the dead may survive.

Related Characters: The Narrator (speaker), Mrs. Grancy, Mr. Ralph Grancy

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 75



Explanation and Analysis


When the narrator visits Mr. Grancy’s home for the first time since Mrs. Grancy’s death, he marvels at how Mrs. Grancy’s presence still seems alive in the house. Soon after this, Mr. Grancy confides in the narrator that, after Mrs. Grancy died, he was only able to ease his deep depression by imagining that Mrs. Grancy was still alive and present with him. Thus, the narrator’s observations in this passage are particularly insightful. He thinks that Mrs. Grancy is like a “ghost” that separates Mr. Grancy from fully engaging with the world around him—and this does seem to be the case, as Mr. Grancy is only able to emotionally cope with his wife’s death by denying reality and clinging to someone who’s no longer there. Mr. Grancy seems stable on the surface, but the narrator can see that Mrs. Grancy’s presence is like “an enveloping medium, the moral atmosphere in which [Mr. Grancy] breathed.” In other words, Mrs. Grancy is still central to Mr. Grancy’s life despite having passed away over five years ago, suggesting that Mr. Grancy’s mental health is dependent on his wife’s existence—whether real or imagined.

Part III Quotes

“How I rejoiced in that picture! I used to say to [Mrs. Grancy], You’re my prisoner now—I shall never lose you. If you grew tired of me and left me you’d leave your real self there on the wall! It was always one of our jokes that she was going to grow tired of me[.]”

Related Characters: Mr. Ralph Grancy (speaker), Claydon, Mrs. Grancy, The Narrator

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 76

Explanation and Analysis



At the end of the previous chapter, the narrator is horrified to discover that Mr. Grancy has had their friend Claydon alter the portrait that he painted of Mrs. Grancy years ago, making her likeness look older. Here, Mr. Grancy tells the narrator that just after Claydon painted the portrait of Mrs. Grancy, Mr. Grancy told Mrs. Grancy that she was now his “prisoner.” Up until this point, the narrator and the rest of Mr. Grancy’s friends have thought of the Grancys’ relationship as incredibly happy and loving—but Mr. Grancy’s own admission here challenges that idyllic version of their marriage. The Grancys seemed happy while Mrs. Grancy was still alive, but Mr. Grancy’s message to her—that commissioning her portrait was his way of imprisoning her—suggests that Mr. Grancy’s feelings for his wife were based in obsession and control rather than genuine affection. What looked like love to others was actually possessiveness, showing how these two emotions can easily be misunderstood or conflated with each other.


Furthermore, Mr. Grancy’s belief that he could “never lose” Mrs. Grancy so long as he had her portrait echoes Claydon’s earlier comment that “the portrait was Mrs. Grancy.” In both cases, the men are implying that the painting captures the entirety of who Mrs. Grancy is—or, put another way, that there’s nothing more to know about her than her physical beauty as it’s represented in the portrait. This sends the message that Mrs. Grancy’s appearance is her only valuable and noteworthy quality, and that beholding her beauty is therefore equivalent to beholding the woman herself.

“For a week we two lived together—the strange woman and the strange man. I used to sit night after night and question [Mrs. Grancy’s] smiling face; but no answer ever came. What did she know of me, after all? We were irrevocably separated by the five years of life that lay between us. At times, as I sat here, I almost grew to hate her; for her presence had driven away my gentle ghost, the real wife who had wept, aged, struggled with me during those awful years...It was the worst loneliness I’ve ever known. Then, gradually, I began to notice a look of sadness in the picture’s eyes; a look that seemed to say: Don’t you see that I am lonely too?”

Related Characters: Mr. Ralph Grancy (speaker), Claydon,

Mrs. Grancy, The Narrator

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 77

Explanation and Analysis



Mr. Grancy tells the narrator that, after he returned home from his years abroad, he felt like he and the Mrs. Grancy in the portrait were strangers. He's already confided in the narrator that the only way he's been able to survive his grief is by imagining that Mrs. Grancy is a "gentle ghost" who is still present with him. Therefore, the painting of Mrs. Grancy—which, of course, hasn't aged in the five years she's been dead—seems to remind Mr. Grancy that his wife is gone rather than comforting him.


Just prior to this, Mr. Grancy told the narrator that having Mrs. Grancy's portrait painted was his way of imprisoning her. But now, Mrs. Grancy's eternal youthfulness in the painting taunts Mr. Grancy, letting him know that he no longer has any control over her; he'll age and fade away, while she stays the same. Mr. Grancy claims that he has Claydon alter the portrait because he saw that Mrs. Grancy was lonely—but really, his motivation seems to be rooted in his own fear of being alone as he ages. In having Mrs. Grancy's portrait changed—deteriorating it to match his own physical deterioration—Mr. Grancy is able imagine that he has some control over Mrs. Grancy, even after her death.

Part IV Quotes

☞ After that, for ten years or more, I watched the strange spectacle of a life of hopeful and productive effort based on the structure of a dream. There could be no doubt to those who saw Grancy during this period that he drew his strength and courage from the sense of his wife's mystic participation in his task.

Related Characters: The Narrator (speaker), Claydon, Mrs. Grancy, Mr. Ralph Grancy

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 77

Explanation and Analysis

The narrator reflects that, after Mrs. Grancy's death, Mr. Grancy is only able to function by pretending that Mrs. Grancy is still there with him. The narrator's word choice—"spectacle of life" and "structure of a dream"—implies that Mr. Grancy's life is based in fantasy. Rather than accepting Mrs. Grancy's death and moving on in a healthy way, Mr. Grancy is utterly consumed by his memory of her, drawing "his strength and courage from the sense of his wife's mystic participation in his task." This is a testament to how deeply Mr. Grancy is still grieving Mrs. Grancy: over a decade after her death, his mental health is still suffering, to the point that he's willing to delude himself into believing that his wife is still with him if it means that he doesn't have to feel alone.



This is also one of many hints throughout the story that, in spite of how much the Grancys' friends admired their marriage, Mr. Grancy's feelings for Mrs. Grancy are based more in obsession and possessiveness than in genuine love. He's able to feel Mrs. Grancy's "mystic participation" because he had Claydon alter Mrs. Grancy's portrait to look older—in essence, making it feel like Mrs. Grancy is still alive. In this way, Mr. Grancy still wants to feel like Mrs. Grancy belongs to him, and that she's aging alongside him even though she's been dead for many years.


☞ 'Ah,' he said, 'I'm an old man now and no mistake. I suppose we shall have to go halfspeed after this; but we shan't need towing just yet!'

The plural pronoun struck me, and involuntarily I looked up at Mrs Grancy's portrait. Line by line I saw my fear reflected in it. It was the face of a woman who knows that her husband is dying. My heart stood still at the thought of what Claydon had done.

Grancy had followed my glance. 'Yes, it's changed her,' he said quietly. 'For months, you know, it was touch and go with me—we had a long fight of it, and it was worse for her than for me.'

Related Characters: The Narrator, Mr. Ralph Grancy (speaker), Mrs. Grancy, Claydon

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 78

Explanation and Analysis

While Mr. Grancy is recovering from an illness that nearly



killed him, he assures the narrator that we aren't going to die. He seems to be referring to himself and his late wife, Mrs. Grancy, which understandably alarms the narrator. Before this, Mr. Grancy had his friend Claydon alter Mrs. Grancy's portrait to look older so that Mr. Grancy could feel like he and his wife were aging together. Here, he seems to believe that Mrs. Grancy truly is alive, and that she's really growing older and suffering with him through his illness. Mr. Grancy even called on Claydon to alter the portrait a second time, making Mrs. Grancy look even older.


While Mr. Grancy claims to be changing Mrs. Grancy's portrait because it's what she would have wanted, it's really because he doesn't want to grow old and die alone. He's adamant that Mrs. Grancy should be by his side—even if that means making her “suffer,” as Mr. Grancy apparently believes he's doing. In this way, Mr. Grancy doesn't seem to genuinely love Mrs. Grancy; rather, he's afraid of being alone and is therefore selfishly obsessed with and dependent on her companionship.

Part V Quotes

☞☞ ‘Pygmalion,’ [Claydon] began slowly, ‘turned his statue into a real woman; *I* turned my real woman into a picture. Small compensation, you think—but you don't know how much of a woman belongs to you after you've painted her!—Well, I made the best of it, at any rate—I gave [Mrs. Grancy] the best I had in me; and she gave me in return what such a woman gives by merely being. And after all she rewarded me enough by making me paint as I shall never paint again! There was one side of her, though, that was mine alone, and that was her beauty; for no one else understood it. To Grancy even it was the mere expression of herself—what language is to thought. Even when he saw the picture he didn't guess my secret—he was so sure she was all his! As though a man should think he owned the moon because it was reflected in the pool at his door[.]’

Related Characters: Claydon (speaker), Mr. Ralph Grancy, Mrs. Grancy, The Narrator

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 80

Explanation and Analysis



After Mr. Grancy dies and leaves Mrs. Grancy's portrait to Claydon in his will, the narrator discovers that Claydon has restored the portrait back to its original youthful portrayal


of Mrs. Grancy. He's also set up a kind of shrine to it in his studio, which the narrator finds disturbing. Here, Claydon explains that, whereas the mythical figure Pygmalion turned his statue into a woman, “*I* turned my real woman into a picture.” This suggests that he wasn't in love Mrs. Grancy, as the narrator assumed he was—rather, Claydon viewed Mrs. Grancy as his possession. And by painting her portrait, he felt like he had captured her in her entirety—much like Mr. Grancy felt like owning the portrait meant that he was holding Mrs. Grancy as his “prisoner.”

Additionally, Claydon claims that he was the only one who truly saw and understood Mrs. Grancy's beauty. His comment about Mr. Grancy never guessing his secret and assuming that he alone owned Mrs. Grancy perhaps implies that Claydon and Mrs. Grancy had an affair, although this is left ambiguous. It may also simply mean that Claydon feels a unique kind of ownership over Mrs. Grancy, as though he was more entitled to her than her own husband was because he (the artist) was the only one who saw Mrs. Grancy (his muse) in her entirety. In this sense, Claydon has objectified Mrs. Grancy, conflating his romanticized idea of her with who she really was and overlooking everything about her other than her physical beauty.

☞☞ ‘But now [Mrs. Grancy] belongs to me[.]’

Related Characters: Claydon (speaker), Mr. Ralph Grancy, Mrs. Grancy, The Narrator

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 81

Explanation and Analysis

This is the final line in the story, in which Claydon tells the narrator that Mrs. Grancy belongs to him now. Having inherited Mrs. Grancy's portrait from Mr. Grancy's will, Claydon undid the changes that Mr. Grancy had him make to the painting over the years, restoring it back to its original portrayal of Mrs. Grancy as a young woman. In doing so, and in arranging a shrine around the portrait, Claydon feels like he now owns not only the painting but Mrs. Grancy herself. This implies that Mrs. Grancy's beauty, as captured in the painting, is the only thing worth knowing and loving about her—to Claydon, there's no difference between Mrs. Grancy the image and Mrs. Grancy the person.

Claydon claims to have loved Mrs. Grancy, yet his possessive language here suggests that his years-long fixation on her has been based in an obsession rather than genuine love. He's made changes to the portrait that go against Mr. Grancy's wishes and has placed the painting at the center of a shrine—which neither Mr. nor Mrs. Grancy

likely would have wanted. Claydon is thus objectifying Mrs. Grancy rather than honoring her, as well as violating the Grancys' relationship. All that matters to him, it seems, is being able to feel like he owns Mrs. Grancy's beauty—he doesn't actually love Mrs. Grancy, only his romanticized version of her.



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

PART I

The narrator is shocked when he hears that Mrs. Grancy died. Although Mrs. Grancy wasn't a particularly influential member of society, her death has left a large void for those who knew her—particularly for her widower, Ralph Grancy. Mrs. Grancy's role in life was to serve Mr. Grancy; she was his sole source of support, comfort, and inspiration. Her presence is what enabled Mr. Grancy to cultivate a happy life and make himself useful to everyone around him.

The narrator and the rest of Mr. Grancy's "small but devoted band of followers" have seen Mr. Grancy struggle against obstacles like illness and poverty in the past. Worst of all, Mr. Grancy's first wife was egotistical and controlling; to his friends, it seemed like the relationship was slowly drowning him. When his first wife died, Mr. Grancy's friends wondered how much of Mr. Grancy she took with her. Even after his first wife's death, Mr. Grancy still seemed weakened by her, as though a parasite had sucked the life out of him. But when he met his second wife, Mrs. Grancy, he flourished.

Mrs. Grancy was over 30 years old when she married Mr. Grancy, but she still radiated youth and beauty. The narrator and Mr. Grancy's other friends were shocked when Mr. Grancy brought his new wife home to New York—after all, any other man who had experienced a terrible first marriage would have avoided another. But Mr. Grancy's friends recognized that he was very sentimental, so they expected that he would repeat his previous mistake. When the narrator and the others met the beautiful Mrs. Grancy, however, they didn't worry about Mr. Grancy anymore—being with Mrs. Grancy would surely enable him to do great things.

Beginning the story with Mrs. Grancy's death hints that her passing will be central to the plot. Clearly, even though Mrs. Grancy wasn't a public figure, she was very important to those closest to her. Her death is therefore likely to be devastating for her loved ones, especially her husband. The narrator seems to find it romantic that Mr. Grancy's life was so centered around Mrs. Grancy—but the fact that Mr. Grancy had no other source of happiness in his life is a sign that he was perhaps unhealthily dependent on his wife.



The narrator's characterization of Mr. Grancy's friends (including the narrator himself) as his "small but devoted band of followers" sets Mr. Grancy up as a sociable, dominant man whom others look up to. However, the insight about his first marriage contradicts his public image: he seemed to have been dominated by his first wife, yet he chose to endure her cruelty rather than be alone. And, importantly, it was only when he met the second Mrs. Grancy that he was able to regain his confidence and happiness, meaning that he was still depending on another person to feel complete. Together, these details further characterize Mr. Grancy as someone who is perhaps unhealthily invested in his romantic relationships.



The narrator focuses solely on Mrs. Grancy's physical appearance, which implies that her beauty—not any of her other qualities—is what the men in Mrs. Grancy's life value about her. Meanwhile, Mr. Grancy's friends view him as something of a hopeless romantic: someone who is willing to risk misery and heartbreak if it means having a partner to complete him.



Claydon, an artist in the narrator's friend group, believed that marrying Mrs. Grancy was Mr. Grancy's great deed—and Mr. Grancy agreed. He was so enamored with Mrs. Grancy that he commissioned Claydon to paint a **portrait** of her. Mr. Grancy's friends all agreed that Mrs. Grancy's unique beauty was a product of her environment—Mr. Grancy's presence is what brought it out. In return, Mrs. Grancy seemed to open up a new perspective for Mr. Grancy, reviving the vitality and optimism that his previous wife had stifled in him.

To Mr. Grancy's friends, it was clear that his presence (and even the mention of his name) had a visible effect on Mrs. Grancy: the love that the couple shared seemed to light her up from within. Her eyes would take on a charming and mysterious quality when Mr. Grancy was around, which Claydon perfectly captured in Mrs. Grancy's **portrait**.

Those who attended Claydon's art exhibition hailed the **portrait** as his masterpiece, though people who knew Mrs. Grancy said that it was a flattered representation of what she really looked like. But the narrator knew that Claydon painted Mrs. Grancy exactly as Mr. Grancy—not anyone else—saw her. Mr. Grancy also understood this when he saw the portrait, whereas Mrs. Grancy just commented that her likeness looked like she was facing the sun. In retrospect, the narrator thinks that the portrait initially seemed inconsequential to the Grancys' lives—it only became significant later.

A year after Mr. and Mrs. Grancy married, Mr. Grancy gave up his townhouse, and the couple moved an hour away to the countryside. Mr. Grancy still did business in New York, but his friends naturally saw him less often than when he lived in the city. Although this disappointed the narrator and the rest of Mr. Grancy's friends, they felt that Mr. Grancy deserved to be happy in whatever way he chose.

Mr. Grancy's friends believe that marrying Mrs. Grancy is his greatest accomplishment, which reinforces Mr. Grancy's tendency to center his life around his romantic partner. They also seem to view Mrs. Grancy's physical appearance as her primary source of worth. Though this is meant to be complimentary, it objectifies her and diminishes any non-physical qualities she might have to offer. The Grancys' friends also believe that Mrs. Grancy's beauty is only fully brought out by her husband's presence; her value depends on her beauty, and her beauty depends on Mr. Grancy.



Again, Mr. Grancy and his friends are solely focused on Mrs. Grancy's appearance, to the point that Mr. Grancy wants to capture her beauty in a portrait. Given that Mr. Grancy seems to be overly dependent on his romantic relationships, this desire is perhaps rooted in possessiveness over Mrs. Grancy rather than a genuine desire to honor her. And, especially given that the narrator hasn't mentioned anything else about Mrs. Grancy, it seems that glorifying her beauty with a portrait is more objectifying than it is flattering.



Claydon paints Mrs. Grancy as Mr. Grancy sees her, rather than how other people see her—or how she sees herself. This again suggests that Mr. Grancy's feelings for Mrs. Grancy aren't based on a genuine love of who she is; they're based on a romanticized idea of her.



This passage further characterizes Mr. Grancy as someone who's willing to sacrifice other aspects of his life for the sake of his marriage. Although his friends are deeply important to him, he seems to want to isolate himself in his relationship with Mrs. Grancy, which suggests that his happiness lies with her and her alone.



After the move, Mr. Grancy's friends began spending Sundays in the library at the Grancys' rural home, the room where Mrs. Grancy's **portrait** hung. The narrator and the others would tease Claydon that he only visited to see the painting, and once, Claydon cryptically responded that "the portrait was Mrs. Grancy." One of the other men in the group, a novelist, said that Claydon saved himself from falling in love with Mrs. Grancy by falling in love with her portrait instead.

Claydon's obsession with Mrs. Grancy's portrait—and particularly his assertion that the painting is Mrs. Grancy—suggests that he views Mrs. Grancy's appearance as her most important quality. He seems to think that his painting of Mrs. Grancy conveys everything there is to know about her. Mr. Grancy's other friends recognize that Claydon is in love with his own depiction of Mrs. Grancy, which implies that he—much like Mr. Grancy—loves his romanticized idea of Mrs. Grancy more than he loves the woman herself. In fact, Claydon's obsession with Mrs. Grancy doesn't seem to be rooted in love at all, but in a fixation on and possessiveness of her beauty.



While the other men were charmed by Mrs. Grancy's presence in the library and enjoyed having her participate in their conversations, Claydon would look up at her **portrait** instead, as though listening to the painting speak. The narrator remembers how magical these Sunday afternoons felt, as the Grancys' happiness seemed to radiate onto their guests and made all of their hopes and dreams seem possible.

Claydon gazes up at Mrs. Grancy's painting while she speaks rather than looking at the woman herself, which further indicates that he isn't in love with Mrs. Grancy—he's merely obsessed with her beauty. Meanwhile, the narrator's observation about the Grancys' contagious happiness gives insight into why Mrs. Grancy's impending death is such a tremendous loss.



PART II

Three years later, the narrator hears the news of Mrs. Grancy's death while he's living in Rome. A few months later, Mr. Grancy passes through Rome on his way to begin a new job as Constantinople's secretary of legation. The narrator recognizes that Grancy is using his work as distraction, a means of overcoming his grief—yet it's this resolute exterior that betrays his inner suffering. The narrator and Grancy only discuss superficial topics and part ways after a few days. Sometimes, the narrator thinks, friendship fails to fulfill its traditional purpose.

The narrator recognizes that Mr. Grancy is throwing himself into his work as a way of running from his grief—yet the brave front he's putting on is obviously contrived. This speaks to how grieving people feel pressured (whether by others or by themselves) to act like they're okay, which only causes further emotional damage. The narrator also thinks that friendship, for all its promises of love and support during difficult times, fails to provide Mr. Grancy with what he needs. Even the narrator, his close friend of many years, feels like Mr. Grancy's suffering drives a wedge between them—and in this way, Mr. Grancy's grief affects him interpersonally as well as emotionally.



Soon after this, the narrator returns to the United States for his own work. Mr. Grancy remains in Europe for several years, working tirelessly in international diplomacy. Eventually, Grancy is removed from the office due to a political redistribution, and the narrator hears that he's returned to his house in the countryside. The narrator writes to Grancy, who responds the next day asking the narrator to visit that Sunday, along with any other old friends the narrator wants to invite. The prospect of a reunion disappoints the narrator a little—perhaps because people like to keep their friends' troubles at a distance.

Again, Mr. Grancy's focus on his work indicates that he's trying to distract himself from his grief rather than face it head-on. The narrator's admission that he's disappointed about seeing Mr. Grancy again is further evidence of how a grieving person's relationships can suffer, since most people find it uncomfortable to witness a friend in such a vulnerable state.



On the same evening that the narrator hears back from Mr. Grancy, he runs into Claydon at their social club and invites him to the gathering on Sunday. Claydon, however, claims that he has a prior engagement. The narrator tries to adjust their plans around Claydon's schedule, but Claydon flatly says that he doesn't want to go to Grancy's. This surprises the narrator, since he and Claydon were closer with Grancy than their other friends were.

Claydon then reveals that he's already been to visit Mr. Grancy since he's been back. When the narrator asks whether Claydon doesn't want to visit because Grancy changed beyond recognition during his time abroad, Claydon cryptically replies, "Oh, you'll recognize *him*." The narrator then asks whether Claydon and Grancy's friendship has dissolved, and Grancy exclaims that he wishes it had. He'd do anything for Grancy, he says—except go back to Grancy's house.

The narrator doesn't know how to interpret what Claydon said, but he decides to go to Mr. Grancy's house alone that Sunday. When the narrator meets Grancy at the train station, he immediately notices that Grancy is in high spirits; he no longer seems plagued by grief. Yet Grancy's physical appearance has changed drastically since they last met: though only 45, grief has turned him into a tired, gray-haired old man. Nevertheless, Grancy seems sharp and lively as he and the narrator lightheartedly discuss their old interests.

At Grancy's house, the narrator still senses Mrs. Grancy reflected in every room and every object. He wonders if Mr. Grancy, beneath his cheerful exterior, perceives this as well—if he's haunted by Mrs. Grancy's ghost. Mrs. Grancy's name seems to linger in the air whenever Mr. Grancy mentions her in passing, and it seems as though he's still enveloped in her presence. The narrator marvels at how the dead can live on in this way.

The narrator and Mr. Grancy eat lunch and then take a long walk before returning to the house at dusk. Back inside, Grancy leads the narrator to the library, where Mrs. Grancy always used to welcome them with tea and a warm fire. The narrator remembers how young Mrs. Grancy looked when the evening light would pour into this room and illuminate her girlish features. By all accounts, the library looks the same as it always did, yet the narrator feels a strange resistance at the threshold of the room as he enters.

Claydon's reaction is surprising, since he was so close to the Grancys before Mrs. Grancy died. It's unclear why Claydon is so averse to visiting Mr. Grancy—but given the narrator's own discomfort at the idea, it may be because Claydon, too, finds it uncomfortable to witness their friend's suffering.



The narrator doesn't know what to make of Claydon's comment, but Claydon's emphasis on the word "him" implies that there's someone else the narrator won't recognize at Mr. Grancy's house. Given Claydon's obsession with Mrs. Grancy's portrait earlier in the story, this could mean that something about the painting has changed, to the point that the narrator won't recognize it. Regardless, whatever happened at Mr. Grancy's house was so traumatic for Claydon that he wishes he'd ended his friendship with Mr. Grancy altogether.



Although Mr. Grancy doesn't seem as miserable as he did when the narrator saw him in Europe, his dramatically aged appearance is a sign that he's suffered greatly over the past five years. The physical changes in Mr. Grancy seem to be an outward manifestation of the emotional changes he's gone through as he's mourned Mrs. Grancy.



Although Mrs. Grancy died several years ago, the narrator still feels her presence everywhere. His observation that Mrs. Grancy still seems alive, or like a ghost haunting Mr. Grancy, suggests that she's still central to Mr. Grancy's life. In this way, Mr. Grancy's possessiveness over his wife seems to have lingered even after her death—he refuses to let her go.



Even after Mrs. Grancy's death, the narrator's memories of her are focused solely on how beautiful she was—her appearance, it seems, is what made her valuable and memorable to the men in her life. Meanwhile, the "resistance" that the narrator feels at the threshold of the library ties back to Claydon's refusal to return to Mr. Grancy's house. This foreshadows the narrator encountering something disturbing in the library.



When the narrator spots Mrs. Grancy's **portrait** on the wall, he feels that something about her face has changed. As if reading the narrator's mind, Mr. Grancy asks if he notices a difference and tells the narrator that five years have passed over Mrs. Grancy, just as they've passed over himself. Happiness is what kept Mrs. Grancy young in life, but now they can grow old together—this, Mr. Grancy says, is what his wife would have wanted.

It seems that Mr. Grancy had the portrait of Mrs. Grancy altered to look older, to ensure that she won't be left behind as he ages. However, the reader can infer that this is just an excuse—Mr. Grancy likely had the portrait changed because he doesn't want to feel alone as he gets older. This gives further insight into Mr. Grancy's possessiveness over Mrs. Grancy, as he refuses to leave his wife behind even after she's passed away. It's also a testament to how much he's grieving beneath his cheerful exterior: he's resorted to denying reality and acting as if Mrs. Grancy is still alive.



The narrator is horrified when he sees that Mrs. Grancy's **portrait** does indeed look older: her face and hair seem duller, much like Mr. Grancy's own aged, grief-stricken features. Mr. Grancy asks the narrator if he likes it, but the narrator exclaims that he's "lost her." Mr. Grancy retorts that he's "found her"—the old portrait had become a lie, whereas this new version is how Mrs. Grancy would look now if she'd lived. Mr. Grancy explains that as soon as he arrived home, he'd sent for Claydon to alter the portrait. Suddenly, Mr. Grancy turns away and gestures for the narrator to come sit next to him by the fireplace.

The narrator seems to view the alteration of Mrs. Grancy's portrait as a kind of betrayal, as Mr. Grancy essentially defaced Mrs. Grancy's beauty—the very quality that everyone cherished about her. Mr. Grancy reveals that he had Claydon do this to the portrait, which explains why Claydon was so adamant about never visiting Grancy again. Claydon was obsessed with Mrs. Grancy's beauty when she was alive (particularly the way he portrayed it in his painting of her), so changing the portrait likely felt like a betrayal to him as well.



PART III

As the narrator and Mr. Grancy sit by the fire, Mr. Grancy says that the narrator and their mutual friends can guess how much Mrs. Grancy meant to him, though no one can truly understand. He admits that he needs a partner to experience life alongside him. Mr. Grancy says that when he met his second wife, he finally experienced simple, effortless happiness; Mrs. Grancy seemed to light up the dark parts of his life. On his way home at the end of each workday, Mr. Grancy would only think of how Mrs. Grancy would be sitting in her armchair in the library, the lamplight falling on her hair in a particular way.

Here, Mr. Grancy admits that he needs a romantic partner to feel complete, which is why he had Mrs. Grancy's portrait altered—he needed to feel like she was still with him. This is another hint that Mr. Grancy was perhaps more obsessed with than in love with his wife, as his need for a partner seems to be rooted in a fear of being alone. And, again, Mr. Grancy seems to value Mrs. Grancy primarily for her appearance, as his fondest memory of her is centered on how her hair looked rather than something she said or did.



Mr. Grancy tells the narrator that in Mrs. Grancy's **portrait**, Claydon somehow captured the expression that would appear on Mrs. Grancy's face whenever Mr. Grancy walked through the door. He admits that he sometimes wonders how Claydon knew what Mrs. Grancy looked like when they were alone. Mr. Grancy had adored the painting; when it was finished, he'd told Mrs. Grancy that she was his "prisoner" now. Even if Mrs. Grancy left him, he'd joked, he'd still have her "real self" on his wall. When Mrs. Grancy died three years later, the loss was so sudden that Mr. Grancy felt like nothing had changed—as though Mrs. Grancy herself had been frozen in time, just like the portrait.

Mr. Grancy confides in the narrator that he'd stayed in Europe for five years, working as hard as he could. After a few months of deep depression, he began thinking that Mrs. Grancy would be interested in what he was doing, and eventually it began to feel like Mrs. Grancy was actually there with him. Their hearts and minds had been so intertwined while Mrs. Grancy was alive that it seemed like her consciousness was inhabiting his own.

When Mr. Grancy returned home, he'd gone straight to look at Mrs. Grancy's **portrait** and felt that she was looking at him coldly and distantly. He realized that he and the woman in the painting were strangers now—his wife wouldn't even recognize the haggard old man he'd become. Mr. Grancy thus began to resent the beautiful portrait for driving a wedge between him and the ghostly presence of Mrs. Grancy that had comforted him since her death. He felt incredibly lonely.

Then, Mr. Grancy had noticed that Mrs. Grancy's **portrait** looked lonely too, and he thought about how his wife would have hated to be left behind. Mr. Grancy realized that the painting is what stood between him and Mrs. Grancy—that the portrait, not his wife, was dead. He sent for Claydon, who initially refused to alter the painting. But eventually he agreed, shutting himself into a spare room working on the portrait for a full day. When Mr. Grancy saw the finished result, he felt like Mrs. Grancy was embracing him once more. When he'd thanked Claydon, however, Claydon coldly cut him off and left abruptly. Presently, Mr. Grancy says to the narrator that while Claydon lost his masterpiece, he himself gained his wife back.

Mr. Grancy's comment to Mrs. Grancy, that having her portrait meant that she was his "prisoner," confirms that his feelings for her were based in possessiveness rather than genuine love—in spite of what their relationship looked like to outsiders. Furthermore, the fact that Mr. Grancy believed that he had Mrs. Grancy's "real self" on his wall hearkens back to Claydon's comment that "the portrait was Mrs. Grancy." Together, these sentiments suggest that the essence of Mrs. Grancy was captured in the portrait—that is, that there's nothing more to know and love about Mrs. Grancy than her beauty. The remark that Claydon somehow knew what Mrs. Grancy looked like when she and her husband were alone suggests that Claydon and Mrs. Grancy may have had an affair (in other words, she may have looked at Claydon the same way). This would help explain Claydon's attachment to her.



While Mr. Grancy claims that he was deeply intertwined with Mrs. Grancy, there's no indication that his affections for her were based on anything more than an admiration of her beauty and a dependency on her companionship. Meanwhile, the fact that he imagines she's still alive and present with him speaks to how deeply his grief has affected his mental well-being, as he's resorted to denying reality as a way of coping emotionally.



While Mr. Grancy was fixated on Mrs. Grancy's beauty while she was alive, he began to resent it after her death. This is seemingly because the youthful portrayal of Mrs. Grancy in the portrait made Mr. Grancy self-conscious of his own aging, and this made him feel distant from his late wife. He was, apparently, so intent on maintaining his hold on Mrs. Grancy that he was willing to sacrifice her beauty (the very thing he loved most about her) if it meant feeling like she was alive and aging alongside him.



Again, Mr. Grancy claims that he had the portrait changed because he didn't want Mrs. Grancy to feel left behind, but it's clear that he was the one terrified of feeling alone. His real motivation for having Claydon alter the portrait seems to be that he wanted to feel like Mrs. Grancy was still his "prisoner" and that she was aging alongside him. Claydon, meanwhile, was distraught that he ruined his "masterpiece"—that is, he defaced Mrs. Grancy's beauty, which he all but worshipped when she was still alive.



PART IV

Over the next 10 years, the narrator and others can see that Mr. Grancy seems to derive all of his happiness and productivity from Mrs. Grancy's mysterious presence in his life. A few months after the narrator's initial visit to Mr. Grancy's house, he returns again to find that Mr. Grancy has moved the **portrait** upstairs to a small study. He tells the narrator that this is where he spends all of his alone time now—the library will be reserved for entertaining guests. Gradually, their old friend group reunites, and the men begin spending Sundays in Grancy's library again. In retrospect, the narrator can see that Mr. Grancy was in ill health at this time, yet his high spirits hid any outward signs of weakness.

One summer, the narrator returns home from vacationing in Europe and hears that Mr. Grancy nearly died while he was away. He hurries to the countryside, where Mr. Grancy is slowly recovering from his illness. Mr. Grancy reassures the narrator that although he's an old man, "we" aren't going to die yet. His use of this plural pronoun alarms the narrator, who looks up at Mrs. Grancy's **portrait** and sees that she's changed again—she looks like she knows her husband is dying. The narrator can hardly bear to look at what Claydon has done.

Mr. Grancy tells the narrator that while he was suffering from his illness, Mrs. Grancy was suffering even worse. He explains that Claydon kindly came as soon as Mr. Grancy sent for him. The narrator falls silent and leaves, feeling that he's shutting Mr. Grancy in the house to die. The next time the narrator visits, however, Mr. Grancy looks much better, and he continues to improve over the coming months.

One evening, the narrator runs into Claydon at the club and tells him that he should visit Mr. Grancy now that he's healthy again. Mrs. Grancy's prognosis for her husband, the narrator says coldly, was wrong. Claydon retorts that "she knows," and when the narrator asks if this means that he intends to leave the **portrait** as it is, Claydon simply says that Mr. Grancy hasn't sent for him yet.

All of Mr. Grancy's strength seemingly comes from the imaginary presence of Mrs. Grancy in his life, again suggesting that he depends on her to be happy—even if this means deluding himself into imagining that she's still there with him. Mr. Grancy is so fixated on his late wife that he moves her portrait into a private room. He seemingly wants to isolate himself with Mrs. Grancy, the way he did years ago when he and Mrs. Grancy moved to the countryside, away from their friends. Meanwhile, despite Mr. Grancy appearing happy on the outside, he seems to have become literally sick with grief, suggesting that his inability to move on after Mrs. Grancy's death is destroying him from within.



Mr. Grancy takes his delusion a step further here, as his use of the word "we" indicates that he really believes that he and Mrs. Grancy are a single entity. Mr. Grancy once again had Claydon alter Mrs. Grancy's portrait, seemingly because he still wants to feel like Mrs. Grancy is his "prisoner" whom he can possess and control. This is also an indicator of how severely Mr. Grancy's grief has affected him: he's suffering both physically and mentally.



Again, Mr. Grancy has deluded himself into believing that Mrs. Grancy is suffering alongside him. Yet, rather than sparing her from this perceived suffering, he encourages it by changing Mrs. Grancy's portrait to make her look even older and unhappier. This is further evidence that Mr. Grancy isn't actually concerned with Mrs. Grancy feeling left behind—rather, he has the painting altered because he resents the idea of Mrs. Grancy staying young and beautiful while he grows old and tired.



The narrator implies that Claydon was making a strategic move when he changed Mrs. Grancy's expression to make it look like she knew her husband was going to die. Claydon's cold response seems to confirm this, suggesting that he wants Mrs. Grancy's "prognosis" of Mr. Grancy's impending death to come true. In other words, Claydon would rather have Mr. Grancy (one of his oldest friends) die than have to alter the portrait and tarnish Mrs. Grancy's beauty again.



Two weeks later, Mr. Grancy's housekeeper sends a telegraph to the narrator informing him that Mr. Grancy has taken a turn for the worse. The narrator hurries to the house and learns that Mr. Grancy's health is failing—the doctors won't be able to do much for him. Mr. Grancy tells him that Mrs. Grancy was right after all: he'd realized he was going to die after Claydon altered the **portrait** for the second time, though Mr. Grancy hadn't believed it at first.

Mr. Grancy's sudden turn for the worse perhaps indicates that Mrs. Grancy's portrait has become something of a self-fulfilling prophecy. Mrs. Grancy's likeness seemed to know that Mr. Grancy was going to die. And in fixating so intently on Mrs. Grancy and refusing to let her go, changing her portrait to reflect his own physical deterioration, Mr. Grancy seemingly destroyed himself from the inside out.



The narrator pleads with Mr. Grancy not to believe he's going to die now, but Mr. Grancy is resigned to the fact that it's too late—"she knew." The narrator realizes that it's easier to let Mr. Grancy believe that Mrs. Grancy *did* know. He reflects that, strangely, Claydon seems to have given Mr. Grancy what he wanted after all.

This passage seems to suggest that Mr. Grancy actually wanted to die, perhaps so that he could be reunited with Mrs. Grancy in the afterlife. This is yet another indicator of Mr. Grancy's unhealthy obsession with his wife, as he would rather give up his life entirely than live without her.



PART V

Mr. Grancy dies from his illness, and the narrator is named one of the executors of his estate. He must carry out Mr. Grancy's wishes, which means informing Claydon that Mr. Grancy left Mrs. Grancy's **portrait** to him. When Claydon retrieves the painting from the Grancys' home, the narrator feels like Mr. Grancy's presence has vanished along with it. He wonders if Mr. Grancy has followed Mrs. Grancy, and if one ghost can haunt another.

Mr. Grancy probably left Mrs. Grancy's portrait to Claydon because he trusted his friend to keep his own "masterpiece" safe and honor Mr. Grancy's wishes. But, given Claydon's obsession with Mrs. Grancy and his guilt over defacing the painting, it's likely that he won't keep the portrait the way Mr. Grancy left it. The narrator, meanwhile, feels like Mr. Grancy's presence has vanished after his death, unlike the way Mrs. Grancy's ghostly presence seemed to linger in the Grancys' house. This implies that Mrs. Grancy's "ghost" only haunted the house because Mr. Grancy clung to her so tightly, whereas the narrator seems to be in a more stable headspace and is able to let Mr. Grancy go.



Over the next couple of years, the narrator doesn't hear anything more about the **portrait**, nor does he see much of Claydon. Even though the narrator tries to tell himself that Claydon was kind to sacrifice his masterpiece in order to appease Mr. Grancy's wishes, he still inexplicably resents Claydon for defacing the original painting.

Even though Mr. Grancy was the one who asked Claydon to change Mrs. Grancy's portrait, the narrator blames Claydon for ruining his own "masterpiece." Claydon previously asserted that "the portrait was Mrs. Grancy," and the narrator seemingly agrees. In this way, both Claydon and the narrator seem to think that the portrait represented the essence of Mrs. Grancy—and that, as the artist who captured her beauty, Claydon has some level of ownership over her.



One day, the narrator and some of his friends attend Claydon's latest art exhibition. As the narrator wanders around the studio looking at Claydon's art and collectibles, he notices a curtained archway leading to a smaller room. Stepping through, he sees an ornate vase and a bronze sculpture, and then he finds himself face to face with Mrs. Grancy's **portrait** hanging on the wall. The painting has been restored to its original youthful portrayal of Mrs. Grancy. The narrator realizes that Claydon arranged this room as a shrine to Mrs. Grancy. Claydon had loved Mrs. Grancy the woman, not Mrs. Grancy the portrait—and this, the narrator recognizes, is why he instinctively resents Claydon.

Just then, Claydon comes up behind the narrator and taps him on the shoulder, and the narrator asks Claydon how he could do this. Claydon retorts, "How could I *not*?" and reminds the narrator that the **portrait** belongs to him now. He says that he supposes the narrator thinks he killed Mr. Grancy, and the narrator replies that he thinks Claydon tried to do something cruel. Claydon explains that he turned his real woman into a painting. He says that Mrs. Grancy gave him the gift of her beauty, which no one but him truly understood—and in return, he produced his masterpiece.

Claydon tells the narrator that Mr. Grancy was a fool to think that Mrs. Grancy belonged solely to him, especially after seeing the qualities that Claydon captured in the **portrait**. When Mr. Grancy had called on him to alter the painting the first time, Claydon says, he initially couldn't bring himself to turn the eternally youthful Mrs. Grancy into an old woman. He thought that no man who truly loved a woman should sacrifice her beauty for his own sake. But because Claydon had always been fond of Mr. Grancy—and because it seemed like the image of Mrs. Grancy was telling him that she wanted to abide by Mr. Grancy's wishes—he agreed to change the portrait.

Claydon has restored the portrait of Mrs. Grancy back to its original form, and he's created a shrine of sorts around the painting. This disturbs the narrator, who realizes that Claydon has been in love with Mrs. Grancy all along. But, in fact, Claydon doesn't seem to love Mrs. Grancy at all—the shrine to her comes off as obsessive and violating rather than loving or respectful. Claydon's feelings for her are based in an obsession with her beauty, to the point that he went against Mr. Grancy's wishes and restored Mrs. Grancy's portrait back to the way he wanted it to look.



This passage further proves that Claydon wasn't in love with Mrs. Grancy—he was merely enamored with her beauty. Claydon is adamant that he was the only one who truly appreciated Mrs. Grancy, and that she, in turn, served as his artistic muse. But by calling Mrs. Grancy "his woman," whom he turned into a painting and placed at the centerpiece of a shrine, Claydon portrays her as an object to be admired rather than a person to be remembered. Additionally, Claydon guesses that the narrator thinks he tried to kill Mr. Grancy by making Mrs. Grancy's facial expression look as though she knew Mr. Grancy was going to die. This suggests that Claydon was well aware of how much Mr. Grancy relied on Mrs. Grancy's presence for stability, and that he hoped painting Mrs. Grancy in this way would cause Mr. Grancy to give up on his recovery and succumb to his illness.



Claydon's comment that Mrs. Grancy didn't only belong to her husband is another indication that he and Mrs. Grancy may have had an affair. However, he may also simply mean that Mrs. Grancy wasn't Mr. Grancy's "prisoner," as Mr. Grancy thought she was. Claydon seems to think that by capturing Mrs. Grancy's beauty in her portrait, he had some level of ownership over her. In this way, both Mr. Grancy and Claydon saw Mrs. Grancy as their possession.



Claydon tells the narrator that afterward, he felt like he'd done something unforgivable, which is why he never wanted to go back to Mr. Grancy's house. But then, when Mr. Grancy was dying, he'd sent for Claydon again and told him that he felt like he'd aged 20 years and didn't want Mrs. Grancy to be left behind. This time, when Claydon had looked at the **portrait**, it seemed to him that Mrs. Grancy wanted Claydon to let Mr. Grancy know that he was dying. After all, if she'd been alive, wouldn't she have been the first to notice Mr. Grancy's illness?

This, Claydon says, is why he agreed to alter the **portrait** once more, changing Mrs. Grancy's face to reflect her premonition that Mr. Grancy was going to die. He believes that this is what Mrs. Grancy wanted: for Claydon to keep her and Mr. Grancy together until Mr. Grancy died. But now, Claydon tells the narrator, "she belongs to me."

Claydon claims that he changed Mrs. Grancy's portrait because it's what Mrs. Grancy would have wanted, but it seems like he actually did so for selfish reasons. In reality, he wanted Mr. Grancy to become aware of his own illness and to feel like his wife was ushering him into death, so that Claydon could take the portrait once Mrs. Grancy was gone. Claydon's fixation on Mrs. Grancy as his "masterpiece" was so strong that he was willing to sacrifice his oldest friend to get the portrait back.



Again, while Claydon claims to have been fulfilling Mrs. Grancy's wishes, it seems that he only went along with changing the painting because deteriorating Mrs. Grancy's portrait seemed to encourage Mr. Grancy's own deterioration. Claydon's ultimate goal was to get the portrait back for himself—and now that he has it, he feels that Mrs. Grancy "belongs to [him]." In this way, the portrait represents Mr. Grancy and Claydon's obsessions with Mrs. Grancy. Both men claimed to have altered the painting because it's what Mrs. Grancy would have wanted—yet, as it turns out, doing so was really their way of leveraging ownership and control over Mrs. Grancy, even after her death.





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