

Chapter - V

JULIA : WITH NO REGRETS

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I

Theatre

Somerset Maugham's Theatre appeared in 1937. It deals with Julia, an actress. She wears her stage face in the world. It seems that Maugham shows here how one's own creative profession affects one's private self.

Julia Lambert and Michael Gosselyn belong to the theatrical life. They make a very good couple. They desire to start their own management and succeed in it.

At the age of forty six Julia falls in love with Thomas Fennell. He is a very young man, young almost to be her son. He is an accountant. Their love affair develops and Julia becomes possessive of him. She dislikes him to enjoy outings and games with her son Roger. She gives him many kinds of presents. Tom realises her motive behind bestowing him with presents and hence, returns those presents to her.

Julia is heart broken to learn about the love affair of Tom with Avice Crichton. She is a young upcoming actress. Julia is greatly disturbed and her acting is affected by it.

The unsuspecting Michael suggests her to take a holiday. She goes to St. Malo where her mother and mother's sister live. Julia's stay there enables her to overcome her passion for Tom. When she returns she decides to give herself to Charles Tamerley; her long devoted lover and faithful friend. But she realizes that he is impotent.

Meanwhile it has been settled that Avice should play a role in the new play. Julia has decided to turn the tables on Tom and Avice. Before the play there is a love encounter between Tom and Julia, only to Julia's sense of relief that she no longer loves him.

On the first day of the play, Julia manoeuvres things in such a manner that she emerges totally triumphant ! Avice is almost shattered before Julia's magnificent performance. Tom rushes to her, full of praise and she realises his desire for her has increased much more than before. But now she deliberately decides to evade him. After the play she avoids everyone and goes to a restaurant, all by herself, to celebrate her new found liberty from the pangs of love ! She emerges at the end triumphant, and with her own philosophy of life she is set once again to partake of the joys of life !

"In Theatre he (Maugham) abandoned his alter ego and projected the story through the consciousness of a woman. She is Julia Lambert, England's leading actress ... Julia takes what she wants from life without regret or apology ..."¹

Maugham was well acquainted with the theatre world. He knew many of the ~~actors~~ and actresses closely and so could write with ease and confidence about them, yet he did not try to glorify this world :

"... When he wrote Theatre he entertained no romantic notions concerning the significance or glamour of the theatre."²

II

Julia

"You don't exist, you're only the innumerable parts you've played ... When I've seen you go into an empty room I've sometimes wanted to open the door suddenly, but I've been afraid to in case I found nobody there"³

This poignant remark by Roger gives a fairly good idea of Julia's nature. Julia, a leading actress, a mother, a lover and a friend has a multi facet personality.

She has learnt the first lessons of acting from her aunt's acquaintance who had been an actress herself. She teaches Julia all the arts that she knows. At sixteen Julia attends the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art. After completing her learning, she gets a small break in London. Here she attracts the attention of James Langton. He runs a repertory theatre at Middlepool. Julia accepts his offer and excels herself well on the stage. In the company of James Langton and under his expert direction Julia is made aware of a great actress in her. Her figure is suitable for the stage. Her large dark eyes and her lovely voice make a very good impact on the audience.

She observes people and tries to shape her own personality. She makes use of a good many things in her acting performances :

"... She combined with this recollection her own personality, and thus built up a character founded on fact but enriched with her experience; her knowledge of technique and her amazing magnetism..."⁴

Acting is her second nature. She sincerely follows it in her life :

"... her every action is a performance, every remark a 'line', every emotion designed and in character. In moments of crisis ... she quotes apt lines from her play ..." ⁵

Julia wants to be a great actress, and hence she tries to fulfil her own desires. She dominates the personality of Michael. He prefers to live in the background and allows her to be in the limelight.

She likes Michael for his youth. But the moment she finds that his youth is fading away, she begins to dislike him :

"... She realized that he no longer smelt like a youth, he smelt like a man. ... Her heart sank because she had lost something that was infinitely precious to her ..."6

Perhaps she is constantly in search of fresh youth, and when she finds it in Tom she starts taking interest in him. At the age of forty six she passionately falls in love with Tom. It is her unsatiated passion for youth that takes her once again to the realm of love.

She tries to keep Tom enchained to her. She does not allow any kind of freedom to him. She does everything that helps her to show her love for him. But she realises that Tom does not love her.

Julia is self centred and she is a monomaniac. She exploits others for her own sake. She wants to preserve her own identity and precisely for this she does not respond to Charles Tamerley's offer of elopement with him. He loves her whole heartedly. He spends a lot for her. But she keeps the affair on a platonic level. Later she realises that he loves her truly and offers herself to him. But to her amazement she finds that Charles is an impotent. She therefore dislikes him because she values

creativity more than anything else. But she maintains her relation with Charles.

She is dominantly possessive of those persons who become intimate with her. When she marries Michael, she wants him all to herself. She makes terrible scenes when he goes out to enjoy by himself. Only when she is no more physically attracted to him does she loosen her hold over him. Her relation with Tom explicitly shows how possessive she can be ! She is very jealous when Tom and Roger enjoy outings and games. She wants Tom to spend some of his time with her. When she does not get Tom's company she prepares a scheme to avenge herself. She knows that Tom does not have money to pay as tips to servants. So she deliberately encloses some money to be paid to the servants, along with a note for him. When she has done this, she is satisfied :

"... If she had racked her brains for a week she couldn't have thought of anything that would humiliate Tom more bitterly."⁷

She is possessive of her son, too. The moment she realises that Roger has been seduced by a girl named Joan, she is shocked. She realises that :

"... without ever having passed him, she had lost him."⁸

Julia has taken proper care of her son's education. But it is just not enough. She keeps him away so that he may not become an obstacle in her way of life. In her creative life there is no place for him. Her jealousy dominates her maternal instinct as she tries to be even with her own son for monopolizing Tom's time. It seems that she has failed in performing her duty as a mother in case of Roger. But she is, no doubt, anxious about Roger's future life. She does not want him to be an actor, perhaps being fully aware of the sordidness of stage life. Roger acknowledges all that his parents have done for him. But he sarcastically remarks that his mother has deprived him of belief in everything in life. She has made him mentally handicapped :

"... You've done everything you could for me. Unfortunately for me you've taken away my belief in everything"⁹

It seems that she does not pay much importance to morality in her life. Even though she is a married woman she does not feel guilty in carrying on her love affairs with others. She does not feel anything wrong in such affairs. It seems she believes

in the saying that variety is the spice of life.

She is fickle minded. She cannot stick to an opinion for a long time. There was a time when she had admired Michael and even his petty habits. But now she hates him. She thinks him to be conceited and a 'crashing bore.' Only occasionally she becomes remorseful when she realises that he is being magnanimous.

Her friend Dolly de Vries is a rich widow. Dolly admires Julia for her great ability of acting performance. But she does not like that Julia should love Tom. She says so to Julia but Julia does not pay any attention to it. Dolly is a rich woman and Julia wants to utilize her money. So she does not hurt Dolly.

Julia is shrewd enough to understand people well. She knows from the beginning that Tom does not love her. But she is not frustrated. She tries to persuade the mind of Tom :

" ... she left nothing undone to bind him to her. He liked parties and she took him to parties. ... She knew he was dazzled by the great, and she introduced him to eminent persons ..."¹⁰

Julia is a woman of no principles. She is a hypocrite. Often she says things which she does not mean :

"... she becomes incapable of honest emotion, and ... her soul is as thickly rouged as her face..."¹¹

Though she ceases to admire Michael, she continues to say flattering things to him. With Charles, too, she is hypocritical. She is actually bored at his habit of reciting lines from poems but she pretends to be very interested.

Julia is the very epitome of selfishness. Her journey through life is a story of loneliness :

"... I'm so lonely ... I'm surrounded by hangers on and parasites ..." ¹²

Her egocentric mind deprives her of the real joys and happiness in life. Outwardly she seems to be happy and contented but inwardly she suffers terribly from loneliness. It seems that the characteristics of woman in her are wiped out totally by her selfishness. Maugham presents her as a woman who has become a victim of her pretensions and hollowness. She truly represents the modern woman who is egocentric, monomaniac

and selfish. She takes from life what she needs and never feels any regrets to sacrifice morality and ethics for this.

About the delineation of Julia, Maugham says :

"... I have taken a trait here and a trait there and sought to create a living person. ... I drew the creature of my fancy, I daresay, with a certain coolness. ... I think Julia Lambert is true to life. ..."¹³

Chapter - V

THEATRE

References

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