



CLEMENCE DANE

THE BABYONS

*THIRD PERSON
SINGULAR*

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BY
CLEMENCE DANE

Novels

REGIMENT OF WOMEN
FIRST THE BLADE
LEGEND
WANDERING STARS

Plays

A BILL OF DIVORCEMENT
WILL SHAKESPEARE
THE WAY THINGS HAPPEN
NABOTH'S VINEYARD
GRANITE
MARINERS
ADAM'S OPERA

THIRD PERSON
SINGULAR



THE
BABYONS

THE CHRONICLE

OF A

FAMILY

BY

CLEMENCE DANE

.

THIRD PERSON SINGULAR

MIDSUMMER MEN

CREEPING JENNY

LADY BABYON

THIRD
PERSON
SINGULAR

•
GEORGIAN



GARDEN CITY:
DOUBLEDAY, DORAN
and COMPANY, Inc.

1928

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FIRST EDITION

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THIRD PERSON
SINGULAR

First Person Singular—I.

Second Person Singular—Thou.

Third Person Singular—. . . She or It.

Grammar-book.



THIRD PERSON SINGULAR

I

As he walked along the Pantiles with the spring wind meeting his cheek, the chatter of passers-by and the music of the band meeting his ears, he thought to himself that he was well out of the business. Ouf! the pleasure of fresh air after the heat and half-light of his cousin's room, after the heat and half-light of his cousin's emotion! He was well, well out of it!

Yet through, behind, upon the glittering spectacle of society taking the air and the waters, floating between his eyes and the women's draperies, faces, fans, twinkling high lights on incessantly rustling foliage, sliding clouds up aloft, shadows that ran and paused and shifted like hot blue ghosts in and out among the living shapes, he could still see the room he had quitted ten minutes ago. The three walls of it were still as much before his eyes as if he were sitting in his private box at Covent Garden, as if the memory of the stifling, scorching little scene through which he had passed were an operetta played and sung before him. He could still hear the dark feminine voice, Hariot's voice.

It was odd how one heard Hariot, felt Hariot, never saw Hariot, when it came to looking back into the memory. Heat raying out of half darkness—that was Hariot: heat borne on a voice like the viola in the orchestra at Covent Garden. He had told her so that day—"Your voice—it's like a viola, Cousin!" and the viola voice had answered out of the billows of mulberry

silk, out of the blur of cheek caught in an ivory vice of supporting fist, had answered with a characteristic question—

“Is it your favourite instrument?”

What an escape! Thank the god (goddess, more likely) who looks after bachelors that he had heard for the last time that dark voice, had evaded for the last time the clutching questions of that greedy voice! Marriage with Cousin Hariot—marriage with the Maiden of Nuremberg! He had seen, as one of the sights of the Grand Tour, such a marriage celebrated, had seen some luckless traitor delivered into the Maiden’s arms. It had been explained to him how ingeniously the Maiden was constructed, with what fervour she pressed her mortal kisses upon a man’s eyes and breast and brain. No chance for him once married to the Maiden—to Hariot the Maiden!

“‘Is it your favourite instrument?’ Is it, that is to say, like me? I am your bride and therefore of all instruments it is your favourite, is it not, as I am your favourite, am I not? Of all women, the only woman for you, am I not? Am I not?”

He made up his mind then and there, before that question’s echo had ceased to ring in his mind, that he would not marry Hariot. Contract or no contract, heiress or no heiress, family pressure or no, he would not marry his Cousin Hariot. The delight of having, though only mentally, cut himself free of Hariot and the family, hastened his answer—

“No, Hariot!”

“Not—Jamie?”

She made, with her possessive lingering on it, his very name her possession, and so he had said irritably, to be rid of her questioning—

“I prefer the harp——” with no thought, upon honour, in his mind at the moment of Menella Traill.

“Menella must teach me then,” said the dark voice to that: and so sent his eyes to the window, to the anxious piece of girlhood sitting by the window.

The sun shone in upon Menella Traill, turned her tendrils of hair into a saint’s halo and rosily darkened her cheek, as if it were a branch of spring blossom raised against the sky. A glance, no more, he had given her and none had been returned him from beneath the dropped lids. Yet he had turned back to his cousin a dazzled young man, a young man in revolt.

Why was not Hariot Menella? How easy life would be if Cousin Hariot had been penniless Menella! He liked the way the muslin was folded about her shoulders and pouted over her breast. Hariot was always a restless rustle of silks: her eyes, so black and bright, were a question, a challenge; but muslin, blue ribbon, tendrils of fair hair, dropped lids and a sweet glance asleep behind them, that was Menella's way. And that was how a woman should look and be. There was nothing to be afraid of in Menella, though you might make her afraid easily and comfort her afterwards. Dear Menella! But Hariot—he would not own to himself that he was afraid of Hariot. Instead, he said to himself that he was not obliged to like her because she was his cousin. He was twenty-one, home from the Grand Tour, heir last month to nothing but his mother's settlements, heir to-day to an estate that set him free to marry whom he pleased. If his officious elders had known that his two brothers would die unmarried within a week of each other they would have been less ready to betroth him at eighteen to mature Hariot. He had, he'd admit it, thought himself in love with Cousin Hariot at eighteen; but at twenty-one a man knew more of the world and his own heart. He would not marry her. The families might say and do anything they threatened; but he would not marry the woman who had all but bought him from his greedy parents.

Then her voice had recalled him from his thoughts—

“Shall I, Jamie?”

“Shall you what, Madam?”

“Learn the harp for you?”

“Madam——”

“Hariot, Jamie!”

“There it is, Madam—well then, Hariot—Cousin Hariot. It's that we are cousins.”

“What of it?”

“Cousins, Cousin Hariot! And you must know that I had a master, a doctor of medicine, a most learned man—I met him at Florence——”

“Ah,” she said, “it should have been Mantua.” The tall Spanish leather screen shut off the light: he could not see her clearly; but it seemed to him that she was laughing.

“Mantua, Cousin?”

“Quacks have been common there, Jamie, since Romeo’s day.”

“Quack? He was my friend. And in his view—for I told him of my—of our—that is to say, I made him acquainted with my affairs—I talked of you —”

“To the apothecary?”

“He was physician to the Duke.”

“And to Romeo. Continue, Romeo!”

He scowled at her.

“My name’s Jamie. And I say, Cousin Hariot, that—that—that he bid me look about me. And I have. There’s young Milchester, he was odd enough at school, and now he’s kept to his rooms and thinks himself Cæsar and plays with hobby-horses. Pitiful! And his sister—they had her in a strait-jacket before she was married: and though they call her in her senses you know yourself she’s the talk of the town. And, do you see, their father and mother were—as we are, Hariot! And there’s the horrid tale of the Duke’s eldest—and—and the long and the short of it is, Cousin Hariot, that cousins should like each other as sisters and brothers do—shouldn’t marry.”

He had shot his bolt at last, and in the relief of having done it, waited with tolerable composure for the dusty commotion of its striking home. He even felt a certain curiosity, for he had never yet encountered his Cousin Hariot’s wrath. She had been a stranger to him since their early childhood, save for the holiday month of their betrothal; but the family temper was a legend. Well, now he had braved it and felt the better. Let her say what she pleased. She was only a woman, a mere plain Miss, seven years older than he, and his cousin. Let her rage!

But there was no noise. There was to be, it seemed, no unpleasantness. There had been the faintest rustle of silk, the slightest catch of breath in surprise or what you please, as she raised herself on her elbow on the day-bed: and the red camellia she had been twirling in her free hand fell among the ashes of the hearth beside her, as she said in the rough husky tone of a viola string clumsily twanged—

“Menella!”

“Madam?”

“You may go out, Menella! You may go to tea with your sister, Menella! Go—do you hear me!”

He watched Menella vanish from the room like a candle flame ceasing in a swoop of tempest. He wanted to go after her, to comfort apprehensive Menella.

“Now, Jamie!”

Her voice had stopped him on an actual movement of escape, and he faced her as she rose, raging with himself that he for all his inner sense of grown manhood shaking off its minority, should still be outwardly afflicted by his schooldays’ trick of stammer and blush.

“Now, Jamie!”

She had come directly to him, the dark creature, her two hands pressed to her temples as if she were holding her thoughts steady in her brain. Her glossy, pitch-black hair, dressed high as all women wore it, yet unpowdered as no woman wore it, made her unseemly in his eyes. Her hair was beautiful, but so were Menella’s tresses, more beautiful. For if you have to choose between day and night, day to any sane man is more beautiful. Yet even Menella dimmed her glory with powder, confined it with blue ribbons and tucked in a rose or two. Menella conformed. If Menella were walking now at his side between the trees and the colonnade, her little heels tapping on the smooth tiles, men would gaze and women would glance; but if Hariot were alongside, men would gaze and gape and follow, and the ladies would lift their eyebrows. This unadorned Hariot was more like the Greek witch Medea that he had seen painted black on a red bowl, at Naples, than an English gentlewoman. See how she had walked towards him, hand at her brow, a female Absalom straining against the bough’s clutch! She was too wild for him. Moreover he resented her—“Now, Jamie!” No young woman should use such a tone to him, as if he were a schoolboy. He would show her!

“Now, Hariot!” he returned it: and his blue eyes took the glance of her black ones stoutly.

“But, Jamie, how are you treating me? What is it? What’s amiss? What’s all this talk of cousins? My dear, we are to be married in a month. My gown is half made. Cousins marry every day. Why, my dear, Grandmamma was born a Babyon, yet Sir Endymion married her—his own first cousin, as I am to you.”

“That’s it! My friend says——”

She put out her hands to him, and when he would not see their appeal, caught at the lapels of his coat.

“Jamie! Look at me, Jamie! How unkind you are! Won’t you look at me?”

He looked at her. The shining leaves of the camellia cracked and spat and twisted as a flame sprang up out of the ashes and licked the twig. A thin smoke spiralled upwards and drifted between them, confusing his sight. The acrid scent bothered him: her grip tightened.

“Jamie, if you think—dream—that any one, any man, any friend, can talk us into breaking our contract—do you think that?—you’re much mistaken. I’m your wife: indeed I am. You can’t be off with me now. It’s too late. The settlements are signed. My money is yours. You could use it to-day: you could spend every guinea and I couldn’t stop you. We’re as good as married.”

He stammered.

“I’m not—I won’t—I can’t—I’m not enough for you, Cousin Hariot. You’re a great lady, don’t you see? A duke, a lord—you ought to marry a great lord.”

She pressed in on him.

“There’s no ought. I could have—I should have—but I waited for you. I’ve thought of us as married. We *are* married. I’ve thought of you——”

A dark flame warmed her face. Ten years older and he had thought her a goddess; but at twenty she frightened him with her ‘married!’

“Cousin Hariot—it’s this—I esteem—I admire—but we are not suited——”

She broke in.

“Jamie, I’m older than you. Six years. It’s nothing, six years, and yet it’ll be of use to you, Jamie! I can use my six years for you, when it comes to asking things, contriving things, in society, in the press of things. I’m wise. I can—steer, Jamie. You’ll see! And I shall like to. That’s why I waited for you. As you say—of course I could have married. I tell you I could have married at fifteen—seventeen—twenty. There were suitors enough. I let them go away again. I didn’t want made men. I wanted some one to make. Jamie, I’ll make you, I tell you! What do you want to do? What do you want to be? Chancellor? First Lord? Secretary of State? There’s nothing you couldn’t be with me to help you. I can make people do what I want though they don’t want to. I made you want to kiss me: I made you hang on my doorstep for an hour waiting to escort me, didn’t I, the second time we met?”

It was a family plan, a cradle plan, our marriage; yet you have me to thank, Jamie! I saved the fortune for you. My father would have broken with your guardian: he had a duke for me when I was twenty-two. But I wouldn't have it. I'd seen you by then. I said to myself—'He's the husband for me! There's a fate linking us. We aren't cousins for nothing. I'll take him. I'll make him what he pleases—make him a king if he pleases.' ” And then as he laughed uneasily she repeated with a vehemence that bewildered him—“I mean it, Jamie! I've so much money—mounds of gold! Jamie, do you understand what it means to own half a million pounds? It makes a queen of me and I'll make a king of you. They'd shut me up again: they'd call me mad, if I began to use my money now as I will use it one day—through you! Through you I shall have such power. Jamie, I mean what I say. I'll make you a king, an emperor. Look what Sarah Marlborough did and was! We'll do better than Sarah. We can do what we choose. I can buy you a corner of creation. I can do it, I tell you! I tell you—there's nothing in the world I can't do!”

She stopped abruptly, putting her handkerchief to her lips. He could feel the convulsive shaking of her body and was repulsed, bewildered and suspicious. The phrase she had used rang in his ears—'They'd shut me up again.' He felt himself shrinking as he watched and listened, shrinking from her not as a woman but as a human being: and it seemed to him that he need not be ashamed of his fear of her, that there was maybe a reason for his renewing nervous fear of what she might, in her inexplicable woman's shamelessness, say or do next. He felt that no code of his knowledge would in any way restrain her free utterance and gesture.

He wished he had not yielded to this impulse to tell her of his change of mind. He wished that he had made this bid for liberty any way but by word of mouth. But that would be to shirk. He wouldn't be a jilt: he would see that Hariot agreed with him before he left her. However wild she was in her speech he must wait and bear it and talk to her until she saw that he was right. She was fond of him, poor soul! That was the trouble. But was it for him to be angry with her on that score? No, no! Indeed he wished he could be fond of her in return: indeed he did. He wished most heartily that the boyish heartache of two years ago had lasted. But the family guardians, his and hers, had been too clever. They should have married him to her then, a newly caught and willing fish. If he had travelled with Hariot as he had wished to do, things might have been different. But no, they had been so clever with their talk of “Too soon!” and “Majority!” They had barely let him see her: a kiss or two: a family betrothal feast: and then Hariot was hurried away on some unnecessary visit and he sent on his travels. For a year he had heard nothing: then indeed Hariot had begun to write to him:

letters waited for him at Genoa, Padua, Cadiz, letters that, he felt, should have hurried him home, his first love-letters. But there were so many of them. At any rate when he came home he had hurried to Hariot to renew his courtship and had loved her as much as ever at their first meeting. But at the second meeting Menella Traill was there: she made Hariot seem old and strange, and a person to fear. Menella was frightened of Hariot, for he had caught her one day crying, and she had owned as much: and that fear, ridiculous as it was, had slipped from her lips into his heart as he comforted Menella. Yes, he had left her comforted, though he was not comforted himself. He should not have kissed her: that was disloyal to Hariot, and he knew it and Menella knew it. Hariot had been kind enough to Menella. Menella was scarcely a lady, a country parson's daughter whom Hariot had seen in church and had fancied for a companion. Menella told him the tale. She had sistered Hariot for two years now, and it was plain to him, for all she said little, that she had not found it easy, though Hariot was kind to her and bought her pretty clothes and gave her her own cast-off clothes. Yes, Hariot had been sisterly and kind, and Menella shook and paled whenever Hariot spoke to her. Watching Menella's terror he had grown to share it: that is to say, he was not afraid as a girl might be, but he knew clearly as he watched the two girls that the family had been too clever. Fortune or no fortune, Hariot was not for him. They had sent him on his travels alone and now he had come back, you see, a man of the world, able to acknowledge that she was too old for him, too grand for him, too much for him altogether. But then he must tell her so: he must be honest and make an end of the business.

He smiled at her uneasily.

“Cousin, it's no use talking. I'm fond of you, of course. But, don't you see, marrying—that's another matter. We shouldn't like it, Cousin! We shouldn't be suited. I don't want to be a king or a great man or—or any nonsense. I'm Jamie Babyon of Babyon Court and that's enough for me. But it wouldn't be near enough for you, Hariot! You're so beautiful and rich and fine. You couldn't come otter-hunting with me, now could you, Cousin Hariot? Or know about the still-room and poachers' wives and the price of hay? But that's what I shall want to talk of, Cousin Hariot, and so—and so—cousins and all—and so I say, let's part friends and go our ways. You see, I don't want to be great.”

Her motionless silence emboldened him.

“Come, Cousin! You know I'm in the right. Come now!”

He held out his hand to her, but she struck it down, panting. He took it as an excuse to turn on his heel and leave; but she cried “No, no!” to his movement, in such choking accents of revolt that unwillingly he stopped and waited while she struggled with herself for control of her speech. The puffs and spirals of smoke still twisting up from the burning laurel came at him, as it seemed, almost with intention, like the blind filaments of a living creature, attacking his sight and his judgment. He dispersed them with a movement, angrily, the more so because it seemed to him that she drew in the scent of the smoke with deep breaths, strengthening herself; for her eyes dilated and she spoke so loudly that his capacity to apprehend her meaning was dulled. He listened to the instrument and hardly comprehended the tune.

“Jamie, you’re not going to leave me? You don’t understand! You can’t! Look at me, Jamie! Look at me, I say! Listen to me! I tell you this to warn you, because I can see things coming before they come. Stay with me! I’ll let you do what you like with me. I’ll be quiet and obedient. But if you leave me as you did two years ago—all the more because you leave me—I shall still be with you. I won’t be put away and forsaken. One after another they came and went away again. I wasn’t strong enough to keep them. But you—you shan’t go! I’m strong enough to keep you. You’re younger than I. You’re only a boy still. You shall do as I say. That’s because you are part of me, Jamie, because I married you with my soul. I’ll go with you, I say! Yes, you’ll carry me with you wherever you go. You shan’t get away from me as you did two years ago. If you do, I’ll do worse than I did then. I didn’t know then that you were in league to cheat me, to keep me in one room, to take away my clothes and my money. That woman struck me, Jamie—again and again she struck me. I knew you’d given your orders; but I cheated you all. I didn’t feel the blows because I was away. I was following you, Jamie! But I couldn’t cross running water, so I came back. And they pretended to be glad and let me buy new clothes. Menella pretended to be glad, too, the bitch, when she’d been wearing my clothes, I tell you! O Jamie, Jamie, they were so cruel to me! They took away my body, Jamie, so that I shouldn’t follow you. They took it away, I say! What could I do but scream for my body? To call that being mad, was that fair? They locked all the doors and there I was naked outside the doors of life: and I couldn’t get to you across the sea. Souls can’t cross water unless a body carries them. Jamie, you wouldn’t do that to me: you wouldn’t take away my body? You’ll be kind to me: you’ll understand: you’ll lend me—anything. You and I will get married and be so happy, Jamie—my darling—my dear, dear Jamie!”

She was fawning on him: her arms were round him: he could scarcely breathe for the stricture of her arms about his neck. Her head was flung back

to see him better: her lips were parted: her wild eyes full of tears. He was shocked and stirred beyond measure. He had a terrible sensation of helplessness: he had a vision of a giant drowning and crying for help as it drowned: and of himself as a dwarf safe ashore, watching in futility. The smoke eddied about them still, dilating and distorting the shape of his cousin's face. In a sort of anger he lifted his hands and pulled her hands apart because he didn't know what to do but free himself. What could a man do to this creature? She wasn't Menella. She was a black woman on a red ground, writhing round a vase, a sight he should have seen last year, on his tour, not now, home in safe sunny England. What was he to say to her? He considered and said—

“Cousin, you're ill. Sit down. I'll call your maid.”

“Jamie, save my life!”

He said—

“I'll call your maid. I'll go.”

“Jamie, I warn you. I'll go with you.”

“Cousin, you mustn't be so noisy.”

“Oh,” she cried, her hands on her throat, “let me! It's so silent where I am—outside. Steps don't echo. Shadows don't fall. A pistol shot, that's no more than a latch falling, in my world. But I don't want to go back. I want to stay here. You can keep me here, Jamie, if you will. You will, eh? Eh, Jamie? Eh?”

She came after him at a run as he stayed by the door, his hand rattling the gilded knob. She cried in anguish—

“What? You'll still leave me, after all I've said to you? Then you may—you may, Jamie—oh, cruel, cruel! But that doesn't mean that I'll ever leave you. But you'll forget me——”

“Now, Cousin, indeed I won't.”

“Forget me—forget me! When I touch you, you'll say—‘The wind blew a dead leaf against me!’ You'll brush me off.”

“I have to go, Cousin! An appointment——”

“You won't see me; but I'll see you: nor hear me; but I'll hear you. I warn you, Jamie, I'll creep into your brain. I'll hear your thoughts before you think them. I'll suck your soul out, I tell you: and in the hollow, hollow places where your soul was, there I'll live!”

She stood a moment swaying from the feet upward. She was, it seemed to him at that moment, night, a night monster, cutting off from him the light that streamed in behind her through the broad panes, over the window-sill where Menella had been so lately, where Menella's pretty tools, her golden thimble, her set of scissors in the faded velvet case, her tangle of rainbow silks, still were heaped. It was as if she were denying him his right to sunshine and Menella. And then, suddenly, she was stilled in all her being—eyes, mouth, heaving breast, straining nostrils and hands, all were still on an instant, as a tree stills when the wind drops. She was translated before his eyes into the elegant Cousin Hariot of his boyish admiration—languid, graceful, arch.

“Must you go, dear Jamie? Indeed I think you must. A young woman, you know, unattended—what will Dekker and my maid say to it? Menella should be here. Where is Menella? Yes, you must go, Jamie! There, it isn't long to wait, eh, Jamie? What's a month? My dress is half made, all of the lace that you brought me. And a head, my dear, a head to dream of! Orange blossoms and dewdrops of diamonds! No feather—you don't like feathers—a gauze twist: I sent for it to Paris. It will enchant you. Shall I let you see it? But no, not lucky. You shall see it on our wedding-day.”

He said—it seemed to him that he screamed at her in a voice, a womanish voice of which he was ashamed—

“Cousin Hariot, I won't marry you! I won't! Is that plain? I won't! And now I'm going, and—and—and I'm sorry, Cousin Hariot!”

He turned the handle and flung open the door and pulled it to again behind him, stumbling into the hall and out of the house, under the knowing eyes of Dekker, the man.

He thought he heard her call after him: he was not sure of that. He was only sure that he was well out of it, out of the room, house, street: well out of Hariot's life, never to go back again into Hariot's house and room and life.

He was only sure that the Pantiles on a spring afternoon, though he had little recollection of how he got there, was the freest, gayest place in the world, a better place than any woman's, any queen's drawing-room: and that the veriest pink-ribboned chit mincing beside Mamma upon the pavement would make him a better wife than the dark woman of his blood.

II

HE had paced the Pantiles thrice and back again, for his feet still unconsciously kept up the hurry of that departure—he refused to think of it as flight: and what with his own urgency and the jostle of the crowd in the narrow way between the shops and the colonnade, he came at last to a standstill so hot and flustered for all his sense of emancipation that he was glad at last to pause by the railed inner well and fee the well-woman to dip him up a glassful of the ice-cold water. The draught refreshed him: it ran through his veins as strong as a draught of wine. He bade her dip him up another, and so leaned idly against the rails, sipping, enjoying the tonic bitterness of the iron on his tongue and the quieting smell of the cold water and cooling air and the pleasant chuckle of the springs as they welled up, into, and over the rust-coloured marble basins.

As it drew towards tea-time the crowd of visitors increased till the Pantiles' dark colonnades and sun-dappled open walk under the row of trees were as beswarmed, he thought, as a lime-tree by uncountable insects. The scent that the wind brought him in warm gusts, with now and then a shower of petals from the faint yellow blossoms of the lime-trees, had brought the thought into his mind: so busy were all these people, so happily engaged, murmurous as bees, and, bee-like, sucking the honey out of life. He smiled at them, dismissing for good and all the countries of his travels, as only an Englishman can. These were his own people, these stately, leisurely folk, with their calm ways and dresses all of clean colours—pinks, primrose, blues and greens—bright but pale, northern colours: these were people he could understand and love. What was the phrase?—‘Use all gently!’ They used all gently, the English: they were warm, not flaming, cool, not cold, in their loves and hates. Temperate, that was the word: they were so temperate. Hariot was as uncommon among them as—as this cold well behind him: there were but three in England like it, with its icy bitter strength and reddened waters.

Thus Jamie Babyon, loosing his thoughts idly upon the air, his mind all the while accompanying no one thought very far, any more than his eye accompanied any one particular figure of all the figures that streamed past him up and down the Pantiles. The natural reaction from his emotion of half an hour ago, reinforcing the bright confusion of spa life, made him drowsy,

inclined him, could he but move his lazy legs, to turn to the green refreshment of the Common beyond the Arcade. He was, indeed, on the point of departure when his outer eyes were caught by a particular movement in the all-moving crowd, a particular colour among the multiplied colours, by a known shape in the indifferent throng. Towards him came a gown of primrose linen sprigged with small cornflowers and carnations. Over the short petticoat swelled the hip panniers, and from the panniers the tight bodice rose, sleekly moulded as a young birch-tree: above it again head and neck were shaded by the forward-tilting leghorn hat and cornflower-coloured hat-ribbons fluttering down upon a bosom silky white and silky pink, like birch bark. A green scarf with a long tasselled fringe completed the picture of a sapling birch, a lady of the woods, walking.

He put down his glass hastily on the flat-topped marble railing and sprang down the shallow step or two to dive into the crowd and intercept Menella Traill.

“Menella! Miss Traill! Madam!”

At his address there was a frank reddening of cheek and neck that displayed anew the exquisite texture of the skin. Menella’s eyes sparkled as the tide of colour rose to enhance their blue. He wanted to cry out enchanted at the beautiful sight of clear blue against clear pink, to point it out to the world as he might have done any display that pleased him—flowers, landscape, a tray of jewels. But instead he said, decorously subduing the pleasure in his voice—

“Miss Traill! I am very fortunate. I thought you were visiting your sister.”

Her eyelids drooped. She said in a low voice—

“I have no sister.” And at his gesture of surprise, seeing his puzzled face, she added, twisting the tassel of her parasol—“You don’t understand. She says what comes into her head. It was to tell me to go—I knew I was to go.”

He ventured—

“But I didn’t want you to go. Didn’t you know that too? I wanted you to stay.”

She put up her hands to her cheeks as if she would restrain the flooding colour, as if she could push away her blushes with her mittened hands.

“Did you?” said his Menella: and then—“I came to drink the waters. You see—I have my glass.”

She fumbled in the basket on her arm and drew from it, hidden under a square of silk, a child's tumbler of purple Bristol glass, and began to make her way once more to the free well, he at her side. She was hesitating on the wet slippery step, waiting her moment to stoop between the jostling drinkers, before his dazzled wits returned to him, exultant. But then it was Menella's turn to be dazzled and encompassed, to have her glass taken from her, to have her arm pressed against the arm, have her hand lie on the embroidered cuff of a fine young gentleman's coat, to feel the lace of his ruffle brush her hand, to be escorted up the steps and on to the cool piazza of the private well and, fluttered, to watch the well-woman receive the little glass and a coin that chinked against it. The well-woman set a table and a chair for the lady, and bustled down the steps and returned with the little purple glass filled with cold water for the lady to drink.

The lady drank: her blue eyes shone above the purple glass: her wry mouth at the bitter water made him laugh, and his whole heart cried out again—How beautiful! how kissable! how dear! The well-woman folded her hands complacently upon each other and, leaning against the wall of the well, stared up at them inquisitively. Across the square a stroller lifted a quizzing glass and chuckled.

Menella, drying her glass on the silk napkin and tucking it away again in the basket, caught the well-woman's look. She rose, disturbed, not taking, feigning not to see the hand darted out to help her rise.

"I—we—it's better not to sit here. I must go now, Sir James!"

He besought her—another glass—another minute—coffee, chocolate, cakes! She would not look at him.

"Please—I should go—I want to go. Your cousin will not like it. Your cousin is left alone now—now that you are here. She will be wanting me. She would not like me to come here unattended." And then, anxiously—"You'll not tell her? You will not, Sir James? It's so dull to be attended always. At home I could go anywhere."

He offered her his arm, with a—

"May I not attend you?" And she took it, saying—

"I meant Dekker; but you ought not to come with me——"

He stooped to her—

"Why not, Menella?"

She would not look at him.

“—or call me Menella.”

He gave her an inquiring look. It was not in him to suspect her of coquetry. He was merely anxious to discover her meaning. And she, as honest as he, walked beside him in a flushed silence. Neither suspected that the encounter had dizzied the other, that each felt the need of a moment's recollection, of a pause for arrangement of ideas. Yet they were, because of the sympathy between them, able to walk without discomfort side by side, the embarrassment of each oddly soothed by the other's presence. They left the Pantiles behind them, passed the Chapel-of-Ease, and were half-way up the cobbles of Chapel Place before the boy said slowly—

“Why shouldn't I call you Menella?”

The girl fumbled for words.

“She wouldn't like it—Hariot—my mistress.” And then, at the implied protest of his look, of his turn of the head on the word mistress, she added—“She is my mistress.”

He said soberly—

“She's not mine.”

“What?” she cried amazed.

He blurted it out—

“We're not going to be married, my cousin and I. We settled it this morning.” And at that she clasped her hands upon his arm and cried out in an excited, childish voice that moved him inexpressibly—

“Jamie, is that true? Is it? Is it? Oh, poor Hariot! But is it? But why?”

He looked at her without answering her in words, and her eyelids drooped again. That delighted him. He liked to watch her face change, flush, pale, lighten or droop at his bidding. He gave a shout of laughter, of sheer enjoyment voiced in friendly laughter, and the blue flash woke in her face once more as she said, smiling yet apprehensive—“I must go home!” and did not stir.

Nor did he. They were content to look at each other. They stood thus in the middle of the street, unconscious of the passers-by, for some ten minutes. They broke up the stream of life as a tuft of water-cress and royal loosestrife parted from the river bank will, for the length of a summer day, anchor itself in a shallow of the stream that has detached it, defying the running water, compelling the overwhelming waters to eddy about its frail islet, to flow to

right and left of its purple towers and youthful greenery. The moving clouds in the sky could not have less affected the young man and woman than the movement of the crowd about them. Within the enchanted circle that they had drawn about themselves they conducted their affair, oblivious of creation, conducted it with looks, with smiles, with quickened breath, at last with words—

“Menella!”

“Yes?”

“You do know why?”

“Yes—no——”

“You do know why?”

“Oh, poor Hariot!”

“What else could I do, Menella, when I found out?”

“What did you find out?”

“That I—didn’t love her. It was on that day when I saw you cry.”

She said, shivering—

“She struck me, Jamie! She struck at me with her scissors. Look!”

There was a long, half-healed scratch upon her arm, a furrow that might have been made by a claw of a cat. He darkened, till she cried out, terrified—

“Don’t look like that! You look like Hariot when you frown. Don’t frown!”

He was in a rage that struggled with his tenderness to her, the hurt creature—

“You never told me. You never showed me.”

“I couldn’t, then.”

“Now you can, Menella!”

She nodded—

“Yes, now I can.”

He watched her pull the green mitten once more over the scar and said thickly—

“I could kill her for hurting you.”

She deprecated—

“Ladies punish their maids. I’m her companion.”

“You’re not. You belong to me. You shan’t go back to her. Menella, what are we to do?”

She said weakly—

“Of course I must go back.”

“We’ll get married, Menella. Nobody can stop us. I’m twenty-one.”

She shook her head.

“Hariot will stop us.” And then, with a frantic pretty wringing of her hands that made him put out his own and hold those small, despairing hands firmly in his—“Oh, we are being foolish! You’re to marry your cousin. How can you marry me? I’m your cousin’s companion. You’re Sir James Babyon. I think we’re mad.”

He said—

“Mad? We? It’s Hariot! Hariot’s mad, Menella, isn’t she? Isn’t that the truth of it? She has times and seasons. Isn’t that it? You’ve known it, haven’t you?” For she was nodding, with her face grown white, a ‘yes’ to all his questions.

“You guessed?” she said: “but I never told you, did I? I was sworn not to tell.”

The boy caught at her hand—

“Would you have let me marry her? Would you have followed her up the aisle? Would you have stood behind us, Menella, and seen and heard me marry her? Would you? Would you? That would have been cruel.”

“To me,” she signed, a hand on her breast.

“No,” he said, “to me.”

She murmured—

“I was going to run away.”

At that he had his inspiration. He knew then and afterwards that it was the moment of his life.

“We’ll run away together!”

“Jamie!”

“Yes, my dear, that’s what we’ll do! Now listen to me, Menella! You’ll go home now, go back, I mean—it isn’t your home—back to fetch your clothes——” then, as he saw the terror in her face—“No, you shan’t, you shan’t do that, you shall come with me now, now to my rooms—no, not even that—we’ll take a coach—now, on our walk—and we’ll drive to my lodgings! We’ll stop there only five minutes and I’ll order my man Jabez to see to my affairs, to pay my charges and follow us. He’s a good fellow, Jabez: his father is gamekeeper at Babyon. Oh, you shall know them all—all my people at Babyon! But we, we won’t wait for Jabez: we’ll go straight away to London. There’s a parson at the Temple, a fellow told me, a parson who asks no questions: he shall marry us to-night. That’s to make all safe, Menella! No waiting for banns and so on. But they’re true marriages: it’s been proved in the courts; so you needn’t be frightened. Oh, d’you think I’d not make sure? I want you for my own wife, Menella! It’s because I love you, Menella, that I’m so hasty in this. And then a honeymoon, out of England! I know my way about. I’ll take you to all the places where I’ve been—Paris, Milan, Rome—I’ll show you everything: and so home to Babyon. Isn’t that a good plan, Menella? I tell you, my dear, that’s what we’ll do!”

She worshipped him, as he urged her with sparkling eyes:

“Will we? Now? Never go back to Hariot? Is it possible? Yet she’s been kind to me, Jamie, in between. Aren’t we wicked to Hariot? Ungrateful? But oh, Jamie, to be with you always! Oh, Jamie, do you mean it? Oh, I never knew any one like you! Now? This afternoon? I have no proper clothes. To be married to-day! Oh, Jamie!”

And he, intoxicated by the pride of decision and those soft “Oh, Jamies!” tucked her hand under his arm again and they made off together, that enchanted pair of children, for the mews near Jamie’s lodging. Sir James Babyon ordered his coach and put into it “your lady,” as he called her to the grooms. He carried out his programme as befitted a bridegroom triumphantly on the edge of perfect happiness, bore himself as a traveller experienced in the coaches, the postillions, the lodgings and the fees of five nations. The groom mounted behind, the coachman cracked his whip, and the equipage set off for his lodgings. Menella, shrinking into the roomy cavern of the coach, wondered at the calm of the man Jabez, opening the coach door. Jabez received coin and papers and directions with resignation. Jabez in his fashion also assured listeners hidden in coaches that he had travelled, that he could be relied upon to leave London for Paris, Paris for

Milan, Milan for Rome, Rome for where you please and home again at five minutes' notice. Tunbridge Wells for London—a bagatelle this to Jabez, faintly reproachful because he had not been allowed to deal with the coach and the coachman and the grooms. The listener, measuring Jabez as a future house-fellow, felt relief. Dekker, the only other man-servant she knew, had been too knowing, too much in the confidence of Hariot's guardians and aunts and nurses: and since Hariot's recovery and resumption of power and self-establishment in a new house purged of relatives, Dekker had been too much prepared to be in the confidence of any fluttered companion. Dekker was the chamberlain of Hariot's kingdom and, like such court officials, had been ready to combine with the favourite. Dekker, avoided, evaded, repulsed, had been a lion in the path of Menella.

But this young Jabez was straightforward, friendly-eyed, willing. His pleasant Devon speech, that speech which makes the peasant his master's equal, poorer than he only in vocabulary, made him in Menella's sight almost a lesser Jamie, a younger, poorer, inconsiderable Jamie. He had the same small well-shaped springy body, the same upright carriage, the same tones, the same fresh cheek, swinging arm and cheerful eye. Only he had not the assured air of Jamie. He was the decent young servant, by no stretch of imagination ever the young master. Yet kinship was there—a kinship of race: the same air, earth and water had made and moulded master and man alike: and to Menella, of another county, another stock, they had the resemblance of two foreigners of the same country to each other. That was a point in Jabez' favour: she liked him at sight and knew that just as Jamie Babyon was from now on a barrier, as secure a barrier as some sparkling stretch of salt water, between her and Hariot's dark lands, so the lesser Jamie, Jabez, the land-brother, the servant, would be a match for any back-door recurrence of the town-bred mongrel, Dekker.

Meanwhile, she heard them, with a wonderful lessening of apprehension, speak of Dekker.

“And Jabez——”

“Yes, sir?”

“As for packets, notes, letters——”

“There's a letter come for you, sir, now I think of it.”

“If it's a charge, open it and pay it: pay all charges!”

“No, sir, it's a note. Miss Babyon's man brought it a moment since. He's in the kitchen now, sir, waiting your return for an answer. He wasn't sure if

his mistress had meant him to wait or no: so I bade him wait.”

“Fetch it!”

He did not speak to Menella nor she to him, but they changed anxious glances as they waited for Jabez and the letter, till they saw for themselves that indeed it was no letter but a small packet carefully sealed. As Jamie broke it open a small bright object dropped from the loosened folds of paper, dropped to Menella’s lap. She exclaimed—

“Jamie, a ring! Jamie, it’s her ring! Oh, does that mean——?”

The boy checked her, flushing.

“Not now, Menella!” and turned to his man. “No answer, Jabez! Shut the door!” And then, leaning head and shoulders through the coach window as the man stepped back—“Jabez, you’re to say nothing of this—of my departure! Whip up!”

He drew in his head as Jabez turned to the coachman. But Menella, peering through the glass window, saw a sight which disquieted her. The open doorway of Jamie’s lodgings showed the straight passage through the house and the farther doorway, framing a view of neat garden clumped with peonies. Even as she looked, green garden and crimson flowers were blotted out by the entrance of a figure. It was in blackish shadow, but she knew it nevertheless and cried out—

“Jamie, there’s Dekker! He’s seen us!” But as she cried and shrank the coach began to move, to roll, to rumble. Jamie, sitting down beside her, put his arm about her shoulder and kissed her heartily as the houses slid by them. She leant against him, eased by his touch, comforted by his kiss, and presently, shyly, returned it.

“I love you, Jamie!” said Menella.

“And I you, Menella!”

She sighed happily. A mile went by like a moment. As they rolled through Southborough she looked out and thought that the village green and the noble trees upon it and the surrounding cottages were like the beginnings of *Beulah*, and that they were thirty-three miles now from the *Cæstrial City*. But, being a woman, it was necessary for her to enhance her present beatitude by contemplation of perils past and to come. She stirred in the boy’s arms.

“Jamie, Dekker saw us.”

“Are you sure?”

“He saw me. Now he’ll tell Hariot. Oh, what do you think she’ll do?”

His arm tightened round her.

“What could she do? Besides we’re unfair to her, Menella! She’s a fine creature, my cousin. She’s forgiven me already.”

“How do you know?”

“Why, she sent back my ring, the Babyon ring.”

“Oh, the ring!” And her fingers, remembering what it was they clutched so tightly, relaxed and fell apart. The circlet of jewels lay winking in her palm. She fingered it, turning it round slowly, checking the stones.

“Moonstone, jasper—what’s this, Jamie?”

“Zircon.”

“What a queer name! That’s M. I. Z.—pearl; then amethyst—what’s this?”

“Heliotrope—bloodstone.”

“I see. P. A. H. MIZPAH. It’s very old, isn’t it?”

“Put it on!”

“Should I? It’s Hariot’s.”

“It’s the Babyon bride-ring. Lady Babyon wears it. It’s not personal. I’ll give you your own ring from me, dearest. But this is the Babyon ring. That’s why Hariot sent it back. She understands.”

Said Menella with a flash of jealousy that showed as oddly on her candid face as lightning at noon—

“How do you know? You haven’t read her letter.”

“No more I have!”

He opened the paper and stared puzzled at the two scrawled sentences and the extraordinary signature beneath, the ‘Hariot’ with its three black rigid strokes raking down the paper. They ran from the *h* and the *r* and the *t* with no returning upward line, so that the word ‘Hariot’ was lifted by them like a banner, floating above supporting poles. But the message ran clear enough—

I send it back. I’ll do my own watching.

Bewildered he put the paper in Menella's lap.

"What does she mean? Oh, you may see: it's not private. *My own watching?* Oh, she *is* mad."

Said Menella slowly—

"It's the ring, I think—Mizpah. You know what it means, don't you? It's in the Bible. You ought to know."

"'God keep you'—isn't that it?"

"Not quite. Father preached on it once—oh, such a beautiful sermon! Laban said it to Jacob when they parted after the quarrel—'God watch between me and thee when we are absent one from another.' But——" She pored over the note—"I'll do my own watching! What does she mean? It doesn't make sense, does it?" She looked up at him, her voice shrilled: "Jamie, what is it? What's the matter?"

For he was staring at her with an air of panic—

"We are talking about her again. We talk of nothing but Hariot. Shall we always be talking about Hariot? Menella, what shall we do if——" Suddenly he was speechless.

She put her arms round his neck, sweetly, as a wife might.

"Dear Jamie, what is it? What are you looking at? Jamie, look at *me*! Of course we talked of her. We've had to, things happening like this. But now—we'll not think of her now any more. Poor Hariot! We can't help her, you see! No one can help her. We must just not think of her."

He returned her embrace; but his eyes still looked through her and beyond her as he cried—

"Menella, we'll be true to each other! She could never come between us now, could she, Menella?"

"Never, Jamie!"

"Menella, do you love me?"

"I do, Jamie! I do!"

Gradually his clasp of her relaxed.

"Menella, throw away that paper! Tear it first!"

Obediently she tore it and scattered the fragments over the brandishing, clutching, long-tailed rosy hedges as the coach brushed its way between them.

He watched her, ease coming back into his face, into his pose. He managed to laugh.

“I was a fool, Menella. Put on your ring, my dear, my dearest Lady Babyon! Tonbridge, is it? Tonbridge already? Oh, Menella, only thirty miles more!”

“Oh, Jamie!”

The coach rumbled on.

III

ON the seventeenth of June in the year of our Lord 1750, in the early hours, James Babyon of Babyon Court in the County of Devon, Bart., was united to Menella Traill of the parish of Westerham, Kent, in the furtive little Chapel-of-Ease that lurked on the outskirts of Mayfair. Two yawning witnesses knocked out of their beds and a fuddled clerk hastily fetched by the parson himself from a neighbouring alehouse, witnessed the ceremony. The couple-beggar performed it in a manner wonderfully compact of resentment and obsequy, as the tick of the vestry clock, wheezing on to daylight, vied with the chink of guineas against the wedding-ring in the bridegroom's pocket for his consideration. The bride thought that he was like his church. The ivied porch had loomed out of the blue summer darkness with a welcoming air of innocence, of country-come-to-town; never was a humbler little church looked down upon by fashionable neighbours. But its interior was sophisticated, choked with pews like sheep-pens on market day, with a baroque hugger-mugger of cherubs and composite pillars and faded rep hangings. There was an all-pervading reek, too, of mist, dust, incense, mice, candle-smoke and damp, that might have made two young romantics pause in their adventure by daylight in calm blood and, though they loved, decide for decent lodgings, three weeks' banns and a congregation to watch them married. But these youngsters had been set running on their road by a fear that they did not acknowledge. They ran away perhaps from the fate that runs after golden youth; but they called their pursuer Hariot. A breakdown near Chislehurst had terrified them. When they reached London they would not, could not wait for decent day, but hurried on to the furtive little church, prepared, if need were, to sit the hours out in the church porch, chattering like children in defiant conspiracy to frustrate their pursuer, Hariot.

"Courage, Menella! We must go through with it now, my dear! I know we're doing right. It's the only way. When we're married, you see, she can't come between us."

"Yes, yes, I see! But oh, Jamie, what is this place? I don't like it. But I see it won't do to wait. Dekker may have told her. Oh, suppose she follows us!"

"That's it, you see! And you a minor."

“Am I? Oh!”

“But once we’re married, what can she do? It won’t do to wait till tomorrow—get married now and be safe.”

“Safe from Hariot.”

But when the parson came, though they welcomed him as children hail St. Nicholas, he shocked them. He set them before him, he ranged the witnesses, whispered to the clerk, opened his book and began. Gabbling, stumbling, whining, he launched the pair into marriage as a careless boatman might push off a freighted rowboat into a choppy sea. His drunken breath fouled the air, and Menella shrank and would not look at him as she listened to the exordium, but fixed her eyes instead upon the two altar candles flaring and guttering behind him. For while a part of her was absorbed in her situation, conscious, though she did not turn her head, of every movement of her bridegroom, every change of expression, though her soul was fluttering into peace as a bird flutters down upon and droops into its nest, she was yet able to exercise that capacity for thinking along two paths at once which the human spirit displays in moments of deep feeling. And she did think it strange that the candles should gutter as if blown by a wind when she herself could hardly breathe for the closeness and stillness of the Chapel’s dead air. She supposed that some trick of the draughts caused the flames to dance and sway thus wildly on their wicks, so that the parson’s shadow was incessantly flung forward across his book and on to the outstretched right hands, hers, Jamie’s, blotting them also with shadow: nevertheless the flames and the shadows disturbed her sense of security and she was glad to feel Jamie’s warm fingers clasping her cold ones, glad to hold his hand tight in turn and to feel his hand yet again as he put upon her finger the Mizpah ring. The facets of the jewels dented her flesh as he did so and she noticed this, wincing. Indeed she was noticing details in those few minutes that she had never before observed. Everything within the circle of her vision glowed or shone with a luminous distinctness, as though she were looking through clear water at the pebbly bottom of a river. The stuff of her bridegroom’s coat-sleeve, the lines, veins, texture, shape and colour of his hand, the cheesy fingers of the parson, and his blackened nails, the winking colours of the ring, its intricate setting, the red and black tiles of the floor far below, under their hands, in darkness—all this her eye photographed and retained so long as she lived. She could bring it all back into her mind in sad or happy moments of her later life by the mere thought—‘my wedding-day!’

She looked up at her husband with a sharp lift of the head as the ring married them. He was white and he made his answers in a voice that she had

never heard before. ‘Oh, how he feels it!’ she thought to herself swiftly, with a rush of wonder and thankfulness to him for the whiteness of his face and his shaken voice. ‘It’s his marriage, you see, as well as mine. I hadn’t understood that somehow. Strange—it’s as big a thing to him as it is to me. Who knows, it may even be bigger! He’s frightened too by the change in his life, just as I’m frightened. Oh, if we both feel frightened together in the same way, then we know each other, then we shall surely be happy!’ These thoughts fled through her mind as his lips began the strange, familiar—“With this ring——”

Then they knelt together.

But when the parson, stooping to them, had pronounced them man and wife and had straightened himself again, he turned upon his clerk in a savage undertone, his head jerked sideways—

“Who’s behind the door? Quiet them there, can’t you? What lout’s behind that door? See to it!” And so returned to the blessing.

But, though the service halted for him, the clerk, when his turn came to bless all that feared the Lord including the bewildered bridal pair, refused to proceed until he had cleared up with the parson this problem of the lout behind the door.

“All doors are shut, your reverence!”

“Vestry door, you fool! I tell you some one’s there!”

“Shut, sir, and locked. Look ye, here’s the key.”

Said the parson—

“Are you drunk? I heard the latch go. I heard the click of it. And a wind like a knife went by. See, there’s a candle gone out. Here, give me t’other one—come along now!”

He seized the altar candle, whose flame was still enough now. It dwindled up to the rafters in a straight unwavering line as if the flame were a woman-devil’s distaff from which a thread was being drawn out and upwards to be wound upon a star.

Followed by the clerk and swearing at him, the parson shuffled across the choir floor to the vestry, leaving before the altar his married couple newly risen from their knees. Menella faltered—

“Jamie, what’s the matter with them? What is it? What was it? Did you hear anything? The candle did flicker. I saw it. I felt the wind. Didn’t you?”

But—a latch dropping—I never heard that.”

“A latch?” He started: he gasped: he was unaccountably moved. He put his hand to his head and looked down at her with the air of a man chasing an escaping memory.

“A latch? A latch? Where did I hear——? Who said—who spoke to me of a latch dropping?”

Menella said—

“He said so—the parson—that dreadful man.”

“Was it that? Was it he?” And then, as their situation dawned on him, he began to rage—“They’ve been drinking! Drunken swine! That such a man should be countenanced——! My dear, that I should have had to bring you here! I can’t forgive myself.”

She said—

“Why do you trouble? He—they—nothing can spoil it—nothing can come between us. We’re married.”

The parson was returning.

“My dear sir—ahem, madam—apologies—a trick of the hearing—a trick of the light. It’s as he says, quite empty—swept—ha—hum—and garnished. But I swear to you I heard the click of a latch, and with these gentlemen of the town making no bones how or what they rob—the own house of—ahem—my lord Sandwich three nights since—I was bound to check and search. A click of the latch—gently lifted—could ha’ sworn it. Well, sir and madam, to the matter once more—ahem!” He fumbled anew the leaves of his tattered book.

Said Sir James Babyon, his lady on his arm, stammering a little, but fierce of eye—

“We’ve had what we wanted of you, sir! We are married, I take it? Then, sir, the marriage lines for my wife here! We’ll do without your blessing.” And so moved hot and stately to the vestry.

The parson was accustomed to the whims of his patrons, for his chapel was as much used by the rich, the titled and the familed seeking unostentatious wedlock with unequals, as it was by the adventurers and adventuresses of the town. His office was too convenient, indeed had been too often used by authority, including, it was whispered, by a Personage himself, to be lightly illegalised. It was the parson’s boast that no one, Doll

or duke, walked up his aisle and knelt at his altar without coming out as strictly wedded as if they had been coupled in St. Paul's. Instructing his successor and son, born (said the alehouses) without the benefit of even such clergy as he, he laid it down that 'Eyes have they and see not, and ears have they and do not hear' was written for the special instruction of the cloth, and that the parson with his mouthful of questions got paid in pence when he himself, with a still tongue, blind eyes and short ears, earned guineas. He therefore lifted not an eyebrow nor flickered a lid at his young client's address, but followed meekly to the vestry, superintended the signatures of the witnesses, completed the certificate, received the guineas and bowed his clients down the nave and out at the porch with an air. But as the coach drove away into the lightening greys of the morning, he had a word for his clerk, awake by this time and grown chilly as the dawn.

"What the devil happened, eh, Nat? What was the plot? What woman had you tucked away within there?"

"Woman, your reverence? None, I do assure you. Not a she mouse."

"What? When I heard the swish of a skirt? Come now, Nat, all's well that ends well and they've gone away married. But you've taken a trifle from some friend of the lady, eh, or the gentleman, come to see the knot safe tied? I thought they'd come to spoil it."

"I'd not let 'em, your reverence! But I assure you there was no-one there."

"There had better not be. I've never had a marriage stopped in my church yet. Let this be the last time, Nat, that they bribe you!"

"There was no man or woman there, sir—swear to God!"

"Pooh, why lie to me? I say I heard breathing and the drop of the latch. Come now, who borrowed the key of the outer door?"

"None, sir! It's in your own cassock pocket. Feel now!"

The couple-beggar felt and swore.

"Will you tell me how the devil it got away then?"

Said the clerk, and shivered a little in the sharp air—

"It? You do well to say 'it.' There was naught in the room but sighs and shadows."

"Shadows?"

“Sir, the room was a-crawl with shadows.”

“Why, when a candle gutters in wind——”

“I’m from the west. Did you ever chance to see an otter suppling down to a river’s edge? Such a shadow, hunting——”

“What?”

“I’ll not say. But look along there now!” And the two stared after the diminishing coach.

The armoury of the lifting sun arrowed, splintered, speared and darted off the wet roofs and walls and windows of the street; for there had been rain in the night. As the coach, wet also, rolled forward like Fortuna’s silver globe on wheels, its own long shadow had indeed the air of crawling after it, and when the coach turned into Clarges Street it seemed to the watchers that the shadow overtook and swallowed it whole.

IV

MENELLA was wedded in London but, save for unromantic journey necessities, she was dressed in Paris—a daffodil bride, for the reigning favourite had had a golden fit and all the world wore yellow. But once robed, gloved, shod and hatted as became a Lady Babyon, Menella had done with Paris. She wanted Jamie: she wanted, and he no less wanted, the pleasure of experiencing through the intimacies of travel the fascination of their doubled existence; for to say ‘we’ was still a conscious amusement to them both. They enjoyed driving lordly in their coach through crowds, throngs, masses, of the alien rest of the world. Such a joint passage emphasised their identity with each other. Jamie and Menella, first and second person singular, such good company one for the other, became instantly first person plural, a self-sufficient “we,” when any one or more of the superfluous millions invaded the spiritual island of their privacy by word or look or gesture.

And indeed Paris, since Jamie last honoured her with a visit, had learned to stare. Jamie noticed, without irritation, for who could help looking twice at his Menella, that Paris had a habit of making way for them, gaping after them as if they were royal when they strolled down a boulevard or entered arm in arm the low-browed, darkling shops. Paris, unaccountably intrigued, would not let them be invisible. So they left Paris, which they regarded, let it be said, merely as a stage of their progress—the progress of Sir James and his Lady Babyon through Europe, through life, through eternal happiness by coach.

They drove southward and drove fast. It was, indeed, as if, for all their pleasure in each other and their new state, the impetus of their escape still carried them forward in an unnatural hurry. At the end of a day’s sight-seeing, as they sat over their supper on some high French balcony or took the moonlit air under the shadows of cathedral towers, Jamie would hesitate and soon begin, hurriedly, not looking at Menella—

“My dear, this is a dull place for you. Have you seen all that you want to see? It’s as you choose, my darling. I’ve seen the place before. It’s to see you see it that I brought you. But if you’ve had enough, if you’re ready to go on——”

And Menella, trim in her ways as in her sweet, neat soul, would set her chambermaid to the packing before she went to bed, would be up again at cock-crow, singing softly for joy, in interrupted, inquiring snatches, like a bird at an open cage door peering out excitedly. Menella, too, was always ready to go on.

Thus it was that Jabez, delayed by circumstances of which his master and mistress knew nothing, did not catch up with the wanderers until they were preparing in their own minds to be tired of Milan.

They had a reason.

Jamie affected the theatre, still more the Opera. He was, indeed, open to music, sensitive and critical, and curiously moved always by certain notes in a voice or an instrument. Also, he composed: an entr'acte of his had once been performed in the very theatre to which he, on the first night of their arrival, had conducted Menella: and as patron and amateur he had been welcomed pleasantly and made free of the place. As bridegroom—a titled one, and very much richer than the boy of a year ago—the welcome swelled into enthusiasm for a night and a night. The box at their second visit was filled with visitors between each act, with people of the theatre and the town ready to renew acquaintance with the gentleman and beseech, in broken English, introductions to the ladies. Proudly was Menella handed out of the shadows of the box into the bright candlelight of the withdrawing-room. Gentlemen, enchanted with Menella's complexion and downcast eyelids, overwhelmed her with incomprehensible compliments. It was long before they inquired, with the embarrassed recollection of folk forced by good manners to execute a tedious duty, after Madame's companion.

Companion? Madame, blushing, had none save—a glance at the young husband completed the sentence and proved to the onlooker how blue English eyes could be.

“But, Madame, no companion? Impossible!”

Madame, fluttered at such extreme surprise, had left England hurriedly. Their servant was to follow them, had not yet caught them up.

“But yesterday Madame had a companion?”

“No, indeed!”

“But here, in this box?”

“Here?” Menella stared. Their language was beyond her or her language beyond the gentlemen. The gentlemen seemed to know it. With infinitesimal

shrugs the subject was changed and, the curtain going up soon after, the gentlemen hastily retired to boxes of their own.

When, the next night, with *ne' giorni tuoi felici* running like wine through her soul, Menella clamoured prettily for more music and Jamie was very ready to consent to visit the Opera again, they had music indeed—Pergolesi with his lute shook the cardboard trees for them—but they had fewer visitors between the acts: and on the third night, none. Nor was the fat little manager to be seen emerging in gallantry from his money-box, as Jamie entered the lobby, Menella on his arm. They missed the friendly flutter of welcome, were once more, each for a personal instant, two solitary strangers in a crowd. Then, with the magical simultaneous pressure of hand and supporting arm, they were first person plural again.

“We’ll go home early, I think,” said Jamie, at the end of the act.

“We will,” agreed Menella, watching as she spoke the orange-seller in the seething pit below crying her wares among the standing crowds. The girl’s eyes met Menella’s and she made a swift odd gesture with her hand. Menella pulled at Jamie’s sleeve.

“Look! Look, dearest! She signed to me. Does she want to sell us oranges? Let her come up, Jamie!”

But Jamie beckoned in vain. The girl would not budge for them, did not or would not see them. Then the curtain rose once more and the music rose also, streaming out over the house like Lethe in flood: and Menella forgot the orange-girl and her odd gestures, forgot how cold the box was, always seemed to be in spite of the hot theatre air and the warm southern night without, forgot everything save the music and Jamie’s face open-mouthed with enjoyment. But as she went out afterwards she noticed that the servitor who called their coach made, as he stood back before them, the same odd gesture with the long and little finger pointed from his clenched hand.

It was not till two nights later that she found out the reason of that peculiar gesture. On the next day they had not gone to hear their music. They had driven out into the country in the morning to pick mulberries: and so on with stained lips to Monza, that Menella, privileged pretty lady, might fan herself with Queen Theodalinda’s fan. Jamie, abetted by the smiling brother, would have fished out a tangled golden ringlet with Theodalinda’s comb; but Menella would not let him and put down the fan too, quickly, with a shiver. The country superstitions of her childhood rushed into her mind. A dead woman’s fan, a dead woman’s comb—she wished she had not touched either. Jamie quoted—

and made the ready tears start. She did not know, this tremulous, smiling Menella, this rainbow young wife, why she was so foolishly startled, any more than a brimming cup knows why a touch spills its sparkling burden. But Jamie's voice—it was not only she herself who thought so: everybody said that Jamie's voice was a fine one—Jamie's voice could always move her to a quaint passion of enjoyment when he repeated to her long verses from the classics that he had learned for his own pleasure. He was very ready to declaim to her: and who'll blame Jamie because he could not resist his audience? He had, nevertheless, an unaffected ardour for good music and good verse.

Driving home in the late evening with the moon silvering Milan's spires and turning the red roofs into more mulberries, as Jamie pointed out, Menella begged for the poem again, and Jamie let her have it—

She drew in a breath as if her face were buried in a rose.

“It is lovely—‘young and fair!’ ”

“That's you, Menella—

“Oh, Jamie, but I am not going to die.”

“My dearest—as if I meant——”

“No, I know. Of course not. It was silly of me. And did he die, the poor man, in the pestilence? You see, he says—

Did he?”

“He thought he was going to, anyway: and yet he wrote it, you see,” said Jamie, proudly, as if of an elder brother. “That was great, I think, Menella, to fling such lines at death. It's cowardly to give in to death. I—I despise a suicide. Don't you, Menella?”

“Do you? I don't know. Oh, I know what you mean, of course. But I don't want to think about dying. And yet—

It makes me shiver, it's so beautiful. It's like the moonlight falling down on the roofs. Say it to me again!”

He said it to her again, happily.

They jingled back into Milan, at last, innocently intoxicated, both of them, with Nashe's verse and Jamie's voice and the marvel of being married, Menella to Jamie and Jamie to Menella. It was too late to think of the Opera; but they did not care for that. As Menella said, the moonlight was like music

in the dead of night—"At least, you know what I mean! Can silence be a sort of sound in itself?"

Jamie said that it could: and so, the matter settled, they fell asleep listening to that ivory sound.

But when next morning they proposed to play with the cathedral during daylight and to book their seats at the theatre for the evening, no seats were to be had. Jamie, escorting Menella home to dress and strolling down to the theatre square to buy seats and fill in the hour that she took to the business of dressing, expostulated in vain.

No seats!

With infinitudes of regret—no seats!

To-morrow then?

The clerk, not their old friend the manager, departed mysteriously on a long holiday in the country, but a stranger, uninterested, unimpressed, explained without qualifying by a friendly look the infinitudes of regrets, that there was no box fit for placing at the disposal of milord upon the morrow. All seats were taken: all, by long prearrangement, days, weeks, a month ago, taken for the night!

Now was it not a strange business? The theatre had not been full at any one of their three visits. Strolling home slowly and reluctantly, Jamie felt downright ashamed to present himself before Menella—an *Ali Baba* whose 'Open Sesame' had failed. Unaccountable business! Menella's disappointment, pictured in advance, depressed him. Indeed he was astonished at the sudden heavy depression that settled on him, but he put it all down to his solicitude for Menella. Impossible to own himself, and to Menella, baffled by the booking arrangements of a pack of foreigners! In the very street of his lodging the resolution took him, not to be beaten by a pack of foreigners. He beckoned to an unknown hanger-on, doubtfully in attendance on the inn's customers, and, giving money, promised more. The man was to wait in the theatre forecourt: if any tickets were returned at the last moment, he was to secure them from the theatre, from the ticket-holder, by fair means or foul. "You don't come back without tickets! Understand?"

The man, furtive and ready, understood, to judge by monkeylike noddings and winkings and mouthings, much more of the matter than Jamie did. What had the fellow got into his head? These foreigners!

Jamie paused on his way to Menella's rooms to look out over the railing of the inn gallery, to look down upon these foreigners in their inn courtyard.

The gay, crazy comings and goings of Italy amused him finely: it was like a peepshow. This was life, looked down upon as God looks down from a height. He felt himself in his right place, the Englishman looking down upon the foreign ant-heap. Lifted above her, he was affectionate with Italy, benign. He so well entertained his young greedy eyes, and his young island satisfaction in being isolated, that a pull at his sleeve took him aback. The messenger had already returned—a successful messenger. He could not believe that the man should have gone and come again so soon, and been successful. There, however, in the bronze paw lay the voucher for a box. He bestowed money, a liberal handful, as he questioned the man. How did he come by it so soon? Had some one just returned it? But the dialect answer was beyond him. He pocketed the voucher therefore and, turning to the staircase, left the monkey to his monkeyings—a poked finger, a spit on the floor and a frantic jump backwards out of the black glide of Jamie's shadow.

But Jamie, though he had got his voucher and saved his self-esteem, could not get back his spirits. His oppression had grown: it hung on him, dragging from his shoulders like a cloak. He actually turned once to see if something had not in fact caught him by the shoulders. But there was nothing on the stair but his shadow, swayed by the whim of the candle that flickered on the stairhead above him. He sighed. The sensation bothered him in a way that no physical weariness could do, forced him to realise that it was the brain rather than the body which had turned to lead. The inside of his head was as if overweighted, stuffed suddenly to bursting point with dark thoughts.

The words pattered in his head like rain on a lead roof—
No, not rain—a tolling bell.

If Menella died! What a horror it was to realise that Menella, even Menella, young and fair, might die. A frightened horse, a pricked finger, any trifling mishap, and Menella might die. Menella might—must bear a child, an heir to Babyon, and might die in bearing it. So it was ordered in a world of chance. He had never thought of such things before. Then why now? Because he was stupidly tired, heavy-limbed and heavy-hearted from too much happiness? Is it possible to be too happy? He felt so miserable—was he sickening for any fever?

The refrain made itself into a marching tune for his feet. It drew itself across his quivering mind, up and down, like a bow drawn across a stringed instrument. It moaned like a viola, darkening his thoughts as a viola darkens a passage for strings. He could not escape the repetition.

“Menella!” he cried sharply, hammering on the door of their room in a sudden and horrible fright—“Menella!”

The door of their room flew open and Menella flew out.

Had he stumbled, tripped, hurt himself? Was he late? Why was he late? What was wrong? Was anything wrong?

“Oh, Jamie, are you tired? You look so tired. Have you the tickets? You shouldn’t have bothered about the tickets. My dearest, if you’re tired we won’t go.”

Menella was as normal and sweet as a crocus in spring in her yellow hoops and lavender petticoat: or, he thought, she was liker the flame of the candle on her dressing-table with its lavender heart in a golden radiance. She lifted up his heart in her two hands and warmed it and put it back in its proper place.

Comforted thus by her cheerful welcome he was able to somersault, like the schoolboy he had so lately been, back into the moodless gaiety of yesterday. Indeed it was easier for him to laugh and be cheered than to explain to anxious Menella what had been the matter with him. He was too young, too unaccustomed to consider his own nature, to recognise in this onslaught of an uncomprehended moodiness the fatal sign of approaching Babyon maturity. It was said, in his family, that the boys’ hearts and the girls’ tresses darkened as they grew up. But Babyon youth was gay: and a hunting accident had robbed Jamie of his chance of seeing the truth of the saying written in his father’s face, of comprehending under what oppression of the spirit his mother had sunk. And so, when Menella questioned him, because he did not like to confess to her the strange misery of a moment nor tell her how his mother had come so suddenly into his head as a memory, a dining-room-portrait face, gay and frightened, because he would not admit that he had been assaulted by these fancies, and as much afraid of them as if he were once more a little boy sent to bed up dark staircases without a candle, he burst into boisterous, triumphant flourishes of his ticket and his timepiece in her face. He talked and laughed and hurried himself and her into a state of real excitement, till they romped down the stairs at last, arm in arm, laughing when Menella’s hoops embarrassed them at the turn of the steep stair, Menella and Jamie afraid that the coach might start without them, remembering only just in time as they entered the inn parlour to be Sir James and Lady Babyon, preparing to set out fashionably late for the play.

“Are you sure you still care to go, my dear?”

“As you please, Sir James!”

“The first act is perhaps scarce worth your attention.”

“At least ’twill pass the time.”

“Oh, Madam, if you insist——”

Madam, handed into her coach with a flourish, kept her dimpling countenance pretty well, but Jamie’s laughter echoed round the inn yard.

But it got no flash of white teeth from the ready ostlers. The ostlers, as Menella pointed out to Jamie after they had driven away, were, for Italians, so odd, so stolid and mute.

“How strange it is, Jamie! I thought Italians were a gay people. They never smile at us. My little maid seems half afraid of me. I can scarcely get her to lace me. That reminds me, Jamie, this is the gown you chose. I have never put it on before. Jamie, do you like me in this gown?”

Jamie’s answer lasted them the rest of the short journey. They were not late: the lobbies were still crowded with arrivals. Indeed there was a bustle, and yet they passed easily through the throng. Wherever they turned a lane opened in front of them and whispers followed. They went down the lane, royally indifferent, but within discomfited: and Menella’s hand tightened on Jamie’s arm.

“Jamie? Is it my dress? What have we done?”

Jamie had a lump in his throat that infuriated him. He, the welcomed charming boy, had never known open hostility before.

“Be quiet, my dear! It’s nothing, Menella! I don’t know. Yes, something’s wrong. But it’s nothing to do with us. How can it be? I’ll settle you in our box and then I’ll make inquiries. Something is wrong certainly. It may be bad news—the French—the Austrians—anything. Damn them, though, what has it to do with us?”

He hurried her into the gorgeous, chilly box and looked about him impatiently.

“Menella, it’s icy cold in here. Keep your wraps on! Pish, what sort of a box is this?”

“It’s the same box, Jamie, that we had before.”

“Is it? So it is. But isn’t it cold? Such a draught! These foreign theatres—never knew such a draught. Menella, do you want to stay?”

She looked at him in a mild astonishment.

“Dearest, we’ve just come.”

“Oh yes, of course—yes, we’re here now. But so chilly, the discomfort for you. If you would prefer to leave——”

“My dear, would you prefer it?”

“No—no, no! Now we’re here we’ll stay. May as well stay. But I wish they’d begin.”

He was uneasy. When he had settled Menella in her chair in correct fashion so that the brocaded curtains on her right should shelter her from the bold eyes of the house, he drew up the second of the box’s three chairs. But he did not sit. He fidgeted, opening the box door to discover whence the cold stream of air was loosed upon them: rearranged his cloak, fumbled for his quizzing glass, broke the ribbon and needed Menella to retie it: and while she bent over the task, paused beside her, still standing looking down upon the packed hold of the theatre, much as, an hour earlier, he had looked down from the inn gallery upon the inn yard.

The house was certainly full. He was able to realise its fullness because he found himself facing, not rows of heads in profile, but pink, full-moon faces, open-mouthed Oes behind Oes, all staring to the side of the house in which their box was placed. For an instant he thought to himself that he had made a mistake, that he had brought Menella into one of the bachelor boxes upon the actual stage. That would have been enough to make his acquaintances stare. But no, he was in his proper box, at the side, in the middle gallery among the family boxes. It was the audience that had turned sideways in its seat. The audience puzzled him. It was even more talkative than common; but it was a whispered talkativeness. Here and there a man sprang up gesticulating and was pulled down again. Unrestrained cries from the pit burst out of the muffled chatter, singly, like warnings against a danger. So definite was the concentration of all interest on something or some one in their immediate neighbourhood, whether below or above he could not tell, that involuntarily Jamie turned and looked upwards, craning his neck at the boxes above his head: and then swung sheer round to stare into his own alcove, and so back again, more puzzled than before. He could see nothing to excite the audience. For they were excited: it was unquestionable—excited beyond even his experience of an Italian crowd. And there was a hissing, sinister note in the gabble that made Menella turn to him. She did not know the language, but the tone disturbed her.

“What is it, Jamie? What has happened? What are they afraid of? Oh, Jamie, it couldn’t be fire?”

“My darling, absurd!”

“But what is it, Jamie? What are they all staring at?”

“I don’t know, sweet! Nothing! They’re only Italians. Sit quiet! See, the curtain’s going up.”

The overture had indeed played itself out unheard, adding to, but never mastering the general din, that unnerving din of massed humans all talking together and all in undertones. The sound was like the hiss of waves drawn backward down a beach. It was as if the whole audience were audibly sucking in its breath in preparation for an outburst. On that half lull the curtain lifted. As if the glare of light were a signal, the outburst came.

For as the actors began to play their parts a woman shrieked and, instantly, they were as unnoticed as tree boughs swaying up and down outside the closed window of a lighted room. The audience fed itself, strengthened itself on the blaze of sound and light; but it had no conscious ear or eye for the stage. Languid boxes gesticulated and muttered: the galleries yelled: while the whole arena, on the woman’s cry, rose massively with a forward and upward movement, doubling its size and height.

“Birnam Wood, Menella!” cried Jamie hysterically! “Look, Menella, it’s Birnam Wood!”

Menella sprang up and caught at his arm.

“Jamie, oh, Jamie,” she cried, “don’t you see? Look! It’s us they want! It’s us!”

As she babbled a man came swarming along the gallery rail like a monkey and, swinging from the curtain, flung himself screaming over the edge of the box. He had a knife between his teeth: his face was puckered up with the effort of holding it. Behind him a second man craned forward, flinging phrases that Jamie caught and half understood at the terrified Menella. Jamie took the first man by the shoulders, forced him backwards over the rail, out, out and down, and let go. Then, while the mob below yelped like a pack of hounds diverted, he turned and sent his fist into the face of the second, the gibbering monkey’s face. On that the roar sobered to the former dangerous half-quiet.

“Come on then, all of you!” roared Jamie into the lull. But as he tossed his defiance the door behind him was rattled open. Menella pulled his arm

and he turned. The manager, who should have been away in the country, flung himself upon Jamie in a white perspiration of terror. His hands shook, his lips shook: never did such a frightened little man babble of private exits, mobs, friendship, evil eyes and a theatre wrecked. His fear pricked the bubble of Jamie's fury. Sobering, his arm about the sobbing Menella, he plunged after the twittering creature out into the dim corridor, and heard the smash of glass on the wall behind him as the door swung to, and the cat-calls swelling again, muffled by the shut door, into that inexplicable roar of anger and hate. In another moment they were in the street, in a side street whose look he did not know, and the door in the wall was slammed behind them.

Raging, bewildered, vowing vengeance, sucking his grazed knuckles, scared as any man may well be who faces, unwarned, the beast mob with a woman beside him, Jamie hurried Menella down the alley to the tune of "Why? why? why?" Both panting, and she weeping, they still babbled to each other, "Why?" Their situation was not pleasant; for the shock, the hurry, the sensation of being a quarry pursued, combined to rob Jamie of his sense of direction, and children and loafers were already gathering round them when wheels and the trot of horses came friendly to their ears. Jamie was preparing to stop the coach and entreat hospitality for his exhausted wife from whatever strangers were within; but the coach drew up of its own accord. It was their own. The coachman, calm enough and quite intelligible, had been directed by the theatre management to follow after the *signore* who had tired, so he was told, of the heat of the theatre, and were walking home.

Jamie, sputtering, was at a loss for words. Tired! Walking home! It was too barefaced. But Menella, sagging on his arm, distracted him from the coachman and his shrugging impudence, even from the obvious necessity of going back to the theatre to reinstate himself in the eyes of damned foreigners, to teach infernal foreigners a lesson! He bundled his wife into the coach and followed her himself and, seeing her so white, contented himself with calling savagely to the fellow to drive to the inn and drive quickly or he'd know the reason why. And so turned to his lady.

But, white and overwrought as the adventure had left her, Menella could review the actual incidents of it with a philosophy that amazed as much as it suited Jamie. She was tearful because tears were Menella's way; but she was not angry with Italy. "Foreigners!" was Menella's explanation. She had not come abroad, she explained to him, without being prepared for any crazy thing that foreigners might do.

“I am not afraid of foreigners,” concluded Menella, amazing him, and on that began to cry again with—“Oh, Jamie, I was so frightened!”

“But, darling, you said just now——”

“Oh!” She turned to him with a look of actual horror that peaked her face into what she would be at sixty—“Jamie, it wasn’t them. They’re just Italians. It was the noise they made, so angry, so—mad. Jamie, it made me remember——”

“What?” But he knew what she remembered.

“Harriot!”

“Don’t, Menella! To drag in that now. What has she to do with us? We’re in Italy. You’re talking too foolishly, Menella! Talking of things like that when we’ve been in such danger! You don’t seem to realise what happened. We might have been killed. That crowd was dangerous.”

“Yes!” said Menella—“Mad! Mad as Harriot!”

He put his arm round her.

“Menella, what are you saying? You’ve been so brave. You mustn’t get hysterical.”

“They came at us,” she sobbed, “like Harriot.”

“You little fool! You’re not to talk of her, I tell you, you little fool!” he raged, and saw that he frightened her, that she was in an instant more deeply and terribly frightened by the anger in his voice than she had been by the uproar of the angry theatre. She clutched at him, beseeching him wildly not to talk to her like that—please, please, Jamie, not to talk to her like that! So Jamie, furious with himself for his own outburst because he knew that it was the consequence of his own fright, said to himself that he was a husband now and that his wife was the weaker vessel: he must be firm but kind, very kind always to the weaker vessel. So he told her quickly how sorry he was and then held her tight in the jolting coach, deriving his own comfort from her clinging arms about his neck. Thus the two children comforted each other with wise saws and kisses and forgiveness interchanged, as they drove back to their lodging through the alien hostile town.

When they got home, they found Jabez waiting for them. Jabez had overtaken them at last. Jabez had washed and supped while they had been absent at the Opera: Jabez was ready to be in attendance upon his master when sent for.

His exhausted and dishevelled master was frankly thankful for the arrival of his aide.

“Send him up! *Faites monter!* What’s the word they use?”

Jabez mounted. Jabez, with packets and apologies and a very grave face, presented himself before his young master and mistress. He hoped he had done right. The gentlemen, lawyer-like, wouldn’t have two words about it, so there it was. They had travelled together and he had paid dues for both. The gentlemen had given him letters to say he should pay till they overtook Sir James. Should he come in, sir? He was outside.

“Should who come in?”

Jamie was in a fidgety, laughing, mixed state of irritation at old Jabez, slow as ever, and pleasure at seeing the fellow.

“Who’s outside, Jabez? How you beat about the bush! Who’s with you?”

Menella put her handkerchief to her lips to stifle her cry. All the light in the room was quenched for her. Jabez was no longer a dear funny fellow who made Jamie laugh and forget their dreadful evening. Jabez opened the door. Jabez whistled to the shadows of the staircase. Jabez stood back to let a shadow in. Jabez was a traitor gone over to Menella’s enemies. Jabez had brought with him—Dekker!

V

THEIR instinct had not misled them. They had indeed been hunted from country to country and from town to town; though not by Hariot's orders. It was not Hariot who had sent Dekker after them. Hariot had ceased to trouble herself about Jamie and Menella. Hariot was dead.

Dekker, exhibiting his obedience to former employers as a recommendation to a possible future master, told the story without disguises. He had been bidden watch and report. On the day that Sir James left The Wells he had, as Sir James would remember, delivered a packet—the man's eyes rested a moment on Menella's ringed hand. He had then seen Miss Traill—beg pardon, sir and madam—had seen Lady Babyon sitting in the coach. Returning to his mistress's lodgings he had told his mistress what he had seen. Miss Hariot had ordered her coach. He—he hesitated—he, knowing his mistress since she was a child, being trusted, had been so bold as to beg her to——

“What?”

“Beg her to counter the order, sir! She, my mistress, was in no state to travel. Miss Traill—your pardon, your ladyship—her ladyship will bear me out that my mistress, when she was in her moods, was in no state to travel. It had come on her again, your ladyship!”

“It?” Jamie spoke in a strangled voice of horror.

“Her mood! Her ladyship can tell you: her ladyship has seen my mistress in her moods: her ladyship knows——”

Menella knew. Menella was wringing her hands.

“Again, Dekker, again! And I not there!”

“What happened?” Jamie's mouth was hidden by his hand.

“My lady's maid and I, sir, we—we did what we thought best—being left alone and in charge as it were: old Madam Peacey was not even heeded by my mistress. In the end we persuaded her not to go.”

Said Jamie nervously, incredulously—

“You—my cousin? How could you persuade my cousin?”

“We—I—the maid and I, sir, we held her till she was quiet. Then, sir, we barred the window and the doors and so left her, while I took upon me to send a post to London after you and another to my mistress’s law people. I was gone some two hours. We thought it best to leave her.”

“Alone?”

“The maid, sir, was afraid of my mistress, and old Madam Peacey was taken with the vapours: we did as we thought best. She was quiet enough before we left her to herself. We had barred the door.”

He had left Hariot shut up fast in her room: and gone, the dutiful, reliable servant, to send for lawyers and former guardians. For he had been placed, it transpired, in Hariot’s household by guardians, reluctantly leaving a young woman pronounced capable of choosing her own duenna and managing her own affairs, to manage her own affairs. But they had suggested Dekker: and Hariot had accepted Dekker. And Dekker, justifying their wisdom when his moment came, had done all that was expected of him. But even Dekker could not be expected to foresee everything. Hariot, who so constantly spent her money on ladies’ trifles, filigrees, fans, seals, rings, bodkins, had fancied one day the mother-of-pearl pattern on a lady’s pistol in a jeweller’s window. She and Menella had bought it together. It lay on her silver-table, a toy among toys: and, somewhere near midnight, Dekker thought, for he had been awakened out of his first sleep, Hariot had remembered her toy. There had been one shot, through the heart.

VI

AN arrow of sunlight stirred the room like a spoken word. Encouraged by it, companioned by it, Menella spoke again—

“Jamie!” said Menella timidly.

She had spoken to him thus at intervals throughout the remnant of the night. Dekker had told his tale and Jabez had received his orders, and the two had then been dismissed by a quiet-voiced, collected Jamie who spoke to be obeyed, without lifting eyelids to look at his obedient servants. Jabez was to take order for their departure at the earliest possible hour: and when Dekker, coughing, insinuated that devoted servants had had little enough sleep these three nights, Dekker’s protest was brushed aside. Awake or asleep, Sir James Babyon, his lady, and his people, were to start for England at eight that morning. Jabez and Dekker found themselves tumbling over each other to get out of the room.

In the dark, foreign-smelling passages Dekker was loudly grievous; but Jabez had become a quiet young gentleman’s gentleman, his easy Devon flow of good-natured small talk dammed up. Elder-brotherly, they had come out to a comical young master: they found a stranger and were afraid of him. Dekker, at least, had found a stranger; but to perplexed Jabez it was as if he were once more a head-ducking, forehead-knuckling urchin, holding the reins for the terrible old master who gave you a frown or a shilling, you never knew which to expect, or maybe rode by you without any knowledge of you in his eyes. Dekker, in English, had clamoured for a bed, and Jabez, in Italian, had procured him one. Dekker had gone to sleep, to snore; but Jabez, his orders given and the horses promised for eight, must needs forego his scanty sleeping time to colloque with the gesticulating merry ostlers whom Jamie had found sullen, and, as the wonderful Italian sun came up, to wander into the early waking town. He strolled through the market-place into the street where the theatre stood and paused to chat under their canopies with the women selling mulberries, apricots and plummy fennel: and came back to his headquarters at last with a flower in his coat and blue sunken circles round his eyes that shone with sleeplessness, a very thoughtful young man. He looked up at the shuttered window where, as he knew, his master and mistress lay, and hesitated. But the habit of service was on him and he did not go up unsummoned to their apartments.

Yet his mind, needing a confidant, gave him no rest. He breakfasted and spruced himself for the long day of hot travel; but still his pleasant country countenance showed perturbation and his country mind, accustomed to the alehouse canvassing of wonders, gave him, under the weight of a secret, no rest.

“Dekker!” said Jabez at last, invitingly regarding his room-mate as an arrow of sunlight shot in through the closed shutters. But Dekker only snored and muttered as he turned on his litter, and in Jabez the impulse of confidence died. Meanwhile—

“Jamie!” said Menella again at the selfsame moment in another part of the house.

She had been pattering to and fro between parlour and bedroom all night, light-footed, gathering up their possessions. She had accepted without a thought of objection the abrupt termination of their honeymoon wanderings. Indeed, with the coming of their news, she had ceased, though she was too simple to realise it, to be a bride. In an instant she had become the wife, the unconsidered pivot, the negligible necessity of her husband’s existence. Ribbons might flutter, soft colour rise, tears well up so easily, and a poor lady splash her shoe with common mud, but Jamie—James—Sir James Babyon would never again be in a passion over such matters. Spring was ended and all the blossoms fallen. This she knew as she watched her husband sitting at the table, his head in his hands, needing her, depending on her, oblivious of her. Menella, a finger on her lip, pressing back the expression of her love for him, watched him in his misery and, watching, learned her lesson.

“Jamie!” said Menella timidly. He did not turn.

“Jamie!” breathed Menella again. Then, in the flat silence—“I’d better pack,” whispered Menella: and so came to her wifehood.

But in the morning, her saving duties done, on aching feet, with an aching heart, she returned to him again.

He had scarcely stirred, but sat still at the huge, solid, round mahogany table, twisting and twiddling the tasselled ribbon of the ornate mat that lay upon it. His fresh high colour could not easily leave his cheeks: his hair, for he had not assumed his wig, was still crisped and bright: young and yellow-haired he could be unshaven a night and still not be noticeably ungroomed. Menella therefore, her fingers tentative on the table as she bent across it to

him and looked down on the drooped head and shoulders, saw him so far unchanged. Said Menella then hopefully—

“Jamie! Jamie, did you fall asleep?”

“Asleep!”

He lifted his head at that, and she saw his face at last and scarcely knew it. His eyes, those clear light blue eyes, were sunk in his head and the irids had shrunk to mere grey rings about the enlarged pupils. The change had altered him shockingly. If she felt herself a new Menella, a saddened wise Menella, here, with darkened eyes, eyes of a beast that suffers and cannot tell what it suffers, was also a new Jamie. She gave, at the sight of this new, dreadful Jamie, a little wordless cry of pity and dismay that he ignored. They stood then looking at each other, she not knowing what to say, he not caring what he said; but at last he caught up his own word with a vague—

“Asleep? No, I wasn’t asleep.” There was not even irony in his tone.

She didn’t know what to do for him. She was afraid to kiss him or touch him, lest an assumption of intimacy should offend his misery. She faltered at last—

“I’ve packed.”

“Yes,” said Jamie.

They paused again: and this time his eyes meeting hers did not waver aside again. Indeed, he met her look, purposefully, with a hard exaggeration of indifference: she on her side would not budge. At last he defied her with—

“What are you looking at me for?”

“Jamie!” she besought him. But he still stared her down with hard bold eyes.

“Look as much as you like!” said Jamie. “You’ve got to live with it.”

“Jamie, with what?”

“The mark on my forehead. Isn’t it the mark you’re looking for? Well, you’re my wife: you’ve got a right to look at it. Look at it! See what you’ve got to live with! Look!”

He sprang to his feet and caught up the tall candlesticks on the mantel. The tapers were burnt down to flat pools of wax and flamed and shook in his

grasp like torches at the moment of extinction. He came reeling towards her, the candles held high above him, crying—

“Look! Look at it! Look!”

She ran to him.

“At what, my dear?”

“Cain!” said Jamie. Suddenly his lip began to quiver.

Little Menella reached up on tiptoes and took the lights from his outstretched hands and put them down carefully on the table out of the way. Then, still with the curious methodical quiet that had descended upon her, she took her husband by the hand and led him to the couch behind the table. Sitting down she pulled him down to her, pulled the dear head to her shoulder.

“You’re so tired: you’re worn out,” said Menella to Jamie.

He muttered “Cain! Cain!” and with that began to cry, his hands clutching her shoulders, his face buried in the laces of her dress.

She said nothing for she could think of nothing comforting to say; but she held him tightly, held him, so much had life reversed their relationship in an hour, much as he earlier in the night had supported her in the moving coach. So time passed in a desolate silence until, looking down at him, heavy on her breast, she found that he had fallen asleep. She sat as still as a mouse, afraid to wake him from that merciful exhaustion, till Jabez, knocking at the door, reported breakfast and the coach both ready.

They dressed and ate in haste, paid their dues, entered their conveyance and drove away. Jabez and Dekker on horseback clattered after them.

Menella, watching the mulberry trees slide past them, and villages planted like button mushrooms on a chequered grey-green tablecloth slowly swell to human size and dwindle again, first to dolls’ farms, then to white dots and turning from that interminable regularity to Jamie listless in his corner, thought: ‘We hurry so: we’re still being hurried and chased; but what hurry is there now? She’s dead: she can’t pursue us now.’ And because the thought comforted her she ventured on words—

“Jamie, don’t grieve so! We can’t help Hariot by grieving.”

He turned on her his threatened look of a child in the dark—

“Hariot? If I’d known—if I’d understood—I could have helped Hariot,” said Jamie. “But who’ll help me?” said Jamie. And then, rousing—“There’s

only one person can help me.”

Menella breathed a “Who?”

“Hariot could help me,” said Jamie. He gave her a light, mad glance. His eye said, “You think I’m crazy; but I’m not crazy.”

“But poor Hariot,” began Menella—“poor Hariot’s dead.”

“What of it?” said Jamie. He leaned forward: he became voluble—“Death doesn’t matter,” reasoned Jamie, explaining simple matters to the little fool Menella: “Death! Death’s a door that opens one way. I can see it opening, just a door with a latch. The latch drops and it’s open! If I dropped the latch,” mused Jamie, while Menella watched him fearfully, “I could go through it, you see, to Hariot. I could explain things to her. I didn’t know what she was driving at, you see, Menella! I didn’t understand at all. I ought to go. But I can’t go. If I did go, could I get back? I’d be shut out. That’s what would happen to me. It’s terrible, Menella, to be shut out, outside the house”—his speech slackened and stumbled like the words of one who repeats a half-forgotten lesson—“the house—of—life. You see, Menella _____”

But Menella was terrified by his look of a reasoning, finger-wagging, drunken man. She whimpered—

“Don’t, Jamie, don’t! You’re frightening me.”

“I?” The taut, schooled look faded from the boy’s face. Jamie stirred in his corner. His eye lightened, his glance grew gentle. It was as if Jamie were awakened, thought Menella, from nightmare. More, he was looking at her, concerned for her, was taking her hand, pressing it—“Frightened? My dearest! What’s frightened you? Of course, you’re thinking of yesterday: yes, yes, of course! It was alarming indeed—foreign rabble! I wish I’d had time to investigate. But we had to be off, you see. You do see, don’t you, that it’s mere decency to hurry home? Poor Cousin Hariot! Menella—” he leant to her earnestly, confiding his thoughts—“I’ve a terrible fear that I’m in part responsible for Hariot’s—for the rash act. I should have realised her state of mind. I shall have no peace till I get home and see the physicians and my guardian—her guardian too, you know, and the old lady, Peacey. I can’t cross-question Dekker. It’s questionless that my cousin was mad. And yet I have a feeling—guilty—responsible. We *were* contracted. Don’t you understand me, Menella?”

So he talked on. And Menella, who lived for the moment, rejoiced in this return of Jamie, sobered, yet her own again: and put out of her mind the

anguish of the past night and the passing hour: tried to forget the words, the manner, the look—above all the look—that had frightened her. It was necessary that she should forget the look. She had never before seen a likeness between her fair husband and his dark cousin. But Jamie, shrunk into a corner, staring at her with shining eyes and mouthing death and horror, had been for a moment unmistakably Hariot's cousin. If her own observation had failed her, the wheels insisted on it—"Hariot's cousin! Hariot's cousin! Hariot's cousin!" rolled the wheels, rumbled the wheels, minute by minute, hour by hour.

But Jamie Babyon did not hear the song of the wheels: he was listening to the horses' hoofs beating out—"Hariot! Hariot! Hariot!" Even when they stopped to rest and bait the horses, the beats continued. He carried them along with him throbbing in his heart—"Hariot! Hariot! Hariot! Hariot!" till he thought if his heart did not change its beat he must stop it or go mad.

VII

THEY encountered no difficulties in the days that followed. France had stared after them as they drove south and Italy had openly and inexplicably resented their presence within her borders; but no sooner did they set their faces for home than all went well with them. The inn-keepers welcomed them: the grooms and chambermaids were willing. All Savoy and France seemed to conspire to speed them on their way with—was it possible?—a sigh of relief.

It was the unobservant Menella who noticed and worded that sigh of relief.

“Jamie,” said she as, the Channel crossing behind them, they drove through the familiar lanes of Kent, greeting the whitened hedges with passion, exchanging once and for all the maize and mulberries and spires of Italy for poppies, convolvulus, village square-towered churches and the straw-garlanded damson-trees of blessed, dearest England—“Jamie, I’m glad to be home. They didn’t like us, did they, abroad? They treated us so oddly, not as we treat strangers. No, they didn’t think us comical. It looked to me as if they were afraid of us. It was as if—do you understand me, Jamie?—as if we were plague-struck. And they such dirty people!”

Jamie shifted in his seat, sighing heavily.

“What’s that? You’re fanciful, Menella!”

“No, I’m sure I’m not. I’ll tell you why.”

“Well?” He was scarcely listening. Leaning his arm on the ledge below the coach window, shelving his cheek on his arm, he stared out at the sun-browned happy country. It seemed to her that nowadays he was but half awake, and that even the wakeful half of him grew daily more silent. And Menella, fearing his silence, following her instinct to capture on any or no pretext his attention, had grown daily more garrulous and been less heeded. Jamie had hours, indeed, when Menella, his darling, was no more than a voice murmuring, a lark singing in unattainable skies. She dissolved into a shadow uttering a string of sounds, faint sounds, easily blotted out by the trot of horses’ hoofs or a man’s own heart-beats.

“Well?” said Jamie, watching another lark far away in the blue sky. “Why?”

She hesitated, seeking words. At last she said—

“Jamie, it’s Dekker who’s frightened now. D’you notice how he keeps away, hangs behind, canters on ahead? Now once—now in the old days—now when I lived with——” She broke off, moistened her dry lips, began again—“At Tunbridge Wells, before I knew you, it was I who was frightened by Dekker. He used to—it’s past, Jamie, don’t get angry!—he used to presume upon his place: he was always at my elbow. He used to smile—oh, that smile! He knew he had a right in the house and I was a charity creature. Harriot never helped me against Dekker: never would see. Jamie, are you listening?”

“I’m listening.” Jamie spoke without turning, without interest. “I’m sorry, Menella! It was necessary to bring Dekker back with us. I need him in town at the lawyer’s. Then he’ll be paid off, of course, pensioned and sent about his business.” Then, as if dimly aware that something was expected of him that he had not given—“You shan’t be troubled with the sight of him much longer, dear, Menella dear!”

She was quick to protest at this interpretation of her story.

“I? It’s not I. All that ended for me—all my troubles ended for me when you came. Poor Dekker, how can he harm me? No, no, Jamie, it’s Dekker who’s afraid. Watch him! He’s like those Italian servants. Yesterday when he served us at supper his teeth were chattering. He looks at us so strangely. It’s not Dekker, it’s his fright that frightens me.”

“You’re crazy!” Jamie was incredibly roused, unreasonably annoyed. “Dekker? Take his impudence! Frightened of what, pray?”

“Of us. Oh, he is.”

“What do you mean—us? Are we lepers? What is he frightened of? What can he be frightened of? I tell you what it is—the man’s been drinking. I guessed it before. The man drinks. My God, and my cousin in his charge! But—afraid of us! You’re dreaming, Menella!”

Menella was stubborn.

“Watch him! He doesn’t help Jabez to wait on us unless Jabez calls him. I heard Jabez rate him for it. He keeps out of our way. Don’t you feel it, his fear? What is it, Jamie? What’s amiss with us? Oh, Jamie, what are you going to do?”

For Jamie, plunged half out of the window, was stopping the coach. Jamie, halloing, brought Jabez galloping up for orders.

“Yes, sir! The noon meal, sir? In the lacquer case! At once, sir! I’ll get it out at once.”

“Where’s your fellow?”

“Dekker, sir? On ahead.”

“Fetch him back! I pay his dues: let him earn his keep, do his duty, be at hand!”

Dekker was very far ahead. Dekker, overtaken by Jabez, returned slowly, dismounted slowly, approached slowly.

“Dekker, get the luncheon box out of the hold. Your mistress and I will rest and eat.”

“Jabez——” began Dekker.

“Jabez minds the horses. Spread the cloth. Get out the dishes!”

“Here, sir? In the chariot?”

“In the chariot. What’s wrong with you? Why not in the chariot?” And then, still more angrily—“Jabez!”

“Sir?”

“Is the man bewitched?”

For Dekker had made no motion to obey. He stood, a greenish-faced, stricken creature, and goggled.

“Come on, brother!” Jabez admonished him in an undertone, “The quality’s waiting.” And deftly pulling out the japanned five-sided luncheon case, he whipped out of the coach pocket the dining-cloth of Milan silk, shook it open and spread it with a flourish. Jamie watched him with exact attention: and Menella, shrinking on his arm, held there by his unconscious pressure of her against his body, felt him still quivering with anger. He spoke

“Go to the horses, Jabez! Dekker may do this work.”

That Jabez was unwilling to leave his fellow-servant to his own devices was plain. He hesitated, on the edge of speech.

“D’you hear me?” cried Jamie, stamping his foot: and, for the first time in Menella’s hearing, swore at his man.

Jabez, not much shaken, retreated.

But Dekker, unaccustomed to a furious Jamie, was half cowed, half spurred into a fumbling haste of obedience. He wrenched open the delicately moulded luncheon box so roughly that Menella gave a little scream of protest, and lifted out the close-packed lacquer trays with hands that jolted the china ware. He ranged the trays hastily side by side, and diving again into the box brought up and balanced hastily on the lid itself three of the Murano glasses that were Menella's pride.

On that Jamie cried out in a fume—

“Are you still drunk? Why do you lay three places?”

The goaded Dekker straightened himself. Menella had been long enough his fellow-servant to shrink before her knowledge of an imminent outpouring of abuse. But the words were not spoken, were visibly gulped down.

“Begging your pardon, sir——” began Dekker, and broke off with a gasp. A glass, overbalanced by his backward start, rolled to the cushion's edge, dropped over it and smashed on the coach floor. The man took no heed: his face was paper-white, his mouth open: his gross lips shook.

“Look! Look behind you!” bellowed Dekker. He flung up his arms and, screening his head in them, charged down the empty road as one who seeks safety through the very flames. Before Jamie and Menella could recover from their own startled turn and stare at the innocent field behind them, poppy-splashed, Dekker had blundered into Jabez, torn the bridle from his hand, leaped on to his own saddle-horse and spurred off. The chalk dust rose in clouds behind him from the roadway, dulling the sight and sound of his passage, and before it could settle he had reached the turn of the road and vanished behind the hedge.

VIII

DRUNK—THAT was the explanation! The delirious outburst of a drink-sodden fool. By the time they had reached town and were settled in their lodgings in Pantan Street, Jamie had made up his mind that no other explanation was possible. What other could there be? Mad-drunk or—or what? Or what, Menella? There was no other explanation. If repetition meant conviction then Jamie was convinced that there was no other explanation.

Jabez, called into respectful consultation, thought so too: offered evidence which the coachman would, on appeal, confirm. Dekker had certainly been drunk. Dekker, it appeared, and Menella justified it later to Jamie, had long had his weakness. Dekker met all crises by aid of the bottle. And Dekker, Jabez revealed, had endeavoured to counteract the fatigues of the journey by brandy, and more brandy. Jabez had had much ado, he owned, to preserve appearances, to keep his companion washed, brushed and upright in the last four days. Angrily interrogated by Jamie with an “Ads, man! Why not tell me what was afoot?” Jabez made answer that he knew enough to manage a tipping rogue, and hearing his master say that Dekker was to leave them at London he hadn’t thought to trouble the master, knowing that his master and mistress had troubles enough.

Jamie stared at him.

“Troubles? Do you know—do *you* even know of your master’s troubles? By God, am I so public——”

“Jamie!” implored Menella.

A stranger turned on her.

“Go into the coach! Eat your luncheon! We must drive on shortly. Go, Menella!” Then, watching his wife obey—“Now, Jabez, what do you know?”

Jabez, coughing, confessed that Dekker talked in his cups. If he might take the liberty, the family, sir, was well rid of Dekker, whatever set him running.

“Jabez——” Jamie beat at the knap-weed with his cane till a dozen purple heads lay on the roadside dust like splashes of wine on a napkin—“Jabez,

what set him running? Did you hear him call out ‘Look behind you!’? Did you hear?”

Jabez was voluble: more voluble in the next five minutes than he had been for days, than he had been, indeed, since that sleepless morning when he had gossiped with the Milan hucksters and come back thoughtful—

“Sir, it’s the country trick. You know it—touch and run—we’ve played it on each other: remember it, Master Jamie? He called ‘Look behind you!’ and you looked. That gave him time to run.”

“Why should he run, Jabez?”

“Sir, it was the brandy: he had the horrors. When a man’s that far gone God knows what he thinks he sees.” Jabez mopped at his hot face.

“Ah!” Jamie regarded him thoughtfully: and then—“That’ll do, Jabez!” and with that returned to the coach. Menella looked her questions as the journey was resumed, but got no word from Jamie. It was not until they reached London and were driving up Piccadilly that, looking out, he spoke

“Do you know where we are, Menella?”

Menella shook her head.

Said Jamie—

“We were here not so long ago.”

“Jamie!” She began to smile, for now she recognised street and buildings: “Weren’t we married here, Jamie?”

“Hereabouts. Here we thought to be happy. Till death us do part—eh? Death’s parted us already, eh, Menella? Eh? Say something, Menella! Can’t you speak?”

She could not. She had nothing to say. It was not in her temperament to feel the blow as he felt it. Hariot was dead and it was very sad: so far she was with him. But his horror at his cousin’s death she could not understand. Hariot had killed herself because Jamie had not married her. Yes, but Hariot was mad. Mad people did mad, shocking things. It was wicked of Hariot to kill herself, though she could not help it, being mad. So much for Hariot! She was near hating Hariot for the evil she had brought on them: then how could she pity her? All her pity was for Jamie. What was Hariot’s death to Menella compared with its effect upon Jamie? For Jamie, though he had had a week to get accustomed to the news, still refrained utterly from normal

speech or smiles, bore himself still like a guilty man. What fault was it of his? Yet he went about with a white face and lowered eyes: and that he should do so was calamity. Here was the real blow: it seemed to Menella that Hariot, dead, was robbing her of Jamie, as she, living, had robbed Hariot: and so she hated Hariot's memory: and loved Jamie the more because he disregarded her. But her real suffering came from the fact that she could not understand why he disregarded her. Why had he changed? Why did he suffer so? She knew that he loved her and had never loved Hariot. Yet he suffered because of Hariot.

It was incomprehensible to Menella. Yet she was acutely, agonisingly conscious of adding to his suffering by the mere fact that she could not understand it.

“Say something, Menella!”

She could have torn her heart out for him, resolutely, with the two small hands that he had so often kissed; but she could not say anything to help him because she did not know what to say. She only knew, it was her cross to know, that she could not help him because she could not force her nature into intellectual comprehension of his. “What's the good of loving? Anybody can love!” cried Menella to herself: “But oh, if I could be wise!” and so watched him in a stubborn, speechless torment.

In Menella's nightmares she ran down a staircase to escape a pursuer, faster and faster, till, a half flight from the bottom, she jumped; but she never landed. No sooner did she spring than the stairway would string out down the side of an incredible precipice, and she would fall, fall, fall, to wake in a sweat before ever she reached the ever-receding bottom.

In such a nightmare she now lived by day. She saw Jamie separated from her by a step or two; but when she tried to o'erleap it the distance was enlarged, and would continue to be enlarged, as she realised, by every incident of their mutual life. For when she went with him next day to visit the family lawyer and guardian of both the cousins, she was bewildered anew and distressed anew by Jamie's reception of what was not, after all, such terrible news, come to think of it. For Mr. Laramie, giving no more details than Jamie knew already of Hariot's death and burial, was prepared to put aside the matter quickly, as a finished and bygone family mischance, and to turn to another matter more cheerful arising out of it. Indeed he had such a comforting air, when he referred to Hariot, of implying that tragedies would happen, especially to women, in spite of all that guardians might do: and he seemed so far from implying that Jamie could possibly be supposed

to have anything to reproach himself with, that Menella thought him kind and liked him. But Jamie broke in roughly, gave him almost the lie—

“It won’t do, sir!” said Jamie: “I was contracted to my cousin and I married another woman. Don’t gloze it!”

“If ever”—the ancient gentleman was solemn—“if ever events justified a technical breach—you were very young, Sir James——”

“Three weeks younger than I am now,” said Jamie.

“Ah, but I speak of the time when the arrangement was made. Eighteen—tut-tut—too young. I protested at that time, I remember; but I was overruled.”

“But you drew up the contract,” Jamie mocked him.

“I considered, young gentleman, that you were a penniless younger son.”

“Hark ye now,” said Jamie, “did you know when you contracted us that my cousin was mad?”

“Mistress Hariot Babyon—” Mr. Laramie turned to Menella as to the point of sanity in a world of Babyons—“inherited her father’s wealth, though she could not inherit the title. It was a fine match for a younger son.”

“You did know then?” Jamie raised a clenched hand.

“Jamie!” Menella caught it back: then—“My husband’s not himself,” she stammered: “we’ve been travelling night and day since the news came _____”

Jamie laughed harshly, but he let his hand lie in hers.

“He knows me, Menella! Don’t you, sir? Besides he’ll make allowance for a man who’s a bridegroom and a murderer all in a night.”

“I beseech you, Jamie——”

“It’s you he’ll not forgive, Menella! You’ve lost the family a fortune.”

The lawyer struck in with a smile and a wave of a hand that obliterated wild sayings—

“Not lost——”

“What’s that?” Jamie shrank a little as if he felt the wind of a hand raised for a blow.

“Miss Hariot Babyon, in a will found in her room on the—er—unhappy night——”

Jamie sneered at him—

“You talk, sir, of our wedding night.”

“Give me leave! It is the only pleasant news in a sad business. I am with you there, Sir James, a sad, sad business. But this remains. She has bequeathed to you and to your heirs her entire fortune. It’s a matter of half a million—more—I have the figures somewhere——”

Jamie sprang up: his face was convulsed: he gesticulated like a man beating off not a wind but a rain of blows.

“You can’t burden me with that! I’ll dispute it. It’s not legal. Why, the woman was mad!”

“The will might, of course, be disputed, were it worth any one’s while. But in that case you would still inherit. Grant that she died intestate, you are still next of kin.”

The boy burst into a shout of laughter.

“God rot her, Menella! She gives us a wedding present!”

He collapsed into a chair and, putting back his head, laughed till the tears rolled down his cheeks. The lawyer was shocked at last.

“If you cannot consider your wife, sir, decency to the dead——” He broke off.

“Well, what is it?” Jamie wiped his eyes. Mr. Laramie had half risen.

“I—I fancy—at the door—my clerk perhaps?” But the old gentleman was oddly perturbed.

“Call him in!” permitted Jamie. “Let him join us in our entertainment!”

His guardian hesitated. Then—

“No, it can’t be Lacy. I sent him out. I hope no eavesdropper——”

Jamie lifted himself out of his chair and strolled to the door, while Menella, glad of the interruption, with her cambric handkerchief patted her face into calmness. Their host, however, watched the door.

“Pray come in!” said Jamie, in that boisterous new voice of his that filled the little parlour and re-echoed from the panelling. He flung open the door.

But the passage, well-lighted by the delicate, fan-shaped skylight, was empty. He let in only the draught, that icy, musty draught inseparable, as their host nervously explained, from a basement London house. Their host

was apologetic; for Menella flinched in the cold air and drew her flimsy wraps about her. Jamie mocked her harshly for a feminine wisp and swore that he felt nothing. But the lawyer, with hands and voice shaken a little, for old age feels a sudden draught, agreed with her and shivered with her, and pished at himself for fancying a knock and a caller for nothing, and so letting in on them the draught.

And with his apologies their conference broke up sooner than Menella or Jamie had planned; but Mr. Laramie, it seemed, had an engagement so soon as made no matter. His clerk was out. It would therefore be better perhaps to put all papers in order ready for signature, and give himself the pleasure of waiting on Sir James with them in a day or two. There were minor legacies to be paid over—and the largish one, for example, to Dekker.

Dekker? Oh, yes, he was in touch with Dekker. Yes, yes, the rogue had crawled in on him that morning, sober and penitent. “Indeed, Sir James, I know not what possessed Dekker. Yes, indeed, he told me. Unheard-of conduct. Yet I know him for a most reputable and trustworthy fellow.”

“Did he explain himself?” Jamie wanted to know.

“Explain? Why, yes, in a measure. But the notions, my dear sir, if madam here will forgive me, of a man in his cups—— But we can discuss these minor matters more easily when my clerk is at my elbow—Lacy—you remember poor Lacy, Sir James? Well then, for a week or two, I understand, I find you in Panton Street? Take care of the step—her ladyship must take care that she does not slip at the step.”

He bowed them out himself: and re-entering, collapsing into his chair, rang for his housekeeper and his man. His man, entering, was frightened at his master’s colour and his rambling talk.

“Where’s Lacy? What business had Lacy to step out? Find Lacy! And bid Mrs. Drewitt make me a pint of burnt wine! And build me a fire here, Drewitt! I am cold, Drewitt! The wind strikes cold.”

“Lord, sir, at midsummer!” quoth Drewitt.

“Light it, sirrah, as I bid you! I am getting an old man. The Babyon matters must stand over till Lacy comes. These youngsters with their brawls and their women! The dark one’s my money! What a queen! But what does he want with two wives, Drewitt? And opening the door on me and letting in the cold?”

IX

BUT when Sir James was inquired for at Panton Street a day or so later, Sir James and his lady had left town, left for their country seat.

“Let’s go home, Menella!” said poor Jamie. She thought of him now as poor Jamie. “Let’s go home to The Court. Perhaps when we get home, Menella——”

“Jamie,” she cried desperately, “can’t you put it behind you?”

“It?” He challenged her to use the name: and summoning her courage she used it.

“Harriot.”

“What, is she in front of me now?” said Jamie, staring.

“Don’t joke, Jamie! Please, please! Be wise! Look!” And then as he gave an odd start—“Don’t, Jamie! I mean, listen! Jamie, it’s not kind to me. You promised always to be kind to me. It’s not kind not to listen. Listen! Look at me! This money—there’s no reason that it should burden you so. Think that it’s not for you—think that it’s for——”

“Well, Menella?”

“Jamie——”

“I’m listening.”

“Children, Jamie—when they come.”

“Cain’s brats.”

“Oh, you’re wicked to say such things,” she lamented.

“It’s you who are wicked, Menella, to think of handing on a curse.”

“Money’s not a curse. I’ve been poor all my life. I tell you, money’s a blessing. It buys——”

“Does it buy peace?”

Menella tried again.

“Forget the money’s there. Let it lie for those—for those that come after us. And you, Jamie, you’ve to forget all that’s past and think of me and think

of what may come. I can give you peace, my Jamie, my poor Jamie, if you'll let me. Let me tell you what to do!"

As always after a sudden bitter word, as if he would disclaim it by docility, he gave her a smile.

"Tell me what to do then, Menella! I like to do what you want. I used to think of nothing else but 'What does Menella want?' Here! I'd forgotten." He fumbled at a pocket. "I bought you this in Milan, the day—before Dekker came and we knew. It's lain by in my pocket. Open it! Isn't it pretty? A necklace for you: a daisy-chain filigree—little silver daisies with golden hearts, because they looked so like you, darling Menella! I looked forward to seeing you open it. Oh, I was so happy! How was I to know that Hariot—that Hariot——"

"How could you know? Who could know? You did what was right, Jamie! Forget her! Forget!"

"I couldn't have married her, Menella! I told her so. But you don't think I knew, do you, what would follow? Did Cain know when he struck at Abel? Abel bothered him. He only pushed him out of his way, Menella! Did he know about the blood? Did he know that it would flow after him, crying from the ground? God, Menella, how my head hurts me! It's the London horses—trot-a-trot! Hariot! Trot-a-trot! Hariot! Oh, Menella, can't we escape it—go somewhere—anywhere? Menella, let's go home!"

Thus it was, without warning given, giving no chance to the village to prepare its garlands, its speeches, its welcome home to the young squire married and his bride, that Sir James Babyon brought his lady home to Babyon Court.

Menella, weary from interminable travelling, anxiously occupied with Jamie and his new fit of listless docility, let Hampshire, Wiltshire, Dorset and Devon slide by her like coloured ghosts. But when, late on the third day, they reached a moorland of young heather, drove across an attic of the world through a wind that drove away melancholy, Menella felt a warmth rise in her cheek: and Jamie roused himself and his eye brightened. He began to tell her what this hill and that house nestled under it had for name: to explain the difference between the green ling and the bell heather that, in another month, would be crimsoning the upland plain. The straight road dropped at last into clumped, carved woods. The coach drove, always dropping, for a good three miles up one aisle and down another—it was like desecrating a cathedral—till the road came out with a flourish on to a broad lawn edged with shrubberies, and drew up before wide steps, grey walls and a pillared

front door. Menella, stepping from the coach, stiff and swaying with fatigue, looked up at the beautiful, sober, four-square house and knew it for a friend.

And indeed she needed a friend and helper: for Jamie, as if he had used up his last energy in aching himself home, was fallen into a lethargy that made her long for any outburst of rage, anger or despair, rather than watch him obey her with the fretful docility of an exhausted child. He was at home, yet still homesick. He wandered restlessly about the house and gardens, scarcely speaking, yet uneasy if she were long out of his sight. Sometimes, so low had his disease of conscience brought him, he held her hand and walked her, hour after hour, up and down the long formal paths, the weak tears running down his cheeks, while she, poor soul, wept with him and for him. Jabez, watching them from behind the close-clipped yew hedges, thought that they went about like two children, punished they could not tell why. But Jabez, the travelled country youth, thought that he knew why. He had listened to Dekker when Dekker mumbled to the brandy.

But though he trusted Dekker drunk, he meant to see for himself that what Dekker said was true: so far he had seen nothing but his master and his mistress grieving together. So Jabez, the gamekeeper's son, followed his quarry up and down, to and fro between the yew hedges, to see before he spoke. For Jabez was nursing a resolve to speak. "Didn't my mother nurse him?" said Jabez to his sweetheart. "He's got no kindred to call round him, and Lady Babyon, bless her pretty dolly face! what does she know of how blood works back in the Babyons. But I'm his foster-brother." Thus Jabez.

Meanwhile, as the months went by, the pretty dolly face did its best for Jamie Babyon, wept with him, smiled with him, and racked the anxious brain behind the milk and roses in the effort to devise distractions for him. The little brain could only think of childish ones, being itself but eighteen years in the world; but worse might have been found by wiser wits. Menella had to be shown every drawer of the tall cabinets that Jamie's grandfather, the ambassador, had filled with foreign spoils: then she had to be told the tale of the building of the house. They pored over Wren's actual plans together, and she was shown the bare, scarred, unfinished wall, left to incite a richer generation when the money failed Sir Jacoby, his great-grandfather: and she was taken to see the little hill of piled decaying stone in a clearing of the wood, brought with much expense to Babyon Court and never used. By questioning she extracted from The Court's owner stories, too, of the place; but he told them joylessly and was silent again when she let him be silent. Once, it was in the second month of their stay, he took her from room to room, up the stairs and down, to name for her the portraits that hung round

the walls: and woke, for a moment, from his apathy under Menella's feverish interest; for Jamie was proud of the house and the name. She had him telling her at last that he would see to it that she too should have her portrait hanging among the Lady Babyons, a little fair interloper among the dark women.

"I'm the first Babyon to marry sunshine," said Jamie, elaborating the ghost of a compliment.

Menella, still laughing at it, strayed down the main stairs and, opening a door on the half-landing, called back into the darkness—

"What room is this, Jamie? You haven't shown me this room."

"Don't go in!" said Jamie quickly.

But she was in already and Jamie, following her, said listlessly—

"Why not, after all? This was my room before my brothers died. But I had meant to lock the door."

There was a small four-poster, a couple of Charles II chairs, straight-backed and uncomfortable, a chest and mirror, and comical adornments—a stuffed badger, a string of egg-shells—to prove it once a youngster's bedroom; while a row of little leather-bound books, a wig-block and a stand of canes hinted that here Jamie had grown into James. Menella looked at it, loved the little room, and laughed and teased Jamie at sight of the birds' eggs: and then at another sight, stopped laughing. Jamie's eye followed her stare. By the fireplace, opposite the bed, within a gilded frame, Hariot looked out at them, smiling.

"She gave it me," said Jamie dully. "It's by Mr. Hogarth."

"I know. I was there when it was painted. May I have it?" said Menella sharply.

"What do you want with it?"

"I'll burn it."

"You can't!" said Jamie. "It's one of the family portraits."

"I'll put it away then. We can't have it hanging here, Jamie, in our house."

"What's the use? You can't put her away," said Jamie, and shambled out.

But Menella stayed a moment, looking at the portrait. It had been, at the first glance, so startling an encounter with a remembered creature, and the

eyes had followed their movements so closely that she had to remind herself, ‘All painted eyes follow one when a portrait is painted full face!’ Looking again, more calmly, she thought—‘Now I look closer, it’s not such a good likeness: it’s not so alive. I thought it had a soul when it was painted; but that’s left it. It’s faded. It’s just paint. Let it hang! It’s just paint.’

And with that followed Jamie.

Turning in the door for a last look, she reassured herself anew: the painted eyes were not following her: the life had left them. She ran down the stairs after Jamie, who had gone into the garden, humming a little tune. It would fade, this business of Hariot’s death: it would become no more, she foresaw, than a picture hung on a wall of a forgotten chamber of their minds.

Jabez was with Jamie when she reached him.

“Talk to your mistress!” said Jamie vaguely, as Menella came up. “I can’t settle things, Jabez!” and shambled off again down the garden path, which ended at a terrace and a balcony of stone some fifty yards long. The balcony was adorned at intervals by stone urns, out of which the geraniums of hot western England foamed in rose and green cascades. Beyond was pure sky. It was not until a visitor moved down to it, as Jamie was moving, that the immense panorama that lay under the sky, beyond and below the terrace, was revealed. For the balcony crowned an abyss cut uncountable years before by the brisk shallow river that tinkled, diminished by distance to the breadth of a footpath, round its base and on, dodging and twisting, down the valley to the visible pale ocean ten miles away. The thatched buildings of a farmhouse lay directly under the garden, and across the thread of water the broad valley, a crazy quilt, parti-coloured like Menella’s ring, billowed and dropped into hillocks, mounds, swells, dips and lesser valleys, until it rolled up again on the left to a dark blue hill, with a white speck of village a-top lying level with the garden of Babyon Court.

Jamie, gazing, swung round from hill to sea and so to the toy farm at his feet. The drop was a dizzy one. The wind, tearing the trees in the near woods, bothered him as much as the snatches it brought him of Menella’s high notes, though he could not hear what she said. The chop of a trimming knife came from the edge of the gardens where a ditcher was hacking down some overgrown laurels: somewhere, too, there was a bonfire, for the crackle and scent of burning leaves drifted towards him. The valley was at peace, but the garden, it seemed to him, was all hot noise and movement.

“Oh, I am so tired,” said Jamie, and then, sullenly, “Noise, noise, noise!”

“Over and down!” said a voice in his ear. “It’s silent where I am, outside.”

He reeled where he stood, or rather, the hills and valley rose and danced about him, a stiff, still Jamie.

“I’ve been following you, Jamie! You carry me with you wherever you go. Better come to me, Jamie, where it’s quiet. Jump, Jamie! Over and down!”

He looked over and down, dizzily.

“Jamie!” cried Menella’s voice, grey, far away, but clear—“Come here to me!”

The world steadied. He put up his hand to brush aside a dead leaf that had blown against his cheek, as he turned his back on the depths and came obediently up the long walk to his wife.

Meanwhile, Menella and Jabez had had their talk.

“What is it, Jabez?” Menella had asked, her eyes and mind on her husband.

Jabez, looking down upon his little bird of a mistress, flushed.

“I’d have liefer spoken to the master if he’d give me leave.”

Instantly she gave him her full attention.

“No, no! What is it? Tell me! Your master——” She was seized with a human need to confide in a human, a fellow-creature, servant or no servant. And Jabez was Jamie’s foster-brother, she thought to herself: he was Jabez, Jamie’s Jabez, not a Dekker.

“Jabez, I’m afraid your master’s ill.”

“I know, my lady! Ever since——” he hesitated: he would not look at her as he brought out his fact at last—“it’s ever since that night at Milan.”

“But you weren’t with us,” began Menella, as the lights and the noise and the fear of that night surged over her once more.

“Oh, my lady, they talked at the inn.” He fidgeted his foot on the gravel. “My lady, the talk spread: it’s travelled with us: it’s not me, that I’ll swear. But in the village, my lady, they’re talking again. It’s worse than it was among the foreigners, my lady, for they know more, you see: and—my lady, I hardly like to tell you—it’s spread to the house.”

She thought of her own phrase, 'plague-struck,' and whitened.

"What is spreading, Jabez? What do you mean?"

"They're just afraid, my lady! It's the maids: they vow they won't stay."

"My maids!" All the Lady Babyons entered into Menella on that word—
—"My maids will do as they're ordered."

"Oh, my lady, my lady, it's what they think they see!"

Menella swayed on that: put back her hand to the stone seat behind her for support. It was then that she raised her voice in a call—

"Jamie, come here to me!"

But as Jamie turned and came to them down the path, Jabez, all respect forgotten, caught at her gown—

"There, my lady! There! There!"

"What? Where?"

"Oh, my lady, haven't you your eyes?"

"What are you pointing at, Jabez?"

He muttered—

"Dekker was right."

Menella saw that the man was trembling all over, and she trembled with him, for she had Jamie's cry in her ears again—"Cain! Cain!" and she stared at her husband, searching his smooth brow for a mark that he and others saw there. Mark or no mark, what did it matter to her! But on his forehead there was no mark: only the frown that aged him. He came up with—

"Well, what is it, Menella?"

Said Menella, taking his arm—

"Jabez has something to tell us."

"I can't, my lady!"

"Well, Jabez!" Jamie sat down on the stone seat. He was like a man new from a dream, trying to prove himself awake by curt phrases and a loud voice—"What have you to say, Jabez? Come, don't waste my time!"

"It's what the village says, sir—the maids—everywhere we go. Oh, my lady, I'm only a servant: it's not my place——"

Menella shook her head.

“Be a good servant, Jabez, to your master.” She sat down by her husband and put her hand on his: “He knows something, Jamie, that he ought to tell us. He knows why—why they hated us at Milan, in the theatre.”

Jamie turned on him, roused at last—

“The theatre? I’d forgotten that business. Well?”

Jabez broke in—

“Those Italians, sir, you know they’re a crazy lot: they had a notion, a talk of the evil eye.”

“And what’s that?” said Menella, out of her depth.

But Jamie said slowly—

“The evil eye! It accounts for things. You’ve told me what I might have known.” He laughed. “And is that all, my dear, at the back of his much ado? I’ve got the evil eye, have I? Why, I knew that. If that’s all——”

“Go on!” said Menella hoarsely to Jabez, stamping her foot.

“Not all, sir! It’s followed you.”

“It?”

“The story. The maids here, at The Court, let alone the village——”

“Well?”

“Oh, sir, they’re afraid——”

“Of me? My own people?” Jamie flushed.

“Not of you, sir——” Jabez was unaccountably moved—“never of you.”

“What then?” Suddenly Jamie flung his arm round Menella’s waist—“If any lout dares lay his tongue or his look on Lady Babyon——”

“It’s not that, sir! They’d all run a mile for my lady.”

“What then? Come out with it, Jabez!”

Jabez’ mouth opened and shut.

“I can’t, sir. God help me! With all respect—to me you’re a kind of brother! Sir——”

Jamie nodded comprehension. He had his own feeling for his foster-mother’s son.

“That’s why! See here, Jabez, tell me what you know or guess or think you know!”

But Jabez could not. The young man was openly in a panic, now that it came to the need for plain speech.

“I daren’t, sir! I can’t, sir! But there’s one who could. Sir, you never questioned Dekker. He’ll tell you what your own people can’t, sir! He knows what he knows.”

“Dekker?” Jamie turned to Menella. She recognised the ominous rising inflection of his voice. “D’you think now—did Hariot send Dekker?” He was beginning to pant.

“Hariot’s dead, Jamie!” said Menella gently.

“Dead, is she? So much the more I must talk to Dekker. Laramie pays his pension. Laramie knows where he lodges. Yes, yes, wasn’t Laramie to visit us in Panton Street? Then why did we come away, Menella, with none of our business done? We must go back to London, Menella! I should have talked to Dekker before now. He saw the last of Hariot. I’ll go to-night. I’ll go now. Menella, will you come with me?”

“To-morrow, dearest!”

But he had worked himself up.

“Now! I can’t stay here. The garden’s full of smoke, I tell you—smoke and voices. Jabez, order the coach! You’re to ride with us, Jabez! You’ve hit it, Jabez, Dekker has the key to it all. In half an hour, Jabez! And, Jabez, tell your lady’s maid as you go to the stables to make all ready for your lady!”

He watched Jabez’ departure, lowering.

“The evil eye, eh? But suppose it’s all a cheat!”

“What!” cried Menella.

Jamie eyed her cunningly—

“Dekker saw her dead, quotha! Did he, though? She may be alive, Menella! Menella, I tell you I heard her voice just now. Dekker—Dekker—I should have talked to Dekker. He plots. Yes, yes, you warned me against him, Menella! What’s his game? Hand and glove with Hariot, wasn’t he? So Dekker, maybe, set them on to hound us at Milan. Did Dekker tell them I was marked? No, they’ld see that for themselves. Or can’t they? It ought to be a mark, Menella, not to be mistaken, then they’ld know. Then I shouldn’t be bothered. Then they’ld not pry and whisper. But then, why did Dekker

run away, Menella? I'll know everything if I know why Dekker ran away. If Hariot were alive, then, maybe, I needn't go over the cliff."

Menella whispered, because her voice failed her—

"Jamie, what do you mean?"

"Why, somebody called me, Menella, just now, to come to it over the cliff. But then you called me back."

And with that he stopped to stoop and kiss her with a passion that, she felt, was not for her, but for the life to which she had recalled him.

"Don't let me go, Menella! Keep me with you, my blessed one! Can you forgive me, Menella, for the ill I've brought on you? It's you I love, Menella, remember that! You'll come with me to London? Menella, Menella, you said we shouldn't be parted!"

He waited an instant, half wild, half wistful, for a response. But he was, at last, too much for Menella. Her courage forsook her: almost her love for him fled. She gave a little sigh of utter desolation that reproached him with betrayal of all promises, of flight from her into strange lands, into a soul's desertion of its mate. She thought to herself—'I'm widowed!' and while he, getting no quick answer, resumed his pacing up and down, she, leaning her forehead against the stone lion-head of the bench, began to cry.

It was her fate in life to serve him: her pitiful weakness did more for his sanity than her piteous strength could do.

Jamie paused in his gesticulations, in his striding up and down. He halted: he frowned: he came to her: he sat down beside her and watched her. Presently he put his arm round her and drew her against a kinder pillow than the stone lion.

"But, Menella dear?" said Jamie: and his voice was quiet and his eyes were sane.

Sobbing she fought her last battle against the fate that pursued them and for the moment won it.

"You frighten me so!" wept Menella.

He abased himself. He had a confused memory of a shouting, crazed, gesticulating Jamie, protesting against unfair burdens piled upon him. This Jamie came and went, came in a whisper, with a shout, and was reabsorbed into an echoless quiet, leaving him, the true Jamie, dazed and empty, but her own true love still. This, stammering, he told her. And she, facile in her joys

and sorrows, did not understand, but was appeased again, was a little comforted. And afterwards this momentary return of the boy Jamie was her dearest memory and comfort.

For the end was nearer than they knew. Jabez returned to tell them that the coach waited: and they went into the house arm in arm, reconciled. Jamie could even follow her, as she hurried to her room, to whisper—"This is the last journey I shall take you, Menella, for months and months."

"Oh, Jamie, why?"

"You'll want to be quiet. I shall have to keep you quiet."

Her lips parted in a quick-drawn breath. There was a blessed new secret that she had whispered lately to a sullen Jamie—"Jamie, next year there may be a third person with us!" He had made her no answer. She had grieved in her bed o'nights because it had not moved him. But Jamie, it seemed, had nevertheless heard and had not forgotten. He, too, looked forward: he, too, dreamed of the joy to come. She was a rose in bloom as she left him.

When, cloaked, bonneted, she returned to Jamie, cloaked also now and taking his travelling pistols from their case on the great inlaid sideboard, she was still a rose in bloom. They wouldn't be travelling next year: Jamie had said so himself: no, they would be Sir James and Lady Babyon, sitting at home and in peace with a third person between them. And that would be the end of all troubled wanderings.

She went out behind Jamie down the broad shallow steps to the waiting coach. As he put out his hand to help her into the coach, a horse tossed its head and tried to rear. He turned his head to shout an order to the careless groom, and as he did so he felt cold finger-tips touch his palm, weigh down his hand, and leave it again.

"In, my dear?" he turned to say: and found Menella still beside him, waiting, her little foot poised on the step. Even as he turned she sprang up and in without his help, and settled herself on the near side of the seat. He, looking after her into the darkness of the coach with consternation, saw then that the woman he had handed in before her was his Cousin Hariot, who had seated herself in the farther corner of the coach, smiling. Her white transparent hand that had so lately touched his own lay now lightly on Menella's knee; but Menella, he realised, did not see her neighbour. The terrified horses reared again.

He shut the door on those two and caught at Jabez' mount.

“I’ll join you later!” cried Jamie to the faces smiling at him from the window of the coach. Then, to the ashy Jabez—“Get up behind! You can take the horse presently! I’ll wait on the moor.” And so rode ahead.

He rode at a gallop. The coach, trundling after him, did not overtake him till the lodge gates were left behind. But on the moor, lax in the heather, the white horse standing over him, Jamie waited as he had promised. The heather cried from the ground and he had marked his forehead with the mark of Cain.

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

Decorations and book cover cannot yet be used in this eBook as the artist Joseph E. Sandford’s (1892-1976) work is not yet in the public domain.

[The end of *Third Person Singular* by Winifred Ashton (as Clemence Dane)]