



CLEMENCE DANE

THE BABYONS

*MIDSUMMER
MEN*

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THE
BABYONS

THE CHRONICLE

OF A

FAMILY

BY

CLEMENCE DANE

.

THIRD PERSON SINGULAR

MIDSUMMER MEN

CREEPING JENNY

LADY BABYON

MIDSUMMER
MEN

•
LATE GEORGIAN



GARDEN CITY:
DOUBLEDAY, DORAN
and COMPANY, Inc.

1928

DECORATIONS BY JOSEPH E. SANDFORD

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FIRST EDITION

MIDSUMMER
MEN



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‘One, two, three!

Hang up your Midsummer Men!

One for Harry and one for Larry,

And one for Bob or Ben!

Sweet Saint John!

Upon your Eve I pray—

Show me now the Midsummer Man

Who’ll steal my heart away!’

Old Rhyme.



MIDSUMMER MEN

I

THE brother and sister opposed each other at the breakfast-table as two cats face each other across a doorstep in the deliberate stage of feline wrath. Each pair of hazel eyes had the sleepy morning blink that conceals watchfulness. Each pair of hands, with fingers doubled under, lay lax on the table beside the knife and fork. Isabella was still as a cat in the sun, but Ludovic swayed his whole body slightly to and fro in his chair as a cat swings an angry tail. Old Lady Babyon in her high chair at one end of the spread of damask and young Lady Babyon pouring out chocolate at the other were no more than two unnoted sparrows twittering from a railing.

Only twins could be as much alike as these two fine big-boned creatures, though they were not coloured alike. Ludovic was stouter, ruddier: Ludovic's hair under the powder was hot brown: his hazel eyes were deepened by his emotions to a singular darkness, while those of his sister under precisely the same stress lightened to grey-green. Isabella indeed could wear green as well as a poplar in spring, for she had height and a sapling slenderness: her skin was white as birch-bark and her hair the dun colour that glints into silver. But in structure the two faces doubled each other. Each had the high narrow forehead, arched brows, thin hooked nose and cheeks that, without being gaunt, showed the bone-work: and each had a full strong chin. Only the mouths were not quite a match. Isabella, with her redder, thinner lips had the better of her twin.

But if, as her lips showed, she had the advantage of Ludovic in her capacity for biting upon, choking back, swallowing down and holding under whatever emotion surged up in her until the hour came for uproar and the catlike spring, Ludovic had, with his easier mouth, a masculine power over the immediate moment: so that his daily tempers and humours were more important than Isabella's legendary rages. Ludovic was a high wind, dying down at night: Isabella, a wrecking storm that might never burst over the head of an acquaintance, who would go away after a year's intimacy calling her a quiet creature with little enough to say for herself, but a good listener. For Isabella seldom exposed the uncleavable rock of her opinion: she flowered it rather with smiles and with silence. Now Ludovic, who never listened, said all that was in his mind whenever he chose to say it, said it to the toss of banners and the blare of trumpets for battle.

Meanwhile, into that pause before battle, spoke young Lady Babyon, yawning prettily behind her hand—

“Your chocolate, Ludovic! Isabella, chocolate? Mamma, don't you eat?”

Menella, Lady Babyon, always apprehensive of nobody knew what, nodded obediently, lifted her cup, tried to speak, could not, put it down again and watched her son. Ludovic leant to his lady and took from her with a fond murmur the blue-and-white china cup; but he watched his sister.

Isabella watched no-one. In the pause she stretched out one closed hand and spread the fingers with a little air of interest. Then, with a half smile as if her critical taste admitted that it was indeed a well-kept, well-shaped tool, she turned it palm upwards and examined once more the pink finger-tips closing involuntarily on the hollow centre, like the curving petals of a flower closing at night, and so let it turn again and lie softly, palm down, as it lay before.

“Don't, Isabella!” muttered her mother: and Ludovic at the same instant smashed down upon them with his—

“One moment, Mother! Isabella, do you hear what I say?”

Isabella, lifting brows and lip, looked at him in a glitter of contempt.

“Answer your brother, Isabella!” The faded, tremulous mother ranged herself as by habit on the side of her son. Isabella slanted a glance at her.

“Ludovic likes to own a grievance, Mamma! It would be a pity to rob him.”

At the sound of her gentle voice old Lady Babyon shrank and flushed, and young Lady Babyon, also flushing, took her turn—

“I think you’re impudent, Bella!”

Ludovic scowled.

“Think! Of course she’s impudent! She always has been—headstrong—self-willed! When does she listen to us? What does she care what we think? It amuses her, I tell you, to distress me—and you, Carry! A pretty idea of us she gives you! It makes me ashamed. Yes, you do, Belle, you make me ashamed of my sister before my wife.”

“Ah!” Isabella, her head lifted, observed her relatives. She was like an elegant young thrush considering from the shelter of the flower-bed the possibilities of a raid upon the open lawn. “Ah! So now I know what you all think.” Smiling, she made them wait while she sipped her chocolate: then—“But none among you know what I think. Poor Ludovic! He knows what every womanite at Babyon is doing: he knows what meal the cook is cooking: what room the maids are cleaning: he knows what fields the heifers are in: he knows from what walk the pea-hen screams. Don’t you, Ludovic? Or who will be kissing poor old Jabez’ poor young Clemency——”

“Isabella!” came the three voices in one impulse of outrage.

Isabella was unmoved. She addressed herself to her heated sister-in-law

“Gracious, Caroline! Mayn’t a milkmaid be chucked under the chin? That is the milkmaid’s heaven! Don’t distress yourself, Caroline! Ludovic doesn’t mind who kisses Clemency so long as he knows of it. But he must know what we’re all doing and thinking—you, Caroline, and Mamma, and Clemency, and the heifers, and I. He wouldn’t feel how great it is to be Sir Ludovic if he couldn’t control us all. Would you, Ludovic? But he can’t find out all I think and do. Can you, Ludovic?”

She ceased, unbreathed, smiling faintly, and turned to her cup of chocolate; while Caroline’s flushed cheeks and wide glance adjured her husband as plainly as speech—

‘Show her how she mistakes you! Look at her, you know how! Silence her! Beat her! Stamp her under! Oh, be God, Ludovic! Be God quickly!’

He was as quick as he could.

“Can’t I? I’ll find out what you were doing last night in my garden at twelve of the clock, my lady! I tell you, I won’t have it——”

“Ludovic, Ludovic!” Menella besought him.

“Allow me, Mother! It’s gone too far——”

“But, Ludovic——”

“Mother, let me deal with her! I tell you these night-runnings have got to stop. As a child it was well enough: I know, we did it together. Oh, yes, we did, Mother, and you never knew it: and it was good sport, I don’t deny it. I don’t deny that Belle’s a wonder at night. She can show you sights, Carry, you’d never dream of! Foxes and squirrels and hares—remember the hares in the corn, Belle, that summer——” Here his wife’s eyebrows became so eloquent that he broke off and readdressed himself to his duty—“But you’re quite right, Carry, it’s what I say myself: it doesn’t become a young woman—this night-prowling. Belle must remember that she’s not a little girl. What would Sir Hervey say?”

“And what right has Sir Hervey——” began Isabella.

The check was a welcome irritation. He brought down his fist upon the table and continued, while Menella was anxious over the cups.

“Right or no right, I say I won’t have it. You’ll stay in your bed at night, like other folk. What do you suppose the maids would be thinking if they saw you? Maggie did see you. It’s a fact, Mother! Maggie, good soul, waits and watches near four hours for her last night, and in comes my sister at last and up the main staircase, no hurry at all. It was close on daybreak, Mother! In another hour the servants would have caught her. Maggie holds her tongue and very properly comes to me. But if she talked, eh? A nice tale to tell of Miss Babyon of The Court!”

“Like brother, like sister, a milkmaid might say,” observed Isabella.

Ludovic, the poor red honest young man, sought for words as a horse, wrenched back on his haunches, seeks a footing in the air.

“Belle, Belle! Mother! All of you, hear me! I’m doing my best. I speak for your good. And when I deal with you kindly, you talk—you say—you hint—— How dare you speak to me so before Caroline?”

“The newly wed!” Isabella buttered her roll. “But think how you speak to me, Ludovic! You’re scarcely a Babyon woman yet, Caroline: you mustn’t be impatient. I promise you, in six months—oh, less—he’ll speak to his wife just as he speaks to his sister. It’s our Babyon manner. Will you have some conserve? Clemency made it in our Babyon kitchen.”

Young Lady Babyon blinked at her uncertainly. Her little round face began to pucker with anger and dismay. She spoke on a sob—

“I don’t understand her, Ludovic! What’s this about the girl Clemency? What has she to do with you and all of us?”

Old Lady Babyon broke in—

“Oh, Caroline, don’t listen to them! They can’t help it—when they quarrel they’re not themselves. Isabella, I beg you! Ludovic, be gentler with your sister! Your father was always gentle with women.”

“Even with Cousin Hariot?” Isabella watched her mother.

Menella, the faded widow, had still a sort of dignity. She rose.

“You, Belle, you—I won’t answer you. Oh, if you could see yourself! You’re like your Cousin Hariot, God forgive you both! You, you’re my daughter, and you talk to me, my own daughter talks to me of Hariot. I can’t stay in the room with you, Isabella: you drive me out of it. She’ll drive you out of it too, Caroline, if you listen to her. Don’t listen to her, Caroline! Come with me, my dear!”

But Caroline would not. She enjoyed the contemplation of emotions too subtle for her, and she had, too, her own anger to enjoy. She thought her mother-in-law a great coward to run away from a scene. But then, she reflected, her mother-in-law was a sweet old lady, forty-five at least. Such capped, muffled, grey-haired creatures as old Lady Babyon were scarcely women any more. They wanted warmth and quiet and a little dog to pet. They did not feel, they could not understand, the virtuous jealousy a bride feels at the name, Clemency. No, Caroline would not go.

Menella went through the room as a breath of air might go, and left them to their passions.

Caroline, the youngest, spoke first, with importance and to Isabella.

“What has Ludovic to do with this girl, this—Clemency, Isabella?”

Isabella smiled and said nothing. But Ludovic meanwhile had gathered himself together and now poured out in speech—

“Clemency? Red herring! Damme, Caroline, of what are you thinking? You should know by now that my sister has a tongue like a nettle. She’ll use any word to—” (but he spoke to Isabella, his eye upon her)—“to carry the war into my camp. Damn Clemency! I say, I say again, if Isabella is to stay in my house, she’s got to live like the rest of us. Go to bed when we do and

get up when we do, and be in to meals, and be civil to our guests, and obey my mother, and be useful, and control her temper and hold her tongue. She's had her head too long. For, you see, when I ask her civilly enough—'What were you doing out of doors at midnight, Isabella?'—when I ask her that, why, for answer she rakes up God knows what gossip about poor Clemency, whom I—laughed with at nineteen. That's to make division between you and me, Caroline. She thinks I don't see through it. And that don't satisfy my sister. No! She must torment poor Mother too. She hasn't the decency to hold her tongue about my father. She'd liefer have you think—what did you think, Caroline? Something dark, I'll swear: and I don't blame you. But it's not so. I'd never have told you our sad business: why should I? But now Isabella, my own sister, she makes it needful that I should shame my father to you lest you think a worse thing. My father's family betrothed him to his Cousin Hariot; but he loved my mother and married her instead: and his Cousin Hariot, being moonstruck like Isabella here, put an end to herself. Is that a tale for a daughter to bring before her mother?"

Caroline was wide-eyed.

"Oh, Ludovic—did your father——? Oh, but that was wrong."

"Wrong? Harlot trapped him and he tried to get out of the trap. Wouldn't any one? And she older than he. Our Cousin Hariot was a woman to fear. It's in her face: there's a portrait somewhere."

"I have it," said Isabella, pinching up an elbow ruffle, "in my sitting-room."

"You hear her! Two of a trade! She'll blight some good fellow before she finishes, as Hariot blighted my father. Wrong? Why, Caroline, you should hear my mother talk of him. My father was the gallantest, the kindest creature that ever——"

"Ran away," said Isabella. "He ran away from Cousin Hariot: and then he ran away from my mother."

Ludovic broke in, red and raging—

"Ran away from Mother? It's a lie! Where did he run?"

"Who knows? Out of life anyway. He shot himself, Caroline. He made a habit of running away—our father." She rose so carelessly that for all her grace the chair behind her toppled backwards and fell with a crash. She let it lie. "I have breakfasted. You excuse me—" she lingered on the name—"Lady Babyon?"

“She’ll not excuse you!” Ludovic strode across to the door and set his back against it and continued, for he was in spate—“She is waiting for two things. She is waiting first to hear you take back that vile hint about Clemency——”

Isabella lifted her thin black brows.

“Hint? I hinted nothing. What was there to hint?”

“Ay, what was there to hint? Caroline waits to know.”

“Dear Caroline! She’ll learn to curb curiosity—at Babyon. Oh, Ludovic, don’t!” For he had caught her arm.

Yet, in spite of her protest, she had the air of enjoying herself. She was, as a matter of fact, enjoying the picture they made in the convex mirror with its curly gold frame and silver surface. She saw herself and Ludovic as tall dolls—sharply outlined elegant puppets. His crimson coat with its silver facings was quite admirable in the mirror, a finer colour than in fact. She had mocked at his taste and Caroline’s in choosing such a crab-apple red; but really, miniaturized in the silver surface, it was a perfect foil for her own green and pearl-striped lute-string. The breast-knot of lavender ribbons was perfect too: it lay against her white breast like a bunch of primulas. Who had given her primulas once? Ah—poor Ralph Samuels! She drooped her eyelids, smiling faintly for a moment upon poor Ralph Samuels: then lifted them and her thoughts to the more recent amusement of the mirror. How could Caroline assume that looped, bunched sacque for breakfast? and pink, of all colours, when Ludovic wore crimson! Well—taste is taste, and we all have a right to live; but such a pink against such a crimson! Plague take Ludovic, mauling her arm!

She freed herself with a “Ludovic, how rough!”

“I can be rougher. Tell her that you have been amusing yourself as usual with your nasty hinting and mischief-making. When you know my sister better, Caroline, you’ll understand that it means nothing: Lord, I know that well enough! but until you do——” He shook his sister’s arm impatiently—“Tell her, do you hear me, or I’ll make you! Tell her you know well enough that there’s no harm in Clemency.”

“I know well enough, Caroline,” observed Isabella, quietly freeing herself, “that there is no harm in Clemency. I was amusing myself as usual with my nasty hintings. When you know me better, Caroline, you’ll understand.”

“That’s better!” Ludovic drew a deep breath, too absorbed in prearrangement of his next attack to observe that his pretty pink Caroline had drawn no breath of relief to match his. Nor did he note, as he continued, that she was watching Isabella and Isabella’s smile with the same air of disquiet that he had so recently seen on his mother’s face: that her lips trembled, and that she shrank from him too with the air of one not at all appeased.

“And that business out of the way, I tell you once again, Belle, you are to stay at home at night. God, sister, have you no sense? If any one saw you now what would they, what would any one say? What would Sir Hervey say? Why, that you had crept out to meet a man!”

To Ludovic’s astonishment Isabella laughed.

“So I did, Ludovic! A midsummer man, my dear! I went to find him: he must be sought and found by moonlight. I have hung up Sir Hervey, if you must know. To-morrow, maybe, I shall hang up poor Tom beside him. That’s a gardener’s boy, Caroline, who loved me true before they pressed him. He’d be a midsummer man for me in his regimentals. Do not be afraid, Carry, I’ll not get him. Dear no! When he comes home from the wars he’ll be for Clemency—” her glance flicked her brother—“like all the Babyon men.”

Ludovic tossed and lowered like a teased bull:

“I have told Mamma a hundred times what would happen if she let you hang round the stables getting in my way. Stable wit! What is the use of my giving you your chance if you play the kitchen girl when a gentleman courts you? That’s what it’ll come to, Caroline! You see, she says what she chooses: and she’ll say it to Sir Hervey Eype if she chooses—a man of breeding, a man of the world.”

Isabella nodded amiably:

“I am sure of it. He has been in it long enough. But some folk grey early. What is his age?” She waited smiling for his answer. He pished and gave her none. Serenely she resumed—“There it is, you see, Caroline: he does not choose to answer. Well, if my fate is Sir Hervey, why—Sir Hervey shall be my fate. I’m a dutiful sister. And so I’ve given him his chance, brother!” She turned to her sister-in-law with the air of one addressing a confidante—“Yes, Caroline, I’ve obeyed old Mother Clary. I have hung him up at midnight, by moonlight, the first of my midsummer men.”

The brother eyed the sister, checked, moody, suspicious of her high spirits, thinking himself mocked. He did not like it that his wife should be understanding his sister better than he.

“What is she babbling about, Carry? Are all you women mad? What does she mean? You seem to know what she means.”

Thus Caroline, against her will, found herself classed with the Isabellas, a woman in the wrong. Her married dignity dissolved hastily in hasty explanations—

“We met a gipsy yesterday, Ludovic, on the moor. She told Belle a fortune: and me—she told me mine. She would tell it. She knew all about us.”

He began magisterially—

“Tramps and vagabonds! I’m on the bench. I’ll not have it——” Then, comically duplicating his wife’s manœuvre, he too let his dignity dissolve in curiosity. With the knowledgeable smile of a young husband he attacked her—“What did she tell you, Carry, eh? What did she know?”

Caroline was scarlet:

“She told me—she did know——” she faltered.

He flung his arm round her and pulled her to his knee. He cared nothing for his sister’s presence.

“So she guessed, eh, my Lady Babyon? And did she prophesy? Which is it to be, Carry? She told you? I see that she told you. It’ll be a boy, won’t it, Carry? Did you cross her palm with big silver? You might have given her gold: I’d not have cared. She did tell you, eh, it’s to be a boy?”

She struggled with him, vexed and pleased, settling her cap.

“Don’t talk so, Ludovic! Not now. There’s your sister listening.”

“Well?” Propitiated, he was relaxing severity to the rebellious subject—“Well, and what did she tell sister?”

Isabella made a quick gesture of distaste, but eager Caroline ignored it.

“She told her to go by moonlight and find orpine plants. Where did you hang them, Belle? Yes, Ludovic, if you water them they still grow after they’re dug up. You see, Ludovic, you name each one for a suitor you know, and one for a stranger, and the one of them that lives longest, he’ll love you longest, d’you see? And she said, the woman, Mother Clary, said—if Belle

went out on Midsummer Night and touched them and named them over, calling the men to come to her, she'd see the likeness of the one she's to wed."

"So that's it." He regarded his sister, hands in pocket, straddling the chair. The storm was over: he was appeased and pleasant with his womenkind: he had thrown off his anger like a cloak grown too hot and heavy. "Was that what you did last night, Belle?"

"That I did last night, Ludovic."

"If that's all, why couldn't you have told me?" But he remained good-humoured. "Well, you may pick orpine for all of me, so long as you pick it by daylight; but I'd never have thought you such a fool, Belle. Now Carry here, she'd be the one for charms and nonsense."

"I'm not a fool, though, neither," pouted Caroline.

"But you tried a charm once? Did it work for you last summer, Carry? Was I your midsummer man?" He began playing with her curls.

She accepted the caress, but her mind was preoccupied; though, for the sparing of her hair, she slipped on to his knee again and caught his hands. He, looking down upon her fingers holding his harmless, fell to kissing them. Isabella watched all with a cold, bright-eyed interest. She might have been at a show of performing little dogs. Caroline's tongue ran on—

"Midsummer man? No. Why, I never heard of it till yesterday. Hemp-seed is the proper charm—

'Hemp-seed I throw:
Hemp-seed I sow:
He that shall marry me
Come after me and hoe!'

You must do it at midnight, out of doors; but I never could keep awake."

He gave her a bear's hug: and over the childish head pressed against his shoulder regarded his sister amicably.

"You're a pair! But you, you're a vexing creature, Belle! You trapse out in the moonshine, you rage and rant when one asks you a civil question, till one fears—God knows what folly! And then the answer is a charm, a servant-girl tomfoolery! You, you of all young women, you with your nose in the air to all of us, you work a kitchen charm on the quiet! Midsummer

men! But you hung up Hervey, eh? That's a good girl. He's the man for you, Belle. Who else?"

She leant against the white-panelled door, her hands behind her back: she was repose in green and silver.

"I tell you, brother, poor Tom!"

He chuckled.

"We'll grant her poor Tom, eh, Carry? Who else, sister?"

"Young Mr. Masters?" suggested Caroline, with her baby's air of malice.

He thrust out his lip.

"Belle marries no parson while I'm alive, nor wants to! I know Belle. She never named a flower for him, did you, Belle?"

"No, brother!"

"For whom then?"

She glittered at him.

"Ralph Samuels."

II

RALPH SAMUELS, in Isabella's secret thought, was not worth the ensuing hurricane that raged, with lulls and renewals, for two long hours in the white parlour on utterance of his name, that growled and muttered up the staircases, whirled into old Lady Babyon's dressing-room, reduced to whimpers old Lady Babyon and young Lady Babyon, Maggie my lady's woman, and poor Clemency in the laundry, and made a joyful stir for all the interested dependants at Babyon Court. Out through back doors to the village rumour swept, like dust whirled in a spring wind, down the roads and lanes of the neighbourhood and out on to the open moors. Isabella's name, Sir Ludovic's, my lady's and my young lady's were tossed like stray leaves in the swirl. Jostling them, revolved the straw Clemency, with thistle-down memories of Babyon ghosts and torments—Miss Hariot, poor Miss Hariot, wicked Miss Hariot, and the dear lad, Sir Jamie. Spattering them all with mud, a clotted sifting of the muck of the road, there was swept along with them in popular talk the stranger's name, the Jew's name—Ralph Samuels.

But Isabella, who, early in the discussion, had abandoned the white parlour, abandoned as coolly the evoked thought of Ralph Samuels. In her own room, winding a scarf about her shoulders, grimacing confidentially as she did so at the eidolon Isabella in the mirror, she said aloud to it, "All this noise about poor Samuels!" and so fetched a hat to swing by its green shepherdess ribbon from her finger and glided out of her room and down the shallow, sunny half stairs, past the noisy door of the parlour where Ludovic still boomed, and out into the blessed air and the gentler chatter of the woods. Her family's disquiet did not disquiet Isabella: "All this noise about poor Samuels!" expressed, at the moment, the genuine feeling of her heart. And to them she had condensed the sentiment still further. "Poor Samuels!" Isabella had vouchsafed. It was her sole response to the lightnings and thunders of fraternal solicitude. Now if she had said "Poor Ralph!" or if she had said nothing at all, or if she had burst into defence or disclaimer, it had been time for Ludovic to take counsel with his mother; but she had said, with her glittering smile, "Poor Samuels!" and they could not see that in the use of the surname was her answer to their alarms.

Perhaps, indeed, Isabella did not herself know how strong was the pride of race which held her, in her own estimation, immeasurably remote, a

pitying creature of the upper air to every poor Samuels. So she saw herself. As Caroline said to Ludovic with an exasperation that amazed him,

“I think your sister Belle is the most conceited young woman in Devon.”

Ludovic did not like the phrase: nobody but himself must abuse a Babyon and his sister: nor did he follow his wife’s reasoning. He looked upon Ralph Samuels as a danger to his peace. He could not perceive that Ralph Samuels was no more than Miss Isabella Babyon’s banner of defiance. Opposition, like a wind, had unfurled Ralph Samuels, fluttered and swirled him into a gallantry. He had no other value for her: dropped to a rag again in her mind when the occasion for flaunting him was over. What else could he be to Isabella Babyon? He was a Jew.

He had not even the wit to Christianise his misfortune: he actually obtruded pride in his deplorable situation. He should have stayed in his South-European anywhere, the gold-dropping, impertinent creature. He should not have fallen enamoured of the rich Devon lanes with their steep sides of red clay, bright as Paradise morning with pink campion, foxglove, purple orchis and black lacquer briony inlaid upon shepherd’s purse and lime-lit spurge. He should not have taken personal possession, either, of a farm fallen to his father in the way of trade, and, disinheriting the ghosts of the second-cousins of half the county, cleared all family wrack out of the house, beautified and settled down to live in it.

For yes indeed, young Mr. Samuels was living at Riverhayes, insolently established under the cliffs that support the Babyon lands. His existence obstructed the view, interfered with the fishing. Nor should he have been seen riding a good horse: nor should he have engaged to pay his servants at gentry rates, and then mildly checked their outrageous levies upon his orchard, his mushrooms, his butter, eggs, trout and garden produce. But what could you expect of a Jew?

Yet it was laid up against him that he did not look a Shylockson, that his hair was neatly dressed and powdered, his eyes gentle, his profile as like Ludovic Babyon’s as made no matter; but indeed it made no matter, for, groomed or filthy, the man was a Jew. It was the more monstrous that he should be young, travelled, melancholy, a creature whom ladies liked, with softer manners and better clothes than the young men of the county and the town. It was the young men who hated him. He was a Jew.

He had lived at Riverhayes a year, no more, and already had scraped acquaintance with some of the Babyon half-gentry. That also did not matter. But Isabella Babyon, with a family that traced its descent from a brewer to

King Stephen, Isabella Babyon, with the pride of the devil's grandmother on her high forehead, in her scornful nostrils, had somehow, no one knew how, also made his acquaintance! Here was news! All the village could tell how he had called with a book, some outlandish book that even peeping Clemency, who knew her letters, could not interpret. Mr. Samuels had read to Miss Isabella from the book in gibberish, asserted the gardener's boy, for an hour in the yew arbour; for old Lady Babyon, who could not snub any one, had let Miss Belle walk with him in the garden, to show him how his own house looked from the terrace edge. The boy had watched them fetch stones from the stone pile and fling, laughing fit to kill, the little chunks of rotten marble down the void on to the Jew's roof-tree.

Ludovic, returning from his honeymoon a week too soon—he was a king who needed his kingdom and had, as his Caroline found, no pleasure in incognito—encountered the Jew on his own carriage drive and ordered him out of that beechen nave to say his prayers elsewhere. The fellow, knowing his place, had gone without words, though with a devilish impudent look in his eye. Ludovic, recounting the episode, had required explanation: Isabella, the dumb devil, had closed her mouth; but his mother told the tale. Menella had had a bad hour with her son: Menella had wept, for Ludovic was terrible in anger: Caroline, the new-minted Babyon woman, had been overwhelmed; but Isabella, yawning, when she had had enough of the scene, had retired and left them to it.

Ludovic, Menella and little Caroline said to themselves in the singular and grateful pause which Isabella's departure somehow invariably occasioned, that Isabella was seeing reason. She had said nothing, you see: that surely was her way of acknowledging that she could not stand out against the wishes of her family. Whims were one thing, but to talk with a Jew in corners, said Ludovic, this was loose. He and his mother, Ludovic considered, had been too considerate of his sister. Isabella was spoiled: Isabella was headstrong. It was time to break her in when she began kicking up her heels with a Jew, a Jew living cuckoo-fashion in a victim's house, in poor Frank Topham's old home!

“That,” interposed Menella, “came of play, Ludovic—high play. And I hear you went to Almack's, Ludovic? Caroline spoke of it. Oh, Ludovic, you don't—you never would play high—as Frank Topham did? Oh, see what comes of it!”

“Oh, that's another matter. Men must play or be looked upon as odd. You may trust me, Mamma. I shan't stake Babyon Court, nor borrow from a Jew

if I did. I hope I have my senses. Indeed, I spoke my mind to Frank; but he wouldn't be warned."

"He's paid for it," sighed Menella, "that he wouldn't listen to you, Ludovic!"

"We've all paid, Mamma! This Ralph Samuels has skinned half the county—well, if not Ralph Samuels, his father then. They all owe a hangar or a water-meadow to Shylock."

"But not you, my son? You owe nothing to any one."

"Still, Mamma, I pay. I pay by having a stinking, greasy Jew under my nose and under my feet. I can't look out of my own garden without seeing him walking in his. Oh yes, shrubberies and images, if you please, from Italy—naked statues with broken noses—here in Devon! I never go near the terrace now. Well then, I pay, don't I, with that fellow in my view? And when, to top his insolence, he walks in at my own front door, my mother drops him a curtsey and bids my sister entertain him!"

Menella wrung her hands.

"He brought her a book—a German tale that's the rage of the town. Your father loved the German. Belle wished young Mr. Samuels to turn it into English for her. Indeed he has a good voice, Ludovic. It's like a play to listen to him." She shivered. "Not that I love a play. But I have seen plays with Jamie—with your father—Paris, Milan. Mr. Samuels speaks as the actors did—this voice and that voice. I heard a little of what he read: the sufferings of a young man—Werth—Werther—" her tear-faded eyes were wide—"a young man who shot himself. It's good for Belle to read such books. She should know how true—how true sad stories are. I did not dislike young Mr. Samuels. He translates very well."

"I dare say he does."

"Belle said, of his conversation——"

"Pooh Mother! Belle ought to be whipped."

Then the bride spoke—

"She ought to be married!"

Menella cried out at that in an agitation which her son and daughter-in-law thought extremely foolish. But it soon appeared that she had something to say, and Caroline was not pleased when she found that Menella would not speak in front of her: were not she and Ludovic one flesh? But Menella,

with apologies and agonisings of tenderness, would not speak in front of her. Caroline ruffled out, and tripping after Isabella, shared the walk upon the moor and, as she related the next morning, had her fortune told. The mother and son thus were left alone, and Ludovic waited, impatiently, for his mother to be rid of her little anxiety. But Menella was not satisfied with the click of the door. She listened for her daughter-in-law's footsteps, watched her down the steps and out on to the drive. But then, sure of privacy, she burst into such a flood of words as he had never heard her utter. Her soft fallen cheeks were pink, her eyes bright blue again and a-glitter with agitation. Ludovic thought to himself that his mother must have been pretty once, and was gentle with her at first, until he got the drift of her words: then, indeed, he was angry; but he listened to her at first.

Isabella must not marry—this was Menella's cry. That was why God, who was good in spite of everything, had sent to Menella twin children: the blessing should lie on one and the curse on the other: and God knew she loved them both; but they must not share alike. Ludovic was like her and his father, had got his dear kind heart and his good looks from his father: and he should have the blessing of marriage. She loved Carry already, dear little Carry, and there would be children, and the estate: it was a great thing to be the head of a family. That was Ludovic's inheritance. But Isabella should have the money, and so, you see, there was no need for Isabella to marry.

“What money?”

Ludovic, confessedly pinched by the purchase of diamonds and Paris clothes for his Caroline, pricked up his ears. There had never been enough money at Babyon for all the improvements which he wanted to make. “Money? What money, Mamma?”

Then it had come out at last. He was aghast at the secretiveness of a man's own mother. Here was his mother, it seemed, heiress to close upon a million, and he, the son and heir, had not been informed. He informed himself then, mercilessly. The vague dead Hariot, it now emerged, had left her fortune to his father: and his father had most unjustly left all unentailed property to his mother. There was no check upon his mother, no thought for the children. And so half a million of money had fallen straight into her lap, and, though it was hardly to be believed, Babyon Court had been none the better for it. His mother, his little, soft, pliable, affectionate mother had seen him lag behind the county in sports, balls, travels, furnishings, horses: had seen him, until his marriage, devote every ha'penny to the estate and had never opened her purse to help him. She even drew her jointure money. He thought that his mother must be mad. What had she done with the income

alone of so vast a sum? She, in her out-of-date gown, honeymoon stuff made over, and her darned mittens and worn shoes, had near a million in her banks—more; for interest piles upon interest in twenty-five years, and he'd swear she had not spent it. Isabella, to be sure, was spoilt. Caroline had been shocked at the ribbons, feathers and velvets that Isabella was able to order unchecked from London, even from Paris. Isabella was so fine that the county might have laughed at her, only no one laughed at Isabella. Yes, he understood now why his mother could let Isabella spend; but to him she had given nothing. Yet he could have sworn that his mother loved him better than she loved Isabella. Her superior affection for him showed in her distressed cries at his anger, her pitiful hare's doublings to escape it, her passionate catch at his arm and his heart with—"Listen, my darling, my son, my Jamie's son!"

Yet when he listened and was gentle and helped her to coherence, he could get no sense out of her, only renewed tears. Beneath the tears and the deprecations he came up against an obstinacy that defeated him. The money was not for him: the money was for Isabella. Isabella must not marry; but Isabella should have all the money.

Presently he won to the understanding that she was terrified of the dark patch in the blood. Thus she argued. The woman who was a mere name to her son, but to her, the evil in life incarnate, had been insane. So in the next generation the insane curse would fall upon a woman. Jamie had been sinless because mad when he killed himself. Jamie—hag-Hariot-ridden—had a son and a daughter, beloved Ludovic, dark Isabella. Dark Isabella was very much like the darker Hariot. Was it not clear then on which head the curse must fall?

With a sort of horror Ludovic perceived that his mother, if thoughts or prayers or wishes could in any way direct fate, had for a lifetime been caging him into safety, directing down all sunshine upon him, weaving a witch's circle of maternal love about him, which must turn all evil aside upon the scapegoat Isabella. Why not? Isabella should have the money. Sanity, love, laughter, wife, children, home, friends, servants—all that in Menella's eyes meant paradise, should be extorted from above, should be prayed down like manna upon her son. He should have a double share of life. For Isabella there should be another fate. Why not? There are plenty of women. Menella as a woman could be reckless with the fates of women—and yet just; for dark women are wicked, cold. Nevertheless Menella would be generous to her daughter. Isabella, one day, when she was safely old and

withered and harmless, should have every untouched farthing, principal, interest, and interest on interest, of dark Harriot's money.

He found it incredibly difficult to alter his mother's mind. And in justice it may be said of him that his personal chagrin at loss of a fortune was tempered, unimaginative as he was, by a certain warm pity for his sister. He was proud of her: he thought her the finest girl in the county: and their incessant squabbles had left in him no animus against her. For, with his noisy temper, there went a singular sweetness of disposition. Apple-sweet, old Jabez, his father's servant, called him: and agreed with Menella that he was like his luckless father. Once their battles were ended, Ludovic was always left admiring Isabella for her quicker tongue, her sharper wit; in fact, for her superior art of war. He adored his Caroline; but he admired his sister more than his wife. She stood to him for what his father would have called 'taste.' His mother's view of her shocked him: and he was shocked, too, to realise, as women were always making him realise, how, like cats, they had private lives of their own. Here was a secret warfare that had gone on in his household unknown to him—how long? Did it reach back into childhood? Did it cover the whole of their twin lives? A fresh thought struck him:

“Does Belle know?”

“Know what, my darling?”

“That you—” in discomfort he fidgeted with the laces of his mother's gown—“that you hate her so, Mother?”

There were more tears at that, abject protest—

“Ludovic—hate her—hate my own daughter? How can you speak so wickedly, Ludovic? I see faults in her: I know what's best for her: I've watched her: she is like in all ways—Of course I love her, but she mustn't marry: she might have children. I tell you, my son, she shall have back the money.”

“Mother, it isn't just, not to either of us.”

For he passionately desired to handle the blessed, blossoming, fruitful money, thus held back from its natural use, like grain sealed in an Egyptian tomb. He thought it a miserly vice in his mother to withhold prosperity from Babyon. He had also a vision of his sister's fate as not unlike that of the mummy in such a tomb, and so, through compassion for the beautiful lost wealth, he came also to a conviction that the fate proposed for his beautiful sister was horrible. He could not understand his mother: he could not share her impression of Isabella as a doomed soul in tainted flesh. He thought that

grief had made his mother vapourish. He could understand that Isabella was too much for his mother. His mother was a sweet fool: Isabella was no fool, that was certain: and to a fool the no-fool does seem half mad. He was himself accustomed to fling out upon his sister as a high-flying, crazy hussy; but at heart he was half proud of her superbities. He was accustomed to boast of Isabella, of her whimsies, her wit, her unpowdered hair, her library, her recklessness of speech, her close acquaintance with his woods and pastures, and her power over beasts, birds and animal-humans—his mare, the dogs, stray squirrels, poor Tom. He admired her keen cold temper, and was grateful to her now, looking back, that, with a wise cruelty of which he knew himself incapable, she had saved him, the soft-hearted, from a devil of a scrape. He had confessed to her one night, six years ago now, his entanglement with good old Jabez' Clemency. Isabella had laughed: there were no reproaches: she was as comfortable to him then as a man, though she was not above using her knowledge to discomfort him, years after, in their perpetual bickerings. But while the trouble was real, she knew how to be generous. She had involved him in no scene with Clemency: all ran on as before till his next jaunt to London. But on his return there was a scared Clemency who would not listen, look, speak or linger. What had she said to Clemency? He never knew. Thus she had saved him for Caroline. Now he owed her in return a smoothing of the path. He was married. Why shouldn't Isabella be married and share Cousin Hariot's happy million with her brother? Isabella, he confessed to Caroline, was not, with her vixenish high carriage, every man's delight. She had frightened poor Frank Topham. Still, Ludovic had thought she would make her own match or that his mother would make it for her. Now he perceived that his mother had been railing her off from eligible pretendants. But he himself had been remiss as a brother. His sister—twenty-five—unmarried—it would not do. A match must be made for her and the money shared. One had but to let her be known as an heiress——

Menella would not hear of it.

“But, Mother, consider this! Choose her an older man, a husband who'll take charge of her. Then, if what you fear should ever befall her (how old was my Cousin Hariot?), then, an older man——”

“An old man——” Menella paused on the phrase with a bargaining note in her voice. It was her first hesitation. How hard it had been for her to refuse her darling for so long as half an hour only Menella knew.

“Elderly, say!”

She cried out dreadfully—

“She shall not have children!”

“I think you’re cruel, Mother!”

“No, no, Ludovic, I spare her. It’s such pain watching your own——”

“Me, Mother?”

“Even you! But an old man——”

He slapped his thigh.

“I have the man for her—Sir Hervey Eype. He’ll do. He has her tastes. Books, books, books! Yet of the world, and a pride to match her own. His first wife never dared dispute with him. ‘It is the moon!’ ‘I know it is the moon!’ I heard them at it once. I made his acquaintance in town. He had a town house then. His place is in the next county, a drivable distance. No children either. A friend of the Prince till the Prince sucked him dry. Put not your trust in poor Fred! He wouldn’t sell Eype though, even for Fred’s sake: and so he’s reduced to live in it, half shut up. I like him for that. He’s threadbare greatness still. Oh yes, Mother, a match for a Babyon, a Babyon with money: he’s older than we are. He admires Isabella, you know. He has met her at Caroline’s home. He hinted a regret to me that his affairs did not permit him to indulge his wishes. But now—with half a million—why not, Mother? Why not? And oh, Mamma, the stone pile! It’s lain a hundred years. To be the Babyon to build it up at last! Mother, Mother, you can’t refuse me! And Isabella happy and all, and——” he cast a shrewd look at the wavering, tragic creature whom he loved in his hearty fashion—“and, Mother, Isabella gone, out of the house, we shall be by ourselves, you and Carry and I! You’ll like that, eh? Mother, give Isabella her rights, give her her marriage and her half million and, if you please, that portrait of Cousin Hariot in my father’s room to round it. A clean sweep! You’ll be happier if you do, Mother! You’ll be quit of—thoughts. And in the new wing we’ll build the nurseries.”

He had his way. Only the secrecy to which she had sworn her lawyers had protected Menella so long. The secret out, she must yield, as always, to her nearest man.

Sir Hervey came to dinner. Isabella did not yawn nor laugh at him. Sir Hervey came to drink a dish of tea with Menella. Dear Belle, unluckily abroad upon one of her wild walks, was compared to Artemis Huntress. She returned before he left, trailing brionies to point the quotation. They were dedicate, it appeared, to the moon. From the moon to Venus is but half a

step. Sir Hervey took it. Isabella was cool with him, but meek. Caroline and Ludovic, a little afraid of Isabella's meekness, reckoned nevertheless that by midsummer all would be signed and sealed. There were no more sighs over Werther's sorrows nor did the Jew risk a second expulsion from Eden. The days drew out in a blue heat that thinned the spring call of his river to a sound of kisses. It carried to Isabella's window only on moonlight-silenced nights. In the hot nights, as she told her sister-in-law, she slept badly. Lack of sleep made her tired by day, tame to her suitor, gentle with him, liking him, as they thought. Sir Hervey was closeted with brother and mother, and it was understood that he had but the formalities of courtship with the lady herself to complete. No need to hurry Isabella though. But certainly the matter would be settled by midsummer.

Then, d'you see, a week ere midsummer, Isabella turns devil, leaves her good bed o'nights, is noted by every gossip, ghosting on the lawns at midnight: and when a solicitous brother, head of the house, justly outraged, puts his foot down on such whimsies, she flings at him, insolent as a gipsy, her Ralph Samuels! What would happen if Sir Hervey should hear the whispers? "Do you see, Mother? Do you see, Caroline? What will happen if Sir Hervey hears?"

Little wonder if a storm raged within the house. Rumbblings of high heaven outside it accompanied Ludovic. The bride, unaccustomed to the thunders and splashings of Ludovic's eloquence, wept and wanted her mother. She had to be satisfied with her mother-in-law. Ludovic, disliking the stain of tears on his crab-apple velvet, went off to seek Isabella and renew the quarrel. Isabella, however, was not to be found. Isabella had gone for a walk. Isabella cared little for thunderstorms: if her skirts draggled in the wet she bought new dresses and sent down the spoiled ones as largesse to poor Clemency. Ludovic sought the stables: where else could a man find peace? Heavy drops saluted him as he crossed the yard and spoiled yet further his crab-apple velvet. Heaven, like earth, was growing hysterical; though it was not yet eleven o'clock.

III

IT was not yet eleven o'clock. Isabella, strolling down the avenue, debated within herself whether she should choose the moor or the woods. She had time for either if she missed a meal: and she saw no amusement to-day promised by the family meal. She enjoyed baiting her country bears when they were half asleep, but when they waked and roared she put her fingers in her ears. The black drops decided her: the moor would keep. She knew a hollow in the woods: in it a forgotten Babyon—they said it was dark Hariot's father—had built a shooting hut, using for material the wasting stone piles. In it the night before she had set out her orpine plants in china saucers: thither she made her way now.

Her green-and-silver gown made her part of the green wood so soon as she stepped aside into it. Only a man of the woods could have tracked and kept pace with her, never increasing, never diminishing the distance between them. Such a young man, treading in-toed, but as lightly as she herself, turned aside from a strangled rabbit to go after her: she, serene, did not know that she was followed, but gliding in and out among the trees, stooping now and then as she passed an oak to pluck a harebell, a bennet or a vetch, arrived unstirred of hair or bosom at the shelter she sought. She drew a key from her pocket and entered it.

The neat square chamber had a fireplace and a window with a low sill that faced the walling trees. For the trees, sheared to earth to make room for the building and the builders, had long since scrambled to their feet again and formed a semicircle difficult to pierce at a man's height, though the fox-ways were plentiful nearer the ground. But the door faced an open space paved lavishly with more of the costly stone. Beyond its border a natural lawn held its own against vagrant seeds and the encroachments of the wild, helped by the beeches within whose shadow no flower cares to set up house. All down the scrambling cliff-side that ended the lawn the beeches had dugged graves for their own rusted leaves to rot in. To the left towards Babyon the drop was sheer and the cliff walls as clean as if God had weeded them; but here a man might climb from the tinkling river below to the heights. None climbed though; for the beeches ended where Riverhayes land began—forbidden land, forbidden heights. And upwards, beyond the hidden green-mossed hut, the woods thickened and lightened interminably like the

sea under clouds on a spring day, broke into clearings, darkened again to a dry night of hollies, and so straggled out ignobly amid nettles, hellebore, white-raspberry canes and fruitless brambles to the needed rich sunlight that ripened the moor beyond. The mere bees upon the moor made more noise than the ear could gather in all the woods. Near midsummer it was like stepping up into Italy out of a tomb.

Nevertheless Isabella, seated on the steps, her back against the house-wall and a book upon her knee, was glad that she had not chosen the moor. Here it was cool: the heavy single raindrops that fell solemnly now and then—one splashed weightily on the open page as she turned the leaf and held down the page for her—were warmer than the air through which they fell: on such a day the moor would be a green gasping fire. Besides she had less than no wish to meet the gipsies. She had allowed old Clary Lovell to read her mind two days ago, had yielded it with her hand. It had been a dumb confidence, unobserved naturally by Caroline the fool. She was not compromised save in the eyes of her own delicacy; but now it irritated her to remember that she had been near stooping. She was savage with herself because, had Caroline not been with her, she might have confided in Mother Clary, so weak was she. Confided what? She did not know. She had nothing to confess and yet a bitter need of a confidant. Mother Clary's rhyme pursued her—

‘One, two, three—
Hang up your Midsummer Men:
One for——’

Ralph Samuels? Ah, poor Samuels! But was a Jew a man? She supposed so, to some Jewess. Now Sir Hervey was at least English, and a gentleman; but a midwinter man nevertheless. Between a Jew and an uncle lay her choice, it seemed. But she—she wanted lovers, midsummer men.

The raindrop, unable to evaporate in that cold cloister of summer, lay like a round enlarging glass upon three of the printed lines—

‘BENVOLIO: In love?
ROMEO: Out——
BENVOLIO: Of love?’

The wet letters stood out from the rest of the print, tremulous, black, brilliant. She stared at them, sighed, shrugged and flicked over the page in a hurry. Why had she brought out this armoury of daggers with jewelled hilts? Why must she be trying their temper on her own flesh?

‘In love?
Out——
Of love?’

Daggers? No, flames! She whipped over the flaming pages. The flames leaped up at her from every line and burnt her. She flung aside the book; but the cover, falling away from the broken back, left the end-paper clear. She knew the inscription well enough—‘James Babyon, from his own Hariot!’ His own Hariot—there was a moan in the phrase. Had this same dry, hot fever that possessed her possessed once that forsaken, forbidden Hariot? But Hariot had loved. How could there be a likeness? Isabella loved no one. What a strange sorrow! A girl was brought low, she thought, when she envied a Caroline or a Clemency: yet she envied them.

The heat was stifling, and suddenly it grew thunderous above the trees. She lifted her eyes from *Romeo and Juliet* to enchant them with the spectacle of hyacinthine thunder-clouds slit by a sword of fire, and listened again to the rumble of chariot-wheels, and waited for the rain. But no rain followed: the sky turned black and the heat stole like a smell of incense between the beech trunks, advancing to overwhelm her with a dizziness of soul as well as of flesh. The air was magnified and danced waterily as if the earth below were a lighted cauldron. Its faint movement turned the pages of the book: an invisible reader might have been hunting through it for a quotation. She stretched out a hand and drew it to her again. She would refresh herself at least, she thought, with book Juliets, book nightingales. Then, idle as she was, and superstitious as dreams and hunger can make a girl, she had an odd impulse to do her own fortune-telling, better than Mother Clary. She knew how: she could hear the voice of a pious nurse—“Put your finger between the leaves of God’s book and whatever sentence it touches is the will of God for you!” She put her finger between the leaves of love’s book—

‘I pray thee, good Mercutio, let’s retire:
The day is hot, the Capulets abroad,
And if we meet we shall not ’scape a brawl;
For now these hot days is the mad blood stirring.’

Odd! ‘Let’s retire!’ So she had. ‘The day is hot, the—Capulets—abroad.’ Ralph Montague—Ludovic Capulet. Shame at the next thought to her thoughts shot up the carnation to her cheek, flushed her brow and died in her neck. She a Juliet? What a fool, fool, thrice fool she was! But with a swift reversion of judgment that modernised her—it was the ghost of her

furthest daughter's daughter awakening in her—came the thought, 'Why not? Juliet was only a girl: any girl's a Juliet if she choose to choose. For now these hot days is the mad blood stirring!' Then that girl of the future, having eased her path to remote birth by the movement and the thought, laid down her spirit again within Isabella and slept once more. Isabella, the modern girl of 1775, shivered at her presumptuous thought and made up her mind to read no more in *Romeo and Juliet*. It was unbearable for ever to be reading of love and never to feel it. For now these hot days— Oh, books, books, books, how they lie! How beautiful and easy death is in them 'Romeo, I come!' So easy! And Werther shot himself too. It was a satisfaction to read of his sunset end. But her father and his own Harriot had ended so, each with a pistol shot, and there was no glory in their sunset. How she despised those cheats who ran away: at least, her father ran, and left two ghosts behind him. For her mother had drained her soul away in tears, was sodden with grief, flaked away to a skeleton leaf. That was one ghost accounted for. She, his daughter, was the other. Her mother had put all their father into Ludovic: for her, Isabella, was left the thin, loveless blood fed to her from a ghost's wife. She had been fed on dandelion milk and hermits' herbs while Ludovic ripened in the sun. 'But now these hot days even my dispossessed veins, Mother, and in spite of you, Mother, are stirring!

“One, two, three!
Hang up your Midsummer Men!”

Hang up at least Sir Hervey! By midsummer, I, Isabella, shall be married, as you all desire, to Sir Hervey, Sir Hervey, Sir Hervey! Wintergreen for me. Or else, I think, I shall never be married. You, my mother, would be glad of that. But remember, Isabella, that, if you marry not, every June you'll hang up more orpine; for now these hot days is the mad blood stirring. How old must I grow, Mother, before I forget to gather orpine and the mad blood stirs no more?"

With a wild gesture she rose to her feet and flung out her arms like a young tree tossed at midsummer by a sudden cold wind from the uppermost skies: and to the uppermost skies she breathed her question.

There was lightning and thunder, renewed and renewed again, in shattering, clattering collisions and reverberations, unimpressive, like the tin-pan clash of a gipsy cart in motion. She stood gazing up at the supernal racket till the dropping skies eased her nerves at last with a torrent of rain.

So suddenly and so fiercely did it fall, rush upon her rather, that she fell back before its onslaught to the doorway of the stone chamber. From its shelter she continued to watch the natural drama, till the rains, violently descending in straight lines, flung up again from the earth dry as a snake-skin, and so bespattered her in the rebound that she retreated into the room.

On the stone table in its centre were the three saucers as she had left them the night before, each with its orpine plant in a scatter of sand. She felt at the roots. The plant she had named for her elderly beau was already out of the running: the half-grown stem flaccid and dull as dried blood. But the two remaining plants were stiff and upright, with stems as red as coxcombs and the young leaves a startling green. There was no difference in vigour between them that she could see. But all three needed water and going to the door, a saucer cupped in her hands, she held it out to the skies, fed the thirstiest plant with what the heavens flung down and, returning in a second, was waiting till it too was soaked, when a noise startled her and she turned. The delicate china slipped through her fingers on to the marble floor and broke, spilling its contents as she cried out.

A man's face was at the closed pane.

She knew him and controlled her heart-beats. It was an indignity to her to be caught afraid, yet she knew that she had started violently; for she was of the temperament that must scream at a sudden noise, though she would be stony at a deathbed. Stiffly she stared an instant at the watching countenance, stooped, picked up her broken crockery, scooping back on to it the wreckage of the plant, put all neatly back on the table (but Ralph Samuels' thirsty plant missed its soaking), dusted her hands against each other, and so crossed slowly to the window. She was still watched.

She wrenched at the catch and the face retreated while she flung open the casement and said—Miss Isabella Babyon of Babyon Court said to that watching face—

“What are you doing here? Who gave you leave to come here? What do you want?” And in the silence that followed knew instantly that she had given him two sentences too many.

For she knew him. It seemed to her that she had known him all her life. Yet she had first been aware of him the day before when she talked to the old woman on the moor. He had, not slouched, not slunk, but been and not been, as cloud shadows come and go, about the encampment during their visit. He had been at the horse's head, one with the horse; but he was gone when she looked again. He was stooping over the swinging pot: the

wavering smoke trailed over him an instant, and when it cleared he was there no longer. Presently she saw him, leant against the wheel of the gipsy cart, whittling a stick. Each time she had caught his eye: and the last time chose to hold him with her full impassive glance, that she might observe his trickery, of vanishing like a wood-beast, seen and not seen in a hedge. But he took her gaze as a summons, had come forward composedly with—"Your servant, lady!" The voluble Mother Clary had bidden him begone and not trouble the lady dears. "The lady called me," said the fellow, and stood in waiting. Isabella had been the young, gracious great lady, with a smile for the old woman and a question—"Your son?" The old woman, curtsying and thankful, said that he meant no harm, and—"Here, see, lady dear, here was the line—two, three, four lines below the little finger," and bent her keen bright face low over Caroline's rose-petal palm. But the young man spoke—

"I am not her son," and then, gravely—"Lady, I'll buckle your shoe." And had stooped before she could stop him and had her loose-pulled strap in his hand.

She knew herself to be too great a lady to resist the service. Besides, these were gipsies of the wild, to be placated as you placate strange cattle, with an ignoring steadfast look and step. You go your way and they retreat from you, gentle enough: they are merely curious, the bright-eyed, nudging cattle. Let him buckle her shoe!

"But an't you soon ready, Caroline?"

"A minute, Belle! Oh, Belle, she's telling me such things! Go on, good woman!"

The muttering had continued, and Caroline's giggles had continued, while Isabella looked down on the stooping man and felt his hard finger-tips touch herself through the leather. No sooner had he settled the tightened buckle than she drew back her foot quickly. No less quickly did his hand pluck up from the imprinted grass a trodden clover flower. Puzzled she saw his hand flash to his breast and fall to his side again, an emptied hand.

"Now, sister, your turn!" came Caroline's pipe. "Show her your hand!"

As one obedient to a stronger will, to foolish Caroline's stronger will, she had turned at that and put out her hand. She had been dumb as she listened to her fortune.

"Here's a queen's hand, lady dear. One man, lady dear, and two, that's certain: one, two—nay, I see three, and one of them wears a crown; but he's in a cloud: and there's a fourth too, a hot-eyed man, but he's no lover: and a

fifth, dim-faced: I see the trees through him. Doubtless a dead man, lady dear!”

“Oh, your father!” breathed Caroline.

“Is your gracious father dead, lady dear? That fits. He’s stretching out his hand to you, shaping ‘Stop’, with his lips. Lady dear, you have a strange fortune. There’s a grey man, a green man, a hidden man, a ghost, and a hot-eyed man who’s no lover: five men about you, lady dear, all a-calling ‘Do my will!’ But one’s a ghost, and your hot-eyed man is no lover. You must try a charm, my dear, to clear them for you. ’Tis too dark for Mother Clary.”

And then had come the injunction to seek out orpine, livelong, the plant of the midsummer-men: and she had been taught the sovereign rhyme. She had not seen the gipsy youth again.

At the other end of her mind the scene was brightly lighted, a minute, unforgettable peepshow, viewed through diminishing glasses. She was still looking at it as she repeated her question coldly—

“What do you want here?”

The strange fellow said, as he had said the day before—

“You called me.”

She bent her dark brows into a level line of anger:

“I? You are mistaken. You mustn’t come into these woods. It’s not allowed.”

He frowned in turn. His tone monstrously accused her, Isabella Babyon, of slow wits. He said—

“But I followed you.”

She was discomposed.

“You must not do that. You mustn’t follow me. These woods are private. If my brother hears of it you will be punished——”

“And yesterday I followed you——”

“—whipped——”

“And last night.”

She stared at him with a sensation of fear, as one hearing of incredible dangers escaped unawares. And shuddering cried faintly—

“Yes, yes; but go now, good fellow!”

He continued his speech, leaning his elbows on the sill, thrusting his dark head into the room. He spoke gravely, clipping his words as a man does who speaks in a seldom used tongue—

“I followed you. Why should I not? I tell you I am not that woman’s son. Indeed, I don’t know who I am; but I know what I shall be, you see, because I went away from them for five years to learn. It was too late. I had to come back to the open. I can’t live in houses. But I am not ignorant. I learned to read and write, and cipher, and speak well. Your book there, on the lawn, I could read it. I have read it once, when I served a schoolmaster, and again last night. When you had set out your midsummer-men and went home by moonlight, when I had followed you home and seen you to your door, I came here again. I slept here. I lay down where you lay to-day. I found your book and by moonlight I read it.”

He waited. His eyes burned. He lifted to her a face of entreaty and stretched out his hands:

“Lady, lady, I have your clover here. You trod on it. It smells so sweet.”

She said trembling—

“I don’t know what you’re saying. I think you are a madman. You will be put away if you speak to me like this. Do you want to be locked up in a bedlam? That would be hard for you if you cannot bear houses. I am not angry: I am sorry for you. But you must go away now. I will tell nobody if you go away now.”

He looked at her with an air of a man weighing his own destiny. His hand was closed over some treasure at his breast. Twice he made a half movement as if to open his hand, while his air said, “See what I have here!” and twice he refrained as a shy child might hesitate and refrain. But he did not move from the window. He continued to regard her, leisurely, gently, while she, smitten with a fear that turned her hands and feet cold and set her knees shaking, said to herself, “What shall I do? I am alone here with a madman!” But she knew that she lied to herself as to the true cause of her fear. He was alien: he was not mad. There was nothing to alarm her in his countenance or his bearing. His presence oppressed her; but though her spirit cowered before him as herbs cower under heavy rain, it cowered in refreshment, not in vulgar apprehension. And this terrified her, that, though her knees shook with fear of him, she did not desire him to go.

“Go!” she cried to him.

Thoughtfully he looked at her: then he nodded, drew back from the window and was gone.

She put her hands to her head. It was the thunder that made her feel so ill, and sway reeling back to the support of the wall. So he was gone! She could still feel from yesterday his touch upon her foot, a warm touch. It seemed to her that in his touch and his look, his dark look, was all the warmth of the world, and that he had taken all the warmth of the world away with him from the window. For now these hot days—— But the day had grown cold. The stone chamber was like a tomb. Her teeth chattered: there was no blood in her veins. She was a chained skeleton swinging from a gibbet, and the wind of the sky stirred her rattling bones which once the mad blood had stirred.

She must go home. She pulled her laces over her cold breast and turned to the door.

Outside it the gipsy waited.

She paused as if stricken. The rain was over and the sun had come out. Its thousand rays shone on a million drops of water, and each drop shot seven-hued sparks at her. The innumerable lights dazzled her: they struck a blow of light upon her eyes; nevertheless she had seen him.

She went swiftly past him over the sodden grass, in what direction she could not have told. Her head was averted from him, her hand pressed her trembling lips: she felt his touch on her arm before it came. It came:

Then she stopped and faced him.

“What do you want of me?”

His face told her.

“No!” she said.

“Lady, you and I——”

“No! No! Never!”

“I have known one day that I shall find you. As my father did so I do. My father was of the tan, not my mother. See!”

He fumbled at his breast anew, and this time he opened his hand. A framed ivory stared up at her. She had the impression of a lady's face, but she did not look at it. She was looking at the wilted clover flower that lay with it in a torn and faded wrapping of brocade. She heard him continue——

“My father was cast out because of her: now I shall be cast out. Good! I too go my own path. There’s a Welsh forest that I know, and commons to the north that the Roman people never use. But I shall use them. Three I know who will come to me with their women. I shall be king of the half-and-halves, king of a few till we grow. You come, lady dear?”

For answer she caught up her skirts and ran.

She was swift; for Ludovic was a runner and she had prided herself as a child, as a girl even, that she could out-run him. Now fear sped her down the hillside, guided her between the beech pits, steered her course for her, downwards to light, air, the open and the humanly gossiping river. She was at the edge of the meadows before she dared to pause. When she did pause the gipsy was once more beside her, and she perceived with a keener terror that he had chosen to run within reach of her till she herself should choose to halt. She started away again, stumbled against a root, half fell. Then she felt his arms.

“Let me go!”

“You come? My mother came to my father from a great house.”

“Let go!”

She struck at him, screaming. She was no longer a skeleton swaying in chains; the chains were warm and the blood came flowing down into her cold veins from them, clothing them with quivering flesh. It was a tingling resurrection of the flesh.

“You come?”

There was a woman in her, a wicked, gagged creature, a creature rightly imprisoned and tormented, who was trying to say yes: struggling terribly with the gag that would not let her say yes. To choke, stifle, drive back into its prison that creature of sin, Isabella Babyon screamed again.

There was a scramble in the bushes and an answering hail.

The passion within her drew back into its cell. The tingle in her blood was quieted. She swayed no longer in any grasp. There was no hand upon her wrist, no eyes filling her vision. Isabella Babyon, a remote fine lady hooped in green and pearl, stood, guarding herself, as Ralph Samuels broke into the clearing.

IV

ONE might say that he broke exquisitely into the clearing. The place, time, mood, and manner, all were the servants of Ralph Samuels that noon: he had, too, and it is a gift when dealing with women, the art of dressing to suit the situation. Here he was, eliminating Pan, interposing at the exact moment of need between Syrinx and the river towards which she pressed, in the most admirable suit of green cloth. Though it was cut by the tailor to poor Fred, wit, instinct rather, for Ralph Samuels was an analyst of his own, but not of other folks' moods, had directed him in his choice of linen. He had left his laces, ruffles and fine cravats in town, and the neat bands substituted for them puritanised him in the judgment of an agitated girl; for clothes are symbols to women. That unlucky Ralph Samuels won his chance to prove himself lucky with a woman as he ran across the clearing, and won it neither by his instancy of devotion, his handsome sallow countenance, nor his melancholy eye, but by the respectable simplicity of his cravat. Isabella had never before seen him solid as well as ardent, a landlord lover, and, at that whirling instant, respectability showed romantic. In her recoil from the half-gipsy she could perceive Ralph Samuels as an equal, as the owner of the next property, not as the Jew. Also, that she was on the edge of tears, the difficult tears of a woman who despises them. She was a shaken creature, groping with weakened fingers for her crown of dignity. The Jew with devoted gestures, adoring eyes, and the rolled 'r' of extreme excitement, picked up the tumbled garland and restored it.

“Miss Babyon—I beg—I entreat— My arm—allow me! A fallen tree here in the meadow—you are shaken—you must certainly sit down. It is but two steps. Oh, dear Miss Babyon, when I heard you call——”

Isabella, glad of an arm to lean upon, controlling her lips, said that it was nothing, a ridiculous fright, and the man was gone now: she thought that she must go home: and took the step or two away from home towards the fallen tree-trunk that lay like a breakwater, half on land, half in the brook.

“But who——”

“A beggar—a vagrant—I was foolishly alarmed. I am sure the poor fellow meant no harm.”

Ralph Samuels was eager to be after the poor fellow: he would teach the poor fellow! But—dared he leave Miss Babyon?

She did not doubt that he was torn between gallantries. The expert gesture of his sword arm was as convincing as the lingering look. She intimated with a humorous lifted eyebrow that the poor fellow had better be allowed to live.

But when Ralph Samuels was not so sure of that, her attempt at the mood of comedy collapsed. A dizziness, a languor was overcoming Isabella, and in spite of her it showed in her face. The shadow that dwelt about her mouth was very noticeable in the strong midday sunlight. Ralph Samuels saw it and forgot the poor fellow.

“Miss Babyon, you are ill—what can have happened? Something—some one—has frightened you? Dear Miss Babyon——” and forgot all but Miss Babyon in his concern. She was heavy on his arm: she had barely time to reach the inviting tree-trunk when she slid downwards to it, half sitting, half fallen across it. He said in distraction—“Water!” and was baffled. There was the brook, but how was the reviving draught to be conveyed? Characteristically he waited for a suggestion from the woman. But Isabella dismissed water with a gesture of fatigue.

“It’s nothing. Let me sit still. Sit too, won’t you? Let us be quiet!” and closed to him her beautiful eyes.

He was in his usual passion against himself that he was inadequate. But the sufferings of Werther could not solve for him the problem of how to bring water to a fainting lady without a cup. A dock leaf? He sought energetically; but there were no docks in his well-kept field, none at least where a master could point them out to an underling. But across the river the burdocks of a careless neighbour clothed neglected banks with immense grey fluted disks of foliage. He splashed through the swift shallows in his fine buckled shoes and returned with a leaf that, moulded in his palms, cupped the sparkling water well enough. All for nothing: Isabella would not drink from his cup. She said faintly, yet with the imperiousness that fascinated him—

“I told you, no! Sit down! Let us be quiet!”

He sat down beside her and they were quiet. But presently, to his astonishment, she put out a hand and laid it on his knee.

“I—I am obliged to you,” said Isabella. “You have been kind. I——” Her face worked: there were tears in her eyes. She looked from right to left

with a certain air of distraction. "I must go home," said Isabella hurriedly, and began to weep.

It was a lover's opportunity, and indeed he did catch and hold that gracious cold hand, pressing it; but there was a delicacy about the man that even at such a moment held him back from improving his own obvious fortune. She plainly needed a shoulder, but it was not in his diffident nature, with the fear of rebuff burnt into him by endless centuries of rebuffs, to dare offer her more than a pressure of the hand and a fervent—

"Dear—dearest Miss Babyon!"

Yet all the while the English environment that had made him, worked in him till he grew ashamed of his hesitation. He racked his brain for the right word and gesture and the courage to employ both. He could not find word or gesture to help him or her: he could only watch her tears. Perhaps his instinct was wiser than he; for he loved a woman quicker to give than to take. As if in answer to his wretched inability, she said softly—

"You are kind to be patient. I am very foolish. I was startled, and a sudden fright, you know, breaks open—" she dazzled him with a smile—"closed doors."

Now this was a language he could understand and speak. He choked and stammered on a sudden rush of words.

"Ah, closed doors! Then I could envy you your fright. You might well forgive the fellow. Anything to open closed doors! I wish——"

"What do you wish?" asked Isabella, watching him. His dark skin was not so sallow when he flushed. "What do you wish?"

"I have doors, barred and rusted. I think they will never be opened. I cannot open them, and who would be at the pains to open them for me? But you, Miss Babyon, you—yours——"

She sighed.

"I have to shut them again, my doors."

Suddenly the affectations of the conversation wearied her:

"Why do you not speak plain English, Mr. Samuels? Are you unhappy?"

As a duellist, though he had never sent a challenge in his life, he had never avoided one: nor did he now.

"Because I am a Jew. Yes, I am."

“Because you are a Jew?”

“To be different from one’s neighbours is to be unhappy.”

“Ah!” Her eyes softened.

“Among my own people——”

Her thoughts ran back to a market-square glimpse of old Solomon Samuels, set among the Devon farmers like a Hogarth caricature in a Rubens gallery of blonde Flemings. She said—

“Your own people? I do not see you among them.”

“I cannot live among them. My weakness, I think. One should be content with one’s own people. They like money: I like what money brings.”

“Ah!”

“I am a fool among them—to them—and worse, a runner after strange gods: and indeed I have worshipped——”

“Ah!”

“But the congregation, the strange congregation——” his arm swept down the Devon landscape—“your congregation bars the doors of the temple against me. Your Babyon village church has a window where the leper looked in, in the days of leprosy. Miss Babyon—I—the Jew—there the Jew looks in.”

She said in a stifled voice—

“You would—you could become a Christian?”

“Never! Yet——” he looked at her directly—“I could worship strange gods. But they will not be worshipped by me, the unwilling gods.”

“Goddesses?”

“Miss Babyon!”

She said painfully—

“I too—I too——” And again—“I too—there is a curse——”

“On the Jew?”

She said—

“Sometimes it falls upon the Christian.”

Then he repeated her words of an instant before—

“Are you unhappy?”

She nodded.

“If I could help you!”

She signified with her free hand—“No one can help me.”

“Your family?”

“I am their fool: I too.”

His “You?” came incredulous.

“Or they fear me. I too—strange gods—and they know it. There is an illness in my blood: at least, they think so. My father——”

His look told her plainly that he knew, with all Devon, the story of her father. She leant forward. She was so close to him that a stranger, watching from the woods, might have thought them lovers.

“Oh, do you think——? In those days, did they watch the leper’s child and say beneath their breath, ‘Is its skin still rosy?’ Did it know that they watched, do you think? Did it mock them for watching? But in the midnight, would it go down, do you suppose, to the hall where a great mirror hung, and stripping off all garments, turn and turn, seeking the sign upon its body?” She shuddered. “Is it so with you, you too? Do you go among strangers sometimes and feign not to be a Jew, and think to yourself, ‘They don’t know: they are accepting me: I shall know what living is, like other men!’ And then do you watch their glances?”

“That’s it!” said he. “Always one has to watch——”

They were clutching each other’s hands, like fellow-countrymen, wanderers met by chance in a foreign city: like such wanderers, having found each other, they could not let each other go. He cried—

“Do you despise them, even when——”

And she, with kindling eyes—

“Yes, yes, yes!”

“Yet they make us suffer.”

“Yes, they make us suffer.” Then she drew away from him a little, and she said doubtfully—“But not till to-day—not truly till to-day.” And then—“Why should we suffer?”

He scowled at life, sunny after a storm. He did not look at her as he said

“If they hurt me, I am hardened; I have always been alone: and I have books, money. But if they hurt you—it is not to be endured that you——”

She cried kindling—

“Or you! These clods! My brother shall be taught! He is afraid of me——”

He said slowly—

“Afraid or not, he is Sir Ludovic Babyon. He has the county with him. Afraid or not, he would not let us marry.”

“Marry?” The word brought her up short, like a hand on the reins for the first time felt. “Marry!”

He flushed.

“You see,” he cried, “at heart you’re on their side. What are you saying in your mind now? Be honest! Marry a Jew? Are you not saying it?” He caught her hands again: his face was close to hers: he had the air of reading her face, like some short-sighted man of letters peering at a book. But the book told him nothing. Suddenly he was piteous—“Isabella, what are you saying of me behind your doors?”

Fed by her own young woes she was a spring of pity for him. Pity and love, which is which? Marriage teaches. But she was as yet unyoked, rash and fearless. Yet some remnant in her of caution—distaste—sanity—fought against the impulse of her blood set pulsing in her veins so lately by another’s touch.

“I don’t know. I am dizzy with the heat. Ralph—wait for me! We will speak of it another time.”

He was too ready to obey. She felt his subservience and hated it, not him.

“When? Where?” He was all eagerness, and she was eager too while she waited for his plan. But he had none. “When? Where?” Thus your dog barks joyfully when you take him for a walk, but your dog does not choose the direction of your walk. She became once more Miss Babyon of Babyon Court as she directed his ardours.

“When I cannot sleep at night—sometimes in the moonlight——”

“Oh,” he cried, “the sleepless moonlight!”

“Listen! The house stifles me then. I go out. I walk in my brother’s woods.” She turned sharply on him—“Take me out of them!”

“When?”

“One night! Some night! How should I tell? Within the week, I think. Can you not wait for me? I must go home.”

“Isabella! Where? When?”

She turned on him with a stamp and a flash—

“I will not talk any more. I will not feel any more. I am tired. Enough for to-day. Do you love me? Then wait for me! Look, above there in the woods, the way I came, is a stone house, empty. I keep my books there. There, one night—— But now take me home!”

“In my coach? It shall be ready. It waits for me indeed. I was going driving. I will take you home. Although, of course, your brother——”

“Oh, do you regard my brother?” Then, as he stared at her, hesitating—“Do you—Jew?”

She had stung him at last. She thought to herself, watching, ‘His door is still open.’

He said—

“Regard? My race is older than his or yours. So is my name!” and satisfied her. She was gentle with him then:

“Forgive me, Ralph—dear Ralph! Take me to your coach!”

But when the coach was ready and the horses champing, and she, very beautiful in his eyes, seated in its gaudy darkness, she would not let him go home with her for all his protests and entreaties. Satisfied, she could be prudent: and at heart he liked it that she refused him a seat in his own carriage: his passion was to serve. Moreover, she sweetened obedience with a clear look and a pressure of the hand, though she gave him no smile; for indeed these young people were solemn with each other. The fervid worship of strange gods does not encourage a sense of the laughable, or who would bow to Diana hundred-breasted or the goat-foot Pan? And before the gates of the avenue were reached her prudence had so far increased that she stopped the resplendent coach, dismissed it and, stepping into the plantations through a keeper’s door in the fence, struck into the avenue itself at an angle, and walked on to the house sure that she was returning unseen.

She was mistaken. Old Jabez who kept the lodge heard wheels approaching, was puzzled that they did not turn in at his gates or pass them, and sent out his daughter to investigate. The coach took its time to turn and the liveries were gaudy. Clemency had a keen eye. Returning at length from the high road she spied a woman's figure turn into the avenue a hundred yards ahead of her. She would wear the green-and-pearl dress one day, she knew, for Isabella was kind to her; but she knew also that she might have worn it while it was new had Sir Ludovic lacked a sister. Her pretty witch face was puckered with hatred as she watched the stately young figure recede, recalling the while, as she daily recalled, a certain interview with Miss Babyon. She could still hear Miss Babyon's voice, though it was six years since the words had been spoken:

“It would be said that you bewitched my brother, Clemency! Very silly of the villagers; but they would be sure to say it. They said it, you remember, of Agnes Dimon: and I think she was wise to go away. Of course they don't burn witches now. It's seventy years since a witch was burned. People are much wiser now. The magistrates will punish a village that drags a woman from her house and strips her and pricks her for devil marks, and swims her for a witch—three times, Clemency, thumbs tied together, through the pond. After it is over the magistrates might fine one or two of the men of the village—after it is over.”

“Miss Belle, Miss Belle, for pity's sake!” Clemency could hear her own voice again across the years, could feel again the texture of the dress whose hem she had clutched, grovelling.

“After it is over. But you can't stop a village when it smells a witch. Last year—I read it in the *Gentleman's Magazine*—only last year, in a village outside Exeter—not so far from here, Clemency—they had a witch and her daughter to the water-trial seven times, seven separate times in a fortnight. What was the girl's name? Ah, you've heard of it, I see. She was younger than you. Two men were imprisoned for it. Six months' hard labour, I think—and quite right, too. The mother nearly died.”

“Oh, Miss Belle, stop!”

“Did you hear what else they did to that girl, Clemency? And I dare say, poor wretch, as harmless—— But you know what a village is when the rumour starts. It's so easy to start it when a girl—forgets her place. Well, as I was saying, you may have my cherry lute-string, with the flounces: it's scarcely worn: it will make you a fine gown on Sundays. You may fetch it to-morrow when you come up to Babyon to sew those ruffles for Sir

Ludovic. He will soon be back from London now. Let go my dress, Clemency! Don't be a fool, girl! You are not one really. Let go!"

And Clemency had let go and ceased to be a fool. Indeed, if Isabella Babyon, six years later, could have seen the coarsened pretty face that watched her passage down the avenue, she might have been disquieted by the wisdom in Clemency's eyes.

V

ISABELLA had left Babyon Court behind her agitated to its remotest corners as by a spring cleaning. She returned to find it in a state of unnatural calm. She had been absent, you see, from the great meal of the day, and during that suspicious, auspicious absence new measures had been planned. Circumstances, it was agreed, would exercise more pressure on Isabella than her mother or even Ludovic could do. Let us not argue with Isabella: let us ignore heady references to Ralph Samuels: let us meditate rather on the force of circumstances, exercised upon a single young woman coldly treated for best reasons by her best friends. Let us, Mother, let us, Caroline, be stiff with Isabella: let us, above all, never be tempted to lose our temper with Isabella. Displeasure, always courteous, and complete indifference to her eccentric movements is the proper treatment for Isabella. If she sees us affected by her impertinences she will be encouraged. She thinks it is a piece of humour: it's no worse than that, though there is no doubt that it pleases her to annoy me. You could see that it was so to-day. Caroline saw it too—"Didn't you, Caroline?"

"I did indeed. She's your sister, Ludovic: I can't dislike your sister; but if I had addressed my brothers as Isabella speaks to you——"

"Well, she shall not do it again. She shall see. But let us be calm, all of us, calm, cool, indifferent to her. That is my advice to you, Mother. Meanwhile your invitation goes off to Sir Hervey. That will fix her! Force of circumstance—and she likes him, you know. Let us neglect her, all for her own good: let her feel herself negligible, Mother, in the house. 'Sir Hervey does not find me negligible though,' says my sister to herself." Ludovic chuckled and rubbed his hands: "Oh, I know women: and I know Belle too. We shall be at the settlements before the week's out."

"Here she comes, Ludovic!"

"Now, Mother—now, Caroline!"

He gave them a comical look, and they loved him, as, conspirators, they drew round the tea equipage.

And indeed Ludovic's knowledge of women was so far proved sound that Isabella, physically exhausted and mentally overwrought, in feminine

familiar need of a welcome, a chair and a dish of tea, did feel, like a blow, the deliberate exclusion. A storm of cross-questions upon her absence she expected from Ludovic: there was, in such inquisition, a sort of backstairs affection on which, without knowing it, she relied. She and Ludovic were cat and dog; but there was nevertheless between them an angry bond of mutual interest. Like cat and dog they were always aware of each other in the room. But that afternoon he did not look at her: he did not ask her where she had been. She drank her cooling tea, listened to the talk that did not concern her, and went away again at last feeling, as her brother meant her to feel, that she had indeed no place at Babyon. But here his plans went astray; for her thoughts did not fly for comfort to Sir Hervey Eype and an establishment: and the news that he was expected next day or the day after did not affect her. She did not dream of Sir Hervey as she lay in a waking drowse upon the day-bed in her sitting-room, listening to the beat in her brain of Clary Lovell's tune—

‘One, two, three!
Who is your Midsummer Man?’

Staring between half-closed eyelids at the shadowy detail of the room she was thinking, if she thought of anything at all, that here, here at least, in this room that still half belonged to the boyhood of the dead man, she had a place of her own. The small four-poster which she used as a day-bed had its crimson hangings shaken once a week by old Maggie, and with her came the housemaid to polish the furniture and the floor; but Isabella kept the dusting in her own hands, so that, save for the weekly invasion, the room was sanctuary. Ludovic seldom sought her there: and she could not remember that her mother had ever opened the door in the staircase wall. Here Isabella could foregather with all the other unwanted Babyon accruments.

For the little room was half a family museum. By fits and starts she had plundered the attics and found much beautiful old rubbish that took her fancy: a chair or two out of the fashion: knobbed glasses too coarse for Caroline's taste: some needlework with stumpy figures of Adam and Eve: and a flat oblong pistol case of polished wood, its carrying ring of fine brass lying flat in a groove in the lid. There was still a travelling pistol in it. Years ago she and Ludovic had searched for its fellow and searched in vain: and when Ludovic had tired of the old-fashioned weapon as a toy, she had brought it down to her room. Ludovic did not care what she did with it; for he had come across a bundle of foils and a bent rapier, and his sister must fence with him. A girl might well fence, decided Ludovic at sixteen: it suppld her figure. At sixteen Ludovic thought long and deeply upon

women, upon women's ankles and waists: and he was ready enough to improve his sister's ankle and waist with second-hand agilities derived from the fencing-master at Exeter. But at eighteen he had a soul: at eighteen he would not fence with her: it did not become a young woman of sensibility. But Isabella instead might practise him in his steps! He was then a clumsy dancer and knew it; but with his sister he enjoyed himself: she made him feel light on his toes. For it was a singular trait in Isabella that she could savage the spirit in a man, but would never in her life mock a man's awkward body. Isabella was kind to her brother's red ears and heavy feet, and taught him patiently in the long attic where the chests and the broken furnitures and the sealed coffer stood, till he had courage enough to dance with other men's sisters.

Thereafter she had the attic to herself and for partner the dancing dust in the shafts of light from a window in the roof: and kept up her fencing with unstable shadows cast by the candles that she lit in the dusk. And when she grew tired of parrying the flickers and crying—"A hit! A hit!" to a heartless shadow, she would fall to opening the boxes of clothes, trying on, like a child playing alone, their out-moded contents. She was not greedy in her pleasures. A prowl about the attic ending in the discovery of a glass picture or a posy cut in coloured paper, sufficed for months; for she had the gift of rediscovery. She could daily approach afresh anything that pleased her eye or heart—a bunch of field daisies, a garnet heart of blood, the curve of a brow or the smile on a pair of lips, as if she had never before observed them. She had thus her perpetual feast: and so, though she plundered, in twenty-five years she had not sacked the Babyon attics. It was but a month ago that she had at last opened the sealed coffer labelled 'Effects of Miss Hariot Babyon.' It had intrigued her in childhood; but, like all dusty fixtures, had become so immovable a part of the structure of the place to her that, had she not found a bunch of keys one day, she might have left it another twenty-five years untouched. But she opened it, and as she did so a perfume, sweet, mysterious, faint as an echo, was in the room. It was like the releasing of an Ariel. It lingered about the mulberry-coloured silks and crumpled laces, the tied-up packets of romances, the volume of Prior, and the bundle of letters in her father's hand which she did not scruple to read: and came thus to know something of her dead cousin.

And only the day before, in a workbag, she found at last the source of those delicate odours. Wrapped in a handkerchief was a flat-sided round bottle of amber glass with a chased silver-gilt top, beautifully wrought. The silver top snapped back to show a small inner stopper of white glass, and when she withdrew it, instantly the same scent poured out like a fume,

clinging to her fingers and whatever her fingers touched. There was an oily trickle in the bottle. What was it? The smell of a rose? Not quite. This was no fresh rose but a rose embalmed.

She put back the stopper and snapped down the top again. But still the phial seemed to toss out its sweet remote odour as it swung on the thin gold chain. She liked the toy: she thought she would wear it: and indeed she did wear it all that day in the hollow of her breast. Warmed, it sent up a sweet scent to her as she bent her head.

She had drawn it out and was playing with it, holding it against the light, taking pleasure in the colour of the glass, and in making the round golden fall of light upon the ceiling dance as she moved it, when she fancied that she heard a stir and rustle outside the door. She raised herself upon her elbow, calling, "Who is there? Who wants me?" There was no answer, and she was letting herself fall back again on her pillows when the door was opened quickly and as quickly shut.

But her mother in that instant had slipped into the room.

Surprise held Isabella for the moment motionless. Never in her memory had her mother come to her thus. She did not like it. Here was her quiet invaded; for if her mother came Carry would follow: the two held together. But the thought had not time to bring a frown to her forehead before it was dispersed again by bewilderment at her mother's first words. Menella's eyes were fixed on the amber flask still dangling from her daughter's fingers. The spot of light that quivered with every movement, danced upon Menella's cheek, bosom, hair, like a butterfly fluttering at a window. Menella struck at it with her hands as if it were tangible, crying—

"Where did you get it—that—that?"

"It's mine." Isabella's off-handedness was unfeigned. Then she broke off with an—"At least——" wondering if her raids of the attic could be a late-discovered source of offence. Absurd, of course: but then her mother was so often absurd. She caught the flask between her hands, and the dancing light was gone.

"Yours?" Menella's eyes regarded her with an air of half recognition. It was no motherly glance. Then her terrified stare was once more upon the white closed hands from which issued the thin chain. "Who are you then?" cried Menella shrilly. "If that is yours, who are you?"

Isabella, thoroughly roused, swung on to the floor from her bed in one movement. She was accustomed to Menella's frail accessions of anger,

dignity, remonstrance, and did not much regard them. But the note in her mother's voice was strange enough to alarm her. And in the golden twilight her mother's face looked unnatural.

"Mamma? What do you mean, Mamma? This? It's a scent-bottle. I found it in the attic. I think it belonged——" She broke off. Then—"I am sorry, Mamma, but you said at breakfast you don't like me to speak of her."

"Her?"

"Our Cousin Hariot. It was among her things. I took it because of the smell. Isn't it a sweet smell? Is it roses, Mamma? I think it must be what they call—attar—otto—otto of roses. Why, Mother, what's the matter?"

For her mother gave no sign of hearing her. She had turned to the writing-table set across the corner hard by the tall window. The worn blotter patterned with mother-of-pearl, the standish, the ivory ruler, the sand-box—these might have been long absent friends to be greeted with a trembling lip. She put out an uncertain finger and touched the solid wood of the desk front. It rolled back and revealed a darkness.

"A secret drawer!" Isabella came across to her. "I never knew!"

Her mother did not answer. Abandoning the table, she felt her way across the room, as it seemed, rather than directed herself by looks, to the neat bookshelf by the bed. Then, again lifting her hand, she ran her half-shut palm softly, furtively, along the ridged backs of the books. Thus a woman in love lets her hand sometimes caress a man's coat hanging over a chair.

Isabella wondered what she was doing: and her cool fixed glance, uncomprehending as a bird's, drew Menella's. For a stony space of time the daughter and mother eyed each other. Isabella thought—

"She came here. It's for her to speak. What does she want in my room?" and waited.

Said Menella heavily at last—

"Why do you use this room, Isabella?"

"I don't know, Mamma: I like it."

"It was your father's before he—before we were married."

"I know."

"Why do you use it then? You never speak of your father."

Isabella could have told; but she would not.

“Isabella!”

“Yes, Mamma? Well, Mamma? Is anything wrong?”

“I came to you here lest Ludovic——”

“Ah! Ludovic!”

“He is very good to you, Isabella: he thinks for you—plans—he means well by you. He thinks you should marry——”

“Sir Hervey! Well, Mother?”

“But, Isabella—if you dislike this gentleman——” She hesitated, began again, with an effort out of proportion, Isabella thought, to the resultant speech: “Ludovic means well: he is the head of the house now: and I trust his judgment, my son’s judgment. Nevertheless, Jamie, your father, your dear father, would not wish you to be coerced: nor should I wish it. I should not. I say to myself, you are—you *are* his child.”

She was gasping; but Isabella, raw from the flickings, gave her no pity. She said coldly—

“I understand you, Mamma.” The tone of her voice closed the subject. Menella flushed.

“You are cruel to me, Isabella!”

“You to me, Mother!”

Menella’s eyes wavered and came to rest again on the amber toy swinging at her daughter’s breast.

“It is the scent. It upset me,” said Menella. She took the flask in her hand then, and let it lie there, examining it with that air of bright and curious aversion which a mother bestows upon some gaudy insect that her child has tipped into her palm. “You are right,” said Menella harshly: “it is otto of roses. Your father brought it. She sent me to have it filled for her. It was her perfume—in her dresses, her hair—one smelt it when one went into her room. Now you—in your room——” Her eyes wavered again and she pressed the flask hastily into Isabella’s hand, crying, “Take it when you go, when you marry him, if you marry him. Shall you marry him?”

“I don’t know, Mother.”

“If you will take it away with you when you go——” She licked her lips and began again—“If you will go away—Sir Hervey or no Sir Hervey—I will give you back all your money.”

Isabella's eyes narrowed. Here was a new fact. If she put a construction on this newly emerged fact that was indeed unjust to her mother, if the thought crossed her mind of some base misuse of trust, she was not to be judged too hardly. She, like her brother, had puzzled over the fact that her threadbare mother denied her nothing money could buy. Why now, when her mother loved the shabby Ludovic? Conscience money? The truth had not reached her: Ludovic could sometimes hold his tongue: and though she was puzzled she had not before harboured ignoble suspicions. But now Menella's phrase filled her mind with hateful questions. She would have given them speech and been rid of them, but her mother stopped the words on her lips. Menella's mutterings had swelled into tormented speech—

“It has got to be taken away. It must be broken—buried. But not here. It must not be buried at Babyon. Do you hear me, Belle? If you're my daughter you will obey and take it away. I can't endure the scent of it any more. I say to myself, Belle, if you were truly my daughter and his, would you trail that scent about the house? Don't answer me! When I came into the room I breathed it: it's on your fingers; it's in your hair: you reek of it.”

Isabella dangled her bottle, marvelling.

“Mamma, it's so delicate. It's like the ghost of a scent.”

“A ghost?”

“Mamma, what is the matter with you? I can say nothing right.”

Menella's manner changed. Her daughter's cool voice had, as always, its restraining effect. Twisting her thin fingers, almost she pleaded: she might have been a companion, submitting to her mistress—

“Daughter, I don't mean to be unkind to you. Indeed I don't. You are my daughter. But why aren't you like your father? I could have loved you then. Oh, how I should have loved you! But you stand there, you see, in this room, and look at me so. But I want to be kind. Jamie would want you to be happy. He bears no grudge. No, no, indeed—not with his nature! And I swear to you, Hariot, he never meant to hurt you, now or then. It was you who hurt us. Oh, it was cruel to follow him. And you throw it up at him that he ran away. Of course he ran away, my poorest, my dearest, out of life itself. Yes, you said that—out of life! Couldn't that satisfy you? When he came back to me, must you come with him? Hariot, Hariot, must you too make my womb your habitation?”

Isabella put her hand on her mother's arm.

“Mother dear, I'm Belle.”

Menella struck at her.

“Don’t touch me! You and Ludovic—Hariot and Jamie! Which is which, O my Saviour? Which is which?” And she put her hand to her head, her pretty hand with the Babyon bride-ring sparkling on it, and trembled all over.

Tall Isabella looked down at her mother. In her, uncomfortable impulses of pity warred with the resentment of a grown man or woman for irrevocable wrongs dealt them in childhood. She could not suddenly cease to be hostile: she knew that she could not manufacture love; yet she did attempt a caress. But the child she had been rose up behind her and pinioned her hands as they moved pityingly towards her mother.

“Hariot’s dead long ago, Mother—dust and bones—buried. I can’t help it that I’m like her. Truly, my heart isn’t like her. I don’t want to make you unhappy. Do you want me to go away so much? And does Ludovic? I think I shall marry Sir Hervey, Mother. I’m not so happy here. And yet, Mamma, my father cared nothing for birth: why must I marry Sir Hervey?”

“Ludovic’s friend——” fumbled Menella. Then, in a gleam of cruelty such as the friends of a victim will show when their turn comes—“And old!” said Menella.

Isabella’s pity for her dried up like dew on midsummer morning.

“You’ll force me to be like my cousin, Mother, is that it? I am not to love! Mother, I shall love where I choose, as my father did.” She laughed a little. “Didn’t you hear what I told Ludovic? I’ve hung up my midsummer-men. Ludovic can ask Sir Hervey here: and you can say what you choose to him: you can tell him that I languish, if that’ll keep him till I’m ready; but if he asks me before I’m ready, I say no to him—no, no, no! I’ll go by my midsummer-men, Mamma: you can tell Ludovic what I say.”

But when, primed by Ludovic, Caroline next day was very sweet with Isabella, chattering of all manner of things, and gipsies, and of replanning the garden, Isabella was so fond of flowers, and, talking of flowers, where, she wondered, had Isabella hung up the orpine plants, Isabella laughed at her. Isabella would not tell her where she had set out the orpine plants. Had she ever set out orpine plants? Caroline was a ninny to take for gospel the things that a girl said in talk, in temper, to tease a brother or a mother or a Carry. Isabella was not even sure that she had identified the ugly plant, orpine, that the villagers called livelong: and moonstruck Clary Lovell

midsummer-men: and Sir Hervey, no doubt, by some outlandish Latin name: she would ask him when he arrived what the name was.

But when next day Sir Hervey arrived with coachman, footmen, equipage and valet, for his poverty was of the order that has to have what it has to have, she did not ask him. Hedgerow charms could have no place in his conversation. Sir Hervey brought with him the town—elegance, all the gossip, common sense. Within half an hour he had transformed the countrified household. The brother and sister in their best suits, chatting with him and each other at the breakfast-table, were a Chelsea shepherd and shepherdess, lovingly linked on a china stand: the mother and daughter-in-law were a pair in Dresden. His presence pretty nearly persuaded them that they had never quarrelled, never could quarrel. Quarrels are impossible, his air pointed out, in the porcelain country. It is dangerous for painted china to live in anything but amity. But, dwelt in with discretion, the porcelain country is Eden, a china Eden, unchipped, uncracked by the emotions of outer deserts.

He was singularly convincing. He enchanted Caroline, awed Ludovic, and had for Menella, in her state gown, such an air of special reverence that the little dowager, entreated in the manner of her youth, bloomed. Isabella, watching, had the wit to say to herself, ‘If you put violets that you’ve worn overnight in warm water, how it freshens them for half an hour!’ Isabella, for herself, was also well amused. Compliments were sugar-plums: she cried “More!” and, it may be, snatched a trifle. Sir Hervey’s alacrity, however, implied that a touch of the hoyden in an elegant young woman had its charm in the courting time. Three days passed like ships with sails of silk. Then Sir Hervey had his interview with Miss Isabella Babyon. She blushed, smiled, begged for twenty-four hours’ grace to consider. It was granted, and her discretion applauded: though quotations from Cotton spiced the tribute. Her true name was undoubtedly *Cælia*!

“So!” nodded Carry; but refrained from comment. Menella looked relieved, and Ludovic benevolent. That night Isabella went to bed approved of her family. Indeed, violently setting aside memories and anticipations, infected by the new atmosphere, she approved herself. She was proud of herself for feeling nothing whatever. The thought of Ralph Samuels waiting in the wood for the fourth night now since their meeting, occurred to her as she laid her head upon her pillow. She said aloud, once, “Poor Ralph!” It was a farewell to romance. Then, with just a hint of panic, she turned him out of her mind, for she meant to sleep well. It would be absurd to dream of

Sir Hervey and she did not intend to dream of poor Ralph. Poor Ralph! Ah, poor Ralph! She would dream of neither. It was all a matter of will.

She fell asleep and her will served her. She did not dream of Sir Hervey nor of Ralph Samuels—poor Ralph! She dreamed that the wind blew through her wretched bones as she swung, clanking, from a gibbet: then came a fellow with a ladder and set it against a beam, and climbed. His warm hands revived her dead body as he loosed the chains that bound it: and he lifted down a living body that fled with him. But her soul, she dreamed, stayed screaming by the gibbet.

VI

ST. JOHN'S EVE dawned and continued cloudless: and the little party spent it on the long lawns between the cedars. Isabella, bent over her needlework, had an ear at Sir Hervey's disposal: it seemed to her that his elderly voice blended to admiration with the solemn chatter of the rooks behind the house. Caw—caw—caw! She envied them their dwellings in the hill-tops of high summer. Caw—caw! Ludovic was exceedingly restless: his unceasing efforts to force the jovial note of extreme intimacy devastated the noon meal. Dear Ludovic! She caught Sir Hervey's pebble eye and was chilled. He was not saying, 'Dear Ludovic!' with her. The man had no laughter in him. Poor dear Ludovic! She found herself playing Ludovic's game for the rest of the meal, and he gave her arm a squeeze as the ladies passed out afterwards. "Good Belle!" quoth Ludovic, and returned to his brother-in-law to be.

She thought about him all the afternoon, recalling their childhood: his youth and hers, Clemency, the quarrel about Ralph Samuels—ah, poor Ralph! Her heart ached and the faint sweet smell from the amber toy in her bosom rose with every breath she drew to confuse her judgment. She put down her work at last and strolled down to the stone terrace where rampant trails of Tudor roses hung over the parapet like orators, beckoning to the river far below, haranguing the valleys and tossing petals in kisses to the sky-line and the sea. She picked a striped pink-and-white blossom and stuck it in her dress to disperse with its freshness the ghosts of her cousin's roses. When she turned, Sir Hervey was at her elbow with a comparison. To divert him she asked—

"Why Tudor?"

He was delighted to tell her what she knew already: and continued to relate to her histories that she did not want to hear till the day was dying in a hot gold dusk. But though she had spent so many hours in his company she had not given him his answer. Adroit as he was in leading her up to the subject in all their minds, she was even more skilful in leading him away from it again, and his porcelain manners did not allow him a natural, 'Come now, my girl! Yes or no?'

It was unpardonable of Isabella, as her family agreed. They kept town hours for Sir Hervey, though the kitchen sweated for it and was forced to call in aids—Maggie, the under-gardener, and Clemency from the lodge—and, at the late meal, the porcelain country was felt by every one to be in danger. Caroline was earthenware that night: Ludovic sullen as lead: and there was no freshening Menella's violets any more. Only Sir Hervey remained unflawed, though his black eyebrows had a querying lift as he watched Isabella, in a state gown of ruby brocade with black lace ruffles, flashing her laughter and her cold glances about the table.

Isabella enjoyed the tension. It distracted her thoughts. In watching the gradual cracking of the porcelain she could forget to listen to the question screamed at her by all the china figures—'Have you said yes?' 'When do you say yes?' She knew that it was natural for them to be impatient. It was merely by courtesy after all that a condemned person himself drops the handkerchief: to delay is to abuse a privilege. It was perfectly clear to her that she must shortly agree to marry Sir Hervey Eype. She had let things go so far that retreat was impossible. Nevertheless—must she marry Sir Hervey Eype? A shutter was lifted in her mind, and for a moment she saw very clearly the figure of Ralph Samuels waiting among the foolish orpines. Must she marry Sir Hervey Eype? How inevitable life was!

She rose from the table on Caroline's nod and sat through the rest of the hot evening, a monosyllabic young woman. A little before eleven came tea and the gentlemen—flushed Ludovic, uneasy Ludovic, and the parchment-skinned easy guest. The guest was established beside Menella: Isabella was entreated to the spinet at the other end of the room. Caroline and Ludovic hung uneasily in middle distance. Then Isabella's hands broke into a tump-a-tump that hurried them into the foreground.

'One, two, three!
Who's your Midsummer Man?'

Isabella's voice was a small one, but it was high and sweet:

'Ned the trapper, or Bob the gapper,
Or out-at-elbow Dan?
Sweet Saint John
Upon your Eve I pray,
Show me now the Midsummer Man——'

"Belle!"

Ludovic, playing the boisterous brother, pulled her hands from the jacks.

“Be good now! Here, Carry, sing something, quickly!”

Isabella, graciously making way for her sister-in-law, put up an innocent face—

“I thought my song would amuse Sir Hervey: a country song, Ludovic! Hasn’t he come courting a country girl?”

“Come out! I have got to speak with you.”

“Why not?” said Isabella, smiling, and led the way; while Caroline broke tactfully into—

‘Tell me, my heart, if this be Love——’

as the brother and sister left the room.

In the wide dim hall he stopped her—

“See here, Belle, before a new devil gets into you, what do you mean to do? This damnable not-knowing! Tell me, Belle, are you going to have him?”

She dropped her affectations like a last year’s fashion:

“I don’t know, Ludovic! Brother, I *don’t* know.”

“Belle, do have him!”

“Why?”

“Well, we’ld all like it.”

“It’s to be rid of me?”

“No, Belle, no! But I wish you’ld take him. Do, sister!”

It was the way to move her. She so liked to give and grant. She sat down in a high-back seat.

“Now, Ludovic, what’s the matter? More Clemencies?”

“Belle, don’t begin that——”

“Well, what’s behind this—this panderage? What do you gain if I take him, Ludovic? Come, tell me! You’d better tell me: I shan’t tell Caroline. ‘If I marry your Sir Hervey——’ Go on, Ludovic!”

“You see, Belle——”

“Not yet.”

“You see, Belle, being married costs the devil.”

“Debts?”

“So to speak.”

“Hundreds?”

“More.”

“Thousands?” said Isabella coolly.

“Well——”

“Five—six—seven? Ten? Almack’s? So you *did* play? Oh, my sweet brother! Better not let Mamma know. Lord, if Mamma knew! Does Carry? No! And that’s as well too. You’ve some sense left, Ludovic. Hm! You could sell, of course. You mustn’t sell land though. Hm! What’s to be done?”

And with that it was over. She had been much the same over Clemency. No wasted breath. ‘What’s to be done?’ She had seen so swiftly what had to be done with Clemency: she would see once more what had to be done.

“So if you married Sir Hervey—only if you like him, Belle—then Mother’s money——” He broke off, remembering that he ought not to have told her that. But it was too late to be prudent.

Again the money! In three minutes she had the story out of him and sat brooding while he talked passionately in a low voice of all that a man, a Babyon, the lord of an estate, might do, debts apart, with half a million. Thus had he talked, not so long ago, of all that one might do with a string of conquering chestnuts.

Her thoughts hovered uncertainly over the situation, like hands over an instrument when the music to be played is difficult. There were ways out, of course. Her mother would not live for ever: and, if the need were immediate, between them her mother might be coerced. But she shrank from that: she shrank too from the intolerable pother. She could not cajole and contrive and bargain: not even for Ludovic: she had not the energy. She had lost all her energy. It had been a sealed fountain once, incredibly strong, pressing with ever-gathering strength against its lid of stone. But lately, in a wood, by a river—was it not then?—the stone had been wrenched back, and the waters, springing high, heaven high for a moment in a glorious jet, had subsided to soft weak wellings and overflowings. She had been drained away between the wood and the river. She was not the Isabella she had been. She didn’t

want to fight and overcome any one: she wanted to be fought, to be overcome. Oh, strange relief, if Ludovic would direct her affairs for her and him! She glanced up in hope.

“And so you see, Belle, if you’ll do this, and then come with me to my mother and talk to her——”

Hopeless! She must still be the doer. If she had not been so summer-slack it might have been possible to find a way out; but she could not gather together sufficient energy to think of a way out. She felt very tired: she felt that nothing much mattered. It would be easiest to marry Sir Hervey. With a word she could make them all happy. And why not? She said to herself that she had no affection for them: she thought ruefully that she was born with a cold heart. Nevertheless it did give her satisfaction to gratify Ludovic. Also it made her hot with discomfort to hear herself thus besought, abjectly besought, for so petty a thing as money. She made up her mind as she stood up from her chair.

“Tell Sir Hervey—if he will talk with me to-morrow——”

“Belle!” Ludovic was in a blaze. “You’re in earnest? You will? Lady Eype! My dearest Lady Eype! But—but it’s for your own good, Belle!—yours too?”

“Oh, certainly, Ludovic!”

“Gad, Belle, I’m grateful to you. You’re a good girl, sister!” His lips were vigorous on her cheek: he hugged her: he began to be boisterous. He wanted to romp her into the drawing-room and tell the good news then and there. She resisted.

“No, Ludovic! Be quiet, Ludovic! Make my excuses. I am tired. I am going to my room.”

“I may tell Caroline?”

“Whom you please. Good-night, brother!”

“Good-night, sister!” He embraced her again. Then, not waiting to light her candle, he rollicked off to the drawing-room to his wife.

She stood motionless where he left her, half stunned by the sudden quiet: stunned, too, by the suddenness, the idle suddenness with which she had decided her own fate. What had possessed her to yield to Ludovic’s importunities? What affection had there ever been between them to justify such complacency? Affection? She cared no more for Ludovic than for the wooden arm of the chair in which she sat.

Through the open door she watched the comedy playing itself out in the brightly lighted saloon. Her mother and her future husband were bending over the card-table, undisturbed as yet; but Caroline had been informed. Caroline was perched upon Ludovic's knee, marital toyings discreetly sheltered from the elders by the red folds of the curtain and the pillar of the half-door. Carry's eyes sparkled: she was all attention and excitement and glee as she listened to Ludovic's story: by candlelight she was a Boucher Venus in sky-blue silk.

"In another moment he will kiss her," thought Isabella, watching.

In another moment he did kiss her, whispering in her ear. His eloquent hand, fingering her necklace of beads, said, 'Now they shall be pearls!' The wave of it implied new frocks, caps, laces, feathers. He made a snatch at her curls. She snatched in turn at his clumsy hands and between them, in the scuffle, a French rosebud knotted with blue ribbons was pulled loose. 'Might he have it?' said Ludovic's looks. Indeed he should have it: Carry would fasten it in his coat, upon his heart. The pantomime was as plain as speech.

Isabella's eyes turned from them to her accepted bridegroom. The contrast was as harsh as the doom of the clock behind her striking the half-hour—one, two——

She was like a person violently awakened. Midsummer Eve! It was Midsummer Eve! If she must marry Sir Hervey to-morrow morning, there was nevertheless a night left her.

"Go out on Midsummer Eve, lady dear, name over your orpine flowers and touch them, calling to them by name as the clock strikes twelve, and he'll come to you right enough, the man you're to wed. That's the charm of the midsummer-men, lady dear. 'Tis Mother Clary, who saw her own man so, tells you."

She hesitated. Clemency, crossing the hall from the dining-room, a tray in her arms, was an unnoticed shadow. Isabella had eyes only for those married lovers, theatre-framed in the doorway. Caroline was a blossoming branch in a sky of blue: Ludovic, bent to her, flaunted her blue breast-knot. Well, she too had a lover if she chose: and a lover's trifle hidden in her breast. The amber flask had been a farewell gift: might it not once again be a farewell gift? For the second time in the twenty-four hours the doors of her mind opened and behind them, framed by dark woods, a tiny, patient figure, waited the Jew. For what? For a gift, at least: and he should not wait in vain.

She glided over the broad river of light that, striking from the saloon, divided the hall into two darknesses, and the maid, Clemency, stood aside to

let her pass. Clemency, unconsidered, watched her young mistress go down the steps that shone like white tombstones. Clemency, a quarter of an hour later, was sure that Miss Babyon went down the garden path, crossed the lawns and began to hurry as she reached the trees. She was quite clear in her answers to Ludovic's shocked questions. No, she was not dreaming. She had gone on with her duty of clearing the supper-table. She was sure that if Miss Belle had come in again Clemency would have seen her. Clemency had watched her mistresses and the strange gentleman light their candles and go to bed; but the master, she thought, had ought to know, before he turned the great key and followed them, that Miss Isabella was not yet come home. No, she had told no one else. Which way did Miss Isabella take—where had Miss Isabella gone——?

“Why, to the hut in the woods, Master Vic—Sir Ludovic! It's where they meet.”

The young master did not burst out into violent speech as she hoped to hear him do. He said in a dry, paled voice—

“Meet?”

“Miss Belle and——Don't frighten me so, Master Vic!”

“Whom does my sister meet?”

“Why, Master Vic, the Jew gentleman—Mr. Samuels.”

He gave a cry of rage that reached Menella's fine ears and brought her to the stair-head. She could not see her son; but she had surely heard him call? Where, then, was Ludovic? But as she came trembling and peering down the stairs, Clemency, from the depths of the hall, reassured her. Clemency smiled respectfully at her mistress—

“Yes, my lady! It was Sir Ludovic calling. One of the dogs was loose on the lawn. Now he's run out, chasing it.”

“Did he leave the door like this?”

“Oh yes, my lady!”

“Ah, I see. Thank you, Clemency! That will do, Clemency! Good-night! You are put to sleep with Maggie to-night, are you not?”

“Yes, my lady! But she's not a-bed. We have work yet in the kitchens.”

“Ah! Be as quick as you can, child! Good-night, Clemency! Sleep well!”

“Good-night, my lady! The same to you, my lady!”

Menella went upstairs again slowly, her hand on her fluttered heart.

Clemency, in the kitchens, being as quick as she could, continued to smile.

VII

At the edge of the clearing Isabella paused. There sat Ralph Samuels, as she had seen him in her mind's eye, a crouched, humble figure, on the shallow step. His chin was cocked on his fists: very earnestly he regarded the moon while, like some antique image, he waited in eternal patience for leave to begin to live.

She smiled—it was good to feel herself so warmed into a smile—and called to him, soft and clear, as she stepped over the night-bleached grasses

“Ralph!”

Then he lived.

“Miss Babyon! Isabella! Dear—dearest—at last! You have come at last!”

She was glad of her welcome and her eyes showed it. He alone had this power of bringing the foolish water to her eyes. He healed her heart with his outpouring of undeserved incredible affection that she could not match. And she had come to give hurt for healing, wicked that she was.

“Poor Ralph!” breathed Isabella softly, and bent to him. It was for each of them the first kiss.

Shy apprentices, unused to love, they broke then from each other, leaning each against the doorpost, staring, quaintly amazed. Isabella put up her hand to her own cheek, caressing softly with half-closed fingers her own caressed cheek, in a gesture that made her, though she could never know it, the daughter indeed of dim Menella, fingering memories. Far away a clock struck: midnight was but fifteen steps away. She listened, counting aloud—“One, two, three——” to a tune, and as she hummed, her eyes swept the shadows of the room. For an instant she thought she had heard a sound, caught a movement there; but all was quiet, all was as she had left it a week ago, though, open as she had left it to leaves and birds, it had already an air of belonging to silence and the seasons, not to her. Then she saw that her midsummer-men had been freshly watered and set out. She flashed round on Ralph Samuels in a pleasure—

“You did it, Ralph? That was clever. How did you guess? Are you my midsummer man, then? Let us look at them together.” She caught his willing hand, drew him to the table—“Here is the tallest; but is it yours, Ralph? I called—which now?—after you; but you have shifted them and now I can’t tell. What does it matter? You are here. And that was the clock striking the three-quarters. One, two, three——It’s not yet midnight, but oh, sweet Saint John, I think you have shown him to me! Don’t look at me so, dear Ralph! Are you saying—‘Moonstruck?’ Indeed it is not that sort of fever. Oh, Ralph, I must laugh at you when you are so solemn and staring. Don’t mind, you may laugh at me too! Let us laugh a little, Ralph, till the clock strikes again. Yes, yes, I know—they are wild and whirling words.”

What were her words to him? It was her look that he hung upon, her brilliant cheek whose carnation the moonlight could not altogether banish, her kind eyes, the falling tendrils of disordered hair upon her forehead. He, the word-lover, the word-spinner, twister, winder, had no words now. And hers, for him, were gay babble, meaningless and full of joy as the babble of his own river. Her words said nothing, but meant everything to him, like music. He listened and looked till she faltered under his look. Then, in the silence, her last sentences, floating in his memory, did penetrate to his brain and have a verbal meaning.

“Till—— Till——” He was instantly in a lover’s anguish. “Do you talk already of going home again?”

“What?” Hope unquenchable leaped in her eye. Was he, indeed, and not Sir Hervey to be the midsummer man? If he, the led, should become the leader? If he would not let her go home again? ‘Oh, sweet Saint John, let him have made a plan!’ Thus spoke her spirit. Her tongue said—

“Of course I must go home again. What else is there to do? How could I come to Riverhayes, even did you want it?”

“Want! She says ‘want’!”

She looked at him, not in contempt, but knowing the truth—

“How could you have me there? Is that what you want? Consider—I’m Isabella Babyon. My brother would kill you.”

“If we were married——”

Again she answered him, as women will answer the romantics, with dull truth—

“It’s the Jew—the Jew! What clergyman in all Devon would marry us?”

“Listen! I will plan an escape—coaches—relays—London—France! Give me three days to make my plans and——”

She said dully—

“It should have been planned sooner.”

“It shall be planned now——”

“Now? To-night? We should go to-night?” She hoped, again.

“In three—two days. I should have to get money. My father would not give me money afterwards. I have a little, but it would mean plain living. Could you bear that, and poor lodgings! No, no, you ought not to bear it! Oh, what else can we do?”

She knew him now for the poet’s reed that he was, and pitied him more than she pitied herself. But it seemed to her, too, as she caught her breath on a sob, that she had pity to spare for them both. She said—

“I could have borne it gladly; but not now. You should have been ready. What does it matter? If you had been ready—but you don’t want me, Ralph! Oh, for the moment you want me, but not for all moments. I’d be too strong: I’d tear you. Don’t be angry: I know you can’t be different; but I see things clearly. Oh, I do see clearly. You want to dream, don’t you, always! I don’t want to dream. I want to be awake and happy. Well, there’s to-night for us to dream in still. To-morrow I shall be another woman. To-night—oh, I do still love you, though I came to say good-bye to you: indeed I did. Look!” She stirred the laces of her dress and drew out the amber toy—“This is for you! I’ve kept your book: this is instead of it. Mamma says it’s unlucky; but I like it: it smells sweet. Will you take it, and the risk of it, to remember me by?”

He cried—

“I don’t need it. I don’t want it. Remember you? I tell you I love you, whatever happens. I shall love no one else till I die.”

She shook her head doubtfully:

“I am not made like that. I think, whatever happened to you or me, I should not die. Livelong—that’s my flower. Livelong is midsummer-men, you know: it’s the same flower. I shall live long, whoever dies or leaves me. D’you think me heartless to leave you uncomforted? What can I do? We are not to be together. You see, Ralph, my life is to be different from yours. I am saying ‘yes!’ to-morrow to a lord from London. Good-bye, Ralph!”

She put the amber phial in his hands and turned away from him over the grass.

He let her go. There was half the sward between them before he moved and called to her loudly. It was the mazed voice of a man roused sharply from dreams—

“Come back! Miss Babyon! Come back!”

She called to him across the clearing—

“No! Come to me!” But she stopped and looked at him and then, very slowly, she returned: “What is it now?” she said, mocking him. He flung up his head:

“There—that tone in your voice! I don’t deserve it. I have been dreaming, asleep. I don’t know when or how long—all my life, I think. Pity me for that if you like; but I’m awake now. Oh, what a danger escaped! You were here and I nearly let you go. Is it possible? No wonder you despise me. You do, don’t you?”

She said steadily—

“A little.”

“Don’t any more! I’m not as you’ve seen me. But—Isabella, you must be patient. I’m not quick and scheming. I must have time to turn. I’ve lived by myself always: that spells dreams, confusions. But when you went away from me over the ivory grass——”

She drew back angrily—

“Oh, not that! Not now! Not words, words—always words——”

“I must! It’s my way. I have to live in my way and speak in my own way. I will. If you do love me—you say you do—then you’ll not mock at me for my words—words. I tell you they’re my way. You mustn’t mind them if you’re to come with me now—not in two days—but now. Yes, it can be managed—of course it shall be managed. Will you come?”

“Now?”

“Now.”

She read his face intently—

“Are you awake? What? Now? You don’t mean it, of course. Now?”

“Now! But you see, you don’t trust me!”

She was clasping and unclasping her hands. She was feverish and shrill:

“No delays? No going back to Babyon? To be away from it—Mamma, the house, Hariot—gone like smoke! You would give me that? D’you mean, Ralph, *now*? Oh dear God, Ralph—do you know what you give me? Oh, dear sweet God, I’m not alone any more!”

They were together then, as body strained to body, crying, ‘Give me your soul!’ If marriage be indeed that utter suppliance of each other’s emptiness which welds for an instant two flawed mortals to one whole divinity, then in that instant’s touch, clasp, kiss, they were married.

The interchange of natures was a pleasure complete and exquisite. His was overflowed with royal strength and tenacity of purpose. His soul was a blazing forge: his brain the anvil on which to strike, strike with his will, making weapons and brazen gods. As for her, her burden of will and purpose slipped from her like a loosened dress. She swam naked in dreams: she was washed to and fro by the idle ripples of his dreams, visiting the shores of eternal bliss. It was the place of her remote desire, a place ignorant of thought, action, will. Here one lay dreaming for ever, for ever and ever.

A dog snaps if you touch it suddenly: and a cat growls and switches its tail when it is stirred out of sleep. A child wakened in the night wails and beats the counterpane. An adult, called back to surface life from profound abstraction or concentration, shares this resentment, feeling it more intensely because the physical result of such disturbance is invariably a violent headache. The rule seems to be that you must not hale a soul by the hair from world to world, but rather call softly that it may return of its own will, smiling.

But Sir Ludovic Babyon, his knees green from a fall or so, procured him by leaf-buried stumps of trees, Sir Ludovic Babyon, red and breathless from his run, redder and more breathless with anger, did not call softly to the lost pair in the shadow of the hut. The rage of a just man and a careful brother preceded him by the length of a shout, in a phrase, a repeated epithet which even a Jew will not endure: and as he ran he drew his sword.

To Isabella, the wrench back into the body was a shock of pain, and she leant back against the wall thinking only of how to support herself. For long moments her drugged mind beat at her brows, sending shoots of fire through her head and neck. She saw with her eyes the encounter of the two men, but it was a meaningless vision with which she had no personal concern. The flash and streak of quick white blades was an accurate representation of the pain in her own head, but noisier. She could not perceive the reason for the

incessant change of pose that prevented her from focussing the figures concerned. The flicker and pause—flicker, flicker, flicker and pause—seemed mechanical. She had begun to wonder if it would ever end, when it ended on a cry. Then a masterless rapier, semicircling over the sward in aimless jerks, struck her foot with force enough to hurt her. Mechanically she stooped and picked it up. The hilt fitted itself to her practised hand like the clasp of a friend, and she lifted her eyes from it to see, at the foot of the steps, her brother standing. He was still now and the lightnings had ceased. At his feet lay a figure, twisting feebly on Ralph's ivory grass. Then it must have been that Ralph cried to her: she was to remember, afterwards, the sound of his voice calling to her as he died. But at the moment she did not heed him. She was still in a sleep of the brain.

Then Ludovic, who had dropped on one knee by the fallen figure, turned to her. His face was blotched, red and pale: his voice strained as he spoke—

“Sister, I think he's finished.” He was in deep distress: his quick rage had quickly ended.

But not hers, as her grasp tightened on her weapon. She lifted her face to the trees, the moon and the sky, as one inviting allies: and felt, even as she lifted it, all the blackness in the sky dropping down upon her like a mist. She snatched at the madness enveloping her, wrapped it to her, breathed it, fed upon it. She became a deaf and mindless force, a savage female lust to strike that which had stricken her. She was a mad-woman, rejoicing in the strength that madness lent her. Without a word, without a warning, she ran upon her brother.

He had not time to rise or be afraid; but he cried in ludicrous astonishment—

“Sister, don't—oh, don't!”

Then death took him under Carry's breast-knot, darkening the ribbons.

Somewhere in the valley a clock began to strike the hour.

She stood, looking down at him, pillowed upon her lover's body, until her fingers relaxed and her lover's sword fell from her hand to the ground. As floods subside from a drowned city leaving it water-swept and cleanly, so the madness drained from her. It was as if an alien soul had lodged within her, while its turn was served, and now was cramped again and eager to leave. It took its strength with it. She began to sob and tremble: her hands sought blindly behind her for the support of the wall, and, when they could not find it, she turned, stumbling over the threshold into the darkness of the

room. The table stopped her and she fell heavily across it, making a ruin of the midsummer-men. Then, as she raised herself panting, she perceived that the room was dark because the figure of the gipsy blocked the open window. It did not seem strange to find him there: indeed, without fear or shame, she turned to him, crying, childish and ghastly, as she pointed to the door—

“Look what I have done!”

Looking, he said—

“Now for certain you must come, lady dear!” and, moving to her side, drew her forward.

She moved with him: his will was her will henceforward. Only on the threshold, with eyes averted, with failing knees, she checked and clung to the doorpost, shrieking in whispers that she could not pass them, could not pass them.

He put his arms about her and held her till her cries and her frantic hands were quieted, and her strength came again. Then, stepping with care, he lifted her over the bodies into the open, as a bride is lifted over the threshold of her bridegroom’s house. When they reached the trees he set her down again and, holding back a sweeping bough, waited for her to pass. She went forward obediently: he followed. The curtain of the wood fell into place behind them and silence returned to the clearing. For a little while longer the noiseless moon gaped through the trees at Ludovic and his enemy: then she too went her way.

Thus did the night take Isabella Babyon with her midsummer man. Though the search was furious for many months, no day restored her.

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 *Midsummer Men* by Winifred Ashton (as Clemence Dane)]