

Mirdath the Beautiful

By William Hope Hodgson

“And I cannot touch her face And I cannot touch her hair, And I kneel to empty shadows— Just memories of her grace; And her voice sings in the winds And in the sobs of dawn And among the flowers at night And from the brooks at sunrise And from the sea at sunset, And I answer with vain callings”

It was the Joy of the Sunset that brought us to speech. I was gone a long way from my house, walking lonely-wise, and stopping often that I view the piling upward of the Battlements of Evening, and to feel the dear and strange gathering of the Dusk come over all the world about me.

The last time that I paused, I was truly lost in a solemn joy of the Glory of the Coming Night; and maybe I laughed a little in my throat, standing there alone in the midst of the Dusk upon the World. And, lo! my content was answered out of the trees that bounded the country road upon my right; and it was so as that some one had said: “And thou also!” in glad understanding, that I laughed again a little in my throat; as though I had only a half-believing that any true human did answer my laugh; but rather some sweet Delusion or Spirit that was tuned to my mood.

But she spoke and called me by my name; and when I had gone to the side of the road, that I should see her somewhat, and discover whether I knew her, I saw that she was surely that lady, who for her beauty was known through all of that sweet County of Kent as Lady Mirdath the Beautiful; and a near neighbour to me; for the Estates of her Guardian abounded upon mine.

Yet, until that time, I had never met her; for I had been so oft and long abroad; and so much given to my Studies and my Exercises when at home, that I had no further Knowledge of her than Rumour gave to me odd time; and for the rest, I was well content; for as I have given hint, my books held me, and likewise my Exercises; for I was always an athlete, and never met the man so quick or so strong as I did be; save in some fiction of a tale or in the mouth of a boaster.

Now, I stood instantly with my hat in my hand; and answered her gentle bantering so well as I might, the while that I peered intent and wondering at her through the gloom; for truly Rumour had told no tale to equal the beauty of this strange maid; who now stood jesting with so sweet a spirit, and claiming kinship of Cousinhood with me, as was truth, now that I did wake to think.

And, truly, she made no ado; but named me frank by my lad’s name, and gave laughter and right to me to name her Mirdath, and nothing less or more—at that time. And she bid me then to come up through the hedge, and make use of a gap that was her own especial secret, as she confessed, when she took odd leave with her maid to some country frolic, drest as village maids; but not to deceive many, as I dare believe.

And I came up through the gap in the hedge and stood beside her; and tall she had seemed to me, when I looked up at her; and tall she was, in truth; but indeed I was a great head taller. And she invited me then to walk with her to the house, that I meet her Guardian and give word to my sorrow that I had so long neglected to make call upon them; and truly her eyes to shine with mischief and delight, as she named me so for my amissness.

But, indeed, she grew sober in a moment, and she set up her finger to me to hush, as that she heard somewhat in the wood that lay all the way upon our right. And, indeed, something I heard too; for there was surely a rustling of the leaves, and anon a dead twig crackt with a sound clear and sharp in the stillness.

And immediately there came three men running out of the wood at me; and I called to them sharply to keep off or beware of harm; and I put the maid to my back with my left hand, and had my oak staff ready for my use.

But the three men gave out no word of reply; but ran in at me; and I saw somewhat of the gleam of knives; and at that, I moved very glad and brisk to the attack; and behind me there went shrill and sweet, the call of a silver whistle; for the Maid was whistling for her dogs; and maybe the call was also a signal to the men-servants of her house.

Yet, truly, there was no use in help that was yet to come; for the need did be then and instant; and I nowise loath to use my strength before my sweet cousin. And I stepped forward, briskly, as I have told; and the end of my staff I drove into the body of the left-ward man, so that he dropped like a dead man. And I hit very sharply at the head of another, and surely crackt it for him; for he made instantly upon the earth; but the third man I met with my fist, and neither had he any great need of a second blow; but went instant to join his companions, and the fight thus to have ended before it was even proper begun, and I laughing a little with a proper pride, to know the bewilderment that I perceived in the way that the Lady Mirdath, my cousin, stood and regarded me through the dusk of the hushed even.

But, indeed, there was no time left to us, before there came bounding up, three great boar-hounds, that had been loosed to her whistle; and she had some ado to keep the brutes off me; and I then to beat them off the men upon the earth, lest they maul them as they lay. And directly, there was a noise of men shouting, and the light of lanthorns in the night, and the footmen of the house to come running with lanthorns and cudgels; and knew not whether to deal with me, or not, in the first moment, even as the dogs; but when they saw the men upon the ground, and learned my name and saw me proper, they kept well their distance and had no lack of respect; but, indeed, my sweet cousin to have the most of any; only that she showed no intent to keep distance of me; but to have a new and deeper feeling of kinship than she at first had shown.

And the men-servants asked what should be done with the foot-pads; seeing that they were now recovering. But, indeed, I left the matter, along with some silver, to the servants; and very sound justice they dealt out to the men; for I heard their cries a good while after we had gone away.

Now, when we were come up to the Hall, my cousin must take me in to her Guardian, Sir Alfred Jarles, an old man and venerable that I knew a little in passing and because our estates abounded. And she praised me to my face, yet quaintly-wise; and the old man, her Guardian thanked me most honourably and with a nice courtesy; so that I was a welcome house-friend from that time onward.

And I stayed all that evening, and dined, and afterward went out again into the home-grounds with the Lady Mirdath; and she more friendly to me than ever any woman had been; and seemed to me as that she had known me always. And, truly, I had the same feeling in my heart towards her; for it was, somehow, as though we knew each the way and turn of the other, and had a constant delight to find this thing and that thing to be in common; but no surprise; save that so pleasant a truth had so natural a discovery.

And one thing there was that I perceived held the Lady Mirdath all that dear fore-night; and this was, indeed, the way that I had my pleasure so easy with the three foot-pads. And she asked me plainly whether I was not truly very strong; and when I laughed with young and natural pride, she caught my arm suddenly to discover for herself how strong I might be. And, surely, she loosed it even the more sudden, and with a little gasping of astonishment, because it was so great

and hard. And afterward, she walked by me very silent, and seeming thoughtful; but she went never any great way off from me.

And, truly, if the Lady Mirdath had a strange pleasure in my strength, I had likewise a constant wonder and marvel in her beauty, that had shown but the more lovely in the candle-light at dinner.

But there were further delights to me in the days that came; for I had happiness in the way that she had pleasure of the Mystery of the Evening, and the Glamour of Night, and the Joy of Dawn, and all suchlike.

And one evening, that I ever remember, as we wandered in the park-lands, she began to say—half unthinking—that it was truly an elves-night. And she stopped herself immediately; as though she thought I should have no understanding; but, indeed, I was upon mine own familiar ground of inward delight; and I replied in a quiet and usual voice, that the Towers of Sleep would grow that night, and I felt in my bones that it was a night to find the Giant's Tomb, or the Tree with the Great Painted Head, or— And surely I stopped very sudden; for she gripped me in that moment, and her hand shook as she held me; but when I would ask her what ailed, she bid me, very breathless, to say on, to say on. And, with a half understanding, I told her that I had but meant to speak of the Moon Garden, that was an olden and happy fancy of mine.

And, in verity, when I said that, the Lady Mirdath cried out something in a strange low voice, and brought me to a halt, that she might face me. And she questioned me very earnest; and I answered just so earnest as she; for I was grown suddenly to an excitement, in that I perceived she knew also. And, in verity, she told me that she had knowledge; but had thought that she was alone in the world with her knowledge of that strange land of her dreams; and now to find that I also had travelled in those dear, strange dream lands. And truly the marvel of it—the marvel of it! As she to say time and oft. And again, as we walked, she gave out word that there was little wonder she had been urged to call to me that night, as she saw me pause upon the road; though, indeed, she had learned of our cousin-ship before, having seen me go by on my horse pretty oft, and inquired concerning me; and mayhap daintily irked that I had so little heed of Lady Mirdath the Beautiful. But, indeed, I had thought of other matters; yet had been human enough, had I but met her proper before I see her.

Now you must not think that I was not utter stirred by the wonder of this thing, that we had both a dreamful knowledge of the same matters, of which each had thought none other knew. Yet, when I questioned more, there was much that had been in my fancies that was foreign to her, and likewise much that had been familiar to her, that was of no meaning to me. But though there was this, that brought a little regret to us, there would be, time and again, some new thing that one told, that the other knew and could finish the telling of, to the gladness and amazement of both.

And so shall you picture us wandering and having constant speech, so that, hour by hour, we grew gladly aged in dear knowledge and sweet friendship of the other.

And truly, how the time passed, I know not; but there came presently a hullabaloo, and the shouts of men's voices and the baying of dogs, and the gleam of lanthorns, so that I knew not what to think; until, very sudden, and with a sweet and strange little laughter, the Lady Mirdath to perceive that we had missed the hours utter in our converse; so that her Guardian (made uneasy because of the three foot-pads) had ordered a search. And we all that time a-wander together in happy forgetfulness.

And we turned homeward, then, and came towards the lights; but indeed, the dogs found us before we were come there; and they had grown to know me now, and leaped about me, barking

very friendly; and so in a minute the men had discovered us, and were gone back to tell Sir Jarles that all was well.

And this was the way of our meeting and the growing of our acquaintance, and the beginning of my great love for Mirdath the Beautiful.

Now, from that time onward, evening by evening would I go a-wander along the quiet and country road that led from my estate to the estate of Sir Jarles. And always I went inward by the hedge-gap; and oft I should find the Lady Mirdath walking in that part of the woods; but always with her great boar-hounds about her; for I had begged that she do this thing for her sweet safety; and she to seem wishful to pleasure me; but truly to be just so oft utter perverse in diverse matters; and to strive to plague me, as though she would discover how much I would endure and how far she might go to anger me.

And, truly, well I remember how that one night, coming to the hedge-gap, I saw two country-maids come thence out from the woods of Sir Jarles'; but they were naught to me, and I would have gone upward through the gap, as ever; only that, as they passed me, they curtsyed somewhat over-graceful for rough wenches. And I had a sudden thought, and came up to them to see them more anigh; and truly I thought the taller was surely the Lady Mirdath. But, indeed, I could not be sure; for when I asked who she did be, she only to simper and to curtsey again; and so was I very natural all in doubt; but yet sufficient in wonder (having some knowledge of the Lady Mirdath) to follow the wenches, the which I did.

And they then, very speedy and sedate, as though I were some rack-rape that they did well to be feared of alone at night; and so came at last to the village green, where a great dance was a-foot, with torches, and a wandering fiddler to set the tune; and ale in plenty.

And the two to join the dance, and danced very hearty; but had only each the other for a partner, and had a good care to avoid the torches. And by this, I was pretty sure that they were truly the Lady Mirdath and her maid; and so I took chance when they had danced somewhat my way, to step over to them, and ask boldly for a dance. But, indeed, the tall one answered, simpering, that she was promised; and immediately gave her hand to a great hulking farmer-lout, and went round the green with him; and well punished she was for her waywardness; for she had all her skill to save her pretty feet from his loutish stampings; and very glad she was to meet the end of the dance.

And I knew now for certainty that it was Mirdath the Beautiful, despite her plan of disguise, and the darkness and the wench's dress and the foot-gear that marred her step so great. And I walked across to her, and named her, whispering, by name; and gave her plain word to be done of this un wisdom, and I would take her home. But she to turn from me, and she stamped her foot, and went again to the lout; and when she had suffered another dance with him, she bid him be her escort a part of the way; the which he was nothing loath of.

And another lad, that was mate to him, went likewise; and in a moment, so soon as they were gone away from the light of the torches, the rough hind-lads made to set their arms about the waists of the two wenches, not wetting who they had for companions. And the Lady Mirdath was no longer able to endure, and cried out in her sudden fear and disgust, and struck the rough hind that embraced her, so hard that he loosed her a moment, swearing great oaths. And directly he came back to her again, and had her in a moment, to kiss her; and she, loathing him to the very death, beat him madly in the face with her hands; but to no end, only that I was close upon them. And, in that moment, she screamed my name aloud; and I caught the poor lout and hit him once, but not to harm him overmuch; yet to give him a long memory of me; and afterward I threw him

into the side of the road. But the second hind, having heard my name, loosed from the tiring-maid, and ran for his life; and, indeed, my strength was known all about that part.

And I caught Mirdath the Beautiful by her shoulders, and shook her very soundly, in my anger. And afterward, I sent the maid onward; and she, having no word from her Mistress to stay, went forward a little; and in this fashion we came at last to the hedge-gap, with the Lady Mirdath very hushed; but yet walking anigh to me, as that she had some secret pleasure of my nearness. And I led her through the gap, and so homeward to the Hall; and there bid her good-night at a side door that she held the key of. And, truly, she bid me good-night in an utter quiet voice; and was almost as that she had no haste to be gone from me that night.

Yet, when I met her on the morrow, she was full of a constant impudence to me; so that, having her alone to myself, when the dusk was come, I asked her why she would never be done of her waywardness; because that I ached to have companionship of her; and, instead, she denied my need. And, at that, she was at once very gentle; and full of a sweet and winsome understanding; and surely knew that I wished to be rested; for she brought out her harp, and played me dear olden melodies of our childhood-days all that evening; and so had my love for her the more intent and glad. And she saw me that night to the hedge-gap, having her three great boar-hounds with her, to company her home again. But, indeed, I followed her afterwards, very silent, until I saw her safe into the Hall; for I would not have her alone in the night; though she believed that I was then far away on the country road. And as she walked with her dogs, one or another would run back to me, to nose against me friendly-wise; but I sent them off again very quiet; and she had no knowledge of aught; for she to go singing a love-song quietly all the way home. But whether she loved me, I could not tell; though she had a nice affection for me.

Now, on the following evening, I went somewhat early to the gap; and lo! who should be standing in the gap, talking to the Lady Mirdath; but a very clever-drest man, that had a look of the Court about him; and he, when I approached, made no way for me through the gap; but stood firm, and eyed me very insolent; so that I put out my hand, and lifted him from my way.

And lo! the Lady Mirdath turned a bitterness of speech upon me that gave me an utter pain and astonishment; so that I was assured in a moment that she had no true love for me, or she had never striven so to put me to shame before the stranger, and named me uncouth and brutal to a smaller man. And, indeed, you shall perceive how I was in my heart in that moment.

And I saw that there was some seeming of justice in what the Lady Mirdath said; but yet might the man have shown a better spirit; and moreover Mirdath the Beautiful had no true call to shame me, her true friend and cousin, before this stranger. Yet did I not stop to argue; but bowed very low to the Lady Mirdath; and afterward I bowed a little to the man and made apology; for, indeed, he was neither great nor strong-made; and I had been better man to have shown courtesy to him; at least in the first.

And so, having done justice to my own respect, I turned and went on, and left them to their happiness.

Now, I walked then, maybe twenty good miles, before I came to my own home; for there was no rest in me all that night, or ever, because that I was grown deadly in love of Mirdath the Beautiful; and all my spirit and heart and body of me pained with the dreadful loss that I was come so sudden upon.

And for a great week I had my walks in another direction; but in the end of that week, I must take my walk along the olden way, that I might chance to have but a sight of My Lady. And, truly, I had all sight that ever man did need to put him in dread pain and jealousy; for, truly, as I came in view of the gap, there was the Lady Mirdath walking just without the borders of the

great wood; and beside her there walked the clever-drest man of the Court, and she suffered his arm around her, so that I knew they were lovers; for the Lady Mirdath had no brothers nor any youthful men kin.

Yet, when Mirdath saw me upon the road, she shamed in a moment to be so caught; for she put her lover's arm from about her, and bowed to me, a little changed of colour in the face; and I bowed very low—being but a young man myself—; and so passed on, with my heart very dead in me. And as I went, I saw that her lover came again to her, and had his arm once more about her; and so, maybe, they looked after me, as I went very stiff and desperate; but, indeed, I looked not back on them, as you may think.

And for a great month then, I went not near to the gap; for my love raged in me, and I was hurt in my pride; and, truly, neither had a true justice been dealt to me by the Lady Mirdath.

Yet in that month, my love was a leaven in me, and made slowly a sweetness and a tenderness and an understanding that were not in me before; and truly Love and Pain do shape the Character of Man.

And in the end of that time, I saw a little way into Life, with an understanding heart, and began presently to take my walks again past the gap; but truly Mirdath the Beautiful was never to my sight; though one evening I thought she might be not a great way off; for one of her great boar-hounds came out of the wood, and down into the road to nose against me, very friendly, as a dog oft doth with me.

Yet, though I waited a good time after the dog had left me, I had no sight of Mirdath, and so passed on again, with my heart heavy in me; but without bitterness, because of the understanding that was begun to grow in my heart.

Now, there passed two weary and lonely weeks, in which I grew sick to have knowledge of the beautiful maid. And, truly, in the end of that time, I made a sudden resolving that I would go in through the gap, and come to the home-grounds about the Hall, and so maybe have some sight of her.

And this resolving I had one evening; and I went out immediately, and came to the gap, and went in through the gap, and so by a long walking to the gardens about the Hall. And, truly, when I was come there, I saw a good light of lanthorns and torches, and a great company of people dancing; and all drest in quaint dress; so that I knew they had a festival for some cause. And there came suddenly a horrid dread into my heart that this might be the marriage-dance of the Lady Mirdath; but, indeed, this was foolishness; for I had surely heard of the marriage, if there had been any. And, truly, in a moment, I remembered that she was come one-and-twenty years of age on that day, and to the end of her ward-ship; and this surely to be festival in honour of the same.

And a very bright and pretty matter it was to watch, save that I was so heavy in the heart with loneliness and longing; for the company was great and gay, and the lights plentiful and set all about from the trees; and in leaf-made arbours about the great lawn. And a great table spread with eating matters and silver and crystal, and great lamps of bronze and silver went all a-down one end of the lawn; and the dance constant upon the other part.

And surely, the Lady Mirdath to step out of the dance, very lovely drest; yet seeming, to mine eyes, a little pale in the looming of the lights. And she to wander to a seat to rest; and, indeed, in a moment, there to be a dozen youths of the great families of the country-side, in attendance about her, making talk and laughter, and each eager for her favour; and she very lovely in the midst of them, but yet, as I did think, lacking of somewhat, and a little pale-seeming, as I have told; and her glance to go odd-wise beyond the group of men about her; so that I understood in a

moment that her lover was not there, and she to be a-lack in the heart for him. Yet, why he was not there, I could not suppose, save that he might have been called back to the Court.

And, surely, as I watched the other young men about her, I burned with a fierce and miserable jealousy of them; so that I could near have stept forth and plucked her out from among them, and had her to walk with me in the woods, as in the olden days, when she also had seemed near to love. But, truly, what use to this? For it was not they who held her heart, as I saw plain; for I watched her, with an eager and lonesome heart, and knew that it was one small man of the Court that was lover to her, as I have told.

And I went away again then, and came not near to the gap for three great months, because that I could not bear the pain of my loss; but in the end of that time, my very pain to urge me to go, and to be worse than the pain of not going; so that I found myself one evening in the gap, peering, very eager and shaken, across the sward that lay between the gap and the woods; for this same place to be as an holy ground to me; for there was it that first I saw Mirdath the Beautiful, and surely lost my heart to her in that one night.

And a great time I stayed there in the gap, waiting and watching hopelessly. And lo! sudden there came something against me, touching my thigh very soft; and when I looked down, it was one of the boar-hounds, so that my heart leaped, near frightened; for truly My Lady was come somewhere nigh, as I did think.

And, as I waited, very hushed and watchful; yet with an utter beating heart; surely I heard a faint and low singing among the trees, so utter sad. And lo! it was Mirdath singing a broken love song, and a-wander there in the dark alone, save for her great dogs.

And I harked, with strange pain in me, that she did be so in pain; and I ached to bring her ease; yet moved not, but was very still there in the gap; save that my being was all in turmoil.

And presently, as I harked, there came a slim white figure out from among the trees; and the figure cried out something, and came to a quick pause, as I could see in the half-dark. And lo! in that moment, there came a sudden and unreasoned hope into me; and I came up out of the gap, and was come to Mirdath in a moment, calling very low and passionate and eager: "Mirdath! Mirdath! Mirdath!"

And this way I came to her; and her great dog that was with me, to bound beside me, in thought, mayhap, that it was some game. And when I came to the Lady Mirdath, I held out my hands to her, not knowing what I did; but only the telling of my heart that needed her so utter, and craved to ease her of her pain. And lo! she put out her arms to me, and came into mine arms with a little run. And there she bode, weeping strangely; but yet with rest upon her; even as rest was come sudden and wondrous upon me.

And sudden, she moved in mine arms, and slipt her hands to me, very dear, and held her lips up to me, like some sweet child, that I kiss her; but, indeed, she was also a true woman, and in honest and dear love of me.

And this to be the way of our betrothal; and simple and wordless it was; yet sufficient, only that there is no sufficiency in Love.

Now, presently, she loosed herself out of mine arms, and we walked homeward through the woods, very quiet, and holding hands, as children do. And I then in a while to ask her about the man of the Court; and she laughed very sweet into the silence of the wood; but gave me no answer, save that I wait until we were come to the Hall.

And when we were come there, she took me into the great hall, and made a very dainty and impudent bow, mocking me. And so made me known to another lady, who sat there, upon her

task of embroidering, which she did very demure, and as that she had also a dainty Mischief lurking in her.

And truly, the Lady Mirdath never to be done of naughty laughter, that made her dearly breathless with delight, and to sway a little, and set the trembling of pretty sounds in her throat; and surely she must pull down two great pistols from an arm-rack, that I fight a duel to the death with the lady of the embroidering, who held her face down over her work, and shook likewise with the wickedness of her laughter that she could not hide.

And in the end, the Lady of the Embroidering looked up sudden into my face; and I then to see somewhat of the mischief in a moment; for she had the face of the man of the Court suit, that had been lover to Mirdath.

And the Lady Mirdath then to explain to me how that Mistress Alison (which was her name) was a dear and bosom friend, and she it was that had been drest in the Court suit to play a prank for a wager with a certain young man who would be lover to her, an he might. And I then to come along, and so speedy to offence that truly I never saw her face plain, because that I was so utter jealous. And so the Lady Mirdath had been more justly in anger than I supposed, because that I had put hands upon her friend, as I have told.

And this to be all of it, save that they had planned to punish me, and had met every evening at the gap, to play at lovers, perchance I should pass, so that I should have greater cause for my jealousy, and truly they to have a good revenge upon me; for I had suffered very great a long while because of it.

Yet, as you do mind, when I came upon them, the Lady Mirdath had a half-regret, that was very natural, because even then she was in love of me, as I of her; and because of this, she drew away, as you shall remember, being—as she confessed—suddenly and strangely troubled and to want me; but afterwards as much set again to my punishment, because that I bowed so cold and went away. And indeed well I might.

Yet, truly, all was safe ended now, and I utter thankful and with a mad delight in the heart; so that I caught up Mirdath, and we danced very slow and stately around the great hall, the while that Mistress Alison whistled us a tune with her mouth, which she could very clever, as many another thing, I wot.

And each day and all day after this Gladness, Mirdath and I could never be apart; but must go a-wander always together, here and there, in an unending joy of our togetherness.

And in a thousand things were we at one in delight; for we had both of us that nature which doth love the blue of eternity which gathers beyond the wings of the sunset; and the invisible sound of the starlight falling upon the world; and the quiet of grey evenings when the Towers of Sleep are builded unto the mystery of the Dusk; and the solemn green of strange pastures in the moonlight; and the speech of the sycamore unto the beech; and the slow way of the sea when it doth mood; and the soft rustling of the night clouds. And likewise had we eyes to see the Dancer of the Sunset, casting her mighty robes so strange; and ears to know that there shakes a silent thunder over the Face of Dawn; and much else that we knew and saw and understood together in our utter joy.

Now, there happened to us about this time a certain adventure that came near to cause the death of Mirdath the Beautiful; for one day as we wandered, as ever, like two children in our contentment, I made remark to Mirdath that there went only two of the great boar-hounds with us; and she then told me that the third was to the kennels, being sick.

Yet, scarce had she told me so much; ere she cried out something and pointed; and lo! I saw that the third hound came towards us, at a run, yet very strange-seeming in his going. And in a

moment, Mirdath cried out that the hound was mad; and truly, I saw then that the brute slavered as he came running.

And in a moment he was upon us, and made never a sound; but leaped at me in one instant of time; all before I had any thought of such intent. But surely, My Beautiful One had a dreadful love for me, for she cast herself at the dog, to save me, calling to the other hounds. And she was bitten in a moment by the brute, as she strove to hold him off from me. But I to have him instant by the neck and the body, and brake him, so that he died at once; and I cast him to the earth, and gave help to Mirdath, that I draw the poison from the wounds.

And this I did so well as I might, despite that she would have me stop. And afterwards, I took her into mine arms, and ran very fierce all the long and weary way to the Hall, and with hot skewers I burned the wounds; so that when the doctor came, he to say I have saved her by my care, if indeed she to be saved. But, truly, she had saved me in any wise, as you shall think; so that I could never be done of honour to her.

And she very pale; but yet to laugh at my fears, and to say that she soon to have her health, and the wounds healed very speedy; but, indeed, it was a long and bitter time before they were proper healed, and she so well as ever. Yet, in time, so it was; and an utter weight off my heart.

And when Mirdath was grown full strong again, we set our wedding day. And well do I mind how she stood there in her bridal dress, on that day, so slender and lovely as may Love have stood in the Dawn of Life; and the beauty of her eyes that had such sober sweetness in them, despite the dear mischief of her nature; and the way of her little feet, and the loveliness of her hair; and the dainty rogue-grace of her movements; and her mouth an enticement, as that a child and a woman smiled out of the one face. And this to be no more than but an hint of the loveliness of My Beautiful One.

And so we were married.

* * *

Mirdath, My Beautiful One, lay dying, and I had no power to hold Death backward from such dread intent. In another room, I heard the little wail of the child; and the wail of the child waked my wife back into this life, so that her hands fluttered white and desperately needful upon the coverlid.

I kneeled beside My Beautiful One, and reached out and took her hands very gentle into mine; but still they fluttered so needful; and she looked at me, dumbly; but her eyes beseeching.

Then I went out of the room, and called gently to the Nurse; and the Nurse brought in the child, wrapped very softly in a long, white robe. And I saw the eyes of My Beautiful One grow clearer with a strange, lovely light; and I beckoned to the Nurse to bring the babe near.

My wife moved her hands very weakly upon the coverlid, and I knew that she craved to touch her child; and I signed to the Nurse, and took my child in mine arms; and the Nurse went out from the room, and so we three were alone together.

Then I sat very gentle upon the bed; and I held the babe near to My Beautiful One, so that the wee cheek of the babe touched the white cheek of my dying wife; but the weight of the child I kept off from her.

And presently, I knew that Mirdath, My Wife, strove dumbly to reach for the hands of the babe; and I turned the child more towards her, and slipped the hands of the child into the weak hands of My Beautiful One. And I held the babe above my wife, with an utter care; so that the eyes of my dying One, looked into the young eyes of the child. And presently, in but a few

moments of time; though it had been someways an eternity, My Beautiful One closed her eyes and lay very quiet. And I took away the child to the Nurse, who stood beyond the door. And I closed the door, and came back to Mine Own, that we have those last instants alone together.

And the hands of my wife lay very still and white; but presently they began to move softly and weakly, searching for somewhat; and I put out my great hands to her, and took her hands with an utter care; and so a little time passed.

Then her eyes opened, quiet and grey, and a little dazed seeming; and she rolled her head on the pillow and saw me; and the pain of forgetfulness went out of her eyes, and she looked at me with a look that grew in strength, unto a sweetness of tenderness and full understanding.

And I bent a little to her; and her eyes told me to take her into mine arms for those last minutes. Then I went very gentle upon the bed, and lifted her with an utter and tender care, so that she lay suddenly strangely restful against my breast; for Love gave me skill to hold her, and Love gave My Beautiful One a sweetness of ease in that little time that was left to us.

And so we twain were together; and Love seemed that it had made a truce with Death in the air about us, that we be undisturbed; for there came a drowse of rest even upon my tense heart, that had known nothing but a dreadful pain through the weary hours.

And I whispered my love silently to My Beautiful One, and her eyes answered; and the strangely beautiful and terrible moments passed by into the hush of eternity.

And suddenly, Mirdath My Beautiful One, spoke,—whispering something. And I stooped gently to hark; and Mine Own spoke again; and lo! it was to call me by the olden Love Name that had been mine through all the utter lovely months of our togetherness.

And I began again to tell her of my love, that should pass beyond death; and lo! in that one moment of time, the light went out of her eyes; and My Beautiful One lay dead in mine arms . . . My Beautiful One. . . .