

My Company: HOW THEY GAVE, AND HOW THEY WENT. BY SHIRLEY BROWN. It was a rainy night. Pater, pater, pater, came the drops against the casement, with never-ending iteration, and I, sitting by the fire, in the cheery, close-curtained little room, listened to the interminable refrain, and fancied how wildly the wind must be wrestling with the forest trees in the plain below, and how like a miniature Niagara the little brook must be, flinging showers of white spray down the steep rocks. Opposite to the walnut-framed mirror, was the reflection of a bright-haired girl of eighteen, with dreamy brown eyes, cheeks delicately tinted with pink, and rosy lips—my own similitude. And she wore a dark brown dress, with white lace trim at the throat, and the broad band of a wedding-ring gleamed on the third finger of the left hand. For it was Mrs. James Jones, a bride of three months standing, and directly opposite, at his desk, sat my handsome young husband, poring over a pile of papers which he had brought from his office to finish at his leisure. My sewing-machine occupied its place by the window—my pretty cottage piano was open, and my canary slept on its perch, a tiny ball of golden down, while the ribbon-tied work-basket, heaped with pretty needle-fancies, stood close at my elbow. Enough to cheer the heart of any woman, one would have said—and yet I was not contented! Something of my cousin must have depicted itself on my face, for Jamie looked up suddenly and asked, with a smile: "Well, Penny, what is the matter now?" "Jamie," said I solemnly, "I wish we had more company."

And I always like milk gruel for breakfast, my dear, with a fresh-billed egg, not too hard, and raised rolls, fresh out of the oven. Obadiah, he's a vegetarian, and never eats no meat. I hope you've plenty of garden sass for him. Mary Ann has dreadful poor digestion, and eats rye-bread and Graham gams and such like. And I'd be obliged, my dear, if you'll just bear in mind that I prefer black tea, and never drink coffee—and I'm particular about my pie-crust being made with lard, not butter. "I looked piteously at her. "Stop a minute, please," said I. "Don't tell me that!" The old lady gave a sniff of scorn. "Beniah Bright told me that Cousin Jones had married a stuck-up piece," said she, "and now I believe it!" But while I was yet hesitating in what terms to reprimand, a rosy young lady in a pink bonnet, a pink lined parasol, a quantity of fluff hair, and an artificially touched-up complexion, ran into my arms. "Oh, you, darling," said she, "I am so glad to see you! You don't know me, I see—I always did like to take people by surprise. I'm Effie Jones, your husband's fourth cousin. I was engaged to him once," with a coquettish arching of the face, "but his mamma disapproved of cousin marrying, so it was broken off. He used to call me his rosebud. Perhaps he has told you of our youthful loves?" "I colored deeply. "No," said I. "Men are inconstant ever," said Effie, giggling. "But you'll love me, dear, won't you, for his sake? I'm a teacher in the public schools, and it's my vacation now, so of course I thought of you the very first thing. My brother Algernon is bar-tender in the Higginston Hotel, and he don't get leave of absence until September, but he'll run up then, with a gun and fishing-rod, if you'll kindly give him a shake-down some-where, and dear papa will bring a Centennial Chair with him, and I dare say you can spare one of your men to wheel him around a little, now and then."

I sat down in despair and clasped both hands over my forehead. "I'm very glad to see you all," said I, "but—how it takes me so by surprise. I shall have to think a little how to arrange matters so as to accommodate you all."

There was the stout poetess, and her little girl and the two hypothetical boys—they must have the front room, with the sofa bedstead to ease out my pretty Eastlake set. Obadiah Sparks will have the servants' room in the garret, and Margaret must content herself with a bed in the closet opening out of the kitchen. The old lady must sleep in the parlour—I could send to the village for a wife-woven mat, and Mary Ann must occupy the sofa in the parlor, adjoining. But where, where could I put the rosy young lady with the radiant complexion and my own room, and I gave up my curls and went down stairs to keep company with Margaret and the black beetles!

"Please, Mrs. Jones," whispered Margaret herself at the same moment, "we haven't got enough in the house to feed such a regiment! Now that little girl has forced her way into the preserve closet and is eating my currant jam—and the old lady is pulling all the clothes off the bed to see if it is a hair mattress or a bunk one—and please, ma'am, if all these people are going to stay, I wish you to suit yourself with another girl as soon as possible."

I looked helplessly at Margaret.—From the back of the house rose up the whoops of the poetess' little boys, who were evidently nearing the premises with fatal rapidity. Obadiah Sparks was eating the blue plums off from Jamie's pet tree, as if for a wager. Mary Ann was shaking the pillows out of the window. The old lady was preparing to cook herself some unadorned mess on the kitchen fire, and the poetess was calling, "Cousin Jones! Cousin Jones! I couldn't possibly sleep without a mosquito-netting on the bed," when, to my infinite relief, a light elastic step sounded on the green turf of the garden path, and Jamie himself stood before me. "It's all right, Penny," he said, breathlessly. "Morand has concluded to go to Canada himself, and—what's the matter? Why do you look so pale? And who are all these people?"

"Your relations," said I, with a gasp, "come to visit us."

"Well, I swan, there's something wrong somewhere," said Cousin Obadiah, ejecting half a dozen plain stones from his mouth. "This man ain't Cousin Jones."

"Cousin Jones is short and stout, with a bald head and gray whiskers," added the old lady, who had emerged from the kitchen, with a porcelain-lined sauceman in one hand. "We can't have mistook the place, 'cause it's Beech Nut Hill, plain enough over the railroad depot," said Mary Ann, over the chateau de frise of pillow in the windows. "You have certainly mistaken something," said Jamie, curtly. "And I consider this intrusion upon my wife's privacy as perfectly unwarrantable."

"Ain't there no other Jones lives around here?" helplessly demanded Cousin Obadiah, about whom the rest of the relations had clustered as if for aid and protection,—and here Margaret spoke up: "Please, ma'am, that family as has just moved into Eglantine Cottage is called Jones, too—Mr. Jones Jones!" "That's the ticket!" shouted Cousin Obadiah, hilariously slipping his knee. "I beg your pardon, ma'am, and please, ma'am, I'm strag—but of course when we asked for Mr. Jones and the folks directed us here, it wasn't no fault of ours, now, was it?" "Whose ever fault it was," briskly retorted my husband, "if I shall be much obliged to you if you will get out of these premises as speedily as possible."

So they departed, the greasy lady with the three children, old Mrs. Sparks with her son and niece, and the gushing young lady, of whom I had regally begun to be jealous, and, as I turned with a relieved countenance to Jamie, he said, gravely: "Shall I write to my cousin Antonia

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