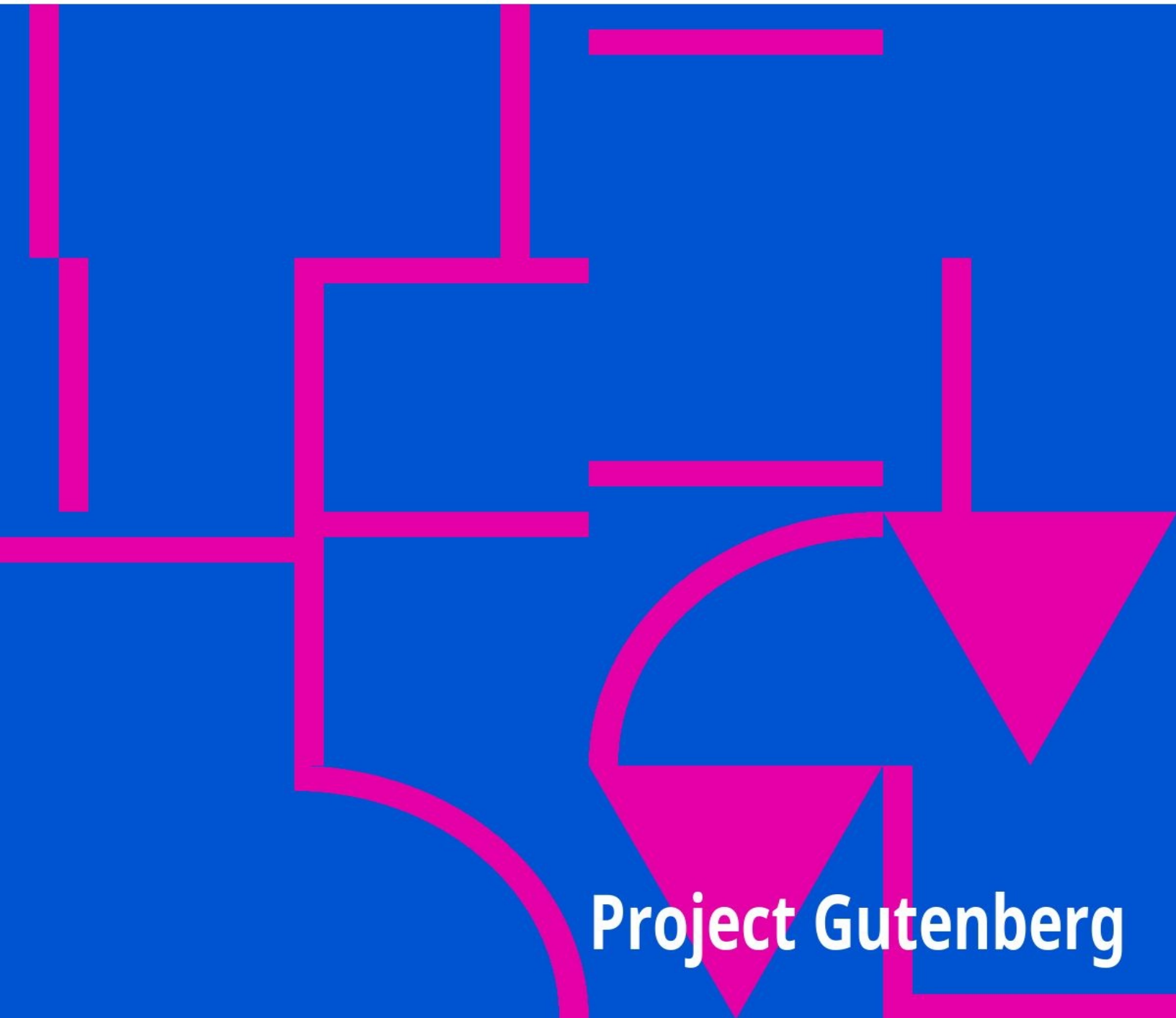
The Gorgeous Isle

A Romance; Scene-- Nevis, B.W.I. 1842

Gertrude Franklin Horn Atherton



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The Gorgeous Isle

By

GERTRUDE ATHERTON

A ROMANCE

Scene: Nevis, B. W. I., 1842

ILLUSTRATED BY C. COLES PHILLIPS

NEW YORK

Doubleday, Page & Company
1908

“‘But what a joy to see you in colour. How does it happen?’”
“‘But what a joy to see you in colour. How does it happen?’”

TO
MRS. SPENCER WIGLEY, OF ST. KITTS, B. W. I.

"We are all souls of fire and children
of the sun."

—*Helmholtz*.

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ILLUSTRATIONS

NOTES

BATH HOUSE. This hotel was erected in 1804 at a cost of £40,000, although built entirely by slaves. Its varied and brilliant career came to an end some time in the forties. The tide of fashion turned, and as it was too large for a private residence, it was left to the elements. Earthquakes have riven it, hurricanes unroofed it, and time devoured it, but it is still magnificent in its ruin.

ATLANTIS. Bacon, in "The New Atlantis," assumes America to be the fabled continent of Atlantis, which, according to his theory, was not submerged, but flooded to such an extent that all the inhabitants perished except the few that fled to the highest mountain tops. I have, however, preferred to adopt the Platonic theory, as at once more plausible and interesting.

QUEEN ELIZABETH'S RING. West Indian tradition gives this historic ring to the Warner family, as related in the story. It descended in the direct line to Colonel Edward Warner, who bequeathed it by will to his brother, Ashton Warner, as "a diamond ring in shape of a heart, given by Queen Elizabeth to the Earl of Essex." This will, dated 27th of December, 1732, was proved in the Probate Court of Canterbury, England, on the 21st of February following. From Ashton Warner it descended to his son Joseph, and at the date of the story was in the possession of Charles Warner, Esq., Solicitor-General of Trinidad, B. W. I.

The Gorgeous Isle

CHAPTER I

Bath House, the most ambitious structure ever erected in the West Indies, and perhaps the most beautiful hotel the world has ever seen, was the popular winter refuge of English people of fashion in the earlier half of the nineteenth century. This immense irregular pile of masonry stood on a terraced eminence rising from the flat border of Nevis, a volcano whose fires had migrated to less fortunate isles and covered with some fifty square miles of soil that yielded every luxury of the Antilles. There was game in the jungles, fish in the sea, did the men desire sport; there were groves of palm and cocoanut for picnics, a town like a bazaar, a drive of twenty-four miles round the base of the ever-beautiful ever-changing mountain; and a sloop always ready to convey the guests to St. Kitts, Montserrat, or Antigua, where they were sure of entertainment from the hospitable planters. There were sea baths and sulphur baths; above all, the air was light and stimulating on the hottest days, for the trade winds rarely deserted Nevis and St. Kitts, no matter what the fate of the rest of that blooming archipelago.

Bath House was surrounded by wide gardens of tropical trees, ferns, and flowers of gay and delicate hues. Its several terraces flamed with colour, as well as its numerous little balconies and galleries, and the flat surfaces of the roof: the whole effect being that of an Eastern palace with hanging gardens, a vast pleasure house, designed for some extravagant and voluptuous potentate. Anything less like an hotel had never been erected; and the interior, with its lofty pillared rooms, its costly mahogany furniture, its panels and hangings of rich brocades, the thick rugs on the polished floors, if more European than Oriental, equally resembled a palace; an effect in no wise diminished by the brilliant plumage of the guests. If the climate compelled them to forswear velvet and satin, their “muslins were from Bengal and their silks from Benares”; and as the daughters of the planters emulated these birds of fashion in all things, Nevis in winter would have been independent of its gorgeous birds and flowers: the bonnets were miracles of posies and plumes, and the crinoline set off the costly materials, the flounces and fringes, the streamers and rosettes, the frills of lace old and new. And as the English Creoles with their skin like porcelain, and their small dainty figures, imitated their more rosy and well-grown sisters of the North, the handsome strapping coloured wenches copied their island betters in materials which if flimsy were no less bright; so it is no matter for wonder that

the young bloods came from London to admire and loiter and flirt in an enchanted clime that seemed made for naught else, that the sons of the planters sent to London for their own finery, and the young coloured bucks strutted about like peacocks on such days as they were not grinding cane or serving the reckless guests of Bath House in the shops of Charlestown.

That was the heyday of Nevis, a time of luxury and splendour and gaiety unknown on even the most fertile of the other islands, for none other was ever bold enough to venture such an hotel; and if the bold adventurer came to grief, as was inevitable, still all honour to him for his spirit, and the brief glory he gave to the loveliest island of the Caribbees.

CHAPTER II

When Anne Percy smiled her mouth looked ripe and eager for pleasure, her eyes sparkled with youth and gaiety, but when shy or thoughtful or impatient her mouth was too large and closely set, her low thick brows made her eyes look sullen and opaque, their blue too dark even for beauty. It was a day when “pencilled” eyebrows inspired the sonnet, when mouths were rosebuds, or should be for fashion’s sake, when forms were slight and languid, and a freckle was a blemish on the pink and white complexions of England’s high-born maidens. Anne was tanned by the winds of moor and sea, she had a superb majestic figure, and strode when she took her exercise in a thoroughly unladylike manner. She had not an attribute, not even an affectation, in common with the beauties of Bath House; and the reigning novelists of the day, Disraeli, Bulwer, Dickens, Lady Blessington, Mrs. Norton, would never have modelled a heroine of romance on her. There were plenty of fine women in England even then, but they were not in fashion, and when fate took them to court they soon learned to reduce their proportions, mince their gait, and bleach their complexions.

But Anne had not yet been to court and had arrived that day at Bath House. She drew down her heavy brows and looked as haughty as she felt shy and impatient, staring at the dark oblongs of open window, beyond which, effaced by the glare about her, was the warm perfumed tropic night. But in the early Victorian era it would not have been thought becoming for a girl to step out upon a terrace alone, nor, indeed, to leave the wing of her chaperon, save briefly for the dance. Anne did not dance, and had remained in the great saloon after dinner watching with deep interest, for a time, the groups of men and women in evening dress, playing whist or loo, the affected young ladies and their gallants, strolling in from the music room, to show themselves off in the long lane between the tables. But the sight, the most splendid she had ever seen, had palled, the glare of the innumerable candles, reflected in the mirrors, and even the crimson brocade of the walls, dazzled her eyes. She had her reasons, moreover, for wishing to be alone, a condition she had not realised since she had left England, now nearly a month since, and she fairly sprang to her feet as her aunt laid down her cards and signified that it was her pleasure to retire. Anne rearranged Mrs. Nunn’s lace shawl, which had fallen to her waist in the ardour of the game, gathered up her

fan, smelling-salts, and winnings, then, with a slight drop in her spirit, steeled herself to walk the great length of the saloon to the thrice blessed exit. Mrs. Nunn, who had been a beauty, and always a woman of fashion, sailed along like a light sloop on a mild afternoon, her curves of time and crinoline not unlike sails filled by a gentle breeze; affectedly unconscious but quite aware that many a card was laid down as she rustled by, and that all the winter world of Nevis already knew that the fashionable Mrs. Nunn, sister of one of the ladies of the bed-chamber, had arrived by the afternoon packet, and eagerly anticipated the intimate bits of court gossip with which she might condescend to regale them.

But Miss Percy knew naught of courts and little of drawing-rooms, and although pride held up her chin, and she tried to reflect that the moors had given her a finer, freer carriage than any of these languishing girls could boast, she followed her imposing chaperon with a furious beating of the heart; a condition which gave her, as the elegant Miss Bargarny remarked to the elegant Mr. Abergenny, the colour of a milkmaid. But although the blood of the girl bred in a remote corner of England was warm and rich in her veins, and her skin was tanned, it would take more than colour to coarsen her features, and perhaps it was the straight nose of the Percys' which enabled her to step calmly along in the wake of her aunt whilst wishing that she might fly through one of the windows. (A good nose is the backbone of moral fortitude.) Although there were arches leading into drawing-rooms, and morning-rooms, there was but one exit to the staircase, and in spite of the grandeur and the masses of palms and tropic flowers everywhere, the hotel had ceased to look like a fairy palace to the girl who had only paused long enough in her journey from her old manor to furnish her wardrobe in the darkest and dirtiest of winter cities. She had felt like the enchanted princess in the fairy tale for a few hours, but now she longed for nothing but her balcony up-stairs.

She had begun to wonder if she might beg her aunt to accelerate her lady-like gait, when, to her horror, Mrs. Nunn was signalled by an acquaintance, as yet unseen, and promptly sat down at her table; announcing that she tarried but a moment. There was no other vacant chair; all near by were occupied by dames as imposing as Mrs. Nunn or by elderly gentlemen who bent the more attentively over their cards. There was nothing for Anne to do but draw herself up to her full height, and look quite indifferent to being the only woman in the room to stand and invite the critical eye. In the early forties "young females" were expected to be retiring, modest, and although they were as often not, by the grace of that human nature which has changed little in its progress down the centuries, they

maintained a decent pretence. There were a number of belles in the room, with their attendant swains, and no doubt each thought herself a great beauty; but not one of them would have stood up alone in the central promenade of Bath House. Several of the men stared in disapproval; which emboldened their fair partners to make disparaging remarks, until it was observed that Lord Hunsdon, the greatest *parti* in the matrimonial market, had gone in search of a chair.

Anne longed to fold the arms she knew not what to do with, but apprehending open laughter, held them rigidly to her sides, shooting anxious glances at the opposite mirror. She encountered a battery of eyes. At the same time she heard a suppressed titter. It was only by an effort of will that she refrained from running out of the room, and she felt as if she had been dipped in the hot springs of Nevis. It was at this agonising moment that the amiable Lord Hunsdon presented the chair, with the murmured hope that he was not taking a liberty and that she recalled his having had the good fortune to be presented to her by his friend Mrs. Nunn earlier in the day. Anne, muttering her gratitude, accepted the chair without looking at him, although after he had retired her conscience smote her and she would have made an effort to be agreeable had he lingered. But immediately she caught the drift of a dialogue between two women at a neighbouring table, where the play had stopped, that had beaten faintly upon her ears before she sank out of sight; and in a moment she was conscious of nothing else.

“My son insists that it is my duty to help him, and I am inclined to agree with him,” a clear decided voice announced. “And after all he is a gentleman, to say nothing of the fact that time was when he had to hide himself from the importunities of Bath House. But since that unhappy affair—I fear our sex had much to answer for—but he has suffered enough——”

“No doubt!” broke in a caustic voice, “but that is hardly the point. He has taken to ways of relieving his sufferings which make him quite unfit for decent society ____”

“He can be reformed.”

“Fiddlesticks. No one ever reforms. He merely changes his vice. And *he*! Mr. Mortlake, who is fond of what he calls the picturesqueness of Charlestown by night, has seen him—well, it is enough that I should have heard. You have been too intimate with the little Queen lately. You never could stand it! Suffice it to say, that brandy, or rum, or whatever he takes by the barrel, makes a madman of

him.”

“I have heard these stories, but I also know that he only drinks by fits and starts ——”

“Worse and worse.”

“Well!” in tones of great decision, “since a woman, and a woman of our own class ruined him, Constance Mortlake, I believe it to be the duty of our sex and rank to redeem him. Do you,” with high and increasing impatience, “realise that the man is a genius, the poet of the age?”

“Haven’t I always doted on poetry since I was in love with Byron? But we can buy this young man’s poetry for a guinea a volume—ten guineas for special editions at Christmas. I hear that Lady Blessington paid him a hundred pounds for three pages in last year’s ‘Book of Beauty.’ I am glad he is in no danger of starving, and am quite willing to do my little share toward keeping him off the parish; but I prefer to enjoy his genius without being inflicted by the horrid tenement in which that genius has taken up its abode. Most undiscriminating faculty genius seems to be. Besides, I have no respect for a man who lets his life be ruined by a woman. Heavens, supposing we—we women——”

“You can’t have everything, and a man who can write like Byam Warner——”

“Don’t believe you ever read a line of him. What on earth has a leader of *ton* to do with poetry, unless, to be sure, to read up a bit before caging the lion for a dinner where everybody will bore the poor wretch to death by quoting his worst lines at him. As for Warner there is no question that he writes even better than before he went to the dogs, and that, to my mind, is proof that he holds his gifts in fief from the devil not from Almighty God——”

“Out upon you for a bigot. I should think you had lived in this world long enough——”

“Was there ever on this earth a more virtuous court than our young Queen’s, Maria Hunsdon?”

“It is too good to last. And it is not so long ago——”

“Let us be permitted to forget the court of that iniquitous man”—Anne could see a large-veined hand wave in the direction of a long portrait of George IV. —“since we are mercifully and at last permitted so to do. Besides,” changing the

subject hastily, “I believe in predestination. You forget that although married these thousand years to an Englishman I am a Scot by birth——”

But Anne heard no more, although her ears were thirsty. Mrs. Nunn brought her amiable nothings to a close, and a moment later they were ascending the great staircase, where the pretty little Queen and her stately husband smiled alike on the just and the unjust.

Mrs. Nunn entered Anne’s room before passing on to her own. As hostess to her young relative whose income would not have permitted her to visit this most fashionable of winter cities uninvited, it behooved her to see that the guest lacked no comfort. She was a selfish old woman, but she rarely forgot her manners.

“These coloured servants are so inefficient,” she remarked as she peered into the water jars and shook the mosquito netting. “This is my third visit here, so they are as disposed to respect my orders as their limited intelligence and careless habits will permit. I should always advise you to look in and under the bed—not for bad characters, but for caterpillars as long as your two hands, to say nothing of ants. There are no snakes on the island, but I believe land crabs have been seen on the stairs, and I am sure I never should recover if I got into bed with one. The maid will bring your coffee about six. I shall not appear till the half-after-nine breakfast.”

“Then you will not mind if I go out for a walk?”

“Dear me, no. This is not London. But of course you will not permit a gentleman to attend you.”

“As I do not know any——”

“But you will,” said Mrs. Nunn amiably. “You are handsome, my dear, if not quite *à la mode*. I am glad you must wear white in this climate. It becomes you far better than black. Good night.”

She was gone at last. Anne locked the door that she might know to the full the joy of being alone. She shook down her hair impatiently. In spite of her twenty-two years, she had worn it in pendant braids, save at the dinner hour, until her capture by Mrs. Nunn. It was rich, heavy, dark hair, bright with much gold, worn in a bunch of curls on either side of the face and coiled low on the neck. Anne made a little face at herself in the glass. She knew that she possessed a noble,

straight, full figure, but she saw no beauty in the sunburnt skin, the square jaw, the eyebrows as wide as her finger. Her mouth was also too large, her eyelashes too short. She had her ideals of beauty, and, having read many romances, they were the conventional ideals of the day. She smiled at her aunt's hint that she might find favour in the eyes of the beaux of Bath House. She knew nothing of the jargon of "the world," nothing of men. Nor did she desire knowledge of either. Even had her father shown any disposition to part with his only companion, she would have refused Mrs. Nunn's invitations to pass a season in London, for she lived an inner life which gave her an increasing distaste for realities. It was before the day when women, unimpelled by poverty or genius, flew to the ink-pot with their over-burdened imaginations. To write a book had never occurred to Anne, although she had led a lonely life in a forgotten corner of England where even her duties were few; the old servants knew their tasks before she was born, and her father preferred his pen and his laboratory to the society of his daughter. She must preside at his table, but between whiles she could spend her time on the sea or the moors, in the library or with her needlework—the era of governesses passing—as she listed.

And the wild North Sea, the moors and her books, above all, her dreams, had sufficed. Her vivid and intense imagination had translated her surroundings into the past, into far-off countries of which she knew as much as any traveller, oftener and still oftener to the tropics, to this very island of Nevis. Then, suddenly, her father had died, leaving her, until she reached the age of five-and-twenty, in the guardianship of his sister, Mrs. Nunn, who purposed making her favourite pilgrimage the following winter, insisted that Anne accompany her, and finally rented the manor over her head that she be forced to comply. The truth was she intended to marry the girl as soon as possible and had no mind that she should squander any more of her youth unseen by man. The shrewd old woman knew the value of that very ignorance of convention, that lack of feminine arts and wiles, so assiduously cultivated by young ladies in the matrimonial market, that suggestion of untrammelled nature, so humbly deprecated by Anne. Moreover, concluded Mrs. Nunn, ruffling herself, she was a Percy and could not but look well-bred, no matter how ill she managed her hoop or curled her hair.

But although Mrs. Nunn could appraise the market value of a comely exterior and the more primitive charms of nature, of Anne Percy she knew nothing. She had puzzled for a moment at the vehement refusal of the young recluse to visit the West Indies, and even more at her ill-suppressed exultation when she realised

that the migration was settled. But, she concluded, there was no accounting for the vagaries of the girl-brain, and dismissed the subject. Of the deep and passionate maturity of Anne Percy’s brain, of the reasons for the alternate terror and delight at the prospect of visiting Nevis, she had not a suspicion. If she had she would have hastened to leave her to the roar of the North Sea and the wild voices of the moor.

CHAPTER III

Anne, free of the tight gown in which she had encased her rebellious form for the benefit of the fine folk of Bath House, wrapped herself in a long black mantle, drew down the curving glass globes that protected the candles from draught and insects, and stepped out upon her balcony. She even closed the window behind her; and then at last she felt that she was indeed on Nevis—and alone. Before her rose the dark cone of the old volcano, its graceful sweep dim against the background of stars; and the white cloud that ever floated about its summit like the ghost of dead fires was crawling down the slopes to the little town at its base. From this small but teeming capital came fitful sounds of music and of less decorous revelry, and its lights seemed to flit through the groves of palm and cocoanut trees, gently moving in the night breeze.

Below the hotel, no man stirred. Anne stood with suspended breath and half closed eyes. At this end of the island it was as still as death and almost as dark. There was no moon, and the great crystal stars barely defined the mountain and the tall slender shafts and high verdure of the royal palm. Far away she saw a double row of lights on St. Kitts, the open windows doubtless of Government House in the capital, Basseterre, where a ball that had taken half the guests of Bath House was in progress.

In a few moments she became aware of other impressions besides the silence and the dark. The air was so warm, so caressing, so soft, that she swayed slightly as if to meet it. The deep delicious perfumes of tropical blooms, even of tree and shrub, would have been overpowering had it not been for the lightness of the air and the constant though gentle wind. Bred upon harsh salt winds, living a life of Spartan simplicity, where the sprigs of lavender in the linen closet wafted all she knew of scent to her eager nostrils, this first moment of tropical pleasure confused itself with the dreams of years, and she hardly dared open her eyes lest Nevis vanish and she find herself striding over the moor, her head down, her hands clutching her cape, while the North Sea thundered in her ears.

She lifted her head suddenly, straining her own throat. A bird poured forth a flood of melody that seemed to give voice to the perfumes and the rich beauty of the night, without troubling the silence. She had read of this “nightingale of a tropic noon” but had not imagined that a small brown bird, bred below the

equator, could rival in power and dulcet tones the great songster of the North. But it sang as if its throat had the compass of a Mario's, and in a moment another philomel pealed forth his desire, then another, and another, until the whole island seemed to swirl in a musical tide. Anne, with a sudden unconscious gesture, opened her arms and flung them out, as if to embrace and hold all the enchantment of a Southern night before it fled; and for the first time in her life she found that realities could give the spirit a deep intoxicating draught.

The nightingales trilled into silence. The last sweet note seemed to drift out over the water, and then Anne heard another sound, the deep low murmur of the Caribbean Sea. Her mind swung to Byam Warner, to the extraordinary poem which ten years ago had made his fame and interpreted this unceasing melancholy of the sea's chant into a dirge over the buried continent and its fate. With the passionate energy of youthful genius abandoning itself to the ecstasies of imagination, he had sung the lament of Atlantis, compelled the blue sepulchre to recede, and led a prosaic but dazzled world through cities of such beauty and splendour, such pleasant gardens and opulent wilds as the rest of Earth had never dreamed of. He peopled it still with an arrogant and wanton race, masters of the lore and the arts that had gone with them, awaiting the great day when the enchantment should lift and the most princely continent Earth has borne should rise once more to the surface of the sea, lifting these jewelled islands, her mountain peaks, high among the clouds.

It had been Byam Warner's first epic poem, and although he had won the critical public with his songs of the Caribbean Sea and of Nevis, the island of his birth, it was this remarkable achievement, white-hot from first to last with poetic fire, replete with fascinating pictures and living tragedy, that gave him as wide a popularity as any novelist of the day. He had visited London immediately after, and, in spite of some good folk who thought his poem shockingly immoral, was the lion of the season, and a favourite at court. But he had soon wearied of London, and although he had returned several times with increasing fame, he had always left as abruptly, declaring that he could write nowhere above the equator; and, notwithstanding revels where he shone far more brilliantly than when in society, where indeed he was shy and silent, that he cared for nothing else.

Little gossip had come to Warkworth Manor but Anne had read "The Blue Sepulchre" when she was seventeen, and after that her allowance went for his books. When a new volume appeared it was an event in her life comparable only to marriage or birth in the lives of other women. She abandoned her soul to this

young magician of Nevis; her imagination, almost as powerful as his own, gave her his living presence more bountifully than had the real man, cursed with mortal disenchantments, companioned her. So strong was her power of realisation that there were hours when she believed that her thoughts girdled the globe and drew his own into her mental heaven. In more practical hours, when tramping the moor, or sailing her boat, she dismissed this hope of intelligent response, inferring, somewhat grimly, that the young, handsome, and popular poet had excited ardour in many a female breast besides her own. Nevertheless, she permitted herself to return again and again to the belief that he loved her and dreamed of her; and certainly one of his most poignant sonnets had been addressed to the unknown mate whom he had sought in vain.

Nor had he married. She had heard and read references to his increasing dissipation, caused by an unhappy love affair, but his work, instead of degenerating with his morals, showed increasing power and beauty. The fire burned at times with so intense a radiance that it would seem to have consumed his early voluptuousness while decimating neither his human nor his spiritual passion. Each new volume sold many editions. The critics declared that his lyrics were the finest of his generation, and vowed the time could not be far off when he would unite the imaginative energy of his first long poems with the nightingale quality of his later, and produce one of the greatest poetical dramas in the language. But the man had been cast into outer darkness. Society had dropped him, and the young Queen would not permit his name to be mentioned in her presence. That gentle spirit, the Countess of Blessington, indifferent to the world that shut its door in her own face, alone received him in what was still the most brilliant *salon* in England. But even Anne knew that during a recent visit to London, when a few faithful and distinguished men, including Count d’Orsay, Disraeli, Barry Cornwall, Monckton Milnes, and Crabb Robinson, had given him a banquet at the Travellers’ Club, he had become so disgracefully drunk that when he left England two days later, announcing his intention never to return, not one of those long suffering gentlemen had appeared at the dock to bid him farewell.

But Anne heard few of these horrid stories in detail, and her imagination made no effort to supply the lack. Her attitude was curiously indifferent. She had never seen his picture. He dwelt with her in the realm of fancy, a creation of her own; and in spite of the teeming incidents of that mental life, her common sense had assured her long since that they would never meet, that with the real Byam Warner she had naught to do. Her father had been forty-five when he was taken

off by a mis-made gas in his laboratory; she had expected to be still his silent companion when herself was long past that age—an age for caps and knitting needles, and memories laid away in jars of old rose leaves.

It is possible that had Mrs. Nunn not succeeded in letting Warkworth Manor she would never have uprooted her niece, who, face to face with the prospect of Nevis, realised that she wished for nothing so little as to meet Byam Warner, realised that the end of dreams would be the finish of the best in life. But circumstances were too strong for Anne, and she found herself in London fitting on excessively smart and uncomfortable gowns, submitting to have her side locks cut short and curled according to the latest mode, and even to wear a fillet, which scraped her hitherto untrammelled brow.

She had little time to think about Byam Warner, but when the memory of him shortened her breath she hastily assured herself that she was unlikely to meet an outcast even on an island, that she should not know him if she did, and that Bath House, whose doors were closed upon him, was a world in itself. And she should see Nevis, which had been as much her home as Warkworth Manor, see those other glowing bits of a vanished paradise. There are certain people born for the tropics, even though bred within the empire of the midnight sun, even when accident has given their imagination no such impulse as Anne Percy's had received from the works of Byam Warner. Mind and body respond the moment they enter that mysterious belt which divides the moderate zones, upon whose threshold the spirit of worldliness sinks inert, and within whose charmed circle the principle of life is king. Those of the North with the call of the tropics in their blood have never a moment of strangeness; they are content, at home.

The pauses at the still more southern islands on the way up from Barbadoes had been brief, but Anne had had glimpses of great fields of cane, set with the stately homes of planters, the grace of palm-fringed shores and silver sands; the awful majesty of volcanic islands, torn and racked by earthquake, eaten by fire, sometimes rising so abruptly from the sea as to imply a second half split to its base and hurled to the depths. But although there had been much to delight and awe, the wine in her cup had not risen to the brim until she came in sight of Nevis, whose perfection of form and colour, added to the interest her gifted and unhappy son had inspired, made her seem to eager romantic eyes the incarnation of all the loveliness of all the tropics. To-night Anne could forget even Byam Warner, who indeed had never seemed so far away, and she only went within when the cloud rolled down Nevis and enveloped her, as if in rebuke of those that would gaze upon her beauty too long.

CHAPTER IV

Anne started from the sound unhaunted sleep of youth conscious that some one had entered her room and stood by her bed. It proved to be a grinning barefoot coloured maid with coffee, rolls, and a plate of luscious fruit. Anne's untuned ear could make little of the girl's voluble replies to her questions, for the West Indian negroes used one gender only, and made a limited vocabulary cover all demands. But she gathered that it was about half-past-five o'clock, and that the loud bell ringing in the distance informed the world of Nevis that it was market day in Charlestown.

She had been shown the baths the day before and ran down-stairs to the great stone tanks, enjoyed her swim in the sea water quite alone, and returned to her room happy and normal, not a dream lingering in her brain. As she dressed herself she longed for one of those old frocks in which she had taken comfort at Warkworth, but even had not all her ancient wardrobe been diplomatically presented by Mrs. Nunn to the servants of their London lodging, she knew that it was due to her aunt that she present herself at breakfast attired as a young lady of the first fashion. She therefore accommodated herself to a white Indian muslin ruffled to the waist and sweeping the ground all round. The bodice was long and tight, exposing the neck, which Anne covered with a white silk scarf. She put on her second best bonnet, trimmed with lilac flowers instead of feathers, the scoop filled with blonde and mull, and tied under the chin with lilac ribbons. Her waist, encircled by a lilac sash of soft India silk looked no more than eighteen inches round, and she surveyed herself with some complacency, feeling even reconciled to the curls, as they modified the severity of her brow and profile, bringing both into closer harmony with her full mouth and throat.

"But what's the use?" she thought, with a whimsical sigh. "I mean never to marry, so men cannot interest me, and it would be the very irony of fate to make a favourable impression on a poet we wot of. So, it all comes to this: I look my best to gratify the vanity of my aunt. Well, let it pass."

She drew on her gloves and ran down-stairs, meeting no one. As she left the hotel and stood for a few moments on the upper terrace she forgot the discomforts of fashion. The packet had arrived late in the afternoon, there had been too much bustle to admit of observing the island in detail, even had the

hour been favourable, but this morning it burst upon her in all its beauty.

The mountain, bordered with a strip of silver sands and trimmed with lofty palms, rose in melting curves to the height of three thousand feet and more, and although the most majestic of the Caribbees, there was nothing on any part of it to inspire either terror or misgiving. The exceeding grace of the long sweeping curves was enhanced by silvery groves of lime trees and fields of yellow cane. Green as spring earlier in the winter, at this season of harvest Nevis looked like a gold mine turned wrong side out. The “Great Houses,” set in groves of palm and cocoanut, and approached by avenues of tropical trees mixed with red and white cedars, the spires of churches rising from romantic nooks, their heavy tombs lost in a tangle of low feathery palms, gave the human note without which the most resplendent verdure must pall in time; and yet seemed indestructibly a part of that jewelled scene. High above, where cultivation ceased, a deep collar of evergreen trees encircled the cone, its harsh stiff outlines in no wise softened by the white cloud hovering above the summit. Charlestown spread along the shore of a curving bay, its many fine buildings and infinite number of huckster shops, its stately houses and negro village alike shaded by immense banana trees, the loftier cocoanut, and every variety of palm.

Anne, as she gazed, concluded that if choice were demanded, it must be given to the royal palm and the cane fields. The former rose, a splendid silvery shaft, to a great height, where it spread out into a mass of long green blades shining like metal in the sun. But the cane fields! They glittered a solid mass of gold on all visible curves of the mountain. When the dazzled eye, grown accustomed to the sight which no cloud in the deep blue tempered, separated it into parts, it was but to admire the more. The cane, nearly eight feet in height, waxed from gold to copper, where the long blade-like leaves rose waving from the stalk. From the centre of the tip shot out a silver wand supporting a plume of white feathers, shading into lilac. The whole island, rising abruptly out of the rich blue waters of the sea, looked like a colossal jewel that might once have graced the diadem of the buried continent.

The idea pleased Anne Percy at all events, and she lingered a few moments half dazed by the beauty about her and wholly happy. And on the terraces and in the gardens were the flowers and shrubs of the tropics, whose perfumes were as sweet as their colours were unsurpassed; the flaming hydrangea, the rose-shaped Arabian jasmine, the pink pluminia, the bright yellow acacia, the scarlet trumpet flower, the purple and white convolvulus, the silvery white blossoms of the lime tree, framed with dark green leaves.

Anne shook herself out of her dream, descended the terraces, and walked down a narrow avenue of royal palms to the town. She could hear the “Oyez! Oyez!” of the criers announcing the wares brought in from the country, and, eager for the new picture, walked as rapidly as her fine frock would permit. She was obliged to hold up her long and voluminous skirts, and her sleeves were so tight that the effort cramped her arms. To stride after her usual fashion was impossible, and she ambled along anathematising fashion and resolved to buy some cotton in the town and privately make several short skirts in which she could enjoy the less frequented parts of Nevis while her aunt slept. Without realising it, for nothing in her monotonous life had touched her latent characteristics, she was essentially a creature of action. Even her day-dreams had been energetic, and if they had filled her life it was because they had the field to themselves. In earlier centuries she would have defended one of the castles of her ancestors with as much efficiency and spirit as any man among them, and had she been born thirty years later she would certainly have entered one of the careers open to women, and filled her life with active accomplishment. But she knew little of female careers, save, to be sure, of those dedicated to fashion, which did not interest her; and less of self-analysis. But she felt and lived in the present moment intensely. For twenty-two years she had dwelt in the damp and windy North, and now the dream of those years was fulfilled and she was amidst the warmth and glow of the tropics. It was the greatest happiness that life had offered her and she abandoned herself to it headlong.

As she entered the capital she suddenly became aware that she was holding her skirts high over her hoop in a most unladylike manner. She blushed, shook them down, and assumed a carriage and gait which would have been approved by even the fastidious Mrs. Nunn. But she was no less interested in the animated scene about her. The long street winding from the Court House to the churchyard on the farther edge of the town was a mass of moving colour and a babel of sound. The women, ranging from ebony through all the various shades of copper and olive to that repulsive white where the dark blood seems to flow just beneath the skin, and bedecked in all the violence of blues and greens, reds and yellows, some in country costume, their heads covered with kerchiefs, others in a travesty on the prevailing fashion, stood in their shops or behind the long double row of temporary stalls, vociferating at the passers by as they called attention to fowl, meats, hot soup, fruit, vegetables, wild birds, fish, cigars, sugar cakes, castor oil, cloth, handkerchiefs, and wood. Many of the early buyers were negroes of the better class, others servants of the white planters and of Bath House, come early to secure the best bargains. Anne was solicited incessantly, even her skirts being

pulled, for since emancipation, four years before, the negro had lost his awe of a white skin. It was some time before she could separate the gibberish into words, but finally she made out: “Bargain! Bargain! Here’s yo’ fine cowfee! Here’s yo’ pickled peppers! Come see! Come see! Only come see! Make you buy. Want any jelly cocoanut? Any yams? Nice grenadilla. Make yo’ mouth water. Lady! Lady! Buy here! Very cheap! Very nice! Real!”

Anne paused before a stall spread with cotton cloth and bought enough for several skirts, the result of her complaisance being a siege of itinerant vendors that nearly deafened her. The big women were literally covered with their young (“pic’nees”), who clung to their skirts, waist, hips, bosoms; and these mites, with the parrot proclivities of their years and race added their shrill: “By’m, lady, by’m!”

The proprietor of the cloth volubly promised to deliver the purchase at Bath House and Anne fled down the street until she was stopped by a drove of sheep whose owner was crying: “Oyez! Oyez! Come to the shambles of Mr. Columbus Brown. Nice fat lambs and big fat sheep. Very cheap! Very cheap!”

Anne retreated into a shop of some depth to avoid the dust. When the drove had passed she was rescued by Lord Hunsdon, who lifted his broad panama without smiling. He was a very serious looking young man, with round staring anxious blue eyes under pent white brows, an ascetic mouth and a benevolent dome. He was immaculate in white linen, and less pinched about the waist than his fashionable contemporaries.

“I believe it is not considered quite *de rigueur* for young ladies and young gentlemen to walk unchaperoned,” he said diffidently; “but in the circumstances I think I may come to your relief and escort you back to the hotel.”

“Not yet, please,” Anne emerged and walked rapidly toward the edge of the town. “I cannot go back and sit in the hotel till half past nine. I am accustomed to a long walk before breakfast.”

“But Mrs. Nunn——”

“She must get used to my tramps. I should fall ill if I gave them up. Indeed, she is sadly aware that I am no fine lady, and no doubt will shortly give *me* up. But if you are afraid of her, pray go back. I recall, she said I was not to be escorted——”

“If you are determined to go on I shall accompany you, particularly as I wish to talk to you on a subject of great importance. Have I your permission?”

Quite lacking in vanity or worldliness, it was impossible that he should be unaware of his importance as a young, wealthy, and unmarried peer, and he shrewdly suspected that Mrs. Nunn would make an exception in his favour on market day in Charlestown.

Anne, wondering what he could have to say to her, led the way past the church to the open road that encircled the island. Then she moderated her pace and looked up at him from the deeps of her bonnet. Her gaze was cooler and more impersonal than he was wont to encounter, but it crossed his burdened mind that a blooming face even if unfashionably sunburnt, and a supple vigorous body were somewhat attractive after a surfeit of dolls with their languid fine-lady airs and affectation of physical delicacy; which he, being no fool, suspected of covering fine appetites and stubborn selfishness. But while he was young enough to admire the fresh beauty of his companion, it was the strength and decision, the subtle suggestion of high-mindedness, in this young lady’s aspect, which had led him to a resolution that he now proceeded to arrange in words as politic as might be.

“It may seem presumptuous to speak after so short an acquaintance——”

“Not after your rescue last night. I had like to have died of embarrassment. I am not accustomed to have half a room gazing at me.”

“You will,” he said gallantly. “But it is kind of you to make it easier. This is it. I have been—am—very unhappy about a friend of mine here. Of course you know the work of one, who, many believe, is our greatest poet—Byam Warner?”

Anne drew her breath in and her eyelashes together. “I have read his poems,” she said shortly.

“I see! Like many others you cannot dissociate the genius from the man. Because a fatal weakness——”

“What have I said, pray, that you should jump to such a conclusion?” She had recovered her breath but not her poise. “No one could admire him more than I. About his private life I know little and care less. He lives on this island, does he not?”

“We shall pass his house presently, but God knows if he is in it.”

“He is a West Indian, is he not?”

“A scion of two of its foremost families, whose distinction by no means began with their emigration to the Antilles. One of his ancestors, Sir Thomas Warner, colonised most of these islands for the crown—in the seventeenth century. A descendant living on Trinidad, has in his possession the ring which Queen Elizabeth gave to Essex—you recall my friend’s poem and the magnificent invective put into the frantic Queen’s mouth at the bedside of Lady Nottingham? The ring was presented to Sir Thomas by Charles I., on the eve of his first expedition to these islands. The Byams are almost equally notable, descended as they are from the father of Anne Boleyn, Earl of Wiltshire and Ormond.” The spirit of British democracy still slept in the womb of the century, with board schools, the telegraph, and the penny press, and the aristocrat frankly admitted his pride of birth and demanded a corresponding distinction in his friends. “I hope I have not bored you,” continued the young nobleman anxiously; “But I have given you some idea of Warner’s pedigree that you may see for yourself that the theory of generations of gentle blood and breeding, combined with exceptional advantages, sometimes culminating in genius, finds its illustration in him. Also, alas! that such men are too often the prey of a highly wrought nervous system that coarser natures and duller brains are spared. When he was younger—I knew him at Cambridge—nor, indeed a few years since, he had not drained that system; his youthful vigour immediately rushing in to resupply exhausted conduits. But even earlier he was always disposed to drink more than was good for him, and when a wretched woman made ducks and drakes of his life some four or five years since, he became—well—I shall not go into details. This is his house. It has quite a history. Alexander Hamilton, an American statesman, was born in it. Have you ever heard of him?”

“No—yes, of course I have read Warner’s beautiful poem to his mother—and—I recall now—when one of the Hamiltons of Cambuskeith, a relative of my mother, visited us some years ago, he talked of this Alexander Hamilton, a cousin of his father, who had distinguished himself in the United States of America.”

Hunsdon nodded. “Great pity he did not carry his talents to England where they belonged. But this is the house where his parents lived when he was born. It used to be surrounded by a high wall, but I believe an earthquake flung that down before my friend’s father bought the place. Warner was also born here.”

The old house, a fine piece of masonry, was built about three sides of a court, in

the centre of which was an immense banana tree whose lower branches, as close as a thatched roof, curved but a few feet above the ground. The front wall contained a wide gateway, which was flanked by two royal palms quite a hundred feet in height. The large unkempt garden at the side looked like a jungle in the hills, but was rich in colour and perfume. The gates were open and they could see the slatternly negro servants moving languidly about the rooms on the ground floor, while two slept under the banana tree. A gallery traversed the second story, its pillars covered with dusty vines. All of the rooms of this story evidently opened upon the gallery, but every door was closed. The general air of neglect and decay was more pathetic to Anne, accustomed to exemplary housekeeping, than anything she had yet heard of the poet. He was uncomfortable and ill-cared for, no doubt of that. The humming-birds were darting about like living bits of enamel set with jewels. The stately palms glittered like burnished metal. Before the house, on the deep blue waters of the bay, was a flotilla of white-sailed fishing-boats, and opposite was the green and gold mass of St. Kitts, an isolated mountain chain rising as mysteriously from the deep as the solitary cone of Nevis. She could conceive of no more inspiring spot for a poet, but she sighed again as she thought of the slatterns that miscared for him.

Lord Hunsdon echoed her sigh as they walked on. “Even here he disappears for days at a time,” he resumed. “Of course he does not drink steadily. No man could do that in the tropics and live. But spirits make a madman of him, and even when sober he now shuns the vicinity of respectable people, knowing that they regard him as a pariah. Of course his associates—well, I cannot go into particulars. For a time I did not believe these stories, for each year brought a volume from his pen, which showed a steady increase of power, and a divine sense of beauty. Besides I have been much absorbed these last few years. There seemed no loosening the hold of the Whigs upon the destinies of England and it was every patriot’s duty to work with all his strength. You followed, of course, the tremendous battle that ended in last year’s victory. I was almost worn out with the struggle, and when I found that these stories about Warner were persistent I came out to investigate for myself. Alas! I had not heard the half. I spent three months with him in that house. I used every argument, every more subtle method I could command, to bring him to see the folly and the wickedness of his course. I might as well have addressed the hurricane. He did not even hate life. He was merely sick of it. He was happy only when at work upon a new poem—intoxicated, of course. When it was over he went upon a horrible bout and then sank into an apathy from which no art of mine could

rouse him; although I am bound to add, in justice to one of the gentlest and most courteous souls I have ever known, his civility as a host never deserted him. I was, alas! obliged to return to England with nothing accomplished, but I have come this year with quite another plan. Will you listen to it, Miss Percy?"

"I am vastly interested." But she had little hope, and could well conceive that three months of this good young man might have confirmed the poet in his desire for oblivion.

"I persuaded my mother to come with me, although without avowing my object. I merely expatiated upon the beauty and salubrity of Nevis, and the elegant comforts of Bath House. Women often demand much subtlety in the handling. We arrived by the packet that preceded yours—two weeks ago, but I only yesterday broached my plan to her; she stood the trip so ill, and then seemed to find so much delight in long gossips with her old friends—a luxury denied her at home, where politics and society absorb her. But yesterday I had a talk with her, and this is my plan—that she should persuade herself and a number of the other ladies that it is their duty to restore to Warner his lost self-respect. For that I believe to be the root of the trouble, not any real inclination to dissipation and low society. This restoration can be accomplished only by making him believe that people of the highest respectability and fashion desire, nay demand, his company. As my mother knew him well in England it will be quite natural she should write him a note asking him to take a dish of tea with her and complimenting his latest volume—I brought it with me. If he hesitates, as he well may do, she can call upon him with me, and, while ignoring the cause, vow he has been a recluse long enough, and that the ladies of Bath House are determined to have much of him. Such a course must succeed, for, naturally the most refined of men, he must long bitterly, when himself, for the society of his own kind. Then, when the ice is broken, we will ask others to meet him——"

"And has your mother consented?"

"Practically. I have no doubt that she will. She is a woman who needs a cause for her energies, and she never had a better one, not even the restoration of the Tories and Sir Robert."

"And you wish me to meet him?"

"Particularly, dear Miss Percy. I feel sure he would not care for any of these other young ladies. I happen to know what he thinks of young ladies. But you—you are so different! I do not wish to be a flatterer, like so many of my shallow

kind, but I am sure that he would appreciate the privilege of knowing you, would feel at his ease with you. But of course it all depends upon Mrs. Nunn. She may disapprove of your meeting one with so bad a name."

"Oh, she will follow Lady Hunsdon's cue, I fancy," said Anne, repressing a smile. "They all do, do they not, even here? I hope the poet does not wear Hyperion locks and a velvet smoking jacket."

"He used to wear his hair, and dress, like any ordinary gentleman. But when I was here last year his wardrobe was in a shocking condition." The immaculate Englishman sighed deeply. "He is totally demoralised. Fortunately we are about the same figure. If all his clothes are gone to seed I can supply him till he can get a box out from England. For the matter of that there is a tailor here who makes admirable linen suits, and evening clothes not badly——"

"Is he very fascinating?" asked Anne ingenuously. She had long since recovered her poise. "My aunt has set her mind upon a high and mighty marriage for me, and might apprehend——"

"Fascinating! Apprehend! Great heavens! He was handsome once, a *beau garçon*,—no doubt fascinating enough. But now! He is a ruin. No woman would look at him save in pity. But you must not think of that. It is his soul I would save—that I would have you help me to save"—with a glance into the glowing eyes which he thought remarkably like the blue of the Caribbean sea, and eloquent of fearless youth. "His soul, Miss Percy. I cannot, will not, let that perish for want of enterprise."

"Nor his fountain of song dry up," replied Anne, whose practical side was uppermost. "He should write, and better and better for twenty years to come."

"I should not care if he never wrote another line. I see a friend with the most beautiful nature I have ever known—he has the essence of the old saints and martyrs in him—going to ruin, wrecking all hopes of happiness, mortal and immortal. I must save him! I must save him!"

Anne glanced at the flushed face of her companion. His expression was almost fanatical, but as he turned suddenly and she met the intense little blue eyes, something flashed in them in no wise resembling fanaticism. She stiffened and replied coldly:

"You can count on me, of course. How could I refuse? But I have sensations that

assure me it is close upon the breakfast hour. Shall we return?”

CHAPTER V

After breakfast, Mrs. Nunn, pretending to saunter through the saloon and morning rooms with Anne, introduced her naturally to a number of young people, and finally left her with a group, returning to the more congenial society of Lady Hunsdon and Lady Constance Mortlake.

Anne, although shy and nervous, listened with much interest to the conversation of these young ladies so near her own age, while taking little part in it. The long windows opened upon an orchard of cocoanuts and bananas, grenadillas and shaddocks, oranges and pineapples, but in spite of the cool refreshing air, many of the girls were frankly lounging, as became the tropics, others were turning the leaves of the *Journal des Modes*, dabbling in water colours, pensively frowning at an embroidery frame. Of the three young men present one was absorbed in the *Racing Calendar*, another was making himself generally agreeable, offering to read aloud or hold wool, and a third was flirting in a corner with the sparkling Miss Bargarny.

All acknowledged Mrs. Nunn's introductions with much propriety and little cordiality, for Anne was far too alert and robust, and uncompromising of eye, to suit their modish taste. Nevertheless they asked her politely what she thought of Nevis, and seemed satisfied with her purposely conventional replies. Then the conversation drifted naturally to the light and dainty accomplishments for which all save herself professed a fondness; from thence to literature, where much languid admiration was expressed of Disraeli's "Venetia," a "performance of real elegance," and the latest achievement of the exciting Mr. G. P. R. James. Dickens wrote about people one really never had heard of, but Bulwer, of course, was one of themselves and the equal of Scott. In poetry the palm was tossed between Mrs. Hemans and L. E. L. on the one hand and that delightful impossible American, Mr. Willis, and Barry Cornwall on the other. Young Tennyson received a few words of praise. When the talk naturally swung to Byam Warner Anne eagerly attended. Had he made a deep personal impression upon any of these essentially feminine hearts? But the criticism of his poems was as languid, affected, and undiscriminating as that of other work they had pretended to discuss. They admired him, oh vastly! He was amazing, a genius of the first water, the legitimate successor of Byron and Shelley, to say nothing of Keats; he might easily surpass them all in a few years. In short they rehearsed all

the stock phrases which the critics had set in motion years ago and which had been drifting about ever since for the use of those unequal to the exertion of making their own opinions, or afraid of not thinking with the elect. Had Warner been falsely appraised by the higher powers their phrases would have been nourished as faithfully; and Anne, with a movement of irrepressible impatience, rose, murmured an excuse, and joined her aunt.

Lady Hunsdon was a short, thin, trimly made woman, with small, hard, aquiline features, piercing eyes, and a mien of so much graciousness that had she been a shade less well-bred she would have been patronising. She looked younger than her years in spite of her little cap and the sedateness of attire then common to women past their youth. Lady Constance Mortlake had the high bust and stomach of advanced years; her flabby cheeks were streaked with good living. Her expression was shrewd and humorous, however, and her eyes were kinder than her tongue. Mrs. Nunn rose with vast ceremony and presented her niece to these two august dames, and as Anne courtesied, Lady Hunsdon said, smiling, but with a penetrating glance at the newcomer:

“My son tells me that he has acquainted you with our little plan to reform the poet——”

“Our?” interrupted Lady Constance. “None of mine. I sit and look on—as at any other doubtful experiment. I have no faith in the powers of a parcel of old women to rival the seductions of brandy and Canary, Madeira and rum.”

“Parcel of old women! I shall ask the prettiest of the girls to hear him read his poems in my sitting-room.”

“Even if their mammas dare not refuse you, I doubt if the girls brave the wrath of their gallants, who would never countenance their meeting such a reprobate as Byam Warner——”

“You forget the despotism of curiosity.”

“Well, they might gratify that by meeting him once, but they will sound the beaux first. What do you suppose they come here for? Much they care for the beauty of the tropics and sulphur baths. The tropics are wondrous fine for making idle young gentlemen come to the point, and there isn’t a girl in Bath House who isn’t on the catch. Those that have fortunes want more, and most of them have too many brothers to think of marrying for love. Their genius for matrimony has made half the fame of Nevis, for they make Bath House so

agreeable a place to run to from the fogs of London that more eligibles flock here every year. There isn't a disinterested girl in Bath House unless it be Mary Denbigh, who has two thousand a year, has been disappointed in love, and is twenty-nine and six months." She turned sharply to Anne, and demanded:

"Have you come here after a husband?"

"If you will ask my aunt I fancy she will reply in the affirmative," said Anne, mischievously.

Mrs. Nunn coloured, and the others looked somewhat taken aback.

"That was not a very lady-like speech," said Mrs. Nunn severely. "Moreover," with great dignity, "I have found your society so agreeable, my dear, that I hope to enjoy it for several years to come."

Anne, quick in response, felt repentant and touched, but Lady Constance remarked drily:

"Prepare yourself for the worst, my dear Emily. I'll wager you this purse I'm netting that Miss Percy will have the first proposal of the season. She may differ from the prevailing mode in young ladies, but she was fashioned to be the mother of fine healthy children; and young men, who are human and normal *au fond*, whatever their ridiculous affectations, will not be long in responding, whether they know what is the matter with them or not."

Anne blushed at this plain speaking, and Mrs. Nunn bridled. "I wish you would remember that young girls——"

"You told me yourself that she was two-and-twenty. She ought to have three babies by this time. It is a shocking age for an unmarried female. You have not made up your mind to be an old maid, I suppose?" she queried, pushing up her spectacles and dropping her netting. "If so, I'll turn matchmaker myself. I should succeed far better than Emily Nunn, for I have married off five nieces of my own. Now don't say that you have. You look as if it were on the tip of your tongue. All girls say it when there is no man in sight. I shall hate you if you are not as little commonplace as you look."

Anne shrugged her shoulders and said nothing, while Lady Hunsdon remarked with her peremptory smile (this was one of a well known set): "We have wandered far from the subject of Mr. Warner. Not so far either, for my son tells me, Miss Percy, that you have kindly consented to meet him—to help us, in fact.

I hope you have no objections to bring forward, Emily. I am very much set upon this matter of reclaiming the poet. And as I can see that Miss Percy has independence of character, and as I feel sure that she has not come to Nevis on the catch, she can be of the greatest possible assistance to me. What Constance says of the other young ladies is only too true. They will pretend to comply, but gracefully evade any responsibility. I can count upon none of them except Mary Denbigh, and she is rather *passée*, poor thing."

"*Passée?*" cried Lady Constance. "At thirty? What do you expect? She looks like an elegiac figure weeping on a tombstone. I can't stand the sight of her. And it's all kept up to make herself interesting. Edwin Hay has been dead eleven years——"

"Never mind poor Mary. We all know she is your pet abomination——"

"She gives me a cramp in my spleen."

"Well, to return to Mr. Warner. Will you all meet him when I ask him to my sitting-room up-stairs? Will you spread the news of his coming among the other guests? Hint that he has reformed? Excite in them a desire to meet the great man?"

She did not speak in a tone of appeal, and there was a mounting fire in her eye.

Lady Constance shrugged her shoulders. "You mean that you will cut us if we don't. I never quarrel in the tropics. Besides, I have buried too many of my old friends! I don't approve, but I shall be interested, and my morals are as pure and solid as my new teeth. If you can marry him to Mary Denbigh and leave her on the island——"

"And you, Emily?"

None had had more experience in yielding gracefully to social tyrants than Mrs. Nunn. She thought Maria Hunsdon mad to take up with a drunken poet, and could only be thankful that her charge was a sensible, commonplace girl with no romantic notions in her head. "I never think in the tropics, my dear Maria, and now that you are here to think for me, and provide a little variety, so much the better. What is your programme?"

"To ask him first for tea in my sitting-room, then for dinner; then to organise picnics, and take him with us on excursions. I shall frequently pick him up when I drive—in short before a fortnight has passed he will be a respectable member

of society, and accepted as a matter of course."

"And what if he gets drunk?"

"That is what I purpose he shall not do. As soon as I know him well enough I shall talk to him like a mother."

"Better let Miss Percy talk to him like a sister. Well, regulate the universe to suit yourself. I hope you will not forget to order Nevis to have no earthquakes this winter, particularly while we are cooking our gouty old limbs in the hot springs. By the way, whom have you decreed James shall marry?"

"I should not think of interfering in such a matter." Lady Hunsdon spoke with her usual bland emphasis, but darted a keen glance at Anne. It was not disapproving, for Miss Percy's descent was long, she liked the splendid vitality of the girl, and Hunsdon had riches of his own. But, far cleverer than Mrs. Nunn, she suspected depths which might have little in common with her son, and a will which might make a mother-in-law hate her. Lady Hunsdon loved peace, and wondered that anyone should question her rigid rules for enforcing it. But of Anne as a valuable coadjutor in the present instance there could be no doubt, and, to do her justice, she anticipated no danger in the meeting of a fine girl, full of eager interest in life, and the demoralised being her son so pathetically described. She was quite sincere in her desire to lift the gifted young man from his moral quagmire, but this new opportunity to exercise her power, almost moribund since her party was no longer in Opposition, was a stronger motive still.

When Anne was alone in her room she sat down and stared through the half-closed jalousies until the luncheon bell rang at two o'clock, forgetting to change her frock. But she could make little of the ferment in her mind, except that her mental companion, that arbitrary creation she had called Byam Warner, was gone forever. Even did she return to her northern home and dwell alone, his image would never return. She could not even now recall the lineaments of that immortal lover. The life of the imagination was past. Realities multiplied; no doubt she was converging swiftly upon one so hideous as to make her wish she had never been born. Any day she might be formally introduced over a dish of tea to a degraded, broken creature whom all the world despised as a man, and who she would be forced to remind herself was the author of the poems of Byam Warner. Byron, at least, had never been a common drunkard. Picturesque in even his dissipations, he had been a superb romantic figure to the last. But this man!

She could hear the struggle and rattle of romance as it died within her. Oh, that she had never seen Nevis, that her father had lived, that she could have gone on ——! Then a peremptory thought asserted itself. The time was come for her to live. To dream for twenty-two years was enough. She must take up her part in life, grasp its realities, help others if she could. She could not love this poor outcast, but were she offered a share in his redemption she should embrace the circumstance as a sacred duty.

In time, perhaps, she might even marry. That dreadful old woman was right, no doubt, it was her manifest destiny. Certainly she should like to have children and a fine establishment of her own. Lord Hunsdon was unacceptable, but doubtless a prepossessing suitor would arrive before long, and when he did she would marry him gladly and live rationally and dream no more. And when she reached this decision she wept, and could not go down to luncheon; but she did not retire from the mental step she had taken.

CHAPTER VI

Her mind had time to recover its balance.

It was a fortnight and more before she met Byam Warner. Lady Hunsdon, to her secret wrath and amazement, met defeat with the poet himself. He replied politely to her ladyship's flattering notes, but only to remind her that he was very busy, that he had been a recluse for some years, that he was too much out of health to be fit for the society of ladies. The estimable Hunsdon, after one fruitless interview, invariably found the poet from home when he called. "The massa" was up in the hills. He was on St. Kitts. He was visiting relatives on Antigua. Had he been in London he could not more successfully have protected himself. Lord Hunsdon was a man of stubborn purpose, but he could not search the closed rooms along the gallery.

But the poet's indifference to social patronage at least accomplished one of the objects upon which Lady Hunsdon had set her heart. The guests of Bath House, vaguely curious, or properly scandalised, at the first, soon became quite feverish to meet the distinguished friend of Lord Hunsdon. So rapidly does a fashion, a fad, leap from bulb to blossom in idle minds, that before a fortnight was out even the young men were anxious to extend the hand of good fellowship, while as for the young ladies, they dreamed of placing his reformation to their own private account, learned his less subtle poems by heart, and began to write him anonymous notes.

Meanwhile, Anne, hoping that his purpose would prove of a consistency with his habits, and determined to dismiss him from her thoughts, found sufficient pleasure and distraction in her daily life. She made her short skirts—several hemmed strips gathered into a belt!—and walked about the island in the early morning. The negroes singing in the golden cane fields, the women walking along the white road with their swinging hips, immense baskets poised on their heads, pic'nees trotting behind, or clinging to their flanks, the lonely odorous, silent jungles in the high recesses, the cold fringe of forest close to the lost crater, the house in which Nelson courted and married his bride and the church in which the marriage certificate is still kept; she visited them all and alone. In the afternoon she drove with her aunt, their phaeton one of a gay procession, stopping sometimes at one of the Great Houses, where she was taken by the

young people out to the mill to see the grinding and partake of “sling;” home in the cool of the evening to dress for the long dinner and brilliant evening. She would not dance, but she made several friends among the young men, notably that accomplished lady-killer and *arbiter elegantiarum*, Mr. Abergenny, so prosilient in the London of his day; and found herself in a fair way to be disliked thoroughly by all the other young women save Lady Mary Denbigh; who, somewhat to her embarrassment, showed a distinct preference for her society, particularly when Lord Hunsdon was in attendance. The men she liked better than she had believed possible, estimating them by their suspiciously small waists, their pinched feet, and hair so carefully curled and puffed out at the side; but although Lord Hunsdon’s attentions were now unmistakable, she liked him none the better that she esteemed him the more, and was glad of the refuge the admiration of the other men afforded her.

And then, without any preliminary sign of capitulation, Byam Warner wrote to Lady Hunsdon announcing that he now felt sufficiently recovered to pay his devoirs to one who had been so kind, apologised for any apparent discourtesy, and asked permission to drink a dish of tea with her on the following evening.

Lady Hunsdon was quite carried out of herself by this victory, for there was a Lady Toppington at Bath House, whose husband was in the present cabinet and a close friend of Peel. She had given the finest ball of the season to signalise the return of the Tories to power, and would have taken quick possession of the social reins had Lady Hunsdon laid them down for a moment. Politics enjoyed a rest on Nevis, but other interests loomed large in proportion, and the apparent defeat of the hitherto invulnerable leader of *ton* excited both joy and hope in the breast of Lady Toppington and her little court. Now did Lady Hunsdon sweep rivals aside with her flexible eyebrows, and on the evening when she was able to announce her triumph, she was besieged in her stately chair, not unlike a throne.

But she was deaf to hints and bolder hopes. She would not thrust a shy young man, long a hermit, into a miscellaneous company when he had come merely to drink tea with herself and son and a few intimate friends. Later, of course, they should all meet him, but they must possess their souls in patience. To this dictum they submitted as gracefully as possible, but they were not so much in awe of Lady Hunsdon as to forbear to peep from windows and sequestered nooks on the following evening at nine o’clock, when Byam Warner emerged from the palm avenue, ran hurriedly up the long flights of steps between the terraces, and, escorted by Lord Hunsdon, who met him at the door, up to the suite of his hostess.

Anne was standing in the deep embrasure of the window when he entered the sitting-room, where she, in common with Lady Constance Mortlake, Lady Mary Denbigh, Mrs. Nunn, and Miss Bargarny, who was a favourite of Lady Hunsdon and would take no denial, had been bidden to do honour to the poet. She heard Lady Hunsdon's dulcet icy tones greet him and present him to her guests, the ceremonious responses of the ladies—but not a syllable from Warner—before she steeled herself to turn and walk forward. But the ordeal she had anticipated was still to face. Warner did not raise his eyes as her name was pronounced. He merely bowed mechanically and had the appearance of not having removed his gaze from the floor since he entered the room. He was deathly pale, and his lips were closely pressed as if to preserve their firmness. Anne, emboldened by a shyness greater than her own, and relieved of the immediate prospect of meeting his eyes, examined him curiously after he had taken a chair and the others were amiably covering his silence with their chatter. He had dressed himself in an old but immaculate white linen suit with a high collar and small necktie. It was evident that he had always been very thin, for his clothes, unassisted by stays, fitted without a wrinkle, although his shoulders were perhaps more bowed than when his tailor had measured him. His hair was properly cut and parted, but although he was still young, its black was bright with silver. His head and brow were nobly formed, his set features fine and sensitive, but his thin face was lined and gray. It was unmistakably the face of a dissipated man, but oddly enough the chin was not noticeably weak, and the ideality of the brow, and the delicacy of the nostril and upper lip were unaltered. Nevertheless, and in spite of the suggestion of ease which still lingered about his tall figure, there was something so abject about his whole appearance, his painful self-consciousness at finding himself once more among people that had justly cast him out was so apparent, that Anne longed for an excuse to bid him go forth and hide himself once more. But to dismiss him was the part of Lady Hunsdon, who had no intention of doing anything of the sort. It is doubtful if either she or any of the others saw aught in his bearing but the natural embarrassment of a shy man at finding himself once more within the enchanted circle. Lady Hunsdon expatiated upon the beauty of Nevis, long familiar to her through his works, vowed that she had come to the island only to see for herself how much he had exaggerated, but was quite vanquished and speechless. Not to have met her son's most valued friend would have blurred and flawed the wonderful experience. Warner bowed gravely once or twice, but did not raise his eyes, to Anne's continued relief: she dreaded what she must meet in them. If the rest of his face was a ruin, what sinks of iniquity, what wells of horror, must be those recording features? There were lines about them and not from laughter! He looked as if he had never smiled. She pitied him

so deeply that she could have wept, for she had never seen an unhappier mortal; but she had no desire to approach him further.

Miss Bargarny poured the tea, and when she passed his cup, roguishly quoted a couplet from one of his poems; lines that had no reference to tea—God knows, he had never written about tea—but which tripped from her tongue so gracefully that they had the effect of sounding apropos. He blushed slightly and bowed again; and shortly after, when all the cups had been handed about and he had drained his own, seemed to recover his poise, for he addressed a few remarks to Lady Hunsdon, at whose right he sat. Anne, who was seated some distance from the table could not even hear his voice, but Lady Hunsdon received such as he ventured upon with so much *empressement*, that he manifestly rose in courage; in a few moments he was extending his attention to Lady Mary Denbigh, who leaned forward with an exalted expression shaded by ringlets, raising her imperceptible bosom with an eloquent sigh. By this time Lord Hunsdon was talking into Anne's ear and she could hear nothing of the conversation opposite, although now and again she caught a syllable from a low toneless voice. But his first agony was passed as well as her own, and she endeavoured to forget him in her swain's comments upon the political news arrived with the packet that afternoon. When tea was over and Miss Bargarny, who cultivated liveliness of manner, had engaged the poet in a discussion upon the relative merits of Shelley and Nathaniel P. Willis—astonishingly original on her part, mild to the outposts of indifference on his—Anne followed Hunsdon to the other side of the room to look over an album of his mother's, just unpacked. It contained calotypes of the most distinguished men and women of the day, and Anne, who had barely seen a daguerreotype before, and never a presentment of the famous people of her time, became so absorbed that she forgot the poet to whose spirit hers had been wedded these five years, and whose visible part had sickened the very depths of her being. Lord Hunsdon had the pleasure of watching her kindling eyes as he told her personal details of each of his friends, and when Anne cried out that she was living in a bit of contemporary history, he too flushed, and felt that his suit prospered. But Anne was thinking as little of him as of Warner, and so intent was she upon the ugly striking physiognomy of the author of "Venetia," with his Byronic curls and flowing collar, that she was hardly aware that Lord Hunsdon's attentions had been claimed by his mother; who skilfully transferred him to the side of Lady Mary.

A moment later she turned abruptly and met the eyes of Warner. He was sitting apart, and he was staring at her. It was not meeting his eyes so suddenly that

turned her hands to ice and made them shake as she returned to the album, but the eyes themselves that looked out from the ruin of his face. She had expected them to be sneering, lascivious, bold, anything but what they were: the most spiritual and at the same time the most tormented eyes that had ever been set in the face of a mortal. She caught her breath. What could it mean? No man could live the life he had lived—Lady Mary, who had a fine turn for gossip, had told her all that Lord Hunsdon had left unsaid—and keep his soul unspotted. It was marvellous, incredible. She recalled confusedly something Hunsdon had said about his having a beautiful character—well, that was originally, not after years of degradation. Besides, Hunsdon was a fanatical enthusiast.

At this point she became aware that Warner was standing beside her, but as she glanced up in a surprise that restored her self-possession, he had averted his eyes, and embarrassment had claimed him again. She was too much of a woman not to rush to the rescue.

"At this point she became aware that Warner was standing beside her"

"At this point she became aware that Warner was standing beside her"

"I have never seen anything so interesting!" she exclaimed with great animation, "I am sure you will agree with me, although of course you have met all these great people. Is not this process a vast improvement upon the daguerreotype? And I am told they expect to do better still. Have you read 'Venetia'? Do you remember that Disraeli makes Lord Cadurcis—Byron—assert that Shakespeare did not write his own plays? Fancy!"

"I never for a moment supposed that he did," replied Warner, evidently grasping at a subject upon which he felt at home. "Nor did Byron. Nor, I fancy, will a good many others, when they begin to think for themselves—or study the Elizabethan era. I have never read any of Disraeli's novels. Do you think them worth reading?"

He was looking at her now, still with that expression of a saint at the stake, but obviously inattentive to her literary opinions. Before she could answer he said abruptly:

"What a fine walker you are! I have never seen a woman walk as you do. It is not the custom here, and even in England the ladies seemed far too elegant to do more than stroll through a park."

"I am not at all elegant," replied Anne, smiling; "as my aunt will tell you. I had

to make myself some short skirts, and I get up at unearthly hours to have my tramp and return in time to dress for breakfast. But I have never met you."

"I have passed you several times, but of course you did not notice me. I have a hut up in one of the jungles and I am always prowling about at that hour in the morning." He hesitated, drew in his breath audibly, and as he looked down again, the colour rose under his pallid loose skin. "I came here to-day to meet you," he added.

For a moment Anne felt that she was going to faint. Good God! Had this dreary outcast found his way to her castles in Spain? Could he *know*? She was unable to articulate, and he went on.

"You must pardon me if that was too bold a thing to say—you are the last person to whom I would give offence! But you have seemed to me the very spirit of the fresh robust North. I have fancied I could see the salt wind blowing about you. All the English creoles of this island are like porcelain. The fine ladies that come to Bath House take too much care of their complexions, doubtless of their pretty feet—they all want to be beauties rather than women. That is the reason you seem something of a goddess by contrast, and vastly refreshing to a West Indian."

Anne drew a long breath as he blundered through his explanation. She was relieved, but at the same time femininely conscious of disappointment. Nor was there sentiment in his low monotonous voice. He paid but the homage of weary man to vital youth.

"I am unfashionably healthy," she said, hoping that her eyes danced with laughter at the idea of being likened to a goddess. She continued with great vivacity, "How relieved I am that you have never noticed the hang of my morning skirts. Ah, that is because you are a poet. But I wish I could give you one-tenth of the pleasure, by my suggestion of the North, that I derive from your wonderful tropics. Don't fancy that I get up at five merely for the pleasure of exercise. My chief object is to enjoy your island for a bit while all the rest of the world is asleep. These last sixteen days have been the happiest of my life." She brought out the last words somewhat defiantly, but she met his gaze, still smiling.

"I am not surprised to learn that you are a poet. What else could be expected—once I learned to pay compliments gracefully, but if I have forgotten the art, I have not lost my power to admire and appreciate beauty in any form. It has given

me the greatest pleasure I have known for years to watch you, and I thank you for coming to Nevis."

Anne by this time was accustomed to the high-flown compliments of polite society, but she could not doubt the sincerity of this man, who had no place in a world where idle flattery was the small coin of talk. She blushed slightly and changed the subject, and as he talked, less and less haltingly, of the traditions of Nevis, she watched his eyes, fascinated. They were not the eyes of mere youth, any more than of a man who had seen far too much of life. Neither, upon closer inspection, were they the eyes of a saint or a martyr, although she could better understand Hunsdon's estimate by picturing him born three centuries earlier. But they were the eyes of the undying idealist, of the inner vision, of a mental and spiritual life apart from the frailties of the body. They seemed to look at her, intent as was his gaze, as from a vast distance, from heights which neither she nor all that respectable world that despised his poor shell could ever attain. With it all there was no hint of superciliousness: the eyes were too sad, too terribly wise in their own way for that; and his whole manner went far beyond modesty; it had all the pitiable self-consciousness of one that has fallen from the higher social plane. No common man, no matter what his fame and offences, could lose his self-respect as this poor gentleman had done. Anne, filled with a pity she had never known was in her, exerted herself to divert his mind from the gulf which had so long separated him from his class. She talked as she fancied other women must have talked to him when he visited London in the first flush of his youth and fame. She even began with "The Blue Sepulchre," which now no longer ranked with the best of his work, so far had he progressed beyond the unlicensed imagination of youth. She told him that she looked down from her balcony every morning expecting to see the domes and towers of ancient cities rise from the sea. And, alas! in the enthusiasm of her cause, before she could call a halt, she had told him all that his poetry had meant to her in her lonely life by the North Sea; in a few moments he was aware that she possessed every volume he had written, knew every line by heart; and although she caught herself up in time jealously to conceal the more portentous meanings it had held for her, he heard enough to make his eyes kindle at this delicious echo of his youth, coming from an innocent lovely creature who had evidently heard little of his evil life.

"I knew that you came from the sea!" he exclaimed. "And the purple rolling moors! How well I remember them, and longed to write of them. But only these latitudes drive my pen. Indeed, I once tried to write about the heather—the purple twilight—no figment of the poetical fancy, that. The atmosphere at that

hour literally is purple."

"When it *is* purple! But you should see the moors in all their moods as I have done. I rarely missed a day in winter, no matter how wild—I have tramped half a day many a time. And I can assure you that the sea itself cannot look more wild, more terrifying—with the wrack driving overhead, and the rain falling in torrents, and the wind whistling and roaring, and rushing past you as if called by the sea to some frightful tryst, some horrible orgy of the elements, and striving to tear you up and carry you with it. Still—still—perhaps it is as beautiful—then—in its way, as in its season of colour and peace."

"Ah! I knew you would say that." He added in a moment, "You are the only person that has quoted my lines to me that has not embarrassed me painfully. For the moment I felt that you had written them, not I!"

"I often used to feel that I had; all, that is——" The magnet of danger to the curiosity in her feminine soul was irresistible. "All but your ode to the mate whom you never could find."

And then she turned cold, for she remembered the story of the woman who had been his ruin. But he did not pale nor shrink; he merely smiled and his eyes seemed to withdraw still farther away. "Ah! that woman of whom all poets dream. Perhaps we really find her as we invoke her for a bit with the pen." Then he broke off abruptly and looked hard at her, his eyes no longer absent. "You—you——" he began. "Ten years ago——" And then his face flushed so darkly that Anne laughed gaily to cover the cold and horror that gripped her once more.

"Ten years ago? I was only twelve! And now—I am made to feel every day that two-and-twenty is quite old. In three more years I shall be an orthodox old maid. All the women in Bath House intimate that I am already beyond the marriageable age."

"The men do not, I fancy!" The poet spoke with the energy of a man himself. "Besides, I looked—happened to look—through the window of the saloon one night and saw you talking to no less than four gallants."

Here she turned away in insufferable confusion, and he, too, seemed to realise that he had betrayed a deeper interest than he had intended. With a muttered au revoir he left her, and when she finally turned her head he was gone. Miss Bargarny was exclaiming:

“Well, dear Lady Hunsdon, he was quite delightful, genteel, altogether the gentleman. Thank heaven I never heard all those naughty stories, so I can admire without stint. Did you notice, Mary, how pleased he was when I recited that couplet?”

“I saw that he was very much embarrassed,” replied Lady Mary, who for an elegiac figure had a surprising reserve of human nature. “It was too soon to be personal with a poor man who has been out of the world so long. But I think he enjoyed himself after the first embarrassment wore off. I feel surer still,” with an exalted expression turned suddenly upon Lord Hunsdon, “that we shall rescue him. We must have him here often, not lose a day of this precious time. Then we can leave Nevis without anxiety, or perhaps induce him to go with us.” She reflected that were she mistress of Hunsdon Towers she should be quite willing to give the famous poet a turret and pass as his mundane redeemer.

Hunsdon moved toward her as if her enthusiasm were a magnet. “It has all exceeded my fondest hopes,” he exclaimed. “He was quite like his old self before he left——”

“Thanks to Miss Percy,” broke in a stridulous voice. “He was devoured with ennui, to say nothing of shyness, until he summoned up courage to talk to her, and then he seemed to me quite like any ordinary young spark. I don’t know that he quite forgot to be a poet,” she concluded with some gallantry, for she had taken a great fancy to Anne and was determined to marry her brilliantly, “but he certainly ceased for a few moments to look like a God-forsaken one. What were you talking about, my dear?”

“*Dear* Lady Constance—Oh, Nevis, and his poetry, for the most part.”

“I should think he would be sick of both subjects. Come now, be frank. Did not you get on the subject of your pretty self? I’ll be bound he has an eye for a fine girl as well as the best of them. You make Mary and Lillian look like paper dolls.”

“I do protest!” cried Miss Bargarny indignantly. “If he does it is practically because he is a—lives in the country himself. If he lived in London among people of the first fashion——”

“He’d admire her all the more. Look at the other beaux. Wait until Miss Percy is in the high tide of a London season. You forget that if girls are always on the catch, men are always ready for a change.”

Miss Bargarny's black eyes were in flames, but she dared not provoke that dreaded tongue further. She forced herself to smile as she turned to Anne, standing abashed during this discussion of herself, and longing to be alone with her chaotic thoughts. "Confess, dear Miss Percy, that you did not talk about yourself, but about that most fascinating of all subjects to man, *himself*. I believe you have the true instinct of the coquette, in spite of your great lack of experience, and that is a coquette's chiefest sugar-plum."

"I believe I did talk about himself—naturally, as I have always been a great admirer of his work, and the very inexperience you mention makes me seize upon such subjects as I know anything about."

Lady Mary went forward and put her arm about her new friend's waist. "Let us take a turn in the orchard before it is time to retire," she said. "I long to talk to you about our new acquaintance. Try to devise a plan to bring him here daily," she said over her shoulder to the complacent hostess; and to Lord Hunsdon, "Will you come for us in a quarter of an hour?"

It was only of late that Lady Mary had determined to lay away in lavender the luxury of sorrow. When a woman is thirty ambition looms as an excellent substitute for romance, and there had been unexpected opportunities to charm a wealthy peer during the past five weeks. She hated poetry and thought this poet a horror, but he was an excellent weapon in the siege of Hunsdon Towers. She was not jealous of Anne, for she divined that Hunsdon's suit, if suit it were, was hopeless, and believed that her new friend's good nature would help her to win the prize of a dozen seasons. So she refreshed her complexion with buttermilk and spirits of wine, and made love to Anne; who saw through her manœuvres but was quite willing to further them if it would save herself the ordeal of refusing Lord Hunsdon.

CHAPTER VII

On the following evening there was so much more dancing than usual—a number of officers had come over from St. Kitts—that the saloon was deserted by the young people, and at the height of the impromptu ball Anne found herself alone near one of the open windows. The older people were intent upon cards. Anne, who had grown bolder since her first appearance in the world, now close upon three weeks ago, obeyed an impulse to step through the window, descended the terrace and walked along the beach. She could have gone to her room and found the solitude she craved, but she wanted movement, and the night was so beautiful that it called to her irresistibly. The moon was at the full, she could see the blue of the sea under its crystal flood. The blades of the palm trees glittered like sinister weapons unsheathed. She could outline every leaf of palm, cocoanut, and banana that fringed the shore. The nightingales ceased their warbling and she heard that other and still more enchanting music of a tropic night, the tiny ringing of a million silver bells. What fairy-like creature of the insect world gave out this lovely music she was at no pains to discover. It was enough that it was, and she had leaned out of her window many a night and wondered why Byam Warner had never sung its music in his verse.

Byam Warner! How—how was she to think of him? Her overthrown ideals no longer even interested her, belonging as they did to some far off time when she had not come herself to dream upon these ravishing shores. And now the surrender of the past three weeks had been far more rudely disturbed. Would even Nevis dominate again? Must not such a man, even in his ruin, cast his shadow over any scene of which he was a part? And of Nevis he was a part! She had been able to disassociate them only until he stood before her, quick. And now she should see him, talk to him every day, possibly receive his devotions, for there was no doubt that he admired her as the antithesis of all to which he had been accustomed from birth; unquestionably she must take her part in his redemption. The thought thrilled her, and she paused a moment looking out over the water. Faded, even repellent, as that husk was, not only was his genius so far unimpaired, but she believed that she had caught a glimpse of a great soul dwelling apart in that polluted tenement. From the latter she shrank with all the aversion of uncontaminated girlhood, but she felt that she owed it to her intellect to recognise the separateness of those highest faculties possessed by the few,

from the flesh they were forced to carry in common with the aborigines. And it seemed almost incredible that his life had not swamped, mired, smothered all that was lofty and beautiful in that inner citadel; her feminine curiosity impelled her to discover if this really were so, or if he had merely retained a trick of expression.

She was skirting the town, keeping close to the shore, but she paused again, involuntarily, to look in the direction of that baker's dwelling, through the window of which, some months since, Byam Warner, mad with drink, had precipitated himself one night, shrieking for the handsome wife of the indignant spouse. For this escapade he had lain in jail until a coloured planter had bailed him out—for the white Creoles thought it a good opportunity to emphasize their opinion of him—and although he had been dismissed with a fine, the judge had delivered himself of a weighty reprimand which was duly published in the local paper. He had lain in prison only forty-eight hours, but *he had lain in prison,* and the disgrace was indelible. No wonder he had been ashamed to hold up his head, had hesitated so long to accept Lady Hunsdon's invitation. The wonder was it had been extended. Anne shrewdly inferred it never would have been in London, no matter what the entreaties of Lord Hunsdon, but on this island many laws were relaxed and many a sin left behind.

Then her thoughts swung to his indubious assertion that he had emerged from his lair merely that he might meet her. She recalled the admiration in his eyes, the desperate effort with which he had overcome his shyness and approached her. What irony, if after having been ignorant, unsuspecting, of her existence during all those years of her worship, when she had been his more truly than in many a corporeal marriage, he should love her now that she could only think of him with pity and contempt. It gave her a fierce shock of repulsion that he might wish to marry her, dwell even in thought upon possessing her untouched youth after the lewdness of his own life. She must crush any such hope in its bulb if she would not hate him and do him ill when she sincerely wished him well. She reviewed the beaux of Bath House for one upon whom she might pretend to fix her affections, and at once, before Warner's inclination ripened into passion; but the very thought of entering into a serious flirtation with any of those tight-waisted, tight-trousered exquisites induced a sensation of ennui, and with Hunsdon she did not care to trifle. He might be wearisome, but he was good and sincere, and Lady Mary should have him were it in her power to bring about that eminently proper match.

It was at this point in her reflections that she found herself opposite the house of

the poet.

CHAPTER VIII

She had walked more rapidly than she had been aware of and was shocked at her apparent unmaidenliness in approaching the house of a man, and at night, in whom she was irresistibly interested; although, to be sure, if she walked round the island, to pass his house sooner or later was inevitable. She was about to turn and hurry home, when she saw what had appeared to be a shadow detach itself from the tree in the court and approach her. She recognised Warner and stood rooted to the ground with terror. All the wild and detestable stories she had heard of him sprang to her mind in bold relief, and although she had met many a hard character when tramping her moors and felt sure of coming off best in a struggle, her strength ebbed out of her before this approaching embodiment of all mysterious vice. To fly down the beach in a hoop was impossible; besides she would look ridiculous. But what would he do! She forgot his eyes and remembered only his adventures.

But he looked anything but formidable as he came closer, and, being without a hat, bowed courteously. Under the softening rays of the moon his features looked less worn, his skin less pallid, and, perhaps because she was alone and attracted him strongly, his hang-dog air was less apparent. He even made an effort to straighten his listless shoulders as he came close enough to get a full view of the beautiful young woman, standing with uncovered head and neck in the bright light of the moon and staring at him with unaccountable apprehension.

“It is I, Miss Percy,” he said. “Have you walked ahead of your party? I have not seen anyone pass.”

“I—it is a dreadful thing to do, I know—I stepped out of the window—just to take a stroll by myself. I never seem to get a moment alone. I am so tired of hearing people chatter. I was thinking—before I knew it I was here. I must go back. My aunt will be very angry.”

“Let me get you a cloak. Your shoulders are bare and the fog will come down presently.”

He went rapidly into the house and she had her chance to flee, but she waited obediently until he returned with a long black Inverness, which he laid about her shoulders. “I shall walk home with you,” he said. “I don’t think you are quite

prudent to go about alone at night. There are rough characters in the town."

"Ah!—never again. You are very kind. I do not know why I should trouble you."

He did not make the conventional response, and for a few moments they walked on in silence. Then, gathering confidence, as he barely looked at her and was undeniably sober, she asked abruptly: "Why have you never written of the fairy orchestra one hears every night? It is about the only phase of Nevis you have neglected."

"The little bells? Thank you for calling my attention to it. I remember—I once thought of it. But so many other things claimed my attention, and I forgot it. I fancy I seldom hear it. But you are right; it is very lovely and quite peculiar to the West Indies. If it would please you I will write some verses about it—well—one of these days."

"I wish you would write them while I am here."

"I am not in the mood for writing at present."

He spoke hurriedly, and she understood. Hunsdon had told her that he never wrote save under stimulants. Could it be possible that he had made up his mind not to drink as long as she was on Nevis? She turned to him a radiant face of which she was quite unconscious, as she replied eagerly. "Yes! We have all resolved that you shall not write a line this winter. A few months out of your life are nothing to sacrifice to people that admire and long to know you as we do. Never was a man so sought. I cannot tell you how many schemes we have already devised to get hold of you——"

"But why—in heaven's name? I cannot help feeling the absurdity."

"Not at all. You are the most celebrated poet of the day, and all the world loves a lion."

"For some five years, the world of Bath House has existed without the capers of the local lion," he responded dryly.

"Ah, but you were so determined a recluse. It takes a Lady Hunsdon to coax a lion from his cave. And, no doubt, she is the only person to come to Bath House during all these years who knew you well enough to take such a liberty. You are such an old and intimate friend of her son."

He stole a quick glance at her, as if to ascertain were she as ignorant of his life as she pretended, but she was now successfully in the rôle of the vivacious young woman, who, in common with the rest of the world, admired his work and was flattered to know the author.

“Don’t think that we mean to make fools of ourselves and bore you,” she added, with another radiant and somewhat anxious smile. “But now that the opportunity has come we are all so happy, and we feel deeply the compliment you have already paid us. Lady Hunsdon hopes that you will read from your works some evening——”

“Good God, no! Unless, to be sure, you have a charity entertainment. I have done that in the past and felt that the object compensated for the torture. But I am somewhat surprised to find that you are a lion hunter.”

“I don’t think I am—that is, I hardly know. You are the first great man I have ever seen. Perhaps after a season in London I shall be quite frivolous and worldly.”

“I can imagine nothing of the kind. I am not so surprised to learn that you have not yet spent a season in town.”

“Oh, yes, I am a country girl,” she said roguishly.

“Not quite that.” But he did not pursue the subject, and in a few moments they came to the gates of Bath House. He took the cloak from her shoulders. “It would exceed the bounds of decorum should I escort you further,” he said formally. “If you will hasten you will not take cold. Good night.”

She thanked him and ran up the steps and, avoiding the saloon, to her own room.

“I have begun well,” she thought triumphantly. “No one could say that I have not done my part. And if he does not drink for three months—who knows?”

CHAPTER IX

Anne conceived more respect for Lord Hunsdon as the days went on, for there was no doubt that his stratagem, carefully planned and carried out, was succeeding. Whether Warner suspected his object or not no one could guess, but that he was flattered and encouraged there could be no question. Invitations to Bath House descended in showers. He breakfasted, lunched, dined there, drove with the ladies in the afternoon, and finally summoned up courage to be host at a picnic in the hills. He was still shy and quiet, but he no longer looked abject and listless. His shoulders were less bowed, even his skin grew more normal of hue, the flesh beneath it firmer. It might be a fool's paradise; these spoilt people of the world might have forgotten him before their return next winter, but the mere fact that they overlooked his flagrant insults to society and once more permitted him to become an active member of his own class was enough to soothe ugly memories and make the blood run more freely in his veins.

Anne treated him with a uniform courtesy and flattering animation, but made no opportunities for private conversation, and he on his side made no overt attempt at deliberate approach. On the contrary, although she often caught him regarding her steadily, sometimes with a sadness that made her turn aside with a paling colour, he seemed rather to avoid her than otherwise. Not so Lord Hunsdon. He was ever at her side in spite of her manifest indifference, and daily confided to her his delight in Warner's response, and his hopes. He joined her in no more of her walks, but he rarely failed to attend her in the orchard in the afternoon—where the younger guests never tired of watching the little black boys scramble up the tall thin smooth cocoanut trees, and, grinning and singing amidst the thick mass of leaves at the top, shake down the green delicious fruit—or in the saloon after dinner. Frequently he invited a small party to take grenadilla ices on the terrace of the gay little restaurant in Charlestown, where half the creole world of Nevis was to be met, and upon one occasion he took several of the more venturesome out to spear turtles, that Anne alone might be gratified. So far he had made no declaration, and often stared at her with an apprehension and a diffidence that seemed a travesty on the fettered and tortured soul that looked from Warner's eyes; but his purpose showed no wavering, despite the efforts of Lady Hunsdon and of Anne herself to bring him to the feet of Lady Mary. That his mother was uneasy was manifest. She was too worldly to pin her faith to the

apparent indifference of any portionless young woman to a wealthy peer of the realm, and the more she saw of Anne Percy the less she favoured her as a daughter-in-law. Lady Constance, who understood her perfectly, laughed outright one evening as she intercepted a scowl directed at Hunsdon and Miss Percy, who sat apart in one of the withdrawing-rooms.

“She won’t have him. Do not worry.”

“I am not at all sure. You forget that Hunsdon would be a great match for any girl.”

“She does not care two straws about making a great match.”

“Fiddlesticks.”

“She is made on the grand scale. Hunsdon is all very well, but he makes no appeal to the imagination. I am almost glad Warner has made such a wreck of himself. A handsome, dashing young poet, with the world at his feet, might be fatal to her. Warner never was dashing, to be sure, but he certainly was handsome ten years ago, and fame is a dazzling halo.”

“He improves every day, but he seems to fancy Miss Percy as little as any of the others.”

“Poor devil! I suppose he recalls the time when so many girls tried to marry him. I cannot see much improvement myself, although he does not look quite so much like a lost soul roaming about in search of a respectable tenement. But his physical attraction is all gone. Not one of the girls is in love with him, not one of the men jealous.”

“Oh, certainly no woman could fall in love with him, any more than any parent would accept him. And as he is quite safe I wish he would command more of Miss Percy’s attention, and leave her with the less to bestow on Hunsdon.”

“He is too much in love with her.”

“What?”

“I seem to be the only person in Bath House with eyes in my head. He is desperately, miserably, in love with her, and too conscious of his own ruin, too respectful of her, to dream of addressing her. He would stay away altogether, I fancy, did he not find a doubtful pleasure in looking at her.”

“I am distressed if I have added to his trouble,” said Lady Hunsdon, who prided herself upon always experiencing the correct sentiments. “I hoped he came so often to us because we had restored his lost self-respect, and he was grateful to be among his equals once more.”

“Oh, that, doubtless. But the rose leaves crumple more with every visit. I only hope the reaction will not awaken the echoes of Nevis.”

“What a raven! Let us hope for the best and continue to do our duty. If he really is in love with Anne Percy it may prove his redemption.”

“Much more likely his damnation. It will be the last drop in a cup of bitterness already too full.”

“You grow sentimental.”

“Always was. But that never prevented me from seeing things as they are. The result is that I am generally called cynical. But don’t worry about Hunsdon. He needs a refusal, and this is his only opportunity.”

CHAPTER X

Lady Mary Denbigh achieved a signal triumph; she persuaded the poet to accompany her to church. Fig Tree Church, romantically poised on the side of the mountain, was this year the favoured place of worship with the guests of Bath House; and where this select extract of London led all the world of Nevis followed. And not merely the wives and daughters of the English creole planters, but the coloured population, high and low, who could make themselves smart enough. It was long since Warner had entered a church, and the brilliant scene contributed to the humour of his mood. The church looked as gay as an afternoon rout in London at the height of the season, and the aristocracy of Nevis were quite as fine as the guests of Bath House. Their costumes were of delicate fabrics radiant of hue, and they were beflounced and beruffled, and fringed and ribboned. There were floating scarves and sashes of lace and silk; bonnets were covered with plumes and flowers, the little bunch of curls on either side of nearly every face, half-concealed by a mass of blonde or tulle. Behind the elect sat the respectable coloured creoles, often dignified and noble of aspect, for the West Indian African had been torn from a superior race; their dress differing little from that of their betters. But who shall describe the mass of coloured folk massed at the back of the church, a caricature of the gentry, in their Sunday abandon to the mightiest of their passions. Their colours were primal, their crinolines and bonnets enormous—the latter perched far back; their plumes, if cheaper, were even longer; where flowers and ribbons took the place of feathers heads looked like window boxes; their sleeves were so tight that they could not hold their prayer books at the correct angle, and more than one had stumbled over her train as she dropped her skirts and tripped into the church. They were still further bedecked with a profusion of false jewellery, cotton lace and fringe, ribbons streaming from every curve and angle, and shoes as gaudy as the flowers on their bonnets. Their men, in imitation of the aristocrats, wore, of the best quality they could muster, smart coats, flowered waistcoats, ruffled neck-cloths, tight white trousers, and pointed boots a size too small. They were the tradespeople of the village; in some cases the servants of the estates, although by far the greater number of the young women of humbler Nevis had received a smattering of education and were now too good to work. Their parents might get a living as best they could, huckstering or on the plantations, while the improved offspring, content to herd in one room on the scantiest fare, dreamed of gala days

and a scrap of new finery. Nevertheless, many of them were handsomer than the white fragile looking aristocrats, with their olive or cream coloured skins, liquid black eyes, and superb undulating figures.

Warner had more than once written of the tragedy of these people, his poet's imagination tracing the descent of the finer specimens from ancient kings whose dust was mixed with the sands of the desert; and his had been one of the most impassioned voices lifted in the cause of emancipation. For these reasons he was much beloved by the coloured folk of Nevis of all ranks, and some one of them had never failed to come forward, when he lay ill and neglected, or the bailiffs threatened to sell his house over his head. All obligations were faithfully discharged, for he received handsome sums from his publishers, but his patrimony was long since squandered; nothing remained to him but his home and a bit of land high on the mountain, which he had clung to because he loved its wild beauty and solitude.

Lady Mary Denbigh, with her languishing airs, her "Book of Beauty" style, bored him more than anyone in Bath House, and he had begun to suspect that her attentions were due not more to vanity than to a desire to find favour with Lord Hunsdon. But she was seldom far from Anne Percy, whose propinquity he could enjoy even if debarred communion. And Lady Mary frequently made Anne the theme of her remarks, in entertaining the poet; whose covert admiration she too detected and encouraged, although not without resentment. Miss Percy was undeniably handsome and high-born, but alas, quite lacking in fashion, in style, in *ton*. Not that Lady Mary despaired of her. If she could be persuaded to pass three seasons in London, divorced from that stranded corner of England where she had spent twenty-two long years, all her new friends felt quite hopeful that she would yet do them credit and become a young lady of the highest fashion. Her figure was really good, if somewhat Amazonian, and her face, if not quite regular—with those black eyebrows as wide as one's finger, and that square chin, when all the beauties had oval contours and delicate arches above limpid eyes—was, as she had before maintained, singularly striking and handsome, and if perhaps too warmly coloured, this was not held to be a fault by some.

Warner recalled the bitter-sweet of her babble as he heard her sigh gently beside him, her long golden ringlets shading her bent face. His eyes wandered, after their habit, to Anne Percy, who sat across the church, distinguished in that gay throng by bonnet and gloves and gown of immaculate white. He worshipped every irregular line in that noble, impulsive, passionate face and wondered that he had ever thought another woman beautiful; condemned his imagination that it

had lacked the wit to conceive a like combination. Her eyes, commonly full of laughter, he had seen darken with anger and melt with tenderness. There were moments when she looked so strong as momentarily to isolate herself from normal womanhood, and suggest unlimited if unsuspected powers of good or evil; but those were fleeting impressions; as a rule she looked the most completely human woman he had ever known.

He sighed and looked away. A wave of superlative bitterness shook him, but he was too just to curse life, or anyone but himself. He did not even curse the worthless woman who had struck the curb from his inherited weakness and made him a slave instead of a rigid and insolent master. She had been no worse, hardly more captivating, than a thousand other women, but she had appealed powerfully to his poetical imagination, and he had elevated her into the sovereignship of his destiny, endowed her with all the graces of soul, the grandeur of character and passion, that he had hitherto shaped from the rich components in his brain. When he was faced with the naked truth his mental disquiet was as great as his anguish. If this woman, one of the most finished works of the most civilised country on the globe, had revealed herself to be but common clay, where should he find another worth loving? Surely the woman was not yet evolved who could fasten herself permanently to his soul and his senses. This may have been a rash conclusion for a man of his years, but a poet is as old in brain at six-and-twenty as he is green in soul at sixty. With all the ardour of his youth and temperament he had longed for his mate, dreamed of a life of exalted companionship on the most poetic of isles; and one woman, cleverer than many he had met, had read his dreams, simulated his ideal, and amused herself until the game ceased to amuse her; and the richest nabob of the moment returned from India with a brown skull like a mummy had offered his rupees in exchange for the social state that only the daughter of a great lord could give him. She had laughed good naturedly as Warner flung himself at her feet in an agony of incredulous despair, and told him that no mood had become him so well, for hitherto he had never expressed himself fully save in verse. And Anne, neither classic nor modish, still vaguely resembled her! It was this suggestion of the woman whom at least he must always remember as the perfection of female beauty, that had tempted him to lurk in the darkness of the terrace and watch Anne through the windows of Bath House. In a day when girls cultivated the sylph, minced in their speech, had numberless affectations, his early choice had possessed a noble, large figure and a lofty dignity. She was not ashamed to walk, was to be seen on her horse in the Row every morning, and cultivated her excellent brain.

But the resemblance, Warner had divined at once, was superficial, and the first interview had justified his instinct. Anne was a child in many ways; the other, although younger in years, had been cool, shrewd, calculating, making no false moves in any game she chose to play. Warner knew that if he had discovered a gold mine in Nevis and won her, he should have hated her long since.

But Anne Percy! He could not make the same mistake twice. And had he met her when he had a decent home and an honoured name to offer her he believed that he could have found happiness in her till the end of his life. Nor, had she loved him, would she have been influenced by worldly considerations. He had seen little of women of the great normal middle class. Conditions had thrown him with the very high or the very low, and experience taught him that the former when unmarried were all angling for husbands, and the latter for patrons. Therefore had he created a world of ideal women—one secret of his popularity, for every woman that read his poems looked into the poet's magic mirror and saw herself; and he had found happiness in creating, as poets must. Even since his ostracism there had been many hours of sustained happiness and moments of rapture when he had quite forgotten his position among men. And Anne Percy, in her radiant presence, drove his ideals into the shadows and covered them with cobwebs! And he could never claim her! Even were he not a poor broken creature, with little alive in him but that still flickering soul dwelling in his faded unspeakable body, he would not even offer the commonest attentions to this uncommon girl who was worthy of the best of men. Nor did he wish to suffer any more deeply than he did at present. To know her better would be to love her more. When she left the island he hoped to relegate her to the plane upon which he dwelt in dreams, and forget that she had not been a created ideal.

But he was sometimes surprised at the strength of his suffering and his longing. He was so unutterably tired, had been for years, so weary in mind and body through excess and misery and remorse, so bitterly old, that he was amazed there should be moments when he experienced the fleeting hopes and deep despair of any other lover of his years. He left his bed at night and went out and walked about the island, or rowed until he was lost under the stars; he dreamed miserably of her over his books, or hid in the cane fields to watch her swing by in the early morning, divested of that hideous hoop-skirt, and unconsciously mimicking the undulating gait of the coloured women she passed. He had replenished his wardrobe and was becoming as dandified as any blood in Bath House, having borrowed from Hunsdon against his next remittance. And as he was eating regularly for the first time in years—less and less of the concoctions

of his own worthless servants—and drinking not at all, there was no doubt that he was improving in appearance as well as in health, in vitality. The last word rose in his brain to-day for the first time. Could it be that this mortal lassitude might leave him, neck and heel? That red blood would run in his veins once more? To what end? He was none the less disgraced, none the less unfit to aspire to the hand of Anne Percy. Not only would the world denounce her if she yielded, but his own self-contempt was too deep to permit him to take so much innocent loveliness to himself. But the thought often maddened him, and to-day, as he looked up and caught her eyes fixed upon him, suddenly to be withdrawn with a deep blush, he had to control himself from abruptly leaving the church. More than once he had suspected an interest, which in happier conditions might have developed very rapidly. There was no doubt that his work meant more to her than to any woman he had ever met, and he was convinced that she avoided him both from a natural shrinking and because her strong common sense compelled her to see him as he was, forbade her imagination to transmute his battered husk into the semblance of what was left of his better self. But she could love him. That was the thought that sent the blood to his head and drove him from his pillow.

But it did not drive him to brandy. He had felt no temptation to drink since he met her. It was true that before his final downfall he had only felt the actual necessity of stimulant coincidently with the awakening of his wondrous but strangely heavy muse; but during the past five years he had burnt out tormenting thoughts and remorse with alcohol, drinking but the more deeply when his familiar throbbed dully and demanded release.

He could not look ahead. He had not the least idea what would be the immediate result of the departure of Anne Percy, his return to the loneliness of his home. With a reinvigorated body, and some renewal of his faith in woman, he might resist temptation if he thought it worth while. But the next poem? What then? He had never written a line of serious work except under the influence of brandy. He knew that he never should. And with nothing else to live for, to forswear the muse to whom he was indebted for all the happiness he had ever known was too much for God or man to ask of him.

He had been sitting tensely, and he suddenly leaned back and endeavoured to invoke into his soul the peace that pervaded the house of worship. The good clergyman was droning, fans and silken skirts were rustling, eyes challenging. But outside the light wind was singing in the palm trees, the warm air entered through the window beside him laden with the sweet perfumes of the tropics.

The sky was as blue as heaven. He reflected gratefully that at least he had never grown insensible to the beauty of his island, never even contemplated deserting her for either the superior advantages or the superior dissipations of the great world. To live his life on Nevis and with Anne Percy! Oh God! He almost groaned aloud, and then came to himself as Lady Mary rose and extended the half of her hymn book.

CHAPTER XI

As he left the church Hunsdon took his arm, and begging Lady Mary to excuse them both, led him down the mountain by a side path to Hamilton House. It was evident that the young nobleman had something on his mind, but it was not until they were in Warner's study, and he had fidgeted about for a few moments that he brought it out.

"Of course, old fellow, you divine that I have a favour to ask?" he said, growing very red, and staring out of the window.

Warner, who had seated himself, looked surprised, but replied that no favour was too great to be asked by the best of friends. Then he wondered if Hunsdon had guessed his love for Anne Percy and was come to warn him from Bath House. With a hot rush of blood to the head he almost hoped that the favour was nothing less and he might relieve his overcharged feelings by pitching Hunsdon out of the window.

But nothing could have been so far from Hunsdon's well-regulated mind. He had come on a very different errand.

"The truth is—well, my dear Byam, you no doubt have seen how it is with me, long since. The state of my affections. But I do not seem to make much headway. Miss Percy is charming to all, but the only reason that I sometimes permit myself to hope is because she is occasionally rude to me. I am told that is always a propitious sign in females."

"Do you want me to propose for you?" asked Warner.

"Oh, by no means. I shall do that myself when I think the moment is ripe. But it is not, as yet. What do you think?"

"I have not the least idea, not being an eavesdropper."

"Of course not, dear old fellow. And naturally you do not take much interest in such matters. But there are certain preliminary steps a man may take, and as I never paid court to a woman before I fear I am not as skilled as some. I feel that you could assist me materially."

“I have few opportunities of talking apart with Miss Percy, but I am willing to inform her of the high esteem in which I hold you——”

“Oh dear me no. Her aunt, I fear, does too much of that. Young women should not be antagonised by being made to feel that their relatives and friends are too anxious for a match. I fancy they are not unlike us, the best of them, in that regard. No, what I should like, what would be of inestimable service in my suit, would be to have you write a sonnet or madrigal to her in my name, that is to say that I could sign—which would not be so good as to betray the authorship. As you know, many men with no pretensions whatever, write odes and sonnets to their fair ones, but I could not even make a rhyme. She does not know that, however, and if it were not too fine, yet delicately flattering—I feel sure that she would be touched.”

“By all means, my dear fellow.” Warner almost laughed aloud as he wheeled about and took up a quill. He had no jealousy of Hunsdon, knew that he would never win Anne Percy; but the irony of inditing a sonnet to her in the name of another man took away his breath.

He wrote steadily for an hour, copying and polishing, for he was too great an artist to send forth even an anonymous trifle incomplete in finish. Lord Hunsdon, who was a young man of excellent parts, took from the table a copy of the *De Augmentis Scientiarum*, and read diligently until Warner crossed the room and handed him the sonnet.

Hunsdon was enraptured, but Warner refused to be thanked.

“It would be an odd circumstance,” he said dryly, “if I could not do that much for you.”

Hunsdon blushed furiously. “Only one thing more could make me the happiest of men,” he cried, with that kindling of the eye that in other conditions would have developed into a steady fanaticism. “And when all is well, you must come and live with us. Now that the world has found you once more I feel that I above all should be held to account did you despise and forget it again. I shall not even leave you behind when I return to England. Now, I must run off and copy this. Remember, you dine with us to-night.”

CHAPTER XII

Lord Hunsdon had already bought an album in Charlestown, and after copying the sonnet several times to practise his chirography, he inscribed it upon the first page—a pink one—signing it “Your most obedient Hunsdon,” with an austere flourish. Then he carefully wrapped the album in tissue paper and sent it to Anne’s room, with strict orders to his man not to leave it unless she were quite alone. The best of men have their vanities; the idea that the superior Mary Denbigh or the satirical Miss Bargarny might witness the offering’s arrival was insupportable.

Anne was alone and unfolded the large square package with much curiosity. It was one of those albums that the young ladies of her day loved to possess; indeed, so far, she had been the only girl in Bath House without one, and had read the flattering verses in several with some envy. This tribute was sumptuously bound in brown calf embossed with gold, and all the leaves were delicately tinted. She turned over the pale greens and pinks, blues and canaries, with that subtle indefinable pleasure that colour gives to certain temperaments. She had not glanced at the servant, and fancied the album a present from Lady Constance. When she saw the signature on the first page she stared, for Lord Hunsdon was the last person she would have suspected of cultivating the muse. She began the sonnet with a ripple of laughter, but paled before she finished. Trifling as it was she recognised it as the work of Byam Warner. She could never be mistaken there. It resembled nothing of his that she knew, but the grace of the verse, the fine instinctive choice of words, the glitter and sweep of phrase, belonged to him and none other. Her heart leaped as she wondered if it were not the first bit of verse he had ever written while sober. And she had inspired it! The thought brought another in its train and she went suddenly to her window and stared through the jalousies at the dazzling sunlight on the palms, for the first time seeing nothing of the beauty of Nevis.

The poem had been written from himself to her. A phrase or two not intended for Hunsdon’s unsuspecting eye assured her of that. It was not an old sonnet furbished up to fit the purpose of a friend. And fragile as the thing was, still it was poetry—and he had written it when sober—and to her——

She repeated this discovery many times before she could give shape to the

greater thought building in her brain. It was a beginning, a milestone. Might it not be within her compass to influence him so indelibly that his muse would continue to wake at her call, at the mere thought of her, with no aid from that foul hag of drink, which of late had almost made her hate his poetry as the work of a base alliance? She believed that if he did not love her he was yet so deep in admiration that she could inspire him with a profound attachment if she chose. And the result? If only she were a seer, as certain of her Scotch kin claimed to be. A hopeless love might inspire him to the greater work the world expected of him; she had read of the flowering of genius in the strong soil of misery. But he had suffered enough already, poor devil! The result of loving for the last time, with no hope of possession, might fling him from Parnassus into the Inferno, where he would roast in unproductive torment for the rest of his mortal span. Even that might not be for long. He looked frail enough beside these fresh young English sportsmen, or even the high-coloured planters, burnt without and within.

It was a terrible question for any woman to be forced to ask, particularly were she honest enough to confess that no woman should ask it. What right had she to put her finger into any man’s destiny unless she were willing to take the consequences and share that destiny if invited? But that no woman could be expected to do. Why could he not have realised her mental picture of him: that glorified being with whom she had dwelt so long? She sighed as she recalled her many disillusionments of the past few weeks. Bath House was the world in little. It seemed years since she had left Warkworth Manor. She found that world a somewhat mean and sordid place. She still loved the gaiety and sumptuousness of her new life, for it appealed to inherited instincts. But she had not found a responsive spirit. The young married women were absorbed in their children or their flirtations. The girls were superficially read, “accomplished,” conceited, insincere, with not an aspiration above getting a husband of fortune. Lady Mary, alarmed at last, was become cool and spiteful. Lady Hunsdon was almost an enemy. Lady Constance seemed to have more heart than most of her ilk in spite of her caustic tongue, but she hardly made a sympathetic companion for a romantic young girl brought up in the country. It was true that she had recently made an interesting acquaintance in Miss Medora Ogilvy, the clever daughter of one of the planters, who vowed she loved her and swore undying friendship; but Anne needed more time to reciprocate feelings so ardent, particularly in her present state of mind.

On the whole she liked the young men better, as they were less spiteful and petty, but they had read little and the only subject of which, barring sport and

society, they had any real knowledge, was politics, and this they vowed too fatiguing for the tropics. They preferred the language of compliment, they loved to dawdle, to hold a skein of worsted, to read a novel aloud, or “The Yellowplush Papers” or selections from “Boz”; when tired of female society, or when it was too hot to hunt or fish, they retired to the gaming tables. Anne had never dreamed that the genus man could be so little stirring, and although she was flattered by their attentions, particularly by those of Mr. Abergenny, and her natural coquetry was often responsive, for mere youth must have its way, she was appalled by her general sense of disappointment and wondered what her future was to be. She had no desire to return to her manor, and for a season in London she cared as little. She would have been glad to remain on Nevis, but to this she knew that Mrs. Nunn would not hearken. London was inevitable; and possibly she would meet some intelligent and interesting man who would help her to bury romance and fulfil the proper destiny of woman.

She wondered to-day as she had wondered once or twice before, could she have loved Byam Warner in spite of his unlikeness to her exaggerated ideal had she found him a normal member of society, as fine in appearance as his years and his original endowment deserved. It was a question to which she could find no answer, but certainly his conversation, could she but permit herself to enjoy it, must be far superior to that of anyone else on Nevis. And a flirtation with the poet of the day would have been exciting, something to remember, a feather in her cap. She had her share of feminine vanity—it grew daily, she fancied—and it was by no means unfed by the manifest admiration, possibly love, of this great poet in his ruin. Whatever his tribute might be worth, it was offered to none but herself, and if the man were beneath consideration the poet was of a radiance undimmed.

Suddenly it occurred to her that did he tread his present straight and hygienic path for a full year he might indeed be his old self when next she came to Nevis. The island was healthy at all seasons, those who lived on it were immune from fever. Nature would remake what Warner had unmade too early to have destroyed root and sap. Many a man had sown his wild oats and lived to a hale old age. Would that mean that next winter Byam Warner would be handsome, attractive, confident? She often heard the good looks of his youth referred to, and there certainly were the remains of beauty in that wrecked countenance. His eyes were sunken, but they were still of a deep black gray, and they daily gained in brightness. His hair was almost black, and abundant. The shape of his head and brow and profile were above reproach, for dissipation had never grossened

him. But his face, although improving, was still haggard and lined and stamped with satiety; his mouth betrayed the wild passions that had wrecked him, and was often drawn in lines of bitterness and disgust. There was nothing commanding in his carriage, such as women love, and his manners were too reserved, too shy, to fascinate her sex apart from the halo of his fame. A return to health and vigour might improve him vastly, but nothing could ever make him a dashing romantic figure; and although sometimes a light came into his face that revealed the poet, commonly he betrayed not an inkling of his gifts. But even so he might be more worth while than any man she had met so far, whatever the great world might have in store; and she wished that his reformation had been accomplished the winter before and she were now in enjoyment of the result. Then she found distaste in the thought that she might have had no hand in his reclamation, and was glad to recall his hint that but for her he would never have crossed the threshold of Bath House. And then she was overwhelmed with the sense of her responsibility. It was not for the first time, but not until to-day had she faced the question of how far she ought to go. And even to-day she did not feel up to reasoning it out. She knew too little of the world, of men; there was no one to whom she could go for advice. She re-read the sonnet, determined to be guided by events, registered a vow that in no case would she shirk what she might believe to be her duty; and then wrote a prim little note of acknowledgment to Lord Hunsdon.

CHAPTER XIII

Lady Hunsdon, having in vain besought the poet to read aloud to a select audience, acted upon the hint he had unwittingly dropped to Anne Percy and organised a charity performance for the benefit of an island recently devastated by earthquake. Warner was visibly out of countenance when gaily reminded by Anne of his careless words, but he could do no less than comply, for the wretched victims were in want of bread. Lady Mary, Miss Bargarny, and several others offered their services. All aristocratic Nevis were invited to contribute their presence and the price of a ticket, and the performance would end with a dance that should outlast the night.

Nevis was in a great flutter of excitement, partly because of the promised ball, for which the military band of St. Kitts was engaged, partly because but a favoured few, and years ago, had heard Byam Warner read. Indeed, his low voice was never heard three yards away, in a drawing-room, although it had frequently made Charlestown ring. He was now on his old footing at the Great Houses. The nobler felt many a pang of conscience that they had permitted a stranger at Bath House to accomplish a work so manifestly their own, while others dared not be stigmatised as provincial, prejudiced, middle-class. If London could afford a superb indifference to the mere social offences of a great poet, well, so could Nevis. They forgot that London had arisen as one man and flung him out, neck and crop. Lady Hunsdon had eclipsed London; rather, for the nonce did she epitomise it. Her gowns came not even from Bond Street. They were confected in Paris. Hers was the most distinguished Tory *salon* in London. Her son was the golden fish for which all maidens fortunate enough to be within reach of the sacred pond angled. It was whispered that Warner would accompany Hunsdon to London, be a guest in his several stately homes, possibly be returned from one of his numerous boroughs. The poet approached his zenith for the second time.

Curricles, phaetons, gigs, britzskas, barouches, family chaises brought the elect of Nevis, and their guests, from St. Kitts to Bath House a little before nine o’clock; the lowly of Charlestown to the terrace before the ever open windows of the saloon where the performance was to be held. In the friendly bedrooms of the hotel there was a great shaking down of skirts, rearranging of tresses. Miss Medora Ogilvy went straight to Anne’s room, by invitation, and finding it empty, proceeded to beautify herself. Byron had been much in vogue at the time of her

birth—was yet, for that matter—and she had been named romantically. But there was little romance in the shrewd brain of Miss Ogilvy. She was well educated and accomplished—like many of her kind she had gone to school in England; she could cook and manage even West Indian servants—her mother was an invalid; and she wished for nothing under heaven but to marry a man of "elegant fortune" and turn her back upon Nevis for ever. She really liked Anne and thought her quite the most admirable girl she had ever met, but she was not of those that deceive themselves, and frankly admitted that the chief attraction of her new friend was her almost constant proximity to Lord Hunsdon.

Miss Ogilvy was petite, with excellent features and slanting black eyes that gave her countenance a slightly Oriental cast. She wore her black hair in smooth bands over her ears, *à la Victoria*, and her complexion was as transparently white as only a West Indian's can be. To-night she pirouetted before the pier glass with much complacency. She wore a full flowing skirt of pink satin, with little flounces of lace and rosettes on the front, puffed tight sleeves, and a corsage of white illusion, pink bands, flowers, and rosettes. As she settled a wreath of pink rosebuds on her head and wriggled her shoulders still higher above her bodice, she felt disposed to hum a tune. She was but nineteen and Lady Mary was twenty-nine if she was a day.

Anne, who had been assisting Mrs. Nunn's maid to adjust lavender satin folds and the best point lace shawl, entered at the moment and was greeted with rapture.

"Dearest Miss Percy! What a vision! A Nereid! A Lorelei! You will extinguish us all. Poor Lord Hunsdon. Poor Mr. Warner—ah, *ma belle*, I have eyes in my head. But what a joy to see you in colour. How does it happen?"

"My aunt insisted while we were in London that I buy one or two coloured gowns. My father has been dead more than a year. I put this on to-night to please her, although I have two white evening gowns."

She wore green taffeta flowing open in front over a white embroidered muslin slip, and trimmed with white fringe. A sash whose fringed ends hung down in front, girt her small waist. Her arms and neck were bare, but slipping from the shoulders, carelessly held in the fashion of the day, was a white crêpe scarf fringed with green. She wore her hair in the usual bunch of curls on either side of her face, but in a higher knot than usual, and had bound her head with the golden fillet Mrs. Nunn had pressed upon her in London. Depending from it and

resting on her forehead, was an oblong emerald; Anne had a few family jewels although she wore no others to-night.

“I vow!” continued Miss Ogilvy, tripping about her, “quite classic! And at the same time such style! Such *ton*! Madame Lucille made that gown. Am I not right?”

Anne confessed that Madame Celeste had made it.

“Celeste, I meant. How could I be so stupid? But it is two long years since I laid eyes on Bond Street. A humbler person, plain Mrs. Barclay, sends out my gowns. What do you think, dear Miss Percy, shall I look provincial, second-rate, amongst all these lucky people of fashion?”

“You are lovely and your gown is quite perfect,” said Anne warmly, and then the two girls went down-stairs arm in arm, vowing eternal friendship. Miss Ogilvy professed a deep interest in the poet, declared that she had begged her obdurate papa time and again to call upon and reclaim him; and Anne, who now detested Lady Mary, was resolved to further her new friend’s interests with Lord Hunsdon. He joined them at the foot of the staircase and escorted them to a little inner balcony above the saloon. There was no danger of interference from Lady Mary, who was to perform, or from Lady Hunsdon, who occupied the chair of state in the front row.

They were late and looked down upon a brilliant scene. Not even a dowager wore black, and the young women, married and single, were in every hue, primary and intermediate. Almost as many wore their hair *à la Victoria* as in the more becoming curls, for loyalty, so long dead and forgotten, was become the rage since the young Queen had raised the corpse. But they softened the severity of the coiffure with wreaths, and feathers, and fillets, and even coquettish little lace laps, filled with flowers. The men were equally fine in modish coats and satin waistcoats; narrow and severe or deep and ruffled neckties but one degree removed from the stock, or in flowing collars *à la Byron*. Their hair was parted in the middle and puffed out at the side; not a few wore a flat band of whisker that looked like the strap of the condemned. Both Hunsdon and Warner shaved, or Anne would have tolerated neither.

There was a platform at the end of the saloon, with curtains at the back separating it from a small withdrawing-room, and it had been tastefully embellished with rugs, jars of gorgeous flowers, a reading stand, a harp and a piano.

“Who will sway over the harp?” asked Miss Ogilvy humorously.

“Lady Mary. Ah! They are about to begin.”

A fine applause greeted Miss Bargarny, who executed the overture to Semiramide quite as well as it deserved. After the clapping was over and she had obligingly given an encore, she remained at the piano, and Mr. Stewart, a young man with red hair and complexion, in kilts and pink knees, emerged from the curtains, and sang in a thundering voice several of Burns’s tenderest songs. After their final retirement the curtains were drawn apart with much dignity, and Lady Mary stepped forth; a vision, as her severest critics were forced to admit. She was in diaphanous white, with frosted flowers amidst her golden ringlets, a little crown of stars above her brow, and a scarf of silver tissue.

“All she needs is wings!” exclaimed Miss Ogilvy, and added to herself, “may she soon get them!”

Lady Mary, acknowledging the rapturous greeting with a seraphic expression and the grand air, literally floated to the harp, where nothing could have displayed to a greater advantage her long willowy figure, her long white thin arms, the drooping gold of her ringlets. As the golden music tinkled from the tips of her taper fingers—formed for the harp, which may have had somewhat to do with her choice of instrument—her ethereal loveliness swayed in unison, and, one might fancy—if not a rival—emitted a music of its own.

“She doesn’t look a day over twenty!” exclaimed Miss Ogilvy. “Who would dream that she was thirty? But those fragile creatures break all at once. When she does fade she will be even more *passée* than most.”

“But women know so many arts nowadays,” said Anne drily. “And she would be the last to ignore them.”

“Ah! no doubt she will hang on till she gets a husband. I never knew anyone to want one so badly.”

“Lady Mary?” asked Hunsdon wonderingly. “I had long since grown to look upon her as a confirmed old maid.”

“La! La! my lord!” Miss Ogilvy suddenly resolved upon a bold stroke. “She’s trying with all her might and main to marry your own most intimate friend.”

“My most intimate friend? He is in England. Nottingdale. Do you know him? Or

do you perchance mean Warner?”

“Never heard of the first and it certainly is not the last. Oh, my lord!” And then she laughed so archly that poor Lord Hunsdon could not fail to read her meaning. His fresh coloured face, warm with ascending heat, turned a deep brick red. He felt offended with both Miss Ogilvy and Lady Mary, and edged closer to Anne as if for protection.

This conversation took place while Lady Mary was bowing in response to the plaudits her performance evoked. She tinkled out another selection, and then, with a gently dissenting gesture, the dreaming eyes almost somnambulistic, floated through the curtains.

There was a brief interval for rapturous vocatives and then the curtains were flung apart and Spring burst through, crying,

> “I come! I come! Ye have called me long.
> I come o’er the mountains with light and song!
> Ye may trace my step o’er the wakening earth
> By the winds that tell of the violet’s birth.”

The young lady, attired in white and hung with garlands, looked not unlike the engraving of “Spring” in the illustrated editions of the poems of the gentle Felicia. For a moment Anne, who had long outgrown Mrs. Hemans, was disposed to laugh, but as the sweet ecstatic voice trilled on a wave of sadness swept over her, a familiar scene of her childhood rose and effaced the one beneath. She saw the favourite room of her mother in the tower overhanging the sea, her brothers sprawled on the hearthrug, herself in her own little chair, her mother in her deep invalid sofa holding her youngest child in her arms, while she softly recited the “Evening Prayer at a Girl’s School,” “The Coronation of Inez del Castro,” “Juana,” or, to please the more robust taste of the boys, “Bernardo del Carpio,” and “Casabianca,” the last two in sweet inadequate tones. Lines, long forgotten swept back to Anne out of the past:

> The night wind shook the tapestry round an ancient palace
> room,
> And torches, as it rose and fell, waved through the
> gorgeous gloom.
>
> There was music on the midnight—
> From a royal fane it rolled.

The warrior bowed his crested head, and tamed his heart of
fire,
And sued the haughty king to free his long imprisoned sire.

Mrs. Percy had been a gentle, sentimental, romantic creature with golden ringlets and floating sylph-like form, not unlike Lady Mary's. She received little attention from her scientific husband and devoted her short life to her children and to poetry, writing graceful vacant verses herself. Mrs. Hemans was her favourite poet, although her eyes could kindle when she read "The Corsair," or "The Bride of Arbydos," particularly as she had once met Byron and remembered him as the handsomest of mortals. But she would have thought it indecorous even to mention his name before her young children. Mrs. Hemans was as much a part of the evening hour in winter as the dusk and the blazing logs, and the children loved her almost as well as the gentle being who renewed her girlhood in those romantic effusions. A malignant fever raging up the coast, had burnt out that scene for ever, leaving Anne alone and aghast, for her father, the first horror and remorse over, subsided once more into his laboratory. Then had come a succession of governesses; finally the library was discovered; she ceased to miss her old companions. But she never forgot them, and no doubt the sweetness and melancholy of the memory did as much as the imaginary Byam Warner to save her from the fate of her dry dehumanised father.

Anne came to herself as a charade progressed, and Miss Ogilvy gaily commented upon the interpretation of the middle syllable of Caterpillar, as A, in the architecture of which one of the handsomest girls and her swain made a striking silhouette. Then she remembered that the next name on the programme was Warner's; he was to read for half an hour from his own work; after which all would hie themselves to the music room and dance.

There was a longer interval than usual. Anne's hands and feet became nerveless bits of ice. Had his courage given out? Had he run away? Worse still, was he nerving himself to an ordeal to which he would prove unequal? A humiliating breakdown! Anne's blood pounded through her body as he finally emerged from the curtains, and she broke her fan, much to the amusement of Miss Ogilvy.

The company, although it had once or twice permitted its applause to go beyond the bounds prescribed by elegant civility, had reserved its real enthusiasm for the poet whose halo of present fashion electrified their springs of Christianity. As he entered, correctly attired, although more soberly than most of his audience, and

walked slowly to the reading stand, they not only clapped but stamped and cried his name until the walls resounded; and so excited the coloured people (with whom his popularity had never waned) that a stentorian chorus burst through the windows and drowned the more polite if no less ardent greeting of the elect.

Warner blushed faintly and bent his head in acknowledgment, but otherwise gave no sign of the astonishment he must feel, and stood quite still until the noise had died away down to its final echo in the neighbourhood of the palm avenue. When he finally lifted his book a sudden breathless silence fell upon the company. Anne leaned over the railing in almost uncontrollable excitement, her face white, her breath short. Lord Hunsdon was too agitated himself to observe her, but the unaffected Miss Ogilvy took note and matured plans.

Warner began to read in his low, toneless, but distinct voice. In a few moments the excitement subsided; he was pronounced insufferably monotonous. Fans rustled, hoops scraped the hard floors. Lady Constance gave a loud admonitory cough. Warner paid no heed. Still he read on in low monotone. A few moments more and its spell had enmeshed the company. The silence was so deep that the low murmur of the sea could be heard beyond (or within) his own voice. The most impatient, the most vehement, raised significant eyebrows and shot out optical affirmations that nothing could be more effective than the verbal method the poet had adopted—although doubtless it was quite his own, so in keeping was it with his reserved, retiring, non-committal personality. Be that as it may, the dramatic scenes, the impassioned phrases, the virile original vocabulary that flowed from his set lips could never be delivered so potently by tones that matched their tenor. The contrast flung them into undreamed of relief. Those most familiar with his work wondered that they had never understood it before.

Anne felt more than all this. She closed her eyes and enjoyed a delusion. It was the soul of the poet reading. The body there was but a fallacy of vision, non-existent, really dead, perhaps; subservient for a while longer to that imperious immortal part that had not yet fulfilled its earthly mission. She had allowed herself to believe that she had caught fleeting glimpses of this man’s soul, so different from his battered clay; to-night she heard it, and heard as she never did by the North Sea when all her world was one vast delusion. It murmured like the sea itself, the gray cold sea of some strange dark planet beyond the stars, whence came, who knew? all genius; a sea whose tides would rise high and higher until they exhausted the clay they beat upon while they had yet a message to deliver to Earth. That clay! If it could but be preserved a few years longer! Great as was his accomplished work he must do greater yet. No student of his more ambitious

poems, half lyric, half dramatic, believed his powers were yet developed.

Anne came to herself amidst a new thunder of applause. She told herself with a sigh and an angry blush that she was a romantic idiot and the sooner she married and had a little family to think of the better. Heaven knew what folly she might be capable of did she give rein to dreams. She became aware that Warner, compelled to silence, was looking straight at her, and she automatically beat her hands together. He smiled slightly and gave his head an almost imperceptible shake. Then some one in the audience called for the popular poem in which he had so vigorously denounced Macaulay’s unjust estimate of Byron a few years since, holding up to scorn the brain of the mere man of letters who dared to criticise or even to attempt to understand the abnormal brain and temperament of a great poet. He recited it from memory and then retired followed by a tumult of approval that he well knew he never should evoke again.

CHAPTER XIV

When Anne descended the company was streaming toward the music room, whence issued the rich summons of a full military band. She manœuvred so well that Lord Hunsdon led out Miss Ogilvy for the first dance, and sat down beside Mrs. Nunn, hoping that Warner would summon courage to take the empty chair beside her. Her pulses beat high with excitement and delight in his triumph, and she longed to show him recklessly for once the admiration and the faith she had taken care to conceal under a correctly flattering manner. But Warner stood talking with a group of men, and even could he have ignored a sudden imperious beckoning of Lady Hunsdon's fan he would have been too late. With one of those concerted impulses to which men no less than women are subject, the young bloods of Bath House, the moment they saw Anne Percy radiant in colour, with an even deeper blush and brighter eyes than usual, determined that she and she alone should be the belle of the evening. She had hardly seated herself when she was surrounded, she was besieged for dances; and in spite of her protests that she had never danced save with her governesses, she found herself whirling about the room in the arm of Mr. Abergenny, and followed by many an angry eye. Abergenny might be untitled and less of a "catch" than Lord Hunsdon, but he had far more dash, manner, and address; he possessed a fine property, if somewhat impaired by high living, and was a man of note and fashion in London. His word alone had stamped more than one ambitious beauty for good or ill, and this was not the first time that he had intimated his entire approval of Miss Percy. Anne guessed that his intentions were never serious, but he had amused her more than the others, and since she must know the world, doubtless she should be grateful for tutelage so able.

Although trembling and suffused with terrified blushes, all her old shyness in possession, Mr. Abergenny was so admirable a partner, he gave her so many courteous hints, he kept her so persistently in the thick of the dancing, where critical eyes could hardly follow her, that her confidence not only returned, but before she had completed the circuit of the room three times she was vastly enjoying herself. She danced round and square dances with her various admirers for the next hour, and when the country dance was at its height she found herself tripping alone between the long files with no return of bashfulness and no less grace than Lady Mary herself; forgetting that there could be no better

preparation for grace in the ball-room than years of free exercise out of doors.

She abandoned herself to the new and unanticipated pleasure, and not only of dancing but of being the acknowledged belle of the night. Beyond the intoxication of the moment nothing existed. Once indeed, she met Warner’s eyes, and they flashed with surprise and rage, but she forgot him and danced until even her strong frame could stand no more, and she went to bed with the dawn and slept till afternoon.

CHAPTER XV

Depressed with reaction and heavy with unwonted sleeping by daylight, she was glad to go from her dressing-table to the carriage waiting to take herself and her aunt for the customary drive. It was but a moment before her mind was startled into its accustomed activity.

“Mr. Warner has disappeared again.” Mrs. Nunn tilted her lace parasol against the slanting sun. “Poor Maria!”

“Disappeared?”

“That is the general interpretation. Maria, with whom he was to dine to-night, received a note from him this morning asking to be excused as he was going away for some time; and when Hunsdon rushed down to Hamilton House—unshaved and without his plunge—he was told that the poet was gone; none of the servants could say where nor when he would return. So that is probably the last of the reformed poet. I suppose last night’s excitement proved too much for him.”

Anne’s feeling was almost insupportable, but she forced her tone into the register which Miss Bargarny and her kind would employ to express lively detached regret. “That would be quite dreadful, and most ungrateful. But I do not believe—anything of the sort. No doubt all that reading of his own work stirred his muse and he has shut himself up to write.”

“Well, as he always shuts himself up with a quart of brandy at the same time, that is equally the end of him as far as we are concerned. For my part I have never been able to make out what all of you find in him to admire. He would be quite ordinary to look at if it were not for a few good lines, and I never heard him utter a remark worth listening to. And as for fashion! Compare him last night with Lord Hunsdon or Mr. Abergenny!”

“I think myself he made a mistake not to appear in a rolling collar and a Turkish coat and turban! I don’t fancy that he emulates Lord Hunsdon or Mr. Abergenny in anything.”

“At least not in devotion to you, so you will not miss him. And you have nothing

to regret, if he *was* the fashion—thanks to Maria—for awhile; a young girl should never suffer detrimentals to hang about her. Which of your beaux do you fancy most?" she demanded in a tone elaborately playful.

"Which? Oh, Lord Hunsdon is the better man, and Mr. Abergenny the better beau."

"I don't fancy that Mr. Abergenny's attentions are ever very serious," said Mrs. Nunn musingly. "He certainly could make any young lady the fashion, but he is fickle and must marry fortune. But Hunsdon—he is quite independent, and as steady as"—she glanced about in search of a simile, remembered West Indian earthquakes, and added lamely—"as the Prince Consort himself." Then she felt that the inspiration had been a happy one, and continued with more animation than was her wont: "You know they are really friendly."

"Who?"

"The Prince Consort and Hunsdon. It is almost an intimacy."

"Why not? I suppose a prince must have friends like other people, and there are not many of his rank in England. I do not see how the Prince Consort could do better than Hunsdon. The Queen certainly must approve."

"I am glad you so warmly commend Hunsdon. I have the highest respect for him myself—the very greatest."

"If you mean that you wish me to marry him, Aunt Emily—have you ever reflected that it might cool your friendship with Lady Hunsdon? She does not like me and I am sure would oppose the match. I may add, however, that Lord Hunsdon has so far made no attempt to address me."

"I don't fancy you are more blind than everybody else in Bath House. I am gratified, indeed, to see that you are not. You are mistaken in thinking that your marriage with Hunsdon would affect my friendship with Maria. It is true that she has conceived the notion that you have an independent spirit, and is in favour of Mary Denbigh at present; but she is too much a woman of the world not to accept the inevitable. And we have been friends for five-and-forty years. She could not get along without me. I have not been idle in this matter. I sing your praises to her, assure her that you have never crossed my will in anything. Last night I told her how sweetly you had submitted to buying that coloured gown, and to wear that fillet—it becomes you marvellously well. I have also told her

what a tractable daughter you were."

"I couldn't help myself. I had not a penny of my own——"

"One of the unwritten laws of the world you now live in is to tell the least of all you know. The fact remains. You *were* tractable—submissive. You never made a scene for poor Harold in your life."

"He wouldn't have known if I had."

"Well, well, I am sure you are submissive, and always will be when your interest demands it. I admire a certain amount of spirit, and your difference from all these other girls, whatever it is, makes you very attractive to the young men. Abergenny says that you are an out-of-door goddess, which I think very pretty; but on the whole I prefer Hunsdon's protest: that you are the most womanly woman he ever set eyes on."

"It has more sense. I never read in any mythology of indoor goddesses. Opinion seems to differ, however. Lady Mary said to me yesterday: 'You are so masculine, dear Miss Percy. You make us all look the merest females!'"

"Mary Denbigh is a cat. You know she is a cat. She would give Maria many a scratch if she caught Hunsdon. But she will not. It is all in your own hands, my dear."

Anne did not make the hoped for response. She did not even blush, and Mrs. Nunn continued, anxiety creeping into her voice: "You need never be much thrown with Maria. She would settle herself in the dower house which is almost as fine as Hunsdon Towers. In town she has her own house in Grosvenor Square. Hunsdon House in Piccadilly—one of the greatest mansions in London—would be all your own."

But she could not command the attention of her niece again, and permitting herself to conclude that the maiden was lost in a pleasing reverie, she subsided into silence, closed her eyes to the beauty of land and sea, and also declined into reverie, drowsy reverie in which pictures of herself in all the glory of near kinship to a beautiful and wealthy young peeress, were mixed with speculations upon her possible luck at cards that night. She had lost heavily of late and it was time she retrieved her fortunes.

At dinner and in the saloon later the talk was all of the poet's disappearance. Some held out for the known eccentricities of genius, others avowed themselves

in favour of the theory that respectable society had risen to its surfeit the night before. The natural reaction had set in and he was enjoying himself once more in his own way and wondering that he had submitted to be bored so long. Anne went to bed her mind a chaos of doubt and terror.

CHAPTER XVI

She would have overslept again had it not been for the faithful maid with her coffee. She sprang out of bed at once, a trifle disburdened by the thought of a long ramble alone in the early morning, and, postponing her swim in the tanks below until her return, dressed so hurriedly that had hats been in vogue hers no doubt would have gone on back foremost. She was feverishly afraid of being intercepted, although such a thing had never occurred, the other women being far too elegant to rise so early, and a proper sense of decorum forbidding the young men to offer their escort.

The sea had never been a stiller, hotter blue, the mountain more golden, the sky more like an opening rose. But she strode on seeing nothing. Sleep had given her no rest and she was in a torment of spirit that was a new experience in her uneventful life. She recalled the angry astonished eyes of Warner as she danced with all the abandon of a girl at her first ball. No doubt he had thought her vain and frivolous, the average young lady at whose approach he fled when he could. No doubt he thought her in love with Abergenny, whose habit of turning female heads was well known to him, and upon whom she had certainly beamed good will. No doubt he had expected her to manage to pass him, knowing his diffidence, and offer her congratulations; whereas she had taken no notice of him whatever. No doubt—oh, no doubt—he had rushed off in a fury of disappointment and disgust, and all the good work of the past weeks had been undone, all her plans of meeting him a year hence as handsome and fine a man as he had every right to be, were frustrated. She had for some time past detected signs that apathy was gradually relieving a naturally fine spirit of its heavy burden, that his weary indifference was giving place to a watchful alertness, which in spite of the old mask he continued to wear, occasionally manifested itself in a flash of the eye or a quiver of the nostril. Anne could not doubt that he loved her, inexperienced in such matters as she might be. However she may have kept him at a distance her thoughts had seldom left him, and he had betrayed himself in a hundred ways.

Had she been half interested in Hunsdon or Abergenny and they had been so unreasonable as to rush off and disappear merely because she had enjoyed her first ball-room triumphs as any girl must, she would have been both derisive and angry at the liberty; but Warner inspired no such feminine ebullition. He was a

great and sacred responsibility, one, moreover, that she had assumed voluntarily. That he had unexpectedly fallen in love with her but deepened this responsibility, and she had betrayed her trust, she had betrayed her trust!

She left the road suddenly and struck upward into one of the sheltered gorges, sat down in the shadow of the jungle and wept with the brief violence of a tropical storm in summer. Relief was inevitable. When the paroxism was over she found a shaded seat under a cocoanut tree and determined not to return to the hotel for breakfast, nor indeed until she felt herself able to endure the sight of mere people; and endeavoured to expel all thought of Warner from her still tormented mind. In the distance she could see Monserrat and Antigua, gray blurs on the blue water, she could hear the singing of negroes in the cane fields far away, but near her no living thing moved save the monkeys in the tree tops, the blue butterflies, the jewelled humming-birds. On three sides of her was a dense growth of banana, cocoanut and palm trees, cactus, and a fragrant shrub covered with pink flowers. Almost overhanging her was the collar of forest about the cone, and the ever-faithful snow-white cloud that only left the brow of Nevis to creep down and embrace her by night. She took off her bonnet and wished as she had rarely done before that she might never leave this warm fragrant poetic land. It was made for such as she, whose whole nature was tuned to poetry and romance, even if denied the gift of expression—or of consummation! Why should she not remain here? She had some money, quite enough to rent or even build a little house in one of these high solitudes, where she could always look from her window and see the sapphire sea, that so marvellously changed to chrysoprase near the silver palm-fringed shore, inhale these delicious scents, and dream and dream in this caressing air. She hated the thought of London. The world had no real call for her. She wondered at her submission to the will of a woman who had not the least comprehension of her nature. On Nevis would she stay, live her own life, find happiness in beauty and solitude, since the highest happiness was not for her; and at this point she heard a step in the jungle.

She sprang to her feet startled, but even before the heavy leaves parted she knew that it was Warner. When he stood before her he lifted his hat politely and dropped it on the ground, and although he did not smile he certainly was sober.

The relief, the reaction, was so great that the blood rushed to Anne’s brow, the tears to her eyes. She made no attempt to speak at once and he looked at her in silence. Perhaps it was the mountain solitude that gave his spirit greater freedom; perhaps it was merely the effect of the beneficial régime of the past two months; there might be another reason less easy of analysis; but she had never seen him

so assured, so well, so much a man of his own world. His shoulders were quite straight, his carriage was quite erect, there was colour in his face and his eyes were bright. Nor did the haunted, tormented expression she had so often seen look out at her. These were the eyes of a man who had returned to his place among men. He looked young, buoyant.

She spoke finally. “I—we all thought—you disappeared so abruptly—*what* am I saying?”

“You believed that I had returned to the pit out of which you—you alone, mind you—had dragged me. You might have known me better.”

“You should not put such a burden on me. You have character enough——”

“Oh yes, I had character enough, but doubtless you noticed when you first met me that I had ceased to exercise it. I went to the dogs quite deliberately, and, with my enfeebled will and frame, I should have stayed there, had not you magnetised me into your presence, where I was forced to behave if I would remain. Later, for reasons both prosaic and sentimental, I remained without effort. I have never had any real love of spirits, although I loved their effect well enough.”

“You must have loved that oth—that woman very much.”

“She made a fool of me. There is always a time in a man’s life when he can be made a complete ass of if the woman with the will to make an ass of him happens along coincidently. I fancied myself sated with fame, tired of life, a remote and tragic figure among men—the trail of Byron is over us all. That was the moment for the great and fatal passion, and the woman was all that a malignant fate could devise; not only to inspire the passion, but to transform a frame of mind arbitrarily imagined into a sickening reality. From a romantic solitary being I became a prosaic outcast. Nor could I recall anything in the world I had left worth the sacrifice of the magician that gave me brief spells of happiness and oblivion. Nobody pretended that it injured my work, and I remained in the pit.”

“And your self-respect? You were satisfied? Oh surely—you looked—when I first saw you——”

“I loathed myself, of course. My brain was unaffected, was it not? I abhorred my body, and would willingly have slashed it off could I have gone on writing

without it. Either I compelled my soul to stand aside, or I was made on that plan —I cannot tell; but my inner life was never polluted by my visible madness. I have been vile but I have never had a vile thought. I fancy you understand this. And when I am writing my ego does not exist at all—my worst enemies have never accused me of the egoism common to poets. I have lived in another realm, where I have remembered nothing of this. Had it been otherwise no doubt I should have put it all at an end long ago."

Anne had averted her eyes, caught in one of those inner crises where the faculties are almost suspended. She faltered out: "And after—when I come back next year, shall I find you like this?"

He paused so long before replying that she moved with uncontrollable excitement, and as she did so his eyes caught hers and held them.

The intensity of his gaze did not waver but he said, unsteadily, until his own excitement mastered him, "I have assured myself again and again that I never should dare to tell you that I loved you; that I was not fit to approach you; that I must let you go, and try to live with the memory of you. But now I remember nothing but that I love you. I can speak of what I have been, but I cannot recall it. I feel nothing but that I am a man in the restored vigour of youth in the presence of the woman I want. If love is egoistical then I am rampant this moment with egoism. If I could have the bliss of marrying you I never should return to the past even in thought. I am a poet no longer. I am nothing but a lover. I remember nothing, want nothing, but the perfection of human happiness I should find with you."

The words poured from his lips before he finished, and the trained monotony of his voice had gone to the winds. His face was violently flushed, his eyes flashing. "I dare!" he cried exultingly. "I dare! It would be heaven of a sort to have broken through those awful barriers even if you told me to go and never enter your presence again."

"I cannot do that! I cannot!" And then she flung her arms out from her deep womanly figure with a gesture expressive as much of maternal yearning as of youthful and irresistible passion. "I will stay with you forever," she said.

CHAPTER XVII

Several hours later Miss Ogilvy, who was riding slowly along the road after a call at Bath House, suddenly drew rein and stared at an approaching picture. She had a pretty taste in art, had Miss Medora, and had painted all her island friends. Never had she longed more than at this moment for palette and brush. A tall supple figure was coming down the white road between the palms and the cane fields, clad in white, the bonnet hanging on the arm, the sun making a golden web on the chestnut hair. Never had the Caribbean Sea looked as blue as this girl's eyes. Even her cheeks were as pink as the flowers in her belt. She seemed to float rather than walk, and about her head was a cloud of blue butterflies. Miss Ogilvy had seen Anne striding many a morning, and it was the ethereal gait that challenged her attention as much as the beauty of the picture.

They were abreast in a moment, and although Miss Ogilvy prided herself upon the correctness of her deportment, she cried out impulsively, and with no formal greeting: "What, in heaven's name, dear Anne, has happened? I never saw any one look so beautiful—so—happy!"

"I am going to marry Byam Warner," said Anne.

Miss Ogilvy turned pale. She had intended to scheme for this very result, but confronted with the fact, her better nature prevailed, and she faltered out,

"Oh—oh—it is too great a risk! No woman should go as far as that. We are all willing to help him, but that you should be sacrificed—you—you of all——"

"I am not sacrificing myself. Do you fancy I am so great a fool as that? No—no—that is not the reason I shall marry him!"

"He certainly is a great poet and has improved vastly in appearance. I never should have believed it to be possible." The inevitable was working in Miss Ogilvy. "But Mrs. Nunn? All her friends? There will be dreadful scenes. Oh Anne, dear, they will rush you off. They will never permit it."

"My aunt controls nothing but my property, and not the interest of that. If she refuses her consent I shall simply walk up to Fig Tree Church and marry Mr. Warner."

Miss Ogilvy recovered herself completely. “You will do nothing of the sort,” she cried, warm with friendship and the prospect of figuring in the most sensational episode Nevis had known this many a year. “Come to me. Be my guest until the banns have been properly published, and marry from Ogilvy Grange. Everything must be *de rigueur*, or I should never forgive myself. And it would give me the greatest happiness, dear Anne. Mama and papa do everything I wish, and papa is one of Mr. Warner’s father’s oldest friends. Mrs. Nunn will not consent. So promise that you will come to me.”

“I am very grateful. I had not thought much about Aunt Emily’s opposition, but no doubt she will turn me out of Bath House. You may see me at the Grange to-night.”

“Send one of the grooms with a note as soon as you have had the inevitable scene. I only hope the result will be that I send the coach for you to-day. I do hope you’ll be happy. Why shouldn’t you? Byam Warner would not be the first man to settle down in matrimony. But can you stand living your life on Nevis.”

“I should have wished to live here had I never met Byam Warner.”

“Oh—well—you are not to be pitied. I shall paint you while you are at the Grange, all in white—only in a smarter gown—in this setting, and with those blue butterflies circling about your head. You cannot imagine what a picture you made. What a pity I frightened them away. Now, mind you write me at once.”

She kissed her radiant friend with a sigh, doubting that even conquest of Lord Hunsdon would make herself look like a goddess, and rode on.

Anne went her way, even more slowly than before. She was in no haste to face Mrs. Nunn, and she would re-live the morning hours before other mere mortals scattered those precious images in her mind. Warner had taken her up to his hut concealed in a hollow of the mountain and surrounded on all sides by the jungle, then, while she sat on the one chair the establishment boasted, he had cooked their breakfast, a palatable mess of rice and plantains, and the best of coffee. They had consumed it with great merriment under a banana tree, then washed the dishes in a brook. Afterward he had shaken down several young cocoanuts and they had pledged themselves in the green wine. Then they had returned to the shade and talked—what had they not talked about? Anne opened the sealed book of the past five years of which he had been the hero. He read it with amazement and delight, but contrite that he had received no message from that turbulent young brain by the North Sea. But he atoned by confessing that he had

recognised her as his own the moment he laid eyes on her, that she was all and more than he had once modelled in the mists of his brain. He demanded every detail of that long union, so imaginative and so real, and told Anne that never before had a poet had the fortune to meet a woman who was a locked fountain of poetry, yet who revealed the sparkling flood by a method of her own with which no words could compete.

“And will you write my poems?” Anne had asked eagerly. But he had drawn down a broad leaf between his face and hers. “I told you that I was a poet no longer—merely a lover. To know absolute happiness in two forms in this world you must take them in turn. I shall write no more.”

“Were you perfectly happy when you wrote?” asked Anne, a little jealously.

“Perfectly.”

“I can almost understand it.”

“I can no more express it than I have ever been able to tell in verse the half of what I blindly conceived.”

“I should think that might have clouded your happiness.”

“Yes—when a poem was revolving and seething in my distracted head. Never tempt me to write, for while the thing is gestating I am a brute, moody, irritable, unhappy. The whole poem seems to work itself out remorselessly before I can put pen to paper, and at the same time is enveloped in a mist. I catch glimpses like will-o’-the-wisps in a fog bank, sudden visions of perfect form that seem to turn to grinning masks. It is maddening! But when the great moment arrives and I am at my desk I am the happiest man on earth.”

By tacit consent the subject of the stimulants under which he had always written was ignored, as well as the terrible chapter of his life which it was her blessed fortune to close. They had discussed the future, talked of practical things. He had told her that his house could be put in order while they travelled among the islands, and that he made quite enough to support her properly if they lived on Nevis. She had three hundred a year and would have more did she consent to let the manor for a longer term, and he had assured her that hers was a fortune on Nevis outside of Bath House. They finally decided to marry at once that he might show her the other islands before the hurricane season began.

In spite of loitering Anne arrived at the hotel quite two hours before luncheon,

and after divesting herself of a frock that would send Mrs. Nunn into hysterics if her news did not, she went to her aunt's room.

Mrs. Nunn, fresh from her sulphur bath, was reclining on a sofa in her large cool room, where the jalousies were half closed, and dawdling over *Godey's Lady's Book*, a fashion magazine printed in the United States, which found great favour in her eyes.

"My dear Anne," she said languidly, "I suppose you breakfasted with Miss Ogilvy. La! La! You are more burnt than ever. Your face is quite red. And I would have you well bleached before the London season. Pray sit down. It affects my nerves to see you wander about like that."

Anne took a chair facing her aunt. "I did not breakfast with Miss Ogilvy. I have been talking to Mr. Warner all the morning."

"Heavens! what a waste of time, when you might have been talking to Hunsdon in the morning-room. It was quite empty. Maria has Mr. Warner in charge. I hope you have not been walking about with him. You know I told you——"

"No one saw us. We talked up in one of the jungles."

"One of the jungles!" Mrs. Nunn sat up. "I never heard anything sound so horrid. Do you tell me that you have the habit of sitting in jungles—dear me—with young gentlemen! I forbid you to go out again unattended."

"This was the first time."

"It assuredly will be the last."

"I think not. Mr. Warner has a hut in the jungle and I am going to marry him."

"What—you——" And then as she met Anne's eyes she gave a piercing scream, and her maid rushed in. "The sal volatile!" she gasped. "The salts."

She fell back limp, and Anne, who was unaccustomed to the easy fainting of fine ladies, was terrified and administered the restoratives. But Mrs. Nunn may have been less time reviving than Anne fancied, for when she finally opened her eyes they were very hard and her features singularly composed.

"You may go, Claire," she said to the maid. "Return in an hour and pack my boxes. We leave by the packet to-morrow. Now," she added, turning to Anne, "I am prepared to talk to you. Only kindly remember, if you have anything further

of a startling nature to communicate, that I am accustomed to less direct and brutal methods."

"I am sorry," said Anne humbly. Mrs. Nunn waved apology aside.

"Of course you know that I shall never give my consent. Are you determined to marry without it?"

"Yes."

“‘I never wish to see you again’”

“‘I never wish to see you again’”

“Your father all over. It was his expression of inhuman obstinacy in your eyes that gave me even more of a shock than your words. Many a time I endeavoured to gain his consent to your visiting London where you would have seen the world and been sensibly married by this time. Never under my earlier tutelage would you have made a fool of yourself. And you have used Hunsdon abominably ill.”

“I have given him no encouragement whatever——”

“Do not argue. My nerves will not stand it. Now this much I have the right to demand: You are of age, I cannot prevent your marrying this outcast, but you owe it to me as well as to yourself to return to London, be presented to Her Majesty, and do a London season——”

“I never expect to leave the West Indies again, unless to be sure, Mr. Warner should feel obliged to go to London himself. If you sail to-morrow I shall go to Medora Ogilvy——”

“You have planned it all out!” shrieked Mrs. Nunn. Anne hastily poured out another dose of sal volatile.

“I met Medora on my way home. She fancied how you would take it and offered me shelter.”

“I am gratified that my sense of propriety is so well known. You can go to her. I proclaim to the world that I wash my hands of the disgraceful affair by leaving to-morrow. Great God! What a victory for Maria Hunsdon. I believe she plotted it all along.”

Then she plunged into worldly argument, abuse of Warner, awful pictures of the future. Finally Anne rose.

“I don’t wish to do your nerves a real injury, so I shall leave you until you are calmer,” she said.

“I never wish to see you again.”

CHAPTER XVIII

Mrs. Nunn, although she had talked with much heat, was still collected enough to console herself with the reflection that Anne would be terrified into sailing with her on the morrow; it was incomprehensible to her well-regulated mind that any young lady in her niece's position in life would consent to a scandal.

To do her justice, she had no wish to precipitate Anne into an act which she believed must be fatal to her happiness, and she trusted to further argument to persuade her to return to London if only for the trousseau. With her niece and the poet on different sides of the equator she would answer for the result.

Nevertheless, she called in Lady Hunsdon and Lady Constance Mortlake, and fairly enjoyed the consternation visible upon the bright satisfied countenance of her Maria. Lady Hunsdon, indeed, thought it a great pity that Anne had not spared her son by selecting one of the beaux of Bath House instead of the dissolute poet.

"It is quite a tragedy!" she said with energy, "and I for one cannot permit it. I feel as if it were my fault——"

"It is," said Lady Constance.

"But is it? I am inclined to blame my son, as he brought me here to reform Mr. Warner—and that part of the work I take credit for——"

"Devil a bit. He never would have come to Bath House without Anne Percy as a bait. I have learned that he was several times seen staring through the windows of the saloon before he accepted your invitation."

"In that case he would have managed to meet her even had I not taken him in hand."

"Logical but doubtful. He had long since lost the entrée to Bath House and to all the Great Houses. Only you, worse luck, had the power to bring him into a circle where he was able to meet the girl."

"Then you must admit that I have done some good. Had he not been able to meet her, he no doubt would have gone from bad to worse. I at least have been the

medium in his reform, the necessary medium."

"I don't believe in reform."

"You were brought up at the court of George IV."

"So were you, and therefore should have more sense. Warner is temporarily set up. No doubt of that. He feels a new man and looks like one. No doubt he has sworn never to drink again and means it. But wait till the honeymoon has turned to green cheese. Wait till he begets another poem. Poets to my mind have neither more nor less than a rotten spot in the brain that breaks out periodically, as hidden diseases break out in the body. Look at poor Byron."

It was Lady Hunsdon's turn to be satiric. "Poor dear Byron must have had a row of rotten spots one of which was always in eruption. One may judge not so much by his achievements as by his performances."

"Never mind!" cried Lady Constance, the colour deepening in her pendulous cheeks streaked with purple. "He was the most beautiful mortal that ever breathed and I was in love with him and am proud of it."

"I feel much more original that I was not——"

"Oh, dear friends," cried Mrs. Nunn, pathetically. "We have to do with a living poet—unhappily. Byron has been in Hucknall-Torkard church these twenty years. Do advise me."

"Stay and see it through," said Lady Constance. "I know love when I see it. It is so rare nowadays that it fairly wears a halo. By and by it will be extinct on earth and then we shall be kneeling to St. Eros and St. Venus and forget all the naughty stories about them, just as we have forgotten the local gossip about the present saints. You cannot prevent this match. You cannot even postpone it. I regret it as much as you do, but I cannot help sympathising with them! So young and so full of high and beautiful ideals! They will be happy for a time. Who knows? He really may be a new man. Maria can convince herself of anything she chooses; I feel disposed to take a leaf out of her book."

Mrs. Nunn set her lips, thrust her bust up and her chin out. She looked obstinate and felt implacable. "I go to-morrow. Upon that I am resolved. I should be criminal to encourage her——"

There was a tap at the door. A servant entered with a note.

“From Anne!” announced Mrs. Nunn. She dismissed the servant and read it aloud:

> DEAR AUNT EMILY:
>
> Miss Ogilvy has sent the coach for me, feeling sure that I have incurred your displeasure, and asking me to go at once to the Grange. I have no wish to leave you if you remain at Bath House, but if you are resolved upon going to-morrow, I shall accept her invitation. Will you not let me come in and say good bye, dear aunt? Be sure that I am deeply grateful for all you have done for me and only wish that I might spare you so much pain.
>
> ANNE.

Mrs. Nunn called in her maid and sent a verbal refusal to see her niece.

“I would have saved her if I could.” She was now quite composed, in the full sense of duty done. “But it is imperative that I go to-morrow and announce aloud my disapproval of this unfortunate marriage. I shall renounce my guardianship of her property the day I return to London. I cannot save her, so I wash my hands.”

“I shall stay for the wedding,” said Lady Constance, “and all London can know it.”

“It is my duty also to remain,” said Lady Hunsdon, “and my son must be best man. But Emily is quite right to go.”

CHAPTER XIX

Anne, during the ensuing month, had her first experience since childhood of home life. Mrs. Ogilvy lay on a sofa in one of her great cool rooms all day, but she made no complaint and diffused an atmosphere of peace and gentleness throughout the house. The younger children were pretty creatures, well trained by their English governess, and Mr. Ogilvy, richly coloured by sun and port, spent much of his time on horseback; amiable at home when his will was not crossed. The large stone house, painted a dazzling white, and surrounded by a grove of tropical trees, stood so high on the mountain that the garden terraces behind it finished at the entrance to the evergreen forest. It was fitted up with every Antillian luxury: fine mahogany furniture—the only wood that defied the boring of the West Indian worm—light cane chairs, polished floors of pitch pine, innumerable cabinets filled with bibelôts collected during many English visits, tables covered with newspapers and magazines, the least possible drapery, and a good library. In the garden was a pavilion enclosing a marble swimming tank. Plates of luscious fruits and cooling drinks were constantly passed about by the coloured servants, who looked as if they had even less to do than their masters. Anne was given a large room at the top of the house from which she could see the water, the white road where the negro women, with great baskets on their heads and followed by their brood, passed the fine carriages from Bath House; and, on all sides, save above, the rich cane fields. Byam Warner came to breakfast and remained to dinner.

Miss Ogilvy was in her element. To use her own expression, Nevis and Bath House were in an uproar. The unforeseen engagement following on the heels of the famous poet's transformation, the haughty departure of Mrs. Nunn, and the manifest approval of Lady Hunsdon and Lady Constance, who called assiduously at The Grange, the distinguished ancestry and appearance of Miss Percy, and the fact that the wedding was to take place on the island instead of in London, combined to make a sensation such as Nevis had not known since the marriage of Nelson and Mrs. Nisbet in 1787. Strange memories of Byam Warner were dismissed. He was a great poet and Nevis's very own. Never had Nevis so loved Medora. The Grange overflowed with visitors every afternoon, the piano tinkled out dance music half the night.

It was quite a week before Lord Hunsdon called at the Grange, nor did Anne and

Medora meet him, even when lunching at Bath House. But one morning he rode out, and after a few moments of constrained politeness in the drawing-room, deliberately asked Anne to walk with him in the garden. She followed him with some apprehension. He was pale, his lips were more closely pressed, his eyes more round and burning, than ever.

When they were beyond the range of Miss Medora's attentive eye, he began abruptly:

"I have not come here before, dear Miss Percy, because I had to conquer my selfish disappointment. You cannot fail to know what my own hopes were. But I have conquered and we will never allude to the matter again. My friendship for Warner is now uppermost and it is of him I wish to speak."

"Yes? Yes?"

"Last night I sat late with him. He is full of hope, of youth—renewed youth must seem a wonderful possession to a man: we are so prone to let it slip by unheeded! Well, he is changed. I never hoped for half as much. He tells me that the demon has fled. He has never a sting of its tail. That may be because he never really craved drink save when writing—until these last years. It is this I wish to talk to you about. You have the most solemn responsibility that ever descended upon a woman: a beautiful soul, a beautiful mind in your keeping. If you ever relax your vigilance—ever love him less——"

"I never shall."

"No," he said with a sigh, "I don't fancy you will. But you must never leave him. He is not weak in one sense, but in loneliness he might turn to composition again, and there could be but one result."

"But if he had done without stimulant for a long while—was quite happy—well, do not you think I might be stimulant enough?" She laughed and blushed, but she brought it out.

Lord Hunsdon shook his head. "No, I do not believe that even you could work that miracle. I have known him since we were at Cambridge together, and I am convinced that there is some strange lack in that marvellous brain which renders his creative faculty helpless until fired by alcohol. If the human brain is a mystery how much more so is genius? Much is said and written, but we are none the wiser. But this peculiar fact I do know. The island records and traditions tell

us that all his forefathers save one were abstemious, dignified, normal men, mentally active and important. But his grandfather, who spent the greater part of his time in London, was one of the most dissolute men of the Regency. He was a wit at court, a personal friend of the Prince Regent. There was no form of dissipation he did not cultivate, and he died of excess at a comparatively early age. By what would seem to be a special tinkering of the devil with the work of Almighty God those lusts have taken possession of one section of Byam Warner's brain only, diseased it, redistributed its particles in a manner that has resulted in the abnormal faculty we call genius, but deprived it of that final energy which would permit those great powers to find their outlet without artificial stimulant. These may be fanciful ideas, but they have become fixed in my mind, and I have come here to-day to ask you to make me a solemn promise."

"Yes?"

"That you will never permit him to write again. You are not the woman to loosen your hold on a man's strongest feelings when the novelty has passed. You can hold, influence him, forever. When you see signs of recurring life in that faculty, divert him and it will subside. He has fame enough. Nor do I think that he was ever untowardly ambitious. You—*you* can always persuade him to let the pen alone."

"But you make no allowance for those creative energies. They may still be very strong, demand their rights. That cry may in time be as irresistible as any of his more normal instincts."

"He has written enough," said Lord Hunsdon firmly. "He must rest on his laurels. You must persuade him that he cannot add to his fame. With feminine arts you will induce him to believe that it is best to let well alone."

"I have given little thought to all this——"

"But you will now! Give me your promise, dear Miss Percy, or I cannot leave this island in peace."

"But do you believe that Byam Warner will be content to settle down for the rest of his mortal life to an existence of mere domestic happiness?"

"By no means. He delights in literature, and although he is well read, there are tomes which not even a Bacon could master in one lifetime. Moreover, he should

buy back his cane fields. That would keep him much out of doors, as overseers are of little more worth than negroes." Then Lord Hunsdon had an inspiration. "Encourage him to write prose. There need be no fury of creation in that. The greater part of his mind is capable of accomplishing anything unassisted. Interest him in politics. He is a Tory and he loves me. Remind him constantly of the Whig inferno from which we have just emerged. I am sure he would write political pamphlets of incomparable influence. I have never heard Warner talk politics, but I don't doubt that his mind would illuminate that subject as it does everything else it touches. Fill the house with quarterlies and newspapers."

"He might write a political romance, after the pattern of Disraeli," said Anne, who wondered why Lord Hunsdon did not take to romantic composition himself.

"Oh, not fiction, not by any means. Work that requires the exercise of the merely intellectual powers, not that fatal creative-spot. But will you promise, Miss Percy? Will you permit me to make sure that you understand your solemn responsibility?"

He faced her, his eyes flashing with that fanatical fire that would have sent him to the stake three centuries since. They seemed to retreat, become minute, bore through her. Anne, whose mind was in confusion, and not a little angered, stirred uneasily, but she replied in a calm decided tone.

"I fully realise my responsibility. Make no doubt of that. I know what I have done, what I am undertaking, I shall live for him, never for myself. I promise you that, if you think the promise necessary."

"And you will never let him write another line of poetry?"

"Not if I believed it would do him more hurt than good."

"That is not enough," cried Hunsdon passionately. "You must be unconditional. One surrender and he is lost. If it were a mere case of brandy while he was writing—but you have not the least idea what it leads to. He is transformed, another man—not a man at all. And when he emerged, did he enter that horror again, he would loathe himself as he never did before. He would be without one shred of self-respect. I shudder to think what would be the final result."

"You will admit that as his wife I may find better opportunities to understand that complicated nature than you have had."

"Will you not make me that promise?"

“I will only promise to be guided by my judgment, not by my feelings. I hear Byam’s voice. After all, it is hardly fair to talk him over like this.”

CHAPTER XX

Hunsdon did not give up the siege, and rode out daily, much to the complacency of Miss Ogilvy, to whom Anne contrived to turn him over. Lady Constance, who found Medora amusing, was still further amused by the subtle currents beneath the surface, blind only to the shrewd young Colonial's court of herself, and was finally inspired to invite her to London for the season. Miss Ogilvy, in her own way, was as happy as Anne. A younger sister was returning from England and could take over her duties at the Grange; Lady Mary, riding dashingly about the island with the spirit of eighteen, was caught in a shower, neglected to change her garments at once, had a fever, and arose as yellow as a lemon; Medora was nineteen and as white as an amaryllis.

The day of the wedding arrived. Never was there such a ringing of bells, so splendid an array of equipages and gowns. Fig Tree Church could hardly hold the planters and their wives, the guests from Bath House, as well as those from St. Kitts, and the Byams and Warners that had sailed over from half a dozen islands. Outside, the churchyard, the road, the fields were crowded with the coloured folk, humble and ambitious. Bonnets and parasols gave this dense throng the effect of a moving tropical garden, and if the women were too mindful of their new manners to shout as the Ogilvy coach rolled past containing the bride hardly visible under clouds of tulle, the men set up a wild roar as they caught sight of Warner hastily approaching the rear of the church by a side path. Mr. Ogilvy gave the bride away, Lord Hunsdon was best man, and Medora the only bridesmaid. Anne had pleaded for a quiet wedding at the Grange, but to this her young hostess would not harken; and the festival was vastly to her credit, from the beautiful decorations of the chancel to the wedding-breakfast at the Grange. Lord Hunsdon was much interested to learn that the dainty, varied, and appetising repast was ordered and partly cooked by the accomplished creature beside him—whose eyes certainly had a most attractive Oriental slant. It so happened that his lordship was deeply concerned with the Orient, and hoped that the cares of state, now that the Tories were safely planted, would permit him to visit it.

The negroes were dined on a platform in one of the bare cane fields, and danced afterward until the bridal party started for the beach before Charlestown; then all, high and low, followed in the wake of the Grange coach with its four horses

decorated with white ribbons and driven by postillions. One of the wedding presents had been a fine little sloop, and in it Warner and his bride set off at four in the afternoon, almost the entire population of Nevis, white and black, crowding the sands and cheering good will.

That honeymoon among the islands was so replete with beauty and bliss and the fulfilment of every romantic and ardent dream, that when it was finished it was almost a relief to Anne to adjust her faculties to the homely details of housekeeping. For two months they wandered amongst that chain of enchanted islands set in a summer sea, the sympathetic trade winds filling their sails and tempering the heat on shore. St. Thomas with its little city on three hills like a painted fairy tale; St. Croix with its old Spanish arcades and palm avenues; the red-roofed Dutch village in the green crater of St. Bartholomew, which shot straight out of the sea without a hand's width of shore; Antigua with its English landscapes and tropical hospitality; St. Lucia, looking like an exploded mountain chain, that had caught the bright plains and forests of another island while the earth was in its throes, green as a shattered emerald by day, flaming with the long torches of gigantic fireflies by night; St. Vincent with its smoking volcanoes and rich plantations; Martinique, that bit of old France, with its almost perpendicular flights of street-steps cut in the rock, lined with ancient houses; beautiful honey-coloured women always passing up and down with tall jars or baskets on their stately heads; Dominica, with its rugged mountains, roaring cataracts, and brilliant verdure; Trinidad, with its terrible cliffs, infinitely coloured valleys, mountain masses; its groves of citron, and hedges of scarlet hybiscus and white hydrangea, towns set in the green amphitheatres of gentle hills, impenetrable forests, and lakes of boiling pitch: Warner and Anne lingered on all of them, climbed to the summit of volcanoes hidden in the clouds and gazed into awful craters evil of smell and resounding with the menace of deep, imprisoned, persistent tides; sailed on the quiet lake in the crater of Mt. Pelée; rode on creole ponies for days through scented chromatic forests with serrated heights frowning above them, and companioned by birds as vivid as the flowers and as silent. There were no wild beasts, nothing to mar days and nights so heavy laden with beauty that Anne wondered if the cold North existed on the same planet, and sometimes longed for the scent of English violets. In Trinidad they were entertained in great state by the most distinguished of Warner's relatives, a high official of the island. Anne wore for an evening the famous ring,

and was nearly prostrated with excitement and the fear of losing it. If she had not been half drugged with happiness and the ineffable beauty which scarcely for a moment deserted her waking senses, she would have attempted to define the quiver of terror that crossed her nerves now and again; for life at white heat has been embolismal since the death of the gods. As to Warner, he who had written many poems, now devoted himself to living one, and achieved a perfect success.

CHAPTER XXI

Hamilton House had been repaired during their absence, without and within. It was not necessary to refurnish, for the fine old mansion was set thick with mahogany four-posters, settles, chests, tables and chairs—more stately than comfortable. They arrived without warning, but the servants, under the merciless driving of Mr. Ogilvy, had been on the alert for several days, and as the sloop was becalmed for two hours not three miles from shore, until the lagging evening breeze filled the sails, when Warner and Anne finally landed and were led in triumph to their home by some twenty of their friends, every room of the upper story was flooded with the light of wax candles set in long polished globes, the crystal and silver of the wedding presents was on the great mahogany dining-table laden with the plenty of the tropics, muslin curtains fluttered in the evening wind, the pitch-pine floors shone like glass, and flowers were on every stand and table.

There was a very long and very gay dinner, and many more guests came during the evening. When the last of them had gone and Anne went to her own pink room, the only luxurious room in the house, she felt happier than even during the past enchanted weeks, for she was at home and the home was her own.

She had never been permitted to interfere with the ancient and admirable housekeeping at Warkworth Manor, but she discovered next morning that the spirit of the housewife was in her, and was far more exultant over her bunch of keys, her consultations with her major-domo, her struggles with the most worthless servants on earth, than she had ever been over her first doll or her first novel. The routine into which the young couple immediately settled was unique to both and had little of monotony in it. After their early walk Warner spent the morning in his library, where he had a large case of books, Hunsdon’s wedding present, to consider. He resisted his friend’s proposition to write political pamphlets with the seriousness that rises from the deepest humour, but he loved to read and ponder, and his few hours of solitude were easily occupied with the lore of the centuries. After siesta they rode and called at one or other of the Great Houses, and every evening they were dined or dined others. Bath House was closed, but the island was always gay until the dead heat of summer came and hurricanes threatened but rarely thinned the heavy air, when although tropical storms were frequent, the rain was as hot as the earth.

Even then Warner and Anne had a companionship of which they never tired, and there was a new interest in watching the torn Caribbean and the furious driving of the wind among the trees. They could always exercise on the long veranda, or play games within doors.

Then, for a time, this perfect state of bliss was threatened. Anne was thrown from her horse, frightened by a flash of lightning, as, caught in a storm, they were riding full speed for home, and was in agony and peril for several days, confined to her bed for a fortnight longer. There were the best of doctors on so wealthy an island as Nevis, and she recovered completely, although forced to shroud not the least of her desires. But the wild despair of Warner while she was in danger, and his following devotion, his inspired ingenuity in diverting her during her term of sadness and protest, made her feel that to cherish disappointment even in her inmost soul would be flying in the face of providence; her spirits struggled up to their normal high level, and once more she was the happiest of women. It was another fortnight before she could leave the house, but the languor was a new and pleasant sensation and not unbecoming the weather. Warner read aloud instead of to himself, and they wondered that they had never discovered this firm subtle link in comradeship before. The rainy summer is the winter of the tropics, and they felt the same delight in hiding themselves within their own four walls that others so often experience in a sterner clime when the elements forbid social intercourse.

CHAPTER XXII

Anne could never recall just when it was she discovered, or rather divined, that her husband was once more a dual being. A vague sense of change cohered into fact when she realised that for some time he had been reading aloud and pursuing an undercurrent of independent thought. His devotion increased, were that possible, but the time came when he no longer could conceal that he was often absent in mind and depressed in spirit. He took to long rambles in which she could not accompany him at that season while so far from robust, smilingly excusing himself by reminding her that being so much more vigorous than of old he needed a corresponding amount of exercise. There finally came an entire week when he was forced to remain indoors, so persistent were the torrential rains, and after the first two days he ceased even to pretend to read, but sat staring out of the window with blank eyes and set lips, at the gray deluge beating down the palm trees. He came to the table and consumed his meals mechanically. Nor was he irritable. The gentleness of his nature seemed unaffected, but that his mental part seethed was autoptical. If he was less the lover he clung to Anne as to a rock in mid-ocean, and if he would not talk he was uneasy if she left the room.

There was but one explanation, and he was becoming less the man and more the poet every day. He slept little, and lost the spring from his gait. Anne was as convinced as Lord Hunsdon or Lady Constance that all geniuses were unsound of mind no matter how normal they might be while the creative faculty slept. Sleep it must, and no doubt this familiar of Warner’s had been almost moribund owing to the extraordinary and unexpected change that had taken place in his life, and the new interest that had held every faculty. This interest was no less alive, but it was no longer novel, and a ghost had risen in his brain clamouring for form and substance.

Anne wished that he would write the poem and have done with it. She had never for a moment demanded that he should sacrifice his career to her, and during the past months, having admired as much as she loved him, she had dismissed as a mere legend the belief held by his friends that he could not write without stimulant. And she loved the poet as much as she loved the man. Indeed it was the poet she had loved first, to whom she had owed a happiness during many lonely years almost as perfect as the man had given her. That he had no

weakness for spirits was indubious. There were always cognac and Madeira on the table in the living room where they received the convivial planters, and she drank Canary herself at table. It was patent to her that he refrained from writing because he had voluntarily given her his word he would write no more, and that he had but to take pen in hand for the flood to burst. She did not broach the subject for some days, waiting for him to make an appeal of some sort, no matter how subtle, but toward the end of this stormy week when he was looking more forlorn and haunted every moment, she suddenly determined to wait no longer.

They were standing at the window watching the moon fight its way amidst torn black clouds and flinging glittering doles upon the black and swollen waters. She put her hand on his shoulder as a man might have done and said in a matter-of-fact tone:

“You want to write. You are quick with a new poem. That must be patent even to the servants. I wish you would write it.”

He jerked up his shoulders as if to dislodge her hand, then recollected himself and put his arm about her.

“I never intend to write another poem,” he said.

“That is nonsense. A poem must be much like a baby. If it is conceived it must be born. Do you deny it is there?” tapping his forehead.

“When the devil takes possession it is better to stifle him before he grows to his full strength.”

“You are unjust to speak in that fashion of the most divine of all gifts. You are not intimating that your poem is too wicked to publish?”

“No!” He flung out his hands, striking the window. His eyes expanded and flashed. “I believe it to be the most beautiful poem ever conceived!” he cried. “I never before knew much about any of my poems until I had pen in hand, but although I could not recite a line of this I can see it all. I can feel it. I can hear it. It calls me in my dreams and whispers when I am closest to you. And you—you—are its inspiration. You have liberated all that was locked from my imagination before. I lived in an unreal world until I knew, lived with you. Knowing that so well, I believed that my deserted muse would either take herself off in disdain, or be smothered dead. Art has always been jealous of mortal happiness. But the emotions I have experienced in the past six months—despair, hope, despair,

hope, superlative happiness, mere content, the very madness of terror, and its equally violent reaction when I experienced the profoundest religious emotion—all this has enriched my nature, my mind, that abnormal patch in my brain that creates. Ever since I took pen in hand I have dreamed of a poetic meridian that I have never approached—until now!"

"What must it be?" cried Anne, quivering with excitement and delight. "You have done more than other men already."

"I have never written a great poetical drama. My faculty has been mainly narrative, lyric, epic, with dramatic action in short bursts only. The power to build a great, sustained, and varied drama, the richness and ripeness of dramatic imagination, of character portrayal, representation as distinct from analysis, of vigorous scenes that sweep through the excited brain of the reader with the rush of the hurricane, and owe nothing to metrical sweetness, to lyrical melody—that has never come before—and now—now——"

"You will write it! Do you—can you imagine that I am jealous—that I am not as ambitious for you as you could be for yourself?"

"I have never been ambitious before. I have never cared enough about the world. I wrote first because the songs sang off the point of my quill, and then to keep a roof over my head. I have never placed any inordinate value on my work after it was done, although the making of it gave me the keenest happiness, the polishing delighted all the artist in me. It is only now, now, for the first time, that I have been fancying myself going down to posterity in the company of the immortals. Oh God, what irony! When it did not matter the inspiration lagged, and now it can do me no good!"

"But it shall! And as much for me as for your fame. Your work has been little less to me than yourself. I must have this!"

He turned to her for the first time and looked at her curiously. "Is it possible that you do not know the reason why I cannot write?" he asked. "We have avoided the subject, but I understood that you knew. Hunsdon told me——"

"Oh, yes, but that was when you were physically and morally a——" she stopped short, blushing painfully.

"A wreck," he supplemented grimly.

"Well! You had let yourself go. Now it is different. You are well. You are happy.

Even your brain is stronger—your will, as a matter of course."

"I never wrote a line in my earliest youth without stimulant."

"But you might have done so. It is only a freak of imagination that prompts you to believe that you cannot write alone, that you must take alcohol into partnership, as it were. Even little people are ruled by imagination; how much more so a great faculty in which imagination must follow many morbid and eccentric tracks? And habit, no doubt, is the greatest of all forces, while it is undisturbed. But that old habit of yours has been shattered these last months. You made no attempt to resist before. You could resist now. If I have been the inspiration of this poem, why cannot I take the place of brandy? It is no great compliment to me if I cannot. Try."

He put his hands on her shoulders and looked more the man than the poet for the moment. "Anne," he said solemnly. "Let well enough alone. I made up my mind to write no more the day you promised to marry me. I told you that the lover had buried the poet, and I believed it. But I find that the poet must come to life now and again—for a while at least. But although the process will be neither pleasant nor painless, I shall strangle him in time."

"Can you?"

"Yes—I think so."

"And be quite as happy as before?"

"Oh, I am not prophet enough for that. I can never be unhappy while I have you."

"And I could never be happy if I let you kill a gift that is as living a part of yourself as your sense of vision or touch. Do you suppose I ever deluded myself with the dream that you would settle down into the domestic routine of years—write political pamphlets for Hunsdon? I knew this would come and I never have had a misgiving. I know you can write without stimulant. Nothing can be more fanciful than that the highest of all mental gifts must have artificial aid. That may be the need of the little man driving a pen for his daily bread, of the small talent trying to create, but never for you!"

"There is some strange congenital want. I am certain of it. And if I gave way, Anne, I should be a madman for days, perhaps weeks—a beast—oh, you have not the faintest suspicion; and all I am living for in the wretched present is that

you never may."

"I do not believe in permanent congenital weaknesses with a free rich faculty like yours. I know how that fatal idea has wedged itself in your brain—but if you try—if you persist—you will overcome it. Promise me that you will try."

"You are so strong," he said sadly. "You cannot conceive, with all your own imagination, the miserable weaknesses of the still half-developed human brain. The greatest scientific minds that have spent their lives in the study of the brain know next to nothing about it. How should you, dear child? I know the curse that is the other half of my gift to write, but of its cause, its meaning, I know nothing. You are strong by instinct, but you have not the least idea why or how you are strong. It is all a mysterious arrangement of particles."

"But that is no reason one should not strive to overcome weakness."

"Certainly not. But I have so much at stake that I think it wisest to kill the temptation outright, and not tempt providence by dallying with it. And this regarding the arbitrary exercise of the imagination: It is the small people of whom you spoke just now who are the slaves of what little imagination they have, who can make themselves ill or sometimes well under its influence. But when a man uses his imagination professionally as long as I have done it takes a place in his life apart. It has no influence whatever on his daily life, on his physical or even his mental being. He knows it too well. It would seem as if the imagination itself were cognisant of this fact and was too wise to court defeat."

"I can understand that, but I also know that genius is too abnormal to accept any such reasoning, no matter what the highly developed brain may be capable of. Unknown to yourself you have become the victim first of an idea, then of a habit. You will struggle and exhaust yourself and end by hating yourself and me. You have no doubt that this would be a greater work than your greatest?"

"Oh, no! no!"

"Then do me the justice to make one attempt at least to write it. Come to the library!"

His face had been turned from her for some moments, but at the last words, so full of concrete suggestion, he moved irresistibly and she saw that his eyes were blazing with eagerness, with a desire she had never seen.

"Come," she said.

He stared at her, through her, miles beyond her, then turned mechanically toward his library. “Perhaps,” he muttered. “Who knows? Why not?”

CHAPTER XXIII

When Anne rose the next morning and tapped on Warner's door there was no answer. She entered softly, but found that his bed had not been occupied. For this she was not unprepared, and although she had no intention of galling her poet with the routine of daily life, still must he be fed, and she went at once to the library to invite him to breakfast. He was not there. She glanced hastily over the loose sheets of paper on his writing table. There were a few scratches, unintelligible phrases, nothing more. In the gallery she met the major-domo, who informed her that the master had gone out in his boat about five o'clock. The day was clear and the waters calmer. There was no reason for either surprise or uneasiness, and Anne, who expected vagaries of every sort until the poem was finished, endeavoured to while away the long day with a new novel sent her by Medora Ogilvy. But she had instinctively taken a chair by a window facing the sea, and as the day wore on and she saw no sign of boat of any sort, she finally renounced the attempt to keep her mind in tune with fiction. She snatched a brief luncheon and omitted siesta, returning to her seat by the window. The fate of Shelley haunted her in spite of her powerful will, and she sat rigid, her hands clasped about her knees, her face white. When Warner's boat shot suddenly round the corner of the island the relief was so great that without waiting to find a sunshade she ran out of the house and down to the sands, reaching his side before the boat was beached.

"You should not come out at this hour—and without a sunshade," he said, but keeping his face from her.

"If you could stand it for hours out on those hot waters it will not hurt me for a moment or two here. Have you had any luncheon?"

"I got a bite in Basseterre. Let us go in."

As he raised himself she saw that his face was haggard, his eyes faded. He looked as if he had not slept for weeks. When they reached the living-room he flung himself, with a word of muttered apology, on a sofa and slept until late. The dressing-bell roused him and he went to his room, reappearing at the dinner table. There he talked of his morning excursion, declaring that it had done him good, as he had long felt in need of a change of exercise, and had missed the

water.

It was not until they were in the living-room again that he said abruptly: “I can’t do it. Let us not talk about it. The air is delightfully cool. Shall we order the carriage and call on the Ogilvys?”

The roads were deep in mud, but the moon was bright, the air fresh and stirred by the trade wind that always found its way to Nevis even in summer during one hour of the twenty-four. Warner played billiards with Mr. Ogilvy and Anne listened to the hopes and fears of her hostess respecting Lord Hunsdon, while Felicia, the second daughter, poured out her envy of Medora’s good fortune in enjoying a London season, and its sequel of visits to country houses.

They returned late. Warner was almost gay and very much the lover. The next few days were magnificent and Anne saw for the first time a West Indian island in all its glory of young and infinite greens. Less like a jewel than in her golden prime Nevis seemed to throb with awakening life like some great Bird of Paradise that had slept until spring. Warner and Anne remained out of doors in all but the hotter hours, and the poet was once more the normal young husband, rich in the possession of a beautiful and sympathetic wife. Anne was wise enough to make no allusion to the unborn poem. When curiosity piqued or impatience beset, she invoked the ugly shade of Lady Byron, and resolved anew that while alert to play her part in Warner’s life, she would be guided wholly by events.

The rains began again, those terrible rains of a tropic summer, when the heavens are in flood and open their gates, beating palm tops to earth, tearing the long leaves of the banana tree to ribbons, turning the roads into roaring torrents, and day into night. Boats were used in the streets of Charlestown. The heat was stifling. The Caribbean Sea roared as if boiling tides were forcing their way from Mount Misery on St. Kitts to the crater of Nevis. Warner pretended to read during the day, but it was not long before Anne discovered that he stole from his room every night, and she knew his goal. He appeared at the nine o’clock breakfast, however, and neither made allusion to the vigils written in his face. At first it was merely haggard, but before long misery grew and deepened, misery and utter hopelessness; until Anne could not bear to look at him.

The storms continued. Ten days passed. Anne was not sure that he even slept in the daytime. He ceased to speak at all, although he managed to convey to Anne his gratitude that she was good enough to let him alone. Once she suggested a

trip to England as soon as they could get a packet for Barbadoes, but he merely shook his head, and Anne knew that he would not stir from Nevis.

There came a night when Anne too gave up all attempt to sleep. Even after her illness she had found no difficulty in resuming the long unbroken rest of youth, but youth had taken itself off in a fright.

“Then she left the room again”

“Then she left the room again”

On this night she wandered about and faced the truth. It was a night to assist the least imaginative to face an unhappy crisis. A small hurricane raged, seeming to burst in wild roars from Nevis itself. The streams on the mountain were cataracts. The sea threatened the island. At another time, Anne, like other West Indians, would have paid incessant visits to the barometer, but to-night she cared nothing for the threat of the elements. A storm raged within her, and she had a perfect comprehension of the madness and despair in the library.

She was out of her fool’s paradise at last. She knew that he would never write his drama without the aid that marvellous but rotten spot in his brain demanded. And its delivery was in her hands. He was the soul of honour, unselfish, high-minded. He had taken the woman he loved better than himself into his life and he would keep the promise he had voluntarily made her unless she released him. He would conquer and kill the best part of him.

Anne had no apprehension of his physical death. No doubt his mere bodily well-being would go on increasing after the struggle was over; but what of his maimed and thwarted intellect, the mind-emptiness of a man who had known the greatest of mortal joys, mental creation? What of the haunting knowledge throughout a possibly long life, of having deliberately done a divine gift to death?

Anne felt like a murderer herself. She went suddenly out into the gallery, and stood for a moment with her arms rigidly upraised to the black rolling sky. There was no response in the fury of the rain that drowned her face, and compelled her to bend her head.

The great banana tree was whipping about like an alive creature in agony. She could hardly keep her breath, and the salt spray flew over the roof and touched her lips. The elements roared and shrieked and whistled in a colossal orchestra, and above them she could hear that most uncanny of all sounds in a West Indian storm, the rattling of the hard seeds of the giant tree in their brittle pods.

But the noise inflamed rather than benumbed the tumult in her soul. Little as her husband suspected it, the gossip of Bath House and her own imagination had enabled her to realise the being he was and the life he led when transformed by drink. She had long since put those images from her, but they peopled the gallery to-night. And they were hideous, loathsome. She felt old and dry and wrecked

and polluted in the mere contemplation of them. Could even her love survive such an ordeal? Or life? She had experienced mortal happiness to an extraordinary degree. Were she firm now, she might know it again—not to the same degree—doubtless not—but all that a mere mortal had any right to expect after that one foretaste of immortality. She had her rights. Her life could be made monstrous for a time; then she would go back and live on through countless years by the North Sea. For did Warner return to the habits of the years that had preceded their marriage his extinction would be a mere question of time. He might survive this work, and another; for he would never return to this battle between his love for her and for a love older still and far more deeply ingrained. A year or two and he would be under the island.

And in any case he must suffer. As far as he was concerned it was a question which was the less of the evils. If he returned from a long disgrace in Charlestown to face her again, not even the great work he had accomplished would make him hate himself the less, atone for the final ruin of his self-respect. If he conquered he would be a maimed and blighted being for the rest of his days.

And then the grinning images disappeared and she had another vision. She saw Warner ten years hence, a sleek and prosperous planter, taking an occasional recreation in the great capital with his handsome wife, and smirking at the reminders of its prostration before his glorious youth; congratulating himself and her at his escape; that his soul, not his body, was rotting under Nevis.

Anne turned her face to the wall and pressed her hands to her eyes. The noise of the storm she no longer heard, but the picture filled her with terror. What right had either he or she to consider so insignificant and transient a thing as human happiness, the welfare of the body that began its decay with its birth? Genius of mental creation was the most mysterious, the most God-like of all gifts, as well as the rarest; the herd of small composers counted no more than the idle gossip that filled up awkward pauses. Great gifts were not without purpose bestowed; and as they should be exercised for the good of the inarticulate millions so should they be carefully tended until Time alone extinguished them. In Warner this great gift of poetic imagination combined with a lyric melody never excelled, was to his nature what religion was to common mortals. It had kept the white flame of his inner life burning undimned when men whose lives were creditable had long since forgotten that souls, except as mere religious furniture, were to be taken into account.

Warner had been singled out to enrich the world of letters. That was his mission on earth; all, no doubt, that he had been born for. Youthful training exercised hardly more influence upon the development of the race than literature. If it had no mission it would never have tracked through the infinite variety of interests in the mundane mind to become one of the earthly viceroys of God. And the chosen were few. Nor had Warner, consciously or not, been indifferent to the sacredness of his wardship. Never for a moment had it felt the blight of his wild and often gross and sordid life. He had been passionate but never sensual, romantic and primal, but never immoral. He had consoled thousands for the penance of living, and he had written much that would perish only with the English language. All this might be as nothing to what strove for delivery now. And this he was desperately engaged in stifling to death; and not the beauty of his mind alone but of his nature, for beyond all doubt his gentleness and sweetness and refinement were as much a part of his genius as irritability and violence were fellows to the genius of other men.

Anne was tempted to wish that he had died before she met him, taken body and unmaimed gifts out of life before she was burdened with their keep. But she was a strong woman and the wish passed. The wild ebullition of self had gone before. She did not recall her promises to Hunsdon but she remembered her solemn acknowledgment of her responsibilities the night before her marriage and her silent vows at the altar.

Suddenly she became aware that she was soaked to the skin. She went hastily within and changed her clothes, wrung out her hair and twisted it up. Then she went to the library and opened the door softly. Warner was sitting at the table with his face pressed to the wood, his arms flung outward among the scattered white blank sheets. Anne longed to go forward and take his head into the shelter of her deep maternal bosom. But it was not the time for sentiment, maternal or connubial. To reach his plane and solve his problem she must leave her sex behind her, and treat him as a man and a comrade. She left the room, and returning a moment later placed the decanter of brandy and a tumbler on the table beside him. Then she left the room again.

TRANSCRIBER'S NOTE:

1. Minor changes have been made to correct obvious typesetter errors; otherwise, every effort has been made to remain true to the author's words and intent.

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