# Miss Sarah Jack of Spanish Town, Jamaica

Anthony Trollope



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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK MISS SARAH JACK OF SPANISH TOWN, JAMAICA ***

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# MISS SARAH JACK, OF SPANISH TOWN, JAMAICA.

THERE is nothing so melancholy as a country in its decadence, unless it be a people in their decadence. I am not aware that the latter misfortune can be attributed to the Anglo-Saxon race in any part of the world; but there is reason to fear that it has fallen on an English colony in the island of Jamaica.

Jamaica was one of those spots on which fortune shone with the full warmth of all her noonday splendour. That sun has set;—whether for ever or no none but a prophet can tell; but as far as a plain man may see, there are at present but few signs of a coming morrow, or of another summer.

It is not just or proper that one should grieve over the misfortunes of Jamaica with a stronger grief because her savannahs are so lovely, her forests so rich, her mountains so green, and he rivers so rapid; but it is so. It is piteous that a land so beautiful should be one which fate has marked for misfortune. Had Guiana, with its flat, level, unlovely soil, become poverty-stricken, one would hardly sorrow over it as one does sorrow for Jamaica.

As regards scenery she is the gem of the western tropics. It is impossible to conceive spots on the earth’s surface more gracious to the eye than those steep green valleys which stretch down to the south-west from the Blue Mountain peak towards the sea; and but little behind these in

beauty are the rich wooded hills which in the western part of the island divide the counties of Hanover and Westmoreland. The hero of the tale which I am going to tell was a sugar-grower in the latter district, and the heroine was a girl who lived under that Blue Mountain peak.

The very name of a sugar-grower as connected with Jamaica savours of fruitless struggle, failure, and desolation. And from his earliest growth fruitless struggle, failure, and desolation had been the lot of Maurice Cumming. At eighteen years of age he had been left by his father sole possessor of the Mount Pleasant estate, than which in her palmy days Jamaica had little to boast of that was more pleasant or more palmy. But those days had passed by before Roger Cumming, the father of our friend, had died.

These misfortunes coming on the head of one another, at intervals of a few years, had first stunned and then killed him. His slaves rose against him, as they did against other proprietors around him, and burned down his house and mills, his homestead and offices. Those who know the amount of capital which a sugar-grower must invest in such buildings will understand the extent of this misfortune. Then the slaves were emancipated. It is not perhaps possible that we, now-a-days, should regard this as a calamity; but it was quite impossible that a Jamaica proprietor of those days should not have done so. Men will do much for philanthropy, they will work hard, they will give the coat from their back;—nay the very shirt from their body; but few men will endure to look on with satisfaction while their commerce is destroyed.

But even this Mr. Cumming did bear after a while, and kept his shoulder to the wheel. He kept his shoulder to the wheel till that third misfortune came upon him—till the protection duty on Jamaica sugar was abolished. Then he turned his face to the wall and died.

His son at this time was not of age, and the large but lessening property which Mr. Cumming left behind him was for three years in the hands of trustees. But nevertheless Maurice, young as he was, managed the estate. It was he who grew the canes, and made the sugar;—or else failed

to make it. He was the “massa” to whom the free negroes looked as the source from whence their wants should be supplied, notwithstanding that, being free, they were ill inclined to work for him, let his want of work be ever so sore.

Mount Pleasant had been a very large property. In addition to his sugar-canes Mr. Cumming had grown coffee; for his land ran up into the hills of Trelawney to that altitude which in the tropics seems necessary for the perfect growth of the coffee berry. But it soon became evident that labour for the double produce could not be had, and the coffee plantation was abandoned. Wild brush and the thick undergrowth of forest reappeared on the hill-sides which had been rich with produce. And the evil re-created and exaggerated itself. Negroes squatted on the abandoned property; and being able to live with abundance from their stolen gardens, were less willing than ever to work in the cane pieces.

And thus things went from bad to worse. In the good old times Mr. Cumming’s sugar produce had spread itself annually over some three hundred acres; but by degrees this dwindle down to half that extent of land. And then in those old golden days they had always taken a full hogshead from the acre;—very often more. The estate had sometimes given four hundred hogsheads in the year. But in the days of which we now speak the crop had fallen below fifty.

At this time Maurice Cumming was eight-and-twenty, and it is hardly too much to say that misfortune had nearly crushed him. But nevertheless it had not crushed him. He, and some few like him, had still hoped against hope; had still persisted in looking forward to a future for the island which once was so generous with its gifts. When his father died he might still have had enough for the wants of life had he sold his property for what it would fetch. There was money in England, and the remains of large wealth. But he would not sacrifice Mount Pleasant or abandon Jamaica; and now after ten years’ struggling he still kept Mount Pleasant, and the mill was still going; but all other property had parted from his hands.

By nature Maurice Cumming would have been gay and lively, a man with a happy spirit and easy temper; but struggling had made him silent if not morose, and had saddened if not soured his temper. He had lived alone at Mount Pleasant, or generally alone. Work or want of money, and the constant difficulty of getting labour for his estate, had left him but little time for a young man's ordinary amusements. Of the charms of ladies' society he had known but little. Very many of the estates around him had been absolutely abandoned, as was the case with his own coffee plantation, and from others men had sent away their wives and daughters. Nay, most of the proprietors had gone themselves, leaving an overseer to extract what little might yet be extracted out of the property. It too often happened that that little was not sufficient to meet the demands of the overseer himself.

The house at Mount Pleasant had been an irregular, low-roofed, picturesque residence, built with only one floor, and surrounded on all sides by large verandahs. In the old days it had always been kept in perfect order, but now this was far from being the case. Few young bachelors can keep a house in order, but no bachelor young or old can do so under such a doom as that of Maurice Cumming. Every shilling that Maurice Cumming could collect was spent in bribing negroes to work for him. But bribe as he would the negroes would not work. "No, massa: me pain here; me no workee to-day," and Sambo would lay his fat hand on his fat stomach.

I have said that he lived generally alone. Occasionally his house on Mount Pleasant was enlivened by visits of an aunt, a maiden sister of his mother, whose usual residence was at Spanish Town. It is or should be known to all men that Spanish Town was and is the seat of Jamaica legislature.

But Maurice was not over fond of his relative. In this he was both wrong and foolish, for Miss Sarah Jack—such was her name—was in many respects a good woman, and was certainly a rich woman. It is true that she was not a handsome woman, nor a fashionable woman, nor perhaps

altogether an agreeable woman. She was tall, thin, ungainly, and yellow. Her voice, which she used freely, was harsh. She was a politician and a patriot. She regarded England as the greatest of countries, and Jamaica as the greatest of colonies. But much as she loved England she was very loud in denouncing what she called the perfidy of the mother to the brightest of her children. And much as she loved Jamaica she was equally severe in her taunts against those of her brother-islanders who would not believe that the island might yet flourish as it had flourished in her father's days.

"It is because you and men like you will not do your duty by your country," she had said some score of times to Maurice—not with much justice considering the laboriousness of his life.

But Maurice knew well what she meant. "What could I do there up at Spanish Town," he would answer, "among such a pack as there are there? Here I may do something."

And then she would reply with the full swing of her eloquence, "It is because you and such as you think only of yourself and not of Jamaica, that Jamaica has come to such a pass as this. Why is there a pack there as you call them in the honourable House of Assembly? Why are not the best men in the island to be found there, as the best men in England are to be found in the British House of Commons? A pack, indeed! My father was proud of a seat in that house, and I remember the day, Maurice Cumming, when your father also thought it no shame to represent his own parish. If men like you, who have a stake in the country, will not go there, of course the house is filled with men who have no stake. If they are a pack, it is you who send them there;—you, and others like you."

All had its effect, though at the moment Maurice would shrug his shoulders and turn away his head from the torrent of the lady's discourse. But Miss Jack, though she was not greatly liked, was greatly respected. Maurice would not own that she convinced him; but at last he

did allow his name to be put up as candidate for his own parish, and in due time he became a member of the honourable House of Assembly in Jamaica.

This honour entails on the holder of it the necessity of living at or within reach of Spanish Town for some ten weeks towards the chose of every year. Now on the whole face of the uninhabited globe there is perhaps no spot more dull to look at, more Lethean in its aspect, more corpse-like or more cadaverous than Spanish Town. It is the head-quarters of the government, the seat of the legislature, the residence of the governor;—but nevertheless it is, as it were, a city of the very dead.

Here, as we have said before, lived Miss Jack in a large forlorn ghost-like house in which her father and all her family had lived before her. And as a matter of course Maurice Cumming when he came up to attend to his duties as a member of the legislature took up his abode with her.

Now at the time of which we are specially speaking he had completed the first of these annual visits. He had already benefited his country by sitting out one session of the colonial parliament, and had satisfied himself that he did no other good than that of keeping away some person more objectionable than himself. He was however prepared to repeat this self-sacrifice in a spirit of patriotism for which he received a very meagre meed of eulogy from Miss Jack, and an amount of self-applause which was not much more extensive.

“Down at Mount Pleasant I can do something,” he would say over and over again, “but what good can any man do up here?”

“You can do your duty,” Miss Jack would answer, “as others did before you when the colony was made to prosper.” And then they would run off into a long discussion about free labour and protective duties. But at the present moment Maurice Cumming had another vexation on his mind over and above that arising from his wasted hours at Spanish Town, and his fruitless labours at Mount Pleasant. He was in love, and was not altogether satisfied with the conduct of his lady-love.

Miss Jack had other nephews besides Maurice Cumming, and nieces also, of whom Marian Leslie was one. The family of the Leslies lived up near Newcastle—in the mountains, that is, which stand over Kingston—at a distance of some eighteen miles from Kingston, but in a climate as different from that of the town as the climate of Naples is from that of Berlin. In Kingston the heat is all but intolerable throughout the year, by day and by night, in the house and out of it. In the mountains round Newcastle, some four thousand feet above the sea, it is merely warm during the day, and cool enough at night to make a blanket desirable.

It is pleasant enough living up amongst those green mountains. There are no roads there for wheeled carriages, nor are there carriages with or without wheels. All journeys are made on horseback. Every visit paid from house to house is performed in this manner. Ladies young and old live before dinner in their riding-habits. The hospitality is free, easy, and unembarrassed. The scenery is magnificent. The tropical foliage is wild and luxuriant beyond measure. There may be enjoyed all that a southern climate has to offer of enjoyment, without the penalties which such enjoyments usually entail.

Mrs. Leslie was a half-sister of Miss Jack, and Miss Jack had been a half-sister also of Mrs. Cumming; but Mrs. Leslie and Mrs. Cumming had in no way been related. And it had so happened that up to the period of his legislative efforts Maurice Cumming had seen nothing of the Leslies. Soon after his arrival at Spanish Town he had been taken by Miss Jack to Shandy Hall, for so the residence of the Leslies was called, and having remained there for three days, had fallen in love with Marian Leslie. Now in the West Indies all young ladies flirt; it is the first habit of their nature—and few young ladies in the West Indies were more given to flirting, or understood the science better than Marian Leslie.

Maurice Cumming fell violently in love, and during his first visit at Shandy Hall found that Marian was perfection—for during this first visit her propensities were exerted altogether in his own favour. That little circumstance does make such a difference in a young man's judgment of

a girl! He came back fall of admiration, not altogether to Miss Jack's dissatisfaction; for Miss Jack was willing enough that both her nephew and her niece should settle down into married life.

But then Maurice met his fair one at a governor's ball—at a ball where red coats abounded, and aides-de-camp dancing in spurs, and narrow-waisted lieutenants with sashes or epaulettes! The aides-de-camp and narrow-waisted lieutenants waltzed better than he did; and as one after the other whisked round the ball-room with Marian firmly clasped in his arms, Maurice's feelings were not of the sweetest. Nor was this the worst of it. Had the whisking been divided equally among ten, he might have forgiven it; but there was one specially narrow-waisted lieutenant, who towards the end of the evening kept Marian nearly wholly to himself. Now to a man in love, who has had but little experience of either balls or young ladies, this is intolerable.

He only met her twice after that before his return to Mount Pleasant, and on the first occasion that odious soldier was not there. But a specially devout young clergyman was present, an unmarried, evangelical, handsome young curate fresh from England; and Marian's piety had been so excited that she had cared for no one else. It appeared moreover that the curate's gifts for conversion were confined, as regarded that opportunity, to Marion's advantage. "I will have nothing more to say to her," said Maurice to himself, scowling. But just as he went away Marian had given him her hand, and called him Maurice—for she pretended that they were cousins—and had looked into his eyes and declared that she did hope that the assembly at Spanish Town would soon be sitting again. Hitherto, she said, she had not cared one straw about it. Then poor Maurice pressed the little fingers which lay within his own, and swore that he would be at Shandy Hall on the day before his return to Mount Pleasant. So he was; and there he found the narrow-waisted lieutenant, not now bedecked with sash and epaulettes, but lolling at his ease on Mrs. Leslie's sofa in a white jacket, while Marian sat at his feet telling his fortune with a book about flowers.

“Oh, a musk rose, Mr. Ewing; you know what a musk rose means!” Then she got up and shook hands with Mr. Cumming; but her eyes still went away to the white jacket and the sofa. Poor Maurice had often been nearly broken-hearted in his efforts to manage his free black labourers; but even that was easier than managing such as Marion Leslie.

Marian Leslie was a Creole—as also were Miss Jack and Maurice Cumming—a child of the tropics; but by no means such a child as tropical children are generally thought to be by us in more northern latitudes. She was black-haired and black-eyed, but her lips were as red and her cheeks as rosy as though she had been born and bred in regions where the snow lies in winter. She was a small, pretty, beautifully made little creature, somewhat idle as regards the work of the world, but active and strong enough when dancing or riding were required from her. Her father was a banker, and was fairly prosperous in spite of the poverty of his country. His house of business was at Kingston, and he usually slept there twice a week; but he always resided at Shandy Hall, and Mrs. Leslie and her children knew but very little of the miseries of Kingston. For be it known to all men, that of all towns Kingston, Jamaica, is the most miserable.

I fear that I shall have set my readers very much against Marian Leslie;—much more so than I would wish to do. As a rule they will not know how thoroughly flirting is an institution in the West Indies—practised by all young ladies, and laid aside by them when they marry, exactly as their young-lady names and young-lady habits of various kinds are laid aside. All I would say of Marian Leslie is this, that she understood the working of the institution more thoroughly than others did. And I must add also in her favour that she did not keep her flirting for sly corners, nor did her admirers keep their distance till mamma was out of the way. It mattered not to her who was present. Had she been called on to make one at a synod of the clergy of the island, she would have flirted with the bishop before all his priests. And there have been bishops in the colony who would not have gainsayed her!

But Maurice Cumming did not rightly calculate all this; nor indeed did Miss Jack do so as thoroughly as she should have done, for Miss Jack knew more about such matters than did poor Maurice. "If you like Marion, why don't you marry her?"

Miss Jack had once said to him; and this coming from Miss Jack, who was made of money, was a great deal.

"She wouldn't have me," Maurice had answered.

"That's more than you know or I either," was Miss Jack's reply. "But if you like to try, I'll help you."

With reference to this, Maurice as he left Miss Jack's residence on his return to Mount Pleasant, had declared that Marian Leslie was not worth an honest man's love.

"Psha!" Miss Jack replied; "Marian will do like other girls. When you marry a wife I suppose you mean to be master?"

"At any rate I shan't marry her," said Maurice. And so he went his way back to Hanover with a sore heart. And no wonder, for that was the very day on which Lieutenant Ewing had asked the question about the musk rose.

But there was a dogged constancy of feeling about Maurice which could not allow him to disburden himself of his love. When he was again at Mount Pleasant among his sugar-canes and hogsheads he could not help thinking about Marian. It is true he always thought of her as flying round that ball-room in Ewing's arms, or looking up with rapt admiration into that young parson's face; and so he got but little pleasure from his thoughts. But not the less was he in love with her;—not the less, though he would swear to himself three times in the day that for no earthly consideration would he marry Marian Leslie.

The early months of the year from January to May are the busiest with a Jamaica sugar-grower, and in this year they were very busy months with Maurice Cumming. It seemed as though there were actually some truth

in Miss Jack's prediction that prosperity would return to him if he attended to his country; for the prices of sugar had risen higher than they had ever been since the duty had been withdrawn, and there was more promise of a crop at Mount Pleasant than he had seen since his reign commenced. But then the question of labour? How he slaved in trying to get work from those free negroes; and alas! how often he slaved in vain! But it was not all in vain; for as things went on it became clear to him that in this year he would, for the first time since he commenced, obtain something like a return from his land. What if the turning-point had come, and things were now about to run the other way.

But then the happiness which might have accrued to him from this source was dashed by his thoughts of Marian Leslie. Why had he thrown himself in the way of that syren? Why had he left Mount Pleasant at all? He knew that on his return to Spanish Town his first work would be to visit Shandy Hall; and yet he felt that of all places in the island, Shandy Hall was the last which he ought to visit.

And then about the beginning of May, when he was hard at work turning the last of his canes into sugar and rum, he received his annual visit from Miss Jack. And whom should Miss Jack bring with her but Mr. Leslie.

"I'll tell you what it is," said Miss Jack; "I have spoken to Mr. Leslie about you and Marian."

"Then you had no business to do anything of the kind," said Maurice, blushing up to his ears.

"Nonsense," replied Miss Jack, "I understand what I am about. Of course Mr. Leslie will want to know something about the estate."

"Then he may go back as wise as he came, for he'll learn nothing from me. Not that I have anything to hide."

"So I told him. Now there are a large family of them, you see; and of course he can't give Marian much."

“I don’t care a straw if he doesn’t give her a shilling. If she cared for me, or I for her, I shouldn’t look after her for her money.”

“But a little money is not a bad thing, Maurice,” said Miss Jack, who in her time had had a good deal, and had managed to take care of it.

“It is all one to me.”

“But what I was going to say is this—hum—ha. I don’t like to pledge myself for fear I should raise hopes which mayn’t be fulfilled.”

“Don’t pledge yourself to anything, aunt, in which Marian Leslie and I are concerned.”

“But what I was going to say is this; my money, what little I have, you know, must go some day either to you or to the Leslies.”

“You may give all to them if you please.”

“Of course I may, and I dare say I shall,” said Miss Jack, who was beginning to be irritated. “But at any rate you might have the civility to listen to me when I am endeavouring to put you on your legs. I am sure I think about nothing else, morning, noon, and night, and yet I never get a decent word from you. Marian is too good for you; that’s the truth.”

But at length Miss Jack was allowed to open her budget, and to make her proposition; which amounted to this—that she had already told Mr. Leslie that she would settle the bulk of her property conjointly on Maurice and Marian if they would make a match of it. Now as Mr. Leslie had long been casting a hankering eye after Miss Jack’s money, with a strong conviction however that Maurice Cumming was her favourite nephew and probable heir, this proposition was not unpalatable. So he agreed to go down to Mount Pleasant and look about him.

“But you may live for the next thirty years, my dear Miss Jack,” Mr. Leslie had said.

“Yes, I may,” Miss Jack replied, looking very dry.

“And I am sure I hope you will,” continued Mr. Leslie. And then the subject was allowed to drop; for Mr. Leslie knew that it was not always easy to talk to Miss Jack on such matters.

Miss Jack was a person in whom I think we may say that the good predominated over the bad. She was often morose, crabbed, and self-opinionated; but then she knew her own imperfections, and forgave those she loved for evincing their dislike of them. Maurice Cumming was often inattentive to her, plainly showing that he was worried by her importunities and ill at ease in her company. But she loved her nephew with all her heart; and though she dearly liked to tyrannise over him, never allow herself to be really angry with him, though he so frequently refused to bow to her dictation. And she loved Marian Leslie also, though Marian was so sweet and lovely and she herself so harsh and ill-favoured. She loved Marian, though Marian would often be impertinent. She forgave the flirting, the light-heartedness, the love of amusement. Marian, she said to herself, was young and pretty. She, Miss Jack, had never known Marian’s temptation. And so she resolved in her own mind that Marian should be made a good and happy woman; —but always as the wife of Maurice Cumming.

But Maurice turned a deaf ear to all these good tidings—or rather he turned to them an ear that seemed to be deaf. He dearly, ardently loved that little flirt; but seeing that she was a flirt, that she had flirted so grossly when he was by, he would not confess his love to a human being. He would not have it known that he was wasting his heart for a worthless little chit, to whom every man was the same—except that those were most eligible whose toes were the lightest and their outside trappings the brightest. That he did love her he could not help, but he would not disgrace himself by acknowledging it.

He was very civil to Mr. Leslie, but he would not speak a word that could be taken as a proposal for Marian. It had been part of Miss Jack’s plan that the engagement should absolutely be made down there at Mount Pleasant, without any reference to the young lady; but Maurice could not

be induced to break the ice. So he took Mr. Leslie through his mills and over his cane-pieces, talked to him about the laziness of the "niggers," while the "niggers" themselves stood by tittering, and rode with him away to the high grounds where the coffee plantation had been in the good old days; but not a word was said between them about Marian. And yet Marian was never out of his heart.

And then came the day on which Mr. Leslie was to go back to Kingston. "And you won't have her then?" said Miss Jack to her nephew early that morning. "You won't be said by me?"

"Not in this matter, aunt."

"Then you will live and die a poor man; you mean that, I suppose?"

"It's likely enough that I shall. There's this comfort, at any rate, I'm used to it." And then Miss Jack was silent again for a while.

"Very well, sir; that's enough," she said angrily. And then she began again. "But, Maurice, you wouldn't have to wait for my death, you know." And she put out her hand and touched his arm, entreating him as it were to yield to her. "Oh, Maurice," she said, "I do so want to make you comfortable. Let us speak to Mr. Leslie."

But Maurice would not. He took her hand and thanked her, but said that on this matter he must he his own master. "Very well, sir," she exclaimed, "I have done. In future you may manage for yourself. As for me, I shall go back with Mr. Leslie to Kingston." And so she did. Mr. Leslie returned that day, taking her with him. When he took his leave, his invitation to Maurice to come to Shandy Hall was not very pressing. "Mrs. Leslie and the children will always be glad to see you," said he.

"Remember me very kindly to Mrs. Leslie and the children," said Maurice. And so they parted.

"You have brought me down here on a regular fool's errand," said Mr. Leslie, on their journey back to town.

“It will all come right yet,” replied Miss Jack. “Take my word for it he loves her.”

“Fudge,” said Mr. Leslie. But he could not afford to quarrel with his rich connection.

In spite of all that he had said and thought to the contrary, Maurice did look forward during the remainder of the summer to his return to Spanish Town with something like impatience, it was very dull work, being there alone at Mount Pleasant; and let him do what he would to prevent it, his very dreams took him to Shandy Hall. But at last the slow time made itself away, and he found himself once more in his aunt’s house.

A couple of days passed and no word was said about the Leslies. On the morning of the third day he determined to go to Shandy Hall. Hitherto he had never been there without staying for the night; but on this occasion he made up his mind to return the same day. “It would not be civil of me not to go there,” he said to his aunt.

“Certainly not,” she replied, forbearing to press the matter further. “But why make such a terrible hard day’s work of it?”

“Oh, I shall go down in the cool, before breakfast; and then I need not have the bother of taking a bag.”

And in this way he started. Miss Jack said nothing further; but she longed in her heart that she might be at Marian’s elbow unseen during the visit.

He found them all at breakfast, and the first to welcome him at the hall door was Marian. “Oh, Mr. Cumming, we are so glad to see you;” and she looked into his eyes with a way she had, that was enough to make a man’s heart wild. But she not call him Maurice now.

Miss Jack had spoken to her sister, Mrs. Leslie, as well as to Mr. Leslie, about this marriage scheme. “Just let them alone,” was Mrs. Leslie’s advice. “You can’t alter Marian by lecturing her. If they really love each

other they'll come together; and if they don't, why then they'd better not."

"And you really mean that you're going back to Spanish Town to-day?" said Mrs. Leslie to her visitor.

"I'm afraid I must. Indeed I haven't brought my things with me." And then he again caught Marian's eye, and began to wish that his resolution had not been so sternly made.

"I suppose you are so fond of that House of Assembly," said Marian, "that you cannot tear yourself away for more than one day. You'll not be able, I suppose, to find time to come to our picnic next week?"

Maurice said he feared that he should not have time to go to a picnic.

"Oh, nonsense," said Fanny—one of the younger girls—"you must come. We can't do without him, can we?"

"Marian has got your name down the first on the list of the gentlemen," said another.

"Yes; and Captain Ewing's second," said Bell, the youngest.

"I'm afraid I must induce your sister to alter her list," said Maurice, in his sternest manner. "I cannot manage to go, and I'm sure she will not miss me."

Marion looked at the little girl who had so unfortunately mentioned the warrior's name, and the little girl knew that she had sinned.

"Oh, we cannot possibly do without you; can we, Marian?" said Fanny. "It's to be at Bingley's Dell, and we've got a bed for you at Newcastle; quite near, you know."

"And another for—" began Bell, but she stopped herself.

"Go away to your lessons, Bell," said Marion. "You know how angry mamma will be at your staying here all the morning;" and poor Bell with a sorrowful look left the room.

“We are all certainly very anxious that you should come; very anxious for a great many reasons,” said Marian, in a voice that was rather solemn, and as though the matter were one of considerable import. “But if you really cannot, why of course there is no more to be said.”

“There will be plenty without me, I am sure.”

“As regards numbers, I dare say there will; for we shall have pretty nearly the whole of the two regiments;” and Marian as she alluded to the officers spoke in a tone which might lead one to think that she would much rather be without them; “but we counted on you as being one of ourselves; and as you had been away so long, we thought—we thought —,” and then she turned away her face, and did not finish her speech. Before he could make up his mind as to his answer she had risen from her chair, and walked out of the room. Maurice almost thought that he saw a tear in her eye as she went.

He did ride back to Spanish Town that afternoon, after an early dinner; but before he went Marian spoke to him alone for one minute.

“I hope you are not offended with me,” she said.

“Offended! oh no; how could I be offended with you?”

“Because you seem so stern. I am sure I would do anything I could to oblige you, if I knew how. It would be so shocking not to be good friends with a cousin like you.”

“But there are so many different sorts of friends,” said Maurice.

“Of course there are. There are a great many friends that one does not care a bit for,—people that one meets at balls and places like that—”

“And at picnics,” said Maurice.

“Well, some of them there too; but we are not like that; are we?”

What could Maurice do but say, “no,” and declare that their friendship was of a warmer description? And how could he resist promising to go to the picnic, though as he made the promise he knew that misery would be in store for him? He did promise, and then she gave him her hand and called him Maurice.

“Oh! I am so glad,” she said. “It seemed so shocking that you should refuse to join us. And mind and be early, Maurice; for I shall want to explain it all. We are to meet, you know, at Clifton Gate at one o’clock, but do you be a little before that, and we shall be there.”

Maurice Cumming resolved within his own breast as he rode back to Spanish Town, that if Marian behaved to him all that day at the picnic as she had done this day at Shandy Hall, he would ask her to be his wife before he left her.

And Miss Jack also was to be at the picnic.

“There is no need of going early,” said she, when her nephew made a fuss about the starting. “People are never very punctual at such affairs as that; and then they are always quite long enough.” But Maurice explained that he was anxious to be early, and on this occasion he carried his point.

When they reached Clifton Gate the ladies were already there; not in carriages, as people go to picnics in other and tamer countries, but each on her own horse or her own pony. But they were not alone. Beside Miss Leslie was a gentleman, whom Maurice knew as Lieutenant Graham, of the flag-ship at Port Royal; and at a little distance which quite enabled him to join in the conversation was Captain Ewing, the lieutenant with the narrow waist of the previous year.

“We shall have a delightful day, Miss Leslie,” said the lieutenant.

“Oh, charming, isn’t it?” said Marian.

“But now to choose a place for dinner, Captain Ewing;—what do you say?”

“Will you commission me to select? You know I’m very well up in geometry, and all that?”

“But that won’t teach you what sort of a place does for a picnic dinner;—will it, Mr. Cumming?” And then she shook hands with Maurice, but did not take any further special notice of him. “We’ll all go together, if you please. The commission is too important to be left to one.” And then Marian rode off, and the lieutenant and the captain rode with her.

It was open for Maurice to join them if he chose, but he did not choose. He had come there ever so much earlier than he need have done, dragging his aunt with him, because Marian had told him that his services would be specially required by her. And now as soon as she saw him she went away with the two officers!—went away without vouchsafing him a word. He made up his mind, there on the spot, that he would never think of her again—never speak to her otherwise than he might speak to the most indifferent of mortals.

And yet he was a man that could struggle right manfully with the world’s troubles; one who had struggled with them from his boyhood, and had never been overcome. Now he was unable to conceal the bitterness of his wrath because a little girl had ridden off to look for a green spot for her tablecloth without asking his assistance!

Picnics are, I think, in general, rather tedious for the elderly people who accompany them. When the joints become a little stiff, dinners are eaten most comfortably with the accompaniment of chairs and tables, and a roof overhead is an agrément de plus. But, nevertheless, picnics cannot exist without a certain allowance of elderly people. The Miss Marians and Captains Ewing cannot go out to dine on the grass without some one to look after them. So the elderly people go to picnics, in a dull tame way, doing their duty, and wishing the day over. Now on the morning in question, when Marian rode off with Captain Ewing and lieutenant Graham, Maurice Cumming remained among the elderly people.

A certain Mr. Pomken, a great Jamaica agriculturist, one of the Council, a man who had known the good old times, got him by the button and held him fast, discoursing wisely of sugar and ruin, of Gadsden pans and recreant negroes, on all of which subjects Maurice Cumming was known to have an opinion of his own. But as Mr. Pomken's words sounded into one ear, into the other fell notes, listened to from afar,—the shrill laughing voice of Marian Leslie as she gave her happy order to her satellites around her, and ever and anon the bass haw-haw of Captain Ewing, who was made welcome as the chief of her attendants. That evening in a whisper to a brother councillor Mr. Pomken communicated his opinion that after all there was not so much in that young Cumming as some people said. But Mr. Pomken had no idea that that young Cumming was in love.

And then the dinner came, spread over half an acre. Maurice was among the last who seated himself; and when he did so it was in an awkward comfortless corner, behind Mr. Pomken's back, and far away from the laughter and mirth of the day. But yet from his comfortless corner he could see Marian as she sat in her pride of power, with her friend Julia Davis near her, a flirt as bad as herself, and her satellites around her, obedient to her nod, and happy in her smiles.

"Now I won't allow any more champagne," said Marian, "or who will there be steady enough to help me over the rocks to the grotto?"

"Oh, you have promised me!" cried the captain.

"Indeed, I have not; have I, Julia?"

"Miss Davis has certainly promised me," said the lieutenant.

"I have made no promise, and don't think I shall go at all," said Julia, who was sometimes inclined to imagine that Captain Ewing should be her own property.

All which and much more of the kind Maurice Cumming could not hear; but he could see—and imagine, which was worse. How innocent and inane are, after all, the flirtings of most young ladies, if all their words and doings in that line could be brought to paper! I do not know whether there be as a rule more vocal expression of the sentiment of love between a man and woman than there is between two thrushes! They whistle and call to each other, guided by instinct rather than by reason.

"You are going home with the ladies to-night, I believe," said Maurice to Miss Jack, immediately after dinner. Miss Jack acknowledged that such was her destination for the night.

"Then my going back to Spanish Town at once won't hurt any one—for, to tell the truth, I have had enough of this work."

"Why, Maurice, you were in such a hurry to come."

"The more fool I; and so now I am in a hurry to go away. Don't notice it to anybody."

Miss Jack looked in his face and saw that he was really wretched; and she knew the cause of his wretchedness.

"Don't go yet, Maurice," she said; and then added with a tenderness that was quite uncommon with her, "Go to her, Maurice, and speak to her openly and freely, once for all; you will find that she will listen then. Dear Maurice, do, for my sake."

He made no answer, but walked away, roaming sadly by himself among the trees. "Listen!" he exclaimed to himself. "Yes, she will alter a dozen times in as many hours. Who can care for a creature that can change as she changes?" And yet he could not help caring for her.

As he went on, climbing among rocks, he again came upon the sound of voices, and heard especially that of Captain Ewing. "Now, Miss Leslie, if you will take my hand you will soon be over all the difficulty." And then

a party of seven or eight, scrambling over some stones, came nearly on the level on which he stood, in full view of him; and leading the others were Captain Ewing and Miss Leslie.

He turned on his heel to go away, when he caught the sound of a step following him, and a voice saying, “Oh, there is Mr. Cumming, and I want to speak to him;” and in a minute a light hand was on his arm.

“Why are you running away from us?” said Marian.

“Because—oh, I don’t know. I am not running away. You have your party made up, and I am not going to intrude on it.”

“What nonsense! Do come now; we are going to this wonderful grotto. I thought it so ill-natured of you, not joining us at dinner. Indeed you know you had promised.”

He did not answer her, but he looked at her—full in the face, with his sad eyes laden with love. She half understood his countenance, but only half understood it.

“What is the matter, Maurice?” she said. “Are you angry with me? Will you come and join us?”

“No, Marian, I cannot do that. But if you can leave them and come with me for half an hour, I will not keep you longer.”

She stood hesitating a moment, while her companion remained on the spot where she had left him. “Come, Miss Leslie,” called Captain Ewing. “You will have it dark before we can get down.”

“I will come with you,” whispered she to Maurice, “but wait a moment.” And she tripped back, and in some five minutes returned after an eager argument with her friends. “There,” she said, “I don’t care about the grotto, one bit, and I will walk with you now;—only they will think it so odd.” And so they started off together.

Before the tropical darkness had fallen upon them Maurice had told the tale of his love,—and had told it in a manner differing much from that of Marian's usual admirers, he spoke with passion and almost with violence; he declared that his heart was so full of her image that he could not rid himself of it for one minute; "nor would he wish to do so," he said, "if she would be his Marian, his own Marian, his very own. But if not—" and then he explained to her, with all a lover's warmth, and with almost more than a lover's liberty, what was his idea of her being "his own, his very own," and in doing so inveighed against her usual light-heartedness in terms which at any rate were strong enough.

But Marian here it all well. Perhaps she knew that the lesson was somewhat deserved; and perhaps she appreciated at its value the love of such a man as Maurice Cumming, weighing in her judgment the difference between him and the Ewings and the Grahams.

And then she answered him well and prudently, with words which startled him by their prudent seriousness as coming from her. She begged his pardon heartily, she said, for any grief which she had caused him; but yet how was she to be blamed, seeing that she had known nothing of his feelings? Her father and mother had said something to her of this proposed marriage; something, but very little; and she had answered by saying that she did not think Maurice had any warmer regard for her than of a cousin. After this answer neither father nor mother had pressed the matter further. As to her own feelings she could then say nothing, for she then knew nothing;—nothing but this, that she loved no one better than him, or rather that she loved no one else. She would ask herself if she could love him; but he must give her some little time for that. In the meantime—and she smiled sweetly at him as she made the promise—she would endeavour to do nothing that would offend him; and then she added that on that evening she would dance with him any dances that he liked. Maurice, with a self-denial that was not very wise, contented himself with engaging her for the first quadrille.

They were to dance that night in the mess-room of the officers at Newcastle. This scheme had been added on as an adjunct to the picnic, and it therefore became necessary that the ladies should retire to their own or their friends' houses at Newcastle to adjust their dresses. Marian Leslie and Julia Davis were there accommodated with the loan of a small room by the major's wife, and as they were brushing their hair, and putting on their dancing-shoes, something was said between them about Maurice Cumming.

"And so you are to be Mrs. C. of Mount Pleasant," said Julia. "Well; I didn't think it would come to that at last."

"But it has not come to that, and if it did why should I not be Mrs. C., as you call it?"

"The knight of the rueful countenance, I call him."

"I tell you what then, he is an excellent young man, and the fact is you don't know him."

"I don't like excellent young men with long faces. I suppose you won't be let to dance quick dances at all now."

"I shall dance whatever dances I like, as I have always done," said Marian, with some little asperity in her tone.

"Not you; or if you do, you'll lose your promotion. You'll never live to be my Lady Rue. And what will Graham say? You know you've given him half a promise."

"That's not true, Julia;—I never gave him the tenth part of a promise."

"Well, he says so;" and then the words between the young ladies became a little more angry. But, nevertheless, in due time they came forth with faces smiling as usual, with their hair brushed, and without any signs of warfare.

But Marian had to stand another attack before the business of the evening commenced, and this was from no less doughty an antagonist than her aunt, Miss Jack. Miss Jack soon found that Maurice had not kept his threat of going home; and though she did not absolutely learn from him that he had gone so far towards perfecting her dearest hopes as to make a formal offer to Marion, nevertheless she did gather that things were fast that way tending. If only this dancing were over! she said to herself, dreading the unnumbered waltzes with Ewing, and the violent polkas with Graham. So Miss Jack resolved to say one word to Marian—"A wise word in good season," said Miss Jack to herself, "how sweet a thing it is."

"Marian," said she. "Step here a moment, I want to say a word to you."

"Yes, aunt Sarah," said Marian, following her aunt into a corner, not quite in the best humour in the world; for she had a dread of some further interference.

"Are you going to dance with Maurice to-night?"

"Yes, I believe so,—the first quadrille."

"Well, what I was going to say is this. I don't want you to dance many quick dances to-night, for a reason I have;—that is, not a great many."

"Why, aunt, what nonsense!"

"Now my dearest, dearest girl, it is all for your own sake. Well, then, it must out. He does not like it, you know."

"What he?"

"Maurice."

"Well, aunt, I don't know that I'm bound to dance or not to dance just as Mr. Cumming may like. Papa does not mind my dancing. The people have come here to dance and you can hardly want to make me ridiculous by sitting still." And so that wise word did not appear to be very sweet.

And then the amusement of the evening commenced, and Marian stood up for a quadrille with her lover. She however was not in the very best humour. She had, as she thought, said and done enough for one day in Maurice's favour. And she had no idea, as she declared to herself, of being lectured by aunt Sarah.

"Dearest Marion," he said to her, as the quadrille came to a close, "it is an your power to make me so happy,—so perfectly happy."

"But then people have such different ideas of happiness," she replied. "They can't all see with the same eyes, you know." And so they parted.

But during the early part of the evening she was sufficiently discreet; she did waltz with Lieutenant Graham, and polk with Captain Ewing, but she did so in a tamer manner than was usual with her, and she made no emulous attempts to dance down other couples. When she had done she would sit down, and then she consented to stand up for two quadrilles with two very tame gentlemen, to whom no lover could object.

"And so, Marian, your wings are regularly clipped at last," said Julia Davis coming up to her.

"No more clipped than your own," said Marian.

"If Sir Rue won't let you waltz now, what will he require of you when you're married to him?"

"I am just as well able to waltz with whom I like as you are, Julia; and if you say so in that way, I shall think it's envy."

"Ha—ha—ha; I may have envied you some of your beaux before now; I dare say I have. But I certainly do not envy you Sir Rue." And then she went off to her partner.

All this was too much for Marian's weak strength, and before long she was again whirling round with Captain Ewing. "Come, Miss Leslie," said he, "let us see what we can do. Graham and Julia Davis have been

saying that your waltzing days are over, but I think we can put them down."

Marian as she got up, and raised her arm in order that Ewing might put his round her waist, caught Maurice's eye as he leaned against a wall, and read in it a stern rebuke. "This is too bad," she said to herself. "He shall not make a slave of me, at any rate as yet." And away she went as madly, more madly than ever, and for the rest of the evening she danced with Captain Ewing and with him alone.

There is an intoxication quite distinct from that which comes from strong drink. When the judgment is altogether overcome by the spirits this species of drunkenness comes on, and in this way Marian Leslie was drunk that night. For two hours she danced with Captain Ewing, and ever and anon she kept saying to herself that she would teach the world to know—and of all the world Mr. Cumming especially—that she might be lead, but not driven.

Then about four o'clock she went home, and as she attempted to undress herself in her own room she burst into violent tears and opened her heart to her sister—"Oh, Fanny, I do love him, I do love him so dearly! and now he will never come to me again!"

Maurice stood still with his back against the wall, for the full two hours of Marian's exhibition, and then he said to his aunt before he left—"I hope you have now seen enough; you will hardly mention her name to me again." Miss Jack groaned from the bottom of her heart but she said nothing. She said nothing that night to any one; but she lay awake in her bed, thinking, till it was time to rise and dress herself. "Ask Miss Marian to come to me," she said to the black girl who came to assist her. But it was not till she had sent three times, that Miss Marian obeyed the summons.

At three o'clock on the following day Miss Jack arrived at her own hall door in Spanish Town. Long as the distance was she ordinarily rode it all, but on this occasion she had provided a carriage to bring her over as

much of the journey as it was practicable for her to perform on wheels. As soon as she reached her own hall door she asked if Mr. Cumming was at home. "Yes," the servant said. "He was in the small book-room, at the back of the house, up stairs." Silently, as if afraid of being heard, she stepped up her own stairs into her own drawing-room; and very silently she was followed by a pair of feet lighter and smaller than her own.

Miss Jack was usually somewhat of a despot in her own house, but there was nothing despotic about her now as she peered into the book-room. This she did with her bonnet still on, looking round the half-opened door as though she were afraid to disturb her nephew, he sat at the window looking out into the verandah which ran behind the house, so intent on his thoughts that he did not hear her.

"Maurice," she said, "can I come in?"

"Come in? oh yes, of course;" and he turned round sharply at her. "I tell you what, aunt; I am not well here and I cannot stay out the session. I shall go back to Mount Pleasant."

"Maurice," and she walked close up to him as she spoke, "Maurice, I have brought some one with me to ask your pardon."

His face became red up to the roots of his hair as he stood looking at her without answering. "You would grant it certainly," she continued, "if you knew how much it would be valued."

"Whom do you mean? who is it?" he asked at last.

"One who loves you as well as you love her—and she cannot love you better. Come in, Marian." The poor girl crept in at the door, ashamed of what she was induced to do, but yet looking anxiously into her lover's face. "You asked her yesterday to be your wife," said Miss Jack, "and she did not then know her own mind. Now she has had a lesson. You will ask her once again; will you not, Maurice?"

What was he to say? how was he to refuse, when that soft little hand was held out to him; when those eyes laden with tears just ventured to look into his face?

“I beg your pardon if I angered you last night,” she said.

In half a minute Miss Jack had left the room, and in the space of another thirty seconds Maurice had forgiven her. “I am your own now, you know,” she whispered to him in the course of that long evening. “Yesterday, you know—,” but the sentence was never finished.

It was in vain that Julia Davis was ill-natured and sarcastic, in vain that Ewing and Graham made joint attempt upon her constancy. From that night to the morning of her marriage—and the interval was only three months—Marian Leslie was never known to flirt.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK MISS SARAH JACK OF SPANISH TOWN, JAMAICA ***

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