

# VANESSA

A NOVEL

BY

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MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED  
ST. MARTIN'S STREET, LONDON

1933

FOR  
ERIK PALMSTIERNA  
IN  
FRIENDSHIP

## A PREFATORY LETTER

MY DEAR ERIK,

I take the greatest pleasure in dedicating this final novel in the Herries series to yourself because during those last years our friendship has been one of the best things I possess.

With that pleasure I must contrast a very real sense of loss. I am, as I write the last lines of *Vanessa*, saying good-bye to work that has been, for the last six years, my constant preoccupation. It cannot interest my readers that Judith, Benjie, Vanessa and the others have appeared to me such real and constant friends, but now, as they vanish down the wind, I feel a true and personal loneliness.

But I should like to thank those readers who have also found them friends, and to urge upon one or two critics that long novels are no new thing, and have been always in the tradition of the English novel.

Yet more boldly I would say that in this present case these four Herries novels are intended to be read as one novel, and I hope that some day there will be a reader who will both live long enough and be idle enough to read them so?

But one ambition of mine is, I find, already realised. Some of those who love and know Cumberland have found in these pages a tribute to that country which has pleased them.

Affectionately,

HUGH WALPOLE

‘Therefore, like as May month flowereth and flourisheth in many gardens, so in like wise let every man of worship flourish his heart in this world, first unto God, and next unto the joy of them that he promised his faith unto; for there was never worshipful man nor worshipful woman, but they loved one better than another: and worship in arms may never be foiled, but first reserve the honour to God, and secondly the quarrel must come of thy lady: and such love I call virtuous love.’

SIR THOMAS MALORY

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PART I  
THE RASCAL

E

B





## THE HUNDREDTH BIRTHDAY

AT the sight of her son Judith's eyes and mouth broke into the loveliest smile that any member of the Herries family, there present, had ever seen. It was Judith Paris' hundredth birthday. The Family was making a Presentation.

Adam bent down and kissed her. Her tiny, trembling hand rested on the velvet collar of his coat, then lay against his cheek. Her triumph was complete; her exceeding happiness overflowed so that, laughing though she was, tears rolled down her cheeks.

Afterwards, at the luncheon downstairs, Adam was to make the speech, but when the time came, the one that he made was very feeble. Everyone (except of course Adam's wife, Margaret, and Adam's young daughter, Vanessa) agreed that he was no speaker; the speech of the occasion came, oddly enough, from Amery Herries, of whom no one had expected very much. There were more speeches at the dinner later in the day—Timothy, Barney Newmark, Carey Rockage, Captain Will Herries, all spoke—but it was Amery who was afterwards recalled.

'Damned good speech, d'you remember?'

years later one Herries would say to another. 'At old Madame's Hundredth Birthday party up in Cumberland. . . . Best speech ever I heard in my life.'

Adam was a failure. He never could say anything in public, even long ago in his Chartist days. More than that, he was thinking of his mother, the old lady upstairs, all the time. And more than that again, he couldn't sound the right Herries note. He was only *quarter* Herries anyway, and he simply wasn't able to think of them in the grand historical light that all the family, expectant round the luncheon table, desired.

But Amery could. He thought of them all (including himself) in precisely the grand manner.

All Adam said was:

'I am sure we are all very happy to be here to-day for my mother's hundredth birthday. You'll forgive me, I know, if I don't say very much. Not very good at expressing my feelings. Yes—well—I know what you're all feeling. We're all very proud of my mother and we all ought to be. She's like the Queen—nothing can beat her. I don't need to tell you how good she is. Of course I know that better than the rest of you—naturally I would. There's no one like her anywhere. I ask you all to drink her health.'

And so they did—with the greatest enthusiasm. Nevertheless there was a feeling of disappointment, for he had said nothing about the Family—not a word. It was expected of him. After

all, even though he *was* illegitimate, his father had been of Herries blood. They knew, they had always known, that Adam Paris failed at anything that he tried. What could you expect of a fellow who had once been a Chartist and approved of these Trades Unions, was always on the wrong side, against Disraeli, in favour of tiresome agitators like Mr. Plimsoll? (They disliked any and every agitator. They disapproved of agitation.)

But Amery made everything right again with *his* speech. He didn't look his sixty-five years, so spare of figure and straight in the back; he had not run to seed like poor Garth, who led, it was feared, a most improvident and dissolute life. Amery's speech was short but entirely to the point:

'Only a word. I won't take more than a minute. But I do want to say that my friend Adam is quite right—this *is* a great occasion for all of us! There is not, I venture to say, another family in England with so remarkable a lady at the head of it as Madame whom we are gathered together to honour. It is not only that she has reached her hundredth year—although that is an achievement in itself—but that she has reached it with such vigour, such health, such courage! It is interesting to remember that nearly a hundred and fifty years ago her father, as a young man, rode pack-horse into this district, a stranger and almost you might say homeless. There were, I suppose, members of our family scattered about England at that time, but no one, I fear, had ever heard of any of them. Now, sitting round this

table to-day we have one of England's most famous novelists—spare your blushes, Barney Newmark—the widow of one of England's most prominent financiers—I bow to you, Lady Herries—whose son is following worthily in his father's footsteps—I drink to the City, Ellis—the son of one of England's leading Divines, the gallant Captain here—one of the most active members, I'm told, of the House of Peers—never been there myself, but that's what they tell me, Carey, my son—and one of the loveliest women in the whole of England, Mrs. Robert Forster—I bow towards you, Veronica!

'I promised that I would be short, so I will not point out to you how unusual a family ours is. You know it already (loud and happily complacent laughter). We *are* a remarkable family. Why should we not say so? We have done, we are doing something for England. England, glorious England, Mistress of the World as she deserves to be.' (He was going on to say something about foreigners but remembered just in time that Madame's husband had been a Frenchman and that Adam had married a German.) 'So here's to Madame and here's to England and here's to the Herries family! May they all three live, prosper, and help the world along the way that it should go!'

What cheers, what enthusiasm, what excitement! He had said exactly what they were all longing for someone to say—the one thing needed to make the day a perfect success!

Judith's granddaughter, Adam's daughter,

little Vanessa Paris, aged fifteen, sat between her mother and father and was so happily excited that she found it difficult to keep still. Some of the ladies thought that it was not quite correct that she should be there. In 1874 the golden rule was that children should be seen (at intervals) and never heard. She was Madame's granddaughter and it was proper that she should have been present at the moving ceremony when the presentation was made to the old lady, but the right thing then was for her mother to send her back to Cat Bells where she lived. Nevertheless Lady Herries agreed with Emily Newmark that the child was tall for her age, was certainly pretty in her blue dress, and behaved with decorum. 'It's only to be hoped,' Lady Herries said with foreboding, 'that indulgence like this won't spoil her. But what can you expect? Her mother's a German. Adam Paris can have no idea of how to bring up a child. I never allowed,' Lady Herries added, 'Ellis any liberties, and no mother could wish for a more perfect son.'

Vanessa, of course, neither knew nor cared what anyone was saying. She trusted the whole world and everything and everyone in it. She loved everybody and especially her mother, her father, her grandmother, Aunt Jane Bellairs, Benjamin, Will Leathwaite (how she wished that he was here and could see all that was going on! She was storing everything up to tell him when she was home again).

From where she sat she could watch everything that Benjamin did and said. For the rest she was

sharply observant. She noticed the large and very hideous yellow brooch that Lady Herries wore on her meagre bosom, the beautiful colour of Aunt Elizabeth's hair (many of the ladies were her aunts, although not strictly so in chronology), the way that fat Garth Herries swallowed his wine and smacked his lips at intervals, the funny way that Aunt Jane (who had just come down from upstairs and reported that Madame was doing *splendidly*—not the *least* tired by all the fuss) made little pellets of her bread, Aunt Amabel's suspicious manner of eating as though she suspected poison in every mouthful, and the shy frightened air of Ellis. (She supposed that *that* was because his mother was watching him!)

Of them all there were two who especially interested her. One was Benjamin, whom she loved with all her heart, and the other was a lady whose name she did not know, whom she had never seen before, who appeared to her the perfection of grace and beauty.

First Benjamin, whom she knew so well that he was like part of herself. She had loved him from the first moment of seeing him when, himself between six and seven, and she somewhere about two, he had made her first sticky and afterward sick with toffee that he had made against orders at the kitchen fire. Her first memory of him was connected with disobedience; so she had known him ever after, always against the law, always doing things of which she shouldn't approve, but she kept sacred to the death every secret confided to her. She would never betray him; she would

always love him for ever and ever. It was as simple as that. She knew with that intuitive quickness given to children that her mother did not approve of him. She knew more—that no one approved of him. He lived up at the Fortress with his mother, the lovely Elizabeth, and his grandfather, old broken-down Sir Walter, and it was supposed that Benjamin looked after the estate. In a way, as Vanessa knew, he did. In his own way. He would work like a saint and a hero for a week, really work and with good solid common sense. Then he would have a mad spell, disappear for days to the sorrow and grief of his mama. He told Vanessa that he simply couldn't help it. 'Must breathe fresh air,' he said. He never told anyone where he went. He was already, as Vanessa knew, 'suspect' by the Family. He had been a failure at Rugby: there were stories of scandalous doings in Town. 'He's going to be no good.' 'The makings of a fine Rascal,' and, as always with the Herries family when speaking of someone of whom they disapproved, their voices took on a sort of ceremonial ring, a kind of chanting sound. 'But what can you expect? His grandfather shot himself, and his uncle murdered his father. What an inheritance! And look at his other grandfather!—up at the Fortress—what a life he's led! Nothing better now than an idiot!'

No, poor Benjie has no chance at all, they decide with satisfaction. Nevertheless they could not help but like him—when they were with him. Of course it was different when their backs were



turned. But in his company it was difficult not to smile. He was so merry, so gay, always laughing. So generous too. 'No one's enemy but his own,' Barney Newmark, who liked him greatly, said—and poor old Garth Herries, who had been no one's enemy but his own to such an extent that he was a complete wreck and ruin, sighed sadly in reply.

Vanessa was aware of much of this, although no one had ever told her. She was always hot in Benjie's defence, no matter what the charge might be. When someone accused him it was as though she herself were accused; she was conscious at such times of a strange pain in her heart—a feeling of tenderness, sympathy and apprehension. Now, as she looked across the table at him, she knew that he had no need of her sympathy. He was at his very gayest. He was not large—he would be rather a small man—but his shoulders were broad, his head round, bullet-shaped, his colour red and brown like a healthy pippin, his nose snub, his blue eyes bright and sparkling. If all the Herries were like horses, as someone had said, then Benjie was like a racy little pony, ready for anything and especially mischief. 'He's wild and, I'm sure, wicked. In fact I *know* he's wicked,' Lady Herries said. 'And Ellis doesn't like him at all. But what can you expect with such a family history?' Then dropping her voice and looking into Emily Newmark's eyes with that intimate confidence felt by one upright woman for another: 'Women! Of course—I hear that already. . . .'

Nevertheless he was happy, he loved his beauti-