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藻海无边

《简·爱》前篇

[英] 简·里斯著 陈良廷 刘文澜译



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陈良廷 刘文澜 译

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幽禁在顶楼上的疯女人与简·里斯

陈良廷

《简·爱》问世将近一个半世纪以来,世界各国到底有多少痴心的女读者在这个相貌平平、过早饱尝人生辛酸、但终未失去与生活搏斗勇气的简·爱身上找寻自己的影子,寄予同情,其人数当然无法统计,但肯定是大有人在。然而,若要问有多少女读者对简·爱追求幸福的苦难历程上的障碍——幽禁在顶楼上的疯女人感到一丝一毫同情,甚或对她产生一点儿好感的,那倒大概可以说为数不多吧。但就在为数不多的人中,却有一位对疯女人产生了浓烈的兴趣,她就是英国当代女作家简·里斯(Jean Rhys, 1894—1979)。多少年前,《简·爱》中疯女人的形象就一直像鬼魂附身似地缠得她日夜不得安宁,她早已萌发用新的角度撰写一部以疯女人身世及遭遇为题材的小说。凭她对《简·爱》一书的深刻研究,对疯女人出生时代背景和社会环境——十九世纪英国在西半球的殖民地——的充分了解,再加自己对这一人物的理解和同情,她写出了初稿,反复删改,又否定了。经过多次修订再全部推翻重写的痛苦创作过程,终于完成定稿,并于1966年出版,书名《藻海无边》^①(Wide Sargasso Sea),而且于同年获得英国皇家文学会奖,1967年又获W.H.史密斯奖,还被接纳为英国皇家文学会会员。

夏洛蒂·勃朗特在《简·爱》中对疯女人安托瓦内特这一角色的刻画令人感到不足,从某种意义来说,这种不足倒也耐人寻味,她给读者留下一个想象余地。简·里斯正是从中获得灵

感,启发了她丰富的想象力,施展了超人的写作技巧,赋予夏·勃朗特没有发挥的这角色丰满的形象,把夏·勃朗特没有详细讲述的疯女人的故事再现。《藻海无边》不但在内容上补充了原书的空白,而且自成一统,有它本身的艺术价值。可以说它是《简·爱》的姐妹篇。

小说以充满女性的同情和理解写出了安托瓦内特母女俩的悲惨命运,从另一角度向我们讲述了一个在特定环境下的梦魇般的故事。全书分三部分。第一部分以女主人公自述的笔法描述安托瓦内特的童年和少女时代的生活和遭遇,反映了十九世纪西印度群岛奴隶制解体后,英国殖民者的混血种后裔既受当地土人仇视,又受白人贵族鄙视,这种被社会排斥的夹缝生活,细腻地刻画了她处于那种境遇之下的孤独、寂寞的心理状态。第二部分用交叉进行的手法,大半篇幅以罗切斯特的口吻,并穿插了一节以安托瓦内特的口吻,分别从各个角度描述了他们的新婚蜜月以及感情趋向破裂,安托瓦内特被逼酗酒,精神失常的痛苦过程。最后一部分仍以安托瓦内特的口吻,自述她莫名其妙地被带到英国后幽禁在顶楼上,受到疯子的待遇,终于被折磨得精神彻底崩溃,实现了梦中预示,一把火烧毁了房子,结束残生。

① 藻海指马尾藻海,是北大西洋的一部分,介于北纬 20°—35°、西经 40°—75° 之间,大体指百慕大群岛以南,北回归线以北的一个椭圆形海域而言,面积宽广达 600—700 万平方公里,平静的海面满布以马尾藻为主的褐色藻类,故名。本书故事背景的西印度群岛即在这一海域,这大概是作者取为书名的一个考虑因素。

Part One

They say when trouble comes close ranks, and so the white people did. But we were not in their ranks. The Jamaican ladies had never approved of my mother, 'because she pretty like pretty self' Christophine said.

She was my father's second wife, far too young for him they thought, and, worse still, a Martinique girl. When I asked her why so few people came to see us, she told me that the road from Spanish Town to Coulibri Estate where we lived was very bad and that road repairing was now a thing of the past. (My father, visitors, horses, feeling safe in bed – all belonged to the past.)

Another day I heard her talking to Mr Luttrell, our neighbour and her only friend. 'Of course they have their own misfortunes. Still waiting for this compensation the English promised when the Emancipation Act was passed. Some will wait for a long time.'

How could she know that Mr Luttrell would be the first who grew tired of waiting? One calm evening he shot his dog, swam out to sea and was gone for always. No agent came from England to look after his property – Nelson's Rest it was called – and strangers from Spanish Town rode up to gossip and discuss the tragedy.

'Live at Nelson's Rest? Not for love or money. An unlucky place.'

Mr Luttrell's house was left empty, shutters banging in

the wind. Soon the black people said it was haunted, they wouldn't go near it. And no one came near us.

I got used to a solitary life, but my mother still planned and hoped – perhaps she had to hope every time she passed a looking glass.

She still rode about every morning not caring that the black people stood about in groups to jeer at her, especially after her riding clothes grew shabby (they notice clothes, they know about money).

Then one day, very early, I saw her horse lying down under the frangipani tree. I went up to him but he was not sick, he was dead and his eyes were black with flies. I ran away and did not speak of it for I thought if I told no one it might not be true. But later that day, Godfrey found him, he had been poisoned. 'Now we are marooned,' my mother said, 'now what will become of us?'

Godfrey said, 'I can't watch the horse night and day. I too old now. When the old time go, let it go. No use to grab at it. The Lord make no distinction between black and white, black and white the same for Him. Rest yourself in peace for the righteous are not forsaken.' But she couldn't. She was young. How could she not try for all the things that had gone so suddenly, so without warning. 'You're blind when you want to be blind,' she said ferociously, 'and you're deaf when you want to be deaf. The old hypocrite,' she kept saying. 'He knew what they were going to do.' 'The devil prince of this world,' Godfrey said, 'but this world don't last so long for mortal man.'

She persuaded a Spanish Town doctor to visit my younger brother Pierre who staggered when he walked and couldn't speak distinctly. I don't know what the doctor told her or what she said to him but he never came again and after that she changed. Suddenly, not gradually.

She grew thin and silent, and at last she refused to leave the house at all.

Our garden was large and beautiful as that garden in the Bible – the tree of life grew there. But it had gone wild. The paths were overgrown and a smell of dead flowers mixed with the fresh living smell. Underneath the tree ferns, tall as forest tree ferns, the light was green. Orchids flourished out of reach or for some reason not to be touched. One was snakey looking, another like an octopus with long thin brown tentacles bare of leaves hanging from a twisted root. Twice a year the octopus orchid flowered – then not an inch of tentacle showed. It was a bell-shaped mass of white, mauve, deep purples, wonderful to see. The scent was very sweet and strong. I never went near it.

All Coulbri Estate had gone wild like the garden, gone to bush. No more slavery – why should *anybody* work? This never saddened me. I did not remember the place when it was prosperous.

My mother usually walked up and down the *glacis*, a paved roofed-in terrace which ran the length of the house and sloped upwards to a clump of bamboos. Standing by the bamboos she had a clear view to the sea, but anyone passing could stare at her. They stared, sometimes they laughed. Long after the sound was far away and faint she kept her eyes shut and her hands clenched. A frown came between her black eyebrows, deep – it might have been cut with a knife. I hated this frown and once I touched her forehead trying to smooth it. But she pushed me away, not roughly but calmly, coldly, without a word, as if she had decided once and for all that I was useless to her. She wanted to sit with Pierre or walk where she pleased without being pestered, she wanted peace and quiet. I was old enough to look after myself. ‘Oh, let me alone,’ she

would say, 'let me alone,' and after I knew that she talked aloud to herself I was a little afraid of her.

So I spent most of my time in the kitchen which was in an outbuilding some way off. Christophine slept in the little room next to it.

When evening came she sang to me if she was in the mood. I couldn't always understand her patois songs - she also came from Martinique - but she taught me the one that meant 'The little ones grow old, the children leave us, will they come back?' and the one about the cedar tree flowers which only last for a day.

The music was gay but the words were sad and her voice often quavered and broke on the high note. 'Adieu.' Not adieu as we said it, but *à dieu*, which made more sense after all. The loving man was lonely, the girl was deserted, the children never came back. Adieu.

Her songs were not like Jamaican songs, and she was not like the other women.

She was much blacker - blue-black with a thin face and straight features. She wore a black dress, heavy gold earrings and a yellow handkerchief - carefully tied with the two high points in front. No other negro woman wore black, or tied her handkerchief Martinique fashion. She had a quiet voice and a quiet laugh (when she did laugh), and though she could speak good English if she wanted to, and French as well as patois, she took care to talk as they talked. But they would have nothing to do with her and she never saw her son who worked in Spanish Town. She had only one friend - a woman called Maillotte, and Maillotte was not a Jamaican.

The girls from the bayside who sometimes helped with the washing and cleaning were terrified of her. That, I soon discovered, was why they came at all - for she never paid them. Yet they brought presents of fruit and vegeta-

bles and after dark I often heard low voices from the kitchen.

So I asked about Christophine. Was she very old? Had she always been with us?

'She was your father's wedding present to me - one of his presents. He thought I would be pleased with a Martinique girl. I don't know how old she was when they brought her to Jamaica, quite young. I don't know how old she is now. Does it matter? Why do you pester and bother me about all these things that happened long ago? Christophine stayed with me because she wanted to stay. She had her own very good reasons you may be sure. I dare say we would have died if she'd turned against us and that would have been a better fate. To die and be forgotten and at peace. Not to know that one is abandoned, lied about, helpless. All the ones who died - who says a good word for them now?'

'Godfrey stayed too,' I said. 'And Sass.'

'They stayed,' she said angrily, 'because they wanted somewhere to sleep and something to eat. That boy Sass! When his mother pranced off and left him here - a great deal *she* cared - why he was a little skeleton. Now he's growing into a big strong boy and away he goes. We shan't see him again. Godfrey is a rascal. These new ones aren't too kind to old people and he knows it. That's why he stays. Doesn't do a thing but eats enough for a couple of horses. Pretends he's deaf. He isn't deaf - he doesn't want to hear. What a devil he is!'

'Why don't you tell him to find somewhere else to live?' I said and she laughed.

'He wouldn't go. He'd probably try to force us out. I've learned to let sleeping curs lie,' she said.

'Would Christophine go if you told her to?' I thought. But I didn't say it. I was afraid to say it.

It was too hot that afternoon. I could see the beads of perspiration on her upper lip and the dark circles under her eyes. I started to fan her, but she turned her head away. She might rest if I left her alone, she said.

Once I would have gone back quietly to watch her asleep on the blue sofa – once I made excuses to be near her when she brushed her hair, a soft black cloak to cover me, hide me, keep me safe.

But not any longer. Not any more.

These were all the people in my life – my mother and Pierre, Christophine, Godfrey, and Sass who had left us.

I never looked at any strange negro. They hated us. They called us white cockroaches. Let sleeping dogs lie. One day a little girl followed me singing, 'Go away white cockroach, go away, go away.' I walked fast, but she walked faster. 'White cockroach, go away, go away. Nobody want you. Go away.'

When I was safely home I sat close to the old wall at the end of the garden. It was covered with green moss soft as velvet and I never wanted to move again. Everything would be worse if I moved. Christophine found me there when it was nearly dark, and I was so stiff she had to help me to get up. She said nothing, but next morning Tia was in the kitchen with her mother Maillotte, Christophine's friend. Soon Tia was my friend and I met her nearly every morning at the turn of the road to the river.

Sometimes we left the bathing pool at midday, sometimes we stayed till late afternoon. Then Tia would light a fire (fires always lit for her, sharp stones did not hurt her bare feet, I never saw her cry). We boiled green bananas in an old iron pot and ate them with our fingers out of a calabash and after we had eaten she slept at once. I could not sleep, but I wasn't quite awake as I lay in the shade.

looking at the pool – deep and dark green under the trees, brown-green if it had rained, but a bright sparkling green in the sun. The water was so clear that you could see the pebbles at the bottom of the shallow part. Blue and white and striped red. Very pretty. Late or early we parted at the turn of the road. My mother never asked me where I had been or what I had done.

Christophine had given me some new pennies which I kept in the pocket of my dress. They dropped out one morning so I put them on a stone. They shone like gold in the sun and Tia stared. She had small eyes, very black, set deep in her head.

Then she bet me three of the pennies that I couldn't turn a somersault under water 'like you say you can'.

'Of course I can.'

'I never see you do it,' she said. 'Only talk.'

'Bet you all the money I can,' I said.

But after one somersault I still turned and came up choking. Tia laughed and told me that it certainly look like I drown dead that time. Then she picked up the money.

'I did do it,' I said when I could speak but she shook her head. I hadn't done it good and besides pennies didn't buy much. Why did I look at her like that?

'Keep them then, you cheating nigger,' I said, for I was tired, and the water I had swallowed made me feel sick. 'I can get more if I want to.'

That's not what she hear, she said. She hear all we poor like beggar. We ate salt fish – no money for fresh fish. That old house so leaky, you run with calabash to catch water when it rain. Plenty white people in Jamaica. Real white people, they got gold money. They didn't look at us, nobody see them come near us. Old time white people nothing but white nigger now, and black nigger better

than white nigger.

I wrapped myself in my torn towel and sat on a stone with my back to her, shivering cold. But the sun couldn't warm me. I wanted to go home. I looked round and Tia had gone. I searched for a long time before I could believe that she had taken my dress – not my underclothes, she never wore any – but my dress, starched, ironed, clean that morning. She had left me hers and I put it on at last and walked home in the blazing sun feeling sick, hating her. I planned to get round the back of the house to the kitchen, but passing the stables I stopped to stare at three strange horses and my mother saw me and called. She was on the *glacis* with two young ladies and a gentleman. Visitors! I dragged up the steps unwillingly – I had longed for visitors once, but that was years ago.

They were very beautiful I thought and they wore such beautiful clothes that I looked away down at the flagstones and when they laughed – the gentleman laughed the loudest – I ran into the house, into my bedroom. There I stood with my back against the door and I could feel my heart all through me. I heard them talking and I heard them leave. I came out of my room and my mother was sitting on the blue sofa. She looked at me for some time before she said that I had behaved very oddly. My dress was even dirtier than usual.

'It's Tia's dress.'

'But why are you wearing Tia's dress? Tia? Which one of them is Tia?'

Christophine, who had been in the pantry listening, came at once and was told to find a clean dress for me. 'Throw away that thing. Burn it.'

Then they quarrelled.

Christophine said I had no clean dress. 'She got two dresses, wash and wear. You want clean dress to drop

from heaven? Some people crazy in truth.'

'She must have another dress,' said my mother. 'Somewhere.' But Christophine told her loudly that it shameful. She run wild, she grow up worthless. And nobody care.

My mother walked over to the window. ('Marooned,' said her straight narrow back, her carefully coiled hair. 'Marooned.')

'She has an old muslin dress. Find that.'

While Christophine scrubbed my face and tied my plaits with a fresh piece of string, she told me that those were the new people at Nelson's Rest. They called themselves Luttrell, but English or not English they were not like old Mr Luttrell. 'Old Mr Luttrell spit in their face if he see how they look at you. Trouble walk into the house this day. Trouble walk in.'

The old muslin dress was found and it tore as I forced it on. She didn't notice.

No more slavery! She had to laugh! 'These new ones have Letter of the Law. Same thing. They got magistrate. They got fine. They got jail house and chain gang. They got tread machine to mash up people's feet. New ones worse than old ones - more cunning, that's all.'

All that evening my mother didn't speak to me or look at me and I thought, 'She is ashamed of me, what Tia said is true.'

I went to bed early and slept at once. I dreamed that I was walking in the forest. Not alone. Someone who hated me was with me, out of sight. I could hear heavy footsteps coming closer and though I struggled and screamed I could not move. I woke crying. The covering sheet was on the floor and my mother was looking down at me.

'Did you have a nightmare?'

'Yes, a bad dream.'

She sighed and covered me up. 'You were making such a noise. I must go to Pierre, you've frightened him.'

I lay thinking, 'I am safe. There is the corner of the bedroom door and the friendly furniture. There is the tree of life in the garden and the wall green with moss. The barrier of the cliffs and the high mountains. And the barrier of the sea. I am safe. I am safe from strangers.'

The light of the candle in Pierre's room was still there when I slept again. I woke next morning knowing that nothing would be the same. It would change and go on changing.

I don't know how she got money to buy the white muslin and the pink. Yards of muslin. She may have sold her last ring, for there was one left. I saw it in her jewel box - that, and a locket with a shamrock inside. They were mending and sewing first thing in the morning and still sewing when I went to bed. In a week she had a new dress and so had I.

The Luttrells lent her a horse, and she would ride off very early and not come back till late next day - tired out because she had been to a dance or a moonlight picnic. She was gay and laughing - younger than I had ever seen her and the house was sad when she had gone.

So I too left it and stayed away till dark. I was never long at the bathing pool, I never met Tia.

I took another road, past the old sugar works and the water wheel that had not turned for years. I went to parts of Coulibri that I had not seen, where there was no road, no path, no track. And if the razor grass cut my legs and arms I would think 'It's better than people.' Black ants or red ones, tall nests swarming with white ants, rain that soaked me to the skin - once I saw a snake. All better than people.

Better. Better, better than people.

Watching the red and yellow flowers in the sun thinking of nothing, it was as if a door opened and I was somewhere else, something else. Not myself any longer.

I knew the time of day when though it is hot and blue and there are no clouds, the sky can have a very black look.

I was bridesmaid when my mother married Mr Mason in Spanish Town. Christophine curled my hair. I carried a bouquet and everything I wore was new – even my beautiful slippers. But their eyes slid away from my hating face. I had heard what all these smooth smiling people said about her when she was not listening and they did not guess I was. Hiding from them in the garden when they visited Coulibri, I listened.

‘A fantastic marriage and he will regret it. Why should a very wealthy man who could take his pick of all the girls in the West Indies, and many in England too probably?’ ‘Why *probably*?’ the other voice said. ‘*Certainly*.’ ‘Then why should he marry a widow without a penny to her name and Coulibri a wreck of a place? Emancipation troubles killed old Gosway? Nonsense – the estate was going downhill for years before that. He drank himself to death. Many’s the time when – well! And all those women! She never did anything to stop him – she encouraged him. Presents and smiles for the bastards every Christmas. Old customs? Some old customs are better dead and buried. Her new husband will have to spend a pretty penny before the house is fit to live in – leaks like a sieve. And what about the stables and the coach house dark as pitch, and the servants’ quarters and the six-foot snake I saw with my own eyes curled up on the privy seat last time I was here. Alarmed? I screamed. Then that horrible old man she harbours came along, doubled up with laugh-

ter. As for those two children – the boy an idiot kept out of sight and mind and the girl going the same way in my opinion – a *lowering* expression.'

'Oh I agree,' the other one said, 'but Annette is such a pretty woman. And what a dancer. Reminds me of that song "light as cotton blossom on the something breeze", or is it air? I forget.'

Yes, what a dancer – that night when they came home from their honeymoon in Trinidad and they danced on the *glacis* to no music. There was no need for music when she danced. They stopped and she leaned backwards over his arm, down till her black hair touched the flagstones – still down, down. Then up again in a flash, laughing. She made it look so easy – as if anyone could do it, and he kissed her – a long kiss. I was there that time too but they had forgotten me and soon I wasn't thinking of them. I was remembering that woman saying 'Dance! He didn't come to the West Indies to dance – he came to make money as they all do. Some of the big estates are going cheap, and one unfortunate's loss is always a clever man's gain. No, the whole thing is a mystery. It's evidently useful to keep a Martinique obeah woman on the premises.' She meant Christophine. She said it mockingly, not meaning it, but soon other people were saying it – and meaning it.

While the repairs were being done and they were in Trinidad, Pierre and I stayed with Aunt Cora in Spanish Town.

Mr Mason did not approve of Aunt Cora, an ex-slave-owner who had escaped misery, a flier in the face of Providence.

'Why did she do nothing to help you?'

I told him that her husband was English and didn't like

us and he said, 'Nonsense.'

'It isn't nonsense, they lived in England and he was angry if she wrote to us. He hated the West Indies. When he died not long ago she came home, before that what could she do? *She* wasn't rich.'

'That's her story. I don't believe it. A frivolous woman. In your mother's place I'd resent her behaviour.'

'None of you understand about us,' I thought.

Coulibri looked the same when I saw it again, although it was clean and tidy, no grass between the flagstones, no leaks. But it didn't feel the same. Sass had come back and I was glad. They can *smell* money, somebody said. Mr Mason engaged new servants – I didn't like any of them excepting Mannie the groom. It was their talk about Christophine that changed Coulibri, not the repairs or the new furniture or the strange faces. Their talk about Christophine and obeah changed it.

I knew her room so well – the pictures of the Holy Family and the prayer for a happy death. She had a bright patchwork counterpane, a broken-down press for her clothes, and my mother had given her an old rocking-chair.

Yet one day when I was waiting there I was suddenly very much afraid. The door was open to the sunlight, someone was whistling near the stables, but I was afraid. I was certain that hidden in the room (behind the old black press?) there was a dead man's dried hand, white chicken feathers, a cock with its throat cut, dying slowly, slowly. Drop by drop the blood was falling into a red basin and I imagined I could hear it. No one had ever spoken to me about obeah – but I knew what I would find if I dared to look. Then Christophine came in smiling and pleased to see me. Nothing alarming ever happened and I forgot, or

told myself I had forgotten.

Mr Mason would laugh if he knew how frightened I had been. He would laugh even louder than he did when my mother told him that she wished to leave Coulibri.

This began when they had been married for over a year. They always said the same things and I seldom listened to the argument now. I knew that we were hated – but to go away... for once I agreed with my stepfather. That was not possible.

'You must have some reason,' he would say, and she would answer 'I need a change' or 'We could visit Richard.' (Richard, Mr Mason's son by his first marriage, was at school in Barbados. He was going to England soon and we had seen very little of him.)

'An agent could look after this place. For the time being. The people here hate us. They certainly hate me.' Straight out she said that one day and it was then he laughed so heartily.

'Annette, be reasonable. You were the widow of a slave-owner, the daughter of a slave-owner, and you had been living here alone, with two children, for nearly five years when we met. Things were at their worst then. But you were never molested, never harmed.'

'How do you know that I was not harmed?' she said. 'We were so poor then,' she told him, 'we were something to laugh at. But we are not poor now,' she said. 'You are not a poor man. Do you suppose that they don't know all about your estate in Trinidad? And the Antigua property? They talk about us without stopping. They invent stories about you, and lies about me. They try to find out what we eat every day.'

'They are curious. It's natural enough. You have lived alone far too long, Annette. You imagine enmity which doesn't exist. Always one extreme or the other. Didn't

you fly at me like a little wild cat when I said nigger. Not nigger, nor even Negro. Black people I must say.'

'You don't like, or even recognize, the good in them,' she said, 'and you won't believe in the other side.'

'They're too damn lazy to be dangerous,' said Mr Mason. 'I know that.'

'They are more alive than you are, lazy or not, and they can be dangerous and cruel for reasons you wouldn't understand.'

'No, I don't understand,' Mr Mason always said. 'I don't understand at all.'

But she'd speak about going away again. Persistently. Angriily.

Mr Mason pulled up near the empty huts on our way home that evening. 'All gone to one of those dances,' he said. 'Young and old. How deserted the place looks.'

'We'll hear the drums if there is a dance.' I hoped he'd ride on quickly but he stayed by the huts to watch the sun go down, the sky and the sea were on fire when we left Bertrand Bay at last. From a long way off I saw the shadow of our house high up on its stone foundations. There was a smell of ferns and river water and I felt safe again, as if I was one of the righteous. (Godfrey said that we were not righteous. One day when he was drunk he told me that we were all damned and no use praying.)

'They've chosen a very hot night for their dance,' Mr Mason said, and Aunt Cora came on to the *glacis*. 'What dance? Where?'

'There is some festivity in the neighbourhood. The huts were abandoned. A wedding perhaps?'

'Not a wedding,' I said. 'There is never a wedding.' He frowned at me but Aunt Cora smiled.

When they had gone indoors I leaned my arms on the

cool *glacis* railings and thought that I would never like him very much. I still called him 'Mr Mason' in my head. 'Goodnight white pappy,' I said one evening and he was not vexed, he laughed. In some ways it was better before he came though he'd rescued us from poverty and misery. 'Only just in time too.' The black people did not hate us quite so much when we were poor. We were white but we had not escaped and soon we would be dead for we had no money left. What was there to hate?

Now it had started up again and worse than before, my mother knows but she can't make him believe it. I wish I could tell him that out here is not at all like English people think it is. I wish. . .

I could hear them talking and Aunt Cora's laugh. I was glad she was staying with us. And I could hear the bamboos shiver and creak though there was no wind. It had been hot and still and dry for days. The colours had gone from the sky, the light was blue and could not last long. The *glacis* was not a good place when night was coming, Christophine said. As I went indoors my mother was talking in an excited voice.

'Very well. As you refuse to consider it, I will go and take Pierre with me. You won't object to that, I hope?'

'You are perfectly right, Annette,' said Aunt Cora and that did surprise me. She seldom spoke when they argued.

Mr Mason also seemed surprised and not at all pleased.

'You talk so wildly,' he said. 'And you are so mistaken. Of course you can get away for a change if you wish it. I promise you.'

'You have promised that before,' she said. 'You don't keep your promises.'

He sighed. 'I feel very well here. However, we'll arrange something. Quite soon.'

'I will not stay at Coulibri any longer,' my mother said. 'It is not safe. It is not safe for Pierre.'

Aunt Cora nodded.

As it was late I ate with them instead of by myself as usual. Myra, one of the new servants, was standing by the sideboard, waiting to change the plates. We ate English food now, beef and mutton, pies and puddings.

I was glad to be like an English girl but I missed the taste of Christophine's cooking.

My stepfather talked about a plan to import labourers – coolies he called them – from the East Indies. When Myra had gone out Aunt Cora said, 'I shouldn't discuss that if I were you. Myra is listening.'

'But the people here won't work. They don't want to work. Look at this place – it's enough to break your heart.'

'Hearts have been broken,' she said. 'Be sure of that. I suppose you all know what you are doing.'

'Do you mean to say –'

'I said nothing, except that it would be wiser not to tell that woman your plans – necessary and merciful no doubt. I don't trust her.'

'Live here most of your life and know nothing about the people. It's astonishing. They are children – they wouldn't hurt a fly.'

'Unhappily children do hurt flies,' said Aunt Cora.

Myra came in again looking mournful as she always did though she smiled when she talked about hell. Everyone went to hell, she told me, you had to belong to her sect to be saved and even then – just as well not to be too sure. She had thin arms and big hands and feet and the handkerchief she wore round her head was always white. Never striped or a gay colour.

So I looked away from her at my favourite picture,

'The Miller's Daughter', a lovely English girl with brown curls and blue eyes and a dress slipping off her shoulders. Then I looked across the white tablecloth and the vase of yellow roses at Mr Mason, so sure of himself, so without a doubt English. And at my mother, so without a doubt not English, but no white nigger either. Not my mother. Never had been. Never could be. Yes, she would have died, I thought, if she had not met him. And for the first time I was grateful and liked him. There are more ways than one of being happy, better perhaps to be peaceful and contented and protected, as I feel now, peaceful for years and long years, and afterwards I may be saved whatever Myra says. (When I asked Christophine what happened when you died, she said, 'You want to know too much.') I remembered to kiss my stepfather goodnight. Once Aunt Cora had told me, 'He's very hurt because you never kiss him.'

'He does not look hurt,' I argued. 'Great mistake to go by looks,' she said, 'one way or the other.'

I went into Pierre's room which was next to mine, the last one in the house. The bamboos were outside his window. You could almost touch them. He still had a crib and he slept more and more, nearly all the time. He was so thin that I could lift him easily. Mr Mason had promised to take him to England later on, there he would be cured, made like other people. 'And how will you like that?' I thought, as I kissed him. 'How will you like being made exactly like other people?' He looked happy asleep. But that will be later on. Later on. Sleep now. It was then I heard the bamboos creak again and a sound like whispering. I forced myself to look out of the window. There was a full moon but I saw nobody, nothing but shadows.

I left a light on the chair by my bed and waited for Christophine, for I liked to see her last thing. But she did

not come, and as the candle burned down, the safe peaceful feeling left me. I wished I had a big Cuban dog to lie by my bed and protect me, I wished I had not heard a noise by the bamboo clump, or that I were very young again, for then I believed in my stick. It was not a stick, but a long narrow piece of wood, with two nails sticking out at the end, a shingle, perhaps. I picked it up soon after they killed our horse and I thought I can fight with this, if the worst comes to the worst I can fight to the end though the best ones fall and that is another song. Christophine knocked the nails out, but she let me keep the shingle and I grew very fond of it, I believed that no one could harm me when it was near me, to lose it would be a great misfortune. All this was long ago, when I was still babyish and sure that everything was alive, not only the river or the rain, but chairs, looking-glasses, cups, saucers, everything.

I woke up and it was still night and my mother was there. She said, 'Get up and dress yourself, and come downstairs quickly.' She was dressed, but she had not put up her hair and one of her plaits was loose. 'Quickly,' she said again, then she went into Pierre's room, next door. I heard her speak to Myra and I heard Myra answer her. I lay there, half asleep, looking at the lighted candle on the chest of drawers, till I heard a noise as though a chair had fallen over in the little room, then I got up and dressed.

The house was on different levels. There were three steps down from my bedroom and Pierre's to the dining-room and then three steps from the dining-room to the rest of the house, which we called 'downstairs'. The folding doors of the dining-room were not shut and I could see that the big drawing-room was full of people. Mr Ma-

son, my mother, Christophine and Mannie and Sass. Aunt Cora was sitting on the blue sofa in the corner now, wearing a black silk dress, her ringlets were carefully arranged. She looked very haughty, I thought. But Godfrey was not there, or Myra, or the cook, or any of the others.

'There is no reason to be alarmed,' my stepfather was saying as I came in. 'A handful of drunken negroes.' He opened the door leading to the *glacis* and walked out. 'What is all this,' he shouted. 'What do you want?' A horrible noise swelled up, like animals howling, but worse. We heard stones falling on to the *glacis*. He was pale when he came in again, but he tried to smile as he shut and bolted the door. 'More of them than I thought, and in a nasty mood too. They will repent in the morning. I foresee gifts of tamarinds in syrup and ginger sweets tomorrow.'

'Tomorrow will be too late,' said Aunt Cora, 'too late for ginger sweets or anything else.' My mother was not listening to either of them. She said, 'Pierre is asleep and Myra is with him, I thought it better to leave him in his own room, away from this horrible noise. I don't know. Perhaps.' She was twisting her hands together, her wedding ring fell off and rolled into a corner near the steps. My stepfather and Mannie both stooped for it, then Mannie straightened up and said, 'Oh, my God, they get at the back, they set fire to the back of the house.' He pointed to my bedroom door which I had shut after me, and smoke was rolling out from underneath.

I did not see my mother move she was so quick. She opened the door of my room and then again I did not see her, nothing but smoke. Mannie ran after her, so did Mr Mason but more slowly. Aunt Cora put her arms round me. She said, 'Don't be afraid, you are quite safe. We are all quite safe.' Just for a moment I shut my eyes and rest-

ed my head against her shoulder. She smelled of vanilla, I remember. Then there was another smell, of burned hair, and I looked and my mother was in the room carrying Pierre. It was her loose hair that had burned and was smelling like that.

I thought, Pierre is dead. He looked dead. He was white and he did not make a sound, but his head hung back over her arm as if he had no life at all and his eyes were rolled up so that you only saw the whites. My stepfather said, 'Annette, you are hurt - your hands...' But she did not even look at him. 'His crib was on fire,' she said to Aunt Cora. 'The little room is on fire and Myra was not there. She has gone. She was not there.'

'That does not surprise me at all,' said Aunt Cora. She laid Pierre on the sofa, bent over him, then lifted up her skirt, stepped out of her white petticoat and began to tear it into strips.

'She left him, she ran away and left him alone to die,' said my mother, still whispering. So it was all the more dreadful when she began to scream abuse at Mr Mason, calling him a fool, a cruel stupid fool. 'I told you,' she said, 'I told you what would happen again and again.' Her voice broke, but still she screamed, 'You would not listen, you sneered at me, you grinning hypocrite, you ought not to live either, you know so much, don't you? Why don't you go out and ask them to let you go? Say how innocent you are. Say you have always trusted them.'

I was so shocked that everything was confused. And it happened quickly. I saw Mannie and Sass staggering along with two large earthenware jars of water which were kept in the pantry. They threw the water into the bedroom and it made a black pool on the floor, but the smoke rolled over the pool. Then Christophine, who had run into my

mother's bedroom for the pitcher there, came back and spoke to my aunt. 'It seems they have fired the other side of the house,' said Aunt Cora. 'They must have climbed that tree outside. This place is going to burn like tinder and there is nothing we can do to stop it. The sooner we get out the better.'

Mannie said to the boy, 'You frightened?' Sass shook his head. 'Then come on,' said Mannie. 'Out of my way,' he said and pushed Mr Mason aside. Narrow wooden stairs led down from the pantry to the outbuildings, the kitchen, the servants' rooms, the stables. That was where they were going. 'Take the child,' Aunt Cora told Christophine, 'and come.'

It was very hot on the *glacis* too, they roared as we came out, then there was another roar behind us. I had not seen any flames, only smoke and sparks, but now I saw tall flames shooting up to the sky, for the bamboos had caught. There were some tree ferns near, green and damp, one of those was smouldering too.

'Come quickly,' said Aunt Cora, and she went first, holding my hand. Christophine followed, carrying Pierre, and they were quite silent as we went down the *glacis* steps. But when I looked round for my mother I saw that Mr Mason, his face crimson with heat, seemed to be dragging her along and she was holding back, struggling. I heard him say, 'It's impossible, too late now.'

'Wants her jewel case?' Aunt Cora said.

'Jewel case? Nothing so sensible,' bawled Mr Mason. 'She wanted to go back for her damned parrot. I won't allow it.' She did not answer, only fought him silently, twisting like a cat and showing her teeth.

Our parrot was called Coco, a green parrot. He didn't talk very well, he could say *Qui est là? Qui est là?* and answer himself *Ché Coco, Ché Coco*. After Mr Mason

clipped his wings he grew very bad tempered, and though he would sit quietly on my mother's shoulder, he darted at everyone who came near her and pecked their feet.

'Annette,' said Aunt Cora. 'They are laughing at you, do not allow them to laugh at you.' She stopped fighting then and he half supported, half pulled her after us, cursing loudly.

Still they were quiet and there were so many of them I could hardly see any grass or trees. There must have been many of the bay people but I recognized no one. They all looked the same, it was the same face repeated over and over, eyes gleaming, mouth half open to shout. We were past the mounting stone when they saw Mannie driving the carriage round the corner. Sass followed, riding one horse and leading another. There was a ladies' saddle on the one he was leading.

Somebody yelled, 'But look the black Englishman! Look the white niggers!', and then they were all yelling. 'Look the white niggers! Look the damn white niggers!' A stone just missed Mannie's head, he cursed back at them and they cleared away from the rearing, frightened horses. 'Come on, for God's sake,' said Mr Mason. 'Get to the carriage, get to the horses.' But we could not move for they pressed too close round us. Some of them were laughing and waving sticks, some of the ones at the back were carrying flambeaux and it was light as day. Aunt Cora held my hand very tightly and her lips moved but I could not hear because of the noise. And I was afraid, because I knew that the ones who laughed would be the worst. I shut my eyes and waited. Mr Mason stopped swearing and began to pray in a loud pious voice. The prayer ended, 'May Almighty God defend us.' And God who is indeed mysterious, who had made no sign when they burned Pierre as he slept - not a clap of thunder, not

a flash of lightning – mysterious God heard Mr Mason at once and answered him. The yells stopped.

I opened my eyes, everybody was looking up and pointing at Coco on the *glacis* railings with his feathers alight. He made an effort to fly down but his clipped wings failed him and he fell screeching. He was all on fire.

I began to cry. 'Don't look,' said Aunt Cora. 'Don't look.' She stooped and put her arms round me and I hid my face, but I could feel that they were not so near. I heard someone say something about bad luck and remembered that it was very unlucky to kill a parrot, or even to see a parrot die. They began to go then, quickly, silently, and those that were left drew aside and watched us as we trailed across the grass. They were not laughing any more.

'Get to the carriage, get to the carriage,' said Mr Mason. 'Hurry!' He went first, holding my mother's arm, then Christophine carrying Pierre, and Aunt Cora was last, still with my hand in hers. None of us looked back.

Mannie had stopped the horses at the bend of the cobblestone road and as we got closer we heard him shout, 'What all you are, eh? Brute beasts?' He was speaking to a group of men and a few women who were standing round the carriage. A coloured man with a machete in his hand was holding the bridle. I did not see Sass or the other two horses. 'Get in,' said Mr Mason. 'Take no notice of him, get in.' The man with the machete said no. We would go to police and tell a lot of damn lies. A woman said to let us go. All this an accident and they had plenty witness. 'Myra she witness for us.'

'Shut your mouth,' the man said. 'You mash centipede, mash it, leave one little piece and it grow again... What you think police believe, eh? You, or the white nigger?'

Mr Mason stared at him. He seemed not frightened, but too astounded to speak. Mannie took up the carriage whip but one of the blacker men wrenched it out of his hand, snapped it over his knee and threw it away. 'Run away, black Englishman, like the boy run. Hide in the bushes. It's better for you.' It was Aunt Cora who stepped forward and said, 'The little boy is very badly hurt. He will die if we cannot get help for him.'

The man said, 'So black and white, they burn the same, eh?'

'They do,' she said. 'Here and hereafter, as you will find out. Very shortly.'

He let the bridle go and thrust his face close to hers. He'd throw her on the fire, he said, if she put bad luck on him. Old white jumby, he called her. But she did not move an inch, she looked straight into his eyes and threatened him with eternal fire in a calm voice. 'And never a drop of sangaree to cool your burning tongue,' she said. He cursed her again but he backed away. 'Now get in,' said Mr Mason. 'You, Christophine, get in with the child.' Christophine got in. 'Now you,' he said to my mother. But she had turned and was looking back at the house and when he put his hand on her arm, she screamed.

One woman said she only come to see what happen. Another woman began to cry. The man with the cutlass said, 'You cry for her - when she ever cry for you? Tell me that.'

But now I turned too. The house was burning, the yellow-red sky was like sunset and I knew that I would never see Coulibri again. Nothing would be left, the golden ferns and the silver ferns, the orchids, the ginger lilies and the roses, the rocking-chairs and the blue sofa, the jasmine and the honeysuckle, and the picture of the Miller's

Daughter. When they had finished, there would be nothing left but blackened walls and the mounting stone. That was always left. That could not be stolen or burned.

Then not so far off, I saw Tia and her mother and I ran to her, for she was all that was left of my life as it had been. We had eaten the same food, slept side by side, bathed in the same river. As I ran, I thought, I will live with Tia and I will be like her. Not to leave Coulibri. Not to go. Not. When I was close I saw the jagged stone in her hand but I did not see her throw it. I did not feel it either, only something wet, running down my face. I looked at her and I saw her face crumple up as she began to cry. We stared at each other, blood on my face, tears on hers. It was as if I saw myself. Like in a looking-glass.

*

'I saw my plait, tied with red ribbon, when I got up,' I said. 'In the chest of drawers. I thought it was a snake.'

'Your hair had to be cut. You've been very ill, my darling,' said Aunt Cora. 'But you are safe with me now. We are all safe as I told you we would be. You must stay in bed though. Why are you wandering about the room? Your hair will grow again,' she said. 'Longer and thicker.'

'But darker,' I said.

'Why not darker?'

She picked me up and I was glad to feel the soft mattress and glad to be covered with a cool sheet.

'It's time for your arrowroot,' she said and went out. When that was finished she took the cup away and stood looking down at me.

'I got up because I wanted to know where I was.'

'And you do know, don't you?' she said in an anxious voice.

'Of course. But how did I get to your house?'

'The Luttrells were very good. As soon as Mannie got to Nelson's Rest they sent a hammock and four men. You were shaken about a good deal though. But they did their best. Young Mr Luttrell rode alongside you all the way. Wasn't that kind?'

'Yes,' I said. She looked thin and old and her hair wasn't arranged prettily so I shut my eyes, not wanting to see her.

'Pierre is dead, isn't he?'

'He died on the way down, the poor little boy,' she said.

'He died before that,' I thought but was too tired to speak.

'Your mother is in the country. Resting. Getting well again. You will see her quite soon.'

'I didn't know,' I said. 'Why did she go away?'

'You've been very ill for nearly six weeks. You didn't know anything.'

What was the use of telling her that I'd been awake before and heard my mother screaming '*Qui est là? Qui est là?*' then 'Don't touch me. I'll kill you if you touch me. Coward. Hypocrite. I'll kill you.' I'd put my hands over my ears, her screams were so loud and terrible. I slept and when I woke up everything was quiet.

Still Aunt Cora stayed by my bed looking at me.

'My head is bandaged up. It's so hot,' I said. 'Will I have a mark on my forehead?'

'No, no.' She smiled for the first time. 'That is healing very nicely. It won't spoil you on your wedding day,' she said.

She bent down and kissed me. 'Is there anything you want? A cool drink to sip?'

'No, not a drink. Sing to me. I like that.'

She began in a shaky voice.

‘Every night at half past eight
Comes tap tap tapping –’

‘Not that one. I don’t like that one. Sing *Before I was set free*.’

She sat near me and sang very softly, ‘Before I was set free’. I heard as far as ‘The sorrow that my heart feels for –’ I didn’t hear the end but I heard that before I slept. ‘The sorrow that my heart feels for.’

I was going to see my mother. I had insisted that Christophine must be with me, no one else, and as I was not yet quite well they had given way. I remember the dull feeling as we drove along for I did not expect to see her. She was part of Coulibri, that had gone, so she had gone, I was certain of it. But when we reached the tidy pretty little house where she lived now (they said) I jumped out of the carriage and ran as fast as I could across the lawn. One door was open on to the veranda. I went in without knocking and stared at the people in the room. A coloured man, a coloured woman, and a white woman sitting with her head bent so low that I couldn’t see her face. But I recognized her hair, one plait much shorter than the other. And her dress. I put my arms round her and kissed her. She held me so tightly that I couldn’t breathe and I thought, ‘It’s not her.’ Then, ‘It must be her.’ She looked at the door, then at me, then at the door again. I could not say, ‘He is dead,’ so I shook my head. ‘But I am here, I am here,’ I said, and she said, ‘No,’ quietly. Then ‘No no no’ very loudly and flung me from her. I fell against the partition and hurt myself. The man and the woman were holding her arms and Christophine was there. The woman said, ‘Why you

bring the child to make trouble, trouble, trouble? Trouble enough without that.'

All the way back to Aunt Cora's house we didn't speak.

The first day I had to go to the convent, I clung to Aunt Cora as you would cling to life if you loved it. At last she got impatient, so I forced myself away from her and through the passage, down the steps into the street and, as I knew they would be, they were waiting for me under the sandbox tree. There were two of them, a boy and a girl. The boy was about fourteen and tall and big for his age, he had a white skin, a dull ugly white covered with freckles, his mouth was a negro's mouth and he had small eyes, like bits of green glass. He had the eyes of a dead fish. Worst, most horrible of all, his hair was crinkled, a negro's hair, but bright red, and his eyebrows and eyelashes were red. The girl was very black and wore no head handkerchief. Her hair had been plaited and I could smell the sickening oil she had daubed on it, from where I stood on the steps of Aunt Cora's dark, clean, friendly house, staring at them. They looked so harmless and quiet, no one would have noticed the glint in the boy's eyes.

Then the girl grinned and began to crack the knuckles of her fingers. At each crack I jumped and my hands began to sweat. I was holding some school books in my right hand and I shifted them to under my arm, but it was too late, there was a mark on the palm of my hand and a stain on the cover of the book. The girl began to laugh, very quietly, and it was then that hate came to me and courage with the hate so that I was able to walk past without looking at them.

I knew they were following, I knew too that as long as I was in sight of Aunt Cora's house they would do nothing but stroll along some distance after me. But I knew when

they would draw close. It would be when I was going up the hill. There were walls and gardens on each side of the hill and no one would be there at this hour of the morning.

Half-way up they closed in on me and started talking. The girl said, 'Look the crazy girl, you crazy like your mother. Your aunt frightened to have you in the house. She send you for the nuns to lock up. Your mother walk about with no shoes and stockings on her feet, she *sans culottes*. She try to kill her husband and she try to kill you too that day you go to see her. She have eyes like zombie and you have eyes like zombie too. Why you won't look at me.' The boy only said, 'One day I catch you alone, you wait, one day I catch you alone.' When I got to the top of the hill they were jostling me, I could smell the girl's hair.

A long empty street stretched away to the convent, the convent wall and a wooden gate. I would have to ring before I could get in. The girl said, 'You don't want to look at me, eh, I make you look at me.' She pushed me and the books I was carrying fell to the ground.

I stooped to pick them up and saw that a tall boy who was walking along the other side of the street had stopped and looked towards us. Then he crossed over, running. He had long legs, his feet hardly touched the ground. As soon as they saw him, they turned and walked away. He looked after them, puzzled. I would have died sooner than run when they were there, but as soon as they had gone, I ran. I left one of my books on the ground and the tall boy came after me.

'You dropped this,' he said, and smiled. I knew who he was, his name was Sandi, Alexander Cosway's son. Once I would have said 'my cousin Sandi' but Mr Mason's lectures had made me shy about my coloured

relatives. I muttered, 'Thank you.'

'I'll talk to that boy,' he said. 'He won't bother you again.'

In the distance I could see my enemy's red hair as he pelted along, but he hadn't a chance. Sandi caught him up before he reached the corner. The girl had disappeared. I didn't wait to see what happened but I pulled and pulled at the bell.

At last the door opened. The nun was a coloured woman and she seemed displeased. 'You must not ring the bell like that,' she said. 'I come as quick as I can.' Then I heard the door shut behind me.

I collapsed and began to cry. She asked me if I was sick, but I could not answer. She took my hand, still clicking her tongue and muttering in an ill-tempered way, and led me across the yard, past the shadow of the big tree, not into the front door but into a big, cool, stoneflagged room. There were pots and pans hanging on the wall and a stone fireplace. There was another nun at the back of the room and when the bell rang again, the first one went to answer it. The second nun, also a coloured woman, brought a basin and water but as fast as she sponged my face, so fast did I cry. When she saw my hand she asked if I had fallen and hurt myself. I shook my head and she sponged the stain away gently. 'What is the matter, what are you crying about? What has happened to you?' And still I could not answer. She brought me a glass of milk, I tried to drink it, but I choked. 'Oh la la,' she said, shrugging her shoulders and went out.

When she came in again, a third nun was with her who said in a calm voice, 'You have cried quite enough now, you must stop. Have you got a handkerchief?'

I remembered that I had dropped it. The new nun wiped my eyes with a large handkerchief, gave it to me

and asked my name.

'Antoinette,' I said.

'Of course,' she said. 'I know. You are Antoinette Cosway, that is to say Antoinette Mason. Has someone frightened you?'

'Yes.'

'Now look at me,' she said. 'You will not be frightened of me.'

I looked at her. She had large brown eyes, very soft, and was dressed in white, not with a starched apron like the others had. The band round her face was of linen and above the white linen a black veil of some thin material, which fell in folds down her back. Her cheeks were red, she had a laughing face and two deep dimples. Her hands were small but they looked clumsy and swollen, not like the rest of her. It was only afterwards that I found out that they were crippled with rheumatism. She took me into a parlour furnished stiffly with straight-backed chairs and a polished table in the middle. After she had talked to me I told her a little of why I was crying and that I did not like walking to school alone.

'That must be seen to,' she said. 'I will write to your aunt. Now Mother St Justine will be waiting for you. I have sent for a girl who has been with us for nearly a year. Her name is Louise - Louise de Plana. If you feel strange, she will explain everything.'

Louise and I walked along a paved path to the classroom. There was grass on each side of the path and trees and shadows of trees and sometimes a bright bush of flowers. She was very pretty and when she smiled at me I could scarcely believe I had ever been miserable. She said, 'We always call Mother St Justine, Mother Juice of a Lime. She is not very intelligent, poor woman. You will see.'

Quickly, while I can, I must remember the hot classroom. The hot classroom, the pitchpine desks, the heat of the bench striking up through my body, along my arms and hands. But outside I could see cool, blue shadow on a white wall. My needle is sticky, and creaks as it goes in and out of the canvas. 'My needle is swearing,' I whisper to Louise, who sits next to me. We are cross-stitching silk roses on a pale background. We can colour the roses as we choose and mine are green, blue and purple. Underneath, I will write my name in fire red, Antoinette Mason, née Cosway, Mount Calvary Convent, Spanish Town, Jamaica, 1839.

As we work, Mother St Justine reads us stories from the lives of the Saints, St Rose, St Barbara, St Agnes. But we have our own Saint, the skeleton of a girl of fourteen under the altar of the convent chapel. The Relice. But how did the nuns get them out here, I ask myself? In a cabin trunk? Specially packed for the hold? How? But here she is, and St Innocenzia is her name. We do not know her story, she is not in the book. The saints we hear about were all very beautiful and wealthy. All were loved by rich and handsome young men.

'...more lovely and more richly dressed than he had ever seen her in life,' drones Mother St Justine. 'She smiled and said, "Here Theophilus is a rose from the garden of my Spouse, in whom you did not believe." The rose he found by his side when he awoke has never faded. It still exists.' (Oh, but where? Where?) 'And Theophilus was converted to Christianity,' says Mother St Justine, reading very rapidly now, 'and became one of the Holy Martyrs.' She shuts the book with a clap and talks about pushing down the cuticles of our nails when we wash our hands. Cleanliness, good manners and kind-

ness to God's poor. A flow of words. ('It is her time of life,' said Hélène de Plana, 'she cannot help it, poor old Justine. ') 'When you insult or injure the unfortunate or the unhappy, you insult Christ Himself and He will not forget, for they are His chosen ones. ' This remark is made in a casual and perfunctory voice and she slides on to order and chastity, that flawless crystal that, once broken, can never be mended. Also deportment. Like everyone else, she has fallen under the spell of the de Plana sisters and holds them up as an example to the class. I admire them. They sit so poised and imperturbable while she points out the excellence of Miss Hélène's coiffure, achieved without a looking-glass.

'Please, Hélène, tell me how you do your hair, because when I grow up I want mine to look like yours. '

'It's very easy. You comb it upwards, like this and then push it a little forward, like that, and then you pin it here and here. Never too many pins. '

'Yes, but Hélène, mine does not look like yours, whatever I do. '

Her eyelashes flickered, she turned away, too polite to say the obvious thing. We have no looking-glass in the dormitory, once I saw the new young nun from Ireland looking at herself in a cask of water, smiling to see if her dimples were still there. When she noticed me, she blushed and I thought, now she will always dislike me.

Sometimes it was Miss Hélène's hair and sometimes Miss Germaine's impeccable deportment, and sometimes it was the care Miss Louise took of her beautiful teeth. And if we were never envious, they never seemed vain. Hélène and Germaine, a little disdainful, aloof perhaps, but Louise, not even that. She took no part in it - as if she knew that she was born for other things. Hélène's brown eyes could snap, Germaine's grey eyes were beautiful, soft

and cow-like, she spoke slowly and, unlike most Greole girls, was very even-tempered. It is easy to imagine what happened to those two, bar accidents. Ah but Louise! Her small waist, her thin brown hands, her black curls which smelled of vetiver, her high sweet voice, singing so carelessly in Chapel about death. Like a bird would sing. Anything might have happened to you, Louise, anything at all, and I wouldn't be surprised.

Then there was another saint, said Mother St Justine, she lived later on but still in Italy, or was it in Spain. Italy is white pillars and green water. Spain is hot sun on stones, France is a lady with black hair wearing a white dress because Louise was born in France fifteen years ago, and my nother, whom I must forget and pray for as though she were dead, though she is living, liked to dress in white.

No one spoke of her now that Christophine had left us to live with her son. I seldom saw my stepfather. He seemed to dislike Jamaica, Spanish Town in particular, and was often away for months.

One hot afternoon in July my aunt told me that she was going to England for a year. Her health was not good and she needed a change. As she talked she was working at a patchwork counterpane. The diamond-shaped pieces of silk melted one into the other, red, blue, purple, green, yellow, all one shimmering colour. Hours and hours she had spent on it and it was nearly finished. Would I be lonely? she asked and I said 'No', looking at the colours. Hours and hours and hours I thought.

This convent was my refuge, a place of sunshine and of death where very early in the morning the clap of a wooden signal woke the nine of us who slept in the long dormitory. We woke to see Sister Marie Augustine sitting,

serene and neat, bolt upright in a wooden chair. The long brown room was full of gold sunlight and shadows of trees moving quietly. I learnt to say very quickly as the others did, 'offer up all the prayers, works and sufferings of this day.' But what about happiness, I thought at first, is there no happiness? There must be. Oh happiness of course, happiness, well.

But I soon forgot about happiness, running down the stairs to the big stone bath where we splashed about wearing long grey cotton chemises which reached to our ankles. The smell of soap as you cautiously soaped yourself under the chemise, a trick to be learned, dressing with modesty, another trick. Great splashes of sunlight as we ran up the wooden steps of the refectory. Hot coffee and rolls and melting butter. But after the meal, now and at the hour of our death, and at midday and at six in the evening, now and at the hour of our death. Let perpetual light shine on them. This is for my mother, I would think, wherever her soul is wandering, for it has left her body. Then I remembered how she hated a strong light and loved the cool and the shade. It is a different light they told me. Still, I would not say it. Soon we were back in the shifting shadows outside, more beautiful than any perpetual light could be, and soon I learnt to gabble without thinking as the others did. About changing now and the hour of our death for that is all we have.

Everything was brightness, or dark. The walls, the blazing colours of the flowers in the garden, the nuns' habits were bright, but their veils, the Crucifix hanging from their waists, the shadow of the trees, were black. That was how it was, light and dark, sun and shadow, Heaven and Hell, for one of the nuns knew all about Hell and who does not? But another one knew about Heaven and the attributes of the blessed, of which the least is transcendent

beauty. The very least. I could hardly wait for all this ecstasy and once I prayed for a long time to be dead. Then remembered that this was a sin. It's presumption or despair, I forget which, but a mortal sin. So I prayed for a long time about that too, but the thought came, so many things are sins, why? Another sin, to think that. However, happily, Sister Marie Augustine says thoughts are not sins, if they are driven away at once. You say Lord save me, I perish. I find it very comforting to know exactly what must be done. All the same, I did not pray so often after that and soon, hardly at all. I felt bolder, happier, more free. But not so safe.

During this time, nearly eighteen months, my stepfather often came to see me. He interviewed Mother Superior first, then I would go into the parlour dressed ready for a dinner or a visit to friends. He gave me presents when we parted, sweets, a locket, a bracelet, once a very pretty dress which, of course, I could not wear.

The last time he came was different. I knew that as soon as I got into the room. He kissed me, held me at arm's length looking at me carefully and critically, then smiled and said that I was taller than he thought. I reminded him that I was over seventeen, a grown woman. 'I've not forgotten your present,' he said.

Because I felt shy and ill at ease I answered coldly, 'I can't wear all these things you buy for me.'

'You can wear what you like when you live with me,' he said.

'Where? In Trinidad?'

'Of course not. Here, for the time being. With me and your Aunt Cora who is coming home at last. She says another English winter will kill her. And Richard. You can't be hidden away all your life.'

'Why not?' I thought.

I suppose he noticed my dismay because he began to joke, pay me compliments, and ask me such absurd questions that soon I was laughing too. How would I like to live in England? Then, before I could answer, had I learnt dancing, or were the nuns too strict?

'They are not strict at all,' I said. 'The Bishop who visits them every year says they are lax. Very lax. It's the climate he says.'

'I hope they told him to mind his own business.'

'She did. Mother Superior did. Some of the others were frightened. They are not strict but no one has taught me to dance.'

'That won't be the difficulty. I want you to be happy, Antoinette, secure, I've tried to arrange it, but we'll have time to talk about that later.'

As we were going out of the convent gate he said in a careless voice, 'I have asked some English friends to spend next winter here. You won't be dull.'

'Do you think they'll come?' I said doubtfully.

'One of them will. I'm certain of that.'

It may have been the way he smiled, but again a feeling of dismay, sadness, loss, almost choked me. This time I did not let him see it.

It was like that morning when I found the dead horse. Say nothing and it may not be true.

But they all knew at the convent. The girls were very curious but I would not answer their questions and for the first time I resented the nuns' cheerful faces.

They are safe. How can they know what it can be like *outside*?

This was the second time I had my dream.

Again I have left the house at Coulibri. It is still night and I am walking towards the forest. I am wearing a long dress and thin slippers, so I walk with difficulty, following

the man who is with me and holding up the skirt of my dress. It is white and beautiful and I don't wish to get it soiled. I follow him, sick with fear but I make no effort to save myself; if anyone were to try to save me, I would refuse. This must happen. Now we have reached the forest. We are under the tall dark trees and there is no wind. 'Here?' He turns and looks at me, his face black with hatred, and when I see this I begin to cry. He smiles slyly. 'Not here, not yet,' he says, and I follow him, weeping. Now I do not try to hold up my dress, it trails in the dirt, my beautiful dress. We are no longer in the forest but in an enclosed garden surrounded by a stone wall and the trees are different trees. I do not know them. There are steps leading upwards. It is too dark to see the wall or the steps, but I know they are there and I think, 'It will be when I go up these steps. At the top.' I stumble over my dress and cannot get up. I touch a tree and my arms hold on to it. 'Here, here.' But I think I will not go any further. The tree sways and jerks as if it is trying to throw me off. Still I cling and the seconds pass and each one is a thousand years. 'Here, in here,' a strange voice said, and the tree stopped swaying and jerking.

Now Sister Marie Augustine is leading me out of the dormitory, asking if I am ill, telling me that I must not disturb the others and though I am still shivering I wonder if she will take me behind the mysterious curtains to the place where she sleeps. But no. She seats me in a chair, vanishes, and after a while comes back with a cup of hot chocolate.

I said, 'I dreamed I was in Hell.'

'That dream is evil. Put it from your mind - never think of it again,' and she rubbed my cold hands to warm them.

She looks as usual, composed and neat, and I want to ask her if she gets up before dawn or hasn't been to bed at all.

'Drink your chocolate.'

While I am drinking it I remember that after my mother's funeral, very early in the morning, almost as early as this, we went home to drink chocolate and eat cakes. She died last year, no one told me how, and I didn't ask. Mr Mason was there and Christophine, no one else. Christophine cried bitterly but I could not. I prayed, but the words fell to the ground meaning nothing.

Now the thought of her is mixed up with my dream.

I saw her in her mended habit riding a borrowed horse, trying to wave at the head of the cobblestoned road at Coulibri, and tears came to my eyes again. 'Such terrible things happen,' I said. 'Why? Why?'

'You must not concern yourself with that mystery,' said Sister Maria Augustine. 'We do not know why the devil must have his little day. Not yet.'

She never smiled as much as the others, now she was not smiling at all. She looked sad.

She said, as if she was talking to herself, 'Now go quietly back to bed. Think of calm, peaceful things and try to sleep. Soon I will give the signal. Soon it will be tomorrow morning.'

Part Two

So it was all over, the advance and retreat, the doubts and hesitations. Everything finished, for better or for worse. There we were, sheltering from the heavy rain under a large mango tree, myself, my wife Antoinette and a little half-caste servant who was called Amélie. Under a neigh-

bouring tree I could see our luggage covered with sacking, the two porters and a boy holding fresh horses, hired to carry us up 2,000 feet to the waiting honeymoon house.

The girl Amélie said this morning, 'I hope you will be very happy, sir, in your sweet honeymoon house.' She was laughing at me I could see. A lovely little creature but sly, spiteful, malignant perhaps, like much else in this place.

'It's only a shower,' Antoinette said anxiously. 'It will soon stop.'

I looked at the sad leaning coconut palms, the fishing boats drawn up on the shingly beach, the uneven row of whitewashed huts, and asked the name of the village.

'Massacre.'

'And who was massacred here? Slaves?'

'Oh no.' She sounded shocked. 'Not slaves. Something must have happened a long time ago. Nobody remembers now.'

The rain fell more heavily, huge drops sounded like hail on the leaves of the tree, and the sea crept stealthily forwards and backwards.

So this is Massacre. Not the end of the world, only the last stage of our interminable journey from Jamaica, the start of our sweet honeymoon. And it will all look very different in the sun.

It had been arranged that we would leave Spanish Town immediately after the ceremony and spend some weeks in one of the Windward Islands, at a small estate which had belonged to Antoinette's mother. I agreed. As I had agreed to everything else.

The windows of the huts were shut, the doors opened into silence and dimness. Then three little boys came to stare at us. The smallest wore nothing but a religious medal round his neck and the brim of a large fisherman's

hat. When I smiled at him, he began to cry. A woman called from one of the huts and he ran away, still howling.

The other two followed slowly, looking back several times.

As if this was a signal a second woman appeared at her door, then a third.

'It's Caro,' Antoinette said. 'I'm sure it's Caro. Caroline,' she called, waving, and the woman waved back. A gaudy old creature in a brightly flowered dress, a striped head handkerchief and gold ear-rings.

'You'll get soaked, Antoinette,' I said.

'No, the rain is stopping.' She held up the skirt of her riding habit and ran across the street. I watched her critically. She wore a tricorne hat which became her. At least it shadowed her eyes which are too large and can be disconcerting. She never blinks at all it seems to me. Long, sad, dark alien eyes. Creole of pure English descent she may be, but they are not English or European either. And when did I begin to notice all this about my wife Antoinette? After we left Spanish Town I suppose. Or did I notice it before and refuse to admit what I saw? Not that I had much time to notice anything. I was married a month after I arrived in Jamaica and for nearly three weeks of that time I was in bed with fever.

The two women stood in the doorway of the hut gesticulating, talking not English but the debased French patois they use in this island. The rain began to drip down the back of my neck adding to my feeling of discomfort and melancholy.

I thought about the letter which should have been written to England a week ago. Dear Father . . .

'Caroline asks if you will shelter in her house.'

This was Antoinette. She spoke hesitatingly as if she ex-

pected me to refuse, so it was easy to do so.

'But you are getting wet,' she said.

'I don't mind that.' I smiled at Caroline and shook my head.

'She will be very disappointed,' said my wife, crossed the street again and went into the dark hut.

Amélie, who had been sitting with her back to us, turned round. Her expression was so full of delighted malice, so intelligent, above all so intimate that I felt ashamed and looked away.

'Well,' I thought, 'I have had fever. I am not myself yet.'

The rain was not so heavy and I went to talk to the porters. The first man was not a native of the island.

'This a very wild place - not civilized. Why you come here?' He was called the Young Bull he told me, and he was twenty-seven years of age. A magnificent body and a foolish conceited face. The other man's name was Emile, yes, he was born in the village, he lived there. 'Ask him how old he is,' suggested the Young Bull. Emile said in a questioning voice, 'Fourteen? Yes I have fourteen years master.'

'Impossible,' I said. I could see the grey hairs in his sparse beard.

'Fifty-six years perhaps.' He seemed anxious to please.

The Young Bull laughed loudly. 'He don't know how old he is, he don't think about it. I tell you sir these people are not civilized.'

Emile muttered, 'My mother she know, but she dead.' Then he produced a blue rag which he twisted into a pad and put on his head.

Most of the women were outside their doors looking at us but without smiling. Sombre people in a sombre place.

Some of the men were going to their boats. When Emile shouted, two of them came towards him. He sang in a deep voice. They answered, then lifted the heavy wicker basket and swung it on to his head-pad singing. He tested the balance with one hand and strode off, barefooted on the sharp stones, by far the gayest member of the wedding party. As the Young Bull was loaded up he glanced at me sideways boastfully and he too sang to himself in English.

The boy brought the horses to a large stone and I saw Antoinette coming from the hut. The sun blazed out and steam rose from the green behind us. Amélie took her shoes off, tied them together and hung them round her neck. She balanced her small basket on her head and swung away as easily as the porters. We mounted, turned a corner and the village was out of sight. A cock crowed loudly and I remembered the night before which we had spent in the town. Antoinette had a room to herself, she was exhausted. I lay awake listening to cocks crowing all night, then got up very early and saw the women with trays covered with white cloths on their heads going to the kitchen. The woman with small hot loaves for sale, the woman with cakes, the woman with sweets. In the street another called *Bon sirop*, *Bon sirop*, and I felt peaceful.

The road climbed upward. On one side the wall of green, on the other a steep drop to the ravine below. We pulled up and looked at the hills, the mountains and the blue-green sea. There was a soft warm wind blowing but I understood why the porter had called it a wild place. Not only wild but menacing. Those hills would close in on you.

'What an extreme green,' was all I could say, and thinking of Emile calling to the fishermen and the sound of his voice, I asked about him.

'They take short cuts. They will be at Granbois long before we are.'

Everything is too much, I felt as I rode wearily after her. Too much blue, too much purple, too much green. The flowers too red, the mountains too high, the hills too near. And the woman is a stranger. Her pleading expression annoys me. I have not bought her, she has bought me, or so she thinks. I looked down at the coarse mane of the horse... Dear Father. The thirty thousand pounds have been paid to me without question or condition. No provision made for her (that must be seen to). I have a modest competence now. I will never be a disgrace to you or to my dear brother the son you love. No begging letters, no mean requests. None of the furtive shabby manoeuvres of a younger son. I have sold my soul or you have sold it, and after all is it such a bad bargain? The girl is thought to be beautiful, she is beautiful. And yet...

Meanwhile the horses jogged along a very bad road. It was getting cooler. A bird whistled, a long sad note. 'What bird is that?' She was too far ahead and did not hear me. The bird whistled again. A mountain bird. Shrill and sweet. A very lonely sound.

She stopped and called, 'Put your coat on now.' I did so and realized that I was no longer pleasantly cool but cold in my sweat-soaked shirt.

We rode on again, silent in the slanting afternoon sun, the wall of trees on one side, a drop on the other. Now the sea was a serene blue, deep and dark.

We came to a little river. 'This is the boundary of Granbois.' She smiled at me. It was the first time I had seen her smile simply and naturally. Or perhaps it was the first time I had felt simple and natural with her. A bamboo spout jutted from the cliff, the water coming from it was silver blue. She dismounted quickly, picked a large sham-

rock-shaped leaf to make a cup, and drank. Then she picked another leaf, folded it and brought it to me. 'Taste. This is mountain water.' Looking up smiling, she might have been any pretty English girl and to please her I drank. It was cold, pure and sweet, a beautiful colour against the thick green leaf.

She said, 'After this we go down then up again. Then we are there.'

Next time she spoke she said, 'The earth is red here, do you notice?'

'It's red in parts of England too.'

'Oh England, England,' she called back mockingly, and the sound went on and on like a warning I did not choose to hear.

Soon the road was cobblestoned and we stopped at a flight of stone steps. There was a large screw pine to the left and to the right what looked like an imitation of an English summer house - four wooden posts and a thatched roof. She dismounted and ran up the steps. At the top a badly cut, coarse-grained lawn and at the end of the lawn a shabby white house. 'Now you are at Granbois.' I looked at the mountains purple against a very blue sky.

Perched up on wooden stilts the house seemed to shrink from the forest behind it and crane eagerly out to the distant sea. It was more awkward than ugly, a little sad as if it knew it could not last. A group of negroes were standing at the foot of the veranda steps. Antoinette ran across the lawn and as I followed her I collided with a boy coming in the opposite direction. He rolled his eyes, looking alarmed and went on towards the horses without a word of apology. A man's voice said, 'Double up now double up. Look sharp.' There were four of them. A woman, a girl and a tall, dignified man were together. Antoinette was standing

with her arms round another woman. 'That was Bertrand who nearly knocked you down. That is Rose and Hilda. This is Baptiste.'

The servants grinned shyly as she named them.

'And here is Christophine who was my da, my nurse long ago.'

Baptiste said that it was a happy day and that we'd brought fine weather with us. He spoke good English, but in the middle of his address of welcome Hilda began to giggle. She was a young girl of about twelve or fourteen, wearing a sleeveless white dress which just reached her knees. The dress was spotless but her uncovered hair, though it was oiled and braided into many small plaits, gave her a savage appearance. Baptiste frowned at her and she giggled more loudly, then put her hand over her mouth and went up the wooden steps into the house. I could hear her bare feet running along the veranda.

'*Doudou, ché cocotte,*' the elderly woman said to Antoinette. I looked at her sharply but she seemed insignificant. She was blacker than most and her clothes, even the handkerchief round her head, were subdued in colour. She looked at me steadily, not with approval, I thought. We stared at each other for quite a minute. I looked away first and she smiled to herself, gave Antoinette a little push forward and disappeared into the shadows at the back of the house. The other servants had gone.

Standing on the veranda I breathed the sweetness of the air. Cloves I could smell and cinnamon, roses and orange blossom. And an intoxicating freshness as if all this had never been breathed before. When Antoinette said 'Come, I will show you the house' I went with her unwillingly for the rest of the place seemed neglected and deserted. She led me into a large unpainted room. There was

a small shabby sofa, a mahogany table in the middle, some straight-backed chairs and an old oak chest with brass feet like lion's claws.

Holding my hand she went up to the sideboard where two glasses of rum punch were waiting for us. She handed me one and said, 'To happiness.'

'To happiness,' I answered.

The room beyond was larger and emptier. There were two doors, one leading to the veranda, the other very slightly open into a small room. A big bed, a round table by its side, two chairs, a surprising dressing-table with a marble top and a large looking-glass. Two wreaths of frangipani lay on the bed.

'Am I expected to wear one of these? And when?'

I crowned myself with one of the wreaths and made a face in the glass. 'I hardly think it suits my handsome face, do you?'

'You look like a king, an emperor.'

'God forbid,' I said and took the wreath off. It fell on the floor and as I went towards the window I stepped on it. The room was full of the scent of crushed flowers. I saw her reflection in the glass fanning herself with a small palm-leaf fan coloured blue and red at the edges. I felt sweat on my forehead and sat down, she knelt near me and wiped my face with her handkerchief.

'Don't you like it here? This is my place and everything is on our side. Once,' she said, 'I used to sleep with a piece of wood by my side so that I could defend myself if I were attacked. That's how afraid I was.'

'Afraid of what?'

She shook her head. 'Of nothing, of everything.'

Someone knocked and she said, 'It's only Christophine.'

'The old woman who was your nurse? Are you afraid

of her?’

‘No, how could I be?’

‘If she were taller,’ I said, ‘one of these strapping women dressed up to the nines, I might be afraid of her.’

She laughed. ‘That door leads into your dressing-room.’

I shut it gently after me.

It seemed crowded after the emptiness of the rest of the house. There was a carpet, the only one I had seen, a press made of some beautiful wood I did not recognize. Under the open window a small writing-desk with paper, pens, and ink. ‘A refuge’ I was thinking when someone said, ‘This was Mr Mason’s room, sir, but he did not come here often. He did not like the place.’ Baptiste, standing in the doorway to the veranda, had a blanket over his arm.

‘It’s all very comfortable,’ I said. He laid the blanket on the bed.

‘It can be cold here at night,’ he said. Then went away. But the feeling of security had left me. I looked round suspiciously. The door into her room could be bolted, a stout wooden bar pushed across the other. This was the last room in the house. Wooden steps from the veranda led on to another rough lawn, a Seville orange tree grew by the steps. I went back into the dressing-room and looked out of the window. I saw a clay road, muddy in places, bordered by a row of tall trees. Beyond the road various half-hidden outbuildings. One was the kitchen. No chimney but smoke was pouring out of the window. I sat on the soft narrow bed and listened. Not a sound except the river. I might have been alone in the house. There was a crude bookshelf made of three shingles strung together over the desk and I looked at the books, Byron’s poems, novels by Sir Walter Scott, *Confessions of an Opium*

Eater, some shabby brown volumes, and on the last shelf, *Life and Letters of* . . . The rest was eaten away.

Dear Father, we have arrived from Jamaica after an uncomfortable few days. This little estate in the Windward Islands is part of the family property and Antoinette is much attached to it. She wished to get here as soon as possible. All is well and has gone according to your plans and wishes. I dealt of course with Richard Mason. His father died soon after I left for the West Indies as you probably know. He is a good fellow, hospitable and friendly; he seemed to become attached to me and trusted me completely. This place is very beautiful but my illness has left me too exhausted to appreciate it fully. I will write again in a few days' time.

I reread this letter and added a postscript:

I feel that I have left you too long without news for the bare announcement of my approaching marriage was hardly news. I was down with fever for two weeks after I got to Spanish Town. Nothing serious but I felt wretched enough. I stayed with the Frasers, friends of the Masons. Mr Fraser is an Englishman, a retired magistrate, and he insisted on telling me at length about some of his cases. It was difficult to think or write coherently. In this cool and remote place it is called Granbois (the High Woods I suppose) I feel better already and my next letter will be longer and more explicit.

A cool and remote place . . . And I wondered how they got their letters posted. I folded mine and put it into a drawer of the desk.

As for my confused impressions they will never be written. There are blanks in my mind that cannot be filled up.

*

It was all very brightly coloured, very strange, but it

meant nothing to me. Nor did she, the girl I was to marry. When at last I met her I bowed, smiled, kissed her hand, danced with her. I played the part I was expected to play. She never had anything to do with me at all. Every movement I made was an effort of will and sometimes I wondered that no one noticed this. I would listen to my own voice and marvel at it, calm, correct but toneless, surely. But I must have given a faultless performance. If I saw an expression of doubt or curiosity it was on a black face not a white one.

I remember little of the actual ceremony. Marble memorial tablets on the walls commemorating the virtues of the last generation of planters. All benevolent. All slave-owners. All resting in peace. When we came out of the church I took her hand. It was cold as ice in the hot sun.

Then I was at a long table in a crowded room. Palm leaf fans, a mob of servants, the women's head handkerchiefs striped red and yellow, the men's dark faces. The strong taste of punch, the cleaner taste of champagne, my bride in white but I hardly remember what she looked like. Then in another room women dressed in black. Cousin Julia, Cousin Ada, Aunt Lina. Thin or fat they all looked alike. Gold ear-rings in pierced ears. Silver bracelets jangling on their wrists. I said to one of them, 'We are leaving Jamaica tonight,' and she answered after a pause, 'Of course, Antoinette does not like Spanish Town. Nor did her mother.' Peering at me. (Do their eyes get smaller as they grow older? Smaller, beadier, more inquisitive?) After that I thought I saw the same expression on all their faces. Curiosity? Pity? Ridicule? But why should they pity me, I who have done so well for myself?

The morning before the wedding Richard Mason burst into my room at the Frasers as I was finishing my first cup

of coffee. 'She won't go through with it!'

'Won't go through with what?'

'She won't marry you.'

'But why?'

'She doesn't say why.'

'She must have some reason.'

'She won't give a reason. I've been arguing with the little fool for an hour.'

We stared at each other.

'Everything arranged, the presents, the invitations. What shall I tell your father?' He seemed on the verge of tears.

I said, 'If she won't, she won't. She can't be dragged to the altar. Let me get dressed. I must hear what she has to say.'

He went out meekly and while I dressed I thought that this would indeed make a fool of me. I did not relish going back to England in the role of rejected suitor jilted by this Creole girl. I must certainly know why.

She was sitting in a rocking chair with her head bent. Her hair was in two long plaits over her shoulders. From a little distance I spoke gently. 'What is the matter, Antoinette? What have I done?'

She said nothing.

'You don't wish to marry me?'

'No.' She spoke in a very low voice.

'But why?'

'I'm afraid of what may happen.'

'But don't you remember last night I told you that when you are my wife there would not be any more reason to be afraid?'

'Yes,' she said. 'Then Richard came in and you laughed. I didn't like the way you laughed.'

'But I was laughing at myself, Antoinette.'

She looked at me and I took her in my arms and kissed her.

'You don't know anything about me,' she said.

'I'll trust you if you'll trust me. Is that a bargain? You will make me very unhappy if you send me away without telling me what I have done to displease you. I will go with a sad heart.'

'Your sad heart,' she said, and touched my face. I kissed her fervently, promising her peace, happiness, safety, but when I said, 'Can I tell poor Richard that it was a mistake? He is sad too,' she did not answer me. Only nodded.

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Thinking of all this, of Richard's angry face, her voice saying, 'Can you give me peace?', I must have slept.

I woke to the sound of voices in the next room, laughter and water being poured out. I listened, still drowsy. Antoinette said, 'Don't put any more scent on my hair. He doesn't like it.' The other: 'The man don't like scent? I never hear that before.' It was almost dark.

The dining-room was brilliantly lit. Candles on the table, a row on the sideboard, three-branch candlesticks on the old sea-chest. The two doors on to the veranda stood open but there was no wind. The flames burned straight. She was sitting on the sofa and I wondered why I had never realized how beautiful she was. Her hair was combed away from her face and fell smoothly far below her waist. I could see the red and gold lights in it. She seemed pleased when I complimented her on her dress and told me she had it made in St Pierre, Martinique. 'They call this fashion *à la Joséphine*.'

'You talk of St Pierre as though it were Paris,' I said.

'But it is the Paris of the West Indies.'

There were trailing pink flowers on the table and the name echoed pleasantly in my head. Coralita Coralita. The food, though too highly seasoned, was lighter and more appetizing than anything I had tasted in Jamaica. We drank champagne. A great many moths and beetles found their way into the room, flew into the candles and fell dead on the tablecloth. Amélie swept them up with a crumb brush. Uselessly. More moths and beetles came.

'Is it true,' she said, 'that England is like a dream? Because one of my friends who married an Englishman wrote and told me so. She said this place London is like a cold dark dream sometimes. I want to wake up.'

'Well,' I answered annoyed, 'that is precisely how your beautiful island seems to me, quite unreal and like a dream.'

'But how can rivers and mountains and the sea be unreal?'

'And how can millions of people, their houses and their streets be unreal?'

'More easily,' she said, 'much more easily. Yes a big city must be like a dream.'

'No, this is unreal and like a dream,' I thought.

The long veranda was furnished with canvas chairs, two hammocks, and a wooden table on which stood a tripod telescope. Amélie brought out candles with glass shades but the night swallowed up the feeble light. There was a very strong scent of flowers – the flowers by the river that open at night she told me – and the noise, subdued in the inner room, was deafening. 'Grac-cracs,' she explained, 'they make a sound like their name, and crickets and frogs.'

I leaned on the railing and saw hundreds of fireflies – 'Ah yes, fireflies in Jamaica, here they call a firefly *La belle*.'

A large moth, so large that I thought it was a bird, blundered into one of the candles, put it out and fell to the floor. 'He's a big fellow,' I said.

'Is it badly burned?'

'More stunned than hurt.'

I took the beautiful creature up in my handkerchief and put it on the railing. For a moment it was still and by the dim candlelight I could see the soft brilliant colours, the intricate pattern on the wings. I shook the handkerchief gently and it flew away.

'I hope that gay gentleman will be safe,' I said.

'He will come back if we don't put the candles out. It's light enough by the stars.'

Indeed the starlight was so bright that shadows of the veranda posts and the trees outside lay on the floor.

'Now come for a walk,' she said, 'and I will tell you a story.'

We walked along the veranda to the steps which led to the lawn.

'We used to come here to get away from the hot weather in June, July and August. I came three times with my Aunt Cora who is ill. That was after...' She stopped and put her hand up to her head.

'If this is a sad story, don't tell it to me tonight.'

'It is not sad,' she said. 'Only some things happen and are there for always even though you forget why or when. It was in that little bedroom.'

I looked where she was pointing but could only see the outline of a narrow bed and one or two chairs.

'This night I can remember it was very hot. The window was shut but I asked Christophine to open it because the breeze comes from the hills at night. The land breeze. Not from the sea. It was so hot that my night chemise was sticking to me but I went to sleep all the same. And then

suddenly I was awake. I saw two enormous rats, as big as cats, on the sill staring at me. '

'I'm not astonished that you were frightened. '

'But I was not frightened. That was the strange thing. I stared at them and they did not move. I could see myself in the looking-glass the other side of the room, in my white chemise with a frill round the neck, staring at those rats and the rats quite still, staring at me. '

'Well, what happened? '

'I turned over, pulled up the sheet and went to sleep instantly. '

'And is that the story? '

'No, I woke up again suddenly like the first time and the rats were not there but I felt very frightened. I got out of bed quickly and ran on to the veranda. I lay down in this hammock. This one. 'She pointed to a flat hammock, a rope at each of the four corners.

'There was a full moon that night – and I watched it for a long time. There were no clouds chasing it, so it seemed to be standing still and it shone on me. Next morning Christophine was angry. She said that it was very bad to sleep in the moonlight when the moon is full. '

'And did you tell her about the rats? '

'No, I never told anyone till now. But I have never forgotten them. '

I wanted to say something reassuring but the scent of the river flowers was overpoweringly strong. I felt giddy.

'Do you think that too, 'she said, 'that I have slept too long in the moonlight? '

Her mouth was set in a fixed smile but her eyes were so withdrawn and lonely that I put my arms round her, rocked her like a child and sang to her. An old song I thought I had forgotten:

'Hail to the queen of the silent night,
Shine bright, shine bright Robin as you die.'

She listened, then sang with me:

'Shine bright, shine bright Robin as you die.'

There was no one in the house and only two candles in the room which had been so brilliantly lit. Her room was dim, with a shaded candle by the bed and another on the dressing-table. There was a bottle of wine on the round table. It was very late when I poured out two glasses and told her to drink to our happiness, to our love and the day without end which would be tomorrow. I was young then. A short youth mine was.

I woke next morning in the green-yellow light, feeling uneasy as though someone were watching me. She must have been awake for some time. Her hair was plaited and she wore a fresh white chemise. I turned to take her in my arms, I meant to undo the careful plaits, but as I did so there was a soft discreet knock.

She said, 'I have sent Christophine away twice. We wake very early here. The morning is the best time.'

'Come in,' she called and Christophine came in with our coffee on a tray. She was dressed up and looking very imposing. The skirt of her flowered dress trailed after her making a rustling noise as she walked and her yellow silk turban was elaborately tied. Long heavy gold ear-rings pulled down the lobes of her ears. She wished us good morning smiling and put the tray of coffee, cassava cakes and guava jelly on the round table. I got out of bed and went into the dressing-room. Someone had laid my dressing-gown on the narrow bed. I looked out of the window.

The cloudless sky was a paler blue than I'd imagined but as I looked I thought I saw the colour changing to a deeper blue. At noon I knew it would be gold, then brassy in the heat. Now it was fresh and cool and the air itself was blue. At last I turned away from the light and space and went back into the bedroom, which was still in the half dark. Antoinette was leaning back against the pillows with her eyes closed. She opened them and smiled when I came in. It was the black woman hovering over her who said, 'Taste my bull's blood, master.' The coffee she handed me was delicious and she had long-fingered hands, thin and beautiful I suppose.

'Not horse piss like the English madams drink,' she said. 'I know them. Drink, drink their yellow horse piss, talk, talk their lying talk.' Her dress trailed and rustled as she walked to the door. There she turned. 'I send the girl to clear up the mess you make with the frangipani, it bring cockroach in the house. Take care not to slip on the flowers, young master.' She slid through the door.

'Her coffee is delicious but her language is horrible and she might hold her dress up. It must get very dirty, yards of it trailing on the floor.'

'When they don't hold their dress up it's for respect,' said Antoinette. 'Or for feast days or going to Mass.'

'And is this feast day?'

'She wanted it to be a feast day.'

'Whatever the reason it is not a clean habit.'

'It is. You don't understand at all. They don't care about getting a dress dirty because it shows it isn't the only dress they have. Don't you like Christophine?'

'She is a very worthy person no doubt. I can't say I like her language.'

'It doesn't mean anything,' said Antoinette.

'And she looks so lazy. She dawdles about.'

'Again you are mistaken. She seems slow, but every move she makes is right so it's quick in the end.'

I drank another cup of bull's blood. (Bull's blood, I thought. The Young Bull.)

'How did you get that dressing-table up here?'

'I don't know. It's always been here ever since I can remember. A lot of the furniture was stolen, but not that.'

There were two pink roses on the tray, each in a small brown jug. One was full blown and as I touched it the petals dropped.

'*Rose elle a vécu*,' I said and laughed. 'Is that poem true? Have all beautiful things sad destinies?'

'No, of course not.'

Her little fan was on the table, she took it up laughing, lay back and shut her eyes. 'I think I won't get up this morning.'

'Not get up. Not get up at all?'

'I'll get up when I wish to. I'm very lazy you know. Like Christophine. I often stay in bed all day.' She flourished her fan. 'The bathing pool is quite near. Go before it gets hot, Baptiste will show you. There are two pools, one we call the champagne pool because it has a waterfall, not a big one you understand, but it's good to feel it on your shoulders. Underneath is the nutmeg pool, that's brown and shaded by a big nutmeg tree. It's just big enough to swim in. But be careful. Remember to put your clothes on a rock and before you dress again shake them very well. Look for the red ant, that is the worst. It is very small but bright red so you will be able to see it easily if you look. Be careful,' she said and waved her little fan.

One morning soon after we arrived, the row of tall trees outside my window was covered with small pale flowers too fragile to resist the wind. They fell in a day, and

looked like snow on the rough grass – snow with a faint sweet scent. Then they were blown away.

The fine weather lasted longer. It lasted all that week and the next and the next and the next. No sign of a break. My fever weakness left me, so did all misgiving.

I went very early to the bathing pool and stayed there for hours, unwilling to leave the river, the trees shading it, the flowers that opened at night. They were tightly shut, drooping, sheltering from the sun under their thick leaves.

It was a beautiful place – wild, untouched, above all untouched, with an alien, disturbing, secret loveliness. And it kept its secret. I'd find myself thinking, 'What I see is nothing – I want what it *hides* – that is not nothing.'

In the late afternoon when the water was warmer she bathed with me. She'd spend some time throwing pebbles at a flat stone in the middle of the pool. 'I've seen him. He hasn't died or gone to any other river. He's still there. The land crabs are harmless. People *say* they are harmless. I wouldn't like to –'

'Nor would I. Horrible looking creatures.'

She was undecided, uncertain about facts – any fact. When I asked her if the snakes we sometimes saw were poisonous, she said, 'Not those. The *fer de lance* of course, but there are none here,' and added, 'but how can they be sure? Do you think they know?' Then, 'Our snakes are not poisonous. Of course not.'

However, she was certain about the monster crab and one afternoon when I was watching her, hardly able to believe she was the pale silent creature I had married, watching her in her blue chemise, blue with white spots, hitched up far above her knees, she stopped laughing, called a warning and threw a large pebble. She threw like a boy, with a sure graceful movement, and I looked down at very long pincer claws, jagged-edged and sharp, vanishing.

'He won't come after you if you keep away from that stone. He lives there. Oh it's another sort of crab. I don't know the name in English. Very big, very old.'

As we were walking home I asked her who had taught her to aim so well. 'Oh, Sandi taught me, a boy you never met.'

Every evening we saw the sun go down from the thatched shelter she called the *ajoupa*, I the summer house. We watched the sky and the distant sea on fire – all colours were in that fire and the huge clouds fringed and shot with flame. But I soon tired of the display. I was waiting for the scent of the flowers by the river – they opened when darkness came and it came quickly. Not night or darkness as I knew it but night with blazing stars, an alien moon – night full of strange noises. Still night, not day.

'The man who owns Consolation Estate is a hermit,' she was saying. 'He never sees anyone – hardly ever speaks, they say.'

'A hermit neighbour suits me. Very well indeed.'

'There are four hermits in this island,' she said. 'Four real ones. Others pretend but they leave when the rainy season comes. Or else they are drunk all the time. That's when sad things happen.'

'So this place is as lonely as it feels?' I asked her.

'Yes it is lonely. Are you happy here?'

'Who wouldn't be?'

'I love it more than anywhere in the world. As if it were a person. More than a person.'

'But you don't know the world,' I teased her.

'No, only here, and Jamaica of course. Coulibri, Spanish Town. I don't know the other islands at all. Is the world more beautiful, then?'

And how to answer that? 'It's different,' I said.

She told me that for a long time they had not known what was happening at Granbois. 'When Mr Mason came' (she always called her stepfather Mr Mason) 'the forest was swallowing it up.' The overseer drank, the house was dilapidated, all the furniture had been stolen, then Baptiste was discovered. A butler. In St Kitts. But born in this island and willing to come back. 'He's a very good overseer,' she'd say, and I'd agree, keeping my opinion of Baptiste, Christophine and all the others to myself. 'Baptiste says... Christophine wants...'

She trusted them and I did not. But I could hardly say so. Not yet.

We did not see a great deal of them. The kitchen and the swarming kitchen life were some way off. As for the money which she handed out so carelessly, not counting it, not knowing how much she gave, or the unfamiliar faces that appeared then disappeared, though never without a large meal eaten and a shot of rum I discovered – sisters, cousins, aunts and uncles – if she asked no questions how could I?

The house was swept and dusted very early, usually before I woke. Hilda brought coffee and there were always two roses on the tray. Sometimes she'd smile a sweet childish smile, sometimes she would giggle very loudly and rudely, bang the tray down and run away.

'Stupid little girl,' I'd say.

'No, no. She is shy. The girls here are very shy.'

After breakfast at noon there'd be silence till the evening meal which was served much later than in England. Christophine's whims and fancies, I was sure. Then we were left alone. Sometimes a sidelong look or a sly knowing glance disturbed me, but it was never for long. 'Not now,' I would think. 'Not yet.'

It was often raining when I woke during the night, a light capricious shower, dancing playful rain, or hushed, muted, growing louder, more persistent, more powerful, an inexorable sound. But always music, a music I had never heard before.

Then I would look at her for long minutes by candle-light, wonder why she seemed sad asleep, and curse the fever or the caution that had made me so blind, so feeble, so hesitating. I'd remember her effort to escape. (*No, I am sorry, I do not wish to marry you.*) Had she given way to that man Richard's arguments, threats probably, I wouldn't trust him far, or to my half-serious blandishments and promises? In any case she had given way, but coldly, unwillingly, trying to protect herself with silence and a blank face. Poor weapons, and they had not served her well or lasted long. If I have forgotten caution, she had forgotten silence and coldness.

Shall I wake her up and listen to the things she say in whispers, in darkness. Not by day.

'I never wished to live before I knew you. I always thought it would be better if I died. Such a long time to wait before it's over.'

'And did you ever tell anyone this?'

'There was no one to tell, no one to listen. Oh you can't imagine Coulibri.'

'But after Coulibri?'

'After Coulibri it was too late. I did not change.'

All day she'd be like any other girl, smile at herself in her looking-glass (*do you like this scent?*), try to teach me her songs, for they haunted me.

Adieu foulard, adieu madras, or Ma belle ka di maman li. My beautiful girl said to her mother (*No it is not like that. Now listen. It is this way*). She'd be silent, or angry for no reason, and chatter to Christophine in patois.

'Why do you hug and kiss Christophine?' I'd say.

'Why not?'

'I wouldn't hug and kiss them,' I'd say, 'I couldn't.'

At this she'd laugh for a long time and never tell me why she laughed.

But at night how different, even her voice was changed. Always this talk of death. (Is she trying to tell me that is the secret of this place? That there is no other way? She knows. She knows.)

'Why did you make me want to live? Why did you do that to me?'

'Because I wished it. Isn't that enough?'

'Yes, it is enough. But if one day you didn't wish it. What should I do then? Suppose you took this happiness away when I wasn't looking. . . '

'And lose my own? Who'd be so foolish?'

'I am not used to happiness,' she said. 'It makes me afraid.'

'Never be afraid. Or if you are tell no one.'

'I understand. But trying does not help me.'

'What would?' She did not answer that, then one night whispered, 'If I could die. Now, when I am happy. Would you do that? You wouldn't have to kill me. Say die and I will die. You don't believe me? Then try, try, say die and watch me die.'

'Die then! Die!' I watched her die many times. In my way, not in hers. In sunlight, in shadow, by moonlight, by candlelight. In the long afternoons when the house was empty. Only the sun was there to keep us company. We shut him out. And why not? Very soon she was as eager for what's called loving as I was - more lost and drowned afterwards.

She said, 'Here I can do as I like,' not I, and then I said it too. It seemed right in that lonely place. 'Here I can

do as I like.'

We seldom met anyone when we left the house. If we did they'd greet us and go on their way.

I grew to like these mountain people, silent, reserved, never servile, never curious (or so I thought), not knowing that their quick sideways looks saw everything they wished to see.

It was at night that I felt danger and would try to forget it and push it away.

'You are safe,' I'd say. She'd liked that - to be told 'you are safe.' Or I'd touch her face gently and touch tears. Tears - nothing! Words - less than nothing. As for the happiness I gave her, that was worse than nothing. I did not love her. I was thirsty for her, but that is not love. I felt very little tenderness for her, she was a stranger to me, a stranger who did not think or feel as I did.

One afternoon the sight of a dress which she'd left lying on her bedroom floor made me breathless and savage with desire. When I was exhausted I turned away from her and slept, still without a word or a caress. I woke and she was kissing me - soft light kisses. 'It is late,' she said and smiled. 'You must let me cover you up - the land breeze can be cold.'

'And you, aren't you cold?'

'Oh I will be ready quickly. I'll wear the dress you like tonight.'

'Yes, do wear it.'

The floor was strewn with garments, hers and mine. She stepped over them carelessly as she walked to her clothes press. 'I was thinking, I'll have another made exactly like it,' she promised happily. 'Will you be pleased?'

'Very pleased.'

If she was a child she was not a stupid child but an ob-

stinate one. She often questioned me about England and listened attentively to my answers, but I was certain that nothing I said made much difference. Her mind was already made up. Some romantic novel, a stray remark never forgotten, a sketch, a picture, a song, a waltz, some note of music, and her ideas were fixed. About England and about Europe. I could not change them and probably nothing would. Reality might disconcert her, bewilder her, hurt her, but it would not be reality. It would be only a mistake, a misfortune, a wrong path taken, her fixed ideas would never change.

Nothing that I told her influenced her at all.

Die then. Sleep. It is all that I can give you . . . wonder if she ever guessed how near she came to dying. In her way, not in mine. It was not a safe game to play – in that place. Desire, Hatred, Life, Death came very close in the darkness. Better not know how close. Better not think, never for a moment. Not close. The same. . . ‘You are safe,’ I’d say to her and to myself. ‘Shut your eyes. Rest.’

Then I’d listen to the rain, a sleepy tune that seemed as if it would go on for ever. . . Rain, for ever raining. Drown me in sleep. And soon.

Next morning there would be very little sign of these showers. If some of the flowers were battered, the others smelt sweeter, the air was bluer and sparkling fresh. Only the clay path outside my window was muddy. Little shallow pools of water glinted in the hot sun, red earth does not dry quickly.

*

‘It came for you this morning early, master,’ Amélie said. ‘Hilda take it.’ She gave me a bulky envelope addressed in careful copperplate. ‘*By hand. Urgent*’ was

written in the corner.

'One of our hermit neighbours,' I thought. 'And an enclosure for Antoinette.' Then I saw Baptiste standing near the veranda steps, put the letter in my pocket and forgot it.

I was later than usual that morning but when I was dressed I sat for a long time listening to the waterfall, eyes half closed, drowsy and content. When I put my hand in my pocket for my watch, I touched the envelope and opened it.

Dear Sir. I take up my pen after long thought and meditation but in the end the truth is better than a lie. I have this to say. You have been shamefully deceived by the Mason family. They tell you perhaps that your wife's name is Cosway, the English gentleman Mr Mason being her stepfather only, but they don't tell you what sort of people were these Cosways. Wicked and detestable slave-owners since generations – yes everybody hate them in Jamaica and also in this beautiful island where I hope your stay will be long and pleasant in spite of all, for some not worth sorrow. Wickedness is not the worst. There is madness in that family. Old Cosway die raving like his father before him.

You ask what proof I have and why I mix myself up in your affairs. I will answer you. I am your wife's brother by another lady, half-way house as we say. Her father and mine was a shameless man and of all his illegitimates I am the most unfortunate and poverty stricken.

My momma die when I was quite small and my godmother take care of me. The old mister hand out some money for that though he don't like me. No, that old devil don't like me at all, and when I grow older I see it and I think: Let him wait my day will come. Ask the older people sir about his disgusting goings on, some will remember.

When Madam his wife die the reprobate marry again quick, to a young girl from Martinique – it's too much for

him. Dead drunk from morning till night and he die raving and cursing.

Then comes the glorious Emancipation Act and trouble for some of the high and mighties. Nobody would work for the young woman and her two children and that place Coulibri goes quickly to bush as all does out here when nobody toil and labour on the land. She have no money and she have no friends, for French and English like cat and dog in these islands since long time. Shoot, Kill, Everything.

The woman call Christophine also from Martinique stay with her and an old man Godfrey, too silly to know what happen. Some like that. This young Mrs Cosway is worthless and spoilt, she can't lift a hand for herself and soon the madness that is in her, and in all these white Creoles, come out. She shut herself away, laughing and talking to nobody as many can bear witness. As for the little girl, Antoinetta, as soon as she can walk she hide herself if she see anybody.

We all wait to hear the woman jump over a precipice '*fini batt'e*' as we say here which mean 'finish to fight'.

But no. She marry again to the rich Englishman Mr Mason, and there is much I could say about that but you won't believe so I shut my mouth. They say he love her so much that if he have the world on a plate he give it to her – but no use.

The madness gets worse and she has to be shut away for she try to kill her husband – madness not being all either.

That sir is your wife's mother – that was her father. I leave Jamaica. I don't know what happen to the woman. Some say she is dead, other deny it. But old Mason take a great fancy for the girl Antoinetta and give her half his money when he die.

As for me I wander high and low, not much luck but a little money put by and I get to know of a house for sale in this island near Massacre. It's going very cheap so I buy it. News travel even to this wild place and next thing I hear from Jamaica is that old Mason is dead and that family plan to marry the girl to a young Englishman who know nothing of her.

Then it seems to me that it is my Christian duty to warn the gentleman that she is no girl to marry with the bad blood she have from both sides. But they are white, I am coloured. They are rich, I am poor. As I think about these things they do it quick while you still weak with fever at the magistrate's, before you can ask questions. If this is true or not you must know for yourself.

Then you come to this island for your honeymoon and it's certain that the Lord put the thing on my shoulders and that it is I must speak the truth to you. Still I hesitate.

I hear you young and handsome with a kind word for all, black, white, also coloured. But I hear too that the girl is beautiful like her mother was beautiful, and you bewitch with her. She is in your blood and your bones. By night and by day. But you, an honourable man, know well that for marriage more is needed than all this. Which does not last. Old Mason bewitch so with her mother and look what happen to him. Sir I pray I am in time to warn you what to do.

Sir ask yourself how I can make up this story and for what reason. When I leave Jamaica I can read write and cypher a little. The good man in Barbados teach me more, he give me books, he tell me read the Bible every day and I pick up knowledge without effort. He is surprise how quick I am. Still I remain an ignorant man and I do not make up this story. I cannot. It is true.

I sit at my window and the words fly past me like birds – with God's help I catch some.

A week this letter take me. I cannot sleep at night thinking what to say. So quickly now I draw to a close and cease my task.

Still you don't believe me? Then ask that devil of a man Richard Mason three questions and make him answer you. Is your wife's mother shut away, a raging lunatic and worse besides? Dead or alive I do not know.

Was your wife's brother an idiot from birth, though God mercifully take him early on?

Is your wife herself going the same way as her mother and all knowing it?

Richard Mason is a sly man and he wil tell you a lot of nancy stories, which is what we call lies here, about what happen at Coulibri and this and that. Don't listen. Make him answer - yes or no.

If he keep his mouth shut ask others for many think it shameful how that family treat you and your relatives.

I beg you sir come to see me for there is more that you should know. But my hand ache, my head ache and my heart is like a stone for the grief I bring you. Money is good but no money can pay for a crazy wife in your bed. Crazy and worse besides.

I lay down my pen with one last request. Come and see me quickly. Your obt servant. Daniel Cosway.

Ask the girl Amélie where I live. She knows, and she knows me. She belongs to this island.

I folded the letter carefully and put it into my pocket. I felt no surprise. It was as if I'd expected it, been waiting for it. For a time, long or short I don't know, I sat listening to the river. At last I stood up, the sun was hot now. I walked stiffly nor could I force myself to think. Then I passed an orchid with long sprays of golden-brown flowers. One of them touched my cheek and I remembered picking some for her one day. 'They are like you,' I told her. Now I stopped, broke a spray off and trampled it into the mud. This brought me to my senses. I leaned against a tree, sweating and trembling. 'Far too hot today,' I said aloud, 'far too hot.' When I came in sight of the house I began to walk silently. No one was about. The kitchen door was shut and the place looked deserted. I went up the steps and along the veranda and when I heard voices stopped behind the door which led into Antoinette's room. I could see it reflected in the looking-glass. She was

in bed and the girl Amélie was sweeping.

'Finish quickly,' said Antoinette, 'and go and tell Christophine I want to see her.'

Amélie rested her hands on the broom handle. 'Christophine is going,' she said.

'Going?' repeated Antoinette.

'Yes, going,' said Amélie. 'Christophine don't like this sweet honeymoon house.' Turning round she saw me and laughed loudly. 'Your husband' he outside the door and he look like he see zombi. Must be he tired of the sweet honeymoon too.'

Antoinette jumped out of bed and slapped her face.

'I hit you back white cockroach, I hit you back,' said Amélie. And she did.

Antoinette gripped her hair. Amélie, whose teeth were bared, seemed to be trying to bite.

'Antoinette, for God's sake,' I said from the doorway.

She swung round, very pale. Amélie buried her face in her hands and pretended to sob, but I could see her watching me through her fingers.

'Go away, child,' I said.

'You call her child,' said Antoinette. 'She is older than the devil himself, and the devil is not more cruel.'

'Send Christophine up,' I said to Amélie.

'Yes master, yes master,' she answered softly, dropping her eyes. But as soon as she was out of the room she began to sing:

'The white cockroach she marry
The white cockroach she marry
The white cockroach she buy young man
The white cockroach she marry.'

Antoinette took a few steps forward. She walked un-

steadily. I went to help her but she pushed me away, sat on the bed and with clenched teeth pulled at the sheet, then made a clicking sound of annoyance. She took a pair of scissors from the round table, cut through the hem and tore the sheet in half, then each half into strips.

The noise she made prevented me from hearing Christophine come in, but Antoinette heard her.

'You're not leaving?' she said.

'Yes,' said Christophine.

'And what will become of me?' said Antoinette.

'Get up, girl, and dress yourself. Woman must have spunks to live in this wicked world.'

She had changed into a drab cotton dress and taken off her heavy gold ear-rings.

'I see enough trouble,' she said. 'I have right to my rest. I have my house that your mother give me so long ago and I have my garden and my son to work for me. A lazy boy but I make him work. Too besides the young master don't like me, and perhaps I don't like him so much. If I stay here I bring trouble and bone of contention in your house.'

'If you are not happy here then go,' said Antoinette.

Amélie came into the room with two jugs of hot water. She looked at me sideways and smiled.

Christophine said in a soft voice, 'Amélie. Smile like that once more, just once more, and I mash your face like I mash plantain. You hear me? Answer me, girl.'

'Yes, Christophine,' Amélie said. She looked frightened.

'And too besides I give you bellyache like you never see bellyache. Perhaps you lie a long time with the bellyache I give you. Perhaps you don't get up again with the bellyache I give you. So keep yourself quiet and decent. You hear me?'

'Yes, Christophine,' Amélie said and crept out of the room.

'She worthless and good for nothing,' said Christophine with contempt. 'She creep and crawl like centipede.'

She kissed Antoinette on the cheek. Then she looked at me, shook her head, and muttered in patois before she went out.

'Did you hear what that girl was singing?' Antoinette said.

'I don't always understand what they say or sing.' Or anything else.

'It was a song about a white cockroach. That's me. That's what they call all of us who were here before their own people in Africa sold them to the slave traders. And I've heard English women call us white niggers. So between you I often wonder who I am and where is my country and where do I belong and why was I ever born at all. Will you go now please. I must dress like Christophine said.'

After I had waited half an hour I knocked at her door. There was no answer so I asked Baptiste to bring me something to eat. He was sitting under the Seville orange tree at the end of the veranda. He served the food with such a mournful expression that I thought these people are very vulnerable. How old was I when I learned to hide what I felt? A very small boy. Six, five, even earlier. It was necessary, I was told, and that view I have always accepted. If these mountains challenge me, or Baptiste's face, or Antoinette's eyes, they are mistaken, melodramatic, unreal (England must be quite unreal and like a dream she said).

The rum punch I had drunk was very strong and after

the meal was over I had a great wish to sleep. And why not? This is the time when everyone sleeps. I imagined the dogs the cats the cocks and hens all sleeping, even the water in the river running more slowly.

I woke up, thought at once of Antoinette and opened the door into her room, but she was sleeping too. Her back was towards me and she was quite still. I looked out of the window. The silence was disturbing, absolute. I would have welcomed the sound of a dog barking, a man sawing wood. Nothing. Silence. Heat. It was five minutes to three.

I went out following the path I could see from my window. It must have rained heavily during the night for the red clay was very muddy. I passed a sparse plantation of coffee trees, then straggly guava bushes. As I walked I remembered my father's face and his thin lips, my brother's round conceited eyes. They knew. And Richard the fool, he knew too. And the girl with her blank smiling face. They all knew.

I began to walk very quickly, then stopped because the light was different. A green light. I had reached the forest and you cannot mistake the forest. It is hostile. The path was overgrown but it was possible to follow it. I went on without looking at the tall trees on either side. Once I stepped over a fallen log swarming with white ants. How can one discover truth I thought and that thought led me nowhere. No one would tell me the truth. Not my father nor Richard Mason, certainly not the girl I had married. I stood still, so sure I was being watched that I looked over my shoulder. Nothing but the trees and the green light under the trees. A track was just visible and I went on, glancing from side to side and sometimes quickly behind me. This was why I stubbed my foot on a stone and nearly

fell. The stone I had tripped on was not a boulder but part of a paved road. There had been a paved road through this forest. The track led to a large clear space. Here were the ruins of a stone house and round the ruins rose trees that had grown to an incredible height. At the back of the ruins a wild orange tree covered with fruit, the leaves a dark green. A beautiful place. And calm – so calm that it seemed foolish to think or plan. What had I to think about and how could I plan? Under the orange tree I noticed little bunches of flowers tied with grass.

I don't know how long it was before I began to feel chilly. The light had changed and the shadows were long. I had better get back before dark, I thought. Then I saw a little girl carrying a large basket on her head. I met her eyes and to my astonishment she screamed loudly, threw up her arms and ran. The basket fell off, I called after her, but she screamed again and ran faster. She sobbed as she ran, a small frightened sound. Then she disappeared. I must be within a few minutes of the path I thought, but after I had walked for what seemed a long time I found that the undergrowth and creepers caught at my legs and the trees closed over my head. I decided to go back to the clearing and start again, with the same result. It was getting dark. It was useless to tell myself that I was not far from the house. I was lost and afraid among these enemy trees, so certain of danger that when I heard footsteps and a shout I did not answer. The footsteps and the voice came nearer. Then I shouted back. I did not recognize Baptiste at first. He was wearing blue cotton trousers pulled up above his knees and a broad ornamented belt round his slim waist. His machete was in his hand and the light caught the razor-sharp blue-white edge. He did not smile when he saw me.

'We look for you a long time,' he said.

'I got lost.'

He grunted in answer and led the way, walking in front of me very quickly and cutting off any branch or creeper that stopped us with an easy swing of his machete.

I said, 'There was a road here once, where did it lead to?'

'No road,' he said.

'But I saw it. A *pavé* road like the French made in the islands.'

'No road.'

'Who lived in that house?'

'They say a priest. Père Lilièvre. He lived here a long time ago.'

'A child passed,' I said. 'She seemed very frightened when she saw me. Is there something wrong about the place?'

He shrugged his shoulders.

'Is there a ghost, a zombi there?' I persisted.

'Don't know nothing about all that foolishness.'

'There was a road here sometime.'

'No road,' he repeated obstinately.

It was nearly dark when we were back on the red clay path. He walked more slowly, turned and smiled at me. It was as if he'd put his service mask on the savage reproachful face I had seen.

'You don't like the woods at night?'

He did not answer, but pointed to a light and said, 'It's a long time I've been looking for you. Miss Antoinette frightened you come to harm.'

When we reached the house I felt very weary.

'You like you catch fever,' he said.

'I've had that already.'

'No limit to times you catch fever.'

There was no one on the veranda and no sound from

the house. We both stood in the road looking up, then he said, 'I send the girl to you, master.'

Hilda brought me a large bowl of soup and some fruit. I tried the door into Antoinette's room. It was bolted and there was no light. Hilda giggled. A nervous giggle.

I told her that I did not want anything to eat, to bring me the decanter of rum and a glass. I drank, then took up the book I had been reading, *The Glittering Coronet of Isles* it was called, and I turned to the chapter 'Obeah':

'A zombi is a dead person who seems to be alive or a living person who is dead. A zombi can also be the spirit of a place, usually malignant but sometimes to be propitiated with sacrifices or offerings of flowers and fruit. '[I thought at once of the bunches of flowers at the priest's ruined house.]
"They cry out in the wind that is their voice, they rage in the sea that is their anger."

'So I was told, but I have noticed that negroes as a rule refuse to discuss the black magic in which so many believe. Voodoo as it is called in Haiti - Obeah in some of the islands, another name in South America. They confuse matters by telling lies if pressed. The white people, sometimes credulous, pretend to dismiss the whole thing as nonsense. Cases of sudden or mysterious death are attributed to a poison known to the negroes which cannot be traced. It is further complicated by...'

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I did not look up though I saw him at the window but rode on without thinking till I came to the rocks. People here call them *Mounes Mors* (the Dead Ones). Preston shied at them, they say horses always do. Then he stumbled badly, so I dismounted and walked along with the bridle over my arm. It was getting hot and I was tired when I reached the path to Christophine's two-roomed

house, the roof shingled, not thatched. She was sitting on a box under her mango tree, smoking a white clay pipe and she called out, 'It's you, Antoinette? Why you come up here so early?'

'I just wanted to see you,' I said.

She helped me loosen Preston's girth and led him to a stream near by. He drank as if he were very thirsty, then shook himself and snorted. Water flew out of his nostrils. We left him cropping grass and went back to the mango tree. She sat on her box and pushed another towards me, but I knelt close to her touching a thin silver bangle that she always wore.

'You smell the same,' I said.

'You come all this long way to tell me that?' she said. Her clothes smelled of clean cotton, starched and ironed. I had seen her so often standing knee deep in the river at Coulibri, her long skirt hitched up, washing her dresses and her white shifts, then beating them against the stones. Sometimes there would be other women all bringing their washing down on the stones again and again, a gay busy noise. At last they would spread the wet clothes in the sun, wipe their foreheads, start laughing and talking. She smelled too, of their smell, so warm and comforting to me (but he does not like it). The sky was dark blue through the dark green mango leaves, and I thought, 'This is my place and this is where I belong and this is where I wish to stay.' Then I thought, 'What a beautiful tree, but it is too high up here for mangoes and it may never bear fruit,' and I thought of lying alone in my bed with the soft silk cotton mattress and fine sheets, listening. At last I said, 'Christophine, he does not love me, I think he hates me. He always sleeps in his dressing-room now and the servants know. If I get angry he is scornful and silent, sometimes he does not speak to me for hours and I cannot en-

ture it any more, I cannot. What shall I do? He was not like that at first.'

Pink and red hibiscus grew in front of her door, she lit her pipe and did not answer.

'Answer me,' I said. She puffed out a cloud of smoke.

'You ask me a hard thing, I tell you a hard thing, pack up and go.'

'Go, go where? To some strange place where I shall never see him? No, I will not, then everyone, not only the servants, will laugh at me.'

'It's not you they laugh at if you go, they laugh at him.'

'I will not do that.'

'Why you ask me, if when I answer you say no? Why you come up here if when I tell you the truth, you say no?'

'But there must be something else I can do.'

She looked gloomy. 'When man don't love you, more you try, more he hate you, man like that. If you love them they treat you bad, if you don't love them they after you night and day bothering your soul case out. I hear about you and your husband,' she said.

'But I cannot go. He is my husband after all.'

She spat over her shoulder. 'All women, all colours, nothing but fools. Three children I have. One living in this world, each one a different father, but no husband, I thank my God. I keep my money. I don't give it to no worthless man.'

'When must I go, where must I go?'

'But look me trouble, a rich white girl like you and more foolish than the rest. A man don't treat you good, pick up your skirt and walk out. Do it and he come after you.'

'He will not come after me. And you must understand

I am not rich now, I have no money of my own at all, everything I had belongs to him.'

'What you tell me there?' she said sharply.

'That is English law.'

'Law! The Mason boy fix it, that boy worse than Satan and he burn in Hell one of these fine nights. Listen to me now and I advise you what to do. Tell your husband you feeling sick, you want to visit your cousin in Martinique. Ask him pretty for some of your own money, the man not bad-hearted, he give it. When you get away, stay away. Ask more. He give again and well satisfy. In the end he come to find out what you do, how you get on without him, and if he see you fat and happy he want you back. Men like that. Better not stay in that old house. Go from that house, I tell you.'

'You think I must leave him?'

'You ask me so I answer.'

'Yes,' I said. 'After all I could, but why should I go to Martinique? I wish to see England, I might be able to borrow money for that. Not from him but I know how I might get it. I must travel far, if I go.'

I have been too unhappy, I thought, it cannot last, being so unhappy, it would kill you. I will be a different person when I live in England and different things will happen to me. . . . England, rosy pink in the geography book map, but on the page opposite the words are closely crowded, heavy looking. Exports, coal, iron, wool. Then Imports and Character of Inhabitants. Names, Essex, Chelmsford on the Chelmer. The Yorkshire and Lincolnshire wolds. Wolds? Does that mean hills? How high? Half the height of ours, or not even that? Cool green leaves in the short cool summer. Summer. There are fields of corn like sugar-cane fields, but gold colour and not so tall. After summer the trees are bare, then winter and snow. White

feathers falling? Torn pieces of paper falling? They say frost makes flower patterns on the window panes. I must know more than I know already. For I know that house where I will be cold and not belonging, the bed I shall lie in has red curtains and I have slept there many times before, long ago. How long ago? In that bed I will dream the end of my dream. But my dream had nothing to do with England and I must not think like this, I must remember about chandeliers and dancing, about swans and roses and snow. And snow.

'England,' said Christophine, who was watching me. 'You think there is such a place?'

'How can you ask that? You know there is.'

'I never see the damn place, how I know?'

'You do not believe that there is a country called England?'

She blinked and answered quickly, 'I don't say I don't believe, I say I don't *know*, I know what I see with my eyes and I never see it. Besides I ask myself is this place like they tell us? Some say one thing, some different, I hear it cold to freeze your bones and they thief your money, clever like the devil. You have money in your pocket, you look again and bam! No money. Why you want to go to this cold thief place? If there is this place at all, I never see it, that is one thing sure.'

I stared at her, thinking, 'but how can she know the best thing for me to do, this ignorant, obstinate old negro woman, who is not certain if there is such a place as England?' She knocked out her pipe and stared back at me, her eyes had no expression at all.

'Christophine,' I said, 'I may do as you advise. But not yet.' (Now, I thought, I must say what I came to say.) 'You knew what I wanted as soon as you saw me, and you certainly know now. Well, don't you?' I heard

my voice getting high and thin.

'Hush up,' she said. 'If the man don't love you, I can't make him love you.'

'Yes you can, I know you can. That is what I wish and that is why I came here. You can make people love or hate. Or . . . or die,' I said.

She threw back her head and laughed loudly. (But she never laughs loudly and why is she laughing at all?)

'So you believe in that tim-tim story about obeah, you hear when you so high? All that foolishness and folly. Too besides, that is not for *béké*. Bad, bad trouble come when *béké* meddle with that.'

'You must,' I said. 'You must.'

'Hush up. Jo-jo my son coming to see me, if he catch you crying, he tell everybody.'

'I will be quiet, I will not cry. But Christophine, if he, my husband, could come to me one night. Once more. I would make him love me.'

'No *doudou*. No.'

'Yes, Christophine.'

'You talk foolishness. Even if I can make him come to your bed, I cannot make him love you. Afterward he hate you.'

'No. And what do I care if he does? He hates me now. I hear him every night walking up and down the veranda. Up and down. When he passes my door he says. "Good-night, Bertha." He never calls me Antoinette now. He has found out it was my mother's name. "I hope you will sleep well, Bertha" - it cannot be worse,' I said. "That one night he came I might sleep afterwards. I sleep so badly now. And I dream.'

'No, I don't meddle with that for you.'

Then I beat my fist on a stone, forcing myself to speak calmly.

'Going away to Martinique or England or anywhere else, that is the lie. He would never give me any money to go away and he would be furious if I asked him. There would be a scandal if I left him and he hates scandal. Even if I got away (and how?) he would force me back. So would Richard. So would everybody else. Running away from him, from this island, is the lie. What reason could I give for going and who would believe me?'

When she bent her head she looked old and I thought, 'Oh Christophine, do not grow old. You are the only friend I have, do not go away from me into being old.'

'Your husband certainly love money,' she said. 'That is no lie. Money have pretty face for everybody, but for that man money pretty like pretty self, he can't see nothing else.'

'Help me then.'

'Listen *doudou ché*. Plenty people fasten bad words on you and on your mother. I know it. I know who is talking and what they say. The man not a bad man, even if he love money, but he hear so many stories he don't know what to believe. That is why he keep away. I put no trust in none of those people round you. Not here, not in Jamaica.'

'Not Aunt Gora?'

'Your aunty old woman now, she turn her face to the wall.'

'How do you know?' I said. For that is what happened.

When I passed her room, I heard her quarrelling with Richard and I knew it was about my marriage. 'It's disgraceful,' she said. 'It's shameful. You are handing over everything the child owns to a perfect stranger. Your father would never have allowed it. She should be protected, legally. A settlement can be arranged and it should be arranged. That was his intention.'

'You are talking about an honourable gentleman, not a rascal,' Richard said, 'I am not in a position to make conditions, as you know very well. She is damn lucky to get him, all things considered. Why should I insist on a lawyer's settlement when I trust him? I would trust him with my life,' he went on in an affected voice.

'You are trusting him with her life, not yours,' she said.

He told her for God's sake shut up you old fool and banged the door when he left. So angry that he did not notice me standing in the passage. She was sitting up in bed when I went into her room, 'Halfwit that the boy is, or pretends to be. I do not like what I have seen of this honourable gentleman. Stiff. Hard as a board and stupid as a foot, in my opinion, except where his own interests are concerned.'

She was very pale and shaking all over, so I gave her the smelling salts on the dressing-table. They were in a red glass bottle with a gilt top. She put the bottle to her nose but her hand dropped as though she were too tired to hold it steady. Then she turned away from the window, the sky, the looking-glass, the pretty things on the dressing-table. The red and gilt bottle fell to the floor. She turned her face to the wall. 'The Lord has forsaken us,' she said, and shut her eyes. She did not speak again, and after a while I thought she was asleep. She was too ill to come to my wedding and I went to say good-bye, I was excited and happy thinking now it is my honeymoon. I kissed her and she gave me a little silk bag. 'My rings. Two are valuable. Don't show it to him. Hide it away. Promise me.'

I promised, but when I opened it, one of the rings was plain gold. I thought I might sell another yesterday but who will buy what I have to sell here?...

Christophine was saying, 'Your aunty too old and sick, and that Mason boy worthless. Have spunks and do battle for yourself. Speak to your husband calm and cool, tell him about your mother and all what happened at Coulibri and why she get sick and what they do to her. Don't bawl at the man and don't make crazy faces. Don't cry either. Crying no good with him. Speak nice and make him understand.'

'I have tried,' I said, 'but he does not believe me. It is too late for that now' (it is always too late for truth, I thought). 'I will try again if you will do what I ask. Oh Christophine, I am so afraid,' I said, 'I do not know why, but so afraid. All the time. Help me.'

She said something I did not hear. Then she took a sharp stick and drew lines and circles on the earth under the tree, then rubbed them out with her foot.

'If you talk to him first I do what you ask me.'

'Now?'

'Yes,' she said. 'Now look at me. Look in my eyes.'

I was giddy when I stood up, and she went into the house muttering and came out with a cup of coffee.

'Good shot of white rum in that,' she said. 'Your face like dead woman and your eyes red like *couciant*. Keep yourself quiet – look, Jo-jo coming, he talk to everybody about what he hear. Nothing but leaky calabash that boy.'

When I had drunk the coffee I began to laugh. 'I have been so unhappy for nothing, nothing,' I said.

Her son was carrying a large basket on his head. I watched his strong brown legs swinging along the path so easily. He seemed surprised and inquisitive when he saw me, but he asked politely in patois, was I well, was the master in good health?

'Yes, Jo-jo, thank you, we are both well.'

Christophine helped him with the basket, then she brought out the bottle of white rum and poured out half a tumblerful. He swallowed it quickly. Then she filled the glass with water and he drank that like they do.

She said in English, 'The mistress is going, her horse at the back there. Saddle him up.'

I followed her into the house. There was a wooden table in the outer room, a bench and two broken-down chairs. Her bedroom was large and dark. She still had her bright patchwork counterpane, the palm leaf from Palm Sunday and the prayer for a happy death. But after I noticed a heap of chicken feathers in one corner, I did not look round any more.

'So already you frightened eh?' And when I saw her expression I took my purse from my pocket and threw it on the bed.

'You don't have to give me money. I do this foolishness because you beg me - not for money.'

'Is it foolishness?' I said, whispering and she laughed again, but softly.

'If *béké* say it foolishness, then it foolishness, *Béké* clever like the devil. More clever than God. Ain't so? Now listen and I will tell you what to do.'

When we came out into the sunlight, Jo-jo was holding Preston near a big stone. I stood on it and mounted.

'Good-bye, Christophine; good-bye, Jo-jo.'

'Good-bye, mistress.'

'You will come and see me very soon, Christophine?'

'Yes, I will come.'

I looked back at the end of the path. She was talking to Jo-jo and he seemed curious and amused. Nearby a cock crowed and I thought, 'That is for betrayal, but who is the traitor?' She did not want to do this. I forced her with my ugly money. And what does anyone know about

traitors, or why Judas did what he did?

I can remember every second of that morning, if I shut my eyes I can see the deep blue colour of the sky and the mango leaves, the pink and red hibiscus, the yellow handkerchief she wore round her head, tied in the Martinique fashion with the sharp points in front, but now I see everything still, fixed for ever like the colours in a stained-glass window. Only the clouds move. It was wrapped in a leaf, what she had given me, and I felt it cool and smooth against my skin.

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'The mistress pay a visit,' Baptiste told me when he brought my coffee that morning. 'She will come back tonight or tomorrow. She make up her mind in a hurry and she has gone.'

In the afternoon Amélie brought me a second letter.

Why you don't answer. You don't believe me? Then ask someone else – everybody in Spanish Town know. Why you think they bring you to this place? You want me to come to your house and bawl out your business before everybody? You come to me or I come –

At this point I stopped reading. The child Hilda came into the room and I asked her, 'Is Amélie here?'

'Yes, master.'

'Tell her I wish to speak to her.'

'Yes, master.'

She put her hand over her mouth as if to stifle laughter, but her eyes, which were the blackest I had ever seen, so black that it was impossible to distinguish the pupils from the iris, were alarmed and bewildered.

I sat on the veranda with my back to the sea and it was

as if I had done it all my life. I could not imagine different weather or a different sky. I knew the shape of the mountains as well as I knew the shape of the two brown jugs filled with white sweet-scented flowers on the wooden table. I knew that the girl would be wearing a white dress. Brown and white she would be, her curls, her white girl's hair she called it, half covered with a red handkerchief, her feet bare. There would be the sky and the mountains, the flowers and the girl and the feeling that all this was a nightmare, the faint consoling hope that I might wake up.

She leaned lightly against the veranda post, indifferently graceful, just respectful enough, and waited.

'Was this letter given to you?' I asked.

'No, master. Hilda take it.'

'And is this man who writes a friend of yours?'

'Not my friend,' she said.

'But he knows you - or says he does.'

'Oh yes, I know Daniel.'

'Very well then. Will you tell him that his letters annoy me, and that he'd better not write again for his own sake. If he brings a letter give it back to him. Understand?'

'Yes, master. I understand.'

Still leaning against the post she smiled at me, and I felt that at any moment her smile would become loud laughter. It was to stop this that I went on, 'Why does he write to me?'

She answered innocently, 'He don't tell you that? He write you two letters and he don't say why he is writing? If you don't know then I don't know.'

'But you know him?' I said. 'Is his name Cosway?'

'Some people say yes, some people say no. That's what he calls himself.'

She added thoughtfully that Daniel was a very superior man, always reading the Bible and that he lived like white

people. I tried to find out what she meant by this, and she explained that he had a house like white people, with one room only for sitting. That he had two pictures on the wall of his father and his mother.

‘White people?’

‘Oh no, coloured.’

‘But he told me in his first letter that his father was a white man.’

She shrugged her shoulders. ‘All that too long ago for me.’ It was easy to see her contempt for long ago. ‘I tell him what you say, master.’ Then she added, ‘Why you don’t go and see him? It is much better. Daniel is a bad man and he will come here and make trouble for you. It’s better he don’t come. They say one time he was a preacher in Barbados, he talk like a preacher, and he have a brother in Jamaica in Spanish Town, Mr Alexander. Very wealthy man. He own three rum shops and two dry goods stores.’ She flicked a look at me as sharp as a knife. ‘I hear one time that Miss Antoinette and his son Mr Sandi get married, but that all foolishness. Miss Antoinette a white girl with a lot of money, she won’t marry with a coloured man even though he don’t look like a coloured man. You ask Miss Antoinette, she tell you.’

Like Hilda she put her hand over her mouth as though she could not stop herself from laughing and walked away.

Then turned and said in a very low voice, ‘I am sorry for you.’

‘What did you say?’

‘I don’t say nothing, master.’

A large table covered with a red fringed cloth made the small room seem hotter; the only window was shut.

‘I put your chair near the door,’ Daniel said, ‘a breeze

come in from underneath. 'But there was no breeze, not a breath of air, this place was lower down the mountain almost at sea-level.

'When I hear you coming I take a good shot of rum, and then I take a glass of water to cool me down, but it don't cool me down, it run out of my eyes in tears and lamentations. Why don't you give me an answer when I write to you the first time?' He went on talking, his eyes fixed on a framed text hanging on the dirty white wall. 'Vengeance is Mine'.

'You take too long, Lord,' he told it. 'I hurry you up a bit.' Then he wiped his thin yellow face and blew his nose on a corner of the tablecloth.

'They call me Daniel,' he said, still not looking at me, 'but my name is Esau. All I get is curses and get-outs from that damn devil my father. My father old Cosway, with his white marble tablet in the English church at Spanish Town for all to see. It have a crest on it and a motto in Latin and words in big black letters. I never know such lies. I hope that stone tie round his neck and drag him down to Hell in the end. "Pious", they write up, "Beloved by all". Not a word about the people he buy and sell like cattle. "Merciful to the weak", they write up. Mercy! The man have a heart like stone. Sometimes when he get sick of a woman which is quickly, he free her like he free my mother, even he give her a hut and a bit of land for herself (a garden some call that), but it is no mercy, it's for wicked pride he do it. I never put my eyes on a man haughty and proud like that - he walk like he own the earth. "I don't give a damn," he says. Let him wait. . . . I can still see that tablet before my eyes because I go to look at it often. I know by heart all the lies they tell - no one to stand up and say, Why you write lies in the church? . . . I tell you this so you can know what sort of people you mix

up with. The heart know its own bitterness but to keep it lock up all the time, that is hard. I remember it like yesterday the morning he put a curse on me. Sixteen years old I was and anxious. I start very early. I walk all the way to Coulbri – five six hours it take. He don't refuse to see me; he receive me very cool and calm and first thing he tell me is I'm always pestering him for money. This because sometimes I ask help to buy a pair of shoes and such. Not to go barefoot like a nigger. Which I am not. He look at me like I was dirt and I get angry too. "I have my rights after all," I tell him and you know what he do? He laugh in my face. When he finished laughing he call me what's-your-name. "I can't remember all their names – it's too much to expect of me," he says, talking to himself. Very old he look in the bright sunshine, that morning. "It's you yourself call me Daniel," I tell him. "I'm no slave like my mother was."

"Your mother was a sly-boots if ever there was one," he says, "and I'm not a fool. However the woman's dead and that's enough. But if there's one drop of my blood in your spindly carcass I'll eat my hat." By this time my own blood at boiling point, I tell you, so I bawl back at him, "Eat it then. Eat it. You haven't much time. Not much time either to kiss and love your new wife. She too young for you." "Great God!" he said and his face go red and then a kind of grey colour. He try to get up but he falls back in his chair. He have a big silver inkstand on his desk, he throw it at my head and he curse me, but I duck and the inkstand hit the door. I have to laugh but I go off quick. He send me some money – not a word, only the money. It's the last time I see him.'

Daniel breathed deeply and wiped his face again and offered me some rum. When I thanked him and shook my head he poured himself half a glassful and swallowed it.

'All that long time ago,' he said.

'Why did you wish to see me, Daniel?'

The last drink seemed to have sobered him. He look at me directly and spoke more naturally.

'I insist because I have this to say. When you ask if what I tell you is true, you will ask though you don't like me I see that; but you know well my letter was no lie. Take care who you talk to. Many people like to say thing behind your back, to your face they get frightened, or they don't want to mix up. The magistrate now, he know a lot but his wife very friendly with the Mason family and she stop him if she can. Then there is my half brother Alexander, coloured like me but not unlucky like me, he will want to tell you all sorts of lies. He was the old man's favourite and he prosper right from the start. Yes, Alexander is a rich man now but he keep quiet about it. Because of prosper he is two-faced, he won't speak against white people. There is that woman up at your house, Christophine. She is the worst. She have to leave Jamaica because she go to jail: you know that?'

'Why was she sent to jail? What did she do?'

His eyes slid away from mine. 'I tell you I leave Spanish Town, I don't know all that happen. It's something very bad. She is obeah woman and they catch her. I don't believe in all that devil business but many believe. Christophine is a bad woman and she will lie to you worse than your wife. Your own wife she talks sweet talk and she lies.'

The black and gilt clock on a shelf struck four.

I must go. I must get away from his yellow sweating face and his hateful little room. I sat still, numb, staring at him.

'You like my clock?' said Daniel. 'I work hard to buy it. But it's to please myself. I don't have to please no

woman. Buy me this and buy me that – demons incarnate in my opinion. Alexander now, he can't keep away from them, and in the end he marry a very fair-coloured girl, very respectable family. His son Sandi is like a white man, but more handsome than any white man, and received by many white people they say. Your wife know Sandi since long time. Ask her and she tell you. But not everything I think.' He laughed. 'Oh no, not everything. I see them when they think nobody see them. I see her when she . . . You going eh?' He darted to the doorway.

'No you don't go before I tell you the last thing. You want me to shut my mouth about what I know. She start with Sandi. They fool you well about that girl. She look you straight in the eye and talk sweet talk – and it's lies she tell you. Lies. Her mother was so. They say she worse than her mother, and she hardly more than a child. Must be you deaf you don't hear people laughing when you marry her. Don't waste your anger on me, sir. It's not I fool you, it's I wish to open your eyes. . . . A tall fine English gentleman like you, you don't want to touch a little yellow rat like me eh? Besides I understand well. You believe me, but you want to do everything quiet like the English can. All right. But if I keep my mouth shut it seems to me you owe me something. What is five hundred pounds to you? To me it's my life.'

Now disgust was rising in me like sickness. Disgust and rage.

'All right,' he yelled, and moved away from the door. 'Go then. . . get out. Now it's me to say it. Get out. Get out. And if I don't have the money I want you will see what I can do.'

'Give my love to your wife – my sister,' he called after me venomously. 'You are not the first to kiss her pretty face. Pretty face, soft skin, pretty colour – not yellow like

me. But my sister just the same . . . '

At the end of the path out of sight and sound of the house I stopped. The world was given up to heat and to flies, the light was dazzling after his little dark room. A black and white goat tethered near by was staring at me and for what seemed minutes I stared back into its slanting yellow-green eyes. Then I walked to the tree where I'd left my horse and rode away as quickly as I could.

The telescope was pushed to one side of the table making room for a decanter half full of rum and two glasses on a tarnished silver tray. I listened to the ceaseless night noises outside, and watched the procession of small moths and beetles fly into the candle flames, then poured out a drink of rum and swallowed. At once the night noises drew away, became distant, bearable, even pleasant.

'Will you listen to me for God's sake,' Antoinette said. She had said this before and I had not answered, now I told her, 'Of course. I'd be the brute you doubtless think me if I did not do that.'

'Why do you hate me?' she said.

'I do not hate you, I am most distressed about you, I am distraught,' I said. But this was untrue, I was not distraught, I was calm, it was the first time I had felt calm or self-possessed for many a long day.

She was wearing the white dress I had admired, but it had slipped untidily over one shoulder and seemed too large for her. I watched her holding her left wrist with her right hand, an annoying habit.

'Then why do you never come near me?' she said. 'Or kiss me, or talk to me. Why do you think I can bear it, what reason have you for treating me like that? Have you any reason?'

'Yes,' I said, 'I have a reason,' and added very softly,

'My God.'

'You are always calling on God,' she said. 'Do you believe in God?'

'Of course, of course I believe in the power and wisdom of my creator.'

She raised her eyebrows and the corners of her mouth turned down in a questioning mocking way. For a moment she looked very much like Amélie. Perhaps they are related, I thought. It's possible, it's even probable in this damned place.

'And you,' I said. 'Do you believe in God?'

'It doesn't matter,' she answered calmly, 'what I believe or you believe, because we can do nothing about it, we are like these.' She flicked a dead moth off the table. 'But I asked you a question, you remember. Will you answer that?'

I drank again and my brain was cold and clear.

'Very well, but question for question. Is your mother alive?'

'No, she is dead, she died.'

'When?'

'Not long ago.'

'Then why did you tell me that she died when you were a child?'

'Because they told me to say so and because it is true. She did die when I was a child. There are always two deaths, the real one and the one people know about.'

'Two at least,' I said, 'for the fortunate.' We were silent for a moment, then I went on, 'I had a letter from a man who calls himself Daniel Cosway.'

'He has no right to that name,' she said quickly. 'His real name, if he has one, is Daniel Boyd. He hates all white people, but he hates me the most. He tells lies about us and he is sure that you will believe him and not listen

to the other side.'

'Is there another side?' I said.

'There is always the other side, always.'

'After his second letter, which was threatening, I thought it best to go and see him.'

'You saw him,' she said. 'I know what he told you. That my mother was mad and an infamous woman and that my little brother who died was born a cretin, an idiot, and that I am a mad girl too. That is what he told you, isn't it?'

'Yes, that was his story, and is any of it true?' I said, cold and calm.

One of the candles flared up and I saw the hollows under her eyes, her drooping mouth, her thin, strained face.

'We won't talk about it now,' I said. 'Rest tonight.'

'But we must talk about it.' Her voice was high and shrill.

'Only if you promise to be reasonable.'

But this is not the place or the time, I thought, not in this long dark veranda with the candles burning low and the watching, listening night outside. 'Not tonight,' I said again. 'Some other time.'

'I might never be able to tell you in any other place or at any other time. No other time, now. You frightened?' she said, imitating a Negro's voice, singing and insolent.

Then I saw her shiver and remembered that she had been wearing a yellow silk shawl. I got up (my brain so clear and cold, my body so weighted and heavy). The shawl was on a chair in the next room, there were candles on the sideboard and I brought them on to the veranda, lit two, and put the shawl around her shoulders. 'But why not tell me tomorrow, in the daylight?'

'You have no right,' she said fiercely. 'You have no right to ask questions about my mother and then refuse to

listen to my answer. '

'Of course I will listen, of course we can talk now, if that's what you wish.' But the feeling of something unknown and hostile was very strong. 'I feel very much a stranger here,' I said. 'I feel that this place is my enemy and on your side.'

'You are quite mistaken,' she said. 'It is not for you and not for me. It has nothing to do with either of us. That is why you are afraid of it, because it is something else. I found that out long ago when I was a child. I loved it because I had nothing else to love, but it is as indifferent as this God you call on so often.'

'We can talk here or anywhere else,' I said, 'just as you wish.'

The decanter of rum was nearly empty so I went back into the dining-room, and brought out another bottle of rum. She had eaten nothing and refused wine, now she poured herself a drink, touched it with her lips then put it down again.

'You want to know about my mother, I will tell you about her, the truth, not lies.' Then she was silent for so long that I said gently, 'I know that after your father died, she was very lonely and unhappy.'

'And very poor,' she said. 'Don't forget that. For five years. Isn't it quick to say. And isn't it long to live. And lonely. She was so lonely that she grew away from other people. That happens. It happened to me too but it was easier for me because I hardly remembered anything else. For her it was strange and frightening. And then she was so lovely. I used to think that every time she looked in the glass she must have hoped and pretended. I pretended too. Different things of course. You can pretend for a long time, but one day it all falls away and you are alone. We were alone in the most beautiful place in the world, it is

not possible that there can be anywhere else so beautiful as Coulibri. The sea was not far off but we never heard it, we always heard the river. No sea. It was an old-time house and once there was an avenue of royal palms but a lot of them had fallen and others had been cut down and the ones that were left looked lost. Lost trees. Then they poisoned her horse and she could not ride about any more. She worked in the garden even when the sun was very hot and they'd say "You go in now, mistress."

'And who were they?'

'Christophine was with us, and Godfrey the old gardener stayed, and a boy, I forget his name. Oh yes,' she laughed. 'His name was Disastrous because his godmother thought it such a pretty word. The parson said, "I cannot christen this child Disastrous, he must have another name," so his name was Disastrous Thomas, we called him Sass. It was Christophine who bought our food from the village and persuaded some girls to help her sweep and wash clothes. We would have died, my mother always said, if she had not stayed with us. Many died in those days, both white and black, especially the older people, but no one speaks of those days now. They are forgotten, except the lies. Lies are never forgotten, they go on and they grow.'

'And you,' I said. 'What about you?'

'I was never sad in the morning,' she said, 'and every day was a fresh day for me. I remember the taste of milk and bread and the sound of the grandfather clock ticking slowly and the first time I had my hair tied with string because there was no ribbon left and no money to buy any. All the flowers in the world were in our garden and sometimes when I was thirsty I licked raindrops from the Jasmine leaves after a shower. If I could make you see it, because they destroyed it and it is only here now.' She

struck her forehead. 'One of the best things was a curved flight of shallow steps that went down from the *glacis* to the mounting stone, the handrail was ornamented iron.'

'Wrought iron,' I said.

'Yes, wrought iron, and at the end of the last step it was curved like a question mark and when I put my hand on it, the iron was warm and I was comforted.'

'But you said you were always happy.'

'No, I said I was always happy in the morning, not always in the afternoon and never after sunset, for after sunset the house was haunted, some places are. Then there was that day when she saw I was growing up like a white nigger and she was ashamed of me, it was after that day that everything changed. Yes, it was my fault, it was my fault that she started to plan and work in a frenzy, in a fever to change our lives. Then people came to see us again and though I still hated them and was afraid of their cool, teasing eyes, I learned to hide it.'

'No,' I said.

'Why no?'

'You have never learned to hide it,' I said.

'I learned to try,' said Antoinette. Not very well, I thought.

'And there was that night when they destroyed it.' She lay back in the chair, very pale. I poured some rum out and offered it to her, but she pushed the glass away so roughly that it spilled over her dress. 'There is nothing left now. They trampled on it. It was a sacred place. It was sacred to the sun!' I began to wonder how much of all this was true, how much imagined, distorted. Certainly many of the old estate houses were burned. You saw ruins all over the place.

As if she'd guessed my thoughts she went on calmly, 'But I was telling you about my mother. Afterwards I had

fever. I was at Aunt Cora's house in Spanish Town. I heard screams and then someone laughing very loud. Next morning Aunt Cora told me that my mother was ill and had gone to the country. This did not seem strange to me for she was part of Coulibri, and if Coulibri had been destroyed and gone out of my life, it seemed natural that she should go too. I was ill for a long time. My head was bandaged because someone had thrown a stone at me. Aunt Cora told me that it was healing up and that it wouldn't spoil me on my wedding day. But I think it did spoil me for my wedding day and all the other days and nights.'

I said, 'Antoinette, your nights are not spoiled, or your days, put the sad things away. Don't think about them and nothing will be spoiled, I promise you.'

But my heart was heavy as lead.

'Pierre died,' she went on as if she had not heard me, 'and my mother hated Mr Mason. She would not let him go near her or touch her. She said she would kill him, she tried to, I think. So he bought her a house and hired a coloured man and woman to look after her. For a while he was sad but he often left Jamaica and spent a lot of time in Trinidad. He almost forgot her.'

'And you forgot her too,' I could not help saying.

'I am not a forgetting person,' said Antoinette. 'But she - she didn't want me. She pushed me away and cried when I went to see her. They told me I made her worse. People talked about her, they would not leave her alone, they would be talking about her and stop if they saw me. One day I made up my mind to go to her, by myself. Before I reached her house I heard her crying. I thought I will kill anyone who is hurting my mother. I dismounted and ran quickly on to the veranda where I could look into the room. I remember the dress she was wearing - an

evening dress cut very low, and she was barefooted. There was a fat black man with a glass of rum in his hand. He said, "Drink it and you will forget." She drank it without stopping. He poured her some more and she took the glass and laughed and threw it over her shoulder. It smashed to pieces. "Clean it up," the man said to the woman, "or she'll walk in it."

"If she walk in it a damn good thing," the woman said. "Perhaps she keep quiet then." However she brought a pan and brush and swept up the broken glass. All this I saw. My mother did not look at them. She walked up and down and said, "But this is a very pleasant surprise, Mr Luttrell. Godfrey, take Mr Luttrell's horse." Then she seemed to grow tired and sat down in the rocking-chair. I saw the man lift her up out of the chair and kiss her. I saw his mouth fasten on hers and she went all soft and limp in his arms and he laughed. The woman laughed too, but she was angry. When I saw that I ran away. Christophine was waiting for me when I came back crying. "What you want to go up there for?" she said, and I said, "You shut up devil, damned black devil from Hell." Christophine said, "Aie Aie Aie! Look me trouble, look me cross!"

After a long time I heard her say as if she were talking to herself, 'I have said all I want to say. I have tried to make you understand. But nothing has changed.' She laughed.

'Don't laugh like that, Bertha.'

'My name is not Bertha; why do you call me Bertha?'

'Because it is a name I'm particularly fond of. I think of you as Bertha.'

'It doesn't matter,' she said.

I said, 'When you went off this morning where did you go?'

'I went to see Christophine,' she said. 'I will tell you

anything you wish to know, but in a few words because words are no use, I know that now.'

'Why did you go to see her?'

'I went to ask her to do something for me.'

'And did she do it?'

'Yes.' Another long pause.

'You wanted to ask her advice, was that it?'

She did not answer.

'What did she say?'

'She said that I ought to go away - to leave you.'

'Oh did she?' I said, surprised.

'Yes, that was her advice.'

'I want to do the best for both of us,' I said. 'So much of what you tell me is strange, different from what I was led to expect. Don't you feel that perhaps Christophine is right? That if you went away from this place or I went away - exactly as you wish of course - for a time, it might be the wisest thing we could do?' Then I said sharply, 'Bertha, are you asleep, are you ill, why don't you answer me?' I got up, went over to her chair and took her cold hands in mine. 'We've been sitting here long enough, it is very late.'

'You go,' she said. 'I wish to stay here in the dark... where I belong,' she added.

'Oh nonsense,' I said. I put my arms round her to help her up, I kissed her, but she drew away.

'Your mouth is colder than my hands,' she said. I tried to laugh. In the bedroom, I closed the shutters. 'Sleep now, we will talk things over tomorrow.'

'Yes,' she said, 'of course, but will you come in and say goodnight to me?'

'Certainly I will, my dear Bertha.'

'Not Bertha tonight,' she said.

'Of course, on this of all nights, you must be Bertha.'

‘As you wish,’ she said.

As I stepped into her room I noticed the white powder strewn on the floor. That was the first thing I asked her – about the powder. I asked what it was. She said it was to keep cockroaches away.

‘Haven’t you noticed that there are no cockroaches in this house and no centipedes? If you knew how horrible these things can be.’ She had lit all the candles and the room was full of shadows. There were six on the dressing-table and three on the table near her bed. The light changed her. I had never seen her look so gay or so beautiful. She poured wine into two glasses and handed me one but I swear it was before I drank that I longed to bury my face in her hair as I used to do. I said, ‘We are letting ghosts trouble us. Why shouldn’t we be happy?’ She said, ‘Christophine knows about ghosts too, but that is not what she calls them.’ She need not have done what she did to me. I will always swear that, she need not have done it. When she handed me the glass she was smiling. I remember saying in a voice that was not like my own that it was too light. I remember putting out the candles on the table near the bed and that is all I remember. All I will remember of the night.

I woke in the dark after dreaming that I was buried alive, and when I was awake the feeling of suffocation persisted. Something was lying across my mouth; hair with a sweet heavy smell. I threw it off but still I could not breathe. I shut my eyes and lay without moving for a few seconds. When I opened them I saw the candles burnt down on that abominable dressing-table, then I knew where I was. The door on to the veranda was open and the breeze was so cold that I knew it must be very early in the morning, before dawn. I was cold too, deathly cold

and sick and in pain. I got out of bed without looking at her, staggered into my dressing-room and saw myself in the glass. I turned away at once. I could not vomit. I only retched painfully.

I thought, I have been poisoned. But it was a dull thought, like a child spelling out the letters of a word which he cannot read, and which if he could would have no meaning or context. I was too giddy to stand and fell backwards on to the bed, looking at the blanket which was of a peculiar shade of yellow. After looking at it for some time I was able to go over to the window and vomit. It seemed like hours before this stopped. I would lean up against the wall and wipe my face, then the retching and sickness would start again. When it was over I lay on the bed too weak to move.

I have never made a greater effort in my life than I made then. I longed to lie there and sleep but forced myself up. I was weak and giddy but no longer sick or in pain. I put on my dressing-gown and splashed water on my face, then I opened the door into her room.

The cold light was on her and I looked at the sad droop of her lips, the frown between her thick eyebrows, deep as if it had been cut with a knife. As I looked she moved and flung her arm out. I thought coldly, yes, very beautiful, the thin wrist, the sweet swell of the forearm, the rounded elbow, the curve of her shoulder into her upper arm. All present, all correct. As I watched, hating, her face grew smooth and very young again, she even seemed to smile. A trick of the light perhaps. What else?

She may wake at any moment, I told myself. I must be quick. Her torn shift was on the floor, I drew the sheet over her gently as if I covered a dead girl. One of the glasses was empty, she had drained hers. There was some wine left in the other which was on the dressing-table. I

dipped my finger into it and tasted it. It was bitter. I didn't look at her again, but holding the glass went on to the veranda. Hilda was there with a broom in her hand. I put my finger to my lips and she looked at me with huge eyes, then imitated me, putting her own finger to her lips.

As soon as I had dressed and got out of the house I began to run.

I do not remember that day clearly, where I ran or how I fell or wept or lay exhausted. But I found myself at last near the ruined house and the wild orange tree. Here with my head in my arms I must have slept and when I woke it was getting late and the wind was chilly. I got up and found my way back to the path which led to the house. I knew how to avoid every creeper, and I never stumbled once. I went to my dressing-room and if I passed anyone I did not see them and if they spoke I did not hear them.

There was a tray on the table with a jug of water, a glass and some brown fish cakes. I drank almost all the water, for I was very thirsty, but I did not touch the food. I sat on the bed waiting, for I knew that Amélie would come, and I knew what she would say: 'I am sorry for you.'

She came soundlessly on bare feet. 'I get you something to eat,' she said. She brought cold chicken, bread, fruit and a bottle of wine, and I drank a glass without speaking, then another. She cut some of the food up and sat beside me and fed me as if I were a child. Her arm behind my head was warm but the outside when I touched it was cool, almost cold. I looked into her lovely meaningless face, sat up and pushed the plate away. Then she said, 'I am sorry for you.'

'You've told me so before, Amélie. Is that the only song you know?'

There was a spark of gaiety in her yes, but when I

laughed she put her hand over my mouth apprehensively. I pulled her down beside me and we were both laughing. That is what I remember most about that encounter. She was so gay, so natural and something of this gaiety she must have given to me, for I had not one moment of remorse. Nor was I anxious to know what was happening behind the thin partition which divided us from my wife's bedroom.

In the morning, of course, I felt differently.

Another complication. Impossible. And her skin was darker, her lips thicker than I had thought.

She was sleeping very soundly and quietly but there was awareness in her eyes when she opened them, and after a moment suppressed laughter. I felt satisfied and peaceful, but not gay as she did, no, by God, not gay. I had no wish to touch her and she knew it, for she got up at once and began to dress.

'A very graceful dress,' I said and she showed me the many ways it could be worn, trailing on the floor, lifted to show a lace petticoat, or hitched up far above the knee.

I told her that I was leaving the island soon but that before I left I wanted to give her a present. It was a large present but she took it with no thanks and no expression on her face. When I asked her what she meant to do she said, 'It's long time I know what I want to do and I know I don't get it here.'

'You are beautiful enough to get anything you want,' I said.

'Yes,' she agreed simply. 'But not here.'

She wanted, it seemed, to join her sister who was a dressmaker in Demerara, but she would not stay in Demerara, she said. She wanted to go to Rio. There were rich men in Rio.

'And when will you start all this?' I said, amused.

'I start now.' She would catch one of the fishing boats at Massacre and get into town.

I laughed and teased her. She was running away from the old woman Christophine, I said.

She was unsmiling when she answered, 'I have malice to no one but I don't stay here.'

I asked her how she would get to Massacre. 'I don't want no horse or mule,' she said. 'My legs strong enough to carry me.'

As she was going I could not resist saying, half longing, half triumphant, 'Well, Amélie, are you still sorry for me?'

'Yes,' she said, 'I am sorry for you. But I find it in my heart to be sorry for her too.'

She shut the door gently. I lay and listened for the sound I knew I should hear, the horse's hoofs as my wife left the house.

I turned over and slept till Baptiste woke me with coffee. His face was gloomy.

'The cook is leaving,' he announced.

'Why?'

He shrugged his shoulders and spread his hands open.

I got up, looked out of the window and saw her stride out of the kitchen, a strapping woman. She couldn't speak English, or said she couldn't. I forgot this when I said, 'I must talk to her. What is the huge bundle on her head?'

'Her mattress,' said Baptiste. 'She will come back for the rest. No good to talk to her. She won't stay in this house.'

I laughed.

'Are you leaving too?'

'No,' said Baptiste. 'I am overseer here.'

I noticed that he did not call me 'sir' or 'master'.

'And the little girl, Hilda?'

'Hilda will do as I tell her. Hilda will stay.'

'Capital,' I said. 'Then why are you looking so anxious? Your mistress will be back soon.'

He shrugged again and muttered, but whether he was talking about my morals or the extra work he would have to do I couldn't tell, for he muttered in patois.

I told him to sling one of the veranda hammocks under the cedar trees and there I spent the rest of that day.

Baptiste provided meals, but he seldom smiled and never spoke except to answer a question. My wife did not return. Yet I was not lonely or unhappy. Sun, sleep and the cool water of the river were enough. I wrote a cautious letter to Mr Fraser on the third day.

I told him that I was considering a book about obeah and had remembered his story of the case he had come across. Had he any idea of the whereabouts of the woman now? Was she still in Jamaica?

This letter was sent down by the twice weekly messenger and he must have answered at once for I had his reply in a few days:

I have often thought of your wife and yourself. And was on the point of writing to you. Indeed I have not forgotten the case. The woman in question was called Josephine or Christophine Dubois, some such name and she had been one of the Cosway servants. After she came out of jail she disappeared, but it was common knowledge that old Mr Mason befriended her. I heard that she owned or was given a small house and a piece of land near Granbois. She is intelligent in her way and can express herself well, but I did not like the look of her at all, and consider her a most dangerous person. My wife insisted that she had gone back to Martinique her native island, and was very upset that I had mentioned the matter even in such a roundabout fashion. I happen to know now that she has not returned to Martinique, so I have written

very discreetly to Hill, the white inspector of police in your town. If she lives near you and gets up to any of her nonsense let him know at once. He'll send a couple of policemen up to your place and she won't get off lightly this time. I'll make sure of that. . .

So much for you, Josephine or Christophine, I thought.
So much for you, Pheena.

It was that half-hour after the sunset, the blue half-hour I called it to myself. The wind drops, the light is very beautiful, the mountains sharp, every leaf on every tree is clear and distinct. I was sitting in the hammock, watching, when Antoinette rode up. She passed me without looking at me, dismounted and went into the house. I heard her bedroom door slam and her handbell ring violently. Baptiste came running along the veranda. I got out of the hammock and went to the sitting-room. He had opened the chest and taken out a bottle of rum. Some of this he poured into a decanter which he put on a tray with a glass.

'Who is that for?' I said. He didn't answer.

'No road?' I said and laughed.

'I don't want to know nothing about all this,' he said.

'Baptiste!' Antoinette called in a high voice.

'Yes, mistress.' He looked straight at me and carried the tray out.

As for the old woman, I saw her shadow before I saw her. She too passed me without turning her head. Nor did she go into Antoinette's room or look towards it. She walked along the veranda, down the steps the other side, and went into the kitchen. In that short time the dark had come and Hilda came in to light the candles. When I spoke to her she gave me an alarmed look and ran away.

I opened the chest and looked at the rows of bottles inside. Here was the rum that kills you in a hundred years, the brandy, the red and white wine smuggled, I suppose, from St Pierre, Martinique – the Paris of the West Indies. It was rum I chose to drink. Yes, it was mild in the mouth, I waited a second for the explosion of heat and light in my chest, the strength and warmth running through my body. Then I tried the door into Antoinette's room. It yielded very slightly. She must have pushed some piece of furniture against it, that round table probably. I pushed again and it opened enough for me to see her. She was lying on the bed on her back. Her eyes were closed and she breathed heavily. She had pulled the sheet up to her chin. On a chair beside the bed there was the empty decanter, a glass with some rum left in it and a small brass handbell.

I shut the door and sat down with my elbows on the table for I thought I knew what would happen and what I must do. I found the room oppressively hot, so I blew out most of the candles and waited in the half darkness. Then I went on to the veranda to watch the door of the kitchen where a light was showing.

Soon the little girl came out followed by Baptiste. At the same time the handbell in the bedroom rang. They both went into the sitting-room and I followed. Hilda lit all the candles with a frightened roll of the eyes in my direction. The handbell went on ringing.

'Mix me a good strong one, Baptiste. Just what I feel like.'

He took a step away from me and said, 'Miss Antoinette –'

'Baptiste, where are you?' Antoinette called. 'Why don't you come?'

'I come as quick as I can,' Baptiste said. But as he

reached for the bottle I took it away from him.

Hilda ran out of the room. Baptiste and I stared at each other. I thought that his large protuberant eyes and his expression of utter bewilderment were comical.

Antoinette shrieked from the bedroom, 'Baptiste! Christophine! Pheena, Pheena!'

'*Que komesse!*' Baptiste said. 'I get Christophine.'

He ran out almost as fast as the little girl had done.

The door of Antoinette's room opened. When I saw her I was too shocked to speak. Her hair hung uncombed and dull into her eyes which were inflamed and staring, her face was very flushed and looked swollen. Her feet were bare. However when she spoke her voice was low, almost inaudible.

'I rang the bell because I was thirsty. Didn't anybody hear?'

Before I could stop her she darted to the table and seized the bottle of rum.

'Don't drink any more,' I said.

'And what right have you to tell me what I'm to do? Christophine!' she called again, but her voice broke.

'Christophine is an evil old woman and you know it as well as I do,' I said. 'She won't stay here very much longer.'

'She won't stay here very much longer,' she mimicked me, 'and nor will you, nor will you. I thought you liked the black people so much,' she said, still in that mincing voice, 'but that's just a lie like everything else. You like the light brown girls better, don't you? You abused the planters and made up stories about them, but you do the same thing. You send the girl away quicker, and with no money or less money, and that's all the difference.'

'Slavery was not a matter of liking or disliking,' I said, trying to speak calmly. 'It was a question of justice.'

'Justice,' she said. 'I've heard that word. It's a cold word. I tried it out,' she said, still speaking in a low voice. 'I wrote it down. I wrote it down several times and always it looked like a damn cold lie to me. There is no justice.' She drank some more rum and went on, 'My mother whom you all talk about, what justice did she have? My mother sitting in the rocking-chair speaking about dead horses and dead grooms and a black devil kissing her sad mouth. Like you kissed mine,' she said.

The room was now unbearably hot. 'I'll open the window and let a little air in,' I said.

'It will let the night in too,' she said, 'and the moon and the scent of those flowers you dislike so much.'

When I turned from the window she was drinking again.

'Bertha,' I said.

'Bertha is not my name. You are trying to make me in- to someone else, calling me by another name. I know, that's obeah too.'

Tears streamed from her eyes.

'If my father, my real father, was alive you wouldn't come back here in a hurry after he'd finished with you. If he was alive. Do you know what you've done to me? It's not the girl, not the girl. But I loved this place and you have made it into a place I hate. I used to think that if everything else went out of my life I would still have this, and now you have spoilt it. It's just somewhere else where I have been unhappy, and all the other things are nothing to what has happened here. I hate it now like I hate you and before I die I will show you how much I hate you.'

Then to my astonishment she stopped crying and said, 'Is she so much prettier than I am? Don't you love me at all?'

'No, I do not,' I said (at the same time remembering

Amélie saying, 'Do you like my hair? Isn't it prettier than hers?'). 'Not at this moment,' I said.

She laughed at that. A crazy laugh.

'You see. That's how you are. A stone. But it serves me right because didn't Aunt Cora say to me don't marry him. Not if he were stuffed with diamonds. And a lot of other things she told me. Are you talking about England, I said, and what about Grandpappy passing his glass over the water decanter and the tears running down his face for all the friends dead and gone, whom he would never see again. That was nothing to do with England that I ever heard, she said. On the contrary:

A Benky foot and a Benky leg
For Charlie over the water.
Charlie, Charlie,'

she sang in a hoarse voice. And lifted the bottle to drink again.

I said, and my voice was not very calm, 'No.'

I managed to hold her wrist with one hand and the rum with the other, but when I felt her teeth in my arm I dropped the bottle. The smell filled the room. But I was angry now and she saw it. She smashed another bottle against the wall and stood with the broken glass in her hand and murder in her eyes.

'Just you touch me once. You'll soon see if I'm a dam' coward like you are.'

Then she cursed me comprehensively, my eyes, my mouth, every member of my body, and it was like a dream in the large unfurnished room with the candles flickering and this red-eyed wild-haired stranger who was my wife shouting obscenities at me. It was at this nightmare moment that I heard Christophine's calm voice.

'You hush up and keep yourself quiet. And don't cry. Crying's no good with him. I told you before. Crying's no good.'

Antoinette collapsed on the sofa and went on sobbing. Christophine looked at me and her small eyes were very sad. 'Why you do that eh? Why you don't take that worthless good-for-nothing girl somewhere else? But she love money like you love money - must be why you come together. Like goes to like.'

I couldn't bear any more and again I went out of the room and sat on the veranda.

My arm was bleeding and painful and I wrapped my handkerchief round it, but it seemed to me that everything round me was hostile. The telescope drew away and said don't touch me. The trees were threatening and the shadows of the trees moving slowly over the floor menaced me. That green menace. I had felt it ever since I saw this place. There was nothing I knew, nothing to comfort me.

I listened. Christophine was talking softly. My wife was crying. Then a door shut. They had gone into the bedroom. Someone was singing '*Ma belle ka di*', or was it the song about one day and a thousand years? But whatever they were singing or saying was dangerous. I must protect myself. I went softly along the dark veranda. I could see Antoinette stretched on the bed quite still. Like a doll. Even when she threatened me with the bottle she had a marionette quality. '*Ti moun*,' I heard and '*Doudou ché*,' and the end of a head handkerchief made a finger on the wall. '*Do do l'enfant do*.' Listening, I began to feel sleepy and cold.

I stumbled back into the big candlelit room which still smelt strongly of rum. In spite of this I opened the chest and got out another bottle. That was what I was thinking when Christophine came in. I was thinking of a last strong

drink in my room, fastening both doors, and sleeping.

'I hope you satisfy, I hope you well satisfy,' she said, 'and no good to start your lies with me. I know what you do with that girl as well as you know. Better. Don't think I frightened of you either.'

'So she ran off to tell you I'd ill-treated her, did she? I ought to have guessed that.'

'She don't tell me a thing,' said Christophine. 'Not one single thing. Always the same. Nobody is to have any pride but you. She have more pride than you and she say nothing. I see her standing at my door with that look on her face and I know something bad happen to her. I know I must act quick and I act.'

'You seem to have acted, certainly. And what did you do before you brought her back in her present condition?'

'What did I do! Look! Don't you provoke me more than I provoke already. Better not I tell you. You want to know what I do? I say *doudou*, if you have trouble you are right to come to me. And I kiss her. It's when I kiss her she cry - not before. It's long time she hold it back, I think. So I let her cry. That is the first thing. Let them cry - it eases the heart. When she can't cry no more I give her a cup of milk - it's lucky I have some. She won't eat, she won't talk. So I say, "Lie down on the bed *doudou* and try to sleep, for me I can sleep on the floor, don't matter for me." She isn't going to sleep natural that's certain, but I can make her sleep. That's what I do. As for what you do - you pay for it one day.'

'When they get like that,' she said, 'first they must cry, then they must sleep. Don't talk to me about doctor, I know more than any doctor. I undress Antoinette so she can sleep cool and easy; it's then I see you very rough with her eh?'

At this point she laughed – a hearty merry laugh. ‘All that is a little thing – it’s nothing. If you see what I see in this place with the machete bright and shining in the corner, you don’t have such a long face for such a little thing. You make her love you more if that’s what you want. It’s not for that she have the look of death on her face. Oh no.

‘One night,’ she went on, ‘I hold on a woman’s nose because her husband nearly chop it off with his machete. I hold it on, I send a boy running for the doctor and the doctor come galloping at dead of night to sew up the woman. When he finish he tell me, “Christophine you have a great presence of mind.” That’s what he tell me. By this time the man crying like a baby. He says, “Doctor I don’t mean it. It just happened.” “I know, Rupert,” the doctor says, “but it mustn’t happen again. Why don’t you keep the damn machete in the other room?” he says. They have two small rooms only so I say, “No, doctor – it much worse near the bed. They chop each other up in no time at all.” The doctor he laugh and laugh. Oh he was a good doctor. When he finished with that woman nose I won’t say it look like before but I will say it don’t notice much. Rupert that man’s name was. Plenty Ruperts here you notice? One is Prince Rupert, and one who makes songs is Rupert the Rine. You see him? He sells his songs down by the bridge there in town. It’s in the town I live when I first leave Jamaica. It’s a pretty name eh – Rupert – but where they get it from? I think it’s from old time they get it.

‘That doctor an old-time doctor. These new ones I don’t like them. First word in their mouth is police. Police – that’s something I don’t like.’

‘I’m sure you don’t,’ I said. ‘But you haven’t told me yet what happened when my wife was with you. Or exact-

ly what you did?’

‘*Your wife!*’ she said. ‘You make me laugh. I don’t know all you did but I know some. Everybody know that you marry her for her money and you take it all. And then you want to break her up, because you jealous of her. She is more better than you, she have better blood in her and she don’t care for money – it’s nothing for her. Oh I see that first time I look at you. You young but already you hard. You fool the girl. You make her think you can’t see the sun for looking at her.’

It was like that, I thought. It was like that. But better to say nothing. Then surely they’ll both go and it will be my turn to sleep – a long deep sleep, mine will be, and very far away.

‘And then,’ she went on in her judge’s voice, ‘you make love to her till she drunk with it, no rum could make her drunk like that, till she can’t do without it. It’s *she* can’t see the sun any more. Only you she see. But all you want is to break her up.’

(Not the way you mean, I thought)

‘But she hold out eh? She hold out.’

(Yes, she held out. A pity)

‘So you pretend to believe all the lies that damn bastard tell you.’

(That damn bastard tell you)

Now every word she said was echoed, echoed loudly in my head.

‘So that you can leave her alone.’

(Leave her alone)

‘Not telling her why.’

(Why?)

‘No more love, eh?’

(No more love)

‘And that,’ I said coldly, ‘is where you took charge,

isn't it? You tried to poison me.'

'Poison you? But look me trouble, the man crazy! She come to me and ask me for something to make you love her again and I tell her no I don't meddle in that for *béké*. I tell her it's foolishness.'

(*Foolishness foolishness*)

'And even if it's no foolishness, it's too strong for *béké*.'

(*Too strong for béké. Too strong*)

'But she cry and she beg me.'

(*She cry and she beg me*)

'So I give her something for love.'

(*For love*)

'But you don't love. All you want is to break her up. And it help you break her up.'

(*Break her up*)

'She tell me in the middle of all this you start calling her names. Marionette. Some word so.'

'Yes, I remember, I did.'

(*Marionette, Antoinette, Marionetta, Antoinetta*)

'That word mean doll, eh? Because she don't speak. You want to force her to cry and to speak.'

(*Force her to cry and to speak*)

'But she won't. So you think up something else. You bring that worthless girl to play with next door and you talk and laugh and love so that she hear everything. You meant her to hear.'

Yes, that didn't just happen. I meant it.

(*I lay awake all night long after they were asleep, and as soon as it was light I got up and dressed and saddled Preston. And I came to you. Oh Christophine. O Pheena, Pheena, help me.*)

'You haven't yet told me exactly what you did with my - with Antoinette.'

'Yes I tell you. I make her sleep.'

'What? All the time?'

'No, no. I wake her up to sit in the sun, bathe in the cool river. Even if she dropping with sleep. I make good strong soup. I give her milk if I have it, fruit I pick from my own trees. If she don't want to eat I say, "Eat it up for my sake, *doudou*." And she eat it up, then she sleep a gain.'

'And why did you do all this?'

There was a long silence. Then she said, 'It's better she sleep. She must sleep while I work for her - to make her well again. But I don't speak of all that to you.'

'Unfortunately your cure was not successful. You didn't make her well. You made her worse.'

'Yes I succeed,' she said angrily. 'I succeed. But I get frightened that she sleep too much, too long. She is not *béké* like you, but she is *béké*, and not like us either. There are mornings when she can't wake, or when she wake it's as if she still sleeping. I don't want to give her any more of - of what I give. So,' she went on after another pause, 'I let her have rum instead. I know that won't hurt her. Not much. As soon as she has the rum she starts raving that she must go back to you and I can't quiet her. She says she'll go alone if I don't come but she beg me to come. And I hear well when you tell her that you don't love her - quite calm and cool you tell her so, and undo all the good I do.'

'The good you did! I'm very weary of your nonsense, Christophine. You seem to have made her dead drunk on bad rum and she's a wreck. I scarcely recognized her. Why you did it I can't say - hatred of me I suppose. And as you heard so much perhaps you were listening to all she admitted - boasted about, and to the vile names she called me. Your *doudou* certainly know some

filthy language.'

'I tell you no. I tell you it's nothing. You make her so unhappy she don't know what she is saying. Her father old Mister Cosway swear like half past midnight - she pick it up from him. And once, when she was little she run away to be with the fishermen and the sailors on the bay-side. Those men!' She raised her eyes to the ceiling. 'Never would you think they was once innocent babies. She come back copying them. She don't understand what she says.'

'I think she understood every word, and meant what she said too. But you are right, Christophine - it was all a very little thing. It was nothing. No machete here, so no machete damage. No damage at all by this time. I'm sure you took care of that however drunk you made her.'

'You are a damn hard man for a young man.'

'So you say, so you say.'

'I tell her so. I warn her. I say this is not a man who will help you when he sees you break up. Only the best can do that. The best - and sometimes the worst.'

'But you think I'm one of the worst, surely?'

'No,' she said indifferently, 'to me you are not the best, not the worst. You are - ' she shrugged ' - you will not help her. I tell her so.'

Nearly all the candles were out. She didn't light fresh ones - nor did I. We sat in the dim light. I should stop this useless conversation, I thought, but could only listen, hypnotized, to her dark voice coming from the darkness.

'I know that girl. She will never ask you for love again, she will die first. But I Christophine I beg you. She love you so much. She thirsty for you. Wait, and perhaps you can love her again. A little, like she say. A little. Like you can love.'

I shook my head and went on shaking it mechanically.

'It's lies all that yellow bastard tell you. He is no Cosway either. His mother was a no-good woman and she try to fool the old man but the old man isn't fooled. "One more or less" he says, and laughs. He was wrong. More he do for those people, more they hate him. The hate in that man Daniel - he can't rest with it. If I know you coming here I stop you. But you marry quick, you leave Jamaica quick. No time.'

'She told me that all he said was true. She wasn't lying then.'

'Because you hurt her she want to hurt you back, that's why.'

'And that her mother was mad. Another lie?'

Christophine did not answer me at once. When she did her voice was not so calm.

'They drive her to it. When she lose her son she lose herself for a while and they shut her away. They tell her she is mad, they act like she is mad. Question, question. But no kind word, no friends, and her husband' he go off, he leave her. They won't let me see her. I try, but no. They won't let Antoinette see her. In the end - mad I don't know - she give up, she care for nothing. That man who is in charge of her he take her whenever he want and his woman talk. That man, and others. Then they have her. Ah there is no God.'

'Only your spirits,' I reminded her.

'Only my spirits,' she said steadily. 'In your Bible it say God is a spirit - it don't say no others. Not at all. It grieve me what happen to her mother, and I can't see it happen again. You call her a doll? She don't satisfy you? Try her once more, I think she satisfy you now. If you forsake her they will tear her in pieces - like they did her mother.'

'I will not forsake her,' I said wearily. 'I will do all I

can for her.'

'You will love her like you did before?'

(*Give my sister your wife a kiss from me. Love her as I did - oh yes I did. How can I promise that?*) I said nothing.

'It's she won't be satisfy. She is Creole girl, and she have the sun in her. Tell the truth now. She don't come to your house in this place England they tell me about, she don't come to your beautiful house to beg you to marry with her. No, it's you come all the long way to her house - it's you beg her to marry. And she love you and she give you all she have. Now you say you don't love her and you break her up. What you do with her money, eh?' Her voice was still quiet but with a hiss in it when she said 'money'. I thought, of course, that is what all the rigmarole is about. I no longer felt dazed, tired, half hypnotized, but alert and wary, ready to defend myself.

Why, she wanted to know, could I not return half of Antoinette's dowry and leave the island - 'leave the West Indies if you don't want her no more.'

I asked the exact sum she had in mind, but she was vague about that.

'You fix it up with lawyers and all those things.'

'And what will happen to her then?'

She, Christophine, would take good care of Antoinette (and the money of course).

'You will both stay here?' I hoped that my voice was as smooth as hers.

No, they would go to Martinique. Then to other places.

'I like to see the world before I die.'

Perhaps because I was so quiet and composed she added maliciously, 'She marry with someone else. She forget about you and live happy.'

A pang of rage and jealousy shot through me then. Oh no, she won't forget. I laughed.

'You laugh at me? Why you laugh at me?'

'Of course I laugh at you - you ridiculous old woman. I don't mean to discuss my affairs with you any longer. Or your mistress. I've listened to all you had to say and I don't believe you. Now, say good-bye to Antoinette, then go. You are to blame for all that has happened here, so don't come back.'

She drew herself up tall and straight and put her hands on her hips. 'Who you to tell me to go? This house belong to Miss Antoinette's mother, now it belong to her. Who you to tell me to go?'

'I assure you that it belongs to me now. You'll go, or I'll get the men to put you out.'

'You think the men here touch me? They not damn fool like you to put their hand on me.'

'Then I will have the police up, I warn you. There must be some law and order even in this God-forsaken island.'

'No police here,' she said. 'No chain gang, no tread machine, no dark jail either. This is free country and I am free woman.'

'Christophine,' I said, 'you lived in Jamaica for years, and you know Mr Fraser, the Spanish Town magistrate, well. I wrote to him about you. Would you like to hear what he answered?' She stared at me. I read the end of Fraser's letter aloud: '*I have written very discreetly to Hill, the white inspector of police in your town. If she lives near you and gets up to any of her nonsense let him know at once. He'll send a couple of policemen up to your place and she won't get off lightly this time . . .* You gave your mistress the poison that she put into my wine?'

'I tell you already - you talk foolishness.'

'We'll see about that - I kept some of that wine.'

'I tell her so,' she said. 'Always it don't work for *béké*. Always it bring trouble... So you send me away and you keep all her money. And what you do with her?'

'I don't see why I should tell you my plans. I mean to go back to Jamaica to consult the Spanish Town doctors and her brother. I'll follow their advice. That is all I mean to do. She is not well.'

'Her brother!' She spat on the floor. 'Richard Mason is no brother to her. You think you fool me? You want her money but you don't want her. It is in your mind to pretend she is mad. I know it. The doctors say what you tell them to say. That man Richard he say what you want him to say - glad and willing too, I know. She will be like her mother. You do that for money? But you wicked like Satan self!'

I said loudly and wildly, 'And do you think that I wanted all this? I would give my life to undo it. I would give my eyes never to have seen this abominable place.'

She laughed. 'And that's the first damn word of truth you speak. You choose what you give, eh? Then you choose. You meddle in something and perhaps you don't know what it is.' She began to mutter to herself. Not in patois. I knew the sound of patois now.

She's as mad as the other, I thought, and turned to the window.

The servants were standing in a group under the clove tree. Baptiste, the boy who helped with the horses and the little girl Hilda.

Christophine was right. They didn't intend to get mixed up in this business.

When I looked at her there was a mask on her face and her eyes were undaunted. She was a fighter, I had to admit. Against my will I repeated, 'Do you wish to say

good-bye to Antoinette?’

‘I give her something to sleep – nothing to hurt her. I don’t wake her up to no misery. I leave that for you.’

‘You can write to her,’ I said stiffly.

‘Read and write I don’t know. Other things I know.’
She walked away without looking back.

All wish to sleep had left me. I walked up and down the room and felt the blood tingle in my finger-tips. It ran up my arms and reached my heart, which began to beat very fast. I spoke aloud as I walked. I spoke the letter I meant to write.

‘I know now that you planned this because you wanted to be rid of me. You had no love at all for me. Nor had my brother. Your plan succeeded because I was young, conceited, foolish, trusting. Above all because I was young. You were able to do this to me. . .’

But I am not young now, I thought, stopped pacing and drank. Indeed this rum is mild as mother’s milk or father’s blessing.

I could imagine his expression if I sent that letter and he read it.

I wrote

Dear Father,

We are leaving this island for Jamaica very shortly. Unforeseen circumstances, at least unforeseen by me, have forced me to make this decision. I am certain that you know or can guess what has happened, and I am certain you will believe that the less you talk to anyone about my affairs, especially my marriage, the better. This is in your interest as well as mine. You will hear from me again. Soon I hope.

Then I wrote to the firm of lawyers I had dealt with in

Spanish Town. I told them that I wished to rent a furnished house not too near the town, commodious enough to allow for two separate suites of rooms. I also told them to engage a staff of servants whom I was prepared to pay very liberally – so long as they keep their mouths shut, I thought – provided that they are discreet, I wrote. My wife and myself would be in Jamaica in about a week and expected to find everything ready.

All the time I was writing this letter a cock crowed persistently outside. I took the first book I could lay hands on and threw it at him, but he stalked a few yards away and started again.

Baptiste appeared, looking towards Antoinette's silent room.

'Have you got much more of this famous rum?'

'Plenty rum,' he said.

'Is it really a hundred years old?'

He nodded indifferently. A hundred years, a thousand all the same to *le bon Dieu* and Baptiste too.

'What's that damn cock crowing about?'

'Crowing for change of weather.'

Because his eyes were fixed on the bedroom I shouted at him, 'Asleep, *dormi, dormi*.'

He shook his head and went away.

He scowled at me then, I thought. I scowled too as I re-read the letter I had written to the lawyers. However much I paid Jamaican servants I would never buy discretion. I'd be gossiped about, sung about (but they make up songs about everything, everybody. You should hear the one about the Governor's wife). Wherever I went I would be talked about. I drank some more rum and, drinking, I drew a house surrounded by trees. A large house. I divided the third floor into rooms and in one room I drew a standing woman – a child's scribble, a dot for a head, a

larger one for the body, a triangle for a skirt, slanting lines for arms and feet. But it was an English house.

English trees. I wondered if I ever should see England again.

*

Under the oleanders . . . I watched the hidden mountains and the mists drawn over their faces. It's cool today; cool, calm and cloudy as an English summer. But a lovely place in any weather, however far I travel I'll never see a lovelier.

The hurricane months are not so far away, I thought, and saw that tree strike its roots deeper, making ready to fight the wind. Useless. If and when it comes they'll all go. Some of the royal palms stand (she told me). Stripped of their branches, like tall brown pillars, still they stand – defiant. Not for nothing are they called royal. The bamboos take an easier way, they bend to the earth and lie there, creaking, groaning, crying for mercy. The contemptuous wind passes, not caring for these abject things. (*Let them live.*) Howling, shrieking, laughing the wild blast passes.

But all that's some months away. It's an English summer now, so cool, so grey. Yet I think of my revenge and hurricanes. Words rush through my head (deeds too). Words. Pity is one of them. It gives me no rest.

Pity like a naked new-born babe striding the blast.

I read that long ago when I was young – I hate poets now and poetry. As I hate music which I loved once. Sing your songs, Rupert the Rine, but I'll not listen, though they tell me you've a sweet voice. . . .

Pity. Is there none for me? Tied to a lunatic for life – a drunken lying lunatic – gone her mother's way.

'She love you so much, so much. She thirsty for you.'

Love her a little like she say. It's all that you can love – a little.'

Sneer to the last, Devil. Do you think that I don't know? She thirsts for *anyone* – not for me. . .

She'll loosen her black hair, and laugh and coax and flatter (a mad girl. She'll not care who she's loving.) She'll moan and cry and give herself as no sane woman would – or could. *Or could*. Then lie so still, still as this cloudy day. A lunatic who always knows the time. But never does.

Till she's drunk so deep, played her games so often that the lowest shrug and jeer at her. And I'm to know it – I? No, I've a trick worth two of that.

'She love you so much, so much. Try her once more.'

I tell you she loves no one, anyone. I could not touch her. Excepting as the hurricane will touch that tree – and break it. You say I did? No. That was love's fierce play. Now I'll do it.

She'll not laugh in the sun again. She'll not dress up and smile at herself in that damnable looking-glass. So pleased, so satisfied.

Vain, silly creature. Made for loving? Yes, but she'll have no lover, for I don't want her and she'll see no other.

The tree shivers. Shivers and gathers all its strength. And waits.

(There is a cool wind blowing now – a cold wind. Does it carry the babe born to stride the blast of hurricanes?)

She said she loved this place. This is the last she'll see of it. I'll watch for one tear, one human tear. Not that blank hating moonstruck face. I'll listen. . . . If she says good-bye perhaps adieu. *Adieu* – like those old-time songs she sang. Always *adieu* (and all songs say it). If she too says it, or weeps, I'll take her in my arms, my lunatic.

She's mad but *mine*, *mine*. What will I care for gods or devils or for Fate itself. If she smiles or weeps or both.
For me.

Antoinetta – I can be gentle too. Hide your face. Hide yourself but in my arms. You'll soon see how gentle. My lunatic. My mad girl.

Here's a cloudy day to help you. No brazen sun.
No sun... No sun. The weather's changed.

*

Baptiste was waiting and the horses saddled. That boy stood by the clove tree and near him the basket he was to carry. These baskets are light and waterproof. I'd decided to use one for a few necessary clothes – most of our belongings were to follow in a day or two. A carriage was to meet us at Massacre. I'd seen to everything, arranged everything.

She was there in the *ajoupa*; carefully dressed for the journey, I noticed, but her face blank, no expression at all. Tears? There's not a tear in her. Well, we will see. Did she remember anything, I wondered, feel anything? (That blue cloud, that shadow, is Martinique. It's clear now... Or the names of the mountains. No, not mountain. *Morne*, she'd say. 'Mountain is an ugly word – for them.' Or the stories about Jack Spaniards. Long ago. And when she said, 'Look! The Emerald Drop! That brings good fortune.' Yes, for a moment the sky was green – a bright green sunset. Strange. But not half so strange as saying it brought good fortune.)

After all I was prepared for her blank indifference. I knew that my dreams were dreams. But the sadness I felt looking at the shabby white house – I wasn't prepared for that. More than ever before it strained away from the black snake-like forest. Louder and more desperately it

called; Save me from destruction, ruin and desolation. Save me from the long slow death by ants. But what are you doing here you folly? So near the forest. Don't you know that this is a dangerous place? And that the dark forest always wins? Always. If you don't, you soon will, and I can do nothing to help you.

Baptiste looked very different. Not a trace of the polite domestic. He wore a very wide-brimmed straw hat, like the fishermen's hats, but the crown flat, not high and pointed. His wide leather belt was polished, so was the handle of his sheathed cutlass, and his blue cotton shirt and trousers were spotless. The hat, I knew, was waterproof. He was ready for the rain and it was certainly on its way.

I said that I would like to say good-bye to the little girl who laughed – Hilda. 'Hilda is not here,' he answered in his careful English. 'Hilda has left – yesterday.'

He spoke politely enough, but I could feel his dislike and contempt. The same contempt as that devil's when she said, 'Taste my bull's blood.' Meaning that will make you a man. Perhaps. Much I cared for what they thought of me! As for her, I'd forgotten her for the moment. So I shall never understand why, suddenly, bewilderingly, I was certain that everything I had imagined to be truth was false. False. Only the magic and the dream are true – all the rest's a lie. Let it go. Here is the secret. Here.

(But it is lost, that secret, and those who know it cannot tell it.)

Not lost. I had found it in a hidden place and I'd keep it, hold it fast. As I'd hold her.

I looked at her. She was staring out to the distant sea. She was silence itself.

Sing, Antoinetta. I can hear you now.

Here the wind says it has been, it has been
And the sea says it must be, it must be
And the sun says it can be, it will be
And the rain . . . ?

'You must listen to that. Our rain knows all the songs.'
'And all the tears?'
'All, all, all.'

Yes, I will listen to the rain. I will listen to the mountain bird. Oh, a heartstopper is the solitaire's one note – high, sweet, lonely, magic. You hold your breath to listen . . . No . . . Gone. What was I to say to her?

Do not be sad. Or think Adieu. Never Adieu. We will watch the sun set again – many times, and perhaps we'll see the Emerald Drop, the green flash that brings good fortune. And you must laugh and chatter as you used to do – telling me about the battle off the Saints or the picnic at Marie Galante – that famous picnic that turned into a fight. Or the pirates and what they did between voyages. For every voyage might be their last. Sun and sangoree's a heady mixture. Then – the earthquake. Oh yes, people say that God was angry at the things they did, woke from his sleep, one breath and they were gone. He slept again. But they left their treasure, gold and more than gold. Some of it is found – but the finders never tell, because you see they'd only get one-third then; that's the law of treasure. They want it all, so never speak of it. Sometimes precious things, or jewels. There's no end to what they find and sell in secret to some cautious man who weighs and measures, hesitates, asks questions which are not answered, then hands over money in exchange. Everybody knows that gold pieces, treasures, appear in Spanish Town – (here too). In all the islands, from nowhere, from no one knows where. For it is better not to speak of treasure. Bet-

ter not to tell them.

Yes, better not to tell them. I won't tell you that I scarcely listened to your stories. I was longing for night and darkness and the time when the moonflowers open.

Blot out the moon,
Pull down the stars.
Love in the dark, for we're for the dark
So soon, so soon.

Like the swaggering pirates, let's make the most and best and worst of what we have. Give not one-third but everything. All - all - all. Keep nothing back. . . .

No, I would say - I knew what I would say. 'I have made a terrible mistake. Forgive me.'

I said it, looking at her, seeing the hatred in her eyes - and feeling my own hate spring up to meet it. Again the giddy change, the remembering, the sickening swing back to hate. They bought me, *me* with your paltry money. You helped them to do it. You deceived me, betrayed me, and you'll do worse if you get the chance. . . . (*That girl she look you straight in the eye and talk sweet talk - and it's lies she tell you. Lies. Her mother was so. They say she worse than her mother.*)

. . . If I was bound for hell let it be hell. No more false heavens. No more damned magic. You hate me and I hate you. We'll see who hates best. But first, first I will destroy your hatred. Now. My hate is colder, stronger, and you'll have no hate to warm yourself. You will have nothing.

I did it too. I saw the hate go out of her eyes. I forced it out. And with the hate her beauty. She was only a ghost. A ghost in the grey daylight. Nothing left but hopelessness. *Say die and I will die. Say die and watch me die.*

She lifted her eyes. Blank lovely eyes. Mad eyes. A mad

girl. I don't know what I would have said or done. In the balance – everything. But at this moment the nameless boy leaned his head against the clove tree and sobbed. Loud heartbreaking sobs. I could have strangled him with pleasure. But I managed to control myself, walk up to them and say coldly, 'What is the matter with him? What is he crying about?' Baptiste did not answer. His sullen face grew a shade more sullen and that was all I got from Baptiste.

She had followed me and she answered. I scarcely recognized her voice. No warmth, no sweetness. The doll had a doll's voice, a breathless but curiously indifferent voice.

'He asked me when we first came if we – if you – would take him with you when we left. He doesn't want any money. Just to be with you. Because – ' she stopped and ran her tongue over her lips, 'he loves you very much. So I said you would. Take him. Baptiste has told him that you will not. So he is crying.'

'I certainly will not,' I said angrily. (God! A half-savage boy as well as... as well as...)

'He knows English,' she said, still indifferently. 'He has tried very hard to learn English.'

'He hasn't learned any English that I can understand,' I said. And looking at her stiff white face my fury grew. 'What right have you to make promises in my name? Or to speak for me at all?'

'No, I had no right, I am sorry. I don't understand you. I know nothing about you, and I cannot speak for you....'

And that was all. I said good-bye to Baptiste. He bowed stiffly, unwillingly and muttered – wishes for a pleasant journey, I suppose. He hoped, I am sure, that he'd never set eyes on me again.

She had mounted and he went over to her. When she

stretched her hand out he took it and still holding it spoke to her very earnestly. I did not hear what he said but I thought she would cry then. No, the doll's smile came back - nailed to her face. Even if she had wept like Magdalene it would have made no difference. I was exhausted. All the mad conflicting emotions had gone and left me wearied and empty. Sane.

I was tired of these people. I disliked their laughter and their tears, their flattery and envy, conceit and deceit. And I hated the place.

I hated the mountains and the hills, the rivers and the rain. I hated the sunsets of whatever colour, I hated its beauty and its magic and the secret I would never know. I hated its indifference and the cruelty which was part of its loveliness. Above all I hated her. For she belonged to the magic and the loveliness. She had left me thirsty and all my life would be thirst and longing for what I had lost before I found it.

So we rode away and left it - the hidden place. Not for me and not for her. I'd look after that. She's far along the road now.

Very soon she'll join all the others who know the secret and will not tell it. Or cannot. Or try and fail because they do not know enough. They can be recognized. White faces, dazed eyes, aimless gestures, high-pitched laughter. The way they walk and talk and scream or try to kill (themselves or you) if you laugh back at them. Yes, they've got to be watched. For the time comes when they try to kill, then disappear. But others are waiting to take their places, it's a long, long line. She's one of them. I too can wait - for the day when she is only a memory to be avoided, locked away, and like all memories a legend. Or a lie. . . .

I remember that as we turned the corner, I thought

about Baptiste and wondered if he had another name – I'd never asked. And then that I'd sell the place for what it would fetch. I had meant to give it back to her. Now – what's the use?

That stupid boy followed us, the basket balanced on his head. He used the back of his hand to wipe away his tears. Who would have thought that any boy would cry like that. For nothing. Nothing. . . .

Part Three

'They knew that he was in Jamaica when his father and his brother died,' Grace Poole said. 'He inherited everything, but he was a wealthy man before that. Some people are fortunate, they said, and there were hints about the woman he brought back to England with him. Next day Mrs Eff wanted to see me and she complained about gossip. I don't allow gossip. I told you that when you came. Servants will talk and you can't stop them, I said. And I am not certain that the situation will suit me, madam. First when I answered your advertisement you said that the person I had to look after was not a young girl. I asked if she was an old woman and you said no. Now that I see her I don't know what to think. She sits shivering and she is so thin. If she dies on my hands who will get the blame? Wait, Grace, she said. She was holding a letter. Before you decide will you listen to what the master of the house has to say about this matter. "If Mrs Poole is satisfactory why not give her double, treble the money," she read, and folded the letter away but not before I had seen the words on the next page. "but for God's sake let me hear no more of it." There was a foreign stamp on the envelope. "I don't serve the devil for no money," I said. She said, "If

you imagine that when you serve this gentleman you are serving the devil you never made a greater mistake in your life . I knew him as a boy . I knew him as a young man . He was gentle , generous , brave . His stay in the West Indies has changed him out of all knowledge . He has grey in his hair and misery in his eyes . Don't ask me to pity anyone who had a hand in that . I've said enough and too much . I am not prepared to treble your money , Grace , but I am prepared to double it . But there must be no more gossip . If there is I will dismiss you at once . I do not think it will be impossible to fill your place . I'm sure you understand ."
Yes , I understand , I said .

'Then all the servants were sent away and she engaged a cook , one maid and you , Leah . They were sent away but how could she stop them talking ? If you ask me the whole county knows . The rumours I've heard – very far from the truth . But I don't contradict , I know better than to say a word . After all the house is big and safe , a shelter from the world outside which , say what you like , can be a black and cruel world to a woman . Maybe that's why I stayed on .'

The thick walls , she thought . Past the lodge gate a long avenue of trees and inside the house the blazing fires and the crimson and white rooms . But above all the thick walls , keeping away all the things that you have fought till you can fight no more . Yes , maybe that's why we all stay – Mrs Eff and Lean and me . All of us except that girl who lives in her own darkness . I'll say one thing for her , she hasn't lost her spirit . She's still fierce . I don't turn my back on her when her eyes have that look . I know it .

In this room I wake early and lie shivering for it is very cold . At last Grace Poole , the woman who looks after me , lights a fire with paper and sticks and lumps of coal . She

kneels to blow it with bellows. The paper shrivels, the sticks crackle and spit, the coal smoulders and glowers. In the end flames shoot up and they are beautiful. I get out of bed and go close to watch them and to wonder why I have been brought here. For what reason? There must be a reason. What is it that I must do? When I first came I thought it would be for a day, two days, a week perhaps. I thought that when I saw him and spoke to him I would be wise as serpents, harmless as doves. 'I give you all I have freely,' I would say, 'and I will not trouble you again if you will let me go.' But he never came.

The woman Grace sleeps in my room. At night I sometimes see her sitting at the table counting money. She holds a gold piece in her hand and smiles. Then she puts it all into a little canvas bag with a drawstring and hangs the bag round her neck so that it is hidden in her dress. At first she used to look at me before she did this but I always pretended to be asleep, now she does not trouble about me. She drinks from a bottle on the table then she goes to bed, or puts her arms on the table, her head on her arms, and sleeps. But I lie watching the fire die out. When she is snoring I get up and I have tasted the drink without colour in the bottle. The first time I did this I wanted to spit it out but managed to swallow it. When I got back into bed I could remember more and think again. I was not so cold.

There is one window high up – you cannot see out of it. My bed had doors but they have been taken away. There is not much else in the room. Her bed, a black press, the table in the middle and two black chairs carved with fruit and flowers. They have high backs and no arms. The dressing-room is very small, the room next to this one is hung with tapestry. Looking at the tapestry one

day I recognized my mother dressed in an evening gown but with bare feet. She looked away from me, over my head just as she used to do. I wouldn't tell Grace this. Her name oughtn't to be Grace. Names matter, like when he wouldn't call me Antoinette, and I saw Antoinette drifting out of the window with her scents, her pretty clothes and her looking-glass.

There is no looking-glass here and I don't know what I am like now. I remember watching myself brush my hair and how my eyes looked back at me. The girl I saw was myself yet not quite myself. Long ago when I was a child and very lonely I tried to kiss her. But the glass was between us - hard, cold and misted over with my breath. Now they have taken everything away. What am I doing in this place and who am I?

The door of the tapestry room is kept locked. It leads, I know, into a passage. That is where Grace stands and talks to another woman whom I have never seen. Her name is Leah. I listen but I cannot understand what they say.

So there is still the sound of whispering that I have heard all my life, but these are different voices.

When night comes, and she has had several drinks and sleeps, it is easy to take the keys. I know now where she keeps them. Then I open the door and walk into their world. It is, as I always knew, made of cardboard. I have seen it before somewhere, this cardboard world where everything is coloured brown or dark red or yellow that has no light in it. As I walk along the passages I wish I could see what is behind the cardboard. They tell me I am in England but I don't believe them. We lost our way to England. When? Where? I don't remember, but we lost it. Was it that evening in the cabin when he found me talking to the young man who brought me my food? I

put my arms round his neck and asked him to help me. He said, 'I didn't know what to do, sir.' I smashed the glasses and plates against the porthole. I hoped it would break and the sea come in. A woman came and then an older man who cleared up the broken things on the floor. He did not look at me while he was doing it. The third man said drink this and you will sleep. I drank it and I said, 'It isn't like it seems to be.' - 'I know. It never is,' he said. And then I slept. When I woke it was a different sea. Colder. It was that night, I think, that we changed course and lost our way to England. This cardboard house where I walk at night is not England.

One morning when I woke I ached all over. Not the cold, another sort of ache. I saw that my wrists were red and swollen. Grace said, 'I suppose you're going to tell me that you don't remember anything about last night.'

'When was last night?' I said.

'Yesterday.'

'I don't remember yesterday.'

'Last night a gentleman came to see you,' she said.

'Which of them was that?'

Because I knew that there were strange people in the house. When I took the keys and went into the passage I heard them laughing and talking in the distance, like birds, and there were lights on the floor beneath.

Turning a corner I saw a girl coming out of her bedroom. She wore a white dress and she was humming to herself. I flattened myself against the wall for I did not wish her to see me, but she stopped and looked round. She saw nothing but shadows, I took care of that, but she didn't walk to the head of the stairs. She ran. She met another girl and the second girl said, 'Have you seen a ghost?' - 'I didn't see anything but I thought I felt some-

thing.' - 'That is the ghost,' the second one said and they went down the stairs together.

'Which of these people came to see me, Grace Poole?' I said.

He didn't come. Even if I was asleep I would have known. He hasn't come yet. She said, 'It's my belief that you remember much more than you pretend to remember. Why did you behave like that when I had promised you would be quiet and sensible? I'll never try and do you a good turn again. Your brother came to see you.'

'I have no brother.'

'He said he was your brother.'

A long long way my mind reached back.

'Was his name Richard?'

'He didn't tell me what his name was.'

'I know him,' I said, and jumped out of bed. 'It's all here, it's all here, but I hid it from your beastly eyes as I hide everything. But where is it? Where did I hide it? The sole of my shoes? Underneath the mattress? On top of the press? In the pocket of my red dress? Where, where is this letter? It was short because I remembered that Richard did not like long letters. Dear Richard please take me away from this place where I am dying because it is so cold and dark.'

Mrs Poole said, 'It's no use running around and looking now. He's gone and he won't come back - nor would I in his place.'

I said, 'I can't remember what happened. I can't remember.'

'When he came in,' said Grace Poole, 'he didn't recognize you.'

'Will you light the fire,' I said, 'because I'm so cold.'

'This gentleman arrived suddenly and insisted on seeing you and that was all the thanks he got. You rushed at

him with a knife and when he got the knife away you bit his arm. You won't see him again. And where did you get that knife? I told them you stole it from me but I'm much too careful. I'm used to your sort. You got no knife from me. You must have bought it that day when I took you out. I told Mrs Eff you ought to be taken out.'

'When we went to England,' I said.

'You fool,' she said, 'this is England.'

'I don't believe it,' I said, 'and I never will believe it.'

(That afternoon we went to England. There was grass and olive-green water and tall trees looking into the water. This, I thought, is England. If I could be here I could be well again and the sound in my head would stop. Let me stay a little longer, I said, and she sat down under a tree and went to sleep. A little way off there was a cart and horse - a woman was driving it. It was she who sold me the knife. I gave her the locket round my neck for it.)

Grace Poole said, 'So you don't remember that you attacked this gentleman with a knife? I said that you would be quiet. "I must speak to her," he said. Oh he was warned but he wouldn't listen. I was in the room but I didn't hear all he said except "I cannot interfere legally between yourself and your husband." It was when he said "legally" that you flew at him and when he twisted the knife out of your hand you bit him. Do you mean to say that you don't remember any of this?'

I remember now that he did not recognize me. I saw him look at me and his eyes went first to one corner and then to another, not finding what they expected. He looked at me and spoke to me as though I were a stranger. What do you do when something happens to you like that? Why are you laughing at me? 'Have you hidden my red dress too? If I'd been wearing that he'd have known me.'

'Nobody's hidden your dress,' she said. 'It's hanging in the press.'

She looked at me and said, 'I don't believe you know how long you've been here, you poor creature.'

'On the contrary,' I said, 'only I know how long I have been here. Nights and days and days and nights, hundreds of them slipping through my fingers. But that does not matter. Time has no meaning. But something you can touch and hold like my red dress, that has a meaning. Where is it?'

She jerked her head towards the press and the corners of her mouth turned down. As soon as I turned the key I saw it hanging, the colour of fire and sunset. The colour of flamboyant flowers. 'If you are buried under a flamboyant tree,' I said, 'your soul is lifted up when it flowers. Everyone wants that.'

She shook her head but she did not move or touch me.

The scent that came from the dress was very faint at first, then it grew stronger. The smell of vetiver and frangipanni, of cinnamon and dust and lime trees when they are flowering. The smell of the sun and the smell of the rain.

...I was wearing a dress of that colour when Sandi came to see me for the last time.

'Will you come with me?' he said. 'No.' I said, 'I cannot.'

'So this is good-bye?'

'Yes, this is good-bye.'

'But I can't leave you like this,' he said, 'you are unhappy.'

'You are wasting time,' I said, 'and we have so little.'

Sandi often came to see me when that man was away and when I went out driving I would meet him. I could go

out driving then. The servants knew, but none of them told.

Now there was no time left so we kissed each other in that stupid room. Spread fans decorated the walls. We had often kissed before but not like that. That was the life and death kiss and you only know a long time afterwards what it is, the life and death kiss. The white ship whistled three times, once gaily, once calling, once to say good-bye.

I took the red dress down and put it against myself. 'Does it make me look intemperate and unchaste?' I said. That man told me so. He had found out that Sandi had been to the house and that I went to see him. I never knew who told. 'Infamous daughter of an infamous mother,' he said to me.

'Oh put it away,' Grace Poole said, 'come and eat your food. Here's your grey wrapper. Why they can't give you anything better is more than I can understand. They're rich enough.'

But I held the dress in my hand wondering if they had done the last and worst thing. If they had *changed* it when I wasn't looking. If they had changed it and it wasn't my dress at all - but how could they get the scent?

'Well don't stand there shivering,' she said, quite kindly for her.

I let the dress fall on the floor, and looked from the fire to the dress and from the dress to the fire.

I put the grey wrapper round my shoulders, but I told her I wasn't hungry and she didn't try to force me to eat as she sometimes does.

'It's just as well that you don't remember last night,' she said. 'The gentleman fainted and a fine outcry there was up here. Blood all over the place and I was blamed for letting you attack him. And the master is expected in a

few days .I'll never try to help you again .You are too far gone to be helped . '

I said , ' If I had been wearing my red dress Richard would have known me . '

' Your red dress , ' she said , and laughed .

But I looked at the dress on the floor and it was as if the fire had spread across the room . It was beautiful and it reminded me of something I must do . I will remember I thought . I will remember quite soon now .

That was the third time I had my dream , and it ended . I know now that the flight of steps leads to this room where I lie watching the woman asleep with her head on her arms . In my dream I waited till she began to snore , then I got up , took the keys and let myself out with a candle in my hand . It was easier this time than ever before and I walked as though I were flying .

All the people who had been staying in the house had gone , for the bedroom doors were shut , but it seemed to me that someone was following me , someone was chasing me , laughing . Sometimes I looked to the right or to the left but I never looked behind me for I did not want to see that ghost of a woman whom they say haunts this place . I went down the staircase . I went further than I had ever been before . There was someone talking in one of the rooms . I passed it without noise , slowly .

At last I was in the hall where a lamp was burning . I remember that when I came . A lamp and the dark staircase and the veil over my face . They think I don't remember but I do . There was a door to the right . I opened it and went in . It was a large room with a red carpet and red curtains . Everything else was white . I sat down on a couch to look at it and it seemed sad and cold and empty to me , like a church without an altar . I wished to see it clearly so

I lit all the candles, and there were many. I lit them carefully from the one I was carrying but I couldn't reach up to the chandelier. Then I looked round for the altar for with so many candles and so much red, the room reminded me of a church. Then I heard a clock ticking and it was made of gold. Gold is the idol they worship.

Suddenly I felt very miserable in that room, though the couch I was sitting on was so soft that I sank into it. It seemed to me that I was going to sleep. Then I imagined that I heard a footstep and I thought what will they say, what will they do if they find me here? I held my right wrist with my left hand and waited. But it was nothing. I was very tired after this. Very tired. I wanted to get out of the room but my own candle had burned down and I took one of the others. Suddenly I was in Aunt Cora's room. I saw the sunlight coming through the window, the tree outside and the shadows of the leaves on the floor, but I saw the wax candles too and I hated them. So I knocked them all down. Most of them went out but one caught the thin curtains that were behind the red ones. I laughed when I saw the lovely colour spreading so fast, but I did not stay to watch it. I went into the hall again with the tall candle in my hand. It was then that I saw her - the ghost. The woman with streaming hair. She was surrounded by a gilt frame but I knew her. I dropped the candle I was carrying and it caught the end of a tablecloth and I saw flames shoot up. As I ran or perhaps floated or flew I called help me Christophine help me and looking behind me I saw that I had been helped. There was a wall of fire protecting me but it was too hot, it scorched me and I went away from it.

There were more candles on a table and I took one of them and ran up the first flight of stairs and the second. On the second floor I threw away the candle. But I did

not stay to watch. I ran up the last flight of stairs and along the passage. I passed the room where they brought me yesterday or the day before yesterday, I don't remember. Perhaps it was quite long ago for I seemed to know the house quite well. I knew how to get away from the heat and the shouting, for there was shouting now. When I was out on the battlements it was cool and I could hardly hear them. I sat there quietly. I don't know how long I sat. Then I turned round and saw the sky. It was red and all my life was in it. I saw the grandfather clock and Aunt Cora's patchwork, all colours, I saw the orchids and the stephanotis and the jasmine and the tree of life in flames. I saw the chandelier and the red carpet downstairs and the bamboos and the tree ferns, the gold ferns and the silver, and the soft green velvet of the moss on the garden wall. I saw my doll's house and the books and the picture of the Miller's Daughter. I heard the parrot call as he did when he saw a stranger, *Qui est là? Qui est là?* and the man who hated me was calling too, Bertha! Bertha! The wind caught my hair and it streamed out like wings. It might bear me up, I thought, if I jumped to those hard stones. But when I looked over the edge I saw the pool at Coulibri. Tia was there. She beckoned to me and when I hesitated, she laughed. I heard her say, You frightened? And I heard the man's voice, Bertha! Bertha! All this I saw and heard in a fraction of a second. And the sky so red. Someone screamed and I thought, *Why did I scream?* I called 'Tia!' and jumped and woke.

Grace Poole was sitting at the table but she had heard the scream too, for she said, 'What was that?' She got up, came over and looked at me. I lay still, breathing evenly with my eyes shut. 'I must have been dreaming,' she said. Then she went back, not to the table but to her bed. I waited a long time after I heard her snore, then I

got up, took the keys and unlocked the door. I was outside holding my candle. Now at last I know why I was brought here and what I have to do. There must have been a draught for the flame flickered and I thought it was out. But I shielded it with my hand and it burned up again to light me along the dark passage.

原书空白

第 一 部

常言道同舟共济，白人就是如此。可我们跟他们不是同舟。牙买加的太太小姐对我母亲一向并不赞成。克里斯托芬说：“因为她是美人胎子。”

她是我父亲的续弦，人家认为她太年轻了，跟他不般配，而且，更不利的是，她是马提尼克岛^①姑娘。我问她为什么来看望我们的人这么少，她跟我说，从西班牙镇^②到我们居住的库利布里庄园这条路很糟糕，修路现在已成为过去的事了。（我父亲啊，来客啊，马啊，睡个安稳觉啊——一切都是过去的事了。）

有一天，我听到她同我们家邻居，她唯一的朋友勒特雷尔先生聊天。“他们当然有他们的苦处。还在等待奴隶解放法案通过时，英国人许诺给他们这笔赔偿。有的人要等上好久呢。”

她哪里知道勒特雷尔先生竟是头一个等得不耐烦的人啊？一天，夜阑人静，他开枪打死自己的狗，游向大海，就此一去不回了。英国也没来个代理人照管他那幢叫作纳尔逊庐的房产，西班牙镇上的外地人骑着马来这里闲聊，谈论这件惨事。

“住在纳尔逊庐里吗？死也不去。那是个凶宅呢。”

勒特雷尔先生的宅子空关着，风把百叶窗刮得乒乒乓乓响。不久黑人都说宅子闹鬼，不愿走近，也就没人走近我们家了。

我们过惯了孤独的生活，可我母亲仍然有着打算和希望——也许她每回走过镜子前心里就不由怀着希望。

她每天早晨依然骑着马到处遛遛，丝毫不顾黑人三五成群，站在一边嘲笑她，尤其在她的骑装穿破了以后格外如此（他们只重衣着，只懂金钱）。

后来有一天，大清早，我看到她的马躺在鸡蛋花树下。我走到马跟前，可马不是病倒，而是死了，眼睛上黑压压一片苍蝇。我跑开了，也不提起这事，因为我想，如果我跟谁都不说，这事兴许不会成真的。谁知那天后晌，戈弗雷就发现了死马，原来是给人毒死的。“这下我们可给困住了，”我母亲说，“今后我们的遭遇会怎么样啊？”

戈弗雷说：“我总不能日日夜夜守着那匹马呀。我太老了。旧时光过去了就让它过去吧。抓住它也没用。上帝可不分黑人白人，黑人白人在他看来都一个样儿。尽管放心吧，好人是决不会遭到抛弃的。^①”可是她办不到。她还年轻呢。一切都消失得那么突兀，毫无朕兆，她怎能不去想法弄回来呢。“你要装瞎就瞎，要装聋就聋。你这个假惺惺的老鬼。”她恶狠狠说。“他知道人家打算下什么毒手。”她不断说。“魔鬼哪，”戈弗雷说，“不过这人世间对凡人来说也长不了。”

她恳求西班牙镇上一个大夫来给我弟弟比埃尔看病；比埃尔走道儿摇摇晃晃，说话又口齿不清。我不知道大夫跟她说什么，也不知道她跟大夫说什么，总之大夫从此再也不上门，后来她就变了。突然变了，不是逐步变的。她瘦了，不爱

① 马提尼克岛：西印度群岛向风群岛中部岛屿，岛上居民主要为黑白混血种人和黑人。

② 西班牙镇：牙买加东南部城市，位于科布雷河畔。1692—1872年间是牙买加首府，一译西班牙城。

③ 典出《圣经·旧约·诗篇》第37章第25节“从我年幼，一直到老，还没有见过义人被弃”。

说话，最后她竟一步也不肯离开它子。

我们家的花园又大又美，跟《圣经》里那个长着生命树的花园^①一个样。可是花园荒芜了。小径上杂草丛生，一股败花的味儿和鲜花的味儿混在一块儿。桫欏^②长得同森林里的野生桫欏一样高，桫欏下面，光线绿油油的。兰花长势旺盛，够也够不着，不知为什么，碰也碰不得。有一种长得像条蛇，还有一种像章鱼，长着细长的棕色触须，片叶不生，从盘绕的根部往下披垂。章鱼形兰花一年开两次花——开花时连一丝触须都看不出来。只见一大片铃形花朵儿，有白的，有淡紫的，有深紫的，好看极了。香味芬芳浓郁。我从来不走近它。

整个库利布里庄园都跟这花园一样荒芜了，蔓草丛生，再也没有奴隶制了——为什么人都要干活啊？这点根本不使我感到伤心。我可不记得这地方当初繁荣的景象。

我母亲经常在斜坡上走来走去，斜坡是个铺着路面、装着顶篷的露台，沿屋往上倾斜，通向一片竹丛。她站在竹丛旁看大海可以一览无遗，可是路过的人也可以盯着她看。他们盯着她看，有时还哈哈大笑。笑声远去了，消失了，久久之后，她还闭着眼睛，攥紧拳头。乌黑的眉宇间留下一道深深的皱纹——想必是刀砍的。我讨厌这条皱纹，有一回我摸摸她脑门子，打算捋捋平。谁知她竟把我推开，出手并不粗暴，而是又沉着又冷漠，一言不发，仿佛她已干脆横下一条心，认为我对她毫无用处。她要陪伴比埃尔坐坐，或者到没人纠缠的地方随意走走，她要安宁，要清静。我已经大了，可以照料自己了。“哎呀，别来烦我，”她总是说，“别来烦我，”等我得知原来她是大声自言自语以后，我就对她有点儿害怕了。

① 指伊甸园，见《圣经·创世记》第2章。

② 桫欏是热带木本蕨类植物，又称树蕨，干直木质，顶端有叶。既是观赏植物，又是经济树种。

所以我多半工夫都泡在相距不远的外屋一间厨房里。克里斯托芬就睡在隔壁一间小屋里。

到了傍晚，碰上她心情好就给我唱歌。我总是听不懂她用土话唱的歌——她也是马提尼克岛人——不过她倒教了我一支歌，歌的大意是“小孩子长大了，儿女离开我们了，他们还会回来吗？”还教了一支歌，唱的是雪松树只开一天花。

乐曲虽然欢快，歌词却嫌忧伤，她唱到高音时嗓门儿常常颤抖，接不上气。“Adieu.^①”说这字的调儿跟我们说这字的调儿不一样，而是说成 à dieu^②，这毕竟更有点意思。一往情深的男人孤孤单单，姑娘遭到遗弃，儿女一去不回。再见。

她唱的歌不像牙买加歌，她这人也不像别的女人。

她肤色黑得多了——蓝黑色的皮肤，瘦瘦的脸，端正的五官。她身穿黑色连衣裙，戴着沉甸甸的金耳环，扎着一条黄头巾，扎得仔仔细细，两个尖角翘在前面。别的黑种女人都不穿黑衣服，也不用马提尼克岛方式扎头巾。她说话声音文雅，真笑的时候笑声也文雅，虽然她愿意的话也能说上一口好英语，还能说法语，还能说土话，可是她还是力求跟一般人那样说话。不过他们不愿跟她打交道，她也从没见到自己那个在西班牙镇上干活的儿子。她只有一个朋友——一个叫马约特的女人，马约特不是牙买加人。

那些住在海湾边有时来帮我们洗衣服和打扫的姑娘见了她都怕。我不久才知道，她们是怕她才来干活的——因为她从不付她们工钱。可她们反而带了水果蔬菜来送礼，天黑后我常常听到厨房里传来幽幽的说话声。

所以我就打听克里斯托芬的底细。她很老了吗？她一直跟我们一起过吗？

“她是你父亲送给我的结婚礼物——算是他的礼物中的

① 法语：再见。

② 法语：听天由命。

一件吧。他还以为来个马提尼克岛姑娘可以讨好我呢。我不知道他们把她带到牙买加时她有多大。总之相当年轻吧。我不知道她现在几岁了。这有什么关系？你干吗老缠着我问这些老早的事情？克里斯托芬留下陪我是因为她愿意留下。你可以相信，她自有她的充分理由。我敢说，如果她跟我们作对，我们早就死掉了，死掉倒是好造化了。一死了之，被人遗忘，就此安息。不用知道自己遭到遗弃，受人哄骗，无依无靠。凡是死去的人——如今还有谁替他们说一句好话啊？”

“戈弗雷也留下没走，”我说，“还有萨斯。”

“他们留下是因为要个地方睡觉，要些东西糊口。”她气呼呼说。“萨斯那小子！当初他母亲大摇大摆走掉，把他扔在这里——她满不在乎——咳，当时他身上只有一把骨头。现在长成一个健壮的大小子倒走掉了。再也见不到他了。戈弗雷是个坏蛋。这些新主子对老年人不大客气，这点他知道。这就是他留下的道理。什么事也不干，光会吃，饭量倒足足抵得上两匹马的。他装聋。其实他并不聋——他不想听罢了。他真是恶棍！”

“你干吗不叫他到别处去住？”我说道，她笑了。

“他不愿走。他大概想把我们挤走吧。我可学会少惹麻烦了。”她说。

“如果你叫克里斯托芬走，她会走吗？”我心里想道。可是嘴上没说。我不敢说。

那天下午天气太热了。我看得见她上唇冒着汗珠，眼睛底下露出黑圈。我动手替她扇扇子，她却扭过头去。她说，如果我不去烦她，她就可以歇歇了。

以前我总会悄悄回来，看她在蓝沙发上熟睡——有一次我趁她梳头时曾借口走近她身边，那头柔软的黑发像披风似的遮住我，把我藏起来，让我感到安全。

可是好景不长啊。好景不长。

我母亲、比埃尔、克里斯托芬、戈弗雷，还有离开我们的萨斯——这些就是我生活中接触到的人。

我从没正眼看过哪个陌生黑人。他们痛恨我们。他们骂我们白蟑螂。还是少惹麻烦为妙。有一天，一个小姑娘跟在我后面唱道：“白蟑螂走开，走开，走开。”我赶快走，可她走得更快。“白蟑螂走开，走开，走开。没人要你，走开。”

我平平安安回到家里就在花园尽头紧挨着旧墙坐下。墙上布满天鹅绒般柔软的青苔，我再也不想动弹了。我一动事情就全乱套了。天快黑时，克里斯托芬在墙边找到我，这时我都坐僵了，她只好扶我站起来。她什么也没说，不过第二天早晨，蒂亚就同她母亲，克里斯托芬的朋友马约特在厨房里。蒂亚不久就成了我朋友，几乎每天早晨我都跟她在河边那条路的拐角见面。

有时我们在晌午离开洗澡的池塘，有时我们一直呆到后晌。于是蒂亚就会生起一堆火（她总是一点火就旺，尖利的石子也不会割痛她的光脚板，我也从没看见她哭过）。我们用一口旧铁锅煮青香蕉，就着葫芦瓢用手抓来吃，吃完她马上就睡觉。我睡不着，但我躺在树荫下，眼望着池塘时已经迷迷糊糊了——在树下，池塘显得一片深绿，下过雨的话就成了一片暗绿，可有太阳的话就一片碧绿，亮闪闪的。池水清澈极了，你都看得清浅处水底的卵石。有蓝的，有白的，还有红条纹的。美极了。不论早晚我们都在那条路的拐角分手。我母亲从不问我到哪儿去了，也不问我干了些什么。

克里斯托芬给了我几枚新锄子，我揣在衣兜里。一天早上，锄子掉了下来，我就把锄子搁在一块石头上。在太阳下面，锄子像金子般闪亮，蒂亚眼都看直了。她长着一对小眼睛，乌黑乌黑的，眼窝深陷。

于是她跟我打赌，就赌三个锄子，说我不“像自己说的那样”能在水底下翻筋斗。

“我当然能翻。”

“我从没看见你翻过，”她说。“光会说。”

“拿所有这些钱跟你打个赌，我能翻。”我说。

谁知翻了一个筋斗后我还在打转，冒起身来直呛。蒂亚哈哈大笑，跟我说那回我确实像淹死了一样。说完她就拿起了钱。

“我真翻过了，”我刚开得了口就说，可她直摇头。我翻得不好，再说几个锄子也买不了多少东西。我干吗那样看着她？

“拿着吧，你这骗人的黑鬼，”我说，因为我累了，刚才灌下的水叫我感到恶心。“我要钱还可以去拿。”

她说，她听说的可不是这么回事。她听说我们全都穷得像叫化子。我们吃咸鱼——没钱买鲜鱼。那座老宅子漏得够呛，一下雨我们就忙着拿葫芦瓢盛水。牙买加的白人可不少。地道的白人，他们有的是金币。他们正眼也不看我们，没人看见他们走近我们过。背时的白人如今只落得是白皮黑鬼罢了，黑鬼比白皮黑鬼还强呢。

我身上裹着自己的破毛巾，背对着她，坐在一块石头上，冻得直哆嗦。可太阳晒不暖我。我要回家。我回头一看，蒂亚早走了。我找了半天才相信她竟把我的衣服拿走了——不是拿走我的内衣，她从不穿什么内衣——而是拿走我的连衣裙，那天早上刚浆过，熨过，拾掇得干干净净的。她把她的衣服扔下给我，临了我只好穿上，在热辣辣的太阳下走回家，一边感到恶心，一边直恨她。我打算绕过屋后到厨房去，不料经过马厩时就停步不前，愣愣看着三匹陌生的马。我母亲看见我就叫住我。她正同两位年轻的小姐和一位先生在斜坡上。客人！我心里老大不愿意的慢慢走上台阶——从前我倒一心盼着有客人上门，可那是好几年以前的事了。

我觉得他们很漂亮，都穿着这么漂亮的衣服，我不由掉转眼光，只顾朝下看着石板，他们都哈哈大笑——那位先生笑得最响——我趁此跑进屋子，跑进卧室。我背靠房门站着，只感到一颗心直扑腾。我听见他们在说话，听见他们告辞。我走

出房，我母亲坐在蓝沙发上。她瞧了我半晌才说我的举止怪极了。我的连衣裙比平时还要脏。

“那是蒂亚的连衣裙。”

“那你干吗穿她的连衣裙？蒂亚？哪一个蒂亚啊？”

克里斯托芬原先一直在餐具室里听着，马上过来，母亲吩咐她去替我拿件干净连衣裙。“把那东西扔掉，烧掉。”

于是两人吵起来了。

克里斯托芬说我没有干净连衣裙了。“她只有两身换洗衣服。你要干净衣服从天上掉下来吗？有的人实在是疯了。”

“她一定还有一件连衣裙，”我母亲说。“放在什么地方了。”可是克里斯托芬大声跟她说这真不像话。这孩子没教养，她长得没出息。而且没人管。

我母亲走到窗口来。（“给困住了，”她那挺直狭窄的背，那仔细盘卷的头发似乎在说。“给困住了。”）

“她有一件旧的薄纱连衣裙，找出来。”

克里斯托芬替我擦脸，用根新头绳替我扎辫子的时候跟我说，那些人是新搬到纳尔逊庐的。他们自称姓勒特雷尔，但不管是不是英国人，他们都不像老勒特雷尔先生。“如果老勒特雷尔先生看见他们那样看着你，准揍他们的脸。今天麻烦找上门来了。麻烦上门了。”

那件旧的薄纱连衣裙找到了，我刚绷上身就撕破了。她没注意。

再也没有奴隶制了！她不由笑了！“这些新主子有法律条文。反正一回事。他们有地方法官。他们有地租。他们有牢房，有用锁链拴在一起干苦活的囚犯。他们有折磨囚犯的踏车。新主子比老主子更坏——只是更狡猾罢了。”

那天整整一晚我母亲都不跟我说句话，也不看我一眼。我心里想：“蒂亚说得对，她嫌我丢她脸。”

我趁早上了床，一下子就睡着了。我梦见自己在森林里走。不是一个人。有个恨我的人跟着我，只是看不见。我听

得见沉重的脚步声越来越近，尽管我挣扎喊叫，就是动弹不了。我哭醒了。盖着的被单掉在地上，我母亲正低着头看我。

“你做恶梦了吗？”

“是啊，做了个恶梦。”

她叹了口气，替我盖上被。“你吵得那么厉害。我得去看看比埃尔，你吓着他了。”

我躺着想：“我平安无事。有卧室的门角落，有亲切的家具。花园里有生命树，有青苔遍布的院墙。外面有悬崖和高山做屏障。还有大海做屏障。我平安无事。陌生人伤害不了我。”

我重新入睡时，比埃尔房里的蜡烛光还亮着。第二天早上我醒来才知道一切事情都不会老那样了。事情会变的，而且不断在变。

我不知道她怎么弄到钱去买白薄纱的，还有粉红的呢。好长好长的薄纱。她也许卖掉了自己最后一枚戒指，因为原先还剩下一枚。我在她的珠宝盒里看见过那枚戒指，还有里面放着一片白花酢浆草的小金盒。大清早她们就忙不迭缝啊补啊，等我上了床还在缝个不停。过了一星期她就有了件新连衣裙，我也有了一件。

勒特雷尔家借给她一匹马，她总是一大早就骑马出去，到第二天老晚才回来——累坏了，因为她参加了舞会或月光野餐。她乐呵呵，笑哈哈——我从没见到她这么年轻过，她一走掉家里就凄凄凉凉。

所以我也离开家，在外呆到天黑。我不再去洗澡的池塘，我没再碰到蒂亚。

我走另一条路，路过旧糖厂和多年没转动过的水车。我去了库利布里一些我没看见过的地方，那些地方没有大路，没有小路，没有足迹。锋利的野草割痛我的腿臂，我就想“总比人好些”。黑蚁，红蚁，爬满白蚁的高大蚁窝，淋得我浑身湿透的雨水——有一回我还看见一条蛇。一切都比人好。

好。好，比人好。

眼看着太阳下的红花黄花，心里什么都不想，恍如打开一扇门，我身在别的什么地方，成了别的什么东西。再也不是自己了。

我知道尽管天热，碧空无云，但是天空也会变得一片漆黑。

我母亲在西班牙镇和梅森先生结婚的时候，我当伴娘。克里斯托芬替我卷头发。我捧着一束花，身上穿的全是新的——连脚上精美的便鞋都是新的。可是他们的眼光都从我怨气冲天的脸上溜开。这些满脸谄笑的人趁我母亲不在听的时候说她什么话我都听到，他们没猜想到我在听呢。他们到库利布里来作客时，我就在花园里躲着他们，听他们说话。

“荒唐的婚姻，他迟早会后悔。一个大财主，放着所有的西印度群岛姑娘任他挑，没准儿还有不少英国姑娘也可以任他挑呢，怎么会偏偏挑上她？”“怎么说没准儿？”另外一个声音说。“该说准保没借儿。”“那他怎么偏偏娶了个分文不名的寡妇，而且库利布里是个破败不堪的地方？解放黑奴的动乱送了科斯韦老头的命？胡说——在那以前好多年这庄园就败落了。他喝得把命都送掉了。不止一回啦——唉！还有那么些女人！她根本就不阻止他——反而怂恿他。每年圣诞节都给那些混蛋送礼赔笑。老风俗？有些老风俗还是彻底废除为妙。她的新丈夫可得花上不少钱这屋子才能住呢——到处漏水。还有马厩和马车房都漆黑一团，还有仆人的下房，上回我来这儿还亲眼看见马桶座上盘绕着一条六英尺长的蛇，这些都怎么得了啊？吓了一跳？我尖声呼叫了。于是她收容的那个讨厌的老头儿过来了，笑得直不起腰。说到那两个孩子呢——男孩是个白痴，藏起来，眼不见，心不烦，依我看，女孩也在走这条路了——一副愁眉苦脸的样子。”

“啊，这话我信，”另外一个说，“不过安妮特倒是个大美人

儿。舞跳得真神了。叫我想起了那支歌‘轻如棉花在微风中’，还是在清风中啊？我忘了。”

是啊，舞跳得真神了——那天晚上，他们在特立尼达度了蜜月回到家里，没音乐就在斜坡上跳舞了。她跳舞时用不着音乐。他们停了下来，她靠着他胳膊往后弯下身去，弯到一头黑发碰到了石板——还在往下弯啊弯的。接着她刷地又挺起身来直笑。她这动作做得多轻松，仿佛人人都会做似的，他就吻了她。长长的一吻。那回我也在场，可是他们忘了我。不久我就不去想他们了。我想起那女人说“跳舞！他到西印度群岛又不是来跳舞的——他跟人家一样都是来赚钱的。有些大庄园正在贱卖呢，倒霉蛋吃了亏往往就让聪明人占便宜。不，整个事情都是个谜。屋里养着个马提尼克岛的奥比巫婆^①分明有用。”她指的是克里斯托芬。她说这话用的是嘲弄的口吻，不是正经说的，不过一下子别人都这么说了——而且是正经说的。

屋子装修期间，他们在特立尼达，我和比埃尔就住在西班牙镇上柯拉姨妈家里。

梅森先生对柯拉姨妈并不赞成，她是个逃脱劫难的前奴隶主，是个公然违反天命的人。

“她干吗不帮帮你们？”

我跟他说她丈夫是英国人，不喜欢我们，他说：“胡扯。”

“不是胡扯，他们住在英国，如果她写信给我们的话他就生气。他恨西印度群岛人。不久前他刚去世，她就回家来了，在那以前她有什么办法呢？她并不富。”

“那是她胡编的。我不信。轻薄女人啊。我要是你母亲

① 奥比巫术起源于非洲，在西印度群岛和美国的黑人中间流行，一般使用符咒或护身符，或用匍匐植物施巫术和入药。奥比巫婆指善用这种巫术的女人。

的话，才讨厌她的行为呢。”

“你们谁都不了解我们，”我心想。

我重见库利布里时，这地方看上去还是老样子，虽然干净整洁了，石板缝间没野草了，屋子也不漏了。可是感觉上就是不一样。萨斯回来了，我心里高兴。有人说，他们闻得出钱味儿。梅森先生雇了新仆人——除了马夫曼尼之外，我一个都不喜欢。改变库利布里的是他们对克里斯托芬的议论，不是屋子的装修，也不是添了新家具，更不是多了陌生面孔。他们对克里斯托芬和奥比巫术的议论改变了库利布里。

我对她的房间熟悉极了——圣母全家的图片，祈求死而瞑目的祷词。她有一条色彩鲜艳的拼花床罩，一个放衣服的破衣柜，我母亲还给了她一把旧摇椅。

谁知有一天我正在那屋里等着，忽然非常害怕。房门向阳开着，有人在马厩附近吹口哨，可我心里还是害怕。我确信屋里（那口旧黑衣柜后面）藏着死人一只干枯的手，白鸡毛，还有一只割断喉管的公鸡，正慢慢、慢慢地咽气。鲜血正一滴一滴地滴进一只红盆里，我想象自己听得见这声音。没人跟我说起过奥比巫术的事——可我知道要是我敢去看的话会见到什么。这时克里斯托芬笑吟吟地进屋，看见我很高兴。没发生过什么惊人的事，我就此忘了这事，要不就是我自己说早已忘掉了。

梅森先生知道我吓成什么样子准会笑。甚至笑得比听到我母亲跟他说希望离开库利布里时笑得更响。

这事在他们结婚一年多以后才提起了头。他们说来说去老说那些事，现在我就难得听他们斗嘴了。我知道人家恨我们——可是说到要走呢……这回我倒同意我继父的话。那可办不到。

“你总得有什么理由吧，”他总是说。她不是回答道“我需要换个地方住”，就是回答道“我们可以去看看理查啊”。（理

查是梅森先生头回结婚生下的儿子，在巴巴多斯念书。他马上就要到英国去了，我们不大见到他。)

“可以找个人来照管这地方嘛。暂时照管一下。本地人恨我们。他们确实恨我们。”有一天她直截了当说，他就此开怀大笑。

“安妮特，讲讲道理吧，你既是奴隶主的遗孀，又是奴隶主的女儿，我们相识那会儿，你一个人带了两个孩子在这儿已经住了将近五年了。当时情况可是糟透了。不过你也没受到骚扰，受到伤害啊。”

“你怎么知道我没受到伤害？”她说。“当时我们很穷，”她跟他说，“我们是人家的笑柄。可是我们现在不穷了，”她说。“你不是个穷人。难道你当他们不知道你在特立尼达的庄园的情况吗？还有安提瓜^①的房产？他们数落我们可没个完。他们编派你，造我的谣。他们想方设法打听我们每天吃什么。”

“他们就是好奇。这很自然。你独自过的日子太久了，安妮特。你想象人家不怀好意，其实没这回事。老是走极端，不是走这头，就是走那头。我一说黑鬼，你听了不是像只小野猫似的向我扑来吗？不准说黑鬼，连说黑人也不行。一定得说黑种人。”

“你就不喜欢他们身上的优点，连承认也不承认，”她说，“你就是不肯相信人家身上另有一面。”

“他们懒得出奇，不会惹出事来的，”梅森先生说，“这我知道。”

“懒也罢，不懒也罢，他们可是比你更活跃，而且会出于让你莫明其妙的原因变得凶险狠毒。”

“对，我莫明其妙，”梅森先生总是说。“我根本莫明其妙。”

① 安提瓜：拉丁美洲岛国安提瓜和巴布达一个主岛。

谁知她又说起要走的事。态度固执，怒气冲冲。

那天晚上我们回家途中梅森先生在空落落的小屋附近勒住马。“老老少少又都去跳那种舞了。这地方看上去多荒凉啊，”他说。

“要是有人跳舞我们就听得见鼓声。”我只希望他赶快往前骑，谁知他竟呆在小屋边看太阳下山，但等我们终于离开伯特兰湾时，海天都一片火红。在老远的地方我就看见我们的屋影高高耸立在石基上。只闻到一股杪櫟和河水的味道，我又感到安全了，仿佛我是好人中的一个。（戈弗雷说我们不是好人。有一天他喝醉了，跟我说我们全都该下地狱，祷告也没用。）

“他们偏偏挑了个火热的夜晚跳舞，”梅森先生说，柯拉姨妈来到了斜坡上。“跳什么舞？在哪儿跳？”

“邻近有什么喜庆活动。小屋都走空了。不定有婚礼吧？”

“不是婚礼，”我说。“从来也没有婚礼。”他对我皱皱眉，柯拉姨妈倒笑了。

他们进了屋，我就在凉丝丝的斜坡露台栏杆上支起胳膊，心想我决不会十分喜欢他。我心里还是叫他“梅森先生”。“晚安，白人爸爸，”有天晚上我说，他没恼火，倒笑了。他没来之前情况多少还好一些，虽说他救援我们摆脱贫穷，免遭苦难。“而且刚巧及时。”我们受穷时黑人倒并不怎么恨我们。我们虽是白人，但我们没逃走，眼看就活不成了，因为我们没多余的钱了。有什么好恨的呢？

眼下又闹起来了，而且闹得更凶，我母亲明白，就是没法说得他相信。我但愿自己能跟他说，这里根本不像英国人心目中想象的那样。但愿……

我听得见他们在谈话，柯拉姨妈在笑。她住在我们家里，我很高兴。虽然没风，但我听得见竹子簌簌抖，嘎嘎响。天气

连续干热无风已有多天了。天上的彩霞已消失,天色发青,就是长不了。克里斯托芬说过,一到夜里,斜坡露台可不是个好地方。我进屋时我母亲正扯着激动的嗓门在说话。

“好极了。既然你不肯考虑,我就带比埃尔走。想必你不至于会反对吧?”

“你说得完全对,安妮特,”柯拉姨妈说。我听了真吃了一惊。他们两口子斗嘴时她难得插话。

梅森先生似乎也感到吃惊,心里老大不高兴的。

“你这么瞎说一气,”他说。“而且你完全错到家了。你愿意的话当然可以走开去换换环境。我依你。”

“你以前也依过,”她说。“你说话不算数。”

他叹了口气。“我觉得在这里蛮不错。话虽这么说,我们要来安排一下。快了。”

“我可不愿再呆在库利布里,”我母亲说。“这不安全。对比埃尔不安全。”

柯拉姨妈点点头。

天晚了,我就跟他们一起吃饭,平时我总是自个儿吃的。新来的仆人有一个叫迈拉的,站在餐具柜旁,等着换餐具。如今我们吃的是英国菜,有牛肉、羊肉、馅饼和布丁。

我很高兴自己过得像个英国姑娘,可我怀念克里斯托芬做的菜那滋味。

我继父谈到从东印度群岛^①进口劳工的计划,他称劳工为苦力。迈拉出去后柯拉姨妈说:“我要是你的话决不谈论这事。迈拉在听着呢。”

“可是这里的人不肯干活。他们不想干活。瞧瞧这地方——真够叫你心都碎了。”

“心早碎了,”她说,“肯定碎了。我想你这人做事很精细。”

① 东印度群岛是18—19世纪西方国家对马来群岛的称法。

“你意思是说——”

“我什么也没说，只说过还是别当着那女人谈你的计划来得聪明——这么做无疑是必要的，也是仁慈的。我信不过她。”

“你大半辈子都住在这里，对这里的人却毫不了解。真叫人吃惊。她们还是孩子呢——连只苍蝇都不忍心伤害的。”

“可惜孩子偏偏伤害苍蝇，”柯拉姨妈说。

迈拉又进了屋，同平时一样愁眉苦脸的，虽然每逢她谈起地狱时倒眉开眼笑的。她告诉我，每个人都要下地狱，你要入她那个教派才能得救，尽管那样——不妨别太当真。她胳膊瘦，手大脚大，头上包的围巾总是白的。不带条纹，也不用鲜艳颜色。

所以我不看她，看着自己心爱的那幅画：《磨坊主的女儿》，画上是可爱的英国姑娘，一头棕色的鬈发，一对碧蓝的眼睛，身上衣服从肩头脱落。我隔着白桌布和插着黄玫瑰的花瓶，瞧着梅森先生，只见他自信心十足，一望而知是个十足的英国人。再瞧瞧我母亲，一望而知决不是英国人，但也不是白皮黑鬼。我母亲不是这种人。从来也不是。根本不可能。是啊，如果她没碰上他，早就死了，我心想。我头一回深表感激，而且喜欢上他了。心情快乐舒畅的方式不止一种，或许最好还是像我这会儿那样，感到安宁、满足，享受保护，不管天长地久都得享安宁，往后不管迈拉怎么说，我都可以得救了。（我问克里斯托芬，人死后怎么着，她说：“你要知道的事未免太多了。”）我没忘了临睡前同我继父吻别。有一回柯拉姨妈跟我说过，“你从不吻他，他很伤心。”

“看样子他并不伤心，”我分辩说。

“不管怎样，看样子就是要出大错，”她说。

我走进比埃尔的房间，就在我那间隔壁，这幢屋的最后一间。他窗外就是竹子。几乎碰都碰得到。他还睡有围栏的小床，他睡得越来越多，差不多老是在睡。他瘦得很，我都能一

下子把他抱起来。梅森先生答应过日后带他去英国，在英国他就可以治好病，恢复得像别人一样。“你喜欢那样吗？”我吻他时心里想。“你喜欢恢复得像别人一模一样吗？”他看上去睡得正香。不过那要到日后再说了。日后再说。现在睡吧。就在这时，我又听到竹子嘎啦一响，还有好像谁在悄悄说话的声音。我勉强往窗外一看。只见一轮满月，不见人，什么也没有，只有阴影。

我在床边椅上搁了一支蜡烛等着克里斯托芬，因为我喜欢在临睡前见到她。可她没来，蜡烛点完了，我那股安全的宁静感也就没了。我但愿有条古巴大狗躺在我床边保护我，我但愿没听到竹丛的声响，但愿自己又回到很小的时候，因为小时候我信赖手中的棍子。其实不是根棍子，只是一根狭长的木条，一头还钻出两枚钉子，说不定，是块木瓦吧。他们害死我们家的马以后我就立即捡来，心想还能用来抵抗，万一大事不妙，也可以拼到底，虽然好人往往送命，但那是另一码事了。克里斯托芬把钉子去掉，让我留着木瓦，我渐渐把它当宝贝了，我相信只要身边有这宝贝，就没人害得了我，丢了这宝贝就会大难临头。这一切都是老早以前的事了，当时我还是一团孩子气，深信万物都是活的，不仅河是活的，雨是活的，而且椅子啊，镜子啊，杯子啊，碟子啊，样样都是活的。

我醒来天还黑着，我母亲在房里。她说：“赶快起床，穿好衣服就下楼。”她穿好了衣服，只是头发还没有梳理，有一条辫子散了。“赶快，”她又说了一句，说着就走进隔壁比埃尔的房里。我听见她跟迈拉说话，也听见迈拉回答她。我躺在床上，半睡半醒的，看着橱柜上点着的蜡烛，直到听见一声响，像是小房间里椅子翻倒了，才起床穿衣。

这幢屋子地势高低不一。从我的卧室和比埃尔的卧室到餐厅要下三级台阶，从餐厅到其他几间又要下三级台阶，我们就称做“楼下”。餐厅的折门没关上，我看得见大客厅里全是

人。梅森先生，我母亲，克里斯托芬，还有曼尼，还有萨斯。柯拉姨妈这会儿正坐在屋角的蓝沙发上，穿着一件黑绸连衣裙，一头长髻发梳得整整齐齐。我觉得她神色非常高傲。可是戈弗雷不在，迈拉也不在，厨子也不在，其他仆人也一个都不在。

“用不着惊慌，”我进屋时继父正说着，“就那么几个喝醉的黑人罢了。”他打开面对斜坡露台的门，走了出去。“这样闹是怎么回事啊？”他大声问道，“你们想要干什么？”一片吓人的闹声越来越响，像野兽在嚎叫，但更吓人。我们听见石头砸在斜坡上。他回进屋时脸色苍白，可他关门上闩时还强作笑容。“人数比我想象中还要多，而且情绪也恶劣。到明天早上就会改变主意了。我预见明天就有人送糖汁罗望子果^①和姜汁糖来。”

“明天就来不及了，”柯拉姨妈说，“姜汁糖也好，别的什么也好，都来不及了。”我母亲可不在听他们哪个说话。她说：“比埃尔睡着了，迈拉陪着他，我原想最好还是把他留在自己屋里，免得听到这片吓人的闹声。真想不到。说不定。”她正扭着双手，结婚戒指掉下滚到台阶边的角落里。继父和曼尼都弯下腰去捡，接着曼尼直起腰来说：“唉，上帝啊，他们到后面去了，他们在屋后放火呢。”他指着我刚出来时顺手关上的卧室门，门底下正冒出滚滚浓烟。

我没见我母亲挪身，她行动真快。她打开我房门，我又看不见她了，只见浓烟。曼尼紧跟她跑去，梅森先生也跟着，不过行动更慢。柯拉姨妈双臂搂住我。她说：“别害怕，你很安全。我们都很安全。”我就闭上一会儿眼睛，头枕在她肩上。我记得，她身上有股香草味儿。接着又闻到一股味儿，头发烧焦的味儿。我一看，只见我母亲抱着比埃尔在厅里。原来是她披散的头发给烧着了才冒着那么股味儿。

我心想，比埃尔死了。看样子死了。他脸色煞白，一声不

① 罗望子：热带植物，花朵芬芳，果实如枣，可供食用。

响，脑袋往后搭拉，倒挂在她胳膊上，仿佛根本没气了，两眼朝上翻，只见眼白。继父说：“安妮特，你受伤了——你双手……”谁知她连看都不看他一眼。“他的小床着火了，”她跟柯拉姨妈说。“小房间着火了，迈拉不在房里。她走了。她不在房里。”

“果然一点也不出我所料，”柯拉姨妈说。她把比埃尔放在沙发上，弯下身来看他，随即撩起裙子，脱下白衬裙，动手把衬裙撕成碎条。

“她扔下他就跑掉了，让他一个人去送死，”我母亲说，还是声音幽幽的。所以她尖声叫骂起来，骂梅森先生是个糊涂虫，是个狠毒愚蠢的糊涂虫，这时听上去格外可怕。“我跟你说过，”她说，“我再三再四跟你说会出什么事。”她嗓子喊破了，可还是尖声喊着。“你偏不肯听。你还嘲笑我，你这个笑面虎，你不该活着。你见多识广啊。你何不出去，叫他们放你走呢？说你如何没有恶意啊。说你一向信任他们啊。”

我大为震惊，就此搞得稀里糊涂的。事情来得这么快。我看见曼尼和萨斯搬着原先放在餐具室里的两大只陶器水罐，磕磕绊绊走来。他们把水浇在卧室里，地板上浇得一汪黑水，可那汪水面上还是浓烟滚滚。这时刚才跑进我母亲卧室里去拿房里水壶的克里斯托芬回来了，跟我姨妈说话。“看样子他们把房子那一边都烧了，”柯拉姨妈说。“他们一定是爬上外面那棵树了。这地方眼看就要烧起来了，我们没法子灭火。最好赶快出去。”

曼尼跟那孩子说：“你吓坏了？”萨斯摇摇头。“那赶快跟我来，”曼尼说。“别挡道，”他说着就一把推开梅森先生。餐具室有道狭窄的木梯通下外屋、厨房、仆人下房、马厩。他们就是往那儿走。“带上孩子快来吧。”柯拉姨妈跟克里斯托芬说。

斜坡上也很热，我们出来时他们大声吼叫，接着身后也响起一阵吼叫。我原先没见到火焰，只见到烟和火星，可这会儿

看见了高高的火焰直冲天空，因为竹子着了火。附近还有几棵沙桫，绿油油，湿漉漉的，有一棵也在冒烟了。

“快来，”柯拉姨妈说，她拉着我的手，走在头里。克里斯托芬抱着比埃尔，跟在后面。我们走下斜坡台阶时大家都十分安静。可我回头找我母亲时，只见梅森先生热得满脸通红，似乎在拖着她走，她却挣扎着不肯走，我听见他说：“不成了，现在来不及了。”

“要拿珠宝盒吗？”柯拉姨妈说。

“珠宝盒？根本没这么懂事呢。”梅森先生喊叫道，“她回去找她那只该死的鸚鵡呢。我决不让她去。”她并不回答，只是默默同他挣扎，像猫似的扭动，张牙露齿。

我们那只鸚鵡叫乖乖，是只绿鸚鵡。它不大会说话，就会说 Qui est là? Qui est là?^① 又自己回答说 Ché Coco, Ché Coco^②。梅森先生剪掉它的翅膀后，它变得脾气很坏，虽然它会悄悄歇在我母亲肩上，但是有谁走近她，它就向谁扑上去，啄人家的脚。

“安妮特，”柯拉姨妈说。“大家在笑话你呢，别让人家笑话你。”她这才停止挣扎，他半扶半拖地架着她跟在我们后面，一边大声咒骂。

大家还是很安静，他们有那么多人，我简直看不出草木了。一定有不少海湾来的人，可我一个都认不得。他们看上去全都一个样儿，看来看去都是一模一样的脸，眼睛闪闪发亮，嘴巴半张着想喊叫。我们走过上车的垫脚石时，他们看见曼尼驾着马车绕过拐角。萨斯骑着一匹马，牵着一匹马，跟在后面。牵着的那匹马上备着一副女式鞍^③。

① 法语：谁在那儿？谁在那儿？

② 克里奥耳人通用的法国腔土话：好乖乖，好乖乖。

③ 女式鞍是供女子骑马用的偏座鞍，两腿都搁在马身的一侧，与供跨骑的一般鞍具不同。

有人叫嚷说：“瞧瞧那个黑皮肤的英国佬！瞧瞧那几个白皮黑鬼！”于是大家都叫嚷了。“瞧瞧那几个白皮黑鬼，瞧瞧那几个该死的白皮黑鬼！”一块石头差点打中曼尼的脑袋，他回嘴咒骂他们，他们才在竖起后腿、受了惊的马面前闪开。“快，千万要快，”梅森先生说。“快到马车上，快上马，”可我们动不了，他们在我们四周挤得太拢了。有几个人一边大笑，一边挥舞棍棒，后面有几个人打着火把，照得像大白天。柯拉姨妈紧紧拉住我手，嘴唇动了动，可我听不出，因为声音闹。我心里害怕，因为我知道笑的人最厉害。我闭上眼等着。梅森先生不再咒骂，用虔诚的嗓音大声做起祷告来了。祷告结束时说：“愿万能的上帝保佑我们。”上帝果然神秘莫测，他们趁比埃尔睡着时放火烧他，上帝倒没有显示神迹——没打一声雷，没闪一下电——可神秘莫测的上帝竟立即听到了梅森先生的祷告，并作出响应。喊声止了。

我睁开眼，人人都抬眼看着，指着斜坡露台栏杆上羽毛着了火的乖乖。它拼命想飞下来，可是翅膀剪短了，飞不起来，掉下地直叫唤。它浑身是火。

我哭了起来。“别看，”柯拉姨妈说，“别看。”她弯下腰，双臂搂住我，我掩着脸，可是我感觉得到他们靠得没那么近了。我听见有人说倒霉了，不由想起弄死鸚鵡，甚或眼看鸚鵡死掉，都是要倒大霉的。这时他们开始走了，走得快，也不出声，那些留下的人都闪到一边，目送我们拖着疲惫的脚步走过草地。他们再也不笑了。

“快到马车上，快到马车上，”梅森先生说，“赶快！”他拉着我母亲的胳膊先走，克里斯托芬抱着比埃尔随后，柯拉姨妈走在最后，还拉着我的手。我们谁也没回过头去看。

曼尼把几匹马停在鹅卵石路的拐弯角，我们走近时听见他大声叫道：“你们是什么东西啊？野兽吗？”他对围立在马车周围的一伙男人和几个女人说。一个手里拿着大砍刀的混血儿抓着马笼头。我没看见萨斯，也没看见另外两匹马。“上

车，”梅森先生说。“别理会他，上车。”拿着大砍刀的人说不行。我们会去报警，扯上一大套鬼话的。一个女的说让我们去吧。这都是场意外事故，他们有好多证人。“迈拉她就会给我们作证的。”

“闭上你的嘴，”那男的说。“你剁碎百脚，剁得粉碎，只要留下一丁点儿，它就再长出来……你当警察信谁的话呀？信你还是信白皮黑鬼？”

梅森先生瞪着他。他看上去并不惊慌，只是惊讶得说不出话来。曼尼操起赶车鞭，可有个肤色更黑的人夺过他手里的鞭子，在膝头上啪的一下拗断，扔掉了。“跑吧，黑皮肤的英国佬，像那小子般跑吧。躲在灌木林里。你最好还是躲起来。”站出来说话的倒是柯拉姨妈，“这小孩伤得很重。要是得不到救护，他就没命了。”

那人说：“原来黑人也罢，白人也罢，烧起来都一样的，是吗？”

“都一样，”她说，“今生来世都一样，你总会弄清的。要不了多久。”

他松开马笼头，硬把脸凑到她面前。他说，如果她害他倒了霉，他就把她扔进火里去。他骂她老白鬼。可她寸步不让，直盯着他两眼，嗓音镇静地用炼狱烈火^①来吓唬他。“休想有一滴桑格里酒^②来润润你火烫的舌头。”她说。他嘴里虽再在骂她，但身子却往后倒退。“那上车吧，”梅森先生说。“你，克里斯托芬，抱孩子上车。”克里斯托芬上车了。“该你了，”他跟我母亲说。谁知她已掉过头去，瞧着屋子，他伸手扶她胳膊时，她尖声叫了。

① 炼狱是天主教教义中凡人死后受苦的地方。按教义说，善人死后升天堂享永福，恶人死后下地獄受永罚，烈火永世不灭。

② 桑格里酒是一种用红葡萄酒加果汁的西班牙汽酒，是拉美人常用冷饮。

一个女的说她只是来看看怎么回事。另一个女的放声哭了起来。拿着大砍刀的那个男的说：“你为她哭——她几时为你哭过？倒说说看。”

不过这时我也掉过头去。屋子正在燃烧，烧得天空一片橙红色像晚霞，我知道今后再也见不到库利布里了。什么都不剩了，金色的桫欏和银色的桫欏、兰花、姜黄色的百合花和玫瑰花、摇椅和蓝沙发、茉莉花和杜鹃花，还有那幅《磨坊主的女儿》的画，统统没了。等一切都烧完后，什么都不剩了，只剩下烧黑的墙和上车的垫脚石。永远留着了。那可偷也偷不走，烧也烧不掉。

这时，在不远处，我看见蒂亚和她母亲，我朝她跑去，因为她曾是我生活中的一部分，现在只剩下她了。我们曾经同吃，同睡，同在一条河里洗澡。我边跑边想，今后要同蒂亚一起住，我要像她那样。决不离开库利布里。决不走。决不。我跑近一看，只见她手里有块带尖棱的石头，可我没看见她扔。我也没感觉到，只觉得有什么湿漉漉的东西从脸上淌下。我瞧着她，只见她放声大哭时一张哭丧脸。我们互相瞪着，我脸上有血，她脸上有泪。就像看到了自己。像镜子里一样。

*

“我起床时，看见自己的辫子，扎着红缎带，”我说，“放在柜子抽斗里。我还当做一条蛇呢。”

“你头发不剪掉不行。你原来病得很厉害，宝贝儿，”柯拉姨妈说。“不过你现在跟我在一起平安无事了。我早跟你说过，我们都会平安无事的，这不？可你还得躺在床上。你干吗在屋里转悠？你头发会再长的，”她说。“长得更长更浓。”

“可颜色也更黑，”我说。

“更黑有什么关系？”

她扶着我站起身来。我感到垫着软绵绵的床垫，心里真是高兴，身上盖着凉快的被单，心里真是高兴。

“该给你吃葛粉^①了，”她说着就走出去。等我吃完了她就收拾掉杯子，站着低头看我。

“我起床是因为想知道自己在什么地方。”

“那你知道了吧。”她嗓音焦急地说。

“当然知道。可我怎么会上到你家里呢？”

“勒特雷尔家的人非常好。曼尼一赶到纳尔逊庐，他们就派了四个人，抬了一张吊床。你虽然给颠得够呛。可是他们总算尽心尽力了。小勒特雷尔先生一路上都骑着马陪在你身边。你说体贴不体贴？”

“体贴，”我说。她看上去又瘦又老，头发也没梳理漂亮，所以我就闭上眼，不想看她。

“比埃尔死了吧？”

“这可怜的小娃儿，在路上就死了，”她说。

“在那以前他就死了，”我想道，可是太累，说不了。

“你母亲在乡下。在休养。快恢复了。不久你就可以见到她。”

“我不知道，”我说，“她干吗走开？”

“你一场大病生了快六个礼拜了。你什么都不知道。”

我何苦告诉她说先前我醒来过，听见我母亲尖声嚷着“Qui est là? Qui est là?”接着又嚷着“别碰我。你碰我，我就宰了你。胆小鬼。假正经。我要宰了你。”我双手蒙住耳朵，她的尖声叫嚷又响又吓人。我睡着了，等我醒来四下已一片寂静了。

柯拉姨妈还守在床边瞧着我。

“我的头扎着绷带。热死了，”我说。“我额上会留下疤吗？”

“不会，不会，”她头一回笑了。“伤口长得很好。到你婚礼那天不会叫你破相的，”她说。

① 葛粉是用葛根制成的淀粉，供药用，能发汗、解热。

她弯下腰来吻我。“你还要什么？来点冷饮喝喝？”

“不，不要冷饮。给我唱唱歌。我喜欢听你唱。”

她用颤音唱了起来。

“每天晚上八点半

笃笃笃敲啊敲——”

“别唱那支。我不喜欢那支。唱《我获得自由以前》。”

她挨着我坐下，轻声柔气唱了“我获得自由以前”。我一直听她唱到“我心里感到那股忧伤——”这上半句。下半句我没听完，可临睡前听到了“我心里感到那股忧伤”。

我要去看我母亲了。我硬要克里斯托芬陪我去，不要别人，因为我还没好透，他们才让了步。我记得我们乘车途中那股低落的心情，因为我并不想见她。她是库利布里的一部分，库利布里完了，她也完了。这点我深信不疑。可是我们到了（据说是）她现在住的那幢整洁漂亮的小屋时，我就跳下车来，尽快奔过草地。阳台上有扇门。我没敲门就进去了，愣愣看着屋里的人。只见一个男的混血儿，一个女的混血儿，还有一个女的白人低下头坐着，低得我都看不见她的脸。可我认出她的头发，一条辫子比另一条辫子短得多。还认出她那身衣服。我双臂搂住她，吻了她。她紧紧抱住我，我都透不过气来了，我心想：“这不是她。”再一想：“一定是她。”她瞧着门，又瞧瞧我，再瞧着门。我没法说“他死了”，所以摇摇头。“可是我来了，我来了，”我说。她却悄声说：“不，”接着又大声说：“不，不，不，”说着一把推开我。我摔倒了，撞在隔板上弄痛了。那男的和女的拉住我胳膊，克里斯托芬也来了。那女的说：“你干吗把这孩子带来惹麻烦，麻烦，麻烦？没她来添乱就够麻烦的了。”

回柯拉姨妈家去的路上，我们都没说话。

我不得不上修道院去的第一天，紧紧缠住柯拉姨妈不放，你热爱生命的话也会这样缠住生命不放的。到最后她不耐烦了，所以我只好勉强离开她，穿过走廊，走下台阶，到了街上，他们正在沙厘树^①下等着我，我早知道他们会等着了。他们有两个人，一个男孩，一个女孩。男孩约莫十四岁，就他这年龄来说，算长得高大的了，他是白皮肤，长满雀斑，白得灰暗难看，嘴巴倒是黑人那种嘴型，一对小眼睛，像绿玻璃珠。跟死鱼眼珠似的。最难看，最吓人的是长着一头鬈曲的头发，十足是黑人的头发，不过发色鲜红，眉毛睫毛也是红的。那女孩很黑，没扎包头巾。头发扎成辫子，我站在柯拉姨妈那幢阴暗、干净、温馨的屋子台阶上盯着他们，从那儿都闻得到她洒在头上的发油那股恶心的味儿。他们看样子不怀恶意，安安静静，没人会理会到那男孩眼睛里的闪光。

于是那女孩咧开嘴笑了，开始把指节拗得格嗒格嗒响。格嗒一响我就吓一跳，双手冒出汗来了。我右手正拿着几本课本，我把书换到腋下，可是来不及了，我掌心上有块污迹，书面上也沾了块污迹。那女孩笑了起来，声音很轻，就在这时刻，我恨上心头，随之勇气也鼓起来了，这才胆敢走过他们面前，看也不看他们一眼。

我知道他们在跟着我，我也知道只要我不出柯拉姨妈家看得见的地方，他们就不会有什么行动，大不了在我后面相隔几步跟着溜达罢了。可是我知道他们几时会靠近。我一上山他们就会靠上来了。山坡两边都是围墙和花园，早上这个时刻没人会在山上。

上到半山腰，他们就围住我，说起话来了。那女孩说：“瞧那疯姑娘，你像你娘一样疯。你姨妈吓得不敢留你在屋里。

① 沙厘树是拉美热带地区所产的大戟科乔木，生有木质蒴，蒴干时爆裂，种子飞撒在地。

她把你送交修女关起来。你娘不穿鞋袜，光脚乱走，她 sans culottes^①。她想要杀死丈夫，你去看她那天，她还想要杀死你呢。她长着一对僵尸般的眼睛。你也长着一对僵尸般的眼睛。你干吗不敢看着我？”那男孩只是说：“总有一天让我碰上你单独一个人，你等着瞧吧，总有一天让我碰上你单独一个人。”等我上了山顶，他们就在推搡我了，我闻得到那女孩的头发味儿。

前面一长条空空的街，一直通到修道院——修道院围墙和一扇木门。我得先拉门铃才能进去。那女孩子说：“你不愿瞧我是吗，我偏让你瞧我。”她把我一推，我夹着的书掉在地上了。

我弯下腰去捡书，看见街那边有个高个儿男孩走来，停下脚步，朝我们看着。随即他奔过街来。他腿长，走道儿简直脚不着地。他们一看见他顿时转过身走掉了。他瞧着他们背影，弄得莫明其妙。他们在场的时候我宁死也不跑，可他们一走掉，我就跑了。我还掉了一本书在地上，那高个儿男孩追上我。

“你掉了这本书，”他说着笑了。我知道他是谁，他名叫桑迪，是亚历山大·科斯韦的儿子。从前我就会称他“桑迪哥”^②，可是梅森先生教训我，使我羞于认我的混血儿亲戚了。我咕哝了一句：“谢谢你。”

“我要找那男孩谈谈，”他说，“他不会再找你麻烦了。”

我看得见远处我的仇敌一路飞跑时那头红发，可是他跑不掉。桑迪没等他跑到拐角就追上他了。那女孩倒跑得不见影儿了。我没等着看下文，只是不停地拉门铃。

① 法语：不穿短裤。

② 据本书内容，亚历山大·科斯韦是安托瓦内特的同父异母哥哥，桑迪既是亚历山大生的儿子，在辈份上应是安托瓦内特的侄子。此处原文为 *cousin*，通常指堂兄弟姐妹、表兄弟姐妹，亦可指侄子、侄女。桑迪年龄比她大，按习俗也可称呼为哥。

到后来门开了。修女是个混血儿，她看上去老大不高兴。“你不可以这样拉门铃，”她说。“我不是尽快赶来了吗？”接着我听到身后门关上了。

我一下子受不了，放声大哭。她问我是不是病了，可我没法回答。她拉着我的手，一边嘴里还在啧啧啧，一边咕咕哧哧发着火，带我走过院子，穿过大树的树荫，没进正门，倒走进一大间石板铺地的凉爽房间里。墙上挂着锅啊壶啊的，还有一个石砌壁炉。房间后面还有一个修女，门铃又响了，这时刚才那个修女就去开门了。房里那个修女也是个混血儿，端来了一盆水，可她刚替我擦好脸，我马上又哭了。她看见我的手，问我是不是摔交弄痛了。我摇摇头，她轻轻替我擦掉污迹。“怎么回事？你哭什么啊？出了什么事？”我还是没法回答。她替我端来一杯牛奶，我想喝下去，可呛住了。“哎呀呀，”她耸耸肩，说着就出去了。

她再进屋时又跟来一个修女，说话嗓音沉着：“你这回哭够了，该停了。你有手绢吗？”

我才想起手绢掉了。刚来的那个修女就用一块大手绢替我擦眼睛，还把手绢给我，问我名字。

“安托瓦内特，”我说。

“我当然知道你名字，”她说，“你是安托瓦内特·科斯韦，就是安托瓦内特·梅森。有谁吓唬你吗？”

“是的。”

“那你看着我，”她说。“你不会怕我的。”

我看看她。她长着一对棕色的大眼睛，目光柔和，穿着一身白衣服，不像其他修女那样系着上过浆的围裙。兜住脸部那一圈是亚麻布的，在白亚麻布上面有薄料子的黑头巾，打着褶，披在背后。她双颊红润。一张笑呵呵的脸，两个深深的酒窝。一双手虽小，但看上去又粗又肿，不像身上其他部分。只是到后来我才知道她是得了风湿病而手残的。她把我带进一间客厅，厅里摆设死板，几把直背椅子，中间一张光洁的桌子。

她跟我谈过话以后，我就把哭的原因跟她说了一下，还说我不愿单身走路来上学。

“这事一定得想个办法，”她说，“我要给你姨妈写信。现在圣朱斯蒂娜院长大概在等着你。我派人去叫个女孩来，她跟我们相处快一年了。她名叫路易丝——路易丝·德·普拉纳。你要是觉得不习惯，她样样都会向你讲清楚的。”

我同路易丝沿着一条铺平的小路走向教室。小路两旁长着草，还有树和树荫，间或还有鲜艳的花丛。她很漂亮，她冲我一笑，我简直不敢相信自已痛苦过。她说：“我们老是把圣朱斯蒂娜院长叫做酸橙汁院长^①。可怜的女人，她人倒不大聪明。你以后就知道了。”

趁我还记得住，我得赶快记住那间火热的课堂。火热的课堂，油松木课桌，滚烫的课椅热遍我全身，连双臂双手都烫了。可窗外倒看得见粉墙上阴凉的蓝色影子。我的绣花针粘糊糊的，在十字布上穿出穿进时嘎吱嘎吱响。“我的绣花针在咒骂呢，”我悄声跟坐在身旁的路易丝说。我们正在浅色底子上用十字形针迹刺绣丝线玫瑰花。我们可以随意绣各色的玫瑰花。我绣的是绿的、蓝的和紫红的。底下写上火红色的名字，安托瓦内特·梅森，原姓科斯韦，一八三九年绣于牙买加，西班牙镇，髑髅山修道院。

我们绣花时，圣朱斯蒂娜院长给我们念圣徒传里的故事，什么圣罗斯啊，圣巴巴拉啊，圣艾尼斯啊。可是我们自己的圣女，就是埋在修道院小教堂祭坛下一个十四岁少女的遗骸。圣骨。可是这些修女怎么把遗骸大老远的弄到这儿来的呢？我暗自付道。放在客舱的行李箱里吗？特地装箱放在货舱里吗？怎么弄的？反正她就在这里了，她名字叫圣英诺森齐亚。我们不知道她的事迹，书里可没写她。我们听到的圣女都是

① 酸橙汁(Juice of a Lime)同朱斯蒂娜(Justine)读音相似，故有此谑称。

有财有貌。个个都有英俊阔少爱着。

“……比他在她生前看到的更美丽动人，更浓妆艳抹，”圣朱斯蒂娜嗡嗡低吟道，“她笑着说，‘西奥菲勒斯，这是从我终身归依的神的花园里采下的一朵玫瑰，而你并不信神，’他醒来看到身边那朵玫瑰一直没凋谢。至今还在。”（哦，可在哪儿啊？哪儿？）“于是西奥菲勒斯就皈依了基督教，”圣朱斯蒂娜院长这会儿念得很快，“成了一个献身于神的殉教徒。”她啪的一下合上书，谈起我们洗手时要把指甲的表皮往下推。要讲清洁，要懂礼貌，好心对待上帝的穷人。说了一连串话。（“这是她最得意的时刻，”海伦娜·德·普拉纳说，“可怜的老朱斯蒂娜啊，她也是无可奈何。”）“你侮辱或伤害不幸的人或苦难的人，就是侮辱基督本人，他决不忘记，因为他们是上帝的选民。”这番话是用随随便便的口气说的，随即话题一转，谈到教规和贞操，贞操是无瑕的水晶，一旦打破了就永远无法弥补。又谈到品行。像别人一样，她也给德·普拉纳姐妹迷住了，把她们奉为全班的榜样。我羡慕她们。她向大家指出海伦娜小姐梳头发的特长，没有镜子照样能梳好，这时姐妹俩都坐得镇定自若。

“海伦娜，请你告诉我，你是怎么做头发的，因为我长大了也要把头发做得像你的一样。”

“那很容易。你这样把头发往上一梳，再这样把头发往前推出一点，再用发夹在这儿把头发卡住，在这儿也卡住。发夹决不要用得太多。”

“是啊，不过海伦娜，不管我怎么梳，我的头发总做不到像你的那样。”

她眼睫毛闪了一下，转过脸去，她很有礼貌，明摆的事都不敢说出口。我们宿舍里没镜子，有一回我看见那个新来的爱尔兰年轻修女正对着一桶水照脸，笑着看脸上的酒窝是不是还在。她看到我，顿时涨红了脸，我心想，这下子她可要恨我一辈子了。

有时示范的是海伦娜小姐的头发,有时是热尔梅娜小姐那无可挑剔的风度,有时是路易丝小姐保养一口美丽牙齿的诀窍。要是我们根本不羡慕,她们也不自以为了不起。海伦娜和热尔梅娜也许有一点傲气,孤芳自赏,不过路易丝连这点傲气都没有。她回这没份——仿佛她生来另有所为。海伦娜那对褐色眼睛会闪光,热尔梅娜那对灰色眼睛美丽、温柔,像牛眼似的,她说活慢,不像大多克里奥耳^①姑娘,脾气很平和。那两个姑娘的遭遇,除了意外事故不说,都不难想象。可是路易丝啊!她腰肢细细的,褐色的双手瘦瘦的,散发出一股香根草^②香味的髻发黑黑的,尖嗓门甜甜的,在小教堂里唱到死亡的歌词也那么自然。就像小鸟歌唱似的。路易丝,你什么事都可能经历过,当真什么都经历过,我一点都不感到惊奇。

圣朱斯蒂娜院长说,还有一个圣女,她生活在稍后的年代,可人还在意大利,要不就是在西班牙。意大利是白柱子和绿水。西班牙是火辣辣的太阳晒在石头上。法国是个穿白衣服的黑头发贵夫人,因为路易丝十五年前生在法国,而且我母亲也喜欢穿白衣服,虽然她还活着,可是我必须当她死了,忘了她,为她祷告。

既然克里斯托芬离开了我们去住在儿子家,也就没人说起她了。我不大见到我继父。他似乎不喜欢牙买加,尤其是西班牙镇,经常一出门就是好几个月。

七月里有天下午天很热,姨妈告诉我说她要到英国去住上一年。她身体不好,需要换个环境。她边讲边在做条拼花床罩。一块块各种颜色的菱形绸子,有红的,有蓝的,有紫的,

① 克里奥耳一般指出生于美洲的欧洲人及其后裔,也指这些人与黑人的混血儿。

② 香根草,又称岩兰草,多年生草本植物,根部极香,可提取芳香油,盛产于热带及亚热带地区,如印度、非洲、巴西等。

有绿的,有黄的,溶为一片闪光耀眼的色彩。她在这上面花了好多好多工夫,总算快完工了。她问我会不会寂寞。我说“不会”,眼睛却盯着那片色彩。得花好多,好多,好多工夫呢,我想。

这所修道院是我的避难所,又是个阳光灿烂的地方,又是个死气沉沉的地方。在这地方,大清早,木梆子啪啪一响,就把我们这几个睡在长长一间宿舍里的人都吵醒了。我们醒来一看,只见修女玛丽·奥古斯蒂娜正端端正正坐在木椅上,神态安详,衣着整齐。那长长一间阴沉的房间里照满了金色的阳光,还有悄悄拂动的树影。我很快就学会了跟人家一样说“谨以今日的一切祈祷、善行和苦难奉献给主。”^①可是幸福呢?我开头想,难道没幸福吗?一定有的。当然有幸福啊,得了,有幸福。

可是我一下子就忘了幸福,只顾跑下楼到石砌大浴池去,我们穿着长到脚踝的灰布内衣在浴池里嬉水。你小心翼翼往内衣下面的身子上抹肥皂,这一招可得学会,那时只闻到一股肥皂味儿。穿衣服要端庄大方,这一招也得学会。我们跑上食堂的木梯级时,只见大片大片的阳光。热咖啡,面包卷,融化的黄油。可是饭后就念,现在和我们的临终时刻,^②中午,晚上六点钟,又念现在和我们的临终时刻。让永恒的光照耀他们吧。^③这光是为我母亲照耀的,我心里总是想,不管她的灵魂在什么地方流浪,反正这灵魂已经脱离了她的躯壳。这时我不禁想起她痛恨强烈的光,喜爱荫凉。她们告诉我,这种光与众不同。尽管如此,我还是不愿念这句祷词。我们一下子又回到外面瞬息变幻的阴影里,这比任何永恒的光都要美得多,我一下子又学会了跟别人一样,不动脑子就可以匆匆念

① 天主教祷词。

②③ 天主教祷词。

出祷词。念改变现在和我们的临终时刻,因为这就是我们的全部生活内容。

一切东西不是明的就是暗的。围墙,园里花朵鲜艳的色彩,修女的道袍,都是明亮的。可是修女的头巾,挂在腰际的十字架,树影,都是暗黑的。就是这么回事,光明与黑暗,太阳与阴影,天堂与地狱,因为有一个修女知道地狱的一切情况,谁不知道呢?不过另外有一个修女知道天堂一切情况和进天堂的人需备的特性,其中起码得具备超凡脱俗的美。这是最起码的了。我简直等不及想达到这一切出神入化的境界,有一回我还久久祈祷只求一死。随即想起求死是项罪孽。不是大胆放肆就是灰心失望,我忘掉是哪种了,反正是项滔天大罪。所以我又久久祈祷但求恕罪,谁知杂念来了,那么多事情都是罪孽,为什么啊?想那念头,又是项罪孽。话虽这么说,幸亏修女玛丽·奥古斯蒂娜说,要是心生杂念,马上赶走就不算罪孽了。你就说上帝拯救我呀,我堕落了。我完全知道该怎么办了,心里感到非常宽慰。反正从那以后我就不那么经常祈祷,没多久我简直就根本不祈祷了。我感到更大胆了,更快乐了,更自由了。只是感到不那么安全而已。

在这期间,将近十八个月里,我继父经常来看我。他先去见修道院院长,然后我就打扮好走进客厅,准备去吃饭或看朋友。我们分手时他总给我礼物,糖果啊,小金盒啊,手镯啊,有一回还送一件非常漂亮的连衣裙,当然,我可没法穿。

他最后一回来情况就不一样了。我一进屋就知道了。他吻了我,伸直两条胳膊将手搭在我肩上,仔仔细细用挑剔的眼光看着我,然后笑笑说我长得比他想象中要高。我提醒他说我都十七岁多了,是个成年女子了。“我没忘记送给你的礼物,”他说。

我因为害臊,局促不安,就冷冷回答说:“你给我买的这些衣物,我都没法穿。”

“你同我住在一起就可以爱穿什么就穿什么了,”他说。

“住在什么地方？特立尼达吗？”

“当然不是。暂时就住在这里。同我，同柯拉姨妈，她终于要回来了。她说在英国再过上一冬会要了她老命。还有理查。不能让你一辈子都躲藏起来啊。”

“为什么不能啊？”我想。

他想必是看出我的惊愕，因为他开起玩笑来了，夸奖我几句，还问我些很荒唐的问题，一下子问得我也大笑了。我乐意住在英国吗？我还来不及回答，又问我学会了跳舞没有？修女们是不是管得太严？

“她们管得一点也不严，”我说。“主教每年都来看她们，说她们管得松呢。松松垮垮。 he 说是气候的关系。”

“希望她们叫他别管闲事。”

“她说了啊。院长说了。其他有些人吓坏了。她们严倒不严，就是没人教过我跳舞。”

“跳舞倒不是难事。我要你快乐，安托瓦内特，要你安心。我尽力想过办法，不过那件事我们以后有时间再谈。”

我们走出修道院大门时，他随口说：“我请了几个英国朋友到这里来过冬。你不会乏味的。”

“你看他们会来吗？”我怀疑地问。

“有一个准会来。这点我拿得准。”

也许是看到他笑的那副样子，我又感到惊愕、忧伤惶惑了，憋得我几乎说不出话来。这回我没让他看出这点来。

就像当初看见那匹死马那天早上。一句话也不说，事情就不会是真的了。

可是修道院里的人都知道。修女们都想打听，可我不愿回答她们的问题，我头一回对修女们的笑脸感到厌恶。

她们倒安全无事。她们怎么会知道外面世界会是什么样子呢？

这是我第二回做那个梦了。

我又离开了库利布里那幢屋子。依旧在黑夜，我正往森

林走去，身上穿着一件长长的连衣裙，脚上穿着一双薄薄的便鞋，所以走路很不方便，一边跟着同我一起走的男人，一边提着裙子下摆。裙子是白的，真美，我不愿弄脏它。我跟着他，吓得要死，可我并不求自救；要是有人想救我，我也会拒绝。这事逃不了。眼下我们到了森林。我们在高大阴暗的树木下，没有风。“到了吗？”他转过身来看着我，脸色铁青，一肚子火，我看到他脸色就哭了起来。他狡黠地笑笑。“不是这儿。还没到呢，”他说。我边哭边跟着他。眼下我不想提着裙子了，那件漂亮的连衣裙在泥地上拖着。我们不再在森林里了，而是在一座四下都是石墙围住的花园里，树木也和刚才的不一样。我不认识这些树。有梯级一直通往上面。天太黑了，看不见围墙，也看不见梯级，可是我心里知道它们在那儿，我心想：“等我走上这些梯级就是了。在顶上呢。”我在裙子上绊了一下，起不来了。我摸到一棵树就双臂抱住不放。“到了，到了。”可我心里想，决不再往前走一步了。那棵树摇啊动啊，仿佛想把我甩掉。可我还是死死抱住，时间一秒一秒过去，每一秒都像过上一千年。“到了，在这儿呢，”一个陌生的嗓音说，这棵树就不再摇动了。

此刻修女玛丽·奥古斯蒂娜正领着我走出宿舍，问我是不是病了，叫我千万别吵醒别人，虽然我浑身还在哆嗦，心里却想着不知她会不会带我到神秘的幕后，她睡觉的地方去。谁知没有。她把我安顿在椅子上就不见人影了，过一会儿就端了一杯热巧克力回来。

我说：“我梦见在地狱里。”

“那是噩梦。快忘掉——别再去想它。”她把我冰凉的手搓搓暖和。

她看上去同平时一样，神态安详，衣着整齐，我想问她是不是天没亮就起身了，还是根本没上过床。

“喝你的巧克力吧。”

我喝着喝着，想起了我母亲的葬礼完事后，大清老早的，几乎也像现在一样早，我们回家去喝巧克力，吃糕饼。她是去年过世的，没人跟我说起她是怎么死的，我也没问。梅森先生在场，还有克里斯托芬，没别人了。克里斯托芬哭得好伤心，可我哭不出。我做祈祷，可这些祷词都是空话，一点也没意思。

眼下一想到她就跟我的梦混在一起了。

我看见她穿着打补丁的骑装，骑着一匹借来的马，在库利布里的鹅卵石路的前面想要挥挥手，我又眼泪汪汪了。“出了这么可怕的事，”我说，“为什么啊？为什么啊？”

“你千万别一心想着那怪事了，”修女玛丽·奥古斯蒂娜说。“我们不知道为什么魔鬼偏偏有得逞的一天。至今还不知道。”

她不像别人，向来不苟言笑，现在她根本不笑了。神色忧伤。

她像是在自言自语，说道：“现在悄悄回床上去睡吧。想想太太平平的事情，想法睡一觉。我马上就要敲梆了。马上就明天早晨了。”

第 二 部

进攻啊退缩啊，迟疑啊犹豫啊，统统都结束了。不论是福是祸，^①反正大事已定。我们一行终于来到那儿，我，我妻子安托瓦内特，还有个叫阿梅莉的混血儿女仆，三个人在一棵大芒果树底下躲避大雨。我看得见我们的行李盖着麻袋布，放在邻近一棵树下，树下还有两个搬运夫，一个牵着两匹壮马的小马倌，那两匹马是雇来驮我们攀登两千英尺山路，到等着我们去度蜜月的住所的。

① 这句原是在教堂中举行婚礼时新郎新娘所用誓言，出自祈祷词。意指今后不论是福是祸，夫妇必须祸福与共，同甘共苦。

今天早上阿梅莉那丫头说：“先生，希望你们在你们度蜜月的这个安乐窝里过得很愉快。”我看得出她是在嘲笑我。她人倒是个可爱的小丫头，就是狡黠、刻毒，也许居心不善，就像这地方还有不少人那样。

“只是场阵雨罢了，”安托瓦内特焦急不安地说。“马上就不下了。”

我瞧着垂头丧气、歪歪斜斜的椰子树，停靠在铺满圆卵石的海滩上的渔船，那排高低不一、刷着白粉的棚屋，就向她打听村子的名字。

“大屠杀村。”

“哪些人在这里遭到屠杀了？奴隶吗？”

“啊，不是，”听上去她大吃一惊。“不是奴隶。好久前一定出过什么事。现在谁也不记得了。”

雨下得更大了，大滴大滴的雨点打在树叶上，听起来像下雹子似的，海水偷偷地漫过来又退回去。

原来这就是大屠杀村。不是天涯海角，只是我们从牙买加开始那段走不到头的旅程的最后一站，也是我们美妙蜜月的开头罢了。出了太阳这一切看上去就大不一样了。

原先的安排是婚礼——完事我们就离开西班牙镇，到向风群岛^①的一个小岛上，原先归安托瓦内特的母亲所有的小庄园去过上几星期。我同意这么安排。我对其他一切安排也都是这样统统同意照办的。

棚屋的窗子都关着，门倒开着，门里静悄悄，暗沉沉。这时三个小男孩走过来愣愣看着我们。最小的一个身上什么也没穿，只是脖子上挂着个圣牌^②和一个渔夫常戴的大斗笠

① 向风群岛：又译温德华群岛，指拉丁美洲小安的列斯群岛中部的岛群，处于东北信风带最暴露的一部分，故名。

② 圣牌：通常为天主教徒佩戴的一种硬币形金属牌，上面铸有宗教人物像或图案，人们认为圣牌经教会宣福圣化后即具有灵效。

的帽檐。我对他一笑，他就哭了起来。有间棚屋里一个女人喊了一声，他就跑掉了，嘴里还在嚎哭。

另外两个男孩也跟着慢慢走掉了，边走还边回头看了好几回。

仿佛这是个暗号似的，第二个女人也在家门口露了脸，一会儿第三个也露了脸。

“是卡罗啊，”安托瓦内特说，“准是卡罗。卡罗莉娜，”她一边叫一边招手，那女人也向她招手。只见一个身穿鲜艳花衣服的俗气老婆子，包着一条条纹头巾，戴着金耳环。

“你身上要湿透了，安托瓦内特，”我说。

“不，雨快停了。”她提着骑装下摆，跑过街去。我苛求地仔细打量她。她戴一顶三角帽，显得很相称。至少遮住了眼睛，那双眼睛太大了，会叫人发窘。看来好像从来不眨眼。眼睛长长的，黑黑的，神色忧伤，目光异样。她可能是纯英国血统的克里奥耳人，不过眼睛既不是英国型的，也不是欧洲型的。可我几时开始注意到我妻子安托瓦内特的这一切的呢？我看是在离开西班牙镇以后吧。或许以前就注意到了，就是不肯承认眼见的这一切。倒不是说我有好多时间去注意什么。我到了牙买加一个月后就结婚了，竟有将近三个星期因为发高烧睡在床上。

站在棚屋门口的两个女人一边比手划脚，一边说话，说的不是英语，而是本岛通用的蹩脚法国腔土话。雨水开始顺着我脖颈儿往下掉，更使我感到不舒服和愁闷。

我心里考虑着一星期前就该写到英国去的家信。亲爱的父亲……

“卡罗莉娜问你要不要到她屋里去躲躲雨。”

说话的是安托瓦内特。她说话支支吾吾的，仿佛希望我回绝，所以要回绝并不难。

“可你要淋湿了，”她说。

“湿我倒不在乎，”我对卡罗莉娜笑笑，摇摇头。

“她会很失望的，”我妻子说着又过了街，走进黑沉沉的棚屋。

阿梅莉原来一直背对我们坐着，这时转过身来。她的神情十足是幸灾乐祸，机灵得很，尤其是那么亲昵，我都感到不好意思，只好转过脸去看别处。

“算了，”我心想，“我刚发过高烧。身子还不舒服呢。”

雨下得不那么大了，我就走过去跟搬运夫聊天。头一个不是本岛人。“这地方荒凉得很——没有开化呢。你干吗上这儿来？”他告诉我他名叫牛犊，今年二十七岁。身体魁伟，一脸自以为是的蠢相。还有一个名叫埃米尔，而且，他是生在这村子里的，就住在这儿。“问问他几岁了，”牛犊提出道。埃米尔用询问的口气说：“十四岁吧？对，我活了十四年了，少爷。”

“不可能，”我说。我都看得见他稀稀拉拉的胡子中有几茎白须了。

“没准儿是五十六岁吧，”他似乎急于想讨好我。

牛犊大声笑了。“他不知道自己有多大年纪，他根本不去想它。说真的，先生，这些人不开化。”

埃米尔低声说：“我母亲知道的，可她死了。”说着他拿出一块破蓝布，盘成个垫圈放在头上。

多半女人都站在家门口看着我们，只是毫无笑容。阴阳怪气的地方，阴阳怪气的人。有几个男人正往自己的小船走去。埃米尔叫了一声，有两个人就向他走过来了。他用深沉的嗓门唱起号子。他们应声抬起沉甸甸的柳条筐，一悠就把筐子搭在他头顶的垫圈上。他一手试试筐子是不是放稳了才迈步行走，光着脚踩在尖利的石头上，显然他是送亲的人中最快活的一个了。牛犊扛上东西时卖弄地朝我瞟了一眼，他也暗自用英语唱了起来。

小马倌把马牵到一块大石头那儿，我看见安托瓦内特正走出棚屋。太阳大放光芒，我们身后那片草地腾起一阵雾。阿梅莉脱了鞋，把鞋系在一起，挂在脖子上。她把头上的小篮

子放稳了，也像搬运夫一样轻松地甩开膀子走了。我们上了马，拐个弯，村子就看不见了。一只雄鸡啼声嘹亮，我想起了我们在镇上过夜的头天晚上。安托瓦内特独自睡一间房，她累垮了。我躺在床上睡不着，整夜听着鸡叫，于是早早起床，看见一个个女人头上顶着盖了白布的托盘走进厨房。一个是卖小热面包的女人，一个是卖糕饼的，一个是卖糖果的。街上还有个女人叫着 Bon sirop, Bon sirop^①，我感到安宁。

那条路一直往上。一边是绿树屏，另一边是直抵山下深谷的陡坡。我们勒住马，浏览一下群山和碧绿的藻海。虽然有温暖的和风吹拂，可是我明白了为什么搬运夫称这里是荒凉的地方。不但荒凉，而且险恶。那些山竟把你团团包围。

“真是绿极了，”我只说得这么一句，一面不禁想起埃米尔呼喊那些渔夫，想起他的嗓音，就打听起他来。

“他们抄近路。等我们走到格兰布瓦他们早就到了。”

一切都未免太过分了。我一边恹恹地骑着马跟在她后面，一边这么想。蓝的太蓝，紫的太紫，绿的太绿。花太红，大山太高，小山太近。而这个女人又是个陌生人。她那副求告的神情叫我看了就恼火。不是我买下她，是她买下我，或者她心里这么想着。我低头看着粗糙的马鬃……亲爱的父亲。三万英镑已交付给我，既无异议，也无条件。对方并未为她开列任何条款（那是必须保证办到的）。现在我有一份不算太厚的家产了。我再也不会给你丢脸，或给你偏爱的儿子、我的好哥哥丢脸了。再也不写信向你讨钱，再也不低声下气向你求援了。也不会做出一个小儿子那种见不得人的卑鄙勾当了。我出卖了自己的灵魂，也可以说你出卖了我的灵魂，说到头来，这笔买卖还不上算吗？据认为这姑娘长得美，倒是真美。不过……

① 法语：美味果子露，美味果子露。

这时两匹马慢慢在一条很难走的路上颠着。气候渐渐凉快了。一只鸟尖声鸣叫，鸣声悠长凄厉。“这是什么鸟？”她远远走在前面，听不见我。那鸟又叫了。是只山鸟。鸣声尖厉悦耳。声音怪孤寂的。

她停下来叫道：“快穿上外衣。”我就穿上了，虽然再也体会不到舒畅的凉意，但是汗湿的衬衫反而使我感到冷。

我们又骑马上路了，在斜阳下大家默默无言，一边是树屏，另一边是陡坡。此刻只见一片宁静的碧海，深邃而神秘。

我们来到一条小河。“这里是格兰布瓦的地界。”她对我一笑。这是我头一回看到她笑得这么单纯自然。或许也是我头一回感到在她身边这么单纯自然。崖边冒出一只竹笋，从那儿流出来的水碧蓝中透着银光。她赶快下马，摘下一片白花酢浆草形状的叶子做了个杯子喝水。接着又摘下一片叶子，折成杯子盛了水递给我。“尝尝。这是山水。”她含笑仰起头来，她本来倒是个一般的漂亮英国姑娘，为了让她高兴，我喝了。这水冰凉，清澈香甜，衬着厚厚的绿叶，颜色真美。

她说：“喝了我们就下山，然后再上山就到了。”

接下来她又说：“这里的土是红的，你看到了吗？”

“英国有些地方的土也是红的。”

“英国啊英国，”她嘲弄地反复叫着，那声音在空中回荡，像我不愿听到的一个预兆。

不久来到一条鹅卵石路，我们在一段石阶前停下。左边有一棵高大的露兜树，右边有一座看上去像仿英国式的凉亭——四根木柱子，一个茅草屋顶。她下了马，跑上台阶。上面是一片修剪得马马虎虎、乱七八糟的草坪，草坪尽头那边是一幢破旧的白房子。“你到格兰布瓦了。”我望着衬托在碧空下那紫红色的群山。

房子高高坐落在木桩柱上，似乎要避开后面的森林，伸长脖子一心想把头探向远处的大海。这房子要说难看，倒不如说是看着别扭，有点丧气相，好像自知寿命不长。一群黑人正

站在阳台台阶脚边。安托瓦内特跑过草坪,我跟在她后面,同迎面跑来的一个男孩相撞。他眼睛骨碌碌直转,神色惊恐,没赔个不是就径直往马跟前跑去。一个男人的声音说:“赶快,赶快。赶紧啊。”一起有四个人。一个女人,一个姑娘,还有一个高大威严的男人。安托瓦内特正双臂搂住另一个女人站着。“差点把你撞倒的那个叫贝特朗。那个是罗斯,那个是伊尔达。这个是巴蒂斯特。”

她一一介绍时,这些仆人羞怯地咧着嘴笑。

“这是克里斯托芬,老早以前是我的 da^①,我的奶妈。”

巴蒂斯特说今天是喜日,还说我们会带来好天气。他说一口好英语,不过他的欢迎辞说到一半,伊尔达就格格笑了起来。她是个约莫十二三岁的小姑娘,穿着一件刚齐膝盖的无袖白连衣裙。衣服虽然一尘不染,可是头发没包,尽管搽了油,编成好多辫子,还是显得一副野相。巴蒂斯特对她皱着眉头,可她笑得更响了,然后才用手捂住嘴,走上木台阶进屋了。我听得见她光脚在阳台上跑的声音。

“Doudou, ché cocotte,^②”上了年纪的那女人对安托瓦内特说。我顿时留神看着她,但她看上去貌不惊人。她长得比大多数黑人更黑,她的衣服,甚至包头布都显得色调暗淡。她沉着地看着我,我想那眼光并无半点赞成之意。我们互相盯着,足有好一会儿。我先掉转眼光,她暗自笑着,轻轻把安托瓦内特往前一推,就在屋后的阴影里不见了。其他仆人都走掉了。

我站在阳台上,呼吸着芳香的空气。我闻得到丁香、肉桂、玫瑰和桔子花的香味。一股令人陶醉的清新,似乎这一切我以前都从没呼吸到过。安托瓦内特说:“来,我带你看看房子,”我勉强跟她走了,别的地方都似乎没人照管,一片荒凉。她领我走进一间没油漆过的大房间。房里有一只破旧的小沙

① da 疑系克里奥耳人土话中的“奶妈”。

② 克里奥耳人通用的法国腔土话:心肝儿,小宝贝儿。

发,当中是一张红木桌,几把直背椅,一只旧橡木五斗橱,铜树脚做得像狮爪子。

她拉着我的手走到餐具柜前,那儿有两杯朗姆混合酒^①等着我们。她递给我一杯说:“为幸福干杯。”

“为幸福干杯,”我答道。

那边一间房更大更空。房里有两扇门,一扇通阳台,另一扇微开着一道缝,通里面的小房间。一张大床,床边一张圆桌,两把椅子,一张不同寻常的梳妆台,上面有大理石台面和大镜子。床上搁着两个鸡蛋花做的花环。

“我要不要戴上一个花环?几时戴?”

我在头上戴了一个花环,对镜做了个怪脸。“我看简直配不上我这张漂亮脸蛋吧?”

“你看上去像个国王,像个皇帝。”

“哪有这么回事?”我说着摘下花环。花环掉在地上,我朝窗口走去时踩在花环上。房间里洋溢着一股踩碎的花香。我在镜子里看见她正拿着一把边上染成红蓝两色的小芭蕉扇在扇风。我感到额上冒汗就坐了下来,她跪在我身边,拿她的手绢替我擦汗。

“你不喜欢这里吗?这是我的地方,这里一切都是站在我们这一边的。过去啊,”她说,“我常常身边带着根木棍睡觉,这样要是有人侵害我,我就可以自卫。过去我就是怕成这样。”

“怕什么?”

她摇摇头。“不怕什么,什么都怕。”

有人敲门,她说:“只是克里斯托芬罢了。”

“就是做过你奶妈的那老婆子?你怕她吗?”

“不,我怎会怕她呢?”

① 朗姆混合酒是用朗姆酒(甘蔗汁制成的甜酒)加上水、柠檬和香料混合而成的饮料。

“如果她个子高一点儿,”我说,“又是一个高头大马,穿着非常考究的女人,我或许见她怕。”

她听了大笑。“那扇门通到你的梳妆室。”

我进去随手轻轻关上门。

屋子里其他地方都空荡荡的,这里就显得挤了。房间里有块地毯,这是我在整个屋里看到的仅有一块地毯,还有一只用我不认识的漂亮木材做的壁橱。在敞开的窗下有一张小书桌,备有纸、笔和墨水。“是个避风的地方,”我正在这么想着听得有人说,“这里原是梅森先生的房间,先生,不过他并不常来这里。他不喜欢这地方。”巴蒂斯特正站在通阳台的门口,臂上搭着一条毯子。

“舒服倒是蛮舒服的,”我说。他把毯子放在床上。

“这里晚上有时很冷,”他说。说着就走开了。可我没有了安全感。我疑神疑鬼地四下看看。她的房门可以上门闩,用根粗木闩从这头插到那头。这是屋子里最后一间房。阳台的木台阶通到另一片乱七八糟的草坪,台阶边长着一棵酸橙树。我回到梳妆室里,望着窗外。我看见一条泥土路,有几处一片泥泞,路边种着一排高高的树木。路那边有好几个外屋,隐隐约约的。一间是厨房。没有烟囱,只见炊烟从窗里往外直冒。我坐在狭窄的软床上倾听着。除了河水声,什么声音都听不到。说不定屋里只有我一个人吧。书桌上有一个用三块木瓦片搭起来的粗陋书架,我看看架上的书,有拜伦^①的诗集,有沃尔特·司各特爵士^②的几本小说,《吸鸦片者自白》,^③还有几本

① 拜伦(1788—1824):英国诗人,出身没落贵族家庭,追求民主,在投身希腊民族独立战争中死去。代表作有长诗《哈罗德游记》、《唐璜》等。

② 沃尔特·司各特(1771—1832):英国小说家,诗人,历史小说首创者,主要作品有《威弗利》、《艾凡赫》等。

③ 《吸鸦片者自白》是英国作家德昆西(1785—1859)的作品(1892年出版)。

破旧的棕色封面的书，最后一个架上有本《……传记及书信》，书名其余字迹都蛀蚀掉了。

亲爱的父亲：折腾了几天以后，我们从牙买加总算到了这里。向风群岛这个小小的庄园是安托瓦为特家的一部分房地产，她对此眷恋不舍。她希望尽快赶到这里来。一切都按照你的计划和希望，进展顺利。我当然是司理查·梅森打的交道。你大概也知道，我动身来西印度群岛后不久，他父亲就去世了。他是个好人，亲切好客；他似乎跟我很投缘，对我完全信任。这地方很美，可是我大病初愈，身心交瘁，还未能尽情欣赏。过几天再给你写信。

我把信再看了一遍，又加了段附笔：

我想我已有多日未向你奉告任何消息，因为仅仅宣称婚期在即算不得消息。我到西班牙镇后就发了高烧，一病就是两星期。幸无大碍，只是感到很苦恼。我住在弗雷泽家，他家是梅森家的朋友。弗雷泽先生是个英国人，一个退休的地方法官，他硬要把他审理的案子详尽对我细述一番，令人难以有条有理地思考或下笔。在这个叫格兰布瓦（疑为乔木林之意）的凉快的僻静地方，我已经感觉到好多了，下回写信一定写得长些，写得明白些。

凉快的僻静地方……我真不知道人家怎么寄信的。我把信折好，放进书桌一个抽屉里。

至于我脑子里那些混乱的印象是决不会形诸笔墨的。我脑子里有好些无可弥补的空白。

*

色彩倒是非常鲜艳，非常奇特，可是对我毫无意义。就连

她，我要娶的姑娘，对我也毫无意义。我终于同她见面那会儿，我鞠躬，微笑，亲她的手，跟她跳舞。我扮演大家期望我扮演的角色。她同我根本没有什么关系。我一举一动都是勉强做出来的，有时我真奇怪，居然没人看出这点来。我总是听着自己的说话声，而感到惊讶的是这声音竟如此沉着、得体，不过确实也很单调。可是我的表演一定是完美无缺。要说我在什么人脸上看到怀疑或好奇的神情，准是在黑人脸上，不是在白人脸上。

婚礼仪式实况我记不大清了。只记得四壁都是大理石纪念碑，纪念上一辈种植园主的美德。全是行善积德的。全是奴隶主。全都安息长眠了。我们走出教堂时我握着她的手。火辣辣的太阳下这手却冰凉。

后来我在一间挤满了人的房间里一张长桌边落座。芭蕉扇，一帮子仆人，女人头上红黄条纹的包头巾，男人乌黑的脸。混合酒浓郁的香味，香槟酒较为清醇的香味，我的新娘一身白礼服，可是我简直记不得她是什么模样的了。另一间房间里都是穿黑衣服的女人。堂姐朱莉娅，堂姐艾达，姑妈莉娜。不管胖瘦，她们看上去反正都一个样儿。扎了孔的耳朵挂着金耳环。手腕上套着的银手镯丁零当郎响。我对其中一个说：“我们今夜要离开牙买加。”稍停片刻她答道：“那当然，安托瓦内特不喜欢西班牙镇。她母亲也不喜欢。”她一边细细盯着我。（难道她们年纪越大，眼睛越小吗？越长越小，越像小珠子，越爱打听人家闲事？）从此我觉得在她们脸上都有同样的表情。好奇呢？还是同情呢？还是嘲笑呢？可她们为什么要同情我啊，同情我这个如此一帆风顺的人？

婚礼前一天早上，我正喝完第一杯咖啡，理查·梅森一头冲进弗雷泽家我住的那间房里。“她不愿奉陪了！”

“不愿奉陪什么啊？”

“她不愿嫁给你了。”

“可为什么啊？”

“她没说为什么。”

“她总得有什么理由啊。”

“她不愿说理由。我跟这小笨蛋一直争论了一个钟头。”

我们面面相觑。

“万事具备了，礼物啊，请帖啊。我怎么向你父亲交待啊？”他似乎快哭了。

我说：“她不愿意也只好让她去了。总不能把她硬拉到圣坛前去成婚。让我穿好衣服。我必须听听她有什么话要说的。”

他乖乖走了出去，我一边穿衣服，一边想，这一来真要叫我出丑了。我可不喜欢充当遭到这个克里奥耳姑娘抛弃的失意求婚者的角色回到英国去。我一定要弄清原因。

她正低着头坐在摇椅里。头发梳成两条长辫，甩在肩后。我在相距不远的地方轻声说：“安托瓦内特，怎么回事啊？我哪儿不对啊？”

她一言不发。

“你不愿意嫁给我了？”

“对。”她说话嗓门很低。

“可为什么啊？”

“我怕会出什么事。”

“可你难道不记得昨晚我跟你说过了，一旦你成为我妻子，就再也没什么缘故好害怕的了？”

“是啊，”她说。“那时理查进来，你笑了。我不喜欢你笑的那副样子。”

“可我是在笑我自己啊，安托瓦内特。”

她看着我，我把她搂在怀里，吻她。

“你对我一点也不了解，”她说。

“你要是信任我，我也信任你。就这么讲定了？你要是不跟我讲明我哪儿得罪了你，你就打发我走，那就会害得我很痛苦。我会怀着一颗忧伤的心离开你。”

“你怀着一颗忧伤的心，”她说，摸着我的脸。我热情地吻她，保证给她安宁、幸福和平安，可当我问她：“我能跟可怜的理查说这是个误会吗？他也很伤心呢。”她却没回答我。只是点点头。

*

我回想起这一切，想起理查愤怒的脸色，她说话的声音：“你能给我安宁吗？”想着想着，一定是睡着了。

我一觉醒来听到隔壁房间里有说话声，有笑声，还有倒水声。我仔细听着，一边仍然昏昏欲睡。安托瓦内特说：“别再在头发上洒香水了。他不喜欢香水。”另一个说：“男人不喜欢香水？我从没听说过。”天差不多黑了。

餐厅里倒灯火辉煌。餐桌上点着蜡烛，餐具柜上也点着一排蜡烛，那个旧的水手柜上又有一个三枝叉形烛台。两扇阳台门敞开着，但一点儿风也没有。蜡烛火苗烧得笔直。她正坐在沙发上，我不知道自己为什么从来没有领会到她有多么美。她的头发从脸上往后梳开，柔滑地披垂到腰下。我看得见她头发里闪着红光和金光。我夸她穿上这身衣服好看，她听了似乎很高兴，告诉我说这是她在马提尼克岛的圣比埃尔^①定做的。“据说这款式叫 à la Joséphine^②。”

“你谈起圣比埃尔的口气就像那里是巴黎似的，”我说。

“不过那里倒是西印度群岛的巴黎呢。”

桌上放着蔓生的粉红色花儿，花名悦耳，在我脑际回荡。科拉丽塔，科拉丽塔。吃的东西虽然调味浓得不得了，比起我在牙买加吃过的任何东西来可清淡些了，也更配胃口了。我们喝了香槟酒。大批大批飞蛾和小甲虫纷纷钻进了房间，飞

① 圣比埃尔：西印度群岛东南部马提尼克岛的港口，18—19世纪是繁荣的商业和文化艺术中心。

② 法语：约瑟芬式。

扑到蜡烛上，烧死了掉在桌布上。阿梅莉用一把扫桌面的刷子把这些虫子扫掉。没有用。又有更多的飞蛾和小甲虫飞来了。

“英国当真像个梦吗？”她说，“因为我有一个嫁给英国人的朋友写信这么告诉我。她说伦敦这地方有时像个冰冷而黑暗的梦。我要醒过来。”

“得了吧，”我恼了，回答道，“依我看来，你那美丽的小岛才十足是假的，像个梦呢。”

“可是河、山、海洋，怎会是假的呢？”

“那么几百万人以及他们的房屋和街道，又怎会是假的呢？”

“那更不用说啦，”她说，“更不用多说了。不错，大城市一定像个梦。”

“不，这地方才虚幻如梦呢，”我心想。

长长的阳台上摆着几张帆布椅，两张吊床，还有一张木桌，桌上架着一台有三脚架的望远镜。阿梅莉端出罩着玻璃罩的蜡烛，可是夜色把微弱的烛光笼罩了。只闻得一股馥郁的花香——她告诉我说这是河边长的花，到了晚上才开放——又听得一片震耳欲聋的噪声，这声音在里屋听起来还不小。“是秧鸡在叫，”她解释道，“叫声就像它的名称，^①还有蟋蟀和青蛙也在叫。”

我倚靠在栏杆上，看见千百只萤火虫，“啊，对了，牙买加的萤火虫，当地人叫萤火虫做 *La belle* ^②。”

一只偌大的飞蛾，那么大的个儿，我还当做是鸟呢，一头撞到一支蜡烛上，把火灭了，掉在地上。“真是大个儿。”我说。

① 秧鸡在英文中为 *crake*，又作 *crac*，音译为“呱呱”。按秧鸡形状如鸡，嘴较长，尾短，背部灰褐色，有斑纹。生长在沼泽和水田，叫声“呱呱呱呱”，故名。

② 法语：美人儿。

“烧得厉害吗？”

“伤倒没怎么伤着，就是撞昏了。”

我把这只美丽的昆虫捡起来放在手绢里，搁在栏杆上。这虫一动不动，呆了一会儿，在昏暗的烛光下我看得见双翅上柔和斑斓的色彩，繁复的图案。我轻轻抖动手绢，这虫就飞走了。

“但愿那位花花公子太平无事，”我说。

“我们要不把蜡烛灭了，这虫还会再来的。有星星就够亮的了。”

星光果然灿烂之极，照得一地都是阳台柱子和外面树木的影子。

“来，去散散步吧，”她说，“我来给你讲个故事。”

我们从阳台上一路走到通往草坪的台阶。

“过去六、七、八这三个月里，我们常来这里避暑。我跟正在生病的柯拉姨妈来过三回。那是接着……”她住了口，把手按在头上。

“假如讲的是个伤心事，今晚就别跟我讲了。”

“不是伤心事，”她说，“只是有些事，事过境迁，尽管你忘了是什么原因，忘了是什么时候，这事还总是忘不了。就在那间小卧室里。”

我朝她指的地方看去，只见一张狭窄的床和一两把椅子的外形。

“我还记得这天晚上天很热。窗子都关着，可我叫克里斯托芬把窗子打开，因为晚间山上有微风吹来。是陆风。不是海风。天热得够呛，我睡衣都贴在身上，可我照样睡觉。突然间我醒过来。只见两只特大的老鼠，都像猫那么大，就在窗台上死盯着我。”

“怪不得你心里害怕了。”

“可我心里并不害怕。怪就怪在这里。我死盯着它们，它们就是不动。我在房间那边的镜子里看见自己，穿着一件花

边领圈的白睡衣，死盯着那两只老鼠，两只老鼠一动不动，也死盯着我。”

“那么，后来怎么样？”

“我翻个身，拉上被单，顿时又睡着了。”

“这就是你要讲的故事吗？”

“不是，突然间我又像头一回那样醒过来，虽然老鼠不在了，可是我心里反而非常害怕了。我赶快起床，跑到阳台上。我在这张吊床上躺下。就是这张。”她指指一张平展的吊床，四角都用绳系住。

“那天晚上一轮满月——我对月欣赏了老半天。没有浮云追月，所以看上去月亮一动不动，一直照着我。第二天早上，克里斯托芬发火了。她说，满月时分睡在月光下很不利。^①”

“你没告诉她老鼠的事吗？”

“是啊，至今我还没告诉过任何人呢。可我始终忘不了。”

我想说几句宽慰她的话，可是河边那些花的香味太冲了。我感到晕乎乎的。

“你是不是也有这个看法，”她说，“认为我在月光下睡得太久了？”

她嘴边凝起一丝笑意，只是眼神却那么落落寡合，凄凉寂寞，我看了不禁张开双臂搂住她，当她是孩子似的摇着她，给她唱歌。一支我原以为早忘掉了的歌：

“向静夜的女神^②高呼，

趁月光未暗，请你把罗宾照亮，照亮。”

她听着，随即跟我一起唱着：

① 西方有些人认为发疯是受月光影响。

② 指月神戴安娜。

“趁月光未暗，请你把罗宾照亮，照亮。”

屋子里一个人也没有，原先灯火辉煌的那间房里只点着两支蜡烛。她的房里暗沉沉的，床旁点着一支有罩子的蜡烛，梳妆台上也点着一支。圆桌上有一瓶酒。这时天已经很晚了，我斟了两杯酒，叫她为我们的幸福，为我们的爱情和前途无量的明天干杯。那时我还年轻。我的青春是短暂的。

第二天早上我在绿黄色的光线中醒来，只觉得心神不安，就像有人正在监视我似的。她一定醒了好一会儿了。她的头发梳成辫子，身上穿了一件干净的白色内衣。我翻过身来把她抱在怀里，我原想拆散她仔细编好的辫子，谁知我正拆着，就听得有人小心翼翼地轻轻敲门。

她说：“我把克里斯托芬打发掉两回了。我们这里起床都很早。早上是最好的时光。”

“进来吧，”她叫了一声，克里斯托芬端着放在托盘上的咖啡进来。她打扮得漂漂亮亮，仪表堂堂。她那身花连衣裙的裙摆拖在地上，一走动就沙沙响，她那条黄丝头巾扎得煞费苦心。又长又沉的金耳环把耳垂也坠下了。她含笑对我们道了早安，就把装着咖啡、木薯糕和番石榴果冻的托盘搁在圆桌上。我下床走进梳妆室里。有人已把我的晨衣放在那张狭窄的床上。我朝窗外看看。晴朗的天空比我想象中蓝得浅些，谁知正看着竟觉得看到的天色蓝得深些了。我知道到了晌午天空就会一片金黄，那时在高温下就会变成黄铜色。现在空气清新凉爽，天空碧蓝。我终于转过身来，离开这片亮光和空间，回到卧室里，卧室里依然半明半暗。安托瓦内特正闭着眼仰靠在枕头上。我一进屋她就睁开眼笑了。“少爷，尝尝我的牛血。”说这话的是她的贴身黑人女仆。她递给我的咖啡味道不错，她手指长，大概说得上是纤纤玉手吧。

“不是英国太太们喝的那种马尿，”她说。“我熟悉她们。径自喝啊喝的，喝她们的黄马尿，扯啊扯的，扯她们的鬼屁话。”她走到房门口去时，长裙拖在地上沙沙响。到了门口又转过身来。“我叫个丫头来收拾你们弄得一地的鸡蛋花，这花惹蟑螂进屋。小心别踩在花上滑一跤，少爷。”她悄悄走出房门。

“她煮的咖啡味道不错，只是满口粗话吓人，而且她该提起裙子走路，好长的裙摆拖在地板上一定弄得很脏。”

“她们表示尊敬才不提起裙子，”安托瓦内特说，“或是在节日期间，或是去望弥撒时才不提起裙子。”

“那么今天是节日吗？”

“她希望今天是个节日。”

“不管什么原因，这不是个干净的习惯。”

“是干净的习惯。你根本不懂。她们不在乎裙子弄脏，因为这表示这不是她仅有的一条裙子。你不喜欢克里斯托芬吗？”

“不用说，她是个非常好的人。我对她的脏话可说不上喜欢。”

“那些脏话没什么恶意，”安托瓦内特说。

“而且她一副懒相，磨磨蹭蹭的。”

“你又看错了。她看上去手脚慢，可是一举一动都恰到好处，所以结果还是快的。”

我又喝了一杯牛血。（牛血，我暗自想着。牛犊。）

“你们怎么把那张梳妆台搬上这里来的？”

“我不知道。从我记事起梳妆台就一直在这里了。好多家具都给偷走，就是这件没人偷。”

托盘上有两朵粉红色的玫瑰花，各自插在一个棕色的细颈小瓶里。一朵已经盛开了，我刚一摸，花瓣儿就掉了。

“Rose elle a vécu^①，”我说着哈哈大笑。“那首诗写得真

① 法语：玫瑰凋谢了。

实吗？天下红颜都薄命吗？”

“不，当然不是。”

她的小扇了放在桌上，她拿起扇了，一边笑着，往后一仰，闭上眼。“看来今天早上我不起床了。”

“不起床。索性不起床了吗？”

“等我想起床才起。你要知道我这人很懒。像克里斯托芬一样。我经常整天赖在床上。”她不住挥扇。“游泳池近得很。趁天还不热快去吧。巴蒂斯特会带你去的。有两个池子，一个我们叫做香槟酒池，因为那儿有个瀑布，要明白，不是人瀑布，不过瀑布泻到肩膀上真舒服。底下一个是豆蔻池，池水是棕色的，有一棵大豆蔻树遮荫。池子不算大，刚够游泳。不过要小心。别忘了把衣服放在大石块上，要先抖抖干净才重新穿上。找找有没有红蚂蚁，那是最厉害的。身子很小，通体鲜红，所以你要找的话，一眼就看得见了。要小心啊，”她说着挥挥那把小扇子。

我们到此不久，有一天早晨，我窗外那排高大的树木竟开满了淡色的小花，简直弱不禁风。不到一天就都落了，落在乱蓬蓬的野草上，看上去像雪——散发出淡淡幽香的雪。转眼间花瓣又给吹掉了。

好天气一直持续了多天。初来时那整个星期都是好天，接下来一连三四个星期也都是好天。没半点变天的迹象。高烧不退落下的虚弱症状消失了，一切疑虑也消失了。

我大清早就到游泳池去。一泡就是好几个小时，心里真不愿意离开那条河，那些遮荫的树和夜间开放的花。这些花的瓣儿紧紧合拢，骨朵儿低垂，在厚厚的叶子下躲避太阳。

这地方真美——荒凉，一片原始状态，首先是保持一片原始状态，带有一种异样的、令人不安的、神秘的美。这地方自有不可告人的秘密。我不觉想着：“我看到的都算不上什么——我要看的是隐藏着的实质——那才算得上什么呢。”

傍晚水温较高,她就同我一起游泳。她总是花些工夫往池子当中一块平展的石头上扔小石块。“我看见它了。它没死,也没到别的河里去。它还在那儿呢。陆栖蟹是不伤人的。人家说它们不伤人。我就是不喜欢——”

“我也不喜欢。这些怪物长相真可怕。”

她遇事总是优柔寡断,举棋不定——任何事都如此。当我问她,我们时常看见的蛇是不是毒蛇,她说:“那些不是毒蛇。fer de lance^①当然是有毒的,不过这里一条也没有,”接着又说:“可他们怎么拿得准呢?你看他们知道吗?”然后再说,“我们这儿的蛇不是毒蛇。当然不是。”

不过,她碰到巨蟹倒是很有主见了。一天下午我正看着她,简直没法相信她就是我要的那个脸色苍白,沉默寡言的人,眼看着她穿着蓝色内衣,蓝底白点的那件,衣摆一直撩到膝盖上面,她一下子不笑了,叫我留神,扔了一块大卵石。她扔石块的样子像男孩,动作稳健优美,我低下头朝长长的蟹螯看着,螯边像锯齿一般尖利,但转眼就不见了。

“如果你避开那块石头,它就不会撵你。它就住在那儿。啊,这是另外一种蟹,我不知道英语里叫什么。很大,很老。”

我们走回家时,我问她谁教她投得这么准。“哦,桑迪教我的。你从没见过的一个男孩。”

每天黄昏,我们都在那个茅草棚下看太阳下山,她把茅草棚称做 ajoupa,我称做凉亭。我们看着天空和远处的大海燃烧着——那片火光里色彩纷呈,大块大块的云朵周围闪射出火焰般的色彩。不过我不久就对这片景色厌倦了。我一心等着闻河边的花香——天一黑花就开,转眼天就黑了。谁知来的不是黑夜,而是星光灿烂的夜,一轮异样的月亮——到处一片奇特噪声的夜。可终究还是黑夜,不是白天。

① 法语:枪头蛇。又称矛头蛇。是一种产于美洲热带的剧毒大蛇。

“慰园的主人是个隐士，”她正说着。“他从不见任何人——据说，简直没说过话。”

“有个隐士做邻居倒挺对劲儿。真是太好了。”

“这岛上有四个隐士，”她说。“四个真正的隐士。别的隐士都是假冒的，雨季一到他们就走了。要不就是整天喝得烂醉。到那时就出惨事了。”

“原来这地方果然像给人的感觉一样荒凉？”我问她。

“是荒凉。你在这里过得快乐吗？”

“谁会不快乐啊？”

“我对这里比对世界上任何地方都爱。好像它是个人。超过一个人。”

“可你还没见过世面呢，”我逗她说。

“是啊，只见过这地方，当然还见过牙买加。库利布里，西班牙镇。我根本没见过别的岛屿。那么，世界是不是要美得多？”

这话叫人怎么回答呢？“不一样，”我说。

她告诉我，长期来他们都不知道格兰布瓦的情况。“梅森先生来的时候”（她总是把她继父叫做梅森先生）“森林都把这地方淹没了。”监工酗酒，房屋倒塌，所有的家具都被偷光，后来才找到了巴蒂斯特。是个管家。在圣基茨^①找到的，不过生在这个岛上，愿意回来。“他是个很好的监工，”她总是说，我也总是表示同意，却把自己对巴蒂斯特、克里斯托芬和其他仆人的看法放在心里。“巴蒂斯特说……克里斯托芬要……”

她信任他们，我可不信任。但我不便这么说。暂时还不便。

我们不大见到他们。厨房和忙忙碌碌的炊事活动离我们

^① 圣基茨：即圣克里斯托弗岛，西印度群岛背风群岛中圣基茨-尼维斯-安圭拉的主岛。1623年沦为英国的殖民地。

有一段路呢。至于钱嘛，她出手如此满不在乎，数也不数，也不知道自己给了多少，再说还有那些出出进进的陌生面孔，都是些姐妹啊，姑表亲姨表亲啊，姑妈姨妈啊叔伯舅舅啊，每回来总是大吃大喝一顿，她自己不过问，我怎么能过问呢？

屋子很早就打扫好了，通常那时我还没醒呢。伊尔达端来咖啡，托盘上总有两朵玫瑰花。有时她会孩子般的嫣然一笑，有时她会粗声大气地格格笑，把托盘砰的一声扔下就跑掉。

“傻小丫头，”我总这么说。

“不，不傻。她害臊。这里的姑娘都非常害臊。”

早餐后，从中午到晚餐这段时间都静悄悄的，晚餐开饭时间比英国的晚得多。我相信，这准是克里斯托芬的怪念头和新花招。饭后就没人打扰我们了。有时看到人家斜眼一瞥，或是心照不宣地偷眼一瞥，就让我心烦，不过为时不久了。“现在不到时候，”我总是这么想。“还没到呢。”

我夜里醒来常常碰到下雨，变幻无常的小阵雨，飘忽不定、活泼可爱的雨，时或静悄悄下着，无声无息，越下越响，越下越持久，越下越迅猛，雨声势不可当。然而每次听来都是音乐，一种我从来没听到过的音乐。

这时我总要在烛光下久久望着她，心里想知道为什么她睡着时看上去这么忧伤，咒骂自己发了这场高烧，咒骂自己处处小心，才弄得自己如此有眼无珠，如此软弱无能，如此优柔寡断。我总不由想起她力图摆脱我。（不，对不起，我不想嫁给你。）她是听了理查那家伙一番大道理，大概还是一番恐吓才让步的呢？还是听了我那番真真假假的甜言蜜语和信誓旦旦才让步的呢？我对理查那家伙可不大信任。不管怎么样，她总是让了步，只是态度冷淡，不情不愿，一边还想以缄默不语、脸无表情来保护自己。不堪一击的武器，既对她起不了多大作用，又对她起不了多久作用。要是说我已忘了处处小心，那她早忘了缄默和冷淡了。

我要不要把她叫醒,听听她在黑暗中悄声说的话。不是白天说的那番话。

“我认识你以前根本就不想活。我老想死了倒干净。等了这么久才算熬到头。”

“你有没有跟谁讲过这事?”

“没人可讲,没人会听。你真无法想象库利布里是什么个地方啊。”

“那离开库利布里之后呢?”

“离开库利布里之后可太晚了。我没什么改变。”

到了白天她就整日同其他任何姑娘一样了,对着镜子里的自己笑(你喜欢这种香水吗?),还想教我唱她唱的歌,因为这些歌经常盘旋在我脑海中。

Adieu foulard, adieu madras,^① 或是 Ma belle ka di maman li^②。我的美人儿对她妈妈说(不,不是那样唱的。听着。是这样唱的)。有时她一言不发,有时无端发火,有时用土话跟克里斯托芬闲聊。

“你对克里斯托芬为什么又搂又吻的?”我有时问。

“为什么不好?”

“我决不会对她们又搂又吻的,”我有时说,“我做不到。”

她一听这话就笑上半天,也不告诉我为什么发笑。

可是一到夜里情况就大不同了,连说话嗓音也变了。谈来谈去总是谈到死。(难道她想告诉我说死就是这地方的秘密?没有别的路好走了?她知道的。她知道的。)

“你为什么使我又想活下去了?你为什么对我这么做?”

“因为我希望你活下去。难道这还不够吗?”

“不,够了。可是一旦你不希望我活下去了,那我该怎么办呢?万一你趁我不备,夺走了我这幸福……”

① 法语:再见,软绸头巾,再见,马德拉斯丝头巾。

② 法语:我的美人儿对她妈妈说。

“同时丢掉自己的幸福？谁会这么傻啊？”

“我对幸福还不习惯，”她说。“叫我心里害怕。”

“决不要害怕。怕也不要告诉人。”

“我明白。不过试试也没用。”

“那什么有用？”她没回答这话，后来有天夜里，她悄声说，“现在，趁我还感到幸福。如果我死得了。你愿意这样做吗？你用不着杀我。只要说声死吧，我就死了。你不信我说的？那试试吧，试试吧，说声死吧，我就死给你看。”

“那就死吧！死啊！”我多次眼看着她死去。不过是按我的想法，不是按她的想法。在阳光下，在阴影里，在月光下，在烛光下。在漫长的午后屋里空空荡荡这段时光里。只有太阳陪伴我们。我们把太阳关在门外。为什么不啊？很快——一下子她就同我一样渴望着所谓做爱——事后她总是更忘乎所以，沉湎其中。

她说：“在这儿我爱怎么做就怎么做，”可我做不到，后来也跟着这么说了。在那样一个荒凉的地方这似乎理所当然。“在这儿我爱怎么做就怎么做。”

我们外出时难得碰到什么人。碰到了人，人家也只是打个招呼就再走他们的路。

我对这些山民渐渐喜欢起来了，他们不爱讲话，不露声色，不低声下气，不刨根问底（依我看来是这样）。我竟然不知道他们斜眼一瞟就把他们要看的一切都看在眼里了。

到了夜晚我才感到危险，一心想要忘掉危险，避开危险。

“你平安无事，”我总是说。她喜欢这样——喜欢听人跟她说“你平安无事”。有时我总是轻轻摸摸她的脸，摸摸她的眼泪。眼泪——算不得什么。言语——更算不得什么。至于我给过她的那份幸福，那就压根儿算不得什么。我并不爱她。我渴望得到她，可那不是爱。我对她没几分温情，她在我心目中是个陌生人，是个思想感情方式跟我那套方式不同的陌生人。

一天午后，我看见她扔在卧室地板上的一件连衣裙，竟使我感到气喘吁吁，欲火中烧。等我精疲力竭之后，就翻过身去，背对她睡着了，嘴里还是一句话也不说，也没一点爱抚的表示。我一觉醒来她正在吻我——轻柔的吻。“天晚了，”她说着一笑。“你得让我给你盖上点什么——陆风可能冷。”

“那你呢？你不冷吗？”

“哦，我马上就好了。今晚我要穿上你喜欢的那件衣服。”

“好的，一定要穿那件。”

地板上扔满了衣服，有她的，也有我的。她走到衣柜前时就随随便便踩在衣服上面。“我正在想，我要再做一件跟这件同式同样的衣服，”她乐滋滋地答应说，“你喜欢不喜欢？”

“非常喜欢。”

要说她是个孩子吧，倒不是个笨孩子，而是个倔孩子。她时常问我有关英国的情况，留神听我的回答，不过我相信我说的话没一句起什么大作用。她的看法已经定型了。一些浪漫色彩的小说，偶尔听到便牢记不忘的片言只语，一幅素描，一幅画，一支歌，一支圆舞曲，某个音乐调子，她的观念就确定了。对英国的观念，对欧洲的观念。我改变不了她的观念，大概什么也改变不了她的观念吧。现实可能使她心烦意乱，迷惑不解，痛苦失望，可是她并不会当作现实。她只当成是个误会，是场灾祸，是条走错的路，她那定型的观念决不会改变。

我对她说的一切根本丝毫都影响不了她。

那就去死吧。睡吧。我只能给你这一些了……不知她有没有想到过自己差点儿就要死了。按她的想法，不是按我的想法。这个危险游戏可玩不得——在那样一个地方真玩不得。在黑暗中，欲望、仇恨、生、死都近在眼前。最好不知道有多近。最好别想，一刹那也别想。并不近啊。反正……“你平安无事，”我对她对己总是这样说，“闭上眼，休息吧。”

于是我就听着雨声，一首似乎没完没了奏着的催眠曲……雨，没完没了下着。把我送进了梦乡。而且是一下子工

夫。

第二天早晨总是看不大到下过阵雨的样子。就算有几朵花给打落了,另外几朵花反而香味更芬芳,天空更加蓝莹莹,一片清新气息。只是我窗外的泥土路泥泞不堪。浅浅的小水坑在烈日下闪闪发亮,红土没那么快就干。

*

“这是今天一早给你送来的,少爷,”阿梅莉说,“伊尔达收下的。”她交给我一个厚厚的信封,信封上的姓名地址笔迹工整仔细。信封角上写着:“专递、急件”。

“邻居一个隐士寄来的,”我心里想。“里面的信是给安托瓦内特的。”这时我看见巴蒂斯特正站在阳台台阶附近,就把信放在口袋里,过后也就忘了。

那天早晨我比往常起得晚,我穿好衣服,坐了老半天,一直倾听着瀑布的飞泻声,眼睛半开半闭,昏昏欲睡,怡然自得。我伸手到口袋里掏表,摸到了信封就拆开看了。

亲爱的先生:我左思右想,考虑再三,但最后还是认为说真话总比说假话好,这才拿起笔来。我要说的是这么回事:你受了梅森家可耻的欺骗了。他们也许对你说你妻子姓科斯韦,那位英国绅士梅森先生只是她的继父,可是他们没对你说科斯韦家这些人是哪种样人。他们家世代代都是刻毒可恶的奴隶主——而且牙买加人人都痛恨他们,在这个美丽的岛上,也是人人都痛恨他们。尽管如此,我还是希望你在这里多住一段日子,过得愉快,因为有些事不值得引以为憾。最可怕的倒不是刻毒。那家人都有疯病。老科斯韦就是跟他父亲同样发疯而死的。

你问我有什么证据,为什么要卷进你们的私事里。我就来回答你。我是你妻子的同父异母兄弟,照我们的话说是半同胞手足吧。我和她两人的父亲是个无耻败类,我是他所有

的私生子中最不幸，最穷困的一个。

我妈妈死的时候，我还很小，我教母照管我。老先生尽管不喜欢我，也只好拿出点钱来抚养我。是啊，那老鬼根本就不喜欢我，我长大点儿了以后就看出了这点，我就想，让他等着瞧吧，我总有这么一天会出头的。向上了些年纪的人打听打听他那些令人厌恶的行为吧，先生，有些人会记得的。

这个无赖的太太死后不久，他马上又再娶了，娶的是一个马提尼克岛的少女——他哪儿应付得了啊。他从早到晚喝得烂醉，疯病发作，咒骂一通就死了。

后来值得称颂的解放奴隶法案颁布了，有些贵人老爷的麻烦也就来了。没人愿意替那个少奶奶和两个孩子干活了，库利布里那地方很快就荒芜了，这一带如果没人卖命干活就都这样荒掉了。她既没有钱，又没有朋友，因为长期以来，岛上的法国人和英国人整天争吵不休。开枪，杀人，样样都有。

那个叫克里斯托芬的女人也是从马提尼克岛来的，就一直陪着她，还有戈弗雷那个老头儿，他们都蠢极了，不知道世道变了。有些人就这样。科斯韦这个少奶奶娇生惯养，百无一用，连一抬手的事都不会自己做，不久，所有这些白种克里奥耳人身上都有的疯病，在她身上也发作了。她把自己关起来，四周没人就径自大笑，自言自语，这点很多人可以作证。至于安托瓦内特那个小姑娘呢，刚会走路见了人就躲。

我们都等着听那女人跳崖的消息。按我们这里说法是“fini batt'e”^①，意思就是“不抵抗了”。

谁知没有跳崖。她再嫁给梅森先生这位英国财主，对那件事我倒有很大的发言权，不过你不会相信，所以我还是少说为妙。他们说他们十二万分爱她，要是这天下是他的，他也会牵送给她——可是没用。

她的疯病越发越厉害，只得把她关起来，因为她竟想杀死

^① 克里奥耳人通用的法国腔土话：不抵抗了。

自己丈夫——也不能全怪是疾病的缘故。

这就是你妻子的母亲，先生——那就是她的父亲。我离开了牙买加。我不知道那女人后来怎么样。有人说她死了，也有人说没死。不过老梅森对安托瓦内特那姑娘倒是非常疼爱，临死前把一半家财都给了她。

至于我呢，我到处流浪，算不上走运，只是攒了一点钱，我开始打听到这岛上大屠杀村附近有幢房子出售。价钱很便宜，我就买下了。消息竟然也传到这个荒凉的地方来，随后我就听到牙买加传来消息说，老梅森死了，那份人家打算把那姑娘嫁给一个对她毫不知情的年轻英国人。于是我觉得自己作为基督教徒，有责任警告这位先生，这个姑娘继承了父母双方身上的坏血统，是不应该结婚的。不过人家是白人，我是有色人。人家有钱，我穷。正当我考虑着这些事，他们竟趁你住在地方官家里高烧未退，身体还很虚弱，未能提出询问之前，赶快把这事办了。这事是真是假，你本人一定清楚。

后来你就来到这岛上度蜜月，这确实是天意让我承担这个责任，指定我必须向你说出真相。不过我还犹豫不决。

我听说你年少英俊，不管对黑人、白人，还是有色人，你都一视同仁，说话很恳切。不过我也听说，你娶的那姑娘长得像她母亲一样美，你给她迷住了。她跟你日夜厮守。骨肉相连，不可分离。不过你是个体面人，自然很明白婚姻必需具备的远远不止这一些。而这一些是长不了的。老梅森给她母亲迷得神魂颠倒，瞧他落得个什么下场呢？先生，我祈望我现在这时候告诫你该怎么办是及时的。

先生，你问问自己吧，我怎么编得出这套鬼话来呢，凭什么呢？我离开牙买加时，看书写字算账都会一点儿。巴巴多斯那位好心人又教会我一些，他送给我书，他叫我每天念《圣经》，我没费多大工夫就学到了知识。他对我头脑这么聪明感到很惊讶。不过我仍然是个没什么学识的人，这一套话可不是我瞎编的。我编不出。这是实话。

我坐在窗前，这些词句就像鸟儿般在我眼前飞过——多亏上帝保佑，我抓住一些。

这封信花了我一星期工夫。我晚上尽想着该怎么说，想得睡不着觉。现在我很快就要结束这封信，完成我的使命了。

你还是不相信我吗？那就去问问理查·梅森那鬼家伙三个问题，要他回答你。你妻子的母亲是不是给关了起来的武疯子，而且病情越来越重？不过是死是活我不知道。

你妻子的弟弟是不是一生下来就是个白痴，不过上帝慈悲早已收留他了。

你妻子本人是不是在走她母亲的老路，而且大家都知道这事？

理查·梅森是个狡猾家伙，他会给你扯上一大串库利布里的奇谈怪事，还有这个那个的，我们这里都称之为假话。别听。要他回答——是真是假。

如果他闭口不谈，那就问问别人，因为不少人认为那家人如此待你和你的亲属实在可耻。

先生，我请求你来见见我，因为还有好多事该让你知道。不过我的手痛了，头也痛了，为了我给你带来的痛苦，我的心也像块石头。有钱固然是好事，可是钱也抵偿不了弄个疯老婆跟你同床啊。何止于疯，而且情况越来越严重呢。

搁笔前我向你提出一个最后的请求。赶快来见我。

你的恭顺的仆人丹尼尔·科斯韦上可向阿梅莉那姑娘打听一下我的住处。她知道的，她认识我。她是本岛人。

我仔细折好信，放进了口袋。我并不感到惊讶。似乎一切都不出我所料，我一直在等着这事。我坐着倾听了一阵子河水声，听了多久我也不知道。最后我终于站起身来，这会儿太阳让人感到热了。我僵硬地走着，也没法安下心来想想。这时我走过一丛兰花，长长的花枝上开着金棕色的花

朵。有一朵花拂着我的脸，我不由想起有一天采了几朵花给她。“这花就像你，”我跟她说。可现在我停下步来，折下一枝花，把花踩进泥里。这一来我倒清醒了。我靠在一棵树上，身上一边直冒汗，一边直哆嗦。“今儿天太热了，”我大声说，“太热了。”我看见了屋子就默默走过去。四下都没人。厨房门关着，这地方看上去空寂无人。我走上台阶，沿着阳台走，听到了说话声，我就在安托瓦内特的房门后停下脚步。我在镜子里看得见她房内。她睡在床上，阿梅莉那丫头正在打扫。

“快干完，”安托瓦内特说，“去吩咐克里斯托芬一下，我要找她。”

阿梅莉两手搁在扫帚把上。“克里斯托芬要走了。”她说。

“要走了？”安托瓦内特跟着说一遍。

“对，要走了，”阿梅莉说。“克里斯托芬不喜欢你们这个可爱的度蜜月的屋子。”她转过身来看见我，又哈哈大笑。“你丈夫就在门外，看上去像见了僵尸鬼似的。他想必也是对你们可爱的蜜月厌倦了。”

安托瓦内特跳下床来，给她脸上一巴掌。

“我就还手打你，白蟑螂，我就还手，”阿梅莉说。她果真还手了。

安托瓦内特揪住她头发。阿梅莉露出一口牙，像是要咬人。

“安托瓦内特，看在上帝份上别打了，”我在门口说。

她蓦地转过身来，脸色刷白。阿梅莉双手掩脸，装作在哭，可我看得见她从指缝间偷看我。

“走开，孩子，”我说。

“你还叫她孩子呢，”安托瓦内特说。“她比魔鬼还要老呢，而且魔鬼也没她那么狠毒。”

“去叫克里斯托芬来，”我对阿梅莉说。

“是，少爷，是，少爷，”她垂着眼，柔声回答说。谁知一出

房门就唱了起来：

白蟑螂她嫁了人
白蟑螂她嫁了人
白蟑螂她买了个年轻人
白蟑螂她嫁了人。

安托瓦内特迎上前去几步。她脚步踉跄。我去扶她，可她一把推开我，坐在床上，咬牙切齿，扯着被单，发出恼人的喀嚓喀嚓声。她从圆桌上拿起一把剪刀，剪开贴边，把被单撕成两半，再把每一半都撕成条。

她撕得喀嚓响，我竟没听见克里斯托芬进屋来，可安托瓦内特倒听见了。

“你不走了？”她说。

“走的，”克里斯托芬说。

“那我怎么办？”安托瓦内特说。

“起来穿好衣服，姑娘。在这个万恶的世界里，女人家得有胆量才能活下去。”

她换上了一件灰黄色的布衣服，沉甸甸的金耳环也摘掉了。

“我见到的麻烦够多了，”她说，“我有权利休息一下。我有你母亲多年前给我的房子，我有自己的园子，还有儿子为我干活。孩子虽懒，可我硬逼他干活。再说少爷也不喜欢我，说不定我也不大喜欢他。我呆在这里反而惹麻烦，让你家为此争吵。”

“你在这里过得不痛快就走吧，”安托瓦内特说。

阿梅莉拿着两壶热水进屋。她斜着眼看我，脸带微笑。

克里斯托芬柔声软气说：“阿梅莉。再这样笑一笑，只要再笑一笑，我就把你脸蛋捣糊，像捣大蕉一样。你听见了吗？回答我，丫头。”

“听见了，克里斯托芬，”阿梅莉说。她看上去害怕了。

“而且我还要让你肚子痛，让你尝尝还没尝到过的肚子痛滋味。说不定我让你肚子痛得躺上大半辈子。说不定我让你肚子痛得再也起不来。所以你还是放安份点儿，规矩点儿。你听见了吗？”

“听见了，克里斯托芬，”阿梅莉说着悄悄出了房。

“她真不中用，是个饭桶，”克里斯托芬轻蔑地说。“像百脚似的偷偷爬来爬去。”

她吻吻安托瓦内特的脸。又看看我，摇摇头，嘀嘀咕咕说了几句土话才出去。

“你听见那丫头唱什么吗？”安托瓦内特说。

“她们说的话，唱的歌，我总是搞不懂。”还有别的不管什么都搞不懂。

“是一首唱白蟑螂的歌。就是指我。他们把我们这些早在他们给人从非洲卖给奴隶贩子之前就在这里的人统统叫做白蟑螂。可我又听到英国女人把我们叫做白皮黑鬼。所以在你们中间，我常常弄不清自己是什么人，自己的国家在哪儿，归属在哪儿，我究竟为什么要生下来。现在请你走吧。我得照克里斯托芬说的穿好衣服了。”

我等了半个小时，敲敲她房门。没人应声，我就吩咐巴蒂斯特给我送点吃的来。他正坐在阳台尽头那棵酸橙树下面。他愁眉苦脸的，端来了饭菜，我看了不由感到这些人非常脆弱。我懂得掩饰自己的心情那时才多大啊？还是个很小的孩子呢。六岁，五岁甚至还要小些。大人叮嘱我，必须这样，我也始终接受这个观点。如果群山跟我作对，巴蒂斯特的脸色，安托瓦内特的眼神跟我作对，那他们错了，他们在做戏，是假的（她说过英国一定是假的，像个梦）。

我喝的朗姆混合酒很凶，吃过饭我就困得直想睡。为什么不睡呢？这是大家都睡觉的时间。我想，这会儿猫、狗、公

鸡、母鸡都在睡觉，就连河水都流得慢了。

我一觉醒来，马上想起安托瓦内特，就打开她的房门，可她也在睡觉。她背对我，一动也不动。我望着窗外。这份静寂真令人不安，实在静极了。哪怕听到狗叫声，锯木声，我也求之不得啊。什么都没有。静寂。炎热。现在三点差五分。

我出了屋，沿着窗口看得见的那条小路走着。夜间一定下过大雨了，因为红土一片泥泞。我走过一个稀稀落落种着几棵咖啡树的种植园，又走过零零落落的香石榴树丛。我走着走着，不由想起父亲的脸容和他两片薄唇，还想起我哥哥那对自以为了不起的圆眼睛。他们都知情。还有理查那蠢货也知情。还有那个脸上茫然含笑的丫头也知情。他们统统都知情。

我开始走得很快很快，随即停下脚步，因为光线变了。一片绿光。我已走到了森林，那可是决不会认错的。它怀着敌意。小路上杂草蔓生，不过还能沿着走。我走着走着，对两旁的高树看也不看。有一回我跨过倒在地上一根爬满白蚁的木头。我心里想，怎样才能发现真相啊，可想来想去也想不出结果。谁也不会告诉我真相。我父亲不会，理查·梅森也不会，我娶的那个姑娘当然更不会了。我一动也不动地站着，深信准有人在监视我，不由回过头去看看。除了树和树下的绿光，什么都没有。正巧看见一条小道，我就继续向前走，一边东张西望，有时还赶紧回头看看。因此才绊在石头上，差点儿摔倒。我绊着的这块石头不是大石头，而是一块铺路用的石头。当初森林里原来还铺过一条石路呢。这条小道通到林间一大片空地。这里是一座石头房子的废墟，废墟周围长着参天大树。废墟后面有一棵野桔树，长满了桔子，叶子呈深绿色。真是个美丽的地方。而且宁静——静得让人感到此时此地思考问题、策划事情都显得荒唐可笑。我有什么要思考的啊？我怎么策划得出什么名堂啊？我看到桔树下有几小束用野草扎

起来的花。

不知过了多久我才感到身上冷起来了。那光线又变化了，阴影也长了。我想，我最好还是趁天没黑先赶回去。这时我看见一个小女孩，头上顶着一个大篮子。我正巧跟她目光相遇，使我吃惊的是她竟大声尖叫，甩起膀子就跑。篮子掉下了，我追着喊她，可她又尖叫起来，跑得更快了。她边跑边抽抽嗒嗒地小声哭着，哭声里透着惊恐。随即跑得不见影儿了。我想自己必定就在小道附近，跑三两分钟就到了，谁知走了似乎老半天的工夫，竟然到处碰上矮树丛和藤蔓绊腿，当顶又是绿树密布。我决定回到那片林间空地再重新走，结果还是白跑。天快黑了。我自我安慰说离家不远了，可是无济于事。我迷路了，陷入这些敌意重重的树林中心里真感到害怕，深信处处有危险，所以听见了脚步声和叫喊声我也不敢回答。脚步声和叫喊声越来越近了。我这才大声呼喊回答。开头我没认出巴蒂斯特来。他穿着蓝布长裤，裤脚卷到膝盖上面，细腰上围着一条装饰性的阔腰带。手里拿着把大砍刀，锋利的蓝白色刀刃上寒光闪闪。他看见我时脸无笑容。

“我们找了你好半天，”他说。

“我迷路了。”

他咕哝一声算是回答，一边快步走在我头里，一边轻松地抡起大砍刀砍掉挡道的枝桠藤蔓。

我说：“从前这里有条路，通哪儿的？”

“没有路，”他说。

“可我看见了一条像法国人在这些岛上修造的那种 pavé^①路。”

“没有路。”

“谁住在那幢房子里？”

“据说是个牧师。利列弗尔神父。他多年前在这里住

① 法语：铺石子的。

过。”

“有个孩子走过去，”我说。“她一看见我就吓坏了。这地方是不是有点不太平？”

他耸耸肩膀。

“是不是闹鬼，有僵尸？”我钉着问。

“这种荒唐鬼话一点都没听说过。”

“过去这里有条路。”

“没有路，”他死不改口还是这句话。

我们折回红土小路上时天差不多黑了。他放慢脚步，回过头来对我笑笑。仿佛在我已经见到了的这张兴师问罪的凶脸上戴上了吓人的面具。

“你不喜欢夜间的林子吗？”

他没回答我问的话，却指着一处灯光说：“我一直找了你好半天。安托瓦内特小姐吓坏了，怕你出事。”

我们到家时我已感到非常疲倦。

“你像发烧了，”他说。

“我已经发过烧了。”

“发烧的次数可没个底。”

阳台上没人，屋子里也没声。我们两人站在路上抬头望着。“我叫个丫头来，少爷。”

伊尔达给我拿来一大碗汤和一些水果。我推推安托瓦内特的房门。门拴住了，房里没灯光。伊尔达格格笑着。笑得神经兮兮。

我关照她我什么都不想吃，叫她给我拿瓶朗姆酒和一只酒杯来。我喝下酒，就拿起一直在看的那本书，书名叫《光辉灿烂的群岛王冠》，我翻到“奥比巫术”这一章。

“僵尸是看上去活着的死人，或死去的活人。僵尸也可能是地方上的鬼怪，通常为厉鬼，不过有时以花果献祭上供可以保平安。”（我顿时想起牧师那幢房子废墟上的花束。）“他们

的说话声就是在风中呼号，他们的发怒就是在海上肆虐。”

“我就是这么听说的，可是我注意到黑人一般说来是不肯谈论那么多人都相信的妖术的。这种妖术在海地叫做伏都巫术^①——有些岛上叫做奥比巫术，在南美洲又有另外的叫法。如果追问，他们就胡说一通把事情搅混。有时白人轻信这些谎言，自以为那一套全是无稽之谈，不予理会。凡遇暴卒或神秘死亡情况，往往归咎于黑人所掌握的毒药，那是无从追究的。造成事情更复杂化的原因是……”

*

虽然我看见他就在窗前，但是我并没有抬头去看，只是不假思索地继续往前骑，一直骑到岩石那儿。当地人把这些岩石叫做 Mounes Mors ^②(亡灵)。普雷斯顿见了这些岩石就受惊，据说马到这里经常都会受惊。随即这匹马狠狠绊倒了，我只好下马，臂上挽着缰绳往前走。天热起来了，我走到通往克里斯托芬住屋那条小路时已经累了，她那所屋子有两间房，屋顶盖着木瓦，不是茅草。她正坐在芒果树下一只箱子上，一边抽着白陶土烟斗，她大声叫道：“安托瓦内特，是你吗？你干吗这么早就上这儿来？”

“我只是想来看看你，”我说。

她帮我松开普雷斯顿的肚带，把马牵到附近一条小河边。马就像渴极了似的饱饮一通，饮完水又抖了抖身子，呼哧呼哧喷着鼻息。鼻孔中喷出了水。我们让马去吃草，又回到芒果树下。她坐在箱子上，顺手把另一只箱子推到我身边，可我却挨着她跪下，摸摸她一向戴着的一只细细的银脚镯。

“你身上还是那股味儿，”我说。

① 伏都巫术：西非流行的伏都教施行的巫术，现仍流行于拉丁美洲的海地及加勒比海诸岛的黑人中。

② 克里奥耳人通用的法国腔土话：亡灵。

“你大老远跑来就是要跟我说这句话的吗？”她说。她的衣服上有股经过浆洗、熨烫的干净棉布香味。过去在库利布里我经常看见她站在水深没膝的河里，挽起长裙，洗她的连衣裙和白内衣，洗了再放在石头上捶打。有时还一再有别的女人把洗的衣服搬到石头上来，大家热热闹闹，一片欢腾声。最后她们总是把湿衣服摊在太阳下晒干，擦擦额上的汗，大家开始说说笑笑。她身上也有她们那股味儿，我闻了感到多么温暖，多么舒服（可是他并不喜欢这股味儿）。隔着深绿色的芒果树叶看上去，天空是深蓝色的，我不禁想道：“这里才是我的家呢，这里才是我的归属，这里才是我想要安身的地方。”继而又想道：“多美的一棵芒果树啊，可是这里地势太高，种芒果不合适，也许结不了果，”后来我又想起独自躺在我那张床上，铺着柔软の木棉床垫和精致的被单，留神倾听着的滋味。最后我就说：“克里斯托芬，他并不爱我，我想他恨我。他现在老是睡在他的梳妆室里，仆人全都知道。如果我发火，他就满脸瞧不起人的神情，一声不吭，有时接连几个钟头不跟我讲话，我再也受不了啦，受不了啦。叫我怎么办呢？当初他可不是这样的。”

她门前种着粉红色和大红色的木槿花。她点上烟斗，没有回答。

“回答我啊，”我说。她喷出一团烟。

“你问了我一个难题，我告诉你一个难题，收拾收拾，走吧。”

“走，走到哪儿？到一个再也见不到他的陌生地方去吗？不，我决不走，一走不单是仆人会取笑我，大家都会取笑我的。”

“如果你走了，人家取笑的就不是你，而是他。”

“我决不这么做。”

“既然我回答了你，你又不听，那你还问我干吗？既然我向你说实了实情，你还不听，那你上这儿来干吗？”

“可是必定还有别的办法好试试。”

她脸色阴沉。“男人一旦不爱你了，你越是熬着，他越是恨你，男人都这样。如果你爱他们，他们就待你不好，如果你不爱他们，他们反而日日夜夜缠住你，烦得你没命。我听说过你们夫妇的事。”她说。

“可是我走不得。他毕竟是我丈人啊。”

她回头啐了一口。“天下女人，不管是黑是白，无非都是傻瓜。我生过三个孩子。还有一个活着，三个孩子三个爹，可我没丈夫，感谢上帝。我自己存着钱。我不给哪个没出息的男人。”

“我该几时走啊？我该上哪儿去啊？”

“可净给我找麻烦，像你这么个有钱的白人姑娘竟比别人家还蠢。男人待你不好，提起裙子下摆就走呗。走了他就来找你了。”

“他才不会来找我呢。再说你该明白我现在不是有钱人了。我自己根本没有钱了，我所有的一切都归了他啦。”

“你跟我怎么说来着？”她厉声说。

“那是英国法律。”

“法律！梅森那小子搞的鬼，那小子比撒旦还要坏，总有一天夜里要下十八层地狱的。现在你听我说，我教你怎么办。跟你丈夫说你身子不舒服，要去马提尼克岛看看亲戚。好好跟他把自己的钱要几个回来，这人还不算是坏良心，他会给的。等你走了就分开住了。再要钱。他再给，心安理得。到末了他就来看看你在干什么，没他是怎么过日子的，他要是看到你胖了，过得开心就会要你回去。男人都这样。最好别呆在那幢老房子里。说真的，离开那房子。”

“你看我该离开他吗？”

“你既然问我，我就这样回答。”

“是啊，”我说，“说到头来我可以走，可是干吗要去马提尼克岛啊？我想要看看英国，恐怕还借得到钱做路费呢。不是

问他借,我知道怎么搞到手。我要走就一定要出远门。”

我已经太痛苦了,我心里想,这么痛苦的日子可熬不了,会送掉你命的。一旦住到英国去我就会判若两人,遇到的事也两样……英国在地理书的地图上印成了玫瑰红色,可是反面一页的字印得密密麻麻,看起来也吃力。出口:煤、铁、羊毛。下面是进口和居民特性。地名:埃塞克斯郡、首府切尔默河畔的切姆斯福。约克郡和林肯郡的丘陵地带。丘陵地带?那是指山吗?多高啊?有我们这里的山一半那么高吗?还是连一半也不到?短短的夏天一片凉意,夏天里绿叶也是一片凉意。夏天。一片片麦田像甘蔗田一样,只是颜色金黄,长得也没那么高。过了夏天树木都光秃秃了,然后就到了冬天,下雪了。下的是白羽毛呢?还是撕碎的小纸片?据说霜在窗玻璃上还凝成花卉图案呢。我所知道的还不多,该知道得更多些。因为我只知道我要去住的那房子会很冷,而且住不惯,我要去睡的那张床挂着红帐幔,以前,很久以前,我在那床上睡过好多回了。多久以前啊?在那床上我要续完我的梦。不过我的梦同英国毫无关系,我不该这样想下去,我该记住枝形吊灯和舞会,记住天鹅、玫瑰和雪。记住雪。

“英国,”克里斯托芬说,她正留神看着我说话,“你看有那么个地方吗?”

“你怎么问得出这话来?要知道明明有这么个地方。”

“我又从来没见过这鬼地方,我怎么知道?”

“你不信有个国家叫英国?”

她眨眨眼,赶紧回答道:“我没说我不信,我说我不知道,我亲眼看见的东西才知道,我又从来没见过这地方。再说,我自己问自己这地方真像人家跟我们说的那样吗?有的人这么说,有的人那么说。我听说那地方冷得骨头都冻住了,贼偷起你的钱来像鬼一般机灵。你兜里放着钱,再一看,哇!钱没了。你干吗要到这么个冰冷的贼窝去?就算有这么个地方

吧,我也从来没见过。这一点是错不了的。”

我愣愣地看着她,心想:“这个没知识的死脑筋黑人老婆子,就连有没有英国这么个地方都弄不清,她怎么会知道我最该怎么办呢?”

她磕磕烟斗里的灰,也这么愣愣地看着我,眼睛里根本没有表情。

“克里斯托芬,”我说,“我会照你的劝告去做。不过还不到时候。”(我想,这会儿,我该说说真正的来意了。)“你一看见我就知道我要什么了,现在你包管知道了。得了,难道你不知道吗?”我听见自己的嗓门扯得又尖又细。

“别说了,”她说。“如果男人不爱你了,我也没法让他爱你啊。”

“不,你有办法的,我知道你有办法。这正是我想要的,也正是我来这里的目的。你可以叫人爱,叫人恨。也可以……可以叫人死,”我说。

她一仰脖子,大声笑了。(可她从不大声笑啊,她究竟为什么大笑呢?)

“原来你相信喝醉时听的奥比巫术那个瞎编的故事了?全是胡说八道。再说,那个对 béké^① 也不适用。béké 用上那个麻烦可就大了。”

“你千万得想想办法,”我说,“千万千万。”

“别说了。我儿子乔乔要来看我了,要是给他看到你在哭,他见谁就说。”

“我不说了,我不哭了。可是克里斯托芬,如果他,我丈夫,有天晚上能来找我。再来一回。我就会让他爱我了。”

“不,doudou,不行。”

“行的,克里斯托芬。”

“你说蠢话了。就算我能叫他上你床,我也不能叫他爱你

① 法语:白人移民。

啊。事后他就恨你了。”

“不。他真恨我的话,我也不在乎。他现在就恨我了。我天天晚上都听见他在阳台上走来走去。走来走去。走过我房门时就说,‘晚安,伯莎。’现在他不叫我安托瓦内特了。他弄清了这是我母亲的名字。‘但愿你睡个好觉,伯莎’——真是恶劣透了,”我说,“要是哪一天晚上他来,事后我兴许会睡着。现在我总睡不好。我还做梦。”

“不,我不管你这份账。”

我听了就一拳捶在石头上,勉强想把话说得平心静气。

“离家到马提尼克岛去也罢,去英国也罢,去其他任何地方也罢,都是假的。他决不会给我什么钱离家出走,我向他要点钱,他会大发雷霆的。我要是离开他,就会传为丑闻,他就恨丑闻。就算我走掉了(又怎么走呢?)他也会逼我回来。理查也会逼我。人人都会逼我。逃避他,逃避这个岛,都是假的。我说得出什么要走的理由呢?谁又会相信我呢?”

她低下头来,这时她看上去真老,我不由想道:“克里斯托芬啊,可别变老啊。你是我唯一的朋友了,可别一离开我就变老了。”

“你丈夫当然爱钱,”她说,“这一点不假。钱是美人儿,人见人爱,可是在你丈夫眼里更把钱看做天仙美人儿,别的什么都看不见了。”

“那帮帮我吧。”

“听着,doudou ché^①。不少人硬说你和你母亲的坏话。这我知道。我知道谁在说,说什么。你丈夫人倒不坏,虽然爱钱,但是他听到那么多传闻,叫他也不知该信什么才好了。所以他才躲得远远的。我对你身边那些人一个也信不过。这里也好,牙买加也好,都没人信得过。”

“柯拉姨妈也信不过?”

① 克里奥耳人通用的法国腔土话:乖宝贝。

“你姨妈现在是老太太了，她转过脸去对着墙了^①。”

“你怎么知道？”我说。因为正是这么回事。

我当时走过她房间，听见她跟理查在争吵，我就知道争的是我的婚事。“真丢人，”她说，“真不害臊。你竟把这孩子的所有财产都送给一个完全陌生的人。你父亲决不会容许的。她应该依法受到保护。可以先商定好一份财产协议，应该先商定好的嘛。这才是他的本意呢。”

“你谈到的是位有头有脸的绅士，不是个无赖，”理查说，“你也很清楚，我可无法提出什么条件。从各方面考虑起来，她嫁上他算好福气了。我信任他，何必坚持要有律师办的财产协议呢？我可以拿性命交托给他，”他用装模作样的嗓门继续说道。

“你是在拿她的性命交托给他，不是拿你自己的，”她说。

他就对她说，你这老糊涂，看在老天爷份上快闭嘴吧，临走还把门砰地一甩。他气得要命竟没留神我就站在过道上。我走进姨妈房里时，她正在床上坐起来。“那小子是笨蛋，要不就是故意装蒜。这位有头有脸的绅士身上的一切我都看不顺眼。态度生硬。依我看啊，心肠也硬，脑筋又笨，只关心自己的切身利益。”

她脸色很苍白，浑身哆嗦，所以我就把梳妆台上的嗅盐给她吸。嗅盐装在一个有镀金盖子的红玻璃瓶里。她把瓶了凑到鼻子下，可是手放下了，好像累极了，拿不稳瓶子。于是她背过脸去，不看窗子，不看天空，不看镜子，也不看梳妆台上的漂亮摆设。那个镀金盖子的红瓶掉在地上。她转过脸去对着墙壁了。“上帝抛弃了我们，”她说着就闭上了眼。她再也不开口，过了一会儿我还当她睡着了。她病得太重了，没法来参加我的婚礼，我就去跟她告别。我想着现在要去度蜜月了，心

① 此句在英语成语中有“不理人”之意，另外还可解释为“听天由命”，“心灰意懒”。

里又激动又高兴。我吻了她，她给了我一只小绸袋。“我的戒指。两只都很值钱。别让他看见。藏起来。要向我保证。”

我向她保证了，谁知一打开袋子，竟见其中一枚是纯金的。我昨天想到我可以把另一枚卖掉，可是在这里，谁来买我要卖掉的东西呢？……

克里斯托芬正说着：“你姨妈又老又病，梅森那小子又没出息。自己鼓起勇气，为自己奋斗吧。平心静气，好好跟你丈夫谈谈，把你母亲的事，在库利布里出的事，她生病的原因，以及人家怎么对待她的事，统统都告诉他。别对男人大喊大闹，别一脸疯相。也别哭。哭对他也没用。好好说嘛，让他理解。”

“我试过了，”我说，“可是他不相信我。现在这样做已经来不及了。”（我心想，说真话总是来不及了）“如果你肯依我的要求做，我就再试一试。克里斯托芬啊，我心里真害怕，”我说，“我不知道为什么，可是害怕极了。一直在害怕。帮帮我吧。”

她说了句什么话我没听见。然后她拿起一根尖头棒，在树下的地上画些条条圈圈，再用脚踩掉。

“如果你先跟他谈，我就依你的要求做。”

“现在吗？”

“是的，”她说。“好了，瞧着我。瞧着我眼睛。”

我站起身时头晕眼花的，她嘀咕着进了屋，又端了杯咖啡出来。

“咖啡里搀了一大口白朗姆酒，”她说，“你脸色像死人，你眼睛红得像 coucrist^①。别声张——瞧，乔乔来了，他听到什么就逢人乱说。那孩子就是一张嘴像漏底葫芦。”

我喝下咖啡后不由笑出声来。“原来我无缘无故受了那么多痛苦。无缘无故啊。”我说。

① 克里奥耳人通用的法国腔土话：下山的太阳。

她儿子头上顶着个大篮子。我留神看着他轻松自如地摆动两条壮实的、棕色的腿，沿着小路走过来。他看见我好像有些惊讶和好奇，可还是客客气气地用土话向我问好，还问少爷身体好不好。

“好，乔乔，谢谢你，我们俩都好。”

克里斯托芬帮他卸下篮子，又拿出那瓶白朗姆酒，倒了半玻璃杯。他赶紧一口喝干。她又倒了一满杯水，他也照样一口喝干。

她用英语说：“太太要走了，她的马在后边。去上马鞍。”

我跟着她进屋去。外间有张木桌，一张凳子，两把椅子。她的卧室又大又黑。她依然用着那条鲜艳的拼花床罩，还放着棕榈主日^①用过的那片棕榈树叶，还有祈求死而瞑目的祷词。不过我看到了房角有一堆鸡毛以后，就不再东张西望了。

“原来你已经吓坏了，是吗？”我看见她脸上的神情就从口袋里掏出钱包，扔在她床上。

“你不必给我钱。因为你求我了，我才干这蠢事——不是图钱。”

“是蠢事吗？”我说，悄声悄气的，她又笑了，只是声音轻些。

“如果 béké 说这是蠢事，那就是蠢事。Béké 像鬼一样机灵。比上帝还要机灵。不是吗？好了，听着，我来教你怎么做。”

我们走到屋外阳光下，乔乔正牵着普雷斯顿在一块大石头边。我站在石头上，上了马。

“再见了，克里斯托芬；再见了，乔乔。”

“再见了，太太。”

“你很快就会来看我的吧，克里斯托芬？”

① 棕榈主日：复活节前的星期日，纪念耶稣受难前胜利进入耶路撒冷，因当时民众曾用棕榈树枝欢迎耶稣，故名。

“是啊，我很快就会来的。”

我回头看看小路路端。她正在跟乔乔说话，他似乎又好奇又好笑。近旁有只雄鸡在啼，我就想：“这是有人出卖的预兆，可谁是出卖的人呢？”她原来不想干这事的，是我用几个臭钱逼她干的。可有哪个人知道出卖的人的情况呢？有哪个人知道犹大^①为什么干出他干下的那勾当呢？

我记得那天早上的每一瞬间，一闭上眼就看得见天空的深蓝色，芒果树叶，粉红色和大红色的木槿花，她扎头的黄头巾，用马提尼克岛的款式把两个尖角扎在前面，可是现在我眼前看到的景象都是静止的，如同彩色玻璃上的色彩那样永不变色。只是云彩浮动罢了。她给我的东西包在一片树叶里，贴着皮肤感到又凉又滑。

*

“太太作客去了，”那天早上巴蒂斯特给我端上咖啡时告诉我。“她今晚或明天就会回来。她临时拿定主意就走了。”

下午，阿梅莉给我送来了第二封信。

你为什么不回信？你不相信我？那就问问别人——西班牙镇上人人都知道的。你想他们为什么带你到这地方来？你要我上你家去当着人人的面把你们的事大声张扬出来吗？你來找我，不来我就云——

看到这里我不看了。伊尔达那丫头走进房里，我问她：“阿梅莉在吗？”

“在，少爷。”

“告诉她一声我有话要跟她说。”

“是，少爷。”

① 犹大：指耶稣十二门徒中出卖耶稣的犹大·伊斯卡略。

她一手捂住嘴，像要忍住笑，可是她的眼睛却流露出惊恐和惶惑的神色，我以前从来没见过这么黑的眼睛，黑得连瞳孔和虹膜都分不清。

我背对着大海坐在阳台上，仿佛我一辈子都是这样坐的。我想象不出还有别样天气或别样天空。我不仅熟悉木桌上那两个插满白色香花的棕色陶壶的形状，而且也熟悉群山的形状。我知道那丫头总是穿件白色连衣裙。她总是用白色和棕色相配，她自己称做白人姑娘头发的髻发用块红色头布半遮着，两脚光着。看来去总是不外乎天空，群山，鲜花和那丫头。还有这一切都是场噩梦的感觉，还有隐隐希望自己会醒过来的自慰。

她泰然自若地倚在阳台柱子上，姿势优雅，一副毫不在意的样子，不过态度还算恭敬，等着我发问。

“这封信是交给你的吗？”我问。

“不是，少爷。是伊尔达收下的。”

“写信的这个人是你一个朋友？”

“不是我的朋友，”她说。

“可他认识你——他说认识你的。”

“是啊，我认识丹尼尔。”

“那好极了。请你告诉他，他的信烦死我了，为他自己想最好别再写了。如果他再送来信就退还他。明白吗？”

“是，少爷。我明白了。”

她依然倚在柱子上对我笑笑。我感到她再笑下去随时都会放声大笑起来。为了不让她笑下去我接着又问：“他为什么写信给我？”

她天真地答道：“他没告诉你吗？他给你写了两封信，竟没说自己为什么写信？你要是不知道那我也不知道啊。”

“可你认识他？”我说，“他是不是姓科斯韦？”

“有的人说是，有的人说不是。他自称是姓这个姓的。”

她略加思索又说，丹尼尔是个很了不起的人，老是在念

《圣经》，而且像白人一样生活。我想问清她这话的意思，她就说明他像白人一样有幢房子，专门有一间房当起居室。墙上挂着父母的两幅画像。

“是白人？”

“啊，不是，混血种。”

“可他在头一封信里告诉我说他父亲是白人。”

她耸耸肩膀。“那些都是老早以前的事了，我可说不清。”不难看出她瞧不起老早以前。“少爷，我就照你说的跟他说吧。”接着又说，“为什么你不去看他啊？这样要好得多。丹尼尔是个坏人，他会上这儿来给你找麻烦的。还是不让他来的好。据说他有一阵子在巴巴多斯做过牧师，他说起话来就像个牧师，他有个兄弟住在牙买加的西班牙镇，叫亚历山大先生。是个大财主。他开了三家朗姆酒店，还有两家绸缎呢绒铺。”她向我膘了一眼，目光锐利如刀。“我一度听说安托瓦内特小姐跟他的儿子桑迪先生要结婚，可那净是荒唐话。安托瓦内特小姐是个很有钱的白人小姐，她是决不会嫁给一个混血儿的，哪怕他看上去不像混血儿也罢。你问问安托瓦内特小姐，叫她告诉你。”

她也像伊尔达那样，一手捂住嘴，好像忍不住要笑出声来，就此走掉了。

走走又回过头来，低声低气说：“我真替你难受。”

“你说什么？”

“我没说什么，少爷。”

一张大桌子铺着镶红流苏的桌布，使这间小房间看上去更加热些，仅有一扇窗子关着。

“我把你的坐椅放在靠近门那边，”丹尼尔说，“下面有风吹进来。”可是没有风，一点儿风都没有，这地方地势低，在山脚下，几乎齐海平面。

“我听到你要来就喝了一大杯朗姆酒，再喝了一杯水，想

消消气,可是气没消,化做悲痛的泪水,从眼睛里流出来了。我头一回给你写信时,你怎么不回我信?”他继续说下去,两眼盯着挂在肮脏的白墙上一个镜框里的《圣经》经文:“我必报应。”^①

“主啊,你拖得太久了,”他说出心里话。“我催了你一下。”说罢擦擦瘦瘦的黄脸,又用一角桌布擤擤鼻涕。

“人家叫我丹尼尔,”他说,眼睛还是没有看着我,“不过我名字叫以扫^②。从我父亲那该死的恶魔嘴里听到的只是咒骂和滚蛋。我父亲老科斯韦还在西班牙镇上的英国教堂里公然立了白大理石碑。碑上刻着家族饰章,一句拉丁文格言,还有些大写字母。我不识这种鬼话。但愿那块石碑系在他脖子上,最终一直把他拖到地狱里去。石碑上称颂他,‘虔诚’啊,‘人人爱戴’啊。就是只字不提他当作牲口买卖的那些人口。石碑上还称颂他‘对弱者仁慈为怀’。仁慈!那家伙是铁石心肠。他玩女人总是一下子就腻了,玩腻了就用掉,像甩掉我母亲这样,尽管给了她一间茅屋,一小块地(有人叫做园子),可这不是仁慈,他这么做是出于恶人的妄自尊大。我从没看到那样趾高气扬的人——走起路来就像这天下是他的似的。‘我才不在乎呢,’他说。让他等着吧……我眼前依然看得见那块石碑,因为我常常去看碑。我心里熟记碑上扯的那些鬼话——没人站出来说,你们为什么在教堂里刻写些鬼话?……我跟你讲这些事,你听了就能知道自己跟哪种人打交道了。自己的痛苦自己心里明白,可是要把痛苦一直深藏心坎就难了。我还记得他咒骂我的那天早上,就像昨天的事似的。当时我十六岁,心急。大清早就动身。一路走到库利布里

① 典出《圣经·新约全书·罗马书》第12章第19节:“亲爱的弟兄,不要自己伸冤,宁可让步,听凭主怒。因为经上记着,主说伸冤在我,我必报应。”此节意在劝人不要以恶报恶。

② 以扫原是《圣经》中故事人物,以撒之子,将长子名分卖给孪生兄弟雅各。(见《圣经·旧约全书·创世记》第25章)

去——走了五六个钟头。他倒没有拒绝见我，见我时的态度冷冷淡淡，若无其事，他首先跟我说的话就是我老是缠着他要钱。这是因为有时我向他要钱买双鞋啊什么的。免得像个黑鬼那样光着脚走路。我又不是黑鬼。他不把我当作人看待，我也发火了。“说到头来我总有自己的权利吧，”我跟他说，你知道他怎么着？他当面嘲笑我。他笑完竟问我，‘你叫什么名字来着？’‘我记不住他们这些名字——这对我期望太高了。’他自言自语说。那天早上在大太阳光下他看上去很苍老。‘是你自己给我取名叫丹尼尔的，’我跟他说，‘我不像我母亲那样是个奴隶。’

“‘你母亲是天下少有的滑头。’他说，‘我可不是傻瓜。话虽那么说，那女人死了也就算了。可是你那瘦长的躯壳里要是有我一滴血那就砍我的头。’这会儿我可听得热血沸腾了，说真的，我就此对他破口大骂，‘那就砍你的头。砍你的头。你的时间不多了。要亲你新老婆、爱你新老婆的时间也不多了。她太年轻了，你配不上。’‘天哪！’他说，满脸通红，过后又一片灰白。他想站起身来，可是又倒在椅子上。他书桌上有只银的大墨水台，他把墨水台朝我头上扔来，他咒骂我，可我一闪，墨水台就砸到门上。我不由哈哈大笑，赶快走掉。他派人给我送了些钱——没有信，只有钱。这是我见到他的最后一面。”

丹尼尔深深吸了口气，又擦擦脸，给我倒点朗姆酒。我谢了他一声，摇摇头，他就给自己倒了半杯，一干而尽。

“那都是老早以前的事了，”他说。

“你想要见我干吗，丹尼尔？”

他喝下了这杯酒似乎反而清醒了。他两眼直盯着我，说起话来也比较自然了。

“我一定要见你，因为我有话要跟你说。当你问我跟你说的
事是不是真的，我就看出虽然你不喜欢我，你总会问的。可是你心里很清楚，我的信里没句假话。要提防你是跟谁说话。

好多人喜欢在你背后说三道四，当着你面他们就害怕了，要不就是不愿掺和。说起来，地方法官知道得不少，可是他妻子同梅森家很要好，她总是尽可能不让他说出来。还有我那同父异母的兄弟亚历山大，同我一样是混血儿，不过不像我那样倒霉，他会对你说各种各样的假话。他是老头儿的宠儿，一开头就一帆风顺。是啊，他现在是个财主了，可是他对此只字不会提。因为他发迹了，他是两面三刀，决不会说白人坏话。还有你家那个女人，克里斯托芬。她最坏了。因为她坐过牢才只好离开牙买加，你知道这事吗？”

“为什么送她坐牢？她犯了什么法？”

他眼光避开我眼光。“真的，我离开西班牙镇。我不知道那到底是怎么回事。总之是件很坏的事。她是个奥比巫婆，人家逮住了她。我不信那套弄神弄鬼的事，可是不少人都信。克里斯托芬是个坏女人，她骗起人来比你老婆都厉害。你自己的老婆就是满口甜言蜜语，净说假话。”

架上一只镀金的黑钟打了四下。

我得走了。我得摆脱他那张汗津津的黄脸和他那讨厌的小房间。我一动不动坐着，身子都麻木了，愣愣看着他。

“你喜欢我这钟吗？”丹尼尔说。“我拼命干活才买下的。不过是让自己看着喜欢罢了。我用不着讨什么女人的喜欢。给我买这个，给我买那个——我看啊，女人都是魔鬼的化身。说起来，亚历山大就离不开女人，到头来他娶了个皮肤很白的混血种姑娘，门第很体面。他儿子桑迪像个白人，但比任何白人都英俊，据说好多白人都欢迎他。你妻子老早就认识桑迪了。问问她，让她告诉你。不过我看，不见得把什么事都告诉你。”他哈哈笑道。“啊，不，不见得把什么事都告诉你的。有回他们当做没人看见他们，偏让我看见了。我看见她在……你要走了，呃？”他冲到门口。

“不，你别走，等我把最意想不到的事告诉你了才走吧。你是要我绝口不谈我所知道的底细。她一开头就跟上桑迪。

他们在那姑娘的事上把你蒙了。她一直盯着你眼睛，满口甜言蜜语——跟你说的净是假话。假话。她母亲就这样。人家说她比她母亲更坏，可她简直不过是个孩子呢。你娶她时听不见人家笑你，你一定是聋了。别冲着我乱发火，先生。不是我蒙你，我是想要叫你认清是非……像你这么个堂堂正正的英国绅士，决不愿碰一碰我这么个黄皮小耗子吧？再说，我完全明白。你相信我的话，可是你想要按英国人那样，尽量把一切都办得不透风。那行。不过要叫我闭上嘴，看来你还欠我一份情。五百英镑在你眼里算得上什么？在我眼里可是我的命了。”

一听这话我不禁顿时感到恶心，火冒三丈。又厌恶又愤怒。

“那好吧，”他嚷着，从门口挪开，“走吧……滚吧。这下该我说了。滚吧。滚吧。要是我拿不到我要的这笔钱，你就瞧瞧我的颜色吧。

“向你妻子——我妹子问好，”他恶毒地跟在我后面叫喊。“你不是头一个吻她漂亮脸蛋的男人。漂亮的脸蛋，娇嫩的皮肤，好看的肤色——不像我这身黄皮肤。可妹子还是妹子……”

我走到小路尽头，看不见那屋子也听不见那屋子动静的地方才停下脚步。外界到处都是暑气和苍蝇，出了他那间黑洞洞的小房间，外面的亮光真耀眼。一头拴在近旁的黑白山羊朝我盯着，我也盯着那对斜长的黄绿色眼睛，似乎盯了好一阵子，这才走到刚才拴马的那棵树旁，尽快策马飞奔而去。

望远镜给推到桌子一边去了，挪出空位搁一个失去光泽的银托盘，托盘上放着一只盛了一半朗姆酒的细颈酒瓶和两只玻璃酒杯。我一边倾听外面夜晚无休止的天籁，一边观赏着川流不息的小飞蛾和小甲虫飞扑进烛火，然后我就倒了一杯朗姆酒，一口喝干。夜晚的天籁顿时消退了，声音越来越

远,听起来还受得了,竟然很好听。

“看在上帝份上,你听我说行不行?”安托瓦内特说。这话她先前说过了,可我没搭理她,这会儿我就跟她说,“当然行啊,要是我不听你说,倒真成了你心目中肯定认为的畜生了。”

“你凭什么恨我?”她说。

“我并不恨你,我为你感到非常苦恼,我心烦意乱。”我说。可这不是真话,我并没有心烦意乱,我心平气和,多天来我还是头一回感到这么心平气和,镇定自若。

她正穿着我过去很欣赏的那件白色连衣裙,可是衣服凌乱,滑到一边肩膀上,看上去太大了。我眼望着她右手握着左腕,这习惯真讨厌。

“那你为什么不亲近我了?”她说。“也不吻我,也不跟我讲话。你凭什么认为我受得了这份气?你有什么理由这样对待我?你有什么理由吗?”

“有,”我说,“我有一条理由,”说着又低声细气地说了句“上帝啊”。

“你老是呼唤上帝,”她说。“你信不信上帝?”

“当然信,我当然信上帝的全知全能。”

她扬起眉撇下嘴角,露出疑惑的嘲弄样子。片刻间她看上去活像阿梅莉。我不由想,她们也许是亲戚。有可能。在这种鬼地方甚至大有可能呢。

“那你呢?”我说。“你信不信上帝?”

“我信什么,你信什么,都无所谓,”她心平气和地回答说,“因为我们都无能为力,我们就像这些虫子。”她把一只死蛾子从桌上轻轻掸掉了。“不过我刚问了你一个问题,你总记得吧。请你回答一下好吗?”

我又喝了酒,头脑冷静了,也清醒了。

“好极了,不过你问一个,我也问一个。你母亲还活着吗?”

“没有,她死了,去世了。”

“几时死的?”

“不久前。”

“那你当初怎么跟我说你小时候她就死了?”

“因为他们吩咐我这么说,因为这是真的。她的的确确在我小时候就死了。向来有两种死,一种是真死,一种是人家知道的死。”

“对幸运儿来说,至少有两种,”我说。我们沉默了半晌,我又接着说下去,“我收到了一个自称为丹尼尔·科斯韦的来信。”

“他没有资格姓这个姓,”她连忙说。“要是他有真姓实名的话,该叫丹尼尔·博伊德。他痛恨所有的白人,不过他最痛恨我。他编派了我们不少假话,他拿准你会信他,不听另一面的。”

“有另一面?”我问。

“事情总是有另一面的,总是有的。”

“收到他第二封信是恐吓性的,我才认为最好还是去见见他。”

“你见到了他,”她说。“我知道他跟你说些什么话。说我母亲发疯,是个名声很臭的女人,说我的弟弟生下来就得了呆小症^①,是个白痴,还说我也是个疯女人。他就是这样跟你说的吧?”

“对,他就是这样说的,这些话多少有点真的吗?”我头脑冷静,心平气和地说。

有一支蜡烛火焰一窜,我看见她眼睛下面凹陷的眼窝,耷拉的嘴角,瘦削紧张的脸部。

“现在我们不谈这个了,”我说。“今晚休息。”

① 呆小症是胎儿期或婴儿期中,先天性甲状腺机能低下或发生障碍所引起的病。患儿头大,身材矮小,四肢短,皮肤干黄,智力低下。又译为克汀病(Cretin)。

“可是我们一定得谈谈清楚。”她的嗓门又高又尖。

“只要你答应讲道理就行。”

我想,不过这里不是谈话的地方,现在也不是谈话的时候,不宜在这个又长又黑的阳台上,亮着即将燃尽的蜡烛,外面又是虎视眈眈,留神倾听的黑夜。我就又说了一句,“今晚别谈了,改天再谈吧。”

“在别的什么地方,别的什么时候,我或许就根本不会谈了。别的时候可不行,现在就谈。你害怕了?”她说,一边学着黑人的嗓门,唱着,声调侮慢。

这时我看到她在哆嗦,才想起她原来围过一条黄绸披肩。我站起身来(我的头脑清醒而冷静,我的身体却笨重而呆滞)。披肩放在隔壁房里的椅子上,餐具柜上有蜡烛,我把蜡烛拿到阳台上,点上两支,又把披肩披在她肩上。“可为什么不到明天,在白天里再跟我说呢?”

“你没有资格,”她恶狠狠地说。“你没有资格问了我母亲的事,又不肯听我回答。”

“我当然肯听,要是你希望现在谈,我们当然现在就可以谈。”不过我总觉得那份陌生和敌意很厉害。“我觉得自己在这里完全是个陌生人,”我说。“我觉得这地方同我敌对,跟你站在一边。”

“你完全错了,”她说。“不是同你敌对,也不是跟我友好。这和我们两个都没关系。因为这是另一码事,所以你才害怕。好久前我小的时候就看出这点来了。我爱这地方,因为我没别的好爱了,可这地方就跟你经常呼唤的上帝一样冷漠无情。”

“我们可以在这里谈,也可以在别的什么地方谈,”我说,“随你便。”

细颈酒瓶里的朗姆酒几乎都光了,我就回到餐厅里又拿出一瓶朗姆酒来。她什么也没吃过,也不肯喝酒,这会儿她竟自己倒了一杯,嘴唇沾了一下又把杯子放下了。

“你想要知道我母亲的情况，我就来跟你讲讲她吧，都是实情，不是假话。”说罢她沉默了好久，我就轻声说，“我知道你父亲死后她很孤独，很痛苦。”

“而且很穷困，”她说，“别忘了那点。整整五年哪。说起来多快。可过起来这日子就长了。又孤独。她孤独得很，渐渐就跟人家疏远起来了。有时不免出现这种情况。我也碰到过这种情况，可是我比较容易对付，因为我简直记不得什么别的了。对她来说这日子又陌生又吓人。而且她非常美丽。我常常想，她每回照镜子必定都在盼望和假想。我也假想过。当然想的是两回事。你可以长期想下去，但总有一天全都消失了，只剩下你独自一个人。我们在世上最美的地方独自生活，任何地方都不可能像库利布里这么美的了。大海虽然相隔不远，但是我们听不见海水声，倒是一直听到河水声。听不见海，住的是一幢古老的房子，过去那里有一条栽着王棕的林荫道，可是有大批树倒下了，还有些砍掉了，剩下几棵看上去都掉了魂似的。掉了魂的树。那时人家把她的马毒死了，她再也不能骑着马到处跑了。她在园子里干活，甚至太阳火辣辣的时候也干，他们总是说：‘太太，你进屋去吧。’”

“他们是些什么人啊？”

“克里斯托芬跟我们在一起，老花匠戈弗雷也在，还有个男孩，我忘了他名字啦。啊，对了，”她大笑了。“他名字叫迪萨特罗斯^①，因为他教母认为这词儿念上去很好听。牧师说：‘我不能给这孩子命名为迪萨特罗斯，他一定得再起一个名字，’因此他的名字就叫迪萨特罗斯·托马斯，我们就叫他萨斯。多亏克里斯托芬，她从村里给我们买来了吃的东西，还磨了嘴皮子拉了几个姑娘帮她打扫和洗衣服。我母亲经常说，如果克里斯托芬没跟我们住在一起的话，那我们就死定了。

① 在英语中 Disastrous(迪萨特罗斯)的意思是“灾祸”，所以一般人是不用来作名字的。

当时都死了好多人，有白人，也有黑人，尤其是上年纪的人，可是现在没人再提当时了。他们都忘了，只有假话没有忘。假话永远忘不了，传啊传的传下去，越传越离谱。”

“那你呢，”我说，“你怎么样？”

“我早上从不感到伤心，”她说，“对我来说每一天都是新的一天。我还记得牛奶和面包的滋味儿，落地大摆钟慢悠悠的滴答声，我头一回用细绳扎头发的情景，因为缎带一根都不剩了，又没钱去买。我们园子里满世界的花都有，有时我口渴了，碰上下过场阵雨，我就舔舔茉莉花叶子上的雨滴。如果我能让你明白就好了，因为他们把房子都毁了，如今只剩下这里了。”她拍拍脑门。“有一件最美的东西，就是一段弯弯曲曲的浅台阶，那是从斜坡露台通到上马的垫脚石那儿的，扶手是带装饰的铁的。”

“锻铁的，”我说。

“对，锻铁的，最后一级台阶的扶手端弯得像个问号，我的手搭在上面，感到铁是暖呼呼的，我心里就舒服了。”

“可是你说过，你过去一直高高兴兴的。”

“不，我说的是早上总是高高兴兴的，到下午就不大高兴了，傍晚以后就根本没高兴过，因为傍晚以后屋子里闹鬼，有些地方就闹鬼。后来那天她看见我长得竟像个白皮黑鬼，她就认为我丢她脸，打那天以后一切都改变了。是啊，都是我不好，都是我不好，她才发疯般筹划起来，活动起来，拼命想改变我们的生活。那时又有人来看我们了，虽然我仍旧痛恨他们，害怕他们那种冷峻、取笑的眼光，可是我学会了掩饰。”

“没有学会，”我说。

“为什么没有？”

“你从来没有学会掩饰过，”我说。

“我学会尽力掩饰，”安托瓦内特说。工夫不大到家，我想。

“再后来就是人家烧毁房子的那天夜晚。”她仰靠在椅子

上，脸色很苍白。我倒了一点朗姆酒，递给她，她却粗手粗脚地把杯子推开，酒也洒在自己衣服上。“如今什么都没剩下了。他们糟塌了这地方。这里是圣地。是供奉太阳的圣地！”我不由想知道这些话里有多少是真的，多少是想象出来的，失真的。的确有好多老的庄园府邸给烧掉了。这地方到处都只见一片废墟。

她似乎猜中我的心思，就平心静气地接下去说，“不过我跟你说的是我母亲的事。后来我就发了高烧。我住在西班牙镇上的柯拉姨妈家里。我听到尖声叫喊，还有什么人放声大笑。第二天早上柯拉姨妈跟我说，我母亲病了，到乡下去了。这事对我来说似乎并不奇怪，因为她是库利布里的一部分，要是库利布里给烧毁了，从我生活中消失了，那么她也该消失了，这似乎是天经地义。我病了好久。我的头扎上绷带，因为有人朝我扔石头。柯拉姨妈告诉我伤口快长好了，到了结婚那天决不会叫我破相的。可是我认为这一下真的破坏了我的结婚喜日，而且也破坏了其他一切日日夜夜。”

我说：“安托瓦内特，你的黑夜没给破坏，你的白天也没给破坏，把伤心事统统抛开吧。别想这些事了，我保证你什么都不会给破坏掉。”

可是我心情却沉重如铅。

“比埃尔死了，”她好像没听见我的话，径自说下去，“而我母亲恨梅森先生。她不肯让他走近她，也不肯让他碰她。她说她要杀掉他，我想，她试过。所以他就给她买了一幢房子，雇了一个混血种男人和一个混血种女人侍候她。他伤心过一时，不过他常常离开牙买加，在特立尼达住了好长时间。他几乎把她忘掉了。”

“可你也把她忘掉了，”我忍不住说。

“我不是一个健忘的人，”安托瓦内特说。“但她——她不要我。我去看她，她就把我推开，哭了。他们跟我说我反而给她添病。人家都纷纷议论她，不肯饶过她，他们总是在议论着

她，一看见我就住了口。有一天我打定主意独自去见她。我还没走到她屋子门口就听到她在哭叫。我心想，谁在欺侮我母亲，我就杀掉谁。我下了马，赶快跑到阳台上，在阳台上可以张望屋里动静。我记得她穿的那身衣服——一件袒胸夜礼服，她光着脚。有个胖胖的黑人手里拿着杯朗姆酒。他说：‘喝下你就会忘掉了。’她一口气喝干。他又给她倒了些酒，她接过酒杯，哈哈大笑，把杯子扔到背后。杯子摔得粉碎。‘收拾干净，’那男的对女的说，‘要不她会踩上去的。’

“‘踩上去倒上上大吉了，’那女的说。‘那她说说不定就安静了。’可她还是拿了畚箕和扫帚，把碎玻璃扫掉了。这些事我全看在眼里。我母亲没正眼看他们。她走来走去，说，‘不过这倒令人喜出望外，勒特雷尔先生。戈弗雷，把勒特雷尔先生的马牵走。’说着她似乎累了，就在摇椅上坐下。我看见那男人把她从椅子上抱起来亲吻。我看见他的嘴紧紧贴上她的嘴，她在他怀里浑身酥软，他就哈哈大笑。那女人也大了，不过她气呼呼的。我看到这幕就跑掉了。我哭着回去，克里斯托芬正在等着我。‘你要上那里去干吗？’她说。我就说：‘闭嘴，你这魔鬼，你这地狱里的混账黑魔鬼。’克里斯托芬说：‘哎，哎，哎！净给我找麻烦，净给我找别扭！’”

过了半晌，我听见她自言自语似地在说话：“我要说的话都说了。我想尽办法让你理解。可是没什么改变。”她哈哈大笑。

“别那样笑，伯莎。”

“我的名字不叫伯莎；你干吗叫我伯莎？”

“因为这名字我特别喜欢。我把你当作伯莎。”

“没关系，”她说。

我说：“今天早上你出门，上哪儿去了？”

“我去看克里斯托芬了，”她说。“凡是你想要知道的事，我全都告诉你，不过只讲几句话，因为话多也没用，现在我明白了。”

“你为什么去看她啊？”

“我去请她帮我办点事。”

“你办了没有？”

“办了。”又停顿了半晌。

“你想要请她给你出主意，是不是？”

她没应声。

“她怎么说？”

“她说我应该出走——离开你。”

“啊，她真这么说了？”我惊讶了，问道。

“对，这就是她的忠告。”

“我要尽力把事情办得对我们双方都有利，”我说。“你告诉我的事好多都是头回听到，跟人家引导我想的不一样。难道你不感到克里斯托芬也许说得有理吗？就是说——如果你离开这地方，或者我离开这地方——当然完全按你的意思办——离开一阵子，说不定倒是我们可以采取的一个最聪明的办法吧？”接着我厉声说，“伯莎，你睡着了？不舒服了？干吗不回答我？”我站起身，走到她椅子边，把她冰凉的双手捂在自己手里。“我们在这里坐了好久了，天很晚了。”

“你走吧，”她说。“我想要在这里暗处呆着……只有暗处才适宜我，”她又加了一句说。

“唉，瞎说，”我说。我双臂抱住她，扶她起来，我吻她，可她却闪开了。

“你的嘴比我的手还冷，”她说。我竭力想笑一笑。到了卧室里，我关上百叶窗。“快睡吧，我们明天再好好谈谈。”

“好，”她说，“当然好，不过你愿意进来跟我说声晚安吗？”

“我一定来，亲爱的伯莎。”

“今晚别叫伯莎，”她说。

“当然要叫，偏偏就是今晚，你一定得叫伯莎。”

“那请便，”她说。

我一踏进她房里，就看到地板上洒着白粉。我首先问她

的就是——白粉的事。我问她这是什么。她说是去除蟑螂的。

“你没看到这屋里没有蟑螂,也没有百脚了吗?你知不知道这些虫有多吓人。”她把蜡烛全都点上了,房间里黑影幢幢。梳妆台上点着六支蜡烛,床边桌上点着三支蜡烛。烛光使她变了个人。我从来没见过她如此欢快,或如此美丽。她把酒倒进两个玻璃酒杯里,递给我一杯,可是我敢发誓,我还没喝酒就巴不得像往常那样把脸埋在她头发里了。我说:“我们竟让鬼迷住心窍了。我们干吗不该乐一乐呢?”她说:“克里斯托芬也知道鬼的事,不过她不是这么个叫法。”其实她不必对我来上这么一手。我随时都敢发誓,她不必来上这么一手。她递给我酒杯时正露出笑容。我记得自己用不像自己平素的嗓门说太亮了。我记得把床边桌上的蜡烛灭了,我记得的就这么些。那天夜晚的事我能记得的就这么些。

我梦见自己给活埋了,就在暗处醒来,我醒来后还一直感到憋不过气来。有什么东西堵在我嘴上,是一股浓香扑鼻的头发。我扔掉头发,可是还透不过气来。我闭上眼,一动不动,躺了片刻。等我睁开眼一看,只见那张讨厌的梳妆台上的蜡烛已烧尽,方才知道自己在什么地方。阳台门开着,风很冷,我知道现在一定还很早,还是黎明前。而且我觉得很冷,冷得要命,又恶心,又痛苦。我看也不看她,径自起床,跌跌撞撞走进自己的梳妆室,在镜子里照见了自已,我顿时掉转头去。我呕不出来。只是痛苦地干呕着。

我心想,我中毒了。不过这想法模模糊糊的,就像一个孩子在拼一个他念不来的词的字母,这个词就算念得来也莫名其妙。我头昏眼花,站不住脚,往后一仰,摔倒在床上,瞧着那条色泽怪怪的黄毯子。瞧了片刻我才有力气走到窗口呕吐。仿佛呕了好几个钟头才不呕。我总是身子靠着墙,抹抹脸,接着又是一阵恶心,直犯干呕。完事后我就躺在床上,虚弱无

力，动弹不了。

我这辈子还没像那一回这样费了那么大的劲儿呢。我巴不得躺在床上睡一觉，可我还是勉强撑了起来。我虚弱无力，头昏眼花，只是不再恶心，也不再痛苦了。我穿上晨衣，往脸上泼泼水，随即打开她房门。

只见冷森森的光照着她。我瞧着她牵拉着嘴角那副苦相，两道浓眉间的皱纹，深如给刀砍的。我正瞧着，她动了，胳膊一甩。我冷漠地想道，可以说，非常美，纤细的手腕，丰满动人的下臂，圆溜溜的手拐儿，肩膀到上臂那条弧线。处处都美，处处都挑不出眼。我心里恨恨的，正看着，她的脸蛋又显得光洁了，而且又非常年轻了，她竟然似乎想笑。说不定是光线引起的幻觉。还有什么呢？

她随时都会醒，我心里说。我一定得赶快。她那件撕破的内衣扔在地板上，我轻轻把被单拉过来盖在她身上，像盖在女尸身上似的。有一个酒杯空了，她把自己那杯喝干了。梳妆台上那只酒杯还剩下一点酒。我把手指伸进去沾了一下尝尝。味儿是苦的。我没再看她，径自拿着酒杯走到阳台上。伊尔达手里拿着扫帚在阳台上。我把手指放在唇上，她两个大大的眼睛望着我，就学我的样儿，也把手指放在唇上。

我一穿上衣服，马上走出屋子，抬腿就跑了起来。

我记不大清那天自己往哪儿跑，怎么会摔倒的，怎么哭的，怎么筋疲力尽躺倒的。可是末了我一看竟到了那幢屋子的废墟和野桔树附近。我准是在这里脑袋枕着胳膊睡着了，我醒来时天色都晚了，风凉飕飕的。我站起身来，找到了回屋的那条小道。我知道怎么避开每一根藤蔓，一次也没绊倒过。我走到自己的梳妆室，一路上就是走过什么人的身边我也没看见他们，有人跟我说话我也没听见。

桌上有个托盘，放着一壶水，一只玻璃杯和几块棕色的煎鱼饼。我把一壶水几乎都喝光了，因为我渴死了，可煎鱼饼却没动。我坐在床上等着，我知道阿梅莉总会来的，我也知道她

总会说：“我真替你难受。”

她光着脚，悄没声儿地来了。“我给你送来点吃的，”她说。她带来了冷鸡、面包、水果和一瓶葡萄酒，我一言不发，先喝了一杯酒，接着又喝一杯。她把吃的东西切开，坐在我身边，当我孩子似的，喂我吃。她托着我后脑勺的那条胳膊是暖呼呼的，可我挨到她胳膊外侧却是凉的，几乎是冷冰冰的。我仔细看着她那张毫无心机的可爱脸蛋，坐直身子，把盘子推开。于是她说：“我真替你难受。”

“你刚才已经跟我这么说过了，阿梅莉。你只会这一个老调子吗？”

她默然中流露出一丝欣喜，可我哈哈大笑时她却担心地用手捂住我的嘴。我把她拉到我身边，我们两人一起笑。那回逢场作戏我记得最清楚的就是这些。她热情奔放，轻松自如，她一定把这种欣喜给我分享了些许，因为我根本没有悔恨过。我也不急于想知道同我们仅仅一板之隔的妻子的卧室里发生什么事。

当然，到了早上我就感到不一样了。

又是节外生枝。不可能的事嘛。而且她的皮肤比我想象的更黑，嘴唇也比我想象的更厚。

她正睡得香甜而恬静，可睁开眼睛时却流露出警觉的神色，片刻后又有些忍不住想笑的样子。我感到满足和安宁，可是不像她那样热情奔放，不，天哪，决不是热情奔放。我不想碰她，她也明白，因为她马上就起床，开始穿衣服。

“好雅致的衣服，”我说，她就做给我看穿着这身衣服的种种姿态：拖在地板上，提起来露出花边衬裙，高高拉到膝盖上。

我告诉她，我不久就要离开这岛，可是临走前我要送她一件礼物。这是件大礼物，不过她收下时既没道谢，脸上也没表情。我问她打算做什么，她说：“我早就知道自己要做什么了，我也知道在这里得不到。”

“你长得够美的，要什么就能得到什么，”我说。

“是啊，”她率直地附和道，“可是在这里得不到。”

她好像要去找在德梅拉拉当裁缝的姐姐，但又说她不愿呆在德梅拉拉。她要到里约去。里约有钱人多的是。

“那你几时着手做这些事呢？”我听出味儿来问道。

“现在就着手了。”她要在大屠杀村搭一条渔船，到镇上去。

我笑了，逗她玩。我说她是从克里斯托芬这老太婆身边逃走。

她回答时没笑，“我对谁都不怨恨，可是我不再呆在这里了。”

我问她怎么到大屠杀村去。她说：“我不骑马，不骑驴，我两条腿结实得很，走得到那里。”

她临走时，我不禁半带渴望，半带得意地说：“阿梅莉，说起来，你还替我难受吗？”

“是啊，”她说，“我替你难受。不过我发觉自己心里也替她难受了。”

她轻轻关上门。我躺着，等着听我知道会听到的声音，我妻子离家时的马蹄声。

我翻个身，一直睡到巴蒂斯特送咖啡来我才醒。他脸色阴沉。

“厨娘要走了，”他宣称。

“为什么？”

他耸耸肩，两手一摊。

我起床，朝窗外看看，只见一个高头大马的女人大踏步跨出厨房。她不会讲英语，据说她不会。我忘了这点，说：“我得跟她谈谈。她头上顶着个太包袱是什么？”

“她的床垫，”巴蒂斯特说。“她还要回来取剩下的东西。跟她谈也没用。她不愿呆在这屋子里。”

我笑了。

“你也要走吗？”

“不走，”巴蒂斯特说。“我是这里的总管。”

我注意到他没称我“先生”，也没称我“少爷”。

“还有那个小丫头伊尔达呢？”

“伊尔达会听我吩咐。她会留下的。”

“好极了，”我说。“那为什么愁眉苦脸？太太不久就会回来的。”

他又耸耸肩，嘴里嘀咕着，至于他是在议论我的人品呢，还是在嘀咕自己得多干份外活，我就说不上去了，因为他嘀嘀咕咕说的是土话。

我吩咐他把阳台上的吊床挂一张在雪松树下，我就在吊床上度过那天剩下的时光。

巴蒂斯特为我准备饭菜，不过他不苟言笑，只有回话时才开口。我妻子并没回来。可是我倒不觉得寂寞和愁闷。有太阳，有睡眠，有凉丝丝的河水就够了。第三天我写了封措词谨慎的信给弗雷泽先生。

我告诉他，我正在考虑写一本有关奥比巫术的书，想起了他讲过自己碰上那案子的情况。知不知道那女人现在的下落？她是不是还在牙买加？

这封信交给了一周来两回的信差投送，弗雷泽准是立即写回信，因为没几天我就收到了回信。

我常常惦念着你们夫妇。正想给你们写信。我的确没忘记那案子。所说的那女人叫约瑟芬，或克里斯托芬·杜布瓦诸如此类的名字，她过去是科斯韦家的一个仆人。她出狱后就失踪了，但是众所周知，老梅森先生对她很照顾。听说她在格兰布瓦附近自己有一所小房子和一块地，或者是人家给的。她自有聪明之处，能充分表达自己的想法，不过我根本不喜欢她的模样，认为她是一个危险之至的人。我妻子硬说她已回到马提尼克岛的老老家去了，尽管我如此绕着弯提起这事，我妻子也觉得心烦。我偶然得悉目前她没回到马提尼克岛去，所

从我给你们镇上的白人警长希尔写了封措词十分谨慎的信。如果她住在你附近，胡搞她那套荒唐把戏，立即通知他。他会派两名警察到你那里，这回她就不会轻易逃过了。我会弄清楚……

约瑟芬也罢，克里斯托芬也罢，你快完了，我心想，费娜，你快完了。

那时正是太阳下山后半小时，我自己称作阴郁的半小时。风息了，光线非常美，群山轮廓分明，棵棵树上的片片叶子都看得一清二楚。我正坐在吊床上观望，安托瓦内特骑着马过来了。她打我身边过，都不朝我看一眼，下马后径自进屋去了。我听见她卧室的门砰地一响，她的手摇铃震天价响着。巴蒂斯特从阳台上一路跑过来。我下了吊床，走到起居室去。他打开了柜了，取出一瓶朗姆酒。他把酒倒些在细颈瓶里，又拿了只玻璃杯，一起放在托盘上。

“给谁喝啊？”我说。他没应声。

“无路可走？”我说着哈哈大笑。

“我一点都不想知道这些事，”他说。

“巴蒂斯特！”安托瓦内特尖声叫道。

“来了，太太，”他直盯着我看，就端起托盘出去了。

至于说到那老太婆呢，我没看见她的人就先看到她的影子。她也打我身边过，连头也不回。她既没走进安托瓦内特的房间，也没朝房间看一看。她径自顺着阳台一直走下另一边的台阶，进了厨房。在这短短的片刻，天黑了，伊尔达进来点上蜡烛。我跟她说话，她惊恐地看了我一眼就逃走了。我打开柜子，看着柜里一排排的酒瓶。这是朗姆酒，这酒就是再过一百年也会叫人喝了醉倒，这是白兰地，这是红葡萄酒，白葡萄酒，我琢磨是从马提尼克岛的圣比埃尔，西印度群岛的巴黎走私进来的吧。我情愿喝朗姆酒。而且，喝在嘴里味道淡，

我等了片刻，等着火辣辣的酒力在胸腔里发作，等着那股流贯全身的劲头和热量。于是我想推开安托瓦内特的房门。门只掀开了一条缝。她一定是把什么家具推过来堵住门了，大概是那张圆桌吧。我再推推，才把门开得大些，让我看见了她。她正仰天躺在床上。她闭着眼睛，呼吸粗声大气。她把被单一直拉到了下巴。床边椅子上有一只空的细颈酒瓶，和一只有一点剩酒的玻璃杯，还有一个黄铜的手摇小铃。

我关上门，臂肘撑在桌上坐下身来，因为我认为自己知道会发生什么事，也知道该怎么办。我觉得房间里闷热难熬，就把大半蜡烛都吹灭了，在半明半暗处等着。然后我走到阳台上，留神看着透出亮光的厨房门。

不一会儿那小丫头出来了，巴蒂斯特随后跟着。同时间，卧室里的手摇铃响了。他们两个走进起居室，我也跟着进去。伊尔达点亮了所有的蜡烛，惊恐万状地冲着我直翻眼珠。手摇铃不停响着。

“给我调一杯浓浓的好酒，巴蒂斯特。就是我想喝的那种。”

他远离我一步说：“安托瓦内特小姐——”

“巴蒂斯特，你在哪儿？”安托瓦内特叫道，“为什么不来？”

“我很快就赶来，”巴蒂斯特说。可他刚伸手去拿酒瓶，我就从他手里一把夺过来。

伊尔达跑出房间。我问巴蒂斯特彼此瞪着。我觉得他两只大大的暴眼和一副万分困惑的表情真逗。

安托瓦内特在卧室里尖声叫着：“巴蒂斯特！克里斯托芬！费娜，费娜！”

“Que komesse！^①”巴蒂斯特说。“我去叫克里斯托芬。”

他几乎同伊尔达一样快地跑了出去。

安托瓦内特的房门开了。我一看见她就大为震惊，话也

① 克里奥耳人通用的法国腔土话：什么事！

说不出来。她的头发蓬乱，毫无光泽，披散到眼睛里，眼睛红肿，直愣愣盯着，脸孔通红，看上去像浮肿。她光着脚。但她说起话来嗓门低沉，差点听不见。

“我渴了才摇铃。难道没人听见吗？”

我还来不及拦住她，她已经冲到桌子边，抓起那瓶朗姆酒。

“别再喝了，”我说。

“你有什么资格对我发号施令？克里斯托芬！”她又叫了，不过嗓门变音了。

“克里斯托芬是个恶老太婆，你我心里都一样明白，”我说。“她在这里也呆不长了。”

“她在这里也呆不长了，”她学着我的腔调说，“你也呆不长了，你也呆不长了。我原以为你很喜欢黑人呢，”她仍以那种装腔作势的嗓门说，“不过这跟其他一切一样，都不过是骗骗人而已。你还是比较喜欢浅棕色皮肤的姑娘吧？你大骂种植园主，编派他们的不是，可你自己干的勾当跟他们干的没两样。你把那丫头赶快打发走，一钱不给，就是给也不多，这就是唯一的不同。”

“奴隶制不是个好恶问题，”我力求心平气和地说。“这是个公不公道的问题。”

“公道，”她说。“我听说过这个词。这是个冷冰冰的词。我试验过了，”她仍以低沉的嗓门说。“我把这词写下了。我写了好几回，可看上去我总觉得像十足冷冰冰的假话。没有公道。”她又喝了几口朗姆酒，接下去说，“就说被你们大家纷纷议论的我母亲吧，她得到什么公道啊？我母亲坐在摇椅上，讲到死掉的马，死掉的马夫，还有一个黑魔鬼吻她忧伤的嘴唇。就跟你吻我的嘴唇那样，”她说。

现在房间里热得叫人受不了。“我去开窗放点空气进来，”我说。

“那夜色也要放进来了，”她说，“还有月亮，还有你深恶痛

绝的那些花香也放进来了。”

我从窗口转过身来，她又在喝酒了。

“伯莎，”我说。

“伯莎不是我名字。你用别的名字叫我是想法把我变成另一个人。我知道，这也是奥比巫术。”

她眼睛里泪水滚滚流下。

“如果我父亲，我的亲生父亲还活着的话，那他同你一刀两断之后，你就不用匆匆回到这里来了。如果他还活着的话。你知道你对我干了什么事吗？不是那姑娘的事，不是那姑娘。而是我本来热爱这地方，你却把这地方搞成我痛恨的地方。我过去总以为就算我生活中的其他一切都消失了，我总还有这个地方，如今也给你毁了。这里只不过又是一个令我痛苦的地方罢了，其他一切事情同这里发生的事情比起来算不上什么。我现在痛恨这地方，就像痛恨你那样，我死前一定要让你看看我多么痛恨你。”

使我吃惊的是她这会儿竟不哭叫了，她说：“她是不是比我漂亮得多？你一点儿也不爱我了么？”

“对，我不爱你，”我说，（说时想起了阿梅莉说，“你喜欢我的头发吗？是不是比她的头发漂亮？”）“这会儿不爱你，”我说。

她听了这话笑了起来。痴笑。

“你瞧。你就是这么个人。石头。不过我也是活该，因为柯拉姨妈不是跟我说别嫁给他吗？就算他装满钻石也别嫁给他。她还跟我讲了好些别的事。我说，你不是讲到英国吗，就讲讲我外公从细颈盛水瓶上递过杯子，热泪滚滚，哭着所有那些早已去世、再也见不到面的老朋友好吗？她说，据我所闻，这事跟英国可毫无关系。恰恰相反：

一脚拐，一腿弯，
查理蹚水过河来。

她用嘶哑的嗓门唱开了。然后又拿起酒瓶喝了。

我说：“不行。”嗓门不大镇静。

我想方设法一手抓住她手腕，一手抓住酒瓶，不料胳膊给她一咬，酒瓶就掉下来了。房间里一股酒味。可我这会儿真火了，她也看出来。她把另一只酒瓶往墙上一砸，手里拿着碎玻璃站着，两眼杀气腾腾。

“你只要碰我一碰，就叫你马上明白我是不是你这号大蠢种。”

接着她就把我浑身上下都骂遍了，骂我的眼睛，骂我的嘴巴，骂我身体的每个器官。呆在这间没有家具的大房间里，烛光摇曳不停，看着这个眼睛布满血丝、头发蓬乱，算是我妻子的陌生人用污言秽语大声骂我，真像是场梦。就在这个做着恶梦的时刻，我听见克里斯托芬那镇静的嗓门。

“快住嘴，安静点。别哭了。哭对他没用。我早跟你说过了。哭没用。”

安托瓦内特瘫倒在沙发上，抽抽搭搭地哭下去。克里斯托芬看着我，两只小眼睛里一副愁色。“你干吗做出那种事来呢？你干吗不跟那个一钱不值的贱娘们儿到别处去搞呢？她可像你一样爱钱——想必你们就是这样才搞到一块儿去了。臭味相投呗。”

我再也忍受不了，就又走出房间，坐到阳台上。

我的胳膊在出血了，正痛着，我用手绢包住伤口，可我总觉得周围一切都对我怀着敌意。望远镜也避开了说别碰我。树木都危机四伏，慢慢在地板上挪动的树影威胁着我。那种绿色的威胁。自从我看见这地方起我就感到那种威胁了。没有一样我熟悉的东西，没有一样东西可以安慰我。

我留神听着。克里斯托芬正轻声轻气地说着话。我妻子在哭。接着门关上了。她们走进了卧室。有人在唱着“Ma

belle ka di^①”，或许就是那支唱什么千年万载的歌吧？但不管唱什么，说什么，都充满危机。我一定得保护自己。我沿着黑洞洞的阳台轻轻走着。我看得见安托瓦内特一动不动地躺在床上。像个玩偶。甚至在拿酒瓶威胁我的时候也有牵线木偶的神态。我听到说，“Ti moun，”和“Doudou ché^②”。包头巾末端在墙上映出手指般的影子。“Du do l'enfant do^③。”听着听着，我就开始感到又困又冷了。

我踉踉跄跄回进亮着烛光的大房间里，房里仍然一股浓烈的朗姆酒味。我不顾酒味，打开柜子，又拿出一瓶酒。我正想着，克里斯托芬进来了。我正想到自己房里最后痛痛快快地喝一通，把两扇门关上，睡上一觉。

“但愿你这下可称心了。但愿你这下可称心如意了，”她说，“跟我扯你那套假话来可不顶用。我和你都一样清楚你跟那丫头搞的勾当。比你清楚。别当我也怕你。”

“原来她逃出去告诉你说我虐待她了吧？我早该料到这一点。”

“她一件事也没告诉我，”克里斯托芬说，“一件也没有。总是这么一回事。总以为谁也没有自尊心，只有你们自己才有。她比你更有自尊心呢，她什么也没说。我看见她站在我门口，脸上那副神色不对，我就知道她碰上什么不妙的事了。我知道我必须赶快行动，我就行动了。”

“当然，看来你是行动起来了。而你干了些什么才把她带回来，弄成现在这副状况的？”

“我干了些什么！留点神！我已经给惹火了，别再火上加油又惹我。说真的，还是别惹我的好。你想要知道我干了些什么吗？我说，doudou，要是你有麻烦来找我，我就对了。我还吻

① 法语：我的美人儿。

② 克里奥耳人哄孩子的土话：你是我的乖宝贝。

③ 克里奥耳人哄孩子的土话：睡觉觉，睡觉觉，孩子，睡觉觉。

了她。就在我吻她时，她哭了——吻她前可没哭。哭是头件大事。让她们哭吧——哭了心里就舒坦了。等她不再哭了我就给她一杯牛奶——幸亏我还有些牛奶。她不肯吃，也不肯说。我就说，‘躺到床上去吧，doudou，想法睡一睡，因为我可以睡在地板上，没关系。’不消说，她自然不打算睡，可我有办法让她睡。这就是我干的事。至于你干了些什么——总有一天你会有报应的。”

“凡是碰上这种事，”她说，“头件大事就是得让她们哭，哭了还得让她们睡。别跟我说什么医生，我比任何医生都懂得多。我替安托瓦内特脱衣服，这样她就可以睡得凉快，睡得安逸。就是在这时刻，我看清你对她很粗暴，是吗？”

说到这里，她笑了——尽情放声欢笑。“这一切都是小事——桩——算不上什么。要是你见到我在这个墙角放着明晃晃的大砍刀的地方见到的情景，你就不至于为了这么点小事把脸拉得这么长了。要是你心里正是想要她更爱你的话，就要让她更爱你。她不是为了这脸上才死气沉沉的。绝对不是。”

“有一天夜里，”她继续说道，“我按住一个女人的鼻子，因为她丈夫拿了大砍刀差点把她鼻子砍下来。我打发一个男孩去找医生，医生深更半夜就骑马飞快赶来替这女人缝上鼻子。完事后他跟我说：‘克里斯托芬，你真是万分沉着。’他就是这样跟我说的。这时那男人正哭得像个小孩似的。他说：‘医生，我不是有意的。不巧碰上了。’医生说：‘我知道，鲁珀特，不过千万别再碰上这种事了。你干吗不把那把要命的大砍刀放在别的房间里啊？’他说。他们只有两间小房间。我听了就说：‘不行，医生——放在床边反而更危险。一转眼工夫两口子就会把对方剁成碎块的。’医生笑了又笑。啊，他真是个好医生。他缝好那女人的鼻子后，我虽说不上看来像原来一个模样，但倒说得上看不大出两样。鲁珀特是那男人的名字。你注意到这里有好多叫鲁珀特的吗？一个是鲁珀特亲王，一个是编歌的鲁珀特，外号赖恩。你看见过他吗？他就在镇上

桥边卖唱他编的歌。我刚初离开牙买加后就住在这镇上。鲁珀特，这名字真美，呃？不过这名字是哪儿来的？我想大概是从老八辈子就传下来的吧。”

“那医生是个老派医生。这些新派医生我可不喜欢。他们一开口就是警察。警察——那玩意儿我最不喜欢。”

“我就料定你不喜欢，”我说。“不过你还没告诉我，我妻子跟你在一起时是怎么回事。说清了，你究竟干了些什么？”

“你妻子！”她说。“你真让我好笑。我虽然不清楚你都干了些什么，可是多少也有些数。大家都知道你是图她的钱才娶了她，你把钱都拿走了。接下来你就想要气死她，因为你妒忌她。她比你强多了，血统也比你的高贵，她也不在乎钱——钱在她看来算不上什么。啊，我头一回看见你就看出那点来了。你虽然年轻，但是心肠已经很硬，你要了她。你让她以为你看了她一眼就活不了啦。”

大概是这么回事，我心想。大概是这么回事。不过还是一句也不说的好。这样一来她们两个包管才会走，那就该轮到睡觉了——我这一觉准睡得又长又沉，而且迷迷糊糊的。

“然后，”她继续用法官的口气说，“你向她求爱，求得她沉醉在你的爱里，那种酒都不会让她醉成这样，醉得她没你的爱就不行。这下是她再也活不了啦。她眼睛里只有你。可是你却一心想气死她。”

（不是你指的那种情况，我心想）

“不过她挺住了，是吗？她挺住了。”

（是啊，她挺住了。真可惜）

“你竟敢就此听信那该死混蛋跟你说的全部假话。”

（那该死混蛋跟你说的）

现在她说的每一个词儿都在我头脑里回响，回声响亮。

“这一来你就可以抛弃她了。”

（抛弃她）

“也不跟她说什么原因。”

(什么原因?)

“再也不爱了,是吗?”

(再也不爱了)

“这种事,”我冷冷地说,“就是你管的吧?你想要毒死我。”

“毒死你?可净给我找麻烦,这人疯了!她来找我,求我给她点什么玩意儿,好让你重新爱她,我告诉她不行,béké的事我可不插手。我跟她说这么做是荒唐的。”

(荒唐荒唐)

“就算这么做不算荒唐,那玩意儿对 béké 也太厉害了。”

(对 béké 太厉害了。太厉害了)

“可是她哭着求我。”

(她哭着求我)

“所以我给了她点春药。”

(春药)

“可是你并没跟她作爱。你一心只想气死她。这药反而使你气死她。”

(气死她)

“她跟我说,半道儿你骂起她来了。骂她提线木偶。大约这么句话吧。”

“对,我想起来了,我说过。”

(马里奥内特,^① 安托瓦内特,马里奥内特,安托瓦内特)

“那话的意思是玩偶,对吗?因为她不说话。你想要逼她哭,逼她说话。”

(逼她哭,逼她说话)

“可她不肯。所以你就想出了另一招。你把那个贱丫头带到隔壁去玩,你们有说有笑,还作爱,让她什么都听到。你存心让她听到的。”

① 马里奥内特(Marionette)在英语中意思即“提线木偶”。

对,这不是碰巧的。我是存心的。

(他们两个都睡着了,我倒整宿躺着睡不着,天一亮我就起身,穿好衣服,给普雷斯顿上了鞍子。我就来找你了。克里斯托芬啊,费娜啊,费娜,帮帮我。)

“你还没告诉我,你究竟怎么对付我的——安托瓦内特来着。”

“不对,我跟你说了。我让她睡觉。”

“什么?一直都在睡?”

“不,不。我叫醒她,让她在太阳下坐着,在阴凉的河里洗澡。尽管她困死了。我给她熬好吃的浓汤。有牛奶的话就给她喝牛奶,还给她吃我自己果树上摘下的果子。要是她不想吃我就说:‘看在我份上,吃下去吧,doudou。’她这才吃下去,吃过她又睡。”

“可你为什么这样做呢?”

沉默了半晌,她又说:“她最好还是睡。我替她调理——让她身子康复的这段时间里,她必须睡。可是这些事我就不跟你统统都说了。”

“可惜的是你的治疗并不奏效。你没有让她康复,反而把她治坏了。”

“不对,我治好了,”她忿忿地说,“我治好了。可是我害怕的是她睡得太多了,睡得太久了。她不是你这种 béké,可她是 béké,她跟我们也不一样。有时早上她醒不过来,有时醒过来看上去还像在睡。我就不想再给她——本来给的那个了。所以,”她停顿一下又接着说,“我让她改喝朗姆酒。我知道那酒不会伤她身子。不大伤身子。谁知她一喝上那酒就说起胡话来了,硬是要回来找你,我劝不住她。她说我要是不陪她来她就自个儿来,不过她求我陪她来。我清清楚楚听到你跟她说,你不爱她了,说这话时冷冰冰的,不动声色,叫我做的——一番好事都白做了。”

“你做的——一番好事!你满嘴胡言叫我厌透了,克里斯托

芬。看上去你用劣质朗姆酒把她灌得烂醉，不成人样。我简直认不出她来了。你干吗这样做我也说不上来——想来是因为恨我吧。你既然听到那么多话，或许你也听信她承认的——吹嘘的那套话吧，你也听信她骂我那些话吧。你的doudou确实会讲一些脏话。”

“告诉你，不是这么回事。告诉你，这算不得什么。你害得她这么苦，她都不知道自己说些什么了。她父亲老科斯韦先生骂起来才要命呢——她跟他学来的。有一回，她小时候逃出去，跟海湾边的渔夫和水手混在一起。那些人哪！”她抬眼望着天花板。“你决不会想到他们过去都是些天真的奶娃娃。她回来就学他们说话了。可她不懂自己说些什么。”

“我想她懂得每句话的意思，而且句句话都有用意。不过你说得对，克里斯托芬——这都是小事一桩。算不得什么。这里没有大砍刀，所以没有砍刀伤人的事。这一回根本没伤人的事。我相信不管你把她灌得多醉，这点你还是小心提防的。”

“你这人年纪轻轻，心肠倒真够狠的。”

“是你这么说的，是你这么说的。”

“我跟她就这么说的。我提醒过她。我说，这个人眼看你完全垮了也决不会来帮你一把。只有最好的人才会这样做。最好的人——有时最坏的人也会。”

“可是不用说，你准把我当作最坏的一个人了？”

“不，”她冷漠地说，“我看你既不是最好的一个，也不是最坏的一个。你是——”她耸耸肩——“你不会帮她一把。我跟她这么说过。”

蜡烛差不多全都灭了。她没去再点新的——我也没去点。我们坐在昏暗的光线中。我想，我该终止这场毫无意义的谈话了，可是竟如在催眠状态中一般，只能听着她从暗处传来的低沉噪音。

“我了解那姑娘。她决不会再求你爱她了，宁死也不求。

不过我克里斯托芬，我求你了。她这么爱你。她渴望着你的爱。等一阵子，也许你会再爱她的。就像她说的，有——一点儿爱。就像你做得到的，有——一点儿。”

我摇摇头，还一直习惯性地摇下去。

“那个卑鄙的混蛋跟你说的统统是假话。他也不姓科斯卡。他母亲是个一无是处的女人，她想法蒙骗老头儿，可是老头儿没受骗。‘多——张嘴少一张嘴都无所谓’，他说着哈哈大笑。他错了。他越是照顾那些人，他们越是恨他。丹尼尔那人——肚子仇恨——叫他心里不得安宁。要是我知道你们到这里来，我就叫你们别来了。可你们匆匆结婚，匆匆离开牙买加。来不及了。”

“她跟我说他的话都是真的。那会儿她说谎。”

“因为你伤了她的心，她也要伤你的心，就是这缘故。”

“那么说她母亲发疯，也是假话？”

克里斯托芬没有立刻回答。等她回答时嗓门就没那么镇静了。

“人家把她逼疯的。她儿子死了以后，有一阵子她就稀里糊涂，人家就把她关起来。人家跟她说她疯了，把她当成疯子看待。问啊问啊。就是没句体贴话，也没有朋友，她丈夫也走了，离开了她。人家又不让我去看她。我想去，可是去不成。他们也不让安托瓦内特去看她。到末了——我不知道她疯不疯——她干脆死了心，什么都不在乎了。那个照管她的男人几时想要玩她就玩她，他女人就去乱说了。那个男人，还有别的男人，他们都玩过她。唉，没有上帝啊。”

“只有你的神灵，”我提醒她说。

“只有我的神灵，”她沉住气说。“你们的《圣经》里说上帝是神——可没说没别的神灵了。根本没有说过。她母亲的遭遇叫我很伤心，我决不能让这种事再出现。你叫她玩偶？她没使你满足吗？再试试她一回，我想这一回她会满足你的。要是你抛弃她，人家就会把她彻底搞垮的——就像他们搞垮

她母亲那样。”

“我决不会抛弃她，”我厌烦地说。“我会尽力照顾她。”

“你会像以前那样爱她吗？”

(替我吻吻我妹子，你妻子。像我以前那样爱她——啊，真的，我爱过她。我怎能答应这样做呢?)我一言不发。

“是她得不到满足。她是克里奥耳姑娘，心中充满阳光。实话跟你说吧。她可没有上人家对我说的英国这地方去，她没有上你漂亮的公馆去求你娶她。没有，是你大老远的来到她屋里——是你向她求的婚。而她爱上你，把她所有的统统给了你。如今你倒说你不爱她了，你把她气死了。你把她的钱怎么花啊？”她的嗓门依然很轻，不过说到“钱”时，嗓音里带点嘲笑的嘘声。我想，当然啰，拉拉杂杂地说了一大套就是绕到这上面。我再也不感到惶惑、困倦，昏昏欲睡，而是警觉了，提防着，准备自卫了。

她想探听我为什么不能把安托瓦内特的嫁妆归还她一半，离开这个岛——“如果你不想再要她就离开西印度群岛”。

我问她心里想要的准数是多少，可她并不清楚。

“这件事和其他诸如此类的事你都去同律师解决吧。”

“那她今后怎么办？”

她，克里斯托芬，会好好照顾安托瓦内特的(不消说，还包括她的钱)。

“你们两个都留在这里？”我但愿自己的嗓音能同她的一样婉转。

不，她们要到马提尼克岛去。然后再到别处去。

“我想趁自己还没死多见见世面。”

或许是因为我如此沉着镇定，她又不怀好意地说道，“她去跟别人结婚。忘掉你，过好日子。”

我顿时心里充满一阵愤怒和妒忌。啊，不，她不会忘。我笑了。

“你笑我吗？你干吗笑我？”

“我当然笑你——你这丢人现眼的老太婆。我不打算再同你讨论我的事情了。也不同你的小姐讨论。你要说的话我都听了，我不相信你。好吧，跟安托瓦内特告别一下就走。这里发生的一切事情全都怪你不好，所以别再回来了。”

她昂首挺胸，双手叉在臀部。“你算老几，竟敢叫我走？这屋子是安托瓦内特小姐的母亲，如今归她了。你算老几，竟敢叫我走？”

“你尽管放心，现在这里归我了。你必须走，要不走我就叫人来赶你出去。”

“你当这里的人敢碰我吗？他们才不是你这种大笨蛋，哪敢用手碰我？”

“那我要叫警察来了，我警告你。尽管这里是个荒岛，必定也有法治的。”

“这里没有警察，”她说。“没有用锁链拴在一起干苦活的囚犯，没有折磨囚犯的踏车，也没有黑牢。这里是自由国家，我是自由人。”

“克里斯托芬，”我说，“你住在牙买加多年了，总很熟悉西班牙镇的地方官弗雷泽先生吧。我写过信给他打听你的事。你想听听他怎么回答的吗？”她两眼瞪着我。我就大声念了弗雷泽回信的结尾：“我给你们镇上的白人警长希尔写了封措词十分谨慎的信。如果她住在你附近，胡搞她那套荒唐把戏，立即通知他。他会派两名警察到你那里，这回她就不会轻易逃过了……你小姐在我酒里下的毒药是你给的吧？”

“我已经跟你说过了——你胡扯。”

“我们总会查清的——那酒我还留着一点儿呢。”

“我跟她这么说的，”她说，“这玩意儿对 béké 一向不管用。一向要惹麻烦……原来你把我打发走就好独吞她的钱。那你打算把她怎么着？”

“我不明白干吗要把我的计划讲给你听。我打算回到牙

买加去同西班牙镇的医生和她哥哥商量一下。我要遵照他们的意见。这就是我的全部打算。她身体不好。”

“她哥哥！”她往地板上啐了一口。“理查·梅森不是她哥哥。你想蒙我吗？你想要她的钱，可又不想要她的人。你是存心硬说她发疯了。我知道的。你跟医生们怎么说，他们怎么说。你想要叫理查怎么说，他这个人就怎么说——而且心甘情愿，我知道。她将成为她母亲那样。你那样做是图钱吗？可你真像撒旦一样恶毒呀！”

我大声狂叫说：“你以为我情愿要这一些吗？我宁死也要解脱这包袱。我宁愿瞎了眼也决不要看到这个鬼地方。”

她笑了。“这倒是你说的头一句大实话。你宁愿牺牲什么就牺牲什么，对不？那你自己定吧。你插手了什么事，也许自己还不知道呢。”她开始喃喃咕咕，自言自语了。说的不是上话。现在我听得出土话口音了。

她跟那一个同样疯了，我想，就转身对着窗。

几个仆人正围成一伙，站在丁香树下。巴蒂斯特，那个小马倌和伊尔达那丫头。

克里斯托芬说得对。这些仆人不打算卷入到这场纠纷里去。

我朝她一看，只见脸上戴着个面具似的，眼神不屈不挠。她是个斗士，我得承认。我违心地又说了一遍，“你想要去同安托瓦内特告别吗？”

“我给她吃了点睡觉的药——对她一点也没害处。我不叫醒她让她苦恼了。这事你去跟她说吧。”

“你可以给她写信，”我生硬地说。

“我不会念，不会写。别的倒会。”

她头也不回，径自走了。

我的睡意全都消失了。我在房里来回走着，感到指尖血脉颤动。这股血顺着两臂流到心脏，一颗心就急剧跳动起来。

我一面走一面大声说话。说的就是我打算写的信中的话。

“我现在才知道你一手策划这件事，因为你想要摆脱我。你根本就不爱我。我哥哥也不爱我。你的计划得逞了，因为我当时年轻、自负、愚蠢、轻信。首先是因为我年轻。你才能对我来上这一手……”

可是我现在并不年轻了，我心里想道。我不再徘徊，喝起酒来了。这种朗姆酒就跟母亲的奶汁或父亲的祝福一样淡。

我想象得出要是我发出这封信，他看了信脸上的表情。

我写道：

亲爱的父亲：

我们不久就要离开这个岛去牙买加了。一些预见不到的情况，至少是我预见不到的情况，迫使我作出这一决定。我相信你一定知道发生了什么事情，或者猜想到了，我也相信你一定会认为你对任何人越少谈起我的事情越好，特别是我的婚事。这不仅是为了我的利益，而且也是为了你的利益。希望不久你会再收到我的信。

于是我给我在西班牙镇打过交道的律师事务所写信。我告诉他们想在离镇不要太近的地方租一幢有家具设备的房子，面积要宽敞，容得下两套独立的套间。我还告诉他们雇一批仆人，我准备付给他们丰厚的工资——只要他们保持缄默就行，我想——可我信上却写道，规定他们必须谨慎可靠。我和妻子大约在一周内就可到达牙买加，望届时诸事齐备。

我写这封信时，外面有只雄鸡一直啼个不休。我随手拿起一本书就对鸡扔去，谁知这鸡昂首阔步走了几步又啼起来了。

巴蒂斯特露面了，朝安托瓦内特那静悄悄的房里看看。

“你还有不少这种名贵的朗姆酒吗？”

“朗姆酒多的是，”他说。

“是真正百年陈酒吗？”

他冷漠地点点头。一百年，一千年，对 le bon Dieu^①和巴蒂斯特定反正都一样。

“那只瘟鸡啼个什么名堂？”

“要变天才啼呗。”

因为他眼睛死盯着那卧室，我就对他大声叫道：“睡着了，dormi, dormi^②。”

他摇摇头走开了。

我想，他对我绷着脸了。我把写给律师的信再看一遍时也绷着脸了。不管我付给牙买加的仆人多大一工钱，也休想买得到谨慎可靠。我会成为流言蜚语的话柄，胡诌乱唱的资料（而他们竟把每件事，每个人都编成歌曲。可惜你没听到那支唱总督夫人的歌）。今后我走到哪儿，哪儿就有人议论我。我又喝了几口朗姆酒，喝着喝着画了一幢房子，四周都是树木。画的是幢大房子。我把三层楼隔成几间房间，在一间房里画了一个站着的女人——像孩子的涂鸦，一个小圆点儿算作脑袋，一个大圆点儿算作身体，一个三角算作裙子，几根斜线算作胳膊和腿。不过房子画的是英国式的。

英国的树木。我真不知道自己还能不能再见到英国。

*

在夹竹桃下……我凝视着隐秘的群山和笼罩着山峦真面目的薄雾。今天天气凉爽，就像英国的夏天一样凉爽、无风、阴沉。不过无论什么天气，这里都是一个可爱的地方，无论我走到多远，都看不到比这里更可爱的地方。

飓风季节不远了，我想，一定要让树把根扎得更深些，准备抗击大风。没用的。如果飓风一旦来临，这些树全都会拔

① 法语：上帝。

② 法语：睡着了，睡着了。

掉。有些王棕会挺住(她跟我说的)。枝桠全都刮光了,活像高大的棕色柱子,可依然挺住——凛然不屈。难怪称作王了。竹子采取的是逆来顺受的方式,弯身贴地倒伏,吱嘎作声,呻吟哀号求饶。睥睨一切的大风刮过时,对这些卑躬屈节的竹子毫不关心。(让它们活下去吧。)狂风刮过时一边怒吼,一边呼啸,一边大笑。

然而这一切离今还有几个月。眼下是英国的夏天,天气那么凉爽,天色那么灰暗。但我还想着我的报复和飓风。脑子里匆匆掠过一连串言(也有行)。言。其中一个就是怜悯。这念头使我不得安宁。

怜悯正如一个乘着狂风而来的赤子。

好久前我年轻时念到过这句诗——我现在恨诗人,也很恨诗。我从前也同样爱过音乐,现在也恨了。唱你的歌去吧,外号赖恩的鲁珀特,可是我不会听你唱,尽管人家告诉我说你有一副好歌喉……

怜悯。难道对我就一点儿怜悯也没有吗?终身受一个疯子束缚——而且是一个醉气熏天、满口胡言、走着她母亲老路的疯子。

“她这么爱你,这么爱你。她渴望着你的爱。就像她说的,有一点儿爱。就像你做得到的,有一点儿。”

一直都在讥笑我,魔鬼。你当我不知道吗?她渴望着任何人的爱——不是渴望着我……

她会披散一头黑发,笑啊,哄啊,讨好啊(她是个疯女人,才不会在乎爱的是什么人呢)。她会呻吟,叫喊,神志清醒的人决不会像她这样忘形——也决不可能。也决不可能。然后就死气沉沉地躺着,像这阴天一样死气沉沉。一个始终头脑清醒的疯子。可根本没有真正清醒过。

直到她整日沉醉于杯中,经常玩弄她的鬼把戏,连下三烂都不理睬她,讥笑她。而我该不该知道这事呢——我?不,我自有一个能顶两个的高招。

“她这么爱你，这么爱你。再试试爱她一回吧。”

说真的，她什么人不爱，什么人都爱。我没法伤害她。只有像飓风伤害那棵树那样——一下子摧毁。你说我下过手吗？没有。那是爱的狂热游戏。现在我要下手了。

她再也不会在阳光下欢笑了。她也不会梳妆打扮，对着那面讨厌的镜子里的身影露出笑容了。不会那样得意，那样称心了。

聪明面孔笨肚肠啊。生来就是为了谈情说爱？是啊，不过她再也没有情人了，因为我不需要她了，而她也见不到别人了。

那棵树颤抖了。一面颤抖，一面养精蓄锐，等待应战。

（现在正刮着凉风——寒风。这股风有没有载着那个生来要乘着一阵狂风的赤子啊？）

她说她爱这个地方。这将是她最后一次看见这地方了。我倒要看看她有没有一滴眼泪，一滴有人性的眼泪。不是看那张茫然、仇恨、发狂的脸。我还要听听……她是不是说再见了，或许说 adieu。Adieu——就像她唱的那些老歌中唱的。总是唱 adieu（所有的歌都这么唱的）。假如她也这么说，或是哭泣，我就会把她，我的疯女人抱在怀里。她虽是疯了，但她是我的人，我的人呀。我才不管它什么神啊，鬼啊，命运啊。假如她笑了，或哭了，或是又哭又叫。都是为了我呢。

安托瓦内特——我也会温情脉脉的。把你的脸藏起来。只是藏在我怀里。你马上就会看到我有多温柔。我的疯女人。我的疯妻子。

这是阴天帮你的忙。没有黄灿灿的太阳。

没有太阳……没有太阳。天气变了。

*

巴蒂斯特正等着，马已上了鞍。那小马倌站在丁香树旁，身边放着他要随带的篮子。这些篮子轻，而且不透水。我决

定把一只篮子放几件必需的衣服——我们的行李大部分在一两天内就可随后运出。有一辆马车停在大屠杀村来接我们。一切事宜我都料理好，安排妥了。

她在 ajoupa 里，我看到她已着意穿戴好准备起程了，可是脸色茫然，毫无表情。眼泪？她一滴眼泪也没有。得了，等着瞧吧。我心里纳闷，她想起什么，感觉到什么了吗？（那片蓝色的云雾，那片阴影是马提尼克岛。现在清晰了……还是想起那些山的名字。不，不是山。Morne，^① 她总是这么说。“对那些来说——山是个难听的字眼。”还是想起西班牙佬杰克的传说了。好久以前的事了。当她说：“瞧！绿宝石耳坠！带来了好运。”果然不错，有一阵子天空都发绿了——碧绿的夕阳。真怪。不过还远不如说这带来了好运道。）

我对她那种茫然的冷漠神态毕竟还是有所准备的。我知道我的梦想只是梦想。可是眼望着这幢破旧的白房子油然而生的那股悲哀却是我没有准备的。它越发力图挣脱这蛇一般的黑森林。它更加拼命地大声喊道：救救我，别让我毁掉，沦为荒凉的废墟吧。救救我，别让蚂蚁一口口把我啃得慢慢死掉吧。可你真蠢，在这里干什么？这么靠近森林。难道你不知道这是个危险的地方吗？而且黑森林永远获胜？永远。如果你不知道，马上就会知道的，我可一点也帮不了你。

巴蒂斯特看上去大不一样。丝毫没有懂礼貌的下人模样。他戴了一顶帽檐很宽的草帽，像渔夫那种帽子一样，不过帽顶是扁平的，不是高高尖尖的。他的阔皮腰带擦得亮亮的，那把带鞘的弯刀的柄也擦得亮亮的，那件蓝布衬衫和裤子都纤尘不染。我知道那顶帽子是不透水的。他备了防雨的，准是快要下雨了。

我说我想跟那个老是笑的小丫头伊尔达告别。“伊尔达不在这里，”他用精确的英语回答说，“伊尔达走了——昨天走

^① 法语：小丘。

的。”

他说话口气算得上有礼貌的了，但我感觉得到他态度里的憎恶和轻蔑。这同那个鬼婆子说“尝尝我的牛血吧”时的轻蔑态度一样。她意思是说喝了这个可以让你成为男子汉。或许是吧。我才不管他们对我有什么想法呢！至于她嘛，我暂时把她忘掉了。所以我永远也弄不明白，为什么突然一下子竟胡里胡涂地认准过去自己信以为真的一切都是假的。假的。只有巫术和梦是真的——其余一切都是假象。让它去吧。秘密就在这里。就在这里。

（可是那秘密已经失落了，那些知道秘密的人又不能说出来。）

没有失落。我在一个隐秘的角落找到了，我保存起来了，紧紧守住。如同守住她一般。

我瞧着她。她正向外凝视着远处的大海。她是沉默的化身。

唱吧，安托瓦内特，我现在听得见你唱了。

现在风说曾经是，曾经是
大海说必定是，必定是
太阳说可能是，终究是
雨说……？

“你得听听这支歌。我们的雨会唱种种歌。”

“还有种种眼泪？”

“种种，种种，种种。”

对了，我要听听雨声。我要听听山鸟歌唱。啊，令人心醉的就是美洲鸫的一声啼叫——声调高亢、优美、凄凉、迷人。你屏息凝神听着……没了……走了。我该对她怎么说才好呢？

别伤心了。也别想着告别。千万不要告别。我们还要再

次观赏暮色——还要多次观赏暮色，或许我们会看到绿宝石耳坠，那种带来好运的绿色霞光。你准会像以往一样有说有笑——跟我说说在圣茨外面打的那场仗，或者说说在玛丽·加兰特的野餐——那回以打架告终出名的野餐。或者说说海盗，说说他们在航海之余都干了些什么，因为每次航海都可能是他们的最后一次。阳光，桑格里酒是一种一喝就醉的混合饮料。还有——地震。哦，是的，据说上帝对人们的所作所为感到愤怒，一觉醒来，吹了一口气，他们就消失了。上帝又睡了。不过人们却把自己的金银财宝，还有贵过金银的东西都丢下了。有些金银财宝给后人找到了——只是找到财宝的人决不会说出去，因为要明白，说了他们就只能拿到三分之一了。这是财宝法。他们想全归自己，所以决不会说的。有时候找到的是珍贵物品或珠宝。他们不断找到珠宝并暗中卖给小心谨慎的人，买主称啊，量啊，犹豫不决，问些得不到回答的问题，然后才交钱拿货。大家都知道西班牙镇上有金器和珍宝出现——（这里也有）。各个岛上都有，不知从哪儿来的，都是从没人知道的地方来的。因为最好不要谈起珍宝。最好不要告诉人家。

对，最好不要告诉人家。我不会告诉你，我几乎没有听你讲的那些故事。我一心渴望的是夜晚和黑暗，还有月光花开放的时刻。

掩住月亮，

摘下星星。

在黑暗中相爱，因为我们喜欢黑夜

稍纵即逝，稍纵即逝。

像趾高气扬的海盗那样，让我们把全部所有都尽量挥霍，尽情享受，并作最坏的打算吧。不是献出三分之一，而是献出一切。全部——全部——全部。毫无保留。

不,我要说——我知道自己要说什么。“我犯了一个大错。原谅我吧。”

我说出来了,一边看着她,只见她眼睛中一股仇恨——就此感到自己也冒出来一股仇恨回敬。而且那种令人眼花缭乱的转变,那种勾起回忆的、令人恶心的大转变又回到仇恨上来了。他们用你那笔臭钱把我,我买下了。你帮助他们买的。你欺骗我,辜负我,如果有机会,还会作出更恶劣的事来……(那姑娘她一直盯着你眼睛,满口甜言蜜语——跟你说的净是假话。假话。她母亲就这样。人家说她比她母亲更坏。)

……如果我命该下地狱就下地狱吧。再也没有骗人的天堂了。再也没有可恶的巫术了。你恨我,我也恨你。我们倒要瞧瞧谁最恨谁。不过首先,首先我要把你的仇恨彻底打掉。此时此刻。我的仇恨格外冷酷,格外强烈,你要发火也恨不起来了。你什么都不会有了。

我也做到这点了。我看见她眼睛中的仇恨消退了,是我逼退的。她的美貌也随着仇恨一起消退了。她只是一个幽灵而已。一个出没在昏暗的白昼中的幽灵。只剩下绝望。说声死吧,我就死了。说声死吧,我就死给你看。

她抬起眼睛。两只茫然、动人的眼睛。疯狂的眼睛。一个疯女人。我不知道自己要说什么,做些什么。一切都悬而未决呢。不料就在这时刻,那个没名没姓的小马倌一头靠在丁香树上哭了。呜哩呜哩的大声哭得好伤心。我真恨不得一把掐死他。可我竭力克制自己,走到他们身边,冷冷地问:“他怎么啦?他哭什么?”巴蒂斯特没应声。那张拉长的脸拉得更长了,这就是我从巴蒂斯特那里得到的回答。

她倒听得懂我的话,回答了。我简直认不出她的嗓门了。没有热情,没有温柔。玩偶自有玩偶的嗓门,上气不接下气,冷淡得古怪。

“我们刚来时他问我,我们走时肯不肯——你——肯不肯带他走。他不要什么钱。只是跟在你身边罢了。因为——”

她顿了一下，舌头舔舔嘴唇。“他很爱你。所以我说你肯的。带上他吧。巴蒂斯特跟他说你决不会带他走。所以他才哭。”

“我当然不会带他走，”我发火说。（天哪！一个半野蛮的小鬼，又是……又是……）

“他会讲英语，”她依然态度冷淡地说。“他英语学得很用功。”

“他没学会什么我听得懂的英语，”我说。瞧着她那张绷紧的苍白脸容，我不由更火了。“你凭什么资格代表我许愿？究竟凭什么资格替我说话？”

“对，我没资格。对不起。我不了解你。我对你一无所知，我不能替你说话……”

就这么算了。我跟巴蒂斯特告了别。他老大不愿意地勉强对我鞠了一躬，嘀咕了一句——我想是祝我们一路顺风吧。我敢说，他才巴不得别再见到我呢。

她上了马，他往她跟前走去。她伸出手来，他握住不放，一边非常诚挚地跟她说话，一边握住手。我没听到他说什么，可我觉得她当时要哭了。谁知没有，脸上又露出玩偶般的笑容——凝住不变了。即使她像抹大拉的马利亚^①那样痛哭失声也没什么用处。我筋疲力尽了。所有疯狂而矛盾的情感都烟消云散，只落得内心厌倦而空虚。神志清醒。

我对这些人腻烦了。我讨厌他们的笑声和泪痕，他们的奉承和猜忌，自负和欺骗。而且我痛恨这个地方。

我痛恨峰峦、山丘、江河、雨天。我痛恨不管什么色彩的晚霞。我痛恨晚霞的美景、魅力和我无从知晓的秘密。我痛恨晚霞的冷漠和残酷，这原是它美妙之处。我尤其痛恨她。因为她属于魅力和美妙。她留给我的是渴望，我这一生在没找到丢失的东西之前总是这么渴望着、惦念着。

① 抹大拉的马利亚是《圣经·新约·路加福音》第7章所写的一个妓女，她悔过从良后得到宽赦，成为耶稣的信徒。

我们就此骑着马走了，离开这里——这个隐秘的地方。这不是我呆的地方，也不是她呆的地方。这点我注意到了。此刻她在路上已走得远远的了。

不久她就将同所有那些知道秘密而不会说出来的人在一起。那些人或者是没法说出来。或者是因为所知不多想说也说不出。那些人一看就认得出来。苍白的脸容，恍惚的眼神，并无所指的手势，声调尖利的怪笑。他们走路、说话、尖叫的神态，要是你也对他们笑，他们就企图自杀，或是杀你。不错，必须把他们看管住。因为他们到时候就想杀人，杀了之后就走得没影了。不过其他人在等着接替他们，这支队伍长着呢。她是其中的一个。我也等得到这一天，到了这一天她就只是一个不愿再想起的回忆，深锁心头的回忆，而且像一切回忆一样，只是个传奇。或者假象……

我记得我们拐弯时，我不由想到巴蒂斯特，不知他还有没有别的名字——我从来没问过。接着又想到要把这地方卖个好价钱。我原来是打算把这地方归还她的。如今——还她有什么用呢？

那个蠢孩子跟在我们后面，头上顶着篮子。他用手背擦掉眼泪。谁会想到一个孩子竟会哭成这模样。哭得无缘无故。无缘无故……

第三部

“人家都知道他父亲和哥哥去世的时候他在牙买加，”格莱思·普尔说。“他继承了全部家产，不过在此之前他就只是一个财主了。人家说，有的人就是运气好，言下之意说的是他带回英国来的那女人。第二天埃弗太太想要见我，她抱怨有人说长道短。我不允许有人说长道短。你一来我就对你讲明了。我说，下人们会说三道四，你又堵不住她们的嘴。再说，

没准这份工作对我还不适合呢，夫人。当初我看了你们广告来应聘的时候，你说要我照料的不是个年轻女人。我问是不是个老太太，你说不是。见到了她，我倒不知道怎么想才好了。她浑身哆嗦地坐着，瘦得要命。如果她死在我手里，那该怪谁啊？她说，等一下，格莱思。她正拿着一封信。趁你还没拿定主意，请你先听听这家主人对这事是怎么吩咐的吧。“如果普尔太太令人满意，何不给她双倍工资，三倍工资呢，”她念着信，再把信折好收起，可我已经看见下面一页写的了，‘只是千万别再让我听到这事了。’信封上贴着枚外国邮票。我说：‘我才不为了几个钱就替魔鬼干坏事呢。’她说：‘你要是以为替这位爷们儿干活是在替魔鬼干坏事，那就大错特错了。打他小时候起我就认识他的为人了。青年时我也认识他的为人。他生性和善，慷慨，勇敢。他在西印度群岛住过一阵子后竟变得认不出来了。头发白了，眼神中很痛苦。要我去怜悯把他害成这副模样的人可甭想。我说得够多的了，太多了。我并不准备给你三倍工资，格莱思，不过我可以出你双倍工资。只是决不允许再有人说三道四。否则我马上叫你走。我看，要找个人替你还是办得到的。相信你一定会明白。’我说，对，我明白。

“于是就把全部仆人都辞退了，她雇了一个做饭的，一个使女，还有你，莉亚。她们虽然都给辞退了，可她怎么堵得住她们的嘴呢？依我说呀，全郡的人都知道。我听的那些谣言——跟事实差得老远呢。可我不去辟谣。我哪会这么胡涂得去多嘴多舌呢。说到头来，这幢房子倒是又大又安全，是个躲避外面世界的场所，外面世界对女人可以说是暗无天日，十分残酷。也许这就是我继续留下的缘故吧。”

厚厚的围墙，她心想。走过大门口就是长长的一条林荫道，走进屋子就是熊熊炉火，还有深红色和白色的房间。不过首要是厚厚的围墙，把你一直在跟它们斗，斗到无法再斗下去的纷繁世事隔绝在外。是啊，也许这就是我们这几个人——我，埃弗太太和莉亚留下来的缘故吧。我们这些人嘛，除了那

个生活在自己黑暗世界的女人不算。我倒要替她说一句，她并没有垂头丧气。她还是那么凶悍。她眼睛里一露出那种神色，我就不敢掉头不管她。这种事我知道。

我在这间房里早早醒来，躺着净打哆嗦，因为房里很冷。那个照料我的女人格莱思·普尔终于拿纸、枯枝和煤块生着了火。她跪着用风箱吹旺火。纸蜷缩了，枯枝哗哗剥剥爆出火星，煤块直冒烟，发红了。末了火焰窜上来了，真美。我起了床，走近前去看着火，心里直纳闷，不知为什么自己会给带到这里来。什么缘故啊？一定有个缘故。我应该做些什么事？我刚来时还以为只住一天两天，至多住上一星期呢。我还以为我一见到他，跟他说话时自己会灵巧像蛇，驯良像鸽子^①呢。我会跟他说，“我自愿把全部家产统统都给你，只要你放我走，我今后再也不会来打扰你了。”谁知他根本没来过。

格莱思那女人睡在我房里。有时晚上我看见她坐在桌边数钱。她手里拿着枚金币发笑。数完就把钱都放进一个袋口有束带的小帆布袋里，再把袋子挂在脖子上，好让衣服遮住袋子。开头她数钱之前总要先看看我，可我总是装睡，现在她可不费这份神了。她喝了桌上那瓶里的东西就上床了，或者胳膊支在桌上，脑袋枕着胳膊就睡了。可是我却躺着眼睁睁看着火灭掉。趁她打呼噜时我起床，尝尝那瓶里无色的东西。头回一尝就差点要唾出来，可还是勉强咽了下去。等我又回到床上，就能想起更多的事，又能动动脑筋了。我也不那么冷了。

有一扇窗子离地很高——没法往外看。我的床原来有门，却给拆掉了。房里没多少别的东西。她的床，一只黑衣

① 典出《圣经·新约·马太福音》第10章第16节。原句是“你们要小心，我派你们出去，就像送羊入狼群，所以你们要灵巧像蛇，驯良像鸽子”。

橱,中间一张桌子,两把雕刻着花果的黑椅子。高高的靠背,没扶手。梳妆间很小,隔壁那间房挂着壁毯。有一天我朝挂毯一看,认出了我母亲,穿着夜礼服,却光着脚。她像往常一样,眼光避开我,看着我头顶上面。我不会跟格莱思说这件事的。她的名字不该叫格莱思^①。名字可大有关系,比如过去他不肯叫我安托瓦内特时,我就看到安托瓦内特和她的一身香味,漂亮衣服,连同镜子,都从窗口飘出去了。

这里没有镜子,我不知道现在自己成了什么模样。我想起过去对镜看着自己刷头发,自己的眼睛也迎面看着自己的情景。我看见的那女人是我本人,可又不太像本人。好久以前我还小的时候,非常孤独,我还想去亲亲她呢。可是镜子挡在我们中间——冰硬的,我呵出的气都把镜面蒙住了。现在他们把一切都拿走了。我在这地方干什么,我是谁啊?

挂壁毯那间房间的门总是锁着。我知道这门通到一条过道。格莱思就站在那里跟我从没见过过的另一个女人讲话。那人叫莉亚。我留神听着,可听不懂她们说什么。

原来仍然有我听了一辈子的说悄悄话的声音,不过口音不同而已。

到了夜里,她喝过几口睡着之后,要拿钥匙就容易了。我现在知道她把钥匙放在哪儿了。拿到钥匙我就打开门,走进他们的世界。我一向就知道,这世界是纸板糊成的。我以前在什么地方见到过,这个纸板世界的全部东西都是棕色的、深红色的或黄色的,里面一点亮光也没有。我沿着过道走着,只想能看到纸板后面有什么东西。她们告诉我说我在英国,可我不信她们的话。我们到英国来就迷路了。儿时迷路的?在哪儿迷路的?我都记不得了,总之我们迷了路。是不是那天晚上他看见我在船舱里跟一个给我送饭的年轻人说话那会儿?我双臂勾住他脖子,要求他帮助我。他说:“我不知道怎

① 格莱思(Grace)在英语中的含义是优美、温雅。

么办才好，先生。”我把杯盘都往舷窗上砸去。我巴不得把舷窗砸破，让海水进来。结果进来一个女人，还来了一个上了年纪的男人把地板上的碎东西扫掉了。他打扫时没看我一眼。第三个人来了说喝了这个你就会睡觉了。我喝了说，“不像看上去那样。”他说：“我知道，根本不像。”后来我就睡着了。等我一觉醒来已到了另一片大海。天气更冷些。我想，大概就是那天夜里，我们改变了航向，迷失了到英国的路。我夜里在房里走来走去的那个纸板屋子不是英国。

有一天早上我醒来就浑身都痛。不是着凉，而是另外一种痛。我看见自己双腕红肿。格莱思说：“我想，你打算跟我说你一点都不记得昨晚的事了吧？”

“昨晚是几时啊？”

“昨天。”

“我不记得昨天了。”

“昨晚有位先生来看你，”她说。

“是哪一位先生啊？”

因为我知道这屋子里有陌生人。我拿了钥匙，走进过道时我听见他们在远处有说有笑的，像鸟般热闹，楼下一层还有灯光。

我拐过一个弯看见有个姑娘走出卧室。她穿了一件白衣服，独自哼着歌。我把身子紧紧贴住墙，因为我不想让她看见我，谁知她停下了不走了，朝四下看看。她什么也没看见，只见影子。我留神提防着呢，可她并没走到楼梯头。她撒腿跑了。她碰到另一个姑娘，第二个姑娘说：“你见到鬼了吗？”——“我什么也没看见，只是好像觉得有什么动静。”——“那就是鬼了，”第二个姑娘说，两个人就一起下楼去了。

“究竟是哪一个人来看我啊，格莱思·普尔？”我说。

他并没有来过。他来我即使睡着了也会知道的。他还没来呢。她说：“我看你记得的事可多着呢，你是装作记不得。

我保证过你会安安静静，能识好歹，你为什么偏偏要这样？我今后再也不想帮你忙了。你哥哥来看过你了。”

“我没哥哥。”

“他说他是你哥哥。”

我的心思顿时回到好久好久以前。

“他名字叫理查吗？”

“他没告诉我自己的名字。”

“我认识他，”我说，一骨碌跳下床。“就在这里，就在这里，我像藏所有的东西那样，把它藏起来了，免得让你那双贼眼看见。可它在哪儿啊？我把它藏到哪儿去了？在我鞋底吗？在床垫下面吗？在衣橱顶上吗？在我那件红连衣裙的口袋里吗？这封信在哪儿啊，哪儿啊？这封信短，因为我记得理查不喜欢长信。亲爱的理查，请你带我离开这里吧，因为这里又冷又黑，我都快死了。”

普尔太太说：“现在跑来跑去找也没用了。他早走了，不会回来了——换成我也不会回来的。”

我说：“我记不得是怎么回事了。记不得了。”

“他进屋后，”格莱思·普尔说，“都认不出你了。”

“你生上火行吗？”我说，“因为我冷死了。”

“这位先生突然到来，硬要见你，竟得到这么一番报答。你拿把刀向他冲去，他从你手里夺过刀，你就咬他胳膊。你再也见不到他了。你那把刀是从哪儿弄来的？我告诉他们说是你从我这里偷去的，可我谨慎得很。我见惯你这种人了。你从我这里偷不到刀。一定是那天我带你出去时你买的。我跟埃弗太太说过应当带你出去。”

“我们上英国去那会儿，”我说。

“你这傻瓜，”她说，“这里就是英国。”

“我不信，”我说，“我决不会相信。”

（那天下午我们去英国了。只见青草和橄榄绿的河水，还有俯临河水的高树。我想，这就是英国了。如果我能在这一

的话,我就能康复了,头脑里的声音就不会再响了。我说,让我多呆一会儿吧,她那会儿坐在树下睡着了。不远的地方有辆马车——一个女人正驾着车。就是她卖给我刀的。我把脖子上挂的小金盒跟她换的。)

格莱思·普尔说:“原来你不记得自己拿刀捅这位先生了?我说过你会安安静静的。他说:‘我一定得同她谈谈。’啊,警告过他,他就是不愿听。我在房里,可他说的话我没全听见,只听到一句‘根据法律我无法干涉你们夫妇之间的事’。就是在他说到‘根据法律’时你向他扑上去的,他夺过你手里那把刀时,你就咬了他。你意思是说你对这事一点都不记得了吗?”

现在我才想起他不认识我了。我看见他瞧着我,两眼先朝这个角落看看,再朝那个角落看看,没找到想找的东西。他瞧着我,当我是个陌生人似的跟我说话。你碰上这种事的时候,你怎么办?你为什么笑我?“你把我那件红连衣裙也藏起来了吗?如果我那时穿上那身衣服,他就认识我了。”

“没人把你的衣服藏起来过,”她说,“这衣服就挂在衣橱里。”

她瞧着我说:“我不信你知道自己在这里过了多久了,你这可怜虫。”

“恰恰相反,”我说,“只有我才知道自己在这里过了多久。日日夜夜,夜夜日日,成千成百个日夜从我手指缝间溜走。可是那没关系。时间没有什么意思。只有像我那件红连衣裙这种看得见摸得着抓得住的东西才有意思。这衣服在哪儿啊?”

她把头朝衣橱一扭,嘴角往下一撇。我刚把钥匙一转,就见这衣服挂着,火的颜色,晚霞的颜色。就是凤凰木那种颜色。“如果你葬在一棵凤凰木^①树下,”我说,“一旦开花了,你的灵魂就升天了。人人都想要这样升天的。”

① 凤凰木,又称“火树”,豆科,落叶乔木,高达二十米,夏季开花,花大,艳红如火,有光泽。

她摇摇头,但她一动不动,也不来碰我。

开头那件连衣裙散发出的香味很淡,后来越来越浓。一股香根草和鸡蛋花的香味,还有肉桂树和尘灰,夹着酸橙树开花时的味儿。还有太阳光的味儿,雨水的味儿。

……桑迪最后一次来看我时,我就穿着那种颜色的连衣裙。

“你愿意跟我走吗?”他说。

“不,”我说,“我不能。”

“那么就此告别了?”

“对,就此告别了。”

“可我不能就这样扔下你不管,”他说,“你很不幸。”

“你在白费时间,”我说,“我们的时间本来就很少。”

那个男人不在的时候,桑迪常来看我,我出去乘车兜风时我总是跟他见面。那时我还能乘车兜风。仆人们都知道,可是没一个人说出去。

现在已经没时间了,我们就在那间乏味的房里亲吻。墙上挂着打开的扇子作为装饰。我们以前经常亲吻,可是不像这一回。这一回是生离死别的亲吻,只有事隔多年之后,你才懂得这生离死别的亲吻是怎么回事。那艘白轮船鸣过三次汽笛了,一次是喜气洋洋的,一次是呼唤,一次是告别。

我取下这件红连衣裙,贴着身子试试看。“穿上这身衣服我看上去放荡淫乱吗?”我说。那个男人对我这么说过。他发现了桑迪上家里来过,我也去看过他。我根本不知道是谁说给他听的。“臭娘养的臭女儿,”他跟我说。

“啊,放进去吧,”格莱思·普尔说,“来吃饭吧。这是你的灰色晨衣。我真不明白他们干吗不给你好一点的东西。他们有的是钱嘛。”

可是我手里拿着这件连衣裙心里直纳闷,不知他们是不

是使出最狠毒最恶劣的手段。不知他们是不是趁我不备把这衣服偷换了。如果他们把衣服偷换了,这就根本不是我的连衣裙——不过他们怎么弄得到这种气味呢?

“得了,别站在那儿打哆嗦了,”她说,这在她算十分体贴的了。

我让那件连衣裙掉在地板上,眼睛从炉火看到衣橱,又从衣橱看到炉火。

我把那件灰色晨衣披在肩上,只是告诉她我不饿,她倒不像有几回那样硬逼我吃。

“你不记得昨晚的事也没关系,”她说。“那位先生昏过去了,这里叫叫嚷嚷好热闹呢。到处都是血,大家怪我不该让你去捅他。再说过几天少爷就要回来了。我今后再也不会想法帮助你了。你已经疯得没治了。”

我说:“如果我一直穿着那件红连衣裙。理查早就认出我来了。”

“你那件红连衣裙,”她说着笑了。

可我瞧着地板上那件连衣裙,看来好似大火在房间里蔓延开来了。真美啊,使我不禁想起自己有什么事一定得干。我心想,我总会想起来的。这会儿我很快就会想起来了。

那是我第三回做这梦了,这回结束了。现在我知道那段楼梯的梯级通到我这间房间,我就躺在这房里眼望着那个把头枕在胳膊上熟睡的女人。我在梦中等到她打起呼噜来了才起床,拿了钥匙,手里拿着蜡烛,开门出去。这回可比以往容易了,我飞也似地走着。

所有一直呆在这屋子里的人都走掉了,因为卧室的门都关着,可是我总觉得有人在跟着我,有人在追我,一边哈哈大笑。我不时左看右看,可总不敢朝后面看,因为我不想看到人家说在这地方闹的那个女鬼。我走下楼梯。这回走得比以往远。一间房里有人在说话。我悄没声儿地慢慢走过那房间。

我终于走进亮着一盏灯的门厅里。我记得我来的时候。一盏灯，黑洞洞的楼梯，我脸上蒙着面纱。人家以为我不记得，可我记得。右面有扇门。我开了门，走进去。里面是间大房间，铺着红地毯，挂着红窗帘。其他一切都是白的。我在一张长沙发上坐下，看着这房间，依我看，这里阴森森，冷飕飕，空荡荡，像一座没圣坛的教堂。我想看个清楚，就把蜡烛全都点上了，房里蜡烛多的是。我仔细地用手里那支蜡烛去点别的蜡烛，就是够不着那个枝形烛台。我就四下张望，想找圣坛，因为这房间里有这么多蜡烛，这么多红色，使我不由想起了教堂。接着我听到一只钟滴嗒滴嗒走着，钟是黄金做的。黄金是他们崇拜的偶像。

我在那间房间里忽然感到痛苦万分，虽然我坐着的那张长沙发很软和，我身子都陷下去了。我觉得自己快要睡着了。这时我恍惚听见脚步声，心想万一他们看见我在这里会怎么说，怎么对付。我用左手握着右腕等着。可是什么事都没有。之后我就很累很累。我想要离开这房间，但我那支蜡烛点完了，就另外拿了一支。忽然间我在柯拉姨妈房里了。我看见阳光照进窗子，窗外那棵树，以及地板上树叶的影子，可我也看见了那些蜡烛，我恨蜡烛。所以一下把蜡烛全撞倒。蜡烛多半都灭了，只有一支蜡烛把红窗帘后面一幅薄窗帘点着了。我看见这美丽的颜色这么快就蔓延开来不由哈哈大笑，可我没留在房里看。我手里拿着那支长蜡烛，又走进门厅了。就在这时刻，我看见了——那个鬼。这个披头散发的女人。四周围着一个镀金画框，可我认识她。我扔下手里的蜡烛，烛火就把桌布一头烧着了，我看见火焰冒了起来。我一边跑着，或许是一边飘着、飞着，一边就喊救命，克里斯托芬，救命啊，回头一看，看见自己有救了。一道防火墙保护着我，可是这堵墙太烫了，把我烫痛了，我又离开了这堵墙。

一张桌上还有不少蜡烛，我拿了一支就跑上第一段楼梯，再跑上第二段。在三层楼上我又扔掉蜡烛。可我也没有留下

来看。我跑上最后一段楼梯，跑过过道。我经过他们昨天，或是前天带我来过的那房间，我不记得了。也许是好久以前的事了，因为我似乎对这房子很熟悉。我知道如何躲避这股热浪和叫喊，因为现在有人在叫喊了。我跑到外面围着雉堞的平台上就凉快了，简直听不见他们的声音了。我安安静静坐在那儿。我不知道坐了多久。后来我回头看看天。天空一片红，我整个一生都在这里了。我看见了那座落地大钟，柯拉姨妈的拼花床罩，五颜六色都有，我看见了兰花，千金子藤花，茉莉花，还有生命树，都在熊熊烈火中。我看见了枝形烛架，楼下的红地毯，还有竹子，桫欏，金蕨啊、银蕨啊，还有花园围墙上那层天鹅绒般柔软的青苔。我看见了我小时的玩偶屋子，书和《磨坊主的女儿》那幅画。我听见了鸚鵡像平时见到生人时那样叫着 *Qui est là? Qui est là?* 那个恨我的男人也在叫着，伯莎！伯莎！风刮着我的头发，刮得头发像翅膀似的飘扬。我想，如果我跳上那些硬石块，也许会让我飞起来。可是我从边上朝外一看，只见库利布里那个池塘。蒂亚在池塘那儿。她朝我招招手，我一时拿不定主意，她哈哈大笑。我听见她说，你害怕了？我又听见了那男人的嗓门，伯莎！伯莎！一转眼的工夫我看到了这一切，听见了这一切。天空一片红。有人尖叫一声，我心里就想，我干吗尖叫啊？我喊了一声“蒂亚”就跳出去，就此醒了。

格莱思·普尔正坐在桌边，可她也听见了那声尖叫，因为她说：“是什么声音？”她站起身来，走过来看看我。我一动不动地躺着，呼吸均匀，双眼紧闭。“我准是一直在做梦，”她说。于是她又回去，不是回到桌边，而是回到床上。听到她打呼噜以后我又等了半天，这才起床，拿了钥匙，打开房门。我拿着蜡烛呆在门外。现在我终于明白自己为什么给带到这里来，也明白自己该怎么做了。一定是刮了一阵穿堂风，因为火苗一闪，我原以为给吹灭了。可我用手挡住火苗，它又旺了，照亮我一路沿着黑暗的过道走去。

Vocabulary 词汇表

A

arrowroot / 'ærəru:t / *n.* 竹芋;

竹芋粉

astound / ə'staund / *vt.* 使震惊;

使大吃一惊

B

babyish / 'beɪɪʃ / *a.* 孩子气的;

幼稚的

bandage / 'bændɪdʒ / *vt.* 用绷带

包扎 *n.* 绷带; 包扎带

Barbados / bɑ:'beɪdəs / *n.* 巴巴

多斯(岛)

barrier / 'bærɪə / *n.* 障碍; 隔阂

racial barriers 种族隔阂

bastards / 'bɔ:stɒd / *n.* 私生子;

杂种; 坏种

battlement / 'bætlmənt / *n.* 雉

堞; 城墙垛

beckon / 'bekən / *vt.* (用点头、

招手等方式) 召唤; 吸引 *vi.*

召唤; 吸引

Bible / 'baɪbl / *n.* 基督教圣经

blossom / 'blɒsəm / *n.* 花; 开花

bouquet / bəu'keɪ / *n.* 花束; 大

串烟火

bridesmaid / 'brɪdzmeɪd / *n.* 女

宾相

brim / brɪm / *n.* 边; 边缘; 帽檐

brute / bru:t / *a.* 畜生般的; 残

忍的

C

calabash / 'kæləbəʃ / *n.* 加拉巴

木; 加拉巴果

centipede / 'sentɪpɪd / *n.* 百脚

chandelier / 'ʃændɪliə / *n.* 枝形

吊灯

choke / tʃəʊk / *vt.* 阻碍…的呼

吸; 使窒息 *vi.* 透不过气; 呛

住

clench / klenʃ / *vi.* 钉牢; 握紧

vt. 把(钉子)钉穿后敲弯(或

敲平) 钉头; 捏紧(拳头等)

cobblestone / 'kɒblstəʊn / *n.* 圆

石; 大鹅卵石

cockroach / 'kɒkrəʊʃ / *n.* 蟑螂

contradict / 'kɒntrə'dɪkt / *vt.* 反

驳; 否认 *vi.* 反驳

counterpane / 'kaʊntəpeɪn / *n.* 床

罩

crackle / 'krækl / *vt.* 使劈啪爆

裂 *vi.* 劈劈啪啪地响

creak / kri:k / *vi.* 吱吱嘎嘎地作

响 *n.* 吱吱嘎嘎的声音

crib / krib / *n.* (有围栏的)童床
 crimson / 'krɪmzən / *n.* 深红
a. 深红色的
 crumple / krampl / *vt.* 把...弄皱; 扭弯 *vi.* 起皱; 扭弯
 Cuba / 'kjʊbə / *n.* 古巴
 Cuban / 'kjʊbən / *a.* 古巴(人)的
 cure / kjʊə / *vt.* 治愈; 治疗
n. 治愈; 痊愈
 curl / kɜ:l / *vt.* 使卷曲 *vi.* 卷曲
 cutlass / 'kʌtləs / *n.* 短弯刀; 大砍刀

D

dart / dɔ:t / *vt.* 投掷 *vi.* 猛冲
n. 镖; 飞镖
 drag / dræg / *vt.* 拉; 拖着(脚等)行进 *vi.* 吃力地, 慢吞吞地行进
 draught / draʊt / *n.* 拉; 拖

E

enmity / 'enməti / *n.* 敌意; 仇恨; 不和
 eternal / 'i:tənl / *a.* 永久的; 永恒的

F

fern / fɜ:n / *n.* 蕨; 蕨类植物; 羊齿植物
 ferociously / fə'reʊfəʃli / *ad.* 凶

猛地; 凶恶地; 残忍地
 festivity / fes'tɪvəti / *n.* 节日; 喜庆日; 欢庆
 flagstone / 'flægsteɪn / *n.* 石板; 板石; 扁石
 flambeau / 'flæmbəu / *n.* 火炬; 装饰用的大烛台
 flicker / 'flɪkə / *vi.* (鸟)扑动翅膀
 forsake / fə'seɪk / *vt.* 遗弃; 抛弃
 fraction / 'frækʃən / *n.* 一部分; 小部分; 一点儿; 一些
 frivolous / 'frɪvələs / *a.* 轻薄地; 轻浮地

G

glacis / 'glæɪs / *n.* 缓(斜)坡; 斜堤
 glower / 'gləʊə / *vi.* 怒视; 沉着脸; 凝视
 gossip / 'ɡɒsɪp / *n.* 流言蜚语; 道听途说
 grin / grɪn / *vt.* 咧嘴而笑地表示 *vi.* 露齿而笑; 咧嘴

H

half-caste / 'hɑ:fkeɪst / *n.* 混血儿 *a.* 混血儿的
 hammock / hæmək / *n.* 吊床
 haughty / 'hɔ:ti / *a.* 傲慢的; 目中无人的
 holy / 'həʊli / *a.* 神圣的; 神的;

圣洁的

honeysuckle / 'hʌni,sʌkl / *n.* 忍冬; 杜鹃花

howl / haʊl / *vi.* 嚎叫; 号叫

n. 嚎叫; 号叫; 嚎哭

hypocrite / 'hipəkraɪt / *n.* 伪君子; 虚伪的人

I

idiot / 'ɪdiət / *n.* 白痴

inherit / ɪn'herɪt / *vt.* 继承

vi. 接受

interminable / ɪn'tɜːmɪnəbl / *a.*

冗长不堪的; 漫无止境的

J

jagged / 'dʒæɡd / *a.* 锯齿状的;

参差不齐的

Jamaica / dʒə'meɪkə / *n.* 牙买加

Jamaican / dʒə'meɪkən / *a.* 牙买加的; 牙买加人的

jasmin(e) / 'dʒæsmɪn / *n.* 茉莉

jumby / 'dʒʌmbɪ / *n.* 〈美方〉鬼; 幽灵

L

Lamentations / ,ləmen'teɪʃənz /

n. [复用作单]《耶利米哀歌》(《圣经·旧约》中的一卷)

locket / 'lɒkɪt / *n.* (挂在项链下用以珍藏亲人头发、照片等的)金(或银等)质小匣

lump / lʌmp / *n.* 块; 大量; 一大堆

M

machete / mə'tʃeɪt / *n.* 大砍刀

magistrate / 'mædʒɪstreɪt / *n.* 地方行政官; 法官

malignant / mə'lɪgnənt / *a.* 恶意的; 恶毒的

maroon / mə'ruːn / *vt.* 把…放逐到孤岛

Martinique / mə'tɪniːk / *n.* 马提尼克岛

massacre / 'mæsəkeɪ / *n.* 大屠杀
vt. 大规模屠杀; 残杀

medal / 'medəl / *n.* 奖章; 勋章; 圣牌

mockingly / 'mɒkɪŋli / *ad.* 嘲笑地; 嘲弄地

molest / məʊ'lest / *vt.* 妨碍; 骚扰

mortal / 'mɔːtəl / *a.* 世间的; 凡人的

moss / mɒs / *n.* 苔鲜; 地衣; 泥炭沼

mournful / 'mɔːnful / *a.* 悲哀的; 悲痛的

muslin / 'mʌzliːn / *n.* 穆斯林纱; 平纹细布

N

nasty / 'nɑːsti / *a.* 极脏的; 令人

作呕的;淫猥的 *n.* 令人讨厌的人(或事物)

Negro / 'nɪgrəʊ / *n.* 黑人;具有黑人血统的人

nigger / 'nɪɡə / *n.* 黑鬼(污蔑黑人的用语)

O

obeah / 'əʊbrə / *n.* 奥比巫术;奥比巫术使用的符咒

octopus / 'ɒktəpəs / *n.* 章鱼

orchid / 'ɔ:kɪd / *n.* 兰花

outbuilding / 'aʊt,bɪldɪŋ / *n.* 外屋;附属的建筑

P

pantry / 'pæntri / *n.* 餐具室;食品室

patchwork / 'pætʃwɜ:k / *n.* 拼缝物;拼凑的东西;拼缀物

patois / 'pætwaɪ / *n.* 方言;土语

pebble / 'pebl / *n.* 卵石

peck / pek / *vt.* 啄;啄食

persistently / pə'sɪstənlti / *ad.* 坚持不懈地;持续地

perspiration / ,pə'spə'reɪʃən / *n.* 出汗;汗

pious / 'paɪəs / *a.* 虔诚的;敬神的

pitcher / 'ptʃə / *n.* (有嘴和柄的)罐壶

plait / plæt / *n.* 辫子

prance / prɑ:ns / *n.* (马的)腾跃
vi. (马)腾跃

premise / 'prems / *n.* 假设;前提

privy / 'prɪvi / *a.* 个人的;私人的;秘密的

Q

quaver / kweɪvə / *vi.* 颤抖;发颤
n. 颤抖;颤音

R

railing / 'reɪlɪŋ / *n.* 做栏杆用的材料;栏杆[总称];围栏

rascal / 'rɑ:skəl / *n.* 流氓;无赖;恶棍

rear / riə / *n.* 后部;后面 *a.* 后部的;后面的

resent / rɪ'zent / *vt.* 对...忿恨;对...不满

righteous / 'raɪtjəs / *a.* 正直的;正当的;正义的

roar / rɔ:/ *vt.* 呼喊;大声喊出
vi. 吼叫;怒号

rumour / 'ru:mə / *n.* 谣言;谣传;传闻

S

saddle / sædl / *n.* 鞍;马鞍

sangaree / sæŋgə'ri: / *n.* 桑加里酒

sargasso / sɑ:'gæsəʊ / *n.* 马尾藻

Sargasso Sea 马尾藻海
 screech / skri:tʃ / *n.* 尖叫; 尖声
 刺耳的声音 *vt.* 尖声喊叫出
vi. 发出尖声刺耳叫声
 scrub / skrʌb / *vt.* 用力擦洗; 擦
 净; 擦亮 *vi.* 用力擦洗
 sect / sekt / *n.* 派别; 宗派
 shamrock / 'ʃænrək / *n.* 三叶
 草; 白花酢浆草
 shield / fi:ld / *vt.* 保护; 保卫
vi. 起保护作用
 shingle / 'ʃɪŋɡl / *n.* 木瓦; 墙面
 板; 海滨砂石; 铺满砂石的海
 滩
 shingly / 'ʃɪŋɡli / *a.* 铺满砂石的
 shiver / 'ʃɪvə / *vi.* 颤抖; 哆嗦
 shrivel / 'ʃrɪvəl / *vt.* 使皱缩; 使
 枯萎 *vi.* 皱缩; 枯萎
 shutter / 'ʃʌtə / *n.* 百叶窗
 sideboard / 'saɪdbɔ:d / *n.* 餐具柜
 sieve / sɪv / *n.* 筛; 滤器
 slavery / 'sleɪvəri / *n.* 奴隶身份;
 奴隶制
 slipper / 'slɪpə / *n.* 拖鞋; 浅口便
 鞋
 sly / slaɪ / *a.* 狡猾的; 诡诈的
 smoulder / 'sməʊldə / *vi.* 闷燃
 snore / snɔ: / *n.* 打鼾; 鼾声
vi. 打鼾
 solitary / 'sɒlɪtəri / *a.* 独居的; 无
 伴的; 孤独的; 寂寞的
 somersault / 'sʌməsɔ:lt / *n.* 筋斗

spiteful / 'spɪtful / *a.* 怀恨在心
 的; 恶意的
 starch / stɑ:tʃ / *vt.* 给…上浆; 浆
 硬
 stephanotis / ,stefə'næʊtɪs / *n.* 千
 金子藤
 stoop / stu:p / *vi.* 俯身; 弯腰
 straight / streɪt / *a.* 端正的; 整
 齐的
 swarm / swɔ:m / *vt.* 挤满 *vi.* 密
 集; 云集
 syrup / 'sɪrəp / *n.* 糖浆; 果子露

T

tamarind / 'tæmərɪnd / *n.* 罗望
 子; 罗望子果
 tentacle / 'tentəkl / *n.* 触手; 触
 角
 track / træk / *n.* 车辙
 trail / treɪl / *vt.* 循…的踪迹
 tread machine 踏车
 treble / 'trebl / *a.* 三倍的 *n.* 三
 倍 *vt.* 使成三倍
 Trinidad / 'trɪnɪdəd / *n.* 特立尼
 达岛

V

vanilla / vənɪlə / *n.* 香子兰
 velvet / 'velvɪt / *n.* 天鹅绒; 丝绒
 vex / vek / *vt.* 使烦恼; 使苦恼

W

West Indies / west 'ɪndɪz / *n.* 西

印度群岛	wreck / rek / <i>n.</i> 失事; 遭难
Windward Islands / 'windwəd	wrench / rentʃ / <i>vt.</i> 猛扭; 猛拔;
'aɪləndz / <i>n.</i> 向风群岛	猛拧 <i>vi.</i> 猛扭; 猛拧