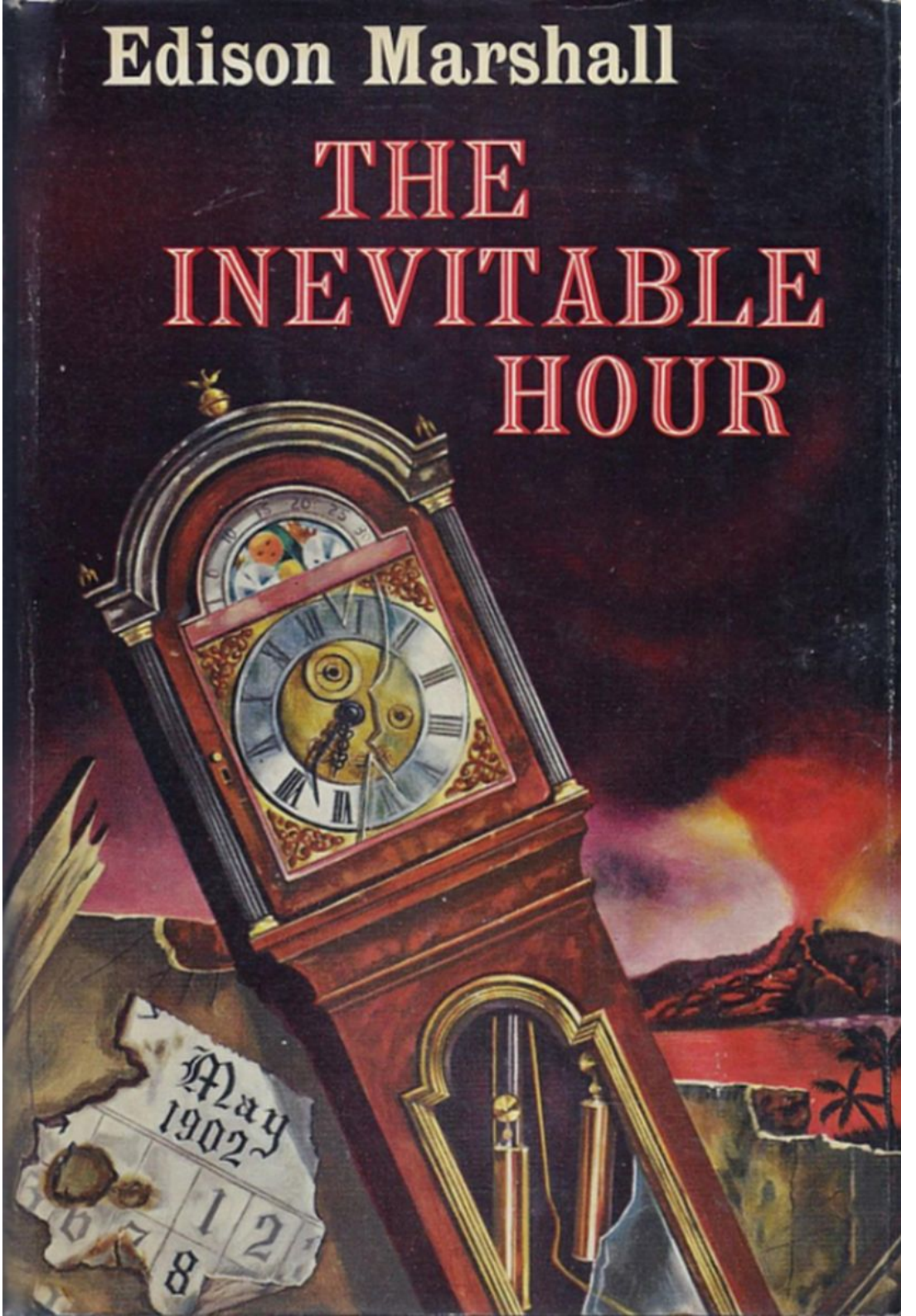
Edison Marshall

THE INEVITABLE HOUR



Title: The Inevitable Hour, A Novel of Martinique
Date of first publication: 1957
Author: Edison Marshall (1894-1967)
Date first posted: Apr. 18, 2022
Date last updated: Apr. 18, 2022
Faded Page eBook #20220445

This eBook was produced by: Mardi Desjardins, Cindy Beyer & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at https://www.pgdpcanada.net

THE INEVITABLE HOUR

Books by Edison Marshall

A Novel of Martinique

THE INEVITABLE HOUR

BIOGRAPHICAL NOVELS

GREAT SMITH: A Tale of Captain John Smith

THE VIKING: A Tale of Ogier the Dane

CARAVAN TO XANADU: A Tale of Marco Polo

HISTORICAL NOVELS

YANKEE PASHA

THE GENTLEMAN

BENJAMIN BLAKE

THE UPSTART

CASTLE IN THE SWAMP

GYPSY SIXPENCE

THE INFINITE WOMAN

AMERICAN CAPTAIN

MEMOIRS OF BIG GAME

THE HEART OF THE HUNTER

SHIKAR AND SAFARI

VOLUMES OF SHORT STORIES

LOVE STORIES OF INDIA

THE HEART OF LITTLE SHIKARA

THE ELEPHANT REMEMBERS

EDISON MARSHALL

The Inevitable Hour

A NOVEL OF MARTINIQUE

G. P. Putnam's Sons *New York*

Library of Congress Catalog
Card Number: 57-10718

MANUFACTURED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

To the greatly trusted helper
of a very great man,
Ann Whitman,
Good Angel to this book.

THE INEVITABLE HOUR

The boast of heraldry, the pomp of pow'r,
And all that beauty, all that wealth e'er gave,
Await alike the inevitable hour . . .

—Thomas Gray

THIS tale might be said to begin close to the beginning of the world. In the days of the dinosaurs, vast volcanic upheavals under shallow seas between what is now the Yucatan Channel, west of Cuba and north of the Orinoco Estuary in Venezuela, formed a chain of islands, great and small, that we know as the West Indies. From Puerto Rico east and south stretches about a third of the chain's length, which we call the Windward Islands and the Leeward Islands, although the classical scholar prefers to designate them as the Lesser Antilles. They rim the eastward reaches of the Caribbean; and such is their strong sunlight, abundant rains, rich verdure, clear streams, blue waters, and fresh winds that they rank among the most beautiful islands ever seen by man. Their beauty helped to shape their later history.

Perhaps the most enchanting of these green jewels in the turquoise sea is Martinique, a large island as the Windward Islands go, in area about four hundred square miles, its name derived from a Carib Indian word, Madiana. Quite possibly Columbus set foot there as early as 1493. Its fertile ground was settled by the French in the middle 1600's; the future Empress Josephine was born there in 1763. Most of the time since these early days, it has seemed a kind of Hesperides, the Happy Isle, to its dwellers as well as to dreamers in Old France, and a sanctuary for those whom fate or circumstances drove from the Mother Country across the sea.

Its annals had been shadowed by slavery and stained with blood. But in the year 1890 the island was at peace, the slaves had been freed, its tremendous yield of sugar brought riches, and its people—two hundred or more thousand—were among the happiest on earth. True, only a few of these were great landowners of pure French blood. The main comprised a new race who called themselves Creoles; unlike the white Creoles of Louisiana, they showed traces of French, Spanish, Negro, and Indian blood, and sometimes of Chinese. The most favored of the mixed breeds, with a perfection of physical development and beauty of person rarely seen, they were religious in a touching, childish way, superstitious in the dark ways of the Haitians, music-loving and dance-loving.

Yet it is not with these that this narrative mainly deals, although they bear upon it with great force. In the course of these events, a Carib Indian with a strong infusion of Negro blood and a Creole girl of the rare type called a chabine speak for the island. The daughter of a great plantation owner and the son of its overseer are white Creoles, meaning pure French born on Martinique, one of ancient lineage here, the other from a family of newcomers. A French doctor, a French artist, the sailor son of a French soldier in Algiers, and an Irish-born actor of French extraction may be arch

types of immigrants seeking refuge or fulfillment in the Happy Isle. Over them all hung the Mountain, incomparable Pelée. They forgathered in Saint-Pierre, Martinique's strangely lovely capital, known as the Pearl of the Antilles. With them dwelt beauty as real as God ever made, and men said it came to dwell within them. The period of time concerning these affairs is from a June morning in 1890 until 7:40 A.M. Thursday, May 8, 1902.

CHAPTER ONE

Paul and Joan

1.

In the blaze of a summer day, two people who could scarcely be called children, although they were far from grown up, met secretly to pursue a somewhat dangerous adventure.

One was a lad of not quite fourteen, tall and brawny for his age, with the big hands and feet that predict unusual stature and massiveness. The stout peasantry of Normandy from which he sprang had given him a ruddy complexion and a square-shaped head with rough, sandy hair, a large mouth and nose, and eyes of a very light hazel color. His environs, this beautiful West Indian island of his birth, had molded him in ways difficult to define. If there was no handsomeness, there was also no coarseness in his face. And certainly there was nothing plodding in his appearance or movements, which were distinctly animated. He wore the grass hat, brogues, and cotton pants and shirt of a field hand.

In marked and manifold contrast to him was his companion, a girl of twelve. Nearer maturity than he, almost as tall and of as pure French blood, she had been darkened by long ancestry on the island. Her skin had deep olive tones as well as the satiny sheen seen in so many Creole girls of mixed race. Her hair had the shade of black walnut, which is not truly black but more like sable, a color never seen except in animate things, and was parted in the middle in two thick braids. Thus the hairline became sharp and clean and her face well framed and vivid. Her eyes were big and searching and the corners of her mouth had a wistful droop, again like those of the Creole maidens.

Not only her frock of beautifully stitched muslin delaine, trim footgear, and plain gold jewelry denoted a greatly higher social position than that of her playmate. More than the molding of her face and body, it was her manner of walking and speaking and looking, the set of her head and the way she used her hands which revealed the fact too well.

A situation accepted by them both as long as either could remember, deeply felt, a verity of their existences, it had not prevented their intimate association. Indeed the secrecy imposed, the vague guilt and lively fear invoked, had sharpened their feelings toward each other. Only dark-skinned Cecile, the girl's Creole nurse, knew of the bond and abetted it, although the youth often thought that his mother might suspect it and look away. Their stolen hours of play and awkward courtship had rarely permitted such a daring enterprise as this present one. Only the secure absence from home of both their fathers and the departure of almost all the field hands to celebrate a feast day had offered the long tryst.

At one side of the huge Domain De Legle on which they both lived, about equally far from their vastly different houses, stood a tract of the *grand bois*, the primeval forest of Martinique. Cane fields now stretched where once it had billowed league on league, but this remnant remained as wild and ominous as the fantastic forests, climbing from the glens to the slopes and ridges of Mount Pelée, that vast upthrust of the island, nearly a full day's mule ride to the northwest. One dim and narrow path wound through the tract. If unused a single week, the creeping tentacles of the lianas fixed green webs across it, which the palm-heart gatherers and other travelers had to cut with their machetes for swift passage. The two playmates had planned to follow it as far as they dared, then make a cache, as might explorers in African jungles, to use on a future, greater venture to the crater of Pelée itself.

Now the lad carried a small leather sack of jerked venison, fine tramping-and-climbing fodder as all adventurers know, a chisel for scratching their initials on the lava rock of the crest, a big clasp knife, and two rain cloaks for shelter from the storms which broke almost every day on the rugged summit. He had no machete, for the tool house had been locked and his father carried the key. The girl brought a liter bottle of wine, older than the sum of both their ages, which she had extracted from the wine cellar of the *manoir*, since she knew where her father kept the key. With this they intended to pour a libation into L'Etang, Pelée's crater lake, and toast their triumph and pledge their troth.

They had barely entered the woods and its green gloom came down, when the lad wished he had forced the tool-house window to get a machete. Actually the path was open—some traveler had cut its latchstrings not long before—but there might arise other, more urgent needs for a long, sharp blade. The immense tree trunks stood mantled in ferns and bound round and round with lianas, while the vines formed flower-hung screens. Amid these and the labyrinthal roots lurked the fer-de-lance. Both knew well that the

danger was greater than they should have run for play's sake. Only well-armed, experienced woodsmen, who knew the ways of spotted Death-in-the-wood, and could recognize her dim shape and the sheen of her scales in the maze of light and shadow, could safely traverse this path.

They had gone only a league-long half-mile when they heard a sound that would have frightened any Creole palm gatherer and charcoal burner. Yet it did not badly scare the two youngsters, for they were pure French, born on the island, well versed in its superstitions without being steeped in them. Even so, they turned pale and their hearts thumped, for this was the chanting voice of a *quimboiseur*, one of the powerful cult of Creole magicians. Its reverberant tones carried clearly through the intense silence from well ahead on the blind trail.

"Little sister, do not bite me," the voice said, in the declamatory way of native wizards. "You are a big sister, as your clan goes, but at the first movement of that flat head, I will chop it off with my machete. Go back into your hole, spotted one. You know me well—I have passed here a hundred times—and you have learned from your brothers and sisters, when they lay headless in the dust, that I mean what I say. You know I am not one of the newcomers that trod your forest paths. I am a Carib—the last Carib—you and I have been here since our Mountain rose out of the sea, so why should you threaten to bite me? There, that's a good snake. Wriggle away, and catch a rat to eat."

As the voice rumbled on the lad had caught his companion's hand and drew her from the path to a hiding place behind cascading greenery. They sat back against the trunk of a gigantic flowering locust, and in the dimness his arm clasped her waist, as often before when they had hidden from someone.

"It's the man called Atlas," Paul whispered. "He's always saying he's the last Carib brave. He hates the French for killing them off, and Papa says he especially hates the Seigneur."

Now they heard him advancing up the path, rhythmically swinging his machete to make the thickets crackle and shake. When he came opposite to them he stopped.

"You can come out, young ones," he said. "Atlas will not harm you."

The two emerged at once, the boy ashamed that they had hidden. He had seen Atlas two or three times before, a big, powerful man of about thirty with the stern, aquiline face and straight hair of an Indian, although his color, much darker than that of most Creoles, showed a strong admixture of Negro blood. No longer in the least afraid, they gazed at him curiously.

“I know you,” Atlas addressed the lad. “Your name is Paul Barteau and you are the son of the foreman of Domain De Legle. And this tall and pretty girl? Who could she be but the De Legle’s daughter Joan? And so it is a strange thing to find you together far in the thick woods.”

He employed the patois of the Creoles, although Paul knew that when he chose he could speak excellent French.

“That is our concern, Atlas, not yours,” Joan answered with a straight glance of her dark eyes.

“You have your father in you, m’selle, as he has the old French kings in him. Surely there’s an old she-watchdog somewhere about? No, you have run away. But is not my *grand bois* a dark and dreadful place for a picnic?”

“Tell him, Paul,” Joan said. “Cecile says he’s a great quimboiseur, so he’d find out about us anyway.”

“Atlas, we are going to make a cache in a hollow tree trunk, and one day soon we intend to climb the Mountain.”

“My Mountain?” Atlas asked in real astonishment.

“It isn’t your Mountain,” Joan cut in. “Mount Pelée belongs to everybody, rich and poor, on Martinique.”

“Don’t you know that less than fifty years ago she belched fire and molten stone and killed many people?”

“Bah! A few Creole cultivators. Anyway, the volcano is extinct. It will never erupt again. My tutor told me so.”

“You believe your tutor instead of Atlas? Child, she is my Mountain—for there are no other Caribs left to worship her. You don’t even know what her name means. The French say it means bald mountain, but in truth it means the Goddess of Fire who came to us from an island far away in the Great Open. I speak to her and she answers me in the Carib language. It isn’t the ghost of Père Labat that hunts snakes with a lantern on her crest, as you have heard. It is I, her son, Atlas, carrying a torch, for some day she will be the torch of all the world. It does not matter if you tell the people. They will not believe you. They like to believe lies.”

“If you are a real quimboiseur,” Joan commented sharply, “why haven’t you a wand?”

“You mean a pain-stick. That is what the little quimboiseur calls his staff. And it is true, he can touch you with it, and give you pain for seven hours, seven days, or seven years. I have something far better than that. My machete.”

He struck the stout stalk of a sapling, cutting it cleanly.

“Is it with that, that you are going to cut the throats of all the white Creoles?”

“Atlas will never cut one throat, except perhaps in sudden fury like that of a thunderstorm on my Mountain. The vengeance of the Caribs will come in another form.”

“Can the machete talk?” Joan asked boldly. “I’ve heard that the quimboiseurs’ pain-sticks can talk.”

“Certainly he can. Do you wish to hear him?”

Joan’s eyes widened. “Yes, Atlas.”

“A message from the future, or a secret of the past?”

“Let it tell my fortune.”

“Put your ear to the handle and be silent.”

She did so, and, as though blown to her on a wind from far away, she heard a thin voice.

“M’selle, within a month you will take ship across the sea, not to return for years or perhaps ever.”

“I don’t believe it,” Joan said in an unsteady voice, knocking the hilt aside. “Tell him to speak to Paul.”

Atlas put the handle to Paul’s ear. Again faint and far-off, a voice said, “Missie, you can never marry this proud girl. Do not let her break your heart.”

“Joan, I don’t believe it either,” Paul said stoutly, when he could catch his breath.

“Atlas will go now, the way he came,” the big, dark man said. “Maybe I have wasted my time, but you are both young, and I think not. Moreover, if you want me to, I’ll cache your supplies for the great journey. At the very edge of the woods, where the path meets the road, there stands an ancient gum tree, like those we Caribs used to build our boats—its trunk forty-five feet high without a branch. A little higher than you can reach is a hollow that makes a good cache. If you say so, I’ll put your things there.”

“We would thank you kindly,” Paul replied, perceiving that Joan and he should go no further into the woods today.

When he had handed over the little store and Joan her bottle of wine, a strange, dreamy expression came over the austere face and Atlas spoke again.

“You cannot climb my Mountain today, and perhaps never, but if you are brave enough, you may speak to her. Then she will know you and remember you.”

“How may we?” Joan asked quickly.

“You too, m’selle? Well, why not? Can you both climb this locust tree, if I lift you to the first limb?”

“Of course we can. We’ve climbed scores of trees.”

“This is taller than any—one of the tallest in all the forests. Near its top you will have a good view of our Mountain, in all its beauty and grandeur. Young Paul, you say to her, ‘Pelée, be kind to me.’ And the Seigneur’s daughter shall say, ‘Pelée, be kind to me.’ Do you wish to do it, or to drop your hands and go home?”

“Of course we wish to do it,” Paul answered.

“Then stand on my hands.”

Paul did so, and the big dark arms slowly rose until he could pull himself up on a foot-thick limb. Atlas raised Joan the same way and Paul grasped her hands. Then they began their steady careful ascent.

It was a long climb, more frightening than most, but Atlas had spoken the truth. When the top began to sway a little under their weight, they gazed across the sealike expanse of the treetops to behold the violet Mountain, cloud-wreathed, standing beautiful and majestic. Then they spoke the words Atlas had prompted, words which had an unearthly sound in the silent solitude of the treetop, and their flesh prickled. Then, when they had swayed together and kissed, they made their cautious way down.

“You are brave, and our Fire Goddess loves bravery,” Atlas greeted them. “And now it comes to me that you are sweethearts.”

“We are too young—and I am a De Legle,” Joan replied.

“Yet you do not deny it, m’selle, and you need not, for I can see for myself. Well, because of that I will tell you something, and you may work one more charm. The pain-stick of the little quimboiseur often lies. Even the sword of Atlas does not always speak the truth. The charm you will work now is a most powerful charm and sometimes it can change the fate that has been written but not yet signed. Here is a smooth place on the trunk of the tree. M’selle, with this knife blade you must carve a circle. Its size does not matter.”

Joan’s hand was steady and the knife cut deep enough to leave an indelible scar.

“Now, Missie Paul, carve a triangle within the circle, the points touching the inner rim.”

Carefully, Paul obeyed.

“That is the sign made by Carib braves and their beautiful young squaws long ago. I have seen many fully three centuries old. Sometimes they did so before the warriors got in their boats to war on the Arawak. It did not promise victory, but if a warrior fell, the maiden who had made the sign with him would fall dead at the same instant, or else wither and die in a few days. Thus they were not parted, but went forth into the Great Open together. The triangle within the circle is a very old sign—it may be as old as our Mountain. If lovers make it when they are yet young, they become bound in life and death. If they wait until they are old, it is but a mark on a tree.”

As Atlas turned to go, Joan spoke impulsively.

“Drink the wine, Atlas, for your own good luck. I’ll bring some more when we climb the Mountain.”

“Thank you, *che*.”

The foliage closed behind him, and Paul and Joan started homeward. They walked briskly in silence until the light grew bright again at the edge of the forest. Then they stopped and gazed at each other with the profound earnestness of the young.

“What did you think of him?” Paul asked.

“Well, I don’t think he’s altogether the rogue and charlatan that Papa calls him, although the talking machete was of course ventriloquism.”

“A good many quimboiseurs are ventriloquists. Still, he’s more expert than most. I could hardly see his lips move. I think the snake was faked too. He couldn’t have helped but hear our footsteps and he put on the show for whomever it might be. Besides, he’s a real troublemaker for the landowners and vengeful as the Devil. But he was truly in earnest about our speaking to the Mountain and carving the sign on the tree.”

“I’m going to believe in both of them, Paul.”

“I will too. No matter what happens. Always.”

2.

From the first, Joan and Paul had not believed the auguries of the talking machete, and it was against their hearts besides. But this did not stop one of the predictions from coming true, thereby casting an aura of truth over the other.

Atlas could not have foretold the future, Paul’s brain insisted. At best he had guessed shrewdly. More likely he had heard gossip from the kitchens of the villas where Seigneur de Legle had confided in his friends. The crushing

fact remained that less than four weeks after their little venture in the forest, the De Legle had taken his daughter and himself aboard ship and set sail for France.

Paul and Joan had been able to steal only a few minutes to say their farewells behind the tobacco shed, and these had been stifled by tears and kisses. Paul decided bitterly that a trick of ventriloquism had had more substance than ancient Carib symbols and a superstitious appeal to a mountain.

In due course the De Legle returned to his domain, but Paul saw Joan in dreams alone. During the first months of their parting these dreams had been so lifelike as to jolt him wide awake, and he would lie awhile deeply moved, certain that Joan had been dreaming of him too; then the plaguing thought of the four hours' difference in time between Martinique and Paris would strike him, and he would look at his watch, and doubt.

Later the visions dimmed, and he could not be sure of the identity of the tall girl who was their central figure. Although her form and face were Joan's, her darkness fitted some Creole girl who had lately given him a darting glance and a faint smile. "*Bon jou', che*"—the conventional salutation from a son of the island to its beautiful daughter—was his sole response to the inquiry. Almost unaware, he was keeping a long vigil.

There passed four years while Paul grew tall and massive. Now he had the hulking shoulders and powerful physique that his boyhood had promised. No one would mistake him for a gentleman; on the other hand none knew the strength of his body and the stubbornness and expansion of his mind. He had finished only parish school but he had been tutored by a brilliant Jesuit without fee except for the monk's own joy. Part of that joy lay in the discovery of Paul's ability to follow the path of logic, so necessary in penetrating the labyrinths of law. Under the Jesuit's guidance the youth read a little law and first began to think about it as a career.

He had devoured countless other books, most of them borrowed from the excellent library in Saint-Pierre, the capital, but some sent by the Seigneur's secretary from the high and crowded bookshelves of the manoir, ever available to any employee of the domain who knew how to read. By his mother's contrivance he had seen every play of note, often acted by French companies of distinction, at the handsome theater, and these had become part of the rich hoard of his memory. So, as he neared eighteen, it could not be said he was poorly educated. Few men of this age, even students at the great universities, had a more solid and useful grounding.

Early in the year 1894 the Seigneur had again sailed for France, rumor had it to visit his daughter. Then in June of that year word had come from his town house in Saint-Pierre of his return, word which sent a question drifting in and out of Paul's mind. It was a question that entered more easily than it fled. "No" seemed a far likelier answer than "yes," above and beyond the fact that bad news is always more expectable than good. In any case, he reflected, the return of the De Legle was an unhappy fact. Jean, Paul's father, loyal to his master with that steadfast, stubborn heart of a Norman peasant, would not say so aloud or to himself, yet he had reveled in these four months of doing his solid duty without being told.

On the day the De Legle was driving up from the capital, Marie Barteau set out a bountiful midday meal in the comfortable stone-and-timber house provided for the foreman of Domain De Legle and his family. Yet when they sat down not one of the three could eat, and Jean was white in the face. Perhaps because he was ashamed of his perturbation—New World ideas had sifted into his consciousness in the years since he had left a little rented field beside the Seine to follow the Seigneur across the sea—he tried awkwardly to defend it.

"The master's great-grandsire fled here from the Terror," he said, not looking at Paul but speaking to him. "Before that, he was one of the truly great noblemen of France and a minister to the king."

"I've been told of it before," Paul answered.

"It won't hurt you to hear it again. When your mother and I were living on bread and curds, after the German war, the Seigneur looked us over, spoke to us straight, and then gave us a chance to prosper in a new land. We *have* prospered. Look about you and see. We haven't wanted for good meat and wine, I'm in charge of two hundred field hands, and so will you be, if some day you take my place."

"Papa, I never will."

"I've not much expectation of it, I confess, and perhaps I'm glad. For the present, though, we're in his service. Stand by the main gate when the landau comes in sight, and as he passes by take off your hat."

Paul had not yet learned to guard his tongue against bitter speech. "If you say so," he answered, "I'll kneel in the dust."

Jean replied with simple dignity. "No, only uncover, as is his due."

That would happen, Paul thought, about four o'clock this afternoon. The De Legle had sent word that he would be leaving Saint-Pierre at one, and Paul knew the gaits of the team of grays that would draw the landau. As the time neared he walked the road along which he had often wandered, deeply

perplexed, in the soft, starry night when the wild beat of the *ka*, the Creole drum, or, more often, the troubled beat of his own heart would not let him sleep. It was the road that led from the closed gate of the manoir—the walled garth where a tall villa, truly a château, stood among ancient mahoganies and massed bougainvillea and flamboyants—and after many turnings and hills and hollows it arrived at the capital. It offered a clear view of the Mountain dominating the whole landscape, violet in the sun of midday, deep purple at evening, dim silver under the moon.

Taking his stand on the near side of a sharp bend, he suddenly tensed as his father came out of the lane on horseback in his best suit and boots. Paul knew where he was going—around the bend to meet the landau, after which he would serve as its outrider as far as the paved driveway. He smiled at Paul, waved a little salute, and vanished. In about half an hour the boy Felix, a Creole about twelve, darted into sight, his scant garments revealing his wasp-brown skin. The ease of his light swift step contrasted with the strain in his voice as he called:

"He comes even now."

"Then you can wait here with me."

The boy stopped, breathing deeply. "I will, Missie Paul."

After a brief pause, Paul asked a question he had intended not to ask. He wished he had not weakened and he had no excuse. He could have seen for himself in a moment.

"Is the young girl with him?"

"Yes, M'selle Joan sits at his side."

After his first blush of joy, bursting within him, Paul's thoughts took a perverse course. A few field hands had predicted that M'selle would return with the Seigneur, but they had not known that French girls matured more slowly than their own daughters under the ardent sun. Since she was still not quite sixteen, perhaps she had come home only for a visit. He prepared himself to find her still a child.

The gray team trotted briskly into view, the Negro driver holding his reins high, the footman straight-backed and solemn. The front hood of the landau had been let down to admit air and the passengers had sight of him now, although they themselves remained vague shapes in the shadows of the rear hood. Paul swept off his hat with a flourish.

Straightening, Paul looked first at the master. His only surprise was at the lingering youthfulness of the slim, tall, graceful figure he knew so well. He looked hardly forty! He would live forty years more, until Paul himself would be old. Swiftly his carriage drew closer, and Paul saw him start to

raise his hand in acknowledgment of the salute. Then, with a tremendous effort, Paul looked straight at Joan and their eyes met.

With a start Paul realized that Joan's eyes were still dark, big, and searching and that there was still a wistful droop to the corners of her mouth. Above and beyond that, the impression he received of her was terribly vivid, full of implications he could not unentangle and grasp. They frightened him and he let them go to look at her objectively. His notion that she would still be a child had been false, her body was as mature as though she had stayed on the island in the sun. Long like her father's, it had a catlike symmetry which he recognized instantly.

"The Devil," he thought roughly, with a kind of relief, "she might as well be a Creole."

But he had seen something more than that, or at least felt it. He could not have put it in words, but its meaning was that for him Joan was Martinique, and Martinique was Joan, and he could never separate them.

She gave him one intense glance, moved her head slightly in a nod of recognition, and rode on.

3.

Joan's return affected Paul far more than he had ever let himself expect, more than now he could readily confess. Although always keen and vital, he became more alert, more alive. The air had more substance in his lungs, the taste of food and the smell of flowers were more pungent, and the music and laughter he heard from the Creole cabins more melodic and enchanting. The Creole girls were not less beautiful, but more so. Things he had thought commonplace held his attention and vaguely stirred his emotions, such as an old woman, her time of bearing long gone by, sitting in a doorway with her cigar.

He made no effort to avoid encounters with Joan, none to have them. When he saw her at a distance he lifted his hat, and, without looking to see if she responded, went on with his task. Once she came riding around a bend in the road at a rapid clip, and had to pull up sharply to avoid collision with a cane wagon on which he was riding. As she started to pass on the narrow road he spoke to her.

"M'selle!" Deliberately he employed the patois of the Creole field hands.

"Yes."

"Your cinch is loose. The groom Anton has never known how to fasten a cinch. I had better tighten it."

"If you please." Easily and calmly, as if he knew no other tongue, she too spoke Creole.

Paul sprang down, and she dismounted to give him a clear hand. As he tugged at the strap the horse grunted, then he held the stirrup as she remounted.

"You can ride as you used to, now, without fear of a fall." That meant pell-mell, and he recalled too well her dark flushed face and her hair flying.

"I don't ride now as well as then," she offered. "The riding master at school made me post. I don't feel free in the saddle."

"You might try riding bareback for a while—if the Seigneur will let you."

"The Seigneur does not supervise my horsemanship. I've been away four years."

"Four years brings many changes," he said with foolish stiffness. "Childish things are put by."

Her eyes changed expression and she started to ride on, only to pause again. "I brought some new books from France, and, if I remember right, you were fond of reading. If you like, I will have Cecile bring them to your house."

"I'll be grateful, m'selle."

"One is for you to keep. It's a law book—the third volume of Dalloz's *Code Civil*. Oddly enough, Papa remembered his secretary telling him you had borrowed the first two volumes from his library. And thank you, Paul, for tightening my cinch."

With that she spurred the horse and streaked away.

He did not notice any flaw in her horsemanship. He had seen much else though—primarily her beauty which he had drunk in. He wondered from where it had come. He remembered Joan's mother very well. She was a stately woman, fine looking, but not beautiful; and Seigneur de Legle's face, although impressive, was gaunt, mask-like almost, and of a pale yellow color, so that children thought it ugly. Then he remembered his premonition at first sight of her in the landau.

Was it truly the beauty of the island? Did Josephine have it, to captivate a young artillery officer just starting his meteoric career and almost everyone else as long as she lived? A few Creole girls he had seen possessed it in as great or even greater measure; almost all gave some evidence of it.

Could fragrance of flowers, the sweet murmur of clear streams, and the charmed stillness of a mountain work into the fabric of life? Joan would never have absorbed this essence if she had stayed indoors in the big cool and quiet Manor De Legle. He, Paul, had played with her in the sun.

The books she had promised arrived, four of them new, one nearly a century old. Paul took them to his room, and read them by lamplight. The oldest and the best he raced through twice. But ten days more passed by before he could thank his benefactor, and then only by the chance of his encountering her in the mango orchard, where he had gone to gorge on this fruit of paradise, and where she was strolling, daydreaming, with a Creole attendant.

As Paul came up to them, the pale-brown woman took a stiff and menacing stand.

"I read the books, mademoiselle, and liked them all. How shall I return them?"

"I'll send Cecile for them. Which did you like best?"

"The novel by St. Pierre, although I read it first when I was eleven years old."

"I remembered, but thought you'd like to read it again."

"You didn't remember that we used to play I was the Paul in the story and you were Virginie, and we were castaways on the Île de France."

"I hadn't forgotten that, either."

The Creole woman spoke softly.

"My lady, the Seigneur would not be pleased if you detain the young man from his labors."

When Joan flushed and could not speak, Paul let himself sink to sarcasm.

"Francine, didn't you know that in these days, it is considered the duty of chatelaines to provide education for the peasantry?"

"Walk on a distance, Francine."

"The Seigneur—"

"Do as I tell you."

Sullenly, the girl obeyed. When she was out of hearing, Joan turned on Paul and spoke with a trace of the temper he had known so well.

"Paul, what makes you so churlish?"

"I suppose because I'm a churl."

"You didn't used to be. The way you swept off your hat to us on the road was an insult. I used to like you. I want to like you still."

"You used to love me. So you told me. I love you still. I have to talk like a fool sometimes for my pride's sake."

"You?" She laughed harshly.

"Think where I stand compared to you. Look at my face, see my hands and arms, look at these burly shoulders. Don't I show what I am? I mean, am I not what I show?"

"Paul, I don't know what you are, but it isn't what you show."

"Well, will you meet me tonight?"

"No. Of course not. It would be—unseemly."

"I guess that's the worst word of all. Would it be useless too?"

"In the long run, yes."

Paul gazed solemnly into her face. He was some months from eighteen, a time of life that few men would care or dare to live through again, and he was deeply in love.

"In that case, I'll say farewell. I intend to go to sea as soon as possible. I won't presume upon the past."

"*Au revoir.*"

"Why do you say that?"

"Because I have a presentiment—whether a hope or a fear I do not know—that Paul and Joan will know each other again."

4.

Marie Barteau was tall, muscular, fair-haired, blue-eyed, and in every outward aspect a typical Norman peasant woman. To look at her and to watch her stolid, capable performance of her daily tasks, you could hardly guess that she harbored a secret. She had never discussed it with her husband Jean, for it would only worry him. She had had the first inkling of it when Paul was a few weeks old; by the time he was five she was as certain of it as of the moon's beauty over Pelée; and it helped to lend her strength through the ordeal of grief and loss when, that year, her two daughters, nine and ten years old, succumbed to what must have been yellow fever, caught during an excursion to the waterfront at Fort-de-France.

Her secret was that she was the mother of a son exceptionally powerful of mind as well as body, although this last was a fact apparent to anyone,

and actually tended to obscure the more noble gift. People could logically look for great physical strength in the plantation foreman's son, while most of them overlooked or discounted signs of intelligence.

On the night after his encounter with Joan, Paul called Marie to his bedroom. "Mamma, I'm going to leave Domain De Legle and go to France," he said.

"I expected you to tell me that, before long," she said, and he could sense the sorrow in her voice.

"I could give you many good reasons for going, but perhaps you know the true reason."

She nodded. "It is the way of parents to blind themselves to their children's growth," she said, "partly because they want to hold them and not let them go, and partly—perhaps—because it makes themselves seem younger. When I was fourteen I fell in love with a poor schoolmaster who was in love with me. He couldn't marry me because of his higher station—not a mountain higher, only a little hill. I married another and found happiness, but my heart still leaps whenever he comes to mind. Often he visits me in my dreams."

"It would be better if I never came back to the island. But when I'm practicing law in Paris—and I'll make it somehow—you and Papa can visit me there."

A film of tears on Marie's eyes caught the lamplight. "Paul, you know the Creole's name for Martinique."

"*Pays des Revenants.*" While it could mean "The Land of Ghosts," the Martiniquans used it more imaginatively to mean "The Land of Returnings."

"You think you'll not return, but you will. It's also a place where deep wounds heal sometime. It's the magic island."

"When the time comes."

"And the time has not yet come for you to go. Wait until you are eighteen—it's only a few months more."

"Wouldn't it be better—for you and for me too—to cut it short?"

"It might save you something—perhaps some humiliations—and it might cost you something—perhaps more than you can now imagine."

"I don't know what you mean."

"Nor do I. It is only a feeling. On the face of it, there is nothing good to expect, even to hope for. But you have done no wrong. This is not Paris; this is Martinique; the laws of God and nature have more sway. Paul, I don't know how to express this. But I've seen the young lovers among the Creoles

—usually about seventeen and fifteen—and the light in their faces. I can read them well, though I am hardly able to read print."

"Their stories usually have fairly happy endings. Mine could not."

"Who can say? An old woman told me something—people said she was a witch but it may be she was only very wise—where there's great beauty, there are great strokes of fate. Whether in a face or on an island. It is like the royal palm drawing the lightning. Anyway, give it a little more time."

"You are a Roman mother."

"I don't know what that means. I only know I don't want you to run away."

"I didn't think of it as that—"

"You'll know when it would stop being that. Then, if there's no longer any reason to stay, you can go."

Slowly Paul went to the window and looked out over the new-cut cane fields, gray under the moon. Candlelight still glimmered in the open unglassed windows of the workers' quarters. Dimly he could hear the throb of a cask drum, to which some Creole youths and maidens were likely dancing on the grass—perhaps that ancient *Danse de jus de canne à sucre* in which the couples dance face to face alone, with a kind of fierceness and antagonism. Then he noticed that the rhythm was that of a dance called *tango select*, which was not at all like the Argentine tango; but instead a primitive prolonged writhing and the island's most shocking folkway.

He felt his love for his native land well in his heart.

"I'll stay till my birthday, but it won't do any good," he said.

The waiting began to pass with nothing changed except the changing season. The cane was seeded, harvested; then crushed in the huge mills of the distillery, sending little brooks of juice running off in troughs to unite in what was equal to a small mountain stream, pale yellow instead of white. This poured into vats to ferment, then was piped into immense worms from whence came the spirit that was the main product of the domain. Aged in casks five, ten, and, in some cases, fifty years, it was finally exported as Rhum De Legle, famed throughout Europe as the drink of epicures, and exchanged for a stream of gold. Paul marveled sometimes at the Seigneur's stamping his high name on a rum bottle, and it eased his heart a little without his knowing why.

This was the season when the flamboyant trees were in full blossom. They blazed about the villas of the rich and the cottages of the poor, seeming never to stint their gorgeous display, and lighted the wooded glens where often Paul wandered to shoot pigeons or wild pigs or to daydream in the

cool, deep shade. He found he was not impatient to be gone, nor did he regret staying his allotted time. He was giving a brave dream its last chance to come true.

When he chanced to meet Joan on the roads or the little paths of the plantations, they looked at each other, bowed their heads a little, and passed by. But always he drank in her dark beauty in that one straight glance, at the cost of feeling himself gauche and ugly.

In August came a birthday which long ago two children had celebrated in high and imaginative ways. It was Joan's birthday, and until now, with Cecile's connivance, she had never let the day pass without sharing her treats with Paul.

Joan's sixteenth birthday was not like this at all. It was two years too soon for a ball in her honor, but Seigneur de Legle had invited some fourscore sons and daughters of the oldest French families, the nearest to the noblesse that the island boasted, to come in the cool of the evening, hear Creole music, sing, play charades, drink champagne punch, and eat a midnight supper on the grass. Ambitious parents knew that the invitation amounted to a summons. What they did not know for certain was that the De Legle would never consent to marry his daughter to any of the island swains with the unlikely exception of a De Montagne of Saint-Pierre, a Clement, a Clerc, a De Jaham, or Joan's somewhat distant cousin, Anton de Grotte. Some of the guests had ridden or driven twenty miles.

The Little Season of Big Rains had gone by; this was the Big Season of Little Rains. Here a short term of frequent downpours preceded a prolonged period of numerous light showers. Tonight, though, the sky was clear, a mysterious cobalt blue pricked by far-scattered stars and beautified by the famous moon of Martinique. It outlined Pelée and silvered all the fields and limned the sky-leaping top of a distant locust tree above the dark forest. And it happened that an inshore breeze brought dim strains of music and occasionally laughter through the balmy night, all the way from the manoir to the foreman's house.

Paul's own birthday was only two months distant, and the third moon from this would find him far at sea. Thus what he did in Martinique hardly mattered any more. When an old, rude, Norman clock struck ten and the cabin candles were blown out and against sharp-edged moonlight lay black shadows, he crept out of the house and into the road.

His heart thudding and his palms wet, he drew near the palisade of Manoir De Legle, then skirted it to a postern gate used by the servants. Its latch yielded to his hand; now he could gaze between the big tree boles to

the scene of the birthday party. Chinese lanterns hung from the boughs over the croquet ground and the Grecian-style fountain. Their ruddy light threw varied tints on the splashing water and the classical marble figures and glossed the white cloths of the refreshment tables. Almost at the edge of the shadow sat the musicians, dusky Creoles with three-string guitars, mandolins, and flutes. The guests stood in groups on the grass, engrossed in gay talk and laughter.

Paul cared for none of these, but his keen eyes went searching, and soon found what they sought. Even at this distance, Joan's face was more vivid than any of the others, her manner more free, her postures more graceful. He walked nearer and came to the deep shade of a bougainvillea arbor. Then he put his fingers to his lips and perfectly imitated the eerie cry of a little owl common on the island, long ago a signal between two playmates.

He knew that she heard it from the way she stopped and suddenly became motionless. Quiet and tall she stood, no longer one of a group of laughing, talking, gesturing friends; and Paul felt she was alone as he, out here in the dark. He wished he could look into her face. It would tell him her inner response, good or ill, no matter how masked it seemed to the others, and he would know the outcome and be spared this anguish of suspense.

Given once, the call had meant, "Here I am." If repeated, it commanded, "Come to me." Paul waited until he could control his breath, then sounded it again.

It was so true to life that a Creole girl at work in the big, airy kitchen slipped off her sandals and set them carefully on the floor upside down. Only thus could she avert bad luck.

Deep within his brain, Paul too half-believed in conjure, and he felt that evil spirits were out in force tonight. Even the pale-gold moon looked ominous. "*She won't come. It would be unseemly. She doesn't want to come. It's all over.*"

But his eyes narrowed under his furrowed, sweating brow as the still form came to life again, and presently began to move toward a group of guests at the dim edge of the lantern light. Joan stopped there briefly, then in one soft folding the shadows swallowed her. Seconds later the music stopped as the players rested, and it happened that the guests were talking in subdued tones. To Paul's ears, the quiet was breathless.

He cocked his head a little and listened with the intentness of a dog. A stealthy sound, no more than a roosting bird or a snake might make, reached him from the heavy shadows at one side. A paler shadow than the rest

moved swiftly toward him. Out of the dark his intense gaze picked a face, then came a hushed voice.

"Paul, you had no right to do that."

"To pass the barricade?"

"No, to give that call. You knew I would have to answer it."

"I didn't know it. I never believed you'd come."

"Didn't we promise forever and forever? What of the sign we carved on the tree? But we were children—and it isn't fair to invoke the past that you knew I couldn't forget."

Her voice was held low, to the merest murmur, and was more steady than his.

"Do you know what the sign means?" he asked.

"I've found out since. I felt it even then. It means the union between lovers that creates life."

"That's what I want. For that, I gave the call. Now that I've told you, you have every right to go back. You have every right to hit me, too. That was the way it used to be, when I did something you didn't like."

"I don't know that I can ever go back—all the way. You've raised a ghost that I never may be able to lay again. But I needn't come any further."

"I love you, Joan."

"As if I didn't know it." She laughed with a soft but harsh sound. "I'll stay one minute more and then I'll leave you."

"Come closer." Paul held out his big, freckled hands.

She struck at them, twice, left and right, with a catlike motion. Then with a gasp she pushed them apart and fell into his arms.

Joan was a white Creole of the island, returned home after four years of exile in the cold north. He, Paul, a swain only one generation removed from the farm cottages of Normandy, had lived most of his days in the sun, that peculiarly potent sun of the Windward Islands of the Caribbean. Both had been surrounded and enveloped with beauty, not unearthly and mystical, but sensuous in the extreme. But even this could not account for the wracking passion of their kisses. They released what had long been locked away and disclosed a new aliveness to each other, ruthless and dangerous.

It must have been a vision of the world from which they had so briefly fled which brought Paul to his senses. He had crushed Joan's body against his own, driven by the blind urge to join them, when he caught her hands in his, broke the clinging of their mouths, and spoke.

"Joan, you must go back."

"You called me here," she answered.

"You said you would stay a moment, and the moment's up."

"Then I'll go. I must go. We'll pretend it didn't happen."

"It did happen. It will happen again. When will you meet me again?"

She looked back at the scene of lantern light and then into the dimness of his face.

"As soon as I can."

She ran lightly over the soft grass and disappeared.

5.

The starting up of the music, lovely and touching in the hushed night, aroused Paul from his reverie, and sent him home the way he had come. He did not think about himself and very little about Joan; his eyes sought familiar stars and he felt an old fellowship with the moon as he sniffed the exquisite perfume of the summer bloom. Just before he reached his gate a common little owl flushed from a hedge and uttered his wailing cry. Paul laughed loudly and happily, and if his father had heard him he would have feared his wits had turned.

Not until early morning did Paul fall asleep to dream vividly. Most of his dreams were happy, one was a rapturous dream of love, but when the great bronze bell of the plantation clanged at six o'clock, he was dreaming of a fer-de-lance, that hideously poisonous snake of Martinique, coiled and waiting to strike.

The days passed, each having promised Paul a great happening that failed. But many of the great prizes of life are windfalls—he knew that as the Creoles knew it—and he remained of good cheer. Disaster too was more often the whim of enemy powers than punishment for sin, they thought; so it was wiser to make offerings at the little wayside shrines and beware of sorcerers than to trust to industry and virtue. By the same instincts Paul was ready to take a severe risk.

There came a heat-drenched afternoon when Paul was helping a work gang replace the rotted timbers of a little bridge spanning a lovely, limpid brook known to the Creoles as *Mains froides, amour chaud*. Cold Hands and Hot Love was a typical Martinique pet name, although its application to a watercourse was not immediately apparent to aliens. In the distance, under an immense silk-cotton tree, he saw Joan sitting on the grass with Francine, and from the movements of her bare arms Paul thought she was plying a

needle. Immediately he was seized by the odd fancy that she and himself were two points of a triangle, the third point being the tobacco shed, half-screened by flamboyants, behind which they had said good-by before her departure for France.

Dimly it occurred to Paul that Joan's thoughts might be moving with his, and he began walking up the road, looking at various trees as though in search of bridge timbers. When he had passed out of her sight, he took a short cut behind the dense shrubbery to the edge of the small, open field in which stood the tobacco shed. Here he could only wait, trusting to Joan's heart and imagination, for little owls did not wail except when the shadows crept, and his old daylight telegraphy, the broken chatter of a mongoose common in the wood, would attract Francine's attention and possibly arouse her suspicions.

Presently he saw the Creole woman rise, and after brief hesitation take the path that led to the manoir. As soon as she was out of sight Paul raced to the tobacco shed, took a stand in its fragrant shadows, and gazed through the open door.

His heart beat wildly and then seemed to sing as Joan laid down her sewing, rose languidly, strolled a short distance, and broke into a run which for lightness and fleetness would not have shamed one of *les porteuses*, those burden-carrying Creole girls who, in beauty impossible to describe, do the work of pack mules and oxcarts up and down the roads, over the wrinkled mountains, and through the dark, fantastic forests of Martinique. Indeed if she had not worn today a short, loose skirt in the fashion of *les porteuses*, it would not have been possible. Bound tightly around her head was a scarlet kerchief; her hair was drawn back and fastened in a glossy loop. Bare-legged like those lithe Amazons of the routes, Joan wore sandals instead of going barefoot.

She came into the deep shade of the shed and confronted him in her direct way. "Don't touch me until I tell you something," she said.

"How long can you stay?"

"For quite a while—I hope. I sent Francine for a piece of embroidery that doesn't exist. She'll be duty-bound to look in all the drawers of my highboy, and then she'll have the excuse to go through all my things, which she's been aching to do. She won't get suspicious. She can't think of anything except her lover, Louis Vertes, who is returning to work in the distillery in about three weeks."

Paul had heard the *régisseur* mention this trivial fact. None other than old Cecile had asked that the man be reinstated in his former job, after

losing it as a result of a drinking bout.

"Paul, Papa is going to take me into Saint-Pierre in less than a month. Francine won't want to go, and that means Cecile will go in her place. I am to stay with my cousin's family at their house on Morne Rouge while Papa makes a quick trip to Guadeloupe. And I'm going to celebrate your eighteenth birthday in the most wonderful way. After going as far as I can on horseback—Cecile will ride a mule—she and I will climb by the Calabasse to the crater of Pelée. I didn't get to visit it before I left—and I want to."

Paul spoke quickly, not very steadily. "What are you going to do for a chisel to carve your initials on the rock? What about some jerky to stay your stomach? There was a cache in a hollow tree—do you remember?—but first the jerky began to disappear, and after it had gone the chisel went, then there were only a couple of rain cloaks that rotted away."

"You went to see?"

"About four times. I was pigeon hunting and it was no trouble."

"Did Atlas—?"

"I guess he got hungry from time to time, passing that way. One day he must have needed a chisel."

"That he put the things there at all was something. I'll take a bottle of wine and some lunch. The groom will have a machete to help us through the woods—then we'll leave him with our mounts. Paul, we made the sign and climbed the tree and spoke to the Mountain. Shouldn't we reach the summit together?"

Joan had always liked to tease him with *double-entendres*—and her eyes had a suspicious shine.

"Tell your parents you'll spend your birthday fishing at Basse-Point," she went on. "You can go there the night before and set out at dawn to strike one of the old charcoaler's paths. A good one passes Fontaines Chaudes, although it's a little longer. I'll meet you near the crater in time for a picnic lunch."

He had a queer feeling that he had never really known her, but had only dreamed about her.

"Well, push your horses and make it by eleven," Paul said. "Both of us will be hungry by then. On the Mountain at this season it may rain cats and dogs by two o'clock."

"If it's a rainy morning, we'll ride in a closed carriage up the coast road to—Prêcheur?"

"I'll be at one or the other."

She dropped the subject with a happy nod, and immediately the truce was ended. She looked him in the eyes a few seconds and a faint glow came into her olive skin that touched her cheekbones with dark rose. Where the light from the open doorway struck it, her hair had bluish gleams. The gloss of her bare arms riveted his imagination. He felt a sharp sense of his own ungainliness as opposed to her symmetry, the difference between a shambling bear and the elegant, fluent doe. Yet somehow he felt equal to her by some scale beyond his ken, and equal to all that the moment offered.

"I'll stop somewhere," she murmured. "I'll tell you when. Come, I want you to dance the *tango select* with me as you've seen it in the cane barns—the movements, I mean. Why not? We're both Creoles."

Paul heard himself answering strangely.

"Joan, isn't it my part to lead while you follow?"

"I want it this way. I can't explain it very well. Please, Paul. The time may be getting short."

"Well, then—"

He laid his hands on her hips while she put her arms around his neck. They did not kiss, that was an innovation to the *tango select*; instead they gazed into each other's eyes, and with the heel of her sandal Joan tapped a breathless beat on the board floor. Between Paul's powerful hands, her body became fluid without losing its force. Yet Paul's brain protested harshly at the danger, and with a wrench of his will he suddenly stood still. Breaking the clasp of her arms, he turned to the door. It offered a view of a long reach of the path Francine had taken, and, still close to the palisade, he made out her hurrying form.

"She's coming back," he said.

Joan drew a troubled breath, then smiled faintly. "She's less gullible than I thought, and a better bodyguard. Anyhow, it's time we stopped playing we are savages."

"Will you meet me here again?"

"I think we'd better wait till we climb Pelée. Until then—"

She moved toward him and he thought her parted lips would meet his. Instead her hand came up, her fingers curved, and she raked his cheek with her nails. Then, turning abruptly, she sped away.

6.

As the blinding sun declined and the shadows lengthened, Paul worked furiously in an effort to ease his tension and pass the time. His crew avoided noticing the parallel bright-red marks on his cheek. Not so his mother, when, in the tranquil twilight, he came in to supper.

"How did you scratch your face?" she asked.

"I was caught on some devil-thorn."

Paul hid a wry grin at the thought that this was more of an equivocation than a downright lie. Devil-thorn was a fiendish bramble abounding in the wood lot. The philosophic Creoles called it "Wait-a-bit."

After the meal Jean Barteau followed his son into the soft night. "Those don't look like thorn scratches," he remarked. And, although Normandy parents are of stern stuff, Paul detected a faintly indulgent tone.

"So!"

"Paul, have you been meddling with one of the Creole girls?"

"Yes, Papa."

"I thought so. They are an explosive lot. I wouldn't wonder if you bear other wounds. Just be careful."

That was the one thing he could not be, Paul thought, in any comforting degree.

As Joan had predicted, the Creole Louis Vertes returned to his post in the distillery, and thereupon a change came over dour, sour Francine. She sweetened like a green plum in the sun, and apparently jumped at the chance to remain on the domain and allow Cecile to take her place as maid and duenna to Joan on the now imminent visit to Saint-Pierre. From a vantage point Paul saw the landau come out of the driveway and start down the road, the Seigneur and his daughter on the seat, looking tall and clean-cut, and, in some fashion he could not analyze, different from common folk like him. It seemed a difference which was everlasting and complete. The team of grays struck their stylish gait, which no scrubs could copy, and the driver and the footman showed haughty profiles to the gaping fieldworkers. Jean Barteau and the assistant foreman served as outriders as far as the fields stretched, while behind them, in a baggage-loaded cart, rode Cecile and a pure-blooded Alsatian named Auguste, who was the Seigneur's valet.

Paul felt a wave of excitement sweep over him; for in three days more he too would be departing.

When the time came, he rode a fine fast mule with his gear in a saddlebag. There was more romantic scenery along those few miles of dipping, climbing upland road than in the whole of most West Indian

islands, and God alone knew why it was so graced; sometimes there were vistas of beauty unsurpassed in landscape, which travelers from distant lands saw and never could forget; vistas that to the most delicate and sensitive minds came as scenes of a Lost Paradise, whose mystery they could not penetrate. When *les porteuses* came upon such views, they stopped, crossed themselves, and talked to themselves in wild, fanciful language. Paul could only stop his mule and stare.

At Basse-Point he put up at a Creole inn, frequented mainly by fishermen, and began the wonder-filled wait for the morrow. At dawn he bathed in the surf, rinsed in a fresh creek mouth, dressed coolly and lightly with leggings to free his stride, and ate a substantial breakfast of *akras*—fried cakes of pounded codfish and beans—sausage, several kinds of fruit, and of course the black coffee of the island. At the last minute he replaced the bright kerchief around his neck with a somber one which would be less conspicuous on the mountainside. His only fine article of clothing was his beautifully made grass hat.

Leaving the inn, he soon struck a well-worn footpath used by charcoal burners and gatherers of cabbage palm. He was threading the riotous green of the rain forest when a fer-de-lance of appalling size started to cross ahead of him, saw him, and coiled. His groping hand found only a short stick heavy enough to deal her a mortal blow, and he knew that if he would draw slowly back the snake would retreat. But he was caught up in the exultation of his pilgrimage, and, without knowing why, he felt compelled to advance.

Of all serpent kind, only the king cobra, the black mamba in Africa which lives on in the folklore of the Creoles, and possibly the bush-master of South and Central America present such a frightening aspect as the fer-de-lance. Its name means the iron spear, and in truth it is swift as a thrown spear. But its eyes with perpendicular-pointed pupils do not resemble cold glittering glass as in most snakes; in their depths they seem alternately to glow and pale. As Paul approached, the fer-de-lance raised her spade-shaped head. Such pure malignity was hard to believe in any living form; to Paul it was as if she were a symbol of all that is evil in the world.

Bending and reaching far, he struck hard and swiftly. At the same instant the snake struck half her length, with her jaws opened erect, her eyes blazing, and her fangs bared. The race was won by meager inches—then the snake lay in its death struggle at Paul's feet. He raised his eyes to the cloud-draped summit of Pelée looming over the forest, and a sense of destiny came upon him. Perhaps he had saved a human life, for such a lethal creature would be certain to strike a woodcutter, herb gatherer, or traveler from her dark ambush; or perhaps he had avenged a brother's death, in agony and ice

cold, his flesh rotting on his bones while he yet breathed, alone in the forest or fallen on the road.

And perhaps he had been spared for some eventuality unknown and unimaginable.

Paul touched the still quivering form with his stick. She could not move, only her eyes blazed, so he caught her behind the head and lifted the forepart of her body off the ground. From her inch-long fangs a viscid liquid dripped in such quantity that no man or beast on the island could have hoped to survive its injection. But the fangs themselves, beautifully curved and needle-pointed, and both retractable in the upper jaw, seemed to Paul works of art, wonders of nature. He flung the spotted carcass into the thickets, and walked on with a troubled mind.

At the first brook he washed his hands. It was an unconsciously symbolic act, for a snake is a clean creature compared with most living things. Thereafter the incident ceased to haunt him, his mind no longer groped for meanings beyond its reach, and he paced happily toward the rendezvous on the mountaintop.

The tree giants crowding thick on either side, enmeshed in vines and snaky lianas and gigantic ferns, gave way to slopes of guinea grass or wild cane, and thickets of tamarinds, wild guavas, and ever-gay flamboyants. Climbing steadily, often he trod the naked lava rock, and the forms and shapes of lava around and below him—ridges in jagged profile, perfect cones, *mornes* wrinkled with ravines, and serrated *tetons*—began to create an unworldly effect, as might the landscape of the moon. Of the forest he had lately left, only a billowing mass of green remained. And now terraces began to take shape like descending steps, to fall below him into dark ravines. The only sound was the occasional sweet pipe of a little wrenlike bird that the Creoles called the Whistler.

Suddenly, it seemed, he was high aloft, all the craggy buttresses of the Mountain gliding away to give him a panoramic view of the crater rim above him while the greater part of Martinique spread out in dreamy beauty and faded into the distance below him. North and east, and westward around the shoulders of the Mountain, he saw the sea in its nameless blueness. Turquoise blue might be the closest approximation of its shade; yet it was not quite that, not quite like anything else in the world but the holy and enchanted blue of the sea waters off the island that Paul loved, *Pays des Revenants*.

There is a surge and roll to Martinique scenery that suggests the sea. He had never before gained enough height to observe it; it was as though in

creation's morning, when the island was upheaved and still in violent convulsion, the Artist God had seen it in an instant of perfect rhythm and proportion, pleasing to His eye, and had lifted His hand and said, "Peace, be still."

The young man on a pilgrimage of love felt a great lift of heart.

He had not quite gained the crater's rim when he caught sight of two tall figures making their way up the steep mountainside. Gradually they came closer, until at last he could make out their faces. If they had suffered from the hard climb they did not show it. Cecile's face, darker by several shades than most Creoles', bore a beaming smile, for her temperament was more Negro than Creole. Joan wiped off some of the sweat agleam on her face and gave him a small smile, different from any he had seen since she had gone away to France. Somehow she seemed again to be childlike, playful, and free.

They said nothing at first since they were short of breath, but Paul noticed that Joan wore a cotton blouse, pale yellow, with a Lord Byron collar, and a fawn-colored riding skirt slashed off just below the knees. Her boots were stout.

"I killed a snake on the way here," Paul offered.

"It is good luck," Cecile pronounced. "You will be forgiven seven sins."

"Was it fer-de-lance?" Joan asked.

"The biggest I've ever seen."

"I'm glad she met her match." Joan was not speaking lightly; he knew it by the widening of the dark eyes.

"Cecile, can you find a place in the shade of a big rock, and make yourself comfortable with your rum and corn cakes and cigars?"

"To the bottom."

Then Joan smiled with singular sweetness, partly because of Cecile's ample bottom, but mainly because she loved the vigorous Creole speech.

"Well, then, Paul and I will take our basket and walk along the rim of the crater until we find a good view."

The path grew rough and rocky, and at every slippery place or steep incline Paul gave Joan his hand. Still this was not a climb to tax anyone with their strength and vigor, and both enjoyed the exercise.

They came at last to the rim, and then to a place with a good view into the crater. Since the sun was getting high, some of its intense light poured down into the dark maw and shone on a body of water. They stopped and

mused and marveled. Everyone knew of the lake that had formed within the abyss, but the actual sight of it aroused emotions hard to grasp and reveal.

"A watery death," Joan murmured, her lips close to Paul's ear.

"The volcano is extinct. That's all."

"You can say only that, but it's actually far more. It's the death of Pelée herself. Atlas said she was a Fire Goddess and for once he told the truth. Dr. Nogret found the origin of the name in an old history of Martinique—very likely Atlas got it out of the same book; for a fraud, he is very sharp. Now her fires have gone out and only her cold shell remains. Everything has to die, even a mountain."

"That's not strange. Many—I suppose most volcanos are extinct."

"Isn't it strange that, after spouting fire ever since the world began, she should die in that little time you and I are alive? We're two little people, yet we happened along to attend the funeral of a mountain. A wonderful, old, old mountain, the Sacred Mountain of the Caribs. Now they're all dead too, the real Caribs, the Caribs of Martinique. Maybe that's why she died."

This last wild flight of fancy astounded Paul for it reflected a side of Joan he had rarely seen, even in their childhood make-believe. Her face had an expression which at first he could not place, although it was dimly familiar; then he realized it was like that he had seen on the faces of Creole women when they were deeply moved by something. Her brow was clear, her eyes looked deep and black, her lips drooped and little hollows, like shadows, appeared in her cheeks. She seemed somehow closer to him than in the dark by the bougainvillea arbor or in the dimly lit tobacco shed.

"I think Atlas is a real Carib. True, he's of mixed blood, but it's the way he feels that counts."

"I admit that's possible."

"And he does worship the Mountain. She's truly his goddess."

"Poor fool, his goddess is dead. Its fiery heart is cold." Joan looked again into the crater, then into Paul's face. "Paul, I don't want to die."

"I don't know anybody who is more alive."

"I don't want you to die, either. You're the first one I think of, to want to stay alive. There's an awful closeness to death in Martinique. The rich growth and the bright flowers and the hot sun and the beauty everywhere makes it seem nearer. There doesn't seem to be time to do anything."

"That's only a fancy."

"Well—let's walk on and find a pretty place to eat our picnic lunch."

They had gone only a little way when they happened on a small oddity of terrain. Between the rim of the crater and the steep slope of the mountain lay a hollow, once perhaps the site of a mineral spring, which had built up a deposit that had since washed away through a narrow breach in the volcanic rock. Dust and ashes had sifted in, forming a thin soil, which now supported a dense low growth of mosslike grass.

Paul, walking ahead ready to give Joan his hand, started to pass by, then stopped. He turned and their eyes met in swift interrogation.

"It's a good place to sit," Paul said. "But the dip's too sharp to see over very well."

"No one can see us, either," she answered.

"We can see each other, which is fine for me but not so fine for you."

"I won't mind."

Scrambling down, they sat facing each other, the basket close at hand. By sitting erect, Paul found he could still see the lower slopes, the spires of Saint-Pierre with its ranks of yellow roofs climbing from the bay side to the hills, the walled gardens in neat squares and rectangles of brilliant green, and the ships lying at anchor. They sat in the midst of a deep silence—each lost in thought of himself and the other, meditating their relationship, and asking how far it could bring them, and how near.

7.

"I'm very happy, Paul," Joan said at last.

"I felt that you were."

"Are you, too?"

"Wonderfully."

"What causes it? When we were together before—since my return—we felt passion but we didn't have happiness. We were both too troubled. Now that trouble seems to have passed away."

"I hate to say it, but I must. The trouble will come back."

"Where has it gone now?"

"We left it at the foot of the Mountain."

"Maybe when we pick it up again it won't be as heavy. It depends on what happens to us here—atop the Mountain. Here there seems to be so much between us—and so little. Even in France, with the last living relics of the *ancien régime*, there are no bonds stronger than those tying me to our

manoir. I'm supposed to take Mamma's place as its chatelaine. I've been brought up to do so, as in a very strict and strong religion. In the absence of a male heir I must carry it all. Well, all my troubles seem blown away by the mountain wind. Of course they aren't—they're only too real—still, if we could just believe—"

She stammered and dropped her hands.

"I do believe what you're trying to say."

"That we could be happy together—always?"

"If we try not to be afraid. If we don't let those troubles separate us. You made one little mistake. You said they could be lighter depending on what happened up here. You should have said on what we make happen. If we hang back, we'll just eat lunch and go away."

"I think that's all that's left now. We've talked too much. We shouldn't have tried to talk it out and make it come right."

A large hawk flying up the Mountain close to the ground came upon them suddenly, saw them, and darted away.

"We're well hidden," Paul said.

"Yes."

"And the sun is warm without being too hot."

"Will you get that bottle of wine out of the basket, open it, and give me a drink? It's a full-bodied Burgundy that's very good when warm."

He handed her the open bottle. She took a deep draught and passed it back to him. When he had drunk, he corked it and they sat still a long minute, enjoying the first glow of the good wine.

"My stomach's not cold any more," Joan said at last.

"Mine's no longer tied in a knot."

"The hawk happened, didn't it?"

"It was a sign. Maybe the fates are on our side."

"I want to ask a question. It's a terribly difficult one to answer—but I must know. Do you really love me, Paul?"

"Don't you know?"

"You said so, but I want you to say it again."

"I love you, I always have, I always will."

"No matter whether I love you or not?"

"Yes, but I'd like to know that you do."

"You can't, because I don't know myself. All the past stands between us —all the future I can see. But isn't the present enough justification for what

we both want? We're on the Mountain away from everyone."

"Don't talk, Joan."

"I want one kiss, and then I'll answer my own question."

He drew her into the hollow of his arm. Their kiss put an end to the alien guilt and fear. Nor did Joan need to answer her question, because it no longer existed. The sanction was in life itself, in their lovely youth, in the warm sun and crystal air, and perhaps on her part in love that knew not itself, because, being forbidden, it hid its face. It had happened often on this warm and flowery island. The wise Creoles took it into their reckoning.

Her hands fumbled at her belt buckle. They faltered, and he came to her aid. Half-weeping, she laughed at his big, awkward-looking hands, then at him as he gaped, wonder-struck, at what he had disclosed. The long, well-knit Creole body is one of the most symmetrical of any human tribe. The limbs are cleanly joined to the narrow trunk, the waist is taut, the breast of classic contour, the thighs slim and round. And Joan was a true Creole, a daughter of the sun.

Nor had her face ever been as beautiful as now, because she had never been as moved.

He bared his own powerful body, burly of chest and shoulder, massive of limb, and for a moment an evil fate seemed to close in, and he was afraid. Then, lying on the bed of grass, she held out her arms.

8.

When Paul had returned to the domain, any thought of quitting the island was furthest from his mind. He lived only for his next meeting with Joan. Thus it was to this end that he carefully searched the disused cabins and outbuildings such as linger on, moldering and unkempt, about all ancient plantations. He hoped to find a meeting place readily accessible, decently clean, its approach screened, and as safe from surprise as possible.

His first few excursions proved fruitless, and he felt at his wits' end. Then a spell of humid weather made him think of hurricanes—this was their season—and from these his mind jumped to a long-abandoned, almost forgotten *cabane-des-vents*—house of the winds—a storm shelter at the edge of the wood lot, hardly a quarter-mile from the manoir. Built of ironwood planks riveted to deep-set, foot-square, hand-hewn corner posts, braced by big beams of mahogany and with a reinforced plank roof, it had been raised in the days of the Seigneur's grandsire, and had stood impervious to both the great gales and the more stealthy attacks of time.

It had been used only once in the builder's lifetime, and, since it was but twelve feet square, it had sheltered only his family and a few favorite servants. But the manoir had itself withstood, except for broken glass, the great hurricane of 1825, although some twenty slaves had been killed. So his son and heir, a humane man, had erected a veritable fort of stone in the side of a hill. On a day of lowering clouds and veering winds, when women felt lightheaded, the cattle would not stand to be milked, and the mules stamped and the chickens hid, all hands could rally here at the warning clang of the bell, and lie cramped but safe through a storm of any strength that men can measure. But even beyond these, there could come storms whose force was immeasurable, their like remembered in the folklore of the island, retold from the tales of the Caribs, storms against whose onslaught no work of man could stand.

The little shelter stood screened by bamboo thickets, through which swine had worn a winding path. Its heavy door could be secured by a plank fitting into iron hooks, but it had hung ajar as long as he could remember and he needed no great cunning to know it must remain so at all times, lest a sharp-eyed Creole wandering by to gather fuel notice the change. Foot-square holes had been cut in two opposite walls, each coverable with a hinged shutter. These admitted light, and amidst a great hurricane the opening on the lee would prevent air pressure building up within that might cause the stout structure to buckle. At one side was a small locked closet in which the builder had planned to keep food and drink to last its refugees through a three- or four-day siege. Paul remembered that the key hung with many other outworn keys on an iron ring in the cottage kitchen.

The retreat's dim light, silence, and lonesomeness, even its smell of long abandonment, wrought upon Paul's imagination, and he stood still awhile, until the visions faded and his wild pulse calmed.

He filched the key at the first opportunity, and stored a few comforts and luxuries in the locked closet.

After Joan's return, he passed a message to her without difficulty. Engrossed in writing a history of *émigré* families in the French West Indies, the Seigneur kept no strict watch on his glowing, lovely daughter, and assumed that her personality was as he had tried to mold it. In two years, he thought, she would return to Paris and marry suitably. Meanwhile the wide domain was her pleasant cloister. If she preferred Cecile as attendant and duenna instead of his own choice, Francine, he would humor her.

"The old storm shelter will do wonderfully," Joan told her lover at the first chance. "But sweep out all the scorpions and centipedes and tarantulas."

"It's as clean as a hermit's cell, and as severe. And it feels as lonely as a mountaintop."

"Something tells me, Paul, that I shouldn't entangle you in this. It's not my instincts—they don't give a damn—I think it's my conscience. If we're caught, I'll only be sent to a convent. But—"

"I'll do my own worrying, thanks."

"All right, then." Her deep, black Creole eyes began to glimmer. "The day after tomorrow Papa's going to Belle-Fontaine to visit the old lord. He invited me to go, but I had a feeling he didn't want me. I think he's interested in the granddaughter, the Comtesse de Antignac who was widowed in the Algerian War. He's almost irresistible to women—that gaunt, yellow face—but of course I wouldn't want him to marry her, and have to hand over my keys. I don't think there's much danger—he wouldn't regard her as his equal—and a mere dalliance could prove most convenient." Paul knew that her gay ribaldry, so worldly-sounding, was self-defensive in some way he could not probe.

"What time will you come?"

She leaned a little toward him and color welled up in her cheeks.

"As soon as the landau rounds the bend."

When she came, in the first full blaze of morning, it was with stealthy steps, like an enchantress. Watching her, Paul felt a rush of exultation at the thought that his bride of the Mountain had come back. Still he must take both her hands and ask:

"Is it the same as it was up there?"

"My hands feel so small in those big paws of yours."

"Can't you answer?"

"I'm the same. Are you the same, Paul? So bold and free?"

"Yes, Joan."

"Are we as safe? You won't disappoint me?"

"No."

"Then the manoir be damned."

"Would you like a glass of wine?"

"I don't need it—but I want it."

He unlocked the closet and took out a bottle of *vin ordinaire*, cheap but good, that he had bought at the plantation depot. He filled two brimming glasses which glowed in the dispersed light from the safety ports.

"Aren't you going to bolt the door?" Joan asked.

"No." He told her why.

She nodded and sipped her drink. "It's very good."

"But I don't know what you'll think of these." He took from the closet an armful of tanned sheepskins which he had bought from the herders and had intended to export. Carefully he spread them in a dim corner.

"It's a nice bed," she told him soberly. "It's even poetical. And a house of the winds is all right, too," she went on, glancing about her. "Although the sun's shining and the sky's blue, you and I are hiding from a hurricane."

Her face and body glimmered strangely and beautifully in the soft light, her tresses were blue-black. That was Paul's last impression before he himself was caught up in a surge of beauty and passion which, like pain, can neither be remembered nor imagined. Perhaps it was his humility that at last caused her to weep. Perhaps it was his rude strength. Perhaps it was only that they were young, and in love.

When it was time for them to part, she paused by the narrow shaft of brilliant light caused by the slight opening of the door.

"I said something when we were on the Mountain."

"Yes."

"I whispered it in a moment when we were not ourselves. If it's true, I ought to know it by now."

"Is it true?"

"Yes. I love you, Paul."

9.

It was unthinkable that Paul and Joan could be temperate. Youth itself was against it, as was the spell of the island, the ardence of the sun, the throbbing drums at night, and the profusion of flowers. In nature as well as in appearance, Joan was sister to the Creole girls, with that beauty of face and litheness of form so often a sign of great aliveness. And it may be that the Creole philosophy of living from day to day lifted them above taboos as did Joan's high and secure position.

They met as often as any reasonable caution permitted. A lifting of her eyes as she looked at him, a slight backward tip of the head, sent him on a roundabout course to the little house of winds. And from the instant they met the indignity of the deceit they were forced to practice and the not-quite repressible guilt of an illicit union were lost and forgotten in triumph and joy. Nor was it possible for either to know shame of the flesh—although one

might expect it of Paul—for this was foreign to the island, banished along with cold weather and stern precepts.

"What if I should become pregnant?" Joan asked suddenly one day.

"We could strike for Trinité and catch a sponge boat for St. Lucia," Paul answered. "The captain would marry us as soon as we cleared the bay—those spongers are Portuguese and a bold lot—and if that failed we'd be married by a magistrate of the island."

"You've given some thought to it, I see."

"Quite a little. But I don't know what would happen after that."

"Even that much wouldn't happen. You're quite wrong in your surmise. I wouldn't catch any sponge boat; I'd go to a convent and have the baby and never see you again."

"By your own will?"

"Not exactly. By force of circumstance. By the will of the Seigneur and the law of the manoir. Being an unmarried mother is better than being the wife of the foreman's son."

"My God, is it that strong?"

"I've tried to tell you a hundred times. Some day you'll get it through your thick Norman head."

"I still don't believe it and won't believe it. I hope you have a baby. Then I'll get both of you."

"You're a fool, but I love you."

There was another troubled conversation between them in early November, when the lianas put out rainbow bloom and the dark forests blazed with beauty. And this time the trouble was obscure and they spoke of it in casual tones with only the little lines between their brows.

"I suppose you know that Louis Vertes, Francine's lover, got in another cutlass fight, and has fled to Guadeloupe," Paul said.

"Yes, and she's asked to be my attendant again. At least that's the talk in the kitchen. Neither the Seigneur nor she has mentioned it to me."

"Is that good or bad?"

"I don't know. But Louis must still be very much in love with her. Before he left her he gave her a Creole bracelet of gold beads that must have cost two hundred francs."

"Where would he get two hundred francs? He's never been lucky at pebble roulette."

"I can't imagine. But Cecile saw him present the gift."

"Do you think Francine will get her wish?"

"Let's cross that bridge when we come on it."

But an uneasy feeling remained as they wooed each other, and their love-making was shorter than usual, and then they were ashamed of the swiftness of their parting. But as she was leaving Joan hesitated, then turned back to speak to Paul, waiting at the door.

"Instead of St. Lucia, why couldn't we go to Tahiti? There are French people there, but no Manoir De Legle."

"Joan—?"

"It isn't so. I swear it. But it may be soon, unless we're forced to stop. I could get hold of some money to pay our passage." She stopped and gazed at him quietly. "Why think about it at all? I wouldn't go."

She turned quickly and raced away.

After three anxious days Paul caught a glimpse of her on the green bank of the big, chattering brook known to the Creoles as *Flux de buche*, one of the prettiest nooks in strolling distance of the manoir. She appeared to be reading while Cecile fished with a cane pole, and in high spirits Joan picked up a stick and whacked it vigorously three times against a tree trunk.

"Everything's going to be all right," she told him when he answered a time-honored summons. "At least I think so."

And no doubt of it showed in her shining eyes.

"The Seigneur has been invited for a week's stay at Belle-Fontaine," she went on gleefully. "The young Comtesse has set her cap for him as sure as the Devil. He's leaving tomorrow. And if he intended to replace Cecile with Francine, he would have told me last night at dinner. I've never seen him so agreeable. We each drank three glasses of champagne and he told me of his capture at Sedan by the Saxons, when he was a lieutenant of twenty-two. It must have been a terribly humiliating experience. I knew of it because Mamma told me—she was a bride in Paris—but I've never heard him mention it before."

"Somehow I can't imagine the De Legle ever being humiliated."

"It must have been awful. Then the German command accused some unknown French officer of killing a prisoner and demanded that the Duke of Magenta—General MacMahon—produce him or suffer reprisal. The Duke couldn't, so my father spoke up and said he was the one. After looking at him, Von Moltke laughed in his face. Of course, that didn't help matters. Just the same, the inquiry was called off."

"You're wonderfully happy, Joan, and I seem to be too. I hope we're not *fey*."

"What does that mean?"

"It's a Viking word I've heard my father use, brought by the Northmen, and handed down. It meant you were going to die. The signs were a great joyfulness."

"No," she whispered, her eyes getting big, "we're going to *live*."

The sun had hardly topped Caravelle when the Seigneur rode out of the palisade in his usual equipage, his valet Auguste astride his favorite saddle horse, Barbe. The morning air was still cool and dewy-fresh when Paul hastened to the house of winds. He had not long to wait. Joan came in her long floating stride wearing a *robe d'enfant*, with her hair in a glossy loop at the back of her neck. A vague wistfulness had followed her exultant mood of yesterday, and her lovely mouth was never more sweet to Paul than when without a word she stopped behind the narrowly open door and stood still in his arms.

From thence events moved slowly, with a kind of solemn cadence, toward their destination. Poignance and bliss came over them sharply, and they saw it in each other's faces, and the external world became shadowy and unreal as in dreams. They could not speak aloud, and whispered they knew not what. It was the nearest to complete union that they had attained.

At its height, Paul became faintly aware of some little change in the background. It caused only a little check and swerve in the flow of his inward experience, a recognition in some dim corner of his brain that the light fell in a different pattern. Slowly the world was coming back, when suddenly he was transfixed in its center, which is the consciousness of every soul, and with a shattering shock he saw that the door of their hiding place was wide open.

He turned to it, at bay, not even hoping that it would not admit an enemy. But no solid shape appeared in the glaring light. There was only a voice, quiet and well controlled.

"I will wait until you two are in a condition to receive me properly."

Paul turned his head and gave Joan a great steadfast glance. It was his first impulse, deeply characteristic, and the expression in her wild eyes changed in a way he could never forget. In a moment or two he replied to the voice. His own voice was shaking but it was a man's.

"We're ready now, monsieur."

Henri de Legle appeared in the doorway, tall, lithe, youthful, and very still. He was dressed as usual in shantung silk, but he had put on gaiters

since Joan had bid him good-by, and these, together with the riding crop in his hand, meant that he had quit his carriage journey and returned on horseback. His gaunt yellow face, with its long brilliant eyes and high-bridged nose, conveyed nothing but an austere self-mastery. He had hardly glanced at Joan as yet, for his gaze was fixed on Paul.

"I regret this very much," he said. "However, I do not regard it as your fault. You are not to blame."

"Sir, I'm completely to blame."

"That statement is laughable. You know better, of course, but the salient fact about your class of people is that they have no discipline. When they are aroused, they riot and murder and burn. They cannot resist temptations of the moment. However, you are said to have intelligence unusual in your order, so I cannot give you a good flogging and keep you in my service. Go out that door, and take to your heels, and never let me lay eyes on you again."

The silence which followed found Paul dazed and crushed. There are no rapiers as sharp as words, no hammer blows as shattering. He accepted the indictment because all his days he had contended with insinuations of the same nature and with self-doubts clouding his soul. Although he had denied them, he had never disproved them. Even so he was able to turn unsteadily to Joan and speak to her.

"I'm going to stay with you."

"No," Joan answered in a choked voice. "Don't stay a second. For God's sake go, before something terrible happens."

Dimly Paul perceived that something terrible might very easily happen —that this quiet scene was charged with dreadful peril and that, in his present state of mind, he could not cope with it. As a lean finger pointed to the door, half-blindly Paul obeyed its command, and as the imperious figure followed him into the open he walked away in long strides. It was only a short distance to a gaudy flamboyant thicket which concealed him from view. Here the presence of familiar things, perhaps even the gaiety and the *élan* of flowers in contrast to the degradation he had just known, enabled him to concentrate, to rally, and find himself. He stopped, listening.

He heard the door slam shut. A moment later came a sound that could only be the big plank that served as a bolt dropping into its iron supports. Kicking off his brogues so he could walk in silence, he began his return. His steps were swift and sure.

He stole up to one of the safety windows and stood there, his senses cleared at last. Seigneur de Legle was speaking in a low voice but Paul

heard him plainly.

". . . You *did* know better. You let animal passion erase all my teachings, nullify your upbringing. Passion is natural enough—I have felt it for a charwoman, half-Indian and half-Chinese—but it must be disciplined, and if a responsible person allows it to master his better self, he must be punished. You must be punished. You are still young enough so that punishment will bite, and afterward restrain. And I mean to punish you in a way you'll never forget."

At that instant, Paul's blood ran cold. He could no longer even hope for a softened outcome. A great storm was rising, and it would strike within minutes, perhaps even within seconds. Fate was up and moving, and he could not see where its stroke was aimed; he only divined its weight. It was strange that he still smelled flowers and heard the rustle of the sea breeze in the trees.

Now Joan spoke, and the heroism of her utterance, her tone sharp, defiant, denunciatory, braced Paul's nerves and rallied his strength for the onrushing crisis.

"You talk like a great lord. Does a great lord bribe a serving wench to spy and inform on his daughter? Does he lay a trap with lies and false show? Tell me that before you punish me."

The Seigneur paused before he answered, thus lending even greater weight to his answer.

"Yes, a great lord does all that, if his house is about to fall and that might save it."

Then Paul heard the soft sound of Joan's crying.

"There would be no use of my giving you the polite punishments—depriving you of jewels, clothes, trips to Europe, parties, or even confining you for a whole year within the palisade. Those wouldn't restrain you, the next time you are tempted to lechery. My family rose in a sterner age than this, and I live by their code. Bare your back, and bend over the closet."

"What?"

"You bared your whole body to your lowborn lover. I do not see any reason for excessive modesty now. I'm going to give you twenty lashes. They won't mark you unduly, but they will burn in the lesson. And I shall act now, because I am as anxious to get it over with as you must be."

Then came a prolonged silence which Paul did not understand. Disbelief fought against a sickening suspicion. At last, dizzy with suspense, he was given the answer—the sharp thud of a riding crop against firm flesh.

Instantly he gave way to blind fury. He could not forget the beam that braced the door, intended to withstand a hurricane, and he wasted precious seconds scanning the ground for a stone that he could hurl through the storm window. The sound was repeated in slow and dreadful rhythm, five times before he knew what he must do. Running back a few steps, he flung his body at the door. Just before it struck he twisted sideways and leaped clear of the ground, his broad shoulder dealing the blow.

The plank held, but the rusted hinges ripped from the sill and the door gave.

Frenzied, Paul burst through the opening and seized the whip. With his left hand he caught the staring De Legle by the throat and, with a great twisting sweep, flung him to the floor on his face. Holding him down, he lashed his side and thigh with savage fury.

"You lay eyes on me again," Paul howled. "Look good, God damn you. You lay eyes on me again."

The Seigneur gazed, but made no attempt to resist, his face wearing an expression of unbelieving astonishment. Then Joan's rigid form, stunned by violence and terror, sprang to life. Her shriek pierced the uproar and reached Paul's ears.

"*Stop it, stop it! He gave me what I deserved!*"

Paul stopped the whip in mid-air, and, with a pounce, Joan snatched it from his hand. Although the full implication of her cry had not yet struck home to him, he stood baffled and inert, his eyes darkening, his great arms dangling.

"He gave you—what—you—deserved?" he stammered.

"Yes, yes." Then she raised her whip as though to strike him in the face, only to let it fall.

Bawling like a child, she pointed to the door.

CHAPTER TWO

Paul's Passage

1.

PAUL was in full flight toward the seacoast, from thence to flee the island. His power of reason told him only that he had committed a serious offense against French law—breaking into a locked building and attacking the owner. That would be the written charge—the judge would say something of this sort when sentencing the prisoner to a term in a penal colony. But overriding that, setting it almost at naught in Paul's mind, was the act he could not measure, the incredible act. Because he, Paul Barteau, had flogged the De Legle of Manoir De Legle with his own horsewhip, he fled as though from hue and cry, with little thought of anything except self-preservation.

Perhaps it was a mercy that few other thoughts could penetrate his consciousness. They could have brought no comfort, and might have weakened his effort. He had not tarried to bid his parents good-by, and no fieldworker had given him a stammered blessing or clasped his hand. There were vagrants on the island that never received such benisons, tramps and fly-by-nights whom Paul had pitied, but they wanted no pity because actually they were on a great quest for a last safe hiding place, and they would find it before long as certain as nightfall. But Paul was a man of strong ties and deep roots. These were broken with the effect of a broken heart, and he was spared from trying to think when they might mend.

At first the bamboo hid him, then a field of cane in which he stooped low, then the steep walls of a ravine. Above this lay a tract of the *grand bois*, and at once, as though by instinct, he struck a path into its fastness. Still dazed, he trod it a moment or two before he realized that this was the same path Joan and he had followed four years before; still the remembrance was as dim as a dream. That day only a few creepers had obstructed passage; today there were many. The lianas girding every tree trunk, enmeshing the limbs, looping and twining, had been one rich torrent of green, while today

they blazed with red, yellow, orange, and purple blossoms, or hung heavy with waxen-white tree lilies of stupefying scent.

Suddenly he stopped, his mind clearing. This was the place they had heard Atlas' voice; nearby stood the gigantic locust tree under which he and Joan had hidden. The thought came to him to look again at the sign they had carved there, but the sign had failed, and among the twisted roots the fer-de-lance lay in wait, mottled and invisible. Others lurked beside the path, and as Paul paced on he wondered whether a spade-shaped head would lash out of the dense thickets and put an end to his flight.

"I would walk a little way from the path," he thought, "and fall. No one would ever find me, and Mamma and Papa would never know what happened to me. I would rot in the forest and the man-eating lianas would hide my bones. I would dream no more of prizes I can't win. I would forget Joan."

Suddenly the stark silence was faintly broken. The sound might be the slash of a machete through a vine stalk in the path ahead. He thought of trying to hide or, one brief, wild impulse, of attacking the traveler from ambush. Instead he paced on and presently came into view of a big dark man, almost naked, upon whom he gazed in speechless wonder. Like any palm gatherer, he carried a machete in his right hand and on his shoulder three hearts of palm, of the color and almost the shape of elephant tusks. But the stern aquiline face and the long coarse hair were the same he had seen before.

"Monsieur Paul, we meet again in the wood," Atlas said in French. "But this time your beautiful companion is not with you."

"No, she's not."

"Why are you in such deep grief? Have you parted from her forever?"

"Yes."

"That is not all. It must be you are fleeing the island."

"Yes, and will you sell me your machete that I may go faster? I'll give you ten francs."

"Ten francs for Atlas' machete that can tell fortunes?"

"It's all the money I have. Answer yes or no, for I must hurry on."

"You have all the night before you, if you are making for Trinité on the east coast. But you had better double back and go to Fort-de-France, where there are more ships."

"That is true—and I will."

“What have you done to the De Legle that you must fly? Killed him? No, there is no shadow of murder on your face. Robbed him? No, you have brought neither his daughter nor his gold. It must be that he discovered your secret, and you beat him in your fury. But do not despair. Your plea to my Mountain has been answered.”

“I don’t know what you mean. The sign on the tree failed. I asked Pelée to be kind to me, as you told me, and instead I am being driven from the island. What a fool I was to believe you! Keep the machete. I’ll go my own way without help from a fraud.”

“Wait, my brother Paul. Pelée is being kind to you by not letting you see her any more. In that way you will be saved.”

“From what?”

“From what is coming. From that which I have seen in dreams. All the great quimboiseurs behold signs and wonders, and many of the people feel foreboding in their hearts. In the hour appointed I will go to the Great Open to join my tribe. It may be that in some distant land you will see only a light in the sky and hear trumpets sound.”

“What of Joan, whom I’ve lost?”

“In some fashion, I know not now, Pelée will be kind to her too. And it may be you have not lost her. I’ve been watching the sign of the triangle within the circle. The bark grows smooth around it, with raised edges, and it becomes more sharp and beautiful year by year.”

“I beg your pardon, Atlas, for calling you a fraud. I was not in my right mind.”

“That, I knew. And here is the talking machete—in your hand a machete and nothing more. I have cut most of the vines across the path but maybe you will need it to deal with spotted Death-in-the-wood. Leave it in the gum tree at the path’s end.”

“I will, and if I never see you again—adieu.”

As Atlas gave the machete to Paul, he almost dropped it.

“It jumped in my hand,” Atlas explained. “It was trying to tell me something—I know not what. Now let us go our ways.”

The forest closed behind him. Paul followed the path to the gum tree, cached the machete, and then took a circling course toward the southwest. Pausing a moment on the crest of an almost naked ridge, he caught his breath while he took a farewell view of his sunlit homeland.

Paul descended to the headwaters of a river, forded where a wayside shrine protected travelers from sudden floods, and wound down to the graded road connecting Trinité with Fort-de-France. This he dared not traverse until nightfall, so he withdrew into a little copse, ate wild bananas and custard apples, and, lying down in a bamboo thicket, fell into a troubled sleep.

When he awakened the sun was down and gray dusk falling. But the still numerous cane and rum wagons, tobacco carts, mule riders, and long-striding Creole women returning from market with empty baskets and jingling pockets, required that he merely skirt the road, making occasional detours. Later he walked it boldly, slipping away into the fields and black thickets only at sight of an approaching lantern or the sound of rumbling wheels. Now his pale-colored eyes, always readily adaptable to the dark, stood him in good stead.

Since he had covered little more than a mile an hour, he reached the outskirts of Fort-de-France shortly before midnight, making his stealthy way to the waterfront. The city had none of the quaint idyllic beauty of Saint-Pierre, but it was the second port on the island, and Paul could hardly believe how soundly it slept. He had known that the Creoles of both cities retired and rose early, as though to preserve enough oil in their lamps for some great advent; but he himself was so completely awake that the silent empty streets and the dark windows seemed unreal. And for the first time he began to believe actively and honestly in his chance of escape.

Standing in an alley, he looked in vain for the bobbing lanterns of a search party. Evidently his pursuers assumed he had made for Saint-Pierre, a city four times larger and one he knew much better than Fort-de-France, or for some fisherman's or sponger's harbor on the east coast.

Looking across the water, he saw the pale lights of about a score of ships, some of them probably laden with the island's rum, sugar, tobacco, cocoa, and vanilla, products that made him homesick. Certainly they would be sailing soon for the ports of the great world.

He walked along the river mouth, looking for a one-man bateau whose sleeping owner he might employ. He found such a boat close under an arched bridge, a human form curled up in its stern. Then he stopped in surprise as the reflected starlight that lay close and ghostly pale over the limpid water disclosed not a fisherman rolled in his sheet but a lean old woman. As near as he could tell, she was the color of café au lait, and wore a bright-hued Creole dress.

"Mother," he said quietly, laying his hand on her shoulder.

"I'm not your mother," she replied instantly and with spirit. "I've given birth to no such lout; it would have sprung me. What do you want? If you're looking for a girl, I know of none, and that's the truth by my good St. Ananias."

"Will you tell me your name?"

"Don't you know?" she asked, in sudden dignity. "I thought everyone on the island knew Bumboat Madelon."

"No, I didn't know."

"Then, you're new off the farm. I thought I smelled buttermilk instead of brandy. Well, why did you wake me up?"

"Do you know whether any of those ships intend to sail tonight? I'd take any, but I hope to go to France."

"You've come to the right berth. It must be I smell of bilge. My son, one ship sails before dawn, the S.S. *St. Lazare*, twenty-five hundred tons, under Captain Leon Calvert, bound for her home port of Havre, and there's no other sailing on that course for a full week."

"Do you think I could go aboard?"

"There's a rope ladder ahang from her forward rail. That's a common thing with ships touching Martinique. The ship watch doesn't shine his lanterns there, and the officer stays aft."

"Do you climb that ladder, Madelon?"

"I'm a bumboat-woman—and I bring up fruit—and flowers. I'm paid my money, and later come back for the stems."

"Will you take me there, Madelon? You needn't come back for me. And it would be well that no lanterns shine on me until the ship is out to sea; then I'll do a man's work to pay my passage."

She looked at him long and keenly in the pale starlight. "Is there a price on your head?" she asked.

"Not that I know of. I've committed no crime of blood."

"How much money have you?"

"Ten francs, also a silver watch worth fifty francs."

"Then it was petty larceny, not grand, and not likely rape, for this is Pays des Revenants, where rape is uncalled for. Well, I've filched a little now and then, when I was hungry. Also I've had slight difficulties with the gendarmes. It's a dark night, and visitors aboard the *St. Lazare* have gone to shore. I'll take you."

"Won't the ladder be taken in?"

"Perhaps, but her dinghy's overboard, and an ape with arms like yours could climb up her line. Sit steady in the bow and don't offer to help me row, for a country jake would splash like a stuck shark."

Madelon pushed off, and, sitting on the stern thwart, she began to scull; the boat skimmed along in almost perfect silence. The lights of the *St. Lazare* slowly brightened, and before long her tall shape loomed between them and the low-hung stars.

"Her forward hatch is open," Madelon told her passenger. "It's a long drop, but there's bales of skins to fall on, and it's safer than the companionway."

"I'll do it."

"Now you can pay me. I won't take your watch. You'll need it to tell the time."

Paul held out two five-franc notes.

"I'll take only one of those." But she did not reach her hand for it yet, and wiped the sweat from her forehead.

"Take both. You deserve far more."

"I don't know about my deservings—I leave it to the good God—but I know this. For a girl of the streets to refuse her wage is to take the bread right out of her sisters' mouths. This is a little different, but the good habit sticks. Put one bill in my hand."

Paul did so, and on impulse kissed the hand. Madelon grunted as though she had been struck, then recovered herself and sculled in perfect silence up to the ship side.

The rope ladder was still down, since no one had thought to take it in, and Paul caught it and climbed quietly to the dark foredeck. At a distance, lanterns cast a yellow haze, but this did not reach him as, hugging the bank of shadows, he made his way to the open hatch. He wished he could throw a beam into the black void, and when he had wormed down and was hanging by his fingers, it took an act of will to let go. Since he had ridden enough to know how to fall, and the distance was shorter than he had feared, he was hardly shaken. After groping his way to the wall, he began a careful exploration of the entire hold. Occasionally he lit a friction match and held it high.

At one end stood rows of hogsheads, no doubt containing tobacco, three deep and strongly secured. After pulling himself up, he crawled over their tops to the bulkhead out of range of lantern light cast into the hold from the deck. By lying on his side with one arm under him and his legs jackknifed, he saved himself acute discomfort from the raised rims of the barrels.

Although the air was hot and close, he suffered from neither hunger nor thirst, and soon dropped off to sleep.

He had slept two or more hours when he was waked by a clang of bells just aft of the hold. The open hatch disclosed stars, and the air had the coolness and damp he had often noticed just before dawn. Presently steam hissed loudly, then he felt the pounding throb of engines turning over. He could sense no motion yet but detected a gurgling sound along the ship's sides. After a long wait, when dawn had begun to break, he felt the first faint dip and swing of a ship standing to sea.

Morning light was spreading in a rushing sweep, a verity of the island, and the open hatch was mirror-bright, when the legs of a ladder came probing down. Soon appeared a young dark Provençal, his devil-may-care expression vividly caught in the blaze of light; in his hand was a lantern, its small yellow flame pale and impotent, but no weapon that Paul could see.

"Well, young fellow, you might as well come out," the seaman said.

A vagrant thought crossed Paul's mind. Since his hiding place was dark, how had he been identified as young, instead of an old sea tramp? The voice was firm but friendly.

"Yes, sir." Paul began to crawl over the barrels.

"Are you armed?"

"No, sir."

"I'm Manfred Mareau, cockswain of this hooker." And then, with true French affability, which will almost always manifest itself if given half a chance, he went on, "You made a good boarding and no one would be the wiser if I hadn't been on deck awaiting a visitor. When Madelon came slithering up and I saw your outline, I thought, 'My God, she's brought me an Amazon!' Then my hopes fell, I tell you."

"Did you tell the captain?"

"I'm a petty officer who knows my duty. But he said not to break you out until we sailed, then he'd either lug you to France in irons or let you work your passage, depending on the cut of your jib and such as that. He'll talk to you now. Let me warn you not to try any tricks. He's one of those quiet skippers who charts his own course."

Mareau led him up the ladder, down the deck past some staring sailors, to the captain's cabin. At its door he saluted and withdrew. Paul saw a tall, proud man with a scholar's forehead, large alert eyes, and a finely trimmed beard, sitting in a swivel chair before his desk. At once he turned to the visitor, gave him a keen glance, and spoke.

"What's your name, young man?"

"Paul Barteau, Monsieur Captain."

"Are you a French citizen?"

"A native of Martinique. I carry the prefect's card."

"Well, what have you done that you had to fly the port? I'll ask only once."

"Sir, I struck a great lord with his own riding crop."

"I take it he was laying it on you. You don't look the kind to go about whipping your betters, unless provoked. Were you greatly provoked?"

"Yes, sir. I was. I'd never been in trouble before."

"Who was the great lord? There are not many on the island."

"The Seigneur Henri de Legle."

"God in Heaven, did you lay a whip on that back?" The captain stared.

"On his side and thigh." For Paul was oddly literal at times, part of his instinct for truth, and, unlike most Frenchmen, he had no sharp sense of the perverse.

Captain Calvert muttered a word that Paul did not quite catch; it might have been "*magnifique*." Then he spoke on in businesslike tones.

"It happens that I lost five good hands at your delightful island. The word's out that we're going into dry dock for half a year when we get home, so they'd have had to find new berths, and the Creole girls are entrancing, and codfish and bananas are cheap. I'm going to put you in the black gang, for I take it you're used to heat. And when we gain port, I suggest you join the Foreign Legion for a lively time in Algiers. The Count of Paris would as likely forgive a whipping as the De Legle of Manoir De Legle."

"Thank you, Captain, and may I ask one question?"

"Yes, you may."

"Was any cry raised against me last night in Fort-de-France?"

"Not that I know of. So perhaps the De Legle didn't report the assault. In that case—well, he might be a greater seigneur than either of us know."

Paul saluted awkwardly and went about his labors.

3.

A few brainy men have written and many brawny men have spoken of the joy in working with iron. Paul discovered it for himself as a stoker in the bowels of the S.S. *Lazare*. True, her engines were long outdated. They

wheezed and sputtered and groaned, and shook so violently that the ship herself had become affectionately known as *Râle de la mort*. But at Havre they were to be replaced by a modern triple-expansion plant, and her whole black gang had resolved to bring her home in style, making all the steam that her rusted pipes could carry, and stoking all the coal that her red mouths could eat. The temperature in the close space stood about 120 degrees Fahrenheit. That did not worry a man who had labored in the cane fields under the Martiniquan sun.

At his first trick in the stokehole Paul was being watched by three fellow stokers. One, his partner, of powerful and symmetrical physique with big handsome features and a winning smile, was a few years older and as sun-browned. Like Paul, he was a colonial, born in a French cantonment in Algiers; although his real name was Georges Pepe, his best friends could hardly recall it, such a good fit was his nickname, Fez. Immediately they enjoyed each other's company and were prepared to like each other. Their hard rhythmic labor pleased mind and body as does teamwork in a boat race, their opponent being the insatiable flame. They could never win over it. They could only play even.

Paul and Fez stoked the starboard boiler while the port boiler was wonderfully fed by two young men somewhat divergent in stature but alike in prowess. One was a blond Breton, wide between the cheekbones and the eyes, who had given his name as Albert Potier. Not nearly of Paul's size, he had the big chest, powerful arms, and sheep legs of a foot racer, a boxer, or an oarsman. The other, bearing the good French name of Roland de Foss, appeared less typically French than the prototype of the American frontiersmen of half a century gone. He stood over six feet, a lean, long-legged, long-nosed, and long-jawed man, and no amount of barbering or pomade could tame his shock of coarse, black hair. His mouth had been cut wide and thin. Close-lidded, his eyes appeared as slightly curvilinear triangles, long at the bottom, with short sides, and of true steel-blue.

When a bell struck eight times and four massive Senegalese, black as the coal itself, came to relieve them, Paul's companions led him to a salt-water shower, where they washed themselves, then put on fresh uniforms. Thereafter they strolled the deck, although Paul had yet to acquire, and perhaps never could do so, the air of slightly disdainful superiority toward the deck hands, the mark of black gangs ever since the old hookers hauled down their sails and traded the winds of heaven for a fiery furnace. And now, for the first time, the three shovelers spoke to their new stokehole mate as men to man.

“Well, my stowaway friend, you won six francs for me today, and that’s three days’ pay,” Fez began with a big grin, when they were mugging up on coffee.

“You lost three for me,” said Albert Potier, “and three for Roland. This devil of a Fez demanded two-to-one odds—we had to beat him down from four to one.”

“What was the bet?” Paul asked.

“That you wouldn’t last out your first trick at the stokehole,” Fez explained. “I said you could—three francs against twelve. But, to tell the truth, I didn’t believe it. I was just betting the colonies against continental France—for the principle of the thing. However, I remembered that Martinique is twenty degrees or more down and across from Algiers, and you must be used to the hot sun. So when they howled for two-to-one odds, I let them have it.”

Actually, the stint had not been as grueling as loading cane, Paul thought, though he did not say so, because it would sound boastful. He had the social perceptions of a much older, more experienced and successful man.

“What about it, Roland?” Albert asked mysteriously. “I agree if you do.”

“I agree if Fez does,” Roland answered.

“I am more than agreeable,” said Fez. “Ask him, Roland.”

“Paul, would you like to join a small, highly exclusive secret society, entitled *Les Chevaliers Noirs*? In fact there are only three members left since we lost a couple at Martinique. Our motto is ‘Ashes to Ashes, Dust to Dust.’ Our purpose is to train for positions of authority and affluence in the Devil’s stokeholes. We can’t invite the Senegalese because they are Mohammedans that eschew the vine. We go to shore together, and if one of us learns of a choice bit, he doesn’t conceal her name and lodging from his brethren. When times are hard, we even share our money. We certainly do not do each other down.”

“I would like to join, very much,” Paul answered gravely.

“First, are you charged with any crime more heinous than mayhem?”

“Not that I know of.”

“Have you any money?”

“Five francs.”

“Two you shall contribute to the expenses of your initiation. Fez, will you put in three francs, half of your earnings by the sweat of Paul’s brow, to the same good use?”

"Certainly."

"So we have five francs, enough to buy a bottle of the steward's good rum. Then we will make merry."

A liter bottle divided among four, and drunk slowly, had only a warming and enlivening effect on men of their youth and vigor and perfect health. They talked a little shop but already a restlessness had come upon most all the S.S. *Lazare*'s crew, from knowing she would soon be in dry dock for half a year, and that they must find new ways; hence the conversation skipped all over the world. With the unconscious good manners that able workmen practice, Paul's companions did not question him regarding his flight from the island, and he, having a stubborn adversity to lying, made no explanation.

Thus began Paul's journey to the land of his fathers. It was prolonged by stops at the Cape Verde Islands and Casablanca, and long before they sighted the French mainland he knew every soul aboard and had made three fast friends. Their talk now was of joining the *Chasseurs d'Afrique*, an elite corps sure to see lively service in the brand-new Tuareg war. Fez was the chief advocate of the plan, mainly perhaps because of his desire to follow in the footsteps of his father, slain in desert battle. However, his knowledge of the deserts and the Arabic language should benefit his companions as well as himself. Of these, Paul found himself the most reluctant. His wilder fears of some kind of retribution by the long arm of the De Legle had dimmed to a vague question in his mind pertaining to the whole man. Paul would enjoy the fellowship and adventure on the desert, but it could only delay his study and practice of law.

As the ship was rounding Cape Finisterre in a calm sea, she bid fair to live up to her grisly nickname of the Death Rattle. Paul had come off watch at four in the afternoon; at five he and his mates were sitting on the hatch combing in fresh uniforms, enjoying the golden downpour of Biscayan sunlight, an equally warming bottle of Bordeaux, and a loaf of crusty bread still warm from the galley. The second assistant came up to them with his usual manner of respect.

"I just had word from the chief," he said. "Bairam has been overcome by heat. One of you men is to go down and take his place at the port boiler."

Bairam was the largest and strongest of the four Senegalese and, being water-tender, acted as their leader. The words were hardly out of the officer's mouth before Fez replied:

"Sir, I volunteer for the duty."

The thought came to Paul that he could have expected Fez to do and say just that. It reflected a likable quality in the big bluff man, also less apparent traits; perhaps here was a puzzle of personality that Paul dimly glimpsed but had not solved. No showoff, yet Fez liked to stand out. He was strongly attracted to any conduct in the least connected with heroism. His fetish was a sergeant major's sword, inherited from his father and his greatest pride.

Yet Paul protested mildly.

"Fez, don't you think all four of us ought to draw straws?"

"Friend, I've got a cramp in my left arm I want to work off."

Fez saluted the officer and immediately disappeared in the fiddley-side hatch. The officer withdrew; some time passed at a common pace, occupied by common talk and action, the sun dropped distinctly lower, and suddenly Fez reappeared. He seemed to bound out of the hatch, and Paul was looking at him, aware of something startling and strange in his appearance which his mind had not yet grasped, when there rose the muffled roar of an explosion.

The whole ship shuddered, but Paul hardly noticed it, for his attention was now riveted by a more alarming event. Instantly following the explosion, almost simultaneous with it, violent puffs of steam burst from the fiddley hatch, and the ventilators. No sailor on deck could doubt what had happened, and the four men of the black gang knew only too well. The explosion had occurred in the boiler room, and the deadly steam had burst from its confines. And although Paul had leaped up and started to run toward the hatch, he stopped after a few strides, his face white from the knowledge that there was no hurry, that he could do nothing but wait, and that his care must be for living men, not the dead.

What could be done in respect to the dead the captain was doing. It was little enough—merely to blow the ship's whistle to help exhaust the remaining head of steam. Weirdly its hoarse cry broke over the now silent ship and the quiet waters. The white discharge from the ventilators and from the open skylight no longer burst with force and it turned into clouds drifting abaft the deck and out on the breeze. When it touched a man's face it was hot but no longer burning.

The ship's hull was intact. As soon as he had made sure of that, Captain Calvert left the bridge and came to the fiddley hatch. There he met the chief engineer who had rushed from his cabin, trembling and aghast. As yet they could not look down without suffering severe burns, but they knew by the falling wail of the whistle that the wait would not be long. The drifting ship was rapidly losing way. And now the captain turned to Fez, standing white and staring, and spoke quietly.

“You had taken Bairam’s place?”

“Yes, my captain.”

“How does it happen that you’re alive?”

“Sir, I looked at the needle on the steam gauge. It was jerking as I’d never seen it do before—I’ve only served in the black gang about half a year. I thought best to come up and ask the second assistant, who was mugging up in the galley. I’d just reached the deck when she blew.”

“I’m glad you’re alive. I can only hope that those three black men didn’t know what hit them.”

Paul had heard what Fez said and had hardly taken it in. There was another side to it, it seemed; he would have to think about it later. With a faint and forlorn moan, the whistle stilled. The two officers peered down into the boiler room, and then Paul looked too. As yet he could see nothing but the milky steam. Slowly it turned more gray, and it seemed to Paul that he saw a shadow, the shape of a man, in its dim depths.

The necessary work went forward. As soon as the engine room had cooled enough to be entered, the chief engineer made a first, quick inspection. His report was no worse than everyone knew it would be—the three Senegalese stokers had fallen with their shovels in their hands and apparently had not moved again—and in some respects it was better. The main steam line had burst with no damage to the boilers. Both could be fired after the break was repaired, low pressure maintained by the shorthanded gang, and the vessel, now heaved to and adrift in the open sea, could safely resume her course at half-speed.

During a second inspection below decks by both engineers, an impulse came to Paul to speak to Captain Calvert who was still standing by the grating. His face was sad but not anxious; within easy sound of the chief’s voice, he was apparently only waiting for further news. Paul was well aware of his inexperience on shipboard. He did not know all the rules and procedures. Still, he was inclined to act on impulses as strong and warm as this. So he stood at attention and spoke.

“My captain, may I make a request?”

“Yes, if you think it’s in order.”

“We men of the black gang would like to bring out the bodies of our fellows and to prepare them for burial.”

“You may do so with you in charge of the detail.”

All about the ship, work went forward that she might sail on.

4.

A private and particular job fell to Paul alone when Fez and he had stoked both boilers for the first time after the explosion. The chief himself had stood the watch with them, with one eye on the new steam fitting and the other on the pressure gauge. He expected no trouble—the line was stronger than before—still professional ethics demanded his presence instead of that of a junior. Although the sighing and groaning and clanking of the old plant alarmed Paul considerably, hard work and worry over his partner's frequent fumbles largely occupied his mind. Fez turned white under his tan and bit his lip.

When they had bathed and dressed, Paul brought Fez to the fo'c'slehead to share some sandwiches and a small flask of rum. This last had flowed niggardly lately, on account of the depleted purses of all hands, a ration of *vin ordinaire* taking its place. Fez tasted the strong drink in surprise.

"It's for you," Paul told him gravely.

"Why me?"

"Because you're going to need a bracer before we're through."

"I don't know why."

But he did know, Paul thought. His expression belied his words.

"Fez, do you belong to a church that has private confession?"

"No. If I'm anything, I'm a Mohammedan."

"Well, confession is a mighty comforting thing sometimes—a healthy thing. You're going to have to confess to someone—if you don't, you're going to break—and there's no munchi aboard, nor a priest. But you have friends, and I'm one of them. I don't like the prospect one damned bit. Still, I invite you to tell me the truth of what happened in the stokehole. Not what you told the captain."

"What will you do if I don't?"

"Nothing—except drop you as a friend."

"Good God, don't do that. I'll tell you. You may not believe me, but I've wanted to from that minute. I can tell you in a few words. Instead of twitching, the needle on the steam gauge went up from two hundred and fifty to four hundred and fifty, fast as a fly walking up a wall. I knew what had happened—before Bairam was overcome he was too sick to turn on the water injector. I knew something had to give and I yelled to the three Senegalese to run for it, but they have their own language and I forgot that only Bairam spoke French. When I rushed to the deck, it wasn't to report to the second. It was to save my life from the steam."

“It was too late to raise the water. The whole plant would have exploded. But you could have opened the exhaust valve.”

“I thought of turning that damned wheel—and I couldn’t take the time. I didn’t have the guts—I left those fellows to die. Paul, I was afraid that streak was in me—I’ve seen signs of it before. The main reason I wanted to enlist in the African war was either to be a man or be dead. But now I won’t—unless you do—I might desert and be shot for cowardice.”

“I doubt it,” Paul said thoughtfully. “Maybe you would get well. Fez, has any other such attack—we can call it that—ever cost a human life?”

“No. And no one ever knew but myself—and I made excuses.”

“No one’s going to know about this but you and I. It was panic but not necessarily cowardice—you did try to warn the men. I don’t think you’re a coward. I’d compare you to a dog that’s gun-shy—he got that way when he was a pup; often a dog gets over it, and so can you.”

“My God, but those are sweet words. To be the son of a soldier who fell fighting—to be given his sword by the French government—and then to run off from my gang—”

“Besides that, everybody loses his grip sometimes,” Paul went on. “I once looked for a rock to kill a man for doing what he thought was his duty. Later I ran from him like a scared rabbit. Still, I guess it’s not the time for you to enlist. You’d try to do too much and get killed. I think that trying too hard is half your trouble. Well, let’s have another drink to the future of *Les Chevaliers Noirs*. And to you, Fez—*à votre santé*.”

“Paul, I want to tell you something,” Fez said, when he had replied to the toast.

“All right.”

“If you had been down there with me, it wouldn’t have happened. At least, I don’t think so. You see, those fits—attacks you called them—always happen when I’m alone. I was alone down there, in the sense that I couldn’t talk to the Senegalese. I think I could have kept my head and opened the safety valve. Paul, would you mind if I stick pretty close to you until—well, say until I’ve got a better grip on myself? You’re good for me, Paul—I can’t say why, unless you’re a natural leader. If you stay in Paris, I want to too. Is that asking too much?”

“Not a damned bit. Everything’s going to come out all right. Some day we’ll go back to Martinique—it’s the Land of Returnings—and you can make friends, as I did, with our Mountain.”

Paul did not quite know what he was saying or why he said it. His eyes glimmered.

5.

Captain Calvert, charting his own course often athwart the niceties of law, had listed Paul Barteau as "signed on" at Martinique. Thus Paul did not enter France under a cloud or under any name but his own. The immigration and custom officers did not look at him askance, and no gendarme called him from the line of sailors, each with his sea bag or chest, passing muffled jokes along as they filed through the rear door of the customhouse onto the dock at Havre. Hence it was to his great astonishment that a well-dressed man, known to the crew as an agent of the shipping company, beckoned him aside.

"Monsieur Barteau?" the official asked politely.

"Yes, monsieur."

"I have orders to deliver a letter from a gentleman in Paris, Monsieur du Bois, a friend of our general manager. I take it you are the one?"

"I don't know Monsieur du Bois, but I am Paul Barteau from Martinique."

"Please sign this receipt, monsieur. Thank you. I wish you good evening."

It was exceedingly polite treatment to be accorded a common seaman, Paul thought. But what seemed a greater wonder was that the letter writer should have known where to find him. Well, perhaps that was not wonderful at all. If the matter had its beginning in Martinique, as was almost certainly the case, there had been no other sailing for France close to the time he had left. His voyage had been leisurely, and anyone concerned with him could have easily rushed a letter to New York to be forwarded to Paris on a swift Atlantic liner and reach his correspondent in abundant time for the latter to get in touch with a *St. Nazaire* stoker. The why and wherefore of it Paul did not attempt to grasp. It was no use.

As Fez watched him uneasily, and Roland and Albert stood curiously by, Paul opened the letter under a gaslight. Embossed on the heavy stationery was an address on the Faubourg St. Honoré. The fluent handwriting read:

> Monsieur:
>
> If you come to Paris in the near future will you give me the pleasure of receiving you? There is a matter that I wish to broach which I hope will interest you.
>
> Sincere salutations,
>
> Denis du Bois

“What does it mean?” Fez asked, when Paul had shown his friends the letter.

“How in the devil would I know? I’ve never heard of him.”

“I think I have,” Albert said thoughtfully. “Wait just a minute—I’ve got it. When I was working for Mornay Frères, printers and engravers to the aristocracy, we got out an invitation to a private exhibition of paintings by a swell of that name. An expensive job it was, too. I remember the foreman telling us that he was a cadet of a great house in Normandy and rolling in money. A good thing he was, I guess, for I never heard of him being a successful artist—and I did hear of most who were, because one of our specialties was the reproduction of works of art.”

“My parents came from Normandy—and so did the De Legles,” Paul remarked. “There’s no use my wracking my brain. My bet would be, it won’t turn out very much.”

But he would bet that anyway, he thought, to keep it from coming true: That was Creole cropping out in the French mind.

6.

On the ancient avenue, in a neighborhood infiltrated by commerce, there stood in 1894 a considerable mansion, once the town house of a great family of Lorraine. Although very old, it gave no appearance of decay, no doubt because it was so squarely and solidly built of stone. Of late it had been remodeled with a lift installed, and its five floors, each comprising a separate establishment of about ten large rooms, rented for long terms to people of affluence. It was the first floor to which Paul was directed on an early fall evening of that year. He came just after sundown, with the feeling that an artist could be more generous with his time well before dinner and when the clear north light he worked by had begun to fail.

A slim, middle-aged manservant, whom Paul took for a Picard, opened the door, bowed slightly on hearing his name, and led him to a small, warmly furnished reception room. In a moment there entered a man approaching fifty, well made and active, of finely molded bone and the northern blondness and cast of features associated in Paul’s mind with his parent’s homeland, Normandy. He had a studious face and wore a mustache and small beard. His nose was Roman, his eyes were prominent with the brilliance betokening a high-strung man. Paul noticed his hands as he had once noticed those of Paul Gauguin, who had painted six years before in Martinique, and they were not at all the same. Gauguin’s hands had been

broad, strong, and practical. Befitting the myth of the artist, Du Bois' hands were long and delicate. His clothes were beautifully tailored although bearing an obscure suggestion of Bohemianism.

"I am Denis du Bois. It was good of you to accept my invitation."

"It is a pleasure, monsieur."

"I happened to hear that you were bound for France," Denis went on with what seemed to Paul faint traces of embarrassment. "I wanted to offer my welcome and any assistance I can give. Did you have a good crossing?"

"A long, slow crossing, monsieur, but very pleasant except for a tragic accident in the boiler room." Meanwhile Paul's curiosity was seething.

"A long time ago I met your parents," Denis went on. "They were tenant-farmers on the old De Legle estate near Rouen, which was adjacent to my childhood home. Although the main branch of the De Legle family had settled in Martinique, I was closely acquainted with the cadet branch, and often hunted and shot and fished on their lands. My guide—actually my companion—was almost always Jean Barteau, who was a few years younger than I. I remember him with pleasure."

The shoe was on the other foot, Paul was thinking. It did not stand to reason that this rich, highborn artist had any clear memory of his gillie of more than twenty years before and hence had extended this courtesy to his son. It seemed far more likely that Jean Barteau had recalled the warm and generous nature of a former patron, and, greatly distressed by his son's flight, had dispatched a letter via New York asking Monsieur to befriend him if he had gotten into serious trouble. Still, the action did not seem quite characteristic of Paul's strong-minded, just, and proud parent.

"Thank you, monsieur," Paul said.

"I have a pleasant acquaintance with the Seigneur, Henri de Legle; we always saw one another during his occasional visit to the old family seat," Denis went on. "Last year I enjoyed meeting his daughter Joan, who was spending a holiday from school at the château of an old family friend and who later dined with me here. So you see I have numerous associations with your beautiful island."

"I won't see its beauties for a long time, I'm afraid," Paul ventured.

"Before I inquire as to your plans in Paris, suppose we have a punch made of excellent Martinique rum. Perhaps, if you have the time, I might show you some good paintings. Not my own, you understand. I love the calling but have made no marked success in its pursuit. However, I have acquired several works from great painters, so-called impressionists, whom I am fortunate enough to know well and regard as my intimate friends."

“I would love to see them.” Paul started to add the trite apology of knowing nothing about paintings, only to realize that Denis had put no question as to that.

“Then you shall see a great work on display in my dining room. To possess it is my particular pride.”

Crowning the large, unconventionally furnished room was a large painting over the fireplace, a landscape dominated by the rugged mass of Mount Ste Victoire, which reminded Paul of his own Pelée. It was quite true that Paul knew very little about paintings, yet he perceived the elemental vigor and primitive grandeur of the work, and vaguely realized it was in a different style from most French paintings he had seen and thus it suggested the Gauguins that still hung in the College at Saint-Pierre. Paul told Denis what he felt, then asked about some other objects in the room.

“I’ve seen something like them in Martinique, made by the quimboiseurs and the back-country Creoles,” Paul said.

“No wonder,” Denis replied. “They express the most ancient creative energy of the human race.”

Along one wall ran a row of voodoo masks, grimacing, grinning, threatening. In the corners stood West-African wood carvings, one symbolic of phallic worship; one, the rarest in the collection, of much older yonic worship; one a long-limbed nymphlike form in ebony, the arms rigid at the sides and the face with its beautiful planes lifted as though to heaven. Perhaps the best was a blocklike elephant, terrifically forceful, with a delicately carved ape on its back.

From thence Denis led his guest to his beautiful salon, where hung a study of ballet dancers by Degas, displaying superb draftsmanship and a wonderful mastery of light. There too was a glowing nude by Renoir and a touching portrait of a young girl by Manet. Paul felt the greatness of all three, although he could not put it in words.

“I bought these at the Exhibition of the Rejected,” Denis said. “The name means just what it says—a display of paintings scorned by the critics and rejected by the galleries.”

“I find it hard to believe.”

“I do also—and find in it a great hope for any painter, no matter how unrecognized, who paints and keeps on painting with all his heart and soul.”

It was a strangely intimate statement for a man of Denis’ dignity to make to a new acquaintance. Paul wondered at it only until he saw the expression on his host’s face.

Denis led his guest to the library and they sat in big chairs whose dark-red leather looked as old and beautified by use as the binding of the books. The Picard manservant, Romain, brought punches of rum mixed with cane syrup in the Martinique style. Again Denis seemed slightly ill at ease.

"Do you plan to remain in Paris?" he asked.

"My plans are undetermined as yet," Paul answered. "I hope to work here a year or two and save enough money to enter the University of Paris. Thereafter I hope to make my way by working in my spare time."

"I wish to ask some questions that may seem somewhat personal. I believe I have good reason for asking them. How much formal education have you had?"

"Only parish school in Martinique and a generous amount of coaching by a Jesuit teacher. He told me he thought I could qualify for a university."

"If you did so, monsieur, what school would you prefer to enter?"

"The school of law. I would hope to enter the profession in about four years."

"It would interest me to know why you would choose law. Can you tell me, rather fully?"

"Yes, I believe I can." Paul steadied his voice and went on. "Brother Joseph thought I had natural fitness for it and had me read some law. It was hard reading but it stayed by me, and since then I've been fascinated by law and how it works. How man-made law complements—sometimes opposes—natural law; how the most savage people saw the need of it; how Roman law is still the admiration of the world; and how the Code Napoleon, with its compromises and conflicts and, some say, illogicalness, remains the greatest French achievement of modern times."

Paul spoke fluently now, with deep earnestness, not as a callow youth but as a thoughtful, mature man. He was incited to do so by a strong need, a sense of something of great importance hanging fire tonight, of the reality of an opportunity, to seize which he must leave no stone unturned.

"Go on," said Denis. His eyes looked narrow and glimmering.

"The recent arrest of Captain Dreyfus for treason made me wish I were a lawyer."

"Well, Paul—if I may call you that—you can be."

"Monsieur, I don't believe I understand you."

"I'll make my meaning as plain as possible. I don't think you will have trouble qualifying for the school of law at the University of Paris—the examining board is headed by a liberal and wise man. A person who wishes

to remain anonymous has instructed me, if I too thought the plan feasible, to deposit funds for your tuition and other expenses at the Banque de France, to be renewed monthly. It would not be necessary for you to work part-time, which would put you at a disadvantage, as the course of studies is difficult. I join that person in hoping you will accept."

After a moment of amazement, Paul's mind was not too stunned to leap to what must be the identity of the donor. It was not his father. Jean Barteau had practiced thrift in the way of a French peasant, but patently could not afford a university education for his son; if he could, he would have said so long before now. But Joan had a great deal of money, some of which came from her mother's family, the De Grottes of South Martinique, and was already under her control. Paul remembered with a twinge of pain as from an old wound how she had said she would pay their way to Tahiti—except that she would not go! Any way he looked at it, there was no possible source of such bounty other than Joan. And she had made use of the offices of an old family friend.

Meanwhile Denis du Bois was waiting for his answer. Paul pulled himself together and gave it—the only possible answer from a man of fixed and direct aim in life, a strong man who would not trade reality for a dream, who had long ago established rapport with fate.

"Monsieur, I accept with the greatest pleasure."

"Good! I make one request. I do not wish the donor to fear I have blundered in my approach to this matter. If you suspect who the person is—which seems to me quite possible—please give no hint in any communication you might have with this or any other person."

"I promise I will not."

However, these very instructions might throw a dim and uncertain light on Paul's remaining question—one of far greater difficulty—not as to the identity of the giver but her motive. Certainly she was not merely playing Lady Bountiful. It might be that despite her last words to him she loved him truly and deeply. But if so, she wanted no dealings with him now—Denis' request had made plain that fact. So above all else, the gift could be—and Paul feared it must be—a magnificent leave-taking, a grand farewell.

7.

Deeply shaken, Paul walked the long way to the cheap lodgings of *Les Chevaliers Noirs*, and at midnight sat with them at a quayside mughouse,

sharing a bottle of good, second-grade French brandy with which Paul stood treat.

"Pop goes three days' wages on old Death Rattle," Albert Potier remarked, as he looked at the label on the bottle.

"I think something rather handsome has happened," lank Roland said to his friend. "I can see it in Paul's eyes."

"Make a clean breast of it, Paul," Fez said anxiously.

"Well, I will—as far as I can," Paul answered. "You know I was adverse to serving in the Tuareg War. After all, it's a job for specialists. Fez decided against it, too, and neither Roland nor Albert wanted to break up our band. I hoped to study at the University of Paris after working a year or two, but, greatly to my surprise, it's become possible for me to enter at once."

"I'm afraid that does break us up," Roland said after a long pause. "Town and gown are further apart than fore and aft the mast."

"Maybe Paul will condescend to write to us occasionally from the hallowed precincts," Fez said, then turned gray and looked ashamed.

"Did one of those quimboiseurs back in Martinique work a little conjure?" Albert asked.

The shot was more straight than Albert knew, Paul thought. Creepily he remembered the sign he and Joan had carved on a giant tree trunk, and how Atlas had told him it grew more beautiful year by year.

"In a way of speaking," Paul answered. "Anyway I've had a windfall and am going to study law. Roland, I'm not going to let it break us up permanently. Fez, don't be a bigger cabbage-head than you were born. If all of you can see your way to stay in Paris, we'll break many a bottle at dives like this. If not—we'll meet whenever we can. Do you agree to that?"

" 'Barkis is willin',' " said Roland, who loved Dickens better than he loved Balzac.

Albert held out a freckled hand and Fez raised his glass, a tense look on his face. Before they went to bed all three of Paul's good companions had charted a tentative course. Since he knew a little engineering and was not without influence, Roland thought he could get a minor post with the Department of Roads and Bridges. Albert wanted to go back to printing and engraving, the precision of which suited his disposition. Fez explained that a family friend was a market manager at Les Halles Centrales and would get him a good job.

In the next few days Paul took oral and written examinations before a board of savants and received tentative admission to the University of Paris.

By preliminary schooling in liberal arts, he could major in law next year, and obtain a *licencié en droit* in something like four years. He plunged happily into study; and for the first time in his life his intellectual curiosity, as avid as a child's, received abundant food.

By the nature of things he fell in love with Paris. The funds his patron provided month by month enabled him to live comfortably, dress respectably, and revel now and then with his fellow students. Social lines and barriers gave him very little trouble. In the first place, the university had a democratic ideal; in the second place his last scene with Joan and the strange thing happening now—apparently a new relationship with the girl who had owned to deserving a whipping for giving her favors to a foreman's son—could not be coped with at present and seemed to act as a catalyst resolving other perplexities. Anyway he was too intelligent not to learn how to get on.

One of his cup-mates was the son of a duke. A brother bookworm had risen from the gutters of Marseilles. He joined le Société de Martinique, its membership of twenty neatly divided among five white Creoles, five Negroes, and ten Creoles of different shades. He walked the city far and wide, took in the museums and the music halls, browsed in the libraries and old bookshops, and visited courtrooms. He loved the theater, and saw the French-Irish actor, Patrick Inge, perhaps a falling star but still illustrious, play Alexandre in *Lucrezia*. Among other art displays, he attended the Exhibition of the Rejected, and there he saw a painting by Denis du Bois, good but not comparable to "The Card Players," by one of the latter's friends.

Mindful not to waste the intermediary's time, Paul paid only rare, obligatory calls on Denis du Bois to report the progress of his studies and answer questions about Martinique. At least once a month *Les Chevaliers Noirs* forgathered in a boozing den, and talked of old days aboard the Death Rattle—pleasant talk enough, since for various reasons no one ever mentioned the engine-room disaster.

Paul met with Fez about every two weeks, and, drinking Algerian wine and Martinique rum, they toasted their native lands and the lovely women thereof. Once they used their first-aid skill to stop the bleeding of a dock hand knifed in a fight. Then the doctor arrived, a stocky man in rumpled clothes who took such cases and who gave his name as Griffon. Then and there the doctor sutured the wound, sent the man home, and stayed to share a flask of *vin de la maison* with the two men. He was oddly interested in the fact that Paul had never seen a case of rickets in Martinique, and Paul caught himself talking expansively of his beautiful island.

CHAPTER THREE

Doctor of Medicine

1.

THE month was July of the year 1895.

The place was Paris.

In a dusty office within a shabby house not far from the Canal St. Martin sat a rumpled man. His name was Claude Griffon. His title, clearly shown by a framed certificate on the wall over his desk, was *Docteur en médecine*. He looked about fifty-five; actually he should be celebrating, just now, his forty-eighth birthday. A handsome eighteenth-century bracket clock of marble and gilt, outclassing other articles in the room and evidently an heirloom from a more prosperous generation, said twenty minutes after six. The bottle of Château Pape-Clément that he had meant to share with his only crony, Dr. Raoul Lambert, waited misty and cool to be drunk with a birthday toast; and Raoul himself, living five doors distant, would be getting impatient.

Claude had put on his best coat, far from new or expensive to start with, although of an old-fashioned sobriety befitting a doctor. Of medium height by French standards, but short compared to an average Norwegian or Highland Scot, he was solidly built, and his attitudes and actions evinced a good deal of strength and vitality. His iron-gray hair and heavy eyebrows were his most notable features, at least at first glance; old and observing patients noticed his rounded face, plain but good, raised from the commonplace by eager eyes and a quick, shy smile. To the surprise of better-off doctors whom he met occasionally at medical functions, he always conveyed an expression of happiness.

Truly this was hard to account for, using ordinary yardsticks. Claude's father had been a successful fuel merchant, leaving him an income of two thousand francs a year, but not a gentleman by European counting. Nor did his professional earnings and attainments elevate him from the bourgeoisie. Most of his practice was with petty tradesmen, bargemen, and longshoremen, and he took at a nominal or no fee a great many cases at the

Hospitals Ivry, La Salpêtrière, and Bicêtre. It was guessed that his total income did not exceed five thousand francs, that of a small shopkeeper.

Nor had he been lucky in common ways. He had never married and he did not quite know why; plenty of good women had come to his notice, he had been drawn to them, but circumstance and his own shyness, perhaps his waiting for better days, had somehow caused his love affairs to end nowhere. He had no close kin except one sister who had married above herself and now eschewed his company, and one brother who had inherited and expanded the family business and whose handsome house in Passy had somewhat chilling doors. However, besides his friend Raoul, he had Ruben, former canal-boat hand, lame from the bad setting by a drunken surgeon of a broken tibia; he had become Claude's cook, sweeper, and doorman. Claude fed and lodged him and paid him thirty francs a month, and they got along well.

And meanwhile he practiced medicine! That, after all, was the mainspring of his life and the source of his happiness. Every patient who came to his door or whom he visited in the dim wards of the institutions was a human being eternally unique, and every case posed a different problem. Sometimes his treatment made a person feel better, he had known it to save a life; sometimes it failed. It was as simple as that. Without brilliance, he was sensible and tenacious. The other doctors, the big doctors, never spoke in his praise, although at almshouse consultations they listened to his brief and self-effacing utterances with respect.

Of course he had a dream. What man who lives does not? His was a splendid dream, seemingly out of proportion to the size of the man, but he did not let it interfere with his daily rounds, his common duties. It was a dream that could conceivably come true; no eternal obstacle stood in its way. He had noticed and tabulated the incidence of rickets in the children of Parisian slums as compared to more fortunate children. He did not believe that the disparity was caused by crowding, dirt, bloodsucking vermin, child labor, or an act of God in punishment of loose-living parents. Instead he had made the wild surmise that it was a simple fault of diet. He would never forget the thrilling moment when he had learned of villages on the Breton coast where rickets were almost unknown. Later he had heard of towns in interior Provence where it was exceedingly rare. Paul, the student with whom he had talked in a waterfront mughouse, had said he had never heard of it on his native island in the French West Indies, Martinique.

If some day he could find some common cheap article of food present on one scrawled list and absent on the other, he would have an answer to the puzzle and the fulfillment of his dream. Then he would truly deserve the

name of doctor. The trifling accident of his birth would seem the design of God. Meanwhile he kept a big notebook, recording all his experience with rickets, in which he ventured to write down his guesses, theories, thoughts, and half-dreamed inklings. When he felt discouraged he remembered Jenner, dead before his time, and also a man whose hand he had shaken, who had talked to him for almost ten minutes at a great public affair, a simple man who had died only two years before. The man's immortal name was Pasteur.

Claude emerged from his musings and glanced at the clock again. A dock hand who had called early this morning, and asked for an appointment at six in the afternoon—Miller—Moleax—Mollet—was already half an hour late. Need he wait for him any longer, with this thirst in his throat, this fatigue gripping his body, and an eagerness in his heart to sit down with his friend Raoul and enjoy a small birthday bout? He was about to get up and go when his doorbell rang.

Claude opened a book, for lately, probably too late, he had perceived the importance of front. Ruben ushered in the visitor, showed him a chair, and left. Claude observed a muscular man, well above average size, about forty years old, thin-skinned to judge by the flush of his cheekbones, exceedingly high-strung by nature or nervous impairment. He had been handsome in a rugged way and was still impressive. The swollen glands at his throat could indicate old syphilis; the contracted pupils of his eyes might mean drug addiction. He had not quite the look, or the way, of an alcoholic, and there was no smell of liquor on his breath. Certainly he needed medicine, and at once.

"What is your name, monsieur?" Claude asked politely.

"Joseph Minard, Monsieur Doctor."

"What may I do for you?"

"I'm tied in a knot. Can't you give me something to quiet me? I've money to pay your fee."

"Kindly tell me your symptoms."

"Half the time I can't keep down my food. I sleep in snatches and have bad dreams and get up every little while. I have hot flashes and heavy sweats and my fingers twitch and my lips tingle. Sometimes I want to swallow and can't. My muscles stiffen up and I drop my loads, and at this rate I'll soon lose my job. Give me a lot of something strong, please, doctor. If you don't, I'm afraid I'll have an attack."

"Did you ever have any?"

"A few, as a little child."

Claude was beginning to doubt that the man's condition was caused by syphilis or the use of drugs, unless the former were congenital. Still, he could not rule them out.

"Are you a heavy drinker?"

"No, monsieur."

"Use morphine or cocaine?"

"No, monsieur."

"Venereal disease?"

"Never a sign of it."

"Well, I'm going to give you something to make you sleep, and since tomorrow is Sunday and you'll be off work, come here at nine for a thorough examination." This must either be a case of severe neurasthenia or something like toxic kidneys.

"How long have you had this trouble?" Claude asked, as he rose and walked to his big medicine cabinet.

"I've always been nervous, but it began to get worse about three months ago and now it's terrible."

Claude was thinking of giving him Dover's powder, which was soporific and relaxing. But it would not be an effective dose for a patient so distrait, nor would a spoonful of laudanum containing five grains of opium. Sodium bromide would be the safest drug—and then his mind leaped to a concoction he had made only the day before for an overwrought Negro bargeman, who had also demanded dosage in colossal quantity. Its active ingredient was sodium bromide in two ounces of alcohol, diluted with eight ounces of orange juice, a mixture that would surely taste odd enough to seem strong medicine. The other patient had failed his appointment and the bottle with "Neuro tonica" scrawled on its label remained untouched and at hand. Although perhaps four ounces would do, Claude decided to give six to this suffering newcomer.

From his cabinet he took a half-liter bottle of yellow liquid and glanced at its label. Meanwhile he was listening to his patient's desperate-sounding complaint.

"Doctor, it's worked me up to come here. If you don't hurry, I'm afraid I'll have a stroke—"

"I'll have you feeling better in a minute."

Claude poured a tumbler two-thirds full and handed it to his patient. The man took a swallow, grunted, and made a wry face.

"My God, it's bitter."

Actually it was salt, Claude was thinking. Evidently the fruit juice did not disguise it or the mixture had a vile taste he had not anticipated.

"Better get it down," he urged.

The man he thought was a chance patient, possibly never to be seen again, drained the glass, half-gagged. He looked so shaken that Claude began to question him, in quiet tones, on matters far removed from the present scene. No doubt there was less freight to be handled at the docks, now that the Tuareg had been defeated on the desert. Joseph Minard nodded but did not speak. Had he ever served in the military? The man shook his head. Had he a wife—children? Again a headshake, an oddly jerky one, as though his neck were stiff. Claude reached for the box and offered him a cheroot. He paid no attention.

Suddenly the patient spoke in a rasping tone.

"Doctor, my hands are jerking. I feel more nervous than before."

"There's quite a bit of alcohol in that medicine. Alcohol is a depressant, but when it first reaches the brain it acts as a stimulant. It will pass off in a few minutes, and you'll feel—"

"Doctor, my face feels stiff—"

"What?"

"Here at my jaws. And the back of my neck." He started to touch the spot, but his hands jerked and there was a sudden outward thrust of his elbows.

"I think I'd better give you some laudanum."

"Give me something, for the love of God. Doctor, there's something wrong. I know it. I can feel it creeping over me. It's awful, I tell you." The outcry ended in a thick babble.

Claude sprang up and rushed to a table where he had set the bottle. His gaze leaped to the label, and instantly the most terrible seconds that he had lived on earth moved upon him, a reality worse than any dream he had ever dreamed.

At a quick glance, the label on the bottle had seemed to read in his own scrawl, "Neuro tonica." To his starting eyes, seeing only too true, it read "Nux vomica."

He had given his patient a grain and a half of strychnine.

2.

The hideous tragedy went on relentlessly.

Claude caught one glimpse of his victim's face as he sprang to his side. The lips were already fixed in a dreadful leer, the rest seemed frozen except for the eyes, which spoke only too eloquently of inutterable horror. Desperately Claude tried to force open the mouth, with the idea of gagging the man with his fingers so that he might vomit some of the poison; but at the first thrust the man pitched to the floor in a severe convulsion.

Claude turned his gaze away, and, amid the ghastly thudding and thumping reverberating through the room, he sought some kind of tool with which he might force open the locked jaws. Before he found one, he knew, with that inexorable certainty that forces its way into the brain but a few times in any man's life, that there was no hope. The poison had been absorbed and its victim had been hurled into tetanic spasm. Even so, Claude poured chloroform on his handkerchief, and, exerting all his strength, pressed it against the livid face. He was shouting "*Ruben, Ruben!*" in frantic tones when his pale attendant, alarmed by the noise, ran limping into the room.

"Get Dr. Lambert at once," Claude yelled. "Tell him this man is dying from strychnine poison."

The spasm grew less violent and then passed off. Joseph Minard lay gasping for breath, for the attack had brought him close to suffocation. Claude dared administer no more merciful chloroform and yet dared not refrain from trying again to induce vomiting, although it seemed useless cruelty to the implacably doomed. Again the action brought on a convulsion, and this, Claude believed, would be the last.

At its height, a sight to appall the most seasoned doctor, Raoul dashed into the room.

"Oh, God," he burst out, "how much has he taken?"

"He didn't take it! I gave it to him. A grain and a half. Is there anything —?"

"Nothing. Look there. The arch is forming. I've seen it before in hydrophobia and tetanus. See, it's taking the usual pattern. The toes are turning inward as the weight rests more and more on the heels and the back of the head. How can the back bend in that great arc without shattering the vertebrae? Claude, it's about complete. Note the extended legs and arms like iron—sometimes the arms are flexed strongly over the chest—note the clenched fists. The jaws clamped and now the diaphragm contracted, the whole thorax rigid. He'll die quickly now, thank God. Do you suppose the poor devil is still conscious?"

"They say—such poor devils—are."

“Well, here comes death. He’s not breathing and the face is turning blue. I don’t think he knows anything now—feels anything. *Rigor mortis* before the heart stops beating.” Raoul bent, reached, and rolled back an eyelid. “Finis.”

The stopped brain stopped the poison’s working. The flexed muscles slowly relaxed and the arched body slumped to the floor. Claude and Raoul stood still several seconds, then Raoul asked quietly:

“How did it happen?”

Claude told him in a rush of words. “What shall I do now, Raoul? My head won’t work.”

“First, send Ruben to the inspector of police. That’s standard procedure in a death from poison. Then I’ll submit your case, at once, to the board of the Academy of Medicine—before the story spreads through Paris and reaches the newspapers. Only quick and complete frankness can save you now, old friend. It alone will allay—as far as it can be allayed—the storm.”

Claude sent Ruben on his grievous errand. His limp as he hurried out the door—rememorant of another’s mistake—seemed to Claude some sort of augury.

“Will you write the notes?” Claude asked.

“Yes. I’ll summon Baron du Ville, De Rouvier, Jourdan, Renart—Des Mares, Viret. Gautier is out of the city, worse luck; once he gave an overdose of laudanum and had the devil’s own time saving the child’s life. We’ll get four or more of them here by eight o’clock.”

Before the brief notes were written and dispatched by couriers, an inspector of police rang the doorbell. He bowed courteously to both doctors, looked at the body, asked a few questions, and sent for the *wagon-des-cadavres*. Already a little crowd had gathered in front of Claude’s door, and instead of dispersing it was slowly growing.

When the stretcher bearers came and carried out the unmistakable shape under a sheet, someone shouted, “*Assassinat!*” Meanwhile the clock had stopped for Claude, he felt numbed and unable to contemplate either the future or the past. Dimly he heard the inspector’s statement on departing; it seemed to mean nothing.

“Dr. Griffon! This is a most unfortunate event. To err is human—occasionally the error costs human life. It is my firm conviction that no criminal charge will be made against you, if that is any comfort. All I can say beyond that is to express my hope that the other penalties that you must pay will not be too severe.”

The crowd had increased outside the door. Many people stopped briefly and walked on, but a greater number lingered in morbid curiosity. Four carriages arrived at short intervals; and always the way to the door was cleared for frock-coated, sober-faced men. Within Claude's little parlor the doctors waited, talking to one another in low tones. They fell silent when the leader of those summoned made his austere appearance. This was Doctor the Baron du Ville, President of the Academy.

"Will you gentlemen kindly sit and hear an account of this tragic case?" Raoul asked.

"Not here," Du Ville answered in an impersonal tone. "We wish to proceed to the scene of the tragedy, which, I presume, is Dr. Griffon's office."

"There are not enough chairs—but we can bring some."

"As for me, I prefer to stand."

As the others stood back, Du Ville led the way. In Claude's mind, a kind of dream began, gray and bleak and hopeless like so many dreams of slumber. He heard himself speaking, trying not to employ emphasis, always avoiding any words that smacked of self-defense, stating the bare facts. When he had finished, a silence fell, only to be breached by Baron du Ville's voice.

"Doctor, will you kindly produce the bottle containing the nux vomica and that of the bromide solution?"

Claude set them side by side, his hands sweating but fairly steady.

"There is a superficial similarity in the appearance of the two labels. Dr. Griffon, is it habitual with you to label your bottles, including one containing a deadly poison, in such careless handwriting?"

"I am afraid, sir, that it is. I must say that I have never before failed to read them correctly."

"One failure cost a human life. I have another question. By what necessity was the bromide given in such a dilute solution? You say the patient wanted a large dose. Evidently you thought that such a dose would reassure him and have a psychological effect. Personally, I object to the doctrine that doctors may deceive their patients for their own good. I must say that I think deceit of this kind does more harm than good in the long run, and—pardon my blunt speech—is unworthy of our profession. Bromide should be administered as pills, powder, or in solution according to the time-tried procedures. The word of the doctor should be enough, without any attempt to impress the patient."

“I agree with you perfectly, Dr. Du Ville,” said the famous diagnostician, De Rouvier.

“In my cabinets, poisons are invariably kept in small vials, with precise labels. Under the circumstances, I submit that you, Dr. Griffon, are guilty of carelessness with your patients’ lives. I shall not recommend that your license be withdrawn. I have appreciated your work at the charity hospitals, and it may be that you have learned a most terrible lesson. However, in the public mind, your action will cast a reflection upon all physicians, and we, as well as you, will have to try to live it down. Under these circumstances, I think I speak for all the directors of the Academy when I request that you no longer practice medicine in continental France. If you wish to go to some other country or to some French colony across the sea and make a fresh start, we will wish you Godspeed.”

“You speak for me, doctor,” said wizened Jourdan in his piping voice, when Claude stood stunned.

“And for me,” added the ambitious Viret.

“I’ve made mistakes too,” said Des Mares, a rumpled man despite his high birth and the flashing brilliance of his scalpel.

“Doctor, will you give us your reply?” Du Ville asked.

“I will never again practice medicine in continental France.”

“Then we will take our leave.”

The others bowed, and only Des Mares shook Claude’s hand in departure.

The office was empty now except for Claude and Raoul. The shadows gathered, for the clock had struck nine, and the long midsummer day was almost over. Claude could hear a muttering from the crowd outside, and a stealthy glance through the window revealed its dispersal. “It’s a Jewish plot,” someone yelled, and that would have been wildly funny except for two things, a man’s death, and the death of many souls from a more subtle poison. Claude leaned wearily against the wall, then straightened and walked to Raoul, standing gray-faced by the medicine cabinet.

“Raoul, what in the devil shall I do?” And he thanked heaven that there was one man alive—indeed there were two—to whom he could speak in his despair.

“This is your forty-eighth birthday,” Raoul remarked after a long pause.

“Yes.”

“Don’t bring out that bottle of wine. It would choke me. What I started to say was, few doctors have done their best work until after fifty. You are as

competent to practice medicine now—perhaps more competent—than before this happened. You are not a careless man. I know you to be quite the opposite—a painstaking worker. Before God, you're a good doctor. You can cure many a sickness—save many a life."

"Thank you, thank you. I only wish I could believe you, too. But time will pass, and perhaps my sickness will be cured. Give me a year, Raoul. I need that long at least for it to run its course. In the meantime, where shall I go? To Indo-China?"

"Cholera and malaria are endemic there. You'd be busy enough. But the language of the people is difficult to learn and it's so far."

"Tahiti? It's said to be beautiful—"

"It is, and there's plenty of work for a doctor. Consumption, venereal disease brought in by sailors, smallpox, I suppose malaria also. Again you'd have a language difficulty. Still—"

"Oh, I know! Oh, thank God. Maybe God sent that young man—that student—I met in the mughouse. A dock-worker had been stabbed, and he and his friend staunched the wound. His name was Paul—I've forgotten his last name. He'd come from Martinique and he told me there was no rickets there. He said it was the most beautiful island in the world. He said too a strange thing—that it was the place for healing wounds."

"Good! Good! The people speak a patois, easy to learn. I remember a great smallpox outbreak in the capital about 1885—even now only a small percentage have been vaccinated. Now I'm going to leave you, for I need to be alone awhile, and I know that you do too. After a while—before midnight—take a strong bromide—from that bottle if you like. You've got to learn to live with this thing—and go to sleep."

"I wish—I almost wish—I could mistake the label again. But don't worry. There's no danger of that. Anyone who had seen Joseph Minard—" Claude covered his eyes with his hand.

"I'm going now."

"Good night, old friend."

Raoul left, and Claude stood alone in the dim, haunted room. Its loneliness had pressed in upon him, crushing him, when Ruben limped in to light the oil lamp. His face was inscrutable in its gleam.

"Ruben?"

"Yes, Monsieur Doctor."

"I've been asked not to practice medicine in France. I am going across the sea, and maybe some day I can practice again. But I can't ask you to

come with me. You don't want to go with a marked man."

"I too am a marked man, Monsieur Doctor."

"Not by your own fault."

"Perhaps no markings are a man's fault, in the last counting."

"I'll provide you with a pension and help to get you a post."

"Do you want me to go with you, Monsieur Doctor?"

"Yes, yes."

"Then I will. I have no other life. And the time may come that I'll wash your bottles again."

3.

A small and dirty packet steamer sailed from Havre, bound for the West Indies, ten days after Claude's birthday. In that period he had obtained clearance from the law absolving him from any criminal intent in having caused the death of Joseph Minard; and he stood in no danger of a civil suit for the pitiful reason that the man seemed to have no kin. No one had claimed the body from the public morgue. The anatomists had wanted it, to study the effects of acute strychnine poison on stomach secretions, but Claude, who oddly enough had the most say, declined to surrender it, an unprofessional act perhaps, although one he could not help committing. He himself paid for the modest funeral.

In this same period he had found a buyer for his house at no great loss. He had packed his clock, most prized books, microscope, stethoscope, and articles of clothing he might use in a hot climate along with one he might never use, a black frock coat of some dignity. Getting underway at dusk, the ship kept all that night in sight of shore lights. In the morning, standing by the rail of a small afterdeck, the two exiles watched the slow recession of the Breton coast. It turned from green to blue, after a long time to purple, and at last to gray. In grayness, as with men, it died away.

Claude had been a week at sea before he ventured to converse with fellow passengers. By then, all of them knew who he was—the doctor whose name had appeared in headlines in the French press—and he would not be taking advantage of them by addressing them, for if they did not wish to talk to him, they had only to turn away. But as it happened, not one did so. All had come from the middle walks of life, or they would not have been traveling on this cheap ship; they too had made disastrous mistakes and knew well what great folk often forget, that the dragging hook of destiny can

snag any fish in the human sea. One fellow passenger, a swarthy young Jew who was an agent for Rhum De Legle, offered to inform him about the island.

At their second meeting, after Claude had praised the drink that Jacobs had brought forth, he ventured to ask him about the health of the islanders.

"To tell you the truth," Jacobs answered in reply to Claude's question, "I couldn't think of a worse place for a doctor to make a living."

"Isn't that very strange, in a tropical climate?"

"I suppose it is, but it's true. When the Creoles get sick, they go to herb doctors or quimboiseurs. There are occasional epidemics, and sometimes a porter girl catches pneumonia from fording a mountain river in a high sweat, but usually you don't see anyone with a common cold. The people's diet of fish, fruit, rice, manioc flower, and vegetables seems just about perfect. You'll say the same when you see their magnificent physiques and their beautiful children."

"Is there much smallpox since the plague?"

"You rarely see any pockmarks. When you see a marked face, the Creoles will tell you that a mabouya—that's a lizard-like thing that kills centipedes—has run over it."

"How about malarial fever?"

"It's certainly not common."

"There's a fellow in India—I think his name is Ross—who maintains that malaria is spread by mosquitoes. Are there many mosquitoes in Martinique?"

"Plenty of big ones and little ones."

"That doesn't fit in very well with his theory. Probably nothing to it. What is the principal cause of death, other than old age?"

"Apart from occasional plagues, I'd say snakebite and poison." Jacobs stopped, his color rising.

"Please go on, my friend."

"There are many poisons in the big woods—no one knows exactly what they are. The conjurors are said to know many subtle poisons, and will give them to your enemy for a fee."

"Yellow fever is common in the West Indies. Do you see many cases?"

"The ships bring it in once in a while. I've never heard of a yellow fever epidemic in Martinique. Yet it's quite bad in spots, especially in a village called Chaude Oree—only about three miles from Saint-Pierre."

“Is it low and swampy? I asked because, going back to mosquitoes, I remember a paper by a Cuban—Carlos Lindley—Findley, I guess—that I read about fifteen years ago. He proposed that yellow fever was spread by mosquitoes. The theory’s been completely discredited, but it impressed me at the time.”

“No, Chaude Oree is on a dry ridge. It’s almost the only town I know that doesn’t have Gouyave water—that is, crystal-clear water led through the town from mountain brooks. Instead all the houses have clay or wooden tanks to catch rainwater.”

“That plays the devil with Findley’s theory. My friend, you are a very good informant. I can’t thank you enough.”

Now that the ice was broken, others of the short list of passengers, as well as officers and men of the crew, passed companionable minutes with Claude. When the boatswain stuck a big sliver deeply in his foot, he went to Claude to have it removed, and thus, without dreaming of it, he gave him a bitter-sweet pleasure. Although the food was plain and in small variety, it was good traditional French cooking. The bunks were hard and not wholly free of invaders, but Claude slept more than he had hoped, and most of his dreams skipped over the last month and revisited his childhood.

He could not help but wish that the journey could last forever. It seemed a kind of recess between past and future. Yet lucky people are those who ever seek the splendid prize and never lose heart, those who journey over the mountains, and are still breasting the heights when they fall. They are not those who dream forever in the lotus land. In Martinique he must find something to do worth doing. Otherwise it was unthinkable that he could go on living.

Steaming for Cayenne in French Guinea, the vessel’s first port of call was the island of Guadeloupe. Although a beautiful spot, Jacobs conceded, it could not be compared with its close neighbor, Martinique. Yet, as she drew near her anchorage there, a place in the long row of fifty ships big and little lying abreast, Saint-Pierre’s witching beauty did not impress Claude as much as its look of solidarity. As to other travelers, it seemed hewn out of solid rock. The streets, the public buildings, the rows of stone houses, even the mansions on the heights appeared one continuous and proportionate carving in cobalt, multicolored quartz, gray granite, topaz, coral, and jade. His heart yearned for something unbreakable and he dreamed he had found it.

Claude had hardly set foot on shore when a powerfully built man with Indian hair and physiognomy and Negroid color, carrying a machete,

stopped in his fore.

"I am Atlas, the last of the Carib braves," the man announced in good French and in a low, rumbling voice.

"Yes, monsieur."

"I know who you are. You are Dr. Claude Griffon, lately from Paris."

"You have the advantage of me, monsieur. I do not recall meeting you before."

"We have never met until now. We meet now because we are in the same boat. I came here to give you a message."

Claude wanted to ask, "How could you know I was coming?" He did not, because the answer would in all probability be a lie, and, like all men of courtesy, he did not like to put people in need of lying or to catch them when they did so. He knew of no earlier boat from which Atlas could have heard the trivial news. More likely he had come with other Creoles to see the ship arrive and talked to a deck hand about the case a moment or two ago. Claude waited politely.

"The rich and great have driven you from your native land and away from your own people," Atlas went on. "The rich and great of this island drove my own people away from me, long ago they did so, dispatching them with the sword, which is more merciful than the exile into which you are sent. But I will be your friend. I will defend you."

"From whom?" Claude asked the question in a puzzled way, feeling that he ought to know.

"From our Mountain."

Trained to be sensitive to symptoms, some of them obscure, Claude rejected the idea of a mountebank playing a game. Sincerity shone in the man's brooding eyes. That he was some sort of fanatic there could be no doubt.

"What would it do to me, except for your protection?" Claude asked politely.

"I cannot tell you, because I do not know. I know she will slay me, in loving kindness, so I may go with my brothers, but amid the great slaughter of my enemies, her sword of flame will deal mercifully with you. You may believe me, doctor man. The handle of my machete throbs in my palm, and that is a sign that my vision is true."

"When will the sword strike? Can you tell me?"

"That's an easy question. When she wakens from her sleep. Look at her —she is sleeping now, and dreaming—what divine dreams? You and I are

brothers, doctor man. *Au revoir.*"

He turned away and Claude watched him shouldering through the crowd. The spell that his wild words had cast slowly faded away.

4.

Claude inquired of a French dockmaster as to living quarters. The Hôtel des Bains was expensive, but room and board could be had at a Creole house for five francs a day for Monsieur and his attendant. Dusk was falling when he left the busy docks. Then with female porters carrying his baggage on their heads—tall, erect brown girls making naught of a hundred-pound burden, yet not to be compared in magnificence with *les porteuses* of the routes—he made his way up the narrow, stone-flagged streets. Through each ran a channel of the good Gouyave water, clear and cold from a mountain river; and its murmur mingled with the whisp-whisp of naked feet was a medley as peculiar to Saint-Pierre as its smell of spice and flowers. Steps had been cut in the sharper steeps, and moss grew in the clefts, and they seemed unimaginably old.

Thus began Claude's stay in Saint-Pierre, known as the "Pearl of the Antilles," a city of about thirty thousand, now that its sunlight-fed fecundity had restored the frightful losses of the great plague. At the end of the first week, when the news of the arrival of a refugee doctor was surely known to all the readers of French journals, he called on Anton Nogret, president of a small medical society in Saint-Pierre. He did not send in his card, bearing the significant initials, but gave his name without explanation to a Creole servant. For all the man knew, he was a patient.

Not so Dr. Nogret, when he came into the little waiting room. First he offered Claude his hand. But at every encounter, if a dozen times a day, Martinique men shake hands, as the Creole women call one another *che*. So Claude did not take hope from this, although his heartbeat quickened.

"I am glad that you came to see me, Dr. Griffon," said this tall, grave, distinguished man. And suddenly Claude perceived that he too was of the Creole race of Martinique. His swarthy skin and glimmering black eyes told of his mixed blood.

"It is kind of you to receive me," Claude answered.

When they had talked a few minutes of medical matters here and abroad, Claude posed his burning question.

"Dr. Nogret, it is not my intention at present to try to establish a medical practice here on Martinique. It will be a long time, if ever, before I can trust

myself again. But I want something to do of a medical nature. I've heard that very few of the Creoles have been vaccinated against smallpox; perhaps I could help with that. If another epidemic should occur, I would like to serve in any capacity. I can make the ordinary laboratory tests for diabetes, Bright's disease, malaria, anemia, tuberculosis, intestinal parasites. I would like to stipulate that I receive no fees, saving the patient that much. Doctor, do you think you and your confreres can use me? If not every day, occasionally." Then, lest this sound too humble, "I am eager to keep my hand in."

"I understand perfectly. Certainly we can use you occasionally, and I hope frequently. We have a hard fight here against the herb doctors and the conjurors."

A servant brought rum punch and the two men bowed their heads and drank. Later Claude returned to his own place.

Dr. Nogret kept his word. Almost every day Claude was summoned to the hospital for an hour or two. During a smallpox scare he was kept busy vaccinating Creole children for a full month, and the contagion disappeared without striking out a single life. Oddly enough, the parents had refused medication because of some superstition that they recognized as such but still observed.

When Claude had spent more than a year on the island, and there came a spate of cholera infantum, busying all practitioners in Saint-Pierre, Nogret summoned him to his office on an urgent matter.

"As you know, yellow fever is endemic in the town of Chaude Oree," the quiet-speaking physician began. "God knows why it should linger on there, thirty or more cases a year, when the rest of the island remains practically immune. It must have something to do with the water—stored rain water instead of the mountain water that the rest of the people drink—although I cannot imagine what. Almost all of those cases have been light—no black vomit or bloody stools. But suddenly the bug—and God knows we know so little—seems to have gotten stronger. There are three cases, all of them severe. Well, none of us can leave, and I thought of you."

"I thank you kindly," Claude answered with the old-fashioned formality he sometimes employed to mask his feelings.

"Let me remind you it would be a dangerous assignment. We think the disease is passed by contact with the sick, or the handling of their bedding—and aseptic measures may be taken by the doctor and nurses—but how do we know?"

A thought knocked at the door of Claude's mind—something he had heard or read—but he did not know how to give it entrance and it passed by.

"I'd be very happy to go there and do what I can. I have a rugged constitution and am not likely to contract the disease."

"Godspeed." And then Claude remembered not what had just eluded him but the parting words of Doctor le Baron du Ville.

Claude and Ruben left that day in a hired cart. They brought antiseptics and stimulants, and Claude's excellent microscope. The town had but three winding streets, more or less parallel, on the western slope of a ridge; and Claude wondered how it had come into being. Actually it was a large charcoal market at the intersection of two busy country roads and overhung a fertile valley of small farms. There was an open-air market, shops dealing in odd assortments of goods, several shrines, and a noble church in a flower-rich square. The heat hung heavy and the settlement skirted the ruins of an ancient forest.

Claude wondered at a lack, something missing from the scene, a pleasant thing he was used to seeing in the towns hereabouts. Then he perceived it was the runnels of crystal water through streets and gardens and even the cool courts of Creole houses.

The first townsmen that he met informed him as to the progress of yellow jack. There were no new cases, and unless another appeared soon, the three would soon be reduced to two. A grave was being dug, and needlewomen were making a shroud.

Claude went at once to the house of the afflicted, while Ruben searched for living quarters. "Missie Doctor" was admitted by a stalwart Creole girl, her melting black eyes eloquent of grief, but showing no terror and little shock, so deep lies the Creole sense of doom. He was taken to the sickroom crowded with Creole women, kinfolk of the family or merely neighbors, giving what they could of comfort and help, for the doctrine of human brotherhood is a working force, a visible reality, among the common people of Martinique.

Claude thought of evicting the visitors. Most of the doctors he had admired would have done so. They knew no asepsis, they must touch the sick one when soothing and serving him, and frequently change the bedding or it would not appear so clean. No doubt the same had held true with every case of yellow fever in Chaude Oree. Yet so was the disease passed, according to the books. There came a little catch in his train of thought, then it flowed impotently on.

The sick man was dying, and revival was beyond hope. Claude had not seen a severe case of yellow fever in many years, and it must be that he had tried to forget its dreadful aspect, or he would not now suffer from such shock. He had forgotten the wasted countenance, the cold and yellow skin, the dead eyes, the silent vomiting of black blood. He had trouble finding a pulse, it was so slow and feeble. The temperature was five degrees below normal.

There was nothing he could do for the stricken man, and the shock he himself was suffering excited his brain to abnormal activity. Fingering his watch chain, he thought upon all he had ever seen or heard or read of yellow fever. Then he approached the tall girl who had admitted him, the most capable and cool-headed in the room.

"You have seen many cases of yellow fever," he said in the patois he had long since learned.

"Yes, Missie Doctor."

"Do you remember any of the women falling sick with it within a few days of nursing a sick one?"

"No, Missie Doctor."

"Who are the most likely to fall sick—women, men, fieldworkers, those who drink mabi, those who put a little rum in the cup, or those who drink plain water?"

"There is little difference, Missie Doctor. It may be that there are more men than women who fall sick—for they like to sit under the trees at twilight, and smoke, and talk, while the women work indoors. And twilight is the time that zombis come forth—they must go back when the Angelus rings—and the *maun-mo*, the dead folk, walk." The girl scratched her head in sudden fierceness. "I will tell you, too, Missie Doctor, although maybe you will not believe. It is the custom in Chaude Oree to burn an oil lamp before the Virgin all night in the bedchamber. So when one falls sick with the yellow fever, we ask, 'Did he blow out the lamp to save oil?' More often than not, he answers that he did, and may the Virgin intercede for him! Until now she has done so, for the sick one has suffered, then become well."

Claude's brain began to surge.

"Tell me this, my daughter. Does the west wind blow in mosquitoes from the marshes?"

"No, our night wind is down from the mountain. We see no big mosquitoes, only little ones, only a few and rarely."

"Thank you, *che*."

Claude left directly, then made brief visits to two other houses where yellow jack had preceded him. One of the patients was weak but safe; Claude administered a stimulant and hurried away. At the last house, a feverish youth had not yet reached the crisis of the disease.

At this house the doctor asked to inspect the water tank. A woman led him there and left him to his studies. They were profoundly absorbing; into his plain, good face came an expression which patients in the charity hospitals in faraway Paris might remember well. He tasted the water: it had a woody taste but looked quite clean. Neither of these things mattered, he thought with sudden force; neither dirty water nor bad flavor caused yellow fever. Leaning over the tank, his gaze fixed where there was no glare of light, he watched with great care.

Then he found what he sought—tiny moving strings that were unmistakably mosquito wrigglers.

With the discovery came a long leap of thought. He remembered from his student days that a kind of mosquito—he could almost recall its Latin name—found in warm climates bred only in water tanks and utensils, never in salt marsh or swamps. With that he started running into the street.

The townsmen would tell later of a rumpled-looking Frenchman, short and stocky, trotting clumsily and shouting, "Where's Ruben? Where did he go? Has anyone seen the lame Frenchman who came in the cart with me? In the third house, you say? Oh, thank you! thank you!"

Within seconds Claude ran into that house, saw a startled woman's face, found Ruben in the doorway. He threw his arms about him and spoke between laughter and tears.

"*Ruben! Ruben! I'm going to practice medicine again! Do you hear me, Ruben? I'm going to practice medicine—with a mosquito swatter!*"

CHAPTER FOUR

The Artist and the Nymph

1.

On the night of January 19, 1897, Denis du Bois stood with his servant Romain in his richly and oddly furnished dining room, directing the appointments of the table. There was to be a distinguished dinner for an illustrious group of guests.

"This is the fifty-eighth birthday of my old friend, Monsieur Cézanne," Denis told Romain. "He has come up from Aix for a visit, and tonight is paying his former associates the honor of dining in our company."

"It will be pleasant to have him here again."

"The others will be Messieurs Auguste—Claude—Hilaire—Ignace, and of course Mademoiselle. I will make seven, and the chair where Monsieur Édouard used to sit will remain vacant. When you serve champagne, please fill the glass at the empty place."

"Thank you, monsieur. I would have remembered to do that."

"We will have brandy—Armagnac '82—and coffee in my studio. Now be prepared to answer the doorbell."

Denis went into the salon where, by the blazing hearth, stood Celestin—*la rose jaune*, as she had been known in the studios of the Left Bank—wearing a very simple pale-green gown with a band under the bosom, almost Grecian in style. She had a wealth of pale-gold hair which she had drawn back and fastened with a gold band. She wore jade earrings and a jade bracelet, gifts from Denis. On her long, slim delicate feet were fawn-skin sandals.

"I asked you to dress to honor and charm my guests, and you have done so," Denis said.

"Do you like the effect? This dress was one I wore when I modeled for Hilaire, and he let me keep it. It was perfect for pastel."

The fact was she charmed everyone who came near her, regardless of her costume. Born in Bruges, she had come to Paris at sixteen; that was ten

years ago, and she still looked sixteen. It was almost unthinkable that so slight a form could be so moving; yet she had at once become the rage of the artists of the newer schools. Denis recalled now Hilaire's beautiful sensuous pastel of Celestin in the green gown. Her hair had been flowing with a black ribbon atop; in her mouth was the stem of a large pink rose; one exquisite hand lay open on her breast. How well he had caught the odd-shaped, witchy eyes of Flemish blue!

An American had bought the picture, Denis thought, and it was gone from France forever.

"This will be the first time I have seen Hilaire since I came here to live," Celestin murmured in subtle interrogation.

"Yes."

"Well, he may be jealous. Won't you be a little jealous, too?"

"He won't be, and I won't be. If Hilaire should ask you to come back—and you were willing to go—I suppose I would let you. He did so much better with you than I have done. There is no comparison. You know as well as I do that I've failed. Unless—that is—this last picture changes everything."

"It has. It will. I know it."

"Do you, Celestin? Oh, God, I hope you're right. If it has, it will be in a greater measure than you know by your inspiration."

"Then would you still give me back to Hilaire?"

"No! I didn't mean it. It was just big talk."

"Denis, your eyes are too bright, considering you haven't worked today or drunk anything but a little wine. Hadn't you better take a powder?"

"As a sedative, in case of—say a possible impending disappointment?"

"No such thought crossed my mind. I want you to calm down a little. Having Paul come—Claude—Auguste—Hilaire—Ignace—all at the same table for the first time God knows since when—the old Trojans fighting what seemed a hopeless war with Greece—"

"Celestin, that's very pointed."

"I always surprise people when I say something reasonably clever. Well, this reunion tonight—plus what you have to show them—has worked you up. Remember that you're fifty. Your heart isn't as young as it was, for mine, God knows, is old at twenty-six."

"Bah! Put your best foot forward, for I hear a carriage."

The peal of the bell interrupted him. Romain answered it, and ushered both Paul and Hilaire into the room. Paul's hair and eyes were strikingly

dark in contrast with his somewhat pallid skin; his expression was very thoughtful; his mustache and goatee and jaw-encircling sideburns were not as trim as of yore. His face had been beautifully planed by struggle and creative anguish. The nose hooked over the upper lip used to mar its aspect; now it lent distinction.

Hilaire had a patrician face, long and narrow, flawed and yet made far more telling by thick lips. He had eyes for physical grace, found in ballet dancers, jockeys, workmen, and for all fluent gestures and movement; it followed he was a great draftsman and handler of light. He bowed low to the Yellow Rose.

The others came shortly—sensuous Auguste, adventurous and virile Claude, imaginative Ignace, born to the brush, immensely capable although not great. In a few minutes, Romain announced dinner.

Paul broke that odd, slightly awkward silence that comes over a dinner party on first sitting down.

"Denis, old friend, I'm glad to see another old friend over your mantel. It's either the first or second one I did of Victoire, and I believe it's the best."

At once everyone wanted to talk. Denis kept still except for brief replies—his time and his test were coming later—but his heart spoke already, volubly, almost wildly, trying to tell of its joy at his being in this company, the elation that it had first felt when the peerless Édouard invited him to meet his friends at the Café Guerbois. As for his own work until now, he had sold no more than a dozen pictures, not one to a gallery or collector of standing. The exhibition of his work that his own purse had paid for had turned out to be a humiliating fiasco. Even passionate and fantastical Van Gogh had done no worse; but while gold had smoothed his own way, the Calvinist minister's son had careened down to insanity and death. And now, when he had lain six years in a forgotten grave, some connoisseurs—a very few—were beginning to look for his canvases with strangely feverish eyes.

So his futile quest was not a failure—yet. He was all of fifty but only fifty; many an artist did not find himself until thereafter. Meanwhile he had been friend, confrere, and patron of the most dynamic group of painters in the present world. What life could he have bought, whether that of continental society to which his wealth and name would have admitted him, or that of the dilettante or of sport, that could have been as good a buy? What he had told Celestin about not being jealous of her was quite true. He was truly fond of her and found many satisfactions in her beauty; these and her habit of loyalty to her current lover were all he asked. So how much less

could he be jealous of the success of his fellow artists, loyal friends from first to last?

And how pleased he was to be patron to this feast! His chef had prepared a superb dinner—beef marrow soup, brook trout, stuffed woodcock, fresh pineapple, and old Camembert—and he had chosen the wines with epicurean care. And now, with the champagne, came time for a little observance, sentimental if you please, forgotten at none of their dinners over thirteen years. Denis rose and spoke.

"I offer our first toast of obligation. To the soul of Édouard. May he now be plying colors that he never imagined."

They stood and drank. Two tears ran down Paul's cheeks. And only a little while after that, when coffee and brandy were being served in the big, cluttered, comfortable studio whose large windows gave view of northern skies, a great and terrifying moment in Denis' life edged closer and then was upon him.

Warmhearted, generous, ever understanding, Pierre gave him, on his own impulse, his cue.

"Denis, *ami*, what's behind that curtain?" He pointed to a big easel covered with a drape.

2.

Denis rallied inward forces and spoke slowly, his face suddenly beaded with sweat.

"Before I show you, I must attempt a brief explanation. You all know how I've tried to be one of the pioneers in the struggle forecast by Ferdinand and the Old Man—led by our own Édouard—to free painting from academic routine. You know too that my own efforts have been failures. Either I lacked the necessary talent for success in an untrammeled art, or—just possibly—I was too deeply rooted in classicism."

"My guess would be the latter," Auguste of the ever-glowing heart broke in.

"Friends, it may be possible that all the time I was trying to follow the new faith, I kept looking back as did Lot's wife. I was turned into a pillar of sterile salt. In my heart I went whoring after Boucher and David. Well, a painter can deny himself—refuse to recognize himself—only so long. At age fifty I decided to try to identify myself, for better or worse. Now I'll show you what I have done."

He started to rise from his chair, but Celestin sprang lightly, smiling at him, and unveiled the painting.

It was large and revealed a reach of beach with a blue sea melting into the sky and a gentle surf of creamy white. The central figure was a young woman—rather a girl of about sixteen—seated on a craggy piece of driftwood. On the back of her head was an elaborate *coif*, ornamented with embroidery; the hair visible in front was parted in the middle and pale-gold. Around her neck hung a fringed scarf, fastened in the back and partly concealing a richly embroidered bodice with a V-shaped stomacher. The full skirt of roan-red accented the slimness of the waist and was pinned up at the knees. The expression on the lovely face was of innocence and dreams.

Beside her sat a big basket of small, multicolored fish.

Denis' guests gazed awhile from their seats, then one by one they arose to inspect the picture at close range and from different angles. Although Denis could not help trying to read their expressions, he did not succeed. The first to speak was Auguste.

"Denis, this seems to me the best work you've ever done. Would you say so, Ignace?"

"I'm quite certain of it."

"It's an interesting treatment, Denis," said Hilaire. "The choice of elements is very good—the whole design admirable."

"Denis, I didn't know that a leopard could change his spots in one fell swoop," Claude remarked with great warmth.

"I think it's wonderful that you did so," Auguste broke in, slapping Denis on the back.

"The embroidery alone ought to make the picture," Ignace said. "It *does* recall Ingres. I have never seen any that was more rich. Denis, I congratulate you."

Paul had not yet spoken, but his face told that he was deeply moved. This was a far greater tribute, Denis thought, than the others' compliments, although these too were music in his ears, considering that their comments on one another's work had always showed restraint, actually the first law of all hard-working confreres. Denis began to speak somewhat wildly.

"Please notice the flesh tones. In this light you would never guess they are Celestin's—I had to take her on a boat ride, half-naked, on a July morning to get them through my head. I've been working on it since May—and this is January. What does it matter if at last I've done something fairly good? A dozen times I thought I had it—just as I had envisioned it—only to have to rub out, and block in. Where do you suppose I got that array of fish?

From an old fishwife crying her wares on the Quai de Bethune. I bought the whole basket and for once I had to work like lightning, and, even so, Romain went around with his nose in the air. That bit of beach came rather easily. I found the perfect spot below Cape d'Antifer and had it fixed in paint in about a fortnight. You won't believe it, but that piece of driftwood, half-buried in sand, is exactly—"

Denis stopped. All his hearers had fixed their gaze on him, and on their faces there had come a curious likeness of expression. He did not know what it meant. He drew a deep breath and spoke again, very quietly now.

"Gentlemen"—and this word was very rarely used in their company —"have I got it? For God's sake tell me."

Auguste spoke quickly.

"Denis, this is your first return to classical painting—which for years you disavowed but which was your first love. As such, it's a notable—at least an interesting—effort. I believe it's the best work you've ever done. Your later efforts will be better."

"Paul, you haven't said a word!"

"I'll speak now. Not to you, my dear friend Denis, but to these other friends."

He paused, and all eyes were turned to him perhaps because—and Denis knew it as well as they—his own face had turned white.

"Denis is our old friend—I can truly say our patron—he has bought more of our paintings than any other individual in France. Tonight he has served us a delicious dinner. Let us not try to pay for it in false coin."

"This is going to be awful," Hilaire said in an undertone to Claude. "I wish to hell I was a thousand miles away."

"False coin," Denis repeated to himself.

"And with false kindness," Paul went on. "Denis is a man, and he has the soul of an artist, although it has not yet been realized in the appalling reality of paint. I agree that this may be the best picture Denis has ever painted. I agree that later pictures may be better. But the worst enemy of an artist is not a hostile critic, not an apathetic public, but his own illusions. Don't let Denis suffer from them. Auguste, what is your real opinion of this picture?"

"God forgive me, I'll say this," Auguste answered with a face as pale as Denis'. "I don't understand why it's not better. The composition is good, the draftsmanship fair, a considerable technical skill is evident in the application of paint, and—but I can say no more."

"Hilaire?"

"To the Devil with all pictures. What are they but pictures? Why should our cursed souls—?" He stopped and dropped his hand.

"Claude?"

"Excuse me, Paul. I cannot express an opinion."

"Ignace?"

"I like the picture. I am not a great artist and never will be, let alone a critic. Now give your opinion, Paul. Look Denis in the face and give it."

Paul nodded, and turned to Denis, both men sitting rigid in their chairs.

"My friend, this is not a good picture. Little as they have said in its favor, the others have said too much. The painting has no body, it is not true. It is only a façade."

3.

In the aching silence, Auguste rose and filled every glass with brandy. Then the men sat looking down, their arms in their laps. Celestin's blue eyes gleamed with fury.

At last Denis spoke.

"I guess there's nothing more to say," he observed quietly. "But don't go for a while."

"There's a great deal more to say," Paul answered quickly, "if we only knew what."

"Well, I've got an idea," Claude ventured. "Sometimes the tearing out of his roots by will or by destiny, and replanting them in other earth, changes a man's perspective—gives a lift to the spirit that is like youth's. I call your attention to Paul Gauguin whom I believe began to find himself only about ten years ago, when he painted in Martinique. Since then his paintings of native life in Tahiti seem from the brush of an entirely different and far greater painter."

"I've touched Martinique in my travels," Hilaire remarked, with a dim smile. "Quite possibly it is the most beautiful island in all the seas."

"I've longed to go there," Paul said. "I want to paint Pelée which I hear is a greater challenge than Victoire—massive—monumental—terrifying."

"Look out, Paul," Auguste interposed quickly. "You'll have our best friend leaving us, and what in the devil would we do?"

"No amount of good pictures—of which there's a surfeit anyway—could even that up," Ignace offered.

"Let Denis tell us if the idea has any attraction," Claude insisted.

"Not much, I confess, but I think it has been forced upon me," Denis said slowly. "I don't believe I can remain in Paris. I haven't the heart to attempt another picture in these surroundings, and I've heard much of Martinique from my friends there, including a young law student, Paul Barteau. That's as much as I can say, tonight."

"This night will end," Paul said with great dignity. "Pass it, and see the appearance of things in the morning. We'd better go now, *ami*; you have much to wrestle with. We've said all we can say and had to say, may our tongues not wither in our mouths like Jonah's gourd vine. No, don't see us to the door."

In a moment the men had gone, the talk was through, and the room silent. It seemed larger than before, and the things in it that he loved and used appeared to have no meaning. Celestin came toward him, very pale and still, and the lamplight glossed her hair.

"Shall I sleep with you tonight, Denis?" she asked. "That's all I have to offer, all I can say."

"Not tonight, *cherie*. Tonight I'm not fit to be your bedfellow. Tomorrow —we'll see what tomorrow brings."

When, about seven, Romain entered his room with a tray of *café au lait*, fruit, and bread, Denis looked dark under the eyes and careworn, although there was no change that this trained servant could detect in his usual smile and greeting.

"I hope you slept well, monsieur," Romain remarked as he laid the cover on a small table by the window, overlooking the great loop of the Seine.

"Not too well. I had a hard decision to make. You have been with me the longest of anyone in our household, so you shall be the first to hear it. I've decided to leave Paris and go to Martinique for an indefinite stay. The island is famed for its beauty, and I hope that there my work will improve. I would like to have you with me, if you care to go."

No flicker of expression crossed the guarded face.

"Thank you, monsieur. How long may I have to decide?"

"I ask for your answer now. I feel sure you are perfectly aware of whether you wish to leave France."

"Then I shall give it now. No, monsieur, I'm not Parisian-born, but my days have been spent here, and, by the grace of God, I shall die here. I will

be sorry to leave your service."

"I'll be sorry to lose you. Will you ask Georges to come to my room?" Georges was Denis' chef.

"Yes, monsieur."

In a moment the man appeared in his snowy hat and apron, a short, plump Gascon with the beady eyes and oily skin of his trade. Also in his appearance were subtle signs of an alert intelligence, by no means rare in people who devote their lives to the prodigious subject of edibles and eating.

"Monsieur!"

"First, I wish to compliment you on last night's dinner. It was excellent."

"Thank you, monsieur."

"As Romain may have told you, I am leaving shortly for Martinique and may never return. I am pleased with your cooking, and I would like to have you accompany me, if you care to go."

"Monsieur, is your purpose to paint pictures there? From Romain's hurried words, I gathered that was the case."

"It is the case."

"In order to do so successfully, would it not be necessary for you to adapt yourself to the island life, adopt its customs, and become a Martiniquan instead of a Parisian?"

"I hadn't thought of it—but I suppose it's true."

"It struck me in the short while since Romain told me of your decision. In that case, monsieur, you will wish to employ native servants and eat Martiniquan food. I assure you, monsieur, that one must eat the food of the country in order to dine well, and be happy and healthy. All good cooks know that. The materials are there, and the facilities. Materials and facilities for French meals will be sadly lacking. I could not serve you well in Martinique, and hence, with regret, I must decline your offer."

"That is a very sensible position. I will miss you, Georges. Thank you very much."

Georges departed and Denis went on with his breakfast. He was just finishing when Celestin came in, in a white dressing gown and her pale hair flowing. She sat opposite him, fragile and lovely-looking.

"You didn't sleep well, Denis."

"No."

"But I can almost tell from your appearance that you've come to a decision in regard to leaving Paris. I know your face quite well, you know,

and your mannerisms. Something has been settled—not happily, I know, but definitely."

"Those odd-shaped down-pointed eyes of yours are very keen. I have come to my decision. Actually it was Hobson's choice."

"Is it to go? I'm almost sure it is."

"Yes, and without delay."

She nodded and waited.

"The next question is one for you to answer. Will you go with me?" Denis guarded his face and voice with great care.

"I had hoped you would ask me. I won't keep you waiting. No, it is impossible."

"Will you tell me why? You needn't if you'd rather not, but I would be more satisfied—"

"Certainly I'll tell you. The life I chose is here, a paid servant of the artists, occasionally, perhaps, their inspiration."

"I know of no reason why we shouldn't marry. You are beautiful, and you would be constant, and a great joy to me."

"I will never marry. That would confine me. I could not endure confinement."

"Let me mention one other thing of importance. You like to live well. You are attracted by money itself—a perfectly human trait, I won't even call it a failing. If you part with me, you part with money, more than you are likely to have access to again. Among the artists, only the fashionable portrait and landscape painters may live in high style. The Sargents and Corots have no need of you. I doubt if you would appeal to them."

"I am sure I wouldn't, nor would they appeal to me. Yes, money is very important to me, but, if need be, I can get along with little. I wouldn't leave France—Paris—the Left Bank—for all the money in the world, nor for all the love—love of a man—that my shallow heart can hold."

"Under those circumstances, there's no use of saying more."

"No, there isn't, Denis. The yellow rose will blossom here awhile, and drop her petals here. But I want to live with you until you leave, if you still want me."

"I do want you, and I think I understand."

Tears ran down her face and she left the room. Denis touched his coffeepot, and it was still lukewarm.

4.

Denis' first impressions of the island were bitter-sweet. There was such a wealth of beauty here and such poverty within himself—for at last he knew it—for capturing it on canvas.

At first there was only the blue sea, the green island, and the violet cloud-wreathed mountain. Then Creole urchins came swarming to the ship side in tiny boats made of crates to dive for coins in the limpid water. They were Attic children, he thought, and they dived and swam like the sons of Poseidon. In due course, boatmen, any one of them a subject for Hilaire's pencil, lightered him and his goods to the customhouse of Saint-Pierre. Now the city lay above him, the steeply climbing narrow streets breaking into steps to rise to terrace after terrace, until his view was briefly arrested by the rooftops of the mansions in the district called Montagne, and, minimized by distance, the villas on Morne Rue.

Beyond these, upward and onward, swept the vast side of Pelée—monumental and terrifying to a stranger's eyes, as Paul Barteau had told him, although, to those native here, greatly beloved. Long ago, she had belched forth flame and molten lava; but her tumultuous fiery heart had quieted and cooled, she was an old one now; and anyway, tall and glimmering over the city on the crest of Morne d'Orange stood Notre Dame de la Garde.

A letter from the Count of Paris had preceded him on an earlier boat, and the Governor of Martinique had come down to the quay to welcome Monsieur Denis du Bois, even though Monsieur had forsaken his own order to associate with Bohemians. They talked civilly a few minutes, His Excellency proffered any assistance Monsieur might require, then left an aide to clear his baggage and to see to the formalities of his landing. Denis took the opportunity to stroll the streets.

Even the smaller houses had walls of stone. Their peaked roofs were mainly yellow, and the windows had no glass, only slatted shutters painted green or gray. Most comprised two stories and an attic, and were built for coolness and perhaps for resistance to earthquake. The larger houses had walled gardens, in which runnels of clear water murmured softly in the daytime, volubly in the silences of the night; the same as along the streets. All this was quaint and lovely, suggesting some never-never city of lost dreams, but even more moving to Denis' beauty-loving gaze came and went the people. The hour was a busy one, and the most dramatic aspect of the streets fronting or dipping down to the quays was the bronze-colored, all-but-naked workmen. Many rolled casks of rum or hogsheads of sugar, others

carried incredible-looking loads. In all his studies, he had never seen such bodies. Rarely large, they were wrought of bone and sinew only, the hot sun and a Spartan diet sloughing off every ounce of tare; and Denis had never before perceived, even when studying Greek sculpture, that the male form as fashioned by the chisel of God in the sunlit morning could so approximate the idea of perfection.

Their remote Negro ancestors must have come from the finest West African tribes, possibly the tall, lithe Mondongue. The projecting heel of many Africans had disappeared, the arch of the foot was high, prognathism of jaw and broadness of nose were rarely seen. But the beaming smile and the mellow voice remained.

Denis turned his attention to the Creoles of mixed blood—naked children in the doorways, and female porters and peddlers. The burden-carriers wore only a low-cut short-sleeved chemise and a skirt caught up in front; even so they managed a touch of gaiety in their poor dress; and every head was adorned by a big kerchief. Some of the peddlers had dressed in high Creole style, perhaps to attract more attention from shore-visiting French passengers. Their headdress was invariably canary-yellow madras in checks or stripes, one end pushed through and sticking up. The chemise was often richly embroidered, and a silk scarf draped the shoulders—yellow, blue, green, black with orange, like a ricebird's feathers, or blue with purple in the tints of a hummingbird, rose, lilac, or crimson. From their ears hung cylinders of gold while the wrists and throat had been adorned by strands of gold beads. Their bare feet went whisp-whisp on the flagstoned streets.

It seemed impossible for one of them to strike an awkward attitude or make an unpleasing movement. When they stopped to laugh and gossip together, Denis felt that instinctively they grouped themselves according to laws of harmony and proportion which only artists are assumed to know. The motions of their fluid hands recalled the living grace captured by Hilaire's first studies of the dance.

They walked with long strides, springing on their toes almost as if floating, their black eyes darting right and left in search of a buyer of their exotic or homely wares. The big tray on the head of one would be heaped with vegetables such as Dennis had never seen; another offered fruits of many colors, shapes, and sizes, study for a still life that no Parisian critic could be made to believe; a third had little loaves of bread; a fourth bore a basket of incredibly colored fish. "Who will buy snails?" cried a girl of the color of a ripe banana and the features of Little Barrel's Venus new-risen from the sea. Ducks? Maize cakes? Roots and herbs? Charcoal? Earthen jars?

Alive to skin color, he could not help but gape in wonderment at the varied tints of these faces and limbs. To judge by what he had seen this soon, somewhere on the island there must be every color found in nature from burnt umber to Naples yellow. The exact shade of pineapple could be seen, and of muskmelons, pears, and ruddy plums. He saw two girls who had been marked—so he mused in pleasant jest—by their mothers eating too many mangoes in their third month. The skin of one matched the meat of that sublime fruit—a rich orange-yellow smooth as cream—the other that of the dark-red blush that comes sometimes on its cheek on the sunny side of the tree.

The most common color was brown. It ranged from olive, through light tan and fawn color, tawny, amber, ale brown, nut brown and cinnamon, to a lively russet, and at last to the elegance of clear bronze.

So far he had not seen a *chabine*—a golden girl. They were found here, Paul Barteau had told him. Then, as he was returning to the dock, he caught a glimpse of one in a throng of people entering the white, two-towered cathedral, for evening service. She was about fifteen, he thought, tall, poorly dressed, of a remarkably chiseled face to judge by its profile, and her skin was different from any other he had seen. It had metallic-looking tints, and the metal was pure gold.

She vanished instantly. But his mind remained haunted by her as he walked on. He wished now that he had made a fool of himself and spoken to her—Paul had told him that the true chabines were quite rare. Perhaps in the weeks and months and years that stretched before him, he would encounter her again.

5.

Denis had brought a great heap of bags, trunks, and crates which at once made his reputation among the dock workers—to them he was *Missie d'énorme bagage*. *Tambou*, they were lucky! So were these mammas who helped carry it to the grand hotel and store it in an empty room. Missie flung out yellow money as though it were white, white as though it were red.

In about two weeks, the shower of money came over again. Missie was moving from the hotel to a fine house in Montagne—a house with a walled garden through which flowed good Gouyave water—with a court kept green with a fountain—with tables for eating, and beds big enough for a whole family, of the kind brought from France before the Big Wind of Missie Bon. Here Petit Pierre, a shrewd Creole who served as go-between for French

newcomers and the poorer populace, engaged him a valet, a cook, a gardener, two housemaids, and a laundress.

Denis was immensely pleased with these arrangements. The stone walls of the house stood two feet thick, excluding the worst of the heat and most of the street sounds; the floors of black and white tiles laid in a checkerboard pattern offered few hiding places for centipedes, scorpions, and tarantulas. The largest chamber had three big windows facing north, through which at any hour of day or night could be seen the looming shape of Mount Pelée. All of the servants took an immediate and passionate interest in his well-being and affairs; and Simeon, his valet, had the mark of a treasure. He had brought his favorite easels and pallete and brushes, pencils, tubes, great stores of canvas, even turpentine; and these he laid out handy to his use; but he was taking a long time in getting settled, and on Ascension Day, in 1897, he had not yet conceived a picture. It was as though a block across his mind had somehow tied his hands.

His eyes were busy always, so the time had passed quickly and pleasantly enough. In the early mornings and late afternoons he walked the ever-charming streets or drove about the countryside in a hired gig. Although he had entree there, he saw little of Saint-Pierre society, but never missed a play at the Salle de Spectacle, Saint-Pierre's impressive theater with its noble portico and long flight of steps. Actually he was steeping himself in the city and the island, beginning to interpret its sounds and smells, and feeling his way toward its people. It was a small chore to learn the Creole patois. In this, his household was his schoolroom. Soon he got to talking to passers-by, and one day he would find a subject and begin to paint.

Oddly enough, he had not forgotten his glimpse of the young chabine entering the cathedral, and whenever he had seen a girl of that rare color he found himself looking for her. He had inquired about her among the women of the household, but they knew of no such mamma. Perhaps she had come here from Carbet, from Belle-Fontaine, even from Fort-de-France. Then on an early morning of gorgeous, flower-gay June when roses ran riot and flamboyants blazed, he caught a glimpse of her in the crowded market square. At once she disappeared behind a food booth.

"Did you see that young chabine in the green skirt?" he asked a youth standing nearby.

"Yes, missie."

"If you catch her and bring her here to speak to me, I'll give you five francs."

The young man darted away. Denis waited with a feeling of strain as though something of great importance to him hung in the balance. In about five minutes the boy returned alone, yet with a hopeful mien.

"Missie, I found her, but she would not come. She said if Missie wishes to speak to her, he must go to the house of her Mamma."

"Did you find out their names and the place?" Denis asked with ill-concealed anxiety.

"Her own name is Clio. Her mother's name is Coraline. No father stays with them, and, from her looks, I think she's a child of passion. They live behind the Old Fort, next to the baker's shop."

"Can you find her again?"

"Of a certainty, missie!"

"Then do so, and say I will come to her house at seven in the evening."

"Shall I take you there, missie?" the youth asked, pocketing his fee. "I would know how to deal with that mamma better than a Frenchman."

Denis' blood stirred pleasantly, but he shook his head.

"I can do well enough, thank you."

Intentionally, he was a little late as good manners demanded in Saint-Pierre. He was dressed in cool duck, and had seen fit to take a carriage with driver and footman. The equipage was a most unusual sight in the neighborhood and its stopping before this door would be long remembered. The house was one of the most squalid he had seen in Saint-Pierre, its walls of baked clay stood flush with the road, and its roof sagged. A tall ale-brown woman, finely formed and with beautifully chiseled features, admitted him to a cluttered, garlic-scented room, not nearly as clean as most Creole interiors. Two straw mattresses lay against the wall, and on a rickety table were the leavings of tonight's supper—a manioc paste that looked to be "more water than flour," as the Creoles put it, fragments of what appeared to be a lambi, the great sea snail that must be pounded to make it edible, sold cheaply at the wharfs, and some too ripe bananas. A narrow ribbon of dark brown weaving across the table was a parade of ants. In a little box, fixed to the wall and decorated with tinsel, stood a small china image of the Virgin, one arm broken off at the elbow.

Yet to Denis there seemed to be a light in the room beside that of the dying day. It was only an illusion conjured up by the strange brightness of the young Creole girl sitting on a wooden stool. He did not look at her straight. Indeed he could not bear to do so, while the upshot of his errand was still in doubt; he wished to remain calm, and not to let his artist's heart prevail over common sense.

The woman offered him the only chair in the room. He nodded his thanks and spoke.

"I am Monsieur Denis du Bois. I live in the Montagne."

"I am Coraline. Yonder is my daughter Clio. How may I serve you, missie?"

"I am a painter and I wish to paint your daughter, and for that I will give both of you a generous fee."

To Denis' surprise, the woman uttered a brief peal of low, musical laughter.

"Your pardon, missie. My daughter is already painted—like unto gold—by the Bon Die and the sun and the pale color of her father, which was like cane juice."

"I mean I want to paint her picture on a canvas, in the way of artists."

"When and where, missie?"

"In my studio—that is the room where I keep my paints and brushes—in my house."

"How long would it take, missie?"

"Perhaps a month—perhaps three months—perhaps a year."

"What would you do with the picture, when it is finished? Would you sell it in a shop?"

"I would send it to France, or keep it."

"She would come every day to your house?"

"Every day but Sunday and feast days. Then she could rest."

"The time is drawing near when I intended to put her on the roads. Since a little child she has carried burdens; I meant her to be a porter. As such she would make a good wage."

"How much?" Denis asked bluntly.

"The good ones—a franc a day."

"I will pay Clio three francs a day and you two francs." The two Creoles evinced no surprise, although their eyes met in a darting glance.

"To make a pretty picture, she must have a half-dozen madrases, so that every day one will be clean for her long hair. She will need embroidered chemises—skirts of silks—shoulder scarfs of great richness—white slippers. I can buy her none of these things. Since my husband went to St. Vincent, I am very poor."

"I will buy her these things."

“To go with them, she will need gold earrings that alone cost one hundred and seventy-five francs. A heavy bracelet worthy of a pretty picture costs two hundred and fifty francs. A big gold clasp for her scarf costs another hundred, and many strands of beads cannot be bought for under five hundred francs. If they are large—as some rich missies give young mammas—the price is a thousand francs.”

“The sums add up to fifteen hundred francs. Counted in gold napoleons, that would come to seventy-five. I will buy the ornaments, and she shall wear them as she stands to be painted, and at last, if she does her work well, I will give some of them to her.”

“You will give her her meals in your kitchen, so she needn’t buy *akras*, and loaves, and a little fish from the hucksters?”

“Of course.”

“What is left on her plate, she can bring home?”

“Of course.”

Coraline turned to her daughter. “Go outside, *che*. I will talk alone to the missie.”

The girl rose lightly and in six long strides had gone. It seemed to Denis the room became almost unbearably squalid.

“Missie, it may be that you will paint her more than once?”

“Many times, perhaps. She will be what artists call my model.”

“In different dress? And sometimes in none at all?”

“Perhaps. In fact that would be likely.”

“Give ear to me, missie. My daughter, Clio, is drawing near her sixteenth birthday—for one—two years by Creole counting she has been ripe—and you are not the first French gentleman who has inquired of her. I am a poor woman. My daughter is a chabine, and good to look upon, and has the warm heart of a Creole. How do I know that she will not give it to you, in the way of the young when well cared for?”

Denis felt his pulse throbbing in his fingertips, and hence he spoke with great restraint. “I don’t think it very likely, considering the difference in our ages, and that my hair is grizzled.”

“Missie, I know nothing about painting—and models—and the like. But I know the way of a man with a maid. If she goes to you, I’ll not have her to lean upon in my old age. If you cast her off, she may not make a good marriage. Pay me a thousand francs, and what you do to her will not be my concern. What is a thousand francs to you? It would not buy the team of

horses that draws your carriage! Can you compare those to a chabine who has known no man?"

"No, I cannot. I will pay the thousand francs, but not at once. Tonight I will pay you a hundred. At the end of the week I will pay another hundred. Thereafter I will pay a hundred every month for eight months. This will be on two conditions. One of them is that you pledge yourself to stand by your bargain."

"I swear it by the Blessed Virgin, without whose intercessions for me to Bon Die, I would soon be carried off by zombis, or brought to pain and sickness by the quimboiseurs." She gazed upon the holy image in its tinseled box, and made the sign of the Cross.

"The other condition is that Clio come willingly. You must ask her in my presence. Ask only that she come every day but Sunday and feast days, stay as long as I require, and pose for as many paintings as I desire."

"What is the good of that?" Coraline asked, in a tone of strain. "She's my daughter and must do what I say."

"You must do what I say, if the deal is to be made."

"Missie, you are taking the risk of losing her."

Coraline called, "Clio," in a sharp tone. At once the daughter of this house, this hovel, returned with her long, soaring stride. She might have been carved by Pygmalion, then touched by the hand of Midas, then brought back to life by Aphrodite with the gold still on her, Denis thought wildly. Actually this flight of fancy was a trick of his mind to try to dispel or to ignore his gathering anxiety. The room changed with her entrance, his world changed, he himself was changed.

"Stand before our Blessed Mamma," Coraline ordered.

Clio did so, her long eyes cast down.

"My daughter, will you go every day except Sunday and feast days to Missie's house and let him paint your picture? He will pay you three francs a day, give you your meals and your leavings to take home, and buy you sweet clothes and jewelry of pure gold?"

Clio considered carefully, then a lovely expression stole across her face.

"Will he paint me sometimes wearing a hat?" She meant, Denis mused, as opposed to wearing a madras, the standard headdress of a colored Creole. White Creoles—pure French people born on the island—and a few children with Creole mothers and white fathers were said to be "raised in a hat."

"If you wish," Denis answered.

"Why, then," she went on in a sweet, childish voice, "I will."

6.

When the hour he had named drew near, Denis could not refrain from standing by a window overlooking the street. He would not want anyone to see him doing so—to catch him at it was what he meant—and that caused him to think how countless had been his acts which he would have kept more secret than any moral lapse. All concerned the maintenance of face. Show me up as a knave, O Fate, but not as a weakling or a fool! Perhaps many men suffered from the same infirmity of the soul, but some men were more proud than others or more hard-bitten.

At twenty minutes past the hour she had not showed up. He had begun to feel sick and to talk to himself and curse, when the sun picked out Clio's golden skin from a multicolored group of Creole girls. Rather ostentatiously, he thought, she turned into the garden gate used by all his servants. Moving quickly into his dining room, he heard her knock on the kitchen door.

"How goes it with you, *che*?" he heard her ask the kitchen maid. "I am Clio, who has come to help Missie make a picture."

"All goes sweetly with me, *che*," the maid answered. "I am Honorine."

Denis retired quickly to the cool, green court. Clio came in shyly, directed by the maid, and gave him a childish smile. No doubt she was wearing her oldest and most worn dress—by her mother's direction, he thought. The chemise was low-cut, the sleeves elbow-length, the skirt caught up in the front, and any garment underneath became unthinkable. The very drabness of her apparel accented, as though by design, the rich color and gloss of her skin.

"*Bon jour, che*," he greeted her, good manners in a gray-haired man addressing a Creole girl.

"*Bon jou'*, missie."

"Please sit down. I wish to look at you a moment or two, without speaking. I must see you very plainly, if I am going to paint a good picture."

She nodded and sat on an iron bench. He had thought her position might be awkward—but he might have known that awkwardness was as impossible to this islander as to a golden pheasant. He gazed at her with studious intentness, with as little emotion as he could manage; while her eyes wandered about the court.

They were long eyes, not black like most Creole eyes, with a little more brown in the iris than in her skin, but still suggesting gold. The lashes were long and silky, characteristic of Creoles, and her thick hair a rich sable. He had seen Arab girls from North Africa, and he was struck by their similarity

of feature with this chabine. Yet he could not call her a Semitic type; only the bold cast of her face, especially as seen in profile, recalled his mental image of Scheherazade and Rebecca. Her forehead was narrow and retreating; the lips were peculiarly inviting, being quite full; more of their inner surface was visible than in most European mouths, they were of pale-rose color, and had a childish, sweet expression. He had seen very ancient figurines found in Asia Minor, Crete, and Thrace whose faces and forms resembled Clio's. Oddly enough, although slim, with no accent on breast or womb, most of these were supposedly connected with fertility cults.

He was dreaming. . . . He had to get back to the artist's business, which is seeing what light reveals. Her neck was long and slender. Her breasts, clearly outlined by the pull of her bodice, were well spaced and had the classic upward and outward thrust; however, they were too large to suit Denis' sense of proportion. Her torso looked long only when not compared with her long, tapering legs and arms and wrists and hands. Still he was not certain of their symmetry.

He perceived she had a wonderful muscular structure; he did not doubt that she could carry a hundred pounds on her high head all day. All this spelled beauty, unique and strange. He could no more deny it than deny the beauty of Gauguin's Tahitians. Even without her incredible skin tones, she could be a model all but unsurpassed in the studios of Europe. That fabulous gift of the sun had increased his luck to the point where it frightened him; it was too much for the gods to give any artist in good faith. There must be some stipulations in writing too fine to read.

He said silently to himself in complete earnestness:

"All I ask is to paint her as she is. I don't care how long it takes if I succeed. In any case, I'll paint her as long as I live, and need no other subject. A thing of beauty is a joy forever."

7.

Denis had bought a handsome madras of canary-yellow silk during his early morning walk. It was in a paper bag that he had cunningly left on a table at one side of the court; and Clio's roving gaze had stopped there, as might a child's. Now he asked her to fetch it.

"See what it is," he proposed, when she had flown there, and flown back.

At her first peep into the bag she began to beam. Then, as she took it by the corners and held it up, he was troubled more than touched by the

happiness in her face. It was disproportionate to the occasion. It was too pure.

"It's yours," he said. "Take off that old headcloth and put it on. I want to see how you do it."

Her hands flew. He could not follow all the motions of the swiftly moving fingers, but he noticed, as any artist would, that always their lines became part of a clean curve. In a moment the kerchief was in place, one corner poked through and sticking up.

"The table with the box of ferns has a looking-glass top," he told her. "See how you like it."

She did so, nodding to herself, and making some whispered comment. Then she sped back to her seat.

"Thank you, missie. It is beautiful."

"I'm of the same opinion, *che*. Now talk to me a little. How old are you?"

"The mamma told you. On the fifteenth of August, the Feast of the Assumption, I will be sixteen."

"Is your papa alive?"

"I don't know. I think so."

"Your mamma spoke of him as being the color of cane juice. Did you know his mamma and papa?"

"I have seen them. His papa was a white Creole, who is dead of La Varette. His mamma was a pale-colored Creole."

"What of your mother's parents?"

"Her papa was a Chinese who kept a food shop. Her mamma was an Indian woman, with long straight hair. She is dead, too, of the cough, but my mamma's half-brother is alive, the one called Atlas, the last of the Caribs. So there is no black man in my family."

"It would be no harm, if there were."

"Many of the black men are quimboiseurs," she said, a little shame-faced.

"Who do you think gave you your golden color, Clio?" Denis asked.

"I know who gave it to me, the Bon Die." Then she came forth with a remarkable utterance. "Bon Die gives every Creole in Martinique her own color, her own alone, and it is never quite matched except, perhaps, by a full brother or sister, and then only if they love each other very dearly, and each wishes to see herself in the other. When every Creole is born, Bon Die whispers in her ear, 'You differ from all the rest. I have made you so as a

special favor.' Well I remember when he whispered it to me. I was still unwashed, and the cord had not been cut, and it stopped me from crying. And so it comes to pass that we Creoles may groan and sigh, and of course laugh and sing, but it is hard for us to weep. We must have our hearts broken, before we weep, and then we howl more than we shed tears."

"I believe that's true."

"And Bon Die gave his special care to us alone. He did not give it to the Creoles of St. Vincent, or St. Lucia, or even of Guadeloupe. The girls are pretty—but some are like peas in a pod."

"I will do my best to paint you just as you are."

"I would like to see it. And when you are finished, missie, can the picture talk?"

"Who ever heard of a picture talking!"

"I don't see why not, if you can do magic. The quimboiseurs have sticks that can talk. They are called pain-sticks because, if their masters wish, they can touch you with the stick and cause great pain, lasting seven days, seven months, or seven years. Once when its master bade it, one of them spoke to me. I held it to my ear and its voice was very faint, as though it had come a mile on the wind, but I understood."

"What did it tell you, Clio?"

" 'Some day an old man will give you a gold necklace.' "

"I am an old man, by your thinking, and it may be I will give you a gold necklace, but I am not a magician."

"I am glad of that. Maybe you are a Protestant. If so, you can't go to heaven when you die."

"I'm not a Protestant."

"I'm glad of that, too."

"Now I'm going to the shops to buy you some clothes. I know your size to the centimeter. While I am gone, you may look at everything in the house, except the things in my studio; that door is kept locked."

She thought this over—showed signs of alarm—was tempted to speak—then spoke in a rush.

"That makes me think of a wicked one I have heard of. His name was Barbe-Bleue."

"You think I may be he?"

"Your beard is not blue—it is like ripe cornsilk, and it has not been dyed. I can see a few white hairs."

Perfectly charmed, reluctant to leave this astonishing child of the sun, he asked her to tell him the tale of Bluebeard. She did so, with Creole embellishments. His real name was Père Labat, and his beard had blue lights in it, and he had lived before the Big Wind of Missie Bon. This mamma had married him, and gone to live in his manoir, and one day when he was taking ship for St. Vincent, he had given her his keys. This mamma could go in every room but one; that one she must not enter, lest her heart be dried up like an old sponge. When this mamma had searched through all the other rooms, a great itching came upon her to go into the forbidden room. She did so, and there were seven dead mammas hanging by the hair of their heads, and the breast of every one had been cut open, and the heart taken out for Père Labat to eat. *Tambou*, she could hardly walk or speak, so afraid she was! Then Père Labat came back—he had gone only to St. Lucia—and he said he would beat this mamma like a lambi until she was dead, then cut out her heart and eat it. And she had only an hour to confess her sins to Bon Die.

Clio had grown big-eyed and her voice faltered so that Denis had to urge her to continue.

Well, without stopping to pray, this mamma sent her sister, named Annaline, to the roof of the manoir. As the time drew near for the beating to begin, this mamma called, "*Che, che*, do you see anybody coming?" And that mamma answered, "I see only *les porteuses* walking in step." Then in a minute, "*Che, che*, do you see anybody coming?" "I see only a one-legged man who was bitten by Death-in-the-wood." Then, as Père Labat was getting out his club, "*Che, che*, do you see anybody coming? For the love of Bon Die, look well!" "Yes, I see a horseman riding fast."

"And, missie, that horseman was this mamma's brother, and he snatched the club from Père Labat's hands, and beat him like a lambi, and would have killed him had not the club broken in two."

"What happened to Père Labat after that?"

"He wailed and groaned, and a good Father heard him, and, thinking he was about to die, went into his house to shrive him. But there was much life in Père Labat yet, and much wickedness, so the good Father made him confess. 'Père Labat,' the Father said, 'you have committed seven thousand sins.' Truly, he had committed seventy thousand, but the good Fathers never find out how sinful sinners are, and make the number too small. 'For each seven sins you must kill one fer-de-lance,' the good Father said, 'and that means you must kill a thousand fer-de-lances before you can go to heaven. Moreover, you must kill them on the top of our Mountain, for that is the nearest to heaven of any place on Martinique, and the Bon Die doesn't want any snakes up there.' So Père Labat began climbing the mountain every

night with a lantern and a club. But the snakes hid from him and in ten years he had killed only a hundred, penance for only seven hundred of his seven thousand sins, then he fell off a cliff and was killed."

"So that was the end of Père Labat."

"Oh, no, missie! His ghost came to the good Father, and said, 'Can I go to heaven now?' 'By no means yet,' the good Father answered with a stern face. 'You have got to do as you were told.' So almost every night you can see a light, like a little candle, moving on top of our Mountain. That is the ghost of Père Labat, still hunting snakes. And now Missie had better go to town, or the shops will be closed for siesta."

Denis departed, perfectly content to let Clio finger his treasures, having found out that almost none of the proud Creole race will beg or steal. He caught himself taking a sharp pleasure in buying madras kerchiefs, embroidered chemises, skirts, and scarves for a Creole girl of such-and-such dimensions. He bought lavishly of bright colors, each of the seven complete outfits wrapped separately. Even Hippomenes racing Atalanta had sense enough to throw his apples one by one.

On his return, he produced none of the packages, promising Clio a surprise tomorrow. Although it went against the grain, he thought best to have her eat lunch with the Creole house servants, while he ate in lonely state; and it was no comfort to him to hear her joyful laughter from the kitchen. In the afternoon he took her to his studio, upon which she made a cheerful remark. "I am glad, missie, not to find seven mammas hanging by the hair." She was going to be a constant bringer of the unexpected, Denis reflected.

Clio found something else that affected her profoundly. These were the four wood carvings that had stood in the corners of his dining room in Paris. Denis was watching her as her sweeping gaze first took them in, then as it darted back from one to another in astonishment and consternation. He felt a start of excitement at the response of this primitive-minded woman, nursed on the earth's breast, to these ancient and primitive expressions of the universal mind. It was more significant, he thought, than the response of any artist or connoisseur or anthropologist.

"What are they, Clio?" he asked quietly.

"Conjure," she answered.

"Have you ever seen anything like them?"

"Yes, missie. My mother's half-brother, who is called Atlas, brought me to see a stone pillar with a rounded top. It was in a cave under the cliff, and he said the shamans used to go there to make medicine."

“What about the round one?”

“I have never seen one—except as toys for children that the old people used to make.”

“Taken together, do you know what they mean?”

“I can’t tell you, but I can draw it with a pencil.”

“Take the charcoal pencil and draw it in my notebook.”

In one swift sweep of her hand she drew a triangle enclosed by a circle.

“That is right, of course,” Denis said, gazing into the face of this remarkable living sculpture, a face at once innocent and terribly wise. “What do you think of the carving of the girl?”

“I don’t like it. I know who she is. She still lives on Martinique—many have seen her, and a few lived to tell of it, although they were never the same. She is a tall black woman who walks the roads. Her arms are stiff at her sides when she stands still and swing when she walks. She carries her head like a swimming snake, and her eyes are always fixed on the sun.”

“Why does she not go blind?”

“Because she is a kind of zombi. Men follow her, with an awful aching. Finally, at the edge of the cliff, she turns as if to kiss them, and then she fades away, and they rush on and tumble down and die.”

“What is her name, Clio?”

“I don’t know her name.”

And this, he believed, was the first lie she had told him.

“Why did your mother’s half-brother take you to the cave?”

“He said if I would do such-and-such, I could become a conjure woman.”

“You didn’t wish to?”

“No, I wish for the care of the Blessed Mamma, and for Bon Die, and to go to heaven when I die.”

“What do you make of the ape riding the elephant?”

“It makes me feel queer. It means—I don’t know what it means.”

“Try to tell me, Clio.”

“I have seen an elephant in the circus brought from France, and many monkeys. That elephant did not have as big ears as this elephant and she was a mamma instead of a papa. This little monkey makes this big elephant pick fruit for him. This papa elephant is very strong and wise, and this monkey is weak and silly. Yet he—she—it—makes this elephant go where he doesn’t want to go.”

“Stand just as you are, Clio, for just a few minutes. I wish to put something in my notebook.”

But she saw his hand moving, his eyes searching her deeply, and she gave way to self-consciousness and her glowing, rhapsodic face set in discordant planes. He had been wrong about her incapability for awkwardness. His work was cut out for him.

8.

After Clio had gone home, as Denis was finishing dinner with coffee and liqueur, his valet, Simeon, answered the doorbell. The personable Creole youth returned looking visibly agitated.

“Missie, he is a big, dark man, part Indian, part Negro. He said to me, ‘Tell the rich Frenchman that the last Carib will speak to him.’ He did not give his name and he need not. He is the one called Atlas, the greatest of the quimboiseurs, and a half-brother to Clio’s mother.”

“She spoke of him today,” Denis replied thoughtfully. “Although she implied he was some kind of magician, not long before then she had spoken rather disdainfully of quimboiseurs.”

“That is the way of the girls of Clio’s class. The good fathers told them quimboiseurs belong to the Devil, but they take up with them just the same —as long as their magic works. Clio pretends she is ashamed of her half-uncle, Atlas, but truly she loves him and is greatly proud of him.”

“If he is waiting, I must see him or tell him I’m engaged. What do you think, Simeon? You know the country better than I.”

“See him, missie. His bark is always worse than his bite, still he could make trouble for you in getting Clio.”

The Creoles were inclined not to mince words, Denis was thinking, and their patois lent itself to plain speech.

“Very well.”

Atlas was shown in, and Denis was instantly taken with his muscular development and his brooding dark eyes; even on this call at a gentleman’s house, he carried his machete.

“I am the last Carib brave,” he announced, as Denis gave him a polite greeting.

“You said as much to my man, Simeon.”

“Truly, I did. I speak of it too often. Who in the world cares but myself? But you say, ‘my man, Simeon.’ How does it happen he is your man?

Because you give him a jingle's worth of silver coins a month? Thank God, I am no man's man. And is my niece Clio your woman?"

"She is a child. Also, she is to be my model. That is the only answer I care to make."

To his amazement, the somber face lit with mirth and the resonant voice broke in laughter.

"A child, you say. She is nearly sixteen and more wise than Madame de Staël and George Sand put together. You wonder that a Carib quimboiseur should have heard of them let alone read their books, but that is because you yourself know nothing about human life. And in that ignorance have you ever painted a picture that I, Atlas, would hang on the wall of my hovel? If so, I have never heard of it. Your model, you say. Before there can be a model there must be a painter, such as Gauguin, whose paintings I have seen and which tore my heart. You see no truth; how can you tell it? You are a *dilettante*. I will tell you what Clio is. Your intended prey. She is a beautiful woman of a beautiful race, and you tell yourself you wish to paint her, when your real desire is to seduce her."

"Monsieur, I shall not listen—"

"Do not move from your place, monsieur. In one flick I could behead you with my machete. You have no defense against me. I would be sent to the guillotine, but that would be only a short cut to the Great Open, where I would join the other Caribs whom the French slaughtered two centuries ago. Do you think I would bargain for my life, when all it does is alienate me from my tribe? I would like to live until my Mountain speaks, as surely she will speak. But I will pay no fee of heart's desire; I will hear her voice wherever I have gone. Monsieur, you stand very close to death."

"Put me there if you dare." Denis' face had flushed, his sunken eyes glittered, and his whole aspect was one of defiance and belligerence. "Now you have threatened me, strike, if you are a man. But you are a rascal and a fraud!"

Atlas stared at him in amazement. Then he gasped, "*Tambou!*"

"What is that?" Denis snarled.

"Monsieur, it is only a drum. It has a deep voice like me. No, I will not behead you, painter man, for truly you are a man, and I will shake hands with you if you wish."

Almost no civilized man could refuse such an offer, and Denis was highly civilized and French besides.

"Moreover, I will have no objection if you take my niece for your mistress," Atlas went on after their handclasp. "She is going to have a lover

before long—unless the sun quits shining in our island sky—and you would be good to her and provide for her well. Nor will you likely cast her off, because she will still be young and beautiful when you are aged. No, monsieur, you need give no thought to her seeming childishness. You could not take advantage of it if you tried. She would be more than a match for you, or I do not know the Creoles."

"I have no reason to think she would become my mistress," Denis said, fascinated and perhaps half-charmed by the cadence of Atlas' sentences and the roll of his deep voice. "But I thank you for your consent."

"Move slowly, and do not frighten her, and all will be well. Obtaining her, you may obtain much more. Then what will befall you on the day of retribution? If you have been kind to the niece of Atlas, Pelée, my mother, will want to be kind to you. Show Pelée's majesty and beauty in your pictures, painter man—she will like that. Now put your hand on the handle of my machete. Do you feel it throb?"

"I could almost think I do," Denis said wonderingly. Of course it was only the throb of his own pulse.

"Here or there in my wild words I have foretold truth. That is the sign. Put faith in my Mountain and in me. And although I have come in like a lion, I go out like a lamb, as the French say of the month of March. *Au revoir*, monsieur."

He was an odd-looking lamb, with his dark visage and great strength and glittering blade. When the door had closed, Denis laughed loudly, half at the extravagant comparison, half in happiness he need not attempt to probe.

9.

Denis' progress in painting Clio was snail-slow. That did not worry him in great measure as long as there was any. He found that she would stand, docile, as patient as a cow waiting to be milked, when he sketched only her hand or foot; then by stealing glances he began to get hasty drawings of her facial features. Whenever he bought her a new garment, she spent half an hour examining it in the most minute detail, and at such times she almost managed to sit still. Thereafter she frequently fell into a reverie, a waking trance, during which she sat quite motionless.

His best trick was to get her talking about her beloved island, and especially its demonology. The morning following a midnight visit of a zombi to her house—she had seen her as plain as her hand before her face—she replied so volubly to his slow questions that he worked nearly an hour

before she became conscious of his rapidly moving pencil. In what form did the zombi appear? She appeared as a woman twelve feet high. Bah, the walls of the room stood no more than eight feet; did she walk with a stoop? No, the ceiling opened in front of her head and closed behind her. How did it happen that the zombi did not take her? Because the moon shone in the window and glinted on the little image of the Blessed Mamma, and that caused the zombi to take fright. What other zombis had she seen, or had anyone else seen? There followed a wide-eyed excited recital.

On another day she told him of the Big Wind of Missie Bon. It had come on an August day when her great-grandmamma was nine years old. Her name was Zabette and she had known a big wind was coming because of the sea birds flying inland, and the chickens hiding, and the animals stomping, but she had no notion it would be the greatest wind that Bon Die had ever sucked in his breath to blow. The sea was a terrible steel-gray with purple spots like the back of a fer-de-lance until Bon Die began scooping it up and throwing it, and then it was as black as a black-boned hen.

Now Missie Bon was a wicked man. When he whipped his slaves, he made a pickle with peppers and lemon and vinegar and poured it on their flayed backs. Once he tied a young mamma on an anthill, because she would not sleep with him, and the ants stripped her bones until they were clean as a cane fork. When he saw the big wind coming, he went into his house, and boarded all the windows, and braced the doors. Some of his slaves wanted to go in with him, for they had no *cabane-des-vents*, but he would not let them, and kicked and pushed away even young mammas with babies on their breasts. They heard him laughing as he brought out the big demijohn of rum to drink during the storm, for he cared no more for the Devil than for Bon Die.

"What happened after that?" Denis asked, as he plied his pencil.

"The Big Wind blew for seven days and seven nights," Clio answered, big-eyed. "It couldn't blow down the stone houses of Saint-Pierre, because their walls are two feet thick, but the wooden houses broke into little sticks, and the *grand bois* lay like cut cane. Now the house of Missie Bon was also stone, with walls three feet thick. But a great gust of wind came down from the sky, with live chickens whirling in it and parts of houses, and cows and horses, and it sucked up the house of Missie Bon from the ground like country soup from a bowl. After the wind blew itself out, some slaves who had not been killed went to look for Missie Bon. His house was gone, the furniture was gone, Missie Bon was gone; nothing remained in their place but a little black kitten with red eyes. As the slaves crossed themselves, the cat winked one of her red eyes and then she too was gone."

Denis had tried offering Clio cheroots to smoke as she posed, thinking they might lull her and make her daydream. The result was a quite surprising outburst of what appeared to be indignation and outraged virtue. She did not smoke! If her mamma caught her smoking, she would beat her like lambi! A smoldering cheroot was like enough to burn the house down and leave her and the mamma burned hard and black as a maize cake fallen on the coals! A girl with a cheroot in her mouth was ugly. It made her smell worse—

"Oh, shut up, Clio," Denis ordered, as he tried to draw an upper eyelid.

Clio fell silent in deep surprise, and Denis felt rather pleased with the domination until he saw her hanging that beautiful head. Then he must go and get her a pretty crimson chemise, one of his dwindling store.

The cheroot incident was curiously reflected in another passage between Denis and his contrary model a few days later. It came about through a proposal made by Simeon, Denis' valet, an alert youth of a handsome pale-brown hue known to the Martiniquans as *sopota*. He had become loyal to Denis in a deeper way than his other servants and took an earnest interest in the progress of the painting. Denis had mentioned to him the difficulty of getting Clio to remain tranquil before his easel. Evidently Simeon had given much thought to it, for, while deftly shaving his master, he remarked modestly:

"Missie knows the stir in the city, especially among the housewives, when a *bom*-ship comes into port?"

Bom-ship was the Creole name for an American freighter, the *bom* evidently referring to the big metal containers of provisions, especially canned goods, which American merchants traded for rum and sugar, and was possibly an onomatopoeic word representing their noisy falling on the dock.

"Yes," Denis replied.

"Besides food, the *bom*-ships bring tobacco made to chew. It comes in big twists and cakes, mixed with sugar and licorice in a way we islanders do not understand, and it is sold here by the Chinese shopkeepers. Not a great many of our people use it, preferring cheroots, but some do, and these become most attached to it, and will spend their bread money for a fresh supply."

"Well?"

"Among those who love it best is Clio, Monsieur's chabine."

Denis sat quite still, in respect for Simeon's razor, but he felt a little shaken.

"Is it true?"

“Surely, missie. Her grandfather was a Chinese shopkeeper and he gave her some when she was six years old. Now it comes to me if Clio could chew tobacco while Missie paints—in truth she does not move her jaws, only stuffs a little under her lip—she would sit quietly and be content as a babe at the breast. But if Missie buys her some, be sure to have a spittoon handy.”

“Thank you, Simeon. It may prove a very valuable suggestion.”

Denis lost no time in sending for half a kilo of a popular brand. This he left conspicuously on a studio table. Clio discovered it within five seconds of her entrance—almost tardily, Denis thought, considering the usual swift and comprehensive sweep of her long eyes—and continued to glance at it as might a child at candy. After he had worked a few minutes he went to the table, cut off a piece, and, turning his back to her, put a small part of it in his mouth.

He returned to his easel, with Clio watching him hungrily. In a few minutes the little comedy he had staged moved to its climax.

“Pardon me, *che*,” he burst out. “Perhaps you would like a little share in my treat.”

“What is it, missie?”

“It’s tobacco, prepared in America for chewing. It is said to be good for the teeth. Would you care to try it?”

“I don’t mind.”

He gave her his knife and moved the spittoon in her easy reach. The venture proved an unqualified success. For an hour he worked without interruption while Clio sat motionless, a faraway look in her eyes—except for an occasional sudden movement of her head as she turned and spat with the accuracy and almost the speed of a pistol bullet.

Before the plug was used up, Clio had become so accustomed to posing unconcernedly that no tranquilizer was necessary. However, he occasionally gave her a supply and knew that she bought a good deal. How she managed to keep such a clean mouth and sweet breath remained a mystery that he never solved.

Meanwhile a great problem remained unsolved, as to how he could capture on canvas the fullness of her golden beauty.

Of the immortals of his times that Denis knew well, only Paul Cézanne eschewed, as far as possible, nude models. His reluctance in employing them remained a curious idiosyncrasy of this enormously complex and gifted artist. Many of the great sketched the naked forms of their subjects before they clothed them, to the betterment of painting them in simplicity

and depth. Denis needed this help in painting Clio—but it was not all his need. The rest he did not probe.

He had tried to prepare her for the experience. Always he had spoken casually, setting the time a little further on; she had never raised any objection nor yet given him the least hint that she would comply. In the fifth month of their association, he decided to face the issue. Some weeks had passed since he had given her a gift, and he knew she was beginning to pine for something new; if this were taking a base advantage of an Arcadian girl it could not be helped. One day he laid aside his brush and spoke.

"Clio, go behind the screen and undress. I want to paint you naked."

She did not move or speak.

"You heard me, didn't you? When I made arrangements with your mamma, we agreed on this. It's only so I can paint a beautiful picture. Stop sitting there and do what I say."

She rose and very slowly walked behind the screen. But when she had been gone ten minutes—and she could have stripped in two—he went to look for her. She was sitting on a stool he had artfully provided, completely clothed, and completely calm.

"I was going to, Missie, but I couldn't."

"I haven't all day to wait. Let me see you start undressing. If you won't, I'll have to do it for you."

With aggravatingly slow movements, she removed her headdress. Denis perceived that the whole aspect of her face was changed, and there came a mingling of excitement in his heart. Then her hands dropped in her lap.

"I warned you." He moved toward her and began to pull up her chemise.

"I'll do it. Go on out, missie, please. I promise by Bon Die."

Denis waited ten minutes more. Then Clio emerged, still dressed, hanging her head.

"I wanted to—and I tried—but my clothes stuck to my body," she told him in plaintive tones.

"Oh, damn it."

"I will talk to Mamma tonight, and if she says I may, tomorrow I'll take off every stitch and let you make a picture."

"Very well, then. Go home now. Here is a whole franc to buy your dinner. Don't come back until you are ready to obey my orders."

She stood twisting her fingers, and if she had not been so young, tall, wistful, and so strangely beautiful, he would have liked to slap her.

“Missie, will you lend me enough money to buy a new charcoal pot?” she asked. “It will please my mamma, for ours has cracked from the heat.”

“When will you pay me back?”

“You can take it out of my day’s wage. They cost five francs.”

“Very well. Here are five francs.”

“You promised to buy me some white satin slippers, and you never—”

“No, and I never will. I like your feet bare. But I’ve changed you from a ragmuffin to the best-dressed Creole girl on your street. Have you ever heard of Cinderella? I suppose not—”

Her eager expression arrested him. “Who was she?”

“She was the stepdaughter of a wicked woman,” Denis began, happy enough to talk and repair a breach that might be widening. “Cinderella had two stepsisters who were cruel to her. They made her work her fingers to the bone, and when the Prince was going to give a great ball to choose a wife —”

Clio broke in with a low, mellow peal of laughter.

“Missie, her name was not Cinderella. It was Cendrillon, and she lived in Saint-Pierre before the Big Wind of Missie Bon.”

“I didn’t know it.”

“Well, she did, and she was a chabine, like me. Do you know what she wore, when a blessed angel brought her clothes to go to the ball? Her madras was orange and purple, in big squares. Her chemise was crimson with gold embroidery and lace, and her skirt was crimson too. What do you think she wore in her turban? Gold pins that trembled in the sunlight. Her shoulder scarf was gold-colored silk, fastened with three gold brooches. And she wore gold earrings and many golden bracelets—”

“Clio, how would you like to have me give you a pet name?” Denis broke in.

“I might like it. I don’t like Clio very well.”

“Then I will call you Cendrillon, except when others may hear.”

“I like it very much.”

“Now go, and come early tomorrow, and maybe there will be a little surprise for you.”

She went out beaming, and Denis took himself happily into town. The crimson skirt and the gold-colored scarf proved easy finds; an orange-and-purple kerchief of heavy silk turned up in an Armenian shop; he had almost despaired of discovering a crimson chemise with gold lace and embroidery when he found just what he wanted on the shelves of a Cantonese importer.

He need buy no jewelry except three pins that "trembled in the sunlight" for he had in store gold bead necklaces and bracelets and Creole-style earrings which now and again he had let his model wear.

He spent an absurdly anxious night—absurd, that is, in a man of the world of fifty. But when he saw her floating through the garden gate he felt no shame; he only wondered what in the devil in this life was truly sensible.

"Missie Dan!" she greeted him. This no doubt was as near as her tongue could hit upon his first name, and she meant it not as a familiarity, rather as an expression of friendship and respect.

"Have you had your breakfast?"

"I had coffee when I woke up. But you said to come early—"

"Then you shall eat in my studio, at the little table."

Simeon brought fruit, fish bearing what looked like fingermarks and called God-touched-me, baked yams, and maize cakes. Clio ate heartily with sweeping movements of her long arms until suddenly she stopped with a childish, "I've had enough." And now he must put the fateful question.

"Well, what did your mother say?"

Clio cast down her eyes. "Mamma said I must do what you tell me, and that you're old enough to be my father, and there's no harm."

By fast work on the part of all concerned, in the Martiniquan fashion, he could be her grandfather, Denis mused. But aloud he said, "Are you going to obey her?"

"Missie, I will try." She spoke doubtfully.

The time had come to play his high card. One by one he unwrapped his purchases and displayed them before her enraptured eyes.

"Are they gifts for me?" she asked, her beautiful throat working.

"They are to trade for the clothes you have on. The old things are to be put in my hand, and I will keep them an hour, while you stand before my easel. If at the end of that time they have not been blown out the window by the Big Wind of Missie Bon, I will give you the Cendrillon clothes to keep always."

To his relief, Clio laughed. "Missie, I've told you that big wind blew when that mamma, my mother's grandmamma, was nine years old."

"Is it a fair trade?"

"Yes, Missie Dan."

"Do you wish to go behind the screen?"

“If I did, I would start talking to myself, and become afraid. I will take off the old things here, with your eyes on me. What does it matter?”

Denis rose and locked the door despite the fact that his servants had been instructed never to open it or even to knock while he was painting. When he returned, Clio had already taken off her headcloth. Rather slowly, almost ceremoniously—as some ancestress of hers might have disrobed for a heathen rite—she pulled her chemise over her head and hung it on a chair. As her skirt dropped to the floor, Clio’s bashfulness fell away like an invisible garment. Her eyes did not meet Denis’—they almost never did so in any exchange—but they were quiet and limpid and lovely, and her countenance was tranquil.

With her arms at her sides she opened her hands, not in any entreaty or vanity, but as if to tell him, “Here I am.”

She was there, but what was she? Denis realized with a great start that he did not know. No two people are alike, and hence some of them must come close to the border of some other order of being. Can beauty alone bring about a sea change? Not spiritual beauty—this he did not understand—but earthly beauty?

This beauty was of the earth. It could be the beauty of Eve, of Artemis, or a young Carib squaw. He had seen “divinity disrobed,” or what had seemed its like, on a stage in France and in a studio in Italy; in each case it had been almost flawless; here there was a suggestion of disproportion, perhaps in the too-long limbs and wrists and hands, in the breasts too generous for this lean torso. But he had never seen beauty so moving, and so elemental.

And she was a chabine! He looked again, with artist’s eyes, at her golden skin with its strange metallic high lights. It seemed to him that he could truly say he had caught a nymph. No, he had not caught her, he could only look at her and try to paint her. And then a curtain was drawn aside within his own brain, and a thing that had been true for many weeks, that had been coming into being since he first laid eyes on her, was revealed to him like an unveiled picture. Atlas’ charge had been partly true. Denis craved to possess Clio for himself alone. He must paint a great picture of her, but before that, essential to that, he must have and hold her, her body and heart and soul. In all his life he had never known such consummate desire.

But it is the way of the nymph ever to escape.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Doctor and the Nobleman

1.

MEMBERS of the faculty of the Law School at the University of Paris were frequently invited to address Paris schools of medicine on the subject of medical jurisprudence. Early in the year 1898, the Director of the Law School saw fit to return the compliment and so invited the President of the Academy of Medicine to speak to the law students. This distinguished doctor was Baron du Ville, and some of his hearers remembered that he had played a part in a case of some renown, resulting in the exile from France of a physician, Claude Griffon, who had given a patient a fatal dose of poison.

Although austere-looking, Dr. Du Ville made an oddly intimate and moving speech. His theme was the fallibility of all men as discovered in the close relationships between doctors and patients, how both were subject to grievous mistakes, and often these mistakes led to the dark side of the law. He seemed to be asking these lawyers, prosecutors, and judges of the future to be as lenient as their consciences would allow in their dealings with the unlucky, the unlawful, and the unwise.

"Many men have regretted dealing punishment," Du Ville said in conclusion. "Very few have regretted granting mercy. We wish it were a Frenchman who had written the greatest invocation to mercy ever penned by modern man. Instead it was an Englishman, although the whole civilized world claims him for its own. The lines are familiar to all. Since they were given to us in a trial scene, they should have a special meaning for students of law."

And then the Baron quoted, in superb French translation:

> Though justice be thy plea, consider this,
> That in the course of justice none of us
> Should see salvation: we do pray for mercy,
> And that same prayer doth teach us all to render
> The deeds of mercy.

Among the throng of students that went to the rostrum to thank the speaker, Paul Barteau walked slowly and in last place. Of all who had heard the speech, perhaps he was the most astonished by it. He had never forgotten meeting Paul Griffon in a waterfront mughouse, and talking to him, over a bottle of wine, about Martinique. Yet this distinguished academist had been the one to make the unmerciful decision which had banished the erring doctor from continental France. Having followed the newspaper reports of the case, Paul recalled this fact perfectly clearly. Only a visit to some of his Normandy kinsfolk that summer had prevented him from paying a call on Dr. Griffon and offering his condolences. All the indignation he had felt then at what seemed to him a miscarriage of justice had returned in force as he heard this man of great name and fortune and success prate of mercy which he himself had refused to give his fellow physician.

Paul did not know what to say to him, although he felt surely he must say something.

"I took a deep interest in your address," Paul began when the other students who had come up had passed out of hearing.

"Thank you," Dr. du Ville answered. "And may I ask where you are from? You speak excellent French, but it's somewhat softer than Parisian French, and I can't recognize it."

"Monsieur Doctor, I was born and raised in Martinique."

Paul knew that Griffon had taken refuge on the island, and he wondered if its name would have any effect, visible or invisible, on Baron du Ville. Suddenly Paul realized that, by pronouncing it, he need say no more; that the question in his mind would now be answered, and the issue was far greater than he had thought.

"Did you say Martinique?" the Baron asked from a tense throat, his face turning gray.

"Yes, sir, I did."

"Then you may have heard of a late immigrant there—an immigrant from Paris whose name was blazoned in the press two years and some months ago. Monsieur, did you come to charge me with hypocrisy? I saw something in your face—I see it now."

"No, monsieur. I did not know what I wished to say to you. But I had met Dr. Griffon and knew of the accident and its consequences."

"Then perhaps you knew that he was the real subject of my address!"

"No, I could not know that."

"If you had charged me with hypocrisy, how could I have answered? I was not guilty of it today—I spoke from the heart if a man ever did—but had I not been guilty of it before? When I made that harsh decision, did I do so for the good of the profession—for sound medical reasons—or was I flattering myself—taking advantage of my position as the President of the Academy? Dr. Griffon made the promise I had asked—he quit his practice among the poor—much of it without fee in our charitable institutions—and took ship for Martinique. And since then I have been taught a bitter lesson."

Paul looked at the pale highbred face and waited. By no means could Dr. du Ville stop speaking now.

"I too administered poison by mistake. Only by the greatest luck did I save the patient's life. I too was going to drop my practice—what else could I do in honor?—until a woman—and a priest—persuaded me otherwise. I wrote to Dr. Griffon, begging his forgiveness and asking him to return to France. The letter was returned unopened."

The doctor's anguished look changed to one of sadness as he regained his calm. "I am sorry. I was overcome, monsieur—"

"Monsieur Doctor, I am deeply grateful for your confidence. My name is Paul Barteau."

"Will you be returning to Martinique before long, Monsieur Barteau?"

"It is known as the Land of Returnings. And when I do, may I seek out Dr. Griffon, provided he is still on the island, and tell him what you said?"

"It would be a great service to me and in some measure, I hope, to him."

"Then I will."

Paul returned the doctor's bow and watched him walk away, amazed at him, almost as much amazed at himself. On the spur of the moment he had said something he had not intended and had dwelt upon only vaguely, and until that moment had not known was true. As soon as he won his degree in law he would practice among his own people.

2.

It need surprise no one that Dr. Griffon did not receive Baron du Ville's letter despite the excellent island mails. A guerrilla fighter against yellow jack, he and Ruben were always on the move.

This prolonged war of attrition, which made great demands upon Claude's health and strength but little by little was bringing to light the enemy's long-guarded secrets, cut both men off from anything like a

civilized existence. They ate what they could scrape up, slept where they could stretch out, wore what they could find to wear, and spent Claude's income and ate into his small capital buying disinfectants and medical supplies, and paying bribes. Claude no longer worked with the medical society of Saint-Pierre. Partly this was because he lacked the time, partly it was his increasing attitude of secrecy, a withdrawal from all human society except yellow fever cases, as might come upon a miser with a chest of yellow gold. He did not want other doctors inquiring into his activities.

Always he feared they would discourage him, and sometimes the guilty thought crept into his brain that they would divine his discoveries and beat him to the prize. He did not want to meet them or to listen to their talk. This same frame of mind kept him from ever opening a medical journal. As is true, of course, with all men of such intense dedication, he went a little mad.

Yet his methods, if makeshift and often bizarre, remained thorough and true to the scientific spirit. To be convinced that yellow fever was spread by a single species of mosquito, *A. Calopus*, was not enough; to wipe it out in Martinique was not enough; he must prove his contention before the world. Happily the cases in Chaude Oree again took a mild form, so he did not set about killing the wrigglers in the village water tanks; this action would come later, near the end of the war, after he had proven that the disease could not be contracted by other means. To this end he attended every yellow fever case on the island that his paid spies reported. He went to exhaustive lengths to sterilize clothes and bed covering, and to keep track of every person who came near the patient. Not once did any of these become infected unless there were wrigglers of this species in water tanks, utensils, and even old shards. If the house of the afflicted was isolated from any other, he always dug up a recent case somewhere up the wind, in mosquito-flying range. When he reached the patient very early in the attack, and wiped out the mature mosquitoes and larvae thereabouts, no cases developed among the nurses and far-gathered kinsmen, nor was there a follow-up in the near vicinity.

After three years on the island he had arrived empirically at what he thought was the cycle of infection. From one to five days after fever first rose, a mosquito of that species, sucking blood from a capillary, could become infected with the germ of the disease. Not until twelve to fourteen days later could its bite transfer the germ to another person. Again there was a delay of from three to six days before that person fell sick. Thus, by a direct route of infection cases could occur from sixteen to twenty-five days apart. These facts caused him to contemplate a daring experiment.

It remained in the back of his mind until, visiting the village of St. Joseph to investigate what proved a gallstone case causing a jaundiced skin, a field hand from the vast De Legle plantations not far away implored his help. He was a very dark Creole named Christophe about fifty years old; and, at first glance at him, Claude became almost certain he could not help him, except to allay his pain. That Christophe might help Claude was as yet the merest glowworm of an idea.

Christophe's face and body were puffed with dropsy, his breath was short. He complained of severe back pains and frequent vomiting; the urine was scant, dark, and contained a large amount of albumen, casts, and blood corpuscles. It was obviously the final phase of Bright's disease. Christophe had not long to live.

"I will give you laudanum to ease your pain and settle your stomach," Claude said, his mind turning over fast.

"Bon Die bless you, Missie Doctor."

"I can do no more for you."

"That I know. I will soon be among the *maun-mo*."

"Christophe, would you run the risk of a quick death for a generous sum of money?"

"Missie, I would do it for nothing, for my soul to be rid of my body. Except that I fear the fires of hell, I would enter the woods alone at night and prod the fer-de-lance."

"No, I would pay you a hundred francs. If my plan prospers, I will send a cart for you."

Ideal conditions for Claude's experiment came about very shortly, with a case of yellow fever developing at a small settlement on the River Capot. Claude's careful search of dark corners and smooth surfaces disclosed several mosquitoes resting, their bodies parallel with the board and with proboscises at an angle with the thorax. This and their general appearance persuaded Claude that they were *A. Calopus*.

After carefully counted days, when his patient had passed the crises of a light attack, Claude asked him and his household to move for a few days to a kinsman's house nearby, explaining that he wished to wrestle with the voodoo that had caused the sickness. As soon as they were gone, he sent a cart driven by Ruben to the Manoir De Legle. He was to speak to Christophe, and if he were still willing to accept a night's perilous employment with his master's consent, he was to come at once.

The time drew near for the cart's return. Then he saw it coming down the road with only one occupant, preceded by a handsome landau drawn by

a tall team of bays. On the raised front seat rode the coal-black driver and footman, while under the hood sat a tall, lean man, with a faintly yellow skin and beautifully planed countenance. Although Claude had never seen him, he had no trouble identifying him. This was De Legle of Manoir De Legle.

The landau stopped at the garden gate, the doctor hurried out, and the two men exchanged bows.

"Dr. Griffon?" the Seigneur asked.

"Yes, monsieur."

"Doctor, may I come in? I would like to discuss the matter that you broached to Christophe."

"Monsieur, I would be very happy to have you do so. But I must tell you it would be dangerous for you to enter those rooms. There was a mild case of yellow fever not long ago, and I have reasons to believe in the possibility of contagion."

"By your leave, I will enter them anyway. I've entered a good many Creole cottages during and soon after sickness. I'm not in the least afraid."

"Very well, monsieur."

Claude showed him into the little parlor and to a chair. There seemed a good deal of tension in his visitor's face. He did not know what it meant.

"Doctor, Christophe told me you had offered him a hundred francs to pass a night in this house, warning him that he would run some risk to his life. Of course I assumed it was a medical experiment of some kind, for the good of humanity. Since then Christophe has had access to a supply of opium and no longer suffers pain, although he's failing every day. Also, he has begun to dwell a good deal on religion and he feels he should do nothing that might hasten his end, and instead should leave his calling to Bon Die."

"That is quite understandable—in fact, to be expected."

"Yet you look disappointed, Dr. Griffon."

"Pray pardon me. Conditions seemed right for my experiment, which may not occur again in the near future."

"Doctor, I came in person instead of sending a messenger, because I wish to make a request. It is simply to take Christophe's place in your experiment."

"Monsieur! Surely you are not in earnest."

"I never speak lightly, Dr. Griffon. Alas, I've never learned how. One of my great congenital handicaps, as far as getting along in the world is concerned, is too great earnestness. Please consider my petition."

“Monsieur, you dumbfound me. You, of all people on this island, the wealthiest, the highest born. You look no older than forty-five—”

“Forty-nine. I have a daughter approaching twenty-one. Also I’m in perfect health. I think that may be a factor in your experiment.”

“It is, indeed, monsieur, and one that gives me pause. True, all the cases of yellow fever I have seen lately have been light. But no doctor can promise that the next case won’t be severe, quite possibly bringing the patient to an ugly death.”

“Very rarely is death beautiful—in itself I mean—although we must assume that it brings peace. Suppose, doctor, that Christophe had accepted your offer, received a heavy infection, and had died. Would it have furthered your efforts to fight yellow fever? Do you feel that mankind would have been served?”

“Whether he died or got well, it would have furthered my efforts. I believe—I hope—mankind would have been served.”

“You don’t appear to me either incompetent or fanatical,” the De Legle remarked. “In fact I’ve heard of your competence from my friend Dr. Nogret. So I repeat my request.”

His eyes had fixed on Claude’s, and they seemed to him to hold a yearning as great as that he had sometimes seen in the eyes of patients begging to be saved. It did not appear to make sense. Still he could not believe that this quietly spoken aristocrat, with the beautifully molded countenance, was in the least deranged. Claude wiped the sweat from his forehead.

“I don’t see how I can expose a healthy man in the prime of life—”

“Let me remind you, doctor, that a mere lieutenant must, in battle, expose the lives of men in the flush of youth for causes far more doubtful than the cause you serve. Happily that wasn’t true of our side in the Franco-German War. I look back on those two years as the most significant in my life. Isn’t that reason enough for allowing me another term of service?”

“I think—I believe—I will say that it is.”

“Then do you agree, Dr. Griffon? I’ve come prepared to spend the night, as you instructed Christophe.”

“God grant that I’m doing right, I agree.”

He had rarely seen such relief on a human face; when he had, it had usually happened suddenly, when a patient went free of pain.

Claude did not tell his guest and helper his theory of the transmission of yellow fever. He felt that he should, and started to over and over, only to veer away. In these years of labor, lonely except for Ruben's company and help, working with docile Creoles, the habit of secrecy had become fixed. For all the Seigneur knew, he was being exposed merely to the scene of an attack, with perhaps curtains and carpets and the recesses of the beds contaminated. However, it seemed that he might guess part of the truth from Claude's provision of having them sit together, without light, in the gathering gloom.

Ruben scoured the market for the best edibles it afforded, and served a late, substantial supper. Lacking wine, Ruben had proposed that he stir up a pitcher of cocoyage—a pleasant, strong punch made of coconut milk, egg, sugar, nutmeg, and gin. Claude declined, on the wild chance that alcohol in the blood might in some fashion prevent infection. Such theories were commonly put forth in regard to many maladies; occasionally by physicians, sometimes by topers, a good excuse for several rounds of punch.

The De Legle did not appear to need a stimulant to be a delightful companion. Indeed, Claude could not fail to observe the high spirits of his guest. He talked fluently, although of nothing current, nothing very close; in discussing the island he dealt with its long-ago history, such as the massacre of the Carib Indians by the French, the great hurricane that had probably spawned the many legends of Missie Bon, and the wars with the English. From thence his talk ranged back to medieval France and the great days of the Valois. He loved the Charlemagne cycle of romantic myth, and especially the *Song of Roland* and the part played by Morgan le Fay.

"What time is it, monsieur?" Claude asked at last.

They were sitting again without light except from the moon pouring in the windows. The Seigneur held his repeater to his ear.

"Eight minutes after eleven."

"Then we had better turn in. We shall sleep in separate rooms, and your bed, though a bit hard, should be fairly comfortable. May I ask that you sleep naked except for moresques?" These last were loose calico pantaloons, a Creole night garment adopted by most French as being cool and comfortable on hot nights.

"I have a pair in my bag."

"I should like the night air to reach as much of your skin as possible. Of course if you get cold toward morning, you may pull up the sheet."

"I don't think I'll get cold here."

“If you brought a mosquito net, I’d rather you wouldn’t hang it. It would cut off the night air.”

“I will not do so. Doctor, this has been a very pleasant evening. I shall see you in the morning.”

Claude went to bed haunted by anxiety and self-doubt. Had he done right in exposing a man of this eminence to a serious, often mortal disease? Yet philosophy told him that the exposure of a field hand of the same age and health would pose exactly the same moral problem. Claude was too highly dedicated to believe he had done wrong; whether he had been wise was, as the French say, another pair of shoes. If the worst happened, and the word got out, he might be forced to quit the fight in Martinique, and what under God would he do then?

He thought of taking an ounce or two of gin to quiet him, but, resolved to run the same risks as his helper, he refrained. Shortly after midnight he dropped into troubled sleep.

Soon after that, it seemed, he was questioning the Seigneur at breakfast.

“Did you sleep well, monsieur?”

“Much better than usual, doctor.”

“Were you bothered by mosquitoes?” Claude controlled his voice well.

“I heard them singing a few times, a little different song than sung by swamp mosquitoes. It seemed to have less of a metallic twang. I had several bites that itched a little, and in fact slapped one persistent biter. He stuck quite greedily to my arm while I lighted the candle. He was of a small species I don’t remember ever having seen.”

“Did you apply lotion?”

“No.”

Presently the Seigneur was ready to take his leave. In a rather flurried manner Claude gave him final instructions. If within six days, he should have a chill and develop fever, he must send for him at once.

“I hope it won’t happen—” Then Claude paused, for he did not know—before his soul, he didn’t know—if he were speaking the truth.

“If it doesn’t happen, will it not mean that your experiment failed?” the De Legle asked quietly.

“It will be evidential of something in either case,” Claude equivocated.

“I like to have things go. So I’m inclined to hope otherwise. Good-by, Dr. Griffon.”

Claude passed three days in anxiety. Then Ruben rushed in to tell him there were riders on the road. They dashed up—a young lady on a

thoroughbred horse and a Creole groom riding one horse and leading another. Claude went staring to meet them. The girl was tall and highbred and beautiful, and sat her horse well. She had something of the Seigneur's manner of stillness. Despite her pale face, she spoke quietly and firmly.

"I'm Joan De Legle. My father, the Seigneur De Legle, has come down with fever. He ordered that you be sent for, and no other doctor."

"I'll be ready in a moment, mademoiselle. My bag is nearly packed."

It contained, Claude remembered, his microscope, a few medicines, stimulants, chemicals used in simple laboratory tests, and his stethoscope. He had only to add a few garments and toilet articles. He came forth, rumpled and flurried, and put the bag and a long black coat in the groom's charge. Cutting an odd figure in the eyes of the Creole onlookers, although they could not have told why, the flushed, stocky man rode awkwardly but well enough. Joan set a fast pace and a white froth of sweat appeared on the thighs and flanks of the horses. In a little under an hour they gained the palisade of Manoir De Legle.

Within the big, cool villa, the most impressive Claude had ever entered, he asked to wash before he saw the patient. Although a valet brought him his frock coat, he did not put it on. The lack gave him a vague feeling of nakedness, akin to that so often known in dreams, but it was true in a sense, he did stand naked before the gods, and there was no use trying to fool them. With his satchel in his hand he followed the servant to the closed door.

Lying on a high, Empire bed in a magnificent chamber, the De Legle turned his head slightly and gave Claude a dim smile. But the doctor perceived more than that. It was an instantaneous and vivid picture of yellow fever. The disease must have progressed with shocking rapidity. The look of the face was completely characteristic—haggard, flushed, the eyes red as a ferret's. As he walked swiftly nearer he noted the red lips and nostrils.

The Seigneur spoke in a husky murmur.

"Good day, doctor. Joan, will you please leave the room a little while? The doctor will want to make some tests."

Joan spoke in sharp urgency. "I think Dr. Griffon should call in Dr. Nogret for consultation."

"Please do as you're told, Joan. The other will be settled later."

Joan ran out, and Claude thought she might be crying. The Seigneur's lips curled in what might be, what looked like a triumphant smile, and that would be infinitely stranger than a daughter's tears.

"Doctor?"

"Yes, monsieur?"

"Is it a good clear case? You know my skin is naturally the color of cane juice. Are you sure of the diagnosis?"

"Perfectly sure. That shade of yellow is unmistakable. I'll make those tests now. Actually there are only two that are important."

Claude took the samples that had been saved and his equipment into the bathroom. His pale face turned gray, his eyes beady, and his brow wet as detail after detail became plain. There was a great deal of albumen in the urine. There were hemorrhagic signs of evil import. When he returned to the chamber, the patient was vomiting a clear fluid, but it would not be clear long. The dread "black vomit" of the yellow jack that precedes prostration was not far off.

"Will you administer a stimulant, doctor?" he asked when the spell had passed. "I have something to say."

Struggling to beat off dreadful memories, wanting to hide his face, Claude gave him a spoonful of nux vomica.

"I feel better now. Doctor, I must ask a question, bitter though it may be for you to answer. Is this a severe case?"

"Yes."

"Do you think I'll recover?"

"I am obliged to tell you that it's doubtful. The signs are bad."

"Well, I don't care. I tell you so for what comfort it may be to you. You never had a more indifferent patient. As to what slight leanings I have, I'll call them negative."

This was high fever speaking, and made more voluble by the stimulant, but Claude could not doubt that it spoke true.

"I don't understand you, monsieur. Unless you fight to live, you will almost surely die. While you took the risk of death to help humanity—and God knows I trust it will—still you must rally all your forces—"

"Doctor, I took advantage of your credulity. Truly I was glad enough to help you out. You are the kind of man who touches my heart—working harder than the Devil from dawn until late in the night, buzzing like a wasp on the screen, thinking, dreaming, living your great prayer, never touching a woman or finding any of the dubious solaces of existence. In respect to that, I haven't told a soul of your experiment and I never will and, since Christophe is mercifully dead, he won't speak of it either. My daughter regards my absence that night as a *sortie d'amour*. But I take no real interest

in your unequal contest with yellow fever, nor do I give two sous for humanity."

"I refuse to believe you—"

"You might as well. To me, humanity means the canaille."

"Monsieur, you have done me a great wrong. I saw earnestness—what I thought was idealism—in your face—"

"I was completely in earnest as to my desire to undergo the experiment. Believe me, Dr. Griffon! Understand that I am a communicant of the church. Under those circumstances it would have been sacrilegious for me to die by my own hand. However I've been wooing death in a chivalrous fashion since I was a stripling. I am persuaded that my long courtship has at last borne fruit."

"Will you tell me, in God's name, why you want to die?"

"Who can explain those things? I can tell you this. All my companions are dead long since—almost the last of them slaughtered in the French Revolution. Even if I had lived then, I would have been an anachronism. 'The State, it is I,' said Louis XIV. Bah, what a fool he was! The times have changed, my friend, and there is no longer a place for me. I sensed the great void in which I moved in quite early childhood; and, oddly enough, I was given a sharp lesson less than five years ago. I was taking a horsewhip to one who had breached the dignity of my house. A young peasant snatched it from my hands and laid it on me! Please hand me that slop jar."

Claude observed that the vomiting was without strain or any sobbing sound and the fluid no longer clear.

"Monsieur, do you realize you may not live through the night?" Claude asked, when the splendidly chiseled head again lay on the pillow.

"*Voilà!*"

"The disease is advancing with terrible rapidity. Will you call in Dr. Nogret at once?"

"Certainly not."

"Then I shall ask Mademoiselle to do so."

"She won't disobey me. She too was taught a lesson some years ago. Since then she has been very careful to observe my wishes and commands. I love the girl—I suppose because of her beauty—and she loves me for various real and imaginary traits. The fact remains, she'll be happier when I'm safely and securely underground. She'll become the chatelaine of Manoir De Legle in more than name. She can make certain overtures to her own times and world."

“Monsieur, have you any other children to summon to your bed-side?”

“Doctor! You imply that I’ve been careless. Actually, I have another daughter—at least I’ve been told so—but I’ve never seen her as far as I know, and she would be an anomaly in the death chamber of the De Legle. Her mother was half-Chinese, the other half Carib Indian—half-sister to the notorious Atlas, who calls himself the last of the Caribs. Still she was one of the most beautiful women I have ever seen. I gave her a thousand francs, swore her to secrecy, and declined to view the baby. You understand I could do nothing for either one. Repeated gifts of money do not help such people and tend to ruin them. Obviously I did not wish to arouse ambitions that couldn’t be realized.”

“I am old-fashioned, too, in another way. I should think you would want to see the girl before you die.”

“It would be a nuisance. However, doctor, you might like to see her, and if she is comely, take her for your mistress to brighten your old age. I don’t think you’d have much trouble finding her. She would be about eighteen, if I remember right; her mother’s name was Coraline. I have forgotten her married name. And she lived in Saint-Pierre near the Old Fort. The girl is a chabine, the gold-colored type that is quite rare.”

“I have no time or energy for mistresses, thank you very much. I have one more thing to say, monsieur, and one question to ask. If God sits in judgment, as I believe, I think you’ll want to tell him that, regardless of your motives, the experiment I made with your help was a success. To my own satisfaction, my theory has been proved. In time I’ll prove it to the world. It will sound the death knell of yellow jack.”

“I take an academic interest in ideals and idealists. Now ask your question, for I wish to sleep.”

“If the disease follows its usual pattern you will soon sink into lethargy, with subnormal temperature. It will then be too late to attend to certain matters. You spoke of being a communicant. Shall I summon the parish priest?”

The red eyes appeared to gleam in the congested face.

“Dr. Griffon, if I can’t be shriven by an archbishop, in full regalia, I’ll die unshriven.”

CHAPTER SIX

Artist in Love

1.

ENOUGH age was on Denis du Bois that he could be cautious, patient, and cunning. If, in the way of hearts, his heart desired a quick and easy conquest of Clio, and in his daydreams it sometimes seemed quite possible, his head warned him it was not to be had, and one mistake might deprive him of the prize. He resolved to complete the first nude before he moved or showed any sign of passion. That she might already know of it was possible or likely. Young untried females as well as the well schooled had antennae more delicate than Marconi's wireless to detect such activity. He was never able to breathe calmly or speak coherently when she first undressed.

He did not take pains to paint a good picture. He aimed only at an extremely pretty picture, one which Clio would think more beautiful than beauty itself. He did not let her see it as it progressed; and in a little over a week he had it almost done. On the afternoon of the last day he dawdled, to provide an excuse for her staying late. A few last touches, easy and harmless, he did by lamplight.

"When you are dressed, you can look at the picture," he told her, in the calmest tone he could manage. Actually he was in the grip of strong excitement, too charged with anxiety to be exhilarating, and instead almost painful. The clock stood at about ten, when the early-rising, early-to-bed inhabitants of the city were quieting down, when distant lights went out one by one or in sudden batches, when little noises came in the windows sporadic and faint, when the whisp-whisp on the stone streets had died away, when the murmur of running waters increased to a chatter. The big house lay in heavy silence.

His studied decision to make no advance when she was undressed had nothing to do with chivalry. He hoped tonight for only a first step, not the breaking of ice because there was no ice, but instead a barrier of air that slipped through his hands. He had sometimes touched her body in posing her, but he had talked the while, seemed very businesslike, and apparently

she had felt nothing either hopeful or discouraging to his pursuit. On the other hand, his least advance when she seemed so vulnerable might offend her or frighten her or embarrass her. Perhaps it would do none of these things.

As soon as she had dressed and fixed her madras, she came eager-eyed to see the picture. Her response was no more surprising than countless others he had seen; it merely seemed so because he had dealt with models for half his lifetime and had made a habit of expecting native exhibitionism, which persisted in his mind despite Clio's original shyness. After her first wildly startled glance, her long golden hands shot up and covered her face.

"Don't you like it?" he asked.

Clio spread her fingers and peeped through them.

"I didn't know I looked like that," she offered.

"What did you think you looked like?"

"I didn't know. I was ashamed to look into a long mirror without my clothes on."

There had been no long mirror in her life. He would like to buy her one, he thought sensuously. He would like to have her become a little vain, but not too much. Or, his canvas would be her long mirror. If he could have her, he would paint her as she was, as the light and not his own dreams showed her, and it would be one of the great portraits of his times.

"Oh, it is very beautiful!" Clio cried out suddenly, dropping her hands.

"Actually, it's a little better than I thought," Denis remarked to himself.

"Are you going to show it to people, Missie Dan?"

"A few, perhaps."

"Maybe you should paint a mask on my face, like the people wear at our carnival. Then no one would know whose naked body it is."

"That would make the body seem all the more naked. Anyway, if it's beautiful, as you say, you should be proud."

"If a good many young men see it, I'm afraid some of them would—" Her childish voice wavered and died away.

"Yes, they would want you, but they can't have you, because you belong to me."

"Don't let any quimboiseurs come near it, or any witch woman. If they stuck a knife in it, or touched poison to my mouth, I would die."

"I won't let any one see it for a while."

“Missie Dan, I didn’t know you could paint such a beautiful picture of Clio. It looks like it could talk.”

“I’m pleased that you like it, Clio.”

“But you’ll want to paint other pictures of me? Or will you only copy this one over and over, and sell the copies?”

“Why, Clio, I’ve just started. I’m going to paint many pictures of you, some naked, some with clothes on. And when at last I have painted you as Cendrillon, dressed for the ball, I’ll give you all the golden jewelry you wear in the picture.”

“I don’t mind.”

“Now I’m going to give you two little gifts. One of them is to reward you for staying late. Open your hand and shut your eyes.”

She did so, and Denis laid a napoleon on her palm. These coins were occasionally hoarded by rich Creoles and brought twenty francs. Although she had probably never seen one, she would know its value or Denis missed his guess.

“Now close your hand and open your eyes,” he ordered, his voice brimming with happiness. “What do you think it is?”

“Missie, it’s a coin.”

“What color?”

“Only an American half-dollar is as big and no—not as heavy. So could it be yellow?”

“You can look and see now, Clio.”

“Not until I show it to the moon. I must show it to the moon, Missie Dan.”

This was a corner room with a window on one side looking eastward. Clio opened its shutters and held the coin up to the rising moon and spoke in an undertone. Then she came stealing back with the look of a priestess.

“Now, Missie, many more golden coins will come into my hand,” she said.

“Now, I’ll give you another sign of my friendship for you.”

As he moved toward her quickly, she appeared curious and expectant. But she had had no idea he intended to kiss her bright and beaming mouth, for her response was dynamic and spontaneous. She leaped back, at the same instant sweeping the back of her hand across her lips.

“I don’t kiss white men,” she said.

“You didn’t kiss one. One kissed you. I told you it was a sign of favor.”

Deeply shaken, Denis managed to sustain an easy manner. He could even smile, concealing his intense anxiety. Clio exhaled slowly and grew calm.

"Then there's no harm done, Missie Dan," she said placidly. "Shall I go now?"

"Yes, you may go."

"You haven't paid me my three francs, but since you gave me the gold guinea, you needn't bother with them."

"That's very kind of you, Clio-Cendrillon." Instinct forced him to keep irony out of his voice.

"That is all right, Missie Dan. You've been kind to me too."

2.

Denis could not save himself an anxious night, broken sleep, and unhappy dreams. At breakfast he persuaded himself he had nothing to fear, but when Clio's usual time of arrival and another half-hour on top of it passed by without sign of her in the gateway or on the road, his spirits drooped and he found himself in only too-real depression. Only its first stage made him ashamed; its later stages alarmed him; he felt strangely lost. Another hour droned by. He could not read, paint, or redirect his thoughts. He kept throwing a handful of coins on the table, counting heads or tails in a complex game, the winning or losing of which would predict his fortune. He wished to high heaven that he had not acted so soon. Maybe he had given her the guinea too soon, and if he dangled it as a prize . . .

Then all at once he stopped being a moon-struck fool, his pride rushed back, and life became logical and good, for he heard the kitchen door slam. Only Clio entered in that fashion.

"Bon jou', missie," she told him, when, beaming, she found him in the court.

"Why are you so late?"

"Missie, do you know the fern that we call 'Did I amuse myself?' If you ask it that, and touch it, it will answer you. I saw one by the sidewalk, and it answered me by closing up, and that means, 'Yes, you did, you haughty mamma. You should have been at work!' But, missie, I was late getting home, and slept late, and since I would be late getting here, I thought I might as well go to a shop and buy something for my mamma."

"What did you buy her, may I ask?"

"A new madras, because I knew you'd not want me to give her one of mine that you needed to paint."

"Well, go in the studio and we'll try to make up for lost time."

She looked again at the picture, viewing it from all angles, and her eyes shone. When Denis walked to his cupboard and appeared busy with his tubes and brushes, he heard her talking to it in low, tense tones. Sometimes she nodded her head as a golden flower on a long stem nods in the breeze. He felt a presentiment of marvelous fortune.

"I think I'll do some sketching," he told her, businesslike.

"Do you want me to undress?"

"Only to the waist." That meant no more than taking off her chemise, which she did quickly.

"*Voilà!*"

"Now sit down a minute on the couch. I'm going to sit beside you and talk to you." His nerve was back in him and he spoke in dominant tones.

She did so, politely making room for him, and butter, as the English say, would not have melted in her mouth.

"Last night, Clio, I kissed you. Your mouth is very pretty and inviting. You jumped back and wiped off my kiss."

"I don't like to be kissed on the mouth, missie, even by my mamma."

"I want to do more than that," he went on boldly. "Your mother said that anything I did to you was not her concern. It is your concern, I know, but you can be sure your mother would make no objection. It would be to your advantage to make no objection, either. You see, Clio, the closer we are, the better I can paint you, and the better I paint you, the more I can do for you. I can afford to do it, then. You've been with me a long time. Now if you would become my sweetheart, I think you'd be happy under my protection, and find happiness in everything. It's true I'm a Frenchman and you're a Creole. You are young, and compared to you I am old. Sometimes such things stand in the way of pleasure; sometimes they don't. Many young mammas have old lovers in Martinique."

She was listening to him with a sober look as though hearing a lesson in arithmetic, and he got the idea that she was merely waiting. She started slightly when he paused. "That is so, missie," she said sweetly.

"Your breasts are beautiful," he said, "and I wish to touch them."

"I don't mind, Missie Dan."

He had sensitive hands, soft and smooth, and when they caressed the silky golden skin, he knew by the slow lift of her breasts from tension and

the erection of the dark-red nipples that she shared his pleasure. Being of a high order of man, of superior intellectual and emotional development, lovingly raised, he was profoundly a lover of woman, and hence particularly involved with the female breast. Then his ardor made him forget her curious injunction and his lips sought hers. At once she pressed them tight, rejecting his kiss.

"I want more than this," he whispered, in great yearning.

He thought she nodded.

"Tell me, Clio. I'll take only what you want to give."

"It's all right if you do *joujou* with me, Missie Dan." Clio employed a Creole expression meaning to toy.

When he rose and stripped to the waist, she looked curiously at his white chest, touched it lightly, and remarked, "*Élégance*," in a pleased tone. It was his first assurance that she did not harbor an innate racial antagonism. He drew her long body into his lap, her breast against his.

He wooed her with practiced art, perhaps as delightful to her as her shy, awkward addresses were to him. It was not possible for extremities of sensation to last long; and whether their consummation brought her to the heights that he knew, he could not tell. Almost at once he broke into wild laughter which had nothing to do with mirth and instead was a paean of triumph. She seemed greatly pleased by this, giving him a beaming smile. He was all the more elated from not having to face the issue of toying with a virgin. Her mother had told him that Clio had known no man, and he believed it true. If, like most Creole children in the poorer districts, the same as in Europe and in America, she had had exploratory experience, even as late as her fourteenth year, he accepted it as the civilized lover that he was.

His celebration continued the rest of the morning, without his touching brush to palette. He could not help but brag, sometimes; mainly he told her stories dear to his heart, and now and then an earthy joke that she would understand and enjoy, never a decadent one. As lunchtime drew near, he asked her if there were any dish she would especially like.

Yes, she would like fat duck, or the fish called Barrel of Wine, but anything would do. At once Denis sent for impassive Simeon. None of these edibles were at present in the larder, but how would Mademoiselle like a boiled crawfish with a foot-long tail, served with melted butter *à la Américain*? The "Mademoiselle" both staggered and delighted Denis. Simeon knew nothing, but he felt something. The way that the poor know their own kind, and especially the expert use that poorly educated people

make of their eyes and ears, and how they can smell and feel the air, again astonished him.

"When you leave this afternoon, remind me to give you some money," he told the happy child. "Early tomorrow I want you to go to the market and buy what will make a nice lunch. You pick it out; I'll be pleased to eat it, for I'm like a goat, liking everything. The chef won't be angry at you. He can buy for the other meals and the servants' lunch, and I'll pay him his usual commission on what you buy."

This afternoon Clio showed signs of proprietary interest in him. In washing his face, she said, he must not use soap; it would kill the light in the eyes. If he went walking at night, he must never enter the cemetery, for the *maun-mo* would be up out of their graves. When the cra-cra—a giant cricket—stops his cry, Missie need not listen to the little bells in his watch, because the hour will be exactly four-thirty, and then he need not fear zombis any more, because every one "goes back" promptly at four. He could drink safely from the many little stone fountains in Saint-Pierre, but when he drank from the bamboo fountains on the road, he must put a little rum with the water in his glass, because rum was made from sugar cane, which every year the priests blessed with the blessing of Bon Die.

He must look carefully where he stepped because what he thought were just two crossed sticks, or a rumple of paper, or a bit of cloth, might have been placed by the quimboiseurs. And if he met a man with red hair and red eyes, wearing a high cap, he must look carefully at his shoes, for if they were odd-looking, it meant he was the Devil, trying to hide his ape feet and two little horns. And he mustn't, without thinking, clasp his hands over his head, for that was the sign of mourning, and if there was no cold body to mourn over, the Devil would furnish one.

When in late afternoon she told him good-by, he was greatly tempted to say, "I love you, *che*." Instinct warned him against it, however, and he only wished her pleasant dreams. Arriving in the morning only half an hour late, she had quite a basket of edibles. These she showed him—sweet rice cakes on which Creole children doted, sweet pastries bought from a white-clad vendor, *di pain-mi* which were maize cakes rich with brown sugar and almonds, bright-colored vegetables and fruits, and her prize which looked like a large skinned rat. This was a manicon, she said, that carried her babies in a pouch, and they appeared but rarely in the markets, and only the rich could eat them. Denis rather regretted his boast of omniverousness, but resolved he would do or die.

"Almonds are very good for old men," Clio observed blandly.

"How did you know?"

"The mamma told me. And so are conks, she said, made into a gumbo. Perhaps they ward off fever."

"I doubt that they ward off fever!"

"Now I'll give them to the cook. Here is the tally of what they cost."

Actually, Clio had bought very economically and had earned the commission she had no doubt deducted. When lunch was served, Denis made no great progress with the greasy manicon, but his companion reveled in it, giving him lively pleasure.

She posed in the afternoon, and when Denis could stand it no longer, he stopped painting and made love to her. It was a triumph like to that of the day before, no greater and no less, for he perceived she was not nearly ready for unconditional surrender. And he asked no more at present, except, when the lovely passage was over, to ask a greedy question.

"Clio, will you say to me what you said to the fern yesterday morning?"

She caught on quickly. "Did I amuse myself, Missie Dan?"

"I believe you did. Has anything ever given you so much pleasure?"

"No, Missie Dan. And now you'd better go on with the painting. If I caused you to idle too long, you would be angry at me."

He could never be angry with Clio-Cendrillon, he thought warmly. Then he tapped with his knuckles on a wooden cabinet to propitiate the Devil.

Actually it turned out in the next few months that he was frequently exasperated with the sweet chabine, and sometimes highly irritated. She was increasingly lax about arriving anywhere near on time, sometimes offering a bland excuse for her tardiness, more often saying nothing but "I couldn't get here." When he told her she could go, she made a remarkably rapid exit, unless she had a favor to ask—usually a small loan—in which case she became dutiful in the extreme. She took the tidiest care of all the clothes and jewelry he had given her, but the things he lent her to wear while posing she left scattered about amid his paint tubes or on the floor. She had an annoying habit of leaving cuds of tobacco in unexpected places, and put at cleaning his brushes and palettes and taking care of his equipment, she was worse than useless.

She seemed perfectly happy and satisfied with their dalliance and never gave the slightest sign of wanting a closer bond. Often he thought of forcing the matter, telling himself that if he angered her and she broke away from him, he would find another model and more compliant sweetheart, but he never believed it for an instant, and when she was more than an hour late,

his annoyance turned to distraction and something like terror. Indeed there was hardly anything she could do for which her mere appearance in his door did not atone. Always she came in long-striding and beaming, more beautiful than he had dared remember her during the night.

3.

"Bon jou', Missie Dan!"

"Did you sleep well, Clio? Did you dream of me?"

"I never dream, missie. After supper I undress and go to bed and go to sleep." The unsatisfactory answer was characteristic.

"Haven't you girl friends with whom you go out?"

"No, missie."

"A great many young men must invite you—"

"No, missie."

"They don't speak to you, and tell you how beautiful you are?"

"No one tells me so but you, Missie Dan."

"I can't understand it. You're the most beautiful girl in Martinique, French or Creole."

"Perhaps if Missie would paint me as Cendrillon at the ball—"

"The slipper wouldn't fit you until we're real lovers."

Such bonds as they had, incomplete yet wonderfully beautiful to Denis, had stood ten months, when Clio asked him to give her a violet scarf. It should be of such-and-such a size and any kind of silk would do, but if it were of heavy satin, of the hue of a hummingbird, it would do best. The money he had given her she had spent helping her mamma, or she need not have come to him.

"I love to have you come to me," he answered, somewhat rashly. "When is the new scarf to be worn?"

"At our carnival just before Lent. All the girls wear violet scarves. The people come for miles around, and there are parades and masking, and merrymaking. It ends when we bury the spirit of the Carnival—it's a little mannikin in gay clothes—and then we go home and are good."

Denis soon learned that along with his entire household, the total Creole population intended to partake in this feast before the fast. The last day broke clear, with not even a cloud capping Mount Pelée. This was their

reward, the people thought, for many little offerings at the countless shrines, and perhaps the favor of Notre Dame de la Garde.

The city of Saint-Pierre was thronged with celebrants, many of them wearing plain white masks that completely concealed the faces. Denis had walked to the Rue Victor Hugo to watch the crowds, perhaps to find inspiration for a picture, and found himself caught up in the holiday spirit. He laughed at the caricatures—one of Uncle Sam, hitched with a mule and dragging a wooden cannon, another of an English dude, and a third an ingenious portrayal of the Devil himself. No zombis were represented: they were too serious a matter to the Creole mind.

Some of the illusions he did not understand—among them a body of marching boys, shouting, "Bimbolo! Zimbolo!" over and over in a primitive rhythm. Nor did he get the point of some of the jokes passed back and forth, most of them on the bawdy side. What delighted him most was the dramatic entry of a troupe of dancers, numbering two hundred or more, the men dancing backward and facing the girls. Two bands in uniform playing wind instruments and four-stringed calabash provided a wailing background for the *tambou*, the *ka*, the quarter-keg drums carried in horse carts. Straddling each of these crouched the *tambouye*, their hands beating a double roll that rose and fell and had a frantic effect upon the dancers.

"Watch him give it the heel!" someone standing close to Denis shouted in exultation. Now the drummers were pressing their heels against the skins, manipulating with one hand what appeared to be strings stretched across them, on which were fastened thin pieces of bamboo. The beat changed somehow, the whole effect became more sensuous, the dancers shouted, and the men dancing backward began to advance, lay hands on girls' hips, and in turn be clutched around the neck. Their thighs ground together with a circular motion. It was a version of the so-called *tango select*.

Then Denis got one of the great shocks of his life. The tallest girl in the row, the most beautifully cast, the one who danced with the greatest abandon, wore a white mask like the others, but her shape, her movements, and the flesh tones of her arms and legs he could not mistake if all the chabines on the island passed in review.

He stared so hard that he began to attract attention from the people about him. Then he clapped his hands and laughed, and the gorge rose in him at his own cheapness. He watched until the dancers wriggled down Rue des Ursulines to the Savane, then white-faced he turned away and worked his way out through the throng. Like a man in a trance, he found his way home.

He read awhile, with less than half his attention on the type, then listened to some old, lovely German tunes charmingly played by an elaborate music box, with tinkling notes, gongs, and little drums, fashioned in Vienna before he was born. Before nightfall his jealous anger had cooled, although he still felt weak and squeamish in the belly. The fact itself remained stubborn and objectionable, but as a civilized Frenchman he must accept the bitter with the sweet. If he had not known it, he thought wistfully, it would not have hurt him. Beyond that he knew that the word carnival meant exactly what it implied, whether in mock-service to Dionysus twenty-two centuries ago, or to a festooned king and queen of Mardi Gras on this very day. All Western peoples, even stolid Germans, must get rid of inhibitions every so often, to keep a balance between native instincts and rectitude.

As for Clio being the most abandoned dancer in the company, what could he expect of one with her beauty and *élan*?

He resolved to discuss the matter with her sensibly and tolerantly, putting himself in the father-role that he rather fancied. After making this decision, he slept well.

In the morning she came in buoyantly with no sign of darkness under her eyes, and these wondrously lighted. He waited until he had mixed his paints, then spoke in casual tones.

"Did you have a good time yesterday, Clio?"

"A good enough time, Missie Dan."

"How did you like the dancing in the streets?"

"I don't like it very well; it's too coarse. I watched it a little while, then I went to see the trained dogs. They were almost as smart as people."

"You didn't dance with the other young people?"

"If I danced one step with them my mamma would beat me like a lambi."

"Are you sure, Clio?" Denis had an inkling he should not have asked that question. He had the feeling he was getting into a cul-de-sac.

"Missie Dan, do you think I would make a show of myself before all those people? I was raised better than that. And when you're so good to me, to make you ashamed of me—"

"I wouldn't have been ashamed of you. It was the carnival. I'm not ashamed of you for doing it."

"I didn't do it."

“Clio, I saw you, and you’re making it a whole lot worse by not telling the truth.”

“I’m telling you the truth. I didn’t dance with those people. It was some other chabine—” A stubborn look had come into her face.

“It was you. You wore a green chemise and a scarlet skirt. You danced with a young man dressed as a clown.”

“I never—and I’m not going to work for you no more.”

Denis shut his mouth. Employing a common trick of mind when he was greatly distressed, he thought objectively about her speech. It was a queer thing how uneducated people throughout the Western world employed the double negative. Meanwhile she had turned her back to him and was yanking off the fishwife costume he had furnished her today and throwing it on the floor. In a bare minute she had put on her own clothes and was making for the door. There she paused, her hand on the knob.

“Simeon will pick up those things for you,” she said. “I won’t.”

“Before you go, Clio—did you or did you not dance in the streets? Be careful how you answer me.”

“Yes, I did. And I’m not going to work for you no more.”

“I’m sorry. I’ll miss you very much.”

She turned her black eyes full on his, and they were hot with rage.

“Besides that, people say you and I go together.”

“Who says it? I don’t know anyone who does. I’ve never heard it.”

“No one says it. Not anybody says it. But just the same I’m not going to work for you no more.”

With that, she flung the door open and slammed it behind her.

4.

Denis stood still for several minutes, trying to orient himself. Then he sent for Simeon and recounted the incident. “I want to ask your advice,” he concluded. “I don’t like to lose a good model unless it’s necessary.”

“Missie, I’ll tell you something about Creoles. I know, because I am one. High or low, they are very proud. If you had started scolding her quite hard, she would have hung her head and taken it as her due. Instead, you caught her in a lie. That, she couldn’t stand.”

“Well, what should I do now?”

“Nothing, missie. If you want her to come back, wait in patience. By no means send for her or go to talk to her. She knows what side her bread is buttered on, and her mamma knows too. She won’t come tomorrow—she will sulk. Remember she has had no education and, until you employed her, a very poor position in society. If you could see her as she lies in bed all day tomorrow, you would hardly know her. Her face will be swollen, and her skin will look sallow, and she won’t eat. But the next day, the sun will shine for her again, her shame at being caught will drop back into the past, and you can look for her bright and early in the morning.”

Simeon tipped his head in a graceful gesture and went out. For the remainder of that day and all the next day, time had a different gait, it seemed of different stuff, than ever before. Denis’ accord with it was broken. To his soul, which knew about such abstractions as time, it seemed inimical instead of friendly. It was not later than he thought, it was earlier than he had hoped, and when this change comes permanently, and time takes this inverted aspect, so long before he could sleep, it is a sign of evil import. It is fate’s grim and heartless tidings of a man’s defeat; he will not fall in battle but by creeping dissolution or by his own hand.

For Denis, it was only a spell, an attack he would repulse, but he knew at last beyond any doubt how terribly he was in love. Love was indeed a terror, when this was its symptom. It could be analyzed no better than rationalized. He could glibly say that he was an aging man trying to be youthful by a desperate clutch on a young sweetheart. Psychologists would charge that he was haunted by a foreboding of impotence—that he could never find anyone else to stir his passions to paroxysm. When she was in his arms he had felt whole. As a whole man, he could function, he could paint. As a fragment, he remained sterile.

The second night ended, and Simeon’s prophecy came true. There stood Clio, before his chair in the cool court, unfazed, startlingly beautiful to his eyes that could not get used to her, her eyes not meeting his because they almost never did, knowing full well that his were feasting on her, smiling a little shyly.

“I came early, missie, because there were palm-cabbage worms in the market, and quail and snails, and I thought you would like to have me buy some for your lunch before they were sold out.”

“Buy quail and snails, but no worms. And come back quickly, because I wish to paint.”

“*Bon*, missie.”

She took the money and sped away, and Denis found himself in a high state of excitement, an aching passion, and began to plot her conquest. The ripeness of the time struck him forcefully. Unless the bond between them became greatly stronger, he would soon lose her to some other man: that was the real lesson of the street dancing incident. Today she would be more compliant than usual, eager to please him, herself warmed by her return after an unprofitable absence.

Denis wasted no energy on romantic attitudes. He was dealing with a factual situation of vital importance to his life's success. He considered what approach he would make to Clio, trying to decide on the most hopeful, and at once he realized it must not be alien; it must be in accord with her upbringing as a lower-class Creole girl, it must seem as natural to her as the orgy of the street dance, it must not embarrass or estrange her. Otherwise he believed it would fail.

He remembered how they had sometimes romped. Almost all wooers do so, while swimming or on picnics; it has been a tacit form of courtship since the race began, and many children know no other form. He had enjoyed its sensual excitement and also the demonstration of his greater strength. He had found that if he dug his fingers into her ribs the contest lost all semblance of equality; her shouting laughter ceased and she slid to the floor, helpless in his grasp. That might easily derive from a subconscious desire to surrender.

When she returned, he asked her to pose nude. As she started to undress, he began the game, and it reached the same point as before. Rough and forceful as she had never seen him, against his chivalric training although natural in his need, he no longer tried to conceal his intent nor did he gentle its attempt. It was not an attack. She understood that perfectly well; she could resist if she desired; to her it was courtship of a kind she could understand and which put Missie Dan on a plane where they could meet man to woman. If the gap of their years had caused a barrier, it disappeared. As he was holding her down with one arm and one leg, and snatching off her clothes and his own, she offered only a token resistance. Then abruptly she lay docile.

This docility persisted until close to the end. If Denis' mind were open and clear instead of in storm, he would have perceived that it had a ceremonial aspect, a sign of submission to her lord, some of which signs appear in Creole marriage customs. She turned her lips away from his; otherwise she was compliant. At the very last her nostrils flared, the cords of her throat grew rigid, and she arched her body against his.

He did not laugh loudly and wildly as after their previous love-making; he was caught up in solemn happiness. Clio was soon her serene self. “Excuse me, missie,” she said sweetly, and went out the door. Denis wondered what would be her first remark when she returned.

“Missie, I’m hungry,” she announced. “Isn’t it almost lunchtime?”

“First, we’ll have a cocktail as do the Americans.” Anything American usually appealed to Creoles. “Get some ice.”

The ice had been brought by ship from icehouses in New England and was something of a luxury in Martinique. She watched absorbedly as he mixed Dutch gin and French vermouth kept in his cabinet, and she rubbed her finger on the frosted shaker. But when he handed her the glass, she touched it gingerly to her lips, made a face, and set it aside.

“I don’t like it. A little rum is good with water from bamboo fountains—or sometimes with syrup in a punch. I’ll drink some *vin ordinaire* at lunch.”

“Instead I’m going to open a bottle of champagne.”

“That would be good.”

When the wine sparkled in his best glasses—deep and narrow instead of bowl-shaped as was lately the fashion—he could not conceal his elation. It was more than that; the truth of his victory was breaking on him rapidly now as well as its degree; at last he could hope to win all. All meant her love, for him alone. He remembered what Coraline had said about Creole girls giving their hearts to their care-takers. That was a common thing between Frenchmen and their Creole mistresses. He gave way to exultation.

“Clio, does your mamma own the little house you live in?” he asked.

“Yes, Missie Dan.”

“How did she get the money to buy it?”

“Her father gave it to her about the time I was born. He was a Chinese shopkeeper who had saved his money. It was a thousand francs, she said. Soon after that he went back to Canton.”

“It strikes me that house is not a fit place for you to live. Tell your mother tonight that I want her to sell it. With what she gets for it, I’ll put enough to buy a more suitable house. It will be bigger, and on a better street.”

“Would it have a room just for sleeping?” She drew a long breath.

“And one just for sitting, with a good breeze, and a small room for cooking and eating.”

“I wonder what Rena will say, when she sees it.”

“Who is Rena?”

“She’s just a girl. She’s stuck up because her lover works in the post office. I tell you, Missie Dan, she’ll turn green as a grasshopper and curl up and die!” Clio laughed happily.

This was plainly one of the roads to Clio’s heart. He intended to travel them all.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Paul's Return

1.

THE Mountain had not changed. From afar it looked purple, but of the same noble shape, of the same dominance over the rugged island. As Paul's ship drew nearer, it took on its familiar violet hue, and the city of Saint-Pierre appeared as a mosaic in many-colored precious stones. His emotions remained in his good control. He was glad to be off duty for these final hours of his voyage, for the picking up of one landmark after another gave him great joy.

So soon, now, he must face the future. He and his three mates had already talked over their hopes and plans. Albert Potier had saved enough to start a small printing and engraving shop. Fez, who had gone from Les Halles Centrales to a sugar importing business in Paris, meant to seek a job in a cane mill. Roland de Foss, still with the Department of Roads and Bridges, had obtained a transfer to Martinique. Paul had brought his books and his framed license to practice law, and being native-born he should do well. As far as he knew Joan was in Martinique, but surely she had given him a magnificent dismissal; and although he had accepted her parting gift, he could not let her go. As the city rose like a city of myth out of the sea, Paul was haunted by a sense of moving fate.

The Pearl of the Antilles had lost none of its beauty. He went ashore with his friends and smelled and touched it, and tasted it when he drank the good Gouyave water pouring from a lionhead fountain in the angle of a wall. It still seemed an Atlantan city, the place of a long-lost dream. Men of bronze color with sculptured bodies rolled casks and carried loads; peddler girls of every tint that was beautiful walked like Artemis and cried their wares; naked godlings played in doorways; and feet went whisp-whisp on the stone and the runnels sang. Although he looked prosperous—almost the gentleman despite his burly shoulders—no child begged a sou; and when he had spoken—"*Bon jou', che*"—to some especially lovely Creole girl, she knew him for the island's own.

And as over the city Pelée loomed in majesty, he could not help but think of a small grassy hollow near its crest, a lunch with wine, a hawk flying, a little whistler bird piping its tune, and a loveliness he could recapture only in dreams.

He had not heard from his father for about three months; his mother could not write at all. Denis du Bois, who had lent his good offices in a financial arrangement between Paul and a nameless benefactor, had sent him no word since Denis' arrival in Martinique. The fund had been renewed monthly, as regularly as the flamboyant blooms in the island summer, until at Paul's graduation he sought out a trust officer of the Banque de France and told that courteous gentleman that the term of the contract was now over and he could accept nothing more. Now the thought came to Paul to seek out Denis and talk to him, but on second thought what did he have to say to him and what questions to ask? So when his companions had had a day or two to settle themselves, in his direct fashion Paul hired a horse cart and started up the road toward Domain De Legle.

Tension mounted within him as he began driving past the far-flung cane fields, although still not in sight of the villa. At last he had something to do with that great house, a matter of right and moment, although he did not in the least know how to go about it. He put the matter by and worried about his parents. The immediate cause of his uneasiness was seeing one field in which the cut cane had been left too long and had started to ferment. He knew this from its color and smell, and he could not get it off his mind, for such neglect had been rare indeed in former days. Birds singing, flowers in riotous bloom, butterflies reeling in their jerky flight, and hummingbirds flashing in the sun remained a verity of the island, a glow in the heart.

When he saw a wagon heaped with cane moving slowly up the road, he forced his lazy horse to a jolting trot to meet it.

The driver was a fine-looking Creole youth of twenty, and in his face there was something familiar, an echo from long ago. Suddenly he raised his voice in a shout.

"*Tambou!* It's Missie Paul!"

"And you're Felix, who came running down this road to tell me the Seigneur was in sight! By the good God, how you've grown!"

A shadow passed over Felix's face. Paul could not guess what it meant.

"Felix, is my mother all right?" he asked, holding his voice tight.

"She is very well, missie. I saw her in the yard not an hour ago."

"And my father?"

"This minute he is laying out a coco-field beside *Mains froides, amour chaud*."

"What a wonderful name! I'd almost forgotten. It's just a brook, yet it has cold hands and a warm heart!" Paul stopped suddenly and stared. "But there's something wrong. What is it?"

"Don't you know, Missie Paul? I thought every one in the world knew! The Seigneur has gone to heaven." The youth broke into tears.

Paul could only sit still in the cart seat, caught up in wonder, disbelief, and dismay. The land seemed the same, but it was not the same. He himself was not the same with the De Legle gone; the feudal system of the manoir had wrought upon him to that degree. Although at times an inimical force, it had been at other times a sustaining force. No one can chop away the past, whole nations cannot do so. The De Legle had seemed one of the verities of his existence; he was more free, but the future seemed more uncertain.

Paul felt that his chance of having Joan was no better, and it might be worse, now that Seigneur De Legle was in the ground.

"How did he die?" Paul asked.

"They said it was yellow fever."

"Where did he catch it? There's never been any that started around here."

"I think it was put on him by a quimboiseur. All the people say so."

"What quimboiseur? Do they have any idea?"

"They believe it was the one called Atlas, the last of the Caribs. It is true he came here, some months ago, and the Seigneur talked to him in the office at the depot, and the storekeeper heard the Seigneur laugh at him, and saw Atlas go away with a stormy face, muttering to himself. Why did the Seigneur laugh? It must be that Atlas tried to make him pay money for something. Now, with the Seigneur dead, Atlas has talked to the people, and told them not to enter the Field of the Mamma Snake, for he has poisoned it, and some of them believed him. Missie Barteau led a lot of us there, and we cut the cane, but the legs of some of us swelled up, and the rest wouldn't go back to load the cane, and, since we are shorthanded, it has lain too long and has spoiled."

"I saw the field from the road. What then?"

"Missie de Grotte, the chatelaine's cousin, had been appointed to carry out the Seigneur's will. He sent word to Atlas that he would shoot him if he came on our plantations, and we haven't seen him since."

“Thank you, Felix, and tell the people not to be afraid of Atlas. He can’t hurt them, unless they’re afraid of him.”

“Yet the Seigneur was not afraid of him—and the Seigneur is among the *maun-mo*.”

“He died of yellow fever. My two little sisters caught it in Fort-de-France and both of them died. I will see you soon again, I go now to see my papa and mamma.”

The distance that had narrowed and disappeared between the cart and the cane wagon began to widen again, and that was the way with every joining, Paul thought.

His parents rushed to the gate to meet him, and his mother wept, while his father turned red in the face, and his own throat filled. To his great joy, they remained unmarred by time. He went into the well-loved rooms, and sat in a chair almost as familiar as his own body while Marie Barteau brought forth a cordial made from the delicious four-stoned Martiniquan cherries. Jean Barteau asked as to his well-being and the weather of his crossing.

“Our letter missed you,” Jean said during a slight pause, “but I guess you’ve heard what happened.”

“Yes, he’s heard,” Marie broke in. “I can see it in his face.”

“We knew you had some trouble with him,” Jean went on. “I was going to leave my position, but Mamma asked me not to, till we heard from you. You never told us, so we never knew.”

“There was provocation on both sides. Do you know where he caught yellow fever?”

“Not on the plantations. He sent that word to the hands. There were no other cases here; the nearest previous case was at the Capot River mill.”

“Did he have Dr. Nogret from Saint-Pierre?”

“No. He called in a doctor who came here after you left—Dr. Claude Griffon. Dr. Griffon makes a specialty of yellow fever cases. I think he’s trying out a new treatment. If so, it didn’t work on the Seigneur. One day he fell sick, and in three days he was dead.”

“I’ve met Dr. Griffon in Paris.”

“If I fall sick, I don’t want him.”

“We’ll remember. How have things gone since, under Monsieur de Grotte’s directorship? Felix told me about Atlas.”

“As for Monsieur, he is a very pleasant gentleman, easy to get along with. He doesn’t interfere with my work or with the operation of the distillery. He makes regular financial reports to the chatelaine.”

Paul ached to speak, feared to speak, and compromised by waiting a moment more.

"I think that Seigneur was disappointed that Monsieur and the chatelaine didn't marry," his father went on. "They were only third cousins and have always been warm friends."

"You spoke of the chatelaine," Paul remarked, and only Marie saw the strain in his face. "If Joan ever married, you didn't write about it. Maybe you wouldn't have, anyway. Has she married?"

"No, and no one knows why."

"She'll be twenty-one this coming August."

"That's right," his mother said.

"Where is she at present?"

"At the manoir."

Less than half a mile, as distance is measured.

"Well, Mamma, when you've given me something to eat, I'm going to pay her a call."

While Jean looked deeply troubled, Marie's pleasant face remained calm.

"I'll give you a good, big dinner as though you were still growing," she said.

Paul's silver watch said five as, walking, he approached the barricade. The last time he had entered the grounds it was by the garden gate; this was the first time in his life he had entered the main gate. He gained the portico and used the ancient bronze knocker. At once the door was opened by a liveried servant.

"*Bon jou'*, Missie Paul."

"*Bon jou'*, Leopold. I wish to see Mademoiselle. Is she in?"

"Wait a moment, missie, and I'll see."

He left Paul in the vestibule, no doubt his orders as to callers of dubious or involved standing. Paul did not mind in the least being midway between the outdoors and the inner sanctums, to either of which he could readily move. He had repressed if not conquered the main of his excitement, now that his presence here was an indubitable fact; and as he sat in one of the straight-backed ebony chairs, ancient, uncomfortable, and canonical, he was mainly wondering why Joan was keeping him waiting. It was her nature to bestir herself promptly; and she would not likely be changing her dress unless she had happened to be lounging in a Chinese blouse and moresques. Paul decided she was sitting before a mirror, conferring with herself.

After about fifteen minutes, Leopold returned.

"Please, missie, come into the *salon*."

Paul nodded and followed him to the door. It opened and closed behind him; and he found himself in a large well-lighted room, equal in magnificence to any he had seen in Europe. The parquet flooring was probably of native woods, of more varied color than would have been possible abroad; the designs were Creole, the refinement of the work no doubt Parisian. The walls seemed of island mahogany, elaborately carved, with panels of leather embossed in gilt; the richly molded ceiling bore scenes of Creole life, charmingly painted. The furniture seemed of the buhl type, somewhat heavy for the island climate and richly inlaid with shell, ivory, silver, exotic woods, and, in some pieces, plaques of Sèvres porcelain.

Paul took it in with one comprehensive sweep of vision. Then he looked at Joan, standing by a chimneypiece, perhaps copied from a fireplace in the Château De Legle on the Seine; it was a façade that had never felt flame. She, though, was native to the island, real, solid as well as tall, and had felt fierce flame.

"I'm not trying to belittle you, Paul, with this monstrosity," she said. "The idea was to build myself up."

He looked closely and critically. The great wonder was, to him, that four and a half years had gone by. She was dressed very simply, wore only gold jewelry, and her sable hair was heaped high. Thus she called attention to the exotic—it would be called so in Paris, although it was native here—facial structure, flesh and bone refined in the furnace of the sun. Her body remained long and spare; her eyes had the shape and softness and sadness of Creole eyes; he would have known the sensuousness of her mouth if he had never kissed it almost to heart's content. Her complexion seemed a deeper olive than he had thought; he had seen and been stirred by so many pale Parisians.

"Why should you feel any need of building yourself up, Joan?"

"I suppose to try to maintain the same elevation over you that I had—or imagined—before you went away. I wasn't always sure of it even then. Now the potential that I perceived in you is beginning to be realized. I don't know what you've done. I spoke to your mother two or three times, and hinted, but she wouldn't open her mouth. You told her not to."

"Yes, I did."

He spoke very calmly, considering the wild rush of his thoughts. *I don't know what you've done.* Why should forthright, usually honest Joan go to these lengths in a pretense of guarding an open secret? Who could know

better than she what he had done, when she had provided the wherewithal? Her face was a study he could not follow.

"You must have done a good deal, or you wouldn't have come so brazenly to the front door," Joan went on. "If you haven't, I'll have to ask you to leave and come in the postern door."

Joan was playing a game—that seemed perfectly clear—she had always loved to gull him—but this game was deeper than most. Paul decided to fall in with it for the time being.

"I'm not sure that I qualify, Joan. You can judge better than I. I hold a degree in law and license to practice."

"I can hardly believe it."

"Why not? You remember I was a fairly good student."

"Well, in that case, you are within your rights. Professional men always came in by the front door. That was my father's ruling, in respect to the universities. Of course you know he went out by the front door—feet first."

"I heard it, and was sorry for you."

"Yes, I needed him a great deal—as a prop, a citadel of faith. It doesn't seem to be quite possible that he could be dead—perhaps the last of the *ancien régime*. Of course you found out that they don't exist any longer in France. The Creoles say he was killed by the last of the Caribs; it would be a poetic rounding out, and I wish I could believe it. De Legle of Domain De Legle shouldn't be felled by a germ, any more than an elephant should be felled by a bullet."

"You inherited too much from him for me to have much hope of winning you," Paul said sorrowfully. Then, in deep thought, "I wonder what you would have been without this." Paul swept away all the room's magnificence in one gesture. "What if the seed from which you sprang had been lodged in the womb of a Creole woman? What if you were born in a mean street in Fort-de-France—even in Saint-Pierre? I suppose he would have provided for you—"

"I suppose he wouldn't—but go on."

"Would you be at all the same?"

"If the aristocratic hypothesis is true, I would have been very much the same. You know what happens when a pure-bred hound is bred to an enterprising cur. The long pedigree prevails and only an expert can tell that the pups are bastards. Of course if you keep it up—"

"Anyway, it's academic," Paul broke in. "You are the last of the De Legles, and you know who I am. You have never married, Joan. Will you

marry me?"

"Certainly not."

"I thought not, but sometimes you surprise me, and I decided to ask to make sure. What do you want of me? Anything?"

She was quiet a good while. Then she said, "Paul, I don't quite know."

"Will you try to decide fairly soon?"

"It would help me to decide if I knew what you want of me. Remember that day in the tobacco shed—you said it was the man's right to speak first."

"I want all you will give me."

"Of course you know that you have a strong hold on me, Paul. But I was taught a very good lesson."

"So was I. So asking you for anything takes a lot of nerve. Thank heaven I have it, when the goal is important enough."

"I suppose I thank heaven for that, too. To encourage you, I'll tell you something the Seigneur said on his deathbed—among his last coherent words—he said them to Dr. Griffon, an odd, rumpled little man, yet terribly impressive somehow—and he told me. They were very strange words for my father to utter—maybe he was out of his mind. He said that his death might permit me to make overtures to the times and world to which I was born. It's an almost unbelievable comedown for De Legle of Manoir De Legle. If he meant it, I still don't think he intended me to make overtures to the son of his foreman. Don't you agree with me?"

"I think I do."

"He said something else, too. That I would become the chatelaine in something else than name—which is quite true. I feel the responsibility very clearly—and I enjoy the power."

"Where does that leave you, Joan?"

"On the horns of a dilemma. You bragged about your nerve. Would you have the nerve to come here to make love to me, in the Seigneur's house?"

"It's your house, now."

"That's true. The Seigneur is cold in his grave. You haven't said whether you wish to come."

"Certainly I do."

"And you're not even pale! Come to the front door about nine."

2.

Paul dressed soberly, then walked through the fragrant dark. A maidservant admitted him to the manoir and directed him to the green court where a fountain played. He found Joan on an iron bench wearing a green dress, its seeming simplicity concealing its art and much of its cost; on the other hand she had been lavish in her choice of jewels—emeralds of a size and fire such as he had never seen. These blazed in the candlelight like the eyes of night prowlers; while she herself glowed softly. He determined to keep his wits about him as long as possible.

"I was wondering whether you would come," Joan said.

"I don't see how you could doubt it."

"Because you're a highly intelligent man, wilful and direct, the kind that always makes the most surprising moves. Actually, of the two of us, I'm far easier to understand."

She stopped, perhaps to collect her thoughts or perhaps so Paul could savor what she had just said. What kind of a game was she playing that she should claim transparency at the very time that she withheld any mention of her munificent gift to him?

"I am different from a great many women in that I do and say what comes natural to me, while they often hide their natural impulses," she went on, with every sign of sincerity. "However, I don't wish to imply I'm in any way unique. More women than you can believe behave as I do—especially among the very rich and the quite poor. Practically all Creole women do. I'm true to the island."

"You must think I'm not, if you ever doubted I would decline your invitation—actually your challenge."

"You've been away four years. You've studied law. You may be in love with someone else, regardless of the sign we carved on the tree. You just might think that taking up with me again would get you into trouble with no good to come of it. You were only a boy when we seduced each other—I'll take half the blame and you take the other half. But you had a somewhat lively conscience even then. Now you are older and warier, and conscience in regard to morals is often nothing but wariness."

"That sounds somewhat cynical. Happily, I know you are far too beautiful to be any such thing. No truly beautiful woman can be cynical; it would be to die by her own hand. Joan, I realize perfectly well that no venture in my life has been more important than this, tonight."

"Do you really, Paul?"

"All the people in the world know the same thing, a fact of nature, and they provide for it one way or another, polite to the preachers but quite sure

they won't go to hell. As long as a chance remains to win you for my own, Joan, I couldn't be satisfied with any other prize."

"I can't marry you, but we might become lovers. I reached the age of consent five years ago—and I *am* the chatelaine of Manoir De Legle."

"If we become lovers, I think I can manage the rest."

"That's pretty close to bragging. Still, I concede the possibility."

"Joan, let's not talk too long. Remember what you said before—on the Mountain? That we'd talked too long and there was nothing to do but go home. Then the hawk flew by."

"No hawk will fly by tonight. There might be an owl, which is likewise a totem in our love affair. Well, let's drink a bottle of excellent wine. There may be better wines than Grands Echezeaux but I doubted if you knew of them, and I wanted to please you. Will you get it? It's been cooling in the fountain."

It was delicious in the extreme. They drank slowly, almost in silence; the sensuous Joan surrendered herself to pure gustatory delight; Paul, whose palate was not as educated, enjoyed the flavor and the warmth, and thought of the little vineyards of the Côte d'Or that he had seen on a holiday; and how any good Burgundy would have done him just as well.

"Did someone call it stored sunlight?" Joan asked.

"Only about a hundred."

"Damn you, Paul. I'm quite sure I wouldn't want you for a husband, and I'm dubious about the other. I couldn't surprise you often enough."

"You're wrong about that, Joan."

And to prove her wrongness or her wile, she made a remark that seemed to jar the top of his head.

"Paul, you haven't told me how you got through law school. I suppose you worked your way, but it couldn't have been easy."

"No, my education was paid for by a benefactor."

"In the name of God, who? I suppose there are American millionaires that go about doing such things, or even a few rags-to-riches Frenchmen. But how did it happen? How did you meet him?"

Paul flushed and spoke straight.

"Joan, I was never told the name. The intermediary requested that I not ask, or, if I guessed, give no hint of it. But that's gone by the boards now. You ought to know who did it. It was you."

"*Tambou!*"

"Is that all you can say?"

"Paul, as heaven is my judge, I had nothing to do with it. Such a thought has never crossed my mind. You make me ashamed—because I should have thought of it. I know your abilities—I had plenty of money—and I loved you as far as I would let myself. Maybe instinct made me *not* think of it—wiped out the thought before it could form—because if you became a lawyer or made any great rise in station, it would be that much harder to stick to my guns—to defend my castle—and let you go."

"I thought that was what the gift meant—that you were letting me go—an imperial good-by."

"Paul, my brain doesn't work that way, and since I didn't do it, who did? Well, there's a letter in a drawer upstairs. I found it and could make no sense of it until now—in fact, I didn't pay much attention to it. I'll get it. And, Paul, you'd better fortify yourself with some more of the Grands Echezeaux. You'll need all the fortification you can find."

She sprang up and sped out the room as Paul awaited the outcome with a fatalistic emptiness of mind. She returned with a sheet of stationery the exact likeness of which he had seen once before. Embossed on its top was an address on the Faubourg St. Honoré. The date in fine script was a few days after his arrival in France following his flight. He read:

> My dear Henri:
>
> I was pleased to hear from the head of the great house which I hold in such esteem, whose forebears were neighbors and friends of my forebears for more centuries than, in these days of democracy, one should mention. Needless to say, I am proud that you chose me to carry out your wishes in what was indeed a pleasant office.
>
> I made a brief investigation and came to the conclusion that the profession of law would be benefited by this addition and in time a mark of honor would be made. Hence I have gone ahead and completed the arrangements with the Banque de France.
>
> When will De Legle of Domain De Legle come back to his own? The roar of the mob about the guillotine is long stilled. But I could as well ask when I will stop dabbing paint on canvas. And perhaps you found your own place, your Avalon, in Martinique. I wish I could say the same of my cluttered studio. Some day, though, we may meet on your side of the water. Alas, I am no Gauguin, but, even more than he, I need a new scene and a new inspiration.
>
> With deep sentiments of friendship,

Joan waited for Paul to speak, but he could not. Then she spoke.

"Well, they did meet on this side of the water. If they ever meet again it will be on the other side of waters broader than these. Paul, I'm afraid this disclosure comes at a bad time for us both."

"I think I know what you mean. Say it, will you?"

"There was always a good deal of myth in the doctrine of aristocracy. The people believed it and that seemed to make it so. Now lots of people don't believe it—and it's dying and almost dead. But if there ever was such a thing as a real aristocrat, it was the De Legle. His high name and long lineage helped, but leaving France and its memories of the Terror and becoming the great Seigneur of Martinique put on the final stamp. Have you wondered why he was the one, the last De Legle, to renounce the title of Marquis? There were too many marquises in France and anyway they were beneath princes and dukes. The De Legle was beneath no one on earth—or so he saw himself. He was the flawless aristocrat. I'm not enough of one even to guess that your standing up to him that day, lashing him with his own whip, would cause him to give you your chance to rise out of your order and become a successful man or even a gentleman. I can't follow his thinking, let alone his feelings, but they can be summed up in *noblesse oblige*. You may have seemed to him a living argument of the doctrine of democracy. If so, he mustn't shut you off—keep you down. Well, Paul, I was terribly under his influence before—deeply in his power. Now this has happened, I am more so than ever."

"The De Legle," Paul answered quietly, hardly knowing what he said, "is dead."

"He is more alive than ever—in me. And what remains for me but to keep alive his memory?"

There fell a long pause. Thoughts moved swiftly in both minds; neither spoke for they had become estranged; Paul looked inert, although actually he was rallying his resources for a great effort.

"What remains for you, Joan—what remains for all who have lost those they love—is to live."

"How can you think of me, advise me, when you have just learned this stunning fact? Why aren't you thinking of the De Legle?"

"I have thought of the De Legle too much in my life already. I had reached some sort of conclusions about him. They have been strengthened, not changed by this action, which you rightly said rose out of his doctrine of

noblesse oblige. Truly I should have guessed it was he who did it, not you; it was in keeping with his religion. But it has not changed in the least degree my attitude toward you or my intentions toward you. I am not thinking of him now because he is dead, and you and I are alive."

"Perhaps I hate you for that."

"It doesn't stand to reason that you should."

"Don't rely too much on reason. You are a lawyer—"

"I am also a pleader. Therefore I ask you to recall his last message to you, which you repeated to me this afternoon: that by his death you became the chatelaine in more than name, and that you could make overtures to your times."

She turned away, turned again, and then came slowly toward him, her eyes on his.

"Papa did a good job, Paul. You're a good lawyer."

"Well?"

"I'm going to do what I intended, provided you wish it. Has the wine taken effect? Can you remember only lovely things? Can you lay a ghost?"

"No ghost walks for me. I remember only lovely things. Will you take me to your bedchamber?"

"No. It's the room where the De Legle died—as chatelaine, I moved in. It's Empire and ugly to my eyes and anyway that would be going too far—it would increase the chance of failure, too great already. I'm going to take you to my former room—it's early American and sweet. In one hand bring the bottle. It's only half-empty and I'm cold and frightened. In your other hand take my hand, and hold it tight."

They walked up the great, dim stairway on which hung ancient weapons, shields with armorial bearings, and at the landing a splendid portrait by David of the young Marquis De Legle, who had been fated to escape the guillotine and find refuge and grandeur in Martinique. The room to which she brought him lay in a warm dusk, the glimmer from one lamp casting high lights on the dark-red mahogany of the four-poster bed and its canopy and curtains. It was the perfect setting for the meeting Paul desired, but Joan's ghosts still walked, and her eyes looked so wild and bright the issue remained in grave doubt.

He noticed something he did not at first understand. As Joan undressed, she kept facing him not by chance but with intent, nor was it a struggle against modesty or strain. She was hiding something. . . .

“You’ve already noticed I don’t want you to see my back,” she told him quietly.

“Good heavens.”

“Well, you don’t blame me, do you? Often when I stand before a glass and look over my shoulder, I think I see them. They’re like watermarks in silk.”

“They couldn’t be there, Joan. The skin was never broken. If it had been—if I’d seen one drop of blood—I don’t know what would have happened.”

“They turned red afterward. The word is welts. Well, look and see. If you don’t see them, I’ll feel better—”

She came close to the lamp and turned.

“True, it’s like silk, but no shadow of a mark.”

“Then, make love to me quickly, Paul.”

He did so, himself unchanged since the day in the *cabane-des-vents* when she had said, “I love you.” But she had changed. She did not say it now. At that instant when he would have most expected her to say it, a look of sadness came upon the beautiful face he held between his hands, and she said something greatly different.

“I haven’t met you as I did before,” she whispered. “My stripes hurt.”

He could not speak.

“You think it’s imaginary, but it isn’t. They hurt awfully. I’m afraid I’m marked forever. They are unhealable wounds.”

“I won’t accept it. I don’t believe it.”

“No, don’t believe it ever. Never accept it, Paul. Try again soon. My only hope of love lies in you.”

CHAPTER EIGHT

A Homicide

After some months of drifting from job to job, Fez had found a post to his liking at the Guerin sugar mill, at the mouth of the River Blanche. It was a big mill, with modern machinery, and the Creoles regarded it with awe, hardly aware that it was not a considerable fraction as wonderful as the river. It was a fine river, cold and rushing, born in a deep glen slicing down from the crater of Pelée; but there are many fine rivers in Martinique, and it was no considerable fraction as wonderful as the washwomen who every day except Sundays and feast days gathered in its rocky bed. Seen from a distance, the bright-blue water seemed to run between snowbanks. That was because of the new-washed clothes laid out to dry in the sun.

The washwomen of Saint-Pierre were a guild to themselves, second only in pride and magnificence to *les porteuses* of the routes. Almost invariably they were tall, supple, and seemingly tireless; they called one another *che*, and helped one another when sudden freshets, born of cloudbursts on the mountaintop, threatened to wash the wash and washwomen out to sea. The clothes were cleaned without soap—immaculately clean—the unchanging process was as old as the city itself. The songs they sang in chorus were equally old, and the gossip of births, loves, and deaths, old as Eve. The guild had its heroines—mammas who had drowned trying to save other mammas, or sometimes only to save clothes.

It was among the washwomen not far above the mill that Fez first laid eyes on Pauline.

Actually she was not a professional. Fez knew it by the space left open all around her by the other women. She did not speak to them nor they to her, nor did she join their songs. The fact remained none of them did their work better or with greater economy of effort. That was only a way of saying that none had more grace. She seemed to revel in her isolation from them. When one of them gave her a glance, her bold eyes met it until the glancer looked away, and on her mouth was a cryptic smile. When Fez cast his eyes on her, she replied in the same way. She was one of the boldest,

conceivably one of the wickedest women he had ever seen. And what made the boldness and the wickedness more telling was that only in the Martiniquan sense had she reached womanhood. In France, if that warm, bright, but never torrid or blazing land could have produced her, she would still be called a girl.

If a witch, she was a young witch, not more than twenty-one. And as all authorities on demonology know, young witches are the worst kind.

In color, she seemed only a shade lighter than the *Saccatra*, the darkest Creoles as opposed to Negroes. It was a striking and somehow elegant color, Fez thought; still he could not be sure of seeing any beauty in her face and long neck and limbs, and hence he could not explain her attraction for him. However, they were wonderfully clean-cut and would have taken any artist's eye. And Fez had never been told of a witch woman whose neck suggested that of a swimming snake and who looked always into the sun. This girl had a long neck on which her head was defiantly set, and often she glanced at the sun as might some immortal who could make mock of time. So it was no wonder that some of the washwomen, knowing the island legends, wondered if she could be that witch, famed these hundred years, who led heartsick lovers to their death at cliff brink. Only a few who frequently visited Chaude Oree knew her for a charcoal burner's daughter named Pauline; and even these did not seek her closer acquaintance.

Fez went up to her. "*Bon jou', che*," he said.

"*Bon jou'*, missie."

"I've not seen you here before."

"We have not got a good washing river where I live, and since I must go into Saint-Pierre to buy a new lamp, I brought my clothes along."

"*Che*, are you a madame or a m'selle?"

The girl laughed softly. "I am neither one. I am a Creole."

"Do any French live in your village?"

"It isn't a village, it is a town with three streets and a tall church three miles from here."

"Do you go to that church, *che*, and put money in the poorbox?"

"I was once caught taking money out of the poorbox—for who was poorer than I?—and when I would do no penance for a little fat priest—and for this and that and the other—I was—what you call it?—excommunicated. It is said that excommunication gives people a peculiar smell, perhaps something like burning pitch and brimstone. Anyway, these cows smell something, and keep their distance, which pleases me greatly."

“The town must be Chaude Oree.”

“Yes, missie.”

“Do any French people live there?”

“One Frenchman has a cottage there, and comes and goes. He is short, and his clothes are always rumpled, and I think he is mad, because he used to pay people for news of yellow fever, and lately he has been putting little fish in our water tanks. He says since the Bon Die told good St. Peter where to cast his nets to catch big fish, little fish too small to eat are blessed, and will bring the house good luck. It may be true, for all I know.”

“I know about him. My best friend told me. The man you speak of is Dr. Griffon. And my best friend is a lawyer in Saint-Pierre.”

“There is another Frenchman who comes to Chaude Oree. He has a great house on Morne Rue, and he looks after Domain De Legle, and he has blue veins in his arms. He is Missie de Grotte. Have you heard of him?”

“I’ve heard his name mentioned,” Fez answered guardedly. “Why does he come to a little town like Chaude Oree?”

“Missie, you’ll have to ask someone else.”

“On what nights does he come, Pauline?”

For the first time the girl cast down her eyes in a semblance of shyness which deceived Fez not at all, as Pauline herself well knew; but which was expected of her at this point, a matter of punctilio.

“Always on Sunday night. No one sees him come and go—and you mustn’t speak of it—could it be he arrives at eight and leaves at ten? Often on Friday, or even Monday or Tuesday, when his great affairs give him leisure.”

“I will come on Wednesday—to start with.”

“What makes you believe the wasp won’t sting you?”

“Not when I’ve fed her honey.”

“Except for these long-nosed ant-eaters watching, I’d slap your face.”

“Don’t do that, for I’d have to slap you back three times as hard. At what house in Chaude Oree does the wasp have her nest?”

“It is the second up the hill from the blacksmith shop. But if you hear a buzzing you had better go about your business quickly. All goes sweetly with the wasp today, but by Wednesday I may hear you are a French quimboiseur meaning to conjure me.”

“If I am, I’ll be going to the right door to meet my match.”

Laughing loudly, and without looking back, Fez strode away.

2.

In Fez's mind, one of Pauline's chief attractions was that she had caught the attention of Anton de Grotte, of the great South Martiniquan family of *emigrés*, a daughter of which had married the late De Legle. De Grotte stood among the foremost of the white Creoles. Nervousness gave him a somewhat haughty manner which had impressed Fez more than he would confess. In deep secrecy—indeed partly hidden from himself—Fez resented the prominence, wealth, and culture of such people, ached to be noticed by them, and found some consolation in the notion that he was more the man.

Such is the boast of many blackguards who have no other. Their favorite illusion is that, if given half a chance, they could seduce the wives and daughters of most of their social and intellectual superiors. Although rarely obtaining any evidence to support the view, they seem to be extremely successful with women of their own class. They walk and talk with a sexual swagger. While the upper-grade man is gentle and considerate with the riffraff girl with whom he is infatuated—"she makes a plaything out of him," the Creoles say—the ruffian treats her like dirt, knocks her about, demands a constancy which she well knows he has no intention of keeping, and in the reverse of the time-honored chivalrous expression gives her his favors! Remarkably often she replies to this treatment by slaving for him in various ways, until, as may happen, her soul rebels and she gives him the full and final answer of the knife.

Actually Fez was far from a ruffian, as Paul knew well. The ruffianly aspect he sometimes showed was almost always histrionic, intended to impress women with his virility. Paul, who had seen its signs, thought it might be involved with his weakness—the occasional disorder of his personality caused by extreme fright. Because Pauline was a primal creature compared with the lovely, sensitive Creole women—they themselves took her for a witch—Fez persisted in the show, believed it real, succeeded in impressing Pauline, and was enjoying with her an affair of atavistic savagery, out of the same dark heart of life that had brought into being the *tango select* of the island.

The affair progressed rapidly. It had little tenderness and could not be called lascivious; it arose from too deep roots. At every meeting both sensed a profound antagonism, the ancient war between sexes condensed to one pitched battle; and if he had been a thoughtful man, he would have considered the drone's death at the instant of completed union with the queen bee. He fancied that he, and only he, brought about this cyclonic storm. Actually the wild power lay in her alone.

He gave her very little money. This was in accord with his boastful concept of his male role. He talked a good deal about slapping her, but rarely did so. He did, however, demand that she break engagements with Anton de Grotte with any lie that came handy, and quite frequently she complied. And this was truly his greatest satisfaction, for he was not of the Paleozoic stuff to match Pauline.

Quite possibly he could have persuaded her to cast De Grotte off. Actually she was somewhat inclined that way, partly because such a child of nature craved only one lover at a time, but partly because Monsieur was kind to her, and she had a decent instinct against playing him for a fool. But Fez knew by such inklings as men like him deny or twist to suit their vanities, yet somehow act upon, that if Pauline let the lordling go, his great victory would drop into the past along with others no longer valid in his life —like bottles he had drained and thrown on the ash heap. He chose the smaller but ever recurring triumph of winning the loaf and tossing the loser crumbs.

The thought hardly crossed Fez's mind that the situation was fraught with danger.

On a hot, close night in September, more than a year after his arrival in Martinique, Fez left his quarters near Ursine Guerin with a long thin package under his arm. Uppermost in his mind tonight were his best and warmest thoughts and ideals. His best self, which Paul knew and liked so well, was dominant. He had gotten out his most prized possession and intended to show it to Pauline. Well disguised by the wrapping was the sword his father had worn as a sergeant major in the Algerian Wars, had had in his hand at death, and which had been presented to Fez by the French government. He had kept its brass guard bright as gold and its steel like silver.

As he drew near the market he saw many lanterns, the largest crowd he had ever seen gathered hereabouts, and heard the far-carrying resonant harangue of a deeply earnest speaker. Impelled by curiosity and keeping to the shadows, Fez soon had a look at him. He was standing on a sugar barrel, and three lanterns hanging from a tree cast a dim glimmer on a big frame and a strange and powerful face. It showed part Negro, part Indian, and Fez had not a doubt that there stood Atlas, the last Carib. In his hand he held a machete, almost the badge of the field and forest workers, and swept it back and forth in vicious cuts.

"So tomorrow," he demanded, "go not into their fields. Let the cane rot. Send word for them to keep the little sous they pay you; you will not sell your backs and your souls for such a pittance; you'll live on the wild fruits

given you by Bon Die. And you who make and sell charcoal! Let the cooking pots grow cold, the red flame die away, before you will sell the work of your hands for a slave's wage. Better yet, let them go themselves into the forest and meet the spotted death that dwells there. If they slay me for speaking truth—for one of them, you know his name, has threatened my life—I will only be following my people who died, man, woman, and child, at the hands of the French two hundred years ago. But the day is coming . . ."

Fez stole back the way he had come, the strong voice dying away. Then he took a roundabout route to a hut two doors from the blacksmith shop. There would be little danger of neighbors knocking tonight. Almost the whole populace would be worked up to fever pitch listening to speakers, shouting and marching, and if the *tambous* sounded, as almost always at Creole gatherings, the men would likely dance the Calienda, swinging clubs. It would be as though he and Pauline were away on a lonely island.

All the neighboring houses stood in darkness, but Pauline's gave forth a dim ray through a loose-fitting shutter. He knocked according to prearranged signals, and the door opened narrowly. He slipped into a small, close room in which a low-burning lamp barely limned the walls. It was hot, but Fez liked it so.

"Is everything all right?"

"Yes, Missie Fay." This was as near as she could hit his name. Her tone suggested doubt.

"No cursed neighbors will come looking for you."

"The big missie had said he would come tonight. When you said you were coming, I sent him word that my father was back from the camps. 'Is that true?' he asked the messenger, who was my brother Olivier. 'It had better be true.' "

"Why do you call him the big missie? Is he as big as I am in what counts?"

"I meant he is so rich and stands so high. Why deny what is true? Whom did I choose to have come, you or he? What have you brought me in the package? If it's a gift costing ten francs I'll fall in a dead faint."

She was in an ugly mood, he thought, and his choice lay between giving her a slap that would leave pale fingermarks on her dark cheek, and appeasing her. But when, after a little banter, he showed her the sword, she seemed childishly pleased. Then nothing was left to do but talk a lot and drink a little, for about two hours. He did not wish his sport interrupted by De Grotte's knocking on the door. While an unlikely chance at worst, there

seemed none at all of his coming later than ten. The great man did not like late travel in the countryside! Moreover, if he found out Atlas was in town, arousing a mob, would he not quickly fade away?

All went well, and just before half-past eleven Fez was about to take his leave. He had not rewrapped the sword; he would leave it here a few days for her to show her father. He had gone to the front door and unlocked it when, on sudden impulse, he returned and put ten francs in Pauline's pale-palmed hand. He was making for the door again when it opened.

Into the dim room quietly came Monsieur Anton de Grotte. He appeared well dressed as always, and on his patrician face there was no expression Fez could read. Fez's heart jumped, his stomach swam, and he saw without looking, as an afterimage, the disordered bed and other evidence of what had been taking place. He glanced at Pauline, and, to his great and growing dismay, she looked sharply frightened. De Grotte hardly glanced at him, yet. His cold eyes had fixed on Pauline's face.

"Is this your father?" he asked.

"No, missie. He came on business with my father—to order charcoal—but didn't find him in."

"Did not you send word that your father would be here tonight?"

"Yes, and he came, and went away to join the crowd in the market."

"He should be here by now. The crowd broke up nearly two hours ago."

"I didn't know it, missie."

He turned sharply to Fez. "I think I've seen you somewhere before. Don't you work in the Guerin mill?"

"Yes, monsieur—"

"I'm half-owner of that mill. You came quite a distance to buy charcoal when there is a vendor within a hundred paces of the mill."

"I could get a special rate from Gaspard, Pauline's father."

"Do you know, Pepe—I believe that's your name—I don't like hearing lies?"

"You'd better be careful. Just because you own half the mill—"

"I've no intention of being careful. I'm used to Pauline's lies, but I thought they concerned Creole lovers only, and I didn't let them spoil my pleasure. This afternoon her brother offered to tell me something—if I would give him fifty francs. I declined for various reasons you wouldn't understand, and, having guessed that the secret involved a European, I decided to investigate for myself. From now on, stay away from Pauline, do

you hear me? If you wish to take any action, I've no compunction against mashing in your face—"

As he had spoken, he had turned white with fury. But he wouldn't have talked so big, Fez told himself, if he weren't carrying a pistol. Fez could almost see it in his pocket, he could see the aristocrat using it if he stood up to him. Only a fool used his fists against a pistol. The best thing was to get out and let him cool off. . . .

It happened that the sword lay on a little table nearer the front door. As Fez sprang forward in flight, he snatched it up, with the half-formed idea of defending himself with it, if he were pursued and caught. The door flung open to his hand. As he leaped through, a glance over his shoulder revealed De Grotte close behind him. Almost inhumanly quick, he too had seized a weapon—a small chair of some heavy forest wood. And when Fez had sped six paces to the road, he felt it was being swung powerfully to deal him a crushing blow.

Fez whirled and struck with the sword. When the late-rising moon showed the enemy blow not yet falling, it was too late to check the sweep of the heavy steel. Although he had hacked without aiming, the stroke was only too good, the result horribly positive. Slicing De Grotte's cheek, the blade drove on below his chin, and as he toppled his blood spurted in a red arch spanning the narrow road.

"Oh, great God in heaven!" Fez cried in anguish. Then suddenly he knew he must not break this silence, he must keep still.

The other two remained completely still—Pauline a tall dim shape in the palely glimmering doorway, De Grotte a long dark shape on the faintly moonlit road. Each spurt of blood had fallen short of the preceding one until it flowed in feeble undulation and then ceased. No lights appeared in the windows of houses nearby. There was no sound on the road.

Fez walked toward the door. He was thinking that the rank grass of the yard would not hold footprints, and the road, like most roads in the old towns, had been flagged with stone. Her eyes immense and her mouth round, Pauline stepped out of doors to meet him.

"Take this sword, wash it off in the water tank, and hide it," he said in hushed tones.

"I won't! I'll have nothing to do with it." He noticed that she employed a husky whisper, and that was more important than what she said.

"Have you got a good place to hide it?"

"There's a loose board under the floor, but you'll have to crawl under the house and put it there. I'll have nothing to do with it."

“I haven’t any time for that kind of foolishness. And be careful you don’t mark me,” he went on, when she raised her hand, her fingers curled. “I don’t want any marks on me tomorrow. Remember, if I go to the guillotine, you’re going with me.”

“What else? Hurry up, you devil.”

“When you’ve finished, go in the house and go to bed. If you’re called, get up, but you know nothing about it. You thought you heard a scuffle and a man curse but nothing more, so you went back to sleep. Yes, there’s one other thing. Before you go to bed, see that no sign is left of my being here. Wash the cups and put them away and sweep out tobacco ashes. Is there any blood on that chair?”

“No. . . .”

“Put it back where it was. That’s all.”

“It’s not quite all,” she said, walking quickly toward him. “You’ve killed my good provider, and I must go back to eating lambi and manioc paste. I wish it was you, not him, lying there dead. But this won’t mark you.”

Her hand made a sudden snatch at his head. He came close to screaming as she jerked out enough hair for half a dozen lockets.

“Hold it!” he commanded out of a tense throat. “Don’t let one hair fall on the grass. You’d better burn it before you go to bed.”

She uttered a long gasp, almost a sob.

“At any other time I’d break your jaw. Now be a good girl—do exactly as I told you—remember you know nothing—and we’ll soon be lovers again.”

He left the scene, his shape fading, its moon-cast shadow disappearing. By keeping to the flagged road and then the grassy hillside he believed he left no sign. Within the hour he had gained his quarters at Ursine Guerin. Coming in from another direction he saw no one but the watchman there; to him he remarked on the heat of the night that had driven him out to walk the streets. He went into his room, and it seemed strange and inimical, and he lay an hour listening to every sound, then he drank deeply of the good island rum and soon fell asleep.

Dressed as usual, looking as usual, he came to work at the usual time. Already the mill was buzzing with the news of the finding of Missie de Grotte stone dead on a road in Chaude Oree. A loquacious Creole named Raymond, an ardent admirer of Missie Fay, gave him the latest and quite full account.

"This mamma was walking home late in the night after visiting her sister. She kept looking back to see if any zombis or *maun-mo* were following her, so she did not look well at a low shadow in the road and came almost on it before she saw what it was. It was lying on the edge of the road, and the flagstones were sticky with blood from one roadside to the other. She screamed to the Bon Die and ran back."

"What time was this, Raymond? Although I guess it doesn't matter—"

"Missie, she had heard the midnight bell of the convent only ten minutes before. It was a warm, moist night when sound travels well."

The thought flashed through Fez's mind that Pauline had had abundant time to hide the sword and dispose of every sign of his visit. Still, the gendarmes might find the sword if they made a thorough search of the whole surrounding area. He did not understand why he did not feel greater alarm. . . .

"This mamma, whose name is Albertine, ran to the first house that showed light. There she found another mamma and her husband, home from the meeting, and all of them ran to the house of the priest. Then the good father ran for Missie Doctor, who was still mixing medicines, along with his helper Ruben. When Missie Doctor had run to the place where Missie Grotte lay dead, he looked at the body and felt it and then the priest closed Missie Grotte's eyes and prayed for the Bon Die to have mercy on his soul."

"What had killed him? A bullet?"

"No, missie. There was a gash on his cheek and on the side of his neck and across his shoulder. Missie Doctor said it had been cut with a machete."

Fez breathed deeply, then asked an irritable-sounding question.

"Well, what was a great monsieur doing in a little stinking town like Chaude Oree at that time of night?"

"That, missie, is not hard to guess. The bad man, Atlas, who makes trouble everywhere he goes, had gone to Chaude Oree to speak to the people, and work them up, and keep them from going into the cane fields and to the charcoal kilns. He had already quarreled with Missie Grotte, and made him trouble, and Missie went there to try to stop his wicked talk and to quiet the people. Although the meeting had broken up, it must be that Missie met Atlas on the road."

He paused in his recital and Fez waited in seeming calmness for its denouement. In his bones he felt that it was coming now, he saw the excitement in Raymond's eyes, and although he dreaded its disclosure and their implication, surely everything would turn out well at last, and no great injustice would be done to anyone.

“Missie Fay, when Atlas was speaking to the people he held a machete in his hand and slashed it back and forth. And already the gendarmes have arrested him, and taken him to the jail.”

CHAPTER NINE

The Heart of Clio

"How are you, *che*?" Denis would ask Clio when on a morning she came to his hilltop house, her bright gaze darting in search of something new, her long arms aswing, her face abeam.

"All goes sweetly with me, Missie Dan," his beautiful child bride would answer.

All had gone sweetly with him, he thought, smiling to himself, since his love affair with Clio had moved into these new realms. True, "child bride" was only a figure of speech. She remained childlike in many aspects, these her most enchanting and his best-loved, although beneath them, inside of them somehow, dwelt a woman who always kept in bafflement and suspense such a lover as he. Denis could think of the workhouse woman in the De Maupassant story, but he thought mostly of Cleopatra, probably not Clio's namesake because in all probability Coraline had never heard of her.

She had been about Clio's present age when she became Caesar's mistress; he himself was Caesar's age. That affair had lasted only a few months; Denis' affair was now of three years' duration; if Caesar had chosen Alexandria over Rome—Saint-Pierre over Paris?—he could have kept her until too old to care, although perhaps never conquering her. Anthony did so, it seemed, although he had been forty-two, far from a young sprig. Denis thought he might be somewhat like Caesar in temperament, not at all like Anthony. Still he wished he could dispense with this matter of age in making comparisons. Perhaps no man can do so after fifty, the half-century mark, which is not noon in his life but midafternoon. Age is a terribly solid fact.

Clio was more of a child than she was a bride, more bridelike than wifelike. He did not want her wifelike, he told himself—he wanted the ever-newness, the unfailing surprise, not the repose obtained from wifely love—but this was only half-true if true at all. Well, he couldn't have everything at once. He never wooed her without gaining an impression of virginity, recurring in her as in a houri of Paradise, and of essential innocence. Both

were impressions only, effects he could not explain in many of her words and actions. And he did have great joy.

Perhaps the word had not quite the same meaning as happiness. Joy is sharper, happiness is related more closely to content. Joy seems more of a visitation, it is less constant or prolonged, more an emotion than an inner state, more vulnerable to attack. He could not avoid anxiety about Clio, the fear of losing her. It sprung from the certainty that he did not as yet fully possess her. Sometimes he tried imagining her loss, how he would take it, what he would do, and often it made him feel reassured and bold until he realized that his imagination's leap had fallen short, or reached the end of a tether he himself had tied.

He got a better idea of what her absence could mean when he waited and watched for her for hours beyond the time set, and the best idea on those few days that she did not come at all. On such days he could not refrain from sending Simeon to find out why. He knew it was bad policy, and that Simeon knew it too, but there remained the chance that she was sick and in need of help. Of course she never was; she stayed healthy as a young mule. She was either in town—her mother vouched for the importance of her errand, at the same time accusing her of slacking her duty, but what could anyone expect of a girl of that age, especially these days?—or, even more exasperating, she had decided "to rest." On the following day she would invariably show up bright and early, herself golden-bright and beautiful, and apparently unconscious of his pangs.

But signs of deepening love for him became more frequent and plain. The best was the childish and fierce clasp of her arms in the high moments of their love-making, and the climactic responses which she could not have simulated had she tried. Since she never said so unasked—she retained a kind of shyness in most of their relationships—he could not help asking her if she loved him, and this, he knew, more often than was wise. Always the interchange took about the same form.

"Do you love me, Clio?"

"Yes, Missie Dan."

"When did you begin to love me?"

"It's been so long now, I can't remember."

When this no longer satisfied him, he taught her a little ritual.

"I love you, my Cendrillon."

"I love you, Papa Dan."

She could say it in her sleep, he thought, mocking himself not her. He was highly articulate; she not at all.

Once she came wearing a childish picture drawn in ink on the flat of her forearm. It showed two hearts with an arrow stabbing through them, and two names written in an almost illegible childish scrawl.

"Is that first name Clio?" Denis asked.

"Yes, missie."

"I'd never know it. What's that other name?" Then, to tease her, "It looks like Dom, the trademark of a French drink."

"I can't write very well, missie," she said, hanging her head.

"Well, you're my darling, just the same. I'm going to have a gold pin made for you, to fasten your scarf. It will be something like what you've drawn, but I won't have any names, just the initials C and D. Do you think the jeweler will laugh at me?"

"Not if you go to a Creole jeweler, such as Basil Girard. A good many girls have pins like that, and some of them are set with pearls."

Later, when he noticed a good many such pins in Creole jewelry shops—usually silver or gold plate—he wondered if Clio had planned the whole incident. He dismissed it as unlike her—almost never did she employ subtlety, even in such minor degree, and all her hints were palpable. Also, suspicion of Clio-Cendrillon was unworthy of himself.

Along with the progressing love affair, his work became definitely better. Not only his technical skill improved: his eyes sharpened, his perceptions quickened; and if this improvement was slow and only slight, not much was needed to exalt him. He was already a better painter than thousands throughout the world who called themselves artists. However, his critical sense developed with other senses, he perceived more clearly than ever before the stunning greatness of his old intimates of the Café Guerbois; and he had set his standards perilously high. Otherwise he might have exploited his good, well-disciplined talent, adopted an eye-catching style, and won at least an ephemeral fame. Even so, about one out of five canvases he believed good enough to store away, possibly to exhibit in Paris some sweet day, perhaps collector's items, showing his growth, when he had realized himself, as Paul Cézanne had put it, "in the appalling reality of paint." That realization, that great picture, was not as wild a dream as it used to be. He sensed its potential if and when the lightning struck.

And he need never doubt the superiority of his model. Lovely, long-lost, pale Celestin could not hold rush lights to her. Self-consciousness had disappeared long since and she could not sit or stand or crouch or lie, nude or in any costume he provided for her, without suggesting a picture. Sometimes it was the fascinating effect of light on her dark hair, golden

skin, and fluid joints, and then he longed for the pencil of Hilaire Degas, and sometimes he could only grope for a thing called universality; then he longed for one gleam of the vision of Titian and a little of the soul-stuff of Leonardo.

Life was so rich! The superbly beautiful island, quaint and classical Saint-Pierre recalling a lost Atlantis, the brooding shadow of the mountain, the lavish gift of Clio, all day to paint, all night to dream. Even the fly in the ointment was fascinating and often amusing, almost always concerned with his incomparable model, sweetheart, and delight. And then he was glad he was rich in the worldly sense.

The third evening of Clio's full status as his mistress had brought to his door a handsome, pale-colored Creole of about forty-five with the vaguely familiar name of Alexandre. He had heard Clio mention it a few times, but he could not think in what connection.

"I can't place you for the moment," Denis said courteously. "Will you kindly tell me who you are?"

"Missie, I am the father of the girl who works for you."

When Denis looked at him in good light, he thought it very possible and yet unlikely. Undoubtedly he was Coraline's husband—supposed to be living in St. Vincent—and if this last had been true, he had made a swift return. The man had no marked resemblance to Clio, and Denis remembered perfectly the comment of his messenger who had found her in the market that she was a child of passion. Someone with more distinction in his face and form had sired her, unless Denis missed his guess. Sometimes he had pictured a white Creole in that part, remarkably handsome, but without much position or affluence, this last deducible from her poor circumstances when he had found her.

"What may I do for you?" Denis asked.

Alexandre answered to some length. He was a potter by trade, lately beset with difficulties, and if he could raise a hundred francs he could get a new wheel. This was the gist of the story, which Denis sought to shorten as much as courtesy permitted, and upon which he acted quickly.

"I'll talk with Clio about it tomorrow. If she approves, I'll send you the money."

"Thank you, missie. But will Missie send it by one of his gardeners instead of in her hand? She means no harm, missie, but she is young and attracted by what she sees in the shops, and I have named the lowest sum I can do with, in respect to Missie's kindness; and if ten francs are missing I will miss my chance."

“The sum will arrive intact,” Denis promised.

In the next few months he was astonished at the number of Clio’s kinfolk, unmentioned until now, who had come upon hard times. Almost always she was their delegate, they were cousins and connections of Coraline’s husband, and the sums were usually small, so he gave readily if only to see her beam. Her mother seemed to have only a few living relatives, and these part-Indian or Chinese, too proud or too prosperous to ask help.

Only once did Denis balk. The man had come in person, a young brown-skinned Creole, two or more sizes larger than most of the islanders, who gave the common name of Dominique. Denis had not heard it to his knowledge, and the big handsome face was unfamiliar, although he had a feeling of having noticed the powerful body; perhaps he was a workman on the wharfs. Not as modest and retiring as most Creoles, still he had rather winning ways, including an infectious grin. However, the closest kinship that he could claim to Clio was half-brotherhood to her cousin’s wife, which Denis properly felt was outside his province. Also the sum requested—to build a conch boat—was three hundred francs.

“I’ll talk it over with Clio,” Denis promised. “That’s all I can say now.”

“She’ll put a bad mouth on me, missie. She thinks herself too good to be my cousin, now that she’s working for Missie and living in the new house. Could you spare me fifty in my hand, to make the first payment?”

“Not one franc, unless she approves,” Denis told him, firmly but courteously.

Dominique looked jolted, then quickly recovered himself and left with a pleasant mien. At least one of his statements proved true—when Denis told Clio of his visit, she flushed in anger or humiliation, and the “mouth” she put on him was indeed bad.

“He’s a dog to spit on,” she cried, with unwonted harshness. “He’s no blood kin to me and I hardly know him and wish you’d had Simeon throw him out and break his leg.”

“Simeon would be hard put to it, a man of that size and strength.”

“How can I ask you to help my kinfolk when they are in real need, if cheaters like him come to you with lies? A conch boat, he said. He wanted the money to buy a gold necklace for some black wench!”

“Well, calm down, my sweetheart, I’m not going to give him a sou!”

Only a month later, in September, she came to him more deeply troubled than he had ever seen her. Severely shocked, brilliant eyes misted with tears, she told him of the killing of Missie Grotte, last night in the town of Chaude Oree, and of how, before dawn, her mother’s half-brother Atlas had been

arrested and taken to the jail. True, Atlas was known as a quimboiseur, but he had been kind to her when she was little, and she and her mamma too would swear by Bon Die he had not killed Missie. Did she have any proof? No, but he would have never struck an unarmed man. Hot-tempered as he was, and a troublemaker, still he obeyed the old laws of the Carib chieftains.

Denis went at once to the police station, returning with no good news. Indeed he could hardly bring himself to tell the overwrought girl how black the future looked for the surly prisoner. Then, with her eyes meeting his, which rarely happened except when her deepest feelings were stirred, she made an earnest and quite eloquent appeal.

"Missie, Atlas knows the jailer well, and so does my mamma. His name is Leon, and he is a Creole, not a Frenchman, and my grandfather, who was Chinese, hired him to wait on people in his shop, and later gave him money to go to school. If he let Atlas escape, he himself would be sent to the prison islands—unless he ran away too—and that he wouldn't do without a bag of silver to help him make his way. Maybe he'd do it for five hundred francs. If you'd give them to him, I'd never ask you for another sou, and I'd give you back the gold jewelry you've given me. I've no one else to go to, and I love you, Papa Dan, I truly love you, better than my mamma. I'll pose for you all day, and half the night too, if you want. I beg you, missie! I'll ask Bon Die to bless you." The tears stood in her eyes.

He came to her and held her in his arms and said what he could say.

"I can't offer a bribe to the jailer, Clio, my darling. But wait a while, and I'll see what I can do."

Denis soon found that the best that he could do at present—the best hope for Atlas in the long run—was to do nothing.

CHAPTER TEN

Paul and Atlas

1.

AFTER renting a room with board at a middle-class Creole house in Saint-Pierre, Paul made his obligatory call on Denis du Bois. Again he came in the early dusk when good light for painting had failed and he felt he would be most welcome. Denis received him hospitably, obviously taking a sincere interest in the young lawyer whose career he had helped to launch.

"When we met in Montmartre, I did not expect to see you this soon on your native shores," Denis said, after serving his guest a rum punch.

"I was very pleased to hear you had chosen them as a subject of your paintings. I can assure you that you can never exhaust their possibilities; you will find more and more inspiration as time goes on. We Martiniquans believe there is no more beautiful island in all the world."

"I believe it too, and I hope I will be equal to even one of the countless opportunities it offers. I regret I have not done so as yet, but I feel that I am making progress."

"I hope there will be public showing of your paintings before long."

"You are very kind. I harbor the same hope."

Paul lowered his head in one of those small gestures that the French practice and which are the soul of courtesy; then after a brief pause, he said:

"It was a severe shock to me to hear of the death of the De Legle."

"And to me. As is often said of someone who dies—but rarely as truthfully—we will not see his like again."

"Monsieur, I never tried to find out the identity of the benefactor who paid my way through law school. I never really raised the question, because I thought the answer was self-evident. I was wrong. And I learned the truth from a letter that you wrote to him, shown to me by the chatelaine. I never got a chance to thank him—I wouldn't have known how to go about it, anyway. The least and the last thing I can do is to thank you for your good offices and your recommendations in my behalf."

“I am glad I acted as I did. I accept your thanks with pleasure, and, since you are yet young and my own head is gray, I feel I may express one wish as to your career. One of my unspoken wishes has already come true. I had hoped you would return to your own people to practice law, and you have done so. As for the other—I knew your father in Normandy and remembered him pleasantly; I knew the De Legles in person and in legend. My wish stems from the fear that your gratitude to Seigneur de Legle might influence your decision if ever you must choose between the aristocratic tradition which he upheld so wonderfully and your New World ideal of democracy. One is splendid but wrong, the other is often besmirched but right. I hope you will be true to your own ideal.”

“Thank you, monsieur. I’ll be true to my own side as far as I am able.”

This was the real end of their interview. They talked awhile of Martiniquan life, and Paul took his leave.

So, in the last year of the century, Paul began his law practice in Saint-Pierre.

As he had expected, his progress was at first slow, his fees scanty. However, the word soon passed among the Creoles that he knew their ways of thinking and doing; and the poorer people knew they would be made welcome in his lean office and could be sure of his full attention to the smallest case as well as of a stout advocate in court. When appointed by the President of the Court to defend a pauper, he was so stubborn and resourceful that the public prosecutor paid him ungrudging respect. His greatest weakness seemed to be his first-blush belief in his clients’ stories, often shattered by accumulating fact.

Meanwhile a force as strong as his profession of law moved through his life. His involvement with Joan had not ended—in truth it could never end—nor had it taken permanent, satisfactory form. The affair had hardly progressed since their meeting at the manoir; they had continued to meet, the compulsion equal upon them both, without finding each other as in the old days before their humiliation. The trysts themselves had become more difficult. Joan’s frequent visits to Saint-Pierre were unsatisfactory; when, in the same quest, she came to spend “the season” in the capital, occupying the De Legle town house in Montagne, their hopes remained unfulfilled.

There were prosaic practical difficulties. Joan had a stream of visitors she could not turn away; she was swamped with invitations she had no excuse to refuse; she was the Chatelaine De Legle who must uphold an hereditary position in Martinique society. The servants of the house had lived in town for years, were jealous of their prerogatives, and knew nothing

of the feudal loyalty of the country staff. The happiest meetings between Paul and Joan would seem the most ignominious, since these took place in a clean, comfortable, although shabby Creole house, the lower back rooms of which comprised a low-grade gambling den. It was owned by an old Creole woman whom Paul had saved from jail. He rented an upstairs room, by the month at a nominal rate; the gaming and drinking rooms opened on a noisy alley. Usually they came quite late in a hired chaise, Joan wearing a nondescript costume and a veil; and departed without laying eyes on the resort keeper.

Joan found childish excitement in these rendezvous and the near-brush with low life and in the certainty of utter scandal rocking the town if they should be found out. She was almost as pleased by the bad name of the resort as by its real and charming name among the Creoles—*Ça qui le titiri?*—"Who will buy fish?" Her descent from the cool and noble rooms in her hilltop house broke, in some measure, her bondage with the past. Glowing with good wine, listening to laughter and song and sometimes fights in the distant rooms, they found a keen joy in each other. That part of the past that they longed to recapture still eluded them, the barrier to fulfillment in each other was no less real from being intangible. All that either of them knew was that when Paul's voice or actions said, "I love you, Joan," she made no full reply.

Still they had gained enough that they could hope for the future.

On a hot, windless night in September, 1900, Joan came promptly out the side door of the town house and entered Paul's chaise. About fifteen minutes later they started up dim stairs to their lodging, but to ascend they must pass a curtained window that offered the only view from this side of the house into the gaming rooms and bar. Often the owner stood here unseen, her eye on the customers, the Chinese bartender, and especially the till. Monday night was always a bad night for trade; eleven-thirty a late hour for Creole pleasure-seekers; however, Paul had never known these rooms to lie so quiet. On an impulse, he drew the curtain slightly and peered in.

Sam Lee had gone from his place behind the bar. The only occupant was a large, dark-colored man seated at a table in uncertain light, reading a newspaper. As Paul's idle curiosity started to pass, it was suddenly revived. The reader laid down his paper, revealing a strong odd face, part Negro, part Indian.

"Do you know that man?" Paul murmured.

"I think it's Atlas."

“I’m sure of it, although I haven’t seen him since I fled the island and he lent me the talking machete. There it is, leaning against his chair.”

“I wonder what it would say to us now. Before it hit home too well.”

“But then he told us it didn’t always tell the truth, and we could carve the sign on the tree.”

“It meant we would be together in life and in death, Atlas said. Do you still believe it, Paul?”

“I still believe it, Joan. I told you I would, and I do.”

“Perhaps the bark has grown over it by now. Maybe the tree has died, and only the coils of lianas are holding up the trunk.”

“No, it is still the king of the forest. I went to see on my last visit home.”

“Kiss me, Paul.” Then, when they had swayed together and clung tight, “You should have told me before.”

“We’ve been together—and yet so apart. Joan, Atlas had told me that the sign grew more beautiful every year, and it has. The bark has thickened around it and it looks like an engraving in gray stone.”

“Be kind to me, Pelée!”

“Be kind to me, Pelée! It seems to mean something even now. I don’t know what.”

“But, Paul, he’s probably a fraud and certainly an incendiary and revolutionist. Anton de Grotte had to threaten to shoot him if he ever came back to our manoir. I’m not sure it’s he sitting there, the light is so dim. Anyway he’s changed from that overgrown faun we met in the woods who told us secrets and boosted us up the tree. I can’t feel much sympathy for him now.”

“It’s he, just the same. I was told he would speak tonight—inflammatorily as usual—at Chaude Oree.”

“I hope the people there won’t listen to him.”

They moved on and put him out of the forefront of their minds. They did not quite forget him, though, and the ancient symbol on the tree and its swaying top and the distant, startling, magic-like view of Pelée seemed brought back almost undimmed from the past. It was their most happy and hopeful night since Paul had returned from France. Their window, opened wide, admitted the light of the moon not many nights waned from full. Paul had a vision of it washing the wide world, showing without favor beauty and ugliness, peace and war, sorrow and joy, miscreantcy and grace. He sometimes loved, sometimes hated the sun, not that it gave a damn, so blazing and imperious in the sky, but he felt the Creoles’ sympathy with the

moon. They saw it as almost as vulnerable as themselves, hung out or blown out, at its brightest only mirroring a greater glory, set up only to be torn down, the mock of Deity.

Paul slept a few minutes, Joan's head on his arm and her body in sweet conjunction with his side, and he dreamed of Fez, and of muddy waters slowly rising toward them both.

"I love you, Joan," he said, his first words as he came awake.

"I've been watching you breathe. Such deep strong breaths—I can't tell you how they reassured me—but once they stopped and trouble came into your face. Always love me, Paul—no matter where each of us has gone."

They parted before three. Paul slept for four hours, ate a Creole breakfast, and went to his dingy office. Climbing the stairs with him was a French insurance broker, Monsieur Godwin.

"I suppose you've heard the news," Godwin said.

"No—"

"Anton de Grotte was hacked to death about midnight in Chaude Oree."

"Who did it?"

"There doesn't seem to be much doubt on that score. That fellow Atlas has been causing trouble and was seen in the town armed with a machete. It's assumed that De Grotte went there to try to stop his rabble-rousing—he had had trouble with him before, at Domain De Legle, and had threatened to shoot him. He must have met him on the road, quarreled with him, and got it in the throat."

"At midnight?"

"Nearer half-past eleven, the doctor said."

Paul started to say something—a vastly important thing that made his heart bound—then instantly perceived that he must not say it at this time.

"Has he been arrested?"

"At four this morning. Our gendarmes bestirred themselves, for once. Atlas says that De Grotte needed killing—all the great landlords do—but he didn't do it. He'll have a hard time, I tell you, convincing the court."

"One more question. . . . What lawyer did he engage?"

"None, so far. He says he doesn't want help from any man. And you don't want him for a client, Monsieur Barteau. It would write *finis* to your career!"

Paul thanked him, and hurried into his office. For once relieved that no poor client waited, he dropped into a chair and sat listless, letting his thoughts stray. But within five minutes he was up and on his way to the

police station, downhill from the theater. He asked permission to speak to the superintendent, and was at once closeted with an intelligent, well-mannered Frenchman.

"Monsieur, the victim of last night's homicide was the executor of the will of my father's employer, Monsieur De Legle. Thus I am taking a personal interest in the problems it presents."

"Thank you, monsieur. However, if I may, I will comment on the terms you use. We employ homicide to the killing of human beings when we're unable to use a more specific word. Homicides may be accidental, excusable, or felonious. This case we may, and do, call murder. And by your leave, monsieur, we do not consider that it presents any problems. We have the murderer and his weapon, we know his motive, and his dispatch to the guillotine is assured."

"Then there must be more evidence than is told on the street."

"We have all we need. After his inflammatory speech, he disappeared in the darkness cursing the French and especially Monsieur de Grotte. Monsieur should not have gone alone and unarmed into the town after having had trouble with Atlas, and this is the tragic result."

"Still it seems to me possible that some other person killed him, perhaps with the intention of robbing him. Have the police determined the time of his death?"

"Within a very few minutes. There were no witnesses, but a Creole woman living nearest to the scene was wakened by a brief, angry passage of words. She glanced at an old clock visible by the candle burning before a holy image on her shelf. It said half-past eleven or twenty minutes to twelve —she could not remember which, a fact we gendarmes like, since it argued for her veracity. She would not have been intelligent enough to invent the uncertainty."

Paul nodded respectfully, venturing no opinion.

"Further detail will come out at the trial. We arrested Atlas in his hut in Saint-Pierre. He would have done far more wisely to have admitted the killing, on the grounds that Monsieur de Grotte had threatened him before and now struck him. In that case his lawyer—if he can find one—could ask for something less than the Little Window. As it is, he said that while Monsieur's death would be a public benefit, he could claim no part of it."

"A man of spirit, just the same," Paul observed.

"Quite true. In that respect he is truly the last of the Caribs. But the lawyer who admires it enough to take his case might as well sail for Timbuktu. Especially a young lawyer."

"Monsieur, I would like to ask how he accounts for the time between the breakup of the meeting and the death of Monsieur de Grotte."

"He says he went into Saint-Pierre and visited the resort known as Who Will Buy Fish?, remaining between half-past eleven and midnight. It appears that the Chinese bartender had locked his cupboard and gone out. A frequenter who came in during that time saw nothing of Atlas. His coffin does not need this additional nail; still, since it is provided, we will use it."

2.

Paul thanked him and went out. After walking awhile the charmed, old streets he returned to his office and dispatched a messenger to the Guerin mills. In his luncheon hour Fez came in, apparently a little flurried to be summoned so suddenly by his friend, his light-gray eyes vivid as jewels in his well-tanned face. When Paul said he would like to discuss the case, Fez gave forth a hearty "*Bon!*"

"I have seen De Grotte many times without ever speaking to him," Paul explained. "There was something about him that made me keep my distance. He was a high-minded man and a great gentleman. On the other hand, my friend Atlas is a self-educated Creole, a quimboiseur. Yet not all my sympathies are with this high-type Frenchman, done to death in the night. Some of them are with this wild, muttering insurrectionist who claims to be the last Carib brave."

He had stated a plausible substitute for the main, great cause of his involvement. Now he perceived it was perfectly true of itself. He spoke on, to rationalize it for his own benefit and to stir Fez.

"It takes courage—and perhaps a great and noble despair—to call one's self the last of anything. He was trying to bear the whole tragedy of the Carib Indians, avenge their slaughter by a conqueror race. He moved in the open, against overwhelming odds. And he's far from a true Carib. He must be half-Negro—I've heard mention of a pale-colored woman, his half-sister, who appears more Indian than he. He had to overlook this discrepancy when he accepted the role. For that matter, only a brave man would bear the name of quimboiseur: witches and warlocks have a hard time. They get the satisfaction of being feared and hated, inflationary of the ego, but they have to keep on doing magic, and if their hocus-pocus fails too many times, the fear will turn to ridicule. When a man of great abilities dedicates himself to a great career, the gods must smile as they lay out the thin ice, stretch the tightropes, dig the pits. When the man has only a dream and not much else,

they must come close to feeling pity which, being solely a human quality, is all but unthinkable in a god. We say ‘the poor bastard’ and watch him sprawl.”

“Well?” Fez asked, after a brief pause.

“Now, I want a little more information from Chaude Oree,” Paul went on. “If I tried to get it myself, the people would soon know I was a lawyer, and the very word scares them. You are sharp, a wonderfully keen observer, and a hail-fellow-well-met with everyone. You mastered the patois in jigtime. Also we are closer to each other than any other two of the four.”

“I’m glad of that,” Fez said with a slight smile.

Paul repeated the gist of what he had heard—he was cheered a little by its brevity—while Fez listened with an almost breathless interest.

“Well, what can I do?”

“Go to Chaude Oree and find out, as definitely as possible, whether Monsieur de Grotte could have gone there last night for some reason other than to restrain Atlas and undo some of his damage. Unless he was in a blind fury, such an action is hard to explain. See if he has any other interests there, and if he has visited the town before. It might be that some of the people saw Atlas leave before the time of the killing.”

“I’ll go after work tonight.” Evidently the mission appealed to Fez’s best side, Paul thought. He looked earnest and almost pale.

Paul had a note from him the following morning, saying he would report the next day. And, indeed, he was waiting in the shabby hall when Paul came up. When they were closeted, he spoke slowly and with force.

“It wasn’t entirely a failure. While I didn’t find anyone who saw Atlas leave the town, no one seems to have seen him there after ten o’clock. The blacksmith shop often stays open late and is a great place for the townsmen to gather, and De Grotte might have been walking in that direction to look for him. Apparently he had never visited the town before, and has no interest there. Yet I have an inkling—which I can’t justify—that Atlas isn’t guilty.”

“I have the same inkling.” And what a mild way to put it, Paul thought grimly. Yet he spoke no more forcibly than Fez.

“Perhaps De Grotte was killed by someone wanting money—someone who met him on a lonely road late at night—all the houses dark except for candles before the Virgin—saw he was well dressed and a gentleman, and hacked him down to rob him,” Fez went on. “Some of these charcoal burners from the woods are a hard lot. The devil of it is, he’d be almost impossible to find, especially with the police convinced they’ve got their man.”

Casual murders—between two chance-met strangers—were always the hardest to solve, Paul was thinking.

"But here's one comfort," Fez said. "Atlas' lawyer doesn't have to prove him innocent—the state has to prove him guilty. If I were he, I'd concentrate on the argument that there's no factual evidence—only motive and opportunity. He told the police he was at a gambling den nearly four miles from the scene when the crime occurred. I'd ask the President of the Court to delay the trial until that could be investigated. I'd offer a small reward to anyone who saw Atlas coming or going there. And if a reliable witness turns up, he'll be acquitted."

Paul tightened his countenance and watched over his voice. "I'm inclined to believe you, Fez."

"I've got one thing to ask—a rather odd thing, but I can't help it. Atlas hasn't been able to engage a lawyer—if one is appointed by the court, about all he'll try to get is mercy. On the other hand, you've taken this to heart—I can see it in your face. Although it may hurt you professionally for a long time, I don't think a good stoker should consider that. I've got a lot of nerve—but I ask you to take this case."

Paul was moved more than he could explain or would reveal, yet, when he tried to answer, it sounded priggish.

"That's fine of you, Fez. I feel it's one of the best things—the truest act of friendship you've ever done. I think you came to that decision after a good deal of struggle with yourself. Well, I've got to have one with myself. I'll tell you how it turns out."

Paul's struggle lasted all that day, deep into the night. While it involved his inward nature, ethics, and ideals, he perceived also a practical problem. Any man can appear as witness in any trial on French soil; and the lawyer can himself go into the witness box. It occurred to Paul that a lawyer is in the best position to know how the trial is going, the feeling of the jury and the judges; he can tell better if, and when, additional testimony is needed to win a case. Also he would be better able to regulate the amount—how much he must give, how much he could conceal.

Paul skipped through this argument and turned to one that, for some reason, he liked better. Surely, of any lawyer Atlas could engage, he stood the best chance of obtaining his acquittal on the grounds of lack of evidence alone for he would fight the hardest and care the most. Already he had found out the subtle but powerful effect on a jury of a lawyer's complete belief in his client's innocence. In this case he would hold something stronger than belief—the proof of his own eyes. Would it not tell upon the court without

being stated? Paul liked to think so. Would not then the jurors divine right from wrong? It was Paul's nature to believe that, if strongly championed, right would prevail.

Of course if an influential lawyer of superb powers would see the weakness in the state's case and decide to defend Atlas for fame or honor or self-satisfaction, Paul would only too gladly stand aside and watch developments. He waited three more days in wan hope of this unlikely event. On the third night he went alone to Saint-Pierre's magnificent theater and took a cheap seat. Patrick Inge, the French-Irish actor whom he had seen and admired in Paris, and who had delighted him only the week before in a biting French comedy, *La Fille du Régiment*, was playing Domingo, the old Negro attendant, in a dramatization of the lovely novel *Paul et Virginie*. The bilingual troupe making an extensive tour through the French and English West Indies was somewhat shabby but made up of thespians of the old school. Paul knew he would be carried away, if only by the true-to-life playing of its aging, rarely sober, but almost always luminous star.

Paul was not only taken but deeply touched by the old, sad tale. Patrick Inge picked it up in his first scene, and never laid it down until the final curtain; it was warmed and vitalized and given a magic reality by the power and ardency of his art and personality. He remembered another Paul, his own self in late boyhood, and the reckless sweep of that boy's love for a girl as lovely and highborn as the play's Virginie. Walking home in the balmy night, Paul was able to see his own love story as a whole, to integrate that primary outpouring with all his emotional experience. He need never doubt that Joan loved him in return—a response to him more than her own creation—still that love would always be the great fact of his life, regardless of the outcome. Truly it seemed to him that he and Joan were bound in life and in death.

So if logically he could decide to defend Joan by abjuring any part in the coming trial and thus not bite the hand that fed him, the high hand of the De Legle, instead he resolved to offer his services to that wild and stormy soothsayer, the last Carib.

On the following morning, he sought permission to visit the prisoner. It was readily granted, but when Atlas was brought to the locked entry, he gave his visitor a deep, dark glance of reproach, then gazed out the barred window in proud silence. Paul felt no resentment, remembering that, as a Frenchman, he would be counted among the enemies of this island Pontiac. What he did feel was Atlas' raw power, the profundity of his emotions and intellect, and, within his own brain, a kind of elation, which he must watch and control. It was dangerous stuff.

“Atlas, this is the first time I’ve seen you face to face since we met in the woods on the day I was fleeing the island,” Paul began quietly.

Atlas did not quite hide his surprise at this warm address. “I remember well,” he said.

“No doubt you found your machete that I left for you in the tree.”

“Yes, and that paid the debt you incurred by borrowing it. You owe me nothing more—whether sympathy or advice or even help. I am in need of none.”

“Where is your machete now?” Paul asked, prompted by his instinct for essentials.

“The French have taken it from me, of course. But that does not matter. I do not need it to prophesy—I already know the outcome of the trial. And the sword of Pelée will be forged of lightning.”

Atlas’ dark eyes glowed as he fell silent. For a moment Paul felt discouraged. Then he ventured:

“Atlas, I came here to talk to you about taking your case.”

“The case is settled. My head will be cut off or I’ll be sent to the penal settlement for ten years, years I shall not live. Anyway, Missie Paul, what would you do for a fee? All lawyers must have their fees, and you know I have no money. The thought occurs to me it would be paid by a rich French artist named Denis du Bois.”

“I know and admire him, but why should he pay my fee?”

“His model—so he calls her—is my half-sister’s daughter. Hearing of my arrest, she will likely go to him. Why? Only because she would be ashamed to have a kinsman decapitated? You do not know the Creoles’ warm hearts—their loyalty to their own. He buys pretty things for her child’s eyes—good food and a good roof for her and her mamma. Still I don’t want him buying lawyers to plead for my life.”

“No one has offered me a fee, Atlas, and I ask only for what help you can give me in proving your innocence.”

“My innocence! You believe in my innocence?”

“Yes.”

“Then you must be a fool. Well, everyone’s a fool except me. I call all my brothers fools. When I was born, the last Carib brave, the Fire Goddess of the Mountain gave to me alone the gift of wisdom. That is why I obey no laws, heed no counsel, bow to no man, yield to no threat, ask no mercy, defy all. Thereby I live greatly, and will die still strong and victorious, instead of old and beaten.”

“Thereby you could have founded a great religion,” Paul said quietly, hardly knowing what he was saying. “I’ll take your case.”

“I’ve not offered it to you, yet. Did you know that I once cut off a man’s arm in a machete fight?”

“No.”

“The police know it. You’d hear about it, at the trial. I’m a bad fellow. I stir up trouble. I stand in the way of civilization. If there is a hell, I’ll go there—for your god is certainly on the side of the rich. Whether he exists or is an invention of the French, like the breech-loading rifle, I defy him too. I bow only to the Mountain, our sacred Mountain. I won’t rise when the judges enter the courtroom. Do you still want to take my case?”

“Yes, Atlas.”

“Then, Paul, you may.”

3.

When the word had passed that Paul Barteau, son of the foreman of De Legle Manoir, and educated in France, would defend Atlas at the forthcoming trial, it caused no great stir, but rather what seemed a long, slow ripple that reached everyone at last.

Paul noticed its first effects in the dim, dirty halls of the office building, on the streets, and at the courthouse. Young men with new shingles and old ideals, with whom he had now and then drunk Planter’s Punch, men whom he thought loved the adventure of practice, looked away as he passed so they would not have to answer his “*Bon jour!*” He continued to gaze at each one until he had gone by, to make the snub complete. It came to him that it was part and parcel with his conduct of sweeping his hat almost in the dust when the Seigneur and his daughter passed him on the road.

Chattering Creole girls fell silent on sight of him, and invariably lowered their heads a little in a graceful movement, not the complete bow, but an acknowledgment. The staff at the courthouse, clerks, notaries, and bailiffs whom he knew well, either busied themselves as he approached or answered his greeting in strained tones. The fact remained that Monsieur René Arnaud, President of the Bank de Martinique, whom Paul had thought the most likely to cut him dead, stopped him in a crowded chamber and shook his hand.

“Even a son of our little island may follow in the footsteps of Monsieur Leblois,” Arnaud told him.

"No, monsieur. I may take no such credit." For Arnaud could mean no other than the intrepid French lawyer who had reopened the Dreyfus case.

"In any case, I congratulate you."

About five days after the news, a visitor came early to Paul's office. Paul's heart thumped at sight of her dark face and tall spare form, and at her manner that turned the dingy room into a chamber of state. What he felt was neither fear nor exultation; its main ingredient seemed to be suspense, for he knew now that he could never know how this cat would jump. When he had shown her to the cheap chair, she sat so long in thought that his nerve failed him, and he spoke.

"I didn't expect to see you here, Joan."

"I don't see why not. We should have at least one meeting that is not illicit. We never have, until now."

"You forget my first call at the manoir after my return from France."

"Was it legitimate? The Seigneur had made a practice of admitting lawyers through the front door on the revolutionary theory that lawyers are gentlemen. It was his one bow to the times. Of course it's as full of holes as the idea that army and navy officers are necessarily gentlemen. You know, Paul, you've saved me a lot of beating about the bush."

"Nonsense. You never beat about the bush."

"I was going to, today. As it is, you've stated baldly the real issue of this visit—what I came to find out. Did I do wrong in letting you enter the front door?"

"It's over my head."

"Are you going to prove I did—or that I didn't?"

"Time may tell—but I doubt it."

"In one way, your taking Atlas' case could be called a truly gentlemanly act. A fellow guest at a dinner party maintained it was, that every man is innocent until proved guilty, and you were being true to your profession. But being Monsieur du Bois, he was prejudiced in your favor. The others—all except I, who kept my mouth shut—thought you'd been bribed by the anarchists, or were an anarchist yourself. I didn't agree with them, or with Denis either. I knew something that they didn't know."

"Yes."

"Paul, it was a terrible piece of bad luck that you saw him when you were with me."

"You saw him, too," Paul reminded her bluntly.

"I'm not sure I did. I saw somebody I thought was him. Let that go for now. It may be worse than bad luck—a major calamity as far as you and I are concerned. Actually, it was a miserable chance in a thousand—"

"The Dreyfus case has been mentioned. It is full of the most remarkable coincidences. The resemblance of his handwriting to that of Esterhazy. By the merest chance Dreyfus' brother discovered it. The finding of the *petit bleu* in the wastebasket—"

"I hope you don't mistake the two cases. One is a *cause célèbre* of France. This involves a quimboiseur, mainly faker, of the island."

"What do you want me to do, Joan?"

"Do what you damned please, but I won't answer for the consequences. Paul, we both have a deep feeling about Atlas. We'll never get over it, regardless how much of that ritual was *blague*. The fact remains that he's a revolutionist and terrorist. In a fit of temper, he hacked off a man's arm. He won't go to the guillotine—there's not enough direct evidence—but he deserves to go to prison for his other offenses. You are the receiver of Papa's bounty. Anton was Papa's cousin by marriage, a lesser member of Papa's own order.

"But there's something that would make this a thousand times worse. If you defend him, what can you do but tell the truth about *us*? Do you believe in the code of chivalry? You did, when you came to my rescue that day in the *cabane-des-vents*. By that code any gentleman will give his life for the honor of the woman he loves. Are you going to hold your hand from saving a revolutionist from prison for the honor of the woman you love?"

"Are you speaking your own beliefs, or those of the De Legle?"

"I am the De Legle now. The last De Legle. I remain so, instead of taking another name, because of you. Isn't it your first obligation to uphold me? I went with you to that resort partly for my own sake, partly for yours. If you took a street girl there, you would pay her five francs. How are you going to pay me?"

"It's a question I can't answer positively. I hope and I believe that I can win the case on its merits alone. If not that, it's my firm intention not to involve you in establishing the alibi; I have a story ready."

She leaned forward, scrutinizing him closely. "You're not a very good liar," she remarked. "That makes me wonder if you're a very good lawyer. Paul, why didn't you wait in the background, and if your story was needed, volunteer as a witness and come forth with it?"

"I told you. I thought I could win without it."

“Don’t you see that as his lawyer your unsupported word is suspect? If you’d been a volunteer witness, it wouldn’t be. You’d even be a kind of hero to the mob—the god of the machine. Even gentlemen would applaud your confession—of going to bed with a nameless street walker—to clear a scoundrel unjustly accused of murder. They’d know and you’d know you’d made no real sacrifice—this would be only a handsome gesture. They’d be sorry not to put Atlas where he belonged, but the show would be worth it. Paul, you’ve acted stupidly. Unless you can get out of it, you’ve made the greatest mistake of your life.”

Paul had trouble meeting that clear and candid gaze. She was perfectly right. There had been a flaw in his thinking. He could only comment:

“It’s too late, now.”

“I should have come sooner. I shouldn’t have trusted you. Understand, Paul, I haven’t asked you to repress any evidence that might help you win your case. I’d see you in hell first.”

He looked at her, her easy position, her long hands in her lap, her feet crossed, her face calm and its beauty perfectly lucid, her eyes quiet and lovely, her expression serene. He invoked her rich low voice, to hear it in afterimage.

“I love you, Joan.”

“ ‘If I loved not honor more.’ What a silly speech! The truth is, I don’t trust you. You should have stayed a peasant or become a gentleman. I’m afraid I’m going to be punished more severely than I was before.”

She rose. He went with her to the door.

“Au revoir?” he asked.

“I won’t see you again until the trial—or until after the trial. One or the other, but not both.”

4.

Paul found no difficulty in getting the trial postponed from mid-October, 1900, when it had been scheduled, to February of the following year. In this period he could hope and fairly expect to ferret out someone who had seen Atlas, on or about the Savane Bridge close to eleven-thirty on that fatal night. He had every reason to suspect that the Public Prosecutor approved and abetted the delay. That gentleman was not pleased at having uncovered no one who had encountered the prisoner in Chaude Oree at the same hour.

Fez did most of Paul's searching. He was tireless at it, quick to propose new methods, impossible to discourage. He had a convincing and ingratiating way with those who stayed up late, whether revelers, street walkers, or sober watchmen. By the end of the year he had turned up only one clue—the roundabout report of a young bawd having accosted Atlas close to midnight by the Savane Bridge, and being repulsed. However, he had found evidence that would demolish the testimony of the witness who had told of visiting the gambling den at the crucial hour and seeing nothing of him. Paul would be able to show that he was a proven perjurer and had tossed pots in a mughouse from his arrival at ten until he was chucked out at three in the morning.

By great diligence Fez learned the bawd's name—Alexandrine—and traced her to Belle-Fontaine where she had recently taken up with a fisherman. At first blush, she appeared to have forgotten the incident, and declared she wanted nothing to do with courts and coppers. But as Fez questioned her, meanwhile jingling some coins in his pocket, her memory improved. Before he left, she was able to recall all the circumstances, the very block of Rue des Ursulines where they had met, the time being twenty-five minutes past eleven, corroborated by the closing of an apothecary's shop on the next block of her walk, and what each had said to the other. But she would be ashamed to expose her trade before all those people. Fez sympathized with that—although she had been in court before, and at the bar instead of in the box—and wondered if thirty francs, to be paid the day following the trial, would soothe her feelings? Thirty would not, she said; it would take a hundred. They agreed on fifty.

When Fez had reported his success to Paul—omitting various details of its accomplishment—Paul went at once to see his client. Although still defiant of the world, haughty as any Carib chief that the French laid low, he had come to trust Paul and pay him high respect. Almost as a favor to him, it seemed, he was showing willingness to follow his suggestions and to do all that his strange soul sanctioned to obtain acquittal. Paul began by telling Alexandrine's story, pointed out that it was the first rift in the clouds, then bluntly asked Atlas if it were true.

"I won't say it's untrue," the last Carib answered. "Like all night wanderers, I'm often accosted by harlots. Mostly the darker ones; the very bright ones—the *sang-mêlé*—usually pass by. If Alexandrine had offered herself, I would have refused as she told you. I live a celibate life. I don't wish to risk bringing another Carib into a lonely world."

Atlas spoke this last in declamatory tones. The part of a celibate fitted well with his concept of the Last Carib; yet Paul felt that he might be lying.

Anyway it seemed of no importance and soon slipped his mind.

"Anyway, I would have said, 'No, *che*,' not, 'I am engaged,' " Atlas went on. "I walked far that night, my mind greatly troubled, between about eleven and half-past; perhaps I crossed the bridge. If questioned on the witness stand, I'll tell what I've just told you."

"I think that answer will be very effective."

Paul thought it best to talk to Alexandrine, to try to determine what impression she would make upon the court. He found her decidedly pretty, soft-spoken, with almost none of the mannerisms and habits of speech which women of her trade almost invariably come to employ. She told her story simply and well, wiping all doubt of its truth from Paul's mind.

She agreed that she could have been mistaken as to Atlas' reply to her solicitation. "Most unwilling Creoles say, 'I'm engaged,' " she said. "Frenchmen bow, thank me, and tell me the madame is just around the corner. Of course I know it's a lie, but I laugh and run off."

Paul chose words for a hard question.

"Still it takes a good deal of courage to confess to it in open court. Where did you find that courage?"

"All the people were talking of how Atlas had killed Missie at half-past eleven in Chaude Oree. I couldn't put out of my mind how I had seen and spoken to him near Savane Bridge, almost at that moment. Monsieur, I tried to forget it—I was only a street girl—but something wouldn't let me, and I believe it was the voice of Bon Die."

Savane Bridge was not far from the den called Who Will Buy Fish? Apparently Atlas had gone there immediately after encountering Alexandrine. Paul spoke in a glowing voice.

"If the other lawyer asks you that question, make the same reply. I think you'll save the day for Atlas—and for me."

A faintly troubled expression flitted across the girl's face. After all, Paul thought, she had volunteered for a hard chore! It did not occur to him that she might be reproaching herself for not holding out for a hundred francs.

5.

The crowd filled the grand old courtroom to overflowing. Although mostly upper-class Creoles, it contained also about fifty Frenchmen, almost all of whom had had financial dealings or social intercourse with Anton de Grotte. Exceptions were Paul's parents, dressed plainly yet with dignity, the

rich and highborn artist, Denis du Bois, who in four years' residence in Saint-Pierre had not shown a single picture, and Fez, Roland de Fosse, and Albert Potier.

The only surviving members of Atlas' family sat in front seats—the extremely handsome pale-colored woman called Coraline, his half-sister, and the latter's daughter, a beautiful chabine who took many a roving eye. Neatly, even expensively dressed, they sat with their eyes cast down. The Creole prosecutor, Monsieur Procureur-général, had a sallow skin, a courteous and dignified manner, wide mouth, thick neck, and strong jaw.

Paul's task began when the bailiff, an old, decrepit Frenchman, called in a quavering voice for all to rise. During the rustle of clothes and bodies and shuffling of feet, the big dark man beside him remained seated, giving the impression that only a derrick could hoist him. The old man was slow to see him, slower still and touching as he shuffled toward him, only to stop and stand at quavering attention as three judges entered the chamber in their long robes and wigs. All were dignitaries, Justice Jaret being the President of the Court and a fiery little man of ancient lineage on the island. LaGarde was a brown-skinned Creole of surpassing brilliance, De Fontaine, deliberate and severe, a late-comer from Paris. All three had taken their chairs, Jaret the center, before any of them noticed the seated figure.

Then Jaret motioned for him to rise. Paul spoke quickly.

"Monsieur President of the Court!"

"Monsieur Avocat!"

"I beg you to excuse my client's behavior. In a way of speaking, he is lame."

"In what way of speaking? Can he stand and walk?"

"The lameness is in his mind in regard to certain matters of propriety."

"The point is noted. The question of contempt of court will be settled after this trial. Pray proceed."

The seating of the jury did not take long for Paul did not offer a single protest. It was composed of three Frenchmen, two Negroes, and seven Creoles. One of the French appeared the dandy; and Paul regretted that he, Monsieur Jardin, was chosen foreman. The others seemed intelligent, earnest men, equal to the occasion.

A greater disappointment came to Paul during the prosecutor's address to the jury. Plainly he did not intend to call the witness against whom Paul was so well armed; he had perceived it would be a boomerang. His words were temperate and convincing. After tracing Atlas' career as a troublemaker and machete fighter, he made quite a point of the merits of

circumstantial evidence over direct evidence—the first offering deductions beyond reasonable doubt, the second subject to human error. Obviously the state had no witness to testify to Atlas' presence at the scene and time of the crime.

Paul spoke, politely defying his opponent to prove Atlas' guilt, and promising to prove his innocence. The trial began to move when the prosecutor called witnesses to establish malice on Atlas' part toward Monsieur, deep and long-standing malice; and one of these witnesses was Felix of Manoir De Legle, who related only too well Atlas' trespass of the fields, his interference with the hands, the consequential rotting of the cut cane, and Monsieur's threat to turn his gun on the revolutionist if he returned there. Near the end of that testimony Paul perceived that the questions had been framed with great care. The result seemed to be that Felix did not bring out the source of Atlas' power over the hands—his fame as a quimboiseur.

It did not fit any theory Paul could hit upon, so he had to let it go.

The next witness called was Dr. Claude Griffon. Paul gazed with rapt attention on this stocky rumpled man whom he had met only once before and to whom he had written of Baron du Ville's remorse. He was as impressive as Joan had described him, although Paul could not decide why. Dr. Griffon spoke of being called from his labors by a priest, running to the scene of the homicide, and examining the body. Replying to the prosecutor's questions, he gave his reasons why he had fixed eleven-thirty as the approximate moment of death.

"Dr. Griffon, could it be possible that it could have occurred an hour or more earlier than that?"

"I would call it impossible. As a medical officer in the Franco-German War I have seen many fresh wounds and much spilled blood. I've learned to know their appearance and to identify them by touch."

"Thank you, doctor. Will you tell the court the immediate cause of death?"

"The complete severance by a sharp instrument of the carotid artery on the left side of the neck."

"Is this the artery commonly called the jugular vein?"

"If so, it is improperly called that. The carotid carries blood from the heart to the brain. The jugular vein returns it."

"You speak of a sharp instrument. Could the wound have been caused by a razor, a clasp knife, or any type of knife that could be carried concealed?"

"No, monsieur, that is not possible. The gash was too long and deep."

"What weapon would you say did cause the wound?"

"I have every reason to believe that it was brought about by a powerful blow of a machete. It resembled perfectly other machete wounds I have seen on the island—these fortunately occurred in less mortal areas of the body. Its only counterpart that I've ever seen were sword and saber wounds in the Franco-German War."

The prosecutor turned to Paul. "Monsieur, do you care to question the witness?"

"No, monsieur. I regard his testimony as complete and eminently fair."

Then the prosecution called to the stand Monsieur de Grotte's carriage driver. This soft-spoken, alert Creole told of driving his master to the outskirts of Chaude Oree, arriving there at eleven-ten according to Missie's repeater, whose little bells could tell time better than a cra-cra. What was Monsieur's manner during the ride? His manner was always lofty. Did he seem calm or excited, carefree or anxious, brave or afraid? No, Missie was fearless as a lion at all times; however, he knew he was going into danger.

"How do you know he knew that?" the prosecutor asked quietly, after a pause, amid the deep silence of the chamber.

"Because he told me so."

"Will you repeat his words, as well as you can remember them?"

"Missie, my master said, 'Victoire, this is distasteful business I am on tonight, but it cannot be helped. I will be dealing with a scoundrel who may not hesitate to employ weapons against my bare hands. I expect to teach him a lesson, but if he should kill me, I want you to know I have remembered you in my will. If I've not returned by the time the convent bells strike two, summon the gendarmes.' "

The prosecutor stood as in deep reflection until the first surge of sensation through the court had started to dim. Then he spoke slowly.

"Did he speak the scoundrel's name?"

"No, missie, he did not."

"Did you have any reasonable doubt what he meant?"

"No, missie, I did not."

The prosecutor turned to Paul. "Your witness, monsieur," he said politely.

Paul had already sensed the feeling in the courtroom. There was as much or more animosity against him as against his client; it rose up like a blast of air. He must hold his hand for a while—wait until he could achieve a *coup de main*. Anyway there was no use trying to shake Victoire's testimony. He

would only stagger about and fail, and then the resentment could easily change to cruel exultation that divorced reason and poisoned the mind.

"I may question Monsieur later," he replied with an equal courtesy.

The prosecution now summoned a bronze-colored charcoal burner from Chaude Oree. He was called Gaspard—and when Paul glanced at Fez, to catch any signal he might pass, he found him staring tensely at the witness. But Paul gave it little thought as his attention became fixed on the man's aesthetic face and burning eyes. He was about forty-five, Paul thought, and seemed intelligent. He looked like he might be a most effective witness.

What had he done on the night of the slaying of Monsieur? He had come home from his kiln in the forest, and about eight o'clock had joined the crowd gathered at the market. Why had the crowd gathered? To hear a speech by Atlas, known as the last Carib. At what time did the speech end and what did he do then? The speech was not long—it was over before ten o'clock—and he had sat with friends, eating fruit and drinking tabi until, shortly after half-past twelve, a boy had brought the news of Missie's slaying; then all had run to the blacksmith shop to look and listen.

And then the prosecutor asked a question Paul had meant to ask; the keystone of his defense—and Paul discovered at last how worthy an adversary he had engaged in this low-voiced Creole who was Procureur-général.

"Did you see any more of Atlas?"

"No, missie."

"Do you know of anyone who saw him that night, after he had finished speaking?"

"No, missie. He went out through the back of the market and the shadows hid him."

"What was the gist of his speech? Can you remember any of what he said?"

The Creoles love drama, and Gaspard rose to the occasion. With squared shoulders, a haughty set of his head, and an intensely proud expression, he began to speak in a rumbling voice.

"Don't go into the fields. Let the cane rot. Let the fires go out in your charcoal kilns. Spurn the little copper coins that the French will give you. It may be I will be killed by them. One has already promised me the death that the French gave all my people. But it may be he will be struck down by a strong hand, and I will live to see the vengeance. Look up to our Mountain. To all the poor and wretched and despised, she promises victory and joy."

“Did he employ gestures when he spoke?” the prosecutor asked when Gaspard paused.

“Yes, missie.”

“With one hand, or with both hands?”

“With both hands, missie.”

“Describe them, please.”

“He clenched his left hand and shook it. In his right hand he held a machete with a shining blade. As he spoke, he swung it back and forth.”

“Was there any point in his speech when he swung it with more strength and fury than usual?”

“Yes, missie. When he spoke of how his death had been promised by Missie Grotte. Then his face grew terrible, and he slashed the air in two.”

The prosecutor turned and bowed to the three judges.

“Monsieur the President of the Court and Judges! We rest our case.”

But Paul felt quite sure that the resourceful prosecutor had another iron in the fire.

6.

Paul felt the need of at once checking the tide setting in against him. Thus he called to the stand his most important witness, and, if all went well, his last?

Alexandrine wore a madras on her pretty dark head; otherwise her garb was as subdued as though she were “raised in a hat.” She came quietly to the stand, without awkwardness or visible self-consciousness or the least trace of theatrics, and her face was unpainted, her lips unrouged.

“What is your name, *che*?” Paul asked in the patois, which everyone in court understood.

“I have no name but Alexandrine,” she answered clearly.

“No last name?”

“No, missie. I dropped it, for the sake of my father who is dead.”

“What was your occupation, on the night that Monsieur was killed?”

“Missie, I was a harlot.”

“Did you live in a licensed house?”

“No, missie, I walked the streets and took the men to my room.”

“Do you know the prisoner by sight?”

“Yes, missie. All the people know him. I have seen him many times.”

“When and where was the last time you saw him, previous to his arrest?”

“It was that very night, missie. I met him near the Savone Bridge.”

“Did you see him clearly?”

“Yes, missie. The moon was up by then. I came up to speak to him and called him by name.”

The crowd had grown perfectly still and was holding its breath.

“At what time was this, Alexandrine? Be as exact as you can.”

“About ten minutes before half-past eleven. I know, because when I had walked on, the apothecary shop two blocks away was just closing. It always closes at half-past eleven. I could not buy an opium pill for my aching head.”

“You say you spoke to the prisoner. What did you say?”

“ ‘Will you come with me, dear?’ ”

“What did he reply?”

“ ‘No, *che*,’ and with that he walked on.”

“Did you notice which way he went?”

“I thought he turned into the alley leading to the gaming rooms called Who Will Buy Fish?”

The throng had breathed again with what seemed a long sigh. Flushed, Paul turned to the prosecutor.

“Your witness, monsieur.”

“I will detain her only a moment,” the prosecutor answered in pleasant tones. With his unfailing courtesy he addressed the witness.

“You say that all the people knew Atlas. Do you mean the Creoles of Saint-Pierre?”

“Yes, missie, I did mean that.”

“You had seen him many times, you said, and knew his face well.”

“Yes, missie.”

“Did all the people know he was a quimboiseur?”

“Oh, yes, missie.”

“So of course you knew it too.”

“I—no—yes—all the people said so.”

“One of the greatest on the island, isn’t that true?”

“Yes, it is true, missie.” She spoke barely above a whisper and she had turned white.

“Speak a little louder, please, Alexandrine. I want you to tell me—and tell the court—on pain of punishment for perjury if you lie—that you asked a famous quimboiseur to go with you to your bedroom?”

“Bon Die have mercy!”

“You haven’t answered my question—*che*!” Only in pronouncing the pet name that Paul had used did he employ irony.

“I don’t have to answer it!” she cried, defiantly.

“The witness will answer the question, and at once,” intoned the President of the Court.

“No, I didn’t ask him. I would sooner ask a fer-de-lance—Death-in-the-wood.”

“Then your story is a lie?”

“No, missie. I saw him, but I didn’t speak to him.”

“At what distance did you see him?”

“From across the street. I walked across the street when I saw him coming. I swear it by Bon Die—”

“You have perjured yourself once. Be careful not to do so again. Who told you to tell this story in court?”

“It was a Frenchman. I don’t know his name. I’m not to blame—my man hadn’t caught any fish—the Frenchman promised me fifty francs. May Bon Die burn him in hell!”

The prosecutor turned to Paul, bowing slightly. “Your witness, monsieur.”

As Paul stood gray of face, his great arms hanging, a giggle rose from someone in the throng. Several others laughed at this, a woman squealed, a hoarse, shouting laugh broke through the others, and then in flocks and flurries all the people fell to laughing, ever more loudly, until the sound became a roar, re-echoing from the walls and ceiling, the most shocking sound, the crudest pillory, Paul had ever heard. The aged bailiff called for silence in a quavering voice—someone pointed at him, and the swell of cruel mirth rose again. Only the pounding of the President’s gavel and his stern face finally awed the crowd, and the uproar died away.

“Another disturbance, and I will clear the court,” the President declared.

During that long quaff of hemlock Paul had come to a dreadful decision. One fact stood out—no matter what he did from henceforth, what witnesses he called, he had lost the case. Everyone knew it well; if he had searched for a single frail and foolish doubt, he could not have found it. Yet the strange truth remained that he must fight to the last with any weapons he could lay

hand to. Nothing could stay that. If the knowledge derived from any specific source that he could recognize, it was the spoken wish of a man now sitting in this room, Denis du Bois, when Paul had thanked him for delivering the De Legle's gift.

He could not know of a brief, hushed conversation between Alexandrine, now returned to her chair, and a sunburned man, used to gazing at mirror-bright waters, who had been given a chair beside her. If he had done so he might have won his case, even if still too young to grasp the full import of the words.

"Why didn't you stick to your story, Alexandrine?" the fisherman asked. "It was true. You had brought him to your room before that night."

"It was true, and he was a man like any man, but I'd forgotten the way the people think and talk about quimboiseurs. Do you think I want them saying that I'd stay with one?"

"You could have saved him, and now he's doomed. The man is doomed."

"I couldn't help it, Bon Die have mercy on my soul."

It is the way of doom to strike or to miss by narrow margins.

7.

Paul spoke quietly in the deep hush.

"Monsieur President of the Court and Judges! I make a petition."

"We will hear it," Jaret answered.

"I pray that the court be recessed until two o'clock this afternoon, so that I may summon a witness important to its finding."

"Have you any objection, Monsieur Procureur-général?"

"Not in the least, although I trust that Monsieur will choose one who won't waste the court's time."

"The last comment is uncalled for, monsieur. I declare this court recessed until two o'clock this afternoon. Monsieur Bailiff, clear the court."

"All stand while their honors leave." During the noisy uprising, there came one surprising development. It was a little thing, by a sober reckoning, and perhaps a great thing as felt by the heart. With a proud glance at Paul, Atlas got to his feet with the rest.

The subpoena was issued and quickly delivered; there was no difficulty in finding the witness. Just before two, she entered the courtroom with tall,

dark Cecile, and the bailiff showed them to their chairs. The gathered throng gaped in silence, but she seemed unaware of its stare. She was dressed simply and elegantly in white, and the significance of that was beyond Paul's wit to imagine. He could only gaze at her as at a vision soon to vanish, and his homely face became drawn and pale while his eyes smarted with unshed tears. Although she made no visible effort to avoid his gaze, she did not glance at him.

The trial was resumed. Paul called Joan to the witness box, and as she was making her quiet way there, Atlas spoke to him in a low murmur.

"You do not have to do this, missie. I know not what it is, only that it's terrible. It will make no difference—"

"You are wrong. I have to do it."

As Joan took her seat, Paul felt the enmity of the whole assembly, deep-seated now, and sullen. As though he had divined what was coming, the prosecutor looked haggard and white. The judges sat perfectly still. The faces of Jean and Marie Barteau were like death masks.

"Your name, mademoiselle?" Paul began.

"Joan de Legle, monsieur," she answered clearly.

"Where is your home?"

"De Legle Manoir and the Montagne."

"Will you relate your actions between eleven-fifteen and approximately eleven-thirty on the night that Monsieur was killed?"

"You came to my town house in a closed chaise exactly at eleven-fifteen, the prearranged time. I went out the garden gate and entered the chaise."

Justice de Fontaine leaned forward with a sudden movement.

"Will the witness please speak fully, employing the person's name?"

"Monsieur Paul Barteau came to my house in Montagne at eleven-fifteen, as he and I had arranged. The chaise was standing in shadow and by going out the garden gate I got in without being seen. Shall I proceed?"

"Please do so."

"Monsieur drove to the front of the house whose rear opens on an alley and is occupied by the gambling rooms called Who Will Buy Fish? The front door was unlocked, as Monsieur had arranged. We entered the dark hall and started to go up the stairs."

The prosecutor sprang to his feet. "Mr. President, I object to this testimony and ask that it be stricken from the record."

"On what grounds, Monsieur Procureur?"

“Because it is untrue on the face of it. It is inconceivable. What influence has been brought to bear—”

“Objection denied. The witness will proceed.”

“At the foot of the stairs there is a curtained window that looks into the gambling rooms. Monsieur drew the curtain, saw someone sitting there, and asked if I knew who it was. I said I thought it was Atlas. The light was rather dim and I had seen him only a few times so I could not be quite sure. Monsieur said it was Atlas, and I firmly believe it was he.”

“At what time was that, mademoiselle?” Paul asked.

“It was within a minute or two of half-past eleven. The drive from my house to this house had taken about fifteen minutes.”

The foreman of the jury, Monsieur Jardin, leaped to his feet and stood with his arms rigid at his side. He was a small man, rather foppishly dressed; his face was very red.

“Monsieur President! I rise to a point of order.”

“You may do so.”

“I wish to be the first to volunteer for a public duty. Have I Your Honor’s permission at this point to challenge Monsieur Barteau to a duel?”

“You certainly have not, now or at any time. The witness may proceed.”

“I have no other questions, Monsieur President,” Paul said. Then to the prosecutor, “Will you question the witness?”

“Monsieur, I decline. I’ll have no part in it, and only remark I’ve never known a lawyer to go to these lengths.”

Paul had decided to go to no further lengths. If he himself entered the box as he had considered doing, he could not help his case and would only anger the court even more. So he spoke quietly.

“Then the witness may leave the box and we rest our case.”

Joan walked lightly to her seat. The judges conferred briefly, then the President invited the prosecution to sum up.

“Monsieur President, I feel that the jury has a full picture of this trial, and the sooner the verdict can be reached, the better,” the Creole answered.

“Monsieur Avocat?”

“I’ve nothing to say, monsieur.”

The President’s charge to the jury was the briefest in Paul’s remembrance. The jurymen filed out; the judges withdrew to their chambers. Joan beckoned to the antiquated bailiff; when he had hurried to her chair, she asked him something. At his nod she rose, and, with the throng’s eyes

upon her, walked with her head up to the front chairs where sat Coraline and Clio. This brought her just beyond the rail from Paul's seat, so near that he heard perfectly what she said to them. It was a strange last nearness, he thought.

"I hope your brother and uncle will be acquitted."

Coraline was tongue-tied, but Clio spoke in her sweet, childish voice, her eyes melting in sorrow.

"I think all will go sweetly with him, *che*."

"I'm afraid not. Is your name Clio? I ask because you remind me of someone—one I seemed to have known quite well—but I can't remember who it was. *Bon jou', che.*"

Without a glance at Paul, she left the courtroom.

In a few minutes the judges reappeared and took their seats. At once the jurors filed in, and the ancient ceremony went on.

"The foreman will please arise." And when he had done so, "Has the jury reached its verdict?"

"Yes, Monsieur President."

"What is it, please?"

"By a vote of eight to four, we find the prisoner guilty of manslaughter."

"Thank you, messieurs." And when the President had spoken briefly to his confreres: "The prisoner will arise."

Again Atlas stood on his sinewy feet, his head erect, his shoulders square.

"Have you anything to say before the court passes sentence?"

"I will say this. I am to be sent to the penal settlements, and left to rot. I am the last of the Carib men. All my brothers are dead and rotten long ago. But long before that, long before the white men came to kill us, the Arawak Indians made war upon us, their numbers ten to our one. Our holy Mountain spoke, and many were killed, and the rest took to their boats and fled. When it is time for me to die, our holy Mountain will speak again. I am done."

"We sentence you to ten years' hard labor in the Safety Islands of French Guiana. We have found you innocent of contempt of court." The President turned to Paul. "As for you, we believe that in your attempt to defend the prisoner you have wilfully brought about false testimony. Here and now we charge you, and you will be tried at the next session of court. The court is adjourned."

CHAPTER ELEVEN

The Players

1.

PAUL'S first move after the disastrous trial was to turn over to other lawyers the cases he had pending. It was unthinkable that he could practice law while the charge against him stood. This surprised no one in the profession, whatever they thought of him; he himself was surprised by the civil treatment he received from its members everywhere, not merely restraint from kicking a man when he is down. In the first place they could not quite swallow the idea that he had bribed Alexandrine to give false testimony; it failed to fit his face and previous actions. Certainly he had not bribed Joan, and her testimony, although inconclusive, cast a veil of mystery over the whole case which caused almost everyone to guard his speech. There were no more public outbursts of righteous indignation over his calling her to the stand, or even extravagant gestures by self-appointed knights. Paul need fight no duels.

This stemmed partly from Joan's own attitude, as far as the world knew, toward the scandal. Whatever she felt and expressed in her bedchamber, the chamber-of-state of the De Legle town house, in public she showed no trace of the damsel in distress. Three nights after the trial she attended a ball at the Governor's palace, beautifully garbed, richly jeweled; and escorted by an aide-de-camp; and his Excellency, the Governor, Monsieur Mouttat, requested and received the second dance. Thereafter she suffered no lack of partners among those of the highest standing in the city, young and old; and what they were demonstrating was immensely complicated. Also, quite possibly the completeness of her exposure under such dramatic conditions greatly reduced the social value of prudish display. A scandal, to be made the most of, must sift into ears and out of mouths a grain at a time.

It was noted that their ladies behaved with far less cordiality, and probably had words with their undutiful mates behind the curtain. Also, a few days after the ball, Joan and a small entourage departed the city for De Legle Manoir.

Meanwhile, Atlas was being disposed of in decent obscurity. There were no witnesses, let alone accounts in the press, of his farewell visits from a priest, a rich artist, a handsome half-Chinese, half-Indian woman, and her beautiful gold-colored daughter. When Paul called upon him, the jailer brought rum in tin cups for them to touch in a last toast, for not many convicts returned from the settlements at San Luc.

"I drink to your exoneration and your freedom, for which I'll do everything I can," Paul said.

"Missie Paul, I wish you would not trouble yourself," Atlas answered. "I myself am not greatly troubled about the future. All you can do would be thrown away; it would take too long and my term at San Luc will be short. I am not a patient man by nature. At the first lash on my bare back, I will strike to kill, and I will kill, and then I will be killed. It is so simple and easy. And then, or just before or just after, my Mountain will speak."

"It may be so. But will you do what you can to avoid that first lash? Guard your life the best you can. Do not antagonize the guards, obey the rules. Do not try to break out. It is easy to gain the jungle, but beyond lies the sea; fifty fugitives from the camps have tried to swim to safety, and not one found it. Every one was caught, drowned, or killed by sharks. Eat all the food you can get and keep strong."

"My friend, I will try. I can likely succeed for a year and perhaps longer. I would like to see with these eyes the dawn of the day that is coming, although I look my fate in the eyes. For your care for me, Missie Paul, Pelée will be kind to you! I told you so before, and I am more assured than ever. Farewell."

Paul turned to go, then looked into the stern, dark face again.

"Atlas, have you any idea who did kill Monsieur?" he asked on impulse.

"None. Whoever it was did a public service, and for that I would wish him well. But he caused you to lose your sweetheart—her like is not easy to find—and you are not the kind that can readily forget and find another. For that there is darkness against him in my heart."

"I think you are wrong about Monsieur de Grotte. His death was not a good riddance but a loss to the island, because his like, also, is not easy to find these days, and he would have befriended the people against worse masters. Have you a farewell word for the Chatelaine de Legle, in case I see her again?"

"Yes, you may thank her for speaking the truth at the cost of her reputation. If I were a new Robespierre, feeding the guillotine of Martinique, I would see that the blade was made extra sharp for her slim neck, so she

would not know what struck her, and I would not let the howling mob see her head fall. Her father, the De Legle, was as steadfast in his faith as I am in mine, and she is truly his daughter."

Paul left the cell, and the old jailer pressed his hand, tears in his eyes, although Paul did not know why. And soon Paul's former acquaintances of the court resumed speaking to him, but they still did not like to be seen talking or walking with him. A letter from the *juge d'instruction*, asking him to call at his office, was couched in courteous terms.

Paul showed the letter to Fez and in fact laid it on his lap.

"The matter has to come up sooner or later," he said. "I'm sorry you have to be involved, considering that you did all you could to help me win that trial, with no motive other than fellowship."

"As it is, I helped you lose it. Well, I'm going with you to see the investigator. If he insists on seeing you alone, I'll see him when you're through. I'm going to tell him that I was the one who offered the girl money, and it was not a bribe to tell a lie, only reward for her honesty. What they take off your punishment they can give to me—the whole dish would suit me better."

"I don't think you'll be punished at all, because you're not a lawyer or supposed to know the ethics of the profession. On the other hand, much of the onus will be taken from me. I would have asked you to go, Fez, if you hadn't offered to, but I knew you would offer."

It turned out that the *juge d'instruction* received both men together, and listened courteously and credulously to Fez's story. Then he turned and spoke to Paul.

"I've no reason to doubt your friend, but the fact remains that he is your friend, and moved in your behalf, which makes you in part responsible for his actions. However, I feel sure that the charge against you of obtaining false testimony will be reduced to that of tampering with a witness. Possibly, since contempt of court can be either intentional or by neglect of duty, the state will stop at that. In this case you will be tried by a magistrate."

This last procedure was indeed adopted by the court, partly because the city had heard and talked too much of a great chatelaine, a quimboiseur, a peasant-born lawyer, and a girl of the streets; and it was glad to dispose of its aftermath as quietly as possible. The street girl had moved again and to everyone's relief could not be found.

"You neglected to observe properly your responsibilities to the bar, so I find you guilty of contempt of court," the magistrate told Paul. "I hereby revoke your license to practice law in Martinique for a period of two years."

It was a severe sentence for the offense charged, and Paul knew well that herein lay his punishment for offending the sensibilities of upper-class Frenchmen by a body blow at chivalry, their code even when it was not their creed. For this, Paul had got off lightly. Individuals may be judicial when they meditate alone or talk to their friends and their wives; a class of men lack or lose the ability when ingrained emotions move them. Paul had committed a stupendous gaucherie. The fact that he had told the truth could not pardon it.

2.

In due time Paul closed his office, packed his books, and accepted an old schoolmate's offer to manage the fishermen's dock at Carbet, three miles down the coast from Saint-Pierre. About the same time, Fez gave up his job at the Guerin mills and took another as steam-fitter and mechanic in the engine room of a great distillery, close to the village. It came to pass that these two, Roland de Fosse and Albert Potier, met oftener than at any time since their return from France. It appeared a happenstance, but Roland and Albert sensed the inclination, and Fez was driven by a need he could neither confess nor explain.

A month had passed since Paul's disbarment, and the four were meeting the fourth time on the wharf at Carbet, when Roland made the first mention of Atlas.

"Has anyone ever escaped from these penal settlements?" he asked thoughtfully.

"Not one," Paul answered.

"Well, there's going to be a first time, some time."

"What becomes of all those convicts?" Fez asked, with a nervous twitch of his lip. "I was glancing over the figures. They're sent every year in batches—a great many of them for life—yet the head count at the settlements remains about the same."

"As has been remarked in the Chamber of Deputies—the mortality rate is unduly high."

"What's the best chance for him, Paul?" Albert asked.

"That he be pardoned in three or four years—if he lives that long. Dreyfus was pardoned although not yet exonerated after serving four years of his sentence. But I assume that the health of political prisoners on Devil's Island runs somewhat better than of criminals on the other islands. When the

case can finally be brought to the court of appeals—well, I don't believe Atlas will be available."

"If there weren't so many black marks—insurrection, anarchism, cutting off that Negro's arm—" Fez's strong voice trailed off.

"Such things could properly influence the judges in setting the sentence. They become completely extraneous to a murder he didn't commit."

To Paul's surprise, Fez flushed deeply. He was an odd fellow, Paul thought, with many strengths and weaknesses. Yet it was Fez who, at the next meeting of the band, asked a crucial question.

"Paul, what is the penalty for helping convicts to escape?"

"It happens that I looked that up," Paul answered blandly. "Actually it is not as severe as you might think. The laws are rather new—they'll soon be made more strict—the story went around that after Dreyfus' second conviction, not quite two years ago, a powerful cabal plotted his escape from Devil's Island and had slipped the schedule into a so-called reform bill so the plotters could obtain mercenaries at a reasonable cost. Killing one or more of the guards remains, of course, murder. For threatening or bribing them the penalty is five years. For giving a fugitive aid or comfort on the island, it's two years. For corresponding with him or picking him up at sea it's only one."

"One year at hard labor?" Fez remarked lightly. "Why, that would only grow some hair on a man's chest."

They dropped the subject, and in the next few weeks it seemed that three of them were merely waiting for the fourth to tell them something. On a night in July, when they sat on a beach watching a lightning storm atop cloud-darkened Pelée, Paul laid it out.

"Always the best tactics against a superior force is surprise," he began. "When the inferior force can appear much stronger than it is, the chances of success are greatly increased. Who was the confederate general—Johnson? Johnston?—who bluffed the Union general in the American Civil War? He'd let one of his soldiers be captured, and the man would spin a yarn to McClellan's secret service about a force twice as strong as it was. That set me to thinking."

"Beau Sabreur!"

"Not a bit of it. I tackled it like a problem in calculus at which Roland is far more adept than I. The fact became evident, though, that any scheme we would dare adopt for what's in our minds must be so out of the ordinary—so sensational—I suppose I have to say melodramatic—as to bamboozle the guards completely for the time we're operating."

"*Voilà!*" said Roland crisply.

"Now I have an idea that the guards on St. Luc's Island are not very bright fellows either, or they wouldn't be living the boresome life they do. That's number one item. Number two, there's a steam launch, formerly used by the French provost, lying with her boiler blown up at the wharf at Basse-Terre, in Guadeloupe. The dockmaster has orders to sell it for three thousand francs."

"We wait," Albert Potier said with an odd lift to his voice, "for further items."

"This next one is a trifle. I know a tailor in Saint-Pierre whom I can trust. He has made many fine uniforms for officers. Fez, have you still the sergeant major's sword that your father wore?"

"It's somewhere about my diggings."

"You'd be second in command, a kind of petty officer. Our commandant must be someone older and more distinguished-looking. Did any of you see the comedy, *La Fille du Régiment*, put on by the Paris troupe on its next to the last run in Saint-Pierre? Although he didn't play the lead, the real star was Patrick Inge, the Franco-Irish actor, in the part of the Colonel. He played it straight, and he was so damned convincing that all the fantastic scenes became wildly funny. He's a very distinguished-looking man who goes on sprees. When the rest of the troupe took off for France he couldn't be found; he was lying drunk in a house of ill-fame. He's in Fort-de-France at present, ready for almost any engagement. As a youth he took part in the Home Rule riots in Ireland, spending plenty of time in jail, so we can assume he's of an adventurous disposition."

"He's to be our commandant," Fez said. "I'm to pretend to be a petty officer. What will you be, Paul?"

"I suppose I'll be chief of staff," Paul answered gravely. "Provided—of course—we attempt the coup."

"Are there any more good things, before you start naming the bad?" Roland asked.

"Yes. One piece of flagrant good luck. In our midst is a skilled engraver. Albert, we would need a sheet of heavy paper and envelope to match, both engraved with 'Department of Investigation, Republic of France,'—something of the sort. The superintendent at St. Luc will rub his finger over it without fail, then I don't think it could cross his mind that the writing is a fraud. This will instruct all heads of French penal settlements to put no obstacles in the way of the bearer, Monsieur le Prefect So-and-So, pursuing

the investigation ordered by the President, and it will be signed by the Commissioner. Albert, can you forge a seal too?"

"Perfectly," was the proud answer.

"Well, look. Is the scheme too romantic? Has it got some fatal flaw?"

"It's pretty romantic," Roland said slowly. "But so was the capture of Timbuktu by seven French marines and twelve spahis."

"Mark that we don't have to lay hands on Atlas or on a guard. Escape from the settlement is fairly easy, but the island itself is made a fortress by rough, shark-infested seas. We need only pass Atlas the word to swim out to our boat at night, while Patrick Inge is giving the staff hell. Can he swim? Lord, I forgot to ask."

"I can answer that," Fez said, himself a powerful swimmer. "When he was a boy about twelve he was like any other Creole boy, and he used to dive for coins like the rest. He and another boy were carried to sea in their little crate boat by an offshore wind. They were picked up three days later—the other boy dead of thirst and sunstroke. And from that time on Atlas began to see visions and call himself the last Carib."

Each of the four withdrew into himself and fell into reverie. Albert broke the spell with an impatient question.

"Well, if we snatch the bastard, what will we do with him?"

"He told me that if he could get to Dominica, he could find distant kinsmen, offshoots from the true Caribs of Martinique, and become their chief," Paul answered. "I don't think he'd need fear extradition. Those Indians are left strictly alone by the British, who have had bad consciences over breaking the Treaty of 1748."

"I bet he'd become High Priest of the Boiling Lake," Fez said with a grin.

"There's one other matter which I'm sorry to have to bring up," Roland remarked. "Where are we going to raise the necessary?"

"I think I know where. The person I'm thinking of takes a special interest in the case, and he counts five thousand francs as I count fifty. Now I've got to bring up a touchy matter. There's only one of we four who owes anything to Atlas, and I'm that one."

"No, you're not, by God," Fez answered, changing color. "I lost the case for him by my crude methods with Alexandrine. Also I caused you, Paul, to be disbarred for two years."

"You're too quick to assume guilt, Fez, old friend. Even my obligation is a little bit hard to rationalize. But I've lost my girl—she was truly mine

once, and she's gone—and lost my practice—and I'm in bitter need of some sort of self-justification. There may be only three people living who *know* Atlas' innocence of that killing—himself, the killer, and I. Joan could not make a positive identification. I'm not morally bound to break the law to save him. If I'm bound at all, it's ethically. Or it's just possible it's a Christian duty, although where Christianity leaves off and pagan pride begins I'll be damned if I know. To hell with such speculations. I want to try it."

"Will you take me, Paul?" Fez asked, very simply.

"Yes, you were with me in the trial. Also, I dreamed about it one night—I never did get the dream straight—I was trying to help Atlas, but it always seemed to be you who had the most need. But what about Albert, and Roland? It's straining friendship pretty far—"

"Listen to me," Roland broke in. "I don't know anything to do with a life but live it. Between this point and that point, a strictly limited stretch. We've got to eat, we've got to sleep, we've got to make love sometimes, we've got to play fair as we can manage by the oldest law of live and let live. Beyond these things, we can pick and choose. The French say Liberty, Equality, Fraternity. The Americans say it better with Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness. I was happy with you chaps in the stokehole and here in Martinique. I'd be damned unhappy to be left on the wharf, when you go hunting. It's as simple as that."

"Albert, what about you?" Paul asked gravely.

"As Roland's always saying, 'Barkis is willing.' Who in the hell is Barkis, by the way?"

"I'll tell you when we're at sea," Roland replied. "When do we start?"

"We'll start getting set tomorrow," Paul said. "It will take some months. I hope we can set sail early next year."

The four began to sing lustily, if somewhat out of tune, the French version of a song popular with Yankee tars:

> There's an island owned by France, the *place de revenants*,
> Where sailors run away and leave their pants.
> There's Madelon to guide you, a peachskin girl beside you;
> It's where they do the dreamy tango dance.
> Where a glass of Legle booze you can buy for seven sous.
> Where fish and beans and snails they give away;
> There's Florine and Chechelle, Albertine and Fefe,
> So sure as hell, we'll all return some day.

3.

The money the band needed was obtained, whereupon Paul went to Fort-de-France and found Patrick Inge in a sober interval. He was also without funds, the two conditions being intricately related, and amenable to any suggestions Paul might have. At close range, Patrick was fully as impressive-looking as on the stage. Tall, soldierly, the fruit of a union between a famous French swordsman and a beautiful Irish horsewoman, he had become a matinee idol in Paris twenty years before, and, with his sharp profile and powder-gray hair, he might yet repeat the performance. As is the case with a remarkable number of sots, his fabulous toll of bottles had not marked him except for an illusive and indescribable expression about the mouth.

"I'll have a very important engagement for you, soon," Paul promised. "It will be for one night only, along with a sea trip, and will earn you five hundred francs."

"When? I would like to draw a little in advance."

"In about three months—I hope. Stay here until then, and you will receive an advance of twenty francs a week."

"Is that all?"

"Yes, monsieur, that's all. The remainder will be paid you the night that the show closes. There may be a bonus for an extra good performance."

"Well, I can make out with twenty francs a week, not even a guinea, thanks to the hospitality of a very gracious lady of the city. I draw the distinction between that term, and a woman of the town! I do not wish you to get a false impression. She has jealous spells and is in one of them, now, hence my sorry condition of sobriety. With these funds I can circumvent her spite, a liter bottle of superb rum costing only two francs, ten sous, enough to keep me in reasonable fettle for twenty-four hours. Of course if I am called back to the Théâtre Français—as may happen any day—I will return the sums and go my fated way."

Paul agreed to that, and asked him if by any chance he still had the military outfit he had worn in *La Fille du Régiment*.

"I have," the great thespian declared. "Our miserly manager made us buy our own costumes, and I have never sold one of them even to buy a drink. And if that isn't dedication to one's art, what is?"

"I know of no higher dedication," Paul said thoughtfully, "under the circumstances."

“I have my trunk and my make-up kit intact,” Patrick went on. “In one hour I could go on the stage in any of a score of favorite roles, French and English, ranging from Charlemagne through Cardinal Richelieu to Jack the Ripper.” Then he paused and said something touching and strange. “And you understand, monsieur, I talk in this absurd way only when my liquor, truly my daemon, has died out in me. At such times I suffer from acute feelings of inferiority. I became an alcoholic at age twelve, and which is the cart and which the horse I’m unable to say. But I can tell you, by the soul of Edmund Kean, that once I feel that sweet and gentle warmth, I am again a gentleman, modest, restrained, intellectual, and an authentic actor instead of a ham. I hope you believe me.”

“I do believe you, monsieur, and have every confidence in you.” Paul handed him twenty francs and went his way.

Fez had a gift for mechanics; and first at the mill, then at the distillery, he had picked up a way with engines, whether water-powered or steam-powered. Without misgivings, Paul dispatched him to the nearby island of Guadeloupe, to buy the old police boat on sale at Basse-Terre and to begin its reconditioning. Albert Potier obtained a copper plate and undertook a delicate piece of chalcography. Attached to Bridges and Roads, Roland de Fosse was able to get detailed charts of the Safety Islands and others they might touch, and he and Paul studied them together. Paul read all that he could find on the routines of the penal settlements, and attended to such odd chores as having diamond-shaped buttons, the size of military insignia, punched out of German silver, and engraved with the letters, D.I. A perforated drop of solder on the opposite side would permit them to be sewed to the shoulder straps of a military tunic.

In due course Roland asked for three months’ accumulated leave, saying he wished to visit about the islands, and perhaps shoot stag on Dominica. This being granted, he drifted off to Basse-Terre to lend Fez a hand. The labor of repair was taking longer and costing more than the conspirators had first thought; however, the rustic French and credulous Creoles of Guadeloupe with whom he dealt never doubted Fez’s story of an American millionaire wanting the boat for a sort of tender to his luxurious yacht. Paul turned over four new uniforms and one old and resplendent, along with headgear, to a Creole woman he had known in childhood. She was to sew on stripes and insignia. From a leatherworker, he ordered five pairs of military-looking boots of varied size, saying that he planned to take a walking tour across France with four friends.

In mid-March a letter came from Fez, whereupon Albert quit his shop and took a Portuguese sponge boat to Guadeloupe. These two and Roland

gave the boat a trial run, finding her seaworthy and caching coal for emergencies on an uninhabited islet in the Grenadines. A few days later Paul spoke again of a desire to visit France, this time to his employer, who nodded understandingly and wished him Godspeed. Taking separate ways, he and Patrick Inge met on the Bay du Galion, whose scattered dwellers remained as remote from Saint-Pierre affairs as the islanders of Tobago. Here, in the night, a gently breathing steam launch came and picked them up.

From hence they steered well wide of St. Lucia to their Île du Secret, in the archipelago between St. Vincent and Grenada. The deep bay bending back behind the forest made this a perfect retreat, and here they repainted the craft, painted on some cryptic letters and numbers, and hoisted under the French flag an official-looking pennant of pale green. This completed the regalia. Nothing less than a French cutter would have the impertinence to stop and search her; any English or Yankee skipper, spying her from afar, would comment on the versatile frog in varied designs of profanity. Here they took on water, their larder being already well stocked. From a locked pantry Paul issued Patrick his daily ration of rum, the same amount being divided equally among all other hands. Taking turns at the stokehole, they steered south by east. Paul wrote in the log the date of sailing—the twenty-third of April, 1902.

4.

No matter how long and far they sailed through the uncharted future, the four huntsmen would never find a more delightful shipmate than Patrick Inge. True, he never lifted his eloquent hands to any useful toil—he did not one lick. As for making up his own bed, serving himself in the tiny galley, or washing his own plate, the notion would never have occurred to him. He threw away his emptied bottles only as the climax of a rousing speech, for instance, "The Drunkard's Renunciation," from some forgotten melodrama, or the Doge's yearly proclamation of the marriage of old Venice to the Sea. This occurred at the witching hour of about 4 A.M., Patrick having opened the liter bottle at four in the afternoon. His audience consisted of the coalheaver and the helmsman, the other two of the company being asleep. And he never ranted, muffed a line, or overplayed his role: as he had quietly promised Paul, he remained a true man and a thespian. If half an hour later he could barely manage to undress himself, that was no part of the contract. Of course his official uniform was being kept starched and immaculate for his great engagement.

Often he entertained his shipmates by reciting whole plays, himself taking every part whether of man, woman, or child. His Cyrano de Bergerac, which had captured Paris only four years before, brought a mist to the eyes that was not salt spray. As Cesare Borgia in *Lucrezia* he seemed to have stepped intact out of the Renaissance; as Dumas' Henry III, he was haughty, cowardly, murderous, scheming, indulgent, the puppet of the Medici, yet the last Valois. He loved to recite Musset's lyrics, Gautier's perfect and beautiful rhyme, and the wild and dreadful outpourings of Borel.

The happy holiday must soon end. In order to save coal, the launch had been driven at half-speed the whole distance of nine hundred miles; now, with lank Roland stoking, she tore toward St. Luc from the direction of Devil's Island, to convey the impression of having just visited there on an inspection. Thick and tall rose its jungle, the most feared of the fever-ridden archipelago; its narrow, shallow harbor showed as a blue gap in the rank green. Knowing they would be under close survey from the superintendent's telescope, the five players had donned their costumes twenty miles away, at two o'clock. Now it was after four, Patrick's first drink had taken hold; and suddenly it seemed that, under his hypnotic sway, none of them were actors, that they wore authentic uniforms, and had full right to heave to off the harbor mouth and blow their whistle.

Happily it was a big voice for so small a craft, and Patrick sounded it in imperious bursts. Their battle seemed half-won when they spied a disreputable-looking lighter making out, likewise flying the French flag, and a tunicked figure standing in the stern. When she came within a cable's length, Patrick stepped to the rail with a megaphone. He intended to be the first to speak.

"Who are you?" he bawled.

"I'm the superintendent, and this is our harbor craft." The voice was strong enough, but had a nervous rasp.

"Heave to, Monsieur Superintendent. I wish to come aboard."

"Aye, monsieur."

The voyagers heaved overboard their lifeboat, not very large, but newly painted and trim. Paul and Fez dropped into the thwarts, and held her alongside as Patrick took his seat. Roland and Albert looked on with frozen faces, barely able to conceal the disappointment that only true-born adventurers could know. The two oarsmen rowed skillfully, and soon brought her alongside the lighter.

"Monsieur, I'm accustomed to being piped aboard," Patrick said stiffly as he gained the deck.

“I regret, monsieur, that our appropriation does not allow for pipers.”

“I am Monsieur Dumont, subprefect of our department. Here are my credentials.”

“Welcome, monsieur,” said the other, accepting the glossy envelope. “I am Georges Garnier, at your service.”

He was not a very correct-looking official. His countenance lacked keenness, and he had come as far as he ever would in being head of a notorious penal settlement on a pestilent island off a savage mainland. To Paul’s sharp eyes he had a distinct aspect of brutality, brought upon him by committing countless brutal actions, the sign of the Hun who lies deep in every man, usually inert, but quick to emerge when law and order fall away. Except for this, generous Patrick would have almost regretted riding this high horse. Almost, but not quite—for the performance called for his best powers, and if it succeeded, he could applaud himself, and if it failed, his portion would be something more tangible than boos and hisses.

Garnier stared at the sheet. Although under the prefectual eye—for Patrick was living his part—he was not able to resist thumbing the engraving. He barely glanced through the writing, he was probably not able to read swiftly; however he caught a few words that conveyed its gist.

“Monsieur Prefect, this must be a new department.”

“Fairly new,” Patrick answered coldly. “It was established by Napoleon when First Consul one hundred years ago.”

“They should have told me you were coming,” the man mumbled.

“That was what they were careful not to tell you. Now I wish to go at once to the settlement. I wish to see first what sort of supper is served the prisoners. Tell your men to heave my gig aboard and get underway.”

“I will, monsieur.”

Paul and Fez soon found they had little to do but stand about at attention and watch the goings-on. Their chief difficulty was to keep from gaping at their leader. He took chances, but they did not appear as such; his behavior was exactly that of a bad-tempered high official on an aggravating mission. He never raised his voice in anger. Sometimes suave, more often sarcastic, most of the time icy, he soon reduced Garnier to confusion. Garnier did not remember the exact number of prisoners—he would have to consult the records or ask Fucher. When asked how many had died in the month of April, he guessed there had been six or seven—Fucher would know.

By now they were on the land, Patrick debarking first, and his two henchmen close behind Garnier. They made their way up the wet path to the

dismal, bedraggled settlement; then the redoubtable inspector made straight for the kitchen, housed in a ramshackle shed.

"What's in the small pot?" he demanded of a breechclothed cook.

"Monsieur, it is a ragout for the officers."

"I thought so. It smells appetizing. What's in that huge kettle?"

"Monsieur, it is soup for the prisoners."

"Don't you mean slop? Let me taste it."

The cook produced a big spoon, wiped it on a dirty cloth, and gave it to Patrick with a shaking hand. The latter touched his tongue to it, grimaced, and flung it out the door.

"So much for that, Monsieur Superintendent. Assemble all the prisoners in front of the barracks."

"Monsieur, it's time for them to be locked in."

"Perhaps you misunderstood me, monsieur. Possibly you had better reread your instructions."

"No, sir, I just thought you'd wish to see the regular routine."

"If you please, monsieur, I'll tell you exactly what I wish to see, at exactly what time."

And now the play became only too real and lost the last shadow of comic aspect. The cause was two lines of creatures, human beings they were called, more than a hundred in each line, victims of an evil fate. That they were in somewhat better flesh than Paul had expected, less wasted by fever, could not atone for their vacant faces and dully staring eyes.

Indeed there was only one uncracked figure in the rows—one whole man. He stood taller than the rest, loomed larger, but it was not this that marked him; rather it was the set of his head and his shoulders, the plant of his feet, the humanity of his countenance, the light in his eyes. Paul recognized him instantly, and he recognized Paul. He appeared to draw one deep breath, then stand perfectly still.

Patrick went on with his work, which was art. Paul had the feeling he was not the least touched by the prisoners' pitiful state, for there is no ruthlessness greater than that of a dedicated artist; the fact remained, he had perceived it as by a thousand eyes, every one more receptive than any pair of common eyes, and if some day he might play the part of a prisoner of St. Luc, every gesture, aspect, and position would be true to life, and the whole audience would be touched in his place. Just now he was inspecting the dreary rows, looking, it seemed, for stripes on the naked backs. Presently he stood in front of them.

“Monsieur Superintendent! I wish to speak privately with some of the prisoners. Lieutenant le Moyne! Starting at the left, bring forward to me every tenth man.”

“Yes, Monsieur Prefect,” Fez answered with punctilio.

The tenth, the twentieth, and the thirtieth were brought up in turn; Patrick spoke with each for two or three minutes in low tones, then ordered him to stand off and wait. The fortieth turned out to be Atlas, no surprise to Paul; although when Monsieur Prefect had taken time to make the accurate count he had not observed. In this case his lines had been rehearsed beforehand.

“Did you see our boat?”

“Yes, monsieur.”

“Can you swim out to it after nightfall?”

“Yes, if I’m not eaten by a shark, a good enough end.”

“You will be one of a party with me in the woods. Stay at the edge of the torchlight, and when I cry halt and call up the guards, sneak off. The two men in the boat are friends.”

“Yes, monsieur.”

“Now, tell me something, pointing at the kitchen, the barracks, and at one of the guards.”

Atlas rose well to the occasion. He belonged to a drama-loving people. When Patrick had put him among the others waiting, he persisted with the interviews, scanting none, until every tenth man in both bands had been given due attention. And now the tropic night was falling fast, and so, Paul thought, was the leaven of alcohol in Patrick’s blood, and he had better correct the latter condition at once.

“Monsieur Superintendent?”

“Monsieur Prefect!”

“I wish to make some notes while the data is still fresh in my mind. Please show me to your office. These men are to stay where they are until I return. Lieutenant le Moyne, bring my portfolio.”

This was large, with no unsightly bulge. The three men disappeared in the shabby headquarters; in a moment or two Fez and the superintendent returned. The latter appeared eager to curry favor with the two juniors.

“I hope that your chief and yourselves will take pot luck with me tonight,” he ventured.

“Thank you, monsieur,” Fez answered. “If Monsieur Prefect has time, it will be a pleasure.”

“You see, Monsieur Superintendent, we were behind our schedule,” Paul said. “Monsieur Prefect had hoped to be on our way tonight.”

A wistful, almost hopeful expression crept into the superintendent’s face.

“Of course I wouldn’t presume to detain him.”

“I don’t think he’s found anything yet to cause him to decide on a detailed investigation,” Paul went on. “The lieutenant and I know his mannerisms quite well. So far he seems quite good-natured. Wouldn’t you say so, Lieutenant?”

“Definitely.”

Patrick let the drink infiltrate five minutes more, then reappeared with the brief case in his hand, and employing the almost inimitable butt-thrusting walk of a French general. Handing the bag to Fez, he stopped and turned his head like an eagle, and the whole scene appeared to become taut. The most apathetic wretch tried to stand at attention. The superintendent and his staff waited in visible dread.

“Monsieur Superintendent?”

“Monsieur Prefect?”

“I wish to see where the men work, a typical woodcutting grounds, or tilled field. Is it possible to visit them at once? Or must I wait till daylight?”

“It is perfectly possible, if Monsieur desires. One of the wood lots is less than a kilometer. Monsieur will need lanterns and torches—”

“You may send two of your guards, and I want some of the prisoners along, to show me their methods of labor. These twenty-four whom I’ve questioned will do well enough. The other prisoners are to remain where they are, until I return. Lieutenant le Moyne, you may remain here, and inspect the barracks. Monsieur Superintendent, send a messenger to the lighter captain to keep up steam, also get out your records for the past year; I hope to glance over them as soon as I return. Monsieur Tobart”—this was to Paul—“you are to accompany me.”

“Pardon, monsieur,” the superintendent said. “May I suggest that the other prisoners be locked in the barracks and you take more guards?”

“What might happen to us, pray?” Patrick demanded coldly. “Have these prisoners been made so desperate that they are likely to fall upon us and murder us, we who hope to better their lot? Where would they go then? Would they attempt to swim to the shipping lanes, through the shark-infested waters of Passe de Misère, or be cut to pieces on Banc de Poignard?”

Paul, encountering these little known names in his research, had mentioned them only once to Patrick, and he could hardly keep his eyes from opening as wide as Monsieur Garnier's.

"No, monsieur!"

"Moreover, monsieur, I am not in the habit of saying what I do not mean. Please see that my instructions are carried out."

Lanterns and greasewood torches were lighted and the band set out. The beams danced and cavorted, so gay and graceful, compared to the somber, shambling human forms. Again Paul's heart was touched with pity and guilt. This island adventure, well paved as hell with good intentions, had an evil side. The real butts of its brilliant horseplay were not Monsieur Garnier and his ruffianly guards but the mass of prisoners. If their hopes had not been raised by the visit of a great chief who seemed to care about them, still they were being stood and marched about, with a loss of human dignity if they had any left to lose. They were pawns and grotesque marionettes. And this world was a hell of a place, Paul thought.

He had been walking a little behind Patrick; now he came level with him.

"Monsieur Prefect!"

Speaking in low tones, Paul was not afraid of being overheard. He was only "feeding" the star's part, lest he forget.

"Yes, monsieur."

"My opinion is that this prison camp, although run as well as most, is still a disgrace to France. The men need more appetizing food, recreation, and above all hope. You can make that very plain to the superintendent, if you will. It will benefit the men temporarily and perhaps permanently."

"Thank you, monsieur. It's an excellent suggestion."

Passing soon through scrub jungle, Patrick turned suddenly with a ringing "*Halte!*" Then when the file paused, "The guards will please come forward."

"Yes, monsieur," said the senior of the pair.

"I am being bitten by mosquitoes. These woods look malarial to me. Is any effort made to prevent the infection?"

"Monsieur, when a man comes down we give him quinine, but the supply is limited."

"Is he made to work that day?"

"If he's able. Monsieur Fucher decides."

"Is there a prison doctor?"

“No, monsieur.”

“Walk along with me. Describe the whole procedure as to the sick and wounded. And you may offer what suggestions you please for the improvement of the settlement. They will be considered confidential.”

Flattered, the two men talked volubly. They did not notice what to Paul was so plain—that presently the file of prisoners numbered twenty-three instead of twenty-four—and the suspicion of such a thing did not cross their minds. A great factor here was the official attitude toward the prisoners: they were not people but numbers, identity was lost in the inert mass, not even the guards learned the men’s names. They had not noticed Atlas’ presence in the band and now could not note his absence.

Inspecting the work grounds, Patrick astonished the two guards with the sharpness of his questions and the perspicuity of his comments. When told that the convicts handled the heavy logs without help or work beasts or machinery, he had six of them demonstrate their methods, and oddly enough these revived a little, dropping some of their load of despair. Glancing at the pocket watch Roland had provided, he announced that he lacked the time for a more thorough inquiry, but perhaps he could make it before he left the archipelago. At once he hurried the party back to the settlement. The lazy, short-winded guards, debilitated by the sultry climate and their purposeless existence, could hardly keep pace. The prisoners did so as though under the lash, in a shambling trot.

Patrick arrived at the clearing with clipped orders on his lips. All prisoners were to eat supper at once. The entire kitchen staff would stand duty, and all officers must gather in the wardroom. Here he glanced through the reports Garnier had provided, meanwhile barking questions.

“I propose to let this brief investigation suffice for now,” he announced, handing the papers to Paul. “Monsieur Superintendent, have the men finished eating?”

“I am sure of it, monsieur.”

“Send two of your men to lock them in the barracks. I will give them exactly two minutes, then I want them back here, to receive instructions. In that interval, Lieutenant le Moyne will accompany me to the privacy of your office. Monsieur Tobart will be jotting down the vital statistics given in those records for me to examine at my leisure.”

The two went and returned, Patrick now slightly flushed and bright of eye. The guards Garnier had sent returned panting but quiet, not crying out any alarming discovery, because they had had no time to make any. Patrick

paced back and forth a moment, whirling his eyeglass, then stopped suddenly and faced the tense group.

"Monsieur Superintendent," he began quietly—and Paul felt he was cocked and primed to deliver the best speech of the evening. "It is general military practice for an inspector to report his findings to the commandant, leaving it to him to inform his juniors and see that conditions are improved. I believe in employing another method. Orders passed down through channels are likely to lose force, and responsibility is often shirked. I wish to make perfectly plain to all of you the changes I will expect to find when I visit this settlement again."

He paused, and his cold glance swept across every face.

"Attention, please," he went on. "I am glad to say conditions could be worse, but they could also be a great deal better. First, the prisoners must be better fed. Monsieur Garnier, your officers will take weekly turns at keeping the cook and kitchen help up to the mark. Also they will take turns at seeing that the barracks are respectable and clean. Also they will take turns in providing recreation for all personnel. Monsieur Fucher, you are in command of the labor gangs, under the superintendent; your hope of a good rating lies as much in the health and longevity of the prisoners as in the amount of work performed. There is to be no more manslaughter in the penal settlements. The eye of France is upon them, and there will be no mercy on slack and thoughtless officers, while the cruel and vicious will find themselves trading places with those they have abused. Do I make myself perfectly clear?"

"Perfectly, Monsieur Prefect," the superintendent answered.

"When I return, let me see healthier bodies, brighter eyes, faces reflecting hope instead of despair. That I wish to report to the President of the Republic. Now we will be taken out to our boat. *Au revoir!*"

This last he pronounced with great manner and hauteur, its implied threat setting even Paul's spine tingling, the curtain speech of one of the flawless performances of Patrick's long career.

5.

Patrick's representations during the brief boat ride were in the way of an encore as he questioned Garnier about the wild tribes and the flora and fauna of the mainland and the islands. His manner was civil, although far from familiar. When the two craft stood half a cable's length apart, each visible to the other in the wan moonlight, he had the lighter heave to and his ship's

boat launched. This was good sea practice, since a swell was running; and of course no skipper likes to board his own vessel at sea except from his own boat.

As Paul and Fez rowed up to the launch, their hearts felt faint. Sharks cruised these waters, schools of giant barracuda sometimes cut swimmers to pieces, and small accidents could have large consequences. But sound carries far over water; they sat in silence as Patrick was shrilly piped aboard, the last stagecraft. Then when the boat was hoisted, Paul edged up to Roland and muttered out of a corded throat:

"Where's Atlas?"

"We've got him under hatches," Roland answered, grinning.

In no apparent haste, yet without loitering, the launch got underway. Fez went below to stoke; Albert took the helm; Paul and Roland poured drinks for themselves and Patrick sat inert in exalted reverie. The shape of the island against the sky was dimming fast when Roland ventured a question.

"Well, did it go all right?"

"Not one hitch."

"I don't like that. There's always got to be a hitch or two."

"None showed up. I feel completely assured as far as this venture is concerned. Something else may happen—not very closely connected with this. And excuse the mumbo-jumbo, will you, Roland? I'm a bit hysterical."

"It's not mumbo-jumbo," Patrick broke in. "And remember I'm half-Irish and three-fourths fey."

"Well, will one of you sibyls venture how long it will be before the alarm goes out?" Roland asked.

"I will," Patrick replied. "It won't go out ever. Those oafs will miss Atlas tomorrow morning, certainly tomorrow night; for all they know, he's only seized an opportunity to take off. They'll wonder—they'll get suspicious—then what will they do? What can they do? If they report our visit as coinciding with the escape of a prisoner, they've gained nothing if we're genuine, and they've shown themselves as nincompoops if we're fakes. *Ergo*, they won't report it at all. If they can get out of it, they won't report Atlas' decamp. Maybe they'll say—I would in their place—that he went swimming against orders and is believed devoured by sharks."

"It may not pan out as prettily as all that," Paul said, after a brief pause. "Still, I'm not going to worry about it. There's too much else to worry about."

"What, for instance?" Roland asked.

Paul discovered that he could not answer. Anyway "worry" did not seem the right word. If he must choose a word to fit this inward feeling, it would be "expect."

The journey remained uneventful until they had refueled and redressed the launch at Île du Secret, their hiding place among the uninhabited islets of the Grenadines. Then there was nothing to cause comment but an unbelievably gaudy sunset, red and gold, and later a dimness of stars caused by an impalpable haze. When the sun rose, it looked as though it would drip blood, and the whole sky was greenish-gray except in the north, toward St. Vincent, where hung a smudge of pale brown.

Roland relieved Paul at the stokehole at eight bells; Albert Potier was at the helm. It happened that Fez and Paul had sat down on a chest built on to the rail of the foredeck, containing spare lines and life belts, when Atlas sauntered up and found a seat on the capstan. The other member of their company, having kept good company with the watch until four in the morning, lay sound asleep.

For a time they watched the placid sea, oddly tinted today because of the overcast. The breeze was low and warm, the glass high, and all weather signs fair. Atlas' voice broke the long, comfortable silence.

"Paul?"

"Yes."

"I've been thinking that you can let me off at St. Vincent, instead of taking me all the way to Dominica. I know some people there living in what's called Carib country, lying to the north of the volcano called the Soufrière. They're a mixed breed with a little Carib blood. I'll stay among them for a while, and, if I feel like it, drift on to Dominica at a later time. And if you should happen to be stopped by a French cutter up Martinique way, it would be handy not to have me aboard."

The statement had been carefully thought out. Now Paul gave careful thought to his reply.

"Would you be as safe there, Atlas?"

"Fully as safe, as far as I can tell."

"You might be safer," Fez proposed. "It's only half as large and the people are still busy cleaning up after the big hurricane of '98."

"I don't believe that's the consideration," Atlas said quietly. He must have meant "a consideration," Paul thought idly; and it was unusual for meticulous Atlas to speak incorrect French unless employing the patois. "However, I choose to go there if you, Paul, agree."

“I certainly do agree, if it’s your wish. We could put you on shore about midnight. And it will save us more time than you know, because I’ve got a better and safer plan for the disposal of the boat. We’ll refuel at St. Lucia instead of at Guadeloupe, then hit straight for the Virgin Islands. I think the Danes will buy her without question.”

“Then it’s settled?” Atlas asked.

“Yes, monsieur.”

“I have something else to say—something I wish I need not say—something I can’t get out of saying.”

“I hope you’re not going to tell me I saw a mirage that night, and you did it after all?”

The joke—if it were that—was in execrable taste, and not in Paul’s usual manner. He wondered why he had said it. It must be that he was frightened. Fez, beside him, must have had the same instinct. Paul felt the tension in his body.

“No, I didn’t do it. You knew it, and for that reason you felt called upon to defend me, and, when that failed, to deliver me from the settlement. I shall never go back there. Have no fear of that. Not necessarily because I may be reported drowned or eaten by sharks—the great actor speaks convincingly but not always truthfully—but because I have so decided. If I have no other choice, I will go to the Great Open where went my fellow chieftains long ago. For we had no Happy Hunting Ground like the red men of the northern mainland. We had the illimitable blue sea.”

“As for me, I wouldn’t blame you,” said Fez. And that remark too was in bad taste, Paul thought, although he did not know why.

“But, Brother Paul, what will I do about you?” Atlas asked. A tragic beauty came into his face and he was mantled in impenetrable dignity.

“I don’t know what you mean.”

“Because you are a fanatic. The fanatical burns in your heart. Men said that I was one, for I went about haranguing the people, fomenting trouble, assailing the rich, cursing the French. Bah, I was only trying to realize myself, as does my niece’s lover when he daubs paint on canvas. I wanted to see myself reflected in those frightened or savage faces. It is a way of saying that I was showing off. You, Friend Paul, are no showoff. Almost all of your life is inward, like that of an elephant, perhaps, or of a forest, or of our holy Mountain. What will be your next step?”

“Why, I don’t know.”

“Suppose I am killed resisting arrest. Suppose I slip overboard from the convict ship, in the dead of night? Won’t you still be bound—or think you are so bound—to prove my innocence? It is not a *cause célèbre* like that of Dreyfus. The hearts of a whole people are not touched. Despite my howlings, my name has never been printed in a French journal; I was a Creole troublemaker of no great mark; I call myself the last Carib, but my half-sister has more Carib blood than I, a thousand on these islands could claim it as well as I, if it were also in their hearts as it is in mine. But because I am poor, obscure, vindictive, often a rogue, you must stick to me closer than a brother, defend me more fiercely than if I were a great martyr, the defense of whom would win you sweet fame.”

“I don’t know if that’s true. You overpower me. Give me a little time to think.”

“I have had time to think, in the muck and shame of a penal colony. My brain labored harder than my back when I cut the day’s quota of wood. I had already seen you the laughingstock of a court; I had heard you call your beloved to the stand, and thereby lose her. Since then you have brought yourself and your followers into danger of prison. Paul, I cannot cope with it any more. I must lay the whole burden on your shoulders, to do with what you will, then I will go my way.”

“Do you wish to speak to me alone?”

“No, I’ll speak here—under this murky sky that prophesies as I do—alone with your friend and this strange-looking sea. I did not kill Monsieur de Grotte, but I know who did.”

“What?”

“I said, I know who did.”

“When did you find out? How long have you known?”

“I found out only a few days before I went on trial.”

“Then why in the devil didn’t you tell me? Was it someone you loved?”

“No, it was someone you loved.”

“Well, tell me. Get it over with. Is it a fact or only a suspicion? Great God!”

“It was told to me by a witness. She came with her father to the jail. Her name was Pauline—his was Gaspard—they lived two doors from the blacksmith shop in Chaude Oree. It was a quarrel between two of her lovers, both Frenchmen.”

“But Gaspard—he was a charcoal burner of Chaude Oree—testified against you at the trial.” Paul’s mind was dodging the most frightening

statement Atlas had made, one that he could not confront as yet. Perhaps he thought he might find some great hole in the story and need never confront it.

"He gave circumstantial evidence that was perfectly true."

"Frenchmen don't fight with machetes—"

"One of them seized a chair, the other a sword."

"A sword! An officer of the military, I know some of them, but you said —"

"The sword is at present aboard this boat."

Paul uttered a low sound, sat very still a few seconds, and then, because he must, he turned slowly and looked at the man beside him. The big face had a cast like Death's, in which sweat beads gleamed, but the mouth was not slack as after his flight from the engine room of the *St. Lazare*, and the eyes met his in a dark and fateful gaze.

"Don't speak," Paul said. "I can see for myself. You can speak later if you wish. Atlas, why didn't you tell me?"

"You'd taken my case. You showed yourself my friend, and I had never had a friend before. I couldn't tell on your friend. And what should I care about being sent to prison, or care for the Little Window? Mixed blood or not, I'm still the last of the Caribs."

He rose very slowly and gazed northward.

"One more thing, before I go my way. That smudge on the sky is from Soufrière on St. Vincent—it's in eruption. I think that all the gods are moving, and Pelée is erupting too. I told you she would speak again. It may be the end of the world."

He walked away, and that ought to put an end to something, Paul thought; but it did not seem to end anything. He sat with his arms folded, gazing at the floor. Finally he bethought himself and spoke to Fez.

"If you have something you want to tell me, you can say it now."

"Only this. If you say so, I'll go behind the wheelhouse and quietly put myself overside. Roland won't see me—there'll be no splash. It won't be easy—I told you I'm afraid of the dark. Still, I think I can make it."

"No, don't leave me, Fez. Life is too lonely anyway."

And he was still so young! This was only the morning of May 6, 1902.

CHAPTER TWELVE

The Heart of Denis

1.

It was in September, 1900, that Denis had promised Clio to do what he could to clear Atlas of the charge of murder. At first he intended to hire a lawyer to undertake the defense, only to hear of Paul Barteau's volunteering for the task, which was probably as hopeless as profitless and thankless. Clio had wanted him to engage an older, more famed lawyer, but Denis believed with all his heart that Paul would be a stronger advocate than money could buy. He had a hard time explaining this to Clio, who assailed bitterly the power of money—an outcropping of some feeling he could not explain and had never suspected in her—at the same time imploring him to use it in her kinsman's defense.

When still he had not acted, her temper flared.

"I'm not going to work for you no more, and this time I mean it, and I'll eat bread and drink water before I work for you," she told him, her voice still low but intensely passionate.

"*Bon jour, che*," he called as she stalked to the door.

"And I'll bite my tongue off before I say, '*Bon jou'*, missie,' to you again."

She sulked all the next day. Nerving himself to hold out, he mooned the hours away in a deep gloom, nothing going right, and everything different and dull until the following morning she returned walking slowly and softly with a bowed head.

"*Bon jou'*, Missie Dan."

"How are you, *che*?"

"Nothing goes sweetly with me, missie, since I have been such a bad mamma. Bon Die punished me."

"What did Bon Die do?" Denis asked gently, barely able to keep foolish tears out of his eyes, but knowing he must.

To his surprise, she spoke in a rush, her eyes gleaming.

“You had given me some money to buy rice cakes? Missie, as I was eating them, I bit my tongue almost through! It is the way of Bon Die to take us at our words. The good father says so.”

“Very well, then. Now, we’ll go ahead with the picture.”

From that morning until the trial she had never asked his help for Atlas, nor for any other of her kinsmen, a fact that worried him in the dead of night, and her manner had been docile but dispirited. When the trial was called, an excitement that had the look of elation had come over her; he had noticed the same in one of the kitchen staff while making arrangements for her brother’s funeral. Apparently Clio lost sight of the grave issue just as Coraline had broken contact with the solemn fact of death. She hurried about, was greatly concerned with what she and her mother would wear, and assumed an air of self-importance with the household servants and even with Denis. He suspected it was the way of poor, hardly literate, half-submerged people the world over.

She suffered a rude awakening as the trial progressed. Denis from a back seat saw it all: her astonishment and then her alarm and distress as she perceived the solemnity of the judges and the prosecutor and sensed the mood of the court. She turned white at the laughter at Paul’s expense and fiery red at the collapse of Alexandrine’s story, although she revived considerably when M’selle Joan, the great lady, high as anyone ever raised in a hat, took the stand for Atlas. Her excitement turned to triumph as Joan gave her brief testimony, and Denis saw her glance eagerly about the courtroom to see the people’s faces.

Her response to the prosecutor’s remarks and the foreman’s silly gesture expressed pure bewilderment. Then her pride at once so deep and vulnerable took a sharp rise when Joan came to her chair and spoke to her. Denis saw this, and also saw, with his keen artist’s eyes, a subtle, strange, but sure resemblance between the two girls, above and beyond beauty’s gift. It appeared unaccountable and soon slipped his mind.

Thereafter until the trial’s end, Clio prayed and passionately believed that Bon Die would lift his hand and Atlas would be saved.

The sentence came as an incredible and crushing blow. She slumped in her chair, her face buried in her hands—that beautiful face, those long, strong hands—the first time Denis had ever seen her break, and he himself was shaken to his depths.

When on the morrow she came poorly dressed, pale, and listless to his studio, he did what his nature prompted. Seating her in his lap, he held out

no hope of an early deliverance of the convict, but spoke his firm belief that some of the wrong done would be righted before too long or too late.

"It was a great wrong," Denis said. "Atlas isn't guilty—I know it perfectly well—all the French suspect it now, and more and more will come to believe it. There's no use at present of asking for a rehearing—it would be refused and his chance lost—but I'll do what I can to lay the ground. I'll write to some friends in France."

But the trouble with that was his life had been too aloof to win him many influential friends, or any in high political circles. Perhaps Clio sensed that—at least she knew his solitude in Saint-Pierre—when she asked:

"Will you offer them money?"

"I can't do that. That would be ruinous. But my name would carry some weight."

"How long do you think it will take to get him out?"

He started to say five years, but he realized this would seem half a lifetime to a girl not quite twenty, and he did not know what to say.

"A break in the run of bad luck may come any time. If so, I'd do my best to take advantage of it."

"Missie, if he's kept there for two years, he'll stay there always—in the ground. Some day he will raise his big hand and break someone's neck. He's the last of the Caribs."

Still she was somewhat cheered—he could see it in her face—for she believed in him and in his power to accomplish wonders. And after Atlas had been put aboard a ship, and the ship dimmed into distance, as the days went by with him out of her sight, she did not put him out of her mind. But he withdrew from the focus of her attention, she no longer heard his name on everyone's lips, there remained only memories to feed her emotions, and most Creoles have the blessed gift of living from day to day. She resumed her old ways. She walked with a high and lyric style. She talked in a low, sweet lilt. The beauty that seemed lost that day returned, enhanced it seemed; she ate heartily, posed wonderfully, and enjoyed his love-making more and more.

Then one day a rainbow arched across Pelée's vast violet side in perfect bands, and as they admired it together she told him it was a good sign. And in the early fall that change of luck that he had half-promised with very little faith came in an unexpected form.

A quiet-speaking white Creole whose plain face and big shoulders and powerful arms he had come to know well paid him a visit. He had not much to say—it took only a moment or two—and the gist of it was to ask whether

Denis wished to contribute a substantial sum—quite a large sum—to a venture intended to free Atlas from prison? He would prefer not to tell the *modus operandi*. There was quite a chance of failure, the money might be lost, but, win or lose, Monsieur would not become involved. It appeared to be Atlas' only hope of liberation. The gamble appeared good.

"How large a sum is needed?" Denis asked. "Speak freely, monsieur, please."

"I hope it can be managed for five thousand francs."

"Why, that's almost a fourth the cost of a fine Daimler motorcar," Denis remarked with a glint in his eyes. "Quite a large amount, to help an unruly citizen wrongly convicted of manslaughter."

"He's a lot worse than unruly, monsieur. He's a dangerous insurrectionist. The fact remains, he's innocent of the crime charged."

"Under those circumstances—and for some reasons of my own—I'll be happy to contribute the sum. If it's not enough, you may call on me again. I think it would be worth a somewhat larger fraction of a Daimler—especially on this island of up-and-down cart roads. I make one condition. That you and your associates be as careful as possible."

"That is agreed. May I offer my thanks and bid you good night?"

"I am in no need of thanks but I appreciate the salutation. The sum will be available in gold napoleons at your call. Good night, monsieur, and good fortune."

Denis had asked Clio to come early on the morrow, so he could take advantage of the lucid light before clouds gathered over Pelée. She did so, with nothing in her avid young stomach but coffee and fruit; and as usual, on such days, she had breakfast with him in the studio. This was not a continental breakfast but an island breakfast on which a *porteuse* could climb mountains, a painter stand all morning before his easel, and a model sit perfectly still. There were shirred eggs and sausage and small crusty loaves and baked plantains and, of course, more coffee. When Clio had "had enough," she looked at him curiously, because his eyes were bright, his face slightly flushed, his tone jubilant.

"Has something good happened, Missie Dan?" she asked.

"I hope it will turn out well. I'm sending some money out of the country"—this was true enough—"to try to help Atlas."

"So he can be free and not die on that terrible island?"

"It could well be so."

"To a great lawyer in France?"

“He has something to do with French law.”

“Was it a whole lot of money, Missie Dan, or only a little?”

“Such matters are quite expensive, Clio. It’s enough to buy five necklaces of gold beads.”

“If the very cheapest kind, and real gold, five would cost a thousand francs.”

“Is that so, Clio?”

“You know so, Missie Dan. You are going to give all that to make Clio happy?”

“That has something to do with it, I guess.”

“Then I’ll do everything I can to make you happy.”

“I’m not sure I know what you mean.”

She looked away, and a lovely flush came on her cheekbones.

“You can do anything you like to me.”

He rose, trembling, and walked around the table. Then he bent down. Her face slowly turned toward his, then her soft lips met his in sympathy and warmth and beauty.

2.

These were the halcyon days of Denis’ life. Looking back, it seemed to him that until these days he had never truly lived.

This could be true, of course, only in a deeply personal sense and perhaps one applicable only to an artist. He was getting what he wanted out of life, an intense perception of beauty and a growing power to realize it in paint. Here might be only one phase of the great artist’s obligation and ambition, perhaps a minor phase—the masters had achieved much more—but he could not clearly conceive the greater thing or put it in words. Keats had said it best—truth is beauty, and beauty truth; even this was a mystical concept. As his work improved, he saw more clearly than before that he was not a great artist and never could be, yet he might paint a few pictures far beyond himself, justifying his labor and dedication almost by accident, at least by prodigious luck. He would keep trying to the last.

The greatest piece of luck was his having Clio for his model and mistress. Many great artists, of more powerful mind and rugged nature, had not needed such inspiration; a surprising number in all fields of art had seemed to do so, though; even Victor Hugo had his Juliette for fifty years. For many more years Clio might retain her beauty of body, motion, and

complexion; and perhaps he would leave some pictures that had captured this beauty entire. What more could he ask of life?

If then or before then an art student wrote a monograph on "*La Porteuse*"—this might well be the title of a good picture—he might ask Clio about their love-making, as writers of countless books wish they could have questioned Fanny Brawne about her immortal lover. Clio would not answer, though she might give her childlike smile. Their love-making had a fixed procedure, a ceremony, which might have meaning for the scholars in Vienna and give away his secrets; he knew only its joy.

He liked to have her sit in a straight chair while he sat facing her, astride her lap, her strong, round thighs in the close clutch of his, as he took toll for all the kisses he had missed. Winning it at last, he was obsessed by the tactile beauty of her mouth, which he thought must vary among women as much as visual beauty of face. It was a long feast that he could not leave until driven by wave after rising wave of excitement, and then for a while, as he lay passive in her arms, she became the wooer, with an aggressiveness that was yet deeply tender. At length they wooed each other with great ardor and at last he was caught up in an ecstasy of conquest and surrender that was what love asked, yet was rarely given. So it went with him, an imaginative and idealistic man and artist. If not the same with her, she became his work of art.

Thereby and therewith there came slowly into being two pictures, on which he worked alternately according to his mood and his model's. Both were in a classic style, one a delightful whimsy of Cendrillon, the other a serious study of Clio, a young Creole girl. It was the former that she loved the most and thought the most beautiful; and in this last respect she might be right, for, Denis thought, he was becoming more and more doubtful of intangibles. As his strokes strengthened and became more proud, he was himself more humble.

In this picture, Clio was seated, poorly dressed, in a shabby Creole interior, one leg crossed over the other as she tried on a glittering glass slipper. An elaborately dressed page, for which boyish Simeon had posed, stood at one side, a rich array of garments over his arm, and gold bracelets and necklaces looped about his fingers. The fairy godmother had given way to a plump cupid, hovering near the window in imitation of Rubens except that it too was a chabine. On Cedrillon's face was a faint smile of confidence and conquest.

The gorgeousness of the garments and jewelry did not put Cendrillon in the shade because of her own bright color, played up, but still credible to the viewer of a fairy tale. Her foot was big and sinewy, yet no one need doubt

she could wear the slipper. A small white kitten rubbed against her other foot.

The mood of the picture was bright, obtained by the flood of light, clean drawing, graceful grouping, and everyone's good cheer. Thinking of Toulouse Lautrec, he named it "Cendrillon's Toilet." He could have finished it in one day's hard work; instead he dawdled over its last touches, not willing to risk a lessening of Clio's zest until he had finished the more ambitious picture.

This one bid fair to be his best picture, not by a narrow step but by a great leap. The drawing in charcoal had turned out well, Clio in the foreground in the scant, light robe of a *porteuse*, stooping to drink at the bamboo fountain with a huge tray heaped with fruit on her head; her fluidity of movement and exquisite balance and her grace triumphant over difficulties had been caught so well he could hardly believe his eyes. In the background two other *porteuses*, both heavily laden, chattered together with vigorous gestures. One of the kitchen maids and a neighbor servant girl had posed for these figures.

When he had applied neutral color, Clio and he had happy carriage rides in search of a background. He found it on the Fond St. Denis road, a reach of flagstone with mango trees on one side, a glimpse of a ripe cane field on the other, and distant cloud-wreathed Pelée, drenched in violet-colored light, towering over all. He painted it in with great fidelity, the labor of a month, then began the joyous task of obtaining color harmony. The girls must match the scene as was somehow true of their whole guild; it seemed that they had been shaped and tinted by their multihued environs. Happily he had the great tray of fruits in which color could run riot.

Meanwhile he never forgot that this was to be above all an enduring portrait of Clio. In the picture she was a porter, which she would possibly have been in life except for Denis, but her beauty and personality remained its subject. He worked tirelessly, with extreme care, demanding of himself the utmost application and co-ordination of mind, eye, and hand. In the last days of April, more than six months after its conception, it seemed almost finished.

On the first day of May there came, not an interruption by the island gods, but what struck him as a cosmic accompaniment to his labors.

It began with one of the three craters of Pelée giving forth gray smoke. It did not alarm the people; many of them were glad in a way they could not explain that their Mountain which the savants had believed dead had proved her immortality, and was yet their beloved Pelée, with heart of fire.

Subterranean flames began to give the cloud a lurid glow, and there were upbursts of white ash that soon became almost continuous. It sifted down on her summits and her sides, looking like snow.

But greater violence was to come. Denis expected it because Clio, half-frightened, half-thrilled, had prophesied it.

"The snakes are leaving the big forests on the mountainside and crawling into the deep glens," she told him, her eyes wide and shining with excitement.

"How do you know?"

"The people say so."

True, the power to slay as well as to defend—always the prerogative of a god—still dwelt in the sacred Mountain. On May 4 there rose a deep rumbling sound, broken with claps like thunder, and flame burst from the crater, high and red and ominous through the clouds of smoke. On May 5 occurred the first great eruption in fifty-one years.

Amid prodigious thunder and lightning and rain, the mountaintop split open close to the crater containing Lake L'Etang. The quiet, staring, trembling throng in the streets could not see the rift because of smoke and flame and lurid storm clouds; they knew it only when the River Blanche, beloved of washerwomen, rose in such flood as no dweller of the city had ever seen. Pale-faced runners brought the news of it; how it ran black as a black-boned hen, swept down boulders higher than a man, and ripped away the riverbanks—trees and houses instantly vanishing—and how it caught some women who had heard its roar and tried in vain to flee, and a bright madras had flashed above the torrent and disappeared.

What of the great Guerin mill at the river mouth? It was a landmark of the city, built of stone. One instant it had stood there, massive as ever, seeming indomitable, and the next instant it was gone. With it passed every soul who had not fled to safety. Its manager and his son and daughter had heard the distant thunder of the rock-laden mud-thick cataract and had tried to flee in a boat. The rushing wall smote the sea, and the boat and its occupants were never seen again.

Was there safety anywhere? Or had their Mountain turned upon her own in hate and fury? Word came of cane plantations to the north being overwhelmed by molten lava and the heavy fall of hot ashes, pebbles, and dust; of houses collapsed and burned, and a hundred lying dead. After this, the news bettered. A ship brought word of the eruption of Soufrière on St. Vincent which would surely prove an escape vent for the fires balked and impounded and raging in the earth's bowels; Missie Governor had said so,

and the people could see with their own eyes the diminishing of Pelée's fury. Missie Governor had come back from a journey to reassure and keep company with the people, and now the fires sank down, the smoke cloud lessened, the fall of ashes became lighter, and the only sound from their mountain was an occasional heavy rumble, soon dying away.

"The danger is over," Missie Governor told the people from his balcony. "It is another outburst such as the old men remember fifty years ago, and now it is passing off the same as before. We will bury our dead, and mourn for them, and rebuild what is torn down, and thank the Bon Die it was not worse."

And he spoke true, the people told one another. He would not lie to them. They loved their Mountain and she loved them, and although she chastised them for causes unknown, ending no few lives, she would not destroy them. And Notre Dame de la Garde, defender of the city, still stood tall and staunch and glimmering on Morne d'Orange.

During these fearful days, in which wild rumors chased one another through the town, the people as a whole had proven their steadfastness and strength. Not one day did Denis' household servants fail what they believed their duty, partly of course because the imposing stature and thick walls of the big house had conveyed a sense of safety when they had nowhere else to go. Yet the *porteuses* still paced the roads, bearing their burdens, washwomen gathered at another river, longshoremen loaded and unloaded ships, the shops stayed as open as the churches, and bells rang out the hours. And Clio came staunchly to her work, big-eyed and subdued, but posing for Missie Dan who plied his paints in a kind of measured fury until he dropped the brushes in exhaustion.

"Thursday is Ascension Day," he told her. "If you stand by me until Wednesday evening, I will have finished both my pictures, and you may amuse yourself until Monday; and before you leave I'll keep a promise."

Actually he finished "Cendrillon's Toilet" with a touch or two on Tuesday, omitting only the signing of his name; this he intended to keep veiled until he could show Clio both pictures before she left on Wednesday. He drove himself hard all that morning, with a sense of wonder at what was happening under his brush. On a solid foundation, the final strokes of a good picture became often wonderfully telling; so it was with "*Les Porteuses*." Somehow he escaped from self even in this fullest realization of self he had ever achieved. Time seemed to stop running as it ran at crazy speed; he no longer heard the intermittent fading rumbling of the Mountain; Clio's beauty beat upon his heart as he saw it in life and, in the same glance, almost, stand out from the canvas.

At one o'clock he and his model ate a hurried lunch; two hours later he held his brush still for a long minute, then slowly signed his name. When he had drawn the curtain from the picture on his spare easel, and signed it also, he dropped on the couch with a wan smile.

"You can look now, Clio," he said, "and look well."

She did so, and a strange and lovely expression stole into her face.

"A penny for your thoughts," he went on, when she stayed so still.

"Did you know, missie, that the Cendrillon picture is the prettiest, but the other is more like Clio?"

"Is it truly, Clio?"

"I think so."

"I love you, lovely Clio."

"I love you, Papa Dan."

"I have a present for you, but first I want all of you to give it to. I haven't had you for all my own since—so long ago."

"Since Saturday, missie. But aren't you too tired? You're no longer young." She spoke quite tenderly.

"It's my first prize of victory. I couldn't stand it, to wait for you till Monday."

It seemed that she too was thinking of the long fast ahead, for her eyes changed expression, and instantly the pupils dilated until a black liquor appeared to flood the dark gold of the iris. Swiftly she sped to the straight chair they used for courtship, and held out her long arms. Today their clasp was fiercely close; and the spate of her kisses and her wild movements aroused in Denis a wonder that was faintly troubled because surely some kind of psychic as well as physical storm had broken in her unfathomable depths, and he could not dream what it might forebode.

As he was carrying her to his couch, she whispered something in his ear. He thought it was "*La Brouette*," and if so it was the term used by the Creoles to mean a peculiarly close embrace, instinct of the good earth, and which on the woman's part was the fullness of surrender. At its very peak Clio gasped out words in a language he had never heard. Perhaps they meant "I love you, Papa," and might be either Carib or Chinese, to both of which tongues she had been exposed as a child. At last she grew still, smiled her wide, sweet smile, and fell into a half-faint.

When she was wide-awake and dressed, he got out the garments shown in the Cendrillon picture, the gold necklace, the gold bracelets, and the gold

clasp-pin, with trembling pennants, and all these he put in her long, gold-colored hands. Somewhat to his surprise, her eyes filled with tears.

"I love you, Papa Dan," she told him without being asked. "I'll always love you."

She came and kissed him and went out of the room. Denis looked at his watch, thinking of the long, lonely hours before him. The time was four on Wednesday afternoon of the seventh day of May, 1902. What could he do between now and Monday morning, May eleventh?

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

The Heart of an Actor

1.

Patrick Inge had begun to take a sincere interest in Atlas' future. True, it was linked with his passionate concern, his profound preoccupation with himself. He had played the lead in the drama of his rescue, although Paul had been playwright and producer. Were Atlas to be caught and hustled back to prison, the glory of a great performance would be dimmed; although if he died fighting like the Carib brave he was, the tragic finale would almost compensate for the reversal. The fact remained there was a warm spot in Patrick's susceptible heart for the powerful, brooding savage—it is human to love those we have benefited more than our benefactors—and Patrick would risk much for his clean escape.

After Patrick's first drink of the afternoon, with St. Vincent's whole shape rising purple-hued out of the slate-colored ocean and Soufrière looming high and blackly smoking, he found Atlas by the afterrail and leaned there to talk to him.

"From the look of that mountain, no one will be paying much attention to ships that pass tonight, or to people coming ashore," Patrick remarked. "The accent will be on people getting the hell out."

"There will not be many, monsieur. Where would they go in little fish boats? Creoles are hard to drive from home. They are an island people."

"Still it's a favorable time to land. It's an ill wind—even the belchings of a volcano—that blows no one good."

"The Creoles put it differently. 'It's a fair wind that doesn't blow away someone's roof.' They are a gay people, and yet truthful."

"You said you would land in what's called Carib country in the north."

"Perhaps not. It lies under the volcano and may be devastated. Perhaps I won't land on St. Vincent at all."

"In that case, you'd go on to Dominica as you first planned? If so, you must tell Monsieur Paul as soon as possible."

"No, I won't go to Dominica now. I would go to shore on my native island of Martinique, into my native city of Saint-Pierre. We can anchor after nightfall tomorrow. I would not endanger my friends—I would swim in a black breechcloth into the Rivière du Fort, and my skin is too dark to see well. Then I would find a friend."

"What would keep the gendarmes from finding you? You'd be almost in bullet range of the station."

"Monsieur, the gendarmes will be occupied by more important matters than a runaway prisoner. That is, if I decide to land there, and I will know in a few minutes more, although I am almost certain already. Look at the haze due north of St. Vincent; it is made of dust and smoke. I didn't think my Pelée would hold her fires when Soufrière blazed forth. No, I speak like a Frenchman, a newcomer, more foolishly than would the Creole whose roots in the island are only three hundred years deep. Now I will speak like the Carib that I am; we have known our Mountain, root and branch, since it led us there when new heaved up from the sea. It is Soufrière that follows Pelée. She could not stay quiet when the Goddess-Mountain spoke. Pelée speaks to make good my prophecy at the trial, in honor and love of her son. She would have spoken before now, if she hadn't wished to await my return. I could behold my glory in her own."

"It's a good speech, Atlas. Some day I might give it before the footlights at the Théâtre Français—I myself will shape the play, and name it *The Last Carib*. It has a fine ring to it. It's almost a pity it's not true."

"How much of it is false? Look how the haze has spread even as I speak."

"Spread, risen, and thinned out. There must be wind under it, fresh and sweet, not fire. Still I'm inclined to agree with you that Pelée is in mild eruption, and God knows that is all you should ask, to honor your return. Now let's speak like sensible men, instead of two actors out of work. You say you can find a friend in Saint-Pierre. Would he hide you until the coast is clear?"

"Yes, monsieur." The glow in Atlas' eyes had dimmed and his manner become somewhat abashed. "The gendarmes won't be looking for me. All I need do is to stay out of sight in the daytime. At night I will go on the Mountain, to speak to her and see why she has called me. And if you don't believe that she speaks Carib, you are a fool."

"I do believe it, Atlas. I am not a clod. I didn't know that you spoke it."

"I learned it from my granddam, the last pure-bred Carib squaw. When my Mountain has finished her business—I do not know exactly what it is—I

will be gone. I do not know where—I know only I will vanish in the smoke and flame."

"Are you sure this protector is to be trusted? If an alarm is raised—but I doubt it more than ever—there may be a price put on your head?"

"His name is Leon and he owes me a heavy debt."

"I've heard that name before. Oh yes—I remember him too well. He keeps a kind of boarding house with barred windows. I spent the night there after my troupe had sailed to France without me. A gentleman who liked my playing paid my bill, and I was glad enough to leave, considering the lean meals and the dark, dismal rooms. Now tell me what in the devil you are getting at?"

"Under those rooms there is another room—much older and smaller—two hundred years old—with no window, only a grating in the floor. It is reached by a ladder through the grating, and no one alive remembers its existence except Leon and I. I remember because Timucuacanoa, Chief of the Boats, who led the insurrection against the French, was kept there until he died."

"You know, Atlas, you're more of a poet—a bad one, I suppose—than a bad actor. At least there's a poetic quality—for harmony is the soul of poetry—in all your words and actions. It might work. You'll have to ask Paul. As the old saying goes, which was proven at St. Luc, 'It's darkest under the lamp.' "

2.

Patrick Inge was of melancholy mind when the launch had skirted St. Lucia on her last lap to Martinique. He had not seen the rise of the burnished-copper sun but he had risen far too early for one so late abed. All day the launch had churned through torpid, dingy-colored water under a murky sky, and now, after four o'clock with only twenty miles to go, his first drink of the day seemed slow in taking hold. Whatever its aftermath, this show was off the road, the engagement wound up. Before long, he must start looking for another, and he could not be sure of the best place.

When ten miles out of Saint-Pierre, after reducing speed so as to arrive just after dark, Paul posted him on the foredeck with a spy-glass to report all significant and suspicious circumstances. All aboard could see that Pelée, although still smoking, was not now in eruption. Before long it became evident that the line of ships stern to along the shore was not nearly as long as usual, and most of these were small interisland craft. The rest had taken

off like gulls from the path of a hurricane, Paul thought. However, the remainder looked cozy enough, and only one, the largest, which Paul thought was the *Roddam*, had steam in her boilers.

Shortly after this, Paul made a quick announcement.

"The Guerin mill has disappeared."

"What?" Fez cried.

"Come and look, if you don't believe me. The whole river mouth looks changed."

The glass passed from hand to hand, and worry came into every face.

"Was it lava that did it?" Roland asked. "Or earthquake?"

"If it were earthquake, there'd be rubble, and I don't see any," Paul said. "I don't see any swathe cut by lava above Saint-Pierre, although there might be one to the north. It must have been water, and that could only come from L'Etang. There must have been a big eruption."

"There's no sign of it in the city," Patrick reported. "All the roofs are white, from ashes as we saw on St. Vincent, but there's no desolation. The streets look just the same, all the government buildings are intact, and, thank God, I can see the theater. Well, it's come and gone, while we were larking about."

"How about Carbet—Ste Philomene—Prêcheur?"

"Fit as a fiddle, far as I can see."

"I wonder how it is further north. That part was expected to catch it hardest, if ever she boiled over."

"We'll know tonight, I guess."

"Can you make out Notre Dame de la Garde?"

"I think so. I'm sure of it. She's done a good job—the Creoles will think so—and I think so too. My mother was Irish—half, I should say, the other half being Orange, neither fish nor fowl."

"I too think she's done a good job, in a way of speaking," said hardheaded Roland.

The sun pitched and gave a last red, ribald wink. Thereafter the shadows began to gather over the quaint, beloved city, although the smoke cloud clinging to Pelée's summit remained sunlit, strangely tinted, a while yet. Soon nothing was left for the companions but to prepare for the night.

"I don't like to have you swim to shore" Paul told Atlas.

"Why not? I swam to board this ship, I'll swim to leave her."

“Maybe that is what’s troubling me. It seems so final. I have a feeling I won’t see you again.”

“That will be good luck—for you. I suppose for me too. I told you how that was, yesterday morning.”

Fez turned gray and gazed fixedly at something no one else could see in the middle distance.

“I can’t live up to you—also in a way of speaking,” Atlas went on. “I want to be free of all debts and debtors. Others may have the same trouble. Some may have had it, already. I don’t know what I’m saying. Tonight I’m going to climb my Mountain and find out why, when she labored, she only delivered a mouse. Thereafter I’ll chart my course.”

“Take care it’s not back to St. Luc,” Paul said. “Are you sure you can get safely to Leon?”

“Missie Paul, I’ve skulked about that city and the Mountain ever since I could walk.”

“Are you sure your friend will do what you ask?”

“Perfectly sure. This is my farewell. Neither you nor I want any ceremony. I’m going to take off the clothes you lent me and put on a breechcloth as when I dived for copper coins, and when it gets a little darker—and we a little nearer—I’ll go overside. I won’t be quite as naked as when I came out of the water of my mother’s womb, but almost. You fools, I can swim like a porpoise.”

“I wish I had raced with you when I had the chance,” Fez said. “I might not have beaten you, but you’d know you’d been swum with. Now it’s too late.”

“I would have enjoyed it, Monsieur Fez. Adieu, Monsieur Patrick. I think you have stranger gods than I, but I prophesy they’ll stand by you. *Bon jour*, all.”

He turned and entered the cabin. In the heavy dusk, not far now from countless little shining windows, they heard a soft splash. No one went to look; Fez and Albert began to break out the boat for launching and to ready the cables.

“Patrick, we’ll take you to shore first,” Paul said. “You should be divorced from this company as soon as possible as a safety measure—although I have the strongest kind of inkling that no safety measures are necessary. Still, you’d better tell us where to reach you, in an emergency.”

“Monsieur, I have two hundred francs of my salary, and two hundred bonus. Where would I go but to the Hôtel des Bains and engage the best

room available? I sent my trunk there before I sailed. I have been to the watering places on the east coast."

"The hotel may not have a room available. It's a stout building and many people may have gone—"

"There is always a room available for Patrick Inge. A characteristic and arresting remark. I always arrest people with my remarks. But my drinks are not taking hold too well—I'm as windy as if sober—in spite of making deeper inroads in my bottle than usual at this hour. May I have another bottle to put in my bag for emergencies—like an extra water flask for a desert journey? Or, if you are short, I'll buy one at the hotel."

"I'll give you one, for by that I put you under obligation to keep fit."

"As Atlas wisely remarked, you are too much to live up to, Monsieur Paul. However, I'm sensible to the situation. As Atlas implied also—in impeccable taste—I'll consider that our farewells are said. *Until you see me again!*"

In a little while the ship heaved to, bow and stern anchors were lowered, and the boat was put overside. Roland and Albert rowed Patrick to his shore where a Creole porter took charge of his bag in evident anticipation of a generous fee. The great thespian made for the hotel, and, although his clothes were untidy, almost everyone's were such these past few days, and the French clerk had only to glance at his face and form to give him an apartment de luxe. After seeing the manner with which he signed and then reading his name, the man became quite pleasantly excited and did not ask for an advance payment.

"I saw you as the Colonel in *La Fille du Régiment*," he said, flushing. "It was magnificent."

"Thank you, monsieur. It is one of my favorite roles."

"Will you have dinner served in your room?"

"I've already dined, thank you." Patrick was thinking that his drinks would take hold better on an empty stomach.

The room had a tall, gilt-framed mirror. Patrick sat in front of it awhile, interested in the recasting of his face by years of doing and thinking, and then he began to make some fine plans. He would have no real trouble getting back to Europe. He had enough money to travel third class; René Arnaud would probably lend him enough more to go first class. The real question was, he thought, whether he should head for France or England. He spoke English with only a delightful trace of Irish accent, and had starred in *The Rivals* and *The School for Scandal* in Bath as well as in Dublin and Belfast. In London itself he had not done so well—French comedy was

coldly received by the Victorian audience—but three years ago he had been offered a season of Shakespeare at the Haymarket—Prospero, Jacques, Antonio, Edmund, Macduff, and Othello—when the outbreak of the Boer War canceled the production.

He opened his trunk and began to lay out his costumes. Before he knew it he was putting on some of them, giving himself a quick make-up, and reciting high spots of the parts before the glass. He kept his voice low. He remembered he was a gentleman and a scholar; people in the next rooms would think that several sober men sat in earnest conversation. With a little changing about, his Cardinal Richelieu costume, to be worn at Palais Royal, did for Prospero exiled in the still-vexed Bermoothes. Often his spine tingled and more than once he gazed at himself through tears.

We are such stuff as dreams are made on . . .

The long hours passed swiftly. At one in the morning he had finished his first bottle, and at three, after drinking about a third of the second, he grew weary between one role and another, and dropped half-dressed on the bed. At four he was half-wakened by the Angelus, when all zombis and the *maun-mo* must go back to their dark cells, and there were no cra-cra in the city to cause him to stir half an hour later.

Later than that, he did not know how much, he began talking in his sleep.

> Soft you . . .
> I have done the state some service . . .
> Speak of me as I am . . .
> . . . then you must speak
> Of one who loved not wisely but too well;
> . . . threw a pearl away,
> Richer than all his tribe . . .
> . . . Set you down this;
> Where a malignant and a turban'd Turk
> Beat a Venetian . . .
> I took by the throat the circumcised dog,
> And smote him thus.

There was some uproar. He dreamed that the curtain fell, and the lights changed. Again he spoke, clearly, in his rich voice.

"*Oh, thank you. Thank you for this wonderful ovation. I will never forget. Thank you forever.*"

The sound of his own voice wakened him, and he lay quiet a moment, wondering where he was. Then he groped, found a friction match ready on

his bedstand, scratched it, and looked at the pocket watch Roland had given him. Meanwhile he was hearing the distant rumble of thunder high and far away, and in his window flickered pale-blue flashes.

It was thirty-five minutes after six on the morning of May eighth. Early risers would be gathered at the Cathedral to attend Ascension Day Mass. Awake he felt weary and no longer young, so he went back to his happy dreams.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

The Heart of Joan

SOON after Roland and Albert returned to the launch after landing Patrick Inge, the four comrades made hasty plans for the night. Someone should spend the night aboard, not only a matter of marine law; also to fend off with a likely story a party of coastguards should any come by. Fez was the proper man, as he himself pointed out. His name appeared on the deed of sale as agent for a non-existent American millionaire; he had been associated from the first with the repair of the vessel. By supplying the officials with a list of hands, all fictitious, supposed to have signed on in Guadeloupe and be spending the night on shore, in all probability he would have time to warn his shipmates and, if need be, to take flight. If in this case he could not get to their obscure Creole lodging house, he would hang a lantern on the flagstaff. Then they could take what steps they could toward their own safety.

Actually Paul intended to take no such steps. If trouble should come, which he could hardly believe at this time, he had made up his mind to submit to arrest. Since, if the coup became known, he would be the first to be hunted by the gendarmes, he made a last-minute decision not to remain tonight with Albert and Roland, and instead to lodge with the Creole woman, loved in his childhood, who had decorated the uniforms. If he were arrested, she would get word through her grandson to all hands. It was another precautionary measure incumbent on the leader, despite the night of loneliness and low spirits it would cost all three.

Tomorrow was Ascension Day. The city should lie quiet, the streets almost forsaken except for churchgoers. Wearier than they would confess, the three friends thought to stay long abed, communicating at ten if all went well. Then they could make plans for the future.

Less tired than the others because he was stronger, Paul became greater prey to loneliness. It struck him and bit him as he first walked alone through the hushed streets, and it lay heavily upon him as he came on the small, shabby Creole house that seemed all he had left. It was not true. He had two friends and one charge but he could not sup and swig with them tonight. He

felt divorced from Atlas, without quite knowing why—Atlas' own cryptic words had been poetic and plausible, but did not go deep enough to explain this feeling. The stirring adventure had gone by; there remained only a worrisome aftermath. He was not now a lawyer, with clients into whose lives he could enter briefly and to some depth, and with competitors who gave him a rough and guarded comradeship. He would get word to his parents but thought best to eschew their company for a while. He could not doubt that Joan was in France, probably to return to the island before long, although never to his life.

Then the whole scene became abruptly changed, for good or ill perhaps, more likely for neither one, yet stirring him powerfully for the moment. The Creole woman had received him kindly, asking no news of him, in the way of the old taking little interest in it, forgetting her curiosity along with so much else, although she told him events of the eruption. Thank Bon Die it was over, and the Mountain would go back to sleep in her sweet way, now that she had raised the Devil. And now one of the questions Paul asked seemed an idle one, so calm and quiet was his voice.

"Has M'selle, the great lady I called to the court, returned to her manoir, or is she still in France?"

He expected the answer to be, "I do not know, Missie Paul." Instead she said quietly:

"As long ago as yesterday she was in Saint-Pierre."

Paul paused long enough to get some kind of hold on that. Then he asked:

"Why should she come now, of all times?"

"A good many great folk with country villas came into the city when the Mountain began to spout. They have strange ways—those people. Missie Governor came back too. My grandson saw M'selle in her carriage on the street, and that's all I know."

She spoke on of various happenings; but Paul hardly heard her. Something solid and strong was forming in his mind—a wild notion that shaped into an intention, a desire that became a resolve. He asked for pen and ink, paper and envelope, and, when they were provided, he sat at the rickety table and wrote a brief note:

> Joan:
>
> This will be brought you by Jerome, a small Creole boy. If you care to answer, he will bring a note or an oral message. I have returned from a trip. What seems a little owl utters his wailing cry.

Do you hear it and will you heed it? Perhaps the revival of the Mountain has brought another revival. At least I must know.

Paul

He put the message in the small dark hand, and the young legs flew. Nothing could serve better to pass the time of waiting than an old woman's disconnected remarks. She asked no questions and expected no comments; in between them she dreamed. In less than half an hour the boy burst in the door.

"Missie Paul!"

"Yes."

"M'selle say for you to come now."

Paul drew a deep breath and exhaled with a long sigh. Strangely he felt no more surprise at this acceptance than he would have felt at refusal. Then he smiled with strange sweetness to himself, because that was a way of saying that he still did not know how this cat would jump.

Lately bathed, washed, shaved, his rough hair combed, decently dressed, he set out at once. He climbed the long hill thinking of the steeps of Pelée climbed long ago, of the moss bed and the frightened hawk, the warm flask of wine, the deep draught of life. Loveliness long lost? It can never be wholly so. He would wait what befell. He would not hope or fear, only wait. That was the part of a man which often Paul could not attain in quietude. How much of life is spent in waiting for its explosions! Sometimes stars fell, once in a while they blazed up.

He came to the tall house and, as one night to the Manoir De Legle, entered the front gate, went to the front door. Dark Cecile opened it at once; she did not smile, her face remained impassive; she spoke in half-stifled tones.

"*Bon jou'*, missie."

"*Bon jou'*, Cecile."

"My baby thinks she has grown up and sits in her *salon*. But if she stings or scolds or strikes you, do not go. Wait awhile and say sweet things to her. She too is a wasp, only white instead of brown. She is the sun and rain, the Mountain and the valley. She is Martinique."

It was a wild, hushed outpouring. At once she recovered herself and led him to a big, beautiful, forbidding door. This she opened and through it she called sweetly:

"M'selle, your company has come."

The room was not as grand as the *salon* of the manoir, but more cool and airy. It had been built in the days of the Republic and was in some measure a concession to modern times, for any rich, well-bred lady could properly preside there. Paul felt its atmosphere with hardly a glance at it; his gaze was riveted on the young woman in a pale-blue, plainly cut evening gown seated on a gold-covered Adam sofa. She seemed serene as though nothing undue had happened, as though that raging lion, Time, had not rushed by. She looked him in the face with a small smile.

"Well, Paul, I understand that you came again to the front door."

"That's the way it has to be."

"Have you forgotten you've been disbarred and no longer have the excuse you had before?"

He thought her voice had a blithe tone. She was guarding it and he could not be sure. He knew only that his hopes mounted.

"I don't like excuses. I forswear them."

"No one can do that, I think. You'll come as near as anyone, but we'll all talk awfully fast before the Judgment Seat. Will you sit down by me? This sofa looks as if it would break under your oxlike weight, but like so many delicate-looking things, it's really very strong."

"Adam made it," he said, his eyes sparkling with the bursting joke. "Adam made lots of tough things."

"Good fellow." Her eyes likewise sparkled. "And he raised a lot of hell, too. All right. Sit down. Let's be at ease with each other. We've nothing to fear any more."

"That's a moot point." Then, seating himself and pursuing his brief advantage, playing boldly as he often did, "I remember another delicate-seeming shape that supported my oxlike weight."

"It didn't seem so then," she answered thoughtfully. "I don't know why. Maybe nature provides struts for those very stresses. I felt strong—more than adequate—instead of in danger of being crushed. All women know that feeling."

She reflected a moment, then added:

"Paul, why did you question what I said about our having nothing to fear?"

"What did you mean by it, Joan?"

"It seems to be the fact, in big ways and little ways. Everybody found out we've been lovers. That knocked most of the scandal out of it—what was there to do about it?—talking behind hands became silly. To offend

people of good taste, immorality must be half-hidden under hypocrisy. Otherwise they shrug and say 'live and let live.' You'll be surprised to know that the story got to Paris. I became rather a sensation at affairs there, outshining several young countesses and a beautiful duchess. Of course the story was different—a peasant in the opposite part and a court scene far more dramatic than a correspondent case—and how the French love drama! I received proposals of marriage from two or three eligible and self-sacrificing gallants—my bulging moneybox of course being a consideration. Also, other sorts of proposals from an aging statesman, a terrific sportsman, and a truly great artist, who could offer me their fame although not their names. They were tempting offers—the men were gray and *impressif* and nice—but I had a fixation—that's the latest thing in Paris—and so refused."

"What was the fixation?"

"Not you, according to the young psychologists. His name was Oedipus. You may know about him from Greek mythology."

"Yes, I do."

"Paul, I misjudged the situation. I thought surely I would be severely punished. It may come later, if I live that long—if I marry, that generous tolerant husband may turn into something else when he broods over it. The wages of sin—but at least they must be very widespread, the total amount of punishment must be astronomical, if all sinners catch it. None of this, Paul, excuses you. You thought the exposure would ruin me, yet you went ahead. I still want to *hurt you*—hard as I can. If you are ever excused, it will be on entirely different grounds."

"What grounds?" Paul asked bluntly.

"I'm still answering the other question. There's nothing to fear tonight, as far as I know, except each himself. All the servants but Cecile are off for the holiday. The Seigneur is dead and he'd be glad if he knows about it; whether I'm glad is too complicated for me to probe. None of my friends will call. I've not been at home since I arrived here a week ago, wondering where in hell you were. I said 'as far as I know.' I don't know what kind of a mess you may be in; I do know you're a fanatic and a dangerous person to associate with. All sensible men and women should leave you strictly alone, and all of them will at last quit you, and leave you to die alone." Her expression changed, somehow she was more beautiful, and her tone changed. "I don't want to die alone. It's bad enough at best. Still I can't die with you, Paul, because I'm not up to it."

"I've heard something like that before," Paul said in deep sadness.

"Now about Pelée. At the trial Atlas said she would speak again. She did speak, with a great deal of force. You and I were wrong as could be about her having died. But she killed only a few score terribly innocent bystanders, no one involved with her like Atlas and you and I. So she was not Kali of the bloody breast. Do you know who Kali is? It was not *Götterdämmerung*. Atlantis didn't sink into the sea. There was no Greek tragedy on a colossal scale. Now she's going to sleep again, L'Etang will refill her crater, she'll lie quietly for fifty years. Why did I come back here, when, at the manoir, newly come from France, I heard of the threatened eruption? Not as an aristocratic gesture, as did other white Creoles of high birth. I came here to be with you. If these should turn out to be as the last days of Pompeii, that would be reason enough to forget my threat and my jealous fury and for us to be lovers again. Now the danger's passed and I have no excuse. At least any that I would like to confess."

"Then I don't understand why you let me come tonight."

"Maybe I've got something better than excuse for receiving you—in fact a reason—a good reason."

When her voice died away and her dark face was lit with beauty, he asked humbly:

"What is it, Joan?"

"Come with me and I'll tell you. I'll take you to the chamber of state—the bedroom of the chatelaine."

They rose and she took his hand and they walked slowly side by side up the stately stairway. At the landing they passed a tall clock on a slender bronze stand with a broad base and deeply concave sides. It had only one hand, and that and its whole aspect bespoke its profound antiquity—it had been ticking away when Columbus set foot on Martinique. Now the pointer showed about twenty minutes after ten of the night of May 7, 1902; and the Carib Indians who had gazed at the pale-colored newcomer had disappeared, and the Pearl of the Antilles glimmered in the moonlight where their lodges stood, and four centuries had sped, and even the Big Wind of Missie Bon had blown and died long since, and people past counting had tilled the soil and lay beneath, and the Swan had died, and only the Mountain looked almost the same.

2.

The room to which Joan brought Paul was of great magnificence. It had been fashioned to that effect, with a vaulted ceiling, curved beams, Gothic

windows, and a cold tiled floor. A long-dead architect had been given carte blanche, and whether his riotous imagination had kept to the strait path of good taste, God only knew; but truly it had impressed every bride and lover, visitor, doctor who came to treat, lawyer to litigate, priest to give extreme unction and close eyes. Maybe a peasant's cot on which he rested from his toil was more magnificent in the eyes of God than the great canopied bed, but people have a hard time seeing things from God's eyes, it is almost blasphemy to attempt it, and, the world being the world and Paul of it, he too was terribly impressed and then let it go.

"Now will you tell me why, with Pelée going back to sleep, you still let me come?" Paul asked.

"Yes, I'll tell you now," she said with great wistfulness in her face. "Because you were right."

"I don't quite understand what you mean."

"You did right to call me to the stand to try to save Atlas."

"Even though I knew the case was lost, and he asked me not to do it?"

"That makes it all the more right. I don't know why."

"I can't quite swallow that, Joan. You're the Chatelaine de Legle. Even in France, four thousand miles away, that's a name to conjure with—on the island, it's a prodigious name. Atlas was an odd fish, an amateur Danton; such as he must not be allowed to humiliate you. You know who I am—son of your father's foreman. We can't get anywhere if you put on an act. How could I have done right in your eyes?"

"You didn't have to do right in my eyes, Paul." She spoke in deepest gravity. "Only in your own eyes. It showed a strength of will as great as your strength of body; one of them always thrilled me, and, now I'm grown up, the other thrills me more. Remember I'm a rather primitive person. I showed it that day in the tobacco shed. Have you ever heard of a Creole girl that doesn't itch for a strong lover?"

"Oh, that's different. That's all right, then."

"You didn't let me make you go weak. I tried to weaken you and I couldn't. It took a good while for the effect to take hold, but it has at last. But that's not all of it, Paul. You did right in my eyes too—in everybody's eyes—and the people who said you didn't, they're the ones who are putting on an act. I denied it at the time, but I'm telling the truth now. You see, the *haute noblesse* are all gone. My father was the last. I can't live up to him any more than I can live up to you. There are still great aristocrats—most of them great democrats. The rest are whipping a dead horse. After the Revolution there were a few left who could look back to the Valois—but

attitudes aren't any good since the efficient German burghers, led by some Prussian stag-hunting Junkers, knocked hell out of French chivalry, such as was left. I wanted to believe those attitudes—they are rather magnificent. Seeing that trial disillusioned me."

"Then I've got only one more question. Why did you bring me to the chamber-of-state?"

"I don't know. It was an impulse. Now will you do something about it?" Her face became strangely lighted; her eyes intensely dark. "Make love to me now—this minute—as hard as you can."

"May I undress you—every stitch?"

"Yes, and let those big hands touch me a thousand times."

The silence was itself impassioning. Paul had not known—his brain had shut it back—the extremity of this need. It seemed he had half-forgotten all this beauty until now it was again plain and palpable. For a while, lying facing him, she wanted his big arms about her neck, her breast tight against his, her legs thrilling to his sinews, her mouth captive. Then she freed it and spoke.

"Paul, we're back on the Mountain."

"Yes."

"All the mystery, all the ecstasy. The ten years between are lost, and we've found each other. Do you remember my telling you I didn't want to die?"

"I said, 'I never knew anyone more alive.' Something like that."

"Can we make up those almost ten years? There still doesn't seem enough time."

"We'll try tonight."

"I love you, Paul. Forever and ever. All the hours, all the days, all the years. Say you love me, too."

"I love you, Joan."

He said it in other ways. She was not his equal, so she could hardly believe it could strike so deep. An hour passed, one little hour among many in life's count, at the zenith of the night, the zenith of two existences, enchanted beyond thought as is all true enchantment. At its end he rose and went to the window, for in the great chambers of the tall houses of Saint-Pierre at least one window always faced the Mountain. Its white smoke, silvery in the moonlight, formed an eerie ring. All the lights except those of the docks and ships and the many-stained church windows had gone out. The streets lay quiet.

After a while Joan went to sleep in his arms, and he kept vigil over her for two more of the counted hours, until he wakened her with a kiss. Then it seemed they were the only people awake in the thronged city, and so it was a witching hour, of poignant closeness and lovely communion. Then they both slept, enfolded in each other, and perhaps they wandered the same paths in dreams. Little, lost paths, leading to joy and sorrow, of long ago.

At the first glimmer of dawn they wakened, joyful past telling that they had not parted, and they talked in low tones, and kissed, and then sought each other, lest loneliness would soon return, and found each other. Then the night ended and the day broke quickly.

The words he had dreaded came forth at last.

"Isn't it time for me to go?"

"I suppose so. The sun's up."

He got up, again looked out the window, and half-dazed had turned to dress when she spoke again.

"Come back, Paul."

"Do you mean it?"

"Why not? What is there about time that we should always be counting it? Isn't it endless?"

"In a way of speaking. It's pretty potent and strange stuff, too."

"Paul, it might be that never again in our whole lives can we have such a night as we had last night. It's hard for me to believe it could be given very often. We knocked down the walls. We crossed all the gulfs. We've been happy with each other, and we'll be so lost and frightened until it comes again."

Just then the ancient clock began striking on the landing, with solemn reverberation. He counted the strokes, smiled his gentle smile, lay down, and stretched his arm to be her pillow.

It was seven o'clock of the morning of May 8, 1902.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

The Doctor's Triumph

1.

TOMORROW was Thursday, Ascension Day. The Creole and Negro dock workers would keep the holiday as well as possible, and only one high-seas vessel had scheduled sailing; she was the *Roddam*, the largest in port. She intended to put out in the afternoon of that day; meanwhile her nervous captain, who as a youth had fled a volcanic tidal wave off the Hawaiian shore, stood further out than the other ships and kept steam in her boilers.

Mainly to put a package bound for France aboard her, Claude Griffon and his servant Ruben left their humble quarters in Chaude Oree late on Wednesday afternoon to walk into Saint-Pierre. Since they had business in connection with the package they went prepared to spend the night in the city. Ruben carried a carpetbag in which were night clothes, toilet articles, a change of linen and socks, and a long, black coat which was beginning to have a greenish cast from age, although showing little sign of wear, and the silk facing of its lapels still good as new. Claude carried the package, which was a shoebox addressed to Doctor the Baron du Ville, President of the Academy of Medicine in Paris. It weighed about five pounds, being chock-full of papers.

"Ruben, I've made up my mind to put up at the Hôtel des Bains," Claude said, as they came near the College, his voice not quite steady. "Haven't we enough money to afford this comfort and still have enough left to support us a month more?"

"Monsieur Doctor, you still have five hundred francs from the sale of your house," Ruben answered. "Also your monthly remittance of a hundred and seventy francs should arrive next week."

"More than enough! And, Ruben, I dare say we'll not be bothered by financial problems after hearing from Dr. du Ville."

"I'm certain of it, Monsieur Doctor."

They entered the imposing doorway of the hotel, and Ruben stood back as Claude approached the desk. His pulse was rather fast and his palms

sweated, adrenal activity no doubt, quickened by mere surroundings unfamiliar for many years. Certainly he had no fear of the spruce clerk. If he were told no rooms were available, it would either be true or untrue, and if untrue, he would smile to himself, and tell Ruben, and they would have a little joke about it. The clerk was looking him over from foot to head.

"Monsieur, I am Dr. Griffon. I would like to spend the night here, with my assistant. One bedroom with an additional cot would do us nicely."

The clerk had never heard of Dr. Griffon, and only a few rooms remained unrented. However, by now his educated gaze had reached Claude's face, and there it hovered, for a long second, and took in its molding by time and labor, and the expression in the eyes.

"We will be happy to have you, Monsieur Doctor."

The two men were shown the room, a cot was moved in, the porter and a chambermaid received generous tips. Hungry from their walk, at six o'clock they ate a substantial supper in their room, then Claude made a careful toilet. Ruben went to the service rooms and pressed Claude's best pants, polished his least-old boots, and wiped his celluloid collar to go with his clean shirt. After his first hot bath in some weeks, Claude put a little pomade on his thick thatch of hair, so nearly white now that his iron-gray eyebrows looked almost black. Ruben held the long, black coat for the fumbling arms, and offered the well-brushed hat.

"Am I presentable, Ruben?" Claude asked.

"In any company, Monsieur Doctor. If I may say so, you make a distinguished appearance."

"Thank you. It really doesn't matter—still on this occasion—"

Claude stopped, gave his boyish smile, and then must wipe his eyes.

"It is true, monsieur," Ruben answered, turning his face away.

Ruben stood in the hallway until his master gained the stairs, the shoebox under his arm. It was not a long walk through the deep dusk to Fonds Cohe and the pleasant home of Dr. Nogret, whom Claude had not seen face to face for more than two years. Several carriages with Creole drivers waited near the gate; and Claude's heart was hard put to it not to fall a little, although he could somehow keep his face from falling. Was his visit a contretemps? Plainly Nogret was host to a small but distinguished gathering. Would he see him even for a moment—if so, no worry or thought of time would occur thereafter—or would he send courteous word by a servant to call tomorrow morning? Such would do well enough, of course—what mattered a few hours? The fact remained that Claude's heart was set on tonight.

He tapped the knocker; a Creole houseboy answered.

"Monsieur?"

"I am Claude Griffon, I wish to speak to the doctor."

"Monsieur Doctor is at dinner with his and Madame's guests. My orders were to call him only in an emergency."

"My visit concerns a medical matter. If you'll tell him I have called, I'll gladly abide by his decision."

"You said Claude Griffon? Come into his reception room, monsieur, and I will speak to him."

Claude had hardly collected his thoughts when the door flew open and Nogret rushed in.

"What a pleasant surprise!" he burst out. "Dr. Griffon, I had feared you'd left the island!" He shook hands with him warmly.

"I regret calling when you have dinner guests—"

"It doesn't matter in the least. Nothing is of less importance to a dinner party than the host—provided there is an agreeable hostess, and good food and drink. Pray sit down, doctor. Tell me what you have been doing. Our island is not large—yet whole sections of it remain almost out of communication with other sections. The last I heard of you—indirectly—you were investigating the water supply of some of the villages."

"That is correct—as far as it goes. Dr. Nogret, I won't keep you long. I wish to show you some figures. I have records to substantiate any or all of them, beyond shadow of doubt. The report is complete in every detail."

In vain Claude tried to steady his voice. When he tried to untie the string on the shoebox his hands fumbled, and the knot caught, and he broke it with a strong jerk. Nogret stared at him in growing excitement or concern.

"Doctor! What is this?"

"You'll see in a moment."

The papers rustled, and he brought forth four folded sheets of foolscap, which Nogret took from his trembling hand. Nogret put on his glasses and brought them to the light.

"These appear to record the incidence of yellow fever in the town of Chaude Oree for the past several years."

"Yes, doctor."

"On the first sheet the figures of five years, up to the year 1899, have been consolidated. I am already acquainted with these facts."

"No doubt there were several light cases never identified or reported. I have listed only those diagnosed by competent doctors."

"The figures of 1899 represent, according to the heading, the number of cases occurring in spite of careful asepsis practiced there by yourself and your assistant. The disinfecting of bedlinen, quarantine as far as possible, prevention of contamination of food and water, and all the means then practiced to prevent contagion. Yet the number of cases remains substantially the same."

"That is true."

"In the year 1900 you record that you have started 'Control and Ultimate Conquest of Yellow Fever by Destruction of Carriers.' The incidence that year is less than half the previous year—and here I see that between February 1, 1901, and May 1, 1902, there has not been a single case!"

"Monsieur Doctor, yellow fever is extinct in Chaude Oree. The outbreak around the mills on the River Capot subsided after three cases. About the same as has been true all over the island."

Nogret had turned pale. "Monsieur, do you care to tell me the method?"

"Certainly. The whole medical world will know it shortly after my reports, to be sent off tomorrow, arrive in Paris. The gist of it is the destruction of the wrigglers of *A. Calopus*, a species of mosquito breeding in water tanks and utensils. This species, and this alone, carry the microbe of the disease and thus spread the sickness. The complete cycle of infection is given in these reports, and thus the killing of the mature mosquito becomes properly a last-ditch measure, impossible of thoroughness. But the elimination of stagnant water in utensils and shards and the introduction of wriggler-devouring minnows into water tanks, cheaply and positively does the job you see outlined there."

Nogret did not speak for a long minute, and appeared stunned. Then he gasped out one word:

"Minnows."

"A small thing to do such good for the human race."

"Truly, it is. Doctor, I cannot speak; you must excuse me. I am overwhelmed. May I pour a drink for myself, and one for you?"

"It would be most welcome." For Claude was trembling and spent from the intensity of his emotions.

Dr. Nogret too was profoundly shaken, his hand shook as he poured the rum, and a little spilled on the table. Claude knew he had said all that needed saying, but he could not force back what sprang to his lips.

"No more red nostrils and lips and ferrety eyes, no more yellow skin, bloody urine, and bloody stools, no more black vomit. I will go now, monsieur. Would you care to have me leave the reports, for you to look over in the morning? The *Roddam* is not due to sail until about four in the afternoon."

"No, sir, keep them in your charge. I already know the thoroughness of your methods; I haven't the least doubt of the truth."

"Then good night, monsieur."

2.

Claude Griffon stopped only once on his way to the hotel, and that was to buy a liter bottle of good rum. Carrying it under one arm, and the heavy shoebox under the other, he walked briskly, his coat open and its tails catching the breeze. He burst into his room, flinging off the coat, and dropped limply and blissfully into a chair.

"Ruben!"

"Monsieur Doctor!"

"Order some cane syrup and lemon juice and make two punches, good and strong."

Ruben went limping about his task. Immediately it seemed the two drinks were ready.

"Give me one, and sit down and enjoy the other," Claude directed. "We have nothing to do but rewrap the package, and that can wait till morning. But don't let me forget I'm one drink ahead of you. Dr. Nogret gave me a stout 'un."

"As soon as I hang this coat, Monsieur Doctor."

"Let the damned coat go. It's twenty years behind the style and it's turned a bilious color and I'll soon buy a new one. By the way, Ruben, you look pretty seedy too. Before we sail for France—we'll give 'em about two months to digest the news—you'll have to spruce up. We can't meet those reporters and photographers—let alone the delegations—looking like vagabonds."

"That is true, monsieur. I've often thought about it. A servant of a great man should do credit to his master. I am lame, but a new built-up shoe would conceal the worst of it."

"Ruben, I don't expect to speak or think of you as my servant. After what we've been through together—falling exhausted into bed when the cra-

cra chirp—my reports name you as my assistant. You shall have a suitable share of credit and honors received."

"I will gladly receive my due as a good workman, Monsieur Doctor, but truly I don't wish for more than that. I couldn't live up to it. To sit at one side and see you elected to the Academy—"

"I think you will—and not too far at one side."

"Monsieur Doctor, I have hoped that you'd be awarded the Legion of Honor. Doesn't it seem well within reason?"

"Ruben, I think it does. There are three grades—chevalier, officer, and commander. I would think surely I would get the first, and possibly the second."

"Monsieur Doctor, I've no real doubt that you will be given the highest grade, and the President of the Republic will affix the decoration with his own hands."

"Ruben, I don't say it will happen—but such things have happened to common men who by luck or industry have served humanity—and I don't deny the possibility. We shall see—what we shall see."

They were still a good while, their thoughts ranging far. And then Ruben asked a question.

"What were the honors that Koch, the great German doctor, received?"

"Too numerous to mention. And it's a foregone conclusion that he'll be elected to the German Academy of Sciences, perhaps the greatest in the world."

"You told me that he achieved great things in South Africa in combatting rinderpest. Isn't your discovery—?"

"Let us not make any comparisons, Ruben, my friend. Fix me another drink."

Ruben did so—one for himself too—and they began to speak not of the future, but the past. Claude recalled his theory that rickets was caused by a diet deficiency—and whatever it might be, it did not exist in the cheap fare of Martiniquan children. When the fanfare was over, he might devote the rest of his life to seeking—perhaps finding—the magic ingredient. This along with teaching and lecturing at various universities.

"No matter how fantastic my theory would have sounded to my fellow medicos before, they will listen to me now," he said quietly.

"It is true, Monsieur Doctor. Nothing succeeds like success."

And then he spoke of a matter which he had mentioned only a few times in all these years in Martinique—Ruben could count them on his fingers.

“Ruben, if that thing hadn’t happened—that terrible mistake, that dreadful lapse of care—we would never have come to Martinique, and I wouldn’t have had contact with yellow fever.”

“That is true, monsieur.”

“Suppose the soul survives. Suppose the soul of Joseph Minard looked back to earth and to the cause of his death. Suppose he had never forgiven me—for if a soul can remember love, why not righteous wrath? Ruben, pardon these wanderings—flights of fancy if you will—remember what we have been through these last days, trying to get the reports in order—and I am still greatly wrought upon. Do you suppose that now Joseph Minard will say, ‘I did not die in vain’?”

“Master, as God is my judge, I think he will.”

The two began to relive the hours, the days, the weeks, the months, the years of their labors in Martinique. Claude recalled the first time he had seen the wrigglers and the starlike burst of his hypothesis. They remembered almost nine setbacks to every ten gains. The tabulations and the timing, the weary watch over sick people, the terrifying symptom of black vomit. But there had been no case as portentous as that of the great Seigneur who had wooed death.

“He got what he wanted,” Claude said. “The same time a grim joke was played upon him by the fates. He cared not at all for humanity. To him it meant the canaille. Yet by his death he benefited humanity. I can still see him—his head upon the pillow—and hear his farewell words. And he kept faith with me by not telling of the experiment. He was truly the grand seigneur.”

The grand seigneur. No doubt he was, Ruben thought. Words came to his lips but he silenced them. For him there was only one grand seigneur. He got up and limped across the room to mix a third drink, stronger than usual. For a moment he forgot that he was lame.

3.

After Claude had left Dr. Nogret’s reception room, his steps made a hollow sound on the veranda. Nogret listened until they were out of hearing and did not yet arouse himself from his stupor. At last, still white of face, he rang for the trusted servant who had admitted his visitor.

“Monsieur Doctor!”

"You have observed Monsieur Prentice, the American Consul, seated on Madame's right?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Tell him I said please to excuse himself from the company and join me here."

The Honorable Thomas Prentice was a high type of diplomat. Saint-Pierre had almost always been lucky in this respect, for the charm of the city and the island, long known to diplomatic corps, caused the most engaging and able officers to vie for the posts. He came into the room remarking gaily on the champagne. At sight of Nogret's face, he fell silent.

"Sit down, Tom. I wish you'd brought your glass because you'll need support. If you wish, pour yourself a good tot of the rum."

"No, I'll wait. Something's up. What is it?"

"Do you remember Dr. Claude Griffon? You met him in my office and perhaps saw him in court. He was here a moment ago."

"I'd lost track of him—"

"So had I. It develops that he's been too busy to keep in touch with his handful of friends. No, he had no friends. They were only acquaintances, such as you and I. He had a shoebox full of reports. They represent the labors of years and are perfectly accurate and scientific. On a completely original theory and independent investigation he has proven that yellow fever is transmitted only through *A. Calopus*."

"What?"

"There it is. Laid out. He's sending the reports on the *Roddam*. For God's sake, Tom, who's going to tell him? I started to—give him a hint, anyway—and my throat closed up. I'd almost rather cut off my tongue."

"Thank God, it's not my pidgin. If he were an American, it would be. As it is, I go free. It doesn't seem possible he wouldn't know. Hasn't he read any medical journals?"

"I doubt if he's opened one in three years."

"The newspapers have given the whole dramatic story of Walter Reed's discoveries in Cuba."

"He hasn't read any newspapers. He's been sifting facts, counting, watching, studying all day and all night, catching mosquitoes, killing wrigglers. Months and years alone except for his 'assistant'—he means his servant Ruben. He's no genius like Reed—he's just a hell of a hard and thorough workman—and he had an accidental poisoning in Paris to square with himself and the world. I ask you again, who's going to tell him that he's

rediscovered a discovery already heralded all over the earth? And he's so little too late!"

"Oh, God damn it! Reed had a reputation already—he didn't need this palm. Well, you ask who's going to do it. You're going to do it. Not tonight, but before the ship sails tomorrow. You've got to look into that gray face and hear that heart go smash. Listen. Isn't there any crumb? Did he find out anything Reed doesn't know?"

"One thing. I think so anyway. As far as I've heard, Reed hasn't yet conceived of using minnows to eat up the wrigglers in the water tanks—he kills them with oil and chemicals. I'll lay stress on that if it chokes me. I'll ask him to lunch tomorrow. What bitter bread!"

"If you ask what I think, that kind of bread comes out of the oven too damned often. Well, I haven't anything to do with that. It's not in the jurisdiction of the Foreign Service of the United States. Let's go back to the company and get pissy ass drunk on champagne."

4.

A little groggy, pleasantly dizzy and blissfully happy, Claude and Ruben went to their beds at midnight. At four o'clock Claude was wakened by the Angelus, lay musing a while, then went back to sleep. When he wakened again, morning light poured in the window and diffused the room.

Claude cast a quick and anxious glance at his bureau. There lay the package, as substantial as when he had put it there last night. On the cot against the wall, Ruben snored quietly. Claude picked up his watch from the bedstand, only to find he had forgotten to wind it.

"Ruben!" he called loudly.

"Monsieur!"

"Wake up, you sluggard! It's another day."

"And a beautiful, bright day, monsieur, by the signs."

"And we're going to start it as we have no business doing—but it won't hurt us on this occasion and, by heaven, it will help us. That's by taking a drink."

"Monsieur, it will only give us a good appetite for breakfast."

As each sat on his bed, sipping rum and water—the syrup and lemon juice being spent—they heard a discreet knock on the door.

"Who is it?" Claude called.

"Louis, the waiter. Monsieur left word to be called at this time."

Claude remembered; this was a well-run hotel. The hour was seven-fifteen, and the day was Thursday, and the date was May 8, 1902.

This glorious day!

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

The Picture

1.

WHEN Clio was out of it, Denis' house seemed to him larger, quieter, lonelier, and greatly less occupied. On Wednesday afternoon she had hardly gone before all the servants except Simeon took off, by his consent, on vacation over the holiday; and their pleasant murmur and frequent exclamations vanished from the kitchen and the hallways. Denis wandered into his studio, set his two easels side by side, and sat down on one of Clio's stools to survey them.

He was immediately impressed by how well "Cendrillon's Toilet" had turned out. It was a better picture than he had conceived or intended or supposed. While a whimsy, its whole effect was pleasing, and he could not question the good grouping, the clean draftsmanship, and the skillful laying on of paint. The subject's confident smile delighted the heart; and the long muscular leg shown across the opposite knee, with the big sinewy foot about to glide into the impossibly small glass slipper, was truly a tour de force. The eye centered there. As the skirt fell away, the well-lighted golden flesh of the foreleg postulated a lovely thigh retreating into dimness that would make lovers of the flesh everywhere envy the Prince and the joys of the bridal night. No connoisseur could mistake it for a great picture; its effect was too diffused. The fact remained that many collectors would prize it.

An idle glance toward "*La Porteuse*" made him stop and stare. He sprang up, walked about the room, looked at other objects, then again, with awareness of effort, gazed at the picture. Into his heart crept a tiny chill of doubt.

His mind went all over it again—all he had done and seen that had seemed so good. Was there too much of something? If so, what? Was there a lack? What in the devil could it be? The terrifying thought struck him that it was not, really, as good a picture as the other. "Cendrillon's Toilet" had not presumed to be portraiture; yet Clio more truly lived and breathed. He tried refusing to believe it. It did not stand to his reason, considering his long

labor and the life-likeness of her awkward position she had turned into grace. The coloring was pleasing and perhaps superb. It was a wonderful subject, a thrilling challenge, and he—he had not measured up, or now he was out of his head.

Then he remembered in wan hope that Clio had herself said that the ambitious work portrayed her more truly than the lighter picture. She did not say it to please him; she was not very apt at that; it might have been a self-deceit, not an intentional one. Perhaps it had hit closer to her conception of herself, while Cendrillon was a mischief who would lead the Prince a dance. Good God, had he painted another idealization that hence, in the last analysis, was a façade?

He hurried to the door and called. In a few seconds Simeon appeared, giving his master a sharp, perhaps a worried glance.

"Simeon, look at these two pictures. If you went into a shop to buy one or the other, which would you choose?"

The small, alert Creole looked long and searchingly and then scratched his head.

"Monsieur, I would take that one." He pointed to the "Cendrillon."

"But that's because you're in it."

"No, monsieur. The page is not me—you did not intend him to be me—he looks like me but everyone knows he's a man in a fairy tale. But Clio is not so. The fairy is there—the silver slipper—the white kitten—but she stayed out of the fairy tale. Maybe she will enter it soon, but until she puts on the silks and jewelry—perhaps even then—she is still a girl of the island. Clio looks out of her eyes and the way she holds her leg. I have seen that smile on her face more times than I can count."

"On what occasions, Simeon?"

"When she knew that Missie was going to give her a present."

"Before I knew it myself?"

"Yes, missie."

"That is one side of her, I admit. But there is a deeper, truer Clio, over which she has no control—she neither smiles over her, nor frowns. Perhaps she doesn't even know about her. How can she, when that is who she is?"

"That is over my head, missie."

"Well, I want her here. I want to look at her again, and I can't wait till Monday. The light has gone, but I'll look at her in artificial light, and know then if I painted her by it instead of the sunlight of Martinique. Is that over your head too? It's over mine, I think—it's just a ghastly feeling—a sick

fear. Go for her at once. Tell her she can leave within the hour. Tell her I'll give her a gold napoleon such as she showed to the moon that night, and then the wish she made will come true. Put on your hat and hurry, Simeon, my boy. I'll wait for her here."

Denis did not turn again to the pictures and tried not to think about them and instead read a new French translation of Fitzgerald's *Rubáiyát*. He expected, hating the thought of it, a rather long wait. She was always in a hurry to leave, almost never to come, and even the promise of the gold piece might not stir her out of taking her own sweet time. Then shortly, to his surprise, he heard through the silent house a door open and close.

He read another verse; it was some sort of gesture made to himself. Whoever came walked lightly in Clio's way. He called, "Come," in answer to the knock on the studio door, and his heart was in his mouth, and there was no denying that.

Simeon entered alone. The lamplight was weak and gray close to the door where he paused, and perhaps that caused his face to look ghastly.

"Missie, she was not at home."

"Come closer, please. Stand by the couch."

Simeon tramped forward, his arms at his sides, his hands closed, his head thrust oddly forward.

"Yes, missie."

"Where is Clio?"

"Missie, I don't know."

"Didn't her mother tell you?"

"She only yelled and scolded and I didn't pay much attention."

"She must have told you something. Had she gone down into town?"

"No, missie. She has left the city. Coraline said she was going to Fort-de-France, but that may be a lie."

"Where could she be going? Is she afraid of the Mountain? She wasn't when she left."

"No, missie. The Mountain has wakened and killed people and now goes back to sleep for fifty years. Missie Governor says so, and the good fathers."

"Whom did she go with? How can she get back by Monday? Did she—she didn't go alone?"

"No, missie."

"Who went with her, Simeon? I wish to know the truth."

"Missie, she went with Dominique."

Denis was still holding the beautifully bound book. He laid it down, now, and sat for a few seconds with his eyes lowered, his arms folded. The room was perfectly still except for Simeon's troubled breathing. Denis breathed deeply and silently. At last, he spoke in the quiet voice of a man to whom pride has become second nature, a man of self-control, a man of some greatness.

"I remember that name, but can't seem to connect it with anyone."

"He came here, missie, to borrow money. He was young, big for a Creole, and he said he was Clio's kin by marriage. I don't think Missie gave him any, and Coraline said that Clio put bad mouth on him for coming."

"I remember now. Dominique, with a sopota skin. I couldn't place his face, but I thought I had seen his powerful body, perhaps on the dock." Denis paused, his eyes darkening as though in deep pain. "Did she call him Dom?"

"Everyone called him Dom."

"Then it was his name, not Dan, that she had written with ink on her arm. She'd forgotten to wash it off. Simeon, my brain is working very well now—remembering everything. I know where I noticed his body—in the street dancing—and I didn't see his face because he wore a mask. Clio danced with him, grinding against him more wildly than the other dancers. I'm glad she too wore a mask. I wouldn't have liked to see her face at that moment. And, Simeon, that was quite a long time ago."

"A long time ago, missie," Simeon answered, his voice breaking.

"How long has it been going on? How long have you known?"

Simeon dropped on his knees beside the couch, his face in his hands, sobbing bitterly.

"Try to tell me, boy."

"Missie, I've known about it—we all have—from the first. It began soon after she became your sweetheart and you gave her the gold guinea. Dom wouldn't go with her before then—he had a girl of the bright-skin we call *sang-mêle*."

"Did she give him the gold coin?"

"We think so, missie. And she would have run off with him months ago, if Dom hadn't made her wait till the picture was finished so Missie would give her the sweet clothes, and the gold necklace, and the gold bracelet, and the gold pins that shook in the sunlight."

Denis spoke very quietly and strangely. "I can't help but regret that you didn't tell me, Simeon."

“By the Bon Die, I started to tell you a hundred times,” Simeon cried, tears rolling down his boyish face. “But Missie loved the ground she walked on, and my tongue stuck.”

“Yes, I loved the ground she walked on, and maybe that will count for something at long last.”

2.

The night passed. Lying half-dressed on the studio couch, drugged and drunk, Denis did not count the hours. What wakened him, he thought, were people’s cheerful voices as they hurried along the street toward the cathedral. For half an hour, perhaps, he lay in a reverie so deep that it was like a spell; although he knew himself, his surroundings, and that his brain was at work on some great problem. Suddenly he noticed that morning light was clear and vivid in the room.

He leaned on one elbow, then got to his feet. With narrowed and glazed eyes he went to his work table and began to mix paints on his palette. He picked up a long, delicate brush. Still as in a dream he went to the picture of Cendrillon, paused briefly before it, then moved on to “*La Porteuse*.” Somehow he had gotten the idea that it was unfinished.

He had been wrong about that. It was finished as far as it went—it had realized his conception and had expressed his best powers. What he conceived now—the birth within his brain as he lay in reverie—was a slightly different picture. He knew exactly what it was, he had never visioned anything so clearly, and although his first strokes were tentative and timid, they began to grow bold. These never moved from the subject’s countenance. Mainly they involved the eyes, especially the eyelids, the little hollow from the septum to the middle of the upper lip and the mouth itself. These little changes necessitated retouching the planes under the eyes and the conformity of the jaws. Time passed, and again he did not know it, and the light was dazzling now. He glanced at the clock, which last night, in drunken stupor, he had set by guess.

It read five minutes after eight.

Three times more he touched the picture, then stood back. Suddenly he broke the brush in his hand, dropped the pieces, and threw the palette with all his strength against the wall.

Then he walked slowly to the door and called, “Simeon! Come here at once.”

And at once Simeon came, gray and trembling.

"Missie Dan!"

"Look, and see what you see."

Simeon glanced first at "Cendrillon," glanced away in bewilderment, then turned his gaze on "*La Porteuse*." It became riveted. He looked at Denis, then looked back. Denis uttered a hysterical howl of laughter, which was instantly cut short.

"Well, has the cat got your tongue? What is it?"

"Missie, I don't know!"

"What do you mean you don't know? Haven't you eyes? I asked you what you see."

"I see a *porteuse*."

"Who is she?"

"She resembles Clio. But she is more than Clio."

"You're an articulate fellow, Simeon. Also you have very good eyes. I think your opinion would come up to those of the Directors of the Louvre. You say a *porteuse*. Have you ever seen her?"

"A thousand times, missie."

"What about her? Describe her."

"She carries burdens on the roads, over the hills, down the valleys, through the forest. She earns half a franc a day—sometimes a whole franc. She stops and eats bread and she drinks at the fountains, and if they are bamboo fountains she takes out her bottle and puts in a little rum. At thirty-five she will wear out, but by then she has lived much—talking with the other girls, singing with them, often talking to herself as she sees the ocean over the hills, or the sun casting her long shadow, or Death-in-the-wood crossing the road."

"What does she do at night?"

"She sleeps where she may, but when she comes home again she sleeps with her lover."

"Is he an old man who makes a goddess of her and who gives her gold?"

"No, he is a young man, smelling of sweat, who sometimes gets jealous and hits her."

"What does she do then? Does she cry?"

"No, missie, she hits back, and then they make up, and make love."

"You've told me enough. All I need to know. This picture was painted by Denis du Bois in Saint-Pierre, Martinique, French West Indies. I began it in July of last year. I have finished it at—is that clock right?"

“I think, missie, it is a little fast.”

At that moment they heard a voice high and pure as a flute’s rising from the street, streaming into the open window.

“*Ci qui le escargot?*”

“It’s the girl with the banana-colored skin and her snails are the best in the city,” Denis said quietly. “And now I don’t have to ask you the time. She’s as prompt as a cra-cra.”

The clock was forty-five minutes fast. The time was now exactly half-past seven of Thursday, May 8, 1902.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

The Mountain

1.

SLEEPING aboard the launch, Fez wakened from a bad dream. Instantly he could remember none of it, except that he had dreamed in Arabic. Deeply uneasy, he got up and went out on the deck. The bay had a gentle swell, the sky hung clear except for a wan smoke cloud over Pelée, the city lay in darkness. Bow and stern lights picked out the ships in their quiet row, and he could discern the hulls of those standing nearest. Judged by the position of the Southern Cross, the hour was after four.

Unable to rid himself of his feeling of ill-being, he returned to the cabin, dressed swiftly, and, without any definite plans, put what money he had into his pocket and his few belongings into his well-worn military kit bag. Carrying this, he came again on the deck. He found his gaze was wandering to the Mountain, and once he thought its smoke cloud was briefly limned by a dark-red glow. Occasional low rumbles rose from her bowels, like distant thunder, but these were no louder or more frequent than before.

It was neither of these signs that turned his unrest into deep-seated and sharp alarm. Rather it was what sailors on the North African shore where he was born regarded as evil omens. First, a small meteor streaked across the sky and appeared to fall in the city; more likely it had burned out behind the distant *mornes*; and it vanished before he could cry *Allah Akbar*. He was looking for an indication that the somewhat unlucky sign did not apply to him when he saw another of far more ominous import. A large black bird, not an owl, a bird having no good business being abroad before daylight, flew out of the night, flapped over the launch, and, being startled, let its dropping spatter on the deck. Fez thought it was one of the ravens which sometimes hopped and fed along the waterline. And at that instant he recalled his dream.

It was the scene of an ambush on the desert to which he had gone with his father. There about twenty French soldiers lay in a little huddle, rolled

over by tribesmen's rifle fire. Although they were hardly cold, the winged ghouls had gathered—watching, waiting, hopping, and croaking.

At that instant a sickness that had afflicted Fez a dozen or more times in his life set in upon him again. He did not know it was a sickness. He could not stand off from himself and gaze at it. What seemed his single remaining link with health was but another symptom of the same disease—he knew he must conceal his terror, not because people would disdain him but because they too would perceive the danger and their actions would interfere with his actions. If need be, he must walk on people's bodies to escape.

There was a name for the thing from which he must fly, and the name was Death. It was not wounds or shame or pain; all these he could bear; it was non-being, yes, but he drew close to that frontier when he lay in a drunken stupor; even in deep sleep he touched its shadows. Death that he now must flee was a presence, not an absence, positive not negative, a red darkness and an aloneness and a horror. Some East Indian lascars sailing French ships thought Death was a blood-smeared multiarmed goddess with a necklace of skulls. Many black men from the Ivory Coast thought Death was an elephant with flaming eyes. Fez had laughed at them, for deep in his soul he had always known the identity of Death. It could be a hyena on the desert walking crouched like other hyenas, it could be a vulture that stood with his wings up, croaking and hissing. Usually, though, it was fire and smoke and chaos that only the victim saw advancing across the ground, obliterating all else.

Fez lighted a lantern and watched in all directions. When he made out a fish boat making out from the docks he waved the lantern and shouted. Slowly the boat drew alongside the launch.

"Put me aboard the *Roddam* and I'll give you five francs," he told the man with the rudder oar.

"Truly, missie."

Fez hung the lantern on the flagstaff, then, passing down his kit bag, he dropped overside into the craft. In ten minutes he was under the big hull of the steamer, bidding a deck hand who had answered his halloo to drop a rope ladder. He paid five francs to the boatman, counting the coins carefully, then climbed sturdily aboard, the kit bag in his hand.

"Are you a passenger?" the deck officer asked.

"I've got enough to pay my fare to St. Vincent. I heard she would put in there. If you're shorthanded and can use me I'll work my way across. I'm an experienced stoker."

“I’ll speak to the cap’n when he comes on deck. You can wait on the foredeck.”

“What time will she sail?”

“The cap’n said eight bells this afternoon. Anyhow between then and dark.”

That would be all right, Fez thought. The night waned, the distant ship lights looked pale and strange, and the gray of dawn mixed with the black of night. Sea birds waked and flew, and a few fish boats put out to sea, although most crews would stay in port today to ask intercession by Holy Mother with Bon Die. Not until night fell again would the haunted shadows gather and the Unseen move. Death who lay in ambush, a shape he could almost see, whose cold breath he had felt come and pass, and who would return, was a night walker. No one on board except himself had seen this shadow cast before, and Fez would keep the secret in word and action.

2.

There had been a brief display of heat lightning to the southward about dawn, then all was calm. The sun rose in majesty. Between seven and seven-thirty people in the city saw no change in the Mountain except her deepening tone and the massing of shadows in contrast with the surging sunlight. In the thronged churches priests intoned, congregations made due response, people knelt and rose to kneel again, some of them prayed, some of them contemplated the Mother and the Saints or the Son that today ascended into heaven, a great many daydreamed. Throughout the city thousands of other people, for there were thirty-one thousand within its confines, did all things common to humanity. Men and women worked, loafed, ate, puttered, planned the day, attended their persons, talked and laughed. Some of them wept, a scattering stayed in bed, others started on excursions to the beach or the Botanical Gardens, children played, babies nursed or cried or were rocked and quieted. It was a picture of the world. By and large these were handsome people, and some were beautiful and some ugly. A few seemed fated to make their marks, the rest to breathe out their days in calm obscurity. All loved the sunlight, the sea, and their Mountain. They thought of countless things but very little about death. There was no use thinking about it.

Shortly after seven-thirty a change came over the Mountain. Her cloud of smoke blew away except for a little coil, and the intermittent rumbling in her deeps ceased almost altogether. If there was any heaviness of air it was

not noticeable on the breezy deck of the *Roddam*. The captain, one of his officers, and two visitors talked quietly in her wheelhouse as Fez stood by her forerail—she lay stern to—gazing out to sea. The long hand of the ship's clock jerked across the dial—from seven thirty-five to seven thirty-nine. Fez saw a big flock of gulls on the fish dock take wing, clamoring. They shone prettily in the sunlight.

A few seconds later a flash of light, unworldly bright, broke over the whole scene. It could hardly be compared to lightning a thousand times magnified because it was a sheet instead of a streak. It rose from the Mountain, and all who were gazing in that direction were struck blind. All others saw their surroundings in unimaginable brilliance, the sky white, the sea blinding-blue, growth unearthly green, dark things in stark and terrifying silhouette against brighter things, and every eyeball and brain was stabbed through and through with darting many-colored arrows of pain.

And then at once, before any eye could find itself or any brain could detect the interval, a gigantic cloud, black, orange, and blood-red, billowed up the sky, and under it spread flame.

The flame rolled and raced and leaped as few eyes in all the history of earth had ever seen. Almost instantly it embraced the whole city, every roof and wall and tower wrapped in fire, and rushed in a roaring wall toward the ships. And perhaps, now, already, all of Saint-Pierre lay flat, demolished, reduced to burning rubble. Certainly there fell a titanic blow, some seconds after the blinding light, and striking the ships a second or two later. It was not lava; it had no substance that men could see; yet wooden buildings disappeared in a cloud of flaming dust, and stone structures with foot-thick walls were sheared off a few feet above the ground. And just then, or an instant before then, or an instant later, there was unconscionable sound.

Following that explosion, to be heard a hundred miles at sea, beyond description in terms of ordinary human experience, rose a rending, crashing, grinding noise as though the world were breaking into pieces. Happily for almost all within the obliterated city, the world had already ended. They did not hear even the first blast, because they had been killed as quickly as death can strike, by a sword of flame.

It would be told by distant observers that some force unknown—although probably the same that, striking downward from the mountain, had flattened the city—knocked the waters of the harbor away from the land, and the ships reeled to the bottom, so that when a tidal wave came roaring back, only one ship buoyed up.

Sometimes one detail of a vast calamity may catch the attention of some survivor and become in a minor way significant of the larger human story. The *Roddam* had stood further out than the other ships, and a man standing on her foredeck had been somewhat sheltered from the blast. Knocked down but clinging to a stanchion, he reeled up with his clothes on fire, and began running aft. As he ran he shouted with all his voice:

"*Paul! Wait for me. Roland! Albert! I'm coming, your friend Fez. Wait for me, I say. I'm going with you!*"

Staggering down the afterdeck, he leaped into the steaming hot sea and began to swim strongly toward the obliterating flame.

3.

The *Roddam*'s cable lines had snapped like threads, and her decks were littered with dead. Yet those remaining put steam to her mainshaft, hands to her wheel, water and sand where she was on fire, and somehow got her underway. When time and fate brought her into the harbor of St. Lucia, a boatman was the first to speak to her.

"Where have you come from, *Roddam*?" he called.

"We come from hell," the captain answered.

Shortly then a small vessel put out, with such aid as she could bring to survivors of the cataclysm, if any were left alive. It was only a three hours' sail, but three days passed, from Thursday until Sunday, before the dying flames would let these searchers and others from Fort-de-France enter the ruin of Saint-Pierre.

They walked and walked, and stopped to stare with strangely drawn faces, and sometimes picked up vestiges of things, twisted or melted by the heat, only to let them fall. There was no sound anywhere but the low cackling of scattered fires. And then, where once the jail had stood, they heard a human cry.

Frantically they dug among the ruins, and they found an unblocked hole, and in the deepest cell, a kind of dungeon, they found a body with warmth in it yet and a broken machete lying close at hand. It was badly burned but there was human breath in it, and the searchers brought it forth, and gazed upon it spellbound. After a little while it moved, and then it cried out again, and truly, before heaven, it was a living man.

Then someone spoke.

“That’s Atlas—his real name is Ludger Sylbares—and he’s wanted by French law.”

“What is French law compared to the hand of God?” someone answered.

Atlas stared at them dazedly, then somehow stumbled to his feet. He swung his big body and slowly raised his face to the Mountain.

“I am alive!” he muttered. “Atlas is yet alive!”

The others stared at him speechless. Then with tears rolling down the stern Indian face he spoke in some language unknown to his hearers and in a voice of infinite reproach.

But one of the rescue party listened closely, and locked in his memory the sound of the words, and when the chance came he wrote it down, as near as he could reproduce it, and in time sent the inscription to a great savant at the University of Mexico, who had made a lifelong study of the Caribs. The sender asked if it could be translated; and the answer came back, written in a single line:

“*Pelée, Pelée, why hast thou forsaken me?*”

EPILOGUE

AFTER Atlas had spoken, he began to walk, reeling, toward the waterfront. One of the others overtook him and spoke to him, offering help, but he did not seem to hear or understand. And soon thereafter he took ship from the island; the tales of his travels became confused; and before long he vanished among the shifting shadows of the past.

The searchers who had found him in the rubble of Saint-Pierre heard no other voices but their own. And at last the search ended, fruitless, and the truth was known.

Of all the rest of the city's inmates, thirty-one thousand, the bronzed dock workers, the fishermen, the beautiful *porteuses*, the Creole girls with darting black eyes who vended their wares in the streets, the shopkeepers of all nations, the artisans, the rich and poor, the great and lowly, the Governor in his palace, the pauper in his hovel, the priests and their congregations, and the old men and women who sat in doorways and the children who played around the doors and the babes in arms—of this whole number, not one remained.

Never before in all the annals of man had Death struck down a multitude with more perfect aim—wiped so far and wide with such an unsparing hand.

The whisp-whisp of bare feet on the stone streets was silenced forever. And Notre Dame de la Garde had been hurled from her pedestal on Morne d'Orange and lay prone.

So passed away the Pearl of the Antilles, so died Saint-Pierre. And now half a century has gone by, and some of the broken monuments and shrines have been excavated for sightseers landing at Fort-de-France, and the grand stairway to the portico of the theater can be clearly seen, as well as the fallen walls of the cathedral. They come and stand quietly, gaze, and go away. And lately a few Creoles have built a village in the shadow of the ruins, and go about their quiet affairs.

Only a little distance from the heaps of rubble the flamboyants blaze, and the bougainvillea bloom in beauty. The sea murmurs. The gentle waves roll in. Elsewhere on the island, only lightly touched by the cataclysm, the cane grows tall, turns yellow, and is hauled to the mills, a few mansions

stand, villages have their churches and their market squares, and God-given loveliness, indescribable and matchless, abides in the land. In the days of the carnival the people put on fantastic dress and dance in the streets. Ships sailing the seas and the airplanes touch and take off.

Cloud-wreathed Pelée has gone back to sleep and some say that she has died. But in every heart on the island there lies a brooding sadness over what is gone.

The beautiful people work and play, pray to the Bon Die, laugh and sing and rarely weep, and look up to their Mountain, and watch long. And they wait long, telling no one what they are waiting for; although they know quite well. Everyone is waiting for his hour.

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

[The end of *The Inevitable Hour, A Novel of Martinique* by Edison Marshall]