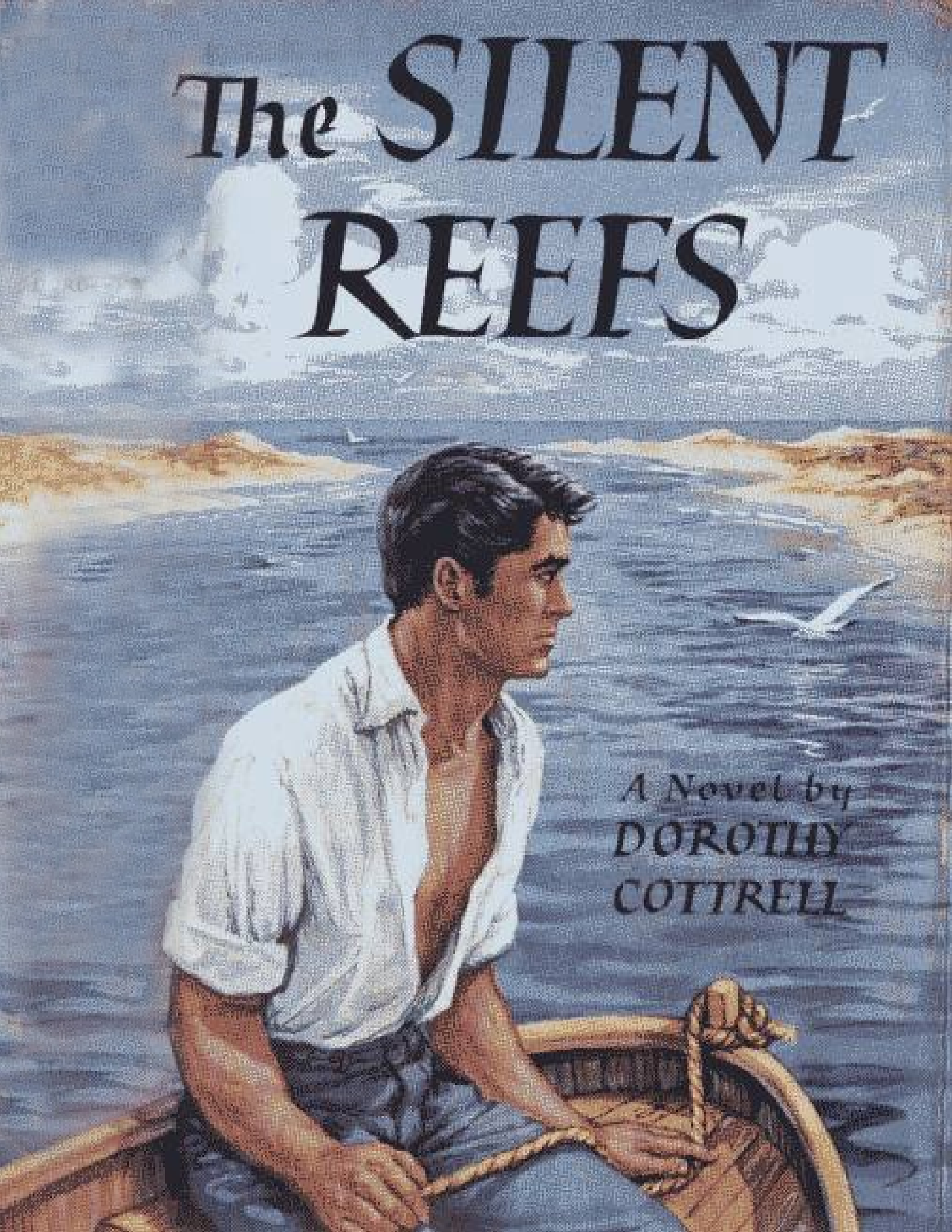
The SILENT REEFS



A Novel by
DOROTHY
COTTRELL

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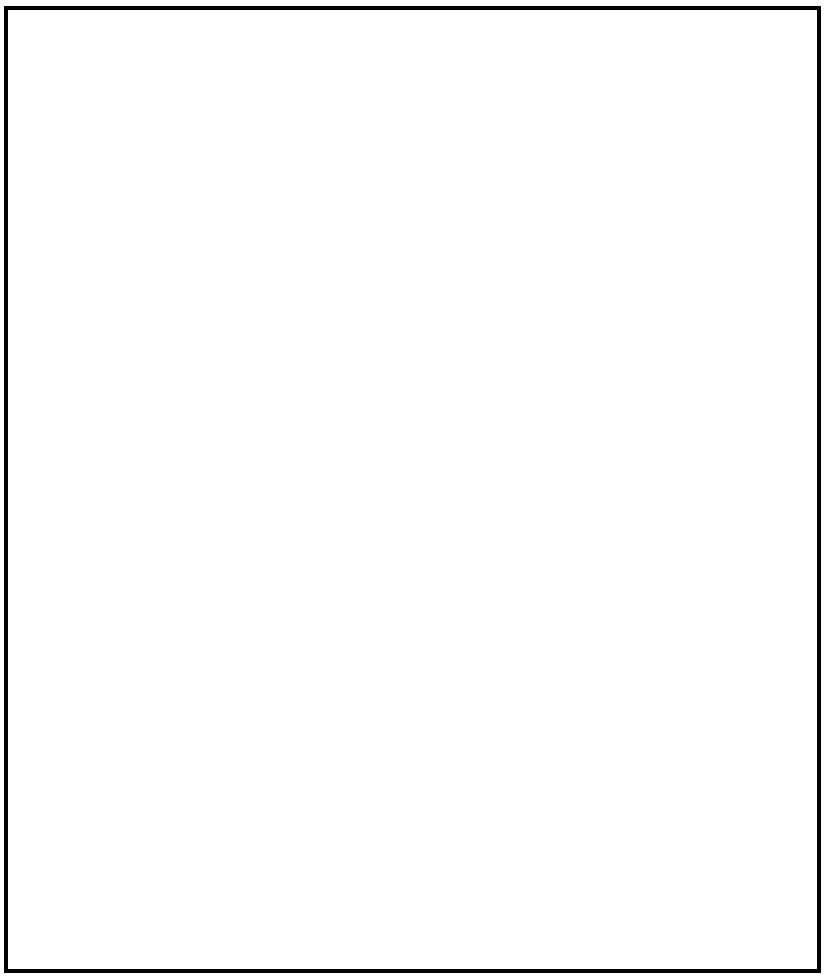

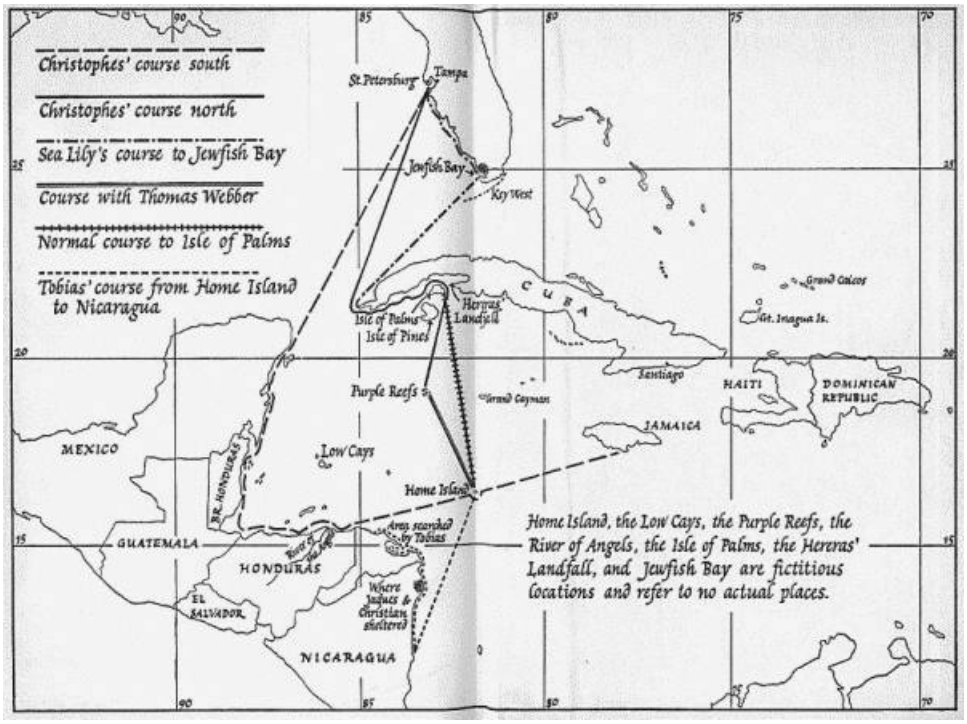
Christophes' course south
Christophes' course north
Sea Lily's course to Jewfish Bay
Course with Thomas Webber
Normal course to Isle of Palms
Tobias' course from Home Island to Nicaragua
St. Petersburg
Tampa
Jewfish Bay
Key West
Isle of Palms
Isle of Pines
Hereras Landfall
CUBA
Grand Caicos
Gt. Inagua Is.
Santiago
HAITI
DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
Purple Reefs
Grand Cayman
JAMAICA
MEXICO
Low Cays
Home Island
R. HONDURAS
Area searched by Tobias
GUATEMALA
HONDURAS
EL SALVADOR
Where Jaques & Christian sheltered
NICARAGUA
Home Island, the Low Cays, the Purple Reefs, the River of Angels, the Isle of Palms, the Hereras' Landfall, and Jewfish Bay are fictitious locations and refer to no actual places.

DOROTHY COTTRELL was born in the Australian goldfields. When most youngsters her age were playing with dolls, she was becoming a crack shot with a rifle. She says, "While still about as long as my rifle, I could shoot like nobody's business. In the Australian Bush, if you can shoot, you are socially 'there'! I was even allowed to go with mighty hunters to 'howl up' and shoot dingoes—the Australian wolf. I apparently had a lilting howl, for no dingo could resist me."

At twelve, Mrs. Cottrell suddenly stopped wanting to be the world's champion shot and wanted to be an artist instead. Her family promptly sent her to study at the Royal Art Society and at fourteen she was the Society's youngest head student. Then she decided to become a writer. Understandably irked, her family shipped her back to Queensland which, she says, was quite the nicest thing that ever happened to her. For presently she met a dour and charming young Scot, Mackenzie Cottrell, and they were married.

The Cottrells have lived nearly everywhere that's delightful and, says Mrs. Cottrell, not particularly respectable. On the island of the great Barrier Reef. With the pearling fleets. With the turtle fleets in the West Indies. On little islands no one ever heard of. They now live in Florida.

Mrs. Cottrell has written several earlier novels and a great many popular short stories. "To be quite truthful," she says, "I'd probably have written more if I could ever resist a schooner leaving for a far off place or if my love had a less itchy foot—and if we didn't like each other's company so."

The Silent Reefs

BY DOROTHY COTTRELL

William Morrow & Company • New York

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To Mac, with all my love.

The Silent Reefs

One

How may men follow the path of a ship where there are no paths? How know the manner of disaster from its traces, two years late, when those seeking within short days had found no trace? How might two fishermen of Caribbee learn that which the navies, coast guards and air forces of five nations had failed to learn? Yet they, Henri Henri Christophe and Joseph Henri Christophe, great and bronzed French West Indians named for a mighty king, for Henri Christophe, King of the North, threadbare if honored sons of the Followers, must prove what had befallen or betray the women and the little ones, even the island itself. Almost the tangible weight of the island was upon their wide and young shoulders as they walked now gravely carrying the stretcher of their Aunt Caroline behind the coffin of their father to the cemetery under the sea-grape trees.

Henri would have liked to have been carrying the coffin, helped only by his brother, but Joseph had said no, because six of the old captains had wished to act as pallbearers. "We have already said farewell to our father," Joseph had said. "To the old ones, this is their farewell—to him and to the old years. He remembered the great days when the island fleets went north to the cold seas to bring the ice, and south in trade to the Amazon and the great deltas—and there were no captains like the captains of the island. Now he is dead and there is in the world one less who remembers, so that now there are only six instead of seven who may talk of those days. The old ones know that soon there will be less than six—and one day only one with none to whom he may say 'Do you remember . . . ?' And then in the world there will be none, for the last is dead, and with him the years die." He had put his hand on Henri's arm and the beauty of his slow smile touched his eyes. "We must let them have their wish!"

So now the coffin tottered slowly between the graybeards in their blue serge suits that were too large for the old frames, instead of moving with measured solemnity in the hands of Henri and Joseph whose worn cotton shirts and trousers bulged to the swell of their great muscles. But Henri knew that as usual Joseph had been right and that this was as their father would have wanted it.

Behind the brothers with Aunt Caroline, who was groaning on her stretcher but greatly enjoying herself, came the population of the island: Monsieur the Commissioner, perspiring in his full dress uniform of blue and gold with cocked hat, the good man having made the supreme sacrifice of donning it in memory of Captain Christophe and as comfort to the family; the spade-bearded Follower elders and the gray-clad women of the sect; the Negroes, led by giant Black Tobias; the lepers, to whom a kindly message had been rushed so that they might not miss the function, walking a little apart.

"Look where you're going!" Aunt Caroline shrilled.

"We are looking, Aunt Caroline," the brothers answered dutifully.

"Well look somewhere else! You're shaking my liver."

"Forgive us, Aunt Caroline," Joseph said.

The procession turned from the blindingly white road into the dappled shadows of the cemetery that was a very friendly place. For until recently it had been the island custom to bury the dead at the cottage doors, planting the brightest flowers above them, but when the government had forbidden this, the people had adopted the cemetery as the place of meeting for community singing and the stately picnics of the Followers, so that one member of a gathering might say to another, "We will gather this time at the grave of my husband, we sat with your wife as of last meeting," or "Today we are singing my brother's favorite songs, let us be near him." And in this way none of the dead were slighted or lonely. The people were particularly kind, too, to those who had only markers in the graveyard, for many of the beautifully polished and lettered slabs of mahogany bore such inscriptions as "Beloved husband of Martha, lost at sea in the Great Storm," or "Miriam and Able, aged five years, they blew away." And while sometimes the people at the gatherings might fail to decorate the graves beneath which dead islanders slept, it was a rare thing when flowers were not dropped beside the markers so that the doubly bereaved could know that those they loved were not forgotten.

One of the most recent of the markers read, "To the memory of Malcolm Henri Christophe, dear husband of Daphne, beloved eldest son of Henri Christophe sr. and brother of Henri and Joseph. Lost with the motorship *Christophe* and seven good men of Home Island under unknown circumstances." And to young Henri it seemed to symbolize the strangeness of the Caribbean whose pale jade shallows were so crystal clear that often it was hard to tell where air and water met and which when he had been a child he had believed to be so filled with treasure that he had expected to see glittering gold through the stir of every patch of brown seaweeds. He no longer hoped to find the salt gold, but apart from the finds and fancies of a boy, treasure was one with the Caribbean, so that every storm threw small quantities of

Spanish silver on the island beaches along with the great pink conchs and the storm-wearied and irritated turtles; while the old captains now believed unshakably that the finding of a great treasure was responsible for the loss of the motorship. The marker stood also for the great sorrow that Henri and Joseph had been pearl fishing in the Pacific at the time of the disaster, that communications in the French Pacific are of a terrible slowness and that they had finally reached the Caribbean and their home only to find their father dying and almost two years after the *Christophe* had sailed on her final voyage that was the island's tragedy. For without a ship there was no transport for the little exports of lace or for the palm hats so marvelously patterned that they might take a week to weave. Orange and purple mangoes rotted beneath the trees. Copra was attacked by beetles. The people, who in prosperous times made purchases of half a cup of sugar or a needleful of thread or an ounce of coffee, could no longer buy from the stores. If another ship could not be bought, the people would grow ragged and walk hungry in the sun. And there could be no new ship until the great mystery of the *Christophe* was solved. For on a day as calm as a duck pond the beautifully built, two hundred and fifty ton motorship had left Main Town on Home Island on a routine voyage for Tampa via the Isle of Palms, and she had never completed the voyage.

And had the ship disappeared in war or storm or on one of the great oceans, many explanations would have sprung to mind, but the loss in peace and in perfect weather and assumably within sight of a coast of the Greater Antilles had constituted a seeming impossibility for which the insurers had refused to pay, charging attempted fraud on the part of owners and crew. In which there was something of sadness, for it was because the Home Islanders make no written agreements and do not lie and because the ship had been operated as a loved and guarded family project that she had been insured as she was, orally and against only specific risks. It having been the Home Islanders custom to place their underwriting by word of mouth with Monsieur Chabrunn and his sons, wealthy merchants of the Windwards, omitting the vast and seemingly needless coverage of "perils of the sea." The Chabrunns were men of high honor but strict dealing, who would pay instantly when convinced that they were liable, but only when so convinced. And thus positive proof of the ship's fate was needed before the insurance could be collected. But at the end of two years of search begun by the navies, coast guards and air forces of five nations and continued when all others had ceased to search, by old Captain Christophe aided by Black Tobias, a search that was perhaps the most exhaustive in the history of the seas, the ship's loss was as utterly mysterious as on the day she had vanished.

Henri and Joseph had dug their father's grave last night, so deep that even hurricane could not disturb it, but with fine view of the brilliant harbor from beneath a giant sea-grape whose six-inch-wide, perfectly round leaves were thick as green cowhide veined in red and whose blue fruit sprays dropped berries in the white sand. And now the lowering of the coffin by the old captains was more than Henri could bear. He felt that he must do one more thing for his father, that if he did not he would always regret it. And he set down his end of Aunt Caroline rather hastily so that she squealed as he jumped forward to take hold of the mahogany casket. Having done it, he knew that, as with all things done for the dead, it was not enough. The ending between himself and his father was still as sharp, the ache in his own great chest, still as painful. His father's booming voice would never greet him again as he returned from a voyage. Never again in this world would he see the old man's pleasure at the tall can of tobacco that he, Henri, had brought.

He remained kneeling by the grave for a moment, the great column of his neck bent above it. Then he stood up suddenly. He could not throw in sand when his turn came, but shook his head and passed the shovel to Joseph. As the eulogies began he was fearful that he might weep publicly, and he tried to turn his mind from his grief for his father to the responsibility that had come to him and to Joseph. And to place the matter in perspective, he must think of the Christophes who were men of peace, yet the manner of whose naming was fiercely strange as the Caribbean's self, and of the island that through a hundred and fifty years had been a Christophe trust. For had not the responsibility come to them from the very sword of the Great Marquis, that young nobleman of France, who, having seen and revolted against the horror of the treatment of slaves in the French West Indies, had spoken passionately in the legislature, quarreled with his titled friends, fought duels past counting and, as the rebellion of 1790 broke, taken up arms for the slave? The same marquis who, escaping at the betrayal of Toussaint l'Ouverture to renounce his French citizenship and his title, to sever in wrath his last ties with a world that deemed itself civilized yet was capable of such treachery, had as final gesture of scorn and of defiance renamed his family in honor of Henri Christophe, black Emperor of Haiti, "For evil he may have been, but born the slave, he became the king! And 'Arms and the man, I sing! Arms and the man!'" Having written which, the self-named Christophe had bought Home Island and its people, only to set the people free, and had bequeathed to his descendants all his own precipitate enthusiasms if not his precise convictions. By reason of which his grandson had

declared arms to be of the spirit, and, dividing the island amongst the islanders, had founded the gentle sect of the Followers, who turned the other cheek as ardently as the marquis had drawn the sword. And always the Christophe sons were handsomer and the Christophe daughters more beautiful and each sunburned generation was desperately poorer. And perhaps because the Christophe men had remained sufficiently French—despite the marquis' injunction against the speaking of the language—to be most excellent husbands, so that in a hundred and fifty years there had never been an unhappy wife beneath a Christophe roof, the clan had formed a laughing and most harmonious whole; a little pool of remarkable happiness in a largely sad world. To the Christophes all the island had ever looked in time of disaster.

And now as the deep sound of the last amen rolled about them and died to the soft murmur of the departing crowd, Henri and Joseph knelt briefly, touching their fingers to the sand. "If we fail, it will not be because we have ceased to try!" Henri said.

"Two things we have that the nations had not," Joseph said when they had carried Aunt Caroline the eight miles back to West Town and the plantation of Domremy and set their faces to the thorn forest. "Our promise to our father and much knowledge of the Caribbean!" He held aside a thorn branch from the cleftlike passage through the trees to let Henri pass and, striding on, regarded his own great palm that was calloused from the handling of ropes. "It is familiar to us almost as the palm of this hand."

"We have also the fact that there are now but our four hands for the feeding of thirty-one mouths of the family and that we must learn what befell or our hands may not accomplish it," Henri said. "And where men have said, 'We will leave nothing unlearned because it seems of no bearing, but will keep the heart open because we are very ignorant,' then often they have learned. Also, as when one seeks a pearl, one looks in every oyster, if we question not only those who should know of the *Christophe*, but all men everywhere whom we may meet, we may learn something that our father did not learn. Meantime, we will know at least a little more when we have talked with Black Tobias."

For the island's uninhabited windward shore belonged to the trade winds, the silver thatch palms, the sea birds and Tobias, whose shack stood on piles in the Great Sound that Henri used to think was the loneliest place in the world. And it was to see Tobias at first star time that the brothers now traversed the path through the thorn forests whose matted crazy puzzle had withstood the hurricanes of centuries, so that the solitary way was a twisting, head-high tunnel under the fernlike, smoke-gray leaves. The scent of the thorn forest was of delicate mimosa flowers and curing hay, while its floor was clean with dry leaves. And it was said that within the forest the hidden men—criminals wanted in other lands for murder and worse crimes—lived out their lives safer than in any fortress. Here also when the moon was gray and silver, the ghosts of armored Spaniards were said to clank along the trail.

Nor were these old men's tales harder of belief than the mystery—inexplicable even for the Caribbean that is the strangest and most mysterious of the seas—that was heavy in the hearts of the brothers and that had bankrupted the island and beggared the Christophes; the most unanswerable mystery of the disappearance of the *Christophe*, a loss less heralded than the more famous mysteries of the sea, yet perhaps of them all the strangest. And true, the Caribbean's very history is written in disaster and death, violence and cruelty, so that the warmth of its crystal-clear waters might seem almost the warmth of blood, the flame of its sunsets, the reflections of burning cities, the eternal thunder, the echo of old cannon fire. For though the gentlest, it is also the most savage of the seas, so that it has smiled under soft trade clouds and boiled ash-veiled and flame-rent to the loosed hell of Mont Pelee while from it great fleets have sailed in pomp to be seen no more. But if at the end of so much mystery and loss, the loss of an island motorship was perhaps a small thing, it was still the least explicable.

Striding through the miles of the thick thorn forest in the flat heart of the island, the brothers were conscious of the vastness and menace of the all-embracing sea that they must challenge. Then the thorns threw up a last rampart and the path was amongst the mangroves of the sound's edge and on the brown pools the fallen leaves floated in autumnal colors, while overhead the sunset was shooting crimson sparks into the richness of the mangrove foliage. And at the end of the path, Tobias' calling-conch hung on a branch. Henri raised the shell to his lips and blew piercingly. Ten minutes later, Tobias' dinghy slid suddenly to their feet from a narrow channel. The great black man did not speak but stood haughtily, with the long sculling oar upright beside him.

"You were a good friend to our father, Tobias," Henri said. "We seek your aid in his name."

Tobias wore patched blue dungaree trousers that showed pale against the darkness of his skin that gleamed to the swell of muscles in his huge chest and shoulders. Staring past the brothers in silent pride, he seemed akin to the elemental passion of the hot air and the richly blazing sunset. "For Cap' Christophe it is ended, the long search," Tobias said. Tobias' hair was like thick soot on a blackened stump and his bowed face worked strangely, like midnight ripples in a dark tide. He said again, "It is ended!"

Joseph said, "Only for our father, it is ended."

Tobias' chest labored and his belly muscles quivered against his heavy shark belt and the clean blue dungarees that had been washed in sea water and sand. "Two years late, you and M'sieur Joseph will not look!" The words were an accusation that Henri and Joseph would have resented except that Tobias' only son, a great, gleaming black lad, had been lost with the *Christophe*.

Henri said gently, "Two years late through no fault of ours. We will search, Tobias!"

Tobias stood with the immobile majesty of a black king of Africa, but his eyes changed as if the sun bursting through storm had suddenly lighted a dark mangrove pool. He said with a different note to his deep voice, "You are welcomed to my house. We will have oysters as we did when you, Joseph and my son were high as my belt. Neither must you think, 'It is wrong to Cap' Christophe that the body hungers.' For Cap' Christophe you must say as I have said of my son, 'The body must be strong though the heart pains!'" He looked fiercely beyond them. "It was not as the underwriting men said that the men of the ship stole the ship away!" Tobias said and his deep voice shook rumblingly. "My son had gone with his hand in mine since he was high as my belt and he would have come home from the ends of the world! It was not as those said who believed that the ship met disaster of the sea. My boy would have reached the shores! He swam as other men walk, as far as he had need to go."

With the brothers aboard, he worked the boat along a leafy tunnel, under a final swish of branches, and suddenly all the space of the world and all the softly pouring air of the world seemed about them. Astern, the water widened in flame to the low, black line of the island, on either hand the vast sound spread in lilac and silver to the distant promontories where the thatch palms bent silver to the trades, and beyond the far line of the seaward reefs the night was coming up. Tobias' sculling oar made no whisper.

By looking directly down, Henri glimpsed through the sky-shine the bottle-green world of the turtle grass meadows and the great red starfish like satanic flowers. Where Tobias' shack perched on its piles half a mile from shore, the men climbed to the pier that extended from the seaward side of the building and at the end of which was a squared rock platform topped by a charcoal pit glowing with thin flames. Henri and Joseph seated themselves on the planks whose surface had been turned to fluffy, gray silk by the weather. Within the shack, Tobias' bed was covered with a red-squared, patchwork quilt and the bed Tobias' son had used was still neatly made with sailcloth sheets and pillow cases of flour sacking, while its quilt was white and blue.

Tobias took three well-washed oyster branches—yard-long sections of mangrove root to which the small, sweet oysters were clustered to the thickness of a man's arm—and laid them side-by-side across the coals. Over them, he threw a blanket of wet turtle grass and in a moment bursts and bubbles of salt and savory steam were rising in the still crimsoning light. As the oysters cooked, Tobias cut mangrove forks and handed Henri and Joseph small, tough-crusted loaves of potato bread and wooden bowls of coconut butter and smaller bowls of sea salt and freshly ground pepper. Then he raked back the seaweed and each man took an oyster branch, on which the shells were now open, revealing the oysters, curl-edged, juicy and plump. They forked the oysters from the china-like interiors of the shells, dipped the exquisite mouthfuls in coconut butter and sprinkled them with salt and pepper, then ate them with a scrap of potato bread. The clean, faint flutter of the wind, the small sounds of the fire and the whisper of water round the piles were part of the meal. And when the oysters were finished, Tobias brought pint fruit cans and filled them with black, Jamaican coffee, sweetened with honey.

As they drank the marvelous coffee, Joseph said, "We come home almost as strangers, and while we know the outline of what befell, there is much in regard to the ship's last days that we do not know—all was well, was it not, at her last careening?"

Everything was dark now except where fish rose to make circled ripples that caught the last crimson of afterglow and where the firelight struck up on Tobias' bent face. "She was sound as on the day of her building," Tobias said rumblingly. "What befell was no fault of the ship or her engines nor of the men upon her!"

"She reached the Isle of Palms in safety?"

"She reached the Isle of Palms," Tobias said, but there was a darkness in his eyes. "For the rest, a hurricane had passed along the course a week before, but even the swell was gone. Perfect, purely perfect the weather was, as is weather after hurricane. Such days as those upon which one says of every day, 'There can have been no other day so blue as this!' Days too calm for sail, but for a motorship, most perfect. There was no weather that was not fair between the Island and Tampa. That was learned later from the men of weather and from the masters of ships. There were not even thunderstorms—not even the young showers!"

"Explosion could hardly be with diesel!" Henri said doubtfully. "Yet where there is machinery, it still might be . . ."

"With the *Christophe*, tended by my son, it could not be," Tobias said harshly. "My son must show me the engines and the bilges often, saying, 'See how clean they are!' I had no love for bilges, but I loved my son for thinking that I must."

Joseph spoke with troubled slowness. "There are many things that can befall a little ship—waterspout, collision with a derelict, fire . . ."

Tobias said, "There were fifteen people upon that little ship, and eight were islanders. There were good life belts and good lifeboats. Had explosion come—and there was no explosion—it were not likely that all were killed. If island men had but a board or their own arms to swim, they would have reached the land, and all men know it! If there were fire, they would have put it out, or if by miracle they could not, they would have launched the boats. In that fair calm a cockle-tub had reached the coasts of the Great Antilles or the Central Americas! Cap' Malcolm Christophe was no fool to sail into a waterspout—and there are no waterspouts without the storms! As for a derelict, island men do not sail blind through day or night. But had they, still the *Christophe* had strong bulkheads, thus had she struck a submerged hulk, she could not have sunk swiftly. I do not have the thought she would have sunk at all, but had she, still had someone reached the shore!" He stirred the shimmering fire. "Of greater meaning, no ship sinks without a trace in dead calm seas! Let there be explosion, there are fragments! Let there be collision, there is oil and those many things that do not sink! Let there be fire and there is charcoal and the trace of ash!" He raised fierce eyes to stare at them. "With hurricane or with time such signs will pass, but here there was great calm and here within short hours the swift air forces were seeking her. Within short suns, the ships of five countries sought for her. The little boats of all the coasts were seeking her, and in them, men who know the currents and the tides, who say, 'Let a ship sink here, the wreckage will be here!' Your father, Papa Christophe, offered high reward for any trace of wreckage, for any smallest thing that could be proved the *Christophe's*. Neither along the Cuban Counter Current nor the Gulf Stream was one small thing found—no board, no life belt, no little stick of wood!"

"It is the inexplicability of the thing that is worst," Joseph said after a silence. "One cannot even say, 'I do not know that it befell thus, but it could have befallen thus!' Instead one can only say, 'By all evidence it could not have befallen, but it did!'"

Leaning forward, Henri asked, "With the *Christophe* herself, was anything—any smallest thing—different from all other voyages?"

Tobias looked at him gravely. "One thing was different! She was two days late at the Isle of Palms!"

Neither brother raised the question of radio messages, for radio was frowned upon by the Follower elders and while its carrying was officially mandatory, no crew of Home Island would have sailed on a ship on which the devil's voice was not rendered irreparably silent.

"A small delay could be engine trouble," Joseph said.

"There was naught amiss with the good engines," Tobias said. "Naught was ever amiss with the good engines tended by my son! An engineer who came once, told me that my son had the genius of machinery. But it is hard for the black man to own or to create, hence my son was very happy keeping Cap' Malcolm's engines brighter than all the engines of Caribbee and saying to me, 'Father, see how beautifully this shines!' For myself I have thought little of my skin, but it was strange to me to look at the kind and wise hands of my son and think, 'They are still the young hands of a black man!'" He raised his glance from the fire. "The large and fair man, Webber, and the small and dark man with the great chest, Ashby—they who were passengers from Home Island to the Isle of Palms—said that Cap' Malcolm had delayed to seek survivors of the wreck that the hurricane had thrown upon the Purple Reefs. But one may not know if men from the world speak truth."

Suppressing a smile at Tobias' doubt of men from the world, Henri asked, "The *Christophe* herself stood off the Isle of Palms?" He knew that such a course had been in no way unusual.

"That is truth. The hour was dark. The strangers had with them the powerboat in which they had reached Home Island.

Cap' Malcolm held no contract at the Isle of Palms for outgoing mail, that going by faster ships via Miami or Tampa. Thus Cap' Malcolm swung the strangers off in the powerboat and they took in the mails as they went ashore. The men of the port watched the *Christophe's* lights pass onward and reported her sailing to the keepers of the lighthouse on the Cape. She never passed the light. Somewhere in that hundred and forty miles she ceased to be. Yet within that hundred and forty miles, unless Cap' Malcolm for unknown reason went seaward, she was within sight of land, she was amongst the snapper cutters and the sponge boats, and upon the shores are the shacks of old men who sleep little because the past is too much with them. Yet after the Isle of Palms, none saw the ship." The organ note of his deep voice vibrated. "The men of the ship were good men. And for the ship herself, she harmed no man alive! She was of service where service was much needed and she injured no man!"

After a silence, Henri said, "There have in the world been meteorites that blasted all things where they struck—it is barely possible . . ."

Tobias answered fiercely, "The chance that anything upon the world be stricken by a great meteorite is one in many million billions. I asked the men of science from the museum. Also the Caribbean is filled with the eyes of helmsmen watching the tall skies and none saw even a shooting star." He gazed into the fire, then beyond it into the night where otherwise invisible thunderheads were revealed by the glow of inward lightning. "Jaques and Christian of the island—who went to sponge hook off Gracias a Dios three weeks ere the *Christophe* sailed—did not return and men say they were overtaken by hurricane. But Jaques and Christian were men of wisdom in the ways of storms. The *Christophe* did not return and men speak of meteorites. But neither hurricanes nor meteorites take account of the two unaccounted days on the *Christophe's* way to the Isle of Palms!"

Joseph said gently, "What is your thought for those two days, Tobias?"

"It is my thought that in them some thing befell that never befell before and should I know its nature I would also know what befell the ship! And I know that you say, 'Tobias is stranged!'"

Henri asked, "Is there record of the course our brother would have followed from the Isle of Palms? I have been the way many times with sail, but using motor power he would have gone more directly."

"There is record. But the course was followed by the men of five countries and a hundred ships. Nothing they found. For there was nothing along that course or beside that course. No little slick of oil. No broken board or floating rope. Nothing in the Caribbean, in the Channel of Yucatan, in the Straits of Florida, on the Ten Thousand Islands, on the beaches of the Gulf. The navies and the coast guards and the swift air forces searched. The men in small boats searched and the men upon the beaches; for love and for reward they searched each meadow of the Gulf-weed, every drift of flotsam, every rick of stranded rubbish on two thousand miles of coast—even in the Bahamas and on the Atlantic coast of Florida, they made search—nor were they searching in wild seas, but with seas like a painted picture. There was nothing."

Neither brother commented upon this. But before their minds there spread the Caribbean as it dreamed in its hours of rest, transparent as glass, celestially serene as might be the mind of God. They visualized also the nature of the search spurred both by the fierce love of the Caribbean and the fierce poverty of the Caribbean. Before them at the end stood two possibilities equally improbable; some unknown and unimaginable catastrophe of nature or some equally unimaginable act of man. And if an act of man, for what purpose? For what unimagined reason could a busy and inoffensive little ship have become of such value or menace to men that they would cause her to vanish without trace? And to what men? Certainly not to the men who worked her. No reward or threat of earth would induce men of the islands to cut themselves off from their islands. No inducement of life would have taken grave Malcolm from Daphne, his young wife, nor any Christophe from Domremy in whose silver weathered walls the wild bees built so that honey ran through the siding and whose pink cabbage roses, blue-fruited sea-grape trees and coral-walled fields were the fairest in Caribbee.

If deliberate human motive and action had induced the thing, it had come from without. And even as the motive must have been very strong, the nature of the action remained unimaginable. And almost the mind, baffled to credulity, went back to the ancient legends of whirlpool and of monster, of ships seen at one moment and in the next nonexistent.

Henri said angrily, "Tobias is right! A ship does not sink without trace! Where it has been said to happen, weeks or months have passed before the loss was known, unknown storms might have crossed the ship's path alone in the great oceans, or swept her a thousand miles from the course she was thought to follow. But here the loss was known within brief hours and the Caribbean is the dooryard of the seas!" He shook his head fiercely.

Tobias stirred the coals round and round, and the red-gold light beating up on his face and upon the hugeness of his extended arm made the breathing darkness of the sea the greater and the older and gave him the semblance of some vast and darkly brooding god of fire lifting the West Indian islands in the passion of their own volcanic heat.

"Cap' Henri laughed at this," Tobias said slowly, "saying, 'Do not grow stranged with the sea, Tobias! We must look for facts not demons!'" He rose suddenly to his majestic height, standing with folded arms as he gazed at the brothers. "You too will laugh, saying, 'Tobias is stranged!' But it is not truth when men say the ship reached the Isle of Palms in safety! The evil was with her then! It had boarded her at the Purple Reefs—from the White Dunes of the Purple Reefs! It is there still! I have seen it as I see this fire, I have touched it as I touch this staff! The footsteps upon the dunes, I saw and touched! Fresh footsteps where there were no men—and with them, the footsteps of a giant! Twice I saw—once four months after the losing of the *Christophe*, once three weeks ago!"

Joseph felt a sharp and terrible shock of pity. After a moment he said gently, "Our father did not see this, Tobias?"

"He did not see it because we sought separately, each in our own boat, meeting at places named," Tobias said. And again Joseph felt terrible compassion in picturing an old white man and a great Negro seeking on when all others had ceased to seek, searching in wild weather and fair, each for a lost son. Tobias' voice rumbled with its own depth. "Though he did not believe, when first I saw them he went with me, but a great rain had washed all away. Then came men of a navy making observations of weather and would let none go to the Reefs, since military men are of a great importance. Only a month ago they went away. Three weeks ago, there were the steps again, but I was alone—for Cap' Henri was dying. I was seeking greatly, for it was my hope to go to him and say, 'My friend, at the last we have learned something!' But when I returned, he could no longer ask, 'What have you learned, Tobias?'"

Henri said, "We thank you for telling us, Tobias."

"I will not tell of it again," Tobias said softly yet terribly. "And you do not believe it and M'sieur Joseph does not believe. But there was that in the *Christophe's* losing that was not of wind or sea or the common fate of ships. Evil touched the *Christophe* in the two days and went with her. Evil out of the sea, taking good men, taking my son. But if it were of men, someday I will find the men! And if it were a devil, someday I will find the devil—and if it were many devils, someday I will find the devils! One day my hands will be upon a throat—if it be after death, if it be in the dark of the sea where the red lights burn!"

Blue-white fire of lightning was turning the upper leaves of the thorns to the semblance of silver flowers as Henri and Joseph started for home and they quickened their pace to avoid having the balsa wood and fish oil torch rained out while they were still amongst the thorns.

"Poor Tobias," Joseph said as they passed from the thorns into the true jungle, where, while the tree-roof roared angrily, little rain came through. "He does not say it, but he plainly thinks the same evil that befell the *Christophe* took Jaques and Christian though they were a sea away!"

"Two men in a cockleshell are vulnerable as a ship is not. Yet they were very experienced men," Henri said, puzzled.

Popeyed, pale blue land crabs scuttered ghostlike in the torch-light before them. "If we are to have hope of learning what befell, we must keep in mind that there must be simple explanation," Joseph said, stepping round a clashing, twelve-inch crab. "That it but seems so strange because we do not know." They plunged into the vertically falling wall of warm rain where the jungle gave place to the plantations of the village of West Town.

Alone, Tobias loaded his seagoing catboat and considered the problem of his own strangedness. Strangedness was very common and took strange forms. But after weighing the matter he did not think that he could be as stranged as he must be if he was stranged at all. He did not wish to play into the hands of the unknown evil by being stranged and not knowing it. But he believed he was right in believing that he had seen what he had seen. He had seen it so clearly! In the giant's steps the little sea snails had been crushed so that Tobias' hand had ended the suffering of one little mollusk by snapping it between thumb and finger. Surely strangedness would not have seen the little snail?

Letting the reefed sail of the catboat snap full to the black storm wind as the first big drops pitted the sound, he was sorry that shyness had stopped him telling M'sieur Henri of the boat that had come to the Great Sound in the night—when with morning there was no boat. Surely, there too, he had not been stranged for he had heard the engine miss?

As a great sheet of lightning revealed the bending silver shapes of the thatch palms, he sent the catboat through the single passage of the reef and set his course for the coast of Nicaragua, four hundred miles away. It was his hope that he could prove the existence of the unknown thing if he could prove that Jaques and Christian had not been killed by hurricane. Somewhere might be a man who would say, "Jaques and Christian of Home Island sheltered here through the storm."

Only when he was well at sea did he remember that he had forgotten to bring food. But there had been many times when Cap' Henri and he had forgotten it when a new thought had come to them. All that mattered was that his friend, Cap' Henri, did not need food any more.

Midnight had stilled the amiable pandemonium of the plantation of Domremy—the sole piece of real estate reserved by Henri's and Joseph's grandfather in his moment of largess—but Daphne Christophe came with a candle from the great kitchen as Henri and Joseph entered.

She said, "Put on dry clothes while I bring you hot chocolate!" The gray, homespun dress and muslin collar of the women of the Followers were beautiful when she wore them, and the candle lit the bright brown of her eyes and threw the shadows of her lashes on her smooth forehead, then touched her dark hair as she gestured with the light. "Hurry for the chocolate is good!"

"We are rough fishermen and unused to such spoiling, but it is very pleasant," Henri said.

Moving with the lithely graceful, dark and golden quickness of the French women of her native Martinique, she set down the candle and stood before them with a hand on the shoulder of each. "Oh, my dears! I am so sorry that you have come home but to anxiety and debts!" Reaching up she kissed them upon either cheek while Henri smiled at her and Joseph blushed to his black hair. "Poor lambs who have already done so much!"

"Beautiful Sister, the financial situation is most desperate, is it not?" Henri asked, placing a packing case as a chair for her beside the hatch-cover table as they rejoined her in the once splendid drawing room. "We do not doubt that it is bad, but we have been gone so long that we are strangers to the full position."

"It is desperate—even for the Christophes," Daphne said, and her eyes smiled with the beautiful tolerance that caused the Christophes—all of whom adored her—to use the French term for sister-in-law even when speaking to her in English. "To be strangers to the position is a tempering of the wind!" She indicated the packing cases. "For the search and for Papa Christophe's advertisements all things that were movable were sold and all things that could not be moved were mortgaged. We have tried very hard to keep expenses down, but the family is so vast and there are so many little ones that we are a millstone about your necks."

The brothers took her hands. "The family has told us of all that you have done to keep the family cared for in the bad time," Joseph said. "We are sorry that you have had to struggle so and we not here to help you!"

Her young face showed the strain of anxiety and responsibility beyond her years, but her eyes were tearless. She said, "Uncertainty is the bad thing for it begets hope. It was hope that killed Papa Christophe. I know that after these years hope is folly, yet I say, 'Lost men have returned after many years!' and I hope again. Crazed people write as they do after mysteries of the sea, saying that men of the *Christophe* have been seen in this port and that, that the *Christophe* has been seen in this ocean and that, and I know that what they write is nonsense, but I hope." Her face held the same stillness that had been in Tobias' face. "If men were responsible for the *Christophe*, I would know what men, and I would not have them go unpunished!"

Henri said, "If it was an accident of nature, we may not find out. If it was an act of men and somewhere there are men living who know what befell, we will find them!"

Moving round the hatch-cover to touch her shyly as he looked down into her pale face, Joseph said tenderly, "If it can be learned, we will learn. But you must not hope and you must not hate! You are too beautiful for hate."

Henri's hands clenched as if he was suddenly infinitely older than Joseph and must protect Joseph and the rest of the Followers as one would guard trustful children from the cruelty of the world. His heart beat with such love for Joseph that he could see its thumping through the blue cotton of his shirt. And for a moment he could not speak, then, meeting Daphne's eyes, he said softly, "If I can ever say, 'These men harmed Malcolm, my brother, and broke the kind heart of my father!' I can hate for both of us, beautiful Sister! Or if I should say, 'This man harmed Joseph, who has little sense but

holds our affections and is very good!' then I would want my hands on a throat as Black Tobias does!"

There was no more valiant man than Joseph in the turtle, shark or pearl fleets of the Caribbean or the French Pacific, either with the bright valor of daring or the quiet courage of cheerful endurance under hardship, but the belief in violence troubled him. And he flushed now in part from pleasure at Henri's love for him, in part because he knew that Henri did not share his deepest beliefs.

"I am not good," Joseph said gravely. "But men have lived by the law of vengeance from the beginning of laws, and it seems that but little has come of it save ever greater hate and death. And when half a world was wet with blood and tears, the chain was broken only by what might have been at the beginning, and that was to forgive."

Aunt Caroline's distant voice shrieked for her medicine, and Daphne rose. "The terrible documents which are our bills and the few which are our receipts are in the crawfish pot on the wall. Now that there is no desk, I have to keep them there so the little ones will not get them. No! I can manage the door." But Joseph was opening one half of the double doors and Henri the other. Turning, she looked back at the great room against whose tremendous windows the storm was dying. "Even with packing cases, it is still the most beautiful room in the world! As Domremy is the most beautiful place in the world!"

Joseph said, "One thinks of it when one is away."

Moving quickly across the room to pick up a gray parrot that was straddling down the stair with confiding nods of its head and obvious anticipation of welcome, Henri touched his fist against the stair rail that was carved in patterns of fruit and cupids, saying fiercely, "Domremy cannot go for any mortgage!"

"No," Daphne said. "There would be something profane in anyone but Christophes being here. Those to whom it might go might even be people so unlike Christophes that they would not borrow to give—because they could not give without borrowing—and who would not know that they could not eat the fowls because all the fowls had pet names such as Mrs. Cluck or Old Scratch, and so unlike certain young men whom I see before me that, happening to see a parrot in a far city, they would not do without waterproof coats they needed so that they might buy the parrot because they maintained that it had told them it did not like its cage and wished to go to Domremy."

"He did say so," Henri said, laughing. "He said, 'I have been hoping for many years to go to Domremy, but there has been a little difficulty when I tried to arrange my passage. Perhaps you gentlemen could be kind enough to assist?' At least if that was not quite what he said, his cage was terribly small and he was very sad." He went up to his sister-in-law and put his hands about her face. "You are right that we are impractical and it is a wonder you have put up with us, Daphne!"

"It is more than should be expected of any woman—and it has been my best experience," Daphne said.

Alone together, the brothers mentally contemplated the Christophe household, which was a village in itself and, unfortunately, a village of dependents; including Aunt Caroline, of great age and many exactions; three distantly related widows with respectively, five, eight and seven children, and one unrelated group of four children whom Captain Christophe had taken in when their parents were killed in the Great Storm. And while Daphne was the household's greatest asset, even she had some small needs. "We need pen and paper!" Joseph said. Henri found them in the crawfish pot.

"It seems that beyond the utmost we have made in the past we must have an additional thousand dollars a year," Joseph said, figuring with the pen that almost disappeared in the largeness of his hand as the normal morning heat drowsed over the old house and the familiar scents of gardenias and roses and of crawfish tails cooking in garlic sauce filled the great room. On the polished mahogany of the ceiling, big gray velvet spiders dozed as pale jade chameleons puffed pink throats in and out on the jalousies. From without the golden buzzing of bees and the clucking of guinea fowl sounded from amongst the milk-and-wine lilies that stood tall as a man. In the courtyard, the Christophes' pet donkey slept against the sundial with a half-eaten cabbage rose sticking to a rubbery lip, and a file of Muscovy ducks waddled past complaining of the heat of the flagstones. "At least none could be more helpful than almost all try to be!" Joseph said of the family.

"But with the exception of Daphne, it were usually better that they did not," Henri said with truthful affection.

Overwhelmed until he confused the small with the great, Joseph added, "Also Aunt Caroline desires a wheeled-chair,

having seen one in the wish book."

Henri's mouth curled to a smile. "Aunt Caroline causes so much trouble for so many persons as it is, might it not be a poor deed to make her more active?"

"That is true," Joseph said seriously. "But she wants it so." He too smiled.

Henri grinned. "She does so much enjoy persecuting the women as they cook or wash, and it is a small pleasure for her! We had better try to get the wheeled-chair. If we make a path, she might even be able to render the women's meetings miserable as she used to." The brothers smiled at each other, thinking of the consternation of the Ladies' Gatherings in His Name as they beheld the horrible sight of Aunt Caroline rendered mobile.

"The question is how?" Joseph said.

There indeed seemed little more that they could do that they had not already done. Even before the loss of the *Christophe*, both young men had accepted the fact that marriage was impossible for them until they could restore the family fortunes. And with the exception of withholding five dollars' spending money per voyage, which usually ended up by buying presents for the smaller Christophes, both had turned over to the family fund all that they had earned in all their adult lives. They owned no clothing that was not patched and repatched until its original nature was obscure. And, when on the island, on Sunday evenings each withdrew six cents from the money jar to place in the collection plate, while they economized in matches during the week so that the ladies might be "fired" at the proper time; this seemingly strange practice being rendered necessary by the fact that the chapel was unscreened and thus small cans of Black Flag insect killer were set beneath the seat of each female worshipper and ignited as the service began, the resulting smoke and flame giving a faintly infernal effect to the assemblies.

It did not for a moment occur to either brother that the responsibility for any part of the present household was not theirs. Christophes had never accepted charity or denied a debt and while a Christophe could earn, no Christophe needed to ask him to share. The four unrelated children were even particularly favored so that they might not feel their lack of blood kinship. But the astronomical sum of an additional thousand a year could come from no two men's catch-shares or wages of Caribbee or the Pacific; yet it must come and continue to come until the younger Christophes matured. And the smaller Christophes had appeared discouragingly small as the brothers had driven them from the doors to continue the present conference.

"It would seem we have three things to do: to prove what befell the Christophe—which would solve all—and meantime to pay the interest upon the mortgage and fill the mouths," Joseph said, raising troubled gaze from his figuring.

"And find the Three Galleons, Joseph!" little Timothy Christophe shouted through a gap in the louvers. "M'sieur the Commissioner has pieces of gold from the Three Galleons."

"We have need to find a galleon's treasure, but meantime be quiet, little Cousin!" Henri said. He added thoughtfully, "And all might be done if we had but a boat—and none can be done if we have not!"

"A launch to run the mail routes?" Joseph asked. "One good enough would cost all of two thousand dollars, though we cut her ourselves. And how could we pay the storemen while she was building?"

"It would be hard to have to ask him, but Monsieur Latour would carry us," Henri said, flushing. "For the rest, let us consult the family! And who knows?"

Consulting the family had a special meaning for the Christophes, since it involved seeing what, if anything, each member could chip in toward a common cause, and in this not merely their unity but even their vast numbers had proved helpful in the past. There had never been a mean Christophe and the quality of generosity appeared to be contagious since it always transferred itself to Christophes-by-marriage. Hence the present concourse listened gravely, Aunt Caroline on her stretcher, adult Christophes on packing cases, medium-sized Christophes on the floor and tiny Christophes on the knees of mothers or sisters. Henri acted as spokesman, concluding, "As you will see, it is in the nature of a venture, but the situation is in the nature of a difficulty."

"It's cockeyed!" Aunt Caroline said, shocking the family by her choice of words.

Daphne went to Henri and smiled up at him. "For myself, I owe a great debt to the House of Christophe. It gave me my

husband and such happiness as few women know. It has given me my home and never a moment's sense that I was not welcomed . . ." A chorus of assurance from assorted Christophes interrupted her. She was their treasure and their joy. All that they had was hers. "I know that, you dear, impractical darlings," Daphne said. "But since you have never permitted me to pay for anything, I have almost two hundred dollars saved from my embroideries and if you will use it now it will give me more pleasure than anything upon which I could spend it. I have also these two rings that came from my great-grandmother. They are not very valuable, but they should be worth five hundred more."

"More fool you!" Aunt Caroline said.

Other Christophes contributed personal items and odd sums until the astonishing total of an estimated nine hundred dollars was reached. A groaning which even surpassed her normal efforts was now heard from Aunt Caroline, combined with a vicious, snipping sound which had been dimly registering itself on the family consciousness for some time. The Christophes looked at her, to be appalled by what they saw, for as they gazed, she appeared to lose her scalp, the superb mass of her snowy locks coming away in toto, to be gathered into a ball in her aged hands and flung at Henri.

"I hope you're satisfied!" she said. "There's my hair. White hair is worth six dollars an ounce, eight dollars if it's long and wavy. The hair dealer tried to buy it last time his boat was in. Now take me to bed!"

The magnitude of Aunt Caroline's sacrifice inspired the other women and even the little girls. And soon, Daphne's dark tresses lay shining on top of the varied pile on the table, while the brothers, a little alarmed by the response they had got, were staring at crop-headed women and children who in turn stared at each other while all the Christophes laughed softly and helplessly. "But Aunt Caroline's gift was the best of all," Daphne said, "for she thought of it."

"We are poor men if we cannot manage the rest with forge and axe!" Joseph said joyfully. He turned to his brother. "Henri, you are the better 'dealing man.' While the family and I start the boat, you must check mail routes and chances of contracts and arrange passage to Jamaica to buy the engines. Now who comes with me to the forest to cut frames?"

"We do!" shouted the family. "Who last lost the axes?"

Two

Arriving at the gangway to the iron shed on piles that was the port authority building of Main Town, Henri found his path blocked by a small donkey that bulged its cheeks and tried to kick him.

"Welcome, Henri! Ah, wait until I assist you!" Monsieur Latour, the elderly and spade-bearded customs officer called serenely. With Monsieur Latour pushing and Henri pulling, they backed the little donkey off the plank. "Someday I will ask the government to appoint him to the customs in my stead!" Monsieur Latour observed.

Actually, Monsieur Latour was customs officer only when he faced west across the two-hundred-year-old desk, when he moved to the end and faced south down the length of the room, he became assistant commissioner and ruler of the island in the commissioner's absences. When he went directly across the main street of Main Town at summons of a jangled cowbell, he was the island's leading storekeeper; while by crossing diagonally at the plaintive blowing of a conch shell, he was the island's only dentist, usually making no charge for the latter service. On Sundays, a great kindness was in his rather prominent blue eyes and shaven lips, while the noble simplicity of his old face suggested the faces of the Disciples in old pictures as he preached humbly in the little church.

Seated now as customs officer, he asked, "What can I do for you, Henri? Was it perhaps a matter of money?"

Flushing with the effort, Henri said, "I hate to ask it, but I came to know if you could carry us while we build a boat. We would keep the stores as low as might be, but with milk for the small ones and Aunt Caroline, and kerosene for the lanterns to work at night the bill would run high."

Monsieur Latour looked serenely over his head and only by his cheerfulness could Henri guess that he was already carrying so much of the island that the request was a difficult one for him to grant. "I know when I have been kindly treated and Christophes have done me many kindnesses. Never once have I been made to feel that I was a man of the people and they descendants of the Great Marquis. It will be an opportunity to repay obligation. Think no more of it!"

"It is good of you, M'sieur. But we know that payments have been poor. It will cause you no serious strain?"

"None. My wholesale bills are not due for six months, and I do not think that anyone would be unduly worried if they were not paid for twelve. What is your plan for the boat? If you are thinking of running the Christophe's mail routes, the distances are dangerously great for a launch! I do not like to see you try it! But if I cannot prevent you, the mail routes are open—the smaller islands still depend upon occasional schooners."

"We will take precautions and Joseph is a very great seaman. To handle the long distances, on the first run and every fourth run thereafter we will carry fuel only and establish caches upon certain of the sand bars, upon the Purple Reefs and on the Cape. M'sieur, if it is not inconvenient, might I see the Christophe's cargo manifests and papers for the last voyage?"

Monsieur Latour roughed his beard. "I too have thought, 'Something in that last voyage must have been different from all other voyages!' But there is nothing to prove it in the ship's papers! Nothing! In the cargo, dyewood, honey, conch shells, braided hats, a little lace. Nothing of danger or of value. I have been over those bills of lading with a toothcomb." He went to the files. "Take all the time you wish."

Henri carried the papers out to where the giant silk-cotton tree shed a green light over the ruined fort and yellow banana birds sang in the wild papayas that cut off the road. He read slowly, seeking the unknown amidst the known. But there was nothing in the ship's papers that was not as it might have been upon a thousand voyages. The Christophe had carried her usual complement of eight islanders, all men whom he had known since his childhood and all members of the gentle sect of the Followers.

In addition to the crew, there had been two first-class passengers for the Isle of Palms, Thomas Webber, and William Ashby, both of whom had disembarked safely, to testify that all was well with the ship up to that point. The ship had also carried five deck passengers, all inland Negroes of Jamaica, bound for Tampa under labor contracts, and all of whom had vanished with the ship.

"You found nothing?" Monsieur Latour asked as Henri returned the papers.

"It can have no bearing, but what was the business of M'sieur Webber and M'sieur Ashby in the island?"

"They were not even here of their choice. They, too, were victims of misfortune of the sea. M'sieur Webber was owner and M'sieur Ashby engineer of the steamship Webber that was wrecked upon the Purple Reefs in the hurricane that

passed a week before the Christophe's sailing, and they made the island in one of the ship's powerboats. When the Christophe arrived, M'sieur Webber arranged with your brother, Malcolm, to give them transportation to the Isle of Palms—stopping at the Reefs en route to inspect the wreck."

"Poor souls!" Henri said with quick sympathy. "It was a feat of seamanship that they should reach here!"

"It was perhaps almost a miracle. Conditions had been such before the Webber struck the Reefs that they were not even certain that it was the Purple Reefs upon which she had driven. Martin Herera, the captain, and four other Hereras of the Low Cays reached the coast of the Greater Antilles two days after the wreck and still in fearful weather for the storm had loitered, and, being the Hereras, became drunk, caused a riot and were jailed for disorder. Six other seamen were lost. By M'sieur Webber's story they lost their heads and bolted without an officer in the boat."

"Poor souls," Henri said again, thinking of the loneliness of men dying at sea.

"It was a year of disaster, Henri. The storm was a cruel one and took many lives. Amongst them, Jaques and Christian of the Island who were sponging off Gracias a Dios and though they were weather-wise men, must in some manner have been overtaken—at least, they never came back." He stopped, flushed, and in his very blue and intelligent eyes was the half-shamed, half-childish fear of the sea that even if they derided it was part of all men who knew the sea very well. "It was no mystery such as that of the Christophe, and of a certainty there are a thousand things that can happen to two men in a little boat, yet they were men of experience and should not have become involved in storm. And still the storm must have taken them. They never came back."

Henri experienced an irrational shock of fear of the sea's self, as if the all-embracing sea was conspiring against the island. He shook his young head angrily. Then, leaning forward, he asked, "Is there record of where the men, Webber and Ashby, have gone? It is unlikely that they have aught to add that might be of help, but they were the last to see our brother and I would talk with them."

"There should be record in the Isle of Palms." Monsieur Latour's gentle face was troubled. "M'sieur Webber was not a good man, Henri."

"You do not mean that he could have had connection with the loss?"

"No! No! That were impossible. I meant only that he was unlikely to be of help. A big and fair man of light conduct, he wore shorts and when pleased he skipped like a fawn in the forest. He was also loud in his opinion of the Island, for it seemed that he had heard of South Sea islands and of island beauties for improper deeds and had expected to find their counterpart here—where maids do not raise their eyes even to lads they know!" Monsieur Latour's old face showed its shocked distaste. "Hardly had he arrived before he had made such advances that his face was well slapped. He also attempted to give my donkey an apple hot from the oven. There was in him a joy in himself and a joy in cruelty as of an evil child—yet one felt that he was at heart a coward. Certainly, he was a most immoral man, and I doubt that he would ever have observed anything save the jocular words pouring from his own mouth and his own licentious wishes!" His face resumed its normal kindliness. "Ashby, the small and dark man with the barrel chest had little to say for himself upon any subject, but he had the eyes of a good man though sad. He might help you, though it is hard to say how."

After a moment, Henri said earnestly, "One more question, M'sieur. A problem of conduct troubles me. The Followers teach the turning of the other cheek. If you were attacked, you would make no resistance?"

Monsieur Latour's sermons in the little church held a shining gentleness, but he was a very humble man who, despite a blameless life, held little hope that he would be amongst the somewhat sadistically few whom the sterner Followers believed would be chosen. He answered gravely, while his old face flushed a little, "I am a man full of faults, Henri, and if I am saved, it will only be by Grace! But no, I would make no resistance. It is better to be sinned against than to sin."

Rising to lean his hands on the desk, Henri asked softly, "But if you could prevent violence only by using violence, what would you do? Imagine, perhaps, that you should see a murderer about to kill and that circumstances were such that you could stay his evil only by killing him, and tell me what would you do?"

Monsieur Latour was silent for a long moment. At last he looked up. "I pray that God never puts me to the test, but I would pray to do as did those in America who strove to follow as we and who prayed for humility while the Indians scalped them and their families one by one! I do not know that I could meet the test, but I would try to meet it!"

"I thank you, M'sieur," Henri said and his hands against the desk were trembling. "I think as always that you are one of the good men of the world, as I think that the people of our church are of the truly good people of the world. Yet I have

the thought that both our father and Malcolm our brother were very good and very gentle—and I have had the thought that in this matter there may perhaps be need for less of goodness and of gentleness!"

Tremendous sunset was shooting flame into the jungle and rumbling thunderheads dwarfed the island and the sea as Henri returned from Main Town with the commissioner's promise of the mail contracts. The wild reflections glowed between the black stakes of the turtle crawls while the turtles' flippers rose and sank darkly in the burning water. And beyond the crawls, far out over the submerged grass flats, Daphne was drawing a fish net.

Setting down the stores he carried, Henri waded out through the tepid and waist-deep water to aid her. "Let me have the draw-rope, Beautiful Sister. And M'sieur Latour has said 'Yes' and M'sieur the Commissioner has said 'Yes' and I have arranged with Captain Royal of the hawksbill schooner to give me passage to Jamaica to negotiate for the engines for the launch! Also I said, 'We have a French woman of Martinique who loves potatoes and who is very good and very kind!' And I was extravagant and bought a sack of real potatoes for supper!"

"Potatoes? How fine!" Daphne said. "The little ones do not know how good fried potatoes and fish can be." She smiled at him and pushed back her cropped hair that curled from the water. As their hands moved over each other along the wet rope she said, "I wanted you to search. Now I am afraid to have you challenge that sea and sky in a little launch!"

"Few men know the sea as Joseph does. We will be safe, Beautiful Sister."

"Try to be! I have been thinking of you and of Joseph, and thinking that it is not true that humanity cannot be unselfishly good. It is the story of the West Indies that men go out to labor endlessly for women they hardly see, but it is still a good story. In imagination, I have been watching men in far ports gazing into store windows at comfortable clothes and boots that were not stiffened by the sea, and knew they must be tempted, but that the little money went to buy gifts for children and lonely women. I knew that it was not right that through poverty it should be so, yet in contradiction I wondered if it was perhaps only in the hardness of sacrifice that love could say 'I love.' So that the Christ Himself could not have told his boundless love had He not walked along hot roads to bring comfort, had He not forgiven the pain of the Cross." With her hands on Henri's shoulder, she touched her fingers to the worn fabric of his shirt and the large, man-made stitches of its patching. "You and Joseph are very good to us, Henri! And again I am sorry that you have come home only to burdens, poor lambs who are so large and so young!"

Henri laughed. "All is well with us, Daphne! Do not trouble your great age that is two years younger than mine!" He kissed her forehead where the dark hair sprang from the brown satin of her sunburned skin. "As Joseph said, we regret that there has been so much sorrow and we not here to aid." Putting his hands against her ribs, he lifted her so that her down-pointing feet cleared the bottom and her beautiful body hung against his as the warm tide pulled about them. "Remember only that we can learn only what befell, that anything more is past hoping! And when you do not hope any more, try to remember that there is no finer man than Joseph, who may not know it, since he loved Malcolm too, but who has loved you since you came to us. Also, we would keep you always a Christophe."

With her face washed in the crimsoning light, she said, "I know—and you are both dear to me as my own—but I do not think that I could love twice even if I wished it."

"Then someday be merely kind to him! Being kind and loving run very close akin, and one might surprise you by growing into the other—and he is worth both." He set her down. "Neither can we make the dead glad of the touch of our hand at homecoming so that the heart sings. Or make the hard thing easy so that when a man's body cries out for rest the heart says to the tired muscles, 'It is for my dear one!' Or make loneliness warm a thousand leagues away so that a man is glad saying merely, 'At home, she is sleeping!' Or fill him with the large pride, 'I must care for me, for these common hands and this common life are of wonder to her!'" He smiled at her. "Joseph has all things but words in his own behalf, so that is why I say for him what he cannot."

They swung the wing of the seine towards the stake that held its base as the westward side of the rounded ripples blazed with deepening color, while through the eastward curves they looked down through crystal to the varied jade floor of turtle grass that was set with groups of lilac sea anemones like chrysanthemum flowers. Drifting schools of fish passed about their limbs and bodies. And from far inland came the sound of Joseph's and the family's axes, while hot perfume poured from the honey trees. Then crimson thickened the light and the turtle grass bottom was obscured by the murk of twilight, so that suddenly the familiar sea seemed menacing. And it was good to rush the bag of the fish-heavy seine up

onto the dark turtle grass beach.

Carrying the fish and the stores along the jungle path, Henri said, "Since their presence was accident and they had left the ship ere disaster came, it can hardly have bearing, but what was your thought of the men, Webber and Ashby, who were the passengers with the *Christophe*? M'sieur Latour who dislikes almost no man, disliked the big and fair man, Webber."

"He was detestable with the cruelty that laughs and skips like a wicked child's yet is worse because it is a man's," Daphne said. "He was big and fair and very handsome save that he was too soft and too pale, and that one could not have borne to touch him! It was as if there was in him such delight in himself that one wished to strike him." Her voice shook with anger. "On one of the days he was here, I was walking the path to Main Town, and the banana birds were racing each other through the treetops and one had struck a branch and fallen. He was touching it with his foot to make it beat its broken wing and he laughed in joy, asking me with his eyes to join him—and he would not stop! I thrust at him with a piece of broken wood and he stumbled, and I thought from his eyes that when he stood up he would strike me. But others of the women came and they beat him with their umbrellas and made him run. But men do not sink ships because women have offended them! Nor do I think he would ever have had part in true violence. He was too much afraid for his white skin. He would rather have stood laughing in glee, while other men were hurt in a prize ring or a sport, while, were crime to be committed, he would have wished to be afar with a loud alibi. For Monsieur Ashby, one was sorry, one did not know why."

"Beautiful Sister, it would be no answer to the how of it, but had Malcolm or our father other enemies?"

She said, "It is not easy to hate quiet and truly kind men who interfered with no man. Neither did any envy the mail routes to the little islands where the great ships do not go, for none have used them. If you would find motive behind what befell, you must find motive other than hate or envy. And there one goes back to the beginning, for where could there be motive? At the end as at the beginning is the mystery."

He said, "As you are meaning it, there are no mysteries!"

But about them as they entered the village of West Town the darkness had crept into the glittering and involved leaves of the breadfruit trees, while the last flush of afterglow lingered on the pink and rose cottage walls and the massed cabbage roses and bloody crotons still held color between the ghosts of picket fences, as the cooking smokes climbed in rose and silver to the single great rose of the sky. It was the moment when the West Indies seem clinging to the safety of day. Then, with a swoop like that of a great bird, the night was on them; the only light was from the distant storms, and, against the will, all mysteries seemed possible.

During the next weeks, Tobias moved patiently up the muddy coast of Nicaragua, explaining to turtle-crew and net weaver and to the dwellers on stilted platforms in the swamps, "I am Tobias of Home Island, seeking news of my son, lost with the motorship *Christophe*. Also of Jaques and Christian of my island, believed sponging here before the storm that preceded the *Christophe's* sailing." Most men were kind, a few derided; women insisted that he share the scant family meals; but in two months he had verified only that Jaques and Christian had been working the sponge fields shortly before the storm. "It is of the storm's self that I would learn," Tobias explained. "I seek one who can say, 'Jaques and Christian of Home Island sheltered here in the storm, thus were not lost in it as has been thought.'" And at that, pity would stand in brown eyes that said, "Tobias is stranged." On a fierce noon he was sailing a little estuary whose water was brown and yellow like a jungle cat's coat and was about to swing seaward, when he saw a lead through the mangroves, and far in amongst the mangroves, the cormorants perched, indicating a hidden lake. He had searched so many estuaries and so many creeks that he hesitated, then knew that if he did not search all things seen he could not say, "I have tried to find my son!" He swung the catboat in where the mangroves made green shadows on the brown-dyed water.

During the same weeks on Home Island, Joseph worked eighteen hours a day at the boat. Adult Christophes chopped, pegged, sawed and painted; medium-sized Christophes sanded, polished, carried boards and ran errands, and little Christophes got in the way. While in Jamaica, through a combination of vehement bargaining, sleeping in the Botanical

Gardens and eating one meal a day, Henri succeeded in realizing enough to buy two secondhand engines and the necessary hardware. And three months and one day from old Captain Henri Christophe's death, the family, though doing without coffee and sugar, owed three hundred dollars to Monsieur Latour, but the launch rode proudly at the foot of the Queen's Steps, half-buried in flowers thrown by cheering islanders.

Aunt Caroline broke an already cracked milk coconut on the bow, the christening having been delayed for a lull in her liver trouble. "I christen thee *Sea Lily*," the old lady shrilled, adding coarsely, "And it should be Sea *Silly*!"

Henri, gaunt from his light eating in Kingston, and Joseph haggard from exhaustion and lack of sleep, swung the Sea Lily free from the stone dock to earn the livelihood of thirty-one persons and repay the Christophe debts.

"Find the *Christophe*, Henri and Joseph!" the old captains shouted.

"Find the Three Galleons for us, Henri and Joseph!" little Timothy Christophe yelled.

"We will try," Henri and Joseph answered, laughing at the little boy. Joseph opened the throttle and the overladen launch was off, to follow in deadly earnest the path of a little ship for which five nations had searched in vain and by chance to run the course of three galleons lost three centuries before.

And to the brothers, it seemed almost that the ghost of the *Christophe* throbbed before them, moving to unknown disaster somewhere in the blue vastness of the sea under the reflected miracle of the clouds.

"She is good," Joseph said happily of the launch.

"She has need to be," Henri answered.

Below fled a sea floor such as no other islands of the earth could show: alight with blue sea fire, visible as if through air; deepening to fantastic patchwork of phosphorescent azure and black cobalt; vanishing in infinite blues. The launch slid into the shadow of a cloud, rode from it across the deep blue of many fathoms, and suddenly the sea was athrash with jacks, foam-slaps over all its surface, a showing of a thousand fish-backs. Then only a hundred blues made up the sea, laced with the tiny and seedlike forms of the sea-itch. Even the island was gone.

"We have striven so hard for this that is the true beginning of search, that it seemed in itself a great step toward learning of the *Christophe*," Joseph said. "But now the sea looks very big. And we must learn, yet even sky and sea would seem to say, 'How?' Thus far we have known from men whom we can believe that all was well with our brother and the ship. From here to the Isle of Palms, we know that men who should have no reason to lie say that all was well. But we must say, 'We are no longer completely sure of man, and must ask unanswering sea and sky and bottom if all was well when our brother passed this way.'"

"I too have thought, 'The open sea where there are no paths assumably has little to tell us.' Yet, if we pass often enough, some thing of sea or sky or bottom may answer us! And at least we know all that may be learned from the island," Henri answered.

"Which is little," Joseph said sadly. His great hands changed the wheel a fraction to meet more perfectly a larger wave and the launch rose under them, cut the crest and slid down the farther trough. "True, we know that two small things were not quite as always. There were two strangers from afar and the *Christophe* was two days late at the Isle of Palms. But what of either? For the delay, the strangers gave explanation that they can doubtless make clearer still."

A school of flying fish rose on the quivering rainbows of their wings and beautifully re-entered the sea. "Both Daphne and M'sieur Latour disapproved of the passenger, M'sieur Webber, and say that he will not aid us. But pleasant or otherwise, he must have been a man of parts," Henri said, smiling. He gestured at the dancing sea. "In opposite direction we are following the course of M'sieur Webber and the little man, Ashby. It is long and hard. And they traversed it from a wrecked ship through the after-whip of hurricane. Yet within hours of their making land, the man, Webber, had energy for thoughts of amours. Almost it would seem that he must have been such a man as the men of old, who fought great battles, encountered mighty gales and deprived countless captive virgins of their honor all upon the selfsame day." His voice lost its mockery. "What is your thought for our brother's lateness at the Isle of Palms?"

"I have had little time to think," Joseph said truthfully and without self-pity. "I have had to keep my mind upon standing on my feet and saying, 'Yonder is the nail. You have but to lift the hammer and strike it!' Yet in truth, I am puzzled somewhat. For on his way from Home Island to the Purple Reefs our brother had followed one route which those from the wrecked Webber might have taken, and by proceeding on his normal course from the Reefs to the Isle of Palms, he would have followed another. It would not seem likely that he would search afar for them until he had both failed to sight

them on that route and had learned that they had not reached shore. Malcolm was the only Christophe of neat mind, and he carried mail and valued his schedule. That he should be late by hours from having studied the wreck was understandable. That he should seek for two days for men who might well be safe ashore would seem strange. Unless there were special reasons to think them drifting—such, let us say, as a message on the wreck telling that the boats were stove and they had taken to the rafts." His voice was doubtful.

"Men do not commonly leave ships unless they think them lost," Henri said. "And then they seldom write messages to the fish. Still it could be. And doubtless the strangers can tell us as we talk." He paused. "But I could wish that our brother himself had made the report of what befell!"

Joseph said slowly, "Again there was nothing unusual in that he did not. Since he was late, it was most normal that he stood off the port. Having the fast powerboat of the strangers aboard, he who had done them favors, would well leave them take in the mails!"

"True. It is what he would have done," Henri said.

For two days and nights the launch ran the open Caribbean, the brothers taking six-hour watches. On the third afternoon they sighted the Purple Reefs, their presence marked by a crestless lifting of the swells and by great patches of sargassum weed, brown upon the surface, wine-purple beneath glass-blue clarity of the sea. Joseph edged the launch in over the tablelands of the reefs and they looked down upon wonder, passing at last into a small, horseshoe-shaped crescent amongst the spraddle of low dunes that formed the only place in which the reefs broke water. Here, from the loneliness of the sea, the humped sand hills rose perhaps twelve feet above tide-level and glittering beaches reached to small sand cliffs topped by coarse grass and leather-leaved, pink-flowered vines. Between the horns of the highest dune was a bay so delicately green that it seemed a pale jewel set in the blueness of the sea and the gold and purple of the great reef. Its floor was of sand as fine as scouring powder and white as snow.

Over the whole enchanted place drifted the greatness of the salt air and the changing patterns of the sky. And afloat in the bay, the launch seemed hung in air, while the little fish that gathered about her glowed purple against the aquamarine light. There might have been no world save the minute world here in the enormous reaches of the sea.

The brothers surveyed the bay for possible sharks, then plunged overboard and swam ashore, to sit at the edge of the ripples and scrub themselves with the refreshing sharpness of the sand. Then they dived to rinse, and finally walked, naked, to the top of the dunes where the salt-encrusted grass bowed in dull silver to the wind. The place was one that they had loved as boys, for to a boy there could be no more marvelous hunting ground.

Sea birds made it a nesting place and in their season, fine eggs could be had for roasting in the ashes. The telltale flotsam of the Caribbean and two continents stranded on the windward beaches and the savage Caribbean lightning, striking the sands, that were strangely of silica here rather than coral, formed crude rods of glass through the sand's softness. The finest pink conch shells of Caribbee were to be had from the mouth of the bay and under weeded ledges were spotted cowries with lips stained in purple. As added wonder, round, Spanish ballast stones could sometimes be found in the ricks of dried turtle grass, or, more occasionally, a piece of crude gold. For legend had it that it was here that hurricane had overpowered the Three Galleons, that had touched at Home Island, paying for water in the coins of gold that were in Monsieur the Commissioner's museum. And once, as a lad, Henri had dug up the beautifully fashioned hilt of a sword, from which rust crumbled, telling of an ancient blade.

Standing now in the colossal loneliness, he understood the call of treasure that lured the old captains. For while many of the ancients were impostors and some had come to believe in originally faked charts, many had strong support for their theories of enormous wealth waiting the expert or fortunate search. The Christophes themselves owned an old treasure chart of the Purple Reefs, but none of the family had ever taken it seriously. Yet great treasure had been lost by ships of the Spanish Main, and had not been found again. And while such countless men had beggared their families and wasted their lives in futile search that to call a man a treasure hunter was a West Indian synonym for calling him feeble-minded, no West Indian was ever quite unconscious of treasure. The salt gold itself was real, as was its mesmerism.

To believe in the finding of treasure was to be stranged, but in dealing with the Caribbean, was the dismissing of the glitter and power of treasure the dismissing of a vital fact? Being an unstranged West Indian, he did not believe it and could not forget it. And looking at the purple-spotted leopard skin of the submerged tableland, he wondered if it was

actually here that the Three Galleons had spilled their gold? If somewhere beneath the brilliant waters within range of his vision there did lie wealth beyond the dreams of men? His mind derided but his heart beat faster and his hands tingled.

He said, "That must be the *Webber*." For to eastward where the tableland dropped off to one of the great deeps, lay the shattered hulk of a steamer, infinitely lonely in this the loneliest spot of the Caribbean.

The area of the reefs between the dunes and the wreck was too shallow for the launch, but Joseph said, "There is time. Let us swim out to her!"

And presently they were gliding through the water beside the rusted hull to a point where the green swells sucked against the violently tilted decks, as the ship lay with her shattered nose only in the shallow water while her afterdecks and stern melted into green-cobalt obscurity. Fish fled like silver arrows and as the brothers drew themselves from the water, hundreds of sea birds flew up. And to the slow rhythm of the swells, a hollow booming followed by the hiss of receding waters came from within the ship. Despite the pounding she had taken, the rupture of at least some of her oil tanks had apparently been small, for faintly iridescent oil slick still trailed from her across the Reefs and out over the western deeps beyond the Reefs.

"I had not realized that she was as big as she is," Joseph said. "She must have been a great loss!" He added ruefully, "At least, since she was lost in hurricane, the underwriters cannot have disputed her loss."

Overside, the coral was already taking her, and from the depths astern that were becoming murky green with shadow, the great forms of two sharks showed. "The brasswork is still with her," Henri said. "With simple diving rigs, we might be able to do a little salvage."

"I, too, was thinking of that," Joseph agreed. "If we are to meet the debts we must make all chances earn for us and this is upon our course, while there will be times when we are ahead of schedule."

"We might also find the chart and glance for the Three Galleons," Henri said, and grinned, waiting for Joseph to deride him.

Perhaps as indication of his financial anxiety, Joseph said, "If one sought as the *Artiglio* sought for the *Egypt*, buoying off square mile by square mile, one might settle the matter one way or the other. And to make the search pay, one might gather conchs and fans—" He stopped, alarmed. "But you are not imagining, Henri, that lost treasure was in the loss of the *Christophe*?"

Henri laughed. "No, I am not thinking that a great treasure was revealed as the *Christophe* touched here and that therein lay motive for such great crimes as treasure has spawned. It could be, but I would have to run gold and jewels through my fingers before I would believe it."

They swam back into the face of the westering sun and behind them the wreck became a thing of gold against the sadness of the eastern sky.

Henri was a natural cook, and as they reached the dunes, he said, "I will go to the bay and prepare the meal."

Joseph smiled at him. "Thanks. While you do it, I will walk the north horn of the dunes."

Henri knew that Joseph was troubled by the immensity of their task and as he ran across the sand-crest and swam to the launch for spear, goggles and sack, he felt again the protective love for his brother that made him seem older rather than younger than unasking Joseph, who had labored all his life for others and had nothing for himself. He decided that Joseph must have a very special supper. And with the spearing equipment across his shoulder, he slid through the water like a seal toward the mouth of the bay and soon had three large pink conchs, four purple-spotted crawfish and a fine pink and silver snapper. Then making a fire of driftwood on the clean sand, he set water to boil and added onions, a bay leaf, pepper and salt, a dust of sage from Daphne's herb garden, a sprinkling of dried parsley. Next he cleaned and sliced the pinkish white flesh of the conchs and dropped it into the steaming soup, allowed the mixture to return to the boil and pulled the pot aside to simmer the conch meat to tenderness. The crawfish he killed and buried whole in the glowing ashes. Last came the fish. This he cleaned, stuffed with eggs, herbs and bread crumbs mixed with grated coconut, basted with coconut oil and placed in a heated camp oven which he buried under the coals. He then worked his way along the shore until he found a weeded sand-bed set with the translucent shellfish whose flesh resembled that of northern mussels, secured some two dozen of the plump morsels and placed them on a bed of wet seaweed over coals, added more seaweed to form a blanket, and then topped the pile with coals. Overhead in the infinite blue, man-of-war hawks angled

curiously towards the thinly ascending smoke.

Joseph, bronzed and intent, walked slowly along the north horn of the dunes where the military installations were already being taken by the rust and the birds. As always on isolated outcroppings from vast areas of water, there were strange and interesting objects on the beach, and at one point a corked bottle caught his eye. He picked it up, and a paper was dimly visible through the green of the glass. He broke the bottle and something tinkled amongst the coral rubble. The note said that the bottle had been thrown overboard from a cruise ship near Panama and asked the finder to inform the writer of where the bottle was found, a dime being enclosed for postage. Joseph looked for the dime but could not find it, which annoyed him, since, though the message was trivial it did not occur to him to disobey the instructions, and he could ill afford the stamps.

On the eastern face of the dunes was record of the fury of the storm that had swept the reefs two years ago. Great blocks of coral torn from the living structure of the coral were heaped upon the beaches and the sandhills, and Joseph considered them, thinking that in such storm, things long buried could have come to light. And he wondered at the freakishness of storms that can wreck a city yet spare a hut or that might change a reef yet leave the wreck of a ship to rust slowly.

The great sky was becoming greenish gold and the clouds glowed angrily in the west, while the wind had caught a lonely whisper, when Henri at last heard the sound of Joseph's step in the sand and looked up smiling. "We have a good supper!"

Joseph said, "The storm must have been of great violence. My only find was a tourist bottle whose dime I lost amongst the coral. Now I will have to spend a dime to mail the letter!"

Henri suppressed a smile and served the meal deftly in smoothly opened tin cans and on sections of smooth gray driftwood. The conch soup to which he had added their one can of evaporated milk was velvety and delicately delicious. And he was pleased that Joseph's tired face had lost something of its weariness. "You are a true chef, Henri!" Joseph said. Henri smiled so that his teeth flashed white. He passed his brother a piece of driftwood on which the grilled shellfish were arranged on a bed of salty green sea lettuce, squeezed Mexican lime juice over them, dotted them with coconut butter and sprinkled them with pepper and salt. The shellfish had a nutlike sweetness and a strange tang from the crisp weed. Next came the crawfish tails, peeled of their charred shells and buttered and sprinkled with parsley and a dash of chili. The shells had kept in every modicum of flavor, and the clove of garlic with which each had been impaled added zest. "A king's feast!" Joseph said.

Henri was critical. "Each should have contained a wild almond, but I forgot to bring them."

"After such carelessness, I do not know that I care to eat!" Joseph said smiling. At the sight of the fish, he groaned in earnest. "No more is expected of me?"

"Taste it!" Henri commanded. Joseph tasted. The fish had a meatlike richness and was smeared with its own brown gravy. The savor of the eggs and herbs had blended with the flavor of the fish and the flavor of the fish with the stuffing. It was the masterpiece of the meal. The coffee—saved for them by Daphne—was from the Blue Mountains of Jamaica, a product of which so little is marketed that it remains the treasured delight of connoisseurs, prized for a flavor so rich that to add milk would be high treason.

They drank it as the sky caught a great and bloody light and the hollows of the dunes darkened to the night wind. One by one the stars came out.

Henri stirred the fire to light, then he said, "I walked the south dunes roughly while the conchs simmered. In a hollow toward the south tip there is a bed of gathered and wired sponges that have been left to rot."

Joseph looked at him startled. And Henri knew that in his mind he visualized the slow disintegration of the skeletal structure of sponge in this salt-saturated air. For it could be that the sponges had been fresh and yellow as a flower garden two years before. None of the searchers then would have noticed anything odd in their presence since every sand dune of the Caribbean at times blossomed with this golden carpet. Any persons seeing the drying sponges two years ago would have thought the spongers busy at some outer bed and that they intended to return. None would rob unattended sponges, for such robbing, if detected, could mean death. And so lonely was the reef that after the first flurry of the search none save the personnel of the military installations might have noted the discarded and by then worthless sponges, and for the military they would have held no special meaning.

To the brothers Christophe they had the possibility of great meaning. Jaques and Christian were spongers. If this had

been their haul it had been strung out after the passage of the hurricane. Yet something had prevented their gathering it. What? What unknown disaster under these same stars, in these same whispering airs amidst these ever present seas?

Joseph said slowly, "Many things, of course, may happen to two men in a little boat: a sudden squall and upset where there are sharks, an accident while diving, carelessness—and the drifting of the boat beyond catching while the men are in the water."

"It is still a strange thing," Henri said. "Two men of the island were absent sponging. While it was not thought that they were here, it is not impossible that they had come here. Certainly men sponging this reef were interrupted. They had a good haul, washed and drying. They never returned for the haul. Nor did Jaques and Christian or the crew of the *Christophe* ever return."

They listened to the voice of the sea, hardly audible by day but all about them in the darkness, and to the bowing of the salt grass in the wind. "Suppose," Henri said, "that there was something here—its nature we cannot guess—but something most unusual that was known to or had affected the spongers; in pausing here our brother could have learned of it or become involved in it . . ."

"But what, Henri? If he had found the spongers missing and perhaps suspected foul play, why did he not report it in the Isle of Palms? Or let us assume that at the time our brother paused here, no disaster had befallen the spongers, what could then happen to destroy both the men on the reef—so that they could not return for their sponges—and also reach out to cause a ship to vanish hundreds of miles from here?"

Henri sighed. "Had the *Christophe* never reached the Isle of Palms, it would be easier! One might then assume that whatever unknown thing befell, befell here, destroying both ship and spongers."

Joseph stirred the fire so that blue and lilac flame leapt from the orange bed of coals. "As it stands, one would need to say almost that here was death, remaining to strike down the spongers, and that also our brother carried death with him from this place—which is quite absurd! For what could be here that could also be there? What in a sane man's reasoning could be in either place that could cause men to vanish without trace, and with men, a ship?"

The black edge of the tide caught the reflections of the fire and tapped softly at the sand. Henri said, "I do not know. But I believe that it was here that the unknown thing first touched them." He smiled. "Tonight I almost believe Tobias' ghosts and demons, but they may vanish as, God willing, we learn!"

Joseph also smiled. "Tomorrow we will search more closely. Meantime, since here is perhaps a stealer of ships and we cannot afford to lose our small ship, we had best swim back to the launch and to bed."

They rose, Henri set the breakfast things in order, and then while Henri laughed inwardly at his own distaste for the swim, they hurled stones to scare away any possible sharks and plunged into the black water that was warmer than the air and swam back to the launch.

Further search in blue and blowing morning revealed nothing save a stronger impression of the fury of the hurricane that had swept the reefs. Henri and Joseph established their gasoline cache and put up a notice: Needed by the Brothers Christophe. Such little hoards were almost invariably inviolate in the Caribbean, for no man knew when his own life might hang on finding safe his cans of fuel.

With the work finished, the brothers looked over the lonely wonder of reefs and dunes. "Joseph, it is your thought the sponge haul was that of Jaques and Christian?" Henri said.

"If it could be shown that Jaques and Christian were not working the beds off Gracias a Dios, I might think so. If they were—as we believe—off a Dios, why in any reason should they have crossed the seas to come here where sponge is scant?" Joseph asked.

"Suppose merely that Tobias and M'sieur Latour are right in that Jaques and Christian were too weather-wise to have been caught by hurricane—that they were safe through it. We have then three mysteries. The fate of the *Christophe*. The fate of Jaques and Christian. The lesser mystery of the unclaimed sponge. Three unrelated mysteries are too many."

"That could be," Joseph said. "But if you would relate them by this place, you have then a thing more strange and harder of belief than unconnected loss. You must think that against reason Jaques and Christian came here and for that reason were lost. You must think that the *Christophe* touched here and that for this death followed her—that for something seen or known or done here, men were struck down."

"I think merely as Tobias and M'sieur Latour think, that Jaques and Christian were too wise to be lost in storm. And if

they were lost for unknown reason is it not more credible that the unknown thing was in one spot rather than that it touched hither and yon across the Caribbean?"

"But what unknown thing, brother?"

"I do not know. And I know that I sound stranged as Tobias, yet I cannot shake away the thought that it was here that the thing began that was not as it had aways been."

Joseph's quiet eyes regarded the morning sunlight. "As you know I am a dull and unimaginative fellow. At things of the hands, I am good, but for saying, 'It must have been thus or thus!' I must look to you, Henri." He turned, smiling while the sun washed the strong beauty of his body. "I am our hands and you our head."

"All my instinct says, 'Search here!'"

"For what, brother?"

"For conchs and sponges and sea things for the good doctor at the museum in Tampa—and for what else the sea may tell us. For what may be worth salvage from the steamer yonder." He grinned. "For little Timothy's Three Galleons, who knows?—for I know not what. Here, at least, for the first time the trail has said to us, 'That is most strange!' If we can learn the reason for the little strangeness we may have the key to the greater strangeness."

Joseph's eyes smiled. "I am child enough to find it easier to seek conchs and starfish where legend says one might also find gold. And few true divers have worked the out reefs in patience."

Ten minutes later, the launch was riding beautifully over a blue and tumbling sea on her way toward the Isle of Palms. Forty hours later, they sighted the first mangrove flanks of the Greater Antilles through misting rain tinged with rainbows, and presently were threading their course between the skirts of dripping mangroves and the gray sadness of rotting beacons. And still it seemed that the ghost of the *Christophe* went before them, rounding this beacon and that, throbbing down rain-pearled estuaries. And, as always, that which upon the map had appeared small and neat, expanded with reality to the endlessly vast, the endlessly confusing. So that while on the map one could say, "The course of the ship lay here and here—she touched only these points, we will follow her!" in looking on the expanses of the sea and the labyrinths of channels and green bays, it seemed, "A hundred ships could have vanished within these few square miles—and we are searching a thousand square miles, two years late!"

Pelicans slid on stiff wings and plunged, broad-breasted into the rain-dimpled sea. Occasionally a creek showed small wharves and drying nets of fishermen, or a haul of sponges were spread in gold on age-silvered planks. In most cases the owners were away, but wherever smoke showed, Joseph put the launch in and they chatted in Spanish over cups of burnt-flavored Cuban coffee sweetened to syrup with condensed milk. Many of the men had come to the swamps but recently and Henri and Joseph could say only, "Spread the word that the Brothers Christophe are seeking news of their brother and of all things pertaining to the *Christophe*!" But one old man had joined in the great search. Unexpectedly, he volunteered the information that Ashby, one of the *Christophe's* fortunate in that he had disembarked, was now living some twenty miles to the north. The old man grinned. "He is now of the retired. Wouldn't tell anyone but you local boys—though you won't learn anything from him. He's just scared rabbit."

In the bays and creeks of the Caribbean were many of the retired: French, German, American—a polished Englishman perhaps—living from the teeming seas on some sweltering estuary or swamp-fringe and vanishing into the mangroves at the approach of coast guard or naval craft or police launch. Between them and the lands from whence they came stood the crimes of theft or murder or treason. They lived for the small scraps of news from the lands to which they could never return. Yet, when those came who could bring news, the retired were afraid to speak with them.

And when Henri and Joseph at last found the battered wharf and shack up the hidden creek, they found it empty. Heavy rain had set in and Henri stood on the dripping wharf and addressed the rain-bowed wall of mangroves. "We are here as friends seeking information only. Observe, we wear no uniforms and carry no weapons!" Leaden rain roared across the swamp and ran as small rivers across the wharf. Then the leaves parted and a small, wizened man with a disproportionately large chest stepped onto the planks. "I was back in the woods," Ashby said rapidly, looking from one to the other of them. "Guess you thought I'd cleared out." He laughed to convey the absurdity of the idea. "Plenty of retired men around the creeks. Run like rabbits." His manner became that of recitation. "Now me, I only stay here because I like it. I can go back to the States any time I want. You been in the States lately to see how things are going there? Some time since I met a man from the States." The desperate hunger of the exile stood in his eyes. He recollected himself and said, "Come in! Come in!" He led the way into the dark shack where the rain was like drums on the iron

roof.

"We have not been in the States for six years," Joseph said kindly. "But we are on our way to Tampa, and when we return, we will bring you news."

Ashby's hands shook. "While you're there you might look up a Mrs. Combs—knew her sort of casually once. Better not mention me. Just see how she and the kids are doing. Youngest kid must be around ten now." His hands shook so that he spilled the tobacco from his cigarette paper. "She lives—used to live—on Wharf Street. Just take a gander at her and the kids. Don't mention me."

"We will act with care," Joseph said, "and we will pretend we are looking for another woman of the same name."

"Not important," Ashby said, flushing under his graying stubble. "Just sort of curious." He cut himself a slice of raw conch meat and ate it hastily. "Never get enough conch." He looked up. "What was that you were asking me?"

"I am Henri Henri Christophe and this my brother Joseph Henri Christophe," Henri said. "We are seeking answer to the loss of the motorship *Christophe*."

Ashby stood up and his scarred hands gripped the table's edge while his eyes darted between their faces and his constant shaking was more noticeable. "The motorship *Christophe*? The lost motorship? Yes, the lost motorship." His haunted eyes seemed again to be asking them something, but what, Henri did not know. "Could have been lost myself with the motorship!" Ashby said. His glance fled between their faces. He began to eat conch meat again.

"It is because you were a passenger on the last voyage that we have come. We are thankful that you disembarked and were safe," Joseph said. "The voyage from the island to the Isle of Palms, was it uneventful, M'sieur? We are seeking any smallest thing that was not as it always was."

"Got through one shipwreck," Ashby chattered. "Could have been in another! See? Could have gone on with her for Tampa!" He became assertive. "Can go to the States whenever I want. Not like these retired fellows . . ."

"We are puzzled that our brother was two days late at the Isle of Palms."

"Late at the Isle of Palms? That was for looking for the men of the *Webber*. Me, I got through the wreck of the *Webber*, but I could have gone on with the motorship . . ."

"We are puzzled that our brother should have searched for two days for men of the *Webber* when he could not have known that they had not reached shore."

Ashby struggled with his conch, then said rapidly, "Tom Webber, the owner, paid him to search. Tom Webber, the owner, was concerned for the men. Tom Webber, the owner, thought the men might be adrift." He stopped and his sad eyes darted. "That was why!"

"All was well with our brother and the *Christophe*?"

"Never better! Never better! Fine man, Captain Malcolm. Kind man—spoke well to everyone. Should not have been lost, Captain Malcolm!" To the surprise of the brothers, sudden tears were running in the stubble of Ashby's wizened cheeks. Clutching Henri's arm, he said fiercely, "Read in the papers a ship sinks, but they don't know how it was, don't know about kids waiting for presents that won't get presents. They don't know how it was at all when men don't go home!" He looked down and stumbled to the shelves to get salt for his conch.

After a moment, Joseph asked, "M'sieur, was anyone else at the Purple Reefs when our brother touched there? Or was there sign that any craft save the wrecked *Webber* had been there?"

Ashby dropped the salt. "Other people than them with the *Christophe*? No! Why should there be other people?"

"Near the time of the *Christophe's* loss, two spongers of Home Island also met disaster. On the dunes of the Purple Reefs are many sponges that have been strung yet were not claimed. We would know their story—you have not by any chance been to the Purple Reefs since your passing with the *Christophe*, M'sieur?"

"I? Been to the Reefs? I got too much to do! Haven't even had time to go to the States! Planning a trip to the States pretty soon now . . ."

"M'sieur, you are positive that there was nothing untoward in the *Christophe's* trip to the Isle of Palms?" Henri asked. "No most trivial thing?"

"No! No! No! How many times do I have to tell you no?" Ashby shouted.

"Thank you, M'sieur," Joseph said. "And we will call upon your friend Mrs. Combs."

Ashby flushed violently, paring his nails with his pocketknife. "Just curious. Take it kindly." He looked at them and his eyes yearned. "Around when you expect to be back?"

As they swung into the launch, Henri said, "Oh, one thing more. The brass is still with the steamer. We had the thought we might make a little with salvage. Do you know if any have bought the rights?"

Standing at the edge of the dock, Ashby shook with a sudden and greater agitation and his face twisted strangely. "Don't work her! Don't go near her! A cursed ship—a bad ship! All bad like the Hereras!" He leaned to them across the rail of the dock. "A wreck isn't like it gets in the papers. Good men go with ships—good men went with the *Christophe*—good men, not just names. Captain Malcolm, a good man. The big black boy, a good man. You boys both good men—good men who will do a favor. Don't go near her! Let her alone!"

The brothers stared, astonished and pitying. "We will be careful, M'sieur," Joseph said.

As they drew away from the rain-drenched creek, Ashby shouted after them, "Don't go near her!"

From the mangrove bank behind him, two small figures had slipped to join him, two half-naked and very wet little boys. Ashby tenderly took a hand of each as he continued to stare after the launch.

"Poor soul!" Henri said softly.

"Madame Combs is doubtless his wife," Joseph commented. "And the little fellows are children of exile—and now there is another reason that he can never go home, whatever the first one may have been."

"Poor soul," Henri said again. "And I think M'sieur Latour was right in that he is a good man."

Three

The launch slid on through the bottle-green water between the bird-thick cays toward the Isle of Palms, the engines making a lonely sound above the tinkling patter of rain. On every side the long, watery lanes of mangroves spread, then sudden and verdured hammocks curved from the sea and miles of low jungle, broken by isolated hill chains, rolled in last gold. From the sea, a great cutter with ropes of yellow sponges on her stays and wreaths of painted roses on her bow was sailing into the light wind. A shower lifted to reveal huge royal palms towering from tall cliffs and beyond them the mountains showed, pale with the lighter green of vertical meadows or swept by gray deluges of rain whose roar could be heard and whose passing left the white trails of waterfalls. The *Sea Lily* rounded a final headland, and the sails of cutters rising above mangroves marked the still unseen river, while the cream towers and red roofs of the town dimmed to the upsweep of shadow as the sun vanished behind purple thunderheads. Deep evening came suddenly with the sharks cruising through lilac and silver. Night was a far whisper in the forests of royal palms as the launch entered the river and everywhere the blue fires of lightning winked. Looking out over the great estuary, it was easy to imagine the *Christophe's* lights riding there as she had last paused to send in the mail.

"I wish to make an adjustment to the port engine," Joseph said when they had completed the formalities at the ancient port authority building. He counted the small amount of change in the sharkskin purse and frowned. "I may even have to buy a three-eighths bolt."

Henri touched the hard warmth of his brother's shoulders. "Do not plunge into the expenditure until I return, Joseph!" He gave Joseph's arm a squeeze and crossed the room to the desk of the port officer, who was a small and dapper man in a wonderful uniform. "Pardon, M'sieur, but as you may guess, we seek all things pertaining to the *Christophe*. Was it you, perhaps, who were on duty at the time she last touched here?"

The port officer, one of whose sidelines was the collection of junk for sale at exorbitant prices to distressed mariners, was equally noted for his meanness in matters of money and for his haughty pomposity, and having already shown his poor opinion of their patched clothes, he now made notes in a small book and touched his small moustache without bothering to answer. Henri unwrapped a flagon of the mango wine for which Home Island was famous. Bowing, he said, "Perhaps this would refresh you?"

The official changed his manner, and produced glasses from beneath the desk. "For you only, M'sieur," Henri murmured. The official's eyes showed that he was not sorry to have sole use of the golden nectar. He poured and sipped. "At your service, Señor!" Despite his increased cordiality, his glance still managed to convey the fact that Henri's shirt was patched over patches.

"First a triviality, M'sieur. If it would embarrass you by entailing too much bookkeeping and red tape, think no more of it! But I wondered if we might purchase a bolt from the assortment yonder?" He indicated a pile of bolts and rusty tools in a corner behind the desk.

"Embarrass me to dispose of a bolt? Are you Home Islanders children? I control the complete finances of the port, Señor!"

"Forgive me," Henri said humbly.

"Take all the bolts and the old tools, too! I was about to have them swept out."

"My thanks, M'sieur. M'sieur, the records of the landing of the shipwrecked men, M'sieurs Webber and Ashby, perhaps you have them?"

"We have all records of all transactions!"

"As they are in Spanish and I do not read it well, you would perhaps translate?"

The records and the port officer's recollections, while flowery, were clear enough. The passengers, Señores Webber and Ashby, had brought in the incoming mail and told their story of the loss of the *Webber* and of their arrival at Home Island, Señor Ashby seeming prostrated by his experiences. It was said, by the way, that he was now in hiding as one of the retired and had with him the little ones of a dance hall girl who might or might not have been his wife but who had run off with an American marine—the uniforms of American marines being notably irresistible to dance hall girls. But returning to the appearance of Señores Webber and Ashby at the port office, the port officer had been able to inform them that the five Herera brothers had very definitely made land at the little town some twenty miles to the northeast

shortly after the storm. They had been so drunk that they neglected to report the loss of the ship, but instead had more or less wrecked the town and been jailed for disorder, which had been awkward since the town had no jail and they had had to be put in the city hall, which they took over. Only from Señores Webber and Ashby had the port authority of the Isle of Palms learned of the wreck of the *Webber*! Since no reports had been received of any other members of the *Webber's* crew, it had to be presumed that six of her men were still unaccounted for. Señor Webber had expressed great concern and had been assured that a search for the lost men would be started instantly by the Navy of the Republic. Señor Webber had listed the names of the still missing men of the *Webber*. The six missing seamen had never been found —which caused one to marvel at the wondrous ways of Providence, since to man's finite mind it seemed that the Hereras must certainly have been a better choice for the sea's bottom than the men who were lost.

"M'sieur, you had seen the lights of the *Christophe* go onward?"

"Yes. Though, dealing with much shipping, I paid no special attention. Many duties . . ."

"All was as always? She was on the Tampa course?"

"All was exactly as always or I should have recorded the fact! I made record of the ship's touching here, officially reported the same, and thought no more of the matter until the lightkeeper reported that the ship had not passed."

"M'sieur, as a man of acute intelligence, have you any theory?"

The wine was well down in the flagon. The official winked. "We are men of the world?" Henri nodded. "We know that all is not always as it may seem?" Henri nodded. "We know that a man or men may have reasons—particular reasons—reasons even if they are family men?"

"Yes, M'sieur."

The official leaned forward a little uncertainly. "Ship was never sunk!" he said dramatically. "Been seen since off New Orleans—know it because of my position." He regarded Henri cunningly, managed a final wink and lowered his head upon his arms and was asleep.

Leaning over the desk, Henri shook him carefully by the hair. "M'sieur! M'sieur! Is it known where Thomas Webber, the owner of the *Webber* went?"

The official opened one eye as Henri hastily let go of his hair. "Eh? Went home to the States, to West Florida. Near the southern tip of the State, on river near a location by the name of the Bay of Jewfish. He has long owned a great tourist resort for millionaires who fish and hunt the deer. Charming man, the Señor Webber! Laughing from morning till night. A true fan of the bullfighting and cock fights." He slept again.

"We are lucky in that M'sieur Webber's home is almost upon our route," Henri reported to Joseph. "We may know more when we have talked with him. Meantime, here is your bolt and assorted mechanical things with the compliments of m'sieur the port official, who is an idiot who believes the *Christophe* still afloat."

"I have improved the carburetor of the port engine," Joseph said. "Such simple things must be my contribution."

"That you are Joseph and a great strength at all times is your contribution!" Henri said fondly. "Let us draw out to the ship anchorage and wait for dawn. From here we must say, 'Somewhere now it perhaps befell!'"

With the first silver light, the *Sea Lily* moved across leprous green bottoms mottled with darker greens between the leaden ghosts of keys. They had passed the place of the *Christophe's* last known human contact—to enter the absolutely unknown, where even in imagination they could no longer be sure that the shadow of the *Christophe* ran before them. From some of these keys, the birds had seen the ship passing, other keys perhaps she had not passed. At evening in darkly rolling blue again, as sunset crimsoned the lighthouse of San Antonio and the flying fish flashed up from the running swells to skim like silver arrows, they knew that almost certainly the *Christophe* had not passed on the last journey. For here it had been Malcolm Christophe's custom to run close to the light, signaling the keeper. On the last trip he had not done this, either because the *Christophe* had never reached this spot or because he had kept far from his usual course. That Malcolm Christophe had kept to sea was not impossible, but that he had broken long custom for harmless reason, later to meet unrelated disaster was beyond likelihood. Yet of all the lost ship's course, the run from the Isle of Palms to the Cape was safest and least isolated; with stagnation of calm to its seas, oppression of stillness to the sky—

where the lumbering shapes of pelicans had replaced the clean lines of the frigate birds—day-long monotony of coast to eastward. And always dotting the horizon or drifting across the shallows, the countlessness of sails, proving the strength of the last stand of sail in one of the earth's last strongholds of sail.

"Yet in our thinking, we must say, 'Almost certainly the unknown thing befell ere our brother reached this spot,'" Henri said softly as the lighthouse sank in the crimson and purple of twilight.

At the meeting of the two differing seas of the blue and ancient waters of the Gulf and the strange sea of grass and water that was the Everglades, they swung to hug the coast of Florida, and to look with awe upon giant mangrove forests where the normally low trees towered sixty to seventy feet into the blowing air, and where, between the mangroves, tunnels of green darkness wound toward one of the few truly wild areas remaining in North America: a kingdom of the birds and the alligator gars, oldest of fishes, and of the reptiles and the saurians, the home of the bright-eyed otters and the walking place of cloud shadows. From it, the southeast wind brought the sweet scents of the thousands of square miles of the mighty swamp that was like no other: a perfume composed of fresh water itself, of tremendous sunlight upon growing things, of the flowers of wild lilies and of the richness of seeding grass.

Fish hawks cut the loneliness of the brilliant sky and on the sand bars that the launch skirted were vivid windrows of bright shells. From one little key, a flight of pink spoonbills rose like a sunset cloud in the noon sun. Then as Joseph twined the launch through sweltering mangroves in late afternoon, a sound as of many birds came from beyond the mangroves ahead, and, as they neared it, became the voices of children. Sliding into a wider waterway, they saw a large, flat-bottomed boat, so crowded with children that it seemed in danger of sinking. The boat was drifting rapidly seaward but the children waved and cheered. Jammed amongst the children, a sunburned, brightly golden-haired girl of perhaps sixteen or seventeen years of age wrenched at the starting cord of an outboard motor, at the same time shouting, "Hey! Hey, you in the launch!" Joseph headed the launch toward her. And pushing back her hair with her arm, she grinned. "We can't start it. You have a try!" Turning, she pushed the children vigorously and cheerfully. "Get back, you guys!"

The bow-ward collapse of the children revealed that she was wearing fewer clothes than the amazed Henri and Joseph had ever seen any woman wear north of the South Seas. Her bare-midriff playsuit had a tiny skirt, but this was so short that it merely drew attention to the short and skintight pants that hugged the firmly rounded curves of her body. And Joseph's face expressed his disapproval, while to Henri the suit gave her a curiously childlike innocence. The fractional suit, he mentally admitted, was intentionally provocative, but the girl herself was so smiling and so frank that it was as if she did not know the nature of the provocation. Like a child bursting with life, she was never quite still, and her hand when it touched his as he worked at the engine was like the friendly and sunburned hand of a child. The brown-gold hair on the nape of her neck was childlike and invited the touch.

"Thanks a lot," she said as the engine started. The children cheered.

"We will make certain that you reach shore," Joseph said coldly.

She laughed. "Reckon I don't want to wash to sea with this mess of kids!"

The brothers Christophe followed the overladen craft into the winding estuary and to within sight of an old wharf on the river bank, beyond which a straggling road ran to a tin and clapboard settlement. The girl stopped the motor. There was now something of anxiety and sudden defiance in her manner. "Don't tell the folks I had the kids out! Kids' folks are always fussing about something!"

"We do not know the parents," Joseph said. "Nor do we gossip." He frowned. "Nonetheless, this is not a good boat to go to sea."

"We didn't go to sea." She grinned. "We were took. Thanks again for the start."

"It was a pleasure," Henri said, smiling at her. "Mam'selle, is this Jewfish Bay?"

The childlike fullness of her lower lids pushed the gold-brown lashes together. "Right, mongsure!" she said impertinently, laughing at her own attempt at French. She frowned in question. "What are you? Frenchies from New Orleans?"

"No, Mam'selle, we are West Indians," Henri said. "I am Henri Christophe and this is my brother Joseph."

She stood looking at them with a strange tenderness on her face. "You're nice, you two!" Joseph blushed and Henri smiled.

"Mam'selle, we are seeking for M'sieur Thomas Webber. His tourist resort is located near here?"

"Tourist resort? Rat's nest's a better name! You passed it. You got to know the way in—I'm Tom Webber's niece. Tom isn't there."

"He will shortly return?"

She shrugged. "How you tell with Tom? He's in New Orleans. He may be back in three weeks, maybe ten." Her face that changed as quickly as the light on running water was flushed and angry.

"Should he return ere we do, you might tell him the brothers Christophe are seeking him—to talk with him of the *Christophe*."

She nodded. "O. K. And so long! You're nice, you two!"

The launch turned back to sea. "She was charming," Henri said, smiling.

"She was indecent!" Joseph answered.

Henri smiled more widely. "A child is not indecent. She was like a child."

Joseph snorted. "My sympathy is with the parents. She is not fit to be with little children!"

"The little children were having a particularly nice time," Henri said. "Perhaps those who are more worthy do not realize that little children like to go boating."

Red sunset two days later saw them running up Tampa Bay. Here they knew that the *Christophe* had not come on the last voyage. The unknown disaster lay behind them.

The formalities of entry having been attended to, the *Sea Lily* was presently bumping lightly in black and oily water against a dark wharf heaped with banana bunches. A large man with stubbled beard and a thin man with buck teeth stood at the edge of the dock and regarded the launch grinningly. In the door of a dimly lighted shed, four other men lounged. "You boys got fruit?" the big man asked.

"Yes, M'sieur," Henri said. "We have a small deck-cargo of bananas."

"Where you get 'em?"

"We obtained them on our way to Cape San Antonio. We have paid duty and the fruit has been inspected," Joseph said.

"Well you may as well tip 'em in the bay right now!" the big man said. "There's a little banana trouble in this port and no one but our little old banana company brings bananas in here!"

"Who maintains that save your company, M'sieur?" Joseph asked politely. "We were not informed of any embargo by the authorities. We would wish the statement of an official before we abandoned our bananas."

The big man shouted, "Hey, Rick! These boys want a 'official statement'!" The men at the door of the shack parted and a uniformed police officer came out picking his teeth.

"M'sieur, we were instructed to unload our bananas here," Joseph explained as the officer reached the edge of the dock. "These men seek to prevent it!"

"That so?" the officer asked the big man.

"Weren't doing a thing!" the big man said grinning. "These Frenchies aren't acting nice."

"You hear that?" the officer asked Henri and Joseph. "You men start any trouble and we know what to do about it!" He lounged back toward the shed, turned at the door and roared, "Get going!"

"They wanted a official statement," the thin man said. He indicated the bananas. "Where you going to tip 'em, boys?"

"Don't be hard, Bud!" the big man said. He made his voice sentimental. "You just keep your bananas among your

souvenirs if you want, Frenchies!" He laughed unpleasantly. "Just don't try to unload 'em here or sell 'em anywhere—or we'll learn who says not pretty quick! Won't we, Bud?"

"Sure will," the thin man said and spat. He narrowed his eyes. "We ain't too keen on foreigners around here nohow."

They turned and slouched back toward the dimly lighted shed. From the door, the big man called. "Embalm your bananas so they'll keep real good, boys! How's that for a idea? And while you're thinking it over, we kind of don't like this dock cluttered up!" The big man and the thin man laughed loudly and banged the door. Starry darkness took the wharf.

"We have a right to sell our fruit," Joseph said stubbornly.

"True," Henri said. "But from what we have heard and seen we are more likely to do it by discretion than by right. Meantime we wish to see Madame Combs, and we cannot leave the *Sea Lily* here and we cannot pay for a private dock."

Finally having found a small, deserted sandspit draped in black lace of casuarinas, they anchored the floating banana bowl that was the *Sea Lily* and waded ashore. No highway passed near the spot and Henri said, "All should be well with her until morning."

Under the first street light, Joseph got out the sharkskin purse. "Do you think thirty-five cents each is too much to allow for such meals as we have to buy?"

"I do not think we will grow overfat on it," Henri said. "By the way, Joseph, I have good news for you. It will only cost you three cents to mail your letter to the gentleman who placed the message in the bottle."

"Having lost his dime, I suppose I should return the change . . ."

"I think you might retain that as payment for service," Henri said. Before a pawnbroker's window, Joseph stopped to study the glittering musical instruments. Henri asked, "Why do you smile?"

"I was thinking how odd the human mind is," Joseph said. "One of the few things I have ever really wanted was a flute—of all ridiculous things!" He laughed at his foolishness and they went on through the increasing crowd past a store that advertised *Bargain* Specials in Nylon Handkerchiefs. Belaced wisps of cream and lilac and pink filled the window. Following Henri towards an inexpensive café, Joseph said, "Daphne makes her handkerchiefs out of flour sacks." But Henri did not hear him because a bus was passing.

The café was rich with scents of frying shrimp and liver and onions and bacon and eggs. Its tables had gay red-checked cloths.

At the table, Joseph said, "I would only care for coffee." He rose. "Would you excuse me a minute, Henri?"

Threading his way hugely through the crowd, he returned to the scene of the handkerchief sale and looked long in the window. Passers-by smiled at the sight of a grave and enormous young man counting his money. Entering the shop he confronted the gum-chewing salesgirl.

"Mam'selle," he said, bowing. "Have you perhaps a handkerchief with lace on it for not more than forty-five cents?"

"Gee!" the girl said studying his black hair, tanned skin and general immensity. "Where have you been all my young life?"

"Pardon?" Joseph said, then smiled, comprehending. "I did not understand! My brother and I are of Home Island in the Caribbean, Mam'selle. It is a small island but very beautiful . . ."

"That wasn't exactly what I meant. But thanks for the geography! What was it you wanted?"

"A handkerchief, Mam'selle, with lace on it, but not more than forty-five cents, please."

The girl brought out a collection of cheaply sewn handkerchiefs with minute appliqués of coarse lace. Joseph touched them dubiously. "They are not right—the lace should be part of them." He glanced towards a show case on the wall. "Something more as those."

"Those are ten-dollar handkerchiefs!"

"Oh! That would be too much—it wouldn't matter if there was not much lace, but it should be good lace and part of the handkerchief. These do not look like her . . ."

"What's she like?"

"She is dark and very beautiful and always, every minute of the day, she is doing something for other people. When there is very little to cook, she thinks of something that will be good and when other people do foolish things, she knows why they have done them and she is not angry. When the little ones have birthdays and there are no presents, she makes presents and, at Christmas, wreaths and berry ropes, so that always it seems as if the house was rich when it is not. She does not have time to worry about herself, which is well, for she has little for herself. She is one of those women who make all things better merely by being there, like good material that stands all wear. I could not take her a common handkerchief!" He thought, creasing his forehead. "You have nothing that is really good but has been shop-soiled? I could wash and iron it. Even perhaps something with a little burn that I could mend . . ."

"You wash and iron it! Did you patch your clothes?"

Joseph glanced at his stitched shirt sleeve. "I was not taking trouble with those stitches, Mam'selle. I can make very fine stitches and almost all Frenchmen can wash and iron. If there was something slightly damaged but good . . ." He firmly ignored the tittering crowd.

The salesgirl glared at the crowd. "He's got a right to say what he wants, hasn't he?" She glanced at his huge hands and the resoluteness of his stand at the counter. "I bet we do have what you want, too! Wait while I look!"

"It cannot be over forty-five cents . . ." Joseph said.

"You mentioned that," the salesgirl said, vanishing between piled shelves. In the sample room, she flicked through boxes and drew out a creamy cobweb of nylon and drawn work. Hesitating as to whether Joseph could get out lipstick marks, she gave up the idea of touching the handkerchief to her mouth and stooped to rub it on the floor. "How about this?" she asked, returning to show the handkerchief to the waiting giant. The red of pleasure swept up Joseph's face.

"That is exactly right! Thank you a million times, Mam'selle!"

Getting out the sharkskin purse, he counted out the money. "Thank you for taking the trouble to find it for me, Mam'selle!"

"You don't know the half of it!" the girl said. Joseph said, "Pardon?"

"Skip it!" the girl said. "Come in again—speaking for myself, it was worth it!"

Turning, Joseph bowed to the audience. "My thanks for your patience, Madames!"

"Was it not fortunate they had it!" Joseph said while his face shone with happiness as he drank his coffee beside Henri. "The girl was most kind and made search through the old stock."

Tampa after midnight was an evil city, and Wharf Street, one of its less desirable areas. Poorly lighted, much of it in complete darkness, it was yet astir. Furtive feet moved in every wall shadow. The brothers glimpsed a savage, silent and dusty fight between two great Negroes in an alley. Everywhere was the sense of life and the smell of whisky and rum came from the dimly lighted bars; but even the bars were almost silent. Passing on through the tumble-down of colored rooming quarters, the brothers kept to the center of the street. Then they were amongst the ruins of onetime estates and banyans crowded overhead and dropped jungle-like aerials. At the dead end of the street was a high iron fence with an elaborate gate, but the driveway was blocked with a mad growth of pandanus and banyans. The light of a match showed a narrow path disappearing between the walls of vegetation. The gate was chained and padlocked.

"This is it," Henri said. "It is not welcoming, nor is it the right time to call casually upon a lady, but we have come so far . . ."

"M'sieur Ashby is also hungry for news of Madame."

They knocked on the iron number plate of the gate then called politely. Birds woke in the matted treetops and rats fled through the pandanus roots, one excited rat running over Henri's foot. "Let us go over the fence!" Henri said. "We cannot waste tomorrow!"

Piled leaves crushed under their feet as they dropped on the inner side of the fence and brushed along the path. Where starlight showed the foundation of a burned house, they stopped and called again. Finding the continuation of the path was rendered difficult by forests of ornamental cane; but presently they were feeling their way under huger banyans and between entanglements of thorny shrubs. The last rampart of shrubs gave way to short, dry grass under banyans—and a

grassy cliff fronted on the river.

"Some tragedy must have befallen," Joseph said, glancing back toward the hidden ruins of the house. A harsh, female voice said, "Get out with your hands up!" The barrel of a shotgun gleamed in the starlight, the roar of the gun split the night and a charge of shot passed over their heads. The brothers stood with their hands up.

"Madame, we are trespassing, but honestly . . ." Henri said.

"Start walkin'!"

"We have a message from a friend!" Henri explained. The gun barrel swung menacingly to point at his legs.

"What friend? You name him and I know him or I'll pepper your legs! Could blow 'em off at this distance!"

"From your husband, M'sieur Combs—though he uses another name!" Joseph said hastily, fearing for Henri's legs. The shotgun wobbled, a flashlight shone in their faces and the harsh voice asked fiercely, "Where's he at? What's he like? And who are you guys?"

"He is in the Caribbean. He is a small man with a great chest. We are the brothers Christophe of Home Island, Madame," Henri said.

Above the flashlight's glow, a strange, lined face with deep-set eyes and strong jaw regarded them from under the brim of a man's hat. A briar pipe was clenched in the corner of the grim mouth but down the furrowed cheeks the glitter of tears was running. "Where's he at? What's he doin'? Is he took bad? I ain't known if he was dead or alive—I ain't known!" She wiped her tears with her fist. "Where to God is he? I just ain't known!"

"Madame, I have in a manner breached a confidence for I feared that you might take aim at my brother," Joseph said. "Your husband is alive and is in great concern for you, but he wished us to learn how you fared without speaking of him. It is our thought that he is in sore trouble . . ."

"He would be or it wouldn't be him!" Her eyes searched their faces. "He ain't dyin'? He ain't crippled? If he ain't, what can ail him?"

"M'sieur Combs was strong and active," Henri assured her. "We do not have his confidence save in the matter of ascertaining your welfare. We owe you our apologies for troubling you at this hour . . ."

"Troublin' me? It's like gettin' a million dollars! Does th' little fellow still eat raw conch? I'm called Ma. Everyone calls me Ma. I'm sorry if I scairt you, but I got folks trained to stay outer here. Come inside! There's coffee on the stove. Just watch th' steps." She appeared to sink into the dark ground. From somewhere below their feet her muffled voice commanded, "Come right on in!"

Parting a spread of banyan leaves, Henri and Joseph descended a faintly rocking companionway into a leaf-hidden houseboat moored against the cliff of the bank. "How nice it is!" Joseph said of the floating house, in a farther cabin of which, towheaded children could be seen sleeping in bunks made from packing cases.

"It is purty," Ma Combs said. "It's th' only shanty-boat with a estate fence! Bought th' land for taxes after a big house burned down and it's th' best place for kids! City tried to run me off after land began to get valuable—but no one runs me off what's mine! I wouldn't change this place for millionaire's row! Set down!" Her hands almost upset the coffee-pot as she moved it over the flame of the kerosene stove. "Where's he at? I don't want to act like this, but I ain't known if he was dead or alive! Where is th' poor little fellow?" She came to the table to set tin cups before them and relight her pipe. "What I can't figure is how he's in any more trouble than he was! He . . . got in trouble a long ways back. But he'd let me know where he was at—up an' down th' islands, then workin' for Webber—an' send every penny he could for me an' th' kids. Then he stops, just like that!" She snapped her gnarled thumb and finger. "He stopped as if th' earth had swallowed him! . . . He wouldn't do nothin' mean or cruel! He's a good man! He wouldn't kill—he was too tenderhearted to kill a rat! . . . What's happened to him? . . . It ain't that he don't care! He loves us, th' poor little guy!"

"Perhaps he does not want to involve you in the trouble, Madame," Joseph said gently.

"Trouble's all he's ever involved me in! We've lived on trouble, an' I gone on likin' it." Her smile made her face strangely beautiful.

"Perhaps if you talked to M'sieur Webber, the owner of the *Webber*," Henri suggested. "Though without your husband's permission it might be best not to mention that we have seen him . . ."

"Talk to Webber? I talked to him till I'm black in th' face! He just says everythin' was fine as silk! He just slaps my back an' says there's nothin' he wouldn't do for my man an' me. An' it can be unfair to say it like that." She grimaced, drawing on her pipe. "Seems I did Webber wrong in some of it. I figured he'd throwed away his ship for insurance. I got old Mr. Atterbury, the marine lawyer, who's my friend, to learn how the insurance was on th' *Webber*. She weren't overinsured. Webber'd give a bit too much for her, for he was green with ships, but she was a good ship an' only insured for th' mortgage. He lost money like he howls." Assisted by Henri and Joseph, she served the coffee, announcing to the alarm of the brothers, "It's good an' strong. It's been boilin' most all day." She came back to the table to lay gaunt hands upon it. "I ain't askin' you to break your given word, but can you just tell me where my poor guy's at?"

"Not without his permission," Joseph said. "I already breached his trust."

"Then tell him th' kids an' me are fine! Tell him they're so purty you'd think they couldn't be our kids. Tell him ever' one of them helps all they can—we've never took relief! Tell him I don't care what he's gone an' done. An' I mean whatever! Tell him I'm for him!"

"We will tell him, Madame."

"You will come back? You will tell me how he's doin'? I'll show you th' customers' bell in th' bushes by th' gate. I sell 'shine to keep th' kids. I make th' best danged 'shine you ever tasted! Let me give you boys some!"

"We do not drink, Madame, but thank you," Henri said, rising. "The good coffee was what we wanted. And we will see him and come back. And you must remember that he loves you very much." He smiled down at her. "We can see why. A man is very foolish if he does not love a great love."

As their footsteps echoed in the darkness of the predawn streets, Joseph said, "What a brave, good woman, Madame Combs with her large pipe and her little brood! One wishes that one could aid her with her husband."

"One would also wish that one knew the reason for the strange thing upon which Madame has set her hand. Monsieur Ashby who is also Monsieur Combs and also, I think, a good man, has been an exile from his country for a long while. But he was not of the retired. He had reasons for being careful with the law, but they were not so serious that he hid. He was openly with the *Webber* as her engineer. The *Webber* was lost; he was shipwrecked and reached Home Island. He embarked with the *Christophe* and landed in the Isle of Palms. Since then he has been of the retired—he is afraid. He fears the *Webber*. He hates the Hereras. It is my thought that he is afraid of M'sieur Webber. Why? We do not know. But between his service with the *Webber* and his retirement something must have befallen to make him afraid as he was not afraid before! Men do not go to the creeks and the swamps without tragic reason. Nor without reason does a fond husband cease to communicate with his wife or a father to learn of his little ones!"

"He left the *Christophe* openly at the Isle of Palms. Also fear may be of many troubles that become too many rather than one great trouble. Also do you not forget that in heart he is torn two ways—a thing that is the tragedy of many exiles?"

"It is my guess that Madame's reaction to the sad little ones we saw upon the dock would be as that of the great ladies of the earlier Latin Americas, who made it their first morning care to be sure that the illegitimate babes of their husbands had received their proper quota of warm milk and were thriving as they should be!"

Joseph's voice from the darkness held a smile. "Perhaps while the capacity of great women for love does not change, weak, modern man has less of self-confidence in presenting such little ones to a wife than had the hidalgos of old?"

To their relief, the *Sea Lily* still rode serenely in the mists off the sandspit. In the morning, they peddled their bananas, receiving many compliments both on the unusually good quality of the fruit and the good manners of its vendors. By midafternoon they had been appalled by the prices of new wheelchairs and had inserted a newspaper advertisement, "Wanted by the brothers *Christophe* a wheeled-chair for their Aunt Caroline," the results of which they could learn on the next trip, had bought the materials needed for a shallow diving outfit and had made surprisingly profitable arrangements for the sale of such sea fans and shells as they might collect. "Also the postal authorities, who were very kind, believe that the little ports in Yucatan and Nicaragua that the *Christophe* served on her southern run are still in need of mail service," Joseph reported happily. "Henri, it seems that we should at least be able to carry the interest payments on the mortgage and feed the mouths and begin the repayment of M'sieur Latour—and it seemed so impossible such little while ago!"

"The business venture does go nicely, dear Joseph," Henri agreed. "Also we have seen some of those whom we must see in seeking the *Christophe*. This morning I talked with M'sieur Atterbury, Madame Combs' marine lawyer. He is a man of highest standing and a kind man and he is very positive that I owe M'sieur Webber an apology, for while it seemingly could not have affected the *Christophe* had there been question in the loss of the *Webber*, I had questioned and it is well to know. Now on our way south, we can seek the Hereras. To see M'sieur Webber we will have to wait. But when next we come here, we will try to go to Miami and see the men of weather and the Navy who were upon the Purple Reefs."

"You cannot have doubts of the Weather Bureau or the United States Navy? Or think that they would not have reported anything amiss?"

"I have no doubts. But they were upon the Reefs and may have seen something the meaning of which they did not know, as they would not know the meaning of the unclaimed sponges."

The bay was wild white under a slashing, purple shower as the *Sea Lily* flew through the north entrance with the savage tide and turned for the Channel of Yucatan. Wild gray wings of rain swept the Gulf and as the Tampa light vanished behind the downpour, the *Sea Lily* was hailed by an incoming launch. Apparently the men on it had combined fishing with whisky, for they roared with song and the helmsman crowded the *Sea Lily* dangerously in the heavy seas. Amongst the drinkers were the large man and the thin man from the fruit docks. Through lashing rain and flying spray as the launches almost grazed, the big man shouted, "Sure hope you boys didn't try anythin' foolish with them bananas or you better hope we don't get to hear of it!" He threw up a whisky bottle and caught it. "Yes, you sure better hope!"

The launches were past each other in the rain, but the laughter of the men came down the wind. "I had not thought of carrying bananas regularly," Joseph said flushing. "But the attitude of those men tempts one!"

"Joseph! Where is my peacemaker?" Henri asked.

Joseph blushed more deeply. "They are so odious! One does not like them to think they have had their way," Joseph said, taking the *Sea Lily* over a crest.

"Meantime, cross your fingers that we find the Hereras without having to go to the Low Cays!"

"You still think that something strange that affected our brother and the *Christophe* happened upon the Purple Reefs?"

"I am still not satisfied that our brother spent two days looking for men from the *Webber* who could have been ashore!"

Following the course that Malcolm Christophe had followed on his southward journeys, they learned nothing in the little ports of Southern Yucatan, British Honduras, Guatemala and Honduras save that the motorship was much missed and that Malcolm Christophe had had no enemies. And at last, reaching the entrance to the larger port on the muddy River of the Angels where the *Christophe* had been in the habit of making her final contact with Central America before swinging eastward for Home Island, they entered the faintly crackling furnace of the iron building that served as port office some three miles below the town. Old Mr. Houston, the frail and birdlike port officer, greeted them warmly and listened attentively. At the end of their story, he said, "I liked to think of myself as Malcolm Christophe's close friend, and I too find it a strange thing that so many days after the storm he should have delayed for two days to look for men who could have been ashore. Malcolm valued his schedule. On his southern run, he was always on time to the dot. I wish everyone was! Were I trying to solve the mystery of the *Christophe*, I would stick like a limpet to what happened on those two days." He smiled. "I wish I was of more help!"

"Perhaps we will understand the matter better when we have talked with M'sieur Webber and the Hereras," Henri said.

Mr. Houston grimaced disgustedly. "You can ask one of the Hereras as soon as he returns my mule. Their ship, the *John P. Riggs*, is upriver now." He indicated a superb powerboat bumping softly beside the *Sea Lily* as the muddy current ambled through the soaking heat. "The launch at the dock there is hers. Martin Herera came ashore here to go inland over some timber deal and borrowed my mule, and since I am an official and he treats my possessions with some faint semblance of respect, I assume he will be back. If you want to question him, question him here! He is wise enough to be superficially polite in my presence." He cocked his head to listen. "Yes! That is my old mule coming now."

The Hereras, who had held undisputed possession of the Low Cays for three hundred years, had perhaps the worst reputation in Caribbee, and both their reckless courage and their cruelty were believed to spring from the fact that they were part Carib Indian. Physically, they ran to hawklike and magnificent men, and fat, frowsy and almost half-witted women. And Martin Herera, thirty-five-year-old, youngest son of hundred-year-old Geraldino Herera, appearing now to stand in the doorway with one hand high on the doorframe, one hand on his hip, might have been an artist's presentation

of a buccaneer. The fact that he was poorly shaved merely gave him a becoming touch of darkness through the copper of his skin; his cheeks and lips had high color through their sun tan and about his rather long, blue-black hair he wore a purple silk handkerchief. And while his shirt and trousers were usual enough faded blue dungarees, the shirt was a little fuller and the trousers a little tighter than those of other men, the total impression being that of elaborate fancy dress. "My thanks for the mule, Señor," he said, smiling. "Which animal I did not override nor strike with so much as a little leaf nor leave standing in the sun nor allow to eat poison-weed nor address unkindly . . ."

"I am glad to hear it," Mr. Houston said. "These, as you know, are Henri and Joseph Christophe. They would ask you some questions."

Martin Herera regarded them a shade too long for courtesy though his expression was smilingly frank. "At your service, Señores!"

"We are puzzled that so long after her wreck our brother sought for two days for men from the wrecked *Webber* who could have been ashore unless there was something in the leaving of the *Webber* that would make him think them drifting," Henri said. "Since you were serving as master of the *Webber* and were close to M'sieur Webber, the owner, we wished your thought."

Martin Herera smiled while the refracted sunlight caught the red-brown glints in his deep-set eyes. "The explanation could be that Señor Webber was an humane man who wished always to do more for others than was needed." He came forward to set his hands on the desk, his manner appropriately grave yet indefinably insulting, as if behind his polite face he derided both those of whom he spoke and his present listeners. But it was said in Caribbee that an Herera could not ask the time of day without making a man feel that he impugned his mother's honor. "Señor Webber would leave nothing undone for poor shipwrecked seamen! He doubtless wished Captain Malcolm to search, leaving no wave unturned."

"What little I have heard of Thomas Webber suggested a passion for the ladies rather than the humanities!" Mr. Houston said dryly.

"Moral men do not understand the good hearts of those who appreciate the ladies," Martin Herera said. "Many people do not know the good hearts of us Hereras!" He stood lightly erect. "As for the leaving of the *Webber*, she developed engine trouble and drove on the Reefs before the full storm struck, shattering her bows on the coral, as you can see if the military men will let you close enough. It was my belief and Señor Webber's that she must break up. I ordered the crew to abandon ship. Señor Webber's concern for the men was great—you misjudge him if you think otherwise. The six men who were lost became panicked and bolted ere we could place an officer in their boat." He shrugged. "They were, as you know, French. Señor Webber and the small Ashby left in the smaller powerboat. My brothers and I left last. As you also know, Señores Webber and Ashby reached Home Island, using the boat's lugsail after their fuel ran out. My brothers and I reached the Republic. The other poor souls must have tried for Yucatan, thus becoming involved in the dangerous quadrant." He shrugged faintly. "As to why the good Malcolm Christophe searched for two days, I can only say that Frenchmen are notably unpredictable—begging the present company's pardon—or again suggest that the action was prompted by Señor Webber's concern. Señor Webber is noted both for his courage and his tenderness of heart. My brothers and I indeed commented together upon his generosity and his fearlessness!" His dark eyes studied them as if he slapped them in the face. "My brothers and I are at your order, Señores Christophe, Señor Houston. Good fortune with your search, Señores Christophe." He moved backward with the grace of a fencer, bowed and turned to drop to his boat, his purple handkerchief disappearing over the edge of the dock. The powerboat's engine roared and then its song diminished up the hot and dirty river.

"That is a splendid boat," Mr. Houston said. "The Hereras have prospered in the last years. Be careful of Martin Herera, Henri and Joseph! He is the handsomest and the worst of a bad lot."

"I can think of no reason why he should do us harm," Joseph said.

The old man smiled. "Nor I. But in my wildest imaginings I can think of no reason that would make a Low Cays Herera do any man good!"

The brothers were working up the three isolated miles of river between the port officer's shed and the town, while the muddy stream draped jungle rubbish and garbage in the mangroves, when the sound of engines reached them from upstream. The channel was narrow and Henri swung the launch over as round a bend half-a-mile ahead came the *John P.*

Riggs, her squat and false red-and-black funnel emitting oily exhaust fumes. She was a ship of about the same size as the *Christophe* had been and, while she was old, the Hereras could have done well with her. But though they were recklessly brilliant seamen, they were indifferent to such matters as schedules or contracts and would work like demons or go fishing as the fancy took them. Willing to attempt almost anything, they might do it a month late or, if they had been paid, might not do it at all. So that, though their names were linked with the most evil trades of the Caribbean, even for evil they were unreliable.

The *John P. Riggs* was now, as usual, cluttered with Herera women, while oddly assorted laundry flew between her houses and crated chickens and two goats showed upon her foredeck.

As Henri and Joseph first sighted the motorship, she was moving at the three knots decreed for the river. But having rounded the turn, she speeded up so that her muddy bow wave rose alarmingly. The launch was now moving parallel and close to the ruins of an abandoned banana wharf whose broken piles were crowned by roosting cormorants and whitened with bird droppings. And unless the motorship slowed down the launch was obviously likely to be smashed against the pilings. Joseph sounded the horn. The Herera men were staring abstractedly at the farther shore, but the Herera women leaned fatly over the rail, convulsed with laughter. The *John P. Riggs* continued to pick up speed, and in the confined space, her bow waves were now small breakers. She was also so close that she threatened to actually crush the launch between her side and the old wharf.

"They mean to wreck us!" Joseph said.

He seized a pole to try and hold the launch off the piles. Many of the Herera women were now rolling on the deck, kicking their legs; a common expression of their amusement, highly embarrassing to the Followers since it was always problematical what an Herera female wore beneath her dirty silk gown or Mother Hubbard. Martin Herera, at the wheel of the motorship, was still staring intently at the distant jungle.

The *John P. Riggs* surged past, almost above the launch and the trough of the bow waves revealed further menace in the form of broken, below-water pilings and teeth of old reinforcing iron. With mighty effort, Joseph succeeded in softening the impact of the visible pilings, but as the trough of the waves sucked the launch downward there was the crash of shattering planks and a rusty rod of reinforcing steel sprang upward through the floor boards. The launch struggled like a pierced moth, almost swamped in the secondary wave, then tore herself gratingly up the impaling steel, to flounder, taking water like a punctured bucket.

Tearing up the bilge cover to try to stop the worst of the leaks, Joseph said, "Get her round the end of the wharf onto the beach!"

Henri attempted to, but the gushing water had both drowned the engines and dropped the launch so that the irons still held her as she settled on some submerged structure. Only now did the male Hereras look at them and cut the ship's engines, while the *John P. Riggs* came to a stop and then began to back up slowly.

Martin Herera leaned over the bridge with the purple handkerchief brilliant about his dark head. "Why didn't you sound your horn?" he asked.

Henri was trembling through all his body. "You would perhaps have heard it had your women not been laughing so loudly as you moved to the wrong side of the fairway and speeded up to wreck us!" he said through white lips.

"Speeded up? On the wrong side of the fairway?" Martin Herera asked, raising black brows. "Everyone here will bear witness that we were doing three knots upon our own side of the river! Why did you deliberately run the launch into danger against a broken wharf? That was poor policy!" His dark and bloodshot eyes mocked. "Or is she, too, perhaps well insured?"

The Herera women rolled, shrieking and kicking fat legs upon the deck. Henri's hand reached for the shark rifle in its oiled lamb's-wool case on the cabin wall. But Joseph caught his arm. "Be still, Henri!"

"I'm afraid you've run yourselves into trouble!" Martin Herera said innocently. "Can we assist?"

"You do not wreck us and claim salvage!" Henri said as Joseph's great hands gripped his shoulder. "Keep clear, you sea scum, or you'll regret it!"

Martin Herera's eyes narrowed slightly but his mouth smiled, showing fine teeth. "Tut, men of peace!" he murmured. "Can these be those who have turned the other cheek to pirates and their seats to the tar and feathering?"

Both references were painful to the Christophes for in the last days of piracy Home Island had been the victim of several

raids of which Martin Herera's great grandfather had been suspected, and Geraldino Herera had once tarred and feathered a Follower elder who had visited the Low Cays to claim a stolen boat.

The women howled like dogs and gobbled like turkeys while their fat legs waved; their faces, down which tears of laughter ran, looked out under the rail.

"The ways of God are strange," Joseph said quietly. "It is strange that Hereras should have reached safety from the sea and poor seamen and sponge fishers have perished!"

The loose mouths of the Herera women hung open questioningly, while from the parted lips of one frowsy redhead a trickle of tobacco juice slid. To the Herera men, a kind of stillness had come, and their eyes were no longer joyous though their lips smiled.

"It strikes you as strange?" Martin Herera asked, lifting dark brows, and his glance turned casually to a pile of lashed hardwood logs that rose above the ship's rail directly over the launch, while two of his brothers set careless hands upon the lashings of the great topmost log.

With a sudden twist and a thrust against his brother's chest that sent Joseph reeling and splashing to one knee, Henri pulled out the rifle, swung behind the cabin and sighted the rifle across the cabin-top at Martin Herera's blue shirt. He said as quietly as Joseph could have, "It is not a merciful Providence with which you deal here, but I, Henri Henri Christophe! If you are thinking of killing us with an unlashed log, think again, Captain! If a log falls or if one of you shoot or knife me, the rifle can still go off! I am no good and gentle man such as my father or my brothers. I am myself and my thumb is holding down the hammer!"

"Logs? Guns? Knives?" Martin Herera asked, shrugging. "The poor fellow is demented!" His grin broke. "But so are all Followers." His hand reached for the engine-room telegraph. As the motorship's propeller turned, the Herera men were again merely the personification of malicious mischief, as if for a moment they had thought seriously of some matter but then dismissed the thought.

The Herera women gobbled, the chickens cackled and the laundry flapped as the *John P. Riggs* moved down river. "Joseph, did I hurt you?" Henri asked anxiously, continuing to hold the rifle as he stood ridiculously in the muddy wash while the ship rounded the bend.

"I cut my knee, but it is nothing," Joseph said, holding a bloody rag against his leg.

"I did not mean to hurt you," Henri said, splashing to him. "Joseph, I am sorry." His fury blazed again. "I am sorry, too, that I did not kill what I could of them!"

"That would neither save Domremy nor find the *Christophe* nor repay M'sieur Latour," Joseph said gently.

"Joseph, I am truly sorry I hurt you!" Henri knelt, still shaking with anger, but frowning in puzzlement. "Oddly, it was you and not I who got under their thick skins!"

"Perhaps even the worst of men like to feel their lives dear to God," Joseph said. "I should not have said what I did. But I do not think they would have dropped the log. It was part of their playing."

"The Hereras do not have a god," Henri said. "I do not think they would have dropped the log here where they must explain to M'sieur Houston, but for a minute they were not playing!"

Four

Henri was so excited about the Hereras that he had forgotten the deplorable situation of the launch, and Joseph had to place a hand on his arm, saying, "The harm may not be too great. But we must get her free before something else passes and the wash tears her to bits."

Reaching into the water, they surveyed the damage. Only two spikes of reinforcing steel had torn through the hull and both had missed keel, ribs and gas tanks. "We are lucky!" Joseph said gratefully. "We will soon have it fixed."

Henri smiled at him. "It must be pleasant to have your disposition, Joseph!" They were still struggling with the problem of how to raise the washing launch from the spikes when a whistle sounded from upstream and a neat and wide-beamed banana ship rounded the bend. Henri and Joseph signaled wildly that she slow down, sweating until they saw the froth of her propeller backing water so that as she finally drew alongside, she was hardly moving.

The young Latin captain leaned over the bridge to ask, "You are pinned in the old iron? How did it happen?"

"The Hereras crowded us, going fast," Henri said bitterly.

The captain's young face darkened. "The scum of the sea ride higher than ever these last years! Let me try to lift you on the davits and cargo hoists."

The brothers glanced at each other, fearful of the bill. But the launch must be freed. "If you would—and let us tack on a patch to reach shallow water," Joseph said gratefully. But when the launch at last lifted free, the captain said, "The damage is not too big. It will be easier to fix it while I hold you." Ample seasoned mahogany was available from the old wharf, and at the end of two hours of frantic work conducted from one of the ship's lifeboats and the interior of the launch, the new sections of plank were in place and the *Sea Lily* afloat again. Henri asked, "What do we owe you, Captain?" He was inwardly quailing over the prospective charge. The Captain's gold teeth flashed in a smile. "Nothing, my friends! Men of the Followers have done all men of the Caribbean many favors and I respect men who follow their belief—even if I do not share it. Also I would not add to the Hereras' mischief by charging you. And as I pass the port office, I will contribute what I can to the complaint you will make later. Not that anything will come of it, since the Hereras will swear the fault yours and the Hereras in court are impressive. Is there anything more?"

"You might tell those whom you meet that the brothers Christophe are seeking news of their brother and of the motorship *Christophe*."

Profound pity was in the captain's dark eyes. "It is a vain search, Señores, but my good wishes!" With a great splashing, the ship was off.

"People are amazingly good," Joseph said, his face flushing with happiness.

"Dear Joseph!" Henri said fondly. "Now let us begin cleaning out mud and drying out blankets and throwing out stores and trying to start the engines."

With old Mr. Houston's infuriated assurances that he would do what he could about the Hereras, and with the river and Central America finally behind them, and only the long blue of the open sea that separated them from Home Island ahead, they began the preparation of their diving gear for use on the Purple Reefs. "Since all have been kind and allowed us to set a long schedule, we will be able to spend at least a week on the Reefs on each northward run," Joseph said. "We will mark off the worked sections of the reef and try also to remember the coral formations so that we will know where we were should our markers be swept by storm. It will be very interesting to work a great reef bit by bit."

"We must not begin to suspect each other over the division of our gold and jewels as do those men in books," Henri said, grinning. "But the good doctor at the museum tells me that the Purple Reefs are a graveyard of old ships and that if we find no more than old cannon, pieced-copper ware and hand-forged anchors, there is good market for all to the right buyers. He says that should we find old coins now and then—and that there must be many hiding there—we must not sell them for their silver or gold, but must let him tell us what to do. He also says that the legend of the Three Galleons themselves is at least as well substantiated as most of the old treasure tales and that so far as is known their gold has never been found. It will, as you say, be interesting to work off square yard by square yard saying, 'From here to here no ship lies.'"

They were still working on the gear as the *Sea Lily* cut through rose and lilac evening. Tightening a clamp on the air hose, Joseph said, "Will you do something for me?" His face was determined-looking and redder than might be

explained by the flush of sunset.

"What was it?" Henri asked, splicing a lead-line.

"Perhaps you would give Daphne the handkerchief—as if it came from you?"

"It was not I who did without my supper to obtain it. Why should I give it?" Henri asked.

Joseph grew redder still and gave signs of overtightening the clamp. "I do not know . . . I would not want to embarrass her . . . I do not know why, but I felt that it might from me." He set down the clamped hose and his face lit with pleasure. "It washed and ironed very nicely!" He went into the cabin and returned with a folded tissue package. "See? One would not know that it had ever been shop-soiled. I was afraid that it might have been ruined when the Hereras sank us, but luckily I had it in the top locker and the mud did not reach it." He passed the opened package to Henri and asked anxiously, "You do think it will please her?"

"It is a truly beautiful gift and would please any woman. But you should give it to her yourself."

Joseph frowned slightly. "I simply feel that it might embarrass her," he said, looking ahead into the warm wind.

Henri finished his splicing. "I, too, feel that it might. But there are embarrassments that are very sweet to women. However, I will do as you wish."

"Thank you," Joseph said, relieved and making himself very busy.

They ate supper in the cloud-veiled light of the enormous moon, and, as always with night, the sounds of the sea grew louder about them; frothing whisper of bow wave and churn of wake, small slap of spray, vast whisper of the moving surface of the sea. The Caribbean was having one of its rainbow moods where the long-spaced swells marched under low-running, vaporous clouds that were the color of doves until they crossed the moon, when they flushed to lunar rainbows, only to pale again as they were past the moon. And even the flung spray and the dark sea caught the color of black opals. Presently a large shark crossed the shadowy moon track, its dorsal fin canting a little as it turned lazily. And each time the shark crossed the moon path, the edge of the great fin also caught a little rainbow. "He is a big fellow," Henri said. "He makes one glad of a sound hull." The tinted sea was rising under the warm wind and the crests becoming too stiff for a lashed wheel. Joseph rose and went to steer. "It is good that in only three days and nights, we will lift Home Island! We have made almost full circle. Is it your thought that we have learned anything of that which we must learn? To me, it would almost seem that we are farther away. In every port, little and big, we have been told that our brother had no enemies and that the *Christophe* is missed. We know that none wanted even a little of the little mail routes. We know that the Hereras, the only men of evil repute who had been near a point our brother passed, were jailed ere our brother even sailed on the last voyage. We are still puzzled that our brother searched for two days for the *Webber's* men, but since M'sieur Ashby, M'sieur Webber and Martin Herera all give the same explanation and since they should have no reason to lie, it would seem that he must have searched as they say at M'sieur Webber's request. We found true strangeness only in the uncollected sponge, but it should seemingly have no connection with the *Christophe*, for if there was some danger at the Purple Reefs, she passed them and proceeded safely to the Isle of Palms . . ." "Yet something odd led to the abandonment of the sponge," Henri said, beginning the washing of the dishes. "Meantime, if we could learn that Jaques and Christian did not die in storm and could find some possible reason for their having crossed a sea to reach the Reefs—so that we could say with some certainty, 'The unclaimed sponge was Jaques' and Christian's haul. They did not claim it because they could neither gather their haul nor come home again—' we could then say, 'There was, it seems, something upon the Reefs that was not merely strange but was very dangerous!' Second, perhaps there are Tobias' giant's steps—to your knowledge, have professional divers ever worked from Home Island or where Tobias might be?"

"Probably not, but what has that to do with giants, brother?"

"To a man who had never seen the track of a suit-diver, would not the track of a dressed diver's boots seem the track of a giant?"

Joseph looked startled. "They could . . ."

"I think they would. I think Tobias saw the track of a diver in heavy suit on the sands. Suit divers are expensive. If there was a professional diver there, someone was looking for something of value or doing something that was of importance to someone."

"It would be a long search or task that took two years!" Joseph said.

"Suppose that he had begun it ere the spongers interrupted him, and ere he, in turn, interrupted the spongers? On the heels of that came the search for the *Christophe*, during which the Reefs were at least a stopping place for the searchers. During that time, he was there once, for Tobias saw his steps. Suppose that he stopped his work for the search to end. Before it ended, came the weathermen and the military men who let none go to the Reefs. There is a long interruption! But hardly had the military men gone, when he was back and Tobias saw his steps again." His mouth smiled at his brother, but his eyes between the dark, Christophe lashes were intent. "Now go to the Hereras! Martin Herera was normal in that he was merely insolent and dangerously mischievous until you spoke to him. Do you remember what it was you said? As I remember it, you said that it was strange that the Hereras had been spared when the seamen had perished. M'sieur the port officer at the Isle of Palms said the same thing—and it is likely that both he and others had said it to the Hereras. But you also said what M'sieur the port officer and others would not have said—that it was odd that the seamen *and the spongers* had perished. When you said it, the Hereras were not merely mischievous for a moment. For a moment, they thought of killing us—the Hereras are used to lack of compliment, Joseph. Could it be that what you said of the spongers was what affected them?"

"You think the Hereras were connected with the diver that was Tobias' giant?"

"To my puzzlement, I think they were not. Martin Herera did not know the military men were gone from the Reefs."

"It is very difficult, Henri!" Joseph said. "Henri, what could a diver have been looking for upon the Reefs? Treasure hunting is legitimate business and few expeditions able to finance a suit-diver are so foolish as to operate without government permission and government protection."

"I have racked my brain as to what he was looking for or what he was doing. While we are planning to look for treasure in a modest way, I do not think he was looking for treasure."

Sitting on the deck, he leaned forward with his arms about his knees, and his face was tense with concentration. "Out of the tangle of the mysteries, it would seem that there is one thing above all other things we should hold in our thoughts. Under the conditions that prevailed at the time of the *Christophe's* last voyage, a ship could not sink without the showing of oil slick; yet no slick was found. We do not believe the old captains' dreams of pirate capture. We know that the *Christophe* was sunk. If we should answer the question, 'How could a ship be sunk without showing oil slick under circumstances where slick must have shown?' we would know what happened to the ship!"

"She could not have sunk without betraying slick," Joseph said patiently.

"She did! It is our business to know how!"

"It is an impossibility, brother . . ."

"Yet it happened! Thus it must only seem impossible. Remember that you yourself said if we were to have hope of learning what befell we must keep in mind that there must be simple explanation, that it but seemed so strange because we did not know! For the oil slick, there may be only one way in which it might be done, but there must be some one way!"

"Your thought?"

"I have no thought under the wide sky," Henri said ruefully. "But when we solve how it might be done, we should know also those who did it!"

On the coast of Nicaragua, Black Tobias had found the little lake empty of life save for the roosting cormorants, but a small sponge dock and thatch hut showed that at times someone lived here. The little harbor was only one of countless unnamed inlets, yet it was admirably sheltered. It was such a place as men sponging on the coast might have used to ride out a storm. He would, Tobias decided, return to it. And, putting to sea again, he had noted the variations of the mangrove forests and the exact entrance to the estuary that was colored like a jungle cat.

North to the border of Honduras—for greater certainty, for a hundred miles up the Honduran coast—then south again, making sure that he had missed nothing through carelessness, he learned only of a half thousand estuaries, inlets and bays where Jaques and Christian had not sheltered. His lips were weary with framing his questions, his ears sad with negative answers when he passed again under the arched mangroves into the little lake. This time yellow sponges were

drying on the racks, a good Yucatan sailboat was moored at the dock and an old man came from the thatch hut at Tobias' hail.

Tobias stood toweringly in the catboat and explained his mission in slow Spanish, "I am Tobias of Home Island. I am seeking news of Jaques and Christian of that island, known to have been sponge-hooking off this coast just prior to the hurricane that preceded the motorship *Christophe's* last sailing . . ."

The old man's blotched pink face twisted in a dozen smiles and he answered in a torrent of French. As a native of Martinique he cherished such men as could speak French as came to this coast. While that great idiot, the Great Marquis, had attempted to make Home Islanders speak English, all Home Islanders used much of the mother tongue. Thus Jaques and Christian of the Followers had been welcomed by him, often working out of his little lake and drying their sponge-hauls on his dock.

"M'sieur, is it your opinion that Jaques and Christian were lost in the hurricane?" Tobias asked, and his heart beat hard.

"How should they be lost in it? They were here until it passed! We got no more than hard rain and gales anyway." He became peevish. "Sheltered their boat here, used my hut. Supposed to be here for a three-months' hooking—then sky was hardly clearing, and off they went! Sea still rough and the hurricane surf still running. Sponges weren't properly dried, but gathered up their sponges and off they went!"

Tobias trembled with excitement so that the great calves and thighs of his legs shook. "M'sieur, do you know why they went? Had they enemies? Did any follow them?"

"How would I know? All I know is they were supposed to be here for a three-months' stay—then they up and off like a donkey that's eaten fire-bush!" He puckered rheumy eyes better to see Tobias. "You mean they're lost? They never got home? No one tells me anything except the wireless—and ran my battery out flat in the storm—have to get another battery . . ."

"My thanks, M'sieur! All the thanks I could speak!" Tobias said earnestly as he raised the sail.

"Crazy! Crazy as bitten bats!" the old man shouted. "Are all Home Islanders crazy?"

In Tobias was a great triumph, so that he was no longer tired but filled with power of limb as if he were young again and the strongest man in Caribbee. For whatever had killed Jaques and Christian, it had not been the simple thing of hurricane! Jaques and Christian had been living when the storm had passed them. Somewhere else in the wide sea, unknown danger had met them. He, Tobias, believed it the same danger that had met his son. Thus was it not as if a man trailing a black panther from its kill in the forest and having lost the trail, had found a second paw-mark far away and could say, "While I still do not know where the trail leads or if I may follow it, here is a new starting point from which to follow the large beast!"

At Domremy the family was somewhat thinner and definitely more threadbare, but it poured over the returning Henri and Joseph in a cheerful tide of love. Even Aunt Caroline said, "So you haven't drowned yourselves yet? I'm glad of it—more fool me!" The parrot tweaked in hopeful smallness at Henri's trousers until he picked it up, when it fluffed to its largest size and shouted rude remarks from the commanding height of his shoulder. The donkey galloped kicking round the garden and little Timothy Christophe ran about shouting, "'Fifteen men on the dead man's chest! Yo-ho-ho and a bottle of rum!'" At Main Town, as Joseph delivered the mail to the post office in the lower story of the tottering building known as Government House, Monsieur the Commissioner leaned over the upper balcony and said, "Glad to see you! I've been worrying as to whether I had aided and abetted suicide."

At the port authority building, Monsieur Latour rose to wring Henri's hand. "Welcome home, Henri! All goes well?"

The old man was somewhat flushed and did not look well.

"All goes finely, M'sieur," Henri said. "But we are still able only to bring a small amount on the debt—twenty dollars made from a good sale of bananas. The mail money will come at the end of three months and we hope this trip to sell sea fans and plumes and perhaps some older finds from the Reefs."

Monsieur Latour put the money back in Henri's hand. "Keep it! You must have cash to operate." He smiled. "Money owed by a Christophe is money in the bank. I am not worried."

"M'sieur, half the island is owing you money, is it not?"

The old man looked down, playing with his official pen. "Times will be tight until there is a ship to take the place of the *Christophe* and handle the little exports. I have suffered very little in comparison with those who now have no market." He raised his kindly blue eyes and was cheerful again. "But enough of all that! Tell me all that you have done!" At the end he said, "It is very strange about the sponge. But were it Jaques' and Christian's, what would have taken them there, Henri?" He smiled, flushing. "After our last conversation, I kept thinking of them and knew that I did not believe they had died in storm. Being for the first time quite honest, I knew that I did not believe they had died of the other normal risks of men in little boats. They were too experienced. Seeking reason for which they might have been far from where they were thought to be—and for reasons for which men quarrel and kill—I thought of treasure. Men have killed even for the hope of treasure, Henri! There is treasure in the Caribbean!" He blushed. "At least, when business took me to Trinidad, where Jaques' and Christian's widows are now living. I asked if their lost husbands had been treasure-bitten. The ladies deny it angrily, saying that had they been, they, the ladies, would personally have cured them. Thus my thought led nowhere."

"M'sieur," Henri said, alarmed, "forgive me, but it was not to mortgage your own properties that you went to Trinidad?" For it was to the banks in Trinidad that the out-island property owners went for their more desperate financing.

Monsieur Latour's cheeks deepened to their crimson flush. "There is nothing alarming in that, Henri. Many men have had to use temporary finance!" His hand on the pen shook slightly.

"M'sieur, for what it is worth, our debt will be off your kind shoulders by next voyage!" Henri said.

"To keep your mind upon the search, that is the important thing! . . . Henri, this may have no bearing, but when the steamship *Webber* left Trinidad for Tampa on the voyage upon which she was wrecked, she sailed from Trinidad with a skeleton crew of five Hereras and the sad little Ashby. And, of course, M'sieur Webber. The other six crewmen—the poor souls who were lost at sea after the wreck—were taken on at Little Nameless Island where, as you know, the port formalities are almost nil. Nobody knew them there. Nor do any seem clear as to how they had come there, perhaps because they were French and Little Nameless is not a French-speaking island. There is merely the record of their names and of their signing with the *Webber*."

"That is odd! But the Caribbean ships enlist odd crews whose papers are in no seamen's hall . . ."

"I see no meaning to it. Seemingly it was simply unlucky for them that they were there and that they signed." He looked up. "Henri, in trying to solve an evil thing, to me it would seem that one should perhaps keep asking, 'Who was the most evil man in any manner connected with the tragedy? Even though it may seem he could not have been connected with it, who was the most evil?'"

"Martin Herera would surely be that!"

Monsieur Latour hesitated. "The Hereras are capable of any cruelty, but in a way their cruelty is like the cruelty of a natural force that carelessly crushes that which is in its way. One does not say that a natural force is evil in the same manner as one says that men who should know better are evil—M'sieur Webber was very evil, Henri! I hate to say it when one should not speak ill, but he was evil with cruelty and self-love—and loving himself most of all because he was evil and delighted in the contemplation of himself as cruel!"

"Evil or good, his contact with the *Christophe* must seem most innocent."

"True. He could not have had reason to hurt the *Christophe*. He was on the *Christophe* only by chance. Yet, I still feel that, searching, I should say, 'Look always for the most evil man!'"

At Domremy, after the evening supper, Aunt Caroline chose to be lifted to the great armchair whose condition was so ruined that the family had been unable to sell it to the antique dealer. Henri was her favorite amongst her relatives and pointing at him, she commanded, "Sit at my feet!" With his youth settled at her aged knee, she patted his shoulder and haughtily addressed the rest of the family, "You are not needed!" Seeing some hesitance in their eyes, she banged suddenly on the arm of the chair and shrieked with the Americanism gathered from her liking for paper-covered detective stories, "Beat it! Scram! Take a powder!" Leering malignly at the emptying room, she nodded. "That did it!" Her old lips pressed together and her wrinkles worked across her forehead and cheeks. "It is my one regret that I lived for so many years without knowing of the retort, 'Oh, yeah?' 'Oh, yeah?' may someday save the world, Henri! . . . It unveils hypocrisy, leaves cant naked to logic, unseats the man on horseback! No argument of the great dialogues is as unanswerable or as assertive of the individual human judgment. Yet consider the beauty of its economy of words!" Her mood changed as she ran her aged claw through his dark hair then tweaked a lock sharply, demanding, "What have you

learned?" He told her of his thought of the oil slick. She listened, letting her head sway gently.

When she spoke her voice was without its usual ribald mockery or shrill complaint. "I know nothing of the sea. I have hated the sea all my life! But I know a great deal of men. If men did this, you must look first for money—great sums of money! Say, 'How might the sinking of the *Christophe* have given much money to men? How might the *Christophe's* presence have endangered the making of much money by men?' Then look where it leads you—no matter where it leads!" Her eyes dreamed at the dying afterglow. "Money is a good thing—I have wished often that the Christophe men cared more for money—but it is strange that most of the world puts it above all else. All the money of the world is not worth what many other things are worth. I tell you this when I am too old to lie. When I am so old that one must say of life, 'For good or evil it is lived! It is a written chapter and I can rewrite no word of it.'" She met his dark eyes and smiled at him. "I am so old that I cannot care as the young care. I did not lose my brother as you lost your father. Death is not to me what death is to you—it is a mere stepping into the next room. There is not time for the very old to care . . . But I remember! And money is not worth many things. It is not worth an hour in which men and women may say to each other, 'I would give you heaven!' And by grace of heaven may give it. It is not worth the hour when a woman knows, 'Life is in my womb! Life of my beloved.' It is not worth the hour when those who have loved long, may say, 'We have come a long journey and we do not know where it leads, but neither death nor life can take away the wonder that we have held hands while we traveled.'" She put her clawlike hands about his face and raised it while her eyes studied him. "You will know what to value! That is why I love you." She released his face. "Meanwhile, while money is not of the value of many other things, look for someone who made much money by the sinking of the ship or would have lost much money had the ship not been sunk!" Her impertinent head tipped and her wrinkles flew into a new pattern of annoyance. "I worry for that fool Daphne, Henri. A woman needs love as a rose needs the rain. She needs to know each day, 'It is important to him that I am alive today!' She should not be a statue watching over a grave."

He smiled at her. "Joseph bought her a handkerchief."

She nodded approval. "And what of you? Is there still no one with whom the ordinary things would not be ordinary? No special voice—to hear when there is no voice? No special face that you may see as Napoleon saw the face of 'Josephine, Josephine, Josephine—in the skies of Italy!'"

Henri shook his head, seeing a face whose gold-brown lashes were pushed together in laughter by the childlike fullness of the lower lids and hearing a voice that was the too loud, crowing shout of a child.

The old lady studied him keenly, the myriad wrinkles playing about her pursed mouth. "Oh, yeah?" Aunt Caroline said.

He put his hand on her withered claw. "We have started search for your wheeled-chair. And we are sorry we could not bring it this time, Aunt Caroline . . ."

"There is no hurry," the old lady said gallantly. "Now carry me to bed!" He rose and lifted her tiny old body. "No hurry at all!" the ancient tyrant cackled. "What woman would not prefer a man's arms to a wheeled-chair?"

"What more charming woman could a man have in his arms?" Henri said laughing as he carried her down the hall. His voice grew fiercely tender, "And you will not have to wait too long for your wheeled-chair, dear! That is a promise!" Setting her down, he knelt beside the bed. "Here, meantime, are three new detective books for you—all murders of the bloodiest."

She took them delightedly. "I will read them first to myself. Then on a night when the wind is in the chimneys, I will read them aloud to the women so that they will be afraid to go to bed. There is nothing more interesting than a large number of women afraid both to go to bed—and to stay where they are!"

The moon was making a pearly mist of light in the garden as Henri led Daphne outdoors, where the heads of the milk and wine lilies swam like water flowers on a lake of light. Night-blooming jasmine, gardenias, roses and lilies scented the air so that it seemed that scent could be lifted in cupped hands and poured from them. Above the mist of light and scent, Daphne's hair was a short-feathered darkness and her forehead seemed faintly shining with cool light. He picked a lily flower and held it against her forehead but the flower had more of pinkness than her skin. "They do not match," Henri said. "But I still have a present for you!" He brought out the handkerchief. She unwrapped it and exclaimed in joy as the cobwebby thing fell over her hand.

"How beautiful! It is not silk or linen. Is it the material they call nylon? I have wanted to see it. How good of you, Henri!"

"Joseph bought it, doing without his supper to do so and having the salesgirl make great search of the store to find one that was shop-soiled but of good quality. He then washed and ironed it, resembling an elephant engaged in needlework. He then asked that I give it you as if it came from me." The brightness of tears was in her eyes as he turned up her face with his hand. "He has a great love for you. It is a pity to throw away a great love, Daphne! He has also had almost nothing save service to others. He expects nothing. If I were a woman, I think that I would think, 'It would be a rather wonderful thing to go to a man who is very kind and very patient, and set my hand on his shoulder and say to him something that would light his whole world with joy—even if the fulfillment of happiness was still across the years of waiting!'"

The tears spilled gleamingly down her cheeks. "I wish I could, Henri! . . . If it were you, I might." She smiled and shook her head as she saw his startled expression. "No! It would merely be because you can laugh and take what is given and let the answers go. Joseph is very grave and cares too much. He must have a young girl with whole heart—or while he might not know that he would grieve, he would grieve for a love that matched his own. Should we marry, I think he would even trouble as to whom I would choose in Heaven should there be meeting in Heaven, as old Grandfather Le Fleur who has had three good wives worries as to which ladies he must hurt by choosing another."

"Women have been known to make men very happy all life long by a lie that is all kindness and thus no lie at all," Henri suggested.

She smiled. "Again, if it were you, I might lie. To Joseph I could not lie."

Henri sighed, then brightened. "Perhaps that in itself is a good sign for the future! Meanwhile you had best be very pleased indeed with the handkerchief—but do not let him know that I told you who gave it!"

"I am very pleased with the handkerchief! I am very selfish and am so pleased with the handkerchief that I could weep in pleasure." She folded the lovely square and tucked it into the bodice of her dress. "When the world seems lonely, there is something very sweet in a fine man thinking of one—even if one should wish that he did not!"

A little wind was shaking down the blue sea-grape fruit as they walked back to the house. Henri sighed again. But he was pleased to think of the handkerchief folded under Daphne's gray dress. He thought that the handkerchief had a very sweet resting place.

"Does anyone know where the map is?" Henri asked later that evening, referring to the family treasure chart. Several members of the family recalled having seen it behind the honey crocks on the pantry shelves, others remembered once rescuing it from the parrot. Unfortunately the time elements were vague. That something could not be found was normal rather than surprising, but Henri consulted Daphne.

The little frown of her concentration stood between her brows. "I have not seen it for a long while. Not since I have been keeping the accounts."

"Can you think, Beautiful Sister, when you might have seen it last?"

Daphne could remember only that it was supposed to be in the shrimp net in the hall with other old papers of merely sentimental value. Search proving that it was not there now, suspicion centered upon little Timothy Christophe whose known passion for treasure made him a marked man. Timothy bawled indignant denials, maintaining with some logic that if he had taken the map he would still have the map. In this, his accusers had to admit, he had a strong point in his favor; none of them could imagine Timothy being parted from a treasure map save by the use of force, if he had once got his hands on it.

"Little Cousin," Henri said, seating himself on the floor beside the beleaguered mariner, "I believe that you have not got the map. But is it possible that Captain Kidd or M'sieur La Fitte or the great Black Beard may have it? I mean that they may have taken it while you were them—or that you may have taken it before you were them—and they may then have snatched it from you in mortal combat while you were both?"

"No!" Little Timothy bawled.

"Then our apologies to all of you!" Henri said. "Blow your noses!"

"While he is at times a terrible collection of pirates, I do not think that when he was all of them any of him could have taken his map from him," Henri said presently. "We will simply have to wait until the map comes back."

While experience had shown that in the vastness of Domremy the theory of the voluntary return of lost objects usually presented the best hope, Daphne promised to continue looking for the map. "But do not trouble to look too hard, Beautiful Sister," Henri said. "For what the map is worth, I think we know it by heart from the time when we were Timothy's size, and it actually marks a place upon the Reefs where treasure most definitely is not rather than a place where treasure perhaps is."

"All proper West Indian households have a treasure map. We must find it!" Daphne said. "The story of our map has always pleased me for it was so all things that a treasure map's story should be."

The story of the map was, indeed, all things that could be asked, and it had been a pleasure to three generations of little Christophes. For it marked the spot where, once upon a time, three fishermen of the island had been sponge-hooking upon the Purple Reefs and through thirty feet of airlike water they had observed what appeared to be two strangely squared pieces of coral. In a skin-dive, one got a line on one of the blocks and they hauled it up, hammered off the limey jacket and found not the copper ballast they expected, but glittering gold. The assumption was that somewhere in the reef, a treasure ship was imbedded, that a storm, perhaps centuries after her wrecking, had broken away something of her coral shield and flung the golden bars across the shallow area of the reef.

Unfortunately the bars had been sold for their gold content only, without effort to establish their age or identity, but both their finders and all subsequent generations of Home Islanders believed that they were part of the treasure of the Three Galleons, and the men who had found them had spent the proceeds of the sale and the balance of their lives looking for the ship or ships from which the bars had come; their families finally becoming Christophe charges. So far as could be ascertained, the searchers had been so mesmerized by the precise location of the first discovery that almost all their efforts had continued to center more or less immediately about it. When, however, the last aged treasure-seeker lay dying, he had given the chart showing the location of the original find to Henri's and Joseph's grandfather. Their father, Captain Henri Christophe, had occasionally amused himself by trying to work out the probable direction of the wind that might actually have wrecked the galleons, thus, in turn establishing at least their faintly likely position upon the reef. In an ocean subject to gales, this might not have been a too difficult conundrum, for by taking the course of the ships and the probable direction of the gale, it could have been argued with fair accuracy that they should have been carried onto the reef from such and such a point of the compass. But hurricanes, for all their enormous size, were circular storms revolving as they marched. Thus, even if the storm as a whole was moving northward, a trapped ship could conceivably be grounded from any angle. Even then, had the disaster to the galleons occurred some centuries later, there might still have been a reasonable line of probability, for Caribbean hurricanes tend to certain paths at certain seasons and mariners, once knowing that hurricanes were circular, had evolved the strategy of storms in which, if threatened by hurricane, they endeavored to place themselves in the navigable quadrant; that is to say on the left hand of the storm for one looking forward along its line of advance, in which position its fury was usually at least merely its rotational velocity minus its forward movement across the sea. The Spanish captains of the galleons had, however, been unaware that hurricanes revolved. Hence, for all their seamanship, they could have been anywhere in the titanic whirlpool of the winds and have landed upon any area of the great reef. "To our father, it seemed, however, that since an unmanageable ship tends to be drawn toward the storm's center, it might have been of interest to try to establish the course of the hurricane that supposedly destroyed the galleons," Henri said, "perhaps fixing its most probable line of advance upon the reefs by the average path of storms from some island it was known to have crossed. Since we plan to talk to the men of weather in regard to their recent stay upon the Purple Reefs, I thought that we might also ask them for the old storm records, catching their interest by showing them the map. We will, however, be able to explain the situation well enough. And for ourselves we know by heart where the gold bars were found."

By working far into the night at the ancient slave-forge, Henri and Joseph finished the iron work of the diving helmet, their shadows moving hugely above them on the braided palm roof that was as golden as the bright plaited hair of fair women. At last returning to the house, they found Daphne still up and in the great kitchen, baking rounded and brown-crusted loaves of yam bread for their trip. The glow of the stove had made her face as red as the cabbage roses and her hair stuck to her forehead. She said, "One loaf has shrimp tails and chopped green onions in it and will not keep, so you may eat it now with coconut cream butter."

In blue dawn the brothers pulled out from the Queen's Steps for the long run to the Purple Reefs, finally lifting the great marine tableland in another frail hyacinth and silver morning in which the salt grass on the dunes was silver tinsel and the water of the little bay was so clear that it did not seem to be there. The white sands of the beaches were free of tracks save for the tracery of the birds and the agitated scrawling of crabs. The gasoline cache and its "needed" notice were as Henri and Joseph had left them and, as always, only the brilliant reefs seemed real and the rest of the world might not

have been. "I am going across the dune for firewood," Henri said. "Again, Daphne has smuggled coffee aboard for us, which she should not have done when she and all the family are doing without it. But a cup will be very good with our yam bread and brown gravy dripping."

With the sand squeaking under his bare feet, he climbed the steep face of the dune and looked into the rising sun and the sea-glitter that was so great that it was like a shout of joy. The morning was so triumphant that the great reef seemed not merely the safest and most joyful place in the world but a treasure chest waiting only for the opening. He could believe buried treasure in the sand beneath his feet and sunken treasure under every ripple of the limpid sea. To look at the reefs that were so like the washing coat of a gold and purple leopard, was to know infinite excitement in saying, "We will play a boy's treasure game and search the pelt spot by spot."

Yet here also was something for which the suit-diver had sought in deadly earnest. Something of great value? Something of great danger?

Looking southward where the abandoned sponge haul had bleached unnoticed in the hollow of the dunes, one must know that for the spongers danger had been here! Here the spongers had come, and perhaps on a day as bright as this some unknown thing had touched them and they had been unable to claim their sponge. Here the *Christophe* had touched and gone on. But was it here that Tobias' unknown evil had touched the *Christophe*? So that, perhaps unknowingly, she carried with her a condemnation? But what could be here of mystery? What could be here of danger?

As Henri returned with the wood and Joseph came from the bay, shaking salt water from his hair and glittering with moisture, even Joseph said, "There is a boy's adventure and a little prickle of the neck in being here! It will be a wonderful thing to say, 'In this ten square yards of the square miles there is no treasure—and no mystery!'" He smiled. "Certainly the good doctor at the museum will never have seen such sea fans and plumes. We must not hope too much, but it would not surprise me if after paying M'sieur Latour and the mortgage interest with the money from the mail contracts, we might even make enough from the sea things for the first payment on the mortgage itself!"

From the practical angle, they planned to work the shallower areas of the Reefs with water-glasses from little Timothy's dinghy, borrowed for the occasion, and where the attached or floating sargassum weed impeded their view or where the water became too deep for the glass or where they noted particularly fine coral or plumes, they would use the homemade helmet fed by the double-action handpump clamped in the dinghy—an arrangement that was reasonably safe to the sixty-foot level, and that, with risk, could occasionally be used to depths of eighty feet.

Since they proposed to seek crisscross from west to east then from north to south over the whole tableland, one starting point was as good as another and the almost complete calm that had followed the morning wind offered ideal conditions for working with the water-glasses across the thirty-foot levels to the south of the dunes. And twenty minutes after they had finished their breakfasts, their two mangrove-wood, glass-bottomed buckets touched the surface that had seemed clear as air, yet which suddenly opened new vistas through the bucket-bottoms. The dinghy idled at perfect pace to the faint pull of its little sail. Below, between the golden brown of the sargassum patches, the upper plains of the reef were vast rock and sand gardens set with gold and lavender sea fans and the richer, animal foliage of the drooping, purple sea-plumes. Between the flower beds of the fans and plumes, the sand showed as pale jade and amethyst in the dance of refracted sunlight and through the perfect clarity of the water, through sun and shadow, the fish swayed, black and yellow, pink and silver, gray and blue. The almost invisible oil slick from the *Webber* still trailed an iridescent band across the Reefs—and out over the deeps to the west—and occasionally blurred the water-glasses. Where the water deepened toward the submarine cliffs to the east, the seascape changed to formations of living coral that from the surface suggested a gently rolling, autumnal countryside, but which was actually a labyrinth of huge brain corals, fantastic coral-mushrooms, overhanging ledges and purple caves, so difficult for a diver that it might take twenty minutes of dogged climbing to traverse twenty yards.

It had been from the upper sea-gardens, three-quarters of a mile south of the dunes that the three fishermen of Home Island had once brought up the golden bars. But legend held that the sole survivor of the Three Galleons had described the ships themselves as having foundered in the wilderness of live coral on the reef's southeastern face, a location also suggested by Old Captain Christophe's hurricane researches. And there was also the possibility that in hurricanes such as that which had torn the reef and wrecked the *Webber*, one or more of the old ships might have been dislodged from its coral bed and thrown upon the plain. In seeking the galleons, both in living coral and upon the plain, what Henri and Joseph would look for was not a ship, but any unusual variation of the normal contours of the reef, any dislodged coral mass that might embrace what had once been a ship or part of a ship.

After Joseph had made several dives to view odd formations or for particularly good fans and plumes—which he lashed

in bundles each marked with a small balsa wood buoy to be picked up at the end of the day—an added silkiness of the surface water and the tossing of what appeared to be golden-brown leaves and berries showed dense sargassum ahead, and Henri put on the makeshift helmet, smiled at his brother through the glass and slid below. And, as always, he felt the utter otherness of the underwater world that lay so close to yet so far from the air-world of men. For while to look down was wonder, in a manner one looked upon a world that lacked its third dimension, but in slipping below, one suddenly became part of a three dimensional fairyland whose sky was the surface of the sea.

Through some peculiarity of the currents of the great reef, the patches of floating sargassum, many acres in extent, were seemingly an eternal part of it. And their fields, that from the surface were flattened carpets, became, for the diver, entrancing arbors of berry-clustered vines trailing their foliage and fruit-like floats through green-blue light against the flashing cobalt of the false sky. The floating weeds tended also to hang above the heavier patches of growing sargassum, so that, sliding deeper, Henri looked upon a wooded landscape in which the attached sargassum forests were like small golden birch woods, slender-stemmed and full of mysterious aisles that led under the floating roofs of radiant foliage into the rich purples of the distance. About the woodland growth of the weed forest, the sea-floor lifted to mossy rock-slopes where the herds of the browsing fishes grazed in place of cattle and the flowers were rose and lilac, crimson and white anemones, while over all, the sunlight, broken by the ripples of the surface, fell like golden leaves or flakes of pale fire. Then as he entered the sargassum woods, the sunlight was shafts of gold through blue-green shadow, or farther shafts of celestial lilac through all the purples of Tyre. And even though the growing sargassum offered little resistance, his movement through the enchanted growth was necessarily slow, for as he edged his way inward, Joseph must maneuver the lines and the hose through the masses of the upper weed-field, and periodically the hose or the lines became entangled in the lithe mass. For Joseph in the dinghy, the whole contest with the weed was an exhausting struggle to man the pump while fighting endless yard-deep masses of salt and slippery stems and leaves, combined with a constant anxiety for his diver whom he could no longer "fish." But to Henri, on the dappled surface of the reef below, the maneuvering of the gear was an entrancing thing. Now he would be looking up only at a golden and amber roof of stage-setting foliage, then Joseph would push the masses apart, and blue of sapphires broke through, while, at the same moment, showers of tiny fish and semi-transparent shrimps and crabs scattered through the sunbeams. As suddenly, a myriad larger fish were there, whirling and darting to an almost dancelike rhythm through the bubbles rising from his helmet and between the weed-trails and over the forest floor. Then Joseph would let the aperture close, the water of the forest resumed its normal turquoise shadow and every fish was gone! The whole thing was pure magic as if one walked through the golden witch-woods of the fairytales of childhood, Henri thought.

He was exploring a particularly dense part of the wood, when he was startled to see the gleam of seemingly pure gold between the weed trails some twenty feet away. The impression of precious metal was so strong that for a moment he did not reason that only in the mint could gold have this perfect and virgin glitter. And he almost ran toward it—only to see that it was a great, golden grouper amongst the darker flock of its normally brown and mottled fellows. Hanging motionless in the buoyancy of the water, the radiant but evil-countenanced fish seemed almost alight, pure-coined as some Pagan image, and its final retreat through the forest had the effect of a harvest moon sailing between shadowy trees.

Henri had often seen the strange, golden giants in the Pacific, but never before in the Caribbean, nor ever one as intensely metallic. And he smiled, but accepted it as a good omen, even following it until it drifted downward into the blue darkness that closed over the diver's death trap of the reefs' western pitch.

The process of systematic search was endless, beautiful and an exercise of patience. While their steady collection of marine specimens maintained a practical element in their labor, they encountered one of the difficulties of the treasure-seeker in that through the mere fact that they watched for the galleons, they had come to believe in the galleons and tended to hurry toward what imagination pictured as lying over the next ledge, in the next sargassum wood, just beyond the immediate range of visibility. There was also the irrepressible hope that the sea-floor might tell them something of what had befallen on the sea's face by reason of which the sponges were not claimed, even that they might learn what the suit diver had sought or done or feared. Because the imagined find seemed so visible, the hoped solution of mystery so certain, constant care must be used to avoid counting an area as searched—and hurrying on—before the first area was truly known. Hunches beset them. They felt the pull of signs and omens such as children follow: the unexpected blowing of a blade of salt-grass, the direction taken by Henri's golden fish. So that reason must warn imagination, "Yard-by-yard! There may be nothing here but the little finds of yard-by-yard! You must not hurry for what may not exist!"

The dancing, undersea landscape became more minutely familiar to them than the upper world of air and sun and cloud in which serenely burning days came up and died. And they worked from the first gleam of steel-blue light to the last flame of sunset that dyed the sea with wine, so that toward the west, the descending contours of the reef seemed wrinkled crimson velvet sinking in port wine. And the sea told them old and strange stories; as through an old anchor deep-pronged in the coral and fastened to a two-fathom chain ending in a twisted and broken link, speaking of a desperately dragging ship hurled who knew whither by the winds; as in sand-buried, coral-bracted skeletons of ships too old to be of record, but still too recent to be treasure ships of Spain; as in bars of iron or copper ballast strewn by unknown disaster. They found blue caverns cleaving the surface of the reef and sinking between weedy and faintly sucking lips to depths beyond the range of light and even the suit diver's resistance to pressure.

At evening of the sixth day, they were hauling in their buoyed bunches of fans and plumes, when a sail appeared to southward as a red-gold spark in the great flame of sunset. The brothers stood dripping on the sand and studied it through hands cupped like binoculars. "It is Tobias' catboat!" Joseph said joyfully.

The approach of the sail was maddeningly slow in the almost unmoving air and Henri said, "Let us start the launch and tow him in!"

The *Sea Lily* and the catboat met as the sea took on its port wine clearness, and as the boats rocked a few feet apart, Tobias' close-wooled head and great shoulders were edged with fire from the fiery sky. "I could not learn surely where they went," Tobias said in his deep voice. "But Jaques and Christian did not die in hurricane." He told them carefully of the matter, ending, "I sought to prove where they went. But that waiting only for the gales to drop, they had left in haste with their sponge haul, was all that the old Frenchman could tell me. And missing you in Home Island, I followed to tell it." He stopped, seeking words that would not seem a boast that he had been right, and fearful also that through hope of proving Tobias unstranged, he might still be wrong. "I have also a message from Madame Daphne. It seems that the small Timothy has mentioned as further proof of his own innocence that he does not believe Jaques and Christian ever returned the treasure chart after Cap' Malcolm had lent it to them. Madame Daphne says that you must not be angry with Master Timothy for none asked him where he thought the map was, but merely suspected him of having it." Excitement touched the organ notes of his voice. "M'sieur Henri and M'sieur Joseph, the chart was of these reefs! Those who have maps seek often after storm. Were it not very likely that Jaques and Christian awaited the passage of hurricane to use the chart? Learning that the hurricane from which they had been sheltering had crossed the Purple Reefs, is it not very certain they came hither in hope that the sea's violence had flung up trace?"

Joseph had turned sharply from his position at the wheel and Henri was still with the tow rope in his hands while the dancing gold light of excitement was in his eyes. "Thank you, Tobias!" Henri said. "We must not hope too much, but out of the puzzles, you have brought us our first answer! So that of one fragment of the large mystery we can say, 'It was thus! Jaques and Christian were treasure-bitten and had a map which their stern and practical wives would sternly have forbidden their using. Thus they let it be thought that they planned merely to work sponge off Gracias a Dios, while secretly planning to come here after the first storm. Neither was there anything odd in our brother's having lent them the chart if they desired it. They were men of the Followers and if they wished to seek, he would know that they would be honest as he with aught they might find. Almost we can say with certainty, 'It was Jaques and Christian who had collected the sponges on the dunes yonder and did not claim them!'"

"To me, it would seem that we might say it with certainty," Joseph said thoughtfully. "Had the sponge fishers who came here carried sponge with them, as Tobias tells us Jaques and Christian carried sponge, it solves one other small thing that puzzled. For since the abandoned sponge on the dunes must have been gathered after the hurricane, it seemed odd that here, where sponging is poor and where it would be poorer after storm, so much sponge could have been gathered ere the military men came and barred the working of the reefs. But if the sponge-haul was Jaques' and Christian's it would have been drying ere even our brother touched here."

"And in that our brother doubtless knew of Jaques' and Christian's plan to seek here after the first storm, we would also have reason for his seeking sign that they were here," Henri said. "And should he have found signs that they had been here and yet have failed to find them, he would have questioned . . ." His voice trailed off. The two young white men and the great black man wordlessly considered the problem of the two unaccounted days of the *Christophe's* last voyage.

"At the least, we owe Tobias great thanks for his great help," Joseph said gravely after the silence. "He must also be

hungry from the long voyage."

On the beach as Joseph prepared the supper fire, Henri said, "We have also had a thought in regard to your giant, Tobias." He knelt in the level red light and drew in the wet sand, pressing in the pattern of a footprint with his fingers. "Is that the large step?"

Tobias knelt upon both great knees to look long and closely in the thick red-and-purple dusk. "It is the step," Tobias said. And the hugeness of his chest swelled while his stomach muscles drew in and his gaze swept slowly about the circle of dunes and sea.

"That is the track of a suit diver," Henri said.

And Tobias stood up so that he seemed black Hercules about to wrestle the Hydra, while his lips stiffened and stood out like the lips of a bull and he breathed as if he had been running. The last purple glow lay across the bunched fans and plumes and was lilac on the sands of the dunes against the darkening sky. Tobias asked, "It is your thought that a suit diver was he by reason of whom Jaques and Christian, coming here, did not come home again? He by reason of whom the *Christophe*, touching here, went on a little way—and did not come home again? The *Christophe*, bearing my son! I have never seen a suit diver, but it cannot be that there are many suit divers in all the Caribbean!"

Joseph looked up sharply from the task of lighting the salty kindling under the fire. Henri said, "We know only that the track of a suit diver was here four months after the *Christophe* vanished—as soon, perhaps, as the slackening search for the *Christophe* gave him some slight privacy—and again just before our return. And that if the diver were the same, that which interested him two years ago, interested him still."

Five

As they baled the dried fans and plumes in the flickering light of the fire amidst the great darkness, Tobias asked, "You think treasure or the hope of treasure was in the loss of Jaques and Christian and of the *Christophe* that took my son?"

Beginning the packing of leopard-spotted, purple-lipped cowries, Henri said wryly, "Save when I myself am looking for it, I do not!" Rolling a magnificent cowrie in dried turtle grass he paused, puzzling out his own thought. "By day, even when search makes one a boy, cold reason says, 'Nothing but simple sun and sea and pretty fish could be here. Great treasure finds are fancies of the stranged!'" He gestured where all about them the sea and the reefs talked in the night and at moments the night wind, cutting over the unseen knife-edges of the dunes, whistled sadly. "At night imagination whispers, 'Yet we know that Jaques and Christian came here—and did not come home again. We know the *Christophe* touched here, and went on a little way—and did not come home again. Being West Indians, we know that the years and the generations pass and the great treasures are not found. We know how unlikely is even a hint of treasure. Yet the things that we know happened with the *Christophe* are not merely unlikely but seemingly impossible. Suppose that Jaques and Christian, coming here to seek treasure, did find treasure or strong indication of treasure? Suppose our brother learned from Jaques and Christian of what they had found or seemed about to find? Suppose that others learned —and believed? There at least would be reason for greed to wish that Jaques and Christian and those of the *Christophe* were not! Or should it be that greed of others had already harmed Jaques and Christian and that our brother learned of this; there would be reason for both greed and fear to wish our brother and those of the *Christophe* were not! Men have killed for greed! Men have killed for fear!'"

Pushing down the starched, purple lace-layers of the fans, Joseph regarded Henri doubtfully. "What others, brother?"

"We do not know. But thanks to Tobias, we do know more than we did. We know that it was here that Jaques and Christian came to meet the unknown evil. We must try to know what it was! We know that a suit-diver had secret interest here. We must try to know what interested him!" He smiled at Joseph. "I know, if my brother Joseph does not, that the Hereras were startled when Joseph spoke of the lost sponge fishers. It takes a great deal to startle the Hereras—if less to make them kill. But for a moment they were startled and considered killing."

"The Hereras were in jail in the Republic ere ever Jaques and Christian or our brother and the *Christophe* reached here, Henri."

"The Hereras are not easily startled—and they were startled," Henri said stubbornly.

"It is the suit-diver that most interests me," Joseph said thoughtfully. "It could be that some thing that Jaques and Christian found and the thing for which he seeks are linked . . ."

"Were a suit needed in regard to any find of Jaques' and Christian's, Jaques and Christian must have found indication only," Henri said. "Jaques and Christian had no suit. Thus if they found aught, they must have found trace of some valued thing rather than the thing itself—perhaps, as with the finders of the golden bars, an indication that said, 'Somewhere still lies a ship from which I came . . . '"

"And we must seek without the indication," Joseph said.

"Yet the great coral beds where it seems likeliest the galleons lie—if they lie—call for no suit," Henri said, continuing his reasoning. "Thus, why a diver feeling a suit needed for tracing aught learned by Jaques and Christian?"

Tobias spoke from where he knelt at the pile of sea urchins' skeletons. "The hurricane here was of a great violence. That which was found by Jaques and Christian could perchance have said, 'Here a ship was flung up—and carried over.'"

"That could be. Of a certainty one sighs for our suits from the Pacific whose sale paid our passage home," Henri said. "Meantime, we are learning those spots where there is nothing that could interest anyone save the good doctor at the museum. We are also piling up such good sea things for him that one regrets wasting a day of the calm weather. Joseph, should Tobias be willing, why do not you and Tobias continue the collecting and the search while I make this mail run alone? The Caribbean, the Channel, the Straits and the Gulf will all be like a duck pond. The only long jumps are from here to the Isle of Palms and from the Cape to Florida and neither will hurt me."

"One man in a launch is always danger, for little disasters for two are great disasters for one," Joseph said hesitatingly. "Yet Tobias and I could lay up many things for the good doctor . . ."

"I will not fall overboard with the engines running. Neither will I break my leg nor develop the malaria," Henri said,

grinning. "Let us do it! I can deliver Madame Combs' messages to her husband, M'sieur Ashby and attend to several matters in the Republic, then go to Jewfish Bay and check if M'sieur Webber has returned. Thence I may be able to send on the mails to Tampa while I go to Miami to do our business there. And still I could be back in Jewfish Bay when you and Tobias reached it with a load in Tobias' catboat. The *Sea Lily* could tow the catboat into Tampa—and we would be very rich! At least rich enough to be utterly certain of paying poor M'sieur Latour. Tobias' share would, of course, belong to Tobias."

Tobias, looking up from the delicate scraping of spines from the exquisite skeletons of the sea urchins, shook his head. "I am comforted to aid, for the aiding leads perhaps to knowledge of my son. But I want no share. Money is very good when love may say, 'It will get this or this for one loved.' But it becomes only very sad when the one loved is no longer there. Let the money go to M'sieur Latour and to Domremy! I have all I need, M'sieur Henri and M'sieur Joseph—and we will speak of it no more!"

The brothers looked at him and respected his decision. "But I still do not like you running the way alone, Henri," Joseph said. "A sailboat sometimes a man overboard may grasp. With a fast launch, one little slip of a foot on the deck that throws a man into the sea means he sees the launch go away and dies very terribly!"

They argued for an hour before Henri and financial urgency won.

At midnight, with the *Sea Lily* stacked with baled specimens, Henri swung out from the Reefs. He had absolute confidence in his ability to make the run, but as the faint pallor of the dunes vanished in the night behind him and he was alone with the great dark of the sea, he did sense the peril of a man alone on the sea.

He was pleasantly sleepy and rather pleased with himself when he finally put the *Sea Lily* into Ashby's hidden creek, only to find the shack shuttered and both shack and mangrove banks silent to his hail. Crossing the dock, he went into the mangroves to see if Ashby had run for cover, followed a little path through the dense walls of green, and came out on an even more secret arm of the creek.

Mangroves met completely over the water and another small wharf, but there were signs that a rather large launch was normally kept and serviced there. At one end of the dock was a weathered storage shed, and looking into its interior darkness through a crack in the planks, he caught but was unable to identify a rich gleam of copper. Ten minutes of calling having produced no result, he wrote down Ma Combs' messages. Then thinking of the little boys as they had stood holding Ashby's hands in the rain, he added, "Monsieur, Madame, your wife, loves you very greatly. While we said naught of the matter, it is my thought that she would also love the little ones—for your sake and theirs. Your friend, Henri Christophe." He slipped the note under the door of the main shack.

Consulting the old man who had originally told them of Ashby's hideout, he learned that the ancient surmised that Ashby had persuaded some native woman on one of the creeks to take temporary charge of the little boys and had gone away in his launch. Ashby had done this before. The old man would like to have owned the launch, a work-boat, but one of the finest and most seaworthy in the Caribbean.

Leaving the old man, Henri considered the fact that Ashby owned a fast and seaworthy launch, that Ashby had shown anxiety at the thought of Henri and Joseph working the Reefs—and wondered where Ashby now was. Had Ashby's fear been for Henri and Joseph, as his words had indicated? Or was it actually part of the fear that had driven him to the swamps? In what manner could a kindly and unimpressive man become involved in such horror that it cut him off from all he most loved and threatened his reason? And what horror? Was it that Ashby knew what had befallen the *Christophe* and that the knowing was a very dreadful thing?

Fearing that he simply wasted fuel, Henri turned the *Sea Lily* for the little town where the Hereras had made their landfall from the wrecked *Webber*, at last approaching the small port through the usual wilderness of mangrove swamps and hidden estuaries—some of them very deep in this area—that typified the Caribbean coast of the Republic. The paintless little streets baked in the heat and a great sleep was upon the place. But the alcalde, the small, fat mayor, woke to apoplectic wrath when asked about the Hereras' sojourn in his town. As Henri had previously been told, the town had no jail. And when the Hereras had been arrested for drunken riot they had been placed in the city hall. The effort at discipline had been notably unsuccessful. For the Hereras had locked up the constable, obtained even more liquor and taken over the building, transacting mock civic business of a most shocking nature, including the crowning of a queen from amongst the town's ladies of least repute. In his capacity as mimic mayor, Martin Herera had made an official speech to the queen in which he thanked her for her personal services to him during his campaign; having thus cruelly embarrassed the actual mayor, since the speech was still quoted by the town's coarser elements when they heckled him

as he addressed the townsfolk. Coinciding, as the Hereras' visitation had with a stalling of the storm's forward march, during which the great terror spun aimlessly, growing always in strength, the while the little town endured long days of high gales, flying spindrift and great anxiety, it had been too much. The mayor was now living only in the hope that the sea scum would one day return to some strongly policed port of the Republic, at all of which ports he had outstanding complaints against them. But their abominable ship, the *John P. Riggs*, was giving the Republic and its islands wide berth.

"M'sieur, have you record of the exact day upon which they left?" Henri asked. The mayor needed no record. It had been upon the day the skies became fully clear as the hurricane, having finally made up its mind, swept far away over the peninsula of Yucatan.

Reboarding the *Sea Lily* in the little, green-watered harbor, Henri was trembling with excitement. For the time of the Hereras' departure from the little town made it physically possible for them to have been back upon the Purple Reefs when the *Christophe* last touched there. Whatever unknown thing had befallen upon the Purple Reefs by reason of which Jaques and Christian had been unable to gather their dried sponge, by reason of which, perhaps, the *Christophe* had gone on a little way but had not come home again, the Hereras had not been behind bars when the thing befell. Yet, having allowed the physical possibility of the Hereras having returned to the wrecked *Webber*, surely their actions made it highly unlikely that they had done so? Their interest in the *Webber* had been so criminally slight that they had failed even to report the wreck. They had shown no interest in salvaging what was left of the *Webber*, and apparently held little interest in the Purple Reefs, since they had not known that the military men were gone. It was as if the possible cast of a drama was taking shape; but what possible drama? How a plot fulfilled? Upon what stage?

Hurrying his mail delivery in the Isle of Palms, he tried to turn every power of mind and senses from the why to the how of the *Christophe's* loss, passionately seeking answer to the seemingly insoluble riddle that must have solution and whose solution must solve all the rest: How might a ship be sunk under conditions where oil slick must have shown, and yet have shown no oil slick? On the previous trip both he and Joseph had been confused by the horror of retreading what must have been the *Christophe's* last miles. This time as the *Sea Lily* threaded the almost landlocked waterway that had been Malcolm Christophe's course between the Isle of Palms and the Cape, he would keep his mind fixed on the one question of the oil slick, asking of every tepid estuary, every green channel or key-bounded bay, how—by any combination of circumstances—a ship might have been destroyed there without betraying slick? If a man put from his mind every preconceived idea, so that his mind would not say, "It could not happen!" but would ask of all the changing seascape, "How was the oil hidden?" then, surely, mangroves and bays and estuaries must answer?

In most places the stagnant and leprous green bottom was actually visible, so that even without oil it must have revealed a sunken rowboat. While even from seemingly deserted keys and the stagnant green hearts of swamps, the little cooking fires climbed, telling of watching eyes and listening ears. And everywhere were sails of sponge cutters or snapper boats or the nondescript and furtive small boats of the retired; everywhere, as Tobias had said, the helmsmen watching the tall skies and old men who slept little because the past was too much with them. And as there was no mile of the run where eyes would not have noted the wild glow of a burning ship, or men been startled by the ground and water shock of explosion, even by putting aside these things and assuming the impossible in granting that a ship sank invisibly and soundlessly and where muddy waters would hide her rest, granting that from unknown cause, her crew could make no trivial effort needed to reach the always present land, assuming that no floating thing remained or that all floating things were gathered up without the long labor of such gathering being noted, there was still the betrayal of the oil that could not be gathered up and must be seen! Accepting even some version of the old captains' belief in pirate capture, the running of a seized ship up some hidden creek, perhaps, where plank and iron, machinery and men, were caused to vanish, still there remained the inevitably escaping, seaward-oozing and betraying oil slick, smooth as silk, delicate as rainbow, but shouting to men of the sea of disaster of the sea.

As every mile of the hundred and forty miles opened before him, he continued to ask himself, "How could oil slick have been unseen here?" At the end of the hundred and forty miles, as the *Sea Lily* took the deep blue of the Channel of Yucatan, he knew that there had been nowhere that oil slick would not have shouted its presence.

As the insurers had contended, it was as impossible that a ship had sunk without trace on that course as that a ship could sink unnoticed at her berth in a trafficked river and leave no trace. Yet the *Christophe* had left the Isle of Palms and had not reached the Cape. Try then the theory that for unknown reason the *Christophe* had gone seaward. What unknown call, what unknown compulsion could have taken her from her course?

With the launch breasting the dark whisper of the Straits of Florida, he was still trying to think of reasons or compulsions

that might have taken Malcolm Christophe seaward. There were none that seemed to him valid. Nor would even detour seaward and sinking over the greater depths have placed a slow little ship so far from course or in such conditions that the searching air forces and ships would not have found the ever-betraying oil; the oil that would have reached the surface wherever the ship sank and would have been found and had not been found. And for the failure in whose finding there must be simple, all solving explanation if the mind could grasp it!

He was exhausted by lack of sleep, yet filled with the strange joy that he was about to see the girl again as the *Sea Lily* threaded the mangrove lanes leading to Jewfish Bay. There was shining excitement in the winding green waterways that took him always closer to the girl, strange and new mystery in the shadowed coves where floating mangrove leaves made swaying carpets, friendly comicality in the familiar pelicans that lumbered up before the launch. He was so eager to see the girl who was a grown girl yet seemed a little girl that it was only after twice falling asleep at the wheel and waking with a jerk as his head nodded, that he put the launch into a sheltered pool amongst the mangroves and stretched out on the deck to sleep.

Waking, as the mangrove shadows stretched long across the pool, his heart beat hard against the warm planks of the deck. But the gray wharf on the muddy little river was empty as he finally swung the launch in under the bank, let the anchor go, then tied a sternline to the willows.

Suddenly, a pair of bare legs shot into view from the top of the bank. "Hello," a rough, young voice said. "How's the rescue business?" And the girl he had wished to see was laughing down at him. "I got a glimpse at you where you come in from the bay." She dropped with a soft plop to the deck to sit cross-legged, running her fingers along her crimson toenails. "Where you heading for now?"

"Good day to you, Mam'selle. We have saved no one since we helped you with the children," Henri said. "I came to learn if M'sieur Webber has returned."

She did not look at him. "No. He ain't come back." She looked up and her face was red. "I'm not at Tom's place now! I'm on my own. I'm runnin' the café. I'm in business." Chattering like a happy child, she told him repeatedly of the various features of the café. Her pride and self-importance were touching. "I'm doing good with the café!" She looked like a delighted infant. "Real good! They said I wouldn't."

"My congratulations. There is much pleasure in one's own business. Mam'selle, you still do not know when M'sieur Webber will be back? It is very important to me that I see him."

She looked down again, playing with her toes. "What you want to see Tom for?"

"As I mentioned before, in regard to our family's lost ship."

"Tom doesn't know nothing! Tom wouldn't do you any good . . ."

"He may know something without knowing that he knows it," Henri explained patiently. "At least, I must talk with him. Can you tell me when he will return?"

Her eyes met his with a strange and pleading anxiety in them. "Tom won't do you good. Tom's—bad medicine. You keep away from Tom!" She jumped up and put her hands on his shoulders. "Don't go to Tom, Henri!" Her face and voice were strangely urgent. "You want to find out something, I'll ask—when he comes back. Tom's a funny sort of man."

He looked at her, puzzled. "Why should I not talk to him?"

"I don't know. Just don't! Promise me you won't talk to him, Henri! He's just no good to you. Promise!" She was so excited that her lips shook.

"I can make no such promise," he said. "As soon as M'sieur Webber returns, I must talk with him, Mam'selle." He looked down into her eyes. "He has not returned?"

"No! No! He ain't—isn't—back. You can't tell with Tom. He goes and comes. I wouldn't fool you, Henri!" She moved backward pulling him toward the bank. "Come and see the café, Henri! Come and have supper, Henri! I'm a good cook. You can have beef hash and greens and hush puppies and chocolate cake! Come on, Henri!"

He found her eagerness and her struggle with her English very lovely.

"The menu is most inviting, Mam'selle. But I do not have the money for such luxuries and I cannot let a charming girl pay for my meal," Henri said, smiling.

Her face fell. She sulked for a minute, then grew happy again. "Well come and see my café. Come and have a cup of coffee! You can have a cup of coffee! It's good coffee!"

"If I pay for it, then many thanks!"

Along the straggling street, she pattered beside him like a confiding puppy. The men greeted her and the younger men eyed her overlong, but the women ignored her. "They don't like strangers. That's why they won't talk to me, Henri. They don't like my café and the boys liking my café either! They just aren't friendly."

"You will forgive me, but since they seem conservative and in main elderly women, could it be that they would be more friendly if you wore more clothing, Mam'selle?" Henri suggested, smiling down at her bright head.

"I wear less'n I did wear because they were so mean to me!" she told him defiantly. After a minute she asked anxiously, "Would you like me more in more clothes? Would you, Henri?" Her brown, child's hand plucked at his sleeve. "Is that what you mean?"

"For me, you could not be more charming," he said, laughing at her as she clutched his hand. "But too great lack of clothing may be misinterpreted by conventional persons."

Her face was redly flushed as she looked down. "Your brother didn't like me, did he? You won't let your brother or anyone turn you against me, will you, Henri? Things the women say are just because I'm a stranger and they're not neighborly, the old cats!—the hateful, scratching old cats!" Her anger cleared. "There's the café! It's nice, ain't it?" Her face was beautiful with pride as she looked at the rickety structure.

"It is truly fine," Henri said, touched.

"I'll make coffee, fresh! Do you like your coffee strong?"

"Monsieur Talleyrand said that it should be 'noir comme le diable, chaud comme l'enfer, pur comme un ange, doux comme l'amour'—'black as the devil, hot as hell, pure as an angel, sweet as love.'"

She puzzled with the quotation, her hands busy at the urn. Even in late afternoon the café was swelteringly hot and beads of sweat glittered on the rose-flush of her forehead. "It isn't the busy time yet, but it gets real busy when the loggers come in. I do all the work, even the dishes, Henri. It's hard work, but it's not too hard. I don't mind it." She pushed her wet hair back with her fist. "The loggers want to help with the dishes but they clown and break them—I haven't told you my name. My name is Rue. I guess my mother was sorry she had me." She worked briskly at the urn. "Here's your coffee!"

The coffee was good, though he regretted the nickel for it. But her joy and his own pleasure in watching her exuberant youth were compensation. Feeling something of the treachery of one who seeks information from a happy child, he also wished to make sure that she did not know when Thomas Webber would be back. "Mam'selle, since you are no longer at Monsieur Webber's Landing, you would know if he had returned? When he goes to New Orleans, he perhaps comes and goes in his powerboat?"

She caught the last part of the sentence and her laughter rang, pushing her lashes together. "Him go to New Orleans in a powerboat? We was fishing once an' it blew a bit so we had to be towed in and he was so scared he took to his bed for two days!"

"I had thought he was a great seaman."

The genuineness of her laughter could not be doubted. Then her face pouted as a truck stopped outside. "The loggers . . ."

"Mam'selle, it was delightful," Henri said, rising as the first group of loggers stamped in. "And my thanks for the pleasure of seeing the café."

In the street that was growing cooler now, he puzzled over the report on Thomas Webber's seamanship and considered the problem of why the girl did not want him to talk to Thomas Webber. She was so altogether openhearted, so disconcertingly frank, that he could not associate her with cruelty or deceit. Yet she did not wish him to talk with Thomas Webber. If he had not liked and trusted her, he would have said that she was afraid, and for herself. Her anxiety had been disproportionate to any simple cause such as a young girl's shame over a perhaps gross relative. He also thought her free of the little pretensions of schoolgirls. Under her play, was a suggestion of fierce strength; the courage that had made her radiantly happy in the heat and hard work of her café.

At the small general store he learned that he could send the *Sea Lily's* mail on to Tampa with the combined mailman and iceman, who would also give him a ride at dawn to the Tamiami Trail where he could catch the bus for Miami. He could

leave the *Sea Lily* with an old man by the name of Pop Watts who cared for boats like babies. It was his hope that by the time he got back from Miami, Thomas Webber might even have returned; and the girl had made him more anxious than ever to talk with Thomas Webber.

He was untying the stern rope of the *Sea Lily* preparatory to catching a fish for his supper as the girl's legs, clad this time in blue slacks, again appeared over the top of the bank. On her feet were scuffed and surprisingly small tennis shoes. Above the slacks, she wore a long-sleeved white shirt. "I made a deal with the camp cook to feed the boys. He'll use all the butter, but I don't care." She mopped her face. "Where you heading for now?"

"I am about to fish for my supper," Henri said.

She smiled her radiant, artless smile. "Take me along!"

He said, "I am alone, Mam'selle!"

She stared at him, then laughed delightedly until her face went red and tears were on her lashes. "What did you say?"

"I meant that I would not wish to embarrass you by in any way compromising you . . ."

"You won't!" she said and her face was suddenly unlaughing. "If that's all that's bothering you, let's get going!"

The launch dropped down the mangrove channels and headed out between the bird-thick islands. Where the nature of the keys changed and little white beaches appeared, Rue suddenly jumped to her feet. "Pink shells! Let me get them!" She pointed to the sand riffles where shells like pink moths lay amongst the coral fragments. Henri edged the launch in and jumped into the thigh-deep water. On the beach, he gathered all that he could find of the fairy shells, then waded back with the bright heap in his cupped hands. "These were what you wished?" As he put them into her hands, his own hands touched hers.

She laughed with pleasure. "Thanks! When I get enough I'm going to make a shell necklace. They look like pink flowers in a real thick pink necklace."

Where sand bottom showed like jade between tall brown weeds, he dropped anchor and baited the lines, handing hers to her. "Lower to the bottom and then pull up until the sinker clears." Hardly were the lines down when he caught a fine grunt and she pulled in a muttonfish. When her line needed rebaiting, he slid on a fresh shrimp tail for her, his hands deftly large about the scrap of flesh as he knelt on one knee at her side. When she had caught two more grunts and he three, he told her, "I have enough now. I would not have needed as many as this save that I am cooking some to carry tomorrow. But perhaps you can use more fish for the café?"

"I sure can!"

They fished until the light turned to lead-silver and the sea between the reflections of the sky was sullen green. As they headed homeward, he said, "Hold the wheel while I clean the fish! Cleaning them is hard for a woman's hands but easy for mine." Surprised, he saw that her eyes were full of bright tears. He smiled at her. "Watch the sand banks!"

"What would happen if we hit a old bank?"

"We would be out all night until the morning tide," Henri said, flicking the silver scales from a pink fish. Beside them the mangrove walls slid by, black-green with coming night. To westward, the water was momentarily flushed with rose and pearl, but where the ripples from the launch altered its plane, it showed green as ink, all at once suggestive of danger. Henri began to wash the fish in the warm water beside the launch. Suddenly the *Sea Lily* checked, reared heavily, almost swamping her stern, lurched sideward and stopped. Henri sprang to his feet on the tilted deck and saw that the girl had steered on the wrong side of a channel marker. She was now staring at him wide-eyed, her face so pale that, leaping to cut the engines, he said, "Do not look so frightened! I should have been watching the markers." Glancing astern, he knew a horrible moment in which he believed the *Sea Lily* might swamp completely, and then thought of mud imbedded iron and possibly stabbed gas tanks that could result in fire. He said calmly, "This is mud bottom. We should not be hurt and may be able to push off." The further tipping of the launch indicated that this was unlikely. Dusk was deepening and the falling tide pulled strong. Hurried readjustment of the baled fans raised the stern. But in a few minutes, it was plain that they were stuck for the night. Henri lit the lantern, which did not contain much fuel, then waded for mangrove roots and branches for a smudge fire. He said cheerfully, "We may as well cheat the mosquitoes. Let me move this bale to make room for the smoke pot!"

Perched on the gunwale and chattering like a myna bird, she asked, "Frenchies are great love makers, aren't they, Henri? I guess I should be frightened, should I, Henri?"

Holding a bale of fans, he stood still. "I trust that Frenchmen are not deficient in love, Mam'selle." His face grew red with anger, "But if your meaning is what I think it is, I do not seduce young children!" He turned his back upon her, swinging the fans to the cabin-top. "Though you doubt it, there are also some standards of conduct in regard to a woman with whom one is accidentally placed alone for a night!"

"It—weren't accident, Henri. I ran the wrong side of the marker on purpose."

He whirled to face her. "You what?" Rage stopped his voice.

She was down off her perch to throw her arms round his shoulders, her head pressed into the curve of his shoulder. "Henri, I didn't want to go back!" Her arms tightened. "I just didn't want to say good-by! I just wanted to go on seeing you! I wanted most to have you talk to me. No one ever talked to me like you—like I mattered . . ."

He lifted her, somewhat violently, back to the gunwale. "Do you know that many people depend on this launch? Do you know that you could have wrecked it had there been old iron or roots in the mud, that a gas tank could have been pierced and fired, that I am responsible for the launch and that, were it lost, I could not look my brother in the face? Mam'selle, how dared you . . ."

She mumbled, "I'm sorry . . ." Her gold head dropped on her knees and she wept. The tears were not, he decided, a woman's appeal for sympathy. They were disproportionate and complete despair. She sobbed as if she was heartbroken, with choking, gulping sobs that became a sort of crooning of desolation. He knelt down beside her and lifted her face. "Do not weep so! You should not be, but you are forgiven." The desolate sound continued. Tears in surprising flood ran steadily down her cheeks while her face was puckered as little Timothy's in his moments of misinterpretation by the family. "I didn't mean to hurt the launch . . . I never thought about it might turn over or catch fire . . . I only wanted to stick it!"

"You are probably incapable of thinking of anything and should not be blamed. It has not turned over or caught fire."

"You hate me!"

"I should and do not! I simply set you amongst the mysteries."

Her eyes were swollen almost shut, her lashes stuck together in spikes and her nose and cheeks were red as those of a weeping child, but the beginning of a shaken smile quivered on her lips. He stood up. "Do you know how to work a Primus stove?"

Her head was still bowed. "No. But I can mix good pancakes—you light the stove . . ."

"Very well." He knelt to light the stove. "Perhaps you can show me some new ways with pancakes?"

She was utterly happy again.

They ate pancakes and crisp-crusted fried fish amongst rolling smoke into which the mosquitoes still fought. From misting smoke, and drinking coffee that tasted of mangrove smoke, she said, "This is the nicest time I ever had, Henri! You are nice, Henri! No one ever baited hooks and got shells for me before. Tell me about the island, Henri!"

He told her. And of the family and Aunt Caroline's hair; of Domremy that was steel-blue dawns when the roses dripped with dew, and where beyond a kind woman in the doorway, smiled the laughter, the kindness and the childishness of the generations.

She said, "My folks were sharecroppers, then fruit tramps. We never stayed."

"Domremy is very poor but the house was planned by the greatest architect of France. It is our hope to paint it again as it was in the days of the Great Marquis, pink to match the roses and white to match the jasmines. But even without paint, the family loves it and the little ones learn their bows and their Latin and are growing up with good manners and learn to sing the little French songs."

"My ma and pa and then my ma and step-pas fought-it-up and the manners the kids learned was keeping out from underfoot and dodging a belt on the head. Fruit tramps move too fast for manners. It must be nice to stay and to matter, Henri! There wasn't time for me to matter."

To a child-loving Christophe there was something almost incredible and terribly moving in an unwanted child getting out from underfoot. He said gravely, "I am sorry, little Rue! Little children should matter."

"I got to school six months in Mississippi. The teacher was a pretty lady with black hair. She said I was pretty and smart,

but we moved along. I'm learning to speak good, Henri. I'm learning to read and write good, Henri. I can read even long words now." Her laughter bubbled. "The first book I read to myself there was a man in it called Joseph. I thought it was Jopeth. I used to spell out with my finger 'And Jopeth said . . . '" She dropped to the deck to sit curled confidingly beside him, her voice a prattling torrent. "I always meant to be someone, Henri! Not just a fruit tramp. I always said, 'I won't be like the girls that go out with any fellow any moonlight night!' I said, 'I'll wait 'til someone matters and I matter to him!' I never even let a fellow kiss me, Henri! I never even let anyone get fresh! Cross my heart I didn't, Henri!"

"That was both wise and admirable," he said, smiling at her.

"Who is Daphne, Henri? What is she like? Do you like her?"

"She is like a tall lily flower and soft music and all the words that a man would wish to hear a woman say in love. She is the widow of Malcolm, my brother, and I hope one day will be the wife of Joseph, my brother."

"What am I like, Henri?"

"You? You are like a little barking puppy-dog that runs."

"A puppy-dog is more fun than a lily, Henri! A puppy loves you more than a old flower!"

"No one loves more than Daphne," he said. "Also she has a great soft laughter—but puppy-dogs are very nice." Laughing at her, he was pleased to have decided what she was. It was a playing puppy.

"Henri, take me to the island! Take me with you!" She reached up and caught his face between her hands, lifting herself until she put her lips lightly against his, and her lips were soft and sweet. She smelled of wood smoke and sunlight and soap and healthy life. "Oh, you Henri, with your funny ways and your packet of fish to carry on the bus!" With one of her lightning changes, she was now, he thought, a woman and beautifully tender. She put her hands flat-palmed against his cheeks. "Funny Henri, dear Henri, I love you! Kiss me, Henri!" He kissed her, and her lips were all kindness and promise and astounding sweetness. Then he broke the kiss and was on his feet, so that she stood with him. He said, "Mam'selle, I have nothing to offer any woman. We are very busy and I am very poor and there are very many things that must be done for very many people before I can even think of love. Neither I nor Joseph can marry until our work is done and the family safe, and Joseph must marry first. I shall probably have a very long beard ere I walk to the altar."

"You love me, Henri? You do love me a little bit?"

"It is strange and it is not proper, for we have not yet known each other for five hours," he said wonderingly. "But as of the moment, I think I do! And I wish I did not, for nothing must come of it—for your sake and for mine! You understand that, little Rue? There is no marriage for Joseph or for me until far in the future. By which time you will have forgotten that you ever had a foolish minute in which to put the launch ashore. You are a dear little puppy-dog and you will have forgotten me before you expect it. Perhaps before I have forgotten you. Now you must behave yourself and be no more trouble."

"I will not forget! I love you! I never loved anyone but you, Henri! You are good, Henri! When I touch you, I touch goodness. Take me to the sea island, Henri! Let me live there! Let me wait!"

"We cannot properly feed the mouths that are there already, dear. Also you are a sea-struck child. Also you know nothing of me as I know nothing of you. This is of youth and the big stars and the night, and if you do not know that it is nonsense, I do! And that is well for us both—and now you must be a good child and talk no more nonsense. How old are you, Rue?"

"Sixteen," she said with her soft-haired head pressed against his throat.

"I thought as much! Now you must behave."

"Kiss me to say you are not angry, Henri! Kiss me!"

She pressed her lips to his cheek as he turned his head away. He said, "I do not kiss you because I am not angry—and because I have always thought the Followers too stern, but now I know that they may be very wise!"

"But you love me? You said you loved me!"

"I hope to be wiser with the dawn! You are too young to be expected to be wise, but I am a man and I am hoping that God will permit me not also to be a fool!"

"If you aren't no wiser in the morning—and the other mornings, Henri . . . ?"

"Then I will be sorry for myself, since it is not pleasant to know oneself without sense!" he said. "And it will otherwise make no difference, for you are to forget all about this! Do you understand, little one? This is a very big piece of nonsense. And if you love me even a little, you will remember that when there is work to be done, one does it, but that at times the days are hard, since a man wishes for his own fire and the sweetness of his own woman beside it and too much wishing stands in the way of the work." He put his hands about her smooth face. "Since I have work to do, do not make the work harder!"

She sighed and stood back from him. "Henri—if you had not work to do, would you marry me?"

"As utterly foolish as it is, I believe I would!" he said. "And doubtless we would make each other wretched to the end of the world!"

The *Sea Lily* came off the bank, undamaged, on the blackness of the morning tide. Stern-faced, Henri caught a bus as dawn was breaking over the Tamiami Trail. As always, his manners were perfect, but he carried a carefully wrapped package of fried fish which smelled appetizingly through its newspapers and worked on the morning hunger of his fellow passengers so that they began to sniff.

On his principle that if one is looking for a pearl, one looks in every oyster, he struck up a conversation with the passengers, explaining that the brothers Christophe sought word of their brother and of the lost motorship. But no one on the bus had ever heard of either.

Through the confusion and aggressive newness of Miami, he went first to the file rooms of the leading newspaper, where an elderly Englishman in a wheelchair, who was amusing himself with the issues covering the Florida Boom, remarked that he did not know what was making him think of fish and chips in London. Since nostalgia is a sad thing, all too familiar to the men of the West Indies, Henri bowed. "Perhaps, M'sieur, you would enjoy a fillet?"

The Englishman, slightly startled, said, "By George, I believe I would . . ." Regarding the very large, immaculately shaven and neatly laundered but amazingly patched young man, he said, "Dudley Markham. Have to live in the blasted sun—Bahamas, Miami—damned places fairly indecent with flowers!" After that he simply pulled his plump and rosy chins, studied Henri with intelligent popeyes and said, "Eh?" or, "H'm." But before a liveried black man came to ask, "Ready, Sir Dudley?" Henri had told the red-faced man the story of the *Christophe* and of what Mr. Houston, Monsieur Latour and Aunt Caroline thought and of his own idea about the oil slick, and even of the advertisement for Aunt Caroline's wheeled-chair, which would have to be a very old chair that they could do up.

"Damned interesting about your ship!" the Englishman said. "Offhand, I'd say your old lady was on firm ground in telling you to look always for 'much money'—some way in which the sinking of your ship could have been worth a lot to someone or in which your ship's remaining afloat could have cost someone a damn big sum! From the mechanical angle, you're right about the oil. How it was done? Why it was done? One of 'em might jolly well explain the other! Find someone who stood for a big gain or a big loss—or someone who could simply have worked the oil trick—and whoever he is, if he's either, you can be pretty sure he's both chaps!"

With his dark eyes grave between the amazing Christophe lashes, Henri explained, "Apart from the fairytale chance of treasure, it had seemed that the one source of great money—or chance that her presence might have cost men great money—with which our little ship could have had remotest contact was that there might have been some large insurance fraud in connection with the steamship *Webber*. But apart from all other things in the way, it seems that there was no shadow of fraud. M'sieur Webber, the owner, lost heavily."

"Don't know enough about the other things in the way to give an opinion, but intentionally wrecked ships haven't always cast shadows of fraud either before or behind them! Seems to me there was something about the *Campello* case. Can't clearly recall it, but might be worth your while to look it up." He stared with popeyed ferocity at Henri. "I used to be one of the Chairs."

"Pardon, M'sieur?"

"One of the underwriters at Lloyd's, you young idiot! Not a piece of furniture." He poked a finger into Henri's flat midriff. "What I'm driving at is that usually when a ship is thrown away, the owners put all their eggs on the seeming legitimacy of the wreck itself to make the claim stick. Very occasionally, they don't. They don't bother so much about

making the sinking look good, but play it from the angle of seemingly taking a loss. Your man seems O. K. from both angles—you can't fake a hurricane! But, you read up on the *Campello*! Didn't work. But basic idea was one of the nicest bits of fraud ever thought up. Remember when I read it I was almost sorry it was spoiled by little bits of carelessness—using Old Captain Fiery Lake, that sort of thing." His popeyes stared aggressively. "If I was going to throw away a ship, I'd certainly read up on the *Campello* case and make a few little improvements and damned well collect! Not impossible another chap with a criminal mind like mine reasoned the same way! Read up on it! Damned interesting! I've got to be off!"

With the black man wheeling the wheelchair, Henri went to bow the Englishman into the elevator. A girl with an armful of papers smiled and said, "That was Sir Dudley Markham, the owner of Asiatic Oil."

Henri said, "He is very nice, but homesick."

He was working through the files for the first account of the *Christophe* as overdue, when the black man came back with the empty wheelchair and a card on which was scrawled: "You will please give the 'wheeled-chair' to Aunt Caroline as a small peace offering for the sometimes questionable things England has done to France. D.M. P.S. If I can help you in any way with the matter of the *Christophe*, call on me or on my attorneys."

"You better take the chair, suh," the black man said. "Sir Dudley, he has a terrible temper. Also he got several more chairs at home and swears at 'em all fierce." He saluted and left.

Henri sat down on his own chair rather weakly. He tried to think what Joseph would have done—Joseph was prouder even than he. After a minute he smiled, set his packet of fish on the seat of Aunt Caroline's magnificent wheeled-chair and knelt beside it to let his hands exult in the chromium wonders. For once, he was agreeing with Joseph about the wonderful goodness of people.

Through the balance of the day, reading carefully through the papers which covered the dates between the first announcement that the *Christophe* was overdue, to the statement that official search had been abandoned, he skipped only the social notes and the editorials, but read the fishing notes, the lost and found columns and studied the pictures. Girls peeped in to comment smilingly on his bent, dark head and his great young figure in its threadbare clothes, but he did not look up. Having reached the notice of the official abandonment of search without having learned anything that was not already known to him, he obtained the papers for the next three months, in one of which a picture caught his eye. It was captioned "Garden Umbrella or Hat?" And it showed a bright-faced small boy holding over his head an outsize palm-woven hat and standing beside a pile of other enormous hats heaped one on the other beside a canal. The boy, it seemed, had been fishing far to the west along the Tamiami Trail and had sighted a bunch of floating hats, still tied together with thatch-palm string but considerably the worse for submersion, the hats presumably having fallen into the canal from a passing truck. At the time the photograph had been taken, the small salvager was attempting to sell the hats for ten cents apiece to passing motorists.

Staring at the photograph, Henri was trembling with excitement. On the *Christophe's* last voyage she had carried such hats as those shown. It had been for some possible trace of the *Christophe* that had not been recognized as a trace that he had sought . . . Was it possible that in a bunch of foolish hats the one tangible thing from the lost ship had been found? But how had it been found where it was found? Beside a road in Florida, whose coast, on the last voyage, the *Christophe* had never reached? Having searched all the places the little ship had been, must they now look for her—or for signs of her—in the Gulf she had not entered?

The contention of the editor's elderly and female secretary that the editor would not be interested in seeing Henri was incorrect. The unexpected appearance of a threadbare young giant wheeling a newspaper-wrapped package of fried fish in an extremely expensive but otherwise empty wheelchair interested the editor at once. "M'sieur, you must forgive my coming in this way," Henri said, gently holding the secretary aside. "But if Joseph and I cannot prove what befell the *Christophe*, Domremy may be lost; we cannot pay good M'sieur Latour and it is a great problem how we may even feed the mouths!"

The editor, whose heavily modeled face suggested that of a sea captain, shook hands strongly. "The *Christophe* was my own pet mystery! I've wanted to meet one of the family who owned her."

"Thank you, M'sieur. My present wish is if possible to see one of the hats mentioned in this story."

The editor took the paper, but his eyebrows were restless. "Just for the record, before we get down to it, who are you wheeling in that wheelchair?"

Henri smiled. "It is a gift for Aunt Caroline." He told the editor of Aunt Caroline's hair, clipped to help build the *Sea Lily*. "And she has wanted a chair for so long so that she may again make the Ladies' Gatherings in His Name as miserable as she used to!"

"One of the odd problems of the results of human conduct," the editor commented. "Sir Dudley performs a kind act and a thousand miles away innocent and Christian women have no premonition 'Aunt Caroline—on Target!' H'mm . . ."

At the end of two hours of telephoning the editor had been able to establish only the place at which the hats had been fished from the canal, an ex-staff photographer remembering it because it coincided with a fine bass hole. The family of the boy who had made the find had moved, leaving no forwarding address.

"M'sieur, I cannot promise to pay you until we learn what befell, or find the galleons. But would it be possible to run in the paper a small advertisement seeking buyers of the hats?" Henri asked, blushing to his black hair. "If I could but see a hat, I would know absolutely if it was of Home Island. Could I show or describe a hat to the weavers, they might even know if it was of those in the *Christophe's* last cargo, for they tie off differently for different years and months."

"We'll run the ad until we get a bite or until I know we won't," the editor said. "There won't be any charge."

"I cannot thank you," Henri said. "M'sieur, would it be possible not to say why we seek the hats?"

"Every newspaperman wants to solve mysteries," the editor said. "We'll mark it 'Top Secret!'"

Arriving at the Weather Bureau, still wheeling Aunt Caroline's chair which he had been afraid to leave at the newspaper offices in case the editor might forget his promise to save it first in the event of fire, Henri looked about him with wonder and smiled at the chief meteorologist. "It is strange to be here, M'sieur, and find neat offices that might be those of draftsmen, yet know that in hurricane the agony of oceans beats in this little room! Strange also to find you a man who might be any kindly and ruddy man of business, when to the islands and the seas your voice is so often the voice of life and death!" He parked the wheelchair and moved to speak earnestly across the desk. "As have all men of the sea, I have already so much for which to thank you that you must forgive me for asking still another favor—but was there anything of secrecy or of importance in the weather observations with which I hear the bureau cooperated and that were made upon the Purple Reefs some two years ago?" He smiled with grim ruefulness. "It is one of the evil things of a search such as my brother and I make that one sees phantoms where none exist."

Smiling, the chief meteorologist assured him that the observations had been routine, agreeing with Black Tobias that the Reefs had been closed simply because military men were of a great importance. He summoned a towheaded young observer who had participated in the tests. Grinning, the young man said, "If you are wondering if there was anything there that might have interested 'an unfriendly power,' forget it! There was nothing more secret than that the sun rises in the east!"

"Thank you, M'sieur," Henri said, returning his smile. "As I have said, one becomes so deranged that while to seamen the men of weather are almost dearest friends, I even came here thinking, These men too had been upon the Reefs where our ship touched ere she did not come home again. Could these men be guilty?'"

"The Hotel Men's Association would back you on guilt! We issue hurricane warnings," the young meteorologist said dryly. "We are, however, innocent of treasure plots or scuttlings."

"Thank you, M'sieur. One question that may be of great importance to our search. While on the Reefs, did you note a quantity of drying sponge there?"

"Sure did," the cheerful young man said. "It was a fine soft bed to take a sun bath on!"

"No one came to seek to collect it—and perhaps was not permitted to do so by the military men?"

"No one. I wondered about it. Only people who tried to come near the Reefs at all were your father and the big black man."

"M'sieurs, this is the last question. It is my understanding that in the southwestern Everglades, the flow of water is toward the southwest? Could that be temporarily reversed by a hurricane striking from the southwest as the second storm of the year of the *Christophe's* loss struck? So that were some object stranded on the beaches or in the mangrove

swamps of the Gulf it might be borne inland, perhaps halfway across the peninsula?"

"With the water-level high, water could drive anywhere with the wind. Particularly in a very wet storm and the second storm that year was a soaker!"

At the Naval Air Station, the gray-haired captain who had supervised the weather tests upon the Reefs was as kindly as the weathermen and as certainly not a man to sink ships. Like the editor, he had closely followed the case of the *Christophe*. He confirmed Henri's thought that the depth in which a ship was sunk could not cancel oil slick. Sea search had been one of his own specialties. Something of oil came up, and up was the surface of the sea. Had the *Christophe* sunk within any area she could have reached from the Isle of Palms in the time elapsed between her departure from the Isle of Palms and the search, there would have been oil slick and the searchers would have seen it.

"Yet, M'sieur, they did not."

"Then, while I wouldn't put any store in the usual sea-rumors of her having been seen afloat here, there and everywhere months later, it would be my opinion she didn't sink in any area searched! And as every area was searched that she could have got into—and as she would have been seen if she was still up and going—that doesn't help you much. . . ."

"Joseph, my brother, who is a great strength, says that all that befell must be very simple—that it but seems so strange because we do not know," Henri said earnestly.

The captain had noted the washed and drying sponges and, while his instructions had been to keep the Reefs closed during the weather tests, he had been ready to pay the owners of the sponge-haul its full value should they come. No one came.

The public library owned a book dealing with the case of the *Campello*, but the book was out. And the librarian suggested a small marine library in Tampa where even better histories of the case should be available.

At ten o'clock, Henri and the wheelchair entered a moonflower jungle on a vacant lot near the river to spend the night. A few yards away, automobiles whizzed past but the open-air bedroom was private, perfumed and shining with large white blossoms. It also commanded a fine view of the sky. And having eaten the last of the fried fish, Henri lay on his back and watched the low silver clouds sail across darkness and stars, and flush pink and green as they passed the neon lights. He found that he looked most often to the west toward the little settlement where a girl who was a child would be closing the café with the noisy importance of a happy child. Suddenly and with alarming tenderness, he thought of her as she would be when she would have a child of her own. Playing with a baby of her own, she would not sing it soft songs. She would shout at it and shake it and laugh loud at it and the child would laugh back at her, loving the crowing shouts and the laughter and the youth of her.

Six

The Everglades were not a blue and running sea, but they too were a sea—of water and of grass: limitlessly sprawling, shining with light; each foot of their thousands of square miles rotting cleanly, growing passionately as they had from the morning of time. Tremendous sunlight beat upon them as Henri finally succeeded in loading the wheelchair into a battered canoe in such a way that the canoe would not capsize, and set out to trace the course along which water, driving in hurricane, might have carried the floating but sodden bale of hats.

And having rounded the first turn of the widest channel that wound generally south and west through the saw grass toward the Gulf, he might have been the only man in a primitive world where the oceans had not yet fully divided from the land. And he wished that the girl, Rue, sat in the stern of the canoe as the first woman to splash young brown hands in the amber water.

Once into the swamp, it was also easy to understand how men and whole parties of men unfamiliar with sun and stars, had entered it and had not been found again. Everywhere about him the little streams and reedy lakes were blue with reflection of sky and dyed with the stain of towering grass stems. Turtles paddled in dappled sun and shadow. Alligator gars—of type so infinitely ancient that he had been told that some scientists regarded them as the forerunners of the serpents—fed voraciously, bonnets pushed up exuberant leaf-piled-upon-shining-leaf and the yellow flower buds thrust vehemently through their own leaves. Vast bullrushes quivered in the sun and 'Glades hawks glided into the ribbon of blue above and zoomed upward at sight of his craft. Yet, violently varied, all things were as if one had seen them before. There were no landmarks.

As the great loneliness grew menacing with evening, he caught a fine turtle, and where the reeds stood black against the wild orange hair of sunset, made camp on a flat-rocked promontory, to cook a stew of turtle meat and onions, using the turtle shell as his cook pot. With darkness, a cold wind came up, but he thought of Rue who was golden warm as sunshine. Her face would be very beautiful across a fire that would light the perfect lines of the junction of neck and cheek and ear. The proud roundness of her neck would gleam softly to little flickers of gold.

On the third day, an Indian helped him by mapping in the mud an unexpected southing in the direction from which the hurricane tides came when a wet storm had flooded the swamp's arterial maze of creeks. And toward evening of the third day he knew that he was near the coast, for flights of pelicans replaced the 'Glades hawks while the water in the rushy streams was salt. Always it seemed to him of increasing importance where he would come out of the swamp, though reason told him that there would doubtless be nothing but beach or mangroves to mark the spot.

Then where the arm of a broad bay swept in a great circle between faded reeds and wind riffles ran over salt water, pelicans struck the water broad-breasted, to lift large bills, gargling a fish. And a wharf and a group of buildings showed; one very large two-storied building and twelve cabins, all paintless. Beyond the gray buildings, the marshes spread, streaked with patches of small, blue flowers, but far down the estuary and across it, a colored woman hung laundry by a small hut. Nearer at hand, about the rickety wharves, tin cans littered the mud and empty beer bottles were mixed with fish heads. Nothing suggested a resort used by millionaires for fishing and the hunting of the deer, but above the door of the large building was a faded sign: *Webber's Landing*.

On the edge of the main wharf sat a large man with hair the color of pale, new gold. He wore only a pair of tattered shorts, but his skin was not sun-tanned but pale as a sheltered girl's. From a distance, he was extraordinarily—quite astoundingly—handsome; then one noted the paleness of the eyes whose blue seemed mixed with milk, the too-fair skin, a sensual coarseness in the low-bridged nose and the overful lips. Looking at him, Henri could understand both how his suggestion of exuberant life and his blazing fairness would fascinate the port officer of the Isle of Palms and how his pallor and his self-delight would make Daphne Christophe feel that she could not have borne to touch him. A less discerning woman might very readily fall in love with him. Into the mind came certain of the ancient figures of Bacchus, that were at once beautiful and corrupt. Returning Henri's gaze, he grinned widely, showing blunt but strong teeth.

"Hello, hello, hello!" he called loudly.

"Good afternoon, M'sieur," Henri said. His own heart was beating fast and he was trembling with suppressed excitement. For here certainly was one of the last men to see Malcolm Christophe and the men of the *Christophe* alive. Here, so far as the balance of evidence went, should be a perfectly innocent man, whose word could be trusted for an account of that last journey. Yet it was to Webber's Landing that the one frail clue of the hats had led.

The man reeled in his line, making flipping, overhand movements with it, so that it circled in the air. "Welcome to

Webber's Landing! Step ashore! 'Home is the sailor, home from sea!'" He extended his hand, while his mouth smiled grinningly.

As Henri swung to the top of the dock and they stood face to face, the West Indian was only a little the taller. The large, fair man laughed exuberantly. "Webber, Old Barrel of Fun, that's me!" His blunt white teeth gleamed as he hit Henri violently upon the back, then threw a heavy and well-muscled but silk-pale arm about him. "Old barrel of fun!" he repeated, with his pale eyes and strangely fair-skinned face close to Henri's. "A Frenchie, eh? From New Orleans?" His eyes were sharply still with a question in them.

Trying desperately to appraise the man, Henri could not. Almost the man seemed an offensive clown, yet under his fool's clowning was some quality that could not be dismissed. But one could not tell wherein the quality lay. It was a reversal of the shock of picking up something that one expected to be heavy and finding it feather-light. Thomas Webber should have been a flashing-fair nothing, yet he was much.

Disliking the close proximity of the man without knowing why he so violently disliked it, Henri said gravely, "My name is Henri Henri Christophe. I am the brother of Malcolm Henri Christophe, captain of the lost motorship. It is of the ship and of Malcolm, my brother, that I would talk with you."

A change as indefinable as the man's extraordinary personality passed in Webber's pale eyes. But continuing to smile, he said, "A Froggy? A Frenchman, eh?" He released Henri's shoulders and whipped up the balance of his line. For so heavy a man, he was curiously light on his feet as he stepped back as the line came in. He sang, off key, "Froggy was a Frenchman, ate frog's legs . . ." He danced lightly about on his legs that had so much irritated Monsieur Latour, and turned suddenly to hit Henri between the shoulders. "Take no notice of me! Just Old Barrel of Fun! Place is yours!"

"You are very kind," Henri said. His own trembling excitement continued, so that he found it hard to keep his hands steady and to keep his eyes from showing the knowledge, "Here is a man who, if he would, might tell me!" He tried to feel what Webber was as he had tried to feel the presence of animals in the jungle. He still could not. Certainly there was nothing in Webber's manner to suggest the panic of Ashby or the sudden thoughtfulness of the Hereras. Henri wondered if he looked into the eyes of a gross and thoughtless but fundamentally an honest man, or into the eyes of an accomplished natural actor?

He said, "You have a pleasant location and fine water here."

"Had big plans for it," Webber said, grinning up at him as he knelt to unbait the line. "The loss of the old *Webber* sank 'em, and the second storm that year beat the camp up badly." He came bouncingly to his feet. "Let's have 'one ham sandwich, all the way'! Then fire ahead with what you want to know!" Henri followed him through blowing air and the stink of fish heads toward the main building. The suggestion of large plans suddenly arrested hung over everything about the place. Every open space, every lean-to and even the outer walls were hung with so odd an assortment of objects that only an insane jaybird seemed likely to have gathered them.

Lounging against the wall so that she partially blocked the doorway, was a frowsy girl with bleached hair. Webber put his arms about her but she shrugged away from him sulkily. Whereupon he gave her buttocks a resounding, flat-handed slap, and roared with laughter when she spat at him like an angry cat as he went, laughing, into the room. Henri held the door open and stood back to let the girl enter. But she shook her head. Suddenly she shouted after Webber, "Why can't y' be po-lite like him?"

"Me a damned, door-opening Froggy?" Webber said, and laughed as Henri blushed.

The main room of the big building was hideous with a sickly shade of pale green picked out in raucous red, while on the walls were displayed the less-dressed samples of calendar art: fair girls thinly draped in swirls of blue chiffon, dark girls ogling from leopard skins, old photos of Mae West bursting bustily from evening gowns. "She's something! Isn't she just something!" Webber said almost reverently of Miss West. He turned back to the calendars. "Oh, what gals!" He hit Henri on the back. "You Followers don't know what you miss!" He explained what they missed and what he did not miss until the back of Henri's neck blushed red. Webber roared with laughter, then turned suddenly to face book-cases crammed with biographies and anthologies, whose titles contrasted strangely with the room's color scheme and the calendars. "Didn't expect to find them in a flophouse on a creek, eh, Frenchie?" Webber asked. "Didn't get to finish high school—got thrown out for chasing the girls—but know what those books say?" He abstractedly crossed the room to the kerosene stove and was suddenly still with a skillet in his hands and a strangely rapt expression on his pale face. "They say, 'It doesn't matter a blank damn! If a man can *think big enough*, he can get what he wants!'" He looked through the high window at the evening sky. "They say, 'Believe it or not, one of these days, even the old boys in us books would

like to say they'd known Old Barrel of Fun when!'" He touched the skillet softly up and down on his extended palm. "One of these days, Frenchie, you'll say, 'I knew Old Barrel of Fun when he was just a broke cracker in the swamp!'"

"I do not doubt it, M'sieur," Henri murmured politely.

Webber lowered his pale gaze from the sky and moved from his wide-legged stance. He winked. He was suddenly laughing widely. Henri could not tell if he had been laughing all the time.

When the meal of huge slices of underdone ham and canned beans was ready, Webber shouted for the girl. She slammed into the room and carried her food to the stove, where she ate with her back toward them. Over her shoulder she said, "Someday I'll shoot him."

Webber ate like a wolf and talked with his mouth full, but he talked of books and of history, of Machiavelli and *The Prince*. Henri was astonished by his knowledge. At times, contemptuously and without turning round, the girl said, "Huh! Says him!"

After the meal, Webber heaped the dishes in the already piled sink and moved lightly to a chair opposite Henri. "I'm a bit of a clown and I like the girls, but I know what it is to lose a ship! What do you want to know, West Indian?"

"M'sieur, you were one of the last two men to see our brother alive. Was there anything in any smallest manner strange in the *Christophe's* last journey to the Isle of Palms? We have, for one thing, been greatly puzzled as to why our brother searched for missing men of the *Webber* ere he could know they were not ashore."

Looking full at Henri, Webber wrinkled his forehead and leaned his pale chin upon his hand. "You know about Ashby and yours truly getting to your island?" He grinned. "Where Old Barrel of Fun wasn't exactly popular!" He grew grave, looking earnestly into Henri's eyes. "Well, Old Webber has a lot of faults, Frenchie, but he doesn't like the thought of men dying at sea! I asked your brother to look for the men in case they were drifting and in bad shape. He said what you say, that the sensible thing was to get on to the Isle of Palms and see if there was word of them." He shrugged with self-deprecation. "I still wanted him to look."

"Big-hearted Boy, that's him!" the girl said as a vaguely mumbled Greek chorus. She got up unsteadily and made a vague gesture at Henri. "Listen mister! I don' know what he's talkin' about—an' I don' care! But if his mouth is opening, he's lyin'."

"Thank you, Mam'selle," Henri said, somewhat at a loss as to a suitable reply.

"Open the door for me!" she commanded.

Returning to the table, Henri asked, "M'sieur, were two sponge fishermen of the Island, Jaques and Christian, perchance upon the Purple Reefs when you touched there with the *Christophe*? Or, if not Jaques and Christian themselves, a trace that had indicated to our brother that they had been there?" There was a slight silence. But Webber's face was frank and undisturbed as he shook his head. Henri's gaze searched his face. "I also wondered if the Hereras had for any reason returned there after leaving the little town they had frightened . . ."

In Webber's pale eyes there was a change, they narrowed and his pale face grew startlingly paler, so that he looked like a man sick with hatred. Looking with narrowed eyes above Henri's head, he spoke softly, but with lips that were having difficulty with the words. "The Hereras, eh? There's going to be a reckoning between the Hereras and me one of these days! Oh, yes, Frenchie, there's going to be a reckoning!" He stood up to walk lightly up and down the room while his face worked and livid indentations marked the outline of his nostrils. Pausing by the table, he gripped the back of a chair and the chair shook under the grip of his hands. His face was vicious as the girl's had been as she spat. "Think they can laugh at Tom Webber, do they? Think a bunch of illiterate half-breeds off a filthy sand bar can get in my way? But we'll see who laughs last! Oh, yes! We'll see! We'll see!" Sweat streamed down the putty of his skin. Henri stared at him in astonishment. He wondered if everyone connected with the mystery of the *Christophe* was slightly insane.

Webber appeared to return his attention to him from a long way off. His eyes became more rational. "Sorry to keep you waiting, Frenchie! No, the fine Hereras weren't on the Reefs." He shook again. He offered rapid explanation. "Sorry to cut up." His lips curled inward against his teeth and he breathed fast. "If it hadn't been for those bloody pirates, I'd still have my ship! The little old resort here would be finished! I wouldn't be living like a wharf rat in a marsh!" He grinned palely, wiping his face. "No. They weren't on the Reefs, I haven't seen them since they beat it from the wreck."

"The Followers have little reason to love the Hereras, M'sieur," Henri said. "But they seemingly could not be blamed for hurricane or for the ship's becoming disabled. With all their faults they are very great seamen."

Webber looked over Henri's head. "They were drunk on duty. If they had not been drunk, the Webber wouldn't have been lost!"

"You surprise me. I would not have thought that they would drink at sea—least of all in coming storm!" He stood up so that they leaned toward each other across the table. "M'sieur, forgive me, but I speak to you out of the distress of a great loss and the confusion of a great mystery. Because there is strong reason to believe that Jaques and Christian of Home Island were upon the Purple Reefs, and because they, like those of the *Christophe*, did not come home again, it would seem that for someone it was perhaps a thing of life and death that none make report of what befell upon the Reefs . . ."

"What are you getting at, Frenchie?" Webber asked. They looked at each other above the hurricane lamp on the table.

"M'sieur, I will tell you the naked truth. My own thought was this: That the most likely form of gain from the sea that must have no witnesses is the throwing away of a ship. The ship upon the Reefs was your ship, the *Webber*!"

Webber's face in the upslanting lamplight was undisturbed, even ruefully amused. "I'd like you to get this straight in your own mind, Frenchie, because I don't want you barking up the wrong tree! I asked your brother to take us to the Purple Reefs on his way to the Isle of Palms! Men in their right minds don't ask men to go where they have something to hide!"

"I know that you asked that my brother take you to the Reefs, M'sieur. The reasoning in my mind is that when he took you, all might not have been as you expected it to be. I know the difficulties, M'sieur! And that the *Christophe* went on to the Isle of Palms, that you and M'sieur Ashby left her there and still she went on—a little way! But I know, too, that Jaques and Christian of Home Island were upon the Purple Reefs between the blowing of the storm and the coming of the military and the men of weather! Jaques and Christian never came home! The *Christophe* went on the little way and did not come home! M'sieur Ashby, who was an exile but was not hiding ere he went with you and with our brother to the Purple Reefs, has hidden since and is said to be stranged with fears which appear to center upon you, M'sieur, and upon the Hereras and the *Webber* and the Reefs."

"Sorry to hear it!" Webber said. "I'd do a lot for Ashby! Where is he?"

"He fears so greatly that even his good wife does not know. There is also the strangeness that Martin Herera, prospering greatly, made jest of the loss of the *Webber*—and jest of you, M'sieur." Webber's nostrils quivered and the whiteness showed round them again. Henri spoke slowly. "The Hereras continued to mock until Joseph, my brother spoke to them of Jaques and Christian the sponge fishers. Then they took thought! It even seemed they feared." He paused. "If in all these things that have troubled me, I wrong you, M'sieur, you must try to forgive me! I might never have said them save for two more things that puzzle. One I would not yet wish to tell you. The other was your own anger against the Hereras. Also that I thought that you, like the little Ashby, were afraid of them."

They looked at each other across the lamp. "I'm not mad at you, Frenchie," Webber said. "I'm sorry for you boys! I can see why you're chasing the wrong rabbit. Now I'm going to answer you two different ways. First I'm going to answer you like I would if I did know what happened to your ship. I'm going to say what I'd say in a court: That you're a cockeyed islander trying to collect on an insurance fraud of your own that the insurers won't even listen to any more unless you get some halfway evidence! I'm going to say you're trying so hard to get some evidence that you're catching as catch can and you've picked on some crazy idea of fraud about the *Webber* as a motive for the sinking of your tub. I'll say you made a bad choice because the *Webber* was sunk by a hurricane and men throwing away ships pick nice calm water near a handy coast! And I'll say you made a bad choice because the *Webber* was one of the few ships on which the owner *couldn't* make a red dime out of the insurance if the insurance was paid! And that, to top the works, your ship was A one at Lloyd's and afloat and going about her business—which was fraud—when Ashby and I left her at the Isle of Palms! I'm going to laugh in your face as I collect for defamation!"

He moved the lamp slightly, smiling. "That's what I'd do if there had been anything crooked with me or the *Webber*. Now I'll play it the other way—from the truth—which is that we both lost our ships, that I know there wasn't any fraud with you, any more than there was with me. That I'm damned sorry for you and I'll answer anything you ask and I'll answer it straight! And you'll get further if you believe me, for if you get off the wrong man you may get on the right one!"

Henri sat down. "M'sieur, I have asked your forgiveness if I wrong you. I know the seeming improbabilities of which you speak . . ."

"And keep your eye on the biggest one of all, Frenchie! If you proved I'd a hundred reasons for being afraid of what your brother could say, you're still at scratch, for you couldn't show that I'm such a cockeyed fool as to have let your brother get to a port where he could have reported what he knew! Which should be pretty plain to any twelve good fools and

true!" He looked full at Henri. "Let's go all the way and suppose I knew he knew something that he himself didn't yet know he knew. Suppose he got to the Isle of Palms without knowing, but left with the means of the ship's sinking in the ship! You still couldn't show how it was done without trace!" He leaned forward across the table. "Raise your hat when you meet an impossibility, Frenchie! The *Christophe* wasn't sunk without the heck of a mess of oil!"

"That is of all the physical mysteries the greatest," Henri agreed. "But could we know the motive, we might know the way!"

They faced each other in the intimacy of the lamplight. "Look, Frenchie, I'm a bad man by the standards of you Followers. If I could have sunk the *Webber* and made a profit—well, I might have! I couldn't make a profit. The *Webber* was a war surplus ship that had cost a million dollars. She was sold to a bunch of crooks for twenty-five thousand dollars—supposed to be 'war damaged.' Which was maybe! The company that bought her from them gave eighty-five thousand. She went through the hands of three different corporations before I got her, with the price going up every sale. I got her for twenty-five thousand cash—all I had in the world—and a hundred and fifty thousand dollar mortgage. The insurance she carried when she was lost covered the mortgage—nothing else. When she was lost, I was out what she was earning and my twenty-five thousand cash!" He looked Henri in the face with a bold and convincing frankness. "The only things need looking into are what the government sold her for and my head!"

"I think I believe you, M'sieur," Henri said slowly. "One last thing. Everything was peaceful with our brother when you reached the Isle of Palms? He spoke of nothing amiss? Above all, he gave no indication of a change from his normal course?"

"All was peaceful with Captain Malcolm Christophe," Webber said with almost strange but impressive emphasis. "He said nothing. He gave no indication of taking a new course!"

"Thank you, M'sieur."

"Exactly what you boys doing now?" Henri told him. Webber's eyes narrowed as he laughed. "Wouldn't like to see you tangle with the banana boys! Hope you weren't taking in bananas?"

"We took in one load from the Republic, but while we did well from it, we have given up bananas," Henri said, smiling.

"Sure glad none of the boys learned you'd sold 'em!" Webber said. He looked down at the table, tapping his fingers on it. Then looked up. "Take my advice and quit on the *Christophe*! If nature did her in, you can't prove it. If she was deliberately sunk, you're likely to find you aren't around if you ever get near to proving it."

"We could not promise our father that we would learn, M'sieur. We promised him that while we lived we would never cease to seek."

Alone in the cabin where Thomas Webber had insisted that he spend the night and that was clean, with a cement floor and furnished with a single iron bed and a washbasin, Henri experienced reaction and disappointment. He had waited for so long to meet Thomas Webber that he had expected some great result from the meeting. He knew only that he had met an extraordinary personality. Sitting on the bed, he put his head in his hands, only to be brought to his feet by a faint scratching sound as if a kitten clawed uncertainly at the wood as the door opened fractionally. Through the crack, as he reached the door, the girl with the bleached hair said secretly, "You wash out f' him!" Her bleach-stiffened hair hung partly over her eye. What was visible of her face nodded with even greater assumption of wisdom. "I don' know what he's thinkin', but he's thinkin'!" She nodded. "You put a chair un'er your door!" The pupil of her one visible eye slowly narrowed to an expression of astonishing hate. "Someday I'm goin' t' shoot him!" With her finger uncertainly on her lips she pointed with her other hand at her temple. "Bang!" She looked at him for his approval then retreated unsteadily from his view. He felt terrible pity for her and for the foolishness of her attempt to be important.

Having blown out the lamp, he raised the blind and looked into the windy moonlight. Webber was standing on the dock, looking down thoughtfully at Henri's canoe. Even in the moonlight, his curled gold hair glittered. His figure was strangely immobile, his clenched hand supporting his chin. From the darkness Henri watched him. Webber was thinking, concentratedly, silently, in some strange manner, alarmingly. For almost twenty minutes he stood there without motion. Then he looked up and he was suddenly smiling. He walked quickly back toward the main building.

Before Henri lay down, he placed one of the heavy chairs under the door handle so that the door could not be opened

from without.

The mists were so thick as he paddled the canoe down the estuary next morning, that he could not see the isolated cabin of the Negress and could only keep his course for Jewfish Bay because the mist was gold toward the east and pearl gray toward the west. But he managed to find and pick a great bunch of the azure dog's-tooth flower spikes.

The lovely vapor still drifted blindingly over the old dock of the little settlement as he swung himself up to sit on the drenched planks and stooped to tie the canoe. Suddenly there was a cry of gladness and Rue was on her knees beside him, her arms round his neck. "Henri! Henri! I weren't sure it was you for you were using the paddle instead of oars." Her mist-wet cheek, fresh and silken as a child's was against his. Involuntarily he put his arms round her and the joy of holding her was the greatest delight of homecoming that he had ever known. He said, "Silly little Rue, what are you doing here?"

"Every morning before I open the café I been coming here! I said, 'Some morning, Henri will be here!' And you are! But, oh, I waited so!"

He said, "That was a very foolish thing to do."

"Every evening just before the loggers come, I run down—and after I closed up at night! Every time I waited half an hour, but you didn't come." She knelt back from him, running her fingertips lightly down his shoulders and arms. "It's you! You're real!" Her arms went round his neck again and he put his hand on the soft-curled head pressing against his shoulder. Hiding her face against his shirt, she begged, "Henri, ask me to marry you! I don't care if it's a thousand years to wait! I only wants to think, 'Someday I'll be Henri's wife! Someday we will go to the Island!' Everything I do, I think, 'Would Henri be pleased?' If I get sad I think how good you are—an' I get happy! I just wants it all to mean something because I'm going to be your wife. Say it, Henri . . ."

He took her face between his hands. "Do you know it may be years of waiting? And only poverty at the end? That I am not in the least the good man you think me and that islands are very lonely and island wives very much alone?"

"I only wants to know you love me!"

Tightening his arms about her, with his cheek against hers, he said, "I love you, little Rue! If you are foolish enough to wish it, someday will you marry me?"

Drawing back, she was quiet before him, but her lips trembled and her eyes were wide. "Thank you, Henri! Thank you!"

He laughed. "Thank you, my darling! You have made a poor bargain." Holding hands, they knelt in front of each other in the drifting mist, smiling marvelingly at each other. He said, astonished, "I had meant to say none of this. And perhaps I am doing a very wrong thing in letting you love me, but I do love you, little Rue, as much as a man can love a woman!"

"Only love me, Henri! Just love me—so I can think, 'Henri is a lot of miles away in his boat amongst the islands, but he loves me!' or 'Henri is far off in Tampa with a crowd of folks, but really and truly I'm there too, because he loves me!' I just want to know, 'Maybe, Henri is thinking of me!'"

"To judge from the great trouble it has caused me not to think of you, it would seem you can very safely think that so long as I am alive!" he said.

She jumped up, pulling him to his feet. "You haven't had breakfast. Come to the café and have breakfast, Henri!"

He laughed down into her eager face. "I still cannot afford restaurants, little Mam'selle. I still cannot let a little girl give me meals without charge."

Her face was desolate as her name. "Please! To please me! Oh, Henri, even coffee tastes different when we drinks coffee with each other . . ."

He smiled at her, and held her tightly against him as he looked over her shoulder. "Someday I will take you to Tampa—on a cold night when all the stars are out. And we will go down the street and catch the good smells from the restaurants and you will choose which one smells the very best. And when we go in we will not choose the thing on the menu which is economical, but the very nicest thing! And we will sit there very royally and drink our coffee and watch the people, not feeling that we must hurry because we had ordered very little!"

"Dear Henri! Oh, dear Henri!"

After a moment, he said, "Since M'sieur Webber is your one kin, we must tell him of our betrothal, Rue. Also I wish to be able to say, 'I speak for little Rue as her betrothed . . . '"

She drew back from him and all the color and glow drained from her face. "No! No! No! He mustn't know! You mustn't tell him!"

He stared at her with puzzled eyes, then took her face gently between his hands. "Why are you so foolishly afraid of M'sieur Webber?"

"Just don't tell him! Don't talk to him! Don't tell anyone about us, Henri! . . . If you love me, Henri!"

His face was troubled and serious. "Little Rue, dear little Rue, do not look so frightened!" She simply looked at him while her lips trembled wildly. He leaned forward and kissed her lightly on the forehead. "Tell me what troubles you." She seemingly could not speak. Trying to reassure her, he laughed fondly at her. "What is it? Did you once steal a dolly? Or perhaps took another little girl's hair ribbon?" He could not make her laugh.

"Just don't talk to anyone about us, Henri!" Her face was imploring. "I want it our secret! If you has a lovely secret, you mustn't tell it, Henri, or it's spoiled! Henri, when I go to bed at nights I want to be all happy! I don't want to be frightened so my hands hurt, Henri!"

"Dear little one, I could not think of you frightened in the night. If I had my wish you would never be frightened in all the world! Merely tell me, as I am sure, that you are not frightened because of anything at all to do with the *Christophe*, darling!"

"Just I want it a secret, Henri. You mustn't tell a secret!"

He loved her the more for her foolishness. They had three days of bliss made of fishing expeditions during the slack hours of the café, of moonlight expeditions into the strangeness of the 'Glades, of occasionally shared cups of coffee in the café. Everything she told him of her life made him love her more.

On the fourth morning as he came on deck on the *Sea Lily*, Joseph and Tobias were poling Tobias' catboat out of the mist that was drifting gold across the river. "Joseph! Tobias! Come see what we have to surprise Aunt Caroline!" Henri called.

After the wonders of the wheelchair had been admired, Joseph said, "Henri, if the galleons were ever upon the upper tablelands of the Reefs, I grow reasonably certain they are no longer up but over."

"Then over go we! Which means a suit and for convenience a small barge, for which we could find old planking on the Reefs," Henri said. He blushed deeply. "Amongst other things, while I waited for you, I did up the canoe for sale and gave the *Sea Lily's* fans and plumes their fresh-water washing."

"It might be well if we washed and repacked the catboat's load here," Joseph suggested. He smiled. "I also see that Tobias wishes to try a canoe."

Tobias agreed to trying the odd craft not because he wished for the experience but because he much desired to know the exact route into Webber's Landing in case he should ever need to return there swiftly through fog or darkness should it be learned Thomas Webber knew aught of Tobias' son. And he was memorizing the curves and distances of the estuary when the large Negress spoke to him from the porch of the lonely cabin. "Good morning, colored man. My name is Mammy." Tobias looked up, frowning at the interruption. With pride in the independence of her status, she explained, "Mister Webber and I has what might be called a business arrangement. I was here before he came but the land wasn't mine. He bought the land. Return for staying, I watch his place when he is absent. He is absent now. So may I ask your business?"

"With M'sieur Henri and M'sieur Joseph, I look for my son and for the lost motorship, *Christophe*," Tobias said.

She gave him a literally golden smile. "You just looks hungry to me! It's 'most noon and the fried chicken is a crime for a widow-woman to have to eat alone."

Tobias intended to refuse the invitation. But instead he answered wonderingly, not having spoken of gentle things for a great while, "I am a widower—it is very bad when for the first time one sets one place at the table."

Unexpectedly seated at her table in the tiny kitchen that smelled wonderfully of good things about to be eaten, he

watched, astonished that he was there to watch, as she made giblet pan-gravy and her starched lilac dress and her starched white apron caught the sun and the sea-gleam from the estuary and her face glowed over the stove. She had nothing of the majestic beauty of many of the elderly colored women of the islands. There was an amazing amount of her, but it was all comfortable and kind. Tobias sat very straight in the polished kitchen chair with his feet and knees together and the white napkin placed neatly on his knees. It had been twenty years since he had sat tidily while a clean, kind woman waited on him. He did not wish to shame her by any table lapse. Yet it was as if they had known each other for a great time as in comfortable silence they ate crisp-crusted chicken with brown gravy, mashed potatoes, buttered green string beans and hot biscuits with honey. The coffee was hot and rich with creamy top milk from the white goat in the yard.

"My man was a good man," Mammy said as she served apple pie. "Tell me about your wife."

Leaning forward, he told her earnestly, "My wife died when my son was born. My son went with his hand in mine from the time that he was high as my belt. But I would find it hard when I measured him against the wall and was glad how he had grown, because my wife was not there for me to say, 'See how he has grown!'"

She nodded in sympathy. "I know. It's the little things gets you. After my man was gone, I'd be agetting on better, then it would be washing time and there wouldn't be any big man's socks in the tub and not a single big man's shirt cookin' over the fire an' I'd have to set spang on the ground it left me so weak . . ."

"It is bad, too, that though one goes to the grave every Sunday when one is not at sea, the face grows harder to remember, so that sometimes one cannot see it," Tobias said. He had never been able to tell any of this to anyone—even his son.

Mammy nodded. "I know. It used to hit me hard. Then I found there was somethin' I always could remember. That was how my big old man would put his hand on my head when I fussed an' say, 'Don't you fret, Honey!' It was as if he said it when I fretted because I couldn't remember him like I had, when I began to enjoy things again and felt sort of wronging him. Just he'd say, 'Don't you fret, Honey.' I think everyone who's loved someone would say that. It's as if lovin' all over was like a one big good wish."

He told her also of the mystery of the *Christophe*.

Bowing hugely at the door as he said good-by, Tobias said wonderingly, "It was as if the clock turned back and the world was good again with none who have done wickedness who must be punished!"

"Redressing wrong is a powerful strange thing. Seems like the Lord demands we give Him a boost in the business. But we has to be mighty careful it isn't the devil we're shovin' up by doin' more than is required!" she said.

As the laden *Sea Lily* towed Tobias in the laden catboat up the coast toward Tampa the next morning, Henri steered and stirred the beans, which the Christophes regarded with detestation but ate for reasons of economy combined with a racial pride which led to the belief that if beans did not poison Americans, Frenchmen were of even more rugged constitution. Joseph, doing the laundry, listened to the details of Henri's night with Thomas Webber. "He seems to speak truth. He even seems kind, for all his grossness," Henri said. "There would appear to be no reason for fraud on his part in the loss of the *Webber*. Nor does anything in M'sieur Webber's way of life suggest sudden wealth."

Joseph sighed. "Against all evidence, I had come to believe that you might have been right and that there might be insurance fraud with the *Webber*."

"Yet M'sieur Webber is, I think, afraid of the Hereras. Certainly M'sieur Webber hates the Hereras with an almost insane hatred. M'sieur Webber swears that our brother was at peace and planned no change of course when M'sieur Webber landed in the Isle of Palms—yet I believe those hats were of Home Island! It would seem they were of all likelihood hats the *Christophe* carried. Seeking where they might have come from, it was to Webber's Landing that I came!"

"The hats also could be quite innocent, Henri," Joseph said gravely across the suds. "Even should they be hats the *Christophe* carried, M'sieur Webber could have bought them from our brother."

"The *Christophe* did not leave the Caribbean, a man with a jay-bird's passion for collection did. M'sieur Webber. The port officer of the Isle of Palms described M'sieur Webber as having left the *Christophe* with his sole possessions in a handkerchief. It was to give us opportunity to check upon that that I refrained from telling M'sieur Webber of the hats."

"Were there not so much of tragedy here, even slow I would find something of comedy in the thought of a man with a yard-thick bale of palm hats up his sleeve, Henri," Joseph said gently.

"I do not think that M'sieur Webber took the hats ashore at the Isle of Palms—in his sleeve or otherwise. But baled hats do not fly from the Caribbean to the Everglades! Yet hats that may be the first tangible thing of the *Christophe* are found in the Everglades of Florida. The explanation may be innocent, but I would know it." He sighed. "It can be that I clutch at a straw hat rather than at the straw of the proverb."

"Because your mind goes very fast and mine plods very slowly, I tend to think so," Joseph said, soaping the worn shirts. "I smiled when you thought the Hereras more than playful. But as Tobias and I came north, two sponge boat captains told us that the Hereras had been making careful inquiry as to our schedules." He regarded Henri with grave eyes. "They had told the captains that they had business to discuss with us."

Since each knew what the other was thinking, they were silent as Joseph rinsed and hung the shirts and Henri served the beans.

"Thank you, brother," Joseph said, dipping his spoon and struggling to look as if he enjoyed the result. "Henri, could this be? That the wreck of the *Webber* was as innocent as it seems. That the unknown thing of value or of fear upon the Reefs might be something entirely else? You believe that both the little Ashby and M'sieur Webber hate and fear the Hereras. From the suffering little alcalde of the town they wrecked, we know that the Hereras could have been back upon the Purple Reefs ere our brother and the *Christophe* reached them. The Hereras are at least capable of any lawlessness. Assume thus that through accident they had learned of something they desired upon the Reefs, something of very great value. Or that Jaques and Christian had learned of it and the Hereras had learned of it from them. One hates very greatly to think it of any men, but the Hereras are capable of killing for what they wish! Assume then upon valuable knowledge and guilty act, the added complication of the *Christophe* comes. Our brother guesses and cannot be silenced except in death. Assume the Hereras—who are wild as natural force—running wild, should silence him and those of the *Christophe* . . ."

"Something of enormous value on the Purple Reefs? Something whose possession was endangered by the presence of witnesses? But what, Joseph?" Henri asked, grinning without mirth as he made Joseph say it.

"Treasure," Joseph said, blushing.

"I only wanted to make my practical one say the word," Henri said grimly. "But why, then, would not the Hereras silence M'sieur Webber and the little Ashby, since you assume them innocent?"

"Could it be that for some reason we do not know they could be sure that the little Ashby and M'sieur Webber dare not speak? Could they know that the sheer fear of the Hereras would keep M'sieur Webber and M'sieur Ashby silent?"

"I, too, have wondered that. At the end of wondering, I cannot see the Hereras trusting to men's fear when they could use the sea's certainty. If they should let two witnesses live when they had reason for wishing no witnesses, it would seem they must have had great need of those whom they let live—and what need could there be, brother?"

Joseph groaned. "As always the impossibility!"

"It is now my turn to blush for the saying of something that sounds most foolish, Joseph. The niece of M'sieur Webber, little Mam'selle Rue, thinking it merely a matter for laughter, told me that M'sieur Webber is so much afraid of the sea that going once with her to fish and a small storm coming up, he was so very much afraid that he spent two days in bed after the Coast Guard had rescued and towed them in. How then, after a voyage of real terror, was he as a playing fawn upon Home Island?"

"The girl must be mistaken," Joseph said, positively.

"The girl, I do not think mistaken!"

"But, Henri, the fact stands, at the end of a voyage to test any man, M'sieur Webber, in the words of M'sieur Latour, did skip as a fawn in the forests!"

"Unless there is some great error in what we think fact, brother . . ."

"What error, Henri? He made the desperate voyage! He skipped!"

"Probably it is merely another contradiction sent to torment us. At least the thinking of it has helped us eat the beans."

"That is true," Joseph said, surprised. "My plate is bare and I hardly knew that I was eating them!"

The rain showers were rosy against dark clouds to the east and Tampa Bay a great rose of evening as the *Sea Lily* and her tow docked at the foot of the old brick-paved city. The customs officer informed Henri and Joseph, "The *John P. Riggs* was in for a load of bulls—the usual floating menagerie! And Martin Herera was asking at length about your schedule. The pirates had evidently expected you to be here."

"We would have been had business not delayed us," Henri said. "At that, I had sooner meet the Hereras here than elsewhere."

With the sea things unloaded, Tobias said, "I will leave now." He looked at the sky that was green and streaked with last rosy clouds. "There will be good wind tomorrow. I will have collected many fans and perhaps have learned something when you return to the Reefs."

"I do not like it that you should be alone on the Reefs, Tobias!" Henri said, frowning. "We want no more men who do not come home again!"

"It was not Tobias whose words might perchance have troubled M'sieur Webber," Tobias said. "Neither is it for Black Tobias that the Hereras are asking in the ports."

They watched his catboat drift through shimmer of rose and green past the lilac silhouettes of the great phosphate docks. "At least the Hereras can hardly be delivering bulls to the Reefs," Joseph said. "And they would have to be very much interested ere they would make a special journey there."

"Were they interested enough, it is also difficult to know what all three of us could do about the matter should we meet them in a lonely place!" Henri said grimly. "Though why they are interested is beyond my imagining."

Tobias, approaching the Purple Reefs and the undulating sand dunes from the north in the glitter of a hot morning, was tempted by the thought of a bath before circling the White Dunes to the little bay. So, anchoring the catboat where the swells were not quite breaking, he removed his clothes and swam rapidly ashore. The white scrubbing sand was less plentiful here, but he walked along the bleached coral fragments to where a ribboned wash of the rare silica sand came down from the inner dunes. Here he sat at the edge of the ripples and scrubbed the majesty of his dark body and even his close-wooled head with handfuls of wet sand. His flesh tingled to the pleasant sharpness, and when he had rinsed, he walked to the dune-crest squeezing the salt water from his hair and glowing with the good feel of fierce sun through salt moisture. The sun and the wind were like caresses, and the sky so blue it seemed that the frigate birds must disappear in its dye. And while Tobias had no illusion that his son was with him, but because it was his habit to speak to the memory of his son, he said, "It is a fair day, my son."

His view toward the south and west was blocked by higher, wind-ridged waves of sand, but to east and southeast, the submerged tablelands spread into the sea-glitter of the east and the passionate colors of the south. For a moment he simply fed his eyes upon pink and purple, sapphire and gold. Then he looked more intently into the sun-path that was blind-silver and strangely empty where, far out, the small silhouette of the wrecked steamer should have risen from it. Wondering, Tobias said, "The *Webber* has gone!" He forced the salt water from his eyes with his fists and looked through cupped hands as if through binoculars and argued the matter aloud. "Perhaps she was more precarious than she seemed or perhaps a line squall whipped up a fine swell—yet I had thought she was pinned until the rust ate her or a new hurricane blew and I would wish to sail round to see!" Tobias said.

Two hours later he was climbing back into the catboat, where the little craft rode wildly outside the eastern surf, and was rehearsing what he would tell Henri and Joseph of that which he had seen at the spot where the *Webber* had lain. He chose the words he would use, for he did not wish to give false impression. "She has gone into the great deep. There is a sluiceway where she lay. The green swells were pouring clear and strong, thus having anchored my boat outside the breakers somewhat to the north, I rode a breaker in to wade the foam along the shoal, well nigh falling in the sluiceway ere I saw it. She may simply have carried the coral with her as she slipped, but the coral is much torn and there are flung fragments. It is my thought that she was dynamited from her bed."

Having expressed the thought, he saw the foolishness of his belief. For who would have done the thing? Salvagers? In view of the *Webber's* location, the only thing worth taking from her would have been her brass and for that no dynamite

would have been needed. Neither would any of the coast guards of the nations have troubled to remove her. An explosion from natural causes, then, of some gas accumulation in the ship's ruined hull? Impossible! Deliberate destruction of the ship because it was in some manner a link with the unknown evil? But why now, after so long?

"Perhaps because M'sieur Henri and M'sieur Joseph would study her should they salvage her brass? Yet what might M'sieur Henri and M'sieur Joseph have seen that the men of the insurance did not see? Wherein might M'sieur Henri and M'sieur Joseph have been different?" Tobias asked, his hand holding the tiller, his eyes regarding the white swells of the dunes with new wariness as the catboat sped.

For if the unknown evil had again been here, it might still be here. If it was here, he would not wish to walk blindly into its power, lest justice never be done for his son and for Cap' Henri. And he knew the exultation of the hunter closing perhaps at last upon the great beast long hunted; the moment in which there is danger the hunter throws away the caution of the years of hunting. Making himself reason, he knew that since the southwestern bay was the natural entry to the Reefs, were evil still here, it might well be within the bay. Thus he should look down upon the bay before entering it. And presently he was wading beside the catboat as he worked it up one of the small creeks of the northern shore between narrowing five-foot cliffs of sand and sedge. When the boat was completely hidden save from one looking down directly from above, he dug the anchor into the sand and swung himself up the little cliff, then cautiously and rapidly worked his way toward the top of the nearest dune. Irritatingly, he was followed by wheeling sea birds whose curious groupings broke up as he stayed still, only to re-form as he moved again. And so that they would not too greatly advertise his presence, he had at times to pause for perhaps ten minutes until they went about their aerial business. Nearing the top of the dune, he crawled on the snowy and wind-rippled sand. Before looking over the final knife edge, he poured white sand on his dark head. As his eyes came slowly above the crest from which the tiny, endless streams of sand were blowing, he stiffened. Below him, the dune swept down for perhaps a quarter-mile, ending in a small cliff, below which was the circular beach of the bay. On the transparency of the bay itself a fine powerboat rode. And on what little of the beach he could see, was a litter of cooking pots, bottles, discarded cans and disarrayed blankets. From under the lip of the little cliff, bare human feet stuck out—some belonging to legs that were casually crossed—while the faint blue of cooking smoke drifted in the sun. Because of the sounds of the wind and the whisper of the blowing sand, Tobias could catch no hint of voices, but the occasional movements of the tiny dots of the feet, then a flung bottle, indicated that the men on the beach were awake.

From his present position it would be impossible for him to draw closer without too great risk of being seen. But some hundreds of yards to the south, the crest of a dune swerved toward the beach and a much steeper pitch of the western face led to a small pocket of salt grass fringed with a low sprawl of sand vines. Tobias worked back from the crest, then rose to run parallel with it until its sand summits swung bayward. He was surprised to see that the columnar flight of sea birds was now wavering over the dunes to the east.

Having reached the section of the crest above the salt-grass pocket, he again peered over. This time he could hear the sound of men's voices but could catch no words, while the men themselves were completely hidden by the raised lip of the sand pocket at the cliff edge. Even in the small hiding place of the sand pocket, there would be great danger of his being seen. But he had searched empty sea and empty dune too long to fling away the chance of closeness. He hoisted himself over the crest and started on his belly down the pitch of snowy and squeaking sand. Little avalanches rolled before him, but he landed in the salt grass hollow without having attracted attention. And cautiously lifting the vine tangles onto the sand-lip so that there would be less chance that a man standing on the beach would see him, he tried to make himself into the mere power of hearing as his straining ears recognized three of the voices as those of Martin, Philip and Diego Herera. But, to his chagrin, they were speaking in Spanish. And only when Martin Herera and Diego Herera, unshaved and unwashed but gorgeous as to handkerchiefs and earrings, rolled out from under the little cliff to sprawl on the sand and it was easier to hear their words, did he learn with astonishment that they were debating as to who had destroyed the *Webber*? Why had someone destroyed the *Webber*? They, themselves, had seemingly delayed the delivery of their bulls in South America—the animals being unhappily parked with the *John P. Riggs* in the Low Cays—and had come here to check some matter in regard to the *Webber*, only to be dumfounded and for some reason worried by finding the *Webber* gone. Being here, though bored, they were waiting for someone or something that should have been here ere this. (Tobias assumed with fright that they referred to Henri and Joseph.)

Old Geraldino Herera's deep voice sounded from under the cliff for the first time. "Bah!" For it was said that the old man spoke five languages, but chose English when he was angry. "Chatter! Chatter! Yabber! Yabber! Have I begotten sons or old women at a cake-bake?" he bellowed so that his voice echoed round the bay. "Once men acted instead of talked! Now what pass as men talk instead of act! It causes me surprise that my grandchildren are not dictionaries and

my great-grandchildren parrots!" He came into view as he rose, clad in faded blue, short-sleeved shirt and blue dungarees, yet more spectacular than his sons, a huge and dark old man with the incredibly seamed face of a Polynesian chief and a humorous blandness of expression that was belied by the known record of his appalling cruelties. "Little girls, old women, chattering myna birds, be quiet!" Lowering his voice, he mocked spitefully from his myriad wrinkles. "'Who did it?' 'What was it?' . . . Is it perhaps the game 'Animal, Vegetable or Mineral' we play?" He closed his great fist. "There is only one question for men! 'What do I do about it?' And for a proper man, that is a short question!"

"The money we brought to the Low Cays at least was long!" Martin Herera said, grinning and also speaking in English. "Very and pleasantly long . . ."

"Baboons!" Old Geraldino said, clapping him ringingly over the ear. "And were you not baboons who played as baboons, we were not now roosting on a sand bar!" He spat and moved stoopingly and hugely toward the bay. And Tobias' eyes, turning momentarily to the sky behind him, noted that the topmost eddies of the remote column of sea birds were now farther to the north. So that he experienced a new fear, for the thing that the sea birds watched was moving toward the catboat! The number and persistence of the birds suggested that the moving thing was no casual creature of the Reefs. And sick at heart, Tobias assumed that some one of the Hereras must be absent from the group by the bay and that even now, some Herera brother or cousin might be approaching the catboat! But why so slowly, so cautiously? And if one of the Hereras had been upon the eastern or northern dunes, why had they not come in to report Tobias' coming, his excursion to the scene of the wreck? Was it the thing the birds watched that Tobias should have been watching, rather than the Hereras by the bay? Terrible anxiety filled him. But, with the Hereras no longer against the little cliff, he could not get back up the dune. He had trapped himself.

This filled him with even greater fear. For what if Henri and Joseph should be unsuspectingly nearing the Reefs and he could not warn them? He pictured the *Sea Lily* as even now in view and he, Tobias, useless as a jungle fowl pretending to be fallen leaves! Anguish made him foolish. His hand exerted unconscious pressure upon the forward rim of his sand basin and a strong rivulet of white sand flowed down upon the beach as the forward lip of the basin began to lower before his eyes. Old Man Herera walked toward him. "What have we here?" On their feet, the Herera men pressed behind their father.

Tobias attempted to fling himself up the rooflike pitch of the dune, but sliding sand defeated him. As he slipped ignominiously backward, Martin Herera leaped to grasp him by one foot, the other Herera brothers seized Martin, and with a combined heave, they jerked the great black man over the collapsing edge of the little cliffs to fall with a violent thud upon the beach. About him, the Hereras laughed, pointed and commented delightedly as they would have laughed at the capture of some large animal. "A pity it is not the old days," Old Geraldino said. "He would have brought a thousand pounds on the slave blocks of Cayman!" He toed Tobias in the side. "Get up, boy! What are you doing here? And why were you spying?"

Tobias rose gravely from the sand as Martin Herera held the razor-keen point of a shark knife against his belly and Philip Herera delicately pricked the small of his back with another. "I gather fans and plumes. I was hidden to see who was upon the beach."

"Where is your boat?"

"I have no boat. The boat is my partner's. He has taken our haul to market." The lie came clumsily to him.

Martin Herera said, "He is lying." He struck Tobias flat-handed on the ear. "Where is your boat? Who dynamited the ship?"

In Tobias' eye was a redness, but he said, "I have no boat, M'sieurs. I do not know what befell the ship."

"He is a boy of Home Island," Old Man Herera said. "Old Captain Henri Christophe's black. Boy, when do Henri and Joseph Christophe come? And what do they seek here?"

Tobias was silent.

"He will talk," Martin Herera said, and smiled at the fire.

"He may or may not," Old Geraldino said indifferently. "In my father's day, at times they told the hiding places of the other runaway slaves. At times they did not and died, if those questioning them were careless enough to destroy valuable properties."

With Martin Herera holding the shark knife against Tobias' stomach and Philip Herera's knife still delicately pricking the

small of his back, Dominico Herera tied Tobias' wrists and ankles. The cord, Tobias noticed, was good Manila instead of Caribbean thatch-palm rope and it spoke of the Hereras' prosperity through the money of which Martin had boasted. Tobias did not like being tied, but he was better off tied than with knife wounds in back or stomach. And he stood still, looking gravely downward at the sand. Neither did he struggle as a half dozen of the Hereras seized him to dump him, sitting, by the pale ashes of the fire. Martin Herera thrust back the ashes with a prong of driftwood so that the ash-veiled orange and rose of the quivering coals showed, sending out a small wave of heat. The other Herera brothers pressed close, some upon one knee, some kneeling with hands on knees as men gather about a game played on a pavement. Their lips moved and their dark eyes danced as men's do at a cockfight. Giant Old Geraldino stood by in casual interest.

"When do Henri and Joseph Christophe come?" Martin Herera asked. "For what do they seek here? Was it they who dynamited the ship?"

Tobias' eyes looked past him at the green edge of the tide against the white sand and at the bay in which today was a wide drift of sargassum like gold filigree on jade. Because of the bigness of Tobias' hands, Dominico Herera had not made the cord as tight as he might have and Tobias was straining outward on it so that the muscles of his arms bulged iron-hard under the dark skin. Old Geraldino smiled and spat at the fire. The cord gave fractionally so that Tobias' big, dark hands turned palm upward as if in supplication. Stooping suddenly, he thrust his hands, scoopwise, deep into the hot ashes and little coals of the fire and swung his filled hands to fling ash and coals—three times—fast!—ignoring the agony in his hands, so that coals and hot ash flew over the close-pressed circle. Shouting, the Hereras pawed at their ash-covered faces, clawed madly at their hair and down their shirts. They rolled and kicked, bellowing. Tobias jammed his wrists down on the coals so that the cord flared, jerked outward on the cord, and his wrists were free. He flung himself over and between the swearing, shouting and rolling Hereras, and was on wet sand, into the water. He did not wait to free his ankles, but swam fishlike with tied feet. Behind him, about the fire, the ash-covered Hereras still clawed at scorched hair, slapped out burning clothing, reached, yelling, down their shirts for coals. Old Geraldino laughed jeeringly, rocking backward and forward as he stood with his hands at his belt.

Tobias, swimming with all his strength, was into the first drifts of the sargassum, which lay heaviest about the south sand-horn of the bay but extended almost across the bay's mouth so that the powerboat would have to circle it. Once into the shelter of the weeds, he dived, swimming below the weeds and coming up only for air. Having rounded the south sand-horn and with the Hereras still not in sight, he surfaced and swam fiercely again, passed the first small permanent water meadow of sargassum weed, and had reached the vast tangles of the golden growth, when he heard the powerboat start. He dived and swam beneath the thicker weed, then fought his way up through its matting for air. Getting his breath, he dived again—and again. From the bay came shouting and the roaring of the powerboat's engine. Deep into the weeds now, Tobias came up softly, deflated his lungs to the usable minimum of air, let his legs hang downward into the green light of the water, tipped his head back and drew a covering of wet yellow weeds across his face. So long as he was not troubled by sharks or barracudas, he did not think the Hereras would find him. But if they found him, he presumed that they were certainly angry enough to kill him.

Against his eyes, the leaves of the weed shone pure gold and through the interstices of the weed he could glimpse that the launch had rounded the dune and that the Hereras were searching the smaller weed patches for him. But if they did not assume that he had drowned, they would guess what he had done and come to the great weed patch where he was hidden. Yet, having guessed, they still could not bring the powerboat under power into the great sargassum meadows for its screws would foul instantly. They could enter the great meadow only by poling, and could discover him only by laboriously parting the weed masses or by prodding for him with the pole. He could still make it quite hard for them to find him.

They were trying the first and smaller meadow now. It was some distance away and he raised his face fractionally so that he saw more clearly between the delicate golden, leaf-sprays of the weed. The Hereras had the powerboat pointed at the swaying carpet of the weed as they intently studied every foot of its surface. There was also something on the bow of the powerboat that Tobias had never seen before and that had not been there as the boat lay in the bay. Tobias thought it was a fat telescope on a tripod, but Martin Herera who gripped the thing, did not seem to look through it. And suddenly the thing emitted a slashing blast of sound that was almost like sharp laughter, while from where a small hump had shown in the sargassum meadow the swirls of foam and torn weed flew upward as the startled flights of the little fish broke water.

Tobias still did not know the thing's name but he knew what it was doing as the Hereras whirled it at those humps of the meadow that might mean that a swimmer sought air beneath the weed or chased those stirrings of the weed carpet that

might mark a fleeing fish or a swimming man. He tried to think what he must do when it turned on his own hiding place. But his head was aching with the too many thoughts and emotions of the day and his hands were stiffening to hardly usable agony. And while, as he thought, he was working frantically at the cord about his ankles, so much of the tips of his fingers was burned flesh that he had difficulty in telling what his fingers did. Yet he must live to warn Henri and Joseph that the Hereras waited for them!

And then the cord was free. And as the powerboat spun toward the larger fields of sargassum where he hid, he steadied himself so that no ripple should mark his place and sank with back-tilted head so that only his lips were above the water under the watery weed. Once the hiss and splash and the torrents of the little fish bombarding his body told him that the laughing gun had slashed at something near him, perhaps at a swirling barracuda. But he resisted all tendency to move, and presently could relax a little. And then, after taking the boat on one great circle round the great meadow, the Hereras grew tired of hunting the despised animal that had angered them. And as the freshening wind began to toss the gold of the weeds, he worked so far into the sargassum meadows that he did not think the Hereras would find him even by poling. Actually, they did not even try this, perhaps believing he had drowned or that their bullets had caught him.

From their distantly seen actions, he also judged that they were in considerable pain and vile temper from their burns and that their patience with their whole project had run out. But before they left, they did a strange thing. They, who hated work, went out to where the *Webber* had lain, and moved, wading and stooping back and forth through the water and sometimes staggering toward the edge of the deep!

When they finally left, it was to the southwest, on the course for the Low Cays. And he felt great relief, for he had feared that they might have gone to intercept Henri and Joseph in the *Sea Lily*.

He was so weak from pain, emotional strain and submersion, that, having gained the shore, he could hardly stand. It also occurred to him that he had not eaten at all today. But he had reached the point of tiredness where he could not eat. Noting in bitterness that the notice that had read *Needed by the Brothers Christophe* had been insolently changed to *Taken by the Brothers Herera*, he saw that both the cache of gasoline and little Timothy Christophe's dinghy were gone, while the emergency supply of water had been upset. Then, stumbling and falling like an old man, he began the long trek back across the dunes. Often he had to lie down, and having lain down, would fall asleep. So that it was rosy evening with the night wind whining as he came out at the head of the little cleft where he had left the catboat.

The catboat was gone!

Tobias stood swaying in the dusk. This was the place. There was the same trail of pink-flowered vine hanging by the same twist of withered gray roots. Peering, he could see the same horned and bleached conch shell he had almost stepped on as he drew the boat into the creek. But the boat was gone and the Hereras had not taken it!

The little, lonely wind sighed out of the lilac of the east. Shadows rose round his feet. The dusk could not deceive him. The catboat had been here and was gone.

Who had taken it? What had taken it? Was it not a man but a thing that the birds had circled? Whatever it was, he was marooned with it under waking stars and falling night. Turning slowly, he looked about him. But there was only the pallor of the dunes and the leaden silver of the blowing salt grass and the great sound of the sea.

Seven

Henri and Joseph, having said good-by to Tobias in Tampa, had confronted their usual problem of what to do with the *Sea Lily* while transacting their business. "I could wish we did not have to leave her anywhere!" Henri said. "Yet we are so pressed for time, we must, and since we are out of the banana trade, there should be no local grievance against her. It would also be ironic if hiding her off a sandspit to foil bad banana men, we delivered her to a small boy playing with matches." He hesitated. "Yet I am afraid whenever she is alone! In truth, I am an old woman!"

Having irritated the dock watchman by requests that he ceaselessly guard the *Sea Lily*, Henri set out to see Dr. Clifford while Joseph went to collect their personal mail and to seek a diving suit at the marine salvage company. And hurrying through the old streets, where tonight the West Florida fog of mist and pine smoke crept thick across neon signs and down black alleys, Henri again had the thought that of all American cities Tampa was perhaps the most mysterious in dusk or darkness, so that it was of America, but alien. He was glad to reach the shell-cluttered innocence of the museum, where Dr. Clifford was delighted by the inventory and even more pleased that they planned to work the Reefs at lower levels, from which the museum had difficulty in obtaining specimens and for which specimens he could pay at higher rates. "The amount of the present check is so good that I can hardly believe it, M'sieur. It has tempted me to an extravagance that I would like to commit tonight . . ." Henri told him. "Would it be too much to ask for a five-dollar advance in cash?"

"I could make it more if you want it," Dr. Clifford said. "What is the extravagance?"

"Joseph wants a flute. If it is still in the pawnshop, I am going to try to buy it for him. Joseph has had very little."

The flute was still in the pawnbroker's window. The pawnbroker, an elderly and bearded Syrian, was behind the counter. Henri bowed, producing the five dollars. "M'sieur, it is my understanding the price of the flute in your window is fifty dollars, which is too much. Since, however, I must offer you a proposition of trade rather than cash, we will accept the too high price of the instrument . . ."

"We will accept cash or nothing!" the pawnbroker said, turning his back.

"Then, M'sieur, part of us will lose the best bargain ever offered him!" Henri said.

"He will take the risk!" the pawnbroker said. ". . . What bargain?"

"M'sieur, for the flute, I will pay you five dollars in cash as binder of the deal. I will place in your hands as security a chronometer worth one hundred dollars cash in any port. In the next two nights I will paint your ceiling with which you are making little progress."

"Two nights' work are not worth forty-five dollars and I do not wish my ceiling painted."

"Two nights' work of mine are worth forty-five dollars, as you will see! But were they not worth the amount, it would but make them match the flute . . ."

"No!"

"M'sieur," Henri said, leaning his hands on the counter, "in all fiction of the world the poor young man desiring to make a purchase offers to trade his labor for it. The kind owner of the business is pleased by his industry and initiative. We know that it has never happened. That the kind owner throws the young man out—if the kind owner is large enough—or shouts him out if the owner is a small man. M'sieur, would you not like to be the first actual kind owner of a business who accepts the poor but honest young man's proposition? Always you could say, 'I am the man of business who really made a trade with the poor but honest young man . . . '"

"Also I could say, 'I am the man of business who presently sends for the police to rid his shop of a nuisance!'" He looked more intently at Henri. "Parlez vous français?"

"Oui . . ." They relapsed into the more suitable tongue of commercial bargaining. They alternately whispered accusingly, pointing at each other across the counter, shouted and gestured simultaneously, or sneered mockingly while moved to lightly ironic laughter by the opposition's statements. At one stage the Syrian gripped Henri by the collar. Periodically they produced the sound effects of a large group of persons talking at once. Obviously their mutual respect and liking grew. "I am worn down!" the pawnbroker said, raising his hands three quarters of an hour later. "Three nights' work and the chronometer as security and the five dollars down, and the flute is yours! My voice can endure no more."

Short of breath but both highly stimulated by contest with a worthy opponent, they completed the deal. "It is one of the sad things of the New World that the making of a bargain was an art left in the Old," Henri said.

"In Damascus, one might discuss a business matter involving one sou for three hours!" the pawnbroker said.

With wrapped flute, Henri overtook Joseph as he was emerging from the salvage company. Joseph's face was alight with pleasure. "I have found a good suit that needs only a little patching and with a really good compressor and even a marine telephone, though that will not work. Best of all we can hire it for ten dollars a month. There was also a thank you letter in our box from the gentleman to whom I reported the finding of the bottle he had set adrift. It seems his hobby is ocean currents and, guessing that we might have been upon the Purple Reefs to seek old ships, he has sent us a chart showing the less known effects of submarine currents upon objects washed over or sunk near large reefs." His face sobered. "There is also a letter for you from your friend, the good editor in Miami. He has secured one of the hats and is mailing it to you. But I would not have you hope too much from it."

"I will not," Henri said as they fell in step. "Meantime behold our fine check from the good doctor! And here is something for you, Joseph."

Joseph took the wrapped package, with puzzled pleasure. Undoing it, he was, Henri knew, ready to be pleased with whatever was within. Seeing the flute, he stood quite still and the red of astonished delight swept up his face. "The flute!" Joseph said wonderingly. He touched it lightly and with much care with two stiffly held fingers of one hand, as if it might vanish. "I have so often looked at flutes, but never thought to have one! But you should not have done it, Henri!"

"The cash cost was but five dollars, my spending money. The rest is a deal that does not concern you, prudent one," Henri said. "Go get the caulking materials and fastenings needed for the diving barge, then make horrid noises with your flute! I go to the library and then to see Madame Combs."

At the little marine library, with the battered volume for which he had sought at last in his hands, Henri was almost fearful of reading lest the reading prove yet another blind lead. But while the book's title suggested piracy, it was actually the strictly factual account of certain of the world's more famous insurance frauds. Through it, "the Greek owners" moved, frantically seeking privacy to sink their ships; across its oceans, Captain Fiery Lake left his astonishing trail of blazing vessels; in its manifests, cargoes of rare fruits and spices proved baled rubbish and leaves, a three hundred and seventy-five thousand dollar shipment of gold turned into bars of iron and singularly unfortunate shipmasters had the odd experience of colliding with the one protruding rock in leagues of sea, later to be embarrassed by having left available the charts upon which the exact location of the rock was most carefully prenoted.

The case of the *Campello*, which Henri's kind Englishman had advised that he study, had first attracted the underwriters' attention through the seemingly odd selection of Captain Fiery Lake himself as a caretaker to see that the ship was kept safe from fire while moored in the James River, a task in which the flame-haunted captain somewhat predictably failed, when the ship was destroyed by burning. The true interest of the case centered, however, in the fact the further investigation—which might never have been undertaken save for the identity of the caretaker, since the ship had not seemed to be overinsured—revealed that the ship, whose original cost had been around a million dollars, had been sold at a forced marshal's sale for, incredible as it might seem, forty-seven hundred dollars, the lucky purchaser shortly reselling her for fifty thousand dollars, the company that had bought her for fifty thousand dollars, as promptly disposing of her for seventy-five thousand dollars, for which last amount a mortgage was accepted, payable over a ten-year period. In view of the amount of this mortgage, the ship's insurance of eighty thousand dollars seemed in no way excessive. The method by which the employer of Captain Fiery Lake had stood to gain by the ship's destruction had come to light only when it was revealed that (with some minor co-operation from friends) he was actually the ship's buyer at the original forced sale, the ship's buyer from himself at fifty thousand dollars and the corporation to which he had sold her for seventy-five thousand dollars and from whom he had accepted the seventy-five thousand dollar mortgage, insured in his favor. Had the insurance been paid, he would thus have stood to profit by the difference between the forty-seven hundred dollars for which he had bought the ship and the eighty thousand for which she was insured, the series of faked sales having been merely a means of concealing the amount of this potential profit.

Reading the story, Henri felt a shock of disappointment. For while the *Campello's* history did reveal a very unusual type of fraud whereby there might be great and hidden profit for a ship's owner at her wrecking, the outward story of the *Campello* was so like the outward story of the *Webber* that the mind must doubt whether any man would risk making the hidden stories equally like . . . Surely no man would risk too closely paralleling an already recorded case of fraud? Yet had Thomas Webber actually been all owners and also the mortgage-holder of the *Webber*, he would have stood to profit by some hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars at her wrecking, or by the difference between the twenty-five

thousand dollars for which she had originally been bought and the hundred and fifty thousand dollar mortgage for which she was insured. Under which circumstances, salt gold, if in more modern form than that of which the old captains dreamed, had certainly lain upon the Purple Reefs at her wreck!

In the smoky depths of the houseboat, Ma Combs' face beamed with delight as she hugged Henri's young shoulders. "Oh, am I glad to see you, boy! Did you see him?" Her clawlike hands dug into his shoulders. "Whatever's amatter with him, Henri?"

"He was away in his launch, Madame. But I left a letter for him, telling him of your love," Henri said gently.

She sighed and her hands shook as she filled her pipe and stuck it in the corner of her mouth. "I guessed you'd told him that! Thank you. Thank you kindly—but what can he be runnin' from, th' poor little fellow? What can be the matter he comes like a ghost in the night ashamed even to talk to me?"

"You mean he came here and left some message, Madame?"

Her face wrinkled with a strange—and strangely sweet—expression. "I reckon you could call it a message. What it's said ain't told much!" She patted the packing-case-framed bed. "Set down, boy!"

Accustoming himself to the odors of smoked fish and corn liquor, Henri sat, noting the familiar shotgun by the companionway. Seeing the direction of his glance, she said grimly, "They'll all get as good as they give if they ever bother me! Revenooers or zoning board—or brother Webber! He was here last night apesterin' me again like a pale shark to know where my poor little guy is at. I told him I wisht I knew but it'd take a better man than him to get it from me if I did. Reckon he believed me. He ain't been back today." She grinned, then was intent. "Henri, I don't know how or if any of it ties, but it's said Tom Webber is thick with the Maffia, which some say controls th' city, and as he has some of th' police in his pocket. It's said he was in half th' little and middle-sized rackets here before he moved south and started his grand resort. A man as thinks he's a little Napoleon but can't fill Napoleon's pants is a real dangerous man, Henri. More dangerous someways than a bigger man because he's always riled up he ain't coming out quite what he thinks he is." She added tobacco to her pipe and snorted smoke.

Rising to stand before her and look down at her gently, Henri said, "Madame, as you know, mystery is bitter and Joseph and I also have a mystery of why Malcolm, our brother, did not come home. I try to say that I wish to ask you things that it may seem impertinent to ask. Perhaps to tell you something that it may seem a breach of trust to tell. I dare because we both have a great trouble."

The sudden film of tears stood in her reddened eyes. The smoke snorted from her old pipe. "What you want to know an' say, Henri?"

"What was your husband's work before he had the . . . difficulty that first took him from you? And what was the nature of the difficulty?"

"He was the best damned diver in the Americas!" she said fiercely. And Henri's mind suddenly identified the gleam of copper that he had seen in Ashby's shed. He also believed that he knew the identity of the suit-diver who had been upon the Reefs. But why? He could not see Ashby as motivated by anything save fear. And what could Ashby fear upon the Reefs that he could reach or hide or prove only with a suit? "And he weren't never bad!" Ma Combs said. "Just sort of a bit outside the law. Like workin' for treasure companies that go for th' rich suckers—with him the diver—so he'd keep 'finding' just enough treasure to keep the backers happy. Nothing to hurt anyone. But then the treasure outfit he was workin' for made a mistake of takin' a mighty smart cookie for a ride. He up and proved the 'galleon' was a tug wrecked in the 1935 storm an' my poor little guy drew a two-year stretch for his part in it. He couldn't be shut in an' he broke out. In breakin' out, another guy with him wounded a guard an' said my guy did it. So he changed his name an' went down the Caribbean, takin' whatever work he could get as did no harm. Like throwin' away a fancy yacht the owners was tired of off Jamaica or sometimes just bein' real engineer for around nothin' because his papers was fake. Months, there wasn't no job at all. That was how it had been when Webber come to me to put 'em in touch. Seems I was wrong, but I supposed it was a throwin' away. A diver is mighty handy to look over underwater damage to be sure it's O. K. before the insurers sees a wreck. Seems I was wrong on th' *Webber* . . ." Her face puckered in changing lines and her keen eyes searched his face as if questioning for the last time how far she might trust him. "But someone—I don't say it had to be Webber!—but someone knew the *Webber* weren't never goin' to reach Tampa, Henri! My poor little guy had changed his name, but he

couldn't never have showed his face open in Tampa. When he sailed on the *Webber*, he must have knew the *Webber* wasn't comin' all the way! 'Less, of course, he was plannin' to leave her en route, which ain't likely in midsea!" She stared at him earnestly. "I don't know who else knowed, if it was Webber or the Herera guys or someone else altogether! But my little guy knew! An' still he wouldn't have meant no harm!"

"You shame me that I did not think of that, Madame! He must have known!"

"Maybe I've just thought of him more . . . Henri, I don't know what happened to him. I just know he didn't expect it to be bad, but it must have been awful bad! Henri, ain't you even got a guess what he's afeard of? Why he can't talk to me or send fer us?"

Hesitating, he looked down at her worn, fierce face. "Just how much do you love him, your husband, Madame? And how much do you know of life?"

"More than everythin' else I ever have loved or will love! Take all the things that's good in a stinkin' world—bacon in the mornin's, fried fish when the frost is comin' with sunset, a kid's voice laughin'—roll 'em all in one, an' he's more! As fer life, I been kicked around so I know all there is to know—an' some more!"

"The reason that he does not let you go to him is not perhaps all danger—and I violate a trust in telling you this! It is that he was alone and the days were long and there was a dance girl who left him when better chance came, so that he cares now for two little children. If he were as many men, he would leave them. But he is, as you say, a good man. He cannot leave what would not have been save for him. It is a very old story of lonely men . . ."

She looked at him, then covered her face as her shoulders began to shake, so that Henri stared, appalled. As she lifted her face, he saw that she was laughing. She rose and he thought her ugly face very beautiful as she reached up to hug him. "You big, gentle, young fool, thank you! Thank you, Henri!" She kissed him on either cheek. "When you catch up with him, you tell him if he had ten children I'd love 'em enough for twenty! But it looks like he believed that letter you left him, Henri." She beckoned and he followed her into the smaller cabin. In it, amongst the plump tow-heads, two small, brown-headed boys were sleeping. Henri had seen them last in the rain in the mangrove swamp near the Isle of Palms. He touched their hair that had been carefully washed and combed. "They was the most of the message he left," Ma Combs said. "The rest was a note, 'They're mine, God help me, Ma! And God forgive me for the worse I done.'"

Henri said, "Madame, you are a good and great woman and I am proud to be called your friend!"

Smiling as she stepped back into the main cabin, she asked, "You got a girl of your own, Henri? The girl that gets you is a lucky woman!"

He flushed, smiling down at her, but so happy that he could not resist telling of happiness. "It is a secret, Madame. I have not even told Joseph, my brother . . . But I have found my girl! The little niece of M'sieur Webber, Mam'selle Rue!"

Her mouth opened as if she would speak, and closed again. She moved to sit at the table while her eyes that were like intelligent loquat seeds, studied his face with an expression he could not read. When she spoke, she said, "This world is tough for women, Henri! Terrible tough!"

"That I believe, Madame!" he said gently. "Women love very much, and to love is very often to be hurt."

Her foot in its old, man's boot swung thoughtfully and the smoke snorted from her pipe. "One thing we needs to remember—man or woman! We expects to love people for what they do—for bein' good an' kind an' fine. It don't work that way! We love people because we love 'em. So we don't want to say, 'He's not worth lovin' or 'She's not worth lovin' because he or she has up an' done so an' so!' If we love him or her, him or her is worth everythin' there is to us, no matter what they done! An' if you ever need help—no matter what—you ask old Ma!" He looked at her, puzzled by her words.

As they said good-by, she said, "Remember it must be something awful bad my poor little guy is afearful of, it must be something awful has him, Henri! But tell him to come home an' face what he's afeared of! And remember this is a wicked city!"

Whether because of her words or because of the clouded darkness that was alive, Henri did not know, but making his way toward the waterfront, for the first time in the search, he had the sense of imminent physical danger. And as black shadow became a man smoking and waiting without movement in a doorway—for what?—or onto battered porches of dark frame houses, silent groups of men stepped to be admitted into unlighted halls, he moved fast, keeping well away from doors, while the muscles of his back were pricklingly alert under the fabric of his shirt, as if the darkness was hunting and he the hunted. His fears for Joseph and the *Sea Lily* became so acute that when occasional cars crammed

with young, Latin men roared past and the men were doubtless quite innocent young men returning to Ybor City from some party, they seemed darkly menacing, and he knew absurd relief when they did not turn toward the docks.

Very near the docks, a car passed him, coming from the docks and going fast, with one man in it. He stopped and looked after it as it turned south. He could not be sure if it was merely his mood that tricked him, but he thought the man in it had been Thomas Webber. Continuing along the way the car had come, he looked down the line of dock entrances, and some hundred feet from the dock he was about to enter, a group of perhaps twelve men were gathered under a light. Henri believed that the man in the car had been with the men under the light. One of them was now seemingly talking with the old watchman from the dock where the *Sea Lily* was berthed. The others were looking in Henri's direction as if they had been waiting for him. As he began the long run down the dark dock, he remembered Daphne's statement that Thomas Webber would never willingly have part in true violence, he was too much afraid for his white skin, but would rather stand laughing in glee while other men were hurt in a prize ring or a sport, while were crime to be committed he would have wished to be afar with a loud alibi.

Glancing back as he ran, against the faint light of the street, he saw the men come through the gate, running silently but somewhat clumsily because several of them carried things that swung. Before him, from the *Sea Lily* came the sweet tones of the flute. And as he landed on board in a flying jump, Joseph looked up, smiling in the cloud-dim night. "I have had my nicest evening," Joseph said. Wonder touched his smile. "I never thought that I would own anything so beautiful." He realized that Henri's method of boarding was not normal. "What is it, Henri?"

"I think trouble is coming!" Henri said, breathing loudly as he swung into the cabin and noted that Joseph had finished the ironing so that the blue shirts and tan trousers were neatly hung against the wall. Pushing the garments aside, he reached for the shark rifle—to find it gone. He called, "Joseph, where is the rifle?"

Joseph was at the companionway. "A police officer took it a little while ago. He was making a search for stolen weapons and said it would be returned. What is the matter, Henri?"

"There are men coming down the wharf. I thought I saw M'sieur Webber leaving them," Henri said, grabbing up two small, stout oars and jumping past Joseph to the deck. On the dock, the shadowy shapes of the running men were almost to the launch. Whatever they carried, occasionally clanked. Thrusting an oar into Joseph's hands, Henri swung onto the dock to plant himself before the baled fans. Joseph too was on the dock, saying, "They are doubtless crewmen from the ships . . ."

Setting down what they carried, and still running, the group of men split up to form a rushingly closing half-circle about the Christophes.

"Good evening, M'sieurs," Joseph began pleasantly. The men did not answer, but crouched, moving in purposefully. Henri shouted, "Help me, Joseph!" He charged, using his oar: an unexpectedly effective weapon when swung edgewise as a goosewing against human shins by a powerful and spinning man, or plied as a rapier at shadowy faces by a trained fencer—and fencing for sport with masked blades was a Christophe memorial to the Great Marquis. So that for a moment Henri produced astonished groans, oaths, stumblings and face-shielding amongst the attackers. Forced backward, he used the oar overhead as an edged club aimed at individually darting heads and shoulders. Trampling, grunting, groaning and shouting echoed in the night. With a backward kick, Henri sent Aunt Caroline's wheeled-chair into the bay.

On one of the ships far down the dock, a searchlight snapped on and flashlights winked. "Help, Joseph!" Henri shouted. Joseph hesitated. And some six of the men darted in, their arms gripping him about the body and by the arms while fists beat his face and head. Henri glanced distractedly toward Joseph. And clutching, striking men were upon him too. Pulling violently backward, then hurling himself forward and down, Henri broke free, shouting, "Into the boat, Joseph! They mean to fire her!" He tried to get to Joseph.

Fists struck his head dizzyingly in shocks of pain, hands clutched his clothing, tearing his shirt from his body. He tore free and whirled, striking furiously about him with the oar, sending the men backward. From the direction of the ships, flashlights were coming fast, like glowworms under the blue sun of the searchlight. Bringing the oar blade down edgewise on the backs of those who beset Joseph, Henri got Joseph free. But between them and the launch were the men. And two of the heavier of their number sprang at Henri's shoulders, throwing him to his knees. Joseph held the oar in his hands, but he did not use it. Instead he stood with head bowed on his great neck while the corded muscles of his shoulders trembled and his chest rose and fell gaspingly. The men laughed with a low, ugly sound and were onto him, their fists thudding on his unguarded face, their legs tripping him.

With his head locked under a man's arm, Henri saw that Joseph was on his knees again, with blood gushing over his face. His mere strength was giving the men trouble, but he still did not defend himself. "Joseph!" Henri shouted imploringly. And Joseph swayed and lifted the men who attacked him but did not strike them. So that the men attacking Joseph laughed with the sound of cruelty becoming a little mad. Through the unreal glare of the searchlight and the staggering shadows, Henri saw a boot kicking at Joseph's stomach. Joseph's face twisted in sudden agony and he went down. The men were all over him, kicking and beating him. Henri struggled to reach the men who beset Joseph, but he was held by the men clinging to his legs and the man on his shoulders was pushing his thumbs into the veins of his neck and trying to twist his head sideward. Behind him there was a clinking sound of metal and of liquid pouring. From the *Sea Lily*, sudden flame rose. In the wild glare, the men from the ship were arriving on the run as a red-faced ship's officer shouted, "What goes here?" From about the furiously burning launch, men scattered and ran, covering their faces. With a final rain of blows, those attacking the brothers also sprang up and darted away. But the *Sea Lily* was flaring like a torch. Staggering to his feet, Henri stood swaying and gasping for breath as he stared at her helplessly. The ship's officer shouted, "Get down! The gas tanks . . ."

Stumblingly, Henri dropped to the planking of the wharf, putting his arm across Joseph's bloody head. Under him, the great planks of the wharf shivered to the shock of twin explosions. A great ball of mushrooming smoke and fire shot upward, to fall as raining fire. Gropingly, he beat out fire on his clothing and on Joseph's clothes and hair. Wild light flickered from burning gasoline on the water. The ship's officer and his men were spraying Foamite on the fire. As Henri got up again, only fire marked the place where the launch had been moored. The desolation of the small, leaping flames where the trim beauty of the *Sea Lily* should have been was almost too much for him.

Joseph raised himself on an arm, his head drooping weakly. "Henri . . . are . . . you badly hurt?" he asked in an anguished voice.

"No," Henri said, trembling with fury. "No! But the *Sea Lily* has gone and we could have saved her if you would have fought!" His face swelled with passion. "To turn the other cheek may be matter of question. Aunt Caroline's hair you should not have turned!" He choked with trembling rage.

"I am sorry," Joseph mumbled, getting from his knees to his feet as he tried to wipe the blood from his face with his hands. "One cannot hold a belief all one's life and abandon it when the first test comes, Henri! Or one would die of self-contempt . . ."

"Thus you have let the *Sea Lily* be lost, thus Domremy may be lost, thus M'sieur Latour will not be paid! Had you but used the oar, we had held them off!" Henri shouted. His fists clenched and the veins in his forehead swelled. "How dared you betray us? With an enemy, one may deal, with a traitor, one cannot deal!"

"I could not give up the belief of a life—I may be mistaken, but you must not speak to me thus, Henri!" Joseph said.

Raising his hand, Henri struck Joseph flat-handed and resoundingly across the cheek. Joseph swayed, whitened and stood quite still. Henri turned away and went furiously to the edge of the dock. Only little flicks of flame now rose amongst the piles. Spraying the last fire, the ship's officer shouted above the confusion, "What happened?"

"It is a very long story—in part of an idiot!" Henri said through his teeth. "Forgive me, M'sieur, I am distrait!" He pushed his hands over his face. As the fire went out and the ship's crew crowded about him, he explained about the bananas and the threats of the large banana man with the stubbled beard and the thin banana man with the buck teeth and of the support given them by the police officer who had been on the fruit dock on the *Sea Lily's* first trip. "Whether these men tonight were fruit men, I do not know. Much happened quickly, but I recognized none of them. Whoever they were, had you not come, I think they meant to kill us. One set of hands upon my neck was trying to choke and turn it. Yet beating or choking with hands would seem a most clumsy method of killing."

"Could have been pretty effective if—er—both of you had held the same views," the ship's officer said; having learned of the Followers. "Could be they thought you did. Rotten thing to beat a man who won't hit back, no matter how cockeyed it is not to hit back! And seems they'd made insurance doubly sure by getting rid of your rifle." The ship's officer's pleasant red face puckered with indignation. "Burning a boat—that's going pretty far!" He kicked the wharf edge angrily and Henri understood his professional viewpoint in which the destruction of a good boat was the capital crime. "I mean, they're a rotten enough bunch who've been trying to tie up the banana trade here. There've been beatings and fruit thrown in the bay—but burning a boat! That's going pretty far! Or killing—you boys can't think of any other reason? Anyone who could want to do you in, making it look like a banana fight?"

Henri hesitated. "Only one that is so unlikely that it could hardly be a reason! And that might be that while to us it seems

we have learned little of a lost ship, to others it might seem that we have learned too much!"

He pushed his hands against his head attempting to think. The ship's doctor, like a small, friendly and staring prawn, was before him as he opened his eyes. Henri said dazedly, "Or it might all be a matter of another ship, the *Webber*!"

"Of course, of course," the doctor said. "Now we'll just stop the worst of this bleeding, then you come with me to the ship." He swabbed Henri's face and began to tape cuts.

Sympathetic small boat owners and sailors crowded the dock, advancing theories as they jammed the wharf edge where a coast guard cutter was playing searchlights on the water where the *Sea Lily* had vanished; men shouted; floodlights blazed. The doctor burrowed in his kit for more adhesive tape. "The telephone . . ." Henri said and left through the chattering crowd toward the wharf sheds. Unable to find him, the little doctor spied Joseph who was holding to a hoist with his head on his arm. Men pressed more closely as the coast guard cutter began to fish for the *Sea Lily*. General and angry suspicion of the banana men filled the crowd. Witnesses who had not been there, were certain they had seen members of the banana gangs. Indignant men who had never met Henri or Joseph increased their indignation by recounting Henri's and Joseph's fine characteristics. Chains rattled and winches squealed.

"Ah, there you are!" the ship's doctor said exasperatedly some ten minutes later as Henri staggered from the telephone booth to the dock. "Now if you'll come with me to the ship, we'll patch you up!"

Holding to the door frame, Henri looked past him down the dock on which the crowd still thickened by the moment as further groups of men arrived from the street. Through the running men, running lightly, his gold head shining under the floodlights and his body big even amongst big men, came Thomas Webber. He ran with an extraordinary grace that was yet strangely animal, so that while he did not skip it seemed that at any moment he might skip. His pale face was intent.

Henri's own cut and bruised face swelled darkly. "M'sieur le docteur, I cannot be treated now! I have one to talk to," he mumbled thickly, stepping forward and almost falling. Thrusting through the thicker crowd by the dock edge, Thomas Webber looked into the strangely lighted faces, blinking against the cutter's searchlights. "What's up here? What happened to the Frenchies?" Men pointed toward the wharf sheds. Lights whirled, chains rattled faster, men shouted. Webber came quickly toward the shed. Recognizing Henri who again held to the booth as the ship's doctor felt him for broken ribs, he stood very still for an instant while the unreadable expression passed in the depths of his pale eyes. "Tough luck, Frenchie!" Thomas Webber said, slowly. "Who did it? The banana boys? I warned you to watch out for those boys!"

"'Tough luck,' as you say, M'sieur," Henri said through adhesive tape. "But we are not, as perhaps was intended, dead as the seeming victims of a waterfront beating! And perhaps the banana men and perhaps someone for whom, as in the children's game, we grow 'too hot' in the matter of lost ships!"

"Hold still, young man!" the doctor said. "You can get into all the rage you want when I'm through. If you'd just come to the ship I could make a job of this . . ."

Shaking with rage and uncertainty, Henri stared between ridiculously swollen eyelids at Thomas Webber. "It was even my thought, M'sieur, that I saw you near the docks just ere the men attacked us!"

"If you go on like this, you're going to see the inside of a hospital," the doctor said, taping ribs. "And, for your own sake, you're in no shape for a debate!"

"Looks like this time you are in bad shape, Frenchie," Thomas Webber said coolly, returning his stare. "I've been playing gin rummy in the hotel since seven o'clock. I came down here when we heard the explosion and there was a news flash that a launch, believed to be the *Sea Lily* of Home Island, had been blown up." He met Henri's eyes. "I can only tell you I'm for you boys and you can't be more wrong about me."

"Nothing broken in the ankle," the doctor said. "Now I want to take another look at your brother's jaw. Where's Stubbornness On the Hoof, Addition Two?" He relocated Joseph.

"If I did not know that I might be wrong, you might not now be alive, M'sieur," Henri said, trying to keep his eyes from swelling shut as he regarded the paleness and glitter of Thomas Webber. "As there is absurdity in the sight of a grown man trying to solve a little child's riddle, there is great difficulty for an honest man in speaking to a man, M'sieur, and trying to know at the one instant, 'This still may be an innocent man!' 'I should kill this man!'"

They leaned toward each other alone in the midst of noise, crowding movement and light. From behind Henri's shoulder, Joseph said, "Henri . . ."

"The poor fellow's off his head!" Thomas Webber said.

"That I wonder myself, M'sieur," Henri said savagely through the adhesive tape. "But lest I am not, a wise and kind friend who was once a Chair of the Room of Lloyd's has just suggested via the long telephone that you be informed, M'sieur, that he has placed the question of the true identity of the steamship *Webber's* varied owners and of her mortgage holder in the hands of his attorneys to learn if, perchance, all owners who followed the government and also the last mortgage holder might prove to be in fact one man! My own thought had been that no man planning the throwing away of a ship would risk so close a repetition of a recorded fraud. But our friend differs, contending it might well be risked could the loss of the second ship be made to seem unquestionably an act of nature—if the ship were, let us say, sunk in hurricane, M'sieur!"

In the wildly changing lights, Thomas Webber's face was still but his lids had narrowed and about his nostrils was livid indentation. Henri sought to know what looked back at him from Thomas Webber's face. Astonishment? Fear? A furious revamping of plans? Incredulous outrage that something small had got into the way of something big? Merely violently concentrated thought? "So now you have it figured I'm half a dozen corporations and a mortgagee! And that I can get men to throw away ships in hurricane! Congratulations on your imagination, Frenchie! Congratulations!" Thomas Webber said. "But do you know too much imagination can make trouble for little men, Frenchie?"

"Perhaps, M'sieur. Yet it is of interest how great a percentage of Caribbean hurricanes follow a course that give the Purple Reefs at least great gales. Thus could one solve the problem of inducing men to throw away a ship before advancing hurricane, that were a singularly well-chosen spot. And should all owners of the *Webber* have been in fact one man, there was much money on the Purple Reefs as the *Webber* lay on the Purple Reefs. And how, or if, our brother might have endangered possession of this I do not yet know"—watching Thomas Webber he pressed what might be advantage or absurdity—"but I have also had the thought, M'sieur, that no man in the Isle of Palms saw our brother. They saw only the ship. I have reasoned, 'Might our brother have been in duress, might our brother even have been dead ere the ship touched at the Isle of Palms?'"

This time Thomas Webber's whole face paled lividly and his eyes shone. But an innocent man could pale before an accusation of murder as sharply as a guilty man from guilt. Henri could not tell if it was merely through his own fancy that it seemed to him they struggled suddenly for possession of some still unknown weapon, vital to both; almost it was as if Thomas Webber had answered him before from violent abstraction, but now fought him with all thought centered upon what was between them.

"Suppose it if you like, Frenchie!" Thomas Webber said as his lips smiled. "You'd still have those who had possession of the ship taking such a fool's risk no fool would believe they'd take it! I'm no seaman, but a seaman would tell you, 'Anywhere on the long approaches to the Isle of Palms the ship could have been stopped—by a coast guard cutter, by a naval craft, by a fish boat or a sponge boat or a dinghy!'" He mocked. "The *Christophe* was loved, remember? The *Christophe* carried messages. The *Christophe* carried passengers without charge when they couldn't pay. The *Christophe* was the little Boy Scout and the poor man's friend! The ship was known in the Caribbean, Frenchie, so that those stopping her would have missed a single member of her crew! It would have been, 'Where is such-and-such a good boy?' 'Where is kind Captain Malcolm Christophe?' Or, 'Captain, why are you acting strangely?' It wouldn't have worked, Frenchie! And the pretty theory won't work!" Henri's mind admitted the truth of this. Thomas Webber narrowed his palely shining eyes still further while his mouth jeered. "And even if your little-pirates-that-weren't-there had taken the risk they wouldn't have taken by bringing her into the Isle of Palms, *after* the Isle of Palms, what do they do? It was the good Captain Malcolm men set their clocks by! Remember? What happened when men saw the good Captain Malcolm off to sea on a bender? And at the end of the fairy tale, how was your ship sunk without oil slick, Frenchie? Crew or pirates aboard doesn't alter that! And *'til* you answer that, you're right out of luck, Frenchie! Right out of luck!" Smiling, he brought his face closer to Henri's as in the pale and narrowed eyes the unreadable expression changed and became suddenly readable as startling rage and the hatred born of rage. "And remember, Frenchie, it doesn't always pay little boys from little islands to fool with other people's business or to make enemies of men who can think above their paper! It doesn't pay to make an enemy of Thomas Webber! If a man can think *big*, he comes out on top and anyone who bothers him gets hurt! Remember that, Frenchie! Anyone who tries to hurt him, gets hurt!"

"Remember also, M'sieur, that the tracing of anything of fraud in the story of the steamship *Webber* cannot now be stopped by aught that might befall Joseph or myself and that very many men know that it is not impossible that you might have reason to wish that something befall Joseph and myself! And that therefore it might be well that nothing more befall us, M'sieur!"

With Thomas Webber gone suddenly into the crowd, Henri clung to the doorframe, pressing his head on his arm. His mind tried dizzily to grasp something that seemed to him of great importance, hinging on a contradiction. Thomas Webber could be guilty of fraud with the *Webber*. Yet it had not been the sudden likelihood of the exposure of fraud with the *Webber* that had caused Thomas Webber to pale most lividly. Yet Thomas Webber's argument in regard to the *Christophe* was unanswerable.

By dawn the gutted skeleton and engines of the *Sea Lily* had been fished up; also Aunt Caroline's wheeled-chair, the latter unhurt save for soaked cushions. The baled sea things on the dock were almost undamaged and Joseph's flute rested safely where he had placed it between two of the bales. For the rest, the caretaker of the dock swore that he had failed to recognize any of the attackers, one of whom had suddenly threatened him with a knife so that he had been unable to give the alarm. He was emphatic that he had seen no man in a car with the attackers. He declared that he had never seen Thomas Webber. The police officer who had been with the banana men on the Christophes' first visit, denied that he had ever seen the Christophes. The police department denied any knowledge of the removal of the shark rifle or of a search for stolen weapons. The only thing that the police force was looking for at the moment was a large quantity of dynamite taken from a construction shack just south of the harbor a week before.

When at last the brothers Christophe were alone in the wet mist of sunrise, Joseph, who was slow with figures, asked timidly, "Will the insurance that was upon the *Sea Lily* and the money from the museum carry the large mortgage payment and repay M'sieur Latour?"

"Since the *Sea Lily* was insured only for what it had cost us to build her in Home Island and since time will not stand still while we rebuild her there and as the mail contracts went with her, they will not!" Henri said bitterly. "As you know, the first payment of principal on the mortgage is almost due and it had been my thought that were we short, we could have mortgaged the launch to pay it and to pay M'sieur Latour, counting upon the mail contracts and the sea things to carry the increased monthly payments." He looked at the bay rather than at Joseph. "As it is, the insurance and the museum payments should make the large mortgage payment, give the family a small amount to eat and provide a tub to get us back to the Reefs. Nothing to M'sieur Latour on the debt we owe him. He said that lending money to Christophes was like having money in the bank—I hope he may not have too much reason to regret it!" The misery of Joseph's beaten face made him feel a brute and made him still angrier. "If you had but used the oar once . . ."

"I am sorry, Henri!" Joseph said, turning crimson.

Henri crushed an impulse to reach out and touch Joseph's swollen hand. Instead he said merely, "Perhaps the best thing for us to do is to obtain a ride with a logger's truck to Jewfish Bay where it will cost us nothing to live while we do up a very bad sailboat that is very cheaply for sale at the boat yard. Once back upon the Reefs with the diving suit, we can get rarer sea things that may carry the monthly payments and the family's current bills. For the next large payment and the repayment of M'sieur Latour, we must trust we find the galleons!"

Blushing for the reproach in Henri's words, Joseph said, "Perhaps that is what we had best do."

"Agreed then," Henri said coldly. He rose. "I now have an obligation to fulfill ere I can leave Tampa. Perhaps while I am fulfilling it, you can collect the diving suit and obtain such things as we will need for reconditioning the sailboat? And may I beg that, since you will not defend yourself, you go nowhere where it is remotely possible you may come to harm? Martyrdom is a great and beautiful thing, but if possible I would not have M'sieur Latour and the family too completely ruined in its process!"

Joseph's face was painfully flushed with hurt and despair. Ignoring it, Henri set out for the pawnbroker's. His anger was increased by his distress that Joseph had been so happy with the flute. His agony of rage that Joseph had been beaten and his shame over having struck Joseph, made him ever angrier with Joseph. He knew that hitting Joseph and reproaching Joseph were the crudest things he would ever do.

"Have my good ceiling painted by a corpse that wobbles? Never!" the Syrian said. "Come back when you will not endanger my property!" He tucked the five dollars paid on the flute into what remained of Henri's trousers' pocket and thrust the chronometer into his hands. "Do not embarrass yourself by explaining that you cannot take them because you wish to make a further deal for a weapon to replace the rifle. I already know it!" His dressing gown trailed after him. "Here are two rifles. I must try, if vainly, to protect my investment. We must have new ammunition! If any trouble you on your Reefs and you arrive in Paradise, do not be disgraced by arriving without company!"

At Jewfish Bay when Henri had snatched a moment with Rue in which she wept satisfactorily over his beaten face but was so delighted to see him that she planned a fishing trip with the children for the next afternoon, the Christophes began work on the, by West Indian standards, atrocious sailboat for which Henri had negotiated. "Since we are using sawn frames where the old frames are broken, it should not take long!" Joseph said anxiously. The gasoline lantern hanging on a mangrove branch above their camp on an old flood-control bridge half a mile from the settlement lit Joseph's tired face and Henri knew that he was trying past his strength to repair the disaster for which Henri had blamed him. But Henri could not overcome his own coldness of anger. Kneeling to free a broken rib from the keel, Joseph said, "I am puzzled as you were by M'sieur Webber. He is offensive and full of pride. But he is right that it would have been insanity for anyone to take the *Christophe* through the waterways to the Isle of Palms were anything amiss with our brother or the crew. And your words to him would not make an innocent man gentle."

"The reason for our search and the direness of our position both place us beyond consideration for M'sieur Webber's feelings," Henri said.

"I suppose so . . ." Joseph said, flushing again because he had again been reproved.

"Joseph," Henri said softly, "I am sorry that I hit you! It was the worst thing I have done and it has been because I have been ashamed of it that I have continued to be angry with you." He put his hand on his brother's shoulder. "Oddly, while I think your belief insane, I perhaps love you most of all for your beliefs and I am ashamed as I have never been ashamed that I hit you!"

"I have helped to bring such disaster, I could hit myself," Joseph said, looking down ruefully. He clenched his hands upon the boat-frame and raised despairing gaze to meet his brother's. "Yet if the thing came again, I still do not know what should be done, Henri! One looks upon our people, the Followers, and knows that they are good as few people are good and happy as few people are happy. And that it is because they harm no man and forgive. One knows that all beliefs are worthless lest they be followed when the following is hard. Yet having done what I believed to be right, I have harmed you, the *Christophe* may not be found, Domremy may be lost, M'sieur Latour's confidence may be betrayed."

"Perhaps the great difficulty with martyrdom is that it is so very difficult to be a martyr alone," Henri suggested gently. "Dear Joseph, I am not laughing. It is a fearful problem."

"Be patient with me," Joseph said. "I am in a dark place. Until now it had seemed so very clear . . ."

"Joseph, have you thought that all officers and crew of the *Christophe* were men of the Followers? It has haunted me since good M'sieur Latour told me that had he been able to prevent violence only by violence, he would have sought to do as those in America did who stood with bowed heads as the Indians scalped them one by one! I cannot think why any man of earth should have sought to do those of the *Christophe* harm, but had they, what might have befallen were too horrible to think on. Thinking of a ship, one thinks, 'Men would hesitate to attack a ship!' But here were brave men and strong men, but men who would not raise their hands to defend themselves if attacked." His voice shook. "They would have stood as lambs, Joseph!"

"It is a dreadful thought!" Hope, which Henri found touching in view of Joseph's beliefs, lit his face. "But the deck passengers, the Negroes, would have fought, Henri!"

"They were all inland Negroes, Joseph. They would have been helpless with seasickness." He looked away. "One must also know that men base enough to harm men such as the Followers who would not defend themselves would also be men who would have made jest of such a faith and thus have known of it."

"It is a dreadful thought! It could also be in part an explanation—but, Henri, I still do not know what is right . . ."

Henri hugged his brother's great shoulders. "Meantime know only that you forgive me!" He rose. "And it is time we had coffee and ate the crabs I have boiling."

As they ate, seated on the coral with the occasional scent of lilies blowing in and the soft smoke rising to the stars, a dinghy came out of the darkness and a soft voice said, "Good evening. I is Mammy. Is nice big colored man here?"

"He is in the Caribbean and at present is doubtless worrying very much as to why we are not," Henri said. "He told us of the fine dinner you gave him."

Her voice was remote. "I wouldn't want anything to happen to that colored man!" Her eyes caught angered pride. "Addition, I don't like people telling me to keep my mouth shut or they beat me. What I say or don't say was not part in

my business arrangement with Mr. Thomas Webber. Mr. Thomas Webber say he beat me if I talked about it, but after Mr. Thomas Webber lost his ship, the men that look like pirate pictures in the school books came several occasions to see him. When they come, I would hear him aroaring and araging and when they left they would be like the cat giving transport to the dickeybird."

"Thank you, Mammy," Henri said. "And we will not let anyone know that you told us."

"I am not afraid of Mr. Thomas Webber," she said. "Mr. Thomas Webber, on the other hand, is terrible afraid of something. He been a worried man since you, young foreign man, visited him. He come back from Tampa last night pretty near a mad man, so he beat poor girl with the bleached hair because she got in his way as he gets things. He left again white round the nose like a mad horse with what is worrying him. Before he left, he came pounding to my cottage to ask if big colored man had told where a man called little Ashby is. I do not like to be asked as he asked." She was silent a moment, her face turned toward the dark water. "That Tobias, he the only man I ever saw was bigger than my man. He surely was a nice big fool of a colored man!"

When she had gone, large and proud, into the darkness, Henri stood staring after her. "Why, Joseph, should M'sieur Webber fear to have it known the Hereras came here, so that he told me they had not come? One would also give much to know why the Hereras were pleased and M'sieur Webber was not and if it was because of the meetings that the Hereras had seemed rich and M'sieur Webber poor? It is our thought that there was fraud. But how might there be fraud in which they would benefit and he would not? It is as if the things we know kept saying to us, 'Henri and Joseph Christophe are so thickheaded that they do not know what they know!' For surely some simple thing we know must cover it all! Yet what?" He checked his thought on his fingers, beginning with his "straw," the hat which had reached him from the Miami editor and was now with Dr. Clifford for safekeeping. "The hat was of Home Island, Joseph! The method of its tying off may prove the baled hats from which it came were hats carried by the *Christophe*. In all likelihood, the hats were swept into the 'Glades from Webber's Landing . . ."

"To me it still seems that much else is of more import," Joseph said. "That someone knew the *Webber* would not go to Tampa, at least that the little Ashby embarked upon her knowing he could not go to Tampa. That you think it was M'sieur Webber you saw ere the launch was burned. Even that M'sieur Webber seeks so earnestly for the little Ashby."

"No, Joseph! All else—save perchance M'sieur Webber's fear over the Hereras coming here—could be of the *Webber* and because of the *Webber*! The hat is the straw, true. But, if it ties, it alone ties solely with the *Christophe*!

"Meaning that the *Christophe* did not reach the Channel of Yucatan. That the Hereras are supposed to have had no contact with the *Christophe* on the last voyage and that M'sieur Webber is supposed to have had no contact with the *Christophe* after leaving her at the Isle of Palms; yet if the Hereras had had no contact and M'sieur Webber did not have the hats as he left the *Christophe* at his last known contact, there might have been later contact of which we do not know?"

"If the hats were part of the *Christophe's* last cargo, they assuredly did not journey from the Caribbean to the coast of Florida without help!" Henri said. He stared unseeingly at the enormous moon that was biting a slice from the edge of the dark water-prairies. "For the place of the *Christophe's* sinking, I do not know. I am increasingly certain that neither we nor the first searchers have yet looked where it befell! The fact that the first searchers found no oil slick should have told us that."

"You mean that there could be truth in the old captains' dreams of pirate capture and the ship sailed far away? Or in the insurers' thought of a stolen ship that was never sunk? Henri, are you ill?"

"The book the good Englishman had us read tells of a stolen ship trading half the world, but it is not a stolen ship or sailing pirates my mind gropes for. Rather some moving of the pieces on the chessboard of the sea so that the piece sought was not—was never!—where it would be sought! How or where or why it was, I do not know. But if one seeks to hide a thing, is not the surest way that it simply be not there? That somehow, it be not there at all?"

Joseph regarded him thoughtfully across the fire. "Were you not my brother and did I not know you to be very sane, I would say that is a statement of a man stranged by the sea!"

"I know. Yet ask, 'How came the hats where the hats could not have come?' Say, 'Why does M'sieur Webber fear to have it known the Hereras came here when it would seem most natural they should come?' Say, 'A ship was sunk. A ship does not sink without the showing of oil—yet there was no oil slick!'"

They were silent as Joseph finished his coffee and Henri threw a stone to make firelit circles on the dark water. For

several minutes he threw single stones. Then he tried landing a second stone into the heart of the circle made by the first.

"Joseph!" Henri said, rising to his feet and staring tensely. "The stones had more sense than I! They have shown me how a ship could sink without showing oil slick!"

"How, Henri?"

"Watch!" Henri threw a stone. The spreading ripples began. Joseph peered questioningly. Choosing a point some yards away, Henri quickly threw two stones, landing the second of the two in the center of the circle of tiny waves made by the one that preceded it. The circles made by the single stone and those made by the two stones were—to any who would not suspect the throwing of two stones—indistinguishable. "If she was sunk where there already was oil slick—where men would expect oil slick—it would be as if she sank without slick!" Henri said in a shaken voice. "That is the one and sure and very simple way it might be done!" They stared at each other.

Joseph said, "In that way it could be done—yet I recall no wrecks having been caused by the hurricane along the *Christophe's* course from the Isle of Palms to the Cape . . ."

Henri did not speak. As always, his thought was returning to the Reefs so that in imagination he saw them howling with gray spindrift under storm, gold and purple on the days of utter stillness, or with white sand dunes pallid under the mystery of the stars. Most clearly of all, he saw them as he and Joseph had seen them at the beginning of the search, with the wrecked *Webber* lying in rusty gold as roosting place for the sea birds and across the Reefs and the rippled sea, the long iridescence of her oil slick.

He said, "There was still oil slick from the wrecked *Webber* even when we saw her . . ."

"That means little, brother," Joseph said. "Remember our brother reached the Isle of Palms—what conceivable reason would he have to return to the Reefs?"

"None. But on the Reefs there still existed the one condition that would solve the greatest of the physical mysteries! At the Reefs, there was already great slick that none would question!"

"Do you not think that you perhaps think too much of the Reefs simply because they are so strange?" Joseph asked gently.

"The 'two lost days' that M'sieur Houston bade us check are tied with the Reefs. M'sieur Latour's 'most evil man,' M'sieur Webber was upon the Reefs. With fraud in the loss of the *Webber*, there was upon the Reefs Aunt Caroline's 'much money.' Upon the Reefs existed a means of hiding the place of the *Christophe's* sinking. When we reach the Reefs with our suit, you may dive for the galleons, it will be for the *Christophe* I dive!"

"Meantime we had best go back to the sawing of frames! If we work hard, we can perhaps sail by tomorrow night," Joseph said, practically if doubtfully.

Late afternoon's gold flamed over angry women crowding the dock at the foot of Jewfish Bay's one street and routed children fled toward the settlement, as Henri sent the canoe up to the old wharf and the clamor of hubbub. At the edge of the dock, with her back to the water, stood Rue, her face flushed and her childishly dimpled fists clenched as she stormed at the women who stormed at her. He caught the words, "Old cats! Scratching, mean old cats!" "Hussy!" "All I done was taked them fishing! They sure loved to go fishing!" "There's some as is not fit to take innocent children fishing! As some was warned . . ."

Swinging onto the dock, he said, "Hush, Rue! What is the difficulty, Madames?"

As she saw him, Rue's face expressed not happiness but terror. She shouted, "Don't listen to them, Henri! Don't listen!"

"Be quiet, Rue," he said gently.

"Don't listen!" she shrieked. Her arms pulled at him. "Let's go fishing, Henri! Let's go away all evening!"

A kind-faced but worried small woman with a white apron over a dark blue dress tried to say something. But a large and fat woman with a cruel mouth, the one tooth of whose lower jaw flickered over the puckering of her lower lip, demanded of him, "And who are you? And she's the difficulty—that better be out of town by night!" Her large and folded arms bounced on her stomach. "She that was at Webber's Landing, a-asking men out in front of us now, is she? And who

are you and what do you know about it, I'd ask? Or maybe she has you fooled like she's tried to fool others . . ."

Rue collapsed suddenly to the planking, rocking her face from side to side against her knees and sobbing hopelessly. Pale with anger, Henri asked the fat woman, "What are you doing to her? How can you be so cruel?" Dropping to one knee, he tried to soothe Rue. "For the rest, I am Henri Henri Christophe of Home Island. Mam'selle Rue asked me to go with her because I have asked her to marry me. And she is rather young and rather innocent to fool anyone, Madame!" He smiled tenderly down at the top of Rue's bent head. "A foolish little one, perhaps, but still a very small child." He stood up. "For what I know, she is an orphan and M'sieur Webber's niece and she is working very hard to be independent! And M'sieur Webber is not a good man—but is it not cruel that you who are doubtless good wives and kind mothers should persecute a young girl for her relatives?"

Flustered pity was in the eyes of the small woman with the kind face. From a gold and purple thunderhead, the first large drops of an evening shower pitted the dust and splattered on the wharf.

Over the silence of the women and the voice of coming rain, the fat woman laughed loud and cruelly. "Thomas Webber hasn't got a living relative in the world, young man! The which I took the trouble to find out!"

He said, "That I do not believe, for Rue has told me otherwise!" Rue's arms went about his legs and he felt her face and the softness of her hair pressed spasmodically against his knees. "And now perhaps, Madames, you will go home? Your children will not be taken fishing again and I give you my word that Rue will not remain here!"

"Which she better not as should have her face slapped!" The fat woman moved menacingly at Rue and Henri held her shoulders as thunder shook the dock and a rush of darkness rolled before the storm.

"Come away, Em!" the small woman said, pulling at the fat woman's great arm. Rain broke in foam across the river and slashed in a drowning downpour as the women covered their heads with their aprons and ran for shelter with their skirts billowing like sails. Violence of rain cut the dock off from the world. He said, "It is true, is it not?"

Rue came to her knees and her arms clung wildly. "Henri, do not reject me! Henri, no one will ever love you like I love you! Kill me if you wants to, Henri, but don't look at me like that, Henri!"

He said, "You have lied, lied, lied to me until I do not even know you! You have lied so amazingly that I do not even know where to look for what I loved. There is no one thing for which I have loved you of which I can say with certainty, 'It was so!'"

"Some things I told you was true, Henri! It was because I loved you that I told you lies, Henri! It were that I wanted to be like I said I was—for you, Henri! Henri haven't you never wished that something was so until it seemed like it might be so? If I done wrong, I been punished, Henri. When I couldn't fool myself and knew I weren't what you thought, my hands would get all cold with fright, Henri! Henri, my hands ached and ached when I would know I wasn't what you thought . . ."

Lifting her, he studied her face frantically. "Perhaps he took you by force? Perhaps you thought you loved him and he deceived you? But why did you not tell me?"

"It were I didn't never expect to love anyone, Henri! I never loved no one in all my life but you, Henri, and a little bit the pretty girl teacher that said I was smart and pretty but then we moved on. It were for a place to stay put so you could tidy it up. I thought, 'I can scrub all the cabins and make curtains,' Henri. I didn't even *see* him, as it were—I was so beglamoured by a place to stay . . . When I did see him, I hated him—an' I knowed I had to move on . . ."

"He should be killed! But you . . . with one at whom you did not trouble to look . . . 'for a place to stay!'"

"You got to love something 'fore you can know things, Henri. When I loved you, I knowed things. But I thought if I were what you wanted for every day from then on, it made it right!"

"Did you perhaps believe in the treasure on the Reefs? Was it perhaps that you thought it worthwhile to lie to me until you saw if the treasure might be real? Or did you lie to me to learn for him? Was he really here when you told me he was not ere I went to Miami? Have you even known of our ship when you have told me that you knew nothing? What *do* you know?"

"All I knowed 'bout ships was he had expected money from a ship 'round two years ago—long 'fore I knew him—an' he didn't get it, Henri, I didn't think it could have to do with you, but I told him he weren't ever to harm you or I'd tell. It's 'cause I think he tried to harm you, I can tell you now. 'Fore that, though he's bad, I'd been in his house and couldn't tell and I didn't think it had to do . . ."

"Then there was fraud! And had we known it we had been on guard and might have saved the *Sea Lily*! But how may I know that you did not laugh with him when the boat was burned and Joseph and I beaten?"

She dropped her arms, sobbing as she crouched again on the planks. "Don't say that! Say anything but that! Don't say I would have had you an' Joseph hurt, Henri . . ." She looked up through tears and streaming rain. "Don't turn on me, Henri! When you spoke to the old cats, I thought you wasn't going to turn on me and I loved you so, Henri! Oh, I loved you so beautiful much . . ."

He said, "One does not publicly repudiate a woman, even though she be a stranger! And for the Followers, betrothal is not broken." Wild hope touched her face. But amazed anger made him cruel. Even then he could not let her think that he thought she had harmed the children. The thought that she should have been blamed for taking out the children filled him with such terrible pity that for a moment his heart almost softened to her. He said coldly, "It is also our effort to be just and I believe that you did the little children no harm but showed them much kindness. For the rest, if it serve you, I will marry you as instantly as the law allows—as honor of my word. I will let you hurt our search still again by taking you to Tampa tonight to Madame Combs, a kind woman who will care for you until you can find honest employment—if it is honest employment you wish! Support you now, as you know, I cannot. But when it becomes possible for me, I will make regular wife's payment to you. But I would not wish to see you again in this world—and to Domremy you shall not go!"

"I don't want support, I wants you to love me, Henri! I didn't want the treasure! I wanted the island, Henri, and the big house that stayed there always and to help paint it pink like the roses and white like the jasmines!"

"Proud and honest women have stood in the doors of that house, Mam'selle. I am only glad that I did not take one who lies endlessly and utterly where there is proud memory of good women!"

She came to her feet. "Tell your good, proud women it's easy to be good an' proud when people thinks you matter! Tell them if they'd never mattered to no one, they mightn't be so proud and good! Tell yourself I wouldn't have hurt you like you done me, not no matter what you done! But if you'd put out your hand to me, I'd have took it to pull you up—not to push you down!"

The knowledge that this was truth tore at him again. He said, "I have offered you what I may. It is obvious you cannot stay here. I will take you to Tampa tonight . . ."

"I won't take your offer! I don't need your offer! I wouldn't let you marry me yet even if you loved me, 'cause I wouldn't burden you—an' I knew Ma Combs in Tampa an' I can get to her myself. Oh, Henri, Henri I loves you so!" She flung herself face downward on the dock and her voice became an unintelligible soft crooning of grief through the great sound of rain. The last thing he saw as he walked into the rain was the gay red shoes turned in toward each other as a crying child's turn inward. He had thought that his striking Joseph was the worst thing he would ever do. But as he strode away from her he knew that this was the crudest thing of his life. And he knew that he would lie awake in the nights with his forehead pressed against his arm, thinking of her and knowing that she was in pain and in despair that he could end with a single touch of his hand. His own suffering for a shattered dream drove him on. He thought with agony of pity of her efforts with the café—that had ended in nothing. The very childishness of her hope that her deception would not be discovered, tugged at his heart.

He ran back through the rain for none of these reasons but simply because he could not endure the pain of leaving her. Kneeling beside her he turned her over and put his arms about her. "Do not cry, little Rue! I love you, dear, and you shall go to the Island and the big house that stays and I could not live without you!"

She sat up and pressed her warm, wet cheek against his as he soothed her. "I won't go yet, Henri. I have plans, Henri. But don't feel different to me, Henri!"

He said, "I love you." But his heart was weeping for a golden child, lost forever, never having existed. Coldly and without haste, as the correct time came, he also planned to kill Thomas Webber.

Eight

"Give it up, my dears!" Daphne said when the brothers Christophe had rather miraculously brought the old sailboat into Home Island on a night of far thunder some four weeks later, to be wept over by a family who had feared them dead. "You are growing thin and old! Do not throw away the good sun and the sea and the beautiful now, for something that cannot be undone! Do not attempt the impossible even for Domremy! Perhaps mere mortals are not meant to have permanent title to paradise. So long as the family is together we will make happiness somewhere else."

"All is well with us, Beautiful Sister," Henri said, smiling down at her as she stood before him in the lamplight. "And it can be that we have met difficulty because we are succeeding, though we may not seem to be." He kissed her. "We are sorry that you have all been so frightened and we hurried so much to set your minds at rest that, having had to check a matter on the coast of the Republic, we came directly thence to Home Island—thus missing the Purple Reefs, where Tobias is now doubtless worrying exceedingly. And now I must go to shine Aunt Caroline's wheelchair so that we can surprise her with it before she goes to bed."

"Joseph, it is not vengeance you are seeking?" Daphne asked. "I would not have you darkened with vengeance, Joseph!"

He took her face gently between his hands. "No—merely to learn what befell good men. And, if it be possible, to win some security for the mouths."

"Joseph, we thought that you were dead. I thought, 'I will never see Joseph again. Neither his large hands that make things deftly nor the wideness of his shoulders as he gives rides to Timothy and the little ones!'" She moved to the outer door. "I looked at the courtyard and thought, 'The lilies and the stars are just the same but something of human goodness may not come again, for Joseph may not come again!' The court and garden were poorer, Joseph."

As they walked into the garden, he said, "I hope you were right. It seems to me now that perhaps the hardest thing on earth is to know what is right! In forgiving a wrong, does one only make evil stronger everywhere? I am very much a man without a light, Daphne!"

"Perhaps the answer is to resist evil without hating the evil-doers?" Daphne said. "Perhaps the answer is merely to continue to try very earnestly not to be wrong. I do not know what God asks, but I think that all I would ask in a man is that he tries very hard not to be wrong—perhaps that is why you are so dear to me that when you did not come for these weeks it was as if the world was suddenly quite empty." Joseph stood very still as she looked up at him in the starlight. She put her hands on his arm that trembled under her hands. "I did not know how terrible it would be—and you cannot know how terrible it was—to think, 'Perhaps in all my life I will never see Joseph again! Perhaps the handkerchief he gave me, pretending he did not give it, is all of Joseph I will have.'"

He said, "I would ask very little except to be of service to you, Daphne."

"It was because you are worth more than very little that until now I would have said no to you. I was a little girl when I married Malcolm and it was a fairy tale of happiness in which a kind and wise man brought a little girl to this fairy place. And I loved him all the more for the twenty years between us that made him wiser than I. The little girl to whom he was so kind still belongs to him. But I am a woman now and the woman I have become loves you, Joseph, with all her heart, for all our lives if you wish it."

"I had never thought that such a thing as this might happen to me," Joseph said wonderingly. "I will think, 'Joseph Christophe, you may seem to be a very foolish man, but actually you are the most valuable man in the world—for Daphne loves you!' I think that I know also another thing. Where one is trusted, one defends. Wherever right may lie, to my poor heart it cannot seem to lie in leaving innocence naked to the wicked and courage unaided before the wicked! But for good or evil, while I live, I seek to stand between you and any hurt—with arms, be they needed, through violence and to death! Neither would I again let any man beat me, for a man is not alone himself but is property of those who love him—and Daphne's property, I will let no man harm!"

She put her arms about his great neck, gently touching her fingers to the short-curled darkness of his hair. "We do not know when we may have more, my dearest. But if it is any joy to you, you may know, 'Daphne thinks herself so fortunate in her property that she cannot believe her fortune!' Oh, Joseph, be careful that all the wonder does not end in the sea! I am not brave enough to take a memory in place of you!"

He put his arms about her and promised, "Such as I am, you will have me always, dear! Until, perhaps you are very bored and say, 'That Joseph's beard! Its particular shade of whiteness has annoyed me for fifty years!'"

"Oh, Joseph, I so want the years to grow bored in! Do people know how fortunate they are when they have the years in which to grow bored?"

"Tell England that France accepts his gift!" Aunt Caroline said of the wheelchair. Having mastered its workings at cost of considerable French wordage which the Christophes had never heard before and feared was profanity as she jammed her fingers, she insisted on touring alone through the vast reaches of Domremy's lower floor, and at her bedtime, could not be found. Henri, at last locating her in one of the great cloak closets, found her weeping. "It is nothing," the old lady said as he sat on the arm of the chair in the cedar-scented privacy of the cupboard. "It is merely that when one has waited with reasonable composure for something that one very much wanted and did not really expect to get, suddenly getting it, one suddenly knows the amount of composure one has used—and is overwhelmed by one's goodness! It is a nadir of self-pity that is one of the most satisfactory human experiences. There is also only one creature more objectionable than an old woman so engaged—that is a young man who looks as pale and as betrayed as you do since this return! What's the matter?"

Playing with the tiny claw of her hand, he said, "Perhaps I forgot something that another wise woman, Madame Combs, told me. Darling, is it possible to love someone and lie to them? To lie exceedingly, I mean?"

"This isn't for general consumption or for the younger generation," Aunt Caroline said. "But do you suppose that man or woman could possibly love someone and be cruel enough to speak the truth? One must of course use self-control. Even our best impulses should not run amuck. But it takes time and experience to learn proper moderation in falsehood. Also there is the matter of provocation. An astounding love might produce an astounding lie."

Tipping up her face that was like that of an irritated and impertinent parrot, he said, "You are a wholly vile character and a great joy to this house and a greater joy to me! Now cross your fingers for me that I can live through the waiting until I may tell one I love that I am sorry I have thought I did not love them, even if they did not know it!" he stood up. "Why do we cause ourselves such loss when there is such wonder merely in saying, 'How I love you!'"

"Perhaps because one cannot have two forms of delight at one time. If we are too occupied in saying, 'How worthy am I!' it is difficult to say 'How I love you!' Both are pleasant, but 'How I love you!' is best. To think, 'My darling! My darling!' is the best of thoughts." She studied him with her frail and myriad-wrinkled shrewdness. "Also do not throw it all away by planning to kill the one for whom you thought you hated your love! Vengeance is sweet, but the price can be too high." He made no answer. He had refound his tenderness for a child tricked by its passion to play house, never having known anything but brutality. He could think, "My darling! My darling!" But he had found even fiercer hate for a man who would so trick a child. The old lady looked at him with anxiety. "I hope your love is a lovely love, Henri. But be happy! A woman will almost always be what a man thinks her if he but thinks it with sufficient articulateness."

"I am trying only to know how I can wait until I may begin to be articulate! Now shall we race down the hall so fast the walls whiz?"

"'Burn rubber!'" Aunt Caroline said. "'Pedal to the floor-boards!' Henri, what is the pedal? And does the rubber burn? Both things happen in the get-away car in which the boys 'beat it!' But it cannot be finer or faster than my own vehicle!"

Morning light fell through the green louvres of Government House. And Monsieur the Commissioner, listening intently to Henri's reasoning, said, "Let me straighten this. You believe there was a great insurance fraud with the steamship *Webber*?"

"It would seem certain, M'sieur. On this trip we came down the coast of the Republic, seeking to find the little Ashby who hides. At the Isle of Palms was a radio message from the kind Englishman, Sir Dudley Markham. His attorneys have established that M'sieur Webber was actually all buyers of the *Webber* and her mortgage-holder. M'sieur Webber thus stood to profit by some hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars at her wrecking."

"Granted he could have stood to make a whale of a profit if he threw the ship away—and Sir Dudley's attorneys should know what they're talking about—and granted he did throw the ship away, how would that involve the *Christophe*?

Offhand, I'd say you could probably prove fraud with the *Webber* and that you have strong evidence that someone, most probably Webber, afraid of the fraud coming out if your search wasn't stopped, burned your launch and tried to kill you, making it look like a banana fight. For the loss of the *Christophe*, you have only a just possible motive to set against a battery of impossibilities! This fellow, Webber, did ask Malcolm Christophe to go to the Purple Reefs, showing he wasn't afraid of having him there. He did leave the *Christophe*—still presumably A1 and certainly afloat—at the Isle of Palms! As he says, he wouldn't have let Malcolm Christophe reach the Isle of Palms if he'd been afraid of him. He's right that only a bunch of raving lunatics would have taken the *Christophe* into the inland waterways to the Isle of Palms if there had been anything even odd aboard!"

"M'sieur, the hat found in the Everglades was a hat carried by the *Christophe*! Its tying-off was of the year and month! M'sieur Webber did not have the hats when he landed in the Isle of Palms. Neither were they in his powerboat. The port officer of the Isle of Palms recalls clearly that they were not!"

"Granting the hats did not get to Florida alone, granting you have evidence the second storm of the year carried them into the Everglades—or whatever the place is—from this Webber's Landing, granting that either Thomas Webber himself or the Hereras were the most likely persons to have taken them there, they could still have picked 'em up innocently as the bale drifted in the Caribbean after the *Christophe* sank!"

"And failed to report the find, M'sieur, when all the Caribbean cried with pleas for news of one drifting thing that could have been of the *Christophe's* cargo?"

"You could prove criminal indifference—no more."

"M'sieur, we have on the Purple Reefs a possible motive for a great crime—the much money for the *Webber's* wrecking whose possession could perchance have been endangered by the presence of ill-timed witnesses. Of those witnesses known to have been upon the Reefs as the *Webber* first lay there, not one came home! In the hats we have strong evidence that those who could have profited from fraud with the *Webber* had some contact with the *Christophe* that they conceal and that cannot therefore be innocent. I believe as I believe in God that the contact was at the time of the *Christophe's* sinking and that the *Christophe* lies upon the Purple Reefs in the oil slick of the *Webber*! For long reasons, I think it not impossible that divers willing to work an evil place can prove it. My fear is that we are likely to fail to prove it because, should we be right, we are likely to be no longer there ere we prove it."

"What you are wanting is that I ask my superiors to send a gunboat to the Reefs while you try to prove your theory?" the commissioner said, tapping plump fingers on his papers. "Well, I can't! Personally I'm certain that you're wrong—and afraid of what may happen if against evidence you're right. But consider my official position. 'The commissioner of Home Island requests police or naval protection for the Purple Reefs!' 'Why does he wish it?' 'Because he thinks there may be evidence there of foul play with the motorship *Christophe*.' 'What evidence has he?' 'That young Henri Christophe thinks the *Christophe* herself is there!' And at that point the governor jibs, 'The *Christophe* was lost between the Isle of Palms and the Cape! Even if she had about faced and hightailed it back for the Purple Reefs, it is physically impossible that she could not have reached them before the searching party from the Isle of Palms reached them to look for the men missing from the *Webber*!' They were there, you know, probably fishing rather than searching, but there, for almost seven days. And before that seven days ended, you couldn't have sunk a bucket in the Caribbean without someone who was looking for the *Christophe* herself having seen it!" He stood up. "I'm granting you there may have been fraud with the *Webber* and that Thomas Webber may have tried to put you out of the way before you turned it up—but now it's in the hands of Sir Dudley's attorneys you yourself don't think he'll dare to try again. You don't think it's because of the *Webber* that he's hunting for William Ashby, but to stop the man testifying to a much worse thing. You don't think the Hereras were ever worried about the *Webber*—assumably believing they could make a story of personal innocence stick even if fraud by the owner came out—but that the thing they are afraid of is that you may be on the track of a far worse thing that resulted from their being caught red-handed in the fraud. But where is the evidence of any worse crime? Assuming there was all hell's fraud with the *Webber*, her wrecking was over and done while Jaques and Christian and the *Christophe* were seas away! No! I can't ask for a gunboat until you give me something better. Even a junk of Spanish treasure would give me an excuse! As it stands, there's strong evidence Thomas Webber didn't have anything to hide when the *Christophe* reached the Reefs and none that he did! There's a time element that proves the *Christophe* couldn't have been sunk at the Reefs and nothing but the convenience of the oil slick to suggest that she was!" He grinned unhappily. "I know that's not very satisfactory from your viewpoint, since what you're worrying about is being the convincing bit of evidence."

"As something of satisfaction, if we do not come back, will you send a gunboat and divers, remembering what I have

thought, M'sieur?"

"Oh, if you don't come back I'll give you every kind of action! True official protection of the citizen. Just be murdered and we'll be there to protect you right away!" the commissioner said wryly. He added, frowning, "And show me one bit of positive proof that any foul play occurred there and I'll not only have the Navy out I'll have every one of those birds arrested on suspicion of murder!"

The Purple Reefs were black and silent as the brothers Christophe approached them in the bumbling sailboat. No prick of light marked a campfire nor was Tobias' catboat in the little bay. Henri said, horrified, "Tobias is not here! I had begun to worry when we learned that he had not gone to Home Island to see if they had news of our delay." Anchoring close to the starlit beach, they jumped into waist-deep water, Henri holding the rifles high. In a moment, they stood further appalled, before the robbed cache of gasoline and the insolently altered notice. Joseph said in a choked voice, "Give me one of the rifles!"

Henri cupped his hands to his mouth and gave the West Indian call of the centuries, "S-a-i-l *ho*! . . . Tobias! . . . S-a-i-l *ho*!" He had the profane sense of shouting at the dead. Gripping Joseph's great arm, he said, "Let us think! If they left him marooned upon the dunes, what would he do?"

"Survival is a very old art of the Caribbean. Marooned men and fleeing slaves knew it long ere the armies did. What could be done, he would do."

"If he was unhurt . . ." Henri said and stumbled on the unlikeliness of the hope. "If he could obtain fish and shellfish, he would live a long while on juice of fish and conchs, but it is hard to live as long as he may have been here. He would hope for showers and to catch water. The best chance of catching water would be the old military installations."

The skeletons of the buildings and their few remaining sheets of iron were black against the stars as the brothers topped a last wash of dune. "Tobias!" Henri called despairingly. From the darkness, darkness detached itself. "M'sieur Henri and M'sieur Joseph!" Tobias called rumblingly. "I was fearful that it was not you! It had been the *Sea Lily* I have listened for." His voice became anxious as they ploughed through the sand to greet each other. "The boat you came in? We must not leave it!" His voice shook. "The unknown evil has been here again, taking my boat, removing the *Webber* . . ." He collapsed to the sand. "M'sieur Henri have you water? I have rationed my drinking to two snail shells full a day . . ."

"Forgive us! Here!" Henri said, unslinging the gourd he had brought from the boat.

"But the Hereras? Was it not they?" Joseph asked, oddly regarding the rifle in his hands.

"Let us go back to the bay!" Tobias said, staggering to his feet. "I do not believe the evil here now, but it was here and took my boat! For the Hereras, they had come—it is my thought at old Geraldino Herera's bidding—to see the *Webber*. Why I do not know. But the evil had destroyed the *Webber* so that she was not there. The Hereras were much puzzled that she should be destroyed and believed that you might have done it and thus in some manner harmed them. Why they should think thus, I know not." So troubled for his lack of competence that he walked with bowed head, he explained what had befallen with the Hereras. And Joseph said softly, "A moment ago I looked at the rifle shocked that I might have shot them had we met. The devils! The cruel, playing devils!"

"You are certain you understood them, Tobias? Certain that it was not they who sent the *Webber* into the deep? Nor they at the end who took your boat?" Henri urged as they plodded, sliding, up the last dune that shut off the bay.

"*They* believed that it might be you who had destroyed the wreck," Tobias said stubbornly. "I have told with care that which I know or do not know. Ere they left, they even gathered flung coral that most clearly showed the *Webber* had been dynamited. Nor was it they who took my catboat from the creek. It was that which the sea birds watched that took my catboat!" He stumbled with weariness in the sand. "The Hereras are evil and may be a part of the large evil. But another—or others—were here of which the Hereras do not know! It was not the Hereras who robbed me of my boat. From the time that the Hereras hunted me in annoyance with the laughing gun, they were within my sight or in the little bay, whence they could not have crossed the dunes to my catboat without my seeing them!" He put a large hand earnestly on Henri's arm. "The Hereras will come back—which may not be an easy matter with which to deal—but the thing the birds watched will come also and is worse for it is unknown and we know not what it is or what it wishes!" He regarded the sailboat with relief as it became dimly visible to them through the starry darkness and the increasing silver

of his hair shone faintly in the starlight above the dark earnestness of his face. "It is my thought that it came first in the night to Home Island ere ever the strangers, Thomas Webber and William Ashby, came to Home Island from the storm-wrecked ship and ere ever the *Christophe* sailed from Main Town for the last time! It came to the Great Sound and the thorn forests in the night in a powerboat, when with dawn there was no powerboat in the Great Sound. I too wondered, 'Is Tobias stranged?' But I do not feel that Tobias was stranged for I heard the engine miss." He put a great hand on Henri's shoulder. "Those who came could not have been the Hereras nor the large and fair man, Webber, nor the little Ashby, for this was but soon after hurricane was posted and the steamer *Webber* was then steaming northward before the storm, bearing them all!"

The brothers stood, astonished, and Joseph asked wonderingly, "Henri, can it be that all we have followed has pertained to the *Webber* only? That in looking for those who harmed the *Christophe* we must look for person or persons of whom we have not even thought? Could the thing of great value upon the Reefs really have been treasure?"

"Meantime, we had best follow Tobias' thought and spend some part of the time they have given us in arranging what welcome we may for the Hereras when they have delivered their bulls and return!" Henri said grimly. "Whether or not they have aught to do with the *Christophe*, I think they plan little good for us."

"At least they will assuredly be late," Joseph said. "They have never had a mail contract but they lost it by going fishing and they carry only their strange cargoes since shippers know they may divert to a port half a sea away because it is carnival or Mardi Gras."

Four days later, they put the finishing touches to the small and dangerously crazy diving barge, tested the compressor and were ready for the first deep dive. And as the diver must now face the slow and tedious business of decompression-staging after every descent, the location of every dive would have to be carefully chosen. "You still believe the *Christophe* lies here, do you not, Henri?" Joseph asked regarding his brother worriedly.

"Yes," Henri said.

"Should we not for the search's sake acknowledge M'sieur the Commissioner right that one impossibility outweighs any likelihoods? Dear Henri, where'er the *Christophe* sank, this is a place it cannot be!"

"I may be stranged, but I believe it but seems impossible that she is here, that some fault in our reasoning but makes it seem impossible." He touched Joseph's hand. "I may be wrong as you and M'sieur the Commissioner believe me. But bear with me to think what men having committed a great crime and in great haste to dispose of its evidence—that is a sacked ship—might do! Oil is the betrayer of sunken ships, but here is already great oil slick. How could they use it? To eastward of the wrecked *Webber* was great depth, seemingly a good place. But the eternal current sets from east to west across the reef. Thus were the . . ." Visualizing the matter, he could not name the *Christophe*. "Thus were a second ship sent down too far to eastward of the wrecked *Webber*, an observer might later say, 'Why oil slick to eastward when the current runs west?' Immediately astern of—almost literally under—the *Webber*? A good place, perhaps, had they known how deep it actually was, but perhaps they were not sure or were not divers and there was the chance that the *Webber* herself might slip backward there and thus the chance that her insurers might send down deep divers who would say, 'What is here? We have the remains of two ships?' Those using the oil slick, would, I think, go down the oil slick where the current carries it across the reefs and the backwash holds it in a gathered spreading against the reefs. They would wish to sink the ship deeply. But the reef there is not vertical but pitched and stepped, and they would not wish to go so far to the west that the second slick might show as a separate slick. They would use the first deep that they assumed to be safe from an enquiring suit-diver . . ."

"Which would be all too safe from us."

"Scuttlers could miscalculate a ship's actions below the water, Joseph! Surface sailors know little of the submarine currents of reefs. We know something of it from our diving in the Pacific, but your friend to whom you sent the message from the bottle has taught us much more. I think the men scuttling the ship in the oil slick did miscalculate or that there was reason to think they perhaps had done so!"

"Dear brother, why?"

"Because I think there was but one diver with them, whom they ignored. The little Ashby. I think he was a good man

involved in a great sin against his will, but after the commission of the sin, a terrified man, terrified not only for himself but for what might befall his loved ones should the sin be known. I think his mind said forever as the hot stillness choked the swamps or the sad rain beat the swamps, 'What if those scuttling the ship *did* miscalculate? What if she lies in reach of a suit-diver?' I think he had to know and came back to try to learn."

"And if so, did not learn, since he was still seeking two years later. And since, were he the little Ashby, he was by his wife's statement a great diver, it would seem the thing cannot be learned."

"Were he Ashby and were he acting as I think, he had been too fearful to ask a professional tender to help him but had taken insane risk by using native boys from the creeks as tenders. A tender is half a diver. I think he was right in his great fear and ineffective in his search."

"At least," Joseph said, relieved if unconvinced, "it is the western downpitch that you wish to search and that is where the better marine growths are. And were the galleons ever wrecked to the east, ever torn from their old beds to be flung upon the tablelands, then carried over, it is approximately down the oil slick that they might lie. So let us make our first soundings for the first dives to the west and down the slick."

Previous soundings had revealed a sloping and chasmed wall, steep-pitched as a church roof, terminating irregularly in drops into the depths the lead could not plumb. While at some points the great submarine cliffs appeared to be undercut for the lead line swung inward with some below-surface current. The first problem in search for trace of ships, old or new, was thus to determine upon what degree of incline on the dizzy battlements of the reef dropping wreckage might have clung? In the case of ancient galleons, upon what unstable resting place could a mass largely composed of coral cling upon an underwater slope? In the case of a ship newly sunk, would the submarine canyons act as catchments unexpectedly bearing her inward as she sank?

"And to settle it, we had best choose a steep incline and see where objects rest and a deep canyon to see how the currents set," Joseph said. "Let me take it, Henri, I have done more incline work than you."

"And you are a better man at fishing your diver, which is what we may need," Henri said. "I will go."

Joseph looked troubled but it was true that in dangerous conditions the tender's ability to fish the diver, to keep steady contact with him through the lines at all times, was of vital importance, particularly where a diver might slip. So Henri put on the suit, took a last glance at the morning of celestial blue light and gently undulating, cornflower blue water, then slid below. Dropping through the color changes and decreasing light of depth, he became increasingly conscious of the forbidding character of the sloping face. Landing, his weighted shoes skidded not merely from the steepness, but on a spongelike marine growth, brown, pliant and slimy, which covered the reef's formation. He could move only by clinging with his fingers and digging in the toes of his boots. About him, down dark mountain sides, ran eroded valleys as of the older sierras; vast, blue canyons cut backward into the hills and to the tilted surface clung torn masses and great coral blocks and small, round boulders threatening the possibility of submarine avalanche. And because of the difficulty of working his way cat-footed around the piles, he signaled Joseph several times for more line, knowing that Joseph sweated as he gave it. Another difficulty was the amount of movement in the water, in which some countercurrent or watery back-draft kept him continually swinging, while at times colder surges from the depths threatened to carry him off his feet altogether. He even saw one great boulder stir to a heavy surge, and wondered how many more might be poised in the blue-green invisibility above him ready to descend?

Moving across and down the slopes and semi-precipices, steadily gathering marine specimens, he struggled with facts, long known or recently learned. A powerboat reasonlessly present in the Great Sound of Home Island in the night as the steamship *Webber* ran north before the hurricane. Thomas Webber expecting a great sum of money but without money. The Hereras strangely rich. A ship seemingly thrown away not merely before hurricane where men would not throw ships but in circumstances so desperate that six seamen die. Thomas Webber skipping as a fawn in the forest after fearful voyage. Yet Thomas Webber a craven coward before the sea. Thomas Webber hating and fearing the Hereras and seeking Ashby. The Hereras seeking Henri and Joseph Christophe. Ashby terrified of both Thomas Webber and the Hereras and hiding from all men. So much that said the *Christophe* lay here; and the seeming impossibility of her lying here, where he, Henri, stubbornly believed she lay. An impossibility so complete that both Monsieur the Commissioner and Joseph believed him demented, the while he admitted that she could not be here and was certain that she was here. So that he admitted that Joseph and the commissioner were right—and hunted steadily for the resting place of the *Christophe*.

Below the last belt of the seaweeds, in the lead-violet of depth, the spongelike growth still continued, darker here, so

that it appeared black-purple, its surface even slicker. Then about him were pale and skeletal ferns that he assumed to be animal in nature and knew to be desired by the good doctor. But the angle of the slope was extreme and the finer massing of the pallid bracken beds sprouted below precariously piled rocks. With infinite caution, watching the rocks above him, he began uprooting the animal sprays. . . . Put from the mind the impossibilities. Assume the *Webber*, ripe for the wrecking, cruising the Caribbean, waiting for hurricane. The manning of a ship entirely by one family or by close associates invites question. Six seamen are shipped. A storm is posted. The ship steams north, allowing the storm to gather force behind her, seeking the logical place for wreck, some lonely and dangerous reef upon which she will be said to have been driven. This is to be the perfect wreck. Not merely will the ship be lost in storm, but for added authenticity the owner himself will be on board, escaping through conditions so desperate that six lives are lost. But the owner is a coward and no man to risk his own fair skin. There is distinct and pre-existent probability as to what general course a storm moving from this storm's location at this season of the year will take; perhaps by now the barometric pressures are even laying down an almost certain course before the storm? In either case there come into existence certain logical landfalls that the owner might make from the wrecked ship. There is nothing save lack of thought—and this owner reads Machiavelli and *The Prince*—to say the owner and a witness, the ship's engineer, should not make one such landfall before the ship is wrecked, there to wait out the proper period of time. All that will be needed is such a place as may be approached privately by a powerboat in the night, such a place as a lonely sound and a deep thorn forest that will not be searched because a simple people fear Hidden Men and Spanish ghosts. A place such as Home Island where—at the right time—a story may be told of desperate voyage from shattered ship; and a simple people will not question the story, the while the story-teller laughs at them for their simplicity!

From practical angle, so far a possible explanation of a man skipping in the forest, the solution of one small mystery. Yet suddenly his heart was pounding with the sense that for the first time his mind was fingering solution, still just beyond its reach; that somewhere the facts were offering him some new thing to show a long-sought error in his reasoning. . . . Under his abstracted and sideward stepping feet the rock gave way and he was falling into vacancy! The skeletal ferns that fringed the drop were almost beyond his reach, then his hands were tearing up the pale and skeletal ferns as his feet hammered against the undercut face of the rock. For a moment that seemed eternal, ferns and sponge continued to strip under his fingers. Then he had a protuberance that did not give. When he had regained his perch, he looked beyond the fringe of ghostly growth into the gloom of depth and knew that if he had gone over, even Joseph could hardly have caught him and he would have died in the oddity of a squeeze, in which the sudden increase of pressure minus compensating air within the suit may ram a diver upward as a bloody mass of bones and flesh into his own helmet.

He sat sweating in the coldness of his suit and steadied the thumping of his heart. Then he began to follow the edge of the drop as it cut eastward across a submarine plateau. The great, cold current of the depths came up at him, also setting east up an underwater box-canyon or fissure such as might trap the reef-wreckage of centuries—or be used for the scuttling of a ship that must lie deep but near the reefs. He was still trying to find a point at which the lip was not undercut and where the surge would not be so violent as to endanger his lines, when Joseph signaled that it was time for him to come up.

On the barge, lifting the helmet from Henri's head, Joseph was jubilant because he had got the marine telephone working, an added safeguard that they had not expected from their ancient equipment. "So I called you a little early so that I might fit it to the suit!" Joseph said. "Also Tobias believes his unknown is back upon the dunes." He smiled fondly at the great black man. "I still have to be convinced that Tobias did not fail to anchor his catboat so that it merely drifted and that it is not a blowing paper or wandering turtle that the birds watch. But the birds have been circling."

Tobias stood as a black colossus staring at the dunes over which a columnar flight of birds was slowly dissolving. The day was all blue and white and from the knife-crests of the distant dunes, the little streams of sand were blowing. As Joseph undressed him, Henri also watched the dunes. Suddenly there as a minute movement and tiny flash as the sun caught some shining object. "M'sieur Henri!" Tobias whispered fiercely. Henri stared intently, but the flash was not repeated. Joseph was looking up from the removal of Henri's boots.

"Something moved at the top of the dune and made a flash," Henri said.

"Perhaps a bit of glass blew?" Joseph suggested.

"Perhaps," Henri said. But he experienced the unexpected sense of danger in the sun. He said, "If you can spare me, I will go and see—no! Do not come! Stay and fix the telephone!" He glanced at the water below them. "If aught is down there on any sort of incline and if we are to have chance of finding it, we must make haste. Even now there are great stirrings across the face. In storm it must boil as a caldron—also, I think that I may have better chance of learning what is on the dunes alone. We are also so admirable a target here, should any one wish to use us for it, that I can hardly be a

better one ashore."

"No," Joseph agreed more thoughtfully than Henri had expected. "We are committed to so much of danger that about danger itself there is little that we can do. And if there is someone yonder—which is uncertain—at least no one has shot at us today." He smiled with salt-dried lips. "Neither, I suppose, do we own the Caribbean. Should we find anyone and say, 'M'sieur, you are upon the Purple Reefs!' he could retort, 'M'sieurs you are upon them!'"

"It is an awkward scene," Henri said, grinning to reassure Joseph. "And it could be prolonged. 'M'sieur, I charge you with looking over a sand dune!' 'M'sieur, I charge you with walking up one to look over it!'"

Ashore, he began the long tramp up the sliding sand hills. As he neared the crest, he flattened to look over carefully. From the knife-edge of the crest the sand was drifting away in its usual small stream and on the windward face, sand patterns were beautifully forming and re-forming to the clear sweep of air. Below him and to left and right, the tossed landscape was empty as was the brilliant sea. But the usual tiny sand runners and beach-crabs were absent. Trying to find an explanation of the flash, he dropped back and knelt between the small salt bush and the tuft of dead grass where he had observed it and sifted the upper sands through his hands. No scrap of glass or crumpling of silver paper came to light. Lacking a fast boat to circle the Reefs, a complete search of the dunes and of the small sand-creeks into which a boat of shallow draft could be run would take days and any person wishing to leave unseen could do so from behind half a dozen sand-horns while they were ploddingly searching others.

He stood up and stepped boldly onto the top of the dune. His sense that he was not alone upon the dunes swept at him more violently. He felt his chest a target. Looking at a point above the horizon—so that he would not obviously be looking at any wrong place amongst sand and vines—he said clearly, "Come out, Ashby! It is I, Henri Christophe. I have many messages from Madame, your wife. Do not be afraid!" He waited in the lovely sun experiencing the sense of absurdity of one who has perhaps spoken to an empty landscape. He smiled confidently and said again, "Do not be afraid and do not make me pull you out!" In one of the less luxuriant, therefore less suspect trailings of pink-flowered vines, there was an upheaval of the sand and William Ashby rose, shabby, haunted and ridiculous with sand. "Didn't know who was here. Can't be too careful!" Ashby muttered, sitting on the sand to dust off sand. At his belt he had a large, Spanish revolver and a shark knife. From the vines he drew a dilapidated pair of field glasses, presumably the origin of the flash. Henri went up to him and dropped to one knee before him. "First, Madame sends her love and has all tenderness for the little ones. And she begs that you come to her and tell—and face—what has befallen. For us, M'sieur, we have sought to befriend you. Tobias is a good man as his son, the big black boy, was a good man. It was a very evil thing that you should take Tobias' catboat and maroon him here."

"A bad place, a cursed place! Took boat so he'd go away. Came back to see if he was all right and to pick him up," Ashby said distractedly. "His catboat's all right; in old rumrunner's tunnel. Came back to pick him up. You believe I came back to pick him up? Wouldn't have hurt him! Wouldn't hurt you fellows! You been good to me. Good. Didn't mean any harm with the catboat—dozen times I been close to pick him up but thought the Hereras were maybe still here. Shouldn't run afoul of the Hereras! Better get going before the Hereras come!"

"M'sieur Webber is seeking you and will find you!" Terror moved in Ashby's eyes. "You will 'run afoul' of the Hereras! Your one hope is to let us help you and to let Madame, your wife, help you. When a man is very frightened, he does the wrong things. It was not of help to you to blow up the wrecked *Webber*." The pitiful eyes showed astonished terror at discovery. "It even made the Hereras very angry, for they know that the reasonless blowing up of a wreck must say to men, 'There was something wrong with the wreck of the ship!'"

"I better be going now," Ashby said, scrambling to his feet, as Henri also stood. "I better be leaving . . ." His trembling hand reached into his pocket for a gritted slice of raw conch. Throwing his body against him, Henri threw him to the sand, feeling the pity of one tripping a child or a frightened animal. Ashby struggled with unexpected strength and for a minute they rolled, gasping. Then Henri had the revolver and the knife. As his own chest heaved and Ashby sobbed, he said, "To go, I cannot let you! We are your friends, that is truth, M'sieur. But you cannot be free to come back and cut our barge adrift. And you must tell us what befell with the *Webber* and the *Christophe* so that we may see justice done! You must also speak for your own sake ere either Thomas Webber or the Hereras find you!"

"Look!" Ashby said, clutching his hand on Henri's arm as they moved toward the top of the dune. "Look! Were things wrong about the *Webber*! I'll tell you about the *Webber*, Henri! Then I gotta go—come away from here, Henri! Can't be here when the Hereras come—any time they may come up over the sky there! They'll shoot you fellows, too, Henri. They have machine guns. I'll tell you all there is about the *Webber*, Henri. Then let's get gone before they come!" He pulled Henri's arm as Henri halted at the top of the dune where Joseph could see that all was well. "I don't want anything to

happen to you fellows, honest. Gotta get away before the Hereras come. They'll kill you if they find you here! They'll kill me if they get me. Look, I'll tell you about the *Webber*! The *Webber* was a throwing-away. That pale, shark's belly devil, Thomas Webber stood for a heap of money if he could throw her away so the insurers wouldn't guess. Thought he was a genius, Thomas Webber. Well, he hears of the Hereras and they was to work the ship 'til a storm showed up—then throw her away in front of the storm. I was her engineer to make a witness they knew couldn't turn. Nothing real wrong in throwing a ship away, Henri! On the long chance she wasn't smashed enough, I was a diver that could fix her underwater 'fore the insurers came." His eyes searched Henri's face. "I'm telling you truth, Henri! You gotta believe me it's truth! Hereras got a mighty lot from Thomas Webber for trying a throwing-away in front of a storm and more coming when it would be done. Their own ship, the *John P. Riggs*, was to pick 'em up after the *Webber* was on the rocks—had to be lonely rocks, so the insurers would believe men wouldn't throw-away there. Thomas Webber thought it all. Thought he was a genius, Thomas Webber. An' th' *Webber* trades around 'til comes a storm an' then the *Webber* comes north, waiting for a place, with the *John P. Riggs* just over the sky so folks wouldn't notice 'em together. . . ."

"What of the extra seamen that would make men say, 'They would not have shipped strangers had there been throwing-away afoot?'"

"I'm not holding back. Extra seamen was just more Hereras. Hereras got more fake papers 'an you can shake a stick at! No poor seamen lost from the *Webber*. Just looked good, that's all. I'm not holding back, see! How it was with Thomas Webber was as it gets certain where the storm will go, him and me takes one powerboat and lands private in Home Island, so he can say he near died in the wreck but won't be within holler of no wreck. Truth was, the *Webber* stood within five miles of the island to put us off! Sort of cheap, making folks think you'd been in wreck. But weren't no real genuine harm. Well, so we just lays low in the old thorn forest 'til would have been time for us to reach the island from the reefs they'd chose. Couldn't be dead sure which reefs it would be, so Thomas Webber says things were that bad we couldn't be dead sure where we'd struck. I'm telling you what I know! You do believe me, Henri?"

"So far, I believe. What happened as the *Christophe* reached the Purple Reefs?"

"The *Webber* was on the Purple Reefs like they'd planned if the storm's course held right. She was smashed enough underwater, so wasn't no need of me for diving. Thomas Webber pretended he was worried for the missing seamen. So—so he had Captain Malcolm look. Then we come on with the *Christophe* to the Isle of Palms." He twisted his shaking hands together. "That's how it was!" His gaze searched Henri's face more desperately. "I—I got to, figuring they might do me in when the insurance was paid. So I laid low. They'd told me they'd kill me if fraud about the *Webber* should come out. I did know about the *Webber*, see? But not about the *Christophe*! The *Christophe* went on! I wouldn't hurt you fellows. You been good to me—good." He looked everywhere but at Henri. "But I worried you might learn about the *Webber* if you took her brass, so I pinched th' dynamite in Tampa an' blew her up. She was a bad ship, a cursed ship. This is a bad place, a cursed place! Come away, Henri, before the Hereras come! You can't learn about the *Christophe* here!"

"We are your friends. But we know that you know of the *Christophe*. You must show us where the *Christophe* lies—down the oil slick yonder!"

"No!" Ashby said. "No! The *Christophe* went on to the Isle of Palms . . ."

"It has not been for the fraud with the *Webber* you have been so afraid! It was not for the *Webber* that you were diving here! It was not for the *Webber* but for that to which the *Webber* might lead that you blew the *Webber* from her bed! It was not for Tobias, but for what even Tobias might find that you stole his catboat!"

Astonishment at discovery was in the hunted eyes again. "Diving? That was for treasure—thought there might be treasure!" Ashby cried wildly. He held Henri's shoulders. "All over with the *Webber* fraud 'fore the *Christophe* got here! *Christophe* isn't here! Don't know anything about the *Christophe*—don't look here! Come away! It was treasure, just treasure I dived for . . ." He gripped Henri's shirt. "*Christophe* went on to the Isle of Palms! I tell you the *Christophe* went on to the Isle of Palms!"

"And I tell you that there is truth you do not tell us! And that it pertains to Jaques and Christian and the *Christophe* having come when there was some matter with the *Webber* that must not be seen! And if you do not tell us, we will still be seeking when the Hereras return—and while we will do what we may, how many of us live past their return is open question!"

"Worse things 'an death," Ashby muttered. His small figure with the great chest of the deep diver was touched with a sudden and tragic dignity. "Things a man can't tell. Things a man can't talk of if he dies for it."

Completely puzzled, Henri said furiously and despairingly, "Then we await the Hereras!"

"Hard to handle machine guns with rifles," Ashby said calmly. "But worse things 'an getting shot. I'll try to help you when Hereras come. I got some dynamite. But things a man can't tell."

"Can we trust Tobias not to harm him as he guards him?" Joseph asked when they had established Tobias and Ashby aboard Ashby's powerboat, extracted from a one time rumrunner's hiding place roofed with planks and covered with sand and vines in one of the sand-creeks and where Tobias' catboat—with unshipped mast—and a quantity of dynamite were also hidden. "And what can it be that he cannot tell? Or has done? I cannot think he would have part in harming men. And, Henri, in one thing do you not think he speaks truth? For, Henri, the *Christophe* cannot be here!"

"Tobias can be trusted. What the poor Ashby will not tell, I do not know. That something that he fears is here, I know! As I said to him the *Christophe* lay here, he looked down the traces of the oil above the canyon where I slipped. But let us merely say, 'Can we once get into the canyon, we may learn what he fears!'"

"What makes it so difficult of access that you believe the little Ashby failed to get in?"

"The gradient is severe and the footing slick. But the large difficulty is the surge. One swings on the slopes and the canyon walls cut back so that attempting a direct drop one could be swung beneath the undercut and the lines would sever—and further from the walls are coral columns."

"If one could find the main head of the canyon there might be a gradient down which one could work without danger to the lines."

"I do not want you down there, Joseph!" Henri said. "That head of yours still spins."

"If it had not been a foolish head, it might not," Joseph said, his face calm in the sunset. "And we alternate the diving—or we neither dive!"

For sixteen days they gathered fine specimens, found many small traces of old ships and ships less old, gained access to a dozen shallower canyons but found no way into the main canyon. The seventeenth day rose in glassy calm, with great lilac and silver cumulus about the sky. Joseph gave Henri a smile as the helmet was lowered over his head and screwed in place. Then he was underwater and below him was only the descending line vanishing into nothing an incredible distance down. Then the dim forms of the slope rose at him; a purple shadow, a marine sierra gathering color, a strange and swaying mountainside about him. He gave the signal to check, swung above the dizziness of the downpitch, and landed, skidding, on the slippery, all enveloping growth.

Today the slope was touched with dark purple and lilac, as if it had caught the colors of a great storm darkening a jungle; the valleys were clear-cut, and his eyes picked out what above water would have been the descending, boulder-filled bed of a dry river. With delays as Henri jockeyed the barge into new position, Joseph followed the bed downward. Then beyond a dam of flat rock was a drop of perhaps thirty feet to a continuing floor of round stones, but mossy and much littered. Their enemy, the current, was present here, but not unmanageable. And having been swung to the lower level, he went forward through the semi-darkness, though much more slowly, for everywhere about him were strange shapes: piled conch shells, green with time, the storm-and-current-collected trash of ages. Then he was in the lea of some large mass but the opaque gloom made him uncertain, so that it was only as his hands were on it that he knew it a ship. A ship. Not very old, the hull shattered and torn to maze of planking. But what ship? He knew of no wreck of recent years that should be here. And he experienced the diver's excitement at contact with an unknown ship. And was suddenly dizzy so that his head throbbed painfully, and knowing the pain an aftereffect of the beating on the docks combined with the pressure of depth, he knew that he must be careful to avoid excitement. He edged his way cautiously along the ship that seemed enormous in the obscurity. And, passing beneath the stern, he used his light, climbing upon the piled rocks to reach up and rub off the coating of sediment from the raised letters of the name. In his reeling head he had the sense of a flash of light and rolling waves of darkness. "Henri!" he said into the telephone. "Help me . . . I am dizzy . . . Henri, I have found the *Christophe*!"

On the barge, Joseph's face was white against the golden tans of the diving suit. Kneeling beside him, Henri asked, "Joseph, are you harmed?"

Joseph put his hands against his face, shaking his head. "I am well. . . ." He returned Henri's gaze. "She is there in the canyon near the drop to the great deep. It is the *Christophe*, I rubbed the growths off her name. Even had I not grown dizzy, I do not think I could have brought myself to look within her."

To the east were dark storm clouds while in the west was sunlight and from overhead a shower was falling so that the great drops flashed like diamonds against the eastern clouds. Out of silence, Henri said in a choked voice, "It seems a terrible thing to speak of haste, but having found what is below we should not needlessly await the Hereras. The weather is changing and lest change of currents in hurricane should carry her into the deep, we must have M'sieur the Commissioner's naval divers as witnesses that the *Christophe* sank here. And if we talk with the sad Ashby now, I think he may be our witness against those by whose act she lies here."

Breathing hard and trembling, they knelt at the edge of the barge. "The *Christophe* lies here—yet she cannot lie here!" Joseph said wonderingly. "And still for what reason was she harmed?"

"The *Christophe* lies here—and she cannot have *returned* here! And, Joseph, I think that the reason for her harming was simple as that the Hereras were late! In thinking of our brother coming to the Reefs, we have said, 'Though there was great fraud with the *Webber*, the *Christophe* could not have endangered it! Too much time had passed. Thomas Webber, the owner, even asked that the *Christophe* come to the scene of the *Webber's* wreck!' But, Joseph, Thomas Webber knew only the time at which the Hereras had promised to wreck the *Webber*. He did not know the true time of the wreck. Only the Hereras knew the true time of the wreck."

Looking at their faces as they entered the dark cabin of the powerboat from rain that had increased to a downpour Ashby said with the calm of despair, "So you found her. So it'll be known now—known." He sat with his hands clenched between his knees as Henri knelt on one knee before him.

"We have found the *Christophe*, M'sieur. And we must go at once in your powerboat to M'sieur the Commissioner and thence to Tampa and you must be our witness to why and by whose act the *Christophe* lies here!" Henri said as Joseph readied the engines and Tobias stowed the things of the cabin for sea. "For, M'sieur, was it not thus? That the Hereras had promised for great fee to throw away the *Webber* as the great gales were rising before hurricane, when the genuineness of a wreck could not be doubted—and when they would not have done it. Actually they planned to parallel the storm and throw the ship away in the first safe moments of after-whip. It had not been as satisfactory from the owner's viewpoint, for always there was the chance a passing ship might later say, 'The *Webber* driven by hurricane on the Purple Reefs? We saw the Reefs empty as the storm was dying!' But it should have worked. But the storm grew, crowding the *Webber* to the coast of the Republic. But it could still have worked, for the Caribbean was filled with flying rain and flying spindrift. The ships were fleeing as they could and sheltering as they might. The little boats were gone into the rivers, the people of the swamps had fled for the high ground. And none were pausing to check the identity of a storm-sheltering ship. But the storm loitered, growing always in force, giving long days of drowning rain and flying drift—and boredom. And the Hereras, having waited two days, so that later they might say they had come from the wrecked ship, were very bored and left the *Webber* in the swamps and went ashore in the powerboat to the little town. But Martin Herera did not make his captain's complaint of wreck, for as yet there had been no wreck. And they would not mean to spend days, perhaps merely a few hours, but being Hereras of the Low Cays, they were arrested and were drunk ere they broke out, and jesting as they always jest, delayed to make further mischief ere they left. So that ere they left, the storm was rolling from the Caribbean. And they were late! Was not that the simple beginning of disaster, that laughing scoundrels were late? For being Hereras still, they gambled for the balance of the promised payment and went to carry out the wrecking, not before the storm as they had promised, not in the spindrift and swell of after-whip as they had planned, but in weather like an angel's dream of peace!" His voice shook. "And so lonely are the Reefs, and so long had the storm itself delayed, that the wrecking should still have worked. But on belated fulfillment of the fraud, Jaques and Christian and then the *Christophe* came, endangering the whole fraud—that still could work except for Jaques and Christian and those of the *Christophe*! And the Hereras killed many men and often in the hijacking wars of the rumrunners. They have killed many poor Chinese when pressed by the gunboats. They will not hesitate to kill many men, but perhaps the wickedness on the Purple Reefs grew when our brother guessed harm to Jaques and Christian and the covering of fraud became the covering of murder—was it not so, M'sieur?"

"Yes," Ashby said in a dead voice. He pressed his forehead upon his arm against the wall.

"We have waited very long to know of this, M'sieur," Henri said. "We would be sure of what befell when the *Christophe* came to the Reefs that day!"

Ashby spoke almost in a whisper. "Tom Webber has asked Cap'n Malcolm Christophe to bring him by the Reefs to see the wreck of his ship. He's said he was plumb certain it was the Purple Reefs they'd struck when they had to 'bandon ship, but he's left it open a bit case the Hereras has had to ditch her somewheres else. He's been all the owner—feelin' bad. Then the *Christophe* is at the Reefs and rounds the North Dunes—and there are the Hereras still faking storm damage on the *Webber* where they'd thrown her away and the *John P. Riggs* standing by to pick them up! And Tom Webber goes white and looks at Malcolm Christophe and says, 'Well, Follower Saint, what do Followers do if they see too much? I've heard they don't go to the law—but I'm wondering!' And Cap'n Malcolm Christophe's face is dark but he looks back at him and says, 'It is true, M'sieur, that the Followers leave the punishment of crime to God—but it is also true that they do not turn away without learning the fate of friends! And the broken catboat upon the sands yonder is that of Jaques and Christian who may also have seen too much. And I must know where are Jaques and Christian now?'"

"And, to cover murder, there must be more murder?" Henri whispered.

Ashby rocked his face against the wall and his voice was a cry of protest against life. "Man means no harm. All at once, it goes wrong. Me, I meant no harm. An' all at once the devils from the Low Cays are killing and the pale, fair devil, Tom Webber as hasn't meant killing but loves pain an' killing when his own skin is safe, is standing off laughing like a fox in his eyes! All at once, good men will not go home . . ."

"And they stood as lambs!" Henri said so softly it was a breath. "Strong men and brave men—but men who would not defend themselves!"

"Somethin' awful an' somethin' beautiful to believe like that!" Ashby muttered. "But somethin' awful to use a man's belief. Awful to hit a man as won't hit back. Haunts a man by night to remember men hit as won't hit back . . ."

"M'sieur Thomas Webber laughed?" Tobias asked through the drum of rain.

"Like I says, he hadn't meant killing. But he wasn't going to be stopped for killing, an' when killing starts he loves the killing, eyes laughing like at the bullfights—like killing was a sport! His eyes bright, so I wanted to kill him. But I ain't what it takes to kill. Only to wisht I was dead!"

"I will go now and prepare my catboat," Tobias said. "Do not wait for me. I will place flowers on the water then sail my catboat."

Joseph moved from the engines to the wheel and turned the boat for Home Island as Henri continued to crouch before Ashby.

"Some things from the *Christophe* they wanted," Ashby said, staring. "Looted the ship like vultures. Like vultures picking th' bones of the dead! Put things on the *John P. Riggs*. Hereras took th' lace. Pale devil fancied the hats for they was like South Sea islands an' women. That's what happened—don't make me talk no more! Not no more! Some things so bad a man can't talk of them! Sooner die than tell the rest on it!" He hid his face in his hands as the boat swung to the open sea.

Putting his hand on Ashby's knee, Henri said, "There is still a thing that might free guilty men. With the *Christophe*, all search began with the thought, 'She reached the Isle of Palms . . .' Questioning if evil befell our brother here ere the ship went on, the mind knew, 'None had taken the risk of taking the ship on if all had not been well!' Even knowing, 'The *Christophe* is here. She could not have returned here, thus she never left here!' the mind thinks, 'But she reached the Isle of Palms!' But did not the answer begin with the very simple thing that the *Christophe* delivered mail from the tiny islands to the Isle of Palms, but did not take mail out, since this went by the Republic's ships to Tampa or Miami? And thus our brother very often sent in the mail by little boat to avoid entering the river. And was not the rest of the answer the very simple thing that for guilty men, even with a ship sunken where oil cannot betray her and where all save a diver think her too deep to reach, it is better if all search be made afar? And thus another ship went on, and if noted by the way, she was what she was, the motorship *John P. Riggs*, that trades hither and yon, but by night her lights are the lights of a motorship such as is common to the islands—and by night passing on the *Christophe's* course, with men presently bringing in the *Christophe's* mail, she is the *Christophe*?"

"Should have known it must be known!" Ashby said into his hands. "'Personating the dead was what we were! Too awful

to talk about, 'personating the dead! Man couldn't have his kids know a man had did that. Couldn't have his old woman know. Man's done blasphemy, he only tries t' go on living 'cause he's afraid to die 'case someday his old woman or his kids might need something he coulda done he were alive . . ."

The brothers looked at each other, startled by the strangeness of the human mind's evaluation of sin, but recognizing the genuineness of despair. With his hand still on Ashby's knee, Henri said, "M'sieur, we are very close to what befell and we know that you wished no part of it, but feared to die because of little ones and a good woman. But do you not see that if you will be witness you begin the undoing of the wrong? And that it is more likely that you live for the good woman and the little ones if you help us bring evil men to justice?"

For the first time rational hope looked back at him from Ashby's eyes. "You ain't turned on me? You reckon I could get back with the old woman?"

"If you will be witness! And we will have both M'sieur the Commissioner and Sir Dudley Markham and also the good Doctor Clifford speak for you!"

"Ain't jail I been afeared of. When a man's done blasphemy he thinks, 'Why didn' I know when I was well off in jail, afore I got in this?'" Ashby said.

Tobias, having made a wreath of the pink-flowered vine, placed it upon the rain-pitted water and said the flower service for the dead, set his course not for Home Island, but for the Isle of Palms, where he learned that Monsieur Thomas Webber had again been seeking William Ashby and had also been attempting to sell his millionaires' resort in Florida to certain wealthy Latins. Having failed, he had now returned to Florida to meet a buyer there. Monsieur Thomas Webber, it seemed, planned to move to the Latin Americas himself. And Tobias gave up sleep and drove the catboat day and night through wind and rain.

A Negro fisherman off Cape Sable told him, "You wish to see Mister Thomas Webber, you better hurry, boy! He sold his fishing camp an' packing." Tobias hurried, for he did not wish to have to seek Monsieur Thomas Webber through the years and the Latin Americas. In the mangroves of the approaches to Webber's Landing a white boatman answered, "I reckon you're too late. Tom Webber was loading his station wagon as I came by from the 'Glades some time back." And Tobias plied the large sculling oar until the catboat surged between the mangroves in the rain and the muscles of his great arms burned. He arrived in the estuary in increasing rain and leaden gray of evening but the large and clean colored woman saw him. "Big colored man, where are you going?" she called. Studying his face, she said, "You has learned of your son?"

"I have learned of my son," Tobias said sternly. "I go to speak with M'sieur Thomas Webber. He is at his landing?"

Her eyes flickered toward the landing, from which came the far sound of raised voices. In a voice that was suddenly weak, she said, "He is there. He does not leave until tomorrow. Help me, big colored man! I is ill . . ." With her hands against her large bosom, she sank in her scrubbed doorway. Tobias looked toward the landing. But the kind woman was sobbing for breath and he must help her. "My heart it is!" Mammy gasped. In agitated hugeness, Tobias tried to save the kind woman, getting her upon her neat bed, getting her the many things for which she asked. It was only as her eyes, looking through the little window, changed suddenly in expression, that he too followed her gaze and saw a large and fair man backing a loaded station wagon from behind the buildings of the landing. Beside the station wagon, a girl with bleached hair clung to the door so that she was dragged. And in far pantomime the man brought his fist down on her hands on the door and tried to fling her off, then, stopping the car, opened the door, jumped out and struck the girl, flinging her from the way so that her head sagged sideward. And the girl pulled the tiny shape of a gun from under her dress and pointed it at the man and the toy sound of a shot came over the water as the man convulsed at the feet of the girl who leaned forward while the toy sound of shots came again and the man was still as the girl collapsed in the rain.

Before Tobias in the cabin, Mammy was sitting up, wiping beads of sweat from her face. "Woman!" Tobias said. "Oh, woman, you have tricked me and robbed me of my vengeance!"

"I couldn't know this would happen. I was merely giving him time to be gone to save you from the 'lectric chair, colored man. But it is right way to have it happen. Mister Thomas Webber is most surely improved the only way he could be improved—by being dead. No one going to punish a poor foolish girl he treated like dirt under his feet an' tried to 'bandon—an' you can go on being a nice, big, angry colored man. Now you come with me proper to comfort poor girl

and tell police he was mistreating her!"

"I will come. But then woman, may I never see your face again!" Tobias said.

Meeting Henri Christophe outside the courthouse in Tampa two weeks later, Mammy looked cheerfully and straight into his dark eyes. "How do matters go with your lost ship, young foreign man? And did you learn why the men that was like the pirate pictures in the school books came to see the late Mister Thomas Webber?"

"The insurance upon our ship has been paid. For what befell between the Hereras and Thomas Webber, we may not know. But I think they said to him, 'We are many and you are one. Pay us not what was arranged but all or we swear you disabled your ship so she drove upon the Reefs. And that you—and not we—killed to preserve the fraud!' And Thomas Webber was a man who read a book that is called *The Prince* and thought very big things. But he was a great coward and I think he paid them. Perhaps they merely told him they would very surely kill him if he did not pay. His fear that it be known they came would be lest men guess he had paid—and question why. For the rest, they who took the lives of our brother and Tobias' son and other good men await hanging in the West Indies. Only Thomas Webber cannot be punished."

"He were punished, for he was sore afraid," she said calmly. "Looking in your eyes, I wonders if you too wasn't like big colored man and saved? And that was the Lord's hand!" She studied him with gentle majesty. "Miss Rue is going with you to the island?"

"She has promised me that one day she will go. She is making me wait while she goes first to school with the good sisters at the convent to learn all things that Daphne, a lady of our house, knows," he said with something of astonishment. "In a year I am to come to ask her hand in the presence of the reverend mother as Daphne's hand was once asked. Meantime she has also found employment in the shop from which a kind salesgirl helped my brother Joseph obtain a handkerchief for Daphne."

She smiled. "She a fine girl with sense, Miss Rue. Young men, they the nicest creatures 'cept even the nicest of them apt to feel they conferring favors by letting a woman love them. Now men not so young, they the nicest creatures 'cept they apt to disbelieve a woman can love them at all." Mammy looked cheerfully and straight at Henri. "How would one get to that island where that nice big fool colored man lives at? And has he cottage and yard?"

He noted as Tobias had done that there was an amazing amount of her but that it was all comfortable and kind. He told her of the island and of Tobias' shack, far out in the Great Sound. She nodded comfortably. "Could be all to the good." Her great, golden smile broke. "If a woman was to arrive to see a man uninvited, it's one thing to push her through the door, but it's another to throw her in the sea!"

On Home Island the evening air was thick with color as if with dust in which the dragonflies were burnished golden sparks, then rubies catching the last of sunset as the brothers Christophe straightened from laying the last flagstone in the path for Aunt Caroline's wheeled-chair from Domremy to the packed coral road that led on to the little chapel in West Town. Regarding them, the old lady said, "So there is safety for Domremy and there will be a new ship and M'sieur Latour will be paid and a small loan to help him as well, which is as it should be—but what of something else?"

"Dear, we wanted to paint it!" Henri said, glancing at the great house. "We have known how you wanted it painted as it was in the great days. We have not known how to tell you that still money would not reach, do what we would. But the mail contracts and cargoes of the new ship will assuredly carry the monthly bills and there is very much evidence of old ships upon the reefs and it was our thought to set our schedule so that we might continue to search and should we make even a small find . . ."

"Never mind!" the old lady said. "I have but waited for three generations to see the house pink for the roses and white for the jasmines. Nor am I unreasonable. What a woman most loves in a man is that he be a truly good man and have the touch of dreams. Having that, she must know that she is likely to wait for the galleons!" She smiled. "Thank you for my path. Nor is the matter of paint quite hopeless. In the letter which you brought me from your love, Henri, she informs me

that each week she is buying house paint from her salary so that when she comes, she will bring a dowry. What three generations of men have failed to do, a girl-child may accomplish." She put her little claws upon the hand-rails of the chair and turned it toward the sweet and unsuspecting sound of distant female voices singing while her face twisted in an expression of the most horrible malignancy that Henry and Joseph had ever seen. "Now, Ladies' Gatherings in His Name, here I come!"

Transcriber's Notes:
page 5 take told of the mahogany casket ==> take hold of the mahogany casket

[The end of *The Silent Reefs* by Dorothy Cottrell]