The Collected Works of

Langston Hughes

Volume 16

The Translations: Federico García Lorca, Nicolás Guillén, and Jacques Roumain

Edited with an Introduction by Dellita Martin-Ogunsola

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Projected Volumes in the Collected Works

The Poems: 1921–1940

The Poems: 1941–1950

The Poems: 1951–1967

The Novels: *Not without Laughter* and *Tambourines to Glory*

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Chronology
By Arnold Rampersad

1902 James Langston Hughes is born February 1 in Joplin, Missouri, to James Nathaniel Hughes, a stenographer for a mining company, and Carrie Mercer Langston Hughes, a former government clerk.

1903 After his father immigrates to Mexico, Langston's mother takes him to Lawrence, Kansas, the home of Mary Langston, her twice-widowed mother. Mary Langston's first husband, Lewis Sheridan Leary, died fighting alongside John Brown at Harpers Ferry. Her second, Hughes's grandfather, was Charles Langston, a former abolitionist, Republican politician, and businessman.

1907 After a failed attempt at a reconciliation in Mexico, Langston and his mother return to Lawrence.

1909 Langston starts school in Topeka, Kansas, where he lives for a while with his mother before returning to his grandmother's home in Lawrence.

1915 Following Mary Langston's death, Hughes leaves Lawrence for Lincoln, Illinois, where his mother lives with her second husband, Homer Clark, and Homer Clark's young son by another union, Gwyn "Kit" Clark.

1916 Langston, elected class poet, graduates from the eighth grade. Moves to Cleveland, Ohio, and starts at Central High School there.

1918 Publishes early poems and short stories in his school's monthly magazine.

1919 Spends the summer in Toluca, Mexico, with his father.

1920 Graduates from Central High as class poet and editor of the school annual. Returns to Mexico to live with his father.

1921 In June, Hughes publishes "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" in *Crisis* magazine. In September, sponsored by his father, he enrolls at Columbia University in New York. Meets W. E. B. Du Bois, Jessie Fauset, and Countee Cullen.

1922 Unhappy at Columbia, Hughes withdraws from school and breaks with his father.

1923 Sailing in June to western Africa on the crew of a freighter, he visits Senegal, the Gold Coast, Nigeria, the Congo, and other countries.

1924 Spends several months in Paris working in the kitchen of a nightclub.

1925 Lives in Washington for a year with his mother. His poem "The Weary Blues" wins first prize in a contest sponsored by *Opportunity* magazine, which leads to a book contract with Knopf through Carl Van Vechten. Becomes friends with several other young artists of the Harlem Renaissance, including Zora Neale Hurston, Wallace Thurman, and Arna Bontemps.

1926 In January his first book, *The Weary Blues,* appears. He enrolls at historically black Lincoln University, Pennsylvania. In June, the *Nation* weekly magazine publishes his landmark essay "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain."

1927 Knopf publishes his second book of verse, *Fine Clothes to the Jew,* which is condemned in the black press. Hughes meets his powerful patron Mrs. Charlotte Osgood Mason. Travels in the South with Hurston, who is also taken up by Mrs. Mason.

1929 Hughes graduates from Lincoln University.

1930 Publishes his first novel, *Not without Laughter* (Knopf). Visits Cuba and meets fellow poet Nicolás Guillén. Hughes is dismissed by Mrs. Mason in a painful break made worse by false charges of dishonesty leveled by Hurston over their play *Mule Bone*.

1931 Demoralized, he travels to Haiti. Publishes work in the communist magazine *New Masses.* Supported by the Rosenwald Foundation, he tours the South taking his poetry to the people. In Alabama, he visits some of the Scottsboro Boys in prison. His brief collection of poems *Dear Lovely Death* is privately printed in Amenia, New York. Hughes and the illustrator Prentiss Taylor publish a verse pamphlet, *The Negro Mother.*

1932 With Taylor, he publishes *Scottsboro, Limited,* a short play and four poems. From Knopf comes *The Dream Keeper,* a book of previously published poems selected for young people. Later, Macmillan brings out *Popo and Fifina,* a children's story about Haiti written with Arna Bontemps, his closest friend. In June, Hughes sails to Russia in a band of twenty-two young African

Americans to make a film about race relations in the United States. After the project collapses, he lives for a year in the Soviet Union. Publishes his most radical verse, including "Good Morning Revolution" and "Goodbye Christ."

1933 Returns home at midyear via China and Japan. Supported by a patron, Noël Sullivan of San Francisco, Hughes spends a year in Carmel writing short stories.

1934 Knopf publishes his first short story collection, *The Ways of White Folks.* After labor unrest in California threatens his safety, he leaves for Mexico following news of his father's death.

1935 Spends several months in Mexico, mainly translating short stories by local leftist writers. Lives for some time with the photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson. Returning almost destitute to the United States, he joins his mother in Oberlin, Ohio. Visits New York for the Broadway production of his play *Mulatto* and clashes with its producer over changes in the script. Unhappy, he writes the poem "Let America Be America Again."

1936 Wins a Guggenheim Foundation fellowship for work on a novel but soon turns mainly to writing plays in association with the Karamu Theater in Cleveland. Karamu stages his farce *Little Ham* and his historical drama about Haiti, *Troubled Island.*

1937 Karamu stages *Joy to My Soul,* another comedy. In July, he visits Paris for the League of American Writers. He then travels to Spain, where he spends the rest of the year reporting on the civil war for the *Baltimore Afro-American.*

1938 In New York, Hughes founds the radical Harlem Suitcase Theater, which stages his agitprop play *Don't You Want to Be Free?* The leftist International Workers Order publishes *A New Song,* a pamphlet of radical verse. Karamu stages his play *Front Porch.* His mother dies.

1939 In Hollywood he writes the script for the movie *Way Down South,* which is criticized for stereotyping black life. Hughes goes for an extended stay in Carmel, California, again as the guest of Noël Sullivan.

1940 His autobiography *The Big Sea* appears (Knopf). He is picketed by a religious group for his poem "Goodbye Christ," which he publicly renounces.

1941 With a Rosenwald Fund fellowship for playwriting, he leaves California for Chicago, where he founds the Skyloft Players. Moves on to New York in December.

1942 Knopf publishes his book of verse *Shakespeare in Harlem*. The Skyloft Players stage his play *The Sun Do Move*. In the summer he resides at the Yaddo writers' and artists' colony, New York. Hughes also works as a writer in support of the war effort. In November he starts "Here to Yonder," a weekly column in the Chicago *Defender* newspaper.

1943 "Here to Yonder" introduces Jesse B. Semple, or Simple, a comic Harlem character who quickly becomes its most popular feature. Hughes publishes *Jim Crow's Last Stand* (Negro Publication Society of America), a pamphlet of verse about the struggle for civil rights.

1944 Comes under surveillance by the FBI because of his former radicalism.

1945 With Mercer Cook, translates and later publishes *Masters of the Dew* (Reynal and Hitchcock), a novel by Jacques Roumain of Haiti.

1947 His work as librettist with Kurt Weill and Elmer Rice on the Broadway musical play *Street Scene* brings Hughes a financial windfall. He vacations in Jamaica. Knopf publishes *Fields of Wonder*, his only book composed mainly of lyric poems on nonracial topics.

1948 Hughes is denounced (erroneously) as a communist in the U.S. Senate. He buys a townhouse in Harlem and moves in with his longtime friends Toy and Emerson Harper.

1949 Doubleday publishes *Poetry of the Negro, 1746–1949,* an anthology edited with Arna Bontemps. Also published are *One-Way Ticket* (Knopf), a book of poems, and *Cuba Libre: Poems of Nicolás Guillén* (Anderson and Ritchie), translated by Hughes and Ben Frederic Carruthers. Hughes teaches for three months at the University of Chicago Lab School for children. His opera about Haiti with William Grant Still, *Troubled Island,* is presented in New York.

1950 Another opera, *The Barrier,* with music by Jan Meyerowitz, is hailed in New York but later fails on Broadway. Simon and Schuster publishes *Simple Speaks His Mind,* the first of five books based on his newspaper columns.

1951 Hughes's book of poems about life in Harlem, *Montage of a Dream Deferred,* appears (Henry Holt).

1952 His second collection of short stories, *Laughing to Keep from Crying,* is published by Henry Holt. In its "First Book" series

for children, Franklin Watts publishes Hughes's *The First Book of Negroes.*

1953 In March, forced to testify before Senator Joseph McCarthy's subcommittee on subversive activities, Hughes is exonerated after repudiating his past radicalism. *Simple Takes a Wife* appears.

1954 Mainly for young readers, he publishes *Famous American Negroes* (Dodd, Mead) and *The First Book of Rhythms.*

1955 Publishes *The First Book of Jazz* and finishes *Famous Negro Music Makers* (Dodd, Mead). In November, Simon and Schuster publishes *The Sweet Flypaper of Life,* a narrative of Harlem with photographs by Roy DeCarava.

1956 Hughes's second volume of autobiography, *I Wonder As I Wander* (Rinehart), appears, as well as *A Pictorial History of the Negro* (Crown), coedited with Milton Meltzer, and *The First Book of the West Indies.*

1957 *Esther,* an opera with composer Jan Meyerowitz, has its premiere in Illinois. Rinehart publishes *Simple Stakes a Claim* as a novel. Hughes's musical play *Simply Heavenly,* based on his Simple character, runs for several weeks off and then on Broadway. Hughes translates and publishes *Selected Poems of Gabriela Mistral* (Indiana University Press).

1958 *The Langston Hughes Reader* (George Braziller) appears, as well as *The Book of Negro Folklore* (Dodd, Mead), coedited with Arna Bontemps, and another juvenile, *Famous Negro Heroes of America* (Dodd, Mead). John Day publishes a short novel, *Tambourines to Glory,* based on a Hughes gospel musical play.

1959 Hughes's *Selected Poems* published (Knopf).

1960 *The First Book of Africa* appears, along with *An African Treasury: Articles, Essays, Stories, Poems by Black Africans,* edited by Hughes (Crown).

1961 Inducted into the National Institute of Arts and Letters. Knopf publishes his book-length poem *Ask Your Mama: 12 Moods for Jazz. The Best of Simple,* drawn from the columns, appears (Hill and Wang). Hughes writes his gospel musical plays *Black Nativity* and *The Prodigal Son.* He visits Africa again.

1962 Begins a weekly column for the *New York Post.* Attends a writers' conference in Uganda. Publishes *Fight for Freedom: The Story of the NAACP,* commissioned by the organization.

1963 His third collection of short stories, *Something in Common,* appears from Hill and Wang. Indiana University Press publishes

Five Plays by Langston Hughes, edited by Webster Smalley, as well as Hughes's anthology *Poems from Black Africa, Ethiopia, and Other Countries.*

1964 His musical play *Jericho–Jim Crow,* a tribute to the civil rights movement, is staged in Greenwich Village. Indiana University Press brings out his anthology *New Negro Poets: U.S.A.,* with a foreword by Gwendolyn Brooks.

1965 With novelists Paule Marshall and William Melvin Kelley, Hughes visits Europe for the U.S. State Department. His gospel play *The Prodigal Son* and his cantata with music by David Amram, *Let Us Remember,* are staged.

1966 After twenty-three years, Hughes ends his depiction of Simple in his Chicago *Defender* column. Publishes *The Book of Negro Humor* (Dodd, Mead). In a visit sponsored by the U.S. government, he is honored in Dakar, Senegal, at the First World Festival of Negro Arts.

1967 His *The Best Short Stories by Negro Writers: An Anthology from 1899 to the Present* (Little, Brown) includes the first published story by Alice Walker. On May 22, Hughes dies at New York Polyclinic Hospital in Manhattan from complications following prostate surgery. Later that year, two books appear: *The Panther and the Lash: Poems of Our Times* (Knopf) and, with Milton Meltzer, *Black Magic: A Pictorial History of the Negro in American Entertainment* (Prentice Hall).

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Introduction

Creative writers have often commented that the imaginative process enables them to find comfort, healing, and restoration from the wounds inflicted by life in a fallen world. The darkness of pain and suffering courses like the "flow of human blood in human veins" through the works of Langston Hughes—saturating his essays, librettos, newspaper articles, novels, plays, poems, short stories, and, of course, translations—but that darkness is ultimately transformed by catharsis. Hughes was not a translator by profession, and he was definitely aware of the Latin proverb "traduttore est traditore" (to translate is to betray). However, when that passionately shy North American author engaged the works of his internationally acclaimed colleagues, he saw translation as a means to something larger than his own life and writing, not as an end in itself. For that reason, it is necessary to consider why Hughes was attracted to a process that was even more elusive and frustrating than creating literature in his own language. One consideration in addressing this question is the need for a writer to mediate between the source language, or the context from which he takes the original text, and the target language, or the milieu in which he tries to create a facsimile of the original text. This was crucial for Hughes, who had a passion for working toward freedom, equality, and justice for the oppressed peoples of the world, particularly those of color. His decision to translate significant works by Federico García Lorca of Spain, Nicolás Guillén of Cuba, and Jacques Roumain of Haiti was a function of his zeal for connecting with other writers to achieve those goals.

On the one hand, translation has developed quite naturally over the course of human history in response to the need for intercultural communication. According to Albrecht Neubert and Gregory M. Shreve, "the term *language mediation,* the collective name for translation and interpreting, underscores this crucial role." On the other hand, authors and intellectuals have approached with trepidation the translation of works from other cultures for a number of reasons:

> A source text is embedded in a complex linguistic, textual, and cultural context. Its meaning, communicative intent, and interpretive effect draw

> upon its natural relationships in that environment. It is a daunting task to pull a text from its natural surroundings and recreate it in an alien linguistic and cultural setting. The text belongs to a dynamic cultural and linguistic ecology. The translator uproots it in a valiant attempt to transplant its fragile meaning.[1]

In the last twenty years, the discipline known as translation studies has emerged in an attempt to view translation in a systematic way. However, this area is the subject of much controversy and complexity. As is evident from the above discussion, translation is a double-edged sword, having the potential for error, misrepresentation, and trivialization, as well as the capacity for healing, enrichment, and education.[2] Nevertheless, Hughes's use of language for aesthetic as well as therapeutic effects goes hand in hand with his desire to form bonds with people, places, and things globally.

Even if the translator does not intend to betray the original, he cannot avoid rewriting it in some fashion. Obviously translation is the only way to bridge cultures without attempting to learn every language in the world that manifests itself in literary form. Thus, Carolyn Hodges asserts:

> Despite the many different precepts evolving from the debate on the art of translation, those who embark upon the task have a common goal—to transfer meaning: they also have a common understanding—that the final product can only be an approximation of the original. The attempt to transfer meaning, that is, to find an equivalent between the original text, or source language, and the language into which it is to be translated, or target language, suggests the possibility of finding *sameness in meaning*.[3]

André Lefevere confirms that "translation is not primarily 'about' language. Rather, language as the expression (and repository) of a culture is one element in the cultural transfer known as translation."[4] Not only did Langston Hughes see translation as a bridge to accessing other cultures, he also perceived it as a way of transferring knowledge about those cultures and their people through his writing.

What was it that made Hughes attempt to convey the similarity of experience between his audience in the United States and audiences in

1. Shreve, *Translation as Text* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1992), 1.
2. Ibid., 2–3.
3. "Introduction: Reflections on the Art of Literary Translation and the Legacy of Langston Hughes," *Langston Hughes Review* 4.2 (fall 1985): vii (emphasis mine).
4. *Translation, Rewriting and the Manipulation of Literary Fame* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 57.

other nations? His statement in *The Big Sea* about believing in books more than in people offers some insight into his passion for translation.[5] The bittersweet facts of Hughes's life are all too well known, for Arnold Rampersad brilliantly explores the psycho-emotional complexity of the author's tragicomic journey in his *Life of Langston Hughes.* Rampersad comments that the act of entering, or reentering, the family is Hughes's way of "celebrating the unique power of the black race to nurture him."[6] Thus, his perennial longing for submersion into the "Big Sea" of black life—whether in the Americas, in Europe, in Africa, or in Asia—prompted him to build bridges between himself and an international circle of writers. Hughes's odyssey was a multilayered exploration of his individual, familial, communal, and, ultimately, global identity. One method of exploration he found most effective was to translate works by authors with whom he felt connected and whose cultures illustrated some amazing correspondences with, as well as differences from, his own. Since Hughes was conscious of what Richard L. Jackson refers to as "a history of shared suffering" among oppressed peoples of color,[7] he wanted to alert the black community in the United States to the diversity and richness of similar experiences abroad. Each encounter with members of the larger group enabled the poet to peel off layers of anxiety, frustration, and pain by affirming his self-worth and enriching his literary repertoire.

Bodas de sangre (1933), or *Blood Wedding* (1938, 1994), is a renowned play by one of Hughes's most famous contemporaries, the Spanish poet and playwright Federico García Lorca (1898–1936).[8] It is the story of the Bridegroom and the Lover (Leonardo), who fight to the death over the Bride. In fact, Leonardo is the only character in the play who has a name. Anyone familiar with Spanish Peninsular culture knows that a preoccupation with blood is an essential feature. This is evident in an art like the bullfight or a sport like the cockfight. On a deeper level, the emphasis on blood manifests itself in the obsession with *limpieza de sangre,* or pure

5. *The Collected Works of Langston Hughes, Volume 13, Autobiography: The Big Sea,* ed. Joseph McLaren (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002), 46.

6. *The Life of Langston Hughes, Volume 1: 1902–1941, I, Too, Sing America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 45.

7. "The Shared Vision of Langston Hughes and Black Hispanic Writers," *Black American Literature Forum* 15.3 (1981): 89.

8. Because García Lorca preferred to use his mother's surname, Lorca, as the name by which he was recognized in the literary world, that is how he will be referred to here.

pedigree, a centuries-old struggle in which "Old" and "New Christians" grapple with their African/European/Jewish/Moorish legacy in Spain and, by extension, Spanish America. The feudalistic code of honor called *pundonor* is a form of legalized murder that is ritualized in the play. In his manuscripts housed at Yale's Beinecke Library, Hughes utilizes two alternate translations of the title: *Fate at the Wedding* and *Tragic Wedding,* but Melia Bensussen later adapted and published the translation with the title *Blood Wedding* (1994). Her term is a more accurate rendition of the Spanish title because it conveys the idea of uncontrolled violence and unexpected death, as well as the futile sacrifice and inevitable destruction that Lorca saw as characteristic of human life in general and Spanish life in particular.

To Hughes, the twin themes of fate and tragedy suggested the epic contours of his own life, that of the "Little Prince" who could never quite find his way back to the Castle. In addition, the culture of Andalusia, Spain's southernmost region where the action of *Blood Wedding* takes place, has been tempered by the gypsy way of life—evident in the *cante jondo* (deep song) and flamenco dance. Just as Lorraine Hansberry's viewing of Sean O'Casey's *Juno and the Peacock* prompted her to write *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959), Hughes was inspired to connect with the literature of a distant land such as Spain where suffering was transposed into a minor key he recognized. Consequently, part of Hughes's therapy for the emotional scars and wounds that festered in his own life was to identify with a Spanish writer who had also experienced alienation and marginality as a result of his ethno-racial and sexual identity. On the eve of the Spanish Civil War, Lorca was brutally assassinated and his body disposed of in an unmarked grave. Lorca's martyrdom attracted Hughes's interest.

Hughes's concept of translation was not as developed as his need to practice the activity. Thus, in his introduction to *The Selected Poems of Gabriela Mistral* (1957), he candidly states:

> I have no theories of translation. I simply try to transfer into English as much as I can of the literal content, emotion, and style of each poem. When I feel I can transfer only literal content, I do not attempt a translation. For that reason, I have not translated the three *Sonetos de la Muerte*. They are very beautiful, but very difficult in their rhymed simplicity to put into an equivalent English form. To give their meaning without their word music would be to lose their meaning.[9]

9. "Introduction," *Selected Poems of Gabriela Mistral,* in *The Collected Works of Langston Hughes, Volume 9, Essays on Art, Race, Politics, and World Affairs,* ed.

The above statement was made twenty years after Hughes translated *Blood Wedding*. Although he spoke Spanish fluently, Hughes still had not resolved some of the difficulties of conveying the "semantic information content of the source text and its illocutionary power" so necessary to understanding the culture.[10] Overall, Hughes does an excellent job at giving the English-speaking reader a feel for the intense conflict of the drama—the clash of individual and communal will power and the transgression of custom and tradition represented by Leonardo's rebellion. The Bensussen adaptation polishes some of the rough edges of Hughes's efforts, but there are some aspects of both versions that are awkward. Specifically, the use of the literal meaning for a word or phrase causes some clumsiness that detracts from the force of the Spanish original. For example, in act I, scene 1, the Boy refers to his Mother as *vieja,* which literally means "old lady." However, the context of that scene is the young man's joy over his pending engagement to his beloved. Lorca uses two variants of *vieja,* one with a prefix (*revieja*), the other a compound term (*requetevieja*), to rhythmically reinforce the playful mood of the young man, not the fact that his mother is elderly. This nuance is lost in the Hughes and Bensussen texts. Another challenge is the translation of the poetic stanzas Lorca interspersed throughout *Blood Wedding*. In act I, scene 2, the lullaby that the Wife and Mother-in-Law of Leonardo sing to his baby conveys the sense of doom associated with the Lover's impending death. However, Hughes's attempt to reproduce Lorca's rhyme clashes with the octosyllabic rhythm so characteristic of the Spanish ballad (*romance*). To his credit Hughes is able to re-create Lorca's powerful imagery—for example, the bruised hooves, frozen mane, and silver dagger plunged between the eyes of the horse that Leonardo rides unmercifully in hot pursuit of the Girl.

A third instance of literalness occurs in act II, scene 1, where the villagers wish to exhort the bride-elect by singing, "Wake up, wake up / It's your wedding day." In Spanish their euphoria is best conveyed by the command form of the verb *despertar*. However, the English translation employs the indicative, "The bride awakes / on her wedding morn," as if she merely opens her eyes and lies there passively. In fact, the Girl is ambivalent about marrying the Boy because of her passion for Leonardo.

Christopher C. De Santis (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002), 494. Permission was not granted for Hughes's translations of Mistral's poems to be included in this volume.

10. André Lefevere, *Translating Literature: Practice and Theory in a Comparative Literature Context* (New York: Modern Language Association, 1992), 19.

However, at this point in the play the focus is on communal, not individual, expectations. Thus, the subjunctive mode, which expresses emotions such as hope, expectation, anticipation, and uncertainty, is more effective.

The translation of *Blood Wedding* improves as the drama approaches its denouement in act III. For instance, in scene 1, the allegory of the Three Woodcutters, the Moon, and Death as the Beggar Woman is highly lyrical, and the reader is pulled into the phantasmagoric aura of the tragedy that unfolds. With the knowledge that the Boy and Leonardo will kill each other over matters of honor, and that the Girl will be forever stigmatized, one waits anxiously for this to happen. Scene 2 illustrates the anticipated outcome, reinforced by the laments of the women and girls of the village, who mourn the loss of another set of young men in the vortex of violence. Again, Hughes conveys well some powerful symbols used by Lorca—muddy sand, skeins of red wool, a nightingale, bitter oleanders, and pocket knives—to heighten the sense of a tragedy that is destined to happen. In short, Lorca's obsession with the libido and death, which he believed represented the deep, dark telluric forces controlling humankind, is presented by Hughes in a manner that transmits the message effectively, although the medium is at times faulty.

Raw sex and violent death also figure in the indigenous-based Spanish culture of Mexico, which young Hughes first encountered in the summers of 1919 and 1920 when he visited his father, James Nathaniel Hughes. In spite of some initial feelings of estrangement, it did not take the precocious youngster long to fall in love with the Spanish language, which he learned by socializing with the children of town officials, as well as by tutoring in English at local schools. During this period of late-adolescent adventures, Hughes witnessed several incidents of violence associated with lost honor (a girl who drowned herself in the town well); jealous rage (a German beermeister who shot at his father's housekeeper, her daughter, and a friend); and law and order (bandits/peasants who were hanged by the authorities). On subsequent visits to Mexico, Hughes intermingled with authors who introduced him to important figures in the world of literature. He even had poems published in the famous journal *Contemporáneos* (1922–1927). Eventually Hughes became part of an international coterie of writers and intellectuals that included Mexican Carlos Pellicer, Chileans Pablo Neruda and Gabriela Mistral, Argentinian Jorge Luis Borges, Senegalese Leopold Sédar Sen-

ghor, Haitian Jacques Roumain, Martinican Aimé Césaire, and Cuban Nicolás Guillén.[11]

The next Spanish-speaking country on Hughes's itinerary was Cuba, which he visited in 1927 and 1930. Both times he met with Guillén (1902–1989) and other Cuban writers and intellectuals who were digging into the African roots of their history for literary material. Edward Mullen documents early interviews between Hughes and Guillén in which we see the budding of their relationship.[12] It is obvious that the North American poet through his cultivation of blues and jazz poetry served as a role model and mentor to the Caribbean bard, but Guillén was already on the road to discovering his own voice in Cuban *rumba* and *son* poetry along with other practitioners of *Afro-cubanidad* (Afro-Cubanism), as it was called during the 1930s.[13]

Josaphat Kubayanda has shown how Guillén's early superficial flirtation with African rhythms and sounds developed into a seasoned acclamation, declamation, and proclamation of Africanity as a basic component of his mulatto aesthetics.[14] In this respect, the title *Cuba Libre* (which the translators leave in Spanish) is significant in that it was the original cry for freedom by black, mixed-race, and white "patriots" who fought for Cuban independence during two major wars of the nineteenth century—the Ten Years War of 1868–1878 and the Spanish American War of 1895–1898. The individual poems that Hughes and Ben Frederic Carruthers translated and compiled for the *Cuba Libre* collection (1948) reveal the mutual admiration and respect between Guillén and Hughes, but they also illustrate Hughes's affirmation of self, family, and community in the international arena. Moreover, the title sets a rebellious tone for a diverse collection of *son*-poems from the ghettoes; ballads on Cuba's dual (African Hispanic) heritage; elegies for sugarcane laborers

11. Rampersad, *Life,* 1:42, 46, 47; *Big Sea,* ed. McLaren, 68, 78–80.

12. "Conversations with Langston Hughes," *Caliban* (fall/winter 1976): 123–26. See also Mullen's "The Literary Reputation of Langston Hughes in the Hispanic World," *Comparative Literature Studies* 13.3 (September 1976): 254–69.

13. On Guillén in relation to Afro-Cubanism, see Keith Ellis, *Cuba's Nicolás Guillén* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983); Ian Smart, *Nicolás Guillén: Popular Poet of the Caribbean* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1990); and Lorna V. Williams, *Self and Society in the Poetry of Nicolás Guillén* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982); and Edward J. Mullen, *Afro-Hispanic Literature: Critical Junctures* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1998).

14. *The Poet's Africa: Africanness in the Poetry of Nicolás Guillén and Aimé Césaire* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1990).

who resisted the Machado and Batista dictatorships; odes to fellow writers like Lorca; and dirges to the unsung heroes and victims of the Spanish Civil War. *Cuba Libre* would inevitably help pave the way for the Cuban Revolution of 1959. More important for the process of transferring cultural meaning, the work would influence black writers in the United States who sought to cross linguistic boundaries during the turbulent 1960s and 1970s.

Of the three works included in this volume, *Cuba Libre* is the finest example of Hughes's talent as a translator. For one thing, many of its poems are close in content, meaning, and style to genres in the United States. This is because the cultural matrices out of which the "forms of things unknown" developed have a common heritage forged in the cauldron of slavery, racism, and oppression. For another, the blues and jazz poems of Hughes and the *rumba* and *son* poetry of Guillén developed in response to cultures created under similar circumstances. Martha Cobb refers to the cultural continuities and corresponding literary patterns that emerged from similar environments as "concepts of blackness," which include

> *confrontation* with an alien and hostile society; *dualism,* or a sense of division between one's own concept of self in conflict with the definitions imposed by the dominant culture (Du Bois' double consciousness); *identity,* a search that embraces the Who am I? of the present situation while at the same time it probes both African origins and historic bases in the Americas; and *liberation,* political and psychical, which has been the predominating quest of black people since their historic confrontation with the West.[15]

No matter what linguistic or national differences existed among these writers, concepts of blackness figure prominently in their works. Therefore, translation was the perfect vehicle for Hughes to explore the survival, resilience, continuity, and wholeness of the black literary tradition on a global level.

John F. Matheus provides some background on the collaborative project through which Guillén's poetry was translated into English by presenting a letter from Ben Frederic Carruthers, at the time a professor of Spanish at Howard University:

15. *Harlem, Haiti, and Havana* (Washington, D.C.: Third World Press, 1979), 53.

> Upon my return to Howard in 1941 I began my own translations and when I moved to New York in 1944 I met Langston again and began to compare notes. We found that a few but not many of our translations were of the same poem but that there were many which I had finished which Langston thought good enough to stand as they were and many others which Langston had completed without my having touched them. We collaborated completely on the final editing and polishing and Langston secured the publisher and the artist, Gar Gilbert.[16]

For the most part, Hughes and Carruthers are quite successful in their translations of Guillén's poems. For example, "Wake for Papá Montero" presents the figure of the *sonero,* or *son* player (like the bluesman), who created the genre in the violent ambience of the *barracón* (quarters), where many Cuban blacks lived and worked in the cane fields before and after the official abolition of slavery in 1886. A typical antihero to the dominant culture, Papá Montero exists on rum, women, and song, and this overindulgence leads to his violent death at the hands of a lodge brother (*ecobio*). In "Cuban Blues" Hughes duplicates very well the antiphonal, repetitive six-line structure of the blues. Both "Wake for Papá Montero" and "Cuban Blues" come from Guillén's collection *West Indies Ltd.* (1934), a militant call-to-arms to throw off the yoke of oppression under the Machado dictatorship. On the other hand, "Song of the Cuban Drum" reproduces more closely the percussive attack and "hot" style of the *bongó*—the drum that symbolizes the *mulatez* or syncretistic origins of the nation. Finally, "The Fourth Anguish: Federico," an elegiac ballad about Lorca's premature death, captures the lamentative aspect of the blues through the evocative power of *mascons,*[17] such as the "dark and empty house of the gypsy" (Cuban *barracón* or Afro American slave shack); the "black moss on the walls" (Tubman knew that moss grows on the *north* side of a tree); and the "garden of green lizards" (perfumed by Juan Francisco Manzano's crushed geranium). The spirit of the blues is reinforced by the translators' positioning of English words to approximate the rhythms of the Spanish ballad. As is evident in these examples, Hughes and Carruthers were able to transfer

16. "Langston Hughes as Translator," *CLA Journal* 11.4 (June 1968): 325–26. This was a special issue dedicated to Hughes a year after his death.

17. Stephen Henderson, "Introduction," in *Understanding the New Black Poetry* (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1973), 44, defines *mascon* words as "a massive concentration of Black experiential energy which powerfully affects the meaning of Black speech, Black song, and Black poetry. . . . It is an acronym Henderson appropriated from NASA."

the content, emotion, and style of various forms of Cuban poetry into their African American counterparts because of the similarity in cultural meaning between the Spanish and English languages.

In 1947 Hughes collaborated with Mercer Cook in translating the novel *Gouverneurs de la rosée* (1944) by Haitian writer Jacques Roumain (1907–1944). As early as 1927, Roumain had called for the intellectuals of his country to stop imitating European literature and to substitute as models Spanish American and Harlem Renaissance authors. Cobb observes that Hughes's commitment to the *blackening* of American letters inspired Roumain to seek the "Haitianization" of his country's "Parisianized" literary tradition. Thus Roumain created a work of fiction with a protagonist who is a French-speaking New Negro, a politically aware peasant who returns to his village after fifteen years spent in the Cuban cane fields and labor movement.[18] *Gouverneurs de la rosée* was published a few months after the novelist's death in 1944. As a tribute to Roumain, Hughes, who had visited him in Haiti in 1937 and subsequently interacted with him at writers' conferences, collaborated with Cook, who was then supervisor of English in the National Schools of Haiti, to translate the novel as *Masters of the Dew* (1947). Hughes also relied on the help of Roumain's widow, as well as various Haitian writers and intellectuals.

Masters of the Dew is the story of Manuel Jean-Jacques Déliverance's valiant struggle to find water to relieve the drought that is ravaging his beloved village of Fonds Rouge. In order to accomplish this goal, Manuel must first try to bring together the warring sides of his extended family. *Masters of the Dew* is also a beautiful love story, for in the process of bringing water to Fonds Rouge, Manuel falls in love with Annaise, and he plans to marry her as soon as the irrigation project is completed. To the grief and bewilderment of Annaise and Manuel's aged parents, the young couple's dream does not materialize, for Gervilen Gervilis, the rival who has been rejected by his cousin Annaise, ambushes and kills Manuel in a jealous rage. In essence, the hero becomes the sacrificial lamb of Fonds Rouge, for after his death the peasants do reconcile with one another and form a *coumbite,* or collective labor effort, to transport water to their village. Despite the tragedy, hope lives on in Manuel's child, which Annaise is carrying. Like *Cuba Libre,* the title *Masters of the Dew* has a rebellious slant, for after years of languishing in abject poverty while waiting for relief from an indifferent, oppressive government, the

18. Cobb, *Harlem, Haiti, and Havana,* 81, 98.

people of Fonds Rouge rise up and fend for themselves, thus becoming their own masters.

Many critics, among them J. Michael Dash and Eric Sellin, classify *Masters of the Dew* as a *roman paysan,* or peasant novel, even though it was written by a highly educated member of the Haitian aristocracy.[19] In fact, Sellin considers the novel the best example of the genre that grew out of the Indigenist Movement in Haiti, influenced by Jean Price-Mars's *Ainsi parla l'Oncle* (1928). Although Roumain's grandfather Tancrède Auguste had been president of Haiti (1912–1913), the young writer rebelled against the lifestyles and values of the Haitian upper class, and he became a political activist for reform. To this end Roumain was a leading figure in the movement against U.S. occupation of Haiti (1915–1934), and he worked feverishly to establish the Communist Party of Haiti (1934). Naturally, Roumain was often jailed, but he was also periodically sent into exile, where he interacted with writers, intellectuals, and artists at various international conferences.[20] Roumain and Hughes had much in common, so it was natural for the latter to want to translate *Masters of the Dew.*

The Hughes/Cook translation provides the English-speaking reader with a powerful portrait of the hardships of life in rural Haiti during the 1930s. On the one hand, Sellin uses such terms as *pastoralism* and *nostalgia* to categorize the novel, and he asserts that it is a subtle form of exoticism because of a "sophisticated" narrator who "assumes the guise and viewpoint of a rustic person." On the other hand, the translators focus on the intracommunal strife suffered by the oppressed peasants of Fonds Rouge, whose members fail to realize that they must achieve group solidarity in order to save themselves from death by starvation. In spite of the lush passages describing the natural beauty of the landscape and the ideal relationship that should exist between land and people, Hughes and Cook center the translated text around the activities of the Adamic protagonist Manuel, who is a combination Christ figure and Marxist hero.[21] The Hughes/Cook translation was timely in that it

19. Sellin, "Pastoralism and Nostalgia in Jacques Roumain's *Gouverneurs de la rosée,*" *Carrefour de cultures: Mélanges offerts à Jacqueline Leiner* (Tübingen: Narr, 1993), 475.

20. Carolyn Fowler, "The Shared Vision of Langston Hughes and Jacques Roumain," *Black American Literature Forum* 15.3 (1981): 87–89. See also Carolyn [Fowler] Gerald, *A Knot in the Thread: The Life and Work of Jacques Roumain* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1972).

21. Sellin, "Pastoralism and Nostalgia," 473, 475–79.

helped reinforce a sense of jubilation in Haiti, for the translators inform us in their introduction to the novel that "in January, 1946, eighteen months after the novelist's death, the Haitian people overthrew the dictatorial Lescot regime."

There are some problematic aspects of the Hughes/Cook translation. Cyril Mokwenye points out four areas of concern that become evident in the light of critical analysis. First are mistakes in translation. One example of such a mistake occurs because of confusion about false cognates. At the end of chapter nine when the songleader Simidor Antoine prepares a new drum song for the anticipated *coumbite,* he sings: "Général Manuel, salut ho! salut ho." According to Mokwenye, an error results from confusing the French verb *saluer* or *faire un salut militaire* (to salute) with the French noun *salut,* which means "greetings" or "welcome." Thus, the English translation suggests that Manuel is saluting the people when in fact the people are welcoming him as their hero. Second, Mokwenye finds inconsistencies in the translation of French and Spanish names or other words of foreign origin. Sometimes the translators put the words in the target language; other times they keep them in the source language. However, this is not a major issue since it does not lead to any textual misunderstanding. Third, the most serious problem involves omissions that leave out important nuances of the narrative. For example, at the beginning of chapter two, the following sentence is omitted: "Du regard, l'homme donna encore une fois le bonjour a ce paysage retrouvé." Mokwenye translates the passage as: "Once more, the man greeted this rediscovered landscape with a look." Moreover, he contends that this sentence is significant in the context of the novel, because Manuel is returning after years of separation from his beloved country. Through an omniscient narrator the reader is presented with the symbolic reunion between the hero and his native land. The English version has Manuel get off the bus and immediately begin to search for the path leading to his family's dwelling without any emotional response to the landscape. An entire paragraph from the French version is omitted that reinforces the closeness between Manuel and the land in terms of a sexual metaphor. Fourth, Mokwenye asserts that there is an abuse (or overuse) of italics in the Hughes/Cook translation, which indicates their uncertainty about transferring variant meanings of the same words from French to English. Two examples are the simple words *oui* and *non,* which in some contexts mean "yes" and "no," but in others mean, "certainly," "surely,"

or "Isn't that right (so, true)?"[22] Nevertheless, this rendering does not detract from one's appreciation for *Masters of the Dew.* Furthermore, it is probable that Hughes and Cook maintained certain expressions and words from the source language to produce a rhythmic effect and to give the English-speaking reader a sense of how Haitian Creole or patois sounds.

The literary correspondences and points of contact between the poet laureate of Harlem and his Spanish, Cuban, and Haitian counterparts are numerous, even though the differences in form and style in their writings were determined by their distinct nationalities, languages, and cultures. Concerning Hughes and Roumain, Carolyn Fowler observes:

> The essential bond between Langston Hughes and Jacques Roumain is thus in their shared vision of the writer as humanist, as the conscience and the voice of his people. Both men spoke in characteristic fashion, Roumain as the systemic intellectual and avowed Communist and Hughes as the deceptively simply and unpretentious observer. . . .
>
> Both spoke from the vantage of men firmly rooted in their own culture, but aware of and reaching out to the intellectual currents and the struggles in their larger society. . . .
>
> Langston Hughes and Jacques Roumain shared a vision of the function of art as the articulation of a people's condition, as a reflection of the culture which that people develops to cope creatively and to express their hope for the fulfillment of universal human aspirations.[23]

The same is true of the relationship between Hughes and Guillén, for the shared vision of these two writers extends, as Cobb points out, in "the network of its expression stretching across the Americas, whose basic unity is visible in its variety."[24]

Even though Lorca was not black, his poetry and drama explored the themes of suffering, injustice, oppression, and death in a manner that connected him to the black experience. Interestingly enough, Lorca belonged to the Generation of 1927, which has been characterized as a group of cerebral writers devoted to a playful art, but not inclined to

22. Cyril Mokwenye, "La Traduction anglaise de *Gouverneurs de la rosée* de Jacques Roumain par Langston Hughes et Mercer Cook: Remarques critiques," *Babel* 39.4 (1993): 230.

23. "The Shared Vision of Hughes and Roumain," 87–88.

24. "Redefining the Definitions in Afro-Hispanic Literature," *CLA Journal* 23 (December 1979): 148.

expressing the deeper emotions of the human heart. When Lorca visited New York City in 1931, he did not get the opportunity to meet Hughes. However, the Spanish writer was so upset by the plight of oppressed blacks and poor whites, as well as the crass materialism of American culture, that he began to focus on protest writing.[25] The posthumous volume *Poeta en Nueva York* (Poet in New York, 1940) was written as a result of Lorca's stay in the United States. Hughes visited Spain in 1937 during its Civil War as a correspondent for the *Baltimore Afro-American,* but by then Lorca was already dead. Yet Hughes was attracted to Lorca's poetry because he saw in the figure of the gypsy a counterpart to the black man in the United States, and because he and Lorca shared a similar perspective on the function of literature in the cause of justice. For this reason, Hughes worked for nearly twenty years with Francisco García Lorca, the poet's brother, and the poet's mother to translate the *Romancero gitano* (*The Gypsy Ballads*).[26]

In short, the cultural and literary ties between Langston Hughes and writers in various parts of the Spanish- and French-speaking worlds were firmly established by his efforts to transfer cultural meaning through translation. To reiterate, Hughes was not a translator by vocation, nor did he develop or adhere to any set theory of translation. His free-styled venture into this area explains the awkwardness of his initial attempts with *Blood Wedding* and his need for collaborators on *Cuba Libre* and *Masters of the Dew.* Yet Hughes was eager to connect with writers from other nations and to make their experiences accessible to the people of his own nation. In all three works there are young male protagonists who struggle against the odds and whose lives are snuffed out tragically or who are frozen in limbo; there are women, old and young, who bear the burden of grief; but there are also cultures that value love, honor, respect, faith, hope, and reconciliation. Essentially, Hughes felt compelled to engage the works of global authors who sought liberation, and he used black music as the poetic referent or instrument to achieve cultural transfer in translation. This was therapeutic for him.

The challenges of translating diverse genres from Spanish and French into English notwithstanding, I agree with Alfred Guillaume Jr. that, "although Hughes lacked the formation of a trained linguist, he nevertheless demonstrated a keen sensitivity to the cultural and aesthetic

25. Ricard L. Predmore, *Lorca's New York Poetry* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1980), 51, 105.

26. As with the *Selected Poems of Gabriela Mistral,* permission to republish *The Gypsy Ballads* was not granted.

values of the writers he translated."[27] We can only be grateful that this truly international writer made such an enduring contribution with an aesthetics and a poetics drawn from the wellspring of dark life, which provided a global context for his multilayered obsession with rejection and acceptance, sickness and healing, death and immortality. That big sea of blackness is a metaphor for all human anguish, but also transcendence, like Michaelangelo's agony and ecstasy.

27. "And Bid Him Soar: Langston Hughes' Translations of Poetry from French," *Langston Hughes Review* 4.2 (fall 1985): 8.

A Note on the Text

For *Blood Wedding,* we have used the adaptation by Melia Bensussen for our text (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1994). Also consulted were several earlier drafts from the Langston Hughes Papers in the James Weldon Johnson Collection in the Beinecke Library at Yale University. The first draft is dated August 1938, and the third is undated. Apparently there was a second draft that was lost, unless Hughes misnumbered them. Both versions are typed with handwritten comments and notes that reveal the translator's struggle to make the cultural and linguistic transfer.

The text for *Cuba Libre* is from the edition published by Anderson and Ritchie, the Ward Ritchie Press, in 1948, and that for *Masters of the Dew* is from the edition published by Reynal and Hitchcock in 1947.

The three texts are presented here in the order in which Hughes translated them rather than in the order of their publication. Obvious typographical errors and misspellings have been corrected. In cases where the meaning of certain words and expressions is not clear, alternate renditions have been provided in the notes.

Blood Wedding
By Federico García Lorca

Translated by
Langston Hughes

Adapted by
Melia Bensussen

(1938, 1994)

Acknowledgments

I am indebted to the company members who were a part of the production process of *Blood Wedding* at the New York Shakespeare Festival, as well as the casts that participated in the readings and workshops, for they helped immeasurably in refining this translation. I also owe a great debt to Kate Rowe of the law firm Lankenau Kovner & Bickford, for her extensive pro-bono work on acquiring the rights to the Hughes translation. My thanks, as well, to the Hughes estate, and to George Bass, who is sorely missed.

Without Vicky Abrash, Bruce Allardice, Constanza Scharff, Arturo Zychlinsky and Charles Epstein, the editing of *Blood Wedding* would never have been completed.

—Melia Bensussen

Characters

Boy
Mother
Neighbor
Mother-in-Law
Wife
Leonardo
Child
Servant
Father
Girl
First Maiden
Second Maiden
Third Maiden
First Youth
Second Youth
First Woodcutter
Second Woodcutter
Third Woodcutter
Moon
Death (as a Beggar woman)
Guests and Neighbors

Act I, Scene 1

A room in yellow.

BOY *(Entering):* Mama!
MOTHER: What?
BOY: I'm going.
MOTHER: Where?
BOY *(Starting out):* To the vineyards.
MOTHER: Wait.
BOY: There's something you want?
MOTHER: Your lunch, son.
BOY: Never mind. I'll eat grapes. Give me my knife.
MOTHER: For what?
BOY *(Laughing):* Why, to cut them!

MOTHER *(Muttering as she looks for it):* A knife! Always a knife! Knives are no good, like the scoundrels that invented them.

BOY: Let's talk about something else, then.

MOTHER: Guns and pistols and pocketknives, and even spades and garden forks, are no good.

BOY: You're right.

MOTHER: Anything that can split the body of a man apart—a fine-looking man, with a flower in his mouth, starting out to his vineyards or his olive trees. His, handed down to him . . .

BOY *(Putting his head down):* But stop talking about it, Mama!

MOTHER: Then that man doesn't come back! Or if he does come back, it's with a palm on his breast, or a saucer of rock salt sprinkled on his body to keep it from swelling. I don't know why you'd dare carry a knife on you, nor why I leave this serpent here in its den.

BOY: Finished?

MOTHER: If I live to be a hundred, I won't talk about anything else. First your father, like the scent of a carnation to me. . . . Hardly three years with him. Then your brother! Is it right, I ask you? How can it be that a little thing like a pistol or a knife can just put an end to a man strong as a bull? I'll never shut up. The months go by and still grief stings my eyes and pricks at the roots of my hair.

BOY *(Sternly):* Will you hush, Mama?

MOTHER: No, I am not going to hush! Can anybody bring your father back to me? Or your brother? The killers are in prison, yes. But what is prison? They eat, they smoke, they play guitars. While the grass fills the bodies of my dead—silent, dust—two men like geraniums—but the killers sit in prison, cool as you please, looking at the mountains!

BOY: Do you want me to kill them?

MOTHER: No. I talk and I talk, but it's just because. . . . How can I keep from talking when I see you go through that door? It's because I don't want you to carry a knife! It's because . . . because I don't want you to go to the country!

BOY *(Laughing):* Oh, Mama!

MOTHER: I wish you were a girl. Then you wouldn't have to go. We could make pretty fringe and little wool poodles.

BOY *(Taking his mother by the arm and laughing):* Mama, suppose I took you with me to the vineyard?

MOTHER: What could you do with an old woman in a vineyard? Could you hide me under the young vines?

BOY *(Lifting her in his arms):* Old lady! Old lady! Old, old lady![1]

MOTHER: Your father would've taken me along. Yes! He was a man, made of good stuff! And your grandfather, he left a baby on every corner! That's what I like. Men to be men, and wheat, wheat!

BOY: Well, what about me, Mother?

MOTHER: You what?[2]

BOY: Do I have to tell you all over again?

MOTHER *(Seriously):* Ah!

BOY: Don't you think it's all right?

MOTHER: It's not that.

BOY: Then?

MOTHER: I don't know, myself. All of a sudden like that, it catches me by surprise. I know the girl's good, isn't she? Quiet. Hardworking. She kneads her bread and makes her own clothes. But just the same, whenever you mention her name, it's like as if somebody hit me in the head with a stone.

BOY: You're being silly now.

MOTHER: More than silly. But I'm the one who'll be left alone. All I've got left is you. So I'm sorry you're going.

BOY: But you'll come and live with us.

MOTHER: No. I can't leave your father and your brother by themselves, here alone. I have to go visit them every morning. If I left, like as not one of those Felixes would die, one of that family of killers, and be buried beside them. And I couldn't stand that! No! That I couldn't stand! I'd dig him up with my own fingers and smash him against the wall.

BOY *(Sternly):* There you go, starting again.

MOTHER: I'm sorry. *(Pause)* How long have you been going with the girl, son?

BOY: Three years. And since then, I've bought the vineyard.

MOTHER: Three years! She had a sweetheart before didn't she?

BOY:I don't know. I don't think so. But girls have to look carefully before they marry.

MOTHER: I never looked at anybody except your father. When they killed him, I looked at the wall in front. One man, one woman—and that's that.

BOY: But we know my sweetheart's a decent girl.

MOTHER: I don't doubt it. Just the same, I'm sorry I don't know what her mother was like.

BOY: Aw, what does it matter?

MOTHER *(Looking at him):* Son!

BOY: What?[3]

MOTHER: Calm down! It's all right! When do you want me to ask her father?

BOY *(Happily):* Would Sunday do?

MOTHER *(Seriously):* I'll take her the earrings of seed pearl, the antiques. And you buy her . . .

BOY: You know what's best.

MOTHER: You buy her some drawn-work stockings.[4] And yourself, two suits. Or three. You're all I've got.

BOY: I'm off now. Tomorrow I'll go see her.

MOTHER: Yes, yes! And see if you can't raise me six grandchildren to make me happy. Or as many as you want to, since your father didn't have a chance to give them to me.

BOY: The first one'll be for you, Mama.

MOTHER: Yes! But have girls, too. I want to do embroidery, and make lace, and be quiet.

BOY: I'm sure you'll like my sweetheart.

MOTHER: Yes, I'll like her. *(She starts to kiss him, then pauses)* Go on with you! You're too big for kisses. Save them for your wife *(Turns aside)*—when she is your wife.

BOY: I'm gone.

MOTHER: Tend that stretch down by the mill you've not been looking after lately.

BOY: Right!

MOTHER: God bless you!

The boy goes out. The mother sits down with her back to the door. A neighbor appears in the doorway in a dark dress with a kerchief on her head.

Come in.

NEIGHBOR: How are you?

MOTHER: Same as usual.

NEIGHBOR: I came down to the store, so I thought I'd stop in and see you. We live so far apart.

MOTHER: It's twenty years now since I've been up to the end of this street.

NEIGHBOR: But you're all right here.

MOTHER: Do you think so?

NEIGHBOR: So many things happen outside! Two days ago, they brought my neighbor's son home with both arms cut off by a machine. *(She sits down)*

MOTHER: Rafael?
NEIGHBOR: Yes. You see! I often think your son and mine are better off where they are, asleep, resting, than to live helpless like he'll be.
MOTHER: Keep quiet! We make up such ideas, but they don't comfort us.
NEIGHBOR *(Sighing):* Ah.
MOTHER: Ah! *(Pause)*
NEIGHBOR *(Sadly):* And your son?
MOTHER: Gone out.
NEIGHBOR: He finally bought the vineyard.
MOTHER: He was fortunate.
NEIGHBOR: Now he'll get married, I guess.
MOTHER *(As though suddenly awaking, drawing her chair near the chair of the neighbor-woman):* Say!
NEIGHBOR *(In confidence):* What is it?
MOTHER: Do you know my son's sweetheart?
NEIGHBOR: She's a good girl.
MOTHER: Yes, but . . .
NEIGHBOR: But nobody knows her well. She lives way off there alone with her father, ten leagues from the nearest house. But she's good. And used to being by herself.
MOTHER: Who was her mother?
NEIGHBOR: I knew her mother. Beautiful, with a face shining like a saint's. But I never liked her. She didn't care a thing about her husband.
MOTHER *(Surprised):* Folks seem to know a mighty lot!
NEIGHBOR: Excuse me! It's not that I want to hurt anybody's memory, but it's true. But whether or not she was decent isn't mentioned anymore. Nobody talks about her now. And she was proud!
MOTHER: But you're still talking about her.
NEIGHBOR: You asked me to!
MOTHER: I just wish that no one knew anything about the dead one or the living one. I want them to be like two thistles that nobody mentions, and that prick if they're fooled with.
NEIGHBOR: You're right. Your son is a fine boy.
MOTHER: A fine boy! That's why I look after him. But they tell me that girl has had a sweetheart before.
NEIGHBOR: She must have been about fifteen then, I guess. But he married her cousin two years ago.[5] That I know. And now nobody remembers their going together.

MOTHER: How do you remember it?
NEIGHBOR: What questions you ask a person!
MOTHER: Well, everybody likes to know about things that touch them. Who was her sweetheart?
NEIGHBOR: Leonardo.
MOTHER: What Leonardo?
NEIGHBOR: Leonardo, one of the Felixes.
MOTHER *(Rising):* One of the Felixes?
NEIGHBOR: But what did Leonardo have to do with any of it? He was eight years old when those things happened.
MOTHER: You're right. But when I hear the name of Felix, and it's those Felix, *(Under her breath)* the word fills my mouth with mud, *(Spitting)* and I have to spit! I have to spit to keep from killing!
NEIGHBOR: Be calm! What good is all this?
MOTHER: None. But you have to understand!
NEIGHBOR: Don't block your son's happiness. Don't say anything to him. You're old. I'm old, too. It's time now for you and me to keep quiet.
MOTHER: I won't tell him anything.
NEIGHBOR *(Kissing her):* Not anything.
MOTHER *(Quietly):* What things do happen . . .
NEIGHBOR: I'm going now. My folks will be back from the fields soon.
MOTHER: What do you think of this heat today?
NEIGHBOR: The children carrying water to the reapers are sunburned as can be! Goodbye, darling. *(She exits)*
MOTHER: Goodbye.

The mother goes toward a door at the left. Halfway she stops and slowly crosses herself.
Curtain.

Act I, Scene 2

A rose-colored room, copper plates, bunches of paper flowers. In the center, a table with a tablecloth. It is morning.
The mother-in-law of Leonardo has a baby in her arms. She rocks it. The wife, in another corner of the room, is knitting.

MOTHER-IN-LAW:

Little child, little child
on a big horse
that won't drink water.

Under the branches
the water is black.
When it gets to the bridge
it stops to sing.
Who knows, child,
what the water says,
dragging its long train
down the green halls?

WIFE *(Softly):*

Sleep, little pink.
The horse won't drink.

MOTHER-IN-LAW:

Sleep, little rose.
The horse starts to cry.
His hooves are bruised
and his mane is frozen
and between his eyes
is a silver dagger.
They went to the river.
Oh, see them go down
where the blood flows fast,
faster than the water.

WIFE:

Sleep, little pink.
The horse won't drink.

MOTHER-IN-LAW:

Sleep, little rose.
The horse is crying.

WIFE:

His warm nose
flecked with silver foam,
doesn't want to touch
the damp bank of the river.
He neighs toward the hard mountains
with the dead river around his neck.
Oh, mighty horse that wants no water.
Oh, sharp pain of snow!
Horse born of the dawn!

MOTHER-IN-LAW:

Stay away! Don't come!
We'll close our windows

with branches of dreams
and dreams of long branches.

WIFE:

The child is asleep.

MOTHER-IN-LAW:

My child is still.

WIFE:

Horse, my child has a pillow.

MOTHER-IN-LAW:

And a cradle of steel.

WIFE:

And a coverlet of fine linen.

MOTHER-IN-LAW:

Little child, little child!

WIFE:

Oh, mighty horse that doesn't want to drink!

MOTHER-IN-LAW:

Stay away! Don't come in!
Go off to the mountains,
through the gray valleys
where the ponies are.

WIFE *(Looking):*

My child is asleep.

MOTHER-IN-LAW:

My child is resting.

WIFE *(Softly):*

Sleep, little pink.
The horse won't drink.

MOTHER-IN-LAW *(Very quietly, taking the child up):*

Sleep, little rose.
The horse is crying.

She exits with the child. Leonardo enters.

LEONARDO: Where's the baby?

WIFE: Asleep.

LEONARDO: He wasn't well yesterday, crying all night.

WIFE *(Gaily):* Today he's like a flower. And how are you? Have you been to the blacksmith's?

LEONARDO: I've just come from there. Would you believe that for the past two months I've been putting new shoes on that horse, and they're always falling off? It looks like the stones must pull them off.

WIFE: It isn't because you ride him a lot?
LEONARDO: No, I almost never ride him.
WIFE: Yesterday the neighbors said they saw you way off on the edge of the plain.
LEONARDO: Who told you that?
WIFE: The women out gathering herbs. I was surprised to hear it. Was it really you?
LEONARDO: No. What do you think I'd be doing out there in that desert?
WIFE: That's what I wondered. But your horse was dripping with sweat.
LEONARDO: Did you see it?
WIFE: No, but my mother did.
LEONARDO: Is she in there with the baby?
WIFE: Yes. Wouldn't you like some lemonade?
LEONARDO: With some good cold water.
WIFE: Since you didn't come to eat . . .
LEONARDO: I was out with the men measuring the wheat. There's always something to hold a man up.
WIFE *(Making the lemonade. Very tenderly):* Are they paying a good price?
LEONARDO: Good enough.
WIFE: I need a new dress. And the baby needs a little bonnet with strings.
LEONARDO: I'm going to take a look at him.
WIFE: Be careful, he's asleep.
MOTHER-IN-LAW *(Entering):* Who's been running that horse like that? He's tied down there with his eyes bucked out like he saw the end of the world!
LEONARDO *(Shortly):* Me.
MOTHER-IN-LAW: Excuse me! He's your horse.
WIFE *(Timidly):* He's been out with the men measuring the wheat.
MOTHER-IN-LAW: The horse can drop dead, as far as I'm concerned.
WIFE: Here's the lemonade. Is it cold enough?
LEONARDO: Yes.
WIFE: You know my cousin's about to be asked for in marriage?
LEONARDO: When?
WIFE: Tomorrow. The wedding will be within a month. I hope they'll invite us.
LEONARDO *(Solemnly):* I don't know.

MOTHER-IN-LAW: I don't think the boy's mother is very much pleased with that marriage.

LEONARDO: Maybe she's right. At least, she's careful.

WIFE: I don't like for you to speak that way about a decent girl.

MOTHER-IN-LAW: Whatever Leonardo says about her, he knows. Wasn't he her sweetheart for three years?

LEONARDO: But I quit her. *(To his wife)* Are you getting ready to cry? Cut it out! *(He pulls her hands down roughly from her face)* Let's go look at the baby.

They exit embracing. A child, with pigtails flying, enters gaily, running.

CHILD: Oh, listen . . .

MOTHER-IN-LAW: What's happened?

CHILD: The young man came down to the store and bought out the best of everything there was.

MOTHER-IN-LAW: Did he come by himself?

CHILD: No, with his mother. She's tall and serious. *(Imitates her)* But such style!

MOTHER-IN-LAW: They are folks of means.

CHILD: They bought openwork stockings. Oh, what stockings! Every girl's dream of stockings. Look! A swallow here *(Shows her ankle)*, and here a boat *(Shows her leg)*, and here a rose! *(Shows her thigh)*

MOTHER-IN-LAW: Child!

CHILD: A rose with stem and stamen even! Oh! And all in silk!

MOTHER-IN-LAW: Two solid incomes getting together there.

Leonardo and his wife come in.

CHILD *(To them):* I came to tell you what they're buying.

LEONARDO: We're not interested.

WIFE: Let her go ahead.

MOTHER-IN-LAW: Leonardo doesn't want to hear about it.

CHILD: Oh! *(Going out crying)* I'm sorry.

MOTHER-IN-LAW: What good reason have you got for aggravating everybody?

LEONARDO *(Sitting down):* Did I ask for your advice?

MOTHER-IN-LAW: All right!

Pause.

WIFE *(To Leonardo):* What's the matter? What's burning inside your head? Don't keep me wondering like this, without knowing what it is.

LEONARDO: Leave me alone.

WIFE: No. I want you to look at me, and tell me what it is.
LEONARDO: Oh, get away! *(He rises)*
WIFE: Dear, where are you going?
LEONARDO *(Sharply):* Can't you keep quiet?
MOTHER-IN-LAW *(To her daughter, firmly):* Hush!
Leonardo exits.
I hear the baby.
The mother-in-law exits and returns with the baby in her arms. The wife remains standing, not moving.
His hooves are bruised. His mane is frozen.
Between his eyes is a silver dagger.
They went down to the river.
Oh, see them go down where the blood flows fast,
faster than the water.
WIFE *(Turning, as in a dream):*
Sleep, little pink.
Now the horse'll drink.
MOTHER-IN-LAW:
Sleep, little rose.
The horse is crying.
WIFE:
Little child, little child!
MOTHER-IN-LAW:
Mighty horse that won't drink.
WIFE:
Stay away! Don't come in!
Go off to the mountains.
Oh, pain of white snow.
Horse born of the dawn.
MOTHER-IN-LAW *(Crying):*
My child is asleep.
WIFE *(Crying as she nears the child):*
My child is resting.
MOTHER-IN-LAW:
Sleep, little pink.
The horse won't drink.
WIFE *(Crying as she leans on the table):*
Sleep, little rose.
The horse is crying.
Curtain.

Act I, Scene 3

Interior of a house dug into a cliff,[6] *where the girl lives. At the back, a cross of big red flowers. Arched doorways with lace curtains and red loops. On the hard white walls there are open fans, blue potteries, small mirrors.*

The servant, very humble and full of guile, admits the boy and his mother. The mother is dressed in black satin and wears a lace mantilla. The boy wears a black velveteen suit and a big gold chain.

SERVANT: Come in. Won't you sit down? They'll be right out.

The servant exits. The boy and his mother sit like two statues, without moving. There is a long pause.

MOTHER: Did you bring your watch?

BOY: Yes, I did. *(He takes it out and looks at it)*

MOTHER: We've got to be back on time. These folks live so far!

BOY: But there's some good land out this way.

MOTHER: Good, but too isolated. Four hours on the road, and not a house, not a tree.

BOY: These are plains.

MOTHER: But your father would have covered them with trees.

BOY: Without water?

MOTHER: He would have found it. The three years that we were married, he planted ten cherry trees. *(Remembering)* Three walnut trees down by the mill. A whole vineyard. And a plant called the Jupiter plant with red flowers, that dried up. *(Pause)*

BOY *(Thinking of his sweetheart):* I guess she's dressing.

The father of the girl enters. He is old, with shining white hair. His head is bowed. The mother and the boy rise and shake hands silently.

FATHER: A long time on the road?

MOTHER: Four hours. *(Sitting down)*

FATHER: You must have come the long way.

MOTHER: I'm too old now to come over the cliff above the river.

BOY: She gets dizzy.

FATHER: We had a good crop of alfalfa[7] this year.

BOY: Good is right.[8]

FATHER: In my time this land wouldn't even give alfalfa. You had to prod it and even cry over it to make it produce anything worthwhile.

MOTHER: But not now. Don't complain, though. I didn't come to ask you for anything.

FATHER *(Smiling):* You're richer than I am. Vineyards are worth money. Each young plant's a silver coin. But what I'm sorry about, you know, is that our lands are separated. I'd like it all to be together. For there's one thorn in my heart, and that's this little green spot here in the midst of my land, that they won't sell me for all the gold in the world.

BOY: There's always one place like that.

FATHER: If only forty pairs of oxen could drag your grapevines over here and put them on my hillside, how good it would be!

MOTHER: Why?

FATHER: What's mine is hers, and what's yours is his. That's why. To have it all together would be fine!

BOY: And less work.

MOTHER: When I die, then you can sell that over there, and buy on this side.

FATHER: Sell? Sell? Bah! Buy, woman, buy all of it! If I'd had sons, I'd have bought all this whole mountain right down to the river. It's not good land, but with strong arms you can make it good. And since nobody passes along this way, they don't steal your fruit, and you can sleep in peace.

MOTHER: You know why I'm here.

FATHER: Yes.

MOTHER: Well?

FATHER: They've settled it among themselves.

MOTHER: My son is capable, and will do the right thing.

FATHER: My daughter also.

MOTHER: My son is handsome. He's never had a woman. He's as clean as a sheet in the sun.

FATHER: I can say the same for mine. She's up making bread before day, with the morning star. She never talks. Gentle as a lamb. Does all kinds of embroidery, and can bite a cord in two with her teeth.

MOTHER: God bless this house!

FATHER: God bless us!

The servant enters with two trays, wine glasses on one and sweets on the other.

MOTHER *(To her son):* When do you want the wedding?

BOY: Next Thursday.

FATHER: The very day when she's exactly twenty-two years old.
MOTHER: Twenty-two! My oldest son would be that age if he had lived. And he would have lived, too, strong and manly as he was, if men had never invented pistols.
FATHER: But you mustn't think about that now.
MOTHER: Every minute I think about it. Just put yourself in my shoes.
FATHER: Then we'll have it on Thursday, will we?
BOY: We will.
FATHER: The bride and the groom and ourselves, we'll go in a carriage to the church, because it's a good distance. And the guests in carts, or on whatever horses they bring.
MOTHER: Very well.
FATHER *(To the servant as she passes):* Tell her she may come in now. *(To the mother)* I will be very pleased if you like her.

The girl enters modestly, her head down, her hands at her sides.

MOTHER: Come here. Are you happy?
GIRL: Yes, ma'am.
FATHER: You mustn't be so solemn about it, then. After all, she'll be your mother.
GIRL: I am happy. When I said *yes,* it was because I wanted to say *yes.*
MOTHER: Naturally. *(Lifting her chin)* Look at me.
FATHER: She looks exactly like my wife did.
MOTHER: Yes?[9] What beautiful eyes! Do you know what marriage is, child?
GIRL *(Solemnly):* I know.
MOTHER: One man, children, and a wall two feet thick between you and everything else.
BOY: Need there be anything else?
MOTHER: No. Let the others live as they will. Yes, let all live.
GIRL: I'll do my part.
MOTHER: Here are some presents for you.
GIRL: Thank you.
FATHER: Won't you eat something?
MOTHER: I shan't. *(To her son)* How about you?
BOY: I'll take something.

The boy takes a sweet. The girl another.

FATHER *(To the boy):* Some wine?
MOTHER: He never touches it.
FATHER: All the better.

There is a pause. They all stand.

BOY *(To his sweetheart):* I'll be back tomorrow.
GIRL: What time?
BOY: Five o'clock.
GIRL: I'll wait for you.
BOY: Soon as I get away from you, nothing interests me. It's like there was a knot in my throat.
GIRL: When you're my husband, it won't be like that.
BOY: That's what I say.
MOTHER: Let us be off. The sun waits for no man. *(To the father)* The agreement is fixed?
FATHER: It is fixed.
MOTHER *(To the servant):* Goodbye.
SERVANT: God bless you!
The mother kisses the girl and begins to exit with the boy, in silence.
MOTHER *(At the door):* Goodbye, daughter.
The girl waves her hand.
FATHER: I'll go out with you.
They exit.
SERVANT: I'm dying to see the presents.
GIRL *(Sharply):* Get away.
SERVANT: Oh, darling! Show them to me.
GIRL: I don't want to.
SERVANT: Anyway, the stockings. They say they are all drawn-work! My!
GIRL: I said, no!
SERVANT: For heaven's sake! All right! It looks like you don't want to get married.
GIRL *(Biting her nails angrily):* Oh!
SERVANT: Child! Baby, what's the matter? Do you hate to give up living like a queen? Don't dwell on unpleasant things. Have you any reason to? None. Let's look at the presents. *(Takes the box)*
GIRL *(Catching her by the wrists):* Leave them alone!
SERVANT: Oh!
GIRL: Leave them alone, I said!
SERVANT: You're stronger than a man.
GIRL: Haven't I done a man's work? I wish I were a man!
SERVANT: Don't talk like that!
GIRL: Hush, I said! Let's talk about something else.
The scene darkens gradually. A long pause.
SERVANT: Did you hear a horse last night?

GIRL: What time?
SERVANT: At three o'clock.
GIRL: It must've been some horse running loose from the pack.
SERVANT: No, it had a rider.
GIRL: How do you know?
SERVANT: Because I saw him. He stopped at your window. That's what struck me.
GIRL: Couldn't it have been my sweetheart? Sometimes he comes by as late as that.
SERVANT: No.
GIRL: You saw him?
SERVANT: Yes.
GIRL: Who was it?
SERVANT: Leonardo.
GIRL *(Loudly):* It's a lie! It's a lie! Why would he come here?
SERVANT: He came.
GIRL: Shut up! Shut that damn mouth of yours!

There is the sound of a horse drawing near. The servant goes to the window.

SERVANT: Come here and look! Was it him?
GIRL: It was him!

Quick curtain.

Act II, Scene 1

Courtyard of the girl's house. At the back, a huge arched doorway. It is night, shortly before dawn.

The girl appears followed by the servant. Both are in starched white petticoats of lace and embroidery, and white corset covers, with their arms bare.

SERVANT: I'll finish combing your hair here.
GIRL: It's so hot you can't stay inside.
SERVANT: In this part of the country it's not even cool at dawn.

The girl sits in a low chair and looks at herself in a hand-mirror. The servant combs the girl's hair.

GIRL: My mother was from a section[10] where there were lots of trees. A rich land.
SERVANT: That's what made her so lively.
GIRL: But she got burned out here.

SERVANT: Fate!

GIRL: As we all are burned-out. These very walls shoot flames. *(Jerking her head)* Oh! Don't pull so!

SERVANT: I'm trying to fix that curl better. I want it to fall just over your forehead.

The girl looks in the glass.

Oh, how pretty you are. *(Kissing her passionately)*

GIRL *(Seriously):* Keep on fixing the curl.

SERVANT *(As she combs):* Happy girl, about to hold a man in your arms, to kiss him, to feel his weight on your body!

GIRL: Hush!

SERVANT: And the best thing of all is when you wake up with him at your side, and feel his breath on your shoulders—just like the feathers of a nightingale.

GIRL *(Loudly):* Can't you just keep quiet?

SERVANT: But, child, what is a wedding, after all? A wedding's just that and nothing more. Is it a cake? Is it a bouquet of flowers? No. It's a shining bed, and a man and a woman!

GIRL: You shouldn't say so.

SERVANT: That's something else again. But it's a mighty fine thing!

GIRL: Or mighty bitter.

SERVANT: The orange blossoms I'm going to put here, right here, so that they look like a crown on your hair. *(She tries on the wreath of orange blossoms)*[11]

GIRL *(Looking in glass):* Give it to me. *(She takes the wreath, looks at it and drops her head)*[12]

SERVANT: What's wrong?

GIRL: Leave me alone.

SERVANT: This is no time to be sad. *(Lively)* Give me the orange blossoms.

The girl throws the wreath away.

Child! You're looking for bad luck, throwing your wreath away like that. Lift up your head! Don't you want to get married? Then say so! There's still time to refuse.

GIRL *(Rising):* Just a passing cloud.[13] I'll get over it.

SERVANT: You like your sweetheart, don't you?

GIRL: I like him.

SERVANT: I'm sure you do.

GIRL: But it's such a big step!

SERVANT: It's one you've got to take.

GIRL: Now that I've given my promise.
SERVANT: I'll put the crown on your head.
GIRL *(Sitting down again):* Hurry up then. They ought to be here soon.
SERVANT: They've been on the way for at least two hours.
GIRL: How far is it from here to the church?
SERVANT: Five leagues along the river, and double that on the road.

As the girl gets up, the servant grows ecstatic seeing her.

The bride awakes[14]
on her wedding morn,
and all the rivers of the world
come bringing her a crown.

GIRL *(Smiling):* You're teasing me!
SERVANT *(Kissing her heartily and dancing about):*

Awake with a green branch
of flowering laurel.
Awake with the branches
and trunks of the laurel!

Loud knocks on the doorknocker.

GIRL: Open the door. It must be the first guests. *(She exits)*
SERVANT *(Opening the door. Surprised):* You?
LEONARDO: It's me! Good morning!
SERVANT: You're certainly the first to arrive.
LEONARDO: Wasn't I invited?
SERVANT: You were.
LEONARDO: Then that's why I came.
SERVANT: And your wife?
LEONARDO: I came on horseback. She's coming along the road.
SERVANT: Did you pass anyone?
LEONARDO: I left them way behind, on my horse.
SERVANT: You're going to kill that creature, running him like that.
LEONARDO: Well, when he's dead, he's dead! *(Pause)*
SERVANT: Sit down. Nobody's up yet.
LEONARDO: And the bride?
SERVANT: I'm just going to dress her now.
LEONARDO: The bride! She ought to be happy!
SERVANT *(Changing the conversation):* How's the baby?
LEONARDO: What baby?
SERVANT: Your son?
LEONARDO *(As though dreaming):* Oh!
SERVANT: Are they bringing him along?

LEONARDO: No.

There is a pause. Singing is heard in the distance.

VOICES:

The bride awakes
on her wedding morn.

LEONARDO:

The bride awakes
on her wedding morn.

SERVANT: The folks are coming. But they're still a long ways off.

LEONARDO: The bride will wear a big wreath, won't she? But it shouldn't be too big. A smaller one would be better for her. And say, has the groom brought the orange blossoms yet for her to put on her breast?

GIRL *(Entering. Still in petticoats with the wreath of orange blossoms on her head):* He brought them.

SERVANT *(Loudly):* Child, what's this?

GIRL: What does it matter? Why do you ask if he brought the orange blossoms? What do you mean by that?

LEONARDO: Nothing. What did you think I meant? *(Approaching)* You know *I* didn't bring them. Say! What have I meant to you anyway? Think back a little. But two oxen and a lousy shack weren't worth a thing! That's what hurts.

GIRL: What did you come here for?

LEONARDO: To see your wedding.

GIRL: I saw yours, too.

LEONARDO: Made by you. Tied by your two hands, yet even if I'm killed, no one will spit on me. But money, that glitters and shines, that can be like spit, too, sometimes.

GIRL: Liar!

LEONARDO: I'd better shut up. I'm a man with blood running in my veins,[15] and I don't want those hills to know what I have to say.

GIRL: I can say a lot more than you.

SERVANT: This kind of talk has got to stop. You mustn't keep the past stirred up like that. *(She glances anxiously at the door)*

GIRL: She's right![16] I shouldn't even speak to you. The nerve of you! Coming here to see me now, getting in the way of my wedding, insinuating about my orange blossoms. Get out! And wait for your wife at the door.

LEONARDO: You and I can't even talk together?

SERVANT *(Angrily):* No, you can't talk together!

LEONARDO: After my own wedding, I wondered day and night who was to blame. And every time I started to think, a new blame came along and ate up the other one. But somebody was to blame!

GIRL: There's a certain man with a horse who knows a lot, and can do a lot to hurt a girl in the desert. But I'm proud! That's why I'm getting married. And I'll lock myself up with my husband, and it'll be my duty to love him more than anybody else on earth.

LEONARDO *(Drawing near):* Pride won't do you any good.

GIRL: Don't touch me!

LEONARDO: Just to stay quiet and burn up inside, that's the worst thing that can happen to us. What good did pride do me, keeping me away from you? Letting you toss without sleep night after night? No good! It just set me on fire inside, that's all! If you think time heals, and walls shut out, it's not true. When something's deep down in your soul, there's nothing on earth can tear it out!

GIRL *(Trembling):* I can't listen to you! Oh, I can't bear to hear your voice! It's just as if I'd drunk a whole bottle of anisette and gone to sleep in a bed of roses. The current drags me down, and I know I am drowning, but I have to go.

SERVANT *(Grabbing Leonardo by the lapels):* You've got to get out! Now!

LEONARDO: This is the last time I'll ever have to talk to her. Don't be afraid.

GIRL: I know I'm mad, and all torn up inside from what I've had to bear, yet here I stand listening to you, watching you lift your arms.

LEONARDO: I'd never have any peace if I didn't tell you these things. I married! Now it's your turn.

SERVANT: And she'll marry, too!

VOICES *(Singing nearby):*

The bride awakes
on her wedding morn.

GIRL: The bride awakes! *(She exits running)*

SERVANT: The folks are here. *(To Leonardo)* Don't go near her again.

LEONARDO: Don't worry.

He exits left. The day dawns.

FIRST MAIDEN *(Entering):*

The bride awakes
on her wedding morn.
The night patrol passes
and on each balcony there's a wreath.

VOICES:
The bride awakes.
SERVANT *(Moving in the merry noise of the crowd):*
Wake her with the green branch
of love in flower.
Wake her with the trunk
and the branches of the laurel.
SECOND MAIDEN *(Entering):*
Wake her with long hair,
and a road of snow,
and patent-leather shoes,
and silver and jasmine
on her forehead.
SERVANT:
Oh, shepherdess,
The moon is rising!
FIRST YOUTH *(Enters waving his hat):*
The bride awakes.
The wedding guests are coming
bringing trays full of flowers
and cakes for the feast.
VOICES:
The bride awakes.
SECOND MAIDEN:
The bride put on her white crown,
and the groom tied it
with golden ribbons.
SERVANT:
In her bed of sweet herbs
the bride cannot sleep.
THIRD MAIDEN:
In the orange grove
the groom has a knife and a napkin.
Three guests enter.
FIRST YOUTH:
Awaken, little dove,
for the dawn clears the sky
of the bells of darkness.
GUEST:
The bride! Fair bride!
Today a maiden, tomorrow a woman.

FIRST MAIDEN:
Come down, dark-haired girl,
with your train of silk.
GUEST:
Come down, little girl,
to greet the dew of the morning.
FIRST YOUTH:
Wake up, woman, wake up!
For the breeze rains orange blossoms.
SERVANT:
And a tree longs to deck itself
full of red ribbons.
On each ribbon is love
with "long live" all around it.
VOICES:
The bride awakes!
FIRST YOUTH:
On her wedding morn!
GUEST:
On her wedding morn,
like a lady you are!
Flower of the mountains,
like the wife of a captain.
FATHER *(Entering):*
The groom carries off
the wife of a captain.
For a gift, he comes
with his oxen.
THIRD MAIDEN:
The groom is like a golden blossom.
When he walks, little carnations
gather in his footsteps.
SERVANT: Oh, happy girl!
SECOND YOUTH: The bride awakes!
SERVANT: Oh, little lady!
FIRST MAIDEN: The wedding feast beckons at all the windows.
SECOND MAIDEN: Bride, come out!
FIRST MAIDEN: Come out! Come out!
SERVANT: Let the bells ring! Clang and ring!
FIRST YOUTH: Here she comes! Here she comes!

SERVANT: Like a bull, the wedding feast comes to life!

The girl enters, in a black gown[17] *of the style of 1900, with a bustle and a long train of flowing gauze and stiff laces. Resting on her head is the crown of orange blossoms. Guitars sound. The maidens kiss the bride.*

THIRD MAIDEN: What kind of perfume have you got in your hair?

GIRL *(Laughing):* None.

SECOND MAIDEN *(Inspecting the dress):* There's no cloth like this anymore.[18]

SECOND YOUTH: Hail to the groom!

BOY: Hail!

FIRST MAIDEN *(Putting a flower behind her ear):* The groom is like a golden blossom!

SECOND MAIDEN: What gentle glances in his eyes!

The boy and girl meet.

GIRL: Why did you wear those shoes?

BOY: They're more colorful than the black ones.

WIFE *(Entering and kissing the girl):* Hail!

All talk merrily at once. Leonardo enters solemnly, as though performing a duty.

LEONARDO: A flower for your crown on your wedding morn!

WIFE: Let the earth breathe in the fragrance of your hair!

MOTHER *(To the father):* They're here, too?

FATHER: They're part of the family. Today's a day of forgiveness.

MOTHER: I'll bear it, but I won't forgive.

BOY: Crowned with happiness, my darling!

GIRL: Let's go quickly to the church.

BOY: You're in a hurry?

GIRL: Yes! I want to be your wife—and stay with you alone—and never hear any other voice but your voice.

BOY: That's what I want, too.

GIRL: And never see any other eyes but your eyes. And have you hold me so tightly that even if my dead mother called me, I couldn't get away.

BOY: I've got two good strong arms. I'm going to hug you for forty years to come.

GIRL *(Dramatically, seizing his arm):* No! Forever!

FATHER: Let's go! Get your horses! In your carts! The sun is up!

MOTHER: Be careful! We don't want any bad luck today.

The big doors at the rear open, and they all begin to exit.

SERVANT *(Crying):* When you leave your house, sweet maiden, you leave like a star.

FIRST MAIDEN: Clean body, clean clothes, when you leave your house for the wedding.

SECOND MAIDEN *(As they go out):* When you leave your house for the church . . .

SERVANT: The breeze strews flowers on the way.

THIRD MAIDEN: Oh, fair young girl!

SERVANT: Dark mist is the lace of your mantilla!

They exit. Guitars, castanets and tambourines are heard. Leonardo and the wife are left alone.

WIFE: Come on.

LEONARDO: Where?

WIFE: To the church. But not on horseback. You're coming with me.

LEONARDO: In the wagon?

WIFE: What else is there?

LEONARDO: I'm not a man for riding in wagons.

WIFE: And I'm not a woman for going to weddings without my husband! I can't stand any more!

LEONARDO: I can't either!

WIFE: Why do you look at me like that? Your eyes are sharp as thorns.

LEONARDO: Let's go.

WIFE: I don't know what's come over you. But I think I know. And I don't want to think like that! But I realize this—you've finished with me. But I have a son. And another child coming. The same fate overtook my mother. Well, let's go. But I won't move a step without you.

VOICES *(Without):*

When you leave your home afar,
You go to church like
the morning star.

WIFE *(Crying):* You go to church like the morning star! I went like that, too, out of my house. And all the countryside was at my wedding.

LEONARDO *(Rising):* Come on!

WIFE: But with me!

LEONARDO: Yes, with you! Come on!

They exit.

Curtain.

Act II, Scene 2

Outside the house of the bride. Landscape in tones of gray whites and cold blues. Big fig trees. Shades of solemn silver. Panorama of earth-colored mesas, all hard as a plaque in ceramics.
The servant is placing trays and glasses on a table.

SERVANT:

The wheel went round and round,
and the water went over,
and the wedding day came
when the branches parted
and the moon adorned herself
at her white railing.

(Loudly)
Put out the napkins!

The bride and groom sang and sang,
and the water went over,
and the wedding day came
that makes the frost sparkle
and fills with sweet honey
the bitter, bitter almonds.

(Loudly)
Bring out the wine!

Lady, lady, lovely lady!
Look how the water goes over—
for your wedding day's come
to gather in your train
and snuggle under your husband's wing
and stay in your house forever.
Your groom's like a male dove
with a heart of live coals,
and the whole countryside
waits for the blood.
The wheel goes round and round,
and the water goes over,
and the wedding day comes,
and the shining water!

MOTHER *(Entering):* At last!

FATHER: Are we the first to get back?

SERVANT: No. Leonardo came a while back with his wife, racing like the wind. The woman was half-dead with fright. They made it so fast they must have come on horseback.

FATHER: That boy's looking for trouble. He's not a good sort.

MOTHER: How is he ever going to amount to anything? All his folks are the same. It's handed down from his great-grandfather who started out killing, and it runs through all their bad breed. Knife-slingers and folks with a false smile!

FATHER: Well, let's not talk about it.

SERVANT: Why not talk about it?

MOTHER: It hurts me to the very roots of my veins. Like a mark on all of them, the only thing I can see is the hand that killed my men. Look at me here! Do I look like I'm crazy? If I am, it's because I've never been able to cry as loud as my heart wants to. Always ready to burst out, this cry I have to grab and smother with my two hands. But then when they bring in the dead, I have to keep quiet. People talk.

FATHER: Today's not the time to think about such things.

MOTHER: When I think about it, I have to talk. And today, more than ever. For today, I'll be alone in my house.

FATHER: But waiting for company.

MOTHER: That's what I'm hoping for—grandchildren.

They sit down.

FATHER: I hope they have plenty of children. We need hands for these fields that don't have to be paid, for there's always war with these weeds and thistles and stones that spring up from God knows where! And those hands must belong to us owners who are willing to sweat and worry over the land until the seeds spring up. The land needs a great many sons.

MOTHER: And a daughter or so too! Boys belong to the wind. They have to carry arms. But girls, they never run the streets.

FATHER *(Happily):* I guess they'll have both boys and girls.

MOTHER: My son is wild about her. And he's a real man! His father could have had a great many sons by me.

FATHER: I wish it could happen in a day. Right away, they'd have two or three full-grown men!

MOTHER: But it isn't like that. It takes a long time. That's why it's so terrible to see the blood of any one of them spilled on the ground.

A red fountain that runs only a moment, costs us years. That day when I got to my son, he had fallen in the middle of the street. I wet my hands in his blood and licked them with my tongue—because he was mine. You don't know what it means! The earth drank up that blood that I would have put in an urn of crystal and topaz.

FATHER: Now, you'll just have to wait. My daughter is able, and your son is strong.

MOTHER: I hope so. *(She rises)*

FATHER: Get the bowls of hot cereal ready.

SERVANT: They're ready.

The wife enters, followed by Leonardo.

WIFE: Congratulations!

MOTHER: Thank you.

LEONARDO: Is there going to be a party?

FATHER: Not much. The people can't stay.

SERVANT: Here they come!

Guests enter in lively groups. The bride and groom come arm in arm. Leonardo exits.

BOY: I never saw so many people at a wedding.

GIRL *(Solemnly):* Never.

FATHER: It was fine!

MOTHER: Whole flocks of relatives came.

BOY: People that never leave their houses.

MOTHER: Your father sowed good seed and now you live to reap it.

BOY: There were cousins of mine I never knew I had.

MOTHER: All our kinfolks from the coast.

BOY *(Cheerfully):* The horses got scared. *(He talks on to others)*

MOTHER *(To the bride):* And what are you thinking?

GIRL: Nothing.

MOTHER: Congratulations are tiresome.

Guitars are heard playing.

GIRL: Awfully tiresome.

MOTHER: But they shouldn't be. You ought to be light as a dove.

GIRL: Are you spending the night with us?

MOTHER: No. No one's at home.

GIRL: But you ought to stay.

FATHER *(To the mother):* Look at the dance they're dancing. A dance from the seacoast.

Leonardo comes out and sits down. His wife stands rigid behind him.

MOTHER: They're my husband's cousins, firm as rocks when it comes to dancing.
FATHER: I like to watch them. What changes have come over this house today! *(He exits toward the dancing)*
BOY *(To his bride):* Do you like the orange blossoms?
GIRL *(Staring straight ahead of her):* Yes.
BOY: They're all of wax, so they'll last forever. I wish you could have had them all over your dress.
GIRL: What for?
Leonardo exits right.
FIRST MAIDEN: Let's go take the pins out.
GIRL *(To her husband):* I'll be right back.
The girl and maiden exit.
WIFE: I hope you'll be happy with my cousin.
BOY: I'm sure I will be.
WIFE: Both of you here together, never having to go away, making a happy home. I wish I lived far away from everything, like this.
BOY: Why don't you buy some land? It's cheap up on the hills, and better to bring up children.
WIFE: We haven't any money! And the way things are going now!
BOY: Your husband's a good worker.
WIFE: Yes, but he likes to jump from one thing to another too much. He's not a steady sort of man.
SERVANT: Won't you have something to eat? I'm going to wrap up some wine-cakes for your mother. She likes them a lot.
BOY: Sure, give her three dozen.
WIFE: No, no! A half-dozen's enough.
BOY: A holiday's a holiday!
WIFE *(To the servant):* Where is Leonardo?
SERVANT: I haven't seen him.
BOY: He must be down there with the rest of the folks.
WIFE: I'm going to look. *(Exits)*
SERVANT: Pretty sight, isn't it?
BOY: But you're not dancing!
SERVANT: Nobody's asked me.
Two guests cross in the background. Until the end of the scene, there is a hustle and bustle of figures.
BOY *(Merrily):* That's funny! Lively old girls like you dance better than the young ones.
SERVANT: Stop throwing bouquets at me, boy! Such folks, your family!

Men among men! When I was a girl, I was at your grandfather's wedding. What a man! He was just like a mountain getting married!

BOY: I'm not as big as all that.

SERVANT: No, but there's the same look in your eyes! Where's the bride?

BOY: Taking off her headdress.

SERVANT: Oh! Well, look! Since you won't be asleep at midnight, I've fixed you some ham, and two big glasses of ripe old wine, down there in the bottom part of the closet, if you want it.

BOY *(Grinning):* I won't be eating at midnight.

SERVANT *(Slyly):* If not you, then the bride. *(Exits)*

FIRST YOUTH *(Entering):* You've got to have a drink with us.

BOY: I'm waiting for the bride.

SECOND YOUTH: You'll see her in the wee hours of the morning.

FIRST YOUTH: That's the best time!

SECOND YOUTH: Come along!

BOY: Let's go.

They exit. Shouts and happy cries. The girl enters. From the opposite side, two maidens come running to meet her.

FIRST MAIDEN: Whom did you give the first pin to, to her or to me?

GIRL: I don't remember.

FIRST MAIDEN: You gave it to me, right here.

SECOND MAIDEN: No, no! She gave it to me in front of the altar.

GIRL *(Worried and troubled within):* I tell you, I don't know.

FIRST MAIDEN: But I wanted you to . . .

GIRL *(Rudely):* I don't care! I've got something else to think about.

SECOND MAIDEN: Oh! I'm sorry.

Leonardo crosses in the background.

GIRL *(Seeing Leonardo):* It's a hard hour for me.

FIRST MAIDEN: We don't know about that.

GIRL: You'll know when the time comes. This is a step that means a lot.

FIRST MAIDEN: But are you upset about something?

GIRL: No. Forgive me.

SECOND MAIDEN: For what? But either of the two pins will bring us husbands, won't they?

GIRL: Either of them.

FIRST MAIDEN: But one of us will get married before the other.

GIRL: Are you as anxious as all that?

SECOND MAIDEN *(Blushing):* Yes.

GIRL: Why?

FIRST MAIDEN: Because . . .

Embracing, the two maidens run away. The boy enters. The girl does not see him. Very slowly, from behind, he puts his arms around her.

GIRL *(Jumping violently):* Get away!

BOY: You're afraid of me?

GIRL: Oh! It's you?

BOY: Why, who else could it be? *(Pause)* Your father or me.

GIRL: You're right.

BOY: But your father wouldn't have hugged you so hard.

GIRL: Hardly!

BOY: He's too old. *(He hugs her a little brusquely)*

GIRL *(Dully):* Leave me alone.

BOY *(Releasing her):* Why?

GIRL: Because, the people . . . they can see us.

The servant crosses in the background without looking at the lovers.

BOY: What of it? Now it's holy.

GIRL: Yes, but let me alone! Later.

BOY: What's the matter? Are you afraid?

GIRL: Nothing's the matter. Don't go.

The wife of Leonardo enters.

WIFE: I'm sorry to bother you, but . . .

BOY: What is it?

WIFE: Did my husband come past here?

BOY: No.

WIFE: I can't find him. And his horse isn't in the barn.

BOY *(Playfully):* He must be giving it a run.

The wife exits anxiously. The servant enters.

SERVANT: Aren't you happy about so much to-do?

BOY: But I wish they'd get it over with now. My wife here's a little tired.

SERVANT: What's the matter, child?

GIRL: I feel like something's beating at my temples.

SERVANT: A bride out of these mountains ought to be strong. *(To the boy)* You're the only one that can cure her, since she's yours. *(Exits running)*

BOY *(Caressing her):* Let's go dance awhile. *(He kisses her)*

GIRL *(In anguish):* No. I want to lie down a little.

BOY: I'll keep you company.

GIRL: Never!! With all these people here? What would they say? Let me be quiet a minute or two.

BOY: If you want to. But don't act like that tonight.
GIRL *(At the door):* Tonight I'll feel better.
She exits.
BOY: That's what I'll be waiting for.
MOTHER *(Entering):* Son?
BOY: Where've you been?
MOTHER: Down there with the crowd. Are you happy?
BOY: Yes!
MOTHER: Where's your wife?
BOY: Resting a little. It's a hard day for a bride.
MOTHER: Hard day? It's the best day. For me it was like coming into a fortune.
The servant enters and goes towards the girl's room.
It's the breaking of new ground, the planting of new trees.
BOY: You're leaving?
MOTHER: Yes, I have to be at home.
BOY: Alone?
MOTHER: Alone, no. My head is full of things, of men, and of fights.
BOY: But fights that are over now.
The servant enters running rapidly toward the rear.
MOTHER: As long as we live, we fight.
BOY: I'll always listen to you.
MOTHER: Try to always be loving to your wife. And if sometimes she's touchy and mean, pet her in a way that hurts her a little, a big hug, a bite—and then a gentle kiss after that. Not enough to make her angry, but enough to let her know that you're a man, the master, and the one that runs things. That's what I learned from your father. But since he isn't here, I'm the one who'll have to tell you what the secrets of being a man are.
BOY: I'll always do as you tell me.
FATHER *(Entering):* Where's my daughter?
BOY: In the house.
FIRST MAIDEN: Come on, you newlyweds, we're going to dance a reel.
FIRST YOUTH *(To the groom):* You'll call the figures!
FATHER *(Coming out):* But she isn't there!
BOY: No?
FATHER: Maybe she went up on the balcony.
BOY: I'll go see.
He enters the house. Laughter and guitars are heard.

FIRST MAIDEN: The dance is starting. *(Exits)*
BOY *(Coming out):* She's not there either.
MOTHER *(Worried):* No?
FATHER: Then where could she have gone?
SERVANT *(Entering):* My child, where is she?
MOTHER *(Solemnly):* We don't know.

The boy exits. Three guests enter.

FATHER: Isn't she down there dancing?
SERVANT: She's not down there dancing.
FATHER *(An outburst):* There's a lot of people down there! Go look!
SERVANT: I did look.
FATHER *(Tragically):* Then where is she?
BOY *(Returning):* No luck! She's nowhere around.
MOTHER *(To the father):* What *is* this? Where is your daughter?

Suddenly the wife of Leonardo enters.

WIFE: They've gone! They've gone! She and Leonardo! On horseback, wrapped in each other's arms, like the wind!
FATHER: It's not true! My daughter, no!
MOTHER: Your daughter, yes! The offshoot of a bad mother. And him—him, too! Yes, him! But she's already my son's wife.
BOY: Let's go get them! Who has a horse?
MOTHER: Who has a horse? Now! Right now! Who has a horse? I'll give all I've got, my eyes, my tongue . . .
VOICE: Here's a horse!
MOTHER *(To her son):* Go on! Get them!

He exits with the two youths.

No, don't go! They'll kill quickly and surely. . . . But yes, run! And I'll follow!
FATHER: It couldn't be her. Maybe she drowned herself in the cistern.
MOTHER: Good girls drown themselves, clean girls! Not that one! But she's my son's wife now. And there are two camps! Two camps here!

All gather around to hear.

My family and yours. Let's get out of here and wipe this dust from our feet. We'll go help my son!

The crowd divides into two groups.

For he has help on his side, my son! All his cousins from the sea, and all those from inland. Be off! Down all the roads. The day of blood has come again. Two camps! You with yours, and I with mine! Follow me! Follow me!

Curtain.

Act III, Scene 1

A wood. Night. Great moist tree trunks. Gloom. Violins playing in the distance. Three woodcutters enter.

FIRST WOODCUTTER: Have they found them?
SECOND WOODCUTTER: No, but they're looking for them everywhere.
THIRD WOODCUTTER: They'll come across them.
SECOND WOODCUTTER: Sh-sss-ss-s!
THIRD WOODCUTTER: What is it?
SECOND WOODCUTTER: Seems like they're coming down all the roads at once.
FIRST WOODCUTTER: We can see them when the moon comes out.
SECOND WOODCUTTER: They'd better let them alone.
FIRST WOODCUTTER: Yes, the world is wide. There's room for everybody.
THIRD WOODCUTTER: But they're going to kill them.
SECOND WOODCUTTER: Since they had to do what they did, they were wise to run away.
FIRST WOODCUTTER: They kept on trying to fool each other, but their blood got the best of them.
THIRD WOODCUTTER: Their blood!
FIRST WOODCUTTER: You've got to do what your blood tells you.
SECOND WOODCUTTER: But the very blood the sun warms, the earth drinks up.
FIRST WOODCUTTER: So what? Better be dead with the blood flowing, than live with it rotting within.
THIRD WOODCUTTER: Shut up!
FIRST WOODCUTTER: What? Do you hear something?
THIRD WOODCUTTER: I hear the crickets, the frogs, all the lurking noises of the night.
FIRST WOODCUTTER: You don't hear a horse?
THIRD WOODCUTTER: No.
FIRST WOODCUTTER: Now he must be loving her.
SECOND WOODCUTTER: Her body meant for him, and his body meant for her.
THIRD WOODCUTTER: But they'll find them and kill them.
FIRST WOODCUTTER: By then, they'll have mingled their blood, and they'll be like two empty vessels, like two dry streams.

SECOND WOODCUTTER: There're plenty of clouds. Maybe the moon won't come out.

THIRD WOODCUTTER: The husband will find them, moon or no moon. I saw him leave like an angry star, his face the color of ashes. Wearing the mark of destiny—the destiny of his breed.

FIRST WOODCUTTER: Breed that dies in the middle of the street.

SECOND WOODCUTTER: You're right.

THIRD WOODCUTTER: Do you think they can break the spell?

SECOND WOODCUTTER: That's hard to say. For ten leagues, all around now, there are knives and guns.

THIRD WOODCUTTER: He rides a good horse.

SECOND WOODCUTTER: But there's a woman with him.

FIRST WOODCUTTER: Well, we're just about where we're going.

SECOND WOODCUTTER: There's that tree with forty limbs. We'll chop it down directly.

THIRD WOODCUTTER: The moon's coming out. Let's hurry.

Light floods in from the left.

FIRST WOODCUTTER: Oh, rising moon! Moon of the big leaves!

SECOND WOODCUTTER: Covered with jasmine blossoms of blood.

FIRST WOODCUTTER: Oh, lonely moon! Moon of the green leaves!

SECOND WOODCUTTER: Silver on the face of the bride.

THIRD WOODCUTTER: Wicked moon, leave a dark bower somewhere for the lovers.

FIRST WOODCUTTER: Oh, sad, sad moon! Leave a dark bower for the lovers.

They exit. In the glow at the left the moon appears. The moon is a young woodcutter with a white face. The whole scene is a brilliant blue.

MOON:

A white swan in the river,
eye of the cathedrals,
false dawn on the leaves am I.
They can't get away from me!
Who tries to hide?
Who's sobbing in a thicket
in the valley?
The moon leaves a knife
hanging in the air,
lurking steel for the pain of blood.
Let me in! I'm frozen

on walls and windows!
Open tile roofs and breasts
where I can get warm!
I am cold! My ashes
of sleepy metals
seek a crest of flames
in the mountains and the streets.
I carry snow on my
shoulders of jasper,
and the water of the ponds
pours over me, cold and hard.
But tonight, I will have
cheeks red with blood,
and reeds will gather
at the feet of air.
There's no shade and no ambush
where they can escape me!
I need to hide in some breast
somewhere to warm me.
A heart for me! A warm heart
flowing from the mountains
of my breast.
Let me in! Oh, let me in!
(To the trees)
I want no shade. My rays
must go everywhere,
so through your dark trunks
let there be streaks of light,
so that tonight I may have
my cheeks sweet with blood,
and the reeds gathered
at the feet of the air.
Who's hiding! Out, I say!
No! There's no escape!
I'll make your horse glitter
like a fever of diamonds.

The moon disappears among the trees, and the scene is dark again. An old woman, a beggar, comes out all covered with gray-green rags. She is barefoot. You can hardly see her face for the rags. She is not a part of the company.

BEGGAR: The moon is gone, and they are on their way here. But they'll never pass. The whisper of the river'll smother in the whisper of the trees the broken flight of their cries. It'll happen here, and soon. I'm tired. Open your trunks and let white rays fall on the floor of the bedrooms where heavy bodies lie with wounds at their throats. Not a bird need awake. And the breeze'll gather their cries in her skirts and fly with them over the black mountains, or bury them somewhere in soft linen. *(Impatiently)* Oh, that moon! That moon!

The moon enters in a flood of blue light.

MOON: They're coming. Some up the glen and others by the river. I'm going to light up even the stones. What do you need?

BEGGAR: Nothing.

MOON: The air is hardening, like a two-edged knife.

BEGGAR: Light up their vests and unbutton their buttons, so that the knives will find the way.

MOON: But they'll take a long time dying. And the blood will make a soft sound in my fingers. Look how my hollows of ash awaken, anxious for the trembling of that spouting fountain.

BEGGAR: We won't let them pass that stream there! . . . Silence!

MOON: There they come!

He exits. The scene is dark.

BEGGAR: Hurry! Light! Plenty of light! You hear me? They can't get away!

The boy enters with the first youth. The beggar sits down, covering herself with a mantle.

BOY: Along about here!

FIRST YOUTH: You won't find them.

BOY *(Forcefully):* I will find them.

FIRST YOUTH: I think they've taken another direction.

BOY: No. I heard his horse's gallop a moment ago.

FIRST YOUTH: It might be another horse.

BOY: Listen! There's only one horse in the world, and it's that horse. Understand? If you come with me, come without talking.

FIRST YOUTH: I only want to . . .

BOY: Shut up! I'm sure I'll find them here. You see this hand? Well, it's not my hand. It's the hand of my brother, and of my father, and of all our family that are dead. And it's so strong I could tear out that tree by the roots if I wanted to. But let's go on, for I feel all my family's teeth gritting so tight it's hard for me to breathe.

BEGGAR *(Moaning):* Ah!

FIRST YOUTH: Did you hear that?
BOY: Go on and look around.
FIRST YOUTH: This is a hunt.
BOY: A hunt! The best hunt of all!

The youth exits. The boy goes rapidly toward the light and comes upon the beggar. She is Death.

BEGGAR: Ah-h-h!
BOY: What do you want?
BEGGAR: I'm cold.
BOY: Where are you going?
BEGGAR *(Always whining like a beggar):* Away off . . .
BOY: Where did you come from?
BEGGAR: Over there, a long ways.
BOY: Did you see a man and a woman go by on horseback?
BEGGAR *(Suddenly alive):* Wait! *(She looks at him)* A good-looking boy! *(She rises)* But much better looking, if you were asleep—
BOY: Listen! Answer me! Did you see them?
BEGGAR: Wait! What broad shoulders you have! How would you like to be stretched out on those broad shoulders, and not have to walk on the narrow soles of your feet?
BOY *(Shaking her):* I asked you, did you see them? Did they come by here?
BEGGAR: They didn't. But they're coming down the hill now. Don't you hear them?
BOY: No.
BEGGAR: Don't you know the road?
BOY: I'll find it, no matter what it's like.
BEGGAR: I'll go with you. I know the way.
BOY *(Impatiently):* Then let's go! Which way?
BEGGAR: That way!

They exit quickly. Two violins in the distance sing like the singing of the woods. The woodcutters return with their axes on their shoulders. They walk slowly among the trees.

FIRST WOODCUTTER: Oh, Death arising! Death of the big leaves!
SECOND WOODCUTTER: Don't open your gates of blood.
FIRST WOODCUTTER: Oh, lonely Death! Death of the dry leaves!
THIRD WOODCUTTER: Don't cover their wedding with your flowers.
SECOND WOODCUTTER: Oh, sad, sad Death! Leave a green branch for love!

FIRST WOODCUTTER: Oh, wicked Death! Leave a green branch for love!

They exit speaking. Enter Leonardo and the girl.

LEONARDO: Keep still!

GIRL: From here on, I'll go alone. Go back! I want you to go back!

LEONARDO: Keep quiet, I said.

GIRL: Take your teeth, take your hands, take whatever you can and break this chain of purity about my neck, and throw me in a corner there in a cave. And if you don't kill me like a little serpent, then give me the mouth of your gun in my hands. Oh, what pain! What fire flames in my head! What splinters of glass stick to my tongue!

LEONARDO: We've done it now! Be quiet. They're after us, near, and I've got to keep you with me.

GIRL: Then you'll have to make me stay with you.

LEONARDO: Make you stay? Who came down the steps first?

GIRL: I came down first.

LEONARDO: Who put the reins on the horse?

GIRL: I did. You're right.

LEONARDO: And whose hands put the spurs on my feet?

GIRL: My hands that are your hands. But when I look at you, they want to break the blue and whispering branches of your veins. I love you! I love you! Leave me here! If I could kill you, I'd make you a shroud out of petals of violets. Oh, what pain, what fire flames in my head!

LEONARDO: What splinters of glass stick to my tongue! I tried to forget. And I put a wall of stone between your house and my house. Didn't I? You remember. And when I saw you far off, I threw sand in my eyes. But when I got on my horse, the horse went to your door. Needles of silver turned my blood black, and in my sleep dark weeds grew in my body. It's not my fault. It's the fault of the earth, and the sweet scent of your hair, and the sweet scent of your breasts.

GIRL: Oh, how foolish we all are! I don't want to share your bed, nor your food, yet there isn't a minute in the whole day I don't want to be with you. If you call me, I'll come. If you told me to fly, I'd follow you through the air like a bit of grass in the wind. I've left a good man and all his offspring, in the midst of the wedding feast, with my orange blossoms on. But you'll suffer for it! And I don't want you to suffer. Leave me here alone. Fly! Get away! There's nobody left to help you.

LEONARDO: The birds of dawn are swaying in the trees, and night is dying on the sharp edges of the stones. Let's go off in some dark place where I've always wanted you. We don't have to care what people say now, nor what ugly poisons they spread. *(He embraces her passionately)*

GIRL: I'll lay at your feet, watching over your dreams. Naked, at your feet like a dog, watching all around. When I look at you, your beauty burns me, consumes me.

LEONARDO: Fire burns fire! One little flame can kill two spikes of grain. Let's go! *(He pulls her after him)*

GIRL: Where are you dragging me?

LEONARDO: Where these men who are after us can't come. Where I can look at you forever.

GIRL *(Sarcastically):* Then drag me from fair to fair, the shame of all good women, and let people see me, with the sheets of my wedding bed flying like flags!

LEONARDO: If I thought as people should think, I'd want to leave you. But I'm going where you go. And you're going with me. Take one step, and I'll prove it! Nails of moonlight bind your hips to mine.

The whole scene is violent and full of great sensuousness.

GIRL: Listen!

LEONARDO: Someone's coming!

GIRL: Run! It's right for me to die here, with my feet in the water and thorns on my head. The leaves will weep for me, a lost woman, still virgin.

LEONARDO: Be quiet! They're coming.

GIRL: Run! Run!

LEONARDO: Be still! So they won't hear us. Go ahead! Let's go, I said!

She wavers.

GIRL: Yes, both together!

LEONARDO *(Embracing her):* Death alone can part us.

GIRL: Then I'll die, too.

They exit in each other's arms. Slowly, the moon comes out. The wood is flooded with a brilliant blue light. Two violins are heard. Suddenly, two long shrieks split the night and cut short the music of the violins. At the second cry, the beggar appears and remains with her back turned. She opens her shawl and stands there like a huge bird with enormous wings. The moon stands still. Silence.

Curtain.

Act III, Scene 2

A white room with thick arches and thick walls. At the right and left, white stairways. A thick high arch at the back in a wall of white. The floor is also a shining white. The room is simple but monumental, like a church. There is no gray, no shadow, not even enough for perspective.
Two girls dressed in blue are unwinding a red skein of wool.

FIRST MAIDEN:
Skein of wool, skein of wool,
what would you like to be?
SECOND MAIDEN:
A flower of a dress
or the crystal of a paper.
To be born at four
and then die at ten.
Just a skein of wool,
a chain on his feet,
and a knot that binds
the bitter laurel.
CHILD *(Singing):*
Didn't you go to the wedding?
FIRST MAIDEN: No.
CHILD: I didn't either. What could have happened under the vines in the vineyard? What happened among the olive trees? What happened that nobody's come back yet? Didn't you go to the wedding?
SECOND MAIDEN: We told you *no.*
CHILD *(Starting out):* I didn't either.
SECOND MAIDEN:
Skein of wool, skein of wool,
what do you want to sing?
FIRST MAIDEN:
Wounds of wax and pain of myrtle.
Sleep in the morning to wake at night.
CHILD *(At the door):*
Skein of wool strikes the flint.
Blue mountain lets them pass.
Run, run, run, and after awhile
you'll run into a knife and
need no more bread.

She exits.

SECOND MAIDEN:

Skein of wool, skein of wool,
what do you say?

FIRST MAIDEN:

Stretched out forever
by the river's gloom,
a speechless lover,
and a crimson groom.

They pause and look at the skein.

CHILD *(Appearing in the doorway):* Run! Run! Run! Bring the skein here! I see them coming, covered with mud. Two bodies stretched out on sheets of marble!

She exits. The wife and mother-in-law of Leonardo appear. They are torn by anguish.

FIRST MAIDEN: Are they coming?

MOTHER-IN-LAW *(Shortly):* We don't know.

SECOND MAIDEN: Tell us about the wedding.

FIRST MAIDEN: Yes, tell us.

MOTHER-IN-LAW *(Drily):* There's nothing to tell.

WIFE: I want to go back and find out everything.

MOTHER-IN-LAW *(Positively):* You, you go home. Brave and alone at home, you'll grow old and weep with the door closed. Never again, dead or alive. We'll nail up the windows, and let night and the rain cover the bitter weeds.

WIFE: What could have happened?

MOTHER-IN-LAW: It doesn't matter. Put a veil on your face. Your sons are your own and no one else's. Put a cross of cinders over your bed where his pillow was.

They exit.

BEGGAR *(At the door):* Bread, little girls, a piece of bread.

CHILD *(Running in front of her):* Make her get away!

The girls gather near each other.

BEGGAR: Why?

CHILD: Because you whine. Get away!

FIRST MAIDEN: Child!

BEGGAR: I *could* ask for your eyes. A cloud of black birds follow me. Do you want one?

CHILD: I want you to go away.

SECOND MAIDEN *(To the beggar):* Pay her no mind.

FIRST MAIDEN: Did you come by way of the river?

BEGGAR: That's the way I came.

FIRST MAIDEN *(Timidly):* Could we ask you something?

BEGGAR: I saw them! They'll be here directly. Two torrents of water calm at last among the big rocks. Two men under the horse's feet, dead in the beautiful night. *(With savory pleasure)* Dead! Yes, dead!

FIRST MAIDEN: Hush, you old woman, you! Hush!

BEGGAR: Their eyes are broken flowers and their teeth two handfuls of hard snow. Both of them went down, while the bride fled with blood on her dress and blood on her hair. Now, covered with two sheets they'll come, borne on the shoulders of tall young men. That's all that happened. It was due to happen. Muddy sand on the golden flower. Muddy sand on the golden flower.

She exits. The maidens hang their heads and walk out in rhythm, repeating her words.

FIRST MAIDEN: Muddy sand . . .

SECOND MAIDEN: . . . on the golden flower.

CHILD: On a golden flower they bring the lovers from the stream. Dark brown the one, and dark brown the other. A nightingale of darkness sobs flying over the golden flower!

They exit. The room is empty. The mother enters with her neighbor. The neighbor is crying.

MOTHER: Hush, now.

NEIGHBOR: I can't.

MOTHER: Hush, I say. *(At the door)* Anyone here? *(She puts her hands to her head)* My son ought to answer me. But my son is nothing but an armful of dry flowers now. My son, just a dark voice in the mountains. *(Angrily to the neighbor)* Can't you keep quiet? I don't want tears in this house. Your tears come from the eyes, that's all. But when I'm alone, mine come from the soles of my feet and the roots of my hair. They burn like blood.

NEIGHBOR: Come over to my house. Don't stay here.

MOTHER: I want to stay here. And quietly, now they're all dead. At midnight I'll go to sleep, and sleep without being frightened anymore by pistols or knives. Other mothers will stand at their windows, whipped by the rain, watching for their sons to come home. Not I. I'll make sleep a dove of cool marble carrying frosty camellias to the cemetery. But no! No graveyard. No! Just a bed of earth that shelters them and rocks them underneath the sky.

A woman in black enters and kneels down at the right.

(To the neighbor) Take your hands down from your face. Terrible days are coming. I don't want company. The earth and I. Just my grief and I. And these four walls. Oh! Oh-oo-o! *(She sits down, rigid)*

NEIGHBOR: Have pity on yourself.

MOTHER *(Pushing her hair back):* Yes, I must be calm. The neighbors are coming and they mustn't see me so poorly! So poor! A woman without a single son to hold to her bosom.

The girl enters in a black shawl. She no longer wears her orange blossoms.

NEIGHBOR *(Looking angrily at the girl):* Where are you going?

GIRL: I'm coming here.

MOTHER *(To the neighbor):* Who is that?

NEIGHBOR: Don't you know her?

MOTHER: That's why I ask, who is she. I have to keep from knowing her, not to drive my teeth into her throat. You snake! *(She rushes threateningly toward the girl, then stops. To her neighbor)* You see her there crying? And me standing calmly here without tearing her eyes out! I don't understand myself. Is it that I didn't love my son? But what about his own honor? Where is his honor?

She strikes the girl, knocking her to the floor.

NEIGHBOR: Lord have mercy! *(Tries to separate them)*

GIRL *(To the neighbor):* Leave her alone. I came so they could kill me, and carry me away with the others. *(To the mother)* But not with your hands. With a fork, with a sickle, hard, until my bones break. Let her alone. I want her to know that I'm clean! I may be mad, but I'll go to my grave with no man ever having looked upon the whiteness of my breasts.

MOTHER: Shut up! Shut up! What's that to me?

GIRL: Because I went with him. Yes, I went. *(In anguish)* You would have gone, too. I was like a woman on fire, covered with burns inside and out. And your son was like cool water to give me children and land and make me well again. But that other one, he was a great dark river with a song in his teeth, and the whisper of reeds, and branches. I needed your son who was like cool water, a little boy of water. But that other one came like a flock of wild birds so thick I couldn't move. And they covered my burning flesh with hoarfrost, the flesh of a poor young girl, caressed in the arms of flame. I didn't want to! Listen! Listen to me! I say I didn't want to! Listen! Listen! I didn't want him! Your son was my destiny, and I never deceived him. But the arms of that other one, they tore me away like a wave of

the sea, like a stubborn mule taking the lead! And they would have torn me away always, always, even if I had been an old woman with all your son's sons holding me by the hair!

Another neighbor-woman enters.

MOTHER *(Sarcastically):* You're not guilty, and I'm not guilty! Who is guilty, then? Lazy, spoiled, sleepless woman throwing away her orange blossoms for the edge of a bed some other woman's made warm!

GIRL: Don't say that! Take your revenge! Here I am! My throat is soft, as easy as cutting a flower in your garden. But don't say that! No! I'm clean, clean as a newborn babe. And I am strong enough to prove it. Light the fire! We'll put our hands in it. You, for your son. And me, for my body. You'll take yours out first!

Enters another neighbor.

MOTHER: What do I care about your purity? What do I care about your dying? What does it matter to me, anyway? Bless the grain because my sons rest beneath it. Bless the rain because it wets the faces of the dead. Bless God who will lay us all down to rest together.

GIRL: Let me weep with you.

MOTHER: Weep, but there at the door.

The child enters. The girl remains in the doorway. The mother is in the center of the room.

WIFE *(The wife enters and goes to the left):*[19] He was a good horseman, and now he's a mountain of snow. He rode to the fairs, to the mountains, and to the arms of women. Now, foam of darkness crowns his brow.

MOTHER: Sunflower of your mother! Looking glass of earth! Let them put on your breast a cross of bitter oleanders. Cover him with a sheet of shining silk. And let the water form a pool of tears in your still hands.

WIFE: Oh! Four men are coming with tired shoulders!

GIRL: Oh! Four young men are carrying death through the air!

MOTHER: My neighbors.

CHILD *(At the door):* There they come, bringing them.

MOTHER: Always the same! The cross. . . . The cross.

GIRL: May the cross shelter the dead and the living!

MOTHER: Friends! With a knife, one day with a knife, between two and three, two men in love killed each other. With a knife, with a little knife almost too small to hold in your hand, but sharp enough to

find its way through startled flesh to stop entangled in the trembling roots of a cry!

GIRL: A knife, a little knife almost too small to hold in your hand, a fish with no scales out of water. One day, between two and three, with this knife two men, stretched out rigid forever, with their lips turned yellow.

MOTHER: And it's almost too small to hold in your hand, but sharp enough to find its way through startled flesh to stop entangled in the trembling roots of a cry.

The neighbors kneel on the floor and weep.

Curtain.

Cuba Libre
Poems by Nicolás Guillén

Translated by
Langston Hughes and
Ben Frederic Carruthers

(1948)

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By Ben Frederic Carruthers

Cuba Libre was originally a cry for freedom and in these poems it still is. Since the days of the Cuban struggle for independence, however, we *yanquis* have come to know it as a delightful drink concocted from the best of light Cuban rum, a dash of *limón* (lime to you) and cola poured over ice. Cuba's rum is the symbol of its fiery passions, its lifeblood, its livelihood. In these poems it must represent the white blood in the veins of our mulatto poet, Nicolás Guillén. As in the perfect *Cuba Libre,* it is fused with the dark cola which for us is the symbol of his African heritage. The *limón* is the bitterness of frustration lending piquancy and genius to the verse as the sour juice does to the drink.

Guillén is, in the opinions of many critics of the front rank, the most gifted living Cuban poet, *el cónsul de los poetas.* But he is more than a Cuban, he is a citizen of the world and the champion of its inarticulate masses. Combining as he does the classic traditions of part of his ancestry, the Spanish, with the pronounced rhythms of Africa, Guillén is the spokesman for the mulatto millions of the New World. Did not the great martyr-poet García Lorca announce that he was leaving Spain to visit Cuba "the land of Nicolás Guillén"? Realizing that the peculiar dialect of the Cuban Negro lends itself readily to poetic rhythm and image, Nicolás Guillén, without knowing it, started a movement known as Afro-Cuban poetry. Its authors today include a number of white, mulatto, and black poets.[1]

Nicolás Guillén was born in 1902, virtually with the republic itself. He came of *mestizo* parentage in the provincial capital of Camagüey. His father, Nicolás *père,* was a journalist and political figure who rose to a seat in the national Senate. He died in 1917, while Nicolás *fils* was quite young, and the boy was forced to seek employment as a typesetter. Although times were indeed difficult, Nicolás managed to graduate in 1920, with a *Bachiller en Letras y Ciencias,* from the Institute of Camagüey. The next year he entered the University of Havana's School of Law but soon discovered that it was not his calling. Forthwith he turned to journalism, politics, and Havana's bohemian literary life.

Today, having recently returned from a long and highly acclaimed tour of South America, Nicolás Guillén is the recognized leader of literary Havana, holding *tertulias* in waterfront cafes, writing for newspapers, working in the congressional library, dabbling in politics, and giving voice to the anguish and hope of the underdog.

Miguel de Unamuno to Nicolás Guillén

"Blessed are ye that weep now: for ye shall laugh." Luke VI:21

Melchior, Gaspar, Baltasar,
three Wise Men; Baltasar is black.
Black too is the night and the Wise Men go on
with the black one gazing at the sky
of stars, he laughs
and the white moon, mirror,
laughs, and laughs again.
And the Child, on seeing the black Wise Man
breaks out in laughter, and His laugh
rocks the manger of heaven.
Pure laughter, full moon,
fusing the earth's snows.
They will conquer this our land,
with purest laughter, these black ones,
with purest laughter that is only laughter . . .
May God keep them laughing:
The magic of laughter brought them up,
black night, God with no frown . . .
Happy are they who laugh
for they shall enjoy dreamless sleep.[2]

Miguel de Unamuno
Epiphany, 1931

Cuban Blues

Don't Know No English

All dat English you used to know,
Li'l Manuel,
all dat English, now can't even
say: *Yes.*

'Merican gal comes lookin' fo' you
an' you jes' runs away.
Yo' English is jes' *strike one!*
strike one and *one-two-three.*

Li'l Manuel, you don't know no English
you jes' don't know!
You jes' don't know!

Don't fall in love no mo',
Li'l Manuel,
'cause you don't know no English,
don't know no English.

Last Night Somebody Called Me Darky

Last night somebody called me darky
jes' to make me fight,
but de one who said it to me
is a darky, too, all right.

Can't fool me, dat white face of yours
'cause I know who your grandma is.
Call her out de kitchen,
call her out de kitchen,
Mamá Inez.
Mamá Inez, you knows all about it.
Mamá Inez, I knows, too.
Mamá Inez calls you grandson,
Mamá Inez.

Thick-Lipped Cullud Boy

How come you jumps salty
when they calls you thick-lipped boy,
if yo' mouf's so sweet,
thick-lipped cullud boy?

Thick-lipped as you is
you got everything.
Charity's payin' yo' keep.
She's givin' you all you need.

Still you go around beefin',
thick-lipped cullud boy.
No work an' plenty money,
thick-lipped cullud boy.
White suit jes' spotless,
thick-lipped cullud boy.
Shoes two shades o' honey,
thick-lipped cullud boy.

Thick-lipped as you is
you got everything.
Charity's payin' yo' keep,
she's givin' all you want.

High Brown

Yep, now I gets you, high brown!
High brown, I knows you likes to say
how wide my nose is anyway
like a tie-knot flattened down.

Well, look at yo' self an' see
you ain't no prize to wed.
Yo' mouf' is awful big fo' me,
an yo' naps is short an' red.

So much switchin' wid yo' hips,
jes' so hot!
So much twitchin' wid yo' lips,
jes' so hot!

So much witchin' wid yo' eyes,
jes' so hot!

If you jes' knew de truf,
Miss High Brown,
I loves my coal black gal
and don't need you hangin' 'round.

No Sirrie!

Git some cash,
git some cash,
'cause I ain't takin' another step.
Rice and crackers all I get.

I knows how 'tis
but, Daddy, I got to eat!
Git some cash,
git some cash,
else jes' watch my feet!

I know they'll say I'm a bad chick
an' folks'll be snubbin' me,
but love and hunger, Daddy, don't mix,
no, sirrie!
Wid all dem new shoes I see?
no, sirrie!
Wid all de jewelry I see, friend?
no, sirrie!
Wid all de finery I see, cullud boy?
no, sirrie!

High-Priced Now

Now I likes a black gal
but she must be a wow!
Since I'm sellin' de CHRONICLE
I'm high-priced now!

De gal in de newspaper

all fixed up so fine
Jes' can't understand me,
don't like her kind o' line!

But if a black gal cries,
what am I s'posed to do!
Gets on her knees and sighs,
what am I s'posed to do!
Calls me her saint,
what am I s'posed to do!
An' makes a sad complaint,
what am I s'posed to do!

Pass On By

Travel on, traveller,
pass on by.
Travel and don't linger,
pass on by.

When you pass front o' her house
don't say you saw me.
Travel on, traveller,
pass on by.

Pass an' don't stop,
pass on by.
Don't look if she calls you.
Pass on by.
Remember, she's evil.
Pass on by.

Curujey[3]

I wants me a doctor-sweetie
dat kin cure me good,
kin find why fo' I hurts
in my middle.

Don't want no lawyer-man,
don't lak to hear 'im lie.
I done had one o' dem, mama,
an' he went off to die.

I wants me a doctor-sweetie,
curujey, curujey!
See if my sweetie kin cure,
curujey, curujey!
An' tell me what's de matter,
curujey, curujey!
wid dis misery in my middle.

My Gal

Dat gal I got,
black as she is,
I ain't tradin' for nobody.

She washes, irons, sews,
an', man, besides dat,
she can cook!

If they come to take her dancing,
or out to eat,
she's bound to take me,
else bring in something.

She says to me, Sugar,
I can't leave you
'cause you needs me,
you needs me,
you needs me,
to look out for you!
You do!

Habaneros

Quirino

Quirino
with his guitar!

Nappy hair, thick lips,
feet that flap afar
and a high-brown whose sweetness
fairly drips . . .

Quirino
with his guitar!

Full moon watches his returning steps
inebriate as they are,
sports a straw hat, shirt fresh-kept,

Quirino
with his guitar!

Lukewarm helper in the fact,
his mother, black Paula Balomar,
sweats, cooks, and bends her back . . .

Quirino
with his guitar!

Wash Woman

Under the explosive sun
of the bright noon-day
washing,
a black woman
bites her song of *mamey.*

Odor and sweat of the arm pits:
and on the line of her singing,
strung along,

white clothes hang
with her song.

Blade

Knife-toting sweet-man
become a knife himself:
whittling chips of the moon
until the moon runs out,
whittling chips of shadow
until the shadows run out,
whittling chips of song
until the song runs out—
and then,
sliver by sliver,
the dark body
of his no-good gal.

Wake for Papá Montero

You burned the dawn
with the fire of your guitar:
juice of the cane
in the gourd of your dark warm flesh
under a cold white moon.

Music poured from you
round and mulatto as a plum.

Steady drinker
with the throat of tin,
boat cut loose in a sea of rum,
horseman of the wild party,
what will you do with the night
now that you can no longer drink it,
and what vein
will give you back the blood
you've lost down the black drain
of a knife wound?

Tonight they got you,
Papá Montero!

They waited for you at the flat,
but they brought you home dead.
It was a good fight,
but they brought you home dead.
They say he was your pal,
but they brought you home dead.
Nobody could find the knife,
but they brought you home dead.

Now Baldomero's done for,
a devil, a dog, and a dancer!

Only two candles
burn away the shadows.
For your two-bit death
two candles are too many.
But the red shirt
that once lit up your songs
and the brownskin laughter of your music
and your gleaming straightened hair,
make more light for you now
than any candles.

Tonight they got you,
Papá Montero!

Today the moon rose
in the courtyard of my house.
It fell blade-wise to earth
and stuck there.

Some kids picked it up
to wash its face,
so I brought it tonight
to be your pillow.

West Indies

Cane

Negro
in the cane fields.

White man
above the cane fields.

Earth
beneath the cane fields.

Blood
that flows from us.

Guadeloupe, W.I.

Pointe-à-Pitre

The blacks work
beside the ship. The Arabs sell,
the French play and rest,
and the sun burns.

The sea goes to bed
in port, the air toasts
the palms . . . I shout: Guadeloupe!
There's no reply.

The ship sails, plowing
the impassible waters with a clamor of foam:
back there, the blacks still work,
the Arabs sell,
the French play, rest,
and the sun burns.

Blues

I die if I don't work
and if I do, I die.
Either way I die, I die,
either way I die.

Yesterday I saw a staring man
staring at the setting sun,
yesterday I saw a staring man
staring at the setting sun:
the man was very serious
for he could not see.
Ay, the blind live sightless
when the sun sets,[4]
when the sun sets,
when the sun sets.

Yesterday I saw a child at play
pretend to kill another child,
yesterday I saw a child at play
pretend to kill another child:
there are babes who play
like men at work!
Who will tell them when they're grown
that men are not children,
that they are not,
that they are not,
that they are not?

I die if I don't work,
and if I do, I die.
Either way I die, I die,
either way I die.

Sweat and Lash

Lash,
sweat and lash.

The sun woke up early
and found the barefooted Negro.
Naked his beaten body
in the field.

Lash,
sweat and lash.

The wind went by screaming:
What a black flower in each hand!
Said the blood to him, *Let's go!*
Said he to the blood, *Let's go!*

He left all bloody, barefooted.
Trembling, the cane field
opened a way before him,

Afterwards, the sky grew silent,
and under the sky a slave
deep-dyed in the blood of the master.

Lash,
sweat and lash,
deep-dyed in the blood of the master;
lash,
sweat and lash,
deep-dyed in the blood of the master,
deep-dyed in the blood of the master.

Maracas

Two by two
maracas approach the Yankee
asking him:
Sir, and how are you?

When a ship comes into sight
maracas are already at the dock
following the tourist trade
with lively eye and wakeful pose.
Equilibrist maracas,
flattering seekers of tourist cash!

But there's another maraca, with a certain
modesty which is almost anti-imperialist.
It's the artist's maraca
that has nothing to do with docks.

Satisfied it is that a poor Negro
shakes it at the back of a sextet
disputing with the indiscreet *bongó,*
and the rum it gets is what the Negro leaves.

It doesn't know there are Yankees on the map,
lives happily, cuts its sonorous bread
while Mama Inez' hard hip rolls
burnished and brighter than a *rumba* of gold.

Chop It with the Cane Knife!

The sun bakes you skin and limb,
and nothing's in your cart,
your coughing brings up blood and phlegm,
your coughing brings up blood and phlegm:
thirty cents a day's your part!
  Chop it with the cane-knife, chop!
  Chop it with the cane-knife, chop!
When they chew this sugar-cane
with it they'll be chewing you,
just like in the days of Spain,
just like in the days of Spain,
now the Yankee's trampling you!
  Chop it with the cane-knife, chop!
  Chop it with the cane-knife, chop!
Havana's far, so far away,
where your President resides
with the flag of Cuba, say,
with the flag of Cuba, say,
in his limousine he rides!
  Chop it with the cane-knife, chop!
  Chop it with the cane-knife, chop!
The cry of protest you give out
won't reach that far from here:

but if you'll let me, I'll shout,
but if you'll let me, I'll shout,
and I'll make them hear.
Chop it with the cane-knife, chop!
Chop it with the cane-knife, chop!
Your cane-knife tears and slices, strips
the toughest thing beneath the sky.
Your freshly laundered clothing drips,
your freshly laundered clothing drips
so take it out of the tub to dry.
Chop it with the cane-knife, chop!
Chop it with the cane-knife, chop!
Your dinner's bad, your lunch is bad,
you live bad, yes, it's bad.
Your only pay's an I.O.U.
from the overseer when it's due.
Chop it with the cane-knife, chop!
Chop it with the cane-knife, chop!

Sensemayá[5]

Chant for Killing a Snake

Mayombe-bombe-mayombé!
Mayombe-bombe-mayombé!
Mayombe-bombe-mayombé!

The snake has eyes of greenish glass,
it comes and twists itself around the stalk,
with its green-glass eyes, around the stalk,
with its green-glass eyes.
The snake walks on no feet,
it hides in the grass,
walking it hides in the grass
walking on no feet!

Hit it with a cane-knife and it dies,
hit it now!
Don't kick it with your foot, it'll bite,
don't kick it with your foot, let it go!

Sensemayá, the snake,
sensemayá.
Sensemayá, with its eyes,
sensemayá.
Sensemayá, with its tongue,
sensemayá.
Sensemayá, with its mouth
sensemayá!

Dead snake can't eat a thing,
dead snake can't hiss or blink,
can't slide or slink,
can't coil to spring!
Dead snake can't lap its drink,
dead snake can't lie a-hiding.
No instinct,
can't kill by biting!

Mayombe-bombe-mayombé!
Sensemayá, the snake. . . .
Mayombe-bombe-mayombé!
Sensemayá, it's still. . . .
Mayombe-bombe-mayombé!
Sensemayá, the snake. . . .
Mayombe-bombe-mayombé!
Sensemayá, it's dead. . . .

Ballad of the Water-Demon

For Eusebia Cosme[6]

Evil, away with the evil!
Demon, away with the demon!

The churning waters of the stream
are deep and hide the dead;
shells of dead tortoises
beside a black child's head.
At night the river lifts its arms
to scratch the silent air
with its claws, claws that with

a crocodile's compare.
Beneath the cry of stars above,
beneath a reddish moon afire,
the river growls among the rocks.
Its hidden claws inquire
about the bridge's slender span
to strangle unwary man.

Evil, away with the evil!
Demon, away with the demon!

Dwarfs with enormous bellies
trouble the water's dream,
their legs short and twisted,
their ears like the devil's seem.
Oh, my little black baby,
they will eat you.
They'll drink your blood,
suck dry your veins,
and close your bright eyes too—
Those eyes that shine like pearls!
Fly, for the monster will kill you!
Fly from his watery swirls!
Baby boy, baby darling,
may your neck-charm save you, baby!

Evil, away with the evil!
Demon, away with the demon!

But *Changó* would not have it so.
From the depths a claw stretched out
to seize him. Then the water demon
dashed his tiny skull about,
plucked his pearly bright eyes out,
tore white teeth from bleeding jaws,
knotted limbs and tied his arms
in his fierce iron claws.

Baby boy, baby darling,
with your sunny thick-lipped smile,
now a stone deep in the river
with your veins all fully bled
and your little heart defiled.

Evil, away with the evil!
Demon, away with the demon!
Baby boy, baby darling,
just as I said—the demon!

Song in a Havana Bar

Tourists in a bar, Cantaliso,
his guitar, and a song that rocks.

Don't pay me for singing
what I'm *not* going to sing.
You're going to hear now
all I've shut up about before.
Who sent for you?
Spend your money,
drink your likker,
buy your souvenirs—
but you can't buy me,
not me,
not me!

All these red yankees
are sons of a shrimp,
born from a bottle,
a bottle of rum.
Who told you to come?
You live,
I die.
You eat and drink—
but not I,
not I.

Though I'm just a poor Negro,
I know when things don't go right.
Oh, but I know a mechanic
to make things go right!
Who sent for you?
When you get back to New York
send me some poor folks,

poor like me,
poor like me,
like me.

I can shake hands
with poor folks
and sing *with* them swell—
for the same songs they know,
I know, as well!

Two Kids

Two kids, twigs of the same tree of misery,
together in a doorway on a sultry night,
two beggar kids covered with pimples
eat from the same plate like starving dogs,
food cast up by the high tide of the tablecloths.
Two kids: one black, one white.

Their twin heads are alive with lice,
their bare heads are close together,
their mouths are tireless in the joint frenzy of their jaws,
and over the greasy sour food
two hands: one white, one black!

What a strong and sincere union!
They are linked by their bellies and the frowning night,
by melancholy afternoons on brilliant paseos,
and by explosive mornings
when day awakens with alcoholic eyes.
They are united like two good dogs,
one black, one white.
When the time comes to march,
will they march like two good men,
one black, one white?

Two kids, twigs of the same tree of misery,
are in a doorway on a sultry night.

Sightseers in a Courtyard

Tourists in the courtyard of a Havana tenement. Cantaliso sings a song not made for dancing.

Rather than live in your fine hotels,
stop in the courtyard of this tenement.
Here you'll see plenty of local color
you'll never find in your hotels.
Gentlemen, allow me to present to you
  Juan Cocinero!
He owns one table and he owns one chair,
he owns one chair and he owns one table,
  and one oil stove.
The oil stove won't burn
and hasn't kissed a pot for ages.
But see how jolly and gay,
how well-fed and happy
  Juan Cocinero
  is today!

Juan Cocinero interrupts:
  With what one Yankee
  drinks down
  in steins of beer,
  anybody could live
  a whole year!

The song continues:
Folks, this is Louis, the candy-maker.
And this is Carlos from the Canaries.
And that Negro there is called Pedro Martínez.
And that other, Norberto Soto.
And that dark girl over there, Petra Sarda.
All of them live in the same room—
No doubt because that's not so dear.
What people! What high-class people live here!

All in chorus:
  With what one tourist
  spends on brandy in a day,
  a month's room rent
  anybody could pay.

The song goes on:
That woman coughing over there,
folks, by the name of Juana:
tuberculosis in an advanced stage.
Nobody looked after her
so, like a dunce,
she went all day
without eating a taste.
A funny idea—
with so much food to waste!

All in chorus:
What one Yankee
drinks up with ease
might've cured
Juana's disease.

The song ends:
Oh, but tourists, stay here
and have a good time!
This is your chance,
so, tourists, stay here!
Have a good time!
This is your chance!
I'll sing you songs
nobody can dance!

Sabás

I looked at Sabás, meek and humble,
begging his bread from door to door.
Why've you always got your hand out, Sabás?
(That Sabás is a good Negro.)

Although they give you bread, bread's not much,
and even less this beggar's bread from door to door.
Why've you always got your hand out, Sabás?
(That Sabás is a stupid Negro.)

I looked at Sabás, hairy Negro,
begging piously to his own defeat.

Why've you always got your hand out, Sabás?
(That Sabás is a dumb Negro.)

Take your bread, but don't beg for it.
Take your light.
Take the hope that belongs to you,
like a man grasps the reins of a horse.
Plant yourself in the doorway—
but not with your hand out
or with your stupid wisdom.
Although they give you bread, bread's not much,
and even less this beggar's bread from door to door.

Damn, Sabás, don't tell me you can't!
Tighten up your belt,
and see if you can't find a way
to educate your belly.

Death sometimes is a good friend,
and not to eat
when you must eat beggar's bread
has its beauty.
The sky covers you.
The sun warms you.
The earth is not so hard.
Wait a little.
Strengthen your timid steps
and let up on the reins a bit.

Damn, Sabás, don't be so dumb!
Sabás, don't be so stupid,
or so good!

Songs for Soldiers

Dead Soldier

What bullet killed him?
Nobody knows.
Where was he born?
In Jovellanos, they say.
How come they picked him up?
He was lying dead in the road
and some other soldiers saw him.
What bullet killed him?

His sweetheart comes and kisses him.
His mother comes and cries.
When the captain gets there
all he says is:
Bury him!

Rat-ta-tat-tat!
THERE GOES THE DEAD SOLDIER.
Rat-ta-tat-tat!
THEY PICKED HIM UP IN THE ROAD.
Rat-ta-tat-tat!
A SOLDIER AIN'T NOTHING.
Rat-ta-tat-tat!
THERE'RE PLENTY OF SOLDIERS.

Execution

They are about to shoot
a man with his arms tied.
Four soldiers
are about to fire.
Four silent soldiers

tied
the same as the man
they are going to kill
is tied.

Can't you get away?
I can't run.
They're about to fire.
What can we do?
Maybe the guns aren't loaded. . . .
Loaded with six bullets of hot lead.
Maybe these soldiers won't fire.
You must be crazy!

They do fire.
(How could they fire?)
They do kill.
(How could they kill?)

Four silent soldiers,
an officer giving the signal
by lowering his sword.
Four soldiers
tied
just like the man
they killed
was tied.

I Don't Know Why

Soldier, I don't know why
you should think I hate you,
since we're one and the same,
me,
you.

You're poor and so am I.
I'm at the bottom just like you.
Soldier, where did you get that idea
that I hate you?

I'm sorry that sometimes

you forget who I am.
But, damn! I'm you—
just like you're me.

But that's no reason why
I should hold something against you,
since we're one and the same,
me,
you.
Soldier, I don't know why
you should think I hate you.

Soon we'll see each other me and you,
going down the street together,
shoulder to shoulder me and you,
without hatred me and you,
but knowing me and you
where we are going me and you.

Soldier, I don't know why
you should think I hate you.

Soldiers in Ethiopia

Mussolini
chin in hand.
On the table
Africa
crucified, bloodless
in green, black, white, and blue
geography on a map.

A finger, son of Caesar's,
pierces the continent.
The rivers of paper
say nothing,
nor the deserts of paper,
nor the cities of paper
where a finger, son of Caesar's,
with a bloody fingernail
claws over an Ethiopia

of paper.

Hell of a fine pirate
this Mussolini
with his face so hard
and his hands so long!

Ethiopia buckles,
arches its back,
cries aloud,
rages,
protests.
Il Duce!
Soldiers.
War.
Ships.

Mussolini in his automobile
takes his morning ride.
Mussolini on horseback
takes his afternoon exercise.
Mussolini in an airplane
flies from city to city,
so fast he makes your head swim.
Mussolini bathed, fresh, clean,
Mussolini happy and
intent.

Ah, but his soldiers
stumbling and falling—
his soldiers
who do not make their trips on a map
but instead on the earth of Africa,
under an African sun,
finding no cities of paper—
for their cities are something more
than dots that speak
with the little green voices of topography!
Their cities are
anthills of bullets
and the barking of machine guns
and a cane field of spears.

Thus, the soldiers—
who do not make their trips on a map—
the soldiers
far away from Mussolini,
alone,
his soldiers,
burning up in the desert,
grow ever smaller and smaller.
His soldiers—
slowly baking in the sun.
His soldiers—
mixed with the excrement
of buzzards—
his soldiers.

Soldier, Learn to Shoot

Soldier, learn to shoot:
you wouldn't aim to hurt me,
we've got too far to go together.
Shoot in the air
if you don't want to hurt me!

Soldier, I'm down here
with you, friend,
shoulder to shoulder,
down here with you in the mud.
Don't shoot down,
I'm here!

Soldier, learn to shoot:
you wouldn't aim to hurt me,
we've got too far to go together!

That Kind of a Soldier, Not Me

I don't want to be a soldier,
then they won't need to send me
to jump on kids and Negroes

and folks with nothing to eat.
That kind of a soldier, not me!

Look at that horse charging
with the soldier on his back
with eyes full of hate
and mouth full of gall
and sword ready to kill
an old man or a woman.
That kind of soldier, not me!

Oh, the cold troop trains at dawn
on fierce rails of blood
running full speed
to break a strike
or close in on a sugar mill.
That kind of soldier, not me!

Oh, blindfolded eyes
that can't see because they're blindfolded.
Oh, hands that are tied
that can't reach out because they're tied.
Oh, poor soldier-slaves of some colonel.
That kind of soldier, not me!

If they ever gave me a gun,
I'd give it to my brothers to use,
to my fellow soldiers to use.
But they won't give me a gun
because I know what it's for.
That's why they won't give me a gun,
nor you, nor you, nor you.

What soldiers we would be
on horses without reins.
That kind of soldier, that's me!
A soldier who doesn't care
about a sugar mill that isn't his,
or about bossing folks around
like a tin-horn barracks king,
or about tearing the hide
off some cane field,
meaner and harder

than a slave-driver.
A free soldier, a soldier
no longer at the service of slavers.
That kind of soldier, that's me!

If you don't give me a gun,
I'll find one myself—
since I know what it's for!

Reveille

Reveille at dawn
blazes like a stickpin of red,
pricking the sleeping dead.
Reveille at dawn.

Everybody up in the barracks
heavy with tired men.
The soldiers fall in.
Everybody up in the barracks.

Reveille, how you'll ring out
that day you become a hellion
sounding your call of rebellion.
Reveille, how you'll ring out!

You'll arouse the lowly beds
where beggars await their end.
Friend! you'll cry, *Friend!*
You'll arouse the lowly beds.

You'll roar with the voice of freedom
over rich beds of silk.
Get up! Nothing's left to your ilk!
You'll roar with the voice of freedom.

Proud! Strong! Fear all gone!
Reveille on a trumpet of fire!
Reveille of a man's desire!
Reveille of dawn!

Here We Are!

Arrival

Here we are!

Humid from the forests come our words
and the strong sun
rises in our veins.

Our fists are strong,
they guide the oars.

Deep in our eyes enormous palm trees sleep,
and our cry cuts the air like a drop of new gold.
Our feet, broad and hard,
stroke the dust of the abandoned roads
too narrow for our numbers.
We know where the rivers are born
and we love them bearing our boats
under red-hot skies.
Our song
is like muscle beneath the soul's skin,
our simple song.

We bring smoke in the morning,
and fire lighting the night,
and knives tempered like silver of the moon
sharpened for savage hides.
We bring alligators in the mud,
bows that speed our dreams,
the belt of the tropics,
and a clean courage.

We bring our mark
to the final profile of America.

Partners,[7] here we are!
The city awaits us with its palaces,
frail as the hives of wild bees.
Its streets are dry as rivers

when there is no rain in the mountains,
and the houses look at us
with the frightened eyes of their windows.

The elders of the town
will give us milk and honey
and crown us with green leaves.

Hey, partners,
here we are!
Under the sun
our sweaty skins will reflect
the damp faces of the conquered,
and, while stars burn
on tongues of flame,
through the night
our laughter dawns
above the rivers and the birds.

New Woman

With the circle of the equator
girded about her waist
as though about a little world,
the black woman,
the new woman,
comes forward
in robes
light as a serpent's skin.

Crowned with palms
like a newly arrived goddess,
she brings the unpublished word,
the unknown gesture,
the strong haunches,
voice, teeth of
morning and its leap.

Gush of young blood
beneath fresh skin,
never wearying feet

for the deep music
of the *bongó*!

Words in the Tropics

Tropics,
with your bright light
toasting the high clouds
and the deep sky, girded by the noonday arch,
on the skin of a tree you dry
the lizard's anguish.
You grease the wheels of the winds
to frighten the palm-trees.
You pierce
with a great red arrow
the heart of the jungles
and the flesh of the rivers!

I see you come by an arduous road,
tropics,
with your basket of mangoes,
your begging sugar cane,
and your *caimitos* fruit
dark as a black woman's sex.
I see you with rough hands
boldly sowing seeds
and from them tearing opulent trees:
new-born, yet ready
to break and run through the clamorous woods!

Here, in the midst of the sea,
frisking in the water with my naked Antilles,
my salute to you, O tropics!
A sportive,
vernal salute
soars from my salty lungs
over the heads of these scandalous Islands
who are also your daughters.
(Jamaica says
she is content to be black,
and Cuba knows she is mulatto!)

Ah,
how I long
to breathe the smoke of your fire
and to feel the two bitter wells of your armpits!
Armpits, O tropics,
whose hair is twisted and retwisted by your flame.

Fists you give me
to peel coconuts like a little angry god,
eyes you give me
to light up my tiger's shade,
Ears you give me
to hear distant hoof-beats
on the earth.

I owe to you my dark body,
my agile limbs and my crisp hair,
my love for elemental females,
and this indelible blood of mine.
To you I owe high vaulted days
on whose blue curtains are stuck
round and smiling suns,
To you I owe my moist lips,
the tail of the jaguar and the snake's saliva.
To you I owe the pool where the thirsty beasts drink.
To you, O tropics, I owe
this childish enthusiasm
for racing around the track
of your mighty sash of yellow roses,
laughing on mountains and on clouds,
while the sea-blue sky at my feet
dashes itself to pieces
in unending waves of stars.

Mark

Your belly knows more than your head,
and as much as your thighs.
That
is the strong black charm
of your nakedness.

Mark of the jungle
with your red necklaces,
your bracelets of curved gold,
and that dark crocodile
swimming
in the Zambezi of your eyes.

Little Ode

Gloves ready poised
at the ends of your squirrel-like body,
Oh, the punch of your smile!
Up North it's fierce and cold, boxer,
but Broadway
pulses like the blood in your veins,
and stamps enthusiastically around those rings
where you leap like a modern monkey of elastic
needing neither ropes nor the pillows of the clinch;
Broadway
spreads wide its melon-like mouth
in surprise at your sport-model car,
your hair sleek black rubber,
your shoes of patent leather.

This same Broadway
extends its beast-like lips
in a great wet bridge
to lick greedily
at the blood of our cane fields.
Certainly you don't keep in touch with things
that happen here,
nor with the current events up there,
because training is hard
and muscles are traitorous
and you must be "strong like a bull"—
as you've learned to say—
so that your blows will hurt more.
Your English,
even worse

than your bad Spanish,
is still enough for you
to understand in the ring
those guys who spit at you
their dirty slang
while you
mow them down,
jab by jab.

I really don't think you need much
because, as you're certainly aware,
you've made your place—
which is what interests you,
and us, as well.
The best thing, after all,
is to get a punching bag,
lose weight in the sun,
jumping,
sweating,
swimming,
from rope to shadow boxing,
from the showers to the table,
to come out glowing, fine strong,
like a newly made cane,
hard and aggressive
as a blackjack.

Now that the white world
toasts its body in our sun
and looks for *rumbas* in Havana,
shine in your blackness, kid,
while the crowd applauds.
Envied by the whites,
speak for the blacks indeed!

Federico

The Fourth Anguish: Federico

I knock at the door of a *romance.*
"Is Federico not here?"
A parrot answers:
"No, he has gone."

I knock at the door of crystal.
"Is Federico not here?"
There comes a hand to answer:
"He is at the river."

I knock at the door of a gypsy.
"Is Federico not here?"
No one answers, no one speaks . . .
"Federico! Federico!"

Dark and empty is the house,
black moss on the walls,
rim of a bucketless well
and garden of green lizards.

On the spongy earth
snails that move,
and the red wind of July
sways among the ruins.

Federico! Federico!
Where does the gypsy die?
Where do his eyes grow cold?
Where is he, that he doesn't come?
Federico! Federico!

A Song

He left on Sunday at nine,
he left on Sunday, at night,
he left on Sunday, and never came back!
In his hand was an iris,
in his eyes a fever,
the iris became blood,
the blood became death.

Another Song

Where are you, Federico?
Where are you, that you don't come!
Federico! Federico!
Where are you, that you don't come!
Where are you, that you don't come!

Moment with the Muse of García Lorca

Federico dreamed of spikenard and wax
and olive and carnation and cold moon.
Federico, his Granada, and the springtime lax.

He slept alone in solitude's abode,
stretched out beneath ambiguous lemon trees
as songs passed down the lonely road.

Vast, the night with blazing starlight gleams.
In its transparent train it pulls along
over paths and cart-roads shining beams.

Passing slowly by, a gypsy crowd,
with unprotesting hands tied fast,
called "Federico!" suddenly aloud.

What voice is that of all their bloodless veins!
What softness in their steps, their steps!
And what benumbed ardors cloak their pains!

Darkened by night, and olive-green they took
the harsh, the hard invertebrated road
where senses used to walk barefoot.

Federico arose all bathed in shining light,
Federico, his Granada, and the springtime lax,
and with his moon, carnation, spikenard, wax
over the perfumed mountain followed them that night.

Mulatto Poems

Song of the Cuban Drum

This is the song of the *bongó:*

Here even blueblood
answers if I call.
Some answer, "Right now!"
Others say, "On my way!"
But my hoarse rejoinder,
deep bass voice,
calls both black and white
to dance the same *son*.
Brown of skin or brown of soul
more from blood than sun,
those who are not night outside
get darker deep within.
Here even blueblood
answers if I call.

In this mulatto land
of Spaniard and African,
(*Santa Bárbara* on one side,
on the other *Changó*)
there's always a grandpa missing
or there's a *Don* too much,
and there are titles from Castile
with cousins in Bondó.

Best be silent, friends,
don't overdo the point
we've come a long distance
and we're walking two by two.
Here even blueblood
answers if I call!

There are some who would insult me
but not deep in their hearts,

some who spit on me in public
but kiss me in private.
To them I say,
Buddy,
you'll ask my pardon yet,
you'll eat my pot stew yet,
you'll call me O.K. yet,
you'll drum on my tight skin yet,
you'll dance to my song yet,
we'll be arm in arm yet,
you'll be where I am yet.
You'll come up from below yet,
for top dog here is me!

The Grandfather

This angelic dame with Southern eyes,
who lives by rhythms of her Northern blood,
she never knew that deep within that flood
a black man beats a hoarsened drum and sighs.

Her haughty, carefree facial line, sharp-nosed,
her mouth, so thin and finely etched below,
no crow spoils the geography of snow,
her flesh, which shines and quivers, all unclothed.

O madame! Look inside mysterious veins,
look, there he rows the living stream, sees
float by the lily, lotus, rose of flames.

Behold him there beside the virgin shores,
your black grandfather's dulcet shadow flees.
He put the curl in those blond locks of yours.

Heat

Heat splits the night
and the night falls toasted
on the river.

What a cry,
what a fresh cry in the waters
the cry uttered by the burned
night.

Red heat for the blacks.
Drum!
Heat for the shining torsos.
Drum!
Heat with tongues of fire
on naked spines . . .
Drum!

Water of the stars
soaks the awakened
cocoa trees
Drum!
High light from the stars
Drum!

The polar beacon wavers.
Drum!
Fire on board! Fire on board!
Drum!
Are you sure? . . . Flee! . . . It's a lie!
Drum!
Deaf coasts, deaf skies . . .
Drum!
The islands sailing,
sailing, sailing,
sailing as they burn.

Ballad of the Two Grandfathers

Shadows that I alone can see
shadow two grandfathers following me.

A lance with a point of bone,
drum of skin and a hollow log,
my black grandfather.

White ruff on strong neck,
gray warrior's armor,
my white grandfather.

Bare feet, hard body,
that of my black grandfather.
Eyes of antarctic glass,
those of my white grandfather.

Africa of the humid forests
and the great songless drums.
I'm dying!
says my black grandfather.
Muddy water of alligators,
green mornings of palm trees.
I'm tired!
says my white grandfather.
Oh, sails in the bitter wind,
galleons of burning gold.
I'm dying!
says my black grandfather.
Oh, virgin shores undefiled,
deceived by beads of glass.
I'm tired!
says my white grandfather.
Oh, solid sun of beaten brass,
prisoner in the ring of the tropics!
Oh, round clean moon
above the monkeys' dream.

So many ships, so many ships!
So many Negroes, so many Negroes!
What a vast glow of cane fields!
What a whip has the slave trader.
Blood? Blood . . . Tears? Tears.
Half-opened veins and half-opened eyes
and empty mornings
and sunsets at the sugar mill
and a great voice, a strong voice,
bursting the silence.
So many ships, so many ships!
So many Negroes!

Shadows I alone can see
Shadow two grandfathers following me.
Don Federico shouts at me,
but Taita Facundo says nothing.
At night they both walk
dreaming, dreaming.
In me they meet.

Federico! . . . Facundo!
They embrace. Both sigh.
Both throw back their strong heads.
Both the same size,
beneath the distant stars.
Both the same size
black longing and white longing,
both the same size,
they shout, they dream,
they cry, they sing.
They dream, they cry, they sing.
They cry, they sing.
They sing!

Little Song for the Children of the Antilles

On the sea of the Antilles
floats a boat of paper:
floats and floats the boat boat
without a pilot.

From Havana to Portobelo,
from Jamaica to Trinidad,
floats and floats the boat boat
without a captain.

A black girl in the stern
and in the prow a Spaniard:
floats and floats the boat boat
with those two.

They pass islands, islands, islands,
many islands, always islands;

floats and floats the boat boat
without stopping.

A chocolate cannon
fires at the boat,
and a cannon of sugar sugar
answers.

Ah, my sailor-boat
with your hull of paper!
Ah, my black and white boat
without a pilot!

There goes the black girl black girl
close close to the Spaniard;
floats and floats the boat boat
with those two.

Propositions

Down the Road

I was going down the road
When Death caught my eye.
"Partner!" Death called,
But I didn't reply.
But I didn't reply.
I just looked at Death
And didn't reply.

I was carrying a white lily
When Death caught my eye.
Death asked me for the lily,
But I didn't reply.
But I didn't reply.
I just looked at Death
And didn't reply.

But, Death, say,
Should you again come my way,
I intend to chat with you
As a friend would do;
Pin my lily on your breast
As a friend would do;
Kiss your hand
As a friend would do;
Linger with you smiling
As a friend would do.

Madrigal

Your fingernails drip
from your hands
in a bunch
of ten purple grapes.

Your skin,
flesh of a burned tree trunk
drowned in the depths of your mirror
gives back
smokily
the timid sea-weed
of your being.

Proposition

Tonight
when the moon comes out
I shall change it
into money.

But I'd be sorry
if people knew about it,
for the moon
is an old family treasure.

Airplane

When this epoch passes
and all our human documents
are consumed to the flames of the centuries,
when the key to our present progress
no longer exists,
and with the patience of ignorance,
man must begin all over again—
then traces of this quite dead
civilization may appear.

What will the naturalists of the future say
about the skeleton of an airplane
dug up in some vast prairie
or discovered hanging on a mountain crag,
rusty, fossilized, incomprehensible,
colossal, strange?

Certainly there will be great amazement,
and they will classify among the specimens
of a fauna long extinct,
their startling discovery.

Barren Stone

You will come back to me
when the road has given you all its secrets,
whispered its dusty voice in your ear—
when, like a barren stone,
your true self is worn away,
your mouth is bitter
and the hours,
with folded arms,
have nothing more to say.

I cannot talk to you then—
for you will be more unresponsive than ever.
Your presence will pass through mine
like a rolling stone
tumbling into the depths of myself,
falling into my past,
I shall see you sinking,
I shall hear the hollow sound.
I shall wait for the last echo,
the ultimate vibration
in the depths,
far down—
a barren stone,
worn away.

Two Weeks

She was a little girl who smelled
of nice cologne and castile soap.
I loved her with a simple passion
that some love poems and a look had given hope.

I remember when I told her that I loved her
a blush made red each pallid little cheek.
She put her stubby hands upon a chair back,
looked at her shoes, and did not speak.

That useless little girl could tell me
nothing new, so I began to see
her love as quite too young for lovers' ways.

Facts are, scarcely did we smile or pine.
We spoke five times and looked nine.
It lasted only fourteen days.

Masters of the Dew
By Jacques Roumain

Translated by
Langston Hughes
and Mercer Cook

(1947)

To Julia Jourdain

Introduction

On August 19, 1944, hundreds of grief-stricken Haitians braved a driving rain to follow a funeral procession to the Port-au-Prince cemetery. The sky seemed to be mingling its tears with those of the Haitians. Three moving eulogies, and the ceremony ended. They had buried Jacques Roumain, poet, novelist, ethnologist, and uncontested leader of Haiti's younger intellectuals. When he had died the day before, "adversaries and disciples, friends and enemies," wrote Roussan Camille, "suddenly realized that a terrible event had just produced a limitless void."

Jacques Roumain had crowded an incredible amount of activity into his brief thirty-eight years. Born in Port-au-Prince, he had traveled and studied in Europe, Martinique, Cuba, the United States, and Mexico. Each trip abroad had intensified his opposition to Fascism of all varieties. Each new contact, literary or personal, strengthened his determination to campaign for the oppressed of all countries, including his own. Intermittently he would return home, only to be imprisoned by the Borno and Vincent governments—he was incarcerated no less than five times during these regimes—for his outspoken, uncompromising championship of the Haitian masses.

Roumain belonged to one of the first families of Haiti. His grandfather, Tancrède Auguste, had been president of the Republic. Money and position were part of Roumain's heritage. In addition, he had been blessed with the physique of an athlete and the features of a god. It would have seemed only natural for him to adopt the smug, ostrich-like attitude, still prevalent in a few Haitians of his class, who have chosen to ignore the realities of racism and exploitation. Instead, at the outset of his career, he served notice of his militancy by writing polemics inspired by the intense nationalism which the American occupation of his country provoked.

A logical outgrowth of this nationalism was the *Revue Indigène,* which Roumain founded in 1927, thereby inaugurating the new Haitian literature with its increasing awareness of things Haitian, of the African rather than the French background.

'Tis a long, long road to Guinée
And death will guide you there.

So began one of his poems of this period, as translated by Edna Worthley Underwood. Likewise, in one of his best-known lyrics, "When the Tom-Tom Beats," which L. C. Kaplan translated, he asked:

> Do you not feel the sweet magic of the past?
> It is a river which carries you far away from the banks and
> leads you towards the ancestral forests.

Other poems, mostly of social protest, appeared in various periodicals, anthologies, and in *Bois d'ébène,* a booklet of verse posthumously published by the author's widow. In this collection, there is a forceful refrain characteristic of Roumain's revolt:

> que les nègres
> n'acceptent plus
> n'acceptent plus
> d'être vos niggers
> vos sales nègres.

Roumain's unusual scientific training, obtained at the Musée de l'Homme and elsewhere, found expression in several monographs, many articles, and in the Haitian Bureau of Ethnology, which he created. As early as 1930 he tried his hand at fiction. His first works—*La Proie et l'ombre* and *Fantoches*—dealt with the Haitian scene, but in a manner that reflected the influence of the French Decadents. Dominated by a sense of futility and pessimism, these volumes treated primarily of the so-called elite Haitian. The following year, with the publication of *La Montagne ensorcelée,* he discovered his most effective medium: the peasant novel. Exile, scientific research, imprisonment, the organization of the Haitian Communist Party, and incessant anti-Fascist activity prevented further experiments in fiction until the Lescot government named him chargé d'affaires in Mexico City, a kind of honorary banishment that would at least keep him out of prison and provide leisure for writing.

Masters of the Dew (*Gouverneurs de la rosée*) was written during Roumain's sojourn in the Mexican capital, and published in Haiti shortly after his death. When it became known in Haiti that we were about to translate the novel, offers of assistance came spontaneously from so many admirers of Jacques Roumain that we are unable to name them all. If *Gouverneurs de la rosée* was to appear in a foreign language, they wanted to help make the translation as faithful as possible.

For hours, several of these friends who knew English—Albert Mangonès, Etienne Charlier, Jules Blanchet, Gerald Mathon, Morisseau-Leroy, Anthony Lespès, Lucien Hibbert—would argue over the exact interpretation of this or that expression. The author's widow and the same Albert Mangonès compared the first draft of the translation line for line with the Haitian version, and René Piquion further checked the English with the original. From all of these, who felt that they were thus paying a debt of gratitude and love to the memory of Jacques Roumain, we received welcome suggestions, and to them all we express our deep appreciation. We are also indebted to Mrs. Francine Bradley, who organized the Friends of Jacques Roumain in New York City, and to Mr. James H. Whyte, who found an American publisher for the novel.

A final word about Roumain's influence. In January 1946, eighteen months after the novelist's death, the Haitian people overthrew the dictatorial Lescot regime. Those who took all the risks in this movement toward the Four Freedoms were principally younger folk, schoolboys and girls, marching in the footsteps of their departed leader. As Jean F. Brierre, Roumain's most ardent disciple, predicted shortly before the revolt:

> Who said you were dead?
> One day, at mealtime,
> you will speak simply of battles.
> From you will come the order
> to set fire to our cowardly calm,
> to don rough haircloth,
> to mount the ramparts,
> to conquer more justice for the oppressed.
> If then we fall battered, bruised, wounded,
> Jacques, oh, Jacques!
> How sweet the knowledge
> that we die on your shoulder!

Langston Hughes
Mercer Cook

Masters of the Dew

Chapter One

"We're all going to die," said the old woman. Plunging her hands into the dust, Délira Délivrance said, "We're all going to die. Animals, plants, every living soul! Oh, Jesus! Mary, Mother of God!"

The dust slipped through her fingers, the same dust that the dry wind scattered over the high hedge of cactus eaten by verdigris, over the blighted thorn acacias and the devastated fields of millet. The dust swirled up from the highway as the ancient Délira knelt before her hut, gently shaking her head covered with a gray frizz as though sprinkled with the same dust that ran through her dark fingers like a rosary of pain.

She repeated, "We're all going to die," and she called on the Lord.

But so many poor creatures call continually upon the Lord that it makes a big bothersome noise. When the Lord hears it, he yells, "What the hell's all that?" and stops up his ears. Yes, he does, leaving man to shift for himself. Thus thought Bienaimé, her husband, as he smoked his pipe, his chair propped up against a calabash tree. The smoke (or was it his white beard?) flew away with the wind.

"Yes," he said, "a black man's really bad off."

Délira paid him no mind. A flock of crows swooped down on the charred field, like bits of scattered coal.

Bienaimé called, "Délira! Délira! Ho!" But no answer. "Woman!" he cried. She raised her head. Bienaimé brandished his pipe like a question mark. "The Lord is the creator, isn't he? Answer me! The Lord created heaven and earth, didn't he?"

Unwillingly, she answered, "Yes."

"Well, the earth's bad off, suffering. So the Lord created suffering." Short triumphant puffs and a long whistling jet of saliva.

Délira looked at him angrily. "Don't bother me, man! Don't I have enough trouble on my hands? I know what suffering is. My whole body aches, my whole body's full of suffering. I don't need anybody piling damnation on top of that."

Then, her eyes filled with tears, sadly, softly, "Bienaimé! Oh, honey!"

Bienaimé coughed hoarsely. Maybe he wanted to say something, but misfortune sickens men like bile. It comes up in their mouths, then the words are bitter.

Délira rose with difficulty, as if she were making an effort to pull herself together. All the trials and tribulations of life were etched upon her black face, but her eyes had an inner glow. Bienaimé looked away as she went into the house.

Back of the thorn acacias a hot haze distorted the half-hidden silhouette of far-off mountains. The sky was a gray-hot sheet of corrugated iron.

Behind the house a round hill, whose skimpy bushes hugged the earth, resembled the head of a Negro girl with hair like grains of pepper. Farther away against the sky, another mountain jutted, traversed by shining gullies where erosion had undressed long strata of rock and bled the earth to the bone. They had been wrong to cut down the trees that once grew thick up there. But they had burned the woods to plant Congo beans on the plateau and corn on the hillside.

Bienaimé got up and walked unsteadily toward the field. Dry weeds had invaded the bed of the stream. The watercourse was cracked like old porcelain, slimy with rotten vegetation. Formerly the water had flowed freely there in the sun, its rippling and its light mingling like the soft laughter of cutting knives. Then millet had grown abundantly, hiding the house from the road.

In those days when they all had lived in harmony, united as the fingers of the hand, they had assembled all the neighborhood in collective *coumbites* for the harvest or the clearing.

Ah, what *coumbites!* Bienaimé mused.

At break of day he was there, an earnest leader with his group of men, all hard-working farmers: Dufontaine, Beauséjour, cousin Aristhène, Pierrilis, Dieudonné, brother-in-law Mérilien, Fortuné Jean, wise old Boirond, and the work-song leader, Simidor Antoine, a Negro with a gift for singing, able to stir up with his tongue more scandal than ten gossiping women put together. But without meaning any harm, only for fun.

Into the field of wild grass they went, bare feet in the dew. Pale sky, cool, the chant of wild guinea hens in the distance. Little by little the shadowy trees, still laden with shreds of darkness, regained their color. An oily light bathed them. A kerchief of sulphur-colored clouds bound the summits of the mountains. The countryside emerged from sleep. In Rosanna's yard the tamarind tree suddenly let fly a noisy swirl of crows like a handful of gravel.

Casamajor Beaubrun with his wife, Rosanna, and their two sons would greet them. They would start out with, "Thank you very much, broth-

ers," since a favor is willingly done: today I work your field, tomorrow you work mine. Co-operation is the friendship of the poor.

A moment later Siméon and Dorisca, with some twenty husky Negroes, would join the group. Then they would all leave Rosanna bustling around in the shade of the tamarind tree among her boilers and big tin pots whence the voluble sputtering of boiling water would already be rising. Later Délira and other women neighbors would come to lend her a hand.

Off would go the men with hoes on shoulder. The plot to be cleared was at the turn of the path, protected by intersecting bamboos. Creepers with mauve and white blossoms hung from riotous bushes. In their gilded shells the assorossis sported a red pulp like velvet mucous.

Lowering the fence poles at the entrance to a plot of land where an ox skull for a scarecrow blanched on a pole, they measured their job at a glance—a tangle of wild weeds intertwined with creepers. But the soil was good and they would make it as clean as a table top. This year Beaubrun wanted to try eggplant.

"Line up!" the squadron chiefs would yell.

Then Simidor Antoine would throw the strap of his drum over his shoulder. Bienaimé would take his commanding position in front of his men. Simidor would beat a brief prelude, and the rhythm would crackle under his fingers. In a single movement, they would lift their hoes high in the air. A beam of light would strike each blade. For a second they would be holding a rainbow.

Simidor's voice rose, husky and strong:

Stroke it in!

The hoes fell with a single dull thud, attacking the rough hide of the earth.

That woman said, man!
Behave yourself!
And don't touch me!
Behave yourself!

The men went forward in a straight line. They felt Antoine's song in their arms and, like blood hotter than their own, the rapid beat of his drum.

Suddenly the sun was up. It sparkled like a dewy foam across the field of weeds. Master Sun! Honor and respect, Master Sun! We black men

greet you with a swirl of hoes snatching bright sparks of fire from the sky. There are the breadfruit trees patched with blue, and the flame of the flamboyant tree long smoldering under the ashes of night, but now bursting into a flare of petals on the edge of the thorn acacias. The stubborn crowing of cocks alternated from one farm to another.

The moving line of peasants took up the new refrain in a single mass voice:

Stroke it in!

Who's that, I yell,
Inside that house?

Some man yells back,
Just me and a cute
Little cousin of mine—
And we don't need you!

They raised their long-handled hoes, crowned with sparks, and brought them down again with a terrific precision:

I'm in there now!

Bring it out! Oh!

What one bull can do,
Another can, too!

Bring it out! Oh!

There sprang up a rhythmic circulation between the beating heart of the drum and the movements of the men. The rhythm became a powerful flux penetrating deep into their arteries and nourishing their muscles with a new vigor.

Their chant filled the sun-flooded morning. Up the road of the reeds along the stream, the song mounted to a spring hidden in the hollow of the hill's armpit, in the heavy odor of fern and moist *malanga* soaking in the shaded secret oozing of the water.

Perhaps a young *Négresse* in the neighborhood, Irézile, Thérèse, or Georgina, has just finished filling her calabashes. When she comes out of the stream, cool bracelets ripple from her legs. She places the gourds in a wicker basket that she balances on her head. She walks along the damp path. In the distance the drum sends out a humming hive-full of sounds.

"I'll go there later," she says to herself. "So-and-so will be there." He's her sweetheart. A warmth, a happy languor fills her body as she hurries on with long strides, arms swinging. Her hips roll with a wondrous sweetness. She smiles.

Above the thorn acacias floated tatters of smoke. In the clearings, the charcoal sellers swept away the mounds under which the green wood had burned with a slow fire. With the back of his hand, Estinval wiped his reddened eyes. From the mutilated tree there remained only the charred skeletons of its scattered branches in the ashes: a load of charcoal that his wife would take to sell in the town of Croix des Bouquets. Too bad he himself couldn't answer the call of the work-song! Smoke had dried his throat. His mouth was bitter as if he had been chewing a wad of paper. Indeed, a drink of cinnamon bark, or better, anise was more refreshing, a long big mouthful of alcohol down to the pit of his stomach.

"Rosanna, dear," he said.

Knowing his weakness, she laughingly measured out three fingers of liquor for him—three fingers spread out like a fan. He spat thick and went back to rummaging in his pile of earth and ashes.

About eleven o'clock, the call of the *coumbite* would grow weaker; it was no longer a solid mass of voices backing up the men's effort; the work-chant stumbled, mounted feebly, as though its wings were clipped. At times it picked up again, spasmodically, with diminishing vigor. The drum still stammered a bit, but it was no longer a happy call as at dawn when Simidor beat it out with such skillful authority.

This could be attributed not only to the need for rest—the hoe becoming heavier and heavier to handle, the strain of fatigue on the stiff neck, the heat of the sun—but to the fact that the job was almost done. Moreover, they had scarcely stopped long enough to swallow a mouthful of white rum, or to rest their backs.

The high-class people in the city derisively call these peasants "barefoot Negroes, barefooted vagabonds, big-toed Negroes." (They are too poor to buy shoes.) But never mind and to hell with them! Some day we will take our big flat feet out of the soil and plant them on their behinds.

They had done a tough job, scratched, scraped, and shaved the hairy face of the field. The injurious brambles were scattered on the ground. Beaubrun and his sons would gather them up and set fire to them. What had been useless weeds, prickles, bushes entangled with tropical creepers, would change now to fertilizing ashes in the tilled soil. Beaubrun was overjoyed.

"Thanks, neighbors!" he kept repeating.

"You're welcome, neighbor!" we replied, but hurriedly, for dinner was ready. And what a dinner! Rosanna wasn't a cheap *Négresse*. All those who had made little spiteful remarks about her—because she was an ugly customer if you tried to get fresh with her—straightway repented. And why? Because, at the turn of the road, an aroma rose to meet them, greeted them positively, enveloped them, penetrated them, opened the agreeable hollow of a great appetite in their stomachs.

And Simidor Antoine—who, not later than two evenings ago, on making a vulgar remark to Rosanna, had received remarkably precise details from her concerning his own mother's irregularities—filling his nostrils with the aroma of the meats, sighed with solemn conviction, "Beaubrun, old man, your wife is a blessing!"

In the cauldrons, the casseroles, and the bowls were stacked barbecued pig seasoned hot enough to take your breath away, ground corn with codfish, and rice, too, sun rice with red beans and salt pork, bananas, sweet potatoes, and yams to throw away!

Bienaimé leaned against the fence. On the other side now there was the same discouragement. The dust rose in thick swirling clouds, and fell on the chandelier trees and thin patches of grass clinging to the scurvy earth.

Formerly at this time of year, early in the morning, the sky would be turning gray. The clouds would gather, swollen with rain—not a heavy rain, no, as when the clouds burst like over-filled sacks—but a little drizzle, persistent, with a few intervals of sunshine. It wasn't enough to drench the earth, but cooled it off and prepared it for the hard rains. At Angelus-time,[1] the timid wild guinea fowl would come to drink water from the puddles along the road and, if frightened, would fly heavily away, benumbed and bespattered with rain.

Then the weather would begin to change. Toward noon, a thick heat would envelop the prostrate fields and trees. A thin mist would dance and vibrate. The sky would break out into livid blisters, which later on darkened and moved ponderously above the hills, splashed by flashes of lightning and echoing thunder.

Deep on the horizon, an enormous enraged breath. The peasants, caught in the fields, hurrying along with hoe on shoulder. The trees bent. Violently shaken by the now uninterrupted baying of the storm, a swift curtain of rain had overtaken them. At first a few warm unhurried drops, then, pierced by flashes of lightning, the black heavens had opened in an avalanche, a torrential deluge.

Bienaimé, on his narrow porch with its railing protected by a projecting thatched roof, would look at his land, his good land, his streaming plants, his trees swaying in the chant of the wind and rain. The harvest would be good. He had labored in the sun for days at a time. This rain was his reward. He watched it affectionately as it fell in close-knitted threads, he heard it splash on the stone slab in front of the arbor. So much and so much corn, so many Congo beans, the pig fattened. That might mean a new jacket, a shirt, and perhaps neighbor Jean-Jacques' chestnut colt, if he would lower the price.

He had forgotten Délira. "Warm up the coffee, wife," he would say. Yes, he'd buy her a dress and a madras, too. He filled his short clay pipe. That was what living on good terms with the earth meant.

But all that had passed. Nothing remained now but a bitter taste. They were already dead beneath this dust, in these warm ashes that covered what formerly had been life. Oh, not an easy life, no, indeed! But they had persisted, and after struggling with the earth, after opening it, turning it over and over, moistening it with sweat, sowing it with seed as one does a woman, then came satisfaction: plants, fruit, many ears of corn.

He had just been thinking about Jean-Jacques and here, coming along the road, was Jean-Jacques, as old and worthless now as he, leading a skinny burro and letting its cord drag in the dust.

"Brother," he greeted him. And the other answered the same.

Jean-Jacques asked for news of Sister Délira.

Bienaimé said, "How's Sister Lucia?"

And they thanked one another.

The burro had a large sore on its back and winced under the bite of flies.

"*Adieu, oui,*" said Jean-Jacques.

"*Adieu,* old man." Bienaimé nodded.

He watched his neighbor plod on with his animal toward the watering place, that stagnant pool, that eye of mud covered by a greenish film, where all drank, men and beasts.

He's been gone so long, he must be dead now, she mused. Old Délira was thinking of her son, Manuel, who had left years ago to cut cane in Cuba. He must be dead now, in a foreign land, she thought again. He had said to her one last time, "Mama!" She had kissed him. She had taken in her arms this big fellow who had come from the depths of her flesh

and blood, and had become this man to whom she whispered through her tears, "Go, my little one, may the Holy Virgin protect you!" And he had turned at the elbow of the road and disappeared. "Oh, son of my womb, sorrow of my womb, joy of my life, pain of my life! My boy, my only boy!"

She stopped grinding coffee, but remained squatting on the ground.[2] She had no longer any tears to shed. It seemed to her that her heart had petrified in her breast and that she had been emptied of all life save that incurable torment that gripped her throat.

He was to return after the *zafra,* as the Spaniards call the harvest. But he hadn't come back. She had waited for him, but he hadn't come. Sometimes she would say to Bienaimé, "I wonder where Manuel is?"

Bienaimé wouldn't answer. He'd let his pipe go out. He'd walk away through the fields.

Later, she would again say to him, "Bienaimé, Papa, where's our boy?"

He would answer roughly, "Hush your mouth!" She would pity his trembling hands.

She emptied the drawer of the coffee mill, poured in more beans, and again took the handle. It wasn't hard work, yet she felt exhausted. It was all she could do to sit there motionless, her worn-out body given over to death that would in the end bring her to this dust.

She began to hum. It was like a groan, a moan from the soul, an infinite reproach to all the saints and to those deaf and blind African deities who did not hear her, who had turned away from her sorrow and her tribulations.

"O, Holy Virgin, in the name of the saints of the earth, in the name of the saints of the moon, of the saints of the stars, of the saints of the wind, in the name of the saints of the storm, protect if it be thy will, I pray thee, my son in foreign lands! O, Master of the Crossroads, open to him a road without danger! Amen!"

She hadn't heard Bienaimé return. He sat down near her. On the side of the hill there was a dull redness as the sun sank behind the woods. Soon night would shroud the bitter earth in silence, drowning their misery in the shadow of sleep. Then dawn would rise with the husky crowing of cocks and day would begin again, hopeless as the day before.

Chapter Two

"Stop!" he told the bus driver.

The driver looked at him in amazement, but slowed down. Not a hut in sight; they were right in the middle of nowhere. There was only a stretch of thorn acacia trees, gum trees, and thickets strewn with cactus. A range of gray hills ran toward the east, fading into the sky.

The chauffeur put on the brakes. The stranger got off and pulled down a bag that he threw over his shoulder. He was tall, black, dressed in a high-buttoned coat and trousers of rough blue material caught in leather gaiters. A long, sheathed machete hung at his side. He touched the broad brim of his straw hat and the bus moved on.

Under a clump of juniper trees the man recognized an almost invisible pathway between a mass of rocks spurting stems of amaryllis bedecked in yellow blossoms.[3] He inhaled the odor of the juniper trees, intensified by the heat. His memory of the place was linked to this peppery odor.

His bag was heavy, but he didn't feel its weight. He hiked up the strap that held it on his shoulder and started off through the woods.[4]

"Ho!" he exclaimed as a stray cat leaped across the path, swerved suddenly, and disappeared in a sound of crushed foliage.

No, he had forgotten nothing. Now another familiar odor came up to meet him—the musty smell of stale charcoal smoke when all that is left of the pit is a circular mass of dirt.

A narrow, shallow ravine opened before him. It was dry. Tufts of weeds and all sorts of prickles had invaded its bed. The man raised his head toward a bit of sky soaked in hot steam, took out a red handkerchief, mopped his face, and seemed to reflect. He went down the path, scattering pebbles on the burning sand. Dead roots crumbled in his fingers when he examined the rough grained earth, so dry that it trickled like powder.

"*Carajo!*" he cried.

He walked slowly up the other side, his face worried, but only momentarily. Today he had too much to be happy about. Water sometimes changes its course like a dog changes masters. Who knew where the vagabond was flowing now? He strolled toward a mound crowned with macaw trees. Their crumpled fans hung inert. There wasn't a breath of

air to open them and turn them into a wild play of dazzling light. This was a detour for the stranger, but he wanted to embrace the countryside from above, to see the plain spread out before him and glimpse, through the trees, the thatched roofs and irregular blots of fields and gardens.

His face, drenched with sweat, hardened, for what he saw was a grilled expanse of dirty rusty color spotted by a scattering of moldy huts. He stared at the barren hill overlooking the village, ravaged by wide whitish gullies where erosion had bared its flanks to the rock. He tried to remember the tall oaks once animated with wood pigeons fond of blackberries, the mahogany trees bathed in shadowy light, the Congo beans whose dry husks rustled in the wind, the long rows of sweet potato hills. But all that, the sun had licked up, effaced with a single stroke of its fiery tongue.

He felt as though he had been betrayed. The sun weighed on his shoulders like a burden. He went down the slope into the savanna where emaciated cattle were wandering through thorny bushes searching for a rare blade of grass. Flocks of crows perched on the tall cactus flew away at his approach in a dark whirl of interminable caws.

Just then he met her.

She was wearing a blue dress gathered in at the waist by a foulard. The knotted wings of the white kerchief which held her hair covered the nape of her neck. Carrying a wicker basket on her head, she walked quickly, her robust hips moving in cadence with her long stride. At the sound of his steps she turned around without stopping, her face in profile, and she answered his greeting with a timid and somewhat uneasy, "*Bonjour, m'sieur.*"

He asked, as if he knew her—for he had lost his manners—how she had been.

"By the grace of God, all right," she said. "*Oui.*"

He explained, "I'm from around here—from Fonds Rouge. I left this country a long time ago—fifteen years this Easter. I was in Cuba."

"Is that so?" she said weakly. She wasn't happy over the presence of this stranger.

"When I left, there wasn't any drought. Water ran in the ravine, not much, to tell the truth, but always enough to do, and sometimes even enough for a little overflow, if it rained in the hills." He looked around him. "Seems like it's been cursed now."

She answered not at all.[5] She had slackened her pace to let him go by, but he gave her the path and walked on at her side. Furtively she stole a glance at him. He's too fresh, she thought, but she didn't dare say so.

Walking along without paying attention to where he was going, he stumbled over a big rock in the road and it took him several droll little jumps to regain his balance.

"Watch out," she cried, breaking into laughter.

He saw that she had lovely white teeth, frank eyes, and very fine black skin. She was a tall, well-built girl. He smiled at her.

"Is today market day?" he asked.

"Yes, at Croix des Bouquets."

"That's a big market. In the old days folks used to come from everywhere, everywhere on the way to that village on a Friday."

"You talk about the old days as if you were already old." She was suddenly startled by her own boldness.

Narrowing his eyelids as though he were watching a long road unfold before him, he replied, "It isn't time so much that makes you old, it's what you have to put up with in life. Fifteen years I spent in Cuba, fifteen years, every day cutting sugar cane, *oui,* every day, from sunrise to dusk-dark. At first, the bones in your back get all twisted up like a corkscrew. But there's something makes you stand it. What? Tell me, do you know what it is?"

He clenched his fists as he talked.

"It's being mad—that's what! Being mad makes you grit your teeth and tighten your belt when you're hungry. Being mad's a great power. When we went on strike, each man stood in line, armed to the teeth with being mad—like a gun. To get mad, that's your right, your justice!"

She hardly understood what he was saying, but she was completely absorbed in this somber voice that hit each sentence hard, and sometimes threw in the magnificence of a foreign word.

She sighed, "Jesus-Mary-Holy-Virgin! Life gives poor folks a hard road to go. *Oui,* brother, that's the way it is! There's no relief."

"Yes, there is relief, too! I'm going to tell you what—it's the earth, your own plot of land that you've cleared by the strength of your arms, with your own fruit trees around it and your own stock in the pasture, everything you need right there—with your own freedom bounded by nothing but the weather, good or bad, rain or drought."

"That's right," she said, "but this land doesn't produce anything any more. When you've eked out a few sweet potatoes or a few grains of millet, they bring in next to nothing at the market. Life is a penance these days."

Now they were skirting the first cactus fences. In the empty spaces between the thorn acacias wretched huts crouched. Their worn-out

thatch covered a thin layer of wicker plastered with mud and crackled whitewash. In front of one of these, a woman was crushing grain in a mortar, with the aid of a wooden mallet. She stopped, with suspended gesture, to watch them pass.

"Madam Saintélis, *bonjour, oui,*" the girl cried from the road.

"Oh! *Bonjour,* my pretty Annaise, how're all your folks, my lovely *Négresse*?"

"Everyone's fine, thanks. And you?"

"No worse, no, except my husband, who's down with the fever. But that will pass."

"Yes, that will pass, my dear, with the Good Lord's help."

They walked a moment.

"So," he said, "your name is Annaise."

"Yes, Annaise is my name."

"Mine's Manuel."

They met other peasants with whom they exchanged greetings, and sometimes she would stop to pick up and distribute news, for in Haiti that's a neighborly custom. Finally, she came to a fence. There was a hut back in the yard under the shade of some logwood trees.

"This is where I live."

"I'm not going much farther either. I'm glad I met you. Will we be seeing each other again?"

She turned her head away, smiling.

"Since I live right in front of you, you might say," he continued.

"Really! Where?"

"Down there by the curve in the road. You must know Bienaimé and Délira. I'm their son."

She almost snatched her hand from his, her face convulsed by a kind of painful anger.

"Hey! What's the matter?" he exclaimed in Spanish. But she had already gone through the gate, moving rapidly without once turning around. For a few seconds he stood rooted to the spot.

"A funny girl, old man," he said to himself, shaking his head. "One minute she's smiling at you friendly-like, then before you can bat an eye, she leaves you without even, *'au revoir'!* What goes on in a woman's mind, not even the devil knows."

To put up a front, he lit a cigarette and sucked in the pungent smoke that reminded him of Cuba with the immensity of its cane fields stretching from one horizon to the other, the grinder at the sugar refinery, and the stinking barracks where, with the coming of evening after an

exhausting day, he would lie down helter-skelter among his comrades in misfortune.

As soon as he entered the yard, a little shaggy dog bounded toward him, barking furiously. Manuel pretended to stoop for a stone to throw at him. The dog ran off yelping, his tail between his legs.

"Quiet! Quiet!" old Délira called as she came out of the hut. She shaded her eyes with her hands, the better to see the stranger. He walked toward her and as he approached, a great light began to shine in her soul. She started to rush toward him, but her arms fell to her sides. She staggered and her head rolled back.

He pressed her to him. She buried her face on his chest. With her eyes closed, in a voice weaker than a breath, she murmured, "My baby! Oh, my baby!" Through her faded eyelids tears were flowing. She gave in to all the weariness of endless years of waiting, having no power now for joy, just as she had none for bitterness.

In astonishment, Bienaimé let his pipe fall. He picked it up and wiped it carefully on his jacket.

"Give me your hand, boy," he said. "You've stayed away a long time. Your mother has prayed a lot for you." He looked at his son, his eyes tear-dimmed. Then he added in a vexed tone, "Even so, you might have announced your coming, or sent a neighbor on ahead with the word. The old woman's nearly shocked out of her wits. You don't have much sense, son."

He felt the weight of his bag. "You're more loaded down than a burro!" He tried to relieve Manuel, but gave way beneath its weight and the bag almost fell. Manuel grabbed it by the strap.

"Leave it be, Papa, this bag is heavy."

"Heavy?" Bienaimé protested, ashamed. "At your age I carried heavier ones than that. This young generation's spoiled, no strength! Worthless, I'm telling you, this young generation!"

He fumbled in his pocket for the wherewithal to fill his pipe. "Got any tobacco? In the country you've just left, they say tobacco's as common as bushes on our hills. To hell with those Spaniards, anyhow! They take our children away from us for years, and when they come back they've got no consideration for their old parents. What are you laughing about? Now he's laughing, the shameless rascal!" Indignant, he called Délira to witness.

"But Papa," said Manuel, holding back a smile.

"There's no, 'but Papa,' about it. I asked if you had any tobacco. You could've answered me, couldn't you?"

"You didn't give me a chance, Papa."

"What do you mean—that I talk all the time? Do words fall out of my mouth like water through a strainer? So you want to disrespect your papa?"

Délira tried to calm him, but the old man pretended to be furious, and was enjoying it.

"I don't want to smoke now, you aggravate me too much! On the very day of your arrival, too!"

But when Manuel offered him a cigar, he took it, sniffed it with veneration, then feigned a grimace of displeasure.

"I wonder if it's any good. I like my cigars plenty strong, I do." Looking for an ember, he walked toward the shed-kitchen covered by dry palm leaves.

"Pay him no mind," said Délira, touching her son's face in a gesture of timid adoration. "He's like that. It's his age. But he's got a good heart, *oui*."

Bienaimé returned. Now he had on his fair-weather face. "Thanks, son, this is a real cigar, all right! Say, Délira, why are you hanging on to that boy like a clinging vine?" He took a deep puff, looked at the cigar with admiration, expectorated with a long whistling spurt of saliva. "Yes, damn it! This *is* a real cigar, worthy of its name! Let's drink something to calm us down, son."

Manuel found the hut faithful to his memory: the little porch with its railing, the earthen floor paved with pebbles, the decayed walls through which one could see the wicker laths. Far back into the past he looked, and as he looked a wave of bitterness receded across those cane fields where the endless fatigue of broken bodies measured each day's toil.

He sat down—at home with his folks, back with his own—this rebellious soil, this thirsty ravine, these devastated fields and, on his own hill, that rough mane of vegetation standing out against the sky like a fractious horse.

He touched the old oak buffet. "*Bonjour! Bonjour!* I'm back!" He smiled at his mother as she wiped the glasses. His father sat with his hands on his knees, staring at him, even forgetting to draw on his cigar.

"Life's life," he said finally.

That's true, Manuel thought. "Life is life!" No need to take short cuts or make long detours—for life is a continual coming back. The dead, they say, come back to Guinea, and even death is only another name for life. The fruit that rots in the ground nourishes a new tree.

When under the flogging of the rural police he used to feel his bones crack, a voice would whisper, "You're still alive! Bite your tongue, swal-

low your cries! You're a man! When push comes to shove, you've got what it takes. If you go down, you'll be seed for an unending harvest."

"You damned Haitian! You black hunk of dung!" the police howled in Spanish.[6]

But their blows didn't even hurt any more. Through a haze charged with lightning shocks, Manuel heard deep in his blood the never-ending call of life.

"Manuel?" His mother was serving him something to drink.

"You look as starey-eyed as a man seeing werewolves in broad daylight," said Bienaimé.

Manuel emptied his glass at a gulp. The alcohol, perfumed with cinnamon bark, caressed the pit of his stomach with a burning tongue as if its fire rushed to his veins.

"Thanks, Mama. That's good *clairin*, and very warming."

Bienaimé drank in turn, after pouring a few drops on the ground. "You've forgotten your manners," he scolded. "You've got no respect for the dead. They, too, are thirsty."[7]

Manuel laughed. "Oh! They don't have to be afraid of catching cold! Me, I've been sweating. My throat's dry enough to spit dust."

"You're impudent, all right—and impudence is what stupid Negroes think is being smart." Bienaimé's anger started to rise again, but Manuel got up and put his hand on his shoulder.

"A person would think you weren't glad to see me."

"I? Who said that?" The old man stammered excitedly.

"No, Bienaimé," said Délira to calm him, "nobody said that. No, Papa dear, you have your fun and be happy. Our boy's here. The Good Lord has blessed us, given us consolation. Oh, thanks be to Jesus and the Virgin Mary! Thanks be to my saints! Three times over I thank you!" She was weeping. Her shoulders shook gently.

Bienaimé cleared his throat. "I'm going to tell the neighbors."

Manuel took his mother in his long muscular arms. "No more crying, please, Mama. From today on, I'm here for the rest of my life. All these years I've been like an uprooted tree in the current of a river. I drifted to foreign lands. I looked hardships in the face. But I struggled until I found the way back to my own land. Now it's for keeps."

Délira wiped her eyes. "Last night, I was sitting here where you see me now. The sun had gone down. It was pitch dark already. Out in the woods a bird just kept on calling. I was afraid something was going to happen and I thought: Am I going to die without seeing Manuel any more? You see, I'm old, baby son. I have pains, my body's no good any more and my head isn't any better. Then, too, life is hard. The other

day I was saying to Bienaimé, I was saying to him, 'Bienaimé, how are we going to make it?' The drought's overtaken us, everything's wasting away, animals, plants, every living human. The wind doesn't push the clouds along any more. It's an evil wind that drags its wings on the ground like swallows and stirs up dust-smoke. Look at the swirls of dust on the savanna. From sunup to sunset, not a single bead of rain in the whole sky. Can it be that the Good Lord has forsaken us?"

"The Lord hasn't got a thing to do with it!"

"Don't talk nonsense, son!"

Frightened, old Délira crossed herself.

"I'm not talking nonsense, Mama. There's heavenly business and there's earthly business. They're two different things, not the same. The sky's the pastureland of the angels. They're fortunate—they don't have to worry about eating and drinking. Of course, they have black angels to do the heavy work—like washing out the clouds or cleaning off the sun after a storm—while the white angels just sing like nightingales all day long, or else blow on little trumpets like the pictures we see in church.

"But the earth is a battle day by day without truce, to clear the land, to plant, to weed and water it until the harvest comes. Then one morning you see your ripe fields spread out before you under the dew and you say—whoever you are—*'Me—I'm master of the dew!'* and your heart fills with pride. But the earth's just like a good woman: if you mistreat her, she revolts. I see that you have cleared the hills of trees. The soil is naked, without protection. It's the roots that make friends with the soil, and hold it. It's the mango tree, the oak, the mahogany that give it rainwater when it's thirsty and shade it from the noonday heat. That's how it is—otherwise the rain carries away the soil and the sun bakes it, only the rocks remain. That's the truth. It's not God who betrays us. We betray the soil and receive his punishment: drought and poverty and desolation."

"I'm not going to listen," said Délira, shaking her head. "Your words sound like the truth—but the truth's probably a sin."

The neighbors began to arrive, the peasants Fleurimond Fleury, Dieuveille Riché, Saint-Julien Louis, Laurélien Laurore, Joachim Eliacin, Lhérisson Célhomme, Jean-Jacques, the Simidor Antoine, and the good women, Destine, Clairemise, and Mérilia.

"Cousin," said one, "you stayed away a long time."

"Brother, we're happy to see you."

A third called him, "pal." They each took his hand in their big rough hands, the hands of tillers of the soil.

Destine, greeting him with a curtsy: "I'm not saying this as a reproach, but Délira was pining away, the poor woman!"

And Clairemise kissed him. "We're relatives! Délira's my aunt. The other day I told her one of my dreams. I saw a black man, a very old man. He was standing on the road where it crosses the path of macaw trees, and he said to me, 'Go and find Délira.' The rest I didn't hear. The roosters were crowing and I woke up. Maybe it was Papa Legba."

"Or else it was *me,*" said Simidor. "I'm old and black, but the womenfolk still love me. They know that walking's better with old sticks. They see me even in their dreams."

"Shut up," said Clairemise. "You've got one foot in the grave and you're still running around."

Simidor laughed loud and long. He was broken and tottering like a tree with rotten roots, but he sharpened his tongue the livelong day on the whetstone of other folks' reputations, and he could tell you a pile of stories and gossip, without sparing saliva. He looked at Manuel with a spark of malice in the corner of his eye and revealed his few remaining snaggled teeth. "Excusing the expression, the proverb says, 'Urine that spreads don't foam.' But may the lightning cut me in two if *you* aren't a fine looking Negro!"

"He's always saying stupid things out in company," Destine chided. "Now he's cursing! You certainly had a bad upbringing!"

"Yes," said Bienaimé proudly, "he's a big strapping fellow all right. I recognize my blood there. Old age has stunted me, but in my youth, I was a head taller than he is."

"Délira," Mérilia interrupted, "Délira darling, I'm going to make you some tea to calm your nerves. You've had more than your share of excitement today."

But Délira was looking at Manuel, at his forehead hard and polished like a black stone, at his determined mouth which contrasted with the veiled and rather faraway expression of his eyes. Joy not unmixed with sorrow stirred in her heart.

"Good!" began Laurélien Laurore. He was a stocky peasant, slow in movement and in language. When he spoke, he clenched his fists as if to hold on to the thread of his words. "Good! I'm told that in the country of Cuba they speak a language different from ours, a jargon, you might say. I'm also told that they talk so fast you can open your ears wide without understanding anything at all, since each word is mounted on a four-wheeled carriage going full speed. Can you speak that language?"

"Of course," Manuel replied.

"Me, too!" Simidor exclaimed. He had just swallowed two drinks of white rum in rapid succession. "I've crossed the border several times. Those Dominicans over there are folks like us, except that they have a redder color than us Negroes of Haiti and their women are mulattoes with heavy hair. I knew one of those dames—big and fat. *Antonio,* she called me, yes, that's how she called me. Compared to the women over here, there wasn't a thing lacking. She had some of everything—and good, too! I could swear to that, but Destine would jump on me afterward. Destine, darling, it isn't the tongue that counts. No, it's what else you've got." He stifled a little hilarious cough. "Take my word for it!"

"I'm not your darling! You're a vagabond! A good-for-nothing!" Destine was beside herself, but everyone laughed.

"Antoine! What a man!"

The bottle of white rum went the rounds. Manuel watched the peasants as he drank, seeing in the wrinkles on their faces the deep marks of poverty. There they were around him barefoot, and, through the holes of their patched garments, he saw their dry earthy skin. All of them carried machetes at their sides, from habit no doubt, for what work was left now for their idle arms? A bit of wood to cut to repair fences, a few thorn acacias to chop down for charcoal that their wives would take on burro-back to sell in town. That was how they eked out their famished existence, adding the sale of poultry or, from time to time, a thin heifer exchanged for little or nothing at Pont Beudet.

But now they seemed to have forgotten their fate. Enlivened by alcohol, they were laughing at Antoine's inexhaustible chatter.

"Friends, I'm telling you—do I usually lie?—I say that that little *Négresse,* that Mamzelle Héloise, is getting rounder and rounder. That's what comes from playing games with young fellows. In my day, this problem of girls was more of a chore. We had to maneuver, pretend, speak French, cut all sorts of shenanigans and make all kinds of fuss. In spite of which, you still found yourself caught for good in the end and tied down like a crab with a hut to build and furniture to buy, not to mention dishes.

"Take Sister Mélie, for example. That devil could set a holy-water basin on fire. Smooth black skin, eyes with lashes of silk long as reeds, teeth just made for sunshine! Furthermore, round all over, nice and plump like I like 'em. Just look at her and the taste of hot pepper came to your mouth. When she walked her hips rolled clear down to the bottom of her dress. She'd make you lose your soul—and upset the marrow of your bones!

"One afternoon, I met Sister Mélie coming from the spring near Cangé's cornfield. The sun was going down—dusk-dark. Not a soul on the road. After talking and talking, I took Sister Mélie's hand. She lowered her eyes and said simply, 'Antoine! Oh, but you're fresh, *oui,* Antoine!' In that day and time, we were brighter than you Negroes are today. We had 'instriction.' So I began in my Frenchiest French, *'Mademoiselle,* since I seen you on the rectory porch, I had a passion of love for you. I've already cut poles, stakes, and straw to build a house for you. On our wedding day, the rats will leave their rat holes and Sister Minnaine's baby goats will come and bleat in front of our door. So, to assure our authorization of love, *mademoiselle,* I ask your permission for a little effrontery.'

"But Sister Mélie took her hand away with her eyes sparkling. She answered, 'No, mussieu, when the mangoes bloom and the coffee ripens, when the *coumbite* crosses the river with drums beating, then if you're in earnest, go call on my papa and mama.'

"To eat, you've got to sit at the table—to get Sister Mélie, I was obliged to marry her! She was a good woman who died long ago. Eternal rest be hers! Amen!"

He gulped down an entire goblet of white rum in a single gulp. The peasants guffawed.

"What a rascal!" Destine whispered, curling her lips in scorn. But Laurélien Laurore, with a kind of patient determination on his placid face, kept on questioning Manuel.

"Good! I'm going to ask you something else. Have they got any water?"

"Plenty of it, old fellow. Water runs from one end of their plantations to the other, and it's good cane that's grown there, with a greater output than our Creole cane."

All were listening now.

"You could walk from here to town without seeing anything but sugar cane, sugar cane everywhere, except now and then some little old palmetto, like a forgotten broom."

"So you say they have water," said Laurélien thoughtfully.

Dieuveille Riché asked, "To whom does that land belong, and all that water?"

"To a white American, Mr. Wilson by name. The factory, too, everything all around is his."

"And the peasants, are there peasants like us?"

"You mean with a plot of land, poultry, and a few head of cattle? No, they're only workers who cut the cane for so much and so much. They've

got nothing but the strength of their arms, not a handful of soil, not a drop of water—except their own sweat. They all work for Mr. Wilson, and this Mr. Wilson sits in the garden of his fine house all the time under a parasol, or else he's playing with other whites knocking a white ball back and forth with a kind of washerwoman's paddle."

"Eh!" Simidor said bitterly this time, "if work was a good thing, the rich would have grabbed it all up long ago!"

"That's right, Simidor!" Saint-Julien Louis approved.

"I left thousands and thousands of Haitians over there in Antilla. They live and die like dogs. *Matar a un haitano o a un perro:* to kill a Haitian or a dog is one and the same thing, say the rural police. They're just like wild beasts."

"That's a damn shame!" Lhérisson Célhomme exclaimed.

Manuel remained silent a moment. He remembered one night when he was on his way to a secret meeting. They were getting ready for a strike.

"Halt!" a voice cried.

Manuel leaped to one side, backing into the shadows. In spite of the rustling of the wind in the sugar cane, he heard, not far from him, someone breathing excitedly. Invisible, tense, he waited, his hands ready.

"Halt! Halt!" the voice repeated nervously.

A weak flash cut the darkness. But with one jump, Manuel seized the revolver and broke the policeman's wrist. They rolled on the ground. The man tried to call for help. With a blow from the butt end of the revolver, Manuel bashed in his teeth, striking ever harder until he sank the weapon deep into his flesh.

He sighed with satisfaction at the memory.

"Yes," Simidor said, "that's how it is. And it's wrong! The poor work in the sun, the rich play in the shade. Some plant, others reap. Certainly we ordinary folks are like a pot. It's the pot that cooks the food, that suffers the pain of sitting on the fire. But when the food is ready, the pot is told, 'You can't come to the table, you'd dirty up the cloth.' "

"That's exactly it!" cried Dieuveille Riché.

Sadness came over the peasants. The second bottle of *clairin* was empty. They were brought back to their own plight and to the thoughts that tormented them—drought, ravaged fields, hunger.

Laurélien Laurore held out his hand to Manuel. "I'm going to leave, brother. Take a rest after your long journey. I'd like to chat with you some other time about that country of Cuba. So I say, *adieu, oui.*"

"*Adieu,* friend."

One after the other, they shook hands with him, and left the house repeating, "Délira, cousin, *adieu, oui*. Bienaimé, brother, *adieu, oui*."

"*Adieu,* neighbors," the old folks responded, "and thanks for your kindness."

From his doorstep, Manuel watched them disappear along various paths through the woods toward their huts.

"You must be hungry," his mother said. "I'm going to fix you something to eat. There isn't much, you know."

Under the shed of palm leaves she squatted before three blackened rocks,[8] lighted the fire and patiently nursed the newborn flame, fanning it with the palm of her hand.

She thought ecstatically, There's a light on his forehead!

The sun sank in the sky. It wouldn't be long before the Angelus sounded; still a mist of heat thickened by dust clung to the rim of the thorn acacias.

Chapter Three

It must be almost day, Manuel mused. Under the door crept the dull light of dawn, with its slight freshness. He heard aggressive roosters crowing in the yard, the beating of wings and the busy scratching of the chickens. He opened the door. The sky was turning pale in the east, but the woods still reposed in a mass of shadow.

The little dog greeted him ill-humoredly, bared his fangs peevishly, and wouldn't stop growling.

"There's a hateful dog for you, a dog that don't like anybody," old Délira exclaimed. She was already busy heating the coffee. "You're up early, son. Did you have a good sleep?"

"*Bonjour,* Mama. Papa, I bid you *bonjour, oui.*"

"How goes it, son?" Bienaimé replied. He dipped a bit of cassava in his coffee. Délira offered Manuel a small mug of fresh water. He washed his mouth and his eyes.

"I didn't sleep," Bienaimé complained, "no, I didn't sleep well. I woke up in the middle of the night, and kept turning over and over till morning."

"Maybe it was happiness itching you," Délira observed with a smile.

"What happiness?" the old man retorted. "It was more than likely fleas."

While Manuel was drinking his coffee, a red glow ascended, spreading above the mountains. The savanna and its kinky bushes grew spacious in the light and stretched to the frontier where dawn disengaged itself from the dark embrace of night. In the woods, the wild guinea fowl uttered their vehement call.

Anyhow, it's good soil, Manuel was thinking. The mountains are ruined, that's true, but the plain can still produce its full measure of corn, millet, and all kinds of crops. What it needs is irrigation.

As in a dream, he saw the water running through the canals like a network of veins transporting life to the depths of the soil—banana trees swaying under the silky caress of the wind, ears beaded with corn, plots of sweet potatoes strewn over the fields, all this burnt earth changed into verdant colors. He turned to his father. "And Fanchon Spring?"

"What about Fanchon Spring?" Bienaimé was filling his pipe with what was left of yesterday's cigar stump.

"What about its water?"

"Dry as the palm of my hand."

"And Lauriers Spring?"

"You're a persistent Negro! Not a drop there either. All that's left is Zombi Pool, but that's a pond of mosquitoes, water as rotten as a dead adder, thick stagnant water too weak to flow."

Manuel remained silent; a stubborn pucker contracted his lips. Bienaimé dragged his chair toward the calabash tree, and sat down, leaning back against the trunk. He faced the road, where the peasant women were passing, leading their panting beasts of burden.

"Get up, burro, get along!" Their shrill voices rose in the morning stillness.

"Mama, how are you going to keep alive?"

"By the grace of God," Délira murmured. She added sadly, "But there isn't any mercy for the poor."

"Resignation won't get us anywhere." Manuel shook his head impatiently. "Resignation is treacherous. It's just the same as discouragement. It breaks your arms. You keep on expecting miracles and providence, with your rosary in your hand, without doing a thing. You pray for rain, you pray for a harvest, you recite the prayers of the saints and the *loas*. But providence—take my word for it—is a man's determination not to accept misfortune, to overcome the earth's bad will every day, to bend the whims of the water to your needs. Then the earth will call you, 'Dear Master.' The water will call you, 'Dear Master.' And there's no providence but hard work, no miracles but the fruit of your hands."

Délira looked at him with an anxious tenderness. "You have a clever tongue, and you've traveled to foreign lands. You've learned things that pass my understanding. I'm just a poor old stupid black woman. Still, you don't give the Good Lord his due. He is the Lord of all things! In his hands he holds the changing of the seasons, the thread of the rain, and the life of his creatures. He gives radiance to the sun and lights the candles of the stars. He blows on the day and changes it to night. He controls the spirits of the springs, the sea, and of the trees. 'Papa Loko,' he says, 'Master Agoué,' he says, 'do you hear me?' Loko-atisou answers, 'Thy will be done.' And Agoueta-woyo answers, 'Amen.' Have you forgotten these things?"

"I haven't heard them for a long time, Mama."

Manuel was smiling. Délira, somewhat abashed, sighed, "Ah! my son, it's the truth, *oui*."

Now it was broad daylight. The sun set fire to the summits of the hills. The erosion stood out in the raw light. The fields appeared in all their nakedness. On the savanna the oxen, exasperated by the ticks, bellowed deeply. The smoke from the charcoal burners' fires floated above the thorn acacias. Manuel went to get his machete.

"I'm going to walk around a bit, Mama."

"Where?"

"Over that way." He made a vague gesture toward the mountains.

"I'll be waiting for you. Don't dally on the road too long, son."

Seeing him walk off toward the woods, Bienaimé grumbled, "He's no sooner got here than he begins to wander off."

Manuel traversed the still-darkened woods whose branches touched the cactus-hemmed path. He remembered that after the detours and crossings, the road would open on a narrow valley where Bienaimé formerly had cleared a path of cotton land. Then, through a notch in the mountain, it would lead to the spring.

He startled a flock of guinea hens that flew noisily away across a thicket of logwood. "I would try to trap one, but guineas are smarter than doves or ortolans." He was full of happiness despite the stubborn thoughts that haunted him. He wanted to sing a greeting to the trees: "Growing things, my growing things! To you I say, 'Honor!' You must answer 'Respect,' so that I may enter. You're my house, you're my country. Growing things, I say, vines of my woods, I am planted in this soil. I am rooted in this earth. To all that grows, I say, 'Honor.' Answer 'Respect,' so that I may enter."

He proceeded at that long, almost nonchalant but graceful gait of a Negro of the plain, sometimes cutting a path with a swift stroke of his machete. He was still humming when he reached a clearing. A peasant was building up a charcoal pit. He was black, thick-set and as short as if he had been hammered down by a rammer. His enormous hands dangled at the ends of his arms like bundles of roots. His hair grew low on his stubborn brow, thin and kinky.

Manuel greeted him, but the man merely looked at him without answering. Under protruding eyebrows, his glance shifted like that of a distrustful animal in a bushy hole. Finally he said, "Are you the Negro who returned from Cuba yesterday?"

"I am."

"You're Bienaimé's son?"

"I am."

His glance narrowed to become no more than a burning cinder. The peasant looked Manuel up and down, then with calculated slowness he turned his head, spat, and returned to his charcoal pit.

Manuel struggled between surprise and anger. One second more of this red veil over his eyes, and he would have repaid the stranger's insolence with the flat of his machete across his cranium, but he controlled himself.

He continued his walk, ruminating over his indignation and his uneasiness. "That son of a bitch!" he muttered in Spanish. "But what's behind it?" He remembered the sudden change in Annaise's attitude. "There's something strange in all that!"

The valley lay at the foot of the mountain. The waters, dashing down from the heights, had hollowed it out and the soil, washed away, had drifted down the slope to be lost in the distance. Bones of rocks pierced its thin layer of skin, and now spider plants covered with prickles had overrun it.

Manuel went up the mountainside under the glare of the sun. Once he glanced toward the sickly-colored plain, the grayish foliage of the thorn acacias, the ravine unfolding its long pebbled gully to the sun. He turned down a path which descended obliquely toward the ravine where formerly had gushed Fanchon Spring.

Slabs of stone polished by water sounded under his feet. He had known them covered by humid moss. He recalled the pure water, its long ripple without beginning or end, and the breath of the wind like wet clothes torn by the gusts of air. The spring came from far away, Manuel thought. It came from the very kidneys of the mountain, winding secretly, patiently filtering through the dark to appear at last in the mountain gap, free of mud, fresh, clear, and innocent as a blind man's glance.

Now only a seam of gravel and couch grass remained, and, farther on, where the flat of the valley began, blocks of rock, having rolled down the mountain, were resting like peaceful cattle around a big thorny *sablier* tree.

He had wanted to see for himself. Well, he knew now. The same was probably true of Lauriers Spring—a hole of caked mud and that was all. So he would have to resign himself to slow death, to sink irremediably in the quicksands of poverty, and say to the soil, "*Adieu,* I give up!"

No! Behind the mountains there were other mountains, and may the lightning strike him dead if he didn't dig through the veins in their

ravines with his own fingernails until he found water, until he felt its wet tongue on his hand!

"Old man, you haven't seen a red mare around here, have you?" It was Laurélien's voice. "The rascal has broken her rope." Awkwardly, he descended the slope toward Manuel. "So you're getting to know the country once again, brother?"

"Hearing and seeing are two different things," Manuel replied. "That's why I came here early this morning. I was saying in my mind, I was saying to myself, 'Maybe a little hidden streamlet remains.' Sometimes it happens that water gets lost in a strainer of sand, then it drips and drips until it hits hard rock and eats its way out through the earth."

With his machete he detached a brittle clod, broke it on a stone. It was full of dead twigs and the residue of dried roots that he crushed in his fingers.

"Look, there isn't anything left. The water has dried up in the very entrails of the mountain. It's not worthwhile looking any farther. It's useless." Then, with sudden anger, "But why, damn it! did you cut the woods down, the oaks, the mahogany trees, and everything else that grew up there? Stupid people with no sense!"

Laurélien struggled for a moment to find words. "What else could we do, brother? We cleared it to get new wood. We cut it down for framework and beams for our huts. We repaired the fences around our fields. We didn't know, ourselves. Ignorance and need go together, don't they?"

The sun scratched the scorched back of the mountain with its shining fingernails. Along the dry ravine the earth panted. The countryside, baked in drought, began to sizzle.

"It's getting late," Laurélien said. "My mare's running loose around here. She's in heat, and I'm afraid the dirty hussy will get herself covered by that bandy-legged chestnut colt of Brother Dorismond's."

Together they went up the slope. "Are you coming to the cockfight tomorrow, if-it-be-God's-will?"

"If I feel like it," said Manuel.

He had only one thing on his mind, and it made him irritable. Laurélien felt it vaguely and kept silent. Having reached the spot where the path forked up and down, Manuel stopped.

"Laurélien," he said, "I'm going to talk frankly to you. Listen to me, please. Listen carefully. This water problem is life or death for us. I spent part of the night wide awake. I was sleepless and restless because I kept thinking. Manuel, I reasoned, what's the way out of this misery? The

more I thought it over, the more I realized there was only one road and a straight one at that—we've got to look for water. Every man has his own convictions, heh? Well, I swear I'll find water and I'll bring it to the plain with the rope of a canal around its neck. I'm telling you, I, Manuel Jean-Joseph!"

Laurélien stared at him in wide-eyed amazement. "And how're you going to do it?"

"Wait and you'll see. But, now, just believe me and let it be a secret between us."

"May the Holy Virgin blind my eyes if I say a word!"

"Good! Then if I need your help, I can count on you?"

"Be sure of it!" Laurélien solemnly swore. They shook hands.

"Agreed?" Manuel asked.

"Agreed!"

"In truth?"

"In truth, three times."

While Manuel was going down the mountainside, Laurélien called him again. "Brother Manuel, ho!"

"What is it, *oui,* Brother Laurélien?"

"You can bet on my rooster tomorrow. There's none any braver."

Manuel skirted the thicket. The old clearing had eaten away its edges, but now a stubborn growth of arborescent cactus bristling with needles, their broad, hairy leaves thick and shiny like the skin of crocodiles, was reclaiming its rights.

When he got home, the sky, turned iron-gray, was pressing down like a hot kettle top on the clearing in the trees. Their hut, leaning against the arbor, seemed as though abandoned for a long time. Bienaimé was nodding under the calabash tree. Life had been thrown off stride, congealed in its course. Squalls of dust swept the fields. Beyond the savanna, the horizon cut off the sight of hope.

Mending a dress that had been worn out a thousand times, worried old Délira went over the same everyday thoughts: food was getting low; they were already reduced to a few handfuls of millet and Congo beans; oh! Virgin Mary! it wasn't her fault, she had done her duty and taken precautions in keeping with the wisdom of her ancestral gods. Before sowing the corn at dawn in the vigilant red eye of the sun, she had said to the Lord Jesus Christ, turning to the east, and to the angels of Guinea, turning to the south, to the spirits of the dead, turning to the west, to the saints, turning to the north, she had said to them, as she scattered the grain in the four sacred directions:[9]

"Jesus Christ, angels, spirits of the dead, saints, here's the corn that I give you. Give me in return the strength to work and the pleasure of reaping. Protect me from disease, and all my family, too—Bienaimé, my husband, and my boy in foreign lands. Protect this field against drought and voracious beasts. It's a favor that I ask you, if you please, through the Virgin of Miracles. Amen! And thank you!"

She raised her tired eyes to Manuel. "So you're back, my son."

"I've something to ask you, Mama. But first I'm going to wash."

He took some water from the jar and filled a wooden basin. Stripped to the waist behind the hut, his skin, vigorously rubbed, took on a lustrous shine and his muscles stretched as flexibly as vines filled with sap. He returned refreshed and drew up a bench under the arbor. His mother sat near him. He related his strange adventure in the woods.

"Tell me what this Negro looks like," asked Bienaimé, who had awakened.

"He's a black man, strong and hard, with hair like grains of pepper."

"And very deep-set eyes?"

"Yes."

"That's Gervilen," Bienaimé declared. "That wretch, that dog, that vagabond!"

"And yesterday I was strolling along with a girl. We were talking in a friend-like way. But when I told her who I was, she turned her back on me."

"What was she like?" the old man inquired.

"Nice build, with large eyes, white teeth, fine skin. She told me her name—Annaise, they call her."

"That's Rosanna's daughter and Beaubrun's who's dead. Long and tall as a tree pole, and good for catching suckers! She's got eyes like a milch cow. As for her skin, I wouldn't give a damn about it! And as far as her teeth are concerned, me, I've never laughed with her enough to notice them!" Bienaimé was boiling angry and the words got all mixed up in the tufts of his beard.

"Why are we enemies?" Manuel asked.

Without answering, Bienaimé went back to his chair. Under the arbor there was a streak of shade that came from the foliage of an overhanging palm tree.

"It's an old story," the old man began. "But it hasn't been forgotten. You were in Cuba at the time." He munched on his pipestem. "Blood was shed."

"Tell me about it, Papa. I'm listening," Manuel said politely.

"Well, son, when the late Johannes Longeannis died—we called him General Longeannis because he had fought with the Cacos[10]—we had to divide up the land. He was really a rich peasant, if you remember, that General Longeannis, a well-mannered Negro, a patriarch. They don't come like that any more. Through him, we were all related, more or less. He had so many children you can't count them. My own great-aunt bore him Dorisca, Gervilen's father—may the curse of hell fall on his scaly head! Dividing up property gives you plenty of arguments, it's true, but it's all in the family, isn't it? And folks finally get it straightened out. One says, 'Do you understand, Brother So-and-So?' And Brother So-and-So replies, 'I understand.' And each takes his piece of land. The soil isn't a piece of cloth. There's room for everybody.

"But Dorisca was as deaf as a stubborn mule, and one fine day he comes along with his family and a bunch of supporters and takes possession. The rest of us—well, you'll see what happened. At that time they were in the very middle of the *coumbite,* Dorisca and his gang, and they hadn't been going slow on white rum. My brother, poor dead Sauveur Jean-Joseph—may God have pity on his soul!—not being a coward, approached first.

" 'Brother Dorisca,' he said, 'you aren't within your rights.' And Dorisca answers him, 'Get off my land, or I'll hack you in pieces that even the dogs will vomit up!' 'So you insult me!' says Sauveur. 'Excrement!' Dorisca answers, 'and your mama this and your mama that!' 'You shouldn't have said that,' Sauveur remarks, and he draws his machete more quickly than the other and stretches him out stone dead.

"Then the fight began. There were plenty of wounded. I, myself—" Bienaimé raised his jacket and ran his finger along a scar under the white hair of his chest. "Sauveur died in prison. He was my kid brother and a good man." Bienaimé wiped a tear away with his clenched fist.

"I'm listening," Manuel said.

"We finally got the land divided up, with the help of the justice of the peace. But we also divided up all that hate between us. Before, we were just one big family. That's finished now. Each one nurses his own grudge and whets his own anger. There's our side—and the others. Between the two, blood! You can wade in blood!"

"That Gervilen is a man full of evil," Délira murmured. "And when he drinks, the *clairin* drives him out of his head."

"He's a Negro with no conscience," Bienaimé amended.

Head down, Manuel listened. Thus a new enemy had come into being in the village and had divided it as surely as a boundary line. It was hate with its bitter brooding over the bloody past, its fratricidal quarrels.

"What's that you're saying?" Bienaimé asked.

Manuel stood up. He could see the thatched roofs through the trees, and in each hut the black poison of vengeance brewed. "I say it's a pity."

"I don't understand you, son."

But Manuel had started slowly toward the fields. He was walking in the sunlight. He was trampling on the withered plants, and his back was bent a little as though he were carrying a heavy load.

Chapter Four

A few days later, Manuel was repairing the arbor. He was replacing a worm-eaten crossbar with a young logwood trunk. He had lopped off its branches, stripped its bark, and set it out to dry. But the wood still sweated a bit of reddish moisture.

"It's a good thing you're fixing the arbor," his mother said.

"It was all decayed," Manuel replied absent-mindedly.

His mother waited a while. "Because I've notified Dorméus."

"Dorméus?"

"The *houngan,* son." Manuel tested the crossbar. "Did you hear me, little one?"

"I heard you, *oui*." He was driving nails in the tender flesh of the logwood.

"It'll be day after tomorrow, if-God-wills," said Délira.

"If-God-wills," Manuel repeated.

"Bienaimé's gone to get fresh leaves to cover the arbor. It's a solemn duty that we have to carry out."

Manuel stepped down from the bench. He had finished.

"It's he, Papa Legba, who showed you the way home. Clairemise saw him in her dream, Atibon-Legba, Master of the Crossroads. We must thank him.[11] I've already invited the family and the neighbors. Tomorrow you'll go to town to buy five gallons of white rum and two bottles of brown rum."

"I'll go," Manuel agreed.

Two evenings later, the peasants were waiting under the freshly decorated arbor. Candles stuck on the posts were burning with an acrid odor and, as the breeze flapped its wings, they would lick the darkness with smoky tongues.

The sound of voices on the road announced Dorméus' arrival. Bienaimé was already awaiting him at the gate. The *houngan* advanced; he was a tall, reddish Negro, grave in each of his movements. Many of his women helpers, his *hounsi,* in headcloths and robes of immaculate white, followed him, and they were holding lighted pine knots high in their hands. They preceded La Place, in charge of the ceremonial, the standard-bearers, the drum-and-cymbal-players.

Bowing, Bienaimé offered Dorméus a pitcher of water. The *houngan* accepted it gravely, and, with both hands, slowly lifted it toward the four cardinal points. His lips were muttering secret words. Then he sprinkled the soil, traced a magic circle, drew himself up to his full height, and began to sing, accompanied by all his aides:

Papa Legba, open the gate for us! Ago, ye!
Atibon Legba! Oh! open the gate for us,
So that we may pass!
We'll thank the great gods, loa yo!
Papa Legba, master of the three crossroads!
Master of the three canals!
Open the gate for us!
Let us in!
When we get in,
We'll thank the loa yo!

"Come in, Papa, come in," said Bienaimé, humbly giving way before the *houngan*.

Dorméus took the lead, followed by his helpers. The torches cast a furtive light on the *hounsi*'s white robes and struck a few sparks of gilded spangles from the banners. The others advanced in a mass darker than the night.

And Legba, that old god of Guinea, was there. Under the arbor, he had just taken on the form of Fleurimond, but had changed him into his own venerable image in keeping with his ageless age. His shoulders bent and his body panting with fatigue, he leaned on the improvised crutch of a twisted branch.

The peasants opened a "path of respect" for the *houngan*. Over the possessed, the standard-bearers waved a canopy of unfurled banners. Dorméus drew the magic circle at his feet, and planted a lighted candle in the middle.

"Your children salute you," he said to Legba. "They offer you this service in gratitude and thanksgiving." He pointed to a straw sack that hung from the center post. "Here's your bag with the food you'll need for your return trip. Nothing is missing. There's an ear of roasted corn soaked in syrup and olive oil, salt fish, cakes, and liquor for your thirst."

"Thank you," said the *loa* in a scarcely audible voice, "thank you for the food and drink. I see that your affairs are going badly with this drought. But that will change, that will pass. The good and the bad make a cross. I, Legba, I'm the master of this crossroad. I'll help my

Creole children find the right road. They will leave behind this road of misery."

A chorus of entreaties encircled him. "Do that for us, Papa, we beg you! Ah! dear papa, if you please! This penance is too much to bear! Without you we're helpless! Forgive us, forgive us! Have mercy!"

The possessed acquiesced with a senile nod. His hand trembled on his crutch, and he again uttered a few breathless, unintelligible words. Dorméus gave a signal. The drums beat a jerky introduction, then grew into a deep rhythmic volume that burst upon the night. A unanimous chant arose, based on ancient rhythms, and the peasants began to dance their supplication, knees bent, arms out-stretched:

Legba, show us how!
Alegba-sé, it's you and me!

Dancing this same *Yanvalou,* their fathers had implored the fetishes of Whydah. Now in these days of distress, they remembered it with a fidelity that brought back from the night of time the dark powers of the old Dahomey gods:

It's you and me, Kataroulo,
Mighty Legba, it's you and me!

The *hounsi,* circling around the central pole, mingled the foam of their white robes with the rolling hips of the peasants dressed in blue. Délira, too, was dancing, with a meditative expression on her face. And Manuel, conquered by the magic beat of the drums in the depths of his being, was dancing with the rest.

Cry glory, Atibon Legba!
Glory, Kataroulo!
Mighty Legba!

Dorméus shook his *asson,* the ritual rattle made of a hollow gourd, adorned by a trellis of adder's vertebra intertwined with glass pearls. The drums quieted down. In the center of the magic circle, on a white napkin, La Place had set a rooster the color of flame, so as to concentrate in one living entity, in a burning bush of feathers and blood, all natural forces. Dorméus seized the rooster and waved it like a fan above those offering the sacrifice.

Mérilia and Clairemise staggered, trembling, their faces distorted. They were dancing now, and their shoulders struggled in the passionate grip of the *loa* who possessed them in flesh and spirit.

"*Santa Maria Gratia!*"

The peasants began to sing the chant of thanksgiving, for this was the visible sign that Legba accepted their sacrifice. With a violent twist, Dorméus snatched off the cock's head and presented its body to the four cardinal points of the compass.

"*Abobo!*" the *hounsi* screamed.

The *houngan* repeated the same gesture of orientation and let three drops of blood fall to the ground.

"Blood! . . . Blood! . . . Blood!" the peasants chanted.

Délira knelt at Bienaimé's side all the while, her palms together before her face. She looked for Manuel, but he was inside the hut drinking a glass of *clairin* with Laurélien and Lhérisson Célhomme.

"Ah! We must serve the old gods of Guinea, *oui,*" Laurélien was saying.

"Our life is in their hands," Lhérisson replied.

Manuel emptied his glass. The harsh hammering of the drums sustained the exaltation of the chant. "Let's go see what's happening," he suggested.

Blood was dripping from the cock, widening a crimson circle on the ground. The *houngan,* the *hounsi,* Délira, and Bienaimé dipped a finger in it and made the sign of the cross on their foreheads.

"I've been looking all over for you," said the old woman in a tone of reproach.

He hardly heard her. Like a frenzied tornado, the *hounsi* were dancing and singing around the fowl of the sacrifice. As they passed, they tore out its feathers by the handful until they had plucked it clean.

Antoine received the victim from the *houngan*'s hands. Antoine was no longer the hilarious Simidor, bristling with gossip like a cactus with prickles. Ceremonious and conscious of his importance, he now represented Legba-of-the-Old-Bones, entrusted with cooking, without garlic or lard, what was no longer an ordinary cock, but the *Koklo* of the gods, endowed with this ritual name and the sanctity that his sacred death conferred upon him.

"Be careful, brother," he said to a peasant who bumped into him.

He immediately became silent, terrified. For it wasn't Duperval Jean-Louis, this man who was wildly jumping up and down with face convulsed. It was Ogoun, the fearful *loa,* god of the blacksmiths and god of killers. And he was screaming in a thunderous voice:

"It's me, it's me, it's me! Negro Olicha Baguita Wanguita!"

Dorméus came over to him brandishing his rattle. Trembling all over, the possessed man brayed, "It's me, it's me, it's me! Negro Batala! Negro Ashadé Bôkô!"

In the *houngan*'s hands the rattle sounded with dry authority. "Papa Ogoun," said Dorméus, "don't be difficult. I beg your pardon, but this service isn't for you. Days come, days go—next time it will be your turn. Let us continue this ceremony."

The possessed man was frothing, reeling violently right and left, driving back the circle of peasants surrounding him.

"Don't insist," Dorméus continued, but with less assurance since there was nothing he could do about it. Ogoun became stubborn, he wouldn't go, he demanded his share of the honor. La Place presented him his saber which he kissed, and the *hounsi* tied a red madras about his head, attached others about his arms, and Dorméus marked out a magic circle on the ground to permit the god to make his entrance. They brought him a chair and he sat down, a bottle of rum and he drank in long swallows, a cigar and he began to smoke.

"So," he said, "this fellow Manuel has returned! Where is Manuel?"

"Here I am, *oui,*" said Manuel.

"Answer me, *'Oui,* Papa.' "

"*Oui,* Papa."

"One would say that you're impertinent, isn't that so?"

"No."

"Answer me, 'No, Papa!' "

"No, Papa."

The possessed man bounded to his feet, roughly pushed back the *hounsi,* and began to dance and sing:

Bolada Kimalada! O Kimalada!
We'll dig the canal! Ago!
We'll dig a canal, I say! Ago yé!
The vein is open, the blood flows.
The vein is open, the blood flows! Ho!
Bolada Kimalada! O Kimalada!

He swayed backward and forward in a Nago dance, alone in the midst of the frightened peasants, then he slowed down to little jumps. Still puffing, still trembling, but more feebly for the *loa* was departing, the stupid face of Duperval slowly reappeared beneath the warlike mask of Ogoun. A few more uncertain steps, a few more spasmodic twists of the head, and Duperval crumpled, the *loa* had departed. With the aid of Dieuveille Riché, Manuel lifted the man and carried him to one side. He was as heavy and lifeless as the trunk of a tree.

"Bienaimé," Délira whispered, "Bienaimé, my man, I don't like what Papa Ogoun sang, no. My heart is heavy. I don't know what's come over me."

But Dorméus continued the Legba service with the ceremony of the *asogwê*. Bienaimé, Délira, and Manuel took the straw bag in their hands together and presented it successively to the four cardinal points. The *houngan* planted the cock feathers about the pole, traced a new magic circle and lighted a candle at its center. The banners waved, the dull rumble of the drum resounded, urging the chant on to a new outburst. The women's voices shot up very high, cracking the thick mass of song:

Legba-sé! Legba!
Blood has been drawn!
Blood! Abobo!
Mighty Legba!
Seven Legba Kataroulos!
Mighty Legba!
Alegba-sé!
You and me!
Ago yé!

Manuel let himself go in the upsurge of the dance, but a strange sadness crept into his soul. He caught his mother's eye and thought he saw tears shining there.

Now the sacrifice to Legba was over. The Master of the Roads had gone back to his native Guinea by that mysterious path which *loas* tread.

Nevertheless, the fête went on. The peasants forgot their troubles. Dancing and drinking anesthetized them—swept away their shipwrecked souls to drown in those regions of unreality and danger where the fierce forces of the African gods lay in wait.

When dawn came over the sleepless plain, the drums were still beating like a heart that never tires.

Chapter Five

Life began again, but it didn't change. It followed the same routine, the same beaten path, with cruel indifference. They were up before dawn. Through the cracks in the obscure sky, the first confused gleams of light passed and scattered. Later, the silhouette of the hill became visible, fringed in pale limpidity.

As soon as the sun touched the woods enough to light its intersecting paths through the thorn acacias, Manuel would be off. He would fell some trees, and in the clearing he would set up his charcoal pit beneath which the wood was to burn in a slow fire. Then he would walk toward the mountains. He'd return from his promenade bathed in perspiration, his hands covered with earth. Délira would ask where he had been. He'd answer evasively, with that stubborn pucker at the corner of his mouth.

Every Saturday, Délira would load two burros with charcoal and go to the city. She would return at nightfall with a few wretched provisions and a bit of change. Then she'd sit in her hut broken down under the weight of an immense fatigue. Bienaimé would demand his tobacco and would never find it strong enough.

At times the old woman related the vexations she encountered. The market inspectors, posted at the gates of the city, would pounce on the peasant women and fleece them mercilessly.

"He comes up and asks me to pay. I show him that I've already paid. He gets angry and begins to swear. 'Look, if you're not ashamed,' I say to him, 'look at my white hair. How would you like your own mother to be treated like this?' 'Shut your trap!' he yells, that's what he yells, 'or else I'll drag you to jail for rebellion and public scandal.' I had to give him the money. No, they don't have any consideration for us poor folks."

Manuel clenched his fists hard enough to make them crack.

"Bandit! No-good Negro!" Bienaimé growled. A moment later he said, "Go to bed, my poor old woman. You can't hold your eyes open. You've covered a lot of ground."

Délira unrolled her mat and spread it on the dirt. Despite Manuel's protests, she had insisted on his occupying the mahogany bed in the other room.

Sometimes Antoine would come by during the day. He would squat down near Bienaimé.

"Ah! song-leader, Simidor," the old man would say, "have you ever seen such misery?"

The Simidor would shake his head. "Never before." And gazing sadly at the charred fields, he would add in a subdued tone, "Don't call me Simidor. Call me Antoine. That's my name. You see, brother, when you say 'Simidor,' that makes me think of the good old days. It's bitter to remember, it's bitter as gall."

On the porch in the afternoons Manuel wove hats of macaw straw. They would easily sell for six cents apiece in the next town. The vodun ceremony had eaten up what little money he had brought from Cuba. Dorméus alone had cost eight dollars.

Often Laurélien came to see him. He'd sit on the bench. His large, twisted hands, made for wielding the hoe, rested on his knees. Softly he'd ask, "What about the water?"

"Not yet, not yet," Manuel would reply. "But I'm on its trail."

His nimble fingers would be moving up and down while his thoughts traveled toward Annaise. Several times he had seen her in the village. Each time she'd turned away. She had walked off with that long, nonchalant, swinging step of hers.

Laurélien would ask once again, "Tell me about Cuba."

"It's a country five times, no, ten, no, perhaps twenty times as large as Haiti. But, you know, I'm made out of this, I am." He touched the earth, caressing its soil. "That's what I am, this very earth! I've got it in my blood. Look at my color. Folks could say the soil has faded on me, and on you, too. This land is the black man's. Each time they've tried to take it from us, we have cleaned out injustice with the blades of our machetes."

"Yes, but in Cuba there's more wealth. Folks live more at ease. Here, we've got to struggle hard with life, and what does it get us? We don't even have enough to fill our bellies, and we've no rights at all against the crookedness of the authorities. The justice of the peace, the rural police, the surveyors, the food speculators live on us like fleas. I spent a month in prison with a bunch of thieves and assassins, just because I went in town without shoes. And where could I have gotten the money to buy them, I ask you, brother? What are we, us peasants? Barefooted Negroes, scorned and mistreated."

"What are we? Since that's your question, I'm going to answer you. We're *this country,* and it wouldn't be a thing without us, nothing at all.

Who does the planting? Who does the watering? Who does the harvesting? Coffee, cotton, rice, sugar cane, cacao, corn, bananas, vegetables, and all the fruits, who's going to grow them if we don't? Yet with all that, we're poor, that's true. We're out of luck, that's true. We're miserable, that's true. But do you know why, brother? Because of our ignorance. We don't know yet what a force we are, what a single force—all the peasants, all the Negroes of plain and hill, all united. Some day, when we get wise to that, we'll rise up from one end of the country to the other. Then we'll call a General Assembly of the Masters of the Dew, a great big *coumbite* of farmers, and we'll clear out poverty and plant a new life."

"You're talking sense, *oui*," Laurélien said.

He had almost lost his breath trying to follow Manuel. A wrinkle on his brow marked the effort of his meditation. In the most inarticulate corner of his brain, accustomed to slowness and patience, a curtain of light began to rise. It illumined a sudden hope, still obscure and distant, but as certain as brotherhood. He spat a jet of saliva through his teeth.

"What you're saying is as clear as water running in the sunlight." He was standing, and his hands were contracting as if to try to hold on to fugitive words.

"You're going already?"

"Yes, I was just passing by before I went to see about the cattle. I'll think over your words. They've got plenty of weight. You can be sure of that, *oui*. So, goodbye, Chief."

"Why do you call me, 'Chief'?" Manuel asked, astonished.

Laurélien lowered his head, reflected. "I don't know why, myself," he said.

He walked away at his peaceful solid gait. Manuel followed him with his eyes until he disappeared among the trees.

A compact, blinding light inflamed the surface of sky and earth. The plaintive cooing of a dove was heard. One couldn't tell where it was coming from. It rolled on the breast of silence with depressing notes. The wind had died down. The fields lay flat under the weight of the sun, with their thirsty soil, their blighted plants. On a distant mound, overlooking the confused expanse of thorn acacias, the leaves of the macaw trees drooped inert as broken wings.

Before each hut, in the shade of the few trees that the drought had spared, peasants brooded over their ill fortune. Quarrels exploded without any apparent motive. The chattering of the women became irritable, turned easily into argument. The youngsters kept out of reach of cuffs,

but their prudence did them no good. One would hear an angry voice shout:

"Philogène? Oh! Missieu Philogène, don't you hear me calling you?" And Philogène would draw near, with death in his soul, to receive a resounding smack on the back of his head.

In fact, things had grown even worse. Hunger was really making itself felt. The price of blue denim was getting higher in the city. It was useless to mend clothes. There were folks whose hind parts (begging your pardon) appeared through holes in their trousers like the crescents of a black moon in the cleft of a cloud—which wasn't at all respectable. No, you couldn't even pretend that it was.

On Sunday at the cockfight, white rum flavored with cinnamon bark, lemon or anise, quickly went to the peasants' heads, especially those of the losers. And there were times when clubs were called into play. Thank heaven, it didn't go any further, not so far as the machete, fortunately, and a few days later the opponents would become reconciled. But one couldn't be sure that they wouldn't nurse a bit of left-over spite deep inside themselves.

"Manuel," said Bienaimé, "suppose you go and see where the white-spotted calf has wandered off to, suppose you go and see?" Manuel stopped his work, untied the rope that was hanging on a nail, and tested it to see how strong it was. "Tie her to a pole, but give her plenty of rope so she won't get tangled up."

"Why don't you wait till she's bigger?" Délira asked. "Till she gives birth to a calf that we can sell later on in her stead?"

"And what'll we live on in the meantime? By then we'll eat our own teeth down to the gums," the old man retorted.

Since the fenced-in fields bordered it on one side and the woods on the other, the savanna served as an enclosure for the cattle. The peasants got a bit of milk of poor quality from the cows. But, ordinarily, the animals lived in wild freedom and were captured only to be branded with a red-hot iron, or to be sold at the Pont Beudet market when there was an urgent need for a little currency.

A kind of short, dry weed grew in little patches like wild hair on warts, and, except under the umbrella of a rare logwood tree, the sun exercised its limitless domination.

"With irrigation it could be rich with Guinea grass," Manuel mused.

He saw the heifer. She stood out in the savanna with her coat spotted in red and white. He cut in, to catch her as quickly as possible by blocking off all retreat and pushing her against the circle of chandelier cactus that

lined Saint-Julien's field. She detected the maneuver and began to run toward open country. With long strides, Manuel raced after her, and lassoed her on the run. She dragged him along, but he pulled firmly, jerking on the rope, pacifying her imperiously with his voice. "Whoa, frisky lady! Whoa, you brigand! Whoa, pretty cow, whoa!"

He succeeded in casting the end of the rope about a stump. The heifer struggled, butting in all directions, but in the end she had to admit defeat. Manuel waited for a moment, then led her toward a logwood tree and tied her in the shade.

"You're going to change masters," he said, patting her snout. "You're going to leave the big savanna. That's how life is, after all." The heifer looked at him with wide sorrowful eyes, and bleated. Manuel patted her back and her sides with the palm of his hand. "You're not any too fat," he said. "To feel your bones, just touch you. You won't bring a good price. No, you surely won't."

The sun was now sliding down the slope of the sky which, under a diluted and transparent mist of clouds, was turning the color of indigo in soapy water. Behind the woods, a high flaming barrier hurled sulphur darts into the bleeding west.

Manuel returned to the main road and went through the village. The huts were laid out at random along scattered paths in the yards. Something more than trees, gardens, and hedges separated them. Anger, secret and repressed, that a spark could ignite into violence, aggravated by poverty, gave each peasant as he faced his neighbor that stitched-up mouth, that evasive glance, that hand itching for a blow. One could see that all these years the past had never been buried with Dorisca and Sauveur. They kept it ever fresh like a half-closed wound continually irritated by a fingernail.

The womenfolks were the most enraged. They were truly furious. That was because they were the first to know that there was nothing to put on the fire, that the children were crying from hunger, that they were wasting away, their limbs thin and twisted like dry branches, their stomachs enormous. Sometimes the women would go out of their heads and insult each other, on occasion, even with words that aren't allowed. But women's insults don't lead anywhere, they're just so much wind. More serious was the silence of the men.

Manuel was thinking of all that as he walked through the settlement. There were some whom he greeted. "*Adieu,* brother," he would say.

"Oh! *adieu,* Manuel," the other would answer.

"How are you?" Manuel would ask.

"We're fighting for life," the other would reply.

But some turned away as he passed, or else stared right through him as though he were smoke.

Nevertheless, he knew them well. Were they not Pierrilis, Similien, Mauléon, Ismael, Termonfils, Josaphat? He had grown up with them in these woods, had taken part in their games, had set traps for ortolans in the savanna, had stolen ears of corn by their side. Later, in the *coumbites,* their voices and their husky young strength had mingled. Ah, how they had cleared and cleaned Brother Merville's field formerly—even that day when they had drunk a bit too much white rum! Yes, he remembered it all. He had forgotten nothing.

He wanted to walk up to them and say, "Well, cousins, don't you remember me? It's I, Manuel, Manuel Jean-Joseph, himself and no other." But their faces were like dark unlighted walls.

No, there was neither justice nor sense in this business. One should let the dead rest in the peace of the cemetery under the red jasmine. They had nothing to do with the ways of the living, these ghosts that returned in broad daylight, these obstinate blood-stained phantoms. Besides, if he found water, everyone's help would be needed. It wouldn't be a small matter to bring it down to the plain. They would have to organize a great *coumbite* of all the peasants. Thus the water would bring them together again. Its cool breath would dispel the evil odor of spite and hatred. With the new plants, with the fruit- and corn-laden fields, the earth overflowing with simple fecund life, a brotherly community would be reborn. Yes, he'd go and find them, and talk with them. They had good sense, they would understand.

In front of his door, Hilarion, the rural policeman, was playing at *trois-sept* with his assistant. He squinted from his cards to Manuel.

"Hello," he said. "You're the very one I want to see. Wait a minute! I've something to tell you." And to his opponent, "Ten of diamonds! Give me your ace."

"I haven't any ace."

"Give me that ace!" Hilarion exclaimed threateningly. The assistant put down his ace. "Cheat! Sassy rascal, you!" Hilarion cried in triumph. He covered the cards in the hollow of his hand as he turned toward Manuel. "So you're going around talking with the peasants, heh?"

Manuel waited.

"You're talking all kind of talk, it seems." A flash of malevolence came into the slit of his eyes. "Well, they aren't to the liking of the authorities, they're words of rebellion." He unfolded his cards like a fan. "Don't say I didn't warn you!"

Manuel smiled. "Is that all?"

"That's all," Hilarion answered, his head in his cards.

"Ten of clubs! Nine of clubs! Give me your ace!"

"But I haven't got any ace," the other moaned in desperation.

"Give me that ace right now!" The assistant surrendered the ace of clubs. "Ah, you monkey!" shouted the hilarious Hilarion. "You thought yourself slick enough to play Hilarion Hilaire! That'll teach you, you rascal, you!"

His loud vulgar laughter resounded as Manuel walked away. He wasn't uneasy. Often he had talked to Laurélien, Saint-Julien, Riché, and the others. Surely they hadn't reported his words, but merely discussed and repeated them, and, like flies who get caught in a spider web, they had reached the hairy ears of Hilarion. It was a good sign, after all, that they were spreading.

Children were following him, fascinated by his great height. To them, he was the man who had crossed the sea, who had lived in the strange country of Cuba. He was crowned with a halo of mysteries and legends. Manuel caught one of them by the arm. He was a very black little Negro, with eyes as round and shiny as marbles. He patted the boy's head that had been shaved with the bottom of a bottle.

"What's your name?"

"Monpremier, *oui*."

But a woman's voice snapped crossly, "You, Monpremier, come here!" The youngster scampered off toward the hut. In his haste his heels hammered his bare buttocks.

Manuel went on, his heart ill at ease. He left the last huts behind him.

Golden thistles covered the ruts in the path with their tiny suns. A reflection of oblique light spread slowly across the plain, but shadows were already nestling in the trees, and mauve spots were spreading over the hillsides. What had been harsh and hostile in the light became tranquil and reconciled itself to the end of the day.

Away down the road, he saw her coming. He recognized her at once by her dark dress, her white madras, because she was tall, because only she had that clean supple stride, those gently swaying hips—and because he was waiting for her.

He walked slowly toward her. "I bid you *bonsoir, oui,* Annaise." There were a few steps between them.

"Get out of my way!" She was breathing hard, her breasts heaved.

"Tell me what I've done to you and why we're enemies."

She hid her face from him. "I don't have to explain anything to you. I'm in a hurry. Let me by."

"Answer me first. I don't mean you any harm, Annaise. I like you. Honest, I do."

She sighed, "*Ay, mes amis,* there's a stubborn man for you! You would think that he has no ears to hear with. I tell you to let me go my way, *oui*." One could see that she was making an effort to appear impatient and displeased.

"I've looked for you all over, everywhere, but you hid as if I were the werewolf himself. I wanted to talk to you, because I know you can help me."

"*I* help *you*? How so?" she asked in surprise.

For the first time, she looked at him, and Manuel saw that there was no anger in her eyes, but only a deep sadness.

"I'll tell you, if you'll listen."

"People will see us," she objected weakly.

"Nobody's going to come. And even if they did, aren't you tired, Annaise, of all the hate there is between us these days?"

"We've got trouble enough in this life, that's true. Ah! how difficult just living has become, Manuel!" She caught herself very quickly. "Let me by! Let me pass, by the grace of God!"

"So you haven't forgotten my name?"

She answered in a whisper, "Please don't torment me."

He took her hand. She tried to withdraw it, but she had no strength. "You're a hard worker, one would say."

"Yes," she said proudly, "my hands are rough."

"I've got to have a long talk with you, you know."

"We won't have time. Night is coming. Look!"

The road began to fade away and the trees were turning black, blending with the shadows. The sky held only a hesitant glimmer, fading and distant. Alone, on the far-off edge of the horizon, a red and black cloud dissolved in the vertigo of twilight.

"Are you afraid of me, Annaise?"

"I don't know," she said in a troubled whisper.

"Tomorrow, late in the afternoon, when the sun is at the foot of the mountain, I'll wait for you on the rise where the macaw trees are. Will you come?"

"No, no!" Her voice was low and frightened.

"Anna," he said. He felt her hand tremble in his. "You'll come. Won't you, Anna?"

"Ah! you torment me. I feel like I've lost my good angel. Why do you torment me, Manuel?"

He saw her eyes fill with tears and, between her supplicating lips, the moist splendor of her teeth. He released her hand.

"It's night, Anna. Go in peace, go and rest, my sweetheart."

Suddenly she was no longer there. Her bare feet, departing, made no sound.

Again he said, "I'll wait for you, Anna."

Chapter Six

Under the macaw trees, there was a semblance of coolness. A faint breath of wind glided over the leaves in a long rustling whisper, and a bit of silvery light shimmered over them with a slight shiver like that of loosened hair. On the road, the peasant women were leading their tired donkeys. They were shouting encouragement to the animals, and the weakened echo of their monotonous cries reached Manuel. He lost sight of them behind a curtain of thorn acacias, but they reappeared farther on. It was market day and they were returning home, with a long way still to go before sunset.

At that distance, he couldn't recognize them, but he knew they were women from his own village of Fonds Rouge, and also from Ravine Sèche which was deeper in the hollow of Morne Crochu, and from settlements on the plateaus of Bellevue, Mahotière, and Boucan Corail. Through the rising dust they moved in an almost uninterrupted file. Sometimes one of them would run after her animal that had strayed to one side, and would whip him back into line by dint of oaths and lashing.

Apart from the others, a girl was coming along mounted on a chestnut horse. Manuel's blood rushed to his heart with fast, burning pulsations. She stopped, looked behind her several times, then entered one of the side roads.

"She's taking the ravine trail. She'll come out by the turn at the foot of the rise."

He listened and heard the sound of hoofs on the pebbles. It was a hesitant clop-clop drowned by a faster trampling when the horse found sand underfoot. The terrain bent its stunted bushes toward the ravine.

"That's where she'll pass, between those elm trees. I'll step out so she can see me."

Now he could hear the impact and dry rebound of the rocks on the pebbles as they rolled down the slope. She turned off the narrow path. The horse was stretching his neck and breathing hard. She was wearing a flowered calico dress and a wide straw hat held in place by a chin strap.

"Get up!" she was saying, encouraging the animal with her heels. "Get up!"

Manuel left his hiding place and she saw him. She stopped and, with a quick pull on the reins, jumped down from her mount. The horse was frothing, his sides were heaving. One could see that Annaise had hurried him along despite the rocks and the ascent. She led him by the bridle and tied him to the fork of a tree.

She moved toward him with her even, agile gait. Her breasts were high and firm, and under the folds of her dress the regal motion of her legs revealed the luscious shape of her young body. She bowed to him.[12] "I greet you, Manuel."

"I greet you, Anna."

She touched his outstretched hand with her fingertips. Under the shade of her hat, a blue silk madras bound her forehead. Silver earrings shone in her ears.

"So you came."

"I came, you see, but I shouldn't have." She lowered her head and turned her face away. "All night long I struggled. All night long I said, 'No.' But in the morning I got dressed when the cock crowed and I went to town to have an excuse for going out."

"And did you have a good sale at the market?"

"Ah, Lord, no, brother! A few measures of corn, that's all." She remained silent for a moment, then, "Manuel?"

"I'm listening, *oui,* Anna."

"I just want to tell you, I'm one woman that goes straight. No man has ever touched me. I came because I am sure you will not take advantage of me." And then, dreamily, she asked, "Why do I trust you? Why do I listen to your words?"

"Trust is almost a mystery. It can't be bought and it has no price. You can't say, 'Sell me so much and so much.' It's more like a plot between one heart and another heart. It comes naturally and sincerely, a glance maybe or the sound of a voice is enough to tell the difference between the truth and a lie. Since the first day, listen, Anna, from the first day I saw that there's nothing false about you, that everything in you is as clear and clean as a spring, like the light in your eyes."

"Don't begin with compliments. That doesn't do any good, and it isn't necessary. I, too, after our meeting on the road, I said to myself, 'He's not like the others and he has a very sincere way about him. But what words he speaks! Jesus-Mary-Joseph! He knows too much for a poor girl like me to understand.' "

"Don't begin with compliments. That doesn't do any good, and it isn't necessary."

Both of them laughed. With head thrown back, the laughter of Annaise rose full-throated, and her teeth were moist with a gleaming whiteness.

"You laugh like a turtledove," Manuel said.

"I'll fly away like one, if you continue your flattery."

His black face lighted up in a handsome smile. "Don't you want to sit down? You won't soil your dress here."

She sat next to him, leaning against the trunk of a macaw tree, her dress spread about her, and she clasped her hands around her knees.

The plain unfolded before them, surrounded by the hills. From here they could see the mingling of acacia trees, huts dispersed in the clearings, fields abandoned to the ravages of drought, and in the glare of the savanna, scattered cattle moving. Above this desolation crows on the wing hovered. Over and over they made the same circuit, perched on the cactus, and, frightened for some reason, flayed the silence with their harsh cawing.

"What's all this talk you had for me? And I'd like to know how I, Annaise, can help a man like you?"

Manuel waited a moment to answer. He was staring in front of him with that strained and distant expression.

"You see the color of the plain," he began. "It looks like straw at the mouth of a flaming furnace. The harvest has perished. There's no more hope. How are you going to live? It would be a miracle if you did live—but then it would only be to die a slow death. And what have you done to prevent it? One thing only. Cried about your misfortune to the *loas,* offered ceremonies so that they'd make the rain fall. But all that's just so much silly monkeyshines. That doesn't count! It's useless, and it's wasting time."

"Then what *does* count, Manuel? And aren't you afraid of offending our old gods of Guinea?"

"No, I respect the customs of the old folks, but the blood of a rooster or a young goat can't make the seasons change, or alter the course of the clouds and fill them with water like bladders. The other night, at the Legba ceremonies, I danced and sang to my heart's content. I'm Negro, no? And I enjoyed myself like a real Negro. When the drums beat, I feel it in the pit of my stomach. I feel an itch in my loins and an electric current in my legs, and I've got to join the dance. But that's all there is to it for me."

"Was it in that country of Cuba that you got those ideas?"

"Experience is the staff of the blind, and I learned that what counts,

since you're asking me, is rebellion, and the knowledge that man is the baker of life."

"Ah! But it's life that kneads us."

"Because you're resigned like dough, that's what you are!"

"But what can we do? Aren't we helpless and with nobody to turn to when misfortune comes? It's just fate, that's all!"

"No! As long as your arms are not lopped off and you're determined to fight. What would you say, Anna, if the valley got all painted over, if on the savanna the Guinea grass grew, high as a swollen river?"

"I'd say thanks for such good fortune."

"What would you say if the corn grew in the cool fields?"

"I'd say thanks for the blessing."

"Can't you just see the clusters of millet, and those thieving blackbirds that we've got to chase away? Can't you see the ears of corn?"

She closed her eyes. "Yes, I see."

"Can't you see the banana trees bent with the weight of their bunches?"

"Yes, yes."

"Can't you see the vegetables and the ripe fruit?"

"*Oui! Oui!*"

"You see all that wealth?"

She opened her eyes. "You've made me dream! What I see is poverty."

"Yes, that's what there could be, if there were only—what, Anna?"

"Rain. Not just a little drizzle—but big, thick, lasting rain!"

"Or else irrigation, heh?"

"But Fanchon Spring is dry, and so is Lauriers Spring."

"Suppose, Anna, suppose I discovered water? Suppose I brought it to our plain?"

She looked at him in amazement. "Could you do that, Manuel?" She gazed at each of his features with extraordinary intensity, as if, slowly, he had been revealed to her, as if she were recognizing him for the first time. She said in a voice muffled by emotion, "Yes, you'll do it. You're the man who will find water. You'll be master of the springs, you'll walk through the dew in the midst of your growing things. I know you are right—and I know you are strong."

"Not I alone, Anna. All the peasants will have a part in it, and all of us will reap the benefits of the water."

She dropped her arms in a gesture of discouragement. "Alas, Manuel! Alas, brother! All day long they sharpen their teeth with threats. One detests the other. Families are feuding. Yesterday's friends are today's

enemies. They have taken two corpses for their battle flags. There's blood on those corpses and the blood is not yet dry!"

"I know, Anna, but listen carefully. It will be a hard job to bring water to Fonds Rouge. We'll need everyone's help, and if there's no reconciliation it won't work out. Let me tell you. At first, in Cuba, we had no defense and no way of resistance. One person thought himself white, another was a Negro, and there were plenty of misunderstandings among us. We were scattered like grains of sand, and the bosses walked on that sand. But when we realized that we were all alike, when we got together for the *huelga* . . . "

"What does that word mean—*huelga*?"

"You call it a strike."

"I don't know what that means, either."

Manuel showed her his open hand. "Look at this single finger—how small it is, and how weak that one is, and that other one isn't any stronger, nor is this little one either, and this last one's standing all alone by itself."

He clenched his fist.

"But now is it solid enough, firm enough, united enough? You'd say yes, wouldn't you? Well, that's what a strike is: A *NO* uttered by a thousand voices speaking as one and falling on the desk of the boss with the force of a boulder. 'No, I tell you! No, and I mean no! No work, no harvest, not a blade of grass will be cut unless you pay us a fair price for our strength and the toil of our arms!'

"And the boss, what can he do? Call the police? That's right. Because the two of them are accomplices like the skin and an undershirt.

" 'Attack those bandits for me,' he orders.

"But we're not bandits, we're workers, that's what our name is—and we hold our line stubbornly. Some of us fall, but the rest hold firm in spite of hunger, police, prison. And all this time the sugar cane is waiting and rotting. The refinery is waiting with idle teeth in its grinders. The boss is waiting with his calculations of all that he expected to fill his pockets with. In the end, he is forced to compromise.

" 'After all,' he says, 'can't we talk this thing over?'

"Of course, we can talk it over. That means we've won the battle. And why? Because we've welded ourselves into one solid mass like the shoulders of a mountain, and when man's determination is as high and as hard as a mountain, there're no powers in heaven or hell that can shake it or destroy it!"

He looked afar off toward the plain, then toward the sky, towering like a cliff of light.

"You see, the greatest thing in the world is that all men are brothers, each weighs the same on the scales of poverty and injustice."

She said humbly, "And I, what's my part?"

"I'll let you know when I find water. Then you'll begin talking to the womenfolks. Women—they're the irritable sex, I don't deny that—but they're also more sensitive and they have more heart. And there are times, you know, when the heart and the mind are one and the same thing.

"You'll say, 'Cousin So-and-so, have you heard the news?'

" 'What news?' she'll ask.

" 'They say that Bienaimé's son, that Negro named Manuel, has discovered a spring. But he says that it's quite a job to bring it to the plain, that it will need a general *coumbite,* and since we're feuding that isn't possible, and the spring will remain where it is without benefiting anybody.'

"And then you'll start to turn the talk around to the drought, to poverty, and how all the children are growing weak and taking sick, and that if there were only some irrigation, all that would change completely. Then if she seems to be listening to you, you'll also tell her that this Dorisca-Sauveur story has maybe outlived its time, that the interests of the living should come before the vengeance of the dead. You'll spread these words around among all the womenfolks—but be prudent and careful. Use plenty of 'It's a pity, *oui!'*—'and yet'—'perhaps after all.' Do you understand, my *Négresse?*"

"I understand, and I'll obey you, Negro of mine."

"If it works, the womenfolks are going to nag their men no end. Even the most stubborn will get tired of hearing them jabber all day long, not counting at night, 'Water, water, water!' That'll start sounding like bells ringing and never stopping in their ears. 'Water, water, water!' until their own eyes begin to see visions of water running through the fields, of plants sprouting all by themselves. Then they'll say, 'All right, women, *oui*! It's all right, we agree!'

"As for me, I'll be responsible for the peasants on my side. I'll talk to them straight and they'll accept, I'm sure and certain. And I can see the day arrive when both sides will come face to face:

" 'Well, brothers,' some will say, 'are we brothers?'

" 'Yes, we're brothers,' the others will reply.

" 'Without a grudge?'

" 'Without a grudge.'

" 'Really?'

" 'On with the *coumbite*?'

" 'On with the *coumbite*!' "

"Ah!" she said, with an admiring smile. "How clever you are! I'm not intelligent, myself—but I'm crafty, too, *oui*. You'll see."

"You? You're smart as you can be, and I'll prove it. Answer this question—it's a riddle." With outstretched hand he pointed to the plain. "Do you see my hut? *Bueno*. Now, follow me to the left, draw a straight line from the mountain to that spot on the edge of the woods. *Bueno*. That's a lovely location, isn't it? A man could build a hut there with a railing, two doors, and maybe a small porch, couldn't he? I can see the doors now, the windows, and the railing all painted blue. Blue makes things look clean. In front of the house, suppose a man planted bay trees. They're not very useful, bay trees aren't. They give neither shade nor fruit, but they'd just be there for decoration."

He put his arm around her shoulder and she trembled. "Who'd be the mistress of that hut?"

"Let me alone," she said in a choked voice. "I'm warm."

"Who'd be the mistress of that garden?"

"Let me alone! Let me alone! I'm cold." She freed herself of his embrace and stood up. She hung her head. She wouldn't look at him. "It's time for me to go."

"You haven't answered my question, no."

She began to go down the slope, and he followed her. She untied the horse's bridle.

"You haven't answered my question."

She turned toward Manuel, her face aglow. It wasn't a ray of the setting sun, it was happiness. "Oh, Manuel!"

He held in his embrace the warm deep sweetness of her body. "It's yes, Anna?"

"It's yes, darling. But let me go, please."

Touched by her plea, he let her slip from his arms.

"Well, goodbye, my master," she said, bowing.

"Goodbye, Anna."

With a graceful bound, she mounted her horse. One last time she smiled at him. Then, spurring the animal with her heel, she went down toward the ravine.

Chapter Seven

As she approached Fonds Rouge, night began to envelop her, but the chestnut horse knew the road, having traversed it so often at this hour. Its regular pace lulled Annaise's thoughts. She was still upset by the languor that had gripped her, that astonishing surprise of the flesh, that sudden whirl of trees and sky before her frightened eyes, a dizzy spell that would have left her broken and confused in Manuel's arms, if her will power had not been snagged by a hidden panic.

She had lost her soul. Oh, God! Good Lord! What spell was this? Certain accursed people—I make the sign of the cross, protect me Gracious Virgin—know the evil charms that change a man into an animal, a plant into a rock in the twinkling of an eye, that's true, *oui*. I'm not the same any more. What's happened to me? It's a sweetness that almost hurts, a warmth that burns like ice. I'm giving in! I'm lost! Oh, Master of the Water, there's no bad magic in you, yet you know all the springs, even the one that lay dormant in the depths of my shame. You awakened it, and it's carrying me away. I can't resist, that's all. Here I am. You'll take my hand and I'll follow you. You'll take my body in your arms and I'll say, "Take me, I'll do your pleasure and your bidding." It's fate.

The horse reared all of a sudden. Someone or something had just leaped into the road.

"Who's there?" she cried, alarmed.

There was a rusty chuckle. "Good evening, cousin."

"Who's there? What's your name?"

"You don't recognize me?"

"How do you expect me to recognize you in this darkness?"

"It's me, Gervilen." He walked along beside her like a compact shadow, hardly different from the night, and she felt a vague threat in his presence. "So you were delayed in town?"

"Yes, the corn didn't sell well. And I don't know what's come over this horse to make him so mulish today. He's a nuisance, this horse!"

"Aren't you scared to go home after dark?"

"No, there aren't any criminals on this road."

"It's not highwaymen who are the most dangerous." And with the same sinister laugh, "There are, above all, evil spirits, demons, big devils, all kinds of Lucifers."

"God forgive me! St. James, St. Michael, help me!" she murmured, frightened.

"You're afraid?"

"My blood has turned to water."

Gervilen kept silent for a second, and during this silence Annaise suffered unbearable anxiety. "They say there's one around here."

"Where?"

"Do you want to know?"

"Oh, tell me quickly!"

He hissed, "On the mound where the macaw trees are!"

She understood immediately. Gervilen had spied on them, the evil-minded wretch, the Judas! With feigned indifference she said, "It might not be true."

"Anyhow, you didn't go that way, did you? That's not your road."

"No."

"You're lying!" He pulled so violently on the bridle that the chestnut horse reared and beat the air with its hoofs. He was yelling but his voice stuck deep in his throat, harsh and swollen with rage. She smelled his breath, poisoned by white rum. "You're lying, you shameless hussy! I saw you two with my own eyes."

"Let go of that bridle. You're drunk! I'm in a hurry to get home."

"Drunk? Are you going to claim that I didn't see him put his paws on you and you didn't do a thing to stop him?"

"And even if it is true, what right have you to meddle in my affairs? What authority have you got over me?"

"That's my business, damn it! We're from the same family. Isn't your mother, Rosanna, my dead mother's sister?"

"You smell like *tafia,*" she said in disgust. "You make me sick at the stomach!"

"You're haughty all right, but you act like any prostitute. And with whom? With a good-for-nothing who has strayed off to foreign lands like a dog without a master—Bienaimé's son, Sauveur's nephew! I mean with our worst enemy of all!"

He spoke with bitter vehemence, but in a low voice, as if the night were listening. They were moving toward the flickering lights. Dogs began to bark. Back in the yards, silhouettes of peasants were stirring around reddish open-air kitchens.

"Annaise?"

She didn't answer.

"I'm talking to you, *oui*, Annaise."

"Haven't you finished cursing me?"

"That's because I was angry."

"So you are saying, excuse me?"

He muttered as though each word were being torn from him with pliers, "I say excuse me." He was still holding her horse by the bridle. "Annaise, have you thought about what I asked you the other day?"

"As far as that goes, *never*!"

"Is that your last word?"

"My very last."

"Then I don't need to send Dorismé, my uncle, to ask Rosanna for you?"

"No, it wouldn't be any use."

He spoke slowly, with a hoarse effort, as if he were strangling. "You'll be sorry, Annaise! And I swear, may the thunder turn me to ashes and the Virgin put out my eyes, if I don't get my revenge!"

In the darkness she imagined how twisted his face was. "You can't frighten me." But fear gripped her heart.

"I'm a man of my word. Mark well what I say—that Negro will regret ever having crossed the path of Gervilen Gervilis. Damn his soul!"

"What are you going to do?"

"Damn his soul, I say! Some day you'll understand these words, and you'll gnaw your fists to the bone!"

"Giddap!" he cried briskly to the horse, hitting its rump savagely with the flat of his hand.

The chestnut horse galloped off, and Annaise had trouble mastering it. When she got home, Rosanna was waiting for her. Rosanna was a huge Negro woman. She filled the entire doorway.

"Why are you so late getting back?"

Annaise dismounted, and Gille, her brother, advanced to unsaddle the horse.

"I'm talking to this girl! Can't she hear me?" demanded Rosanna angrily.

"Good evening, sister," Gille said. "She's asking you why you're so late getting home."

"Ah!" she groaned, at the end of her rope, "if you only knew how tired out I am!"

Chapter Eight

"You're worrying. You think I don't see it, but, *oui,* I do. I ask you why and you don't answer me. That's not right, son. No, that's not right. So you don't trust me? You've been like that ever since you were little—silent and shut up like a wall inside yourself whenever anybody tried to get near you. But there were times—Ah, Lord! one could say that it was only yesterday and yet so long a time has passed—there were times when you used to come close to me in the evening. 'Mama, tell me that story.' And I pretended to be busy and you'd say, 'Mama, please.' We'd be sitting in this very same place at nightfall, and I'd begin, 'Cric? Crac!' And finally you'd fall asleep with your head in my lap. That's how it was, son. It's your old mama who's telling you."

Délira put a piece of yam on Manuel's plate. That was all there was to eat today, with a bit of millet.

"You're talking drivel, wife," said Bienaimé.

"Perhaps, perhaps I am talking drivel. It's because there isn't much difference between then and now. Don't get mad, Manuel, if your old mama rambles a little.

"To me, you see, you're always just my little boy. And when you were lost in a foreign land, while I waited for you, I had a burden in my heart, just as if I were still carrying you in my stomach. It was the weight of pain. Ah, Manuel, what pain I suffered! And now you're back, but it's no better. No, and for several nights now I've had bad dreams."

Manuel ate in silence. His mother, seated on a stool at his feet, kept looking at him, her eyes drowned in sadness.

"Nothing's the matter with me, Mama. I'm not sick, am I? Don't worry yourself."

"Of course you're not sick," Bienaimé interrupted. "Was there ever a bigger, stronger Negro? Délira, will you please leave him in peace, after all? Now, if I wanted to talk, too, I'd ask who taught him to handle a hoe and a pruning knife, to weed, to plant, and even to make traps to catch birds? I could run on like that forever." He lit his pipe with a firebrand.

"Have you finished eating?" Délira asked.

"Yes, I'm full up to here."

Bienaimé was lying. Hunger was gnawing his belly, but the old woman

hadn't yet taken a mouthful, and there wasn't much left in the pot. As usual, he dragged his chair over to the calabash tree, and sat down facing the road. The sun crept about his feet, but his head was in the cool shade.

Délira humbly touched Manuel's arm. "Pardon, son, I say pardon for all these complaints. They're unfounded. But I've worried so much about you that my head keeps on turning around without anything in it. It turns and turns. It's really a mill of worries. When you go off to roam through those mountains, what you're seeking is a mystery. I watch you disappear behind the acacias, and suddenly my heart stops beating. Suppose he doesn't return? Suppose he goes away forever? I know that's impossible, but I pray to my angels and my saints as if there were some danger over your head. And at night I wake up and I open the door of your room, and I see you lying there. He's sleeping, he's breathing, he's there! Thanks, Virgin of the Miracles! It's because you're all I've got on this earth, son, and my old man—disagreeable as he is, poor old Bienaimé."

Manuel pressed her hand. He was deeply moved.

"Don't be upset about me, you hear, Mama? And soon I'll tell you some great news, you hear, darling? I look worried because I expect it to happen every day and I'm impatient."

"What news, what event, what are you talking about, Manuel?"

"It's too soon to tell it. But it'll be something to be glad about, you'll see."

Délira looked at him, nonplussed. Then a tender smile erased whatever anxiety remained on her face. "You've chosen a girl? Ah, Manuel! It's time for you to settle down with a good, hard-working *Négresse,* not one of those city hussies. How many times have I said to myself, 'I haven't long to live. Will I die without seeing my son's sons?' Tell me her name, because I've guessed right, haven't I? Wait: it's Marielle, no? Then, my old friend Clairemise's daughter, Célina. She's a nice girl, too."

"Neither of them, Mama. And that's not the news, or rather—"

"Or rather?"

"That could be. In fact it's even certain. The two things are interwined like the creepers and the branch. But don't ask me, Mama. With all the respect that I owe you, it's still a secret because of the way things are."

"So you keep secrets from your own mother now." She was disappointed and somewhat embarrassed. "What's she like, this girl? Not one of those minxes, I hope."

"She's a *Négresse* who hasn't an equal in this whole country."

"What color is she? Is she black-black, or perhaps reddish?"

"Black-black. But you're going to ask me if she has large eyes or not, a nose like this or like that, or what size is she, whether she's fat or thin, whether she's a long-haired or a short-haired *Négresse*. Then you'd have her picture just as if she were standing right in front of you." He laughed. "Ah, Mama, you're clever, *oui*!"

"All right, all right," said Délira, pretending to be provoked. "I'll shut my mouth. I don't want to know anything. I'm not meddling with anything. Get along, *m'sieur,* I've got these dishes to wash."

But you could see that the adventure intrigued and delighted her. Manuel put his arm around her neck and they both laughed. Délira's laugh was astonishingly young. That was because she hadn't had much chance to use it. Life isn't happy enough for that. No, she'd never had a chance to wear it out. She had kept it fresh like a bird's song in an old nest.

"Anyone would think you two were lovers!" Bienaimé exclaimed. His uplifted arms called heaven to witness. "Just now she was groaning, and here she is laughing! What kind of comedy is this, *mes amis?* Women are as changeable as the weather. But that's *one* proverb that isn't true, for I'd certainly like a good rain to fall after all this dry spell." He drew on his pipe. "A cursed year like this I've never seen before."

The gray-tinted sky was a bare surface blurred by a hard sun-glare. Prostrate chickens looked for shade. The little dog was sleeping, his head between his paws. You could count his bones. If human beings had almost nothing to eat, just imagine the dogs!

Bienaimé closed his eyes. He was still holding his unlighted pipe, but his head drooped to one side. He was slipping off into that sleep which now overtook him at any hour in the day, and which often repeated the same dream: an enormous cornfield, leaves dripping with dew, ears of corn so swollen that they burst their husks with rows of kernels that seemed to be laughing.

As for Délira, she was washing the dishes, and she was singing. It was a song similar to life—it was sad. She knew no other. She wasn't singing loud and it was a song without words, sung with closed lips. It stayed in her throat like a moan, yet her heart was eased since her chat with Manuel. Nevertheless, it knew no language other than this sorrowful plaint. She sang after the fashion of black women. Life has taught black women to sing as though they are choking back a sob, and it's a song that ends always with a beginning because it's in the image of misery. And does the circle of misery ever end?

If Manuel could read her thoughts, he'd object. He sees things in

the light of joy, a glowing light. He says life is made so that men may have happiness and their contentment. Maybe he's right. Days come, days go, and some day that may be proven. But, meanwhile, life is hard.

For a long time, everything seemed to sleep. Only her song lulled the silence.

It was the Simidor's excited voice that awoke Bienaimé. "Bienaimé! Oh, Bienaimé! I've got news," he said.

The old man yawned, rubbed his eyes, shook the ashes from his pipe. "More gossip that you're coming to tell me. If your legs moved as fast as your tongue, you'd make it from here to Port-au-Prince in the twinkling of an eye."

"No, what I'm telling you is the Lord's truth. Saint-Julien's gone away. And brother Loctame, too."

"Well, they'll come back. A horse knows how long its rope is."

"But they've gone for good. Erzulie, Saint-Julien's wife, says they're going to cross the border over by Grand Bois and try to find work in the Dominican Republic. The poor woman's screaming and crying. Soon there won't be a single drop of water left in her body. Saint-Julien's left her with six young little Negroes. But what can you expect? This drought is discouraging. And some folks just can't resign themselves to dying. They prefer to leave the land of their ancestors, to try to make a living in a foreign country. And Charité, Sister Sylvina's daughter, has gone off, too."

"Is that so?"

"Yes, that's how it is, and others will surely follow after her. She's gone to the city. You know how she's going to end up? In sin and with the bad diseases. But it's better to be ugly than dead, the proverb says. And we're all going to die, if this keeps up. As far as I'm concerned, I ask nothing else. I'm old, I've lived my life. And what's the use of living anyhow if I can't sling my drum over my shoulder and lead a *coumbite* with my song, and drink my fill of *clairin* afterwards? I was born for that, with fingers like drumsticks and a flock of songbirds where my brain's supposed to be. So, I ask you, why am I still living? My role has ended."

The Simidor had been drinking a bit and, for once, liquor made him bitter.

"Jesus-Virgin!" Délira sighed. "If the young folks leave, who then will bury our old bones so that on Judgment Day, between Satan and the Eternal Father, they can be put together?"

"You get on my nerves, Délira," Bienaimé growled. "And the Good Lord's going to get tired of hearing you call his name every time you say *yes* or *no*." He turned to Antoine. "You've got to keep them from leaving. This soil has fed us for generations. It's still good. All it wants is a little water. Tell them the rain will come, to have patience. No, I'll go and tell them myself."

But would the peasants listen to Bienaimé? They were fed up with poverty. They were worn out. The most reasonable among them were losing their senses. The strongest were wavering. As for the weak, they had given up. "What's the use?" they said. One could see them stretched out, sad and silent, on pallets before their huts, thinking about their hard luck, stripped of all their will power. Others were spending their last pennies on *clairin* at Florentine's, the wife of the rural policeman, or else they were buying it on credit, which would sooner or later catch up with them. Alcohol gave them a semblance of vigor, a brief illusion of hope, a momentary forgetfulness. But they would wake up stormy-headed and dry-mouthed. Life would take on the taste of vomit then, and they wouldn't even have a piece of salt meat to settle the stomach.

Fonds Rouge was falling away into debris, and the debris consisted of these good peasants, these earnest hardworking Negroes of the land. Wasn't it a pity, after all?

"Manuel! Where is that Manuel?" Bienaimé cried.

"He's gone out," Délira replied.

"Always gone, always out! Always gadding about in the mountains. Wild roving Negro, that son of yours, Délira."

"He's your son, too, Bienaimé."

"Don't cross me! He must've got that from you."

"Yes, because you're beyond reproach, you are!"

"I'm not saying that. It would be boasting."

"There are some," the Simidor remarked, "whose backsides are light as kites—they just can't keep still. It's not their fault."

But Délira was angry. When that happened—and it was rare—she would draw up her fleshless body and seem very tall. Her voice didn't rise. It remained calm and deliberate, but the words cut like knives.

"That's right. I've been a gadabout. I haven't worked for you all the days of my life, from sunup to dark of night. I've done nothing but laugh and dance. Poverty hasn't scratched my face—look at these wrinkles! Poverty hasn't burned me—look at my hands! Poverty hasn't bled me dry—if only you could see inside my heart! As for you, you're a Negro without a fault, a Negro without equal, a Negro beyond compare! Thank

you, Lord, that a person of so little merit should be the wife of a man like him!"

"All right! Enough, I say! Enough, woman! Enough for my ears! Brother Antoine, let's go out and see what's going on."

Watching them move off, Délira shook her head and smiled. Her anger had vanished. "Ah! Bienaimé! Ah! my poor dear!" she whispered.

Her thoughts returned at once to Manuel. What can he be seeking in those mountains? Maybe a treasure? The idea struck her suddenly. White Frenchmen had lived in these parts. Here and there one could still see traces of their indigo factories. And didn't folks say that a peasant from Boucan Corail had found by chance, while digging in his fields, a jar filled with pieces of silver money? What was that peasant's name? Oh, pshaw! I've forgotten, but that doesn't matter. The story was true. Bienaimé had seen one of the coins. It was as big as that and heavy! An Italian in the city had paid a good price for it, and the peasant—what *was* his name? Ciriaque, that was it! Ciriaque had bought some ground over by Mirebalais and had become a big landowner.

"But they say that to find a treasure you have to make a bargain with the devil. Manuel couldn't do that. I'm sure not!"

That Chambrun plateau, where Manuel was then, arose in the midst of a small plain, isolated, like an island from the waves of the surrounding hills. From there the eye could survey the entire countryside. On the east, the promontory whence rose the smoke was Bellevue. Those huts down there, Boucan Corail. And farther, in the distant blue, like shelves on a gentle slope, Mahotière and its lovely truck gardens in the shade of mango and avocado trees. Its peasants were even lucky enough to have a spring of good drinking water, which also sufficed for washing clothes. It spurted in a gorge where carib cabbage grew, and watercress, and even mint. That was where the Fonds Rouge folks got their water now—but it was far, and the filled calabashes were heavy on the way back.

Above Mahotière, after about a day's ride, one reached Morne Villefranche where the pine forests began on its hillsides, with long veils of fog, humid rags worse than rain, penetrating to the marrow of your bones. It was a high mountain, torn by bottomless chasms, crowned by peaks that were lost in the unsettled sky. The trees there were black and solemn and the wind wailed night and day through their branches, for pines are sensitive and musical.

Before Manuel's gaze the crest of the mountains ran to the west in a single pale blue wave soothing to the eye. If sometimes the hollow

of a valley like Chambrun plateau broke it, it soon swept up again with a new surge of more red gum trees, more oaks, and the same tangled brush through which the macaw trees shot.

The stirring of a quick silky breeze made him look up toward a flock of passing wood pigeons. "They're the large gray variety." He followed their ashen path until they swooped down one by one on a nearby hill.

Suddenly an idea struck him that jerked him bolt upright. Wood pigeons preferred cool places. *Caramba!* Suppose this were a sign from heaven?

He went back down the hill almost at a run. His heart was beating furiously. "What's happening to you, Manuel?" he asked himself. "One would think that you were going to your first rendezvous with a girl. Your blood's on fire!"

A strange uneasiness knotted his throat. "I'm afraid it'll be like the other times, a delusion, a deception, and I feel that if I don't find it this time I'll be discouraged. Maybe I'll even say, 'Well, all right, I give up.' No, it isn't possible! Can a man desert the soil? Can he turn his back on it? Can he divorce it without losing the very reason for his existence, the use of his hands, the taste for life?"

Yes, he'd begin his search again, he was sure of that. It was his mission and his duty. Those Fonds Rouge peasants, those hardheaded, rock-headed peasants needed that water to bring about friendship between brothers again and to make life over as it ought to be—an act of good will between men, by want and fate made equals.

He crossed the drain of the plain. He walked rapidly. He was in a hurry, impatient, for it seemed to him that his blood had congealed in his throat and was doing its best to escape through a dull deep thumping in his heart.

"That's where the wood pigeons have roosted—in that thick-wooded mountain. There are even mahogany trees there. And that grayish foliage that looks silver in the sun—if I'm not mistaken those are trumpet trees. And naturally there are plenty of gum trees. But which side should I take to get there?"

His ear guided him, more so than his eye. With each step that he took with the aid of his machete through the maze of plants and vines, he expected to hear the frightened pigeons fly away. He cut through the forest obliquely, toward the thickest part of the mountain. He had already noted this retreat, this darkened wood where the trees were clustered in a turbid light. A steep gully opened before him. He descended, holding on to the bushes. The stones which rolled under him, imme-

diately aroused an intense flapping of wings. The wood pigeons broke loose from the branches and, through an opening in the foliage, he saw them disperse in all directions.

"They were higher. Some were on that giant fig tree over there."

Manuel was at the bottom of a kind of narrow gully encumbered by creeping vines which fell weeping from the trees. A cool breeze blew and that may have been why the twining unruly plants grew so tough and so close together. He went up toward the giant fig tree. He felt the blessed breeze dry his sweat. He was walking through a great silence.

Then, he entered a deep green shade, and his last machete stroke revealed the mountain circling a wide level space where the giant fig tree proudly lifted its powerful trunk. Its branches, laden with floating moss, covered the spot with venerable shade, and its monstrous roots extended an authoritative hand over the ownership and secret of this corner of the earth.

Manuel stopped. He scarcely believed his eyes. A sort of weakness struck his knees. It was because he saw *malangas*. He even touched one of their broad, smooth, icy leaves. And *malangas* are plants that always accompany water!

His machete plunged into the earth. He dug furiously, and the hole was not yet deep or large before water began to creep up through the chalk-white soil. He began again farther on, attacked the *malangas* in a frenzy, pulling out whole armfuls, tearing them out by the fistful. Each time there was a bubbling which turned into a small puddle that looked like a bright eye as soon as it had settled.

Manuel lay down on the ground. With his whole body he embraced the earth.

"There she is! The good, sweet, flowing, singing, cooling, blessed life!"

He kissed the earth with his lips and laughed.

Chapter Nine

"Have you noticed our Manuel? For two days he's been acting as if he had fallen into a nest of ants. He's here, he's there, but never in the same place. He goes out to the road, sits down on the porch, and then gets up again. You call him, he doesn't hear. You call him again, and he seems to come out of a dream. 'Eh, yes?' he says, but you can see that he's not listening to you. At night I hear him twisting and turning on his mattress, turning and tossing. He's looking for sleep and can't find it. Early this morning, I heard him laughing all by himself while he was bathing behind the house. Could he be losing his mind, our boy? Bienaimé, my man, answer me, Bienaimé."

"How do you expect me to answer you?" the old man replied ill-humoredly. "I'm not in his skin. I'm not in his head. He's an active fellow, that Manuel, a restless Negro, that's all. Some folks are slow by nature, and others are quick as lightning. What do you find so strange and upsetting about that? You'd like to have him always in the folds of your dress like a little boy, and you'd like him to say, 'Mama, this hurts! Mama, that hurts!' as if he hadn't grown up, as if he weren't a big strong man, with all his senses and his own mind. So let him have his freedom. Young colts are made to gallop across the savanna. Give me a piece of charcoal to light my pipe."

"Weren't you complaining the other day about his always running around?"

"*Me*? When was that?" The old man feigned astonishment. "Are you trying to pick a fuss with me, Délira?"

"And what about that shovel he bought in town yesterday? Can you tell me why he needs it? And why he took it with him this morning to the mountains? And why, on his return, it was all covered with some kind of white soil, the like of which isn't around here?"

"How do you expect me to answer all those whys? Ask me once and for all the reason the moon sometimes resembles a slice of Spanish melon, when at other times it's as round as a dish. The fact is, you're aggravating, *oui,* Délira. Why are you pinching my sides with your questions the whole day? When you were a young girl, you were on the untalkative side—it was hard to get a word out of you. To tell you the truth, I regret the past."

He buried himself in his chair, grumbling and vexed, his lips squeezing his pipestem. His troubles were increasing. When a man begins to have bad luck, they say, even a curd of clabber can break his head. The spotted heifer had gotten entangled in her rope and had sprained a leg. Dorméus had charged three *gourdes* to treat her, the scoundrel! But she was slow in mending and Bienaimé would have to wait still longer now before selling her. Lhérisson had gone away to work at Croix des Bouquets with a gang from the Department of Public Works. Others were thinking of following his example, and even of leaving Fonds Rouge for good. And now, Manuel was acting like he was about to take down with epilepsy! When, by the beard of the Holy Ghost!—pardon, Lord, I've blasphemed, I won't do it any more, *mea culpa*—when will all these goddamn troubles end?

But here comes Sister Destine. How does she manage to keep so fat? Bienaimé wondered. Her big black face was shining like waxed leather.

"Just stopping to bid you good day, Sister Délira. Brother Bienaimé, good day, *oui*."

"Good day, honey!" the old man replied. Then he pretended to be asleep. He was not anxious to talk. Délira, still standing, had pushed up a stool for Destine. Destine sprawled all over it, jutting out on all sides.

"How's life?" she asked.

"Our penance continues," Délira sighed. With a nod of her head, she pointed toward the fields, then she raised her eyes to the implacable sky. It was the hottest moment of the day, yet it wasn't noon, but rather about two o'clock. The earth had begun to exude a vapor that danced and made the eyes squint, it was so blinding.

In the acacia trees, a melancholy dove cooed. The male answered her with a harsh call. But their dialogue did not break the silence. It accompanied it and made it more oppressive and immediate.

"I'm going away, too," Destine declared.

"Don't say that!" Délira exclaimed, alarmed.

"Yes, dear, that's how it is. We're going to leave the land of our ancestors, my man Joachim and I. We've got relatives at Boucan Corail, distant relatives, but maybe they'll be charitable and give us a small piece of land—enough to build a hut on and plant a little garden. It's God's will, Délira, but how bad I feel!"

She was weeping. The tears traced soiled lines down her cheeks.

Life had dried up at Fonds Rouge. One had only to listen to this silence to hear death. One yielded to this torpor and felt himself already buried. The regular and repeated blows of the mallets in the mortars had become stilled since there wasn't a grain of millet to husk. How far things were

from the good old days of the *coumbite,* from the virile joyous chant of the menfolk, from the sparkling, swinging hoes in the sun, from those happy years when we used to dance the minuet under the arbors with the carefree voices of dark young girls bursting forth like a fountain in the night!

Adieu, I say, *adieu* to the days of pardon and mercy! *Adieu, adieu,* we're leaving, it's ended. Oh, *loas,* my *loas* of Guinea, you don't weigh the work of our hands according to our share of misery. Your scales are false. That's why we're dying with no help and with no hope. Is it fair? Answer me! No, truly it's not fair!

Délira said in a tranquil voice, "On All Saints' Day,[13] I cleaned up the graves of my dead relatives. They're all buried here, they're waiting for me. My day is beginning to end, my night is approaching. I can't go away."

Destine was still weeping. "I've got two sons in the cemetery."

Délira touched her on the shoulder. "Take heart, Destine. You'll come back, cousin. You'll come back with the rain and the good season."

Destine wiped her eyes with the back of her soft, fat, seemingly boneless hand. "This morning there was a snake curled around the beam of our hut. Joachim got up on the table and chopped its head off with his pruning knife. 'Joachim,' I said, 'I only hope that doesn't bring us bad luck, do you hear me, Joachim?' But he shrugged his shoulders without a word.

"This situation is eating Joachim, eating him on the inside like a disease so that now he scarcely ever opens his mouth. And Florentine keeps demanding what's due her for *clairin,* with all kinds of threats and vile words that can't be repeated—that slut, that policeman's hussy!"

She got up. "We'll see each other again, Délira, sweet. I'm not leaving before the end of the week. I met Manuel on the road. My! but he's a fine boy! You're lucky, cousin. My two boys are in the cemetery. But that's life. You can't do much about bad luck. You just have to bear it."

After she had left, Bienaimé opened his eyes. He seesawed his chair forward, and stamped angrily.

"Ah! You ungrateful Negroes!" he cried. "This soil has fed you day after day for years. Now you leave it with a few laments for the sake of appearances, and a little water in your eyes as if to wash off your guilty conscience and remorse. Band of hypocrites! As for us, we're staying! Aren't we, Délira? Aren't we, old woman?"

"Where on earth could we go?" Délira answered.

* * *

Finally, after two impatient days, Manuel had succeeded in finding her. She was walking along the road in plain view of the huts. But he had whispered to her as he passed, whispered between his teeth, "Wait for me under the tamarind tree down by Brother Lauriston's fence."

Now he was leading her toward the spring. She had difficulty in following him, so fast did he travel. She was afraid, too, that someone would see her. But Manuel reassured her that this place had been abandoned for a long time. It was an old cotton field alongside the thorn acacias.

"Look! It's full of weeds and prickles now."

They entered the woods. The sun shimmered through the mesh of the trees and rippled along the path with the movement of the wind in the tall branches.

"Do you believe there's enough water?" Annaise asked.

"I dug *that* deep." With his hand he pointed to his waist. "And not just one hole, either. Several. All along the plateau. It's full, a great basin, I tell you." He was out of breath, less on account of their rapid pace than because of his memory. "If I hadn't stopped up the holes again, I think they would have overflowed, there's so much of it."

"You're smart, *oui,* Manuel."

"No, it's just that I have faith."

"Faith in what?"

"Faith in life, Anna. Faith that men can't die."

She reflected a second. "What do you mean? They're just like that water—your words. I have to dig down deep to find their meaning."

"Naturally the day comes when each man must enter the earth. But life itself is a thread that doesn't break, that can't be lost. Do you know why? Because every man ties a knot in it during his lifetime with the work that he does—that's what keeps life going through the centuries—man's work on this earth."

She looked at him fervently. "Jesus-Mary-Virgin! How wise you are! And all those ideas, do they come out of your own head?" She began to laugh. "Don't you get a headache sometimes?"

"So you're trying to make fun of me, huh?" He took her by the arms and immediately Anna's expression changed. The light wavered in her eyes and she said in a choked voice, because her heart was beating in her throat, "Lead me to the spring."

The thicket grew clearer. The trees were now farther apart. At the end of the path, the open spaces of the plain appeared.

"You see that mountain?" Manuel asked. "No, not that one, the other—the wooded, dark blue one just under that cloud? That's where it is. Wait, I'm going to see if anyone's coming."

He went out of the woods, glanced around, then signaled to her and she joined him.

"Let's go quickly, Manuel. I'm afraid somebody'll see us."

She didn't tell him that since their meeting on the macaw mound, Gervilen had been spying on her. At the bend of a road, he would suddenly appear. He wouldn't say anything, but his bloodshot eyes would have a sinister gleam. Today he had gone to town. That she knew because her brother, Gille, was to accompany him there as a witness before the justice of the peace. It had something to do with a mule stolen or strayed—she no longer remembered which.

Gille had asked her, "Have you had an argument with Cousin Gervilen? Night before last when he came to see me, he looked at you mighty funny." She hadn't answered.

"You seem to be in a dream," Manuel said. "You're not saying anything, sweetheart."

"I wish we were there. We've been a long time getting across the plain. I feel eyes on my back. It's just like the prick of a knife."

Manuel looked in all directions. "Don't be scary! There's nobody around. Soon we won't have to hide. Everybody will know for whom I'm going to build a hut. Three rooms it will have, three. I've already figured it out. The furniture I'm going to make myself. There's some nice mahogany around these parts, and I'm something of a carpenter. And there'll be an arbor, too, with a climbing vine for shade. We might try grapes, what do you think? With a lot of coffee grounds about the roots, they'll grow, don't you think so?"

"That will be as you wish," she whispered.

Yes, I'll be the mistress of your hut, I'll sow your fields, and I'll help you bring in the harvest. I'll go out in the dew at sunrise to gather the fruits of our soil. In the evening afterglow, I'll go and see if the chickens are resting on the tree branches, if the wild and savage beasts haven't carried them off. I'll take our corn and provisions to market. You'll await my return on the doorstep. The lamplight will be behind you on the table, but I'll hear your voice, "Did you have a good sale, wife?" And I'll answer according to the good way or bad way things went that day. I'll serve your meals and remain standing while you eat. And you'll say, "Thanks, sweetheart." And I'll reply, "At your service, my master," for

I'll be the servant of your household. At night I'll lie at your side. You'll say nothing, but I'll respond to your silences, to the pressure of your hand, "*Oui,* my man," for I'll be the servant of your desire. There'll be a stream of water in our garden with reeds and laurels on its banks. You've promised me that. And there'll be children that I'll give you. That I promise in the name of the saints who are on earth, in the name of the saints who are in the stars!

Her face reflected the gravity of her soul.

"Your brows are knitted," Manuel exclaimed. "Your eyes are peering off into the distance. Tell me what's wrong, sweetheart."

She smiled at him but her mouth was trembling. "Where's the spring, Manuel?"

"We're there now. Give me your hand. There's a climb that isn't easy."

They followed the road hacked out by Manuel's machete through the stifling plants. Manuel went down first into the gully. She hesitated, slipped a bit, and he caught her in his arms. Against his body he felt the weight and the warmth of hers. But she freed herself.

"It smells cool," she said. "It smells like wind and water."

The wood pigeons took to the wing, opening a passage through the leaves toward the sky. She lifted her eyes toward the branches which closed again on the silence.

"It's dark! How dark it is! You wouldn't think there was a great sun outside. Here it filters down drop by drop. I listen, I hear no sound. It's just like we were on a little island. We're far away, Manuel, we're at the very end of the world."

"At the beginning of the world, you mean. Because at the beginning of beginnings, there were a woman and a man like you and me. The first spring flowed at their feet, and the woman and the man entered the spring and bathed in life." He took her hand. "Come!" He pushed the vines aside. She walked in the mysterious shade of the giant fig tree.

"That's the keeper of the water," she whispered in a sort of sacred terror. "He's the keeper of the water." She looked at the branches laden with silvery, floating moss. "He's terribly old."

"He's terribly old."

"You can't see his head."

"His head's in the sky."

"His roots are like feet."

"They hold the water."

"Show me the water, Manuel."

He dug in the soil. "Look!"

She knelt down, wet a finger in the pool and made the sign of the cross.

"I greet you, holy water!" she said.

"And there, look again! It's everywhere!"

"I see it," she said. She put her ear to the ground. "I hear it."

She listened, with her quiet face lighted by an infinite joy. He was beside her.

"Anna!"

Their lips touched.

"My sweet," she sighed.

She closed her eyes and he laid her down. She was stretched out on the ground and the low rumble of the water echoed within her in a sound that was the tumult of her own blood. She didn't defend herself. His hand, so heavy, transmitted an intolerable sweetness.

"I'm going to die!"

Beneath his touch, her body burned. He unlocked her knees, and she opened herself to him. He entered, a lacerating presence, and she gave an injured groan.

"No! Don't leave me—or I'll die!"

Her body went to meet his in a feverish surge. In her an unspeakable anguish was born, a terrible delight which absorbed the movements of her body. A panting wail rose to her lips.

Then she felt herself melt in the deliverance of that long sob that left her prostrate in man's embrace.

Chapter Ten

"The sun's rising," Délira said.

"It's hit the mountain," Bienaimé observed.

The chickens were cackling uneasily. They were waiting for someone to toss them some corn, but the peasants had nothing left to eat themselves, or almost nothing. They held on to the last grains, crushed them under the mallet and made a thick, heavy soup, but it was filling. It gave body to one's stomach. The cocks confronted each other, a ruff of feathers bristling about their necks. They exchanged a few pecks, a few blows of their spurs.

"Shhhh!" When Bienaimé clapped his hands together, they separated to make a stand farther on, and to crow their full-throated defiance.

It's like that in every yard. Thus day begins, with a light that can't make up its own mind, drowsy trees, and smoke rising behind the huts—for it's coffee time. And it isn't a bad idea to dip a piece of cracker in it if the coffee is well sweetened—with cane syrup, of course, because sugar, even brown sugar, the cheap kind, simply can't be had these days.

"Manuel said he was going to look for Laurélien."

"That's what he *said*."

"But what's going on, Bienaimé?"

"Ask me all you like, I'll not answer."

"It's been a long time since I heard an agreeable word out of your mouth."

Bienaimé gulped a swallow of coffee. He felt ashamed. "That's because my rheumatism's starting up again," he said to excuse himself. "Suppose you rub me with a little oil? It's got me in the joints."

"I'll heat the oil with some salt. That'll penetrate the pain better."

The old man lighted his pipe. He caressed his white beard. "Délira, ho!"

"Yes, Bienaimé?"

"I want to tell you something."

"I'm listening, *oui,* Bienaimé."

"You're a good wife Délira." He turned his head and cleared his throat. "And I'm going to tell you something else."

"Yes, dear?"

"I'm a disagreeable Negro."

"No, Bienaimé, no, my man! You just have your bad days. It's the fault of all this misery. But since we've been walking together through life—and it's been a long road, God knows! with so many rough places and plenty of tribulations—you've always protected me, you've supported me, you've helped me. I've leaned on you, and I've been sheltered."

But the old man insisted, "I tell you I'm a disagreeable Negro!"

"I know you inside and out. There isn't a better man anywhere."

"You're contrary, *oui,* Délira! I swear I've never seen a more stubborn woman than you are."

"Good, Bienaimé, that's right."

"What's right, what?"

"You *are* a disagreeable Negro."

"*Me?*" said Bienaimé, disconcerted and furious.

Délira gave her clear little laugh. "You're the one that says so."

"But you don't need to repeat it. The entire neighborhood will hear it. 'Bienaimé's a disagreeable Negro, Bienaimé's a . . .' Well, *oui,* and so what?" Anger was the only sap that remained in his veins. He made full use of it.

Manuel and Laurélien approached with long strides. They were coming out of the woods. They were laughing, and Laurélien, usually so calm, was pounding Manuel's shoulder with blows heavy enough to cripple an ox.

"He's found it!" he shouted from afar. "He's found it!"

"What's that Laurélien yelling about? He's gone crazy, no?" Bienaimé grumbled. "Here he comes prancing as though he were walking on prickles! Has he been drinking so early this morning?"

Délira went to get some chairs.

"At your service!" said Laurélien touching his forehead.

"Hello, son," the old man replied. He looked at him suspiciously. "Absinthe," he said, "shouldn't be abused. One glassful to wake up your stomach I don't mind, but no more."

"I'm drunk, that's the truth," Laurélien laughed. He was twisting his huge hands and chuckling. "Yet I haven't had a drop, not even *that* much! Délira, how's life? Ah, my good sister, life's going to change from today on! It's going to change." He turned toward Manuel. His face grew serious. "Speak, Chief. Tell them about it!"

"It's about water," Manuel began. He was breathing hard. Each word was charged with emotion. "Since I returned to Fonds Rouge, I've been searching for it." He opened his arms, his face was full of sunlight. He

almost shouted, "I've found it! A big spring, a basin full to overflowing, able to irrigate the whole plain. Everybody'll have all he needs and plenty left over."

Bienaimé leaped to his feet. His trembling hand clutched Manuel's shirt.

"You did that? You found water? Is it true?" He was laughing with a peculiar expression on his face. His voice broke and tears were flowing into his white beard. "Respect, my son! Your papa's telling you 'respect,' because you're a great Negro. Yes, hats off to you, Manuel Jean-Joseph! Délira, do you hear? My boy's found water! By himself, with his own hands. I recognize my blood. I recognize my race. That's the way we are in this family—enterprising Negroes—and we don't lack intelligence either!" He wouldn't release Manuel. He stammered, his eyes clouded, "Ah, son, son!"

Délira pressed her hands against her heart. She was staring at Manuel, but saying nothing. She felt as weak as she had on the day that he came into the world. She had been weeding the fields when the pains struck. She had dragged herself to her hut, bitten her cries in the flesh of her forearm, and he was born from an immense laceration of her being. She herself had cut the cord, washed and laid the infant down in clean cloths before sinking into black unconsciousness, until Bienaimé's voice and the womenfolks' chatter aroused her. Today, he was here before her, this man so tall, so strong, with that light on his forehead, this man who knew the mystery of water sleeping in the veins of the mountains!

He was beside her. His arms were fondling her shoulders. He was asking, "Are you happy, Mama?"

She heard a voice answer, far, far away, yet it was her own, "I'm happy for us, I'm happy for the soil, I'm happy for the growing things." The world went reeling around her, the hut, the trees, the sky. She had to sit down.

Bienaimé plied Manuel with questions. "Tell me about it, son. Where is this water? What's it like?" And, with a sudden worry, "It isn't just a little bit of water, is it? A trickle next to nothing, only good enough to drink?"

"No," Manuel replied. "It's a lot of water! You should see the place—a big shelf of earth white as chalk. That kind of soil drinks up water easily, but down deeper, the water must have found something harder, more resistant, so it collected there. I'll bet in a few years it would have overflowed. Now, what we've got to do first is plant a row of poles close together to hold the soil, because if we begin by digging in the basin, it

will be just like cracking a pitcher—the water will flood in all directions. Afterward, we'll dig the main canal down through the plain past the acacias, and in every little field each one of us will have his own ditch for his own irrigation. When the main canal and the others are ready, we'll open up the basin. It would be a good idea to appoint a trustee, too, somebody that all the peasants believe in, to distribute the water according to what each peasant needs. You see, it's a big job."

"The trustee will be you, Chief," Laurélien said. "It's already voted."

"Do you hear him, Délira?" Bienaimé exclaimed with great pride. "He's already figured it all out in his head. What he says is reason itself." But a thought seemed to disturb his joy all of a sudden. "You said, 'All the peasants.' You don't include . . . those *others?*"

Manuel was expecting that question. "Can I speak frankly and truthfully?" he asked. "And are you listening to me? Mama? Brother Laurélien?"

"We're listening, *oui,* Manuel."

"Good! How many able-bodied men do we have on our side? Wait!" He counted on his fingers. "Fourteen. And the others, the heirs and partisans of the dead Dorisca, are probably about the same number. Papa, Mama, just think! Brother Laurélien, figure that out. Alone, we'd never get all that work done—poles to be cut, carried, planted. A long canal across the plain, and the forest to clear so that it can pass. And besides, water isn't something that can be divided up into acres. It can't be marked out on a notary's paper—it's everybody's, the blessing of the earth! What right would we have . . . ?"

Bienaimé didn't let him finish. "The right that *you* found it!" he cried. "The right that our enemies haven't got any rights!" He made an effort to control himself. "But tell me straight out what you mean to do."

"To go and find the others. 'Brothers,' I'll tell them, 'it's true what they're saying, *oui,* brothers. I've found a spring that can water all the fields of the plain. But to bring it here, we need everyone's help—a general *coumbite,* that's what it'll take. What one hand can't do, two can. Let's lend each other a hand. I come to propose peace and reconciliation. What do any of us gain in being enemies? If you want an answer, look at your children! Look at your growing things—death is on them. Misery and desolation ravage Fonds Rouge. So let your better judgment have a voice. Yes, blood has been shed, I know, but water will wash the blood away. The new crop will grow out of the past and ripen in forgetfulness. There's only one way to save ourselves—only *one,* not two. It's for us to make again one good family of peasants, to call together again in the

name of brother to brother our union of tillers of the soil, to share our pain and our labor between comrades and comrades. . . .' "

"Shut your big trap, speechifier!" Bienaimé roared. "I'm not going to listen any more. Keep on, and I'll tan your hide all up and down your back with a club."

He broke his pipe, throwing it violently on the ground. Across the fields he went to give air and space to his rage.

Bienaimé's fury surprised the others like a sudden downpour. They kept silent. Délira sighed. Laurélien lifted his heavy hands and scanned them as though they were strange tools. Manuel had that stubborn pucker at the corner of his mouth.

"Mama," he said finally, "what do *you* think about all that?"

"Ah, son! you're asking me to choose between you and Bienaimé."

"No, just between right and wrong—it's a matter of life or death."

Délira struggled with herself, that could be seen from her indecisive look. The words stopped at her lips. Her fingers tormented the cord of her scapulary.[14] But there was nothing she could do but answer, "Dorisca and Sauveur are already ashes and dust. For years they've been resting in peace. Time passes, life goes on. I wore heavy mourning for Sauveur. He was my brother-in-law, and a good man. But there never has been a place for hatred in the heart of Délira Délivrance, may the Good Lord hear me!"

"And you, Laurélien?"

"I'm with you, Chief. The only way out of this situation is to make up. And the others will agree, too, if you talk to them the right way. I've never seen a man cleverer with his tongue than you are. That's right, *oui*!"

Bienaimé was leaning against the gate. He turned his back to them, indicating his refusal.

Manuel said, "For a long time Fonds Rouge has had a rotten smell. Hate poisons a person's breath. It's like a stagnant pool of green mud, of cooked bile, of spoiled, rancid, mortifying souls. But now that water's going to irrigate the plain, that it's going to flow in the fields, he who was an enemy will become a friend. He who was apart will unite, and peasants will no longer act like mad dogs to other peasants. Each man will recognize his equal, his likeness, and his neighbor. And here's the strength of my arm if you need it to work your fields and if you knock at my door saying, 'Honor,' I'll answer, 'Respect, brother! Come in and have a seat. My food is ready. Eat, you're more than welcome!' "[15]

"That's the living truth," Laurélien approved.

"I know my folks," Manuel continued. "Their heads are harder and more stubborn than millet under the mallet. But if a man won't think with his head, he'll think with his belly—especially if it's empty. That's how I'll get to them, in their most sensitive spot. I'm going to see them and talk to them one after the other. You can't swallow a bunch of grapes all at once, no. But grape by grape it's easy."

"But, there're still those others," said Délira uneasily.

"The dead Dorisca's folks?"

"Yes, son."

Manuel smiled. "You say 'those others' as if they were a bunch of devils. Well, Mama, I tell you, just between us, the day isn't far off when there'll be neither 'those others' nor 'ourselves,' but just good peasants gathered together for the great *coumbite* of the water."

"I don't know how you're going to do it—but be careful, *oui*. Night before last, I heard a noise out in the yard. I got up and opened the door ajar. There was a full moon. The man must have heard the key turn in the lock, because he started leaving. I only saw his back, but from his size and his walk it was surely Gervilen. I'd swear it—if that wasn't a sin."

Manuel shrugged his shoulders indifferently. "Probably drunk. He'd lost his way, that's all."

He had spoken to Gervilen only once, in the thorny acacia woods the day following his return to Fonds Rouge. Since then, Manuel had had no trouble with him, except recently at a cockfight when he had stared at him peculiarly with eyes like red coals. But he was obviously as full of white rum as a demijohn, the poor fool!

"Manuel's right," said Laurélien. "That Gervilen's a drunken Negro. *Tafia* must have gone to his head and he got lost in your yard like a chicken thief."

But Délira didn't seem too convinced. The man she had seen wasn't staggering. He was walking straight and quickly toward the gate.

Laurélien shook Manuel's hand. "I'm going to spread the news, but as far as this matter of making up is concerned, that's for you to talk to them about."

"*Bueno,*" said Manuel. "I'll see them later."

"At your service, Délira," said Laurélien politely.

"*Adieu,* Laurélien," the old woman answered. She made an effort to get up. "What's come over me? I feel like I've been run through the mill. I haven't got any more strength."

Manuel restrained her. "Wait a little while."

"What is it, son?"

"The other day you wanted to know that girl's name, didn't you? Well, I'm going to tell you. It's Annaise."

"Rosanna's daughter?" Délira cried.

"Herself. But you look like you're bowled over."

"That's because it can't be, Manuel. Just think, we're enemies."

"In a few days there won't be any more enemies in Fonds Rouge."

"And do you think Bienaimé will agree?"

"Of course. Naturally, he'll get mad first. But he'll be the one who'll take the proposal letter to Rosanna. Tomorrow I'm going to buy it in town as well as the green silk handkerchief to wrap it in, since that's the way proper folks do things. I've still got to find somebody to write it for me, though. I'm no good at that. Do you have any suggestions?"

"At the left of the church in town, on the market place, there's a two-story house with a tin roof. Ask for *M'sieur* Paulma and say Sister Délira sent you. He's a fat mulatto who keeps a hardware store. You'll find him behind the counter. He knows writings."

She smiled almost dreamily. "Ah, Manuel! You've chosen a pretty girl, and she's serious and hard-working, so I've heard. I've seen her grow up. And before all that Dorisca-Sauveur fuss, she used to help me carry my calabashes when I came back from the spring. 'Aunty,' she used to call me, that's what she used to call me. She was a very respectful young girl, that Annaise. I'll get down on my knees, if I have to, before my old Bienaimé to beg him not to be contrary, and I'll pray to the Virgin of the Miracles. I'll say, 'Give your aid to my children. Put your hand on their heads and protect them from misfortune, and guide their steps in life, for life is hard and misery is great for us poor peasant folks.' "

"Thanks, Mama, dear Mama!" said Manuel. He dropped his head to hide his feelings.

"When you've finished plotting with him, Délira, you can go and buy me another pipe at Florentine's." It was Bienaimé returning. He didn't seem any too agreeable, Bienaimé didn't. That was apparent from the way he bit off his words.

"Yes, Bienaimé," Délira hastened to say, "*oui,* Papa, I'm going right away."

Before noon, the rumor that Manuel had discovered a spring had spread throughout the village. We have a word for that, we Negroes of Haiti, "the tell-a-mouth" we call it. That's all it takes for a report, good or bad, true or false, agreeable or disagreeable, to circulate from

mouth to mouth, from door to door, and soon it's gone all over the country. You'd be astonished at how fast it works.

And since Fonds Rouge wasn't very large, it had spread as quickly as a fire in dry grass. By the time the sun reached its zenith over the plain, the peasants were talking only about this event, some guaranteeing that it was true, others that it was not. Some went so far as to affirm that Manuel had brought back a magic wand from Cuba that could discover streams—and even hidden treasures. In short, each one added a bit of salt and seasoned the news to his own taste.

Annaise had fulfilled the mission with which Manuel had entrusted her. She had been from hut to hut to talk with the womenfolks. Some had proved obstinate. But the greater number, with sighs and "Ah, Lord! Good Lord!" had begun to figure out the change and the profit that irrigation would bring, and how much corn the fields would produce, how much millet and provisions and what price they would bring at the market. And I really need a few yards of cloth for a dress, and my man needs a pair of pants and a jacket. As for the children, there's no use talking about them, they're living almost naked, and it's a sin and a shame—all the more so since, in spite of poverty and disease, they are shooting up fast like bad weeds. (It's hard to kill a Negro off. He's tough like nobody's business!)

Nobody knew what the men thought about it. Some had assembled at Larivoire's hut. He was an old man, noted for his good counsel. Furthermore, someone had seen his son, Similien, coming out of Florentine's with a bottle of *clairin,* for it's a known fact, *clairin* makes the tongue light and ideas more supple.

Antoine had come to Bienaimé's, hobbling as fast as he could. He was beaming. He had but one word, *coumbite,* on his lips. He claimed that he would compose a song about Manuel, and that never in man's memory had he heard a more beautiful or a more work-stimulating theme.

But Bienaimé had cursed him out. That hadn't spoiled Antoine's good humor, though. Right now, sitting in front of his door, he was tightening the cords of his drum to give it the proper tension, so that the sounds would carry through distance and buzz the news to all the plain that a good life was beginning again.

"Well, Simidor," he said to himself, "let's see if you aren't rusty. Let's see if your fingers haven't gotten stiff. Let's see if your head is still as full of songs as a beehive is of honey."

He tried the drum, bent his ear down to it, and his toothless mouth stretched wide with laughter. Soon, in the rising sun, with his drum over his shoulder, he would be leading the peasants.

Already words began to graft themselves into the rhythm of a newborn melody:

General Manuel!
Salute! Ho!
Salute! Ho!

His voice directed the rising and falling of the hoes:

Salute! Ho!
Salute! Ho!

Children ran up to listen. They crowded around him, but he chased the little Negroes away. He wanted to be alone so that nothing would disturb him while the song ripened in the beat of his drum.

Chapter Eleven

Manuel began to talk to the peasants, one after the other. For years, hate had become with them a habit. It had given an object and a target to their impotent anger against the elements. But Manuel had translated into good Creole the exacting language of the thirsty plain, the plaint of growing things, the promises and all the mirages of the water. He had led them in advance through their harvest. Their eyes gleamed just from listening to him. Only there was one condition: that was reconciliation. And what did it cost them? A mere gesture, a few steps like walking over a bridge, and they would leave behind the bad days of poverty, they would enter the land of abundance.

"Well, brother, what do you say?"

The other, his feet bare in the dust, ragged, skinny, and famished, listened in silence. It was true that they were tired of that old story. What good was it, after all? Suppose they had a mass sung at the same time for both Dorisca and Sauveur, for the repose of their souls? That would reconcile them in the grave, then they'd leave the living in peace. Restless dead folks are troublesome, they're even dangerous. What was sure and certain was that we mustn't let ourselves perish. Well?

"Well, since it's like that, we agree. But who'll go and talk with the others?"

"I will," Manuel replied.

The others had met at Larivoire's. The news was serious. It merited deliberation. Larivoire stroked the scant hairs of his goatee. His eyes were calm and shrewd, his mouth prudent. What he saw, he measured. What he said, he had first weighed pro and con. His great age had taught him such wisdom. In the bloody feud that divided Fonds Rouge, he had taken sides only because of family ties. But he had done so with moderation, taking care not to excite folks, even appeasing them when the need arose. His word was heeded and respected. His opinion had the weight of a judge's sentence.

"So they're going to have water," Mauléon began.

He said no more. His glance went over the main road, toward his fields beaten down by sunlight. He owed fifteen *gourdes* to Florentine. Hilarion was demanding his bay mare in payment for these debts. A good

animal and worth four times that much! And Cia, his wife, down with that fever that was wasting her away and which no medicine had been able to check. Dorméus claimed that an evildoer had cast a spell on her, so he was asking a large sum of money to rid her of it. The greedy dog! *Oui,* they had their share of trouble, for that they could vouch!

The sun shone through the palm leaves which covered the arbor, and drew a striped mat on the ground. A bottle of white rum and some enameled cups were placed on the rough-hewn table. Pierrilis helped himself, poured a few drops on the ground, then swallowed the rest at one gulp.

"Who knows if it's true?" he asked. He wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. "Yes," he repeated, "it remains to be seen if the news is true."

Larivoire slid back his chair, propping it against one of the poles in the arbor. He squinted his eyes. On the savanna, the light was doing a dance of white-hot needles. It was unbearable.

"A lie," he said, "is like money loaned out. It's got to bring in a profit. What interest would this Manuel have in lying? What profit would he get from it?"

"Well, they'd be able to water their fields," sighed Termonfils.

"And we'd hang around watching them, dry-mouthed," said Ismael.

Crouched on his heels, Gervilen said nothing. His small eyes, buried under the protection of his eyebrows, were nursing a disturbing fire.

"They're lucky, damn them!" Josaphat muttered.

He had just set up housekeeping with a young girl from Mahotière. For two days they had lived on nothing but crackers sopped in a little syrup. She didn't complain, Marianna, but she was silent as a shadow. That was worse than any reproach.

"No!" Nérestan exclaimed. He brought his fist down on the table with all his might. "I say no!" His thick chest was panting. Sweat bathed his face.

"No, what?" Larivoire asked, pulling on the hair of his beard.

Nérestan sat down again. Speaking had never come easily to him. That was why he was as violent as a wild bull. What he couldn't explain in words, he put under your nose with his fist. His hands were like washing paddles, capable of turning a man blue without dye.

There was silence. Larivoire's gamecock beat his cinnamon-colored wings and crowed. Other cocks answered him from the depths of neighboring courtyards.

"I'd rather leave Fonds Rouge," Josaphat said, "than stay here and watch them enjoy life while the rest of us feed on misery."

"So you're going to take to the highway and beg for alms from door to door?" Louisimé Jean-Pierre sneered.

"My fields used to produce thirty bags of corn, full measure," Ismael said. "As for sweet potatoes, there were enough to fatten the hogs. The earth's still there—good earth waiting only for a little water. How many seasons since the rain fell, I wonder? How long?"

"All that's idle talk," Mauléon interrupted. "What are we going to do?"

"There's nothing *to* do," said Josaphat, shrugging his shoulders hopelessly.

"Are you men or dogs?" Gervilen bounded to his feet, shaking with rage. His eyes were darting sparks in his charcoal face. A bit of froth whitened his mouth. "Sitting there like old women telling a rosary about their poverty! Not one brave Negro in the lot of you!" He spat scornfully. "Bunch of capons!"

Nérestan stood up. He was a head taller than Gervilen. "You haven't the right, no, you haven't the right," he stammered.

"Sit down!" Gervilen snapped. To everyone's amazement, Nérestan obeyed. He swayed on his chair like a bear, his head sunk on his shoulders.

"I tell you what we're going to do." Gervilen's voice was harsh now and grating like a rake. The words passed with difficulty through his clenched teeth. "We'll take the water! We'll take it by force!"

"That's the way to talk, boy!" Nérestan exulted. Tumult arose. Each one wanted to be heard. Women came out to their gates to see what was happening.

Larivoire raised his arms. "I'm speaking," he said. He waited for the uproar to subside. "I'm speaking, and you'll do well to listen to me if you want to avoid misfortune. You, Gervilen, from the dead Dorisca you've inherited blood that's too hot. I'm not saying that to reproach you. Even as a little tyke, you showed that character. Sister Miramise, your mama, should have whipped you—but no monkey ever thinks her baby's ugly, if I may say so without offending you. You speak of taking the water by force, but only the law has the right of force. You'll all wind up in jail. There's some more news that's important, too. Annaise came to see my wife no later than this morning."

At the mention of Annaise, Gervilen's whole body shook and his features froze as if cut in black rock.

"So Annaise came and, according to what she's heard, it seems there'd have to be a *coumbite* of all the peasants of Fonds Rouge if we are to bring the water to the plain, because it's a hard job—a task too difficult for Manuel's side to accomplish all by itself. Therefore, if we don't make up, the water will have to stay where it is."

Gervilen burst out laughing. His laugh was frightful to hear. It was like tearing a sheet of rusty tin.

"Can't you see," he shouted, "that Manuel and Annaise are in cahoots?"

"Be careful!" cautioned Gille. "You're talking about my sister."

"Shut your trap, imbecile!" Gervilen howled.

"Now, cousin," Gille said in a slow, drowsy tone. His hand quickly seized the handle of his machete.

"Are you both crazy?" Larivoire had rushed between them. "Negroes with no decency. Ah, accursed Negroes! So you want to shed blood in my house with no regard for my white hair!"

"Excuse me," said Gille, "but he insulted my sister."

"I told the truth," Gervilen retorted, "and if the truth tastes like blood, let it! I say let it! Let it!"

"You, Gervilen, get over there! Gille, sit here!" Larivoire ordered. He turned to the peasants. "Your ears have heard. What do you say?"

"Brothers!" Gervilen shouted. "They're trying to buy you. They're trying to trade your honor for a little water."

"Be quiet!" Larivoire said. "Let somebody else talk."

But the peasants were silent. They felt Gervilen's stare on their faces, eating its way into the depth of their thoughts.

Water! Its sunlit path across the plain. Its splash in the garden canal. Its ripple when it meets tufts of plants along its course. The soft reflection of the sky mixed with the fleeting image of the reeds. Black girls filling their dripping calabashes and their red clay pitchers at the spring. The chant of the washerwomen. The fertile soil. The tall ripening crops. They were struggling with temptation.

"We need to think about that," Ismael murmured.

"Some Negroes have no shame—just like dogs!" said Gervilen bitterly.

Ismael didn't answer. "Thirty bags of corn," he was thinking, "and sweet potatoes and victuals."

The other peasants were also reckoning the possible yield of their fields, making plans, anticipating the future. But they didn't dare say anything. Gervilen's presence disturbed them. He was camped in their midst, and his gaze went like a furious rat from one to the other.

Larivoire understood their hesitation. "Good! There's no hurry. On the contrary, we've got to look at this thing with a clear head. Tomorrow, if-God-wills, we'll meet and make a decision."

The peasants got up. Savagely, Gervilen left first without saying goodbye to anyone, not even Larivoire. At the gate, Nérestan joined him and, in that humble tone that giants take when they speak to little men who dominate them, "Brother Gervilen, I've something to say to you."

"Excrement!" the other replied, without even turning around.

Chapter Twelve

Bienaimé remained difficult. He hardly addressed a word to Manuel except to order, "Do this! Do that! Bring me the spotted heifer. I'm going to sell her myself at Pont Beudet."

Through Annaise, Manuel had learned what had taken place at Larivoire's. Gille had gone home choked with anger and talking about nothing except to cut off Gervilen's head to the root to cure him of his insolence. Fat Rosanna, who could already see her son in the hands of the police, had had a stroke. She had lost consciousness. This had frightened Gille terribly, and at the same time had calmed him down. But he declared himself in favor of reconciliation. He set out on a campaign to persuade the others, especially the younger ones, and he succeeded more or less in winning over Mauléon, Ismael, Termonfils, and Pierrilis.

Larivoire encouraged them on the sly. Only Gervilen and Nérestan were against them. Others were still hesitating, but more and more feebly, for what Manuel had foreseen had happened—the womenfolks had begun to make life impossible for them. They nagged their men mercilessly, buzzing about their ears with a thousand questions and innumerable complaints. They were worse than wasps. In vain the men would escape them to catch a breath of air or gulp down a grog at Florentine's place. On their return, the women would be waiting at the gate or on the doorstep, and the recriminations would start all over again with renewed vigor.

Louisimé Jean-Pierre had lost his temper and had even lifted his hand to impose silence on his unleashed *Négresse* with a good clout, but the latter had threatened to yell, "Murder!" For fear of scandal, Louisimé had abstained—which had left the hollow of his hand itching. The woman, seeing herself triumphant, had began to vex him with all kinds of proverbs like, "Rotten teeth are strong only on rotten bananas"—which meant that he was treating her thus only because she was a weak defenseless woman. She had continued in this vein for a good while, and in the end, Louisimé, who hadn't been able to restrain himself, slapped her right on her talking machine. Then, instead of arousing the neighborhood, she had burst into tears, which softened Louisimé's heart and made him ashamed and sorry.

Even Marianna, Josaphat's wife, had found her tongue.

"At Mahotière," she was saying, "they've got water, and irrigation isn't even necessary for their fields. The cool morning dew suffices. At dawn, all is shiny and moist. You should see it. It's like foam from the sun." She sighed, "*Oui, mes amis,* life is easy at Mahotière, thank God, *oui.*"

Josaphat asked her, "What do you think about this reconciliation business?"

"You are the masters, you men. It's up to you to decide."

They were in their hut. He drew her to him, his pretty young sweetheart. He pressed her in his arms.

"Josaphat, my man," she said, "I've been wanting to tell you this for several days. I'm going to have a baby, dear. But I'll never be strong enough to bear this baby if we keep on living in such misery."

Josaphat released her, his brow contracted. "You really believe that . . . ?"

"Yes," she said firmly.

He seemed to think it over, then his face lighted up. "He's the one who's giving the orders, that little black baby! I'm going to tell Gille yes."

"It's life that's giving the orders," Marianna said, "and water that's life's answer!"

Thus things seemed to be working out satisfactorily and along the right road. Gervilen realized this only too well, and cursed right and left. Besides, since the meeting at Larivoire's, he hadn't once stopped drinking. Nérestan kept him company. But, quite the reverse of Gervilen, *tafia* disposed Nérestan to see the agreeable side of life. None of his violence remained. He became as easily handled as a barrel. One had but to push him down the slope and he'd roll to the depths of blessed intoxication. Gervilen had tried to excite him. Nothing doing. Nérestan would open his enormous mouth and laugh. About what? About a story he'd heard a long time ago. He had forgotten it but he was sure it had been funny. In the end, Gervilen had insulted him, and Nérestan had gone off irritated, bending under the influence of his grog, like the mast of a sailboat in a heavy storm, and telling everyone he met that nothing but his good nature had kept him, Nérestan, from squashing Gervilen like a flea.

Naturally, the whole story had reached Hilarion's ears. It didn't please him, not at all. This Manuel fellow was damn well upsetting his plans. If the peasants succeeded in watering their land, they'd refuse to yield it

in payment of the debts and loans at usurious rates that they were piling up at his Florentine's. He'd have to lock Manuel up in the town jail, and make him tell where the spring was located. They had ways of making folks talk.

Then he'd leave the peasants to dry off in expectation, and when they had lost courage and all hope, he, Hilarion, would seize their fields and become the owner of several fine, well-irrigated plots of land. The rub was that he'd have to split it with the lieutenant and the justice of the peace. They were greedy! But Hilarion would arrange to keep the lion's share. The first thing to do was get hold of Manuel. Besides, he was a bad character, a dangerous Negro, who spoke words of rebellion to the peasants.

"You'll only be doing your duty," Florentine told him. She was a former prostitute from Croix des Bouquets whom Hilarion had picked up out of the gutter, and whose thirst for money devoured her like a malignant fever. "This Manuel is against established law and order. He's against the Government."

"My hand on my conscience," Hilarion swore. With a broad hairy paw he covered the rural policeman's badge that shone on his chest. "My hand on my conscience, in God's truth, that's my duty!"

Who could say that life was soon to have a rebirth at Fonds Rouge?

In the flaming afternoon the mountain stood erect, its sides bled white by rocky gullies. The breadfruit trees, sick from the drought, served as a perch for crows. When their vehement cawing slackened for a second, you could hear the breathless cry of guinea hens in the thorn acacias. A hot decomposed odor, that the wind beat down on the village along with swarms of mosquitoes, rose from Zombi Pool.

"Is it on good and tight?" Bienaimé asked.

"Yes," Manuel answered, pulling one last time at the strap.

Délira lifted her head toward the sun. "You'll get there before nightfall." She sighed. She had done her best to discourage him from undertaking this trip.

The bandy-legged chestnut horse that Dorismond had loaned them for the occasion was waiting under the calabash tree. Bienaimé put his foot in the stirrup and pulled himself up on the saddle with some difficulty. This saddle was the last splendor that he had left, but the saddleblanket was missing. A sack replaced it.

"*Adieu,* Délira," Bienaimé said. And to Manuel, "Untie the animal. Give me the rope. Go and open the gate."

"*Adieu,* my man," said Délira.

Bienaimé clicked his tongue and spurred the chestnut horse with a kick of his heels. The heifer followed docilely. Manuel had removed the thick bamboo poles that served as a gate.

"Have a good trip, *oui,* Papa," he said.

"Thanks," Bienaimé replied dryly, without looking at him.

Manuel went back toward the house. The lizards were dragging their soft, fat bellies through the dust of the path, or scooting off to chase one another under the hedge of the chandelier trees in the thistle-covered garden.

"For a stubborn man, you can't beat him!" the old woman complained. "As if you couldn't have managed that sale in his stead. Can it be that he doesn't realize how old he is? Now he's going to have to spend the night at Beudet on some porch or other, and in the cool night air. That's no good for his rheumatism. Not to mention the fact that he'll have to come back over that same long route tomorrow afternoon. That Bienaimé's certainly one hardheaded Negro!"

Although Manuel had tried to spare his father the fatigue of this trip, he hadn't insisted very much to get him to give it up. He wanted to take advantage of his absence to go to the meeting that would take place that evening at Larivoire's. He wanted to surprise the peasants by his unexpected presence, give them no time to change their mind, and convince them that there was no other solution to their problem save reconciliation. To occupy his impatience, he began to weave a macaw hat. His mother sat near him on the porch.

"Early this morning," she said, "I met Annaise. She must have been going to Mahotière to do the washing, for she was carrying a basket filled with clothes. She said, '*Bonjour, bonjour,* Mama!' That's what she said to me."

Manuel's diligent fingers laced and interlaced the straw.

"And you know how I answered her? *'Bonjour,* daughter-in-law!' That's how I answered her. She showed me her teeth in a smile. She's got what I call beautiful white teeth, big eyes, black skin, smooth as silk, and, furthermore, she's a long-haired *Négresse.* I saw one of her curls dangling out from her madras. In truth, the Good Lord has adorned her with His own hands!

"But, you see, what really matters isn't so much a pretty face, but good manners, and Annaise seems quite proper, I can't deny that. These days, that isn't very easy to find, no. There are too many of these young girls who've lost their respect for the ways of our ancestors. The city

has turned their heads. You might say the soles of their feet have been rubbed with pepper. They can't stand still, the shameless hussies! The land is no longer good enough for them. They'd rather go to work as cooks for some rich mulattoes. As if that was the thing to do!"

The old woman made a wry, contemptuous face. "A sin, I say it's a sin, that's what I say."

Brother, you don't know the spring at Mahotière? Then you're not from around here, brother. Between the legs of the mountain that spring flows. You leave the huts and the fields and by the ease of the slope you reach the ravine. It's a cool ravine because of the steep cliffs and the branches of the *mombin* trees that shade it. Ferns are everywhere in its oozing humidity, and a mat of watercress and mint wades in its cooling current. Under the rocks you catch crayfish, not very big ones, for they're the color of sunlit water so that they can't be seen very easily, the sly rascals! Still you can catch them by the basketful. And with rice it's a very good dish, take my word for it.

The sun delights in playing on the pebbles, and the water makes an incessant babble which mingles with the washerwomen's paddles on the wet clothes. That creates a never-failing din, a laughing music that accompanies the chant of the *Négresses*.

No, they're not to be pitied, the Mahotière folk. They have everything they need, what with their rich red soil built up in terraces, good for all crops. Avocado and mango trees protect their huts from the heat of day, and on their fences you can see those bunches of tiny, rosy bells—what do they call those flowers? 'Pretty Mexican Maids,' that's what they call them.

But the peasants' luckiest possession is that spring. There isn't any better or clearer drinking water anywhere around. And over by Plaisance, in the open curve of the ravine, it reaches the flat of the plain which the Negroes of the region have laid out for their ricefields.

The old folks of Mahotière will tell you that the Mistress of the Water is a mulatto woman. At midnight she comes out of the spring singing, combing her long, dripping hair which makes a music sweeter than violins. It's a song of perdition for anyone who hears it. There's no sign of the cross or, "In the name of the Father," that can save him. Its evil charm catches him like a fish in a net and the Mistress of the Water waits for him at the edge of the spring and sings and smiles at him, and beckons for him to follow her down into the bottomless water from whence he will never return.

Annaise had spread out her clothes to dry on the pebbles: her dresses, her blue, violet, and red bandannas, all her things. Her brother Gille's pants with wide patches where it would be shameful for them not to be, Rosanna's lace-flounced skirts such as elderly women wear, and the white kerchiefs that must be well starched because her mother wore them on her head with her black shawl when she went into town.

She bent over the wash. Her busy hands twisted the clothes and made the soap squirt. She looked like some queen of Guinea with her curved hips, her naked breasts, hard and pointed, her skin so black and smooth.

Her cousin, Roselia, did her washing beside her. She talked continually, relating Fonds Rouge stories, those that were true and those she invented. She had a sharp tongue, that Roselia. But Annaise heard her without listening. Her thoughts were with Manuel.

Manuel, dear, she thought, and a warm wave swept over her, a weakness so sweet that she wanted to close her eyes as she had done last night when he kissed her and she had felt herself drifting in a burning current whose every wave was a thrill to her body. He had covered her completely, he had become one with her, and she had left his mouth only long enough to emit that lacerating cry of the blood that gushed from the depths of her flesh and flowered into a happy sigh of deliverance.

I'm his woman, she dreamt, and she smiled. You had to come all the way back from Cuba to find me here. It's a story that begins like a fairy tale, "Once upon a time." But it's a tale that ends happily, "I'm your wife!" Because, oh, God! some are full of death and disaster.

"You're not working any more. Are you tired?" Roselia asked.

Annaise shook her head as though coming out of a dream. "No, cousin," she said. She seized her paddle and pounded her clothes. The indigo faded in the stream to blend with the current.

Roselia already had four children. Her bosom was dry and flabby. She looked enviously at Annaise's well-filled breasts, with nipples mauve as grapes.

"You ought to get married," she remarked.

"I?" said Annaise. "I've plenty of time ahead of me." She choked back a little laugh that the other mistakenly took for the timidity of a young *Négresse*. But it was a laugh that meant, "How surprised you'll be when you see me in my hut with my husband, Manuel, and there'll be bay trees in our garden and reeds by our canal."

The day ended in dusk, the sky darkened, the mountain disappeared, the woods entered the shadow, a thin slice of moon began its trip through the clouds, and night came.

One after the other, the kitchen fires had been extinguished. You could hear the voice of some irritated woman calling her little black son who, for some reason, had tarried in the yard despite his great fear of the werewolf. A dog howled, a second answered him, and, from door to door, a concert of barking got under way. The time to rest had arrived, when everyone went to stretch out on his pallet, close his eyes, and try to forget his troubles in sleep.

Fonds Rouge slumbered in the black night. There wasn't a light, except at Larivoire's, where a candle stood in the middle of the table under the arbor. Several peasants were already there with the master of the hut, his son Similien, Gille, Josaphat, Ismael, Louisimé. The others would come soon. Manuel knew, so he waited.

"Tell me, Manuel, are you asleep, Manuel?" his mother called from the next room.

Sitting on the bed, he didn't answer. He pretended to be asleep. Before the picture of a saint, with its wick soaked in castor oil, the eternal lamp burned dimly. A breath of air entered through the ill-fitting window flap, stirred the flame, and brightened its faded colors. It was a picture of St. James there, who is at the same time Ogoun, the Dahomey god. He had a fierce air, with his bristly beard, his brandished saber. As the flame licked the dappled red of his clothing, it looked like fresh blood.

In the silence, Manuel heard his mother turn over on her straw mat, seeking the right place to sleep. She was whispering words he couldn't understand, a prayer, perhaps, one last prayer. Délira was a person who called angels by their first names.

Time passed. Manuel finally became impatient. He went to the door and listened. "Mama," he called softly. He heard her peaceful breathing. The old woman had fallen asleep.

Manuel opened the window very cautiously. The rusty hinges scraped a bit. He slipped out into the night. The little dog recognized him without barking, and trotted along at his heels for a moment. It was dark as the devil. Fortunately, a thin thread of moonlight ran along the path. The chandelier trees raised a wall of shadows about the garden. Crickets chirped in the grass. Manuel stepped over the fence. He found himself on the main road.

It wasn't far to Larivoire's hut. The light beckoned to him and guided him. He passed Annaise's place.

Bonsoir, sweet *Négresse,* he thought.

He imagined her sleeping, her face on her curved arm, and a passionate longing for her came over him. This week, Bienaimé and Délira would carry the proposal letter to Rosanna. What lovely words *Monsieur*

Paulma had written! He had read them aloud for Manuel, licking his lips in contentment, as if syrup were flowing from his mouth. And then he had offered him some rum, an exquisite rum, in truth.

He had always regretted, Manuel had, not knowing how to write. But when, thanks to irrigation, existence became easier, they'd ask the Communal Magistrate in town to set up a school in Fonds Rouge. Manuel would propose that the peasants, of their own volition, build a hut to house it. Instruction was a necessary thing; it helped you understand life.

Take, for example, that comrade in Cuba, who talked with him about politics at the time of the strike. He knew things, that *hijo de su madre*! And he could explain the most intricate problems ever so clearly. You could see each question strung up before you on the cord of his reasoning like rinsed clothes hung out to dry in the sun. He would explain the thing so plainly that you could grab it with your hand like a piece of good bread. He put it, so to speak, within your reach. And if a peasant went to school, surely it wouldn't be so easy any more to cheat him, abuse him, and treat him like a beast of burden.

He reached Larivoire's gate. Night shrouded him. The peasants were in a circle under the arbor. Gervilen was speaking, the others listened. Larivoire was shaking his head, trying to interrupt, but Gervilen continued, flaying the air with his arms and stamping his feet.

"Honor," Manuel cried.

"Respect," Larivoire replied.

Manuel advanced rapidly. The peasants recognized him as he came into the light. Some got up. Others remained nailed to their chairs, gaping, petrified with amazement.

"I've come, brothers," Manuel said.

"Enter with respect," Larivoire answered.

"I bid you good evening, brothers."

There were some who replied reluctantly, others, not at all. Larivoire offered his chair.

"With your permission," Manuel said, "I'll remain standing before your white hair."

Larivoire smiled with the corners of his lips. Manuel knows manners, he does. Manuel leaned his shoulder against a pole.

"I've come with peace and reconciliation."

"Speak," Larivoire said. "We're listening."

"It's true, *oui,* what they're saying. I swear it on the head of my old mother—I've discovered a big spring."

"Lies!" Nérestan growled.

"I've taken an oath, Brother Nérestan, and I'm not accustomed to lying. Remember when we were young fellows, no bigger than that, you were accused one day of stealing some ears of corn from Dorismond's garden. And I stepped up and confessed, although I knew my papa'd tear the skin off my back with his whip."

"That's true!" Nérestan exclaimed. "I'll say, you've got a good memory!" He was laughing now with his whole enormous mouth, and pounding his thighs with blows hard enough to knock off a Christian's head.

"Close your teeth!" Gervilen snapped angrily.

"Those ears of corn, I had stolen to roast in the woods with Josaphat and Pierrilis. In those days we used to share things."

He's a clever Negro! Larivoire reflected, admiringly. He's warded off the storm.

"I left for foreign lands," Manuel continued, "and when I returned, I found Fonds Rouge pillaged by drought and plunged into the deepest kind of poverty." He waited a moment. "And I found the peasants divided up and quarreling."

The trouble was starting again. The peasants' faces contracted. Manuel went straight to his objective. "There's only one way to escape from drought and misery—that is to end this feud."

"We can't ever end blood," Gervilen cried. "Blood has flowed, Dorisca's blood. He was my father. You've forgotten?"

"But Sauveur died in prison," Larivoire countered. "Vengeance was gotten."

"No, for I wasn't the one to kill him with these hands, with my own hands!" A frenzied grimace twisted Gervilen's face. He was waving his hands like enormous spiders.

"Brother Gervilen," Manuel began.

"Don't call me brother. I'm nothing to you."

"All peasants are equals," Manuel said. "They're all one single family. That's why they call each other 'brother,' 'cousin,' 'brother-in-law.' One needs the other. One perishes without the other's help. That's the lesson of the *coumbite*. This spring that I've found needs the help of all the peasants of Fonds Rouge. Don't say no. It's life that gives orders. When life commands, we've got to answer, 'Present!' "

"Well spoken!" Gille approved.

"Life's giving the orders!" Wasn't that exactly what Marianna had said? Josaphat stood up. "Present!" he said, "I agree."

"Tell me, is there *enough* water?" Ismael asked. "Because my fields once yielded thirty sacks of corn, full measure."

"Everyone will have enough for his needs and his crops."

"You putrid bastard!" Gervilen spat, turning so brutally toward Ismael that the latter gripped his machete.

"Ah, Brother Gervilen!" he said, slowly shaking his head, but keeping his eyes vigilant. "You're not careful with your tongue. You lack respect for your equals. You'll regret that some day, *oui*!"

"A dirty lowdown Negro if ever there was one!" Mauléon muttered.

"I see, you're all against me." Gervilen spoke as if he were tasting sticky bile. "You've sold your honor for a few drops of water."

"You'd sell yours, all right, for white rum."

Gervilen pretended not to have heard Gille. "As for you, Larivoire, you've defended the family well. Thanks, I say, thanks—because, out of respect for your age, I can't tell you what I think of you as I can tell this bunch of swine!"

"But," Larivoire objected impatiently, "can't you think a moment? Can't you let some sense into your head?"

"No, damn it! I don't want to." He walked toward Manuel, and stopped two paces away from him. He stared at him for a long time, as though he were taking his measurements, then said with a smile that tore his mouth, "You've crossed the path of Gervilen Gervilis twice. Once was already too much!" Then he disappeared in the night.

The peasants felt relieved after his departure. They breathed more at ease.

"I guess an evil spirit is tormenting him," said Louisimé Jean-Pierre.

"He's a nuisance, that Negro," Pierrilis added.

Manuel hadn't budged from his place. He brushed Gervilen from his thoughts as one waves away a mosquito. He was awaiting the peasants' decision.

Naturally, they agreed, the peasants did, but they couldn't reply like that on the double-quick. That would make them seem too anxious. After all, this Manuel mustn't think that he had carried the day so easily. They had their dignity, didn't they?

Being clever, Larivoire understood the turn things were taking. "You came honorably, and we've listened to you. But it's too early yet to say 'yes' or 'no.' Wait till tomorrow, if-it's-God's-will. I'll bring you the answer myself."

"I'm already in favor," said Gille.

"I answered 'present,' " Josaphat added.

"I'm not against it," said Pierrilis.

"Me either," Ismael chimed in.

But the others kept silent.

"You see," Larivoire concluded, "there are some who haven't yet decided. Let me say, without wishing to put you out, we have to examine the matter among ourselves. Thanks for your visit, brother."

"You've said a word that's agreeable to hear, Larivoire. I, too, give you my thanks, brother peasants. And if that Gervilen returns, tell him, please, that I bear him no hard feelings, that here is my hand. And that it's a hand wide open for peace and reconciliation."

Nérestan got up. He walked heavily toward Manuel. His head almost touched the roof of the arbor. His shoulders blocked the view of four peasants.

What a woodsman it would take to notch and fell a man like that! Manuel reflected on seeing him approach.

"Brother Manuel," Nérestan said, "I'd forgotten that story about the corn. This Negro's no ingrate. Thank God, Nestor Nérestan's no ingrate!"

He offered his gigantic hand. Manuel took it. Terrific strength slept in those thick fingers, rough as bark.

"*Salut!*" said Manuel.

"*Salut!*" Nérestan repeated.

In a single gesture, each touched his forehead with his hand.

"At your service," said Nérestan.

"At your service," Manuel repeated.

Larivoire tapped him on the shoulder. "*Adieu,* son, you're a good man. You'll see me tomorrow afternoon."

"Well, *adieu,* Larivoire," Manuel replied.

"Take this piece of pine wood. It'll light your way." Larivoire tendered him a lighted torch whose flame went up in smoke and spread an odor of rosin.

"You're very polite," Manuel thanked him. "Well, cousins, *adieu, oui.*"

This time, they all responded. Their voices no longer hesitated. They sounded a note of friendship.

Manuel passed through the gate. He was now on the main road. The pine torch cast a bit of light about him. A piece of fence protruded in the shadow. A surprised pig, hiding in the thistles, ran off snorting. Manuel

walked with a light heart. What a garden of stars in the sky! And the moon crept among them so brilliant and sharp that the stars should have fallen like cut flowers.

I'm sure that Larivoire will bring the right answer tomorrow. You've done your duty, you've fulfilled your mission, Manuel. Life's going to start all over in Fonds Rouge, and now you can build that hut. Three doors will it have, I repeat, two windows, a porch with a railing, and a little stoop. The corn will grow so high that the hut can't be seen from the road.

He was walking past Annaise's hedge of chandelier trees. That's how it'll be, my sweet *Négresse*. You'll see your man's no idler, but a strong fellow up each day at the first crow of the rooster, a hard-working tiller of the land, a real Master of the Dew!

Back in the yard under the trees her hut was asleep. He stopped a moment. He inhaled the odor of logwood blossoms, and a great, deep, calm joy penetrated his being.

Rest, Anna darling, rest until the rising of the sun.

A crackle of crushed grass made him turn around. He had no time to parry the blow. A shadow danced before him, then struck him again. The taste of blood rose in his mouth. He staggered and fell.

His torch went out.

Chapter Thirteen

He regained consciousness, and the light of the distant stars wavered slowly and dizzily. A sharp pain nailed him to the ground.

"That scoundrel! I'm going to die!"

He tried to get up, but fell back on his face. "I'm going to die in the road like a dog."

He succeeded in raising up on his elbows to drag himself a little way. He was too weak to cry for help. Who would have heard him in this night given over to silence and to sleep?

With a tremendous effort, his side and shoulder pierced by dagger thrusts, he rose, staggering like a drunken man. His knees trembled, his feet were like lead. And still, that rolling sky, that awful nausea! He reeled a few steps forward. Each step thrust terrible pain through his wounds. He wiped his mouth where the blood flowed.

With his hands outstretched like a blind man feeling his way through the darkness, he crossed the road, but his foot slipped in the ditch and he fell. Clawing at the thistles and weeds with his fingernails, he crawled to the fence, and stood up again in an effort of desperate determination. He was panting and an icy sweat moistened his face. His clutching fingers followed the fence. He moved in a night filled with flashes of light, his head dangling as he stumbled against the stones. Sick fainting spells, when he vomited something thick, something clotted, made his legs buckle. With his arm he caught hold of a post, but his weight pulled him down and he rolled to the ground.

He revived weaker each time. But the unbreakable resolve to reach the gate of his own hut renewed his flagging strength. He went forward on his belly and pulled himself up to the fence. The sky had paled, and in the east, a fringe of light heralded the dawn as he achieved his gate. He crawled under the bamboo pole. The path wavered before him like a stream in the moonlight. The little dog ran up to him, barking in distress, frightened by this man crawling on his hands and knees toward the door.

He fell against the door with his whole body.

"Who's there?" the old woman cried.

"Mama!" he groaned.

The dog howled.

"I say, 'Who's there?' " the old woman repeated.

She got up to light the lamp. A mortal anguish made her tremble.

Outside the door, in the dark, a broken moan, "Please, Mama, quick!"

"Manuel? Jesus-Mary-Joseph!"

He lay stretched out before her. With her frail arms she pulled his huge body into the house. Then she saw the blood and screamed.

"I knew it! I knew it! They've murdered him! They've killed my boy! Help, friends! Help, neighbors!"

"Quiet, Mama, quiet!" said Manuel in a low breath. "Close the door and help me to bed, Mama."

She almost carried him to the bed. Where did she get that strength, old Délira? The thought that he was about to die almost drove her out of her head. She undressed him. Two small black wounds pierced his side and his back. She tore a sheet, bandaged the wounds, and went to light the fire to boil some calabash leaves.

Manuel lay there, his eyes closed, hardly breathing. The eternal lamp burned under Ogoun's picture. The god was brandishing his saber and his crimson cloak wrapped him in a cloud of blood.

Blinded by tears, Délira sat down beside him. Manuel's lips moved.

"Mama, are you there, Mama? Stay near me, Mama."

"Yes, my little one. Yes, dear, I'm here." She kissed his hand, hugged his earth-soiled hand. "Tell me the scoundrel's name so I can send word to Hilarion."

He became agitated. "No! No!" his weakened voice pleaded. "That won't do any good. The water, we've got to save the water! The wood pigeons, they flap their wings in its foliage, the wood pigeons. Ask Annaise about the road that runs up to the great fig tree, the road to the water."

His haggard eyes were shining. She sponged his brow that was bathed in a heavy sweat. His chest seemed to be lifting a crushing weight. Little by little he grew calmer, then dozed off. Délira didn't dare leave him.

"My God, my saints, dear Virgin, my angels! Please, please, oh, please make him live! Because if he dies, what will this old Délira do on earth? Tell me, what's she going to do on earth all alone, without consolation in her old age, with no reward for all this misery she's endured all her life? You, Mama of Jesus at the foot of the cross, oh, Virgin of the Miracles! I ask your forgiveness, forgiveness, mercy for my boy! Take me instead! I've lived my time, but he's still in the days of his youth, poor young devil! Let him live, do you hear, dear? Do you hear, Little Mama? My good dear Little Mama of Jesus, you hear me, don't you?"

Torn by a sob, she fell to her knees, arms outspread. She kissed the earth.

"Earth, Holy Earth, don't drink his blood! In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, Amen!"

She wept, she prayed. But what good are prayers and supplications when that last hour has come of which the Book speaks? When the moon goes out and the stars go out and the wax of the clouds hides the sun, and the strong Negro says, "I'm tired," and the *Négresse* stops pounding the corn because she's tired, and there's a bird laughing in the weeds like a rusty rattle, and those who sing are sitting in a circle without a word, and those who weep are running down the main street of the town and crying "Help! Help! Today we're burying our beloved, and he's going off toward the grave, he's going off toward the dust!"

The daylight slipped through the badly hung flap of the window. Some hens started cackling as usual. Manuel opened his eyes. He reached for the air with little panting gasps.

"You're awake, son?" Délira asked. "How do you feel? How does your body feel?"

He whispered, "Thirsty."

"Do you want a little coffee?"

He indicated yes by closing his eyelids. Délira went to heat the coffee and returned with the warm infusion of calabash leaves. She washed his wounds. Very little blood had flowed.

"I'm thirsty," he repeated.

The old woman brought the coffee. She held Manuel in her arms and he drank with difficulty. His head fell back on the pillow.

"Open the window, Mama."

He looked at the patch of light that spread in the sky. He smiled feebly. "Day is breaking. Every day, day breaks. Life starts over again."

"Tell me, Manuel," Délira insisted, "tell me that bandit's name so I can send word to Hilarion."

His hands twisted nervously on the sheet. His fingernails were a scaly white. He spoke, but so softly that Délira was obliged to lean over him.

"Your hand, Mama, your hand. Warm me. I feel so cold in my hands."

Délira gazed at him desperately. His eyes had grown quite wide in the depths of their sockets. A greenish circle lowered over his hollow cheeks.

He's going, she thought. My boy's going. Death is upon him.

"You hear me, Mama?"

"I'm listening, *oui,* Manuel."

He collected his strength to speak. Through a haze of tears, Délira saw his breast heave and struggle.

"If you send word to Hilarion, then that old Sauveur-Dorisca story will start all over again—hate and revenge will live on among the peasants. The water will be lost. You've offered sacrifices to the *loas.* The blood of chickens and young goats you've offered to make the rain fall. That hasn't done any good—because what counts is the sacrifice of a man. The blood of a man. Go see Larivoire. Tell him the will of my blood that's been shed—reconciliation—reconciliation—so that life can start all over again, so that day can break on the dew."

Exhausted, he still whispered, "And sing my mourning, sing my mourning with a song of the *coumbite*."

"Honor!" cried a voice outside.

"Respect," Délira replied mechanically.

Hilarion's evil head framed itself in the window.

"Oh, *bonjour,* Délira."

"*Bonjour, oui.*"

He noticed the outstretched body.

"What's wrong with him? Sick?" His suspicious eyes squinted toward Manuel.

Délira hesitated, but she felt Manuel's hand pressing hers.

"Yes," she said, "he brought back some bad fevers from Cuba."

"Is he asleep?" Hilarion asked.

"He's asleep, *oui.*"

"That's a shame, because the lieutenant wants him. He'll have to report at the barracks as soon as he can get up."

"All right, I'll tell him."

She listened to his steps move away, then she turned toward Manuel. A streamlet of black blood flowed from his mouth. His eyes were looking at her but he no longer saw her. He still held her hand. He had taken her promise with him.

Old Délira closed her boy's eyes. His bloodstained clothes she buried under the bed. Now she could wail the great cry of a wounded animal. Her neighbors heard it and the peasants came running, men and women. The news fell on their heads like a block of stone. They were crushed.

"Such a strong Negro! Only yesterday I was saying to Manuel, 'Brother Manuel . . .' It isn't natural, no, it isn't natural."

But Délira answered all their questions, "The fever, the bad fevers from that country of Cuba." And she uttered that awful cry, she opened her arms, and her old body trembled, crucified.

Laurélien arrived. He looked at the corpse. They lighted a candle at his head and another at his feet. There was a light on Manuel's forehead, and even in death his mouth kept that stubborn pucker.

"So, Chief? You've gone, Chief? You've gone?" Big tears rolled down his hard face.

"Ah, misery!" murmured Sister Destine.

"Ah, life!" Mérilia sighed.

"Aunty," said Clairemise, "I'm going to help you bathe him."

But Délira answered, "No, thanks . . . . I'm waiting."

"You're waiting for whom, Aunty?"

"I'm waiting," the old woman repeated.

Destine brought her a cup of tea. She refused. She swayed on her chair as though rocking her sorrow with her whole body. The others held her up and consoled her, but that was only talk. She didn't even hear them. She wailed as if claws of iron were mangling her soul.

Soon those others too had heard the news. They slipped into Larivoire's. Larivoire was seated under his arbor. He pulled on the hair of his beard. He did not answer their questions. Don't they know? Why, of course they know. Gervilen's door is closed, and he's not to be found anywhere.

The womenfolks met in front of their gates. "Now there's trouble for you," said one. And the other replied, "Yes, indeed."

As for Isménie, Louisimé Jean-Pierre's wife, she claimed that it was the vengeance of the Mistress of the Water. "That's what's dangerous, *oui,* sister, the spirit of the spring."

"But," her neighbor retorted, "they say this Manuel brought back the bad fevers from Cuba. They ate up his blood."

"They say, they say, what don't they say?" the incredulous ones remarked.

Hilarion sniffed the air like a dog looking for a trail. He scented a mystery. He sent his aide for information but everywhere mouths were stitched up tight. Or else folks acted as though they were completely surprised.

"So much the better!" Hilarion reflected. "That Manuel was a nuisance, a rebellious Negro. Now I can get the land from these peasant swine." That was also greedy Florentine's thought.

She for whom Délira was waiting came. Annaise was almost running, she had lost her senses. People could say what they wanted. What did she care? They'll know anyway. All right, let them know! Then what?

Manuel! Manuel! Oh, my brother! My sweetheart, darling! "You'll be the mistress of my hut," he said. "And there'll be reeds and bay trees in our garden . . ."

He had taken her by the spring where the sounds of the water had cut into her body like a fertile stream of life. Can a man die like that, as a breath of air blows out a candle, as a pruning knife cuts a weed, as fruit falls from a tree and rots, when he is such a big strong man? Now the crops would ripen—he wouldn't see them. The water would sing in the canal—he wouldn't hear it. And I, Annaise, your *Négresse,* I'll call you—but you won't answer me. No! No, God! It isn't true! It can't be! It wouldn't be right!

The peasants who saw her pass shook their heads. "*Mes amis!*" they marveled. "Has Rosanna's daughter lost her mind?"

When she entered the courtyard, they looked at her dumfounded. Antoine, who was just arriving, stopped dead still with jaw unhinged. Jean-Jacques grumbled, "What does she want? The impertinent hussy!" And Sister Destine stepped forward, her fists on her hips, with a hostile gesture.

But Délira rose. She led Annaise by the hand. She took her in her arms and they wept together in great heartbroken sobs. Then everyone understood.

Clairemise, who had a good heart, murmured, "Poor girl, poor girl!"

Antoine said, "Life's a comedy, that's what life is!" He spat. "It's got a bitter taste, the bitch!"

Annaise knelt beside Manuel and took his already icy hand in hers. She called him, "Manuel, Manuel, ho!" in a gentle voice wet with tears. Then, with a savage cry, she fell back, her arms upraised, her face distorted:

"No, God, you're not good! It's not true that you're kind! It's a lie! We call on you to help us—you don't hear. Look at our grief! Look at our sorrow! Look at our tribulations! Are you asleep, God? Are you deaf? Are you blind? Have you got no heart, God? Where is your justice? Where is your pity? Where is your mercy?"

"Quiet, Annaise!" Délira ordered. "Sins come from your mouth."

But Annaise didn't hear her. "It's useless for poor Negroes to cry for grace and forgiveness. You crush us like millet under a mallet! You grind us up like dust! You bring us low! You knock us down! You destroy us!"

"Yes, brothers," sighed Antoine, "that's how it is! From Guinea to today the Negro's walked in storm and tempest and turmoil. 'The Good Lord's good,' they say. 'The Good Lord's white,' they *ought* to say. Or maybe it's just the reverse."

"Enough, Antoine! There're already enough curses on this hut."

Délira lifted Annaise to her feet. "Get yourself together, daughter. We're going to bathe him."

The peasants left the room and Délira closed the door. She put her fingers to her lips.

"Don't scream!"

Gently she turned the body over.

"Don't scream, I say!"

She lifted his shirt, and two small wounds, blacker than his skin, appeared, two little lips of clotted blood.

"Lord!" Annaise groaned.

Délira made the sign of the cross over the first wound.

"You've seen nothing."

She made the sign of the cross over the second wound.

"You know nothing."

She looked at Annaise sternly.

"It was his last wish. He was holding my hand and he went away bearing my promise. Swear that you'll keep this secret!"

"I swear, *oui,* Mama."

"In the name of the Holy Virgin?"

"In the name of the Holy Virgin!"

It wasn't Manuel, that great, cold, stiff lifeless body. It was only his likeness in stone. The real Manuel was walking through the mountains and the woods in the sunlight. He was talking to Annaise. "My darling," he was saying, taking her in his arms, enveloping her in his warmth. The real Manuel was making a canal so that the water might flow through the fields. He was walking in the harvests of the future, in the dew of early dawn.

"I haven't the courage, Mama," Anna whispered, afraid.

"He was your man," the old woman said. "You've got to do your duty!"

Annaise lowered her head. "*Oui,* Mama, I'll do my duty."

When the two women had completed their funereal task, when Manuel was dressed in his suit of coarse blue cloth, Délira relighted the candles.

"Put his machete by his side," she said. "He was a hard-working peasant."

Later in the afternoon, Bienaimé returned. He was bringing back the heifer that he hadn't been able to sell. The tired animal was limping again.

"What's this congregation in my yard?" he asked, perceiving a crowd of peasants. Laurélien opened the gate for him.

"I've got a son," said Bienaimé crossly, "and it has to be a neighbor who comes to open the gate for me. Thanks anyway, Laurélien."

He wanted to keep on toward the hut but Laurélien held back his horse by the bridle.

"Brother Bienaimé," he began.

At this moment, Délira came out of the hut. She advanced slowly, tall and thin in her black dress, her head wrapped in a white madras.

"Papa," she said, "get down from your horse and give me your hand."

"What's the matter?" the old man stuttered.

"Give me your hand, Papa."

But her strength left her and she fell against Bienaimé's chest, shaken by bitter sobs.

In the hut the mourners' chorus started. The huge Destine was turning round and round, striking one hand against the other and screaming as if she had lost her mind.

"Ah, Lord! Good Lord! Here's Bienaimé, *mes amis,* here's Bienaimé!"

"Manuel?" said the old man in a toneless voice.

Délira clung to him in despair. "Yes, Papa, yes! Bienaimé, dear Papa, our boy! Our only son, the consolation of our old age."

The peasants moved aside as they passed. The women wailed.

"You don't have to invite misfortune in," Antoine opined. "It comes anyhow and sits at your table without permission. It eats and leaves nothing but bones."

Bienaimé looked at the corpse. He wasn't weeping, old Bienaimé wasn't. But the most hardened turned their eyes away from his face and coughed violently. Suddenly he tottered. The peasants rushed to him.

"Leave me alone," he said, pushing them away.

He went out of the hut. He sat down on a step in front of the porch, bent in two as if someone had broken his shoulders. His hands trembled in the dust.

The sun was about to set. Day had to end sometime. Angry clouds floated toward the horizon with all their sails aflame. In the savanna a herd of oxen took on a stonelike immobility. The hens already flapped their wings in the calabash trees.

Some peasants came as others left. They had to take care of those little Negroes left at home, and they had to go eat a bite. They would come back for the wake.

Already a few tables and chairs, borrowed from the neighborhood, had been installed in the yard. An aroma of coffee and cinnamon tea was spreading. Laurélien lent two *gourdes,* all he had, so that they might buy some *clairin*. Délira had barely enough to pay the *Père Savane* who would come to read the prayers and bless the body. They hadn't the wherewithal for a church funeral. That was too expensive, and the church extends no credit to the poor. It's not a shop—it's God's house.

The weeping quieted down. Night came with its weight of shadow and silence. From time to time, a woman sighed, "Ah, Jesus-Mary-Virgin!" but not with much conviction. In the long run folks tire even of grief.

Délira sat next to Manuel. She did not take her eyes from him, and at times she seemed to be whispering to him. No one heard what she was saying. Annaise left. She went to explain things to Rosanna. That wouldn't be easy. Bienaimé was still in the same place, his head in his folded arms resting on his knees. Was he asleep? They didn't know. Nobody disturbed him.

Laurélien was busy making a coffin in front of his hut with saw and hammer. Anselme, his younger brother, held a torch of candlewood. It was not a big job—three planks and a lid to entrust to the earth this man who had been his friend.

What a man Manuel was! he mused. What a peasant! There wasn't his better in the whole country. But death made its choice like a blind man who selects mangoes at the mart, groping until he finds a good one and leaving the bad. That's the truth—and it's not right.

"Pass me the nails," he said to Anselme.

His movements were silhouetted on the wall of the hut by huge deformed shadows. Anselme was just on the threshold of manhood. If he repeated Manuel's words to him, perhaps he wouldn't understand. I used to watch him weave those hats, his fingers would run through the straw, and he'd say, "A day will come—we'll make a great *coumbite* of all the farmers to clear out poverty and plant a new life." You won't see that day, Chief, you've gone before your time, but you've left us hope and courage.

One more nail, one more. Bring the light closer, Anselme, one more nail. The coffin is finished. The lid fits. I've finished, and to tell the truth, Brother Manuel, it's a job for which I deserve no thanks.

He looked at his work—a long plain box. The wood was too thin, too green. The earth would eat it up in no time. If only I'd been able to get a few good mahogany planks, and maybe some iron bindings like those that *M'sieur* Paulma sells in town, but those are dear, out of reach.

"They've started with the canticles," Anselme said.

"I hear," Laurélien replied.

The chant rose sadly from the heart of the night:

By what excessive kindness Thou hast taken upon Thyself the weight of our crimes. Thou hast suffered cruel death to save us from death.

When it wavered, a woman's voice, high and vibrant, somewhat cracked, took it up again, uniting the other voices, and the canticle started anew in unanimous transport.

It was time to go to the wake.

In the front room of the hut, Délira arranged on a tablecloth a crucifix, lighted candles, and such flowers as could be found in all the drought.

And now, Lord, Thou lettest Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy word.

The peasants droned their canticles before the altar, crowded one against the other, and the light from the candles made shiny reflections on their black sweaty faces.

Fortunately, there was *clairin* to cool them off. Antoine had consumed more than a reasonable amount. Already he was no longer very firm on his legs, but was singing at the top of his lungs. When he let his harsh, powerful voice ring out, it covered that of the others. Destine, with all apparent innocence, jabbed her elbow in the pit of his stomach, and a hiccough almost choked him.

"The shameless wench!" he exclaimed a moment later in the yard. "She doesn't even respect the dead Manuel." Then in a menacing tone, "That's all right. I'll make up a song about her, damn it, that'll—" But he remembered that he was at a wake, so he swallowed the enormous obscenity that was on the very tip of his tongue.

On each table, they had placed a candle that created the illusion of little islands of light in the yard. Peasants sat around playing *trois-sept*. They held their cards like fans, and seemed absorbed. Had they already forgotten Manuel? Oh, no! You mustn't think that! Only, men can't go around crying like women. That soothes the womenfolks, but a man has courage enough to bear grief in silence. Besides, it's the custom to play cards at wakes.

"Nine of diamonds. I cut."

Bienaimé was like a body without a soul. He entered the room where Manuel reposed. He looked down for a moment with deep empty eyes. He went out in the yard and walked past the tables. They spoke to him. He didn't answer. After much prayer and pleading, Délira made him eat a little stew, but he left almost all of it on his plate.

"He's like a man struck by lightning!" Antoine said. "He's done in."

Annaise returned. She had explained to Rosanna. Rosanna had screamed and called her all sorts of names.

"Aren't you ashamed?" she cried.

"No," Annaise answered.

"You're a common woman if ever there was one," Rosanna shouted, "a woman without conscience, without honor!"

"No," Annaise replied, "I'm his wife. He was the finest man on earth. He was honest and he was kind. He didn't fool me or take me by violence. I'm the one who wanted it. . . ."

"But how did you manage to meet him, enemies that we are?"

"He loved me and I loved him. Our paths crossed."

She took off her silver earrings. She put on her black dress and, on her head, a white kerchief.

"You're not going out!"

Rosanna stood before the door.

"I'm in grief, Mama," Annaise said.

"So much the worse! I say you're not going out!"

"I'm in sorrow, Mama," said Annaise.

"You heard me. I won't repeat it three times."

Someone knocked on the door. It was Gille. Gille entered and saw what was going on.

"Gervilen was right," he remarked. "You and Manuel were accomplices." He paused. "Early this morning, Gervilen left Fonds Rouge."

Annaise said nothing. She remembered her oath.

"Do you know where the water is?" Gille asked.

"I know where it is," Annaise replied.

"Let her go out, Mama," said Gille. Annaise went out.

You have to pass the time away somehow at wakes. Cards, hymns, and white rum don't suffice, the night is long.

Near the kitchen, Antoine, a cup of coffee in his hand, was telling riddles. Those who surrounded him were mostly young folks. Not that the older peasants wouldn't enjoy it, but it didn't seem quite proper, especially when you value your reputation as a grave, stern man. Suppose you were forced to laugh at some of Antoine's unexpected sallies? Then what? Then these young Negroes would have no more respect for you—they're always ready to consider you their equal and their pal, those little monkeys!

Antoine began: "On entering the house, all the women take off their dresses."

The others tried to guess, digging deep into their imaginations. Oh, pshaw! They couldn't find the answer.

"What is it?" Anselme asked.

"The schooners clew up their sails on entering port," explained Antoine. He swallowed a drink of coffee.

"I'm going to the king's. I find two roads and have to take them both."

"A pair of pants!" exclaimed Lazare.

"That's right. But this one—my name isn't Antoine if you get it—Little Marie put her fist on her hip and said, 'I'm a big girl.' "

"That's hard, *oui,* that's hard."

"You aren't intelligent enough. Bunch of thick-skulled Negroes that you are!"

They tried and tried in vain, then gave up. Antoine triumphed.

"A cup!" He held his cup by the handle, showed it to them and laughed for joy.

"Another one, Uncle Antoine, just one more," they pleaded in chorus.

"Shhh! You're making too much noise! Looks like you can't get enough!"

He pretended that he had to be begged, but he was only too happy to keep on, Antoine was. All over the plain they could tell you that no one was more famous for his tales and songs.

"Good!" he said. "I'm going to make this one easy for you. Round as a ball, long as the high road."

"A spool of thread."

"I burn my tongue and give my blood to please society."

"A lamp."

"My coat is green, my shirt is white, my pants are red, my tie is black."

"A watermelon."

"Anselme, my boy," said Antoine, "go and fill this cup with *clairin,* up to the brim, you hear? You mustn't spare the *clairin* at a wake. You've got to do honor to the dead. If Sister Destine has the bottle, just tell her it's for Laurélien. Just as a precaution, son, just as a precaution—because that Destine and I, we get along like milk and lemons. We get sick at the stomach merely from looking at each other."

That's how the wake proceeded, between tears and laughter. Just like life, brother. *Oui,* exactly like life.

A small group formed to one side. Old Dorélien Jean-Jacques, Fleurimond Fleury, Dieuveille Riché, and Laurélien Laurore.

"In my opinion," Dorélien said, "it's a death that isn't natural."

"That's what I think myself," Fleurimond approved.

Laurélien didn't share this opinion. "Délira said it was the bad fevers. If she said so, that's the way it is. She'd have no reason to lie. And there are fevers that consume you without seeming to. We're like a piece of furniture that looks very solid, very strong, but the termites are already inside. And one fine day, we fall into dust."

"Maybe so," said Fleurimond. But he didn't seem too convinced.

Then Dieuveille Riché took the floor. "At noon you cross the river on foot. Dry, not *that* much water, just pebbles and rocks. But the rain has fallen like an avalanche in the mountains, and in the afternoon, the water descends like a mad beast and ravages everything as it passes in its fury. That's how death comes, when we least expect it. And there's nothing we can do to prevent it, brothers."

"About the water," Laurélien said, "it remains to be seen whether Manuel told anyone where the spring is. I was his friend, but he didn't have time to show me the spot."

"Maybe Délira knows."

"More probably Rosanna's daughter does."

"Because it would be the worst luck we could have if he had gone with the secret."

"We'd have to scour the entire countryside, searching the smallest cracks of the hills and ravines."

"And even then, you couldn't be sure of finding it."

"We had built up our hopes, and in advance we could see all these fields irrigated. It would be a pity."

"For tough luck, that would really be tough luck. I was already planning to plant beans on one edge of my field. Beans are bringing in a good price nowadays at the market."

"And bananas could grow by the canal."

"I," Dieuveille said, "I was going to try leeks and tropical onions on my piece of land."

Old Dorélien sighed. "So each Negro had his plans. One said, 'I'll do this.' The other said, 'I'll do that.' And all the while, misfortune was laughing on the sly, and waiting at the turn of the road we call Death. Ah, I am going, *mes amis,* I am going, *oui.* I haven't much time left, but I would like to see the cornfields green once more and the crops covering the fields."

Forward into com . . . bat,
On to glo . . . ry!

They're tough, those hymn singers, they don't easily give out of breath. Fat Destine, conquered by fatigue, had plopped down in a chair. Her head rocked on her shoulders, her eyes closed, but she was still beating time with her bare foot, and singing in a sad, sleepy falsetto.

"Ugh! she's ugly!" Antoine whispered with a wry look of disgust.

The bottle of white rum was on the table. He reached for it, but Destine opened one eye, just one—but it was firm, and Antoine pretended to be snuffing out a candle.

"That's just wasting wax," he explained. And he withdrew, his shoulders stooped, swearing between his teeth in words that could not be repeated.

Forward in . . . to com . . . bat,
On to glo . . . oo . . . ry!

Destine sang, but this time in a clarion, triumphant tone which injected new life into the choir as a fresh log revives a fire. Their song was wafted away on the trembling wings of dawn. The peasants who rose early in Fonds Rouge heard it.

"Ah! yes," they said, "the funeral's today."

And those who were sleeping under the arbor with their heads on the table, woke up and asked for coffee. Délira hadn't left Manuel for a second, nor had poor Annaise. Bienaimé had curled up in a corner.

It was the last hymn, the very last, for day came with black chilly trees against a pale sky, and the peasants began to take leave. They would come back later. They disappeared over the paths under the thorn acacias, and the wild guinea hens came down from the branches and assembled in the clearings. Roosters strained their throats from yard to yard, and a young colt neighed nervously on the savanna.

"*Adieu,* Délira," Laurélien said. He hesitated. "*Adieu,* Annaise."

They answered him in a weak voice, for they had wept too much, they had no more strength.

Dawn came in through the window, but Manuel would never see it again. He had gone to sleep for always and forever.

Amen!

About ten o'clock, Aristomène, the *Père Savane,* made his entrance in the courtyard. He was riding a little donkey which bent under his weight and the old man's feet were dragging in the dust. He was late and the animal was restive. Aristomène dug his heels in its flanks so vigorously

that he almost lifted it from the ground. He was wearing a long cloak that must have been black once upon a time, but, because of its great age, now bordered onto the glistening color of a wood pigeon's throat. With an unctuous gesture, he removed his hat and revealed a shiny bald head. "*Bonjour,* one and all!"

The peasants greeted him politely. They offered him a seat, and Délira in person served him a cup of coffee. Aristomène drank slowly. He was conscious of his importance as the murmur of conversation buzzed about him like a homage. His reddish pockmarked face sweated in abundant satisfaction.

In the house, they had placed Manuel in his coffin. Two candles burned, one at his head, the other at his feet. Bienaimé gazed at his son. He was not weeping, but his mouth couldn't stop trembling. It wasn't certain that he had seen Annaise. Her hands covered her face. The tears streamed through her fingers and she sobbed like a hurt child.

Every now and then, some sister—Clairemise, Mérilia, Destine, Célina, Irézile or Georgiana, or some other—uttered a strident scream and all immediately accompanied her, and the mourners' chorus filled the hut with deafening cries.

The men stood in the yard or on the porch. They talked in a low voice, biting the stems of their pipes. But Laurélien was in the room with death.

"Goodbye, Chief. I'll never have another friend like you! *Adieu,* my brother! *Adieu,* comrade!"

He wiped his eyes on the back of his hand. It wasn't usual to see a black man cry, but he couldn't help it and he was not ashamed.

Délira had returned to her post near the coffin. She fanned Manuel's face with one of those straw hats that he used to weave in the afternoon on the porch. She was protecting him from the flies, from the fat flies that are seen only at funerals. The flickering candlelight illumined Manuel's brow.

"There was a light on your forehead the day you came back from Cuba, and not even death can take it away. You're carrying it into the shadows with you. May this light in your soul guide you through everlasting night, so that you can find the road to that country of Guinea where you'll rest in peace with the wise men of our people."

"We're about to start," said Aristomène. He was perusing his book, wetting a finger to turn each page.

"Prayer for the dead."

The women fell on their knees. Délira opened wide her arms, her eyes raised toward something only she could see.

"From the depth of the abyss, I have cried to Thee, Lord! Lord, hear my voice. May Thine ears be attentive to the voice of my prayer!"

He read at top speed, Aristomène did. He swallowed his words without chewing them, he was in such a hurry. Brother Hilarion had invited him to have a drink after the ceremony. And for these measly two *gourdes* and a half that he was going to be paid, this was not worth bothering much about. No, it was really not worth the trouble.

"May they rest in peace. Amen."

"Amen," the peasants repeated.

Aristomène sponged his skull, his face, and his neck with a wide checkered handkerchief. Notwithstanding his haste, he enjoyed the Latin words that he was going to utter. Those "*vobiscums, saeculums,* and *dominums*" that sounded like a stick falling on a drum, and that made these ignorant peasants prattle with admiration.

"My! but he's smart, *oui,* that Aristomène!"

His voice rose in the plaintive, nasal, solemn drawl of a priest. It wasn't for nothing that he had been a sexton for years. And if it hadn't been for that regrettable affair with the Father's housekeeper, he'd still be serving mass at the town church. Oh, that hadn't been his fault. Father should have chosen an older woman to be his servant instead of some young *Négresse,* plump and round as a bantam chicken.

"*Lead us not into temptation,*" the Scripture says.

If words had bones, Aristomène would have choked, he was hurrying so. The pages flew under his fingers as he turned several at a time.

"There's a slick Negro for you!" reflected Antoine, watching him closely.

Délira heard this hurried language, this sacred gibberish, only as a distant, incomprehensible rumbling. She sat beside Manuel. She saw him alone. And she swayed on her chair as if she were exhausted from bearing her burden of sorrow. She was like a branch in a storm, abandoned to a bitter, endless night.

"Pardon, pardon, I ask pardon and deliverance, Lord, take me for I am tired! Old Délira is so, so tired! Lord, let me accompany my boy into that great savanna of death. Let me wade with him across that river in the country of the dead. I carried him for nine months in my body and for a whole lifetime in my heart. I can't leave him!

"Manuel, ah, Manuel! You were my two eyes, you were my blood. I saw with your eyes like the night sees with the stars. I breathed through your mouth, and my veins opened when your blood flowed. Your wound wounded me. Your death killed me. I've nothing more to do on earth.

All that's left for me is to wait in some corner of life like an old rag forgotten at the foot of a wall, like a poor helpless woman who holds out her hand. 'Charity, please,' she says. But the charity she asks is death.

"Hail Mary, Gracious Virgin! Make that day come! Make it come tomorrow! Make it come today even! Oh, my saints, oh, my *loas,* come and help me! Papa Legba, I call you! St. Joseph, papa, I call you! Dambala Siligoué, I call you! Ogoun Shango, I call you! St. James the Elder, I call you! Ah! Loko Atisou, papa! Ay, Guéde Hounsou, I call you! Agoueta Royo Doko Agoué, I call on you! My boy is dead. He's going away. He's going across the sea. He's going to Guinea. *Adieu, adieu,* I say *adieu* to my boy. He'll never come back. He's gone forever. Ah, my sadness! My heartbreak! My misery! My grief!"

She lifted her arms to heaven, her face disfigured by tears and suffering, her shoulders rocked by this desperate incantation. The womenfolks supported her and whispered, "Courage, Délira, dear! Be brave!"

But she didn't hear them, she didn't hear Aristomène as he chanted faster and faster, hurrying to get through.

"Santae Trinitatis. Per Christum Dominum Nostrum. Amen!"

Then from the depths of his cloak he took out a small bottle. He pulled out the stopper with his teeth and sprinkled the body with holy water, and Laurélien came forward with the coffin lid.

"No, no!" Annaise cried, struggling in Clairemise's arms, but Laurélien drew nearer with the lid.

"Let me see him for the last time," Délira cried.

But Laurélien nailed down the lid, and with each blow of the hammer Délira trembled as though the nails were being driven into her soul.

It's over, yes, it's over. Joachim, Dieuveille, Fleurimond, and Laurélien lifted up the coffin. There were wails and groans and voices that cried, "Help me, O God!" for the tall Negroes were carrying the coffin away. They were carrying their brother off toward that earth that he loved so much and for which he had died.

They walked slowly toward the edge of the thorn acacias, and the cortège of peasants followed them. The women were weeping and the men walked in silence. They had dug the grave in the shade of a logwood tree. A pair of turtledoves flew off with a frightened trembling of their wings and were lost beyond the fields in the noonday sun.

"Let him down easy," Laurélien said. The coffin slipped downward to rest at the bottom of the hole.

"Poor devil!" Antoine said. "He died in the bloom of his youth and he was a good fellow, this Manuel."

Laurélien and Fleurimond seized the shovels. A stone rolled down and struck against the coffin. Earth flowed into the grave. The coffin began to disappear. Stifled sobs were heard and the dull thud of clods of earth hardened by the drought. The hole began to fill.

A woman groaned, "God, we ask Thee for strength and courage, consolation and resignation."

Manuel wasn't a partisan of resignation, Laurélien reflected. The signs of the cross, and all this kneeling, and "Lord, Good Lord," he said, meant nothing—that a man was made for rebellion. Now you're dead, Chief, dead and buried. But your words we won't forget. And, if, one day on the hard road of this life, weariness should tempt us with, "What's the use?" and "It's not worth the trouble," we'll hear your voice and we'll be of good courage.

With one hand, Laurélien wiped away the sweat that covered his face. He leaned both hands on the handle of his shovel. The grave was filled.

"Well, it's finished," Antoine said. "May you find rest, Brother Manuel, in that eternity of eternities!"

"In eternity," the others answered.

The circle of peasants broke up. They returned to the hut to tell Délira and Bienaimé *au revoir*. Then, since folks get thirsty under the hot sun, they went to get a little drink—that could only do them good—one last drink of white rum.

"How about it, neighbor?"

But Laurélien remained. He fashioned a little mound of dirt above the grave. Around it he placed some big stones. When they had enough money, he'd build a tomb of brick with a niche where they could light candles in his memory. Then on a plaque of fresh cement, Antoine, since he knew how, would write in a slow painstaking hand:

HERE LAYS MANUEL JAN-JOSEF

Chapter Fourteen

The very evening of the burial, Délira went to Larivoire's. She knocked on his door.

"Who's there?" Larivoire asked. He was already in bed.

"It's me—Délira, me."

Stopping just long enough to light the lamp, Larivoire let her in.

"Respect, neighbor," he said. "Come in, please."

Délira sat down. She arranged the folds of her black dress. She was straight and stern.

"You were expecting me, Larivoire?"

"I was expecting you." There was a silence between them. "Gervilen," Larivoire said without looking at her.

"I know," she replied. "But no one will ever find out. I mean, Hilarion, the authorities."

"Manuel didn't want them to?"

" 'No, no,' he said, as he struggled on his deathbed. 'We've got to save the water,' he kept repeating. He held my hand."

Larivoire raised the wick of the lamp. "He came here the same night of the trouble. He stood under that arbor in the midst of the peasants. He was speaking. I looked at him. I listened to him. I know a man when I see one. He was a Negro of great quality."

"He's dead," Délira said.

"You have a heavy grief to bear, sister."

"My sorrow is great," Délira answered.

Larivoire scratched his chin, pulled on the hair of his beard. "Did he entrust you with a mission?"

"Yes, and that's why I'm here. Go get your folks, Larivoire."

"It's late," the other said.

"My words need the night. Go get your folks, Larivoire."

Larivoire got up, took a few hesitant steps about the room. "Was it your dead Manuel who asked you to talk to them?"

"Yes, it was he. But I, too, want to. I've got my reasons."

Larivoire took his hat. "We've got to respect the will of the dead," he said. He half opened the door. "You won't have to wait too long. I'm going to stop by my son Similien's. He'll notify some and I'll notify the

others. If the lamp burns down, lift the wick. It's not a bad lamp, but the kerosene that Florentine sells is no good."

Délira remained alone. Her head dropped down on her breast, and she folded her hands. The light flickered, the room was peopled by shadows. She closed her eyes.

"I'm worn out! Délira's worn out. She can't go on, *mes amis*!"

Weariness was dragging her into an eddy, to the verge of a fainting spell, slow and irresistible like nausea. But the thought of Manuel buoyed her up.

"I've got to talk to those folks. Afterward I'll go to bed. To sleep, ah, to sleep! And if the day should break without me, it would be, to tell the honest truth, a day of mercy."

"You stayed in the dark all this time!" Larivoire exclaimed. The lamp had gone out. He fumbled in his pocket and finally found the matches. "They're outside, *oui,*" he said.

"Bring the lamp nearer. I want to see their faces." The room lighted up—the table, a demijohn on the oak buffet, a mat rolled up in a corner, and on the whitewashed wall, pictures of saints, an old almanac.

"Let them come in," Délira said.

Délira stood up in her long dress of mourning.

"Close the door!" she ordered.

Louisimé Jean-Pierre shut the door. Slowly Délira looked at them. She seemed to be counting them one by one and, as her sad stern gaze reached them, they would lower their heads.

"I don't see Gervilen. I say that I don't see Gervilen Gervilis. I'm asking where is Gervilis?"

In the silence, you distinctly heard the heavy breathing of the peasants.

"Because I would have liked to repeat my boy's words to Gervilen Gervilis. He told me, here's what Manuel, my boy, told me. 'You've offered sacrifices to the *loas,* you've offered the blood of chickens and young goats to make the rain fall. All that has been useless. Because what counts is the sacrifice of a man, the blood of a man.' "

"That's a great word, *oui,*" said Larivoire, nodding his head gravely.

"He also told me, 'Go and find Larivoire. Tell him the wish of my blood that has been spilled—reconciliation, reconciliation!' He said it twice. 'So that life can begin anew, so the day can break on the dew.' And I wanted to send word to Hilarion, but he was holding my hand. 'No, no,' he said, and the black blood was running from his mouth. 'The water would be lost. We've got to save the water!' "

"Délira," said Larivoire in a hoarse voice, and he wiped his eyes with

his closed fist, "it's been seventy-seven years since water flowed from my eyes, but I tell you, in truth, your boy was a real man, a peasant to the roots of his soul! We won't see another like him soon."

"Mama," said Nérestan in a strangely tender voice, "you've had a great sorrow, Mama."

"Yes, son," Délira answered, "and I thank you for your sympathy. But I didn't come here to tell you about my grief. I came to bring you the last wish of my son. He was talking to me, but he was really talking to all of you, 'Sing my mourning,' he said, 'sing my mourning with a song of the *coumbite!*' "

It's customary to sing mourning with hymns for the dead, but he, Manuel, had chosen a hymn for the living—the chant of the *coumbite,* the chant of the soil, of the water, the plants, of friendship between peasants, because he wanted his death to be the beginning of life for you.

Peasants are hard and tough. Life has tanned their hearts. But they only seem to be thick and rude. You've got to know them—for no one is more blessed with those qualities that give a man the right to call himself a man—kindness, bravery, true brotherhood.

And Larivoire spoke for them all when he approached Délira, his hand extended, and trembling with emotion.

"Take this hand, Délira, and with it our promise and our word of honor." He turned toward the peasants. "Is that true?"

"Yes," the peasants replied.

"Peace and reconciliation?"

And Nérestan advanced. "Mama, I'll dig the canal in your fields myself."

"I'll plant them for you, Délira," said Josaphat.

"Count on me, too," Louisimé added.

"And I'll weed out your plot any time it needs it," said Similien.

"I'll be there," Gille promised.

"We'll all be there," the others assured her.

Over Délira's face there passed a semblance of gentleness. "Thanks, my friends, for this consolation. My boy hears you in his grave. This is how he wanted it—one family of peasants united in friendship. My part has ended.

"Only," and she regained her severity, "only we're accomplices from today on—I didn't come here, you understand? And it was the bad fevers that killed Manuel. Do you understand me fully? Make the sign of the cross on your lips."

They obeyed.

"Swear!"

The peasants struck their chests three times just over the heart, and raised their hands for the oath.

"We swear," they said.

For a moment, Délira studied their faces. Yes, they were good peasant stock, simple, frank, honest.

"Larivoire, my brother," she said, "let another week pass. We've got to respect the mourning. Then you'll come with them to Laurélien's after sunrise. My folks will be expecting you. And then, Annaise, my daughter-in-law, will lead you all to the stream. She knows the place. The wood pigeons flap their wings in its foliage. Oh, fiddlesticks! There I go talking nonsense! It's because I'm so tired, *mes amis*. This old Délira, as you see, has no more strength, no, not a bit. So, I bid you good night, *oui*."

Louisimé Jean-Pierre opened the door for her.

"Wait," said Larivoire, "Similien's going to take you home."

"No, Larivoire, no. That's not necessary. Thanks just the same. There's a moon, the stars are shining. I'll see my way."

And she went out in the dark.

The End and the Beginning

Bienaimé dozed under the calabash tree. The little dog lay in front of the kitchen, his head between his paws. From time to time he opened one eye to snap at a fly. Délira was mending a dress. She held the material close to her eyes, for her sight was getting bad. The sun went its rounds, high in the sky, and the day ran through all the others.

Things had fallen back into the old routine, they'd returned to the beaten path. Each week, Délira went to sell charcoal at the market. Laurélien chopped the wood and prepared the charcoal pit for her. He was a good boy, Laurélien.

Bienaimé had changed so you wouldn't recognize him. Formerly the slightest contradiction used to make him boil. He was always on the verge of anger and irritation, always ready with a retort. A real gamecock! Now, a spring had broken inside him. He said, "*Oui*" to everything like a child. Just, "Yes," and "All right."

Délira had caught him several times in Manuel's room, his hand patting the empty place in the bed and tears streaming into his white beard. Every morning he went to the grave at the edge of the thorn acacias. They had sheltered it under a little arbor of palm leaves. He squatted down near it and smoked his pipe, his gaze vague and distant. He would stay there for hours if Délira didn't come looking for him to take him to the shade of the calabash tree. He'd follow her docilely. He slept a lot and at any time of the day. Antoine was right, he was like a man struck by lightning.

From afar the wind brought a squall of voices and an untiring drumbeat. For more than a month, the peasants had been working at a *coumbite*. They'd dug a canal, a deep gully from the spring to Fonds Rouge, across the narrow plain through the acacia trees, and they'd joined it to their fields by small ditches.

Rage almost strangled Hilarion. Ah, you can imagine how furious he became. And now Florentine nagged from morning till night, as if it were his fault, browbeating him with all kinds of reproaches. Could *he* have foreseen that Manuel was going to die? Naturally, he should have arrested him in time, for they could have made him tell where the spring was located—they had ways of making them talk. The lieutenant had

called him an imbecile. Now Florentine—you could hear her harsh voice all over Fonds Rouge. When he had had enough, Hilarion would make her feel the weight of his heavy copper beltbuckle. That calmed her down more or less, the bitch!

Perhaps, he thought, perhaps I could ask Judge Sainville, the Communal Magistrate, to put a tax on that water. I'd get my share and lay it aside. We'll see about that.

But would the peasants stand for it? They had been working lately right by the spring itself, at the very head of the water. They had followed Manuel's instructions point by point. He was dead, Manuel, but he was still guiding them.

Someone entered Délira's yard, a tall *Négresse,* a beautiful *Négresse*. It was Annaise. The old woman saw her coming and her heart was glad.

"*Bonjour,* Mama," said Annaise.

"Eh, *bonjour,* daughter," Délira replied.

"You're going to ruin your eyes," said Annaise. "Let me mend that dress for you."

"It's simply that it keeps me occupied, daughter. I sew, I sew—and I stitch together the old days and the new. If only we could mend life, Anna, and catch up the broken threads! Oh, God! We can't!"

"Manuel said—I can still hear him, as though it were yesterday—he said to me, 'Life is a thread that doesn't break, that is never lost, and do you know why? Because every man ties a knot in it during his lifetime with the work he has done. That's what keeps life going through the centuries—man's work on this earth.' "

"My boy was a Negro who thought deep," said Délira proudly.

Snatches of the song reached their ears. It sounded a bit like *Hoho Ehhé Ohkoenhého,* and the drum was jubilant. It stammered with joy, for Antoine was handling it with more skill than ever.

"Gille told me they're going to turn the water into the canal today. Suppose we went and looked, Mama? It's a great event, *oui*."

"As you wish, dear."

Délira got up. Her shoulders had bent a bit and she had become even drier than before.

"The sun's hot. I'm going to put on my hat." But already Annaise was running to the hut to get it for her.

"You're obliging, daughter," Délira thanked her. And she smiled that smile that had kept all the gracefulness of youth despite the small scars of sadness with which life marked the corners of her lips.

They went into the woods along the road Manuel had followed the day after his arrival. The acacias smelled like the tepid smoke of the charcoal pits. They walked silently until they came out into a valley inundated by light. The arborescent cactus stood erect with their wide hairy leaves of a dull and dusty green.

"Look!" Annaise exclaimed, "Folks are right to call them 'donkey ears'! They seem so crabby and stubborn and mean, those plants do."

"Plants are like humans—they come in two classes, good and bad. When you see oranges, all those little suns hanging up in the leaves, you feel a rejoicing. They're nice and they're useful, oranges are. While, take a plant with prickles like that one—but we mustn't curse anything. The Good Lord created everything."

"And the calabash," said Annaise, "it looks like a man's head and it's wrapped around something white like a brain—yet it's a stupid fruit. You can't eat it."

"My, you're bright, *oui!*" Délira cried. "You're going to make old Délira laugh in spite of herself."

They went up toward Fanchon Mound. Délira walked slowly because of her age. Annaise came along behind her. The path was rather steep, but luckily it took a few turns.

"I won't go as far as the plateau," Délira said. "Here's a big rock just made, you might say, for a bench."

The two women sat down. The plain lay at their feet in the burning noon. On their left, they saw the huts of Fonds Rouge and the rusty patches of their enclosed fields. The savanna spread below them like an esplanade of violent light. But across the plain the vein of the canal ran toward the thorn acacias which had been cleared along the route for its passage. And if you had good eyes, you could see a line of ditches already prepared in the fields.

"That's where they are," said Annaise, stretching her arm toward a wooded hill. "That's where they're working."

The drum rose exultantly. Its rapid beat echoed over the plain. And the men were singing:

Manuel Jean-Joseph, Oh!
Mighty Negro! Enhého!

"You hear, Mama?"

"I hear," Délira said.

Soon this arid plain would be covered with high grass. In the fields banana trees, corn, sweet potatoes, yams, red and white laurel would be growing. And it would be thanks to her son.

The song suddenly stopped.

"What's happening?" Délira asked.

"I don't know, no."

Then an enormous clamor burst out. The women rose. The peasants came into view running from the mountain, throwing their hats into the air. They were dancing and kissing each other.

"Mama," said Annaise, in a strangely weak voice, "there's the water."

A thin thread of water advanced, flowing through the plain, and the peasants went along with it, shouting and singing. Antoine led them proudly beating his drum.

"Oh, Manuel! Manuel! Manuel! Why are you dead?" Délira groaned.

"No," said Annaise. She smiled through her tears. "No, he isn't dead."

She took the old woman's hand and pressed it gently against her belly where the new life was stirring.

Glossary

Atibon Legba (Papa Legba), Agoué, Ashadé Bôkó, Batala, Bolada Kimalada, Kataroulo, Papa Loko, Papa Ogoun, Olicha Baguita Wanguita: Afro-Haitian deities termed *loas,* venerated among the peasants as are also the saints of the Catholic Church. Catholic and voodoo deities sometimes merge and take on a single identity. During the ceremonies, these may be impersonated by living worshipers.

Abobo! Ago yé!: Religious exclamations of ecstasy.

Asogwê: An Afro-Haitian religious ritual.

Bueno: Spanish word meaning *good.*

Cacos: Peasant revolutionaries.

Carajo, caramba: Mild Cuban oaths.

Chandelier: A cactus tree similar to the Joshua tree or buckthorn, planted as a barrier between plots of land.

Clairin: A raw white rum.

Coumbite: A collective agricultural effort in which neighboring farmers help each other at times such as the harvest, when a task requires more hands than a single peasant family affords.

Creole: The language of the Haitian peasant, an Afro-Creole patois. There is sometimes, especially in his serious moments, a quality of dignity and grandeur in the Haitian peasant's speech, giving it an almost Biblical flavor, to a certain extent due to many archaic words and expressions from the old French of Napoleon's day that are still a part of his language.

Cric? . . . Crac!: Conventional form of beginning a story. The narrator says, "*Cric?*" and the listener replies, "*Crac!*"

Gourde: A monetary unit, approximately twenty cents.

Honor! . . . Respect!: A form of salutation. Before entering a peasant's hut one says, "*Honneur!*" The peasant replies, "*Respect!*"

Houngan: Voodoo priest.

Hounsi: His assistants.

Père Savane: Bush priest who recites Catholic prayers. Often he is also a helper at Vodun ceremonies. In many cases the peasants cannot afford a regular priest and, in the outlying districts, there may not be a priest available.

Malanga: A bulbous plant with wide leaves like elephant ears.

Nègre, Négresse: In the French- and Spanish-speaking Caribbean Islands these words often have a connotation of affection, entirely nonracial in meaning. *Mon Nègre, ma petite Négresse*, is equivalent to, *My dear, my darling, my sweet.*

Simidor: One who leads a group of men at work by setting the pace with song and drum.

Tafia: Rum.

Urine that spreads doesn't foam: A Haitian proverb equivalent to "A rolling stone gathers no moss."

Yanvalou: A slow religious dance.

Notes

Blood Wedding

Act I, Scene 1

1. Lorca plays with sound and rhythm in the Spanish version, using "vieja, revieja, requetevieja" to indicate the young man's playful spirit, not his mother's age. A less literal translation would be, "Ma, Ma Dear, Mama Dearest."

2. The translation here is too literal. "What about you?" is a better rendering.

3. "What?" is too disrespectful a reply for the conservative mores of the rural areas outside the Andalusian cities of Granada and Almería. Because the boy uses the polite form in Spanish to address his mother and other elders, a better rendering would be "Ma'am?" or "Yes, ma'am?"

4. Drawn-work or openwork stockings are similar to the fishnet hosiery popular in the United States during the 1960s and 1970s, some of which had various embroidered designs.

5. The Spanish versions by the Cátedra and Colección Austral publishing houses read "hace dos años," or "two years ago," not "ten years ago," as appears in the Bensussen adaptation.

Act I, Scene 3

6. Lorca's use of the *cueva,* or cavehouse, evokes the unique ambience of rural Andalusia. To live in such a house is not necessarily a sign of poverty, according to Francisco García Lorca, the brother of Federico. See his biography *Federico y su mundo* (Madrid: Alianza, 1980), 339.

7. The Spanish word *esparto* refers to esparto grass, which according to the *New World Dictionary,* is "either of two kinds of long, coarse grass . . . growing in Spain and N. Africa, used to make cordage, baskets, shoes, and paper," while alfalfa is "a deep-rooted plant of the legume family with small divided leaves, purple cloverlike flowers, and spiral pods, used extensively in the U.S. for fodder, pasture, and as a cover crop."

8. The translation here is too literal. "It really was" or "You certainly did" would be more effective.

9. "Really?" is a more accurate translation. Here the boy's mother is expressing admiration for the girl's beauty, but she is also recalling her conversation with her neighbor about the questionable character of the girl's mother (act I, scene 1).

Act II, Scene 1

10. "Place" is a more accurate fit in this passage.

11. There is some confusion here caused by the use of the indirect object pronoun "le" in Spanish. The sentence "Le prueba el ramo de azahar" means that the servant places the wreath of orange blossoms on the girl's head, not on her own.

12. The young lady drops her *head,* not her *hand* as it is translated here, because she is dejected about getting married while still having strong feelings for Leonardo.

13. A less literal translation would be "just cold feet" or "just pre-marital jitters, like everyone else has."

14. The Beinecke manuscripts and the Bensussen adaptation both use the indicative of the verb *despertar,* which refers to the simple act of waking up someone. However, here Lorca employs the command form of the subjunctive mode in Spanish to convey the sense of excitement felt by the community in contrast to the girl's despondency over her pending marriage. A more effective rendition of the verse "Despierte la novia / la mañana de la boda" would be, "Wake up, young bride, / it's your wedding day," because the people are exhorting her to celebrate what should be a happy occasion.

15. "Soy hombre de sangre" means "I *am* somebody," referring to the fact that Leonardo has great pride in his peasant (Old Christian) lineage, no matter how humble in origin. It does not refer to the blood coursing through his body. The question of pure blood or stock has been a constant in Spanish culture and literature since the period of the Reconquest (711–1492), that is, the struggle to retake Spain from the Moors.

16. The published version has "You're right," but that is an error in translation. In Spanish, the girl declares, "Tiene razón," resulting in some ambiguity for the English speaker since *tiene* can have "he," "she," or "you" as its subject. However, here the girl is referring to the servant as she addresses Leonardo: "She's right! I shouldn't even speak to you."

17. It was not unusual for a bride to wear black, which is the color associated with dignity and honor in traditional Spanish society. However, it also conveys the tragic sense of the play. See Paul Julian Smith, *The Theatre of García Lorca: Text, Performance, Psychoanalysis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 54.

18. The translation of "La tela es de lo que no hay" as "There's no cloth like this any more" results in some ambiguity. It sounds like a backhanded compliment indicating that the fabric is outdated. A more effective translation is, "This fabric is awesome or exquisite," because *de lo que no hay* suggests that the material is in a category by itself.

Act III, Scene 2

19. At this point in the play, Lorca switches from prose to verse to heighten the dramatic impact. Neither the Beinecke manuscripts nor the Bensussen adaptation follows his technique, and this results in some confusion of speakers/subjects and erroneous renditions that have been corrected here. The wife eulogizes her unfaithful husband in the third person, thus distancing herself from her anguish. The mother, however, begins by addressing her dead son, using the Spanish *tú,* which is the subject pronoun used with a family member, especially a child to whom one wishes to express intimacy and affection. It is not clear why Hughes and Bensussen chose to use prose instead of poetry.

Cuba Libre

Introduction

1. Richard L. Jackson reevaluates the Afro-Cuban movement, giving it a broader designation called *Afrocriollismo*. Jackson distinguishes between *poetas negros,* or those black and mulatto writers who identified with the African roots of their heritage, and *poetas negristas,* or those white authors for whom the focus on Africanisms in Cuba was a fad. See "The *Afrocriollo* Movement Revisited," *Afro-Hispanic Review* 3 (1984): 5–9.

2. The perspective of the persona in Unamuno's poem is somewhat myopic in that it does not consider the tragicomic vein of the black experience in the West, the "laughin' to keep from cryin' " motif that threads its way through the literature of Africans on the Continent and African-ancestored peoples in the Diaspora. Thus, laughter alone is

celebrated in this poem. However, in light of the biblical verse Unamuno uses as an epigraph, laughter ultimately spells triumph over pain and sorrow, which validates the black experience and turns suffering into a redemptive force. Black, then, becomes a metaphor for all human anguish, but also transcendence over that anguish, like Michelangelo's agony and ecstasy.

Cuban Blues

3. "Curujey" is a wild parasitical plant with sharp, pointed, spadelike leaves that lives off the ceiba tree in Cuba. The plant is a powerful phallic symbol that suggests the kind of lover sought by the female persona in the poem.

West Indies

4. The translation "When the sun goes down" would evoke the blues more effectively. The latter also creates a more pronounced rhythm.

5. One of the most famous pieces by Guillén, "Sensemayá" illustrates the use of *jitanjáforas,* onomatopoetic or "nonsense words" that re-create sounds from nature. See Luis Iacutenigo Madrigal, ed., "Introducción," in *Summa Poética* by Nicolás Guillén (Madrid: Cátedra, 1990), 26–27. However, in the context of the snake-killing ritual presented in the poem, the terms "sensemayá," "mayombe-bombe-mayombé," and so on are not nonsensical. Rather, they create the ambience for the ceremony and they are used for the poem's choral response, thus highlighting the rhythmic effect of its antiphonal structure. Only from the point of view of someone outside the culture are the words meaningless.

6. John F. Matheus, in "Langston Hughes as Translator," *CLA Journal* 11.4 (1968): 325, informs us that Eusebia Cosme was "the gifted *diseuse* who charmed the Spanish circles from Miami to New York in the thirties." Of Afro-Cuban heritage, Cosme sang, performed monologues, and did dramatic impersonations.

Here We Are!

7. The Spanish "compañeros" can indeed be translated as "partners." However, a more powerful term would be "brothers," which conveys a stronger sense of the racial solidarity born out of the experience of slavery and oppression.

Masters of the Dew

Chapter One

1. *Angelus* is a prayer said at morning, noon, and evening in the Roman Catholic Church; also the bell rung to tell the time for this prayer. Haiti is a predominantly Roman Catholic country.

2. In many parts of Africa, Asia, Australia, and South America, including the Caribbean, women squat when they are preparing food (for example, grinding corn) or giving birth. It is an ancient custom that is more common in rural areas than urban ones.

Chapter Two

3. The first part of this sentence is left out in the English translation. According to Cyril Mokwenye, it should read: "Once more, the man greeted this rediscovered landscape with a look . . ." ("La Traduction Anglaise de *Gouverneurs de la rosée* de Jacques Roumain par Langston Hughes et Mercer Cook: Remarques critiques," *Babel* 39.4 [1993]: 228). With this statement the narrator reestablishes Manuel's ties with his native land.

4. A whole paragraph is omitted after this passage: "If one is from a country, if one was born there in a manner that one would say one was a native-indigene, well, one carries the country in one's eyes, skin, hands, in the hairs of its trees, the flesh of its soil, the bones of its stones, the blood of its rivers, its sky, its savour, its men and women; it is an indelible presence in the heart which can be likened to loving a girl: one knows the origin of her look, the fruit of her mouth, the contours of her breasts, her arms sometimes defensive, at times yielding, her knees without mystery, her strength and her weakness, her voice and her silence" (ibid., 229).

5. "She answered not at all" is an awkward construction in English. However, throughout the novel Hughes and Cook try to convey the rhythms of French either by using French words directly or by approximating the sentence structure and general contour of the language.

6. Since the beginning of the nineteenth century, relations between Haiti and other Latin American countries have been very tense. Haiti was the first colonized nation to declare its independence from a European power (France), but because that freedom involved a *black* revolution, Haiti was greatly feared. Even today the whites and people of mixed color view Haitians with alarm, typecasting them as villains, enemies, or untouchables in their oral traditions and written literature. See Rafael

Duharte Jiménez, "The 19th Century Black Fear," in *Afro-Cuba,* ed. Pedro Pérez Sarduy and Jean Stubbs (New York: Latin American Bureau, 1993), 37–47.

7. Offering libations to one's ancestors is a common tradition in many cultures of the world, especially in African countries. Haiti is the most Africanized of the Caribbean and other New World nations.

8. In many societies of Africa, it was traditional for people to cook outside on three stones or large rocks placed in a triangle. That custom has been maintained among various African-ancestored groups in the New World, especially in Haiti and other parts of the Caribbean.

Chapter Three

9. According to the philosophy of many groups in African nations, the number four suggests the quadrants of human existence—birth, life, death, and afterlife. The cardinal points correspond to these quadrants. In relation to this concept, the extended family includes the living, the dead, and those yet to be born.

10. The Cacos were peasant guerrillas who fought to overthrow the dictatorship of Vilbrun Guillaume Sam and his successor, Sudre Dartiguenave, who was supported by the U.S. Marines during the U.S. occupation of Haiti (1915–1934). However, by 1919 the Cacos had been ruthlessly suppressed. See Gerald, *Knot in the Thread,* 11–13.

Chapter Four

11. The ceremony of thanksgiving celebrated in this chapter is one of many types of rituals associated with *vodun,* a syncretistic religion in Haiti that combines African and Roman Catholic deities, beliefs, and practices. Its counterpart in Cuba is *santería;* in Brazil, *candomblé;* in Jamaica, *Pocomía* or *Pocomanía*.

Chapter Six

12. In many African societies it is still the custom for women to bow to men or for younger people to bow to their elders to show respect when greeting them.

Chapter Nine

13. In Roman Catholicism, November 2, or All Saints' Day, is a time for relatives and friends of the dead to visit cemeteries to clean up

the tombs and decorate them with flowers. This custom is observed throughout Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as in cities in the southern United States.

Chapter Ten

14. A scapulary is an article of clothing worn across the shoulders and breast, extending to the waist, where it is tied with a belt or string. It is usually worn by the clergy or deeply devoted people.

15. Another passage missing in the English version is translated by Mokwenye as: "Where harmony does not exist, life is tasteless" ("La Traduction Anglaise de *Gouverneurs de la rosée*," 229). Coming at the end of Manuel's statement of intent to seek the help of the entire village in bringing water to the drought-stricken fields, this statement summarizes the hero's philosophy of reconciliation and peace, which is full-blown in chapters eleven through thirteen.