

WATER WITH BERRIES

GEORGE LAMMING

INTRODUCTION BY J. DILLON BROWN



P E E P A L T R E E

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## INTRODUCTION

When *Water with Berries* first appeared in Britain in 1971, one would have been hard pressed to imagine that it would represent the culmination of George Lamming's career as a novelist. Its almost simultaneous emergence with *Natives of My Person* – released first in the United States rather than the United Kingdom at the beginning of 1971 – seemed to suggest a newly revitalized outpouring of creative energy after a 12-year publishing hiatus.<sup>1</sup> However, four decades have passed since the publication of Lamming's fifth and sixth novels, and while Lamming has remained engaged in all sorts of intellectual activities, including teaching, lecturing, editing and publishing essays, the absence of any further fiction makes the reappearance of *Water with Berries* especially significant.

This novel is probably the least discussed and least celebrated of Lamming's oeuvre and, upon first encounter, it is not hard to see why: *Water with Berries* is a brooding, tenebrous, and ultimately violent book, purposefully resistant to easy comprehension and painstaking in its portrayal of the complications of personal interactions within the lingering shadow of colonialism. There is no comfortable way to integrate the novel's tragic finale into an optimistically progressive worldview. The handful of extant contemporary reviews reveal a struggle to resolve the book's complications, and their comparatively small number for a writer of Lamming's reputation suggests a solution may have been found by the straightforward expedient of ignoring the novel's existence altogether. The reviewer for the *Times* is respectful but uncertain, observing that the "meticulous prose is

enough to persuade the reader of Mr. Lamming's seriousness, but it is an open-ended story, full of magnificent suggestion, with little to grasp and share".<sup>2</sup> The *Times Literary Supplement* is less charitable, advancing the case that the "rich resources of the writer's language are frequently dissipated in a thinness of content: too many words chasing too few thoughts", while dismissing the critique of colonialism as simplistic.<sup>3</sup> Whereas these reviews represent the confusion and eschewal that initial contact with *Water with Berries* seems to have provoked, revisiting the novel from a less immediate vantage allows for some subtler interpretive rewards. Rereading casts light on and extends the intricacies of Lamming's earlier work and offers hints about his aesthetic trajectory; rereading also provides insights into the fractious era in which the novel was composed, and suggests how, in its concerns, *Water with Berries* foreshadows what are the still troubling manifestations of the legacies of colonial history with respect to race, gender and culture in the post-independence era.

In telling the story of three West Indian immigrants in London – Teeton, a painter; Roger, a composer; and Derek, an actor – *Water with Berries* returns most obviously to Lamming's 1954 novel *The Emigrants*. Both texts offer a bleak portrayal of postwar immigrant life, showing snatches of expatriate camaraderie against a steady background of the debilitating alienation brought on by the stress of living as a racially marked outsider in British society – this despite the possession by the main characters of the cultural and educational *bona fides* necessary for belonging. However, these resemblances to the earlier novel are darkened by poignant differences that reflect the historical changes of almost two decades, as well as Lamming's own consistent process of reconsideration. For instance, the delicately wary exchanges between Teeton and his landlord, the Old Dowager, are plainly redolent of scenes in the earlier novel when Collis awkwardly visits the home of Mr. Pearson, an English factory manager. In both scenes, Lamming portrays the tentative, halting attempts to communicate across deeply ingrained differences of perception. The portrayal is sensitive to the potential good will on each side, but also to the heavy weight of custom and privilege that structures the interactions. The salient difference lies in the fact that whereas

Collis has a fleeting encounter with miscarried conviviality, Teeton has been living in the Old Dowager's home, almost like a son, for six years. Another resemblance might be found in the disheartening betrayals enacted by the West Indian characters at each novel's close. *The Emigrants* ends with one emigrant character, the Governor, refusing succour to a newly arrived group of West Indians because of a perceived sense of personal slight. The message is plain: for Caribbean newcomers, the strain of surviving in England can destroy the fragile bonds of compatriotism. A similarly forlorn message emerges out of the explosive ending of *Water with Berries*, in which the three West Indian main characters engage respectively in murder, arson, and rape. The target of this reactive aggression, however, is quite different: rather than the self-defeating internecine betrayal depicted in *The Emigrants*, the violent rebellion in *Water with Berries*, simultaneously personal and political, is directed specifically at those members of the English population who are seen as inheritors of colonial privilege. Here, one registers Lamming's perception of the complex array of historical forces in which West Indians resident in 1970s London feel both more at home *and* more alienated than in the earlier days of postwar immigration. The paradoxes of exile have moved away from equivocal pleasure into a more ominous, yet intimate terrain.

Numerous other echoes of Lamming's earlier work can be found in *Water for Berries*, including the fleeting appearance of Fola, the main character from *Season of Adventure* (1960) as a comrade of Teeton's in the politically subversive Secret Gathering group; the use of San Cristobal, Lamming's fictional, composite Caribbean island familiar from *Season of Adventure* and *Of Age and Innocence* (1958), as the birthplace of his three protagonists; and the representation of the Gathering's conversations in the form of dramatic dialogue, a technique also found in *The Castle of My Skin* (1953) as well as *Natives of My Person*. More broadly, Lamming's consistent themes of the artist's responsibility to society, the fraught balance between individual desire and community progress, and the subtle psychological encumbrances of colonial history all help to make aspects of the novel familiar to readers of Lamming's other books. The most obvious echo,

however, the one that organizes the complex entirety of *Water with Berries*, is what Lamming self-deprecatingly refers to in an interview as “my old Prospero-Caliban theme” – that is, its intertextual relationship with William Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*.<sup>4</sup>

This theme appears most prominently in Lamming’s influential essay collection, *The Pleasures of Exile*, published in 1960. As its title suggests, the book addresses the ambiguous subject of West Indian exile in Great Britain, comprising a series of meditative essays that range across literature and politics, all undergirded by a trope that reassesses the Shakespearean dyad of Prospero and Caliban – stand-ins for coloniser and colonised – in the light of Lamming’s experience of expatriation in the heart of the British empire. As Lamming boldly proclaims on the introduction’s first page: “it is my intention to make use of *The Tempest* as a way of presenting a certain state of feeling which is the heritage of the exiled and colonial writer from the British Caribbean.”<sup>5</sup> Rob Nixon credits Lamming as the progenitor of the tradition of appropriating Shakespeare’s canonical text for anti-colonial ends, a practice that wields discursive power via imaginative reversals and re-readings that work to interrupt conventional understandings of the play.<sup>6</sup> As Lamming notes at the close of the book’s introduction, “My subject is the migration of the West Indian writer... from his native kingdom, once inhabited by Caliban, to the tempestuous island of a Prospero’s and his language” (13). The reversal of the play’s journey – from putative margin to metropole, rather than Prospero’s process of exile from the European city to a distant unnamed island – is a key element of Lamming’s strategy, as is the very conscious naming of a first-person self, closely identified with Caliban, as the thinking, choosing and writing subject.

Indeed, just before this statement of intent, the author asserts his own right to a creative interpretation of Shakespeare’s hallowed text, anticipating and dispensing in advance with disagreements over his treatment of the play: “It will not help to say that I am wrong in the parallels which I have set out to interpret; for I shall reply that my mistake, lived and deeply felt by millions of men like me – proves the positive value of error. It is a value which you must learn” (13). These assertive claims to authority, based

as they are on a confident validation of the previously ignored experience of the colonised, are at the heart of Lamming's engagement with *The Tempest* in *The Pleasures of Exile*. Building out from the play's own portrayal of Caliban's induction into European language, Lamming's essays suggest – and indeed aspire to embody – the revolutionary power such an education has now made manifest. He describes his own contemporary, post-World War II moment as being characterized by a new recognition that “Caliban had got hold of Prospero's weapons and decided that he would never again seek his master's permission” (63), and later suggests, in a forceful, forward-looking way, that “Caliban is at liberty to choose the meaning of this moment” (158). *The Pleasures of Exile*, published just after the jolting, racially motivated riots in Notting Hill in 1958 (which Lamming brings up several times in the book) and just before the onset of flag independence for many British Caribbean islands (beginning, after the collapse of the West Indies Federation, in 1962 with Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago), marks a wary but still hopeful point in time, as Lamming's appropriations of the Prospero-Caliban trope reveal. *Water with Berries* is an allegorical adumbration of this same trope mediated through the novel form, albeit one that comes to fruition within a later, palpably different, less hopeful, historical moment.

The novel's entanglements with *The Tempest* are multitudinous and difficult to consolidate into any fixed interpretive schema, but for a start, one can look at the title, which famously derives from Caliban's long, wistful speech in his initial appearance on stage in the first act of the play. Reacting to Prospero's hard usage and threats, Caliban plaintively recounts the history of their relationship:

This island's mine by Sycorax my mother,  
Which thou tak'st from me. When thou cam'st first,  
Thou strok'st me and made much of me, wouldst give me  
Water with berries in't, and teach me how  
To name the bigger light, and how the less,  
That burn by day and night; and then I lov'd thee  
And show'd thee all the qualities o' th'isle,

The fresh springs, brine-pits, barren place and fertile.  
Curs'd be I that did so! All the charms  
Of Sycorax, toads, beetles, bats, light on you!  
For I am all the subjects that you have,  
Which first was mine own king; and here you sty me  
In this hard rock, whiles you do keep from me  
The rest o' th' island. (1.2.331-44)<sup>7</sup>

Captured in this speech is a complex set of emotions quite apposite for Lamming's aim of illustrating the intimate, bedeviling ties of interpersonal colonial contact. Rather than a straightforward complaint about exploitation, Caliban is effectively grumbling about Prospero's betrayal of their seeming friendship. In his account, Prospero did not just come and conquer, but instead exchanged kindnesses under the pretence of mutual affection and only later emerged as a tyrant. Water with berries thus references a loving gift from Prospero to Caliban, a gift whose fruit has, only in retrospect, turned bitter. This sense of the colonial relation connects with Lamming's discussion in *The Pleasures of Exile* where he proffers the reading that "Caliban plots murder against Prospero, not in hatred, and not in fear, but out of a deep sense of betrayal" (15). Later, underscoring his understanding of the layering of the two figures' delicate personal relationship, Lamming observes that, for Prospero, "Caliban haunts him in a way that is almost too deep and too intimate to communicate" (99). So, in choosing such a title for his novel, Lamming immediately pushes us toward an understanding of the relationship between coloniser and colonised that is far more complicated than the thought of it as simple, unidirectional oppression. Indeed, as Lamming makes clear in *The Pleasures of Exile*, he is well aware that immediately following the speech cited above, Shakespeare's Caliban cheerfully admits to attempting to rape Prospero's daughter, Miranda. Via the novel's title, then, we are asked to recall the initial tenderness of this relationship, as well as the reciprocal disloyalty that irrevocably fractures it. The dispossession of Caliban is real, but the process through which it occurs is tangled up in a panoply of emotions, intentions and layers of responsibility.

This unanticipated intimacy between presumed adversaries is



visible from the first pages of *Water with Berries*, when, after a stark description of Teeton's living quarters from his perspective, we are provided an example of the tactful, surprisingly sensitive contours of Teeton's relationship with the Old Dowager, an old English lady who serves on the literal level as his landlady and, on the allegorical level, as the novel's (aging, feminised) Prospero figure:

There was a muted knocking at the door. Teeton answered yes and waited. He was smiling at her delay. He knew there would be no need to speak again; no need to enquire who was there. The Old Dowager was simply rehearsing her apologies. It was their game, an example of the formula they had made for being together. (33: all page references are to this edition)

While there is a warning hint of the emptily mechanistic in this description, Teeton's smile, his comfortable certainty and the description of their behaviour as a game point towards a mutually achieved sense of domestic congeniality. Just after this moment, as Teeton watches his landlady fixing up his bed, Lamming underscores the improbable nurture arising out of their relationship: "He watched her and wondered what miracle of affection had turned this room into a home. Cosy as a cave when he wanted to be in hiding... It could be like a fortress in the morning: harsh and cold with neglect until the Old Dowager came in and took it over" (34). Although there are ominous, colonially inflected notes dropped into this description, such as the fact that Teeton has "come to think of the room as a separate and independent province," he then also notes that he considers that the "house and room were in some way their joint creation; some unspoken partnership in interests they had never spoken about" (34). The sense of community, cordiality and togetherness, although shadowed by silences and hesitations, is made more poignant by the fact that Teeton is feeling guilty about not telling his landlady that he plans to decamp back home to San Cristobal, something he cannot bring himself to confess until almost the very end of the novel. Although ultimately revealed to be fragile, the relationship between the two primary Caliban

and Prospero figures in *Water with Berries* is one of carefully choreographed, but seemingly genuine, affection.

In fact, as it proceeds, the novel takes form as a series of interwoven scenes of tenuous interpersonal connection, with all but the last of its thirteen sections foregrounding wary conversations between a revolving cast of primary and secondary characters. In this sense, the book mimics a play, beginning with Teeton and the Old Dowager's *pas a deux* in section one, followed by the second section's presentation of Teeton's friends and fellow immigrants, Roger and Derek, which is in turn followed by reprises and recombinations across each section through to the end. One of the most intriguing aspects of these stage-like groupings of characters is the striking fact that, in the course of the approximately two weeks of events represented in the novel, Teeton is never depicted in interaction with Roger or Derek, never shares the stage with his two closest friends. This narrative partition connotes several things at once. One is to remind readers not to conflate the particularities of the novel's three Caliban figures into a single category of understanding: the book fastidiously documents the many idiosyncrasies of personality and temperament of these three West Indian artists (each devoted to a different mode of expression). They are to be seen as discrete, complex individuals.<sup>8</sup> Another connotation is that the nature of relations *between* these presumably similar Caliban figures should not be taken for granted. Indeed, the interactions between Roger and Derek, shown in section two, rival those between Teeton and the Old Dowager for their opacities, hesitations and silences. While relations are shown to be conditioned and exacerbated by historical hierarchies of power and privilege, as well as contingencies of class, ethnicity and cultural difference, the simple task of speaking with any other person is portrayed in the novel as fraught with a daunting array of obstacles. In this way, *Water with Berries* points towards a universalised existential difficulty of communication between individuals.<sup>9</sup>

The opaque complexities of the situation Lamming is setting before the reader is likewise registered in how the novel uses *The Tempest* as a template. The allegorical possibilities encoded into the novel insist on proliferation, rather than the more conven-

tional one-to-one correspondences.<sup>10</sup> In addition to the three ostensible Caliban figures of Teeton, Roger and Derek discussed above, *Water with Berries* offers several Prospero figures besides the Old Dowager, including her deceased husband, as well as his brother (who is named Ferdinand, the love interest of Miranda in *The Tempest*), thus provoking further interpretive complication. The novel also divides the character of Miranda into two complementary figures: Myra, a young white Englishwoman with a traumatic past in San Cristobal, and Randa, Teeton's estranged wife, a native of San Cristobal with her own dark secret. The interlocking circuits of connection between these characters revealed over the course of the novel are byzantine and, from the perspective of realist fiction, improbable – indeed, they bear greater resemblance to the coincidences of a Shakespeare play. Myra, whom Teeton meets (but never sees) twice late at night on Hampstead Heath, turns out to be the daughter of the Old Dowager and her lover, Ferdinand, her husband's brother. Myra had been secretly taken to San Cristobal by her ostensible father, the Old Dowager's husband, and grows up there until his plantation workers sexually abuse her in revenge for his violently degrading treatment of them over the years. Randa, in turn, is revealed to have secured Teeton's release from prison for political crimes in San Cristobal by sleeping with the American ambassador. This act, which Teeton sees as one of sexual betrayal, is further complicated by the fact that whilst he escapes, his fellow rebels are still incarcerated. He broods on this action as involving himself in an act of self-serving betrayal, and thereafter refuses all contact with Randa, who, it is subsequently revealed, has committed suicide around the time the novel's events take place. Amongst all these convulsions and convolutions, it is easy to lose sight of some of the primary implications of this multifaceted allegorical play. One, of course, is the mixed racial status of this twofold Miranda, perhaps echoing Lamming's claim in *The Pleasures of Exile* that "Throughout the play we are impressed by the affinities, the likeness of circumstance between Miranda and Caliban" (111). Another, related implication is that of Teeton's doubleness and culpability: in his haughty silence with regard to Randa, a silence that effectively keeps her trapped in San Cristobal,

he bears more than a passing resemblance to Prospero in his treatment of Caliban. The dizzying kaleidoscope of analogy and resonance built into this novel thus communicates Lamming's keen sense of the shifting positionalities of all the actors on his tempestuous stage.

Teeton's interactions with Myra on Hampstead Heath provide the most important example in the novel of Lamming's prescriptions for negotiating the bewildering, fluctuating complications of relationships enmeshed in the legacies of colonial power. These scenes comprise sections four and six of the novel, and they are central to its ethical thrust, perhaps representing the only redemptive moments in the text. Their first meeting begins when Teeton wanders onto Hampstead Heath after leaving the Mona, the local pub frequented by the main characters (a glancing reference to the campus of the University of the West Indies in Jamaica). He has just found out about Randa's suicide and is in a disturbed state. Alternating between vivid memories and current perceptions (which sometimes blur together in a hallucinatory way), Teeton stops on the grass to rest and, apparently, falls asleep. When he awakes, he has lost his bearings, unsure of where he is or where he has been and "It gave him a fright; this sudden intimation that his memory might have gone completely" (130). As Teeton strains to focus on a distant light to reorient himself, Myra emerges to anchor him: "Then he heard a woman's voice. But he couldn't recall hearing anyone approach; and the voice seemed so near. He wasn't quite sure what he ought to do; but he was relieved to know that someone was there. It was good to hear someone speak" (130). This encounter with Myra – as guilty thoughts about Randa run through his head – begins to recover Teeton in some important way as they engage in an odd, but deeply earnest conversation. In this dialogue, Myra obliges Teeton to access deep reservoirs of emotion and self-analysis.

At the close of their first encounter, Teeton mentions a ritual called the Ceremony of Souls, a religious rite foundational to Lamming's worldview that he witnessed on a trip to Haiti and has frequently returned to in his writing. In *The Pleasures of Exile*, he suggests the ceremony has parallels to *The Tempest*, and in *Season of Adventure* it is the generative event for the protagonist Fola's

recuperation of her spiritual roots. It is also at a Ceremony of Souls that the ten-year-old Teeton met Randa, his future wife. As Teeton explains this ritual to Myra, Lamming takes pains to emphasize Myra's peculiar receptiveness to the story that Teeton needs to tell:

But there wasn't any interference from the woman; no sign of apprehension. She was quiet; so utterly calm as she waited for him to go on. Teeton was growing used to this quality in her attention: this curious probing which showed no trace of hurry, always kept in check by a sombre gift of patience. She was still waiting; yet she didn't seem to treat the intervals as waiting. She was simply there. (140)

In a text so caught up in complexity, this quiet uncomplicatedness is striking, and Myra's ability to coax things out of Teeton that he has needed to confront can be read as a valorized example of human openness. Indeed, as Teeton goes on to explain how the ceremony involves communion by the living with the dead and admits to now wanting to speak with the dead himself, a wonderfully rare feeling of peace and hopeful possibility descends upon him:

And the moment he made this admission he felt unusually relaxed; an infinite calm fell on everything he touched. The grass was asleep under his body. The strange woman had become more than a voice; she seemed to be there in a wholly new way; a presence which had been waiting to be known; someone with whom there would soon be the mutual arrangement for further acquaintance; a revelation of identities. (140)

The language here emphasises receptivity and the possibility of a profound, reciprocal acquaintance with another person. Although mostly operating in the subjunctive, the description of Teeton's state of mind is intensely positive, representing a supple openness to interpersonal connection that is found nowhere else in the novel.

Their second meeting, in section six, carries on in the same sensitive, open-minded vein, as they share food and discuss her

history (in which the parallels with Miranda – being raised by her father alone on an island – emerge in full clarity). Interestingly, here one sees, in the presentation of the meetings between Myra and Teeton, a third-person mode of narration that shifts its focus between the two characters' perceptions, a technique that also features prominently in Teeton's dialogues with the Old Dowager. At these moments, one senses the novel stepping outside an individual, focalised character to suggest the presence of a commenting authorial voice. This more authorially focused third-person mode allows Lamming to express an implicit sympathy with characters attempting to bridge the coloniser-colonised divide. Teeton, in his turn, practices patience in letting Myra tell her tale: "he didn't want to provoke answers that were different from the meaning she preferred to give; and he recalled her patience with his own lack of readiness in reply. She didn't intervene with gifts of consolation when he was at a loss for words. He yielded to this discipline of waiting" (145). Recollecting their (very brief) shared past, Teeton carefully identifies himself with Myra, thereby allowing her the same space to narrate as she afforded him. She, too, acquires some sense of refuge from their odd connection, as the novel notes how "she felt safe, as though she had suddenly discovered some novel promise of security from the presence of this stranger" (175). Myra's story is a horrible one, and she struggles with her understandable reluctance to contemplate physical contact with Teeton, whilst he finds himself strongly attracted to her (despite knowing her only as a voice). But sensing her reluctance, he forestalls his desire to touch, and reflects, "She had given enough of herself. He had to grant her this privilege; this freedom to choose for herself; to choose against his wish. He would have to let her go unseen. At least tonight" (177). Their relationship ends here, on this note of mutual restraint and consideration, with a hesitant thought towards the future. These moments, themselves a kind of Ceremony of Souls, represent what seem to be the novel's ideals of relationship. However, the ideality of Myra's and Teeton's interactions is sharply emphasised by the fact that they never *see* each other, let alone share their names, and this tentative flicker of possibility for communion is extinguished

when circumstances prevent their planned third meeting the following night.

Even so, these scenes represent something of an oasis in a novel otherwise dominated by wary, uncertain exchanges and frustrated attempts at action or fulfilment. As the novel begins, each of the three main West Indian characters has reached a frustrating standstill: Teeton has given up painting, sold all his artwork and still cannot bring himself to admit to the Old Dowager that he is leaving; Derek has become bitter watching his acting career descend into a series of minor and very marginal roles, mostly – in a note of dark humour in the novel – as a corpse; Roger, the musician of Indo-Caribbean origins, learning that his American wife Nicole is pregnant, has become paranoiacally delusional, insisting that she is seeing another man in order to avoid thinking about the mixed-race baby that her pregnancy augurs. London, once an escape and a challenge for these characters, has become desolate and threatening. When Roger is first introduced to the reader, even his hands seem alien: “The fingers were stiff as pegs. The palms were frozen white. He didn’t recognise them as his own although he kept a faultless vigilance over their movement” (69). Meeting Derek in the street, Roger seems unable to decipher the world around him, even the bag he is carrying: “Roger couldn’t bear the tension he had provoked. He glanced down at the carrier bag; but he wasn’t quite sure why it was there. He was afraid what Derek would do” (74). As they leave the pub after a long, tortuous conversation, Derek’s thoughts are similarly fearful and paranoid: “He sensed some unfamiliar danger stalking them. Everything had become delicate, too fragile. It would have been dangerous to offer advice” (102). A sense of alienation pervades the novel’s descriptions of the city as seen through its immigrant characters’ eyes. The reality of their situation – poor, professionally insecure, socially dubious – finds representation in hyperbolic, discomfiting images of a resistant material and social world. As Lamming has observed in an interview, *Water with Berries* reflects the slow shattering of an illusion about Great Britain with which these three characters had been inculcated through their colonial educations: “They then discovered the reality of Prospero’s home

– not from a distance, not filtered through Prospero’s explanation or record of his home, but through their own immediate and direct experience.”<sup>11</sup> This experience, as rendered in the novel, becomes more and more surreal and terrifying.

The incident that precipitates the novel’s tragic finale occurs in section seven, immediately following Teeton’s second meeting with Myra. It begins when the Old Dowager is confronted by a reporter and photographer wanting to interview Teeton about the unrest in San Cristobal. Here Lamming locates the exploitative nature of the British interest in events in and persons from the old colony when the reporter cynically quotes Trinculo’s lines from *The Tempest* (Act II, Scene II) comparing the hiding Caliban to a fairground freak to be gawped at. This is by way of a (baffling) explanation to the young and ignorant photographer about why they are looking for Teeton: “Were I in England now, as once I was, and had but this fish painted, not a holiday fool there but would give a piece of silver. There would this monster make a man” (183). This direct quotation further undercuts any illusion that the relations between coloniser and colonised have changed in any fundamental way from Shakespeare’s perceptions of it. The reporter’s continuation of the quotation makes further (if unwitting in his case) connections to the novel’s tragic denouement: “[though] they [the holiday fools] will not give a doit to relieve a lame beggar, they will lay out ten to see a dead Indian” (183). After the Old Dowager has fended off the reporter and photographer, she discovers the body of Nicole, Roger’s wife, who has committed suicide in Teeton’s room. This corpse – described in an inversion of Derek’s acting roles as “a corpse which might have been playing the part of being alive” (190) – seems to represent the unyielding realities circumscribing immigrant life, and from this point on in the novel many carefully repressed truths explosively emerge. The Old Dowager’s immediate reaction is to treat Nicole as if she is still alive, as if on show, “restoring a natural posture to the limbs, tidying the hair” (190). But after this she begins taking control of the situation, in order to protect Teeton, but also, just as importantly, to protect her reputation with her neighbours. The incident implicitly confirms the worst stereotypes about black men involved with white women in the Old



Dowager's mind (though she excuses herself and projects that imagination onto her neighbours). It prompts her to an ominous sense of duty and control. As Teeton observes when he returns: "The arrival of disaster had given the Old Dowager a boldness he hadn't seen in her before... It had reinforced her defiance against the forces which now threatened her house. They would sink her name in a pollution of rumour that might never end. Teeton seemed feeble before the authority of her will" (195). Becoming fiercely protective – indeed, more or less infantilising Teeton in her actions – the Old Dowager begins to inhabit a Prospero-like power as the novel transitions from its first part, "The Fall", to its second, "Under the Veil". From the moment of the discovery of Nicole's corpse, the social ties that have been constructed between the characters begin to unravel, as racial animosity and the full shaping force of colonial history emerge into the open. The opportunity for a more reasoned exorcism of the colonial past represented by Teeton's and Myra's meetings on the heath is obliterated, and the novel's narration slips inexorably into deeper fragmentation, a dream-like fugue of alienation and violent resentment.<sup>12</sup>

Each of the three West Indian immigrant characters breaks down in turn, assaulted by circumstances and the hopelessness of redress. The novel spends the most time on the Old Dowager's surreal journey with Teeton to the Orkney Islands, where her former lover (and brother-in-law), Ferdinand, has retreated in horror after experiencing what he recognizes as the curse of the colonial project suffered by all parties. Here, on yet a third island, the workings of that curse are enacted on Teeton, the Old Dowager, and Ferdinand, the latter two of whom meet their deaths. Crucially, it seems, Teeton finally realizes the insidious degradation of the position he has been occupying. In conversation with the Old Dowager, he has this epiphany:

But the Old Dowager had been so jealous of his safety, so protective of his interests, that he felt no impulse to show his displeasure. And it struck Teeton that there was a sense, deep and subtle and even dangerous, in which she had achieved some powerful hold on the roots of his emotion. She had

trained him to forgive her; to find some reason for diminishing any offence, however wounding it might have been. (210)

Teeton thus comes to recognize the elusive entanglements of the colonial relation and the depths of its psychological inheritance.<sup>13</sup> Soon after, when he finally makes his awkward confession to the Old Dowager that he had been planning to leave, he is met with silence. This silence, unlike that with Myra, is loaded with malevolence. This inspires a further epiphany about the unacknowledged colonial contours that imprison his life:

And it seemed to him, in the extreme lucidity of the moment, that this shame was an atmosphere in which he had always lived. It was as though this moment, made sharp and frightful as knives by the Old Dowager's absence of sound, was pure in its brutality, pure in the menace which reflected this shame which had been with him always. From the earliest, invisible fungus of birth, it had been soil to his loins; pulse to his heart; vein and artery to the miraculous flow of his blood: this shame now looked up at him from under the veil of his skin. (229)

This moment of comprehension – horrifying in its absoluteness, revealing what is under the veil of everyday activity – identifies the roots of the unease increasingly felt by Teeton, Roger and Derek. From the sudden racist (and misogynist) outbursts of their drinking companion O'Donnell in the Mona pub, to the Old Dowager's apotheosis into imperious control, to Derek's agent's newfound, opportunistic interest in him after the highly publicized rebellion on San Cristobal, to Ferdinand's visceral distaste (and sexual jealousy) of Teeton's "kind", the novel implies that the animus towards racial difference rooted in the workings of British empire has far from dissipated.

The consequences of this unbearable strain are desolate, to say the least. Teeton murders the Old Dowager and burns her body; Derek breaks out of his role as corpse to rape a white actress on stage; and Roger is taken in by the police after burning down several buildings, including his own apartment block and the Mona. The incipient hopefulness hinted at by Teeton's meetings with Myra on the heath recedes, and the novel ends tersely, with

a four-sentence section that details the bare facts about deaths, legal charges, and the Gathering's support for Teeton despite his incarceration.<sup>14</sup> The final line of the novel, however, leaves some room for manoeuvre within its ambiguity. It states simply that: "They were all waiting for the trials to begin" (276). On one hand, these trials, given the context of racial hatred and suspicion, hardly seem likely to end well for the accused West Indians. On the other hand, one can also read into this last line – especially given the adjacent mention of the re-galvanized Gathering in their renewed preparation for political struggle – a different kind of trial. This latter reading speaks to Lamming's belief that West Indians residing in Great Britain should not look to the Caribbean for political purpose but "will have to turn that energy on the increasingly explosive situation in the metropolitan centre."<sup>15</sup> Lamming has suggested in his discussions of the novel that the violence it portrays may in fact be, in an echo of Frantz Fanon's thinking, a necessary, cleansing step (though it is worth observing that some critics have been troubled by the fact that the primary objects of this violence in the novel are women). Talking with George Kent about the contemporary efforts of the formerly colonised to break free from the coloniser's influence, Lamming observes, "It seems to me that there is almost a therapeutic need for a certain kind of violence in the breaking. There cannot be a parting of the ways. There has to be a smashing."<sup>16</sup> He has also suggested that the violence in what is, after all, a non-realist novel, can be read in a somewhat more allegorical way. Lamming proposes that the violence is "very accurate in its symbolism," and goes on to explain that for Teeton, killing the Old Dowager "is the only way to kill that whole area within himself that has been her creation," thus offering a more figurative way to read the novel's concluding scenes.<sup>17</sup>

However one chooses to read the novel's closing violence, the tenor of its Caliban-Prospero interaction is decisively different from that found in *The Pleasures of Exile*. There, in an earlier moment, Lamming can lay claim to his lineage within a British tradition with a sense of helping mould it toward a brighter future, proclaiming:

I am a direct descendant of Prospero worshipping in the same temple of endeavour, using his legacy of language – not to curse our meeting – but to push it further, reminding the descendants of both sides that what’s done is done, and can only be seen as a soil from which other gifts, or the same gift endowed with different meanings, may grow towards a future which is colonised by our acts in this moment, but which must always remain open.” (15)

It is difficult to recapture this sense of optimism from the pages of *Water with Berries*, and indeed, given the sterility and emptiness of all three of its West Indian protagonists’ careers, even the role of art seems to be put under serious question as a force for social change. This late novel of Lamming’s thus registers a time marked by disillusion and impatience in Caribbean and Black British political thinking. There is a feeling of a profound unease with the state of race relations and the failure to address the sordid history that underpins them. There would seem to be only the slightest flicker of hope for something different found within its pages, a pessimism that reveals, alas, an alarming prescience about the social world we still inhabit. Regardless of the hope that it may or may not hold out, the novel, in moulding *The Tempest* into its own version of a Haitian Ceremony of Souls, at the very least signals the imaginative and political necessity of honestly confronting, with compassion and a good measure of empathetic understanding, the still troubling shadows the past casts on our present and, consequently, the future we must inevitably share.

### Endnotes

1. The divergence in initial publishing sites has caused a good deal of bibliographical uncertainty about the respective publication dates of the two novels. Ian Munro asserts, on the basis of a personal interview with Lamming, that *Water with Berries* was written after *Natives of My Person*. See Ian Munro, “George Lamming”, *West Indian Literature* ed. Bruce King (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995), 163-75. In a

1970 interview, Lamming corroborates this sense of it being the later work; see “Texas Dialogues”, *Conversations: George Lamming – Essays, Addresses and Interviews, 1953-1990* ed. Richard Drayton and Andaiye (London: Karia Press, 1992), 73. From the available evidence, it appears that *Natives of My Person* was published in early January of 1971 (in the US.), making it unlikely that *Water with Berries* could have come out earlier (in the U.K.) in that same year.

2. *Times*, 2 March, 1972: 12.
3. *Times Literary Supplement* 11 February, 1972: 145.
4. “Texas Dialogues”, 73.
5. George Lamming, *The Pleasures of Exile* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), 9. All subsequent quotations from this volume will be cited parenthetically in the text.
6. See Rob Nixon, “Caribbean and African Appropriations of *The Tempest*”, *Critical Inquiry* 13, no. 3 (1987): 557-578. Nixon names Aimé Césaire’s *Une Tempête*, several key essays by Roberto Fernández Retamar and Kamau Brathwaite’s *Islands* as the most important texts in this lineage he traces back to Lamming. Peter Hulme has written extensively about Lamming’s relationship to Shakespeare’s play. For a recent example, see Peter Hulme, “The Seeds of Revolt: George Lamming and *The Tempest*”, *The Locations of George Lamming* ed. Bill Schwarz (Oxford: Macmillan, 2007), 112-131
7. *The Riverside Shakespeare* ed. G. Blakemore Evans (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1974).
8. Another important feature of this differentiation is Roger’s evidently Indo-Caribbean background, as opposed to the Afro-Caribbean backgrounds that seem to be shared by Teeton and Derek. With his singular dedication to artistic practice, his sense of having been marooned out of place at birth on San Cristobal, and also in his deep-seated fear of racial impurity – all themes of V.S. Naipaul’s recent novel, *The Mimic Men* (1967) – Roger calls to mind that Trinidadian writer, not least because Naipaul’s father, Seepersad, had married into the Capildeo family.
9. It is worth noting, however, that Roger’s and Derek’s friendship is of a more lasting quality, in that they can fiercely

disagree with each other without harming their relationship: “They had achieved a kind of comradeship which made them free from the fear of malice. There were no debts of apology in their account” (96).

10. John Thieme, whilst focusing on *The Natives of My Person*, provides a compelling reading of how allegory works in both Lamming’s two late novels: see John Thieme, “‘A Future They Must Learn’: Transforming Power Relations in *Natives of My Person*,” *The Locations of George Lamming* ed. Bill Schwarz (Oxford: Macmillan, 2007), 132-150. Although his reading specifically addresses the redemptive possibilities he finds in *Natives of My Person*, the structural logic of his analysis could be applied with similar effect to *Water with Berries*.
11. “‘A Future They Must Learn’: An Interview by George Kent”, *Conversations: George Lamming – Essays, Addresses and Interviews, 1953-1990*, 97. This interview with Lamming and the 1975 interview conducted by Yannick Tarrieu probably provide the most comprehensive insight into Lamming’s thoughts about *Water with Berries* around the time of its composition and publication. For this latter, see Yannick Tarrieu, “Caribbean Politics and Psyche: A Conversation with George Lamming”, *Commonwealth* 10, no. 2 (1988): 14-25.
12. Supriya Nair suggests (following Margaret Paul Joseph) the Ariel-like implications of Nicole’s body being interred under a tree by Teeton and the Old Dowager, noting that in *The Tempest* Prospero frees Ariel from imprisonment in a tree. Nair reads this act of burial as symbolically eliminating any possibility for mediation between Prospero and Caliban, the role traditionally attributed to Ariel. See Supriya Nair, *Caliban’s Curse: George Lamming and the Revisioning of History* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996).
13. The continuing pertinence of Lamming’s treatment of the persistent and deeply rooted psychological consequences of the racism embedded in the colonial relationship is more than confirmed in the contemporary analysis of interracial interactions in Claudia Rankine’s recent prizewinning work, *Citizen: An American Lyric* (2014). Rankine may not be aware of

George Lamming's novel, but David Dabydeen almost certainly is. His novel, *Disappearance* (1993, 2005), with its portrayal of a West Indian lodging with an elderly white English woman, whose late husband had a colonial past, can also be seen as a direct descendant of Lamming's novel in this regard. There is even an Irish character, Christie, in Dabydeen's novel who bears more than a slight resemblance, and plays a similar role, to Lamming's O'Donnell.

14. The American version of the novel appeared, apparently due to a publisher's oversight, without this final, short thirteenth section, inspiring some intriguingly different readings of the novel. The American version ends with Teeton sailing off towards the mainland of Britain, having disposed of the Old Dowager's body. With this unintended omission, Lamming appears to be emphasizing his character's calmness, ending the section with a line ambiguously caught between a sense of destruction and potential rebirth: "There was a smell of fire on the morning" (275).
15. Tarrieu, "Caribbean Politics and Psyche", 23.
16. Kent, "A Future They Must Learn", 100.
17. Tarrieu, "Caribbean Politics and Psyche", 22.





for  
John and Dorothy Figueroa  
and in memory of  
Willy Richardson and Claudia Jones



PART ONE

THE FALL



# 1

## *One*

The fog was breaking up. A moment ago he had marvelled at the huge edifice of blue air which occupied the street, obliterating houses and the telegraph poles. His gaze had grown weary with looking for the first row of houses which would announce the heath. It was such an unlikely start to the day: this black dawn erupting from the heart of September.

But Teeton was in a mood to welcome it. He was in a mood to forgive any extravagance. And after seven years he had learnt to live with the lunacy of the seasons. Teeton had set himself a little apart from them, trusting to some private temperature of the blood. He had let the seasons rub him on the outside. They pushed him about a little, like an amiable crowd drawing attention to their waiting. They might tread on him now and again. But he had never felt any panic amidst their mob; no gales had yet come to tear his skin away. He had been growing without much notice from anyone; a plant which had defied some foreign soil, coming to fruition without a name. He liked it here. London had been a city of welcome, the safest harbour for his kind of waiting. But he was about to bring this pilgrimage to an end. After seven years it was now over.

The sun started a web of light in the corner of his window. There was a tremor of water on the pane. The morning was turning on. He saw a pair of hands divide the curtains in the house across the street. A nose was probing the glass. The fog had begun to crumble; its subtle carpentry of air and smoke was coming apart. Two neat little chimneys of brick emerged as the wind swept the last parcels of dirt up from the roof. He saw the hands withdraw from the window. The nose had disappeared. Now he

turned away from the weather and looked to his room like a farmer alerting himself to the needs of his livestock. He might have been putting it up for auction.

Two windows and one door.

A pair of chairs at opposite ends of the table.

Twin divans that stretched the whole length of the wall.

There was a white plaster head of Columbus on the mantelpiece.

A black tree trunk rose from the far corner.

The folding maps were his only curtains.

He loved this room. Spare, solitary, without any trace of fuss. It was beyond improvement.

Teeton knew what he was going to do with the maps; but it seemed more difficult to decide on the fate of the black tree trunk. It was resting beside the large wash basin, no taller than a man of average height with its twin branches struck out on either side like arms cut off at the elbows. He had salvaged it from the back of the garden more than a year ago.

That's where he had always hung his wet underwear. It was the neatest place for his overcoat. It was the masterpiece of his furniture, this complex of laundry and cupboard: a versatile log of wood which had grown on him like regular company. Now it was quite naked, and he could see how the bark split open round the trunk like a skeleton of ribs. He had fought many a battle to bring it up to the room. When he had got it there, the fight went on to keep it. At first the Old Dowager thought he had gone out of his mind. Next he would be asking to grow vegetables in the carpet; or turn the loft into a chicken farm. But the tree trunk remained.

The Old Dowager had relented; and the tree trunk had won. But she kept an eye on it just in case 'things' began to accumulate. This was, in the end, her only condition. She sprayed it every day; explored the grains of bark for 'things' that might have got away. And Teeton did come to think of it as a nuisance when 'things' began to crawl over him in his sleep. Teeton didn't let her know his reason, but there was a time he wanted to return the tree trunk to the garden. But the Old Dowager wouldn't hear of it. She thought it a perfectly harmless addition to the room. She heard every argument, but she wouldn't yield an inch to anyone who

wanted to dispose of it. This ordinary black portion of a fallen tree had become a necessary piece of the furniture, a natural element of the household. And Teeton had to agree. The room could never be the same without it. But he was going. Now it would be the Old Dowager who would have to decide. He glanced at the map and saw the island smile and sink under the shadows of the early morning.

There was a muted knocking at the door. Teeton answered yes and waited. He was smiling at her delay. He knew there would be no need to speak again; no need to enquire who was there. The Old Dowager was simply rehearsing her apologies. It was their game, an example of the formula they had made for being together. She had heard him say come, but she would not enter until she was ready. Teeton saw the maps stare at him from the window frames like a warrant authorising his return. 'I've almost left it too late,' he thought as he waited for the Old Dowager to appear. 'I must tell her I'm going home.'

"As luck would have it," the Old Dowager said, making her way straight to the table. She had passed him the habitual gift of morning tea.

Teeton greeted her with a gentle complaint against the weather. An instant frown appeared on the Old Dowager's face. She agreed. Neither really thought there was much cause for complaint; but this had become their routine of welcome. For as many mornings as they could count in six years, that's how they had observed their ritual of greeting. The Old Dowager saw the sizzling blaze of an ocean spread out on the maps, and prolonged her scolding of the English air. There was a mild bite in the draught which had blown in. Teeton was making an effort to hold the hot cup up to his mouth. His bottom lip was on fire, but his eyes were laughing.

"I didn't think you were in," the Old Dowager said.

Unnoticed, she had started dusting the mantelpiece. Soon she would extend her campaign to the divans and the carpet, leaving the black tree trunk until everything else was over. But the room had a slightly different shape this morning. It looked a little smaller where the blanket was draped over the high stack of paintings in the corner. She reflected that her stay would be much longer.

“Didn’t think you were in,” she said again.

“Didn’t think I’d be in!” He knew she must have thought up some charge against him. “And where would I be at this hour?” He was in a mood to defend himself; even to offer himself up for mockery.

“I’ve never known you to work by the clock,” the Old Dowager said.

Soon she would be taking him on a tour of his habits; but it would be done without any reference to himself; almost without any trace of curiosity about what he did; or where he went when he wasn’t in the room.

“So what would a man be doing out at seven o’clock on a Sunday morning?” Teeton said and held the map up to give the Old Dowager a better look at the weather.

“Seven o’clock of a Sunday morning,” she said, playing echo to his surprise. “Why, I’ve known some people who get home much later. Very dear friends of mine.”

“I don’t suppose I know these friends?”

“You might and it’s just as likely you might not.”

“They work nightshift, I suppose.”

“I can’t be sure what work they shift,” the Old Dowager replied, “but Saturday can be a long night from home. For some people.”

Teeton suddenly felt a little clot of air harden like cramp in the pit of his throat. He might have laughed it away, but his glance had found the Old Dowager smoothing the sheets over the divan; now she was cuffing the pillows into shape, plucking at the corners so that they stood erect like a dog’s ears.

He watched her and wondered what miracle of affection had turned this room into a home. Cosy as a cave when he wanted to be in hiding; it had also acquired certain characteristics which had nothing to do with its size. It could be like a fortress in the morning: harsh and cold with neglect until the Old Dowager came in and took it over. Soon it would be converted by her hands back to its more normal state: a mixture of workshop, playground and garden. She never came back after this stage of her duty was over; but some signature of her presence was left behind. He had almost come to think of the room as a separate and independent province of the



house. The house was the Old Dowager's; but the room was his; and house and room were in some way their joint creation; some unspoken partnership in interests they had never spoken about. He had changed lodgings nine times during his first year in London. Six years ago he had discovered a home in the Old Dowager's house. But it was time to go. The lump was thawing in his throat. He would have to tell her soon of his plans to leave.

The Old Dowager was moving in reverse, passing slow verdict on the angle of the covers; giving herself a second opinion on the way they fell, and a third on whether they shouldn't have come right down to the floor. Teeton wanted to distract her; he wanted really to distract himself from this emotion which the Old Dowager's chores had aroused. He felt he could now speak without risk. The lump had thawed; and his throat was free. She looked over her shoulder when she heard him call; but she hadn't quite settled her verdict on the bed. Perhaps she could adjourn the issue of the covers until tomorrow.

"Yes, I was saying," said Teeton, restoring the balance of the maps, "I'm going to be away for a couple of days."

She came towards the table.

"Just a couple?" She asked. "You need a lot more than a couple days' rest."

She was getting ready to collect the cup; but she waited for Teeton to go on. She wanted him to offer more details; but she could never let him know that she was trying to calculate how long his couple of days would last. She thought he might have been a little more precise; but it would have been inconceivable for her to ask.

"I'm not here if anyone calls," said Teeton, preparing the Old Dowager for her assignments. "And you don't know where I've gone – or when."

"Which wouldn't be a lie," she reminded him, and quickly added, as though it were urgent and a matter of principle, "I'd only be telling the truth, wouldn't I?"

"I wouldn't ask you otherwise," said Teeton, and caught the Old Dowager's glance reminding him that he should think again.

He turned away; gave himself a moment to extinguish all evidence of his smile before facing the Old Dowager again.

“I know you can handle it,” said Teeton.

“The trouble is your friends don’t always believe me,” she said.

“Which friends?” Teeton had become cautious. He had to be sure the Old Dowager was returning with a name from the right compartment. She had noticed the change in his voice.

“Well there’s the actor to begin with,” she said, sorting the names before taking any risk that she might be wrong.

“Oh Derek,” said Teeton. He looked relieved.

“And Roger is much the same,” she added, now she was sure where the names belonged.

“They wouldn’t hold it against you,” said Teeton; and his caution was no longer there.

Roger and Derek belonged to the compartment which the Old Dowager was free to enter. For a moment he had wondered whether there might have been some breakdown in the agreement which he shared exclusively with the other friends who kept the strictest censorship on what they knew about each other. It would have been against every code of safety for any member of the Secret Gathering to call for him at the Old Dowager’s house.

The Old Dowager was making a loop with the duster. Her silence had focused Teeton’s attention on her wrists. They were wide with a high tide of veins which converged round the sharp white stump of wristbone. Something had delayed her; for it was unusual to see her stand still. She was waiting as she often did when there was some occasion for apology.

“I don’t know what’s come over me,” she said, “but I don’t seem to remember a thing these days.”

She turned to let Teeton judge the truth of her regret.

“What have you forgotten now?” he asked; and smiled so that she knew he had already given her the benefit of the doubt in any charge she was about to make against herself.

“His wife called yesterday,” the Old Dowager said.

“You mean Nicole?”

“Twice,” she answered. “It must have been important.”

“She’s Roger’s wife,” Teeton said, helping her to fix the names where they belonged.

She had caught his meaning; but she showed no reluctance in admitting her failure to remember the names.

“He’s the tall one, isn’t he?”

“Looks Indian,” said Teeton, “as indeed he is.”

“She called twice,” the Old Dowager said promptly.

The loop had come undone; and the duster trailed like the tail of a kite down her side. Teeton watched her turn away to inspect the wrinkles in the black tree trunk.

“She didn’t leave any message?”

“Now I wouldn’t have forgotten that, would I.”

She was looking at him again, confident that she was now free from any lapse of memory. He had often had complaints about her reluctance to let messages through, but he had never brought this to her attention. She was an obstacle he was often glad to have between him and the telephone.

“She is American, isn’t she?”

“All of her,” said Teeton.

The Old Dowager might have been trying to gauge his interest in the message she had given him.

“Twice,” she said again, as though she were drawing attention to danger. “I hope there’s nothing wrong.”

“I’ll see Nicole before I go,” he said.

“Well don’t forget now,” she warned again, trying to curb her curiosity about the telephone calls. “You might be gone longer than you say.”

“Exactly two days,” Teeton said quickly, as though he had to dispel any doubts the Old Dowager might have about his absence.

He had changed her mood by letting her know; it made life so much easier to manage when you knew. She was almost gay; ready to let her irony go sparring at him again. But Teeton had become a little more sombre once more. He was looking at the stack of paintings in the corner, wishing some miracle would pack and transport them where they belonged. The gallery had started to complain about his delay.

‘I’d better tell her now,’ he thought, ‘you’d better tell her you are going home.’

“In that case,” she was saying – and Teeton was startled; felt almost catapulted out of his skin – “we’d better start getting the paintings ready today. It’s not a long time, two days. And there’s a lot to do. No point waiting, I say. Now, is there?”

And Teeton had remained still as though her question had forced a guilty silence on him. "You'd better tell her now."

"I agree," he said, "why not start on them today."

"Then I'll take this if you're through," she said, collecting the cup, at last. "We'll just let Vulcan know. He won't be too pleased I daresay."

"Bring him back with you," Teeton said.

"Most certainly not," the Old Dowager insisted. "There's work to be done." Then she relented; as though there might have been an injustice in such exclusion. "Moreover, he isn't that kind of dog. Not Vulcan. Likes to go his own way. Follows his own nose, I'd say."

"As you like," Teeton was offering.

"Definitely not."

And Teeton realised the matter had been concluded. The dog would not be invited this morning.

## *Two*

The Old Dowager had hardly got past the door when the feeling seized him. It came on like an attack of nerves. He had once deserted his comrades in San Cristobal. It was desertion. There was no other name for his escape from the island. After seven years the word had lost none of its terror. It seemed to drag its echoes up from the deepest roots of his being. Seven years ago he had been arrested after a minor revolt in the San Souci plains. The island was never to be the same. But he had got away, leaving some of his own cell-mates behind. Two were now dead. And the charge had pursued him ever since. How was it possible for him to get away? And when did he decide to go? After seven years he could still hear that martyrdom screaming in his ears. It was desertion. In the notorious plains of San Souci they couldn't have found any other name for his escape. He heard the Old Dowager on her way; and he looked up at the window. The maps were coming to his aid.

Now the island rose in a blaze of morning, riding at ease through treacherous currents of wind and water. Hurricanes had

often disfigured its face. Floods were regular when he was a boy. They would carry huge portions of soil into the sea. But it would grow again, as though its hopes were never wholly out of favour. Its history had been a swindle of treaties and concessions. Its sovereignty was no more than an exchange of ownership. There had been no end to the long and bitter humiliations of foreign rule. The battles for ascendancy were too numerous to be remembered. But its habits of submission had suffered a terrible blow. The meek flame started at San Souci had spread beyond his wildest expectations. Now this name San Cristobal had become a warning everywhere.

But the ocean was too narrow a stretch between San Cristobal and her northern neighbour. There to the north, a nightmare away, the stupendous power of America sent a shiver through every nerve; shut every eye with fear. The ocean was innocent, an amiable killer beside those urgent executioners who kept vigil over the fortunes of that hemisphere. It was no longer safe for a man to remember his name. But the island was there, erratic with rage; pugnacious as its legendary fighting cocks, and vulnerable as air. The hills were shadows unfolding tediously before his eyes. He could hear the murmur of landslide coming down the mountains.

He glanced at the black tree trunk and then across at the canvases stacked high in the corner. The Old Dowager had already taken the blanket away. A week today these objects would be on display somewhere. They were no longer his. He smiled when he recalled the letter which stated the contract for this sordid, little barter. He had astonished the merchants at the gallery by his offer. Five hundred pounds for the lot. Now they could fix whatever price they liked and he wished them luck. He was grateful the matter was no longer in his hands. This premature fruit of a rotten crop was about to pass out of his ownership for all time. They were an innocent betrayal of the island which was dancing about, filling the space of the window. He turned to look at the maps again, inviting the island to pass some verdict on his escape. And the blue ink of ocean looked so troubled, so utterly indecisive where it should go, what it should let him hear. The island was smiling under the monstrous shadow of its northern neighbour.

He heard the Old Dowager's voice tapping on his ear. She had shaken him out of his dreaming. The catalogue, she was saying, you get on with the catalogue and I will get on with the cleaning. Everything had to be clean. She was an enemy of dirt. Teeton watched her body bend; now it was straight again. She was young again; and it made him cheerful. Now she's in her element, he thought, the Old Dowager is in her natural element. Her mind was busy as an engine.

There was work to be done this morning; but it gave pleasure to the Old Dowager's hands. It put a joy on every memory which was working its way back from the past; and her memory was always bright at this hour, sharp and sure as a magnet attracting every particle of gossip that had gone astray in the Mona bar. Hardly an angry word might pass in that pub, but what a cremation of character took place over the passing drink. Yes, she had heard many a marriage go up in flames; watched many a dead heart flutter back to life at the sound of a famous name. It was a minefield of risk for courting couples. An abominable place whose clientele were always persuading themselves to go elsewhere; might have been on their way out forever, almost through the door, when the power of a new scandal suddenly caught them by the ears and swung their attention back into play. 'He's never told me,' the Old Dowager was thinking, 'never told that he had a wife. Never a word after all these years.'

Teeton's voice must have detected her secret thinking.

"The Wednesday evening visitor," Teeton was laughing. "You know that's what they call you at Mona. You're the Wednesday evening drinker. Only on Wednesday in the evening."

Teeton had started to invent a tune that might carry his refrain, only on Wednesday. And the Old Dowager looked up briefly and smiled. It might have been the start of a compliment to his voice; but she had decided to withdraw it. She had a slight shudder at the thought of being caught between the tongues of the Mona firing squad.

"What's wrong with Wednesday?" She had come to her defence. "You know very well why I go on Wednesday."

Teeton said nothing because he knew. The Old Dowager was really a lunchtime regular, visiting every day from about twelve

until she had finished her large gin fizz. That was her limit, served in a glass with a round, wide barrel of a belly. It looked like a chimney at the waist. The Old Dowager would nurse her gin and tonic for the better part of an hour; and if the talk was not too dull, she would make it stretch past the hour. But the evenings were out; except on Wednesday which was, she had warned Teeton, the most tolerable night of the week. It was the night wage earners were likely to be away. The Old Dowager didn't know what happened elsewhere because she never drank in any other bar. But Mona had its own curriculum of traffic; and its own categories of professional spongers. You were not likely to be attacked for a loan on Wednesday because it was the day which fell, according to the Old Dowager, bang in the middle of two extremities: of receiving and disposing. That is – she would explain to Teeton, schooling him in every contingency which Mona might spring on an innocent passer-by – having what you earn and having it not.

“Halfway,” Teeton was teasing her. “Halfway between the two extremities.”

But you see, and the Old Dowager was in delight, rehearsing the days she put her pupil through this exercise, they have to take time off that night. It was a bad day for anyone to negotiate a loan. Much too near the previous Sunday for the sake of dignity; and not near enough to coming Saturday. It put too great a strain on the memory, having to think from Saturday back to midweek. Only the prudent would appear on Wednesday; and then it would be for five minutes or so before closing. Just the right margin of time to escape the expense of company. Thursday was much safer. And Friday offered almost total protection against such emergencies. Except in the event of disaster, like the sudden arrival of O'Donnell; and then you might be caught shamefully, without your guard.

“He's a man who's suffered,” Teeton had said. “You can't be too hard on O'Donnell.”

There was a case in point, the Old Dowager was about to concede; but she felt it necessary to defend the value of her instruction. O'Donnell would have been an exception anywhere. His solicitations were never of a simple nature. He would de-

scend like a vampire, literally from nowhere. You didn't see him enter. But there he was, all tears and whisky in his whisper: 'can I have a word with you, such a terrible thing to have to share'. And how could you resist? He had already got you in his fat embrace; and for the sanctity of your ear alone, that dreadful newsflash of his misfortune fell. A fiancée was on O'Donnell's heels. Breach of promise, never given according to his oath; but perjury can have a terrible success, even in an English court. And what was a poor man to do? Flight was the only answer. Immediate and without further meditation. Flight if a good man of catholic charity were to be saved. Destination two pounds and a coin or so less than ten shillings away. He would make it if the publican's clock wasn't telling a lie. From Vancouver to the underground of North West London the bailiffs had continued to live in his shadow.

"Mona's not all that bad, you know."

Teeton seemed inclined to hoist a flag in praise of something. He was feeling a little merry with the sight of the Old Dowager. She didn't make any challenge, although she heard the cremation fires burn her loyalty into silence: 'you don't know what they say about you... and where is his wife, who knows? Who knows?' That's the song the urn was singing when Teeton's ash came floating down. The Old Dowager wanted to put a curse on Mona, if only for Teeton's sake; but some better judgement advised her to hold her peace. She was careful not to trespass on his past.

"That's what is so nice about you," she was observing. "It doesn't take very much to cheer you up. One good day is grace enough, as they say, for a whole, grievous year."

"It's not a bad place, the Mona," Teeton insisted. "No worse than any other pub. And a good deal better than most. There is such a nice cross-section."

The Old Dowager didn't want to take a break from her work; but Teeton had forced her into argument again.

"I don't like sections," she said sharply, "neither cross-sections, intersections nor any kind of section. That's the trouble, isn't it? Mona is nothing but a section. When it isn't a section of this, it's a section of the other, and a section of the next. It's a rare sight to come across anything whole at the Mona."



“But you love it.” Teeton was irrepressible with his teasing. “You love the place. Admit it, Gran. You love it whatever they say about you.”

It was difficult for her to make any prompt denial.

“The prices are fairly high,” she said. “And you hear the strangest things in that place.”

Teeton looked bored with the chore of making a catalogue of the paintings.

“What a strange couple, the cartoonist and his wife.” The Old Dowager was doubtful whether she ought to go on.

“She wants him to be a millionaire,” said Teeton.

“Does she?” The Old Dowager’s contempt began to simmer. “Well, well. I couldn’t find my breath when I heard her introducing him to her ex-husband.”

“Didn’t know she was married before,” said Teeton.

“Nor did he,” said the Old Dowager.

“Nor did who?”

“Her husband.”

“Which husband, Gran?”

“Her present husband,” the Old Dowager said. “The cartoonist, I mean. It was he started the introductions. He was introducing her to this couple I’d never seen before. But the woman was his ex-wife.”

“The cartoonist?”

“That’s right.”

“I didn’t know he was married before.”

“Never mind,” the Old Dowager said. “Both women knew.”

“They were all ex-’s,” said Teeton.

“But the men never knew,” said the Old Dowager. “Not until then.”

Teeton jerked his head up and stared at the Old Dowager. The duster was waging war over the picture frames as she tried to sort out these marital complexities, divided between her loyalty to order and a restrained passion for the bizarre.

“It was a right musical chairs,” she said.

“Hell of a thing when you don’t know whose chair you’re sitting on.” Teeton was laughing; but it was hardly in keeping with his mood.

“It wasn’t so funny,” the Old Dowager said. “I think the men felt a bit awful.” She paused to judge the truth of this.

“I’d think so,” Teeton agreed. “But I don’t suppose you can throw away your chair because somebody’s been sitting there first.”

“Come off it, Teeton. What would you have done? Finding yourself in that position.” She had begun to regret the direction her gossip had taken.

Suddenly Teeton seemed to retreat from answers. What would I have done? The Old Dowager was in time to see the change of expression when he spoke.

“I don’t know,” he said as though he couldn’t be sure of anything.

“Well it must have taken some doing,” she said. “The publican caught what was up when some terrible looks started to pass, and called for a celebration. A bottle of champagne was off the shelf. On the house.”

“On the house?” Teeton exclaimed.

“Couldn’t believe my eyes,” the Old Dowager said.

“But Millet is not a publican who gives anything away,” said Teeton.

“But he did last Wednesday night,” she said. “You should have been there.”

“I’d have liked to see that.” Teeton’s voice had almost lost its sound.

“It was like a repeat performance of the honeymoons,” the Old Dowager said.

Teeton didn’t respond. It seemed he had lost his enthusiasm for this drama which had enlivened the Mona bar. He was looking at the maps, so lavish and vivid in their detail. His eyes had caught the peaks which were calling from the window frame. He had forgotten the Old Dowager for a while. His glance was loitering over that blue solitude where the forest grew, freezing at night; a circus of wandering birds by day. The mountains drifted away like clouds, hopelessly out of reach. The Old Dowager’s voice was coming back.

“The new couple had just returned from India,” she said.

“That’s a long way,” Teeton said, recovering the lost half of his attention.

“The whole thing seemed so remote,” the Old Dowager said. “But it’s a privilege to travel. Such a great privilege. It never came my way.”

Now Teeton gave her all his attention. She seemed so forsaken the moment she spoke of things that hadn’t come her way.

“It’s never too late,” said Teeton.

She leaned the frame away to get a better look at him. She was laughing. A magic of former times had illuminated her face. Her eyes had been washed clean of the mist which often showed the room to be miles away. Now it seemed the maps had come forward to receive her gaze. She would have liked to believe that every word of Teeton’s was a prophecy that would come true. Teeton knew what an appetite she had for promises; and he wasn’t going to let his offer fall on incredulous ears. Expectations were so scarce at her age. Teeton had always inspired her with the feeling that it was the extraordinary circumstance which would reward her for any loss of opportunity she had suffered.

“You may laugh,” he said, “but you’ll see. It’s going to happen. One day, just like that (and he snapped his fingers like a player at dice, sniffing his luck) one day, out of the blue, your chance has come. Just like that. And you’re away. The Old Dowager up in the sky, taking herself off to foreign parts.”

“No plane for me,” she said, “they are an abomination. All that noise. And you never can tell. Suppose anything goes wrong. Like engine trouble and not so much as a garden plot anywhere in sight. Where would I be? At my age? You can keep your planes. And all that noise.”

“Then we’ll fix you up by ship,” said Teeton. “It’s even better that way. Don’t have to lose your sleep.”

“Oh you get away,” she smiled, “where would I be going?”

“You’ll see,” said Teeton, moving closer to the map.

The Old Dowager had gone back to her work. She was polishing the frame, begging her arms to give all their strength. There was still a lot of living in her hands. Yes, she would show a preference for the boat. But she would want to manage on her own. No, thank you, it’s all right. You look after yourself. I can look after mine. She was already getting herself ready for these eventualities; learning the various courtesies that should go with

saying no. There would be many instances in which she would have to face these offers of help. In rough weather, she had seen boats slide down on one side as though the waves would turn them over. Now there was a case in point! She'd have to learn how to stand like sailors do, shifting the balance the other way. And if, perchance, she stumbled? Then there was a case in point! She would have to practise the right words for saying she refused.

She had paused to change her grip; she wanted to rest the frame on its other side; but her eyes had caught a view of the yellow bars of sunlight plunging out the corner of the painting. She stood the canvas up to look at it again; and the colours seemed to change the more she looked. Now there was a shade of tangerine peeling away from a ledge of cloud that crumbled slowly out of view. A fleet of small boats lay idle on the shore. The sea was blue serge in colour; it was crowded with huge towers of rock leaning high above the surface of the water. She thought of danger; the frightful wreck that could befall a ship which failed to navigate the neck of water which stretched between the bigger rocks. It seemed so absolutely real with peril: those open jaws of rock, waiting to swallow anything that had come into collision there. The sky felt safer now. At least the clouds gave way to the flight of airplanes. There was wickedness in these rocks. She didn't believe that boats would trespass there. But the small boats looked firm enough. Perhaps they were no longer in use. They must have been abandoned after years of service; and brought here until it was time for burning.

Teeton was watching her. He was fascinated by her total absorption with the painting; the gradual stages of her viewing, a little puzzled at first; then hopeful that whatever she had lost couldn't be far away. Then his voice gave her a double shock.

"I can show you exactly where it is," Teeton said.

He made her tremble. She felt as though she had been caught in the act of stealing; the slight alarm of someone who had just failed to escape in time.

"Did you say something?" she asked, putting on her house-keeper's face: the eyes generously open to his request.

Teeton never failed to indulge her in these moments of prevarication. Could this be an element of hypocrisy? But it gave him great

delight. He would never surprise her with the truth; because he felt it was her privilege to be free of all embarrassment; so he would let himself enter into their little game of harmless deceptions, supporting the Old Dowager whenever she felt it a matter of dignity to misplace her memory. Now she was accusing her ears of being idle; of going to sleep when her hearing should have been alert. Teeton didn't hesitate to show that he was on her side.

"Do you want anything?" he asked.

"No, no. I thought I heard someone call."

For a moment they both pretended to speculate on the chance of unexpected visitors. The Old Dowager had raised a hand to consult with the ear which should have been on duty. Teeton let his attention stray leisurely back to the map. He had given her time to recover from the shock of his voice; to adjust to the realisation that she must have let herself get carried away by the painting. It was a cardinal rule of living that she shouldn't ever let enthusiasm take charge of all her attention. Some portion should always be placed on guard, keeping her aware of what was happening elsewhere. Now it was over. They had come to the end of their game; and it was clear that she had suffered no loss of face. The rules came to her rescue.

"I would swear I heard someone call," she said, returning her attention to the frame. She had resumed her polishing.

"It must have been me," said Teeton. "I talk to myself now and again."

"Not to worry," she assured him; and she was in control again. "Everybody does it some time or another." She considered the arch of the frame. "Of course it's a habit that can go too far."

"Don't scare me, Gran."

"God forbid," she said. "What could be farther from my thoughts. And you of all people!"

This phrase was a bond of her affection for Teeton: 'you of all people'. She would put it on, as it were, at the end of the sentence; as you might fix a label to make sure that no one could be in doubt. It was a phrase which had come to mean more to Teeton than she could have imagined. It was not only protective in its tendency to select him from others. Her age had given it a more lasting assurance. It made him hear again the echo of voices which had

mothered his childhood; the exceptional pride of place which infancy occupied in the attention of any who came near.

“I wish you’d start painting again,” the Old Dowager said.

It might have been a message she had forgotten to deliver. There was a hint of embarrassment in her voice. She wasn’t sure she would wait for an answer. She hadn’t raised her head from the painting. Teeton was looking at her. But he wasn’t going to be drawn into a reply. He couldn’t tell the Old Dowager what he was thinking as he watched the crop of canvases gathered in the corner.

He was judging the dead harvest of his youth. They might have had some value as a record of his own lack of foresight. The effortless braveries which had passed for courage. The farce of heroism had been dignified by the subtle briberies of an art which had led him astray. There were subtle and cruel dangers in every natural talent. His brush had been an aimless eye wandering always beyond himself, a glance intended for others. He had been plodding through experience without any pause, collecting pleasures like a royal tramp. But he had brought these frivolities to an end. A look at the Old Dowager was sufficient proof that his youth was over. In seven years time, he would be on the other slope of living, descending tamely towards his natural end.

The Old Dowager was still under the spell of the painting. Teeton looked away. He saw the map shivering against the window pane. A draught had found its way up the backside of the island. The ocean shook. He thought he had to show the Old Dowager where the boats would have been at anchor. He was shading the map with one hand while the other became a telescope under his eye.

“Can you spare a moment...?” he asked, closing one eye in order to sharpen his vision.

“Would you be wanting anything?” The Old Dowager was already on her feet.

“Over here,” said Teeton. He didn’t look up from the map. “It’s just about there. The red lines with the squares. That’s where it is.”

“The sea,” the Old Dowager exclaimed, letting his finger guide her eyes.

“The boats,” said Teeton, making room for her to be near. “That’s where I was born. Cattlewash we call it.”

“The scene for the boats,” the Old Dowager said. “I daresay you could draw them with your eyes shut.”

She had shoved Teeton gently aside; and her eyes devoured the red squares which ran in a crooked line along the coast. “What with the sea so near.”

“On the door step,” said Teeton, continuing his view over her shoulder.

“On the door step,” the Old Dowager intoned, as though she had got a vision of her own journey at hand. “Must be beautiful there.” And taking her head away, she glanced towards the divan where she had left the canvas. “It’s a pity to spoil such places.”

She frowned; and then returned to her scrutiny of the map.

“I hear they are spoiling such places. Those who can afford to get on them.”

She continued to read the map, dipping her glance where the dark line traced the course of the river. She lingered over the names, Chacachacare, Potaro, Saragasso and San Souci, feeling the slight tremor of her lips which were eager to give them sound. Her imagination had grown vivid as the sun: her vision was crowded with superb specimens of a race she could not name; she heard the flow of music, loud and steady as rain, cascading down the mountain range. Nature had gone on holiday before her eyes: a splendour of plants overwhelmed the earth; the flowers were chiming like new bells. She had covered every mile of road; climbed the tallest peaks; explored the dark, unpeopled interior of the forest; and like the travellers in her reading she had survived. She had come back. She was safe.

She looked up from the map, no longer worried that enthusiasm had swept her away. Teeton saw a list of questions in her eyes; but he wasn’t at all prepared for the adventures which had troubled her most. She looked tormented by some keen delight.

“I think we ought to sit,” said Teeton.

“I think so too,” she said. Her agreement was prompt; but it showed no trace of worry about her strength. It was rather a curious feeling of tranquillity which made her welcome his advice.

“Do you believe in another world?” She checked herself in order to make some correction in this turn of phrase. “What I mean is this. When we talk, like we are talking now, it never gets lost. The voice, that is. Wherever it goes, however far, the words never disappear. You follow what I mean, Teeton? The same sound will always keep the words together.”

Teeton had walked over to the divan. He sat directly opposite the Old Dowager. He was halfway to a smile, but it was halted by the expression on the Old Dowager’s face. He had seldom seen such a mood of serenity come over her.

“You think,” said Teeton, weighing his words with excessive care, “that somewhere, in San Cristobal, perhaps, they can hear what we are saying now.”

“Not quite, not, not quite that way,” she said, lifting her chin to ponder the spaces of the ceiling. “Perhaps it could be, I don’t know. But I was thinking more of a lapse of time, if you follow me. Some time in the future, heaven knows where you and I might be, this conversation, word for word, will travel back to you. And every sound, every note of the voice, yours and mine, intact.”

“Just as we’re hearing each other now?”

“Word for word,” she said. “Every note intact.”

Teeton watched her with an increasing sense of wonder. She looked suddenly younger, and free from all restraint; as though she hadn’t a care what this new enthusiasm would entice her to say. A girl’s blush had startled her cheeks.

“I’ve known it happen,” she said and paused as though her natural caution was about to get in the way. “It’s happened to me,” she went on, now careless of all consequence. She might have been talking to herself. “Some years after his death,” she said, “my husband, that is. He’s been dead twelve years to be exact. I was alone when I heard his voice plain and clear as you hear me now. And every word exact as I remember it. And there was his voice, just the voice. No presence as might happen with people who see things, nothing of the kind. Just the sound of his voice, word for word, as it was that morning.”

She brought her hands to rest on the table, pondering this mystery of sound; the extraordinary power that could preserve



everything that had been said. Teeton had got over his early amazement. Now he looked credulous, almost converted to the certainty of the Old Dowager's experience.

"And you could hear yourself as well?" he asked. "Were you saying anything?"

"Yes I did," the Old Dowager said, as though she had been expecting his question. "Both voices were there, each talking in turn exactly as we did that morning. It gave me quite a shock hearing myself as I did. At first that is. But the longer it went on the more I started to feel at home. And of course I knew exactly how we had come to get into that painful scene. A good twelve years after. Would you believe it?"

Recollection was beginning to lose its hold over her; and Teeton noticed her face was resuming its normal pallor; the droop of the eyelids had returned; and the little pleats of flesh ran like stitches down to her chin.

"Then the other voice began."

"A third voice?" Teeton intervened.

"Yes, there was. You see, Teeton." But she wouldn't go on. Some fear had warned her to be quiet.

Suddenly she got up from the table and signalled Teeton to get out of the way. She wanted to get back to her task of dusting the paintings. She appeared fretful and full of rebuke at this lapse of duty. Teeton gave way to her sudden change of mood. He skipped aside, and watched her stoop over the divan to prepare her attack on the picture frames.

"Fancy wasting such precious time," she said, working her hands over the frames. "And it isn't as though it belonged to us. It's just on loan as I always say. That's why you've got to make the most of it."

"Shall I get you some tea?" he asked.

"No you won't," she returned without the least hesitation. "What have I done to deserve it?" She was always decisive in her refusal.

And Teeton had learnt not to persist with his offer. This was another rule of their living game which she wouldn't allow him to violate. He wasn't supposed to offer her tea. It was not on the list of favours which she was prepared to accept. This code was

complex. Once he had brought her a large bar of chocolate which she refused. No argument could make her change her mind. She thought it was a gross extravagance; and she couldn't accept because that would have been a form of encouragement. But she had surprised him by taking a single peppermint from a pack which he had bought for himself. When he offered the rest, she took a second as though it was enough to confirm him in his right to give; but that was the limit. After long debate he had achieved the freedom to help her with the garden. But even this triumph had to go through several stages of resistance before he could put his hand to the fork.

He sat at the table and tried to recollect those moments which had assured him of her welcome in this house. During the first three months they had hardly exchanged a word beyond the normal habit of greeting when they met on the stairs. Always warm and brief. It gave no opening either way for prolonging the comments that might have followed. Then she had missed him for two mornings – and it seemed this habit of greeting was a natural ingredient of a day. The omission had come over her like a violation of custom. For her it would have been an extreme aberration to enquire why she hadn't seen him on the stairs; but she had dared all the rules to find out why this omission had taken place; and discovered that he was down with a cold. Teeton was in no mood to resist her attention. That's how the offer of tea began. And she continued as though his recovery was a matter which she alone was able to decide upon. He hadn't noticed how this simple morning service had passed into ritual.

There was regret in every glance which he now turned on the Old Dowager. He didn't know how he would begin to prepare her for his departure. He couldn't settle with any certainty for a time of day which might make the news more bearable. And he feared – improbable as it seemed – that the actual day would arrive before he had found a way of telling her that he had to go. And then it would be too late. No confession of weakness would spare her the shock.

The Old Dowager was shifting the pictures from the floor to the divan, nursing them with gentle strokes of the duster; but she didn't realise that this was the last time that she would set eyes on

them. In a way she was speeding Teeton's departure; for the removal of the paintings would almost be the last stage of his preparation for going; the final links of possession to this room. He would leave her the maps.

He was going to distract her; to forget his habits of discretion and impose whatever favours he chose on her attention. He had to make himself heard like someone in command. It would be necessary to violate the code.

"Now listen," he said, displaying authority in the wide, elaborate spread of his hands. His grip came firm at each end of the table. She had looked up, a little wary of the tone in his voice. Then she wheeled her body round to face him; and wondered what was holding him back.

"I'm waiting," she said.

"I'll do the talking," Teeton said – straight face, eyes in a militant stare. "And I won't have no for an answer. Or else, and you can take it from me, I shall have no alternative but to leave this house. Bad as it will make me feel, I'd have to go."

"But what's come over you?" the Old Dowager intervened. She was perplexed by this show of petulance.

"I do the talking," Teeton retorted. "The Exhibition is a week away. And on that day, in the afternoon, I want you here. As my guest. And I'm going to make tea. And you will not refuse a crumb, not one single crumb of what I offer when we celebrate the sale of those paintings. Here. Just you and me. Right here. In this room." Now his arms were folded across the table. In a moment of grave consultation, Teeton finished: "I will not ask you for an answer now. And if you say no, that leaves me with no alternative. I will go."

The Old Dowager was trying to recover from these threats; but Teeton rose and came towards her. His mood was slipping into compromise. He was standing before her, his hands offering a stroke of comfort to her shoulder.

"You don't have to give your answer now," said Teeton. "I think that's fair enough. Seeing the circumstances. So you can hold your answer. Just for a day."

There was such a long interval that Teeton had given himself time to turn away; so he couldn't tell what the Old Dowager was

doing. Then he heard her voice pleading for his attention. There was no sign of distress; but it was full of enquiry.

“Did you hear something fall?” she asked, “like a noise in the garden.”

Teeton knew how this moment had to be answered. He walked to the window and looked out towards the end of the long brick wall.

“I’d swear I heard a crash,” the Old Dowager said.

“I’d better go down and see.”

“No, you won’t.”

“It’s all right, I’ll go.”

“Well, as you wish.”

“Back in a minute,” said Teeton, slipping behind the door.

“I’ll be along,” the Old Dowager replied. “Just in case.”

### *Three*

Vulcan had followed close on their heels. He had been waiting for the Old Dowager at the foot of the stairs. They came along the passage which brought them on to the brief ladder of wooden steps that led into the garden. Teeton had gone ahead. The dog raced up and down, flexing its tail like a whip, supervising every movement Teeton made before chasing back to be the Old Dowager’s guide.

The Old Dowager seemed to measure each step as she made her way over the narrow asphalt path that stretched like a lane through the grass. They stood in the centre of the garden, trying to discover some reason for their visit. The Old Dowager made no further reference to the noise. She was inspecting the pots of geraniums to the west, now heavy with shadow from the hedge. It grew high and even all the way from the house to the fence of barrel staves at the back. Beyond there was open space which you entered through the small gate in the fence. But the Old Dowager never bothered to go that far. It was overrun with bush; and the huge trunk of the tree, fallen many a year ago, had become a

fortress of ants. A tool shed rose where the fence met the red brick wall that made a frontier against the encroaching heath.

The crate was safe above the roof of the shed. But Teeton had been trying to ignore it; for this was also the Old Dowager's gift. She had remembered it when she heard him making arrangements for the transport of the paintings. It must have been around for years, a souvenir of some forgotten removal. But the Old Dowager had called it back to service. In a few days he would lower it from the shed and make it ready for packing. He couldn't avoid thinking of the crate as another contribution to his departure.

"What are we going to do with that tree trunk?" the Old Dowager asked.

She was gazing over the fence at the wilderness of bush that obscured the rotting body of the tree. But Teeton didn't answer. He might not have heard; or he might have been resorting to the rules of their private game. Silence was allowed as a form of protection against any further question. The Old Dowager seemed content to go without an answer... She could feel his mood, and she didn't speak again. She was going to give her attention work elsewhere. She began to stray towards the wide cultivated expanses of the garden.

Teeton looked a little alarmed by his own silence. He was thinking of the journey he had made across the garden when he carried the portion of the tree trunk to his room. He was yielding to the sudden intrusions of the past. He could hear the Old Dowager in some dialogue with the plants. But he was careful to exclude her from this sudden recall of their first meeting. In that year of vagrancy when he walked the streets in search of shelter. It felt like an eternity away: that slow, interminable routine of days when living alternated between nervous enquiry and the apologetic reply that he had arrived too late. He was out of luck. He had been exhausted by those journeys. He had often had that curious experience that his feet had gone ahead; his feet would be waiting outside some door until he arrived.

Was it really six years ago that he had made his first visit to the Old Dowager's house? This garden would always remain a part of that event. The shed must have been their witness; and the fallen tree trunk. It was here his vagrancy had come to an end. The

event was to confirm his own sense of expectation. You could never really know the future of an error. For this was not a call to enquire about rooms. He was giving himself a rest from those journeys. He was simply looking for normal company.

He was calling from Roger's room where he had been in hiding from the landlord for more than a fortnight. He could feel again the tremor of the telephone receiver in his hands. The conversation had hardly started before it was over. It was too brief an exchange for him to anticipate the welcome he might receive. But he would depend on the Bensons and the party. They were his credentials. He was sure he had spoken with her then. Yet the voice had surprised him.

"Is that Mrs Gore-Brittain?"

"Yes, speaking."

"I'd forgotten the voice." He had found the tone which might suggest their previous acquaintance.

"Who is it?"

"I met you at the Bensons two nights ago."

"Oh yes." The voice had grown suddenly warm. "What a crowd Theodora got together."

"Too many," he was protesting. He had established his claims to be known. "Theodora thought I ought to drop in on you one day."

"By all means."

He didn't know how he should treat this reply. It had come too soon. Her tone was precise, yet free of any specific intent. It didn't say come; and you couldn't accuse it of saying no. But the habit of vagrancy had made him bold.

"Whenever it suits you." He was making himself free for the asking. "Today or tomorrow?"

There was no reply. The wires might have gone dead. But it was more likely she might have been trying to escape from his intrusion. He was going to put the Bensons' suggestion out of mind. He was too indifferent to plead for entry anywhere. But the voice had suddenly restored his interest. The receiver was about to make him an offer.

"Tomorrow," she was saying. "After six."

"Six thirty would be fine." His mind had been enlivened by the

prospect of a meal. But some instinct warned that he should make his position clear. The honour of his credentials might be at stake.

"After supper might be better for me," he was saying, and heard Roger's laugh intercept her reply. "Seven thirty, perhaps."

"As you like."

He had established his claim to be remembered.

Teeton felt a certain relief that the Old Dowager was occupied. He was grateful to the plants for keeping her there. She couldn't see his face, or she might have guessed what he was thinking. The slightest sound of her voice might have brought the cramp back to his throat. The air seemed to weigh over his eyes. He couldn't resist the demands which his first visit now made on his feeling. 'But she must have known,' he was telling himself, 'and not a word. The old witch never said a word about what was happening.'

No trace of astonishment had showed in her eyes. He might have been a face come back from her own past. Superb in her control, she was guiding him down the passage. Then she stood back and let him go ahead into the huge living room. He was like a puppet that moved at the sound of her voice. He didn't take the seat which she indicated. He had lost his daring. His boldness was not enough to help him settle in the chair. He wanted to explain that there had been a mistake. She was not the person he had spoken to at the Bensons' party. It was necessary to insist that his arrival was not a hoax. There was no mischief in this visit. She must have been at the Bensons' party; but he had never seen her face before. Theodora must have got the names mixed up. Now he understood why the voice had surprised him on the telephone. He couldn't understand why she showed no interest in exposing his error. She must have noticed his reluctance to sit. He was bursting to speak. He was straining to make some apology; but his mind was distracted by her calm. His honour demanded that he should explain. But her response had startled him. It came between him and his duty. He was trying to detect some hint of apprehension in her control. But there was no interval in her welcome; no evidence of the slightest misgiving as she offered him again a free choice of chairs.

"A little sherry?"

It was then he sat; and she must have treated this as his

acceptance of the drink; for he didn't think he had answered yes. He watched her fingers thread round the glass as she walked back from the cabinet to his chair.

"I've known Theodora since she was a girl."

He was saying thanks for the drink.

"But I hadn't seen her for years. Yet she has always been like that. Her friendships never spoil."

He was rebuking his socks where a rent showed the knuckle of his ankle peeping through.

"Have you known them long?"

He was slow to recognise that the question was directed at him. Then he jerked himself out of his stupor; he had made his presence seem normal. He began to speak with an excess of candour. He hadn't known the Bensons long, a matter of two months at the most. That was enough to settle the agenda. They spoke of nothing else all evening until he rose from the chair to say that it was time he went. After three hours she had confirmed his faith against all previous counsels of despair. For the first time since he left San Cristobal he had discovered how it felt to be gay. Like Theodora Benson he might have known her all his life. She saw him through the door and paused to let him lead the way down the passage. She was wishing him a safe journey when she noticed his uncertainty about the street.

"You know the way to your place, I hope."

He started to laugh..

"I have no place, but I know the address."

And she could hear his laughter long after he had gone.

A week later the Bensons informed him that he had found a room; and their astonishment seemed even greater than his. They had never known it happen before: that the Old Dowager would condescend to have a tenant. But they didn't let him know their fears. They were sure the arrangement couldn't last. They had given it a month; then the novelty extended its lease for another month. They were amazed he had survived three months. And finally they forgot that it had ever happened.

Teeton looked a little alarmed by his own silence. His eyes had found the fallen trunk of the tree, but he hadn't recovered from the perplexities of that first visit. It seemed to contain all the



elements of initiation: the disciplined gifts of secrecy which had transformed his error into a friendship that would remain a permanent part of his future. For their friendship had achieved the force and delicacy of a secret. It was never stated; and no strangers shared it. "Not a word," he was muttering to himself, "she never said a word about my mistake. Even to this day."

He had often tried to explore the nature of her silence that night. Now he reflected on the value of negative statement; for it wasn't a silence which he had witnessed, nor was it a form of refusal, but rather the positive and disciplined act of not-speaking. What, then, was the name for such an exercise in concealment? That concealment which continues to work when everything is known; remains transparent to all. It seemed thoughtless to regard it as hypocritical. This struck him as too weak a word to support all the possibilities of the Old Dowager's intention. For experience had shown that it was an act of protection; a generous intervention between him and his embarrassment. She had refused to ruin his visit. She had halted his error from slipping deeper into a feeling of disgrace; and she had done so in the only way she knew: by refusing to call attention to what she was doing. Her behaviour, like its meaning, had become invisible. He couldn't see what she was doing although it was happening under his eyes. Now he could see it as an example of discretion which made any charge of hypocrisy unjust. "Never a word," he reflected again, "even to this day."

The Old Dowager was walking in and out among the rose beds, pausing to sniff the scarlet petals which had arrested her glance. Teeton watched her straighten her body again as she made progress towards the neighbouring row of tulips. They might have been aware of the homage her visit had paid them. They seemed to resist the push of the wind as they waited for the Old Dowager to pass, a guard on parade, now meek and grateful for the honour of her gaze. She was bending low, her hands in a tender hug round the head of the stalk. And he saw her lips move. She was in conversation with the little school of tulips which rose like yellow fists at the near end of the bed.

And Teeton thought this must have been the world her childhood had known: this effortless intercourse with nature. It

had never been learnt. No fashion of taste had influenced her affection for the soil. She would end as her infancy must have begun. There was a pride of ownership in her eyes as she watched over the obedience of her plants. That's how he saw her now; how he would probably remember her always. Her instinct for authority would survive long after her power had become extinct. The habits of command had always ruled her blood. Now her last battles had begun. Old and alone, she would soon be entirely on her own.

Teeton felt the little cramp of air come to his throat again. His departure would strike like an act of desertion. Gradual as an illness you couldn't detect, her loneliness had become a part of his fears. He thought it strange that he had never done a portrait of the Old Dowager after all these years. It was an omission which seemed to defy explanation. Now it was too late. Yet he wondered how he would have gone about that face. He caught a glimpse of her eyes, pale and still as an autumn evening, and soon he could hear a call like trumpets shake the wide, high dome of her brow. He saw her hands when the wind billowed the sleeves, and he heard a clap of sails over her shoulders.

Vulcan started to bark. It must have been a warning to Teeton that they should return to the house. The Old Dowager was emerging from the shade of the trees. Teeton turned away from the fence and came forward to meet her.

"It's too much," the Old Dowager said, sweeping her view across the turf of garden and over the roof of the shed.

"We could have started a little farm here," said Teeton, agreeing about the size of garden.

He had always come to her defence when others complained that it was a waste of land. There was space for two cottages at least, and there would still have been garden enough for the Old Dowager's use. Speculators had grown tired of arguing with her that it was a waste; that she was being wicked at a time when land was scarce. But Teeton had always admired her resistance to their numerous offers for purchase. It made him proud of the Old Dowager; the way she defended her own style of comfort. She had settled for what money she had already; and enough was, in her view, the extent of what anyone should require.

“They’ll make you sell one day,” Teeton said.

“That breed of pest,” she said, making her way up the asphalt path. “They would buy the sky if they could reach it. But nobody is having this. I don’t care what currency they come with.”

She scratched Vulcan’s head. They stood at the centre of the garden, like a family getting ready for home.

“So you won’t sell?” Teeton continued to tease her.

“I’d rather they buried me first,” she defied him. “Rather be buried right on it.”

“But it’s too much land for a single grave,” he said.

“Makes no difference,” she answered.

Teeton was enjoying her triumph against the speculators. And suddenly he began to wonder what would happen if the Old Dowager died. But he couldn’t pursue this speculation; for the thought now made him guilty. He heard himself wishing, please don’t die, at least don’t die before I leave.

“You’re not going North again this year?” Teeton enquired.

She didn’t conceal her surprise. He had taken a step beyond the rules of the game; but it was a violation which now seemed to please the Old Dowager.

“I couldn’t afford it,” she said. “One holiday a year is quite enough.”

Teeton didn’t know why he had raised this question; except that there might have been some sinister hope at the back of his mind. He might be gone while the Old Dowager was away. But it couldn’t have been the reason; for he had no intention of deceiving her; couldn’t think of any circumstance in which he would yield to such a deceit. Now the question was beginning to reveal itself. It had come as an escape from his feeling of guilt that he would be leaving her alone. Perhaps there might have been the earliest groping of a wish that death might come gently and relieve the Old Dowager of any grief which might afflict her after he had gone.

The sun had set a patch of diamonds on her hair; and Teeton felt he had suddenly had a glimpse of the girl who was now buried with age in the Old Dowager’s body. Teeton was going to ask about her youth; to bait the Old Dowager with some flattery that would make her bring the girl back to life. But the Old Dowager had stolen his cue.

“Why are you trying to send me North?” she asked. “Am I in your way?”

“I’m doing no such thing,” Teeton protested.

“But you know I go once a year.”

“Ofcourse you’re in my way,” said Teeton, trying to escape her scrutiny, “and that’s where I want you to be.”

Now she saw the geraniums laugh. The grass had gone incredibly green; and the garden was like a wayward island floating further and further out to sea; in search of its own ledge of ocean.

“The maps,” she said, and felt an unruly joy in the wind. “You’ve always promised to get me some of those maps.”

“I will, I most certainly will,” Teeton accepted.

He was under the spell of her delight. He couldn’t quite understand what he had done to make the Old Dowager look so young.

#### *Four*

The basement is like a cell the Secret Gathering have tunnelled deep underground, shut away from the chuffing of trains, a proof against sound. It’s a freedom which the size of the city allows: this secret cover which emerges like a cave under the solitary bulb which lights them from above. Potaro, Santa Clara, Chaca-Chacare, San Souci. They are waiting for the delegate from the Midland cadres to arrive. Their agenda will last for two days. But time is like luxury in their hands.

“Four hundred and seventy-six pounds seven and sixpence,” Teeton says as he burgles the briefcase up from between his legs and lays it on the table. It swells like a stomach where the zip slits it open and spills its fat.

“The harvest is here,” says Potaro and smiles to hide his amazement. Their voices collide in a chorus of assent.

CHACA-CHACARE: A day is coming when the rich in San Cristobal will eat grass.

POTARO: It is near. Almost here.

CHACA-CHACARE: Will it be good grass?

SANTA CLARA: Grass is grass an' the degree can't make no difference.

POTARO: They build the world on all kind of scheme. Teach the poor their duty is to endure like a man who feel his only ambition is to lose.

SANTA CLARA: Poverty is a bad habit, a kind of epidemic with some people.

Each answers to the name of the province where his assignment will take him; as though the place and the man must be inseparable: a discipline which trains them to identify with the river and the plains they will soon inhabit. It's the same discipline which makes them go blind if they meet by chance in any street. They will never acknowledge each other by daylight. No disaster can be sufficient reason for them to break this rule.

"San Souci," Potaro exclaims, summoning Teeton by the name of his province.

Teeton smiles at the older man's bewilderment. Potaro weighs a packet of notes in both hands, and struggles with his emotion. He compares the inscription on each note; but his reading is slow, tedious, like an adult deprived of schooling, a man who is making his first, laborious discovery that he is literate.

But Potaro is a man of sound though simple education, a voracious reader of biographies and any manual which deals with the business of war. It is not ignorance which delays his reading. It is rather the sight of money in such a quantity which amazes his literacy. It seems that each note reminds him of some obstacle rising like a roadblock across his youth; some previous hazard which has defied his passion to overcome the iniquities of his past. Now he sees knife and gun, fruit and lint, dispensary and supermarket sparkle and shine where sceptre and crown adorn the face of each English pound. And suddenly his familiar laugh overwhelms the basement room. The men respond to Potaro as they have always done; for he is the veteran of the Gathering. He has been hunted in every corner of San Cristobal, sought in almost every major North American city. Until, three years ago,

he deposited his weariness like unregistered cargo in this hidden berth of the basement room.

“What planet you born under?” Potaro asks, talking vaguely to a shadow on the wall.

CHACA-CHACARE: The crab.

POTARO: That’s why you so familiar with grass. An’ what you, Santa Clara, what you born under?

SANTA CLARA: I don’t know.

CHACA-CHACARE: How you mean you don’t know?

SANTA CLARA: I say I don’t know.

CHACA-CHACARE: Then when you celebrate your birthday.

SANTA CLARA: When I feel like.

POTARO: But your birth must be in a register somewhere.

SANTA CLARA: It ain’t.

CHACA-CHACARE: But it got to be. It must be.

SANTA CLARA: My mother didn’t bother to make me known till I was nine. An’ then the place they register birth look so far away. The only transport was by foot. So we leave it at that.

CHACA-CHACARE: Santa Clara, what it is you trying to say.

POTARO: You mean the law don’t know that you alive.

SANTA CLARA: The law know I alive but it can’t verify I was born.

CHACA-CHACARE: What a camouflage that can be.

SANTA CLARA: I just lose my birthday if you want to put it that way.

POTARO: But you start life with a very fine privilege. To know that your name from birth was never between police covers. A fine privilege, that. No trace or recollection o’ this human who choose his own birthday. Can change his name without fear o’ contradiction.

CHACA-CHACARE: I call that a self-made man.

Potaro releases his cannon of laughter again and looks at Teeton as though he wants to hold on to the star that has brought them luck. But Teeton is occupied. He is removing the rubber band from a bundle of notes. He lets them slither over his hands; and the men observe his smile give way to a look of incomprehension. He shares Potaro’s feeling about the money:

the element of chance which may provide it, the impudent privilege which it allows. He has always been at a loss to grasp the intricate arrangements which say: *pay to the order of*. The words startle him, force him to contemplate the machinery of partnerships which support the order to pay one pound, five pounds; the unholy conspiracy which confers such power on this fragile piece of paper.

It can set off the most violent plague of longing; create some special chemistry of need in a man's desire; betray the most disciplined appetite; or nurture a moment of supreme confidence in the most cynical heart. And to think there may be no connection whatsoever between its source and the end which it pursues.

He sees Potaro smiling up at him, and for a moment the crop of paintings falls like a shadow over the table. But it's really theirs, he tells himself; it's really those bitter memories of San Souci which made the paintings which brought the little harvest here. It's less than Potaro deserves, but it is the decisive contribution to their funds. Everyone agrees about that. They hear Chaca-Chacare grumble an oath, as though the money has unearthed some burden he finds it hard to bear.

"Which devil after you now?" Potaro taunts him. And they tease Chaca-Chacare to observe the code.

POTARO: Come straight, Chac. What's worrying you?

SANTA CLARA: You know the rule.

CHACA-CHACARE: Small matter from the past.

SANTA CLARA: Small or large any personal problem is also problem for the Gathering. What is private secret today may be public scandal tomorrow.

POTARO: You ain't kill nobody in this town.

CHACA-CHACARE: Not yet.

POTARO: Some men braver than some. But you just plain fearless. That I know. You fight like a man who had no life to lose.

CHACA-CHACARE: Not without reason. For years I been living a next man's life. Hang by law for what he didn't do. You remember the Belvedere case in Half Moon Bay. The jury sit up eleven nights before agreein' to what never take place at all.

SANTA CLARA: But all the evidence was there, Chacare. The only

question was whether Scar Face beat her first an' rob her after.  
Or the other way round.

CHACA-CHACARE: The old girl was dead before Scar Face get there.

SANTA CLARA: Where you learn that from? It was common knowledge Lady Belvedere always carry cash, an' as the jury say Scar Face would be let free if they didn't find the same notes in his place.

CHACA-CHACARE: That money was for me.

SANTA CLARA: What it is you talkin 'bout?

CHACA-CHACARE: The Belvedere case in Half Moon Bay. I was the only man with evidence that could set Scar Face free.

SANTA CLARA: But I don't see how you come in the picture at all.

CHACA-CHACARE: I was there when she drop down dead.

SANTA CLARA: You mean it was you who kill Lady Belvedere?

CHACA-CHACARE: In a court o' law you could put it that way, but how it happen was different. I believe her heart gave way.

Teeton makes an effort to smile but his lips hang open in alarm. He recalls the Belvedere case with some misgiving. Found at daybreak on the beach and naked to the waist with the stripes of a cane which had bled her back. It was regarded by the jury as a political murder. The Belvedere case and his own internment made the news of the day.

"Did you know Lady Belvedere," Teeton asks, and studies the black shrub of beard which shakes over Chaca-Chacare's chin.

CHACA-CHACARE: For over a year I used to meet the Belvedere lady in secret. Once a week at the private end of Half Moon Bay. She was living alone in the Lightbourne manor then. But I couldn't show my face in such a house as you know. She used to drive herself out every week to that end of the Half Moon beach. It was her money help me escape when the army move in on San Souci.

SANTA CLARA: You say her heart give way?

CHACA-CHACARE: I know for sure it happen so. She was getting old; but her taste was still wicked, rough wicked, I tell you. It was a tamarind whip that make those marks. The only marks



the postmortem find. That was her favourite fun, and she prefer it in the open air. It happen just so. She was right below me, spread flat out, when I notice that she wasn't movin' no more, an' the groan she used to give was comin' low. Then it stops comin' for good. I call out twice, but she didn't hear, an' the third time I call the answer was clear. The old girl had done give up her ghost. I never look back. I run all the way, with that whip in one hand and my heart in the next. Scar Face rob the purse all right but the owner was dead. Done dead.

Teeton observes Potaro's silence, and is sure he knows Chaca-Chacare's account of the Belvedere case. What doesn't Potaro know?

SANTA CLARA: I suppose the law would call that murder by consent.

CHACA-CHACARE: I could never confess. There was something 'bout my performing which make me shy. It was only after Scar Face hang that I lose my shame. Ever since I feel I been livin' his life.

POTARO: Scar Face was a police informer.

CHACA-CHACARE: Makes no difference. His life was a real life, an' he lose it on a false charge. To hear 'bout injustice is one thing, to see it live and see it at work in the Belvedere case is a next. I lose whatever obedience I had for the law.

POTARO: Sometimes I think you go too harsh.

CHACA-CHACARE: You can learn to be that way. A man is what he do, an' there ain't no limit to what he will try.

SANTA CLARA: You sound like the Judge Capildeo when he get in a rage.

CHACA-CHACARE: It was he send Scar Face to his grave.

SANTA CLARA: He would send his own son if he cross the law.

Potaro looks up, observes that Teeton is withdrawing into his silence. He knows of Teeton's friendship with Judge Capildeo's son, and tries to curb any further reference to the law.

"But the son too had to make his escape," Teeton says, as though some other loyalty forces him suddenly to honour his

relationship with the Judge's son. Potaro nods and follows his attention back to the bundle of notes on the table.

"The rich can produce some strange offspring," Potaro observes.

SANTA CLARA: Young Capildeo still making music?

Teeton nods yes.

CHACA-CHACARE: But he live on such a low scale in this town.

SANTA CLARA: Poverty is like an epidemic with some people I say.

Teeton makes no comment. Beyond the secret world of the Gathering and the basement room he has kept his friends in their own compartment; and he must keep them there. The code of the Gathering demands that they must be kept in the dark about his departure which is so near. Potaro's smile attracts his glance; and Teeton tries to avoid the rival claims of need and duty which force the Old Dowager on his attention. He must find a way to let her know that he is going home. After six years in her care, she assumes a priority that makes her different. She inhabits a compartment that is all her own, as though she has earned a brief exemption from all codes. He knows he will let her know that he is going home. "And not a word," he smiles, as he watches Potaro's hands shuffle the English notes, "she's never said a word about that night. How it was my error which made us meet. Not a word."

"Money will serve any master," Potaro declares, as though he has made a new discovery. "But I think I hear someone come."

There is a rattle in the keyhole. A draught shakes the lamp shade, and the light starts a dance of shadows on the table. The whole room rejoices at the long embrace which shakes Potaro's arms. Fola of Forest Reserve has arrived. She is the only woman who shares the secrets of the Gathering.

"October first," Potaro says as they settle down. "Two weeks from today. Just two weeks from today."