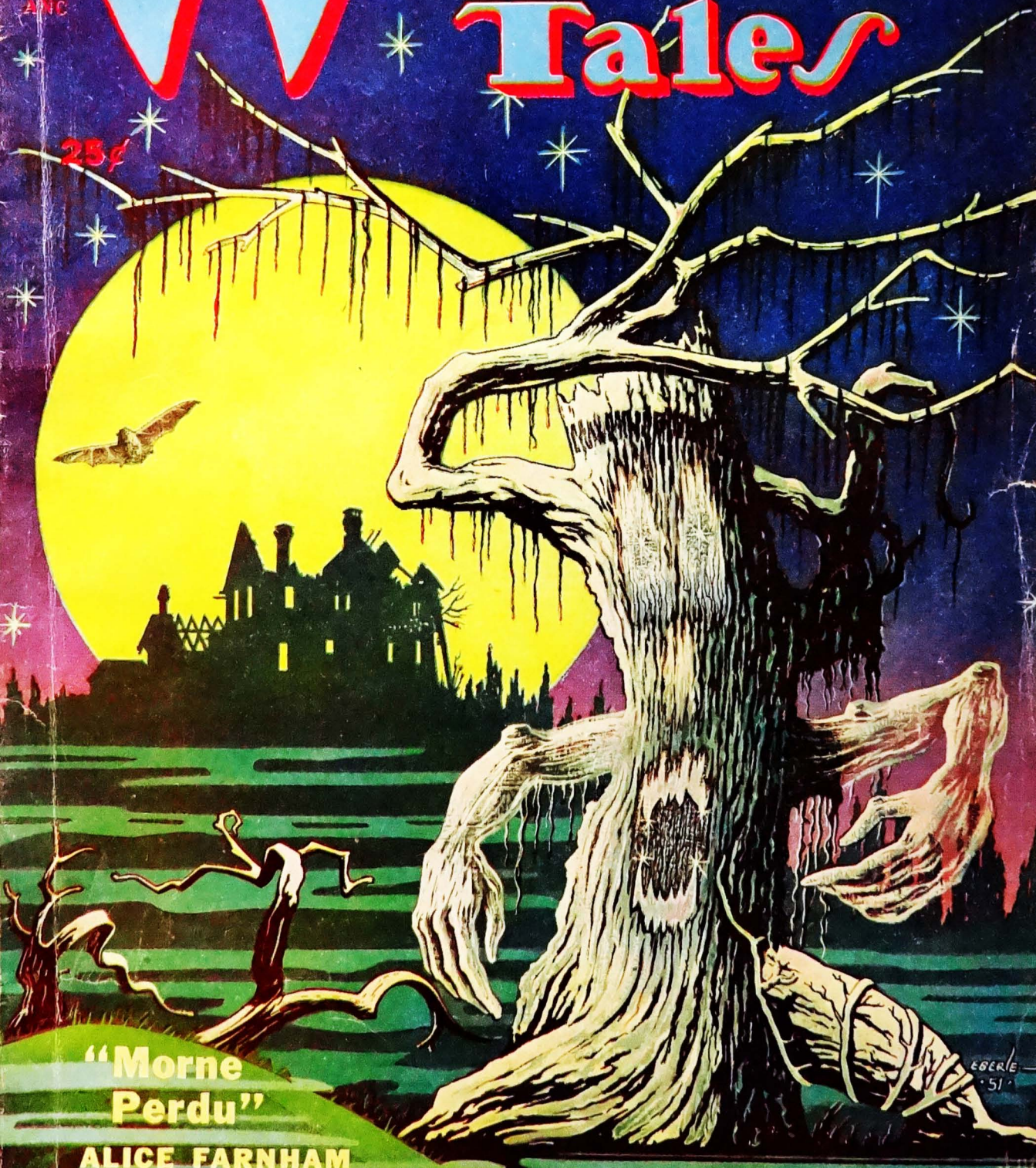


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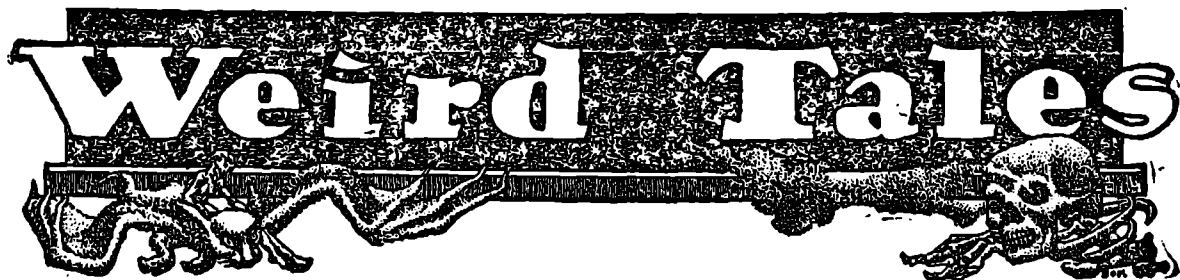
**"Morne
Perdu"**

ALICE FARNHAM

COUNSELMAN—QUINN—LOVECRAFT

EBERLE
51

Weird Tales



MARCH, 1952

Cover by Joseph Eberle

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A master hand at tales of terror follows up the thought that awful, love is not, yet dead.
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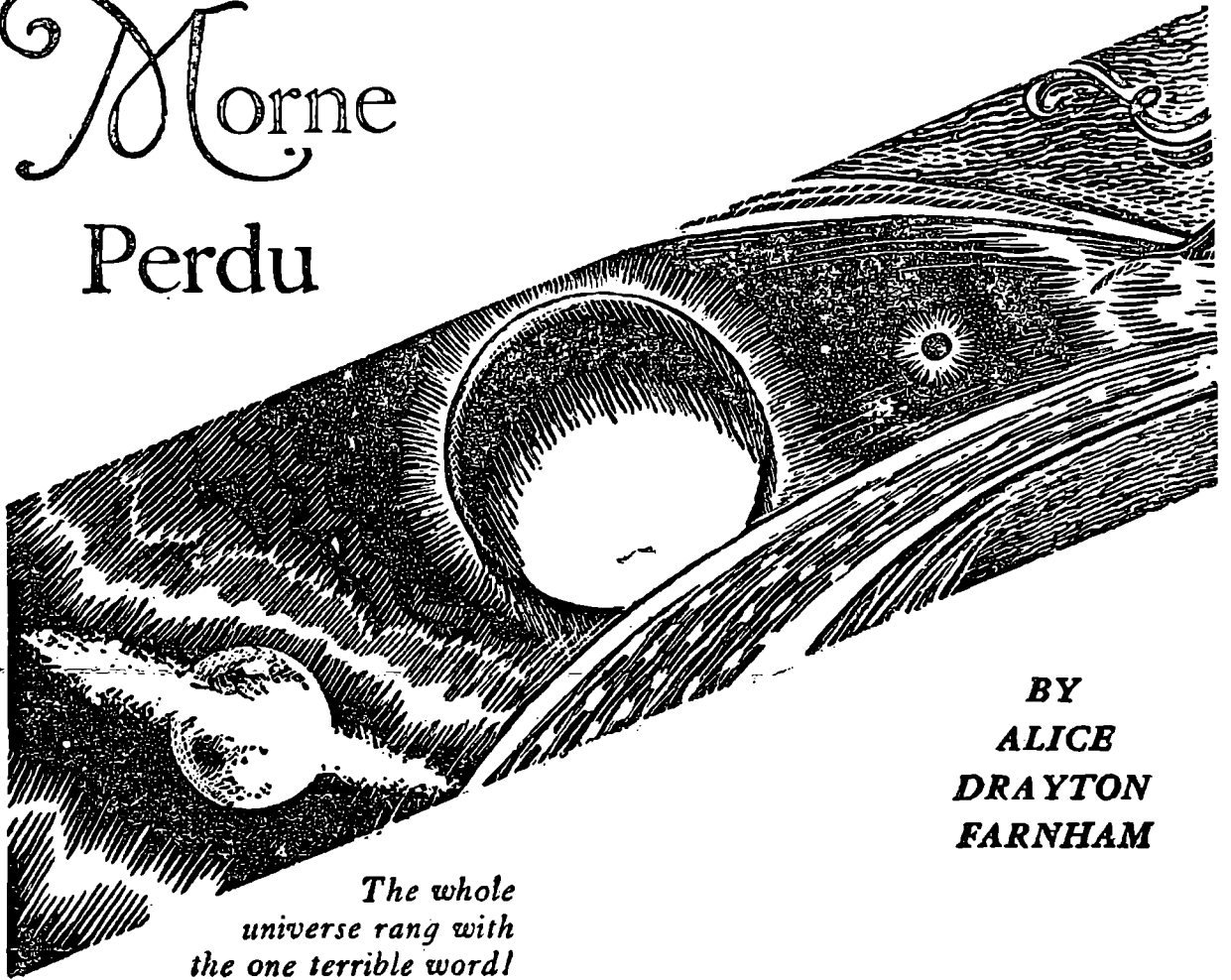
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 Vol. 44, No. 3

D. McILWRAITH, Editor

Morne

Perdu



BY
ALICE
DRAYTON
FARNHAM

*The whole
universe rang with
the one terrible word!*

I

IT WAS not until three days after Jim's burial that Adela found the key. She opened his old roll-top desk in the gray ghost-light of dawn, feeling not elated but worn and ill.

When the sweating blacks had thrown the first splatterings of red earth upon Jim's coffin, in the raw hole between the mahogany trees, she had thought to feel secure. She had raised her eyes to the blue blaze of the Caribbean, beyond the quiet crosses, and known a savage exultation throughout the clergyman's well-bred mumble, a hatred and contempt for the dead that no power, no circumstance in life or death could efface.

And then it had gone. All in a moment, a cloud from nowhere had darkened the sun, a dry-season wind sprung up among the brown dry mahogany leaves and scat-



tered them in a little gust over the parched dead grass. A little sigh, a superstitious shudder, ran over the group of clean and tattered natives who stood in a knot at the churchyard gate apart from the gentlefolk, as the dry earth fell thudding now on the village-made casket—a whisper, a breath, a word. A word plucked from the air, to turn her blood to ice.

"Obeah!"

In Adela's ears it grew, it loudened, it swelled into a roar. The clergyman, the little circle of semi-strangers about the grave, brought only by an unspoken necessity to maintain the white man's prestige, must turn upon her now with accusing looks. Faint, she steadied herself on a tombstone.

"Obeah!"

And then she had raised her eyes and seen the man. Smiling a little secret smile, he was leaning with folded arms against the giant silk-cotton tree that grew just beyond the churchyard wall. No other native on the island would have dared to touch it, for the silk-cotton gives shelter to evil spirits of a frightful kind; but there he had stood among his own, his ragged shirt blowing against his brown chest in the wind, every black hair of his curling beard crisp with vitality, his eyes bright with derision, as he had smiled with intimate amusement at Adela across the open grave.

Behind her now in the empty room came a sudden noise, as a lizard fell from a rafter with a little plop, and stared at her with bright unwinking eyes as she whirled around in terror.

"I didn't!" she cried out wildly, beating her fists on the still closed desk. "Oh God, do you hear me? I'd nothing to do with it! You died of anemia—the doctor said so!"

From the bare floor the lizard stared up at her, with its jewel-bright eyes, its little secret grin. For a dizzy moment, it was the mocking face of the obeah man, grinning at her feet.

"**MORNE PERDU!**" Jim Mountford had said, with the grating laugh that still set her teeth on edge, though it was fifteen years since she had heard it. "'Hill of the Lost,' eh? Natives shortened it, of course. 'Hill of the Damned!' Jolly

names those old Frenchies could give a place, what?"

Adela sat watching him with strangely fluttered spirits as he teetered back and forth on the hearthrug, with his red weather-beaten face and his shallow light blue eyes.

Idiot, she thought, to be twittering like a schoolgirl! But her life had shrunk and narrowed since they last had met; into its straitened confines, across the quiet monotony of her routine as Classics Mistress in the Girls' Secondary School, the return of Jim Mountford was a kind of bombshell. Fifteen years ago he had been an unwelcome suitor, dismissed without regret; to-night—Tonight she was alone in the world, and fifteen years older.

He had grinned at her.

"Rum, eh? Never expected to see me again, after your old man threw me out. Didn't mince matters, did he? Thought for a bit he was going to shoot me. And you weren't too matey yourself." He gave a short bark of laughter, in which there was no mirth. "Well, you never know, do you? Here's the old boy dead, you here all alone—and me back again. Old Faithful in person! What do you say, Adela?"

She busied herself with the spirit-lamp that was heating their coffee.

"Do let me pour you another cup," she said evasively. "I'm sure what you have must be cold."

What *was* there to say? Jim Mountford had been a joke once: common Jim Mountford, with his embarrassing devotion. She had been very grateful to her father for ridding her of him. But her father was dead now, and unfortunately with the years he had grown more formidable, so that in the end he had rid her of everyone else as well. And life in England had grown very drab, teaching Latin extremely dull. Perhaps she hadn't been fair to Jim Mountford.

Her father, she remembered wryly, had been convinced he was a scoundrel. Jim hadn't taken his dismissal very well. He had written a letter that had turned the Colonel quite purple one morning at breakfast.

"Vindictive devil!" he had snorted. "Trying to frighten me! Beware of a feller who holds a grudge, Adela!"

But her father had been mistaken

for once. If Jim Mountford had been vindictive, he would never have come back. That seemed to Adela self-evident.

REALLY a most extraordinary thing, she thought, smiling nervously, this materialization from the past. She had never liked Jim Mountford—she couldn't like him even now—but there was no doubt that since becoming a man of property Jim had improved. His manner held an added assurance; the mustache lent a touch of dignity, and the loud clothes that her father had so derided—"feller looks just like a horse-trainer, dammit!"—had toned down to an unobjectionable blue serge.

"It sounds too marvelous!" she said, wishing she could overcome her nervousness. How long since she'd spoken with a man alone? "A West Indian plantation—it sounds absolutely thrilling!"

And suddenly she seemed to see it, a tiny bright picture, concentrated and brilliant, like something seen through the wrong end of a telescope—an emerald island in an aqua sea, gleaming in perpetual sun.

"Not bad," Jim agreed, complacently adjusting his tie in the mirror over the mantel. He passed one hand over his hair. "Oh, it's no palace, mind you! Just a nutmeg and cocoa estate—but a damn nice little place for all that!"

A West Indian estate, and Jim Mountford a planter. Loud, uncouth, ill-bred Jim Mountford, actually a man of substance.

And if I were to marry him, she thought suddenly—

On his last night in England Jim had proposed. Not in set terms, but she knew why; he was afraid of a second rebuff. Poor Jim! But of course she'd known what he meant. Not like Jim Mountford to be subtle.

"Must get a bit fed up with teaching stunt, eh, Adela?" He gave a comprehensive wave of disfavor toward her books. "Mean to say, teaching the young idea and all that—no life for any woman with any blood in her veins. Why not chuck it and come out to the island? We'd have some good times there. What do you say?"

Adela opened her mouth to say yes. It was an escape from her chains, from everything she hated; and Jim wasn't too bad.

It was an opportunity that would never come again.

But the word would not come.

He winked at her.

"Better say yes, old girl! Neither of us getting any younger, you know!"

She moistened her lips. To antagonize him now would be fatal.

"The term—" she said faintly. "I'd have to give notice, you know, Jim. I—I just can't decide it all so quickly. You'll have to give me time."

Coolly he took his coat and started toward the door.

"Don't miss the bus, Adela!" he said, grinning. "Oh, I know you're tied up now with commitments—never really expected you to accept offhand, anyway. But you think it over. I'll be waiting—at Morne Perdu."

He seized her in a rough embrace that left her shaken yet oddly triumphant. Staring at the closed door, she unconsciously passed her hand across her lips, as if wiping off something distasteful; but her eyes were bright. Another door was still open.

II

"HILL of the Lost!" she said aloud in the bare little whitewashed room. Hol- lowly the walls returned her words. "Hill of the Damned!"

With a little bitter smile, she looked out at the ragged yard. In the melancholy light it seemed incredibly down at the heels and forlorn. A skeleton plum tree, its leaves not to return until summer, thrust smooth gray branches against a gray sky. All around, in untended profusion, grew the banana palms, their leaves hanging in pitiful shreds and tatters, rustling like paper in the early-morning breeze.

A few lean and goat-like sheep were cropping desperately at a stubble of sun-scorched grass, contesting with plaintive cries the intrusions of an emaciated pig, while in little clucking twos and threes gaunt chickens with bare red necks fluttered down in a little shower of white feathers from their nightly roost in the breadfruit tree. Over it all brooded an air of sadness and decay.

Well named, she thought; it has been

well named. In truth, I am mistress of Morne Perdu.

The passage to Marianna had taken almost all of Adela's savings, but she had no regrets. Having reached her decision at last, everything else seemed irrelevant; she would not look back. As for money, she had no need of it now. All that Jim had would be hers.

The trip out was lazy and lovely and irresponsible as a dream. As the ship slid further each day into tropic waters, Adela lay basking in the sun, or leaned dreamily on the rail watching the flying fish, like little bright birds, skim the deepening blue of the water. She did not strike up many shipboard acquaintances, but for the most part remained solitary and curiously content, thinking of Morne Perdu.

Back in the hills, Jim had said in his letters . . . She could see it on its hilltop, bowered in strangely fragrant trees, smiling and peaceful in the sun. The gardens were ablaze with tropical bloom, the house half hidden under flowering vines. And inside there would be deft and smiling servants, flowers everywhere, heaps of brilliant unknown fruit on a gleaming mahogany table.

And as each day took her closer, excitement mounted within her like a fever. On the morning that they were to land, she was on deck hours before daybreak, watching with beating heart for the tiny dark shadow far to the south that was the island of Marianna.

Imperceptibly it took shape along the horizon, as the steamer made a wide arc to follow its coast. Adela stood alone at the rail; her eyes were brilliant. Purple against the dawn, it was an island of rugged hills, steep winding valleys, plunging cliffs and rocky bays; it seemed to grow and advance to meet them. Little native houses came into view, leaning on ramshackle stilts, and a ribbon of road that followed the curving shore. An occasional tiny column of smoke climbed from the tangled green of valley and hillside, and Adela wondered what kind of meal was cooking there, what people would eat it.

Now, swinging out once more, the steamer had rounded the sentinel cliffs that stood guarding the harbor. The tree-covered bluffs glided by, the crumbling old fort on

the hilltop, with the grass growing from its walls, and the port of St. Marks was before them.

Tier on tier the red roofs rose above the water, climbing the green hills that enclosed the town on three sides. The houses came closer: Adela could see their verandas, their trees, the flowers in their gardens.

The little harbor was alive with boats and boatmen. Along the wide pavement that edged the long horseshoe curve of the blue Carenage, people stopped to watch and wave at the oncoming ship, full in the morning sun.

THE boat cut her engines. In the sudden silence they drifted on into the still water of the landlocked Carenage, past the little tin-roofed Grand Hotel, past the Empress Theater ("British News Tonight"), past a spread of drying cocoa beans being trampled by a giggling black girl in bare feet and a big hat. People looked out from windows along the waterfront: Adela could see the clothes they wore, the expressions of their faces, as the vessel swung slowly round and hove to by the wharf.

A sweet spicy breath seemed to rise from the place, drawn up by the hot sun from the gray weathered boards of the wharf itself. Great bags of nutmegs, of cinnamon and ginger and cocoa, lay stacked in rows by the Customs shed, ready for loading. There was a waiting crowd on the dock, with grinning faces upturned, and the air was full of clamor.

Adela shrank back from the rail for an involuntary second. The noise, the hubbub, the strange smells and cries, the confusion of black faces, were overwhelming.

And then the gangplank was lowered. As she walked down it, there was a little bustle, a little falling back among the natives, and Jim Mountford stood there awaiting her. He was wearing khaki shorts and topee, grinning with mingled assurance and self-consciousness under his sun-faded clipped mustache.

"Well, old girl, so you made it, eh? Come along—the old bus is just round the corner. I'll see to your things."

Adela was passive under his kiss. But suddenly the blinding brilliance of the sunlit wharf, the figures and faces and move-

ment, seemed to swim and go black before her eyes. It was as if a part of her, deep-buried and beyond the reach of reason, had seen for that moment into the future, and cried out against what it saw. Jim Mountford—how could she have thought he had changed? He was common Jim Mountford still; his years in the tropics had given him only a coarse hardihood, infinitely repellent. Her dislike had abated not one jot.

Oh God, she thought wildly, what have I done? I've burned all my bridges behind me, I'm marrying a man I detest, and all for a base comfort and security!

An abyss yawned at her feet. There was no way to go but forward.

DIVINA'S soft voice came through the closed door.

"Mistress, you require your breakfast presently, no?"

Adela leaned her aching head upon her hand. How badly she had slept last night! Perhaps—yes, perhaps today she should eat breakfast.

"Later," she said dully. "Not now."

"Yes, mistress—I go start my fire just now!" said Divina joyfully. Adela could hear her padding away, her voice raised in song.

Through the window she saw the black girl, with her face of a happy child, take her leisurely way across the yard to the cook-house, leaning crazily on the pile of rocks that supported it. The side toward the house was half-open, its wall a mere waist-high partition, and she watched as Divina reached a handful of charcoal lumps from a burlap bag on the floor into the round iron coal-pot that stood on the table by the window. The fire once lit, Divina stood fanning the weak flame with an old box-top, lustily singing "Sly Mongoose" the while.

Zotty, the yard-boy, had emerged now from his hut, and stood yawning and stretching at the head of the path, an ebon-black man whose faded blue work-clothes, clean and infinitely patched, hung raggedly about his magnificent body.

"Yes, mon!" he called in cheerful greeting to Divina.

She leaned out the window.

"Yes!" she screamed, laughing all over her child's face. "My lady she eatin' breakfast today, mon!"

Zotty's teeth shone whitely as he bobbed his head toward Adela, sitting with heavy eyes at the desk by the office window.

"Oh, that very good!" he cried heartily. "That a good lady, mum!"

Quick tears of weakness stood for an instant in Adela's eyes. She was so tired, so tired, she felt so ill! The little touch of human warmth and kindness seemed to crack, ever so slightly, the brittle shell of her self-control.

SHE put her weary hand to her eyes for a moment. It had been a most dreadful night. A night of sudden terrors and icy sweats, of madly racing pulses as she lay quivering and stiff, staring with straining eyes into the darkness about her bed—knowing the room was empty, and yet sure she was not alone. A night of desperate waking from frightful dreams, only to sink, struggling, down, down into dreams that were even more dreadful. And the nightmare moment when, in the square of velvet black outside her window, she had thought she saw—

No, no! Her lips tightened, turned under in a bloodless line. Raising her head rather stiffly, she brought her outstretched palms down hard upon the open desk and held them there with a sort of controlled violence, as if holding at bay some invisible enemy that must be kept down. A vein in her temple was throbbing, and that odd little mark on her arm—a spider bite, she was sure; she had seen it scuttle away when she switched on the light—seemed to ache and to throb in sympathy; but her face was still as stone as she sat there, holding down with all her force an enemy unseen. Only the hollow burning eyes were alive.

"I'm going home!" she said aloud in the empty room. "Home, home! I've opened your desk, in five minutes I'll have your money, and I've my passage booked on the *Lady Essex* for day after tomorrow! Home, home—do you hear me? I've waited six years for this day; nothing and no one will stop me now!"

Smiling a little then, a stiff compulsive

smile that was half a grimace, she began searching in his desk for the money.

JIM was in high spirits as he piloted the little Ford past the square solid Government buildings that lined the waterfront, up the steep crooked streets leading over the hill, where they were beckoned on importantly by a jet-black bobby in white tunic and helmet, and then down again, past the teeming Market Square.

"Great little place, eh, Adela?"

She had a confused impression of old stone walls, topped with a froth of pink coralita bloom, of wobbling little open buses with people hanging on to the sides and sitting on one another's laps, of narrow sidewalks so jostled with market-day crowds that people were walking in the dusty street, and as they turned a corner into the Esplanade, of gray eucalyptus trees marching along the road, looped and festooned with purple bougainvillea. High on a cliff overhanging the road stood an old stone church against the sky, the clock face toward them immovably fixed at ten minutes to four.

St. Marks left behind, the road now followed for a while a rocky tree-fringed shore, then turned sharply inland to wind upward among wooded hills. A group of clean and ragged black women who stood in a little rocky river washing clothes straightened up to stare at them curiously.

Adela looked back, and felt a little chill. Already the red roofs of St. Marks had disappeared among the trees. Why had they left the town so soon? Where was the hotel? Surely they couldn't have passed it. How strange that Jim had made no mention of wedding arrangements! And how lonely and wild back here in the bush, strange trees crowding close whose names she did not know, great tree-ferns looming up like distortions seen in a dream. Save for an occasional tiny native hut, crowded with staring occupants, there was not a sign of human life.

The car slowed almost to a stop, as Jim slid an arm around her and pulled her to him. His breath smelt of rum.

"Here, give us a kiss, old girl!"

When he released her, she felt frightened and a little sick. Once more, for a black

instant, she saw herself and her situation in unbearable clarity.

Weakly she essayed a smile, put a tentative hand to her hair. The air was heavy and still, and she was beginning to find the tortuous interminable windings of the road slightly nauseating.

"I wonder—that is, how much farther—"

"I say, Adela, you look topping in that outfit!"

He was looking her up and down in appraisal.

"I ought to," she retorted, with an attempt at laughing vivacity. "It cost me my last shilling!"

The remark seemed to give him pleasure. His light eyes contracted with an inward enjoyment. He gave her a look at once approving and derisive.

"So you really came, eh? Tossed your bonnet over the ruddy windmill!" He chuckled, as the car made yet another hair-pin turn and Adela closed her eyes. "Gad, I never actually thought you'd do it, you know! If only your old man could have been alive to see it! Lord, what I wouldn't give for a sight of his face!"

He burst into roars of laughter.

Adela dug her nails into her palms. She had loved her father. I mustn't notice, she thought. He doesn't mean—

"Jim, where are we going?" she said aloud. "It's—you know, I think I'm a little bit tired. Do we have to ride much longer?"

"Going?" He stared. "Morne Perdu, of course. Where else?"

Adela shrank against the seat.

"I see," she said faintly.

But she didn't. It was all wrong. How could she go there with him like this before they were married? What would people say? And what would the servants think? But then perhaps he was having some friend, some older woman, to stay there with them. Or perhaps he had arranged with the clergyman of St. Andrews—he had told her the little parish church was only five miles away—he was probably already awaiting them there, with a party of welcoming friends, at Morne Perdu.

A surprise wedding—she could see it—in the garden: friendly planters and their wives pressing forward with good wishes, and eager smiling servants in the back-

ground. She brightened a little. Yes, that must be it. He had a surprise for her, that was certain; she could tell by his smothered mirth, his air of being in on a secret joke. Yet she couldn't tax him with it, somehow; she felt a little timid of him all at once. It had begun to seem quite important that Jim should not be offended.

As the car left the road and began climbing a narrow rocky track almost overarched with trees, Adela became aware of a man who stood by the roadside watching them. He stood very straight and tall in his tattered clothing, and somehow there emanated from him a kind of power, an almost regal detachment, as of some solitary watcher passing judgment. With his aquiline features and short black beard, he had almost an Assyrian look.

"Local obeah merchant," muttered Jim. "Impudent beggar—half mad, of course, but it doesn't do to offend him. Hello, Sebastian. Things all quiet in the village?"

Ignoring him, the Negro Sebastian stood motionless as the car drew abreast, his quick brilliant eyes staring Adela boldly in the face. She shrank away.

"Good day, milady," he said softly. His voice was deep and rich. "You have come to the end of a journey, yes? Welcome to Morne Perdu!"

And throwing his head back in sudden uproarious laughter, he sprang up the leafy bank and was gone. Above the straining engine of the little car as it climbed the steep grade, they could faintly hear his laughter, still echoing through the forest.

"All nonsense," said Jim robustly, without looking at her. "Obeah—nothing to it. Still, one doesn't—"

"But what is it?"

Adela was bewildered and uneasy

"Oh, some of that African business, you know. Shango, and all that. Voodoo, they call it in the French islands. Natives still believe in that kind of rot. Well, here we are, Adela. Right at the top. Just around this bend here—"

She leaned forward, half suffocated with excitement. Around the bend would be Morne Perdu: the flowers, the clergyman, the friends, the colonnaded mansion bright with bloom, little jeweled humming-birds darting among its vines. Peace and dignity

and smiling affluence lay just around the bend.

The car slowed and stopped. Before them stood a small weather-worn gray bungalow, with a corrugated metal roof. Behind it was a ruinous smoke-blackened cook-hut, unevenly elevated on a pile of smooth stones. Ragged chickens with raw red necks pecked listlessly about, and a surly pig looked at the car with contempt and stood his ground.

The little clearing was bare of grass, of flower or shrub or vine. All around it stretched the rows of stumpy cocoa-trees, with their mildewed bark, their leaves like limp green paper. Here and there a bamboo pole had been stuck in the earth to support a sagging branch. Scattered along the hillside she could see little tin and thatch-roofed huts of an almost incredible squalor, and a little distance down the yard cocoa-beans were spread to dry in the sun on a huge tray, with a sliding roof on trestles beside it. A few ragged black laborers, shuffling barefoot through the cocoa-beans to polish them, stopped their work to look at her shyly, the women giggling behind their hands and attempting to hide their faces.

"Well—get out, old girl!" Jim opened the door for her, grinning. "It's the end of the line!"

Adela descended from the car like a sleepwalker. Morne Perdu. The end of the line, Jim had said. And no going back.

Around the corner of the house came a round ripe black girl, in a clean and starched print dress reaching not quite to her knees. She was barefoot and wore—indoors and out, as Adela was to learn—a broad-brimmed hat of native straw. At first she would not look Adela in the face, but stood gazing bashfully at the ground, tracing a circle in the dust with her toes.

As Jim thrust her forward, she giggled.

"This is Divina, Adela—the indoor staff. Her aunt used to cook for me till she got sick, poor old soul, and sent Divina up to take her place. Well, Divina—what do you say to the lady, eh?"

Divina raised her head then and looked at Adela, the shining candid gaze of an excited child. Laughter bubbled from her, and she clapped her hands.

"Oh, the lady look nice, nice!" she cried

in admiration. "Oh, I like the lady! She have such a beautiful dress; no?"

Jim Mountford gave a short bark of laughter.

"Come along, Adela! Divina, take care of the luggage." He took Adela by the arm. "Mind that rotten step. Have to fix it one of these days."

When they got inside, she gave one despairing look about her. The room was bare, dingy, uncarpeted. It had no ceiling, and a blotchy brown lizard scuttled hastily across a dusty beam and disappeared. There was a heavy oak table, several straight-backed wooden chairs, a peeling leather couch.

JIM was looking at her with a kind of wry compassion.

"So here we are, Adela, fifteen years later." He threw a clumsy arm about her shoulders. "Sit down, old girl—don't look so stricken. A bit primitive, maybe, but you'll get to like it." He chuckled. "After all—couldn't get back now if you wanted to!"

No. She couldn't go back now if she wanted to. Adela leaned against the door.

"But, Jim—" she began faintly. She moistened her lips. "Jim, I—really we can't—I mustn't stay here with you like this until we're married."

Jim was at the scarred oak sideboard, busy with a bottle.

"Oh, plenty of time for that!" he said easily. "All the time in the world. Here, Adela, have a drink!"

"I don't drink."

"Will when you've been here a while. Relax a bit, Adela, relax. No need to rush things, you know. We'll be married. Tomorrow, if you like. I swear it. I've just been so rushed on the estate this last week—foreman sprained his ankle, the silly blighter—I just haven't had time to get hold of old Donaldson." He gestured with his glass at the table. "Look, Divina's brought you flowers!"

The table was set for two, with dishes that didn't match. In the center was a thick water-tumbler, and from it delicate sprays of coralita vine trailed their rosy weight to the table's stained surface.

"Must have brought 'em all the way from

the village in your honor, eh? No flowers up here. Pretty long walk it is too."

The pink coralita blurred as Adela looked at it. A terrible gush of feeling began its slow rise in her, of a force and tragic intensity that bore madness in its onward sweep.

She took a trembling step forward. Her hands were clenched together in a tight and desperate grip.

"Jim, I'm—I'm really quite tired. If you'd—if I could just go to my room for a little and lie down—"

Setting down his glass very deliberately, dabbing at his ragged sunburned mustache with a handkerchief, Jim Mountford crossed the room and opened a door. She stumbled blindly across the threshold. The jalousies were closed; the room was dark and smelled of tobacco. Scattered clothing lay about the floor. He followed her in.

"Our room, Adela," he said pleasantly, and closed the door.

SIX years, she thought with a sort of dull bitterness as she began opening the drawers of the desk. Six rainy seasons, with their everlasting drip overhead and liquid mud underfoot; six dry seasons, with their glitter and parching wind. Six years of waiting, hopefully at first—surely next week? Perhaps the week after, when he wasn't so busy—and then with hope less and less, and finally with no hope at all but only anger and despair, for Jim Mountford to marry her. Six years of the parsimony that never gave her sixpence for herself. Six years of being introduced, on the rare occasions that she drove with him to town, as "Miss Leigh, my housekeeper."

Gradually she stopped making the trip, and spent all her time at Morne Perdu. No one stared at her there; there was none to avoid her, to whisper behind their hands.

At first he had been merely evasive on the subject of marriage.

"No hurry," he protested. "You're comfortable, aren't you? Roof over your head, enough to eat, all that? I don't mistreat you, do I? Damn it, I'm fond of you, Adela. Don't you trust me?"

She looked at him stormily.

"But you asked me—I never would have

come out here, never! You came to England and asked me to marry you!"

Jim held up one hand.

"Now, now!" he said mildly. "Let's be accurate! I asked you to come out for a visit—and you did. I'm not responsible if you chose to consider that a proposal of marriage. One of these days, maybe—but don't rush me, Adela. That's all you women think of. Has Zotty got back from the post-office yet?"

She faced him across the table.

"You knew I expected to marry you," she said in a low voice. "You knew I spent all my money to get here, that I had none left to go back."

"Rather sporting of you, my dear," said Jim, smiling. "What's more, I enjoy your company. Stay just as long as you like. Zotty, bring me that paper! I want to see what Hendricks' are quoting on nutmegs today in St. Mark's."

Reaching in his pocket for his spectacles, he opened out the *Island Banner*:

Adela spoke with controlled intensity.

"If I had the money—just the passage money!—if I had the money I'd go back on the *Empress* tomorrow!"

Jim gave a short laugh, without looking up from his paper.

"Afraid you couldn't, old girl! I see here that they've taken the *Empress* off this run—not enough business to make it worth their while. Only way you could go now is by the *Lady-boat* to Barbados, and change." As an afterthought he added, "If you'd the money, of course."

Abruptly Adela went into the next room, stared with smarting eyes out the open window. Trees crowded close around the small clearing of Morne Perdu, but at one spot the ground fell sharply away, and through the massed tree-tops was visible one narrow glimpse of the sea, five miles away. There it lay, a sapphire sparkle among the green, and at its further end the steep black cliff of volcanic rock that was the northmost tip of the island. Round that cliff, once in each three weeks, with passengers and cargo picked up at St. Mark's, sailed the Canadian *Lady Essex*, stately and beautiful, on her way to Barbados.

Adela had seen her once, had watched her out of sight with a constriction of the

throat more painful than tears. Ever after, she had looked in the paper to see when the *Lady* was due to arrive and to leave, and had watched through the gap in the trees for one glimpse of the white ship as it slowly crossed the little square of sea. And now that was to be her last link with the world she had left: a chance sight, every third week, of a northward-bound vessel.

She sat there on the edge of the iron bed, staring out to sea.

THERE had been the Saturday that Adela had walked the two miles to the open market in the little native village at the foot of the hill, with Divina proudly walking behind her with a market basket. Rumor had sprung up of a catch of fish—one of the laborers had heard the conch shell, blown as the fishermen neared the shore—and Jim had reluctantly given her the money to buy some for dinner.

The market had been crowded and noisy, with much laughing and high-pitched chatter, as Adela pushed her way through; and then, at something unseen up front, a sudden silence fell. Standing immobile in the packed market, people seemed suddenly to shrink, pressing back against the stalls to make room for someone's passing.

It was the obeah man. Striding through the crowd without looking right or left, his ragged trousers flapping against his brown legs, his lips moving as though in constant speech with some familiar, breaking into occasional laughter, there was a strange power in the man, madman though he might be. As he came past Adela, a terrified urchin, frozen into immobility, blocked the way until yanked out of his path by a frightened parental hand. The obeah man raised his arm in a denunciatory gesture, half abstractedly, and his eyes met Adela's. Recognition gleamed in them, a measuring and sardonic amusement. He halted, while Divina cowered against Adela with a stifled shriek.

Adela met the bright malicious gaze without flinching, though her heart beat faster than usual. For a long moment they stood thus, like duellists taking one another's measure, and then a little sigh went up from the crowd. He was gone.

Adela shook the whimpering Divina by the shoulder. She said sharply, "Stop that nonsense, Divina!"

"Oh God, I afraid him!" Divina moaned. Her childish face was streaked with tears as she straightened her big hat. "Oh God, mistress, never have I experience such eyes! They pierce my soul, yes!"

A bent and shrivelled black woman rearranged her exhibit of yams and plantains on a wooden tray. Her wizened hand was trembling.

"He is an evil man," she whispered. "Oh God, yes! He is a loup garou. And that was a terrible look that he gave madame, an evil terrible look!"

"Oh, come, mistress!" Divina pulled at her arm. "We go home, no? We leave this bad place!"

"Nonsense!" Adela's voice was firm, and made itself felt. Not for nothing had she taught school for fifteen years. "Stop making a spectacle of yourself, Divina! We came here for fish, and I mean to get it. Stop that blubbering at once!"

Divina hung her head without answering.

AS THEY toiled up the rocky hill together in the hot sun with the precious fish and a breadfruit, Adela said kindly, "You mustn't let a man like that frighten you, Divina. He's no different from anybody else you know."

Divina looked about her fearfully. No one was in sight.

"He loup garou, mistress! It have much obeah here on this island, and all persons knowing Sebastian is loup garou."

The day was hot, but Adela felt ever so slight a chill at the repetition of the word.

"What—what on earth's that?"

Divina looked at her with round scared eyes over the market-basket. A bird like a black parrot watched them in silence from a casuarina tree.

"Loup garou suck your blood, mistress. In the night. He leave his body and take the form of a blue light. I have witness this light myself, outside a certain person's house, each night for a week, eh?"

Adela forced a laugh.

"And at the end of the week?"

"At the end of the week," said Divina simply, "that person was dead, oui?"

Adela was impatient.

"What's that got to do with Sebastian?"

"Everyone knowing it was Sebastian, mistress." Divina looked obstinate. "That person had offended him. And every morning Sebastian went round there, you hear? He went round for the asking."

"The what?"

Divina rolled her eyes.

"When loup garou take your blood, mistress, in the night, he must come round first thing in the morning and ask you for something. It is part of the obeah. It is by this you may know a loup garou. He must ask that you give him something—perhaps before you even notice the place on your arm where he drew the blood."

The black parrot flapped away. A slight shiver passed over Adela and was gone.

"Rubbish!" she said, but she was glad to see the house in sight. "There's no such thing as a loup garou, Divina. That's all an old superstition, and I'm surprised at you believing it. Don't let me hear any more about it!"

"Yes, mistress," said Divina. Her face set in a look of sullen stubbornness, and she spoke no more.

The days went on, the months, the rainy seasons and the dry. Every third week the Lady-boat passed across the little strip of open water that could be seen from Morne Perdu, and was gone. When Adela did not catch a glimpse of her, shining briefly in the sun or glowing across the darkness with lights ablaze, it was as if she had missed the visit of a friend.

One year the price of nutmeg was high, the next it began to fall. Cocoa held steady, and then one year witches' broom disease hit the island and Jim said violently that he was ruined. When Adela's last pair of shoes went in holes, it was weeks before he grudgingly consented to buy her a new pair, and then they were of the cheapest and heaviest make. But year in and year out she watched him put in his desk the cocoa and nutmeg money that was paid for his crops by the local agent in the village branch of the big commission house of Hendricks', before he took it to the Royal Bank in St. Mark's for deposit.

Six years—and not a day and not a night that she had not hated Jim Mountford with

all her soul; but the six years might have lengthened into twenty had not Jim Mountford got drunk one Saturday, too drunk to know what he said.

"Poor old Adela!" he said, with a kind of maudlin pity. He had begun drinking early that afternoon, and already his eyes were red-rimmed and his hand shook as he poured the rum into his glass. A little splashed on the table.

SHE glanced at him indifferently from the doorway. No air was stirring, and the tin-roofed house was like a furnace. It was an odd gray day, when the dry leaves and the parched earth glittered like glass in a colorless metallic sun. The hands had all been paid and gone home with their little wages.

"Good-lookin' gal you used to be, too!"

Jim put the bottle down heavily and stared at her, a half commiserating smile on his unshaven face.

She shrugged, and looked down at the worn cotton dress with no change of expression. She had grown very thin and sallow, and looked older than her years, but her looks had become a matter of utter indifference.

Jim's face creased in lines of cunning and of mirth.

"Jolly good joke I played on you, wasn't it?"

"Wonderful, she agreed, watching him pour another drink.

"Poor little Adela, beggin' me year after year to marry her!" His shoulders began to shake. "Throwin' down her last sixpence to get out here! Oh, ho-ho! I turned the tables, eh, Adela? By God, I turned the tables!"

She gazed at him steadily, the dark eyes in her expressionless face taking on a certain fixed quality. Imperceptibly they widened. She stood very still, almost without breathing, but she felt a curious little tingling at the roots of her hair.

"I wasn't good enough, d'ye see," said Jim, slopping more rum on the table and then tilting the bottle itself to his lips. "A-a-ah, that's fine!" He leaned back in his chair and looked at her with a kind of vindictive gloating. "Not good enough for you and your old man, was I, Adela? But

I swore I'd get even with you, my girl, and I did! I'll have you to ruddy bloomin' well understand, sir, my daughter is not for the likes of you, sir!" God, Adela, if old Whiskers could see you now! Housekeeper—" he gave her an alcoholic wink—"housekeeper at Morne Perdu!"

Adela was staring at him as if hypnotized.

"You did it deliberately?" she whispered.

His shoulders began to heave again.

"Poor little Adela! 'Where's the parson, when are we getting married?' 'You've got to marry me—next week!' And then, 'Please, Jim, please!' Lord, Adela, if you could have seen your face!"

He sat red-faced and gasping with laughter, the tears streaming down his face.

Adela made a choking sound. Turning, she ran down the sagging verandah steps and plunged blindly into the woods. Along the top of the ridge, behind Morne Perdu itself, ran a narrow rocky bare plateau fringed with mahogany and cedar trees, where she sometimes went for a glimpse of the sea. Her feet took her there now. She stumbled through the undergrowth unseeing, her face reddened with scratches she never felt.

Up there on the plateau, out of sight of the whole world, she gave vent to the passion of utter abasement consuming her. Swiftly she walked its whole length, turned and with the speed of the wind swept back, beating her hands together. Back and forth she walked, faster and faster, and now her hands were in her hair, in an unconscious gesture clutching it away from her scalp.

AT THAT instant the Lady-boat crossed her vision, far away at sea. At the sight she gave a deep groan, like an animal in anguish, and beat her right fist against a rough-barked tree until it bled.

"Madame has a heart that is full of storm," said a voice behind her.

She whirled around, to stare with dry dilated eyes at the smiling face of the obeah man. He made a graceful gesture at the disappearing ship.

"Madame would perhaps like to leave our little island."

She attempted to speak, but no words would come.

"I can help you, milady," said Sebastian softly. "I have powers and knowledge."

Shadow had crept up the ridge to their feet, but the setting sun threw a lurid light upon their faces.

"A certain sad event could happen, milady, and set you free. For—" smiling, he considered his price—"for fifty Trinidad dollars this sad event might happen, I think. It is a man I do not like."

Adela found her voice then.

"You fool!" she cried harshly. "I haven't fifty cents!" Not until later did it come to her that she had spoken to this ragged native as to an equal. "Do you see the way I'm dressed? I tell you I've not a shilling in the world!"

Sebastian's white teeth gleamed. The last red rays of the sun gave his dark face a terrible and sinister beauty, as if illumined by interior fires.

He said in his velvety voice, "There are many sacks of nutmegs to be sold next week, milady. On Wednesday the Hendricks' truck is to call at the boucan of Morne Perdu for its load. There will be money."

She lifted her head at that and stared at him, pressing the back of her hand to her mouth.

"There will be money," repeated the obeah man. Suddenly the sun was gone and they stood in semi-darkness, but she could see that he was smiling still. "And the money will belong to madame."

In the silence and the deepening darkness the little thin pipe of a tree-frog sounded quite close to them.

"Fifty dollars is not excessive," the velvety voice persisted. "Madame will perhaps feel then that it was worth it?"

There was a dull pounding in Adela's ears.

"Yes!" she said thickly. "Yes!"

Slowly she backed away from him. Then, averting her face, she turned and ran stumbling down the stony path.

FEAR grew in her that night, an insane gibbering fear that kept her staring awake through the darkness. Jim, who had gone to bed drunk and utterly torpid, began all at once to sleep very restlessly, to fling his arms and legs about and toss his head

on the pillow. Once he moaned. Adela cowered away from him. A fine sweat dewed her face, and her hands were clammy.

In the morning he was irritable and moody, hastily drank down a cup of tea without speaking to her and went out into the sunny yard. She heard his voice down at the boucan.

When he returned, his mood was worse than ever. He rarely drank in the morning, but he poured a drink out now.

"Damn insolence!" He was sputtering. "The impudence of the fellow!" Adela scarcely heard him. She was staring with widening eyes at his forearm. Inside his elbow, plainly visible in the short-sleeved khaki shirt, was a tiny red mark that could have been a scratch, and yet on closer inspection seemed more of a puncture wound. She sat very still, her eyes fastened on it.

He followed her gaze.

"Oh, that? Mosquito, of course. Odd to get one up here, but it sometimes happens. You're not listening to me, Adela. I'm telling you about that obeah fellow."

Adela made no sound, but something in her expression seemed to satisfy him that he had caught her attention fully.

"Comes saunterin' up the path, if you please, and follows me to the boucan! 'Good day, sir. Could I humbly request a match?' 'Pon my word!—fellow walks two miles to ask me for a match! Good God, Adela, what's wrong with you? Look as if you'd seen I don't know what!"

That night she lay awake again, icy with sweat. Once again Jim tossed and turned, once again came that paralyzing certainty that something was in the room with them. Evil was present: she could reach out her fingers and touch it. She stuffed her knuckles against her mouth to keep from screaming.

In the morning, there was a drop of blood on the sheet where Jim's arm had lain.

"No, no!" she thought desperately. "It's all superstition, it's nothing but a mosquito bite! It's all in my mind, I've made it all up! It's not true, it's not true!"

Divina came into the bedroom and stood twisting a corner of her apron.

"Mistress, one Genevieve has told me—" she cast a terrified glance about her, and lowered her voice to a whisper—"mistress,

she has told me that for two nights she observe a blue light in this house!"

Angrily Adela turned on her. Her fingers bit into the girl's shoulder, so that she shrank away.

"Divina, stop repeating such rubbish! Get on with your work, and don't ever let me hear that kind of gossip again!"

Divina retreated, round-eyed and subdued.

"Yes, mistress. But it give me a very bad feeling."

ADELA heard her talking to herself as she crossed the yard to the cook-house. Adela herself was breathing hard, as if she had been running.

A few days later, Jim did not get up.

"Nothing, it's nothing," he said querulously. "Don't fuss, Adela! Just not up to the mark, that's all."

Irritably he ground out a cigarette on the ashtray by the bed. It came as a little shock to her that he looked so ill. The once ruddy color had seeped out from under the sunburn, leaving it the bloodless brown of an old leaf. Jim looked suddenly old himself, withered and momentarily pathetic.

Unwilling she heard herself say, "I'll call a doctor," and immediately felt a kind of irritation with him that she had said it.

"You'll do nothing of the kind!"

Jim's brows contracted; a muscle under one bloodshot eye began to twitch.

"It's nothing, I tell you! All I want is to be left alone!"

He closed his eyes. Adela stood looking at him for a moment. His features looked oddly pinched; his mouth hung slack, as if to hold it closed were an effort too great. The mark on his arm was red and a little swollen.

A curious sense of cold that started in the pit of her stomach began to steal over Adela, as she stood staring at it in the morning sunlight. Her mind refused to accept what it saw before it. It was untrue; it was superstition and a madman's babble; it was mere fortuitous coincidence, a chain of circumstance minute but meaningless, at which any reasoning mind must scoff. Overwrought, beside herself, she had for a moment acquiesced in the madman's madness; but that was nothing, surely. A mo-

ment's hysteria, no more. If Jim was ill, it was no doing of hers; there could be no connection. She was not responsible.

And yet—a week ago Jim Mountford had been a hale and vigorous man; and today he lay with his eyes closed, and a blue shadow over them. And slowly across Adela's mind, shuttered and sealed though it was, crept black and enormous a single word, blotting out all that came before it. The room seemed to darken and contract, the morning sun to disappear. The whole universe rang with the one terrible word.

At that instant there was a confusion outside in the passage. Divina's voice rose sharply. Another voice struck in, deep and rich, and at the sound Adela stood frozen.

Jim raised his head suspiciously.

"Who's that?"

Adela's mouth was dry. She tried to speak.

Slowly the door opened. Sebastian stood there smiling, graceful in his rags. He sketched a debonair bow in the sick man's direction.

"Your pardon, sir—"

"Oh, mistress, I afraid him!" blubbered Divina.

"For God's sake, shut that girl up!" Jim's head sank back on the pillow. His face had a clammy pallor, and he had closed his eyes again. "Sebastian, get out of here! You've been hounding me all week."

"So sorry, sir!" The obeah man's mock of obsequiousness was lit by a kind of laughing deviltry, unseen by the man on the bed. At Adela he did not look once. "So sorry—but I find I am once again without matches! Would you of your great kindness—"

"Oh God, Adela—give him a match and let him go!"

Jim had not opened his eyes.

Adela took a step back. The obeah man did not look at her; a ripple of suppressed laughter crossed his brown face as he moved respectfully to the doorway.

"Go!" croaked Adela, in a voice she did not know. She clutched her throat. "Go, do you understand? Go!"

"Oh yes, milady," he said softly. "I understand! I understand, yes?"

He slipped out the door and was gone. Adela stumbled blindly into the next room, snatched the telephone off the hook, wound the crank with a shaking hand.

"The doctor!" she cried hoarsely. "Get me the doctor!"

THE doctor was hopeful, after the manner of doctors, but quietly insistent that Jim should go to the Colony Hospital, down at St. Mark's.

"Pernicious anemia," he explained to Adela. "Apparently of rather long standing. Seems to have been pulled down rather more than one might expect. But with transfusions and all that—very little cause for alarm, you know. Tropical anemia's rather common in these islands. They'll know what to do for him down at St. Mark's. We'll have him back in no time."

In a week, to be exact.

The last day that Adela saw him—the doctor had driven her down—he lay shrivelled and wasted on the high white bed, his head already a skull, the skin stretched taut across his cheekbones. The strong muscles of his neck had shrunk to scrawny sagging cords.

The nurse took his arm gently to tell him Adela was there. At first he gave no sign; then slowly he opened his eyes and with some difficulty focused them on her.

"Going, Adela." He could just frame the words. "Just—leaving now. Cheers, eh?"

Lingering, the nurse sought to brighten the conversation.

"Come now, things aren't as bad as all that! And we've had company today, Mrs. Mountford—from the village!"

Adela stared at her with slowly dilating eyes. Her scalp began to prickle.

There was an odd whispered chuckle from the bed.

"The obeah johnny!" it wheezed, and gasped for breath. "Joker, eh? Twenty miles on the bus to—ask me for a—copper!"

"First thing this morning," added the nurse, smiling. "The very first thing!"

He was buried next day.

OUTSIDE the day was getting under way. Zotty slid back the roof of the boucan, and a melancholy old woman in a turban tramped barefoot up and down the cocoa-beans. Black laborers, with much horseplay and shoving, were lining up by the grindstone to sharpen their long cutlasses.

There was a smell of kerosene and burn-

ing charcoal from the kitchen, the sound of many voices raised in banter. "All day, all night, Mary Ann," sang Divina, as she stooped to blow the charcoal pot.

It was foolish to be frightened. The money was here. Of course the money was here. He had put it in his desk before he was—taken ill. She had seen him. Absurd to be frightened. Absurd.

Beads of sweat stood out on her forehead.

The money was here, it was here! Somewhere in this desk. It had slipped behind his papers, perhaps; she had overlooked it in her haste. No need for excitement. Silly to feel that triphammer pulse in her throat.

She was ill, that was all; not quite herself. It was only weakness that made her feel like this; she'd slept badly. The night had been so very still, and then there were so many fireflies about. Queer little lights that one knew must be fireflies. Somehow they kept one from sleeping.

She pulled out a little drawer that rattled and stuck; in mounting frenzy tugged at it, all but shrieking. There in that drawer was her passage to England. Day after tomorrow the *Lady Essex* docked at St. Mark's. Wildly she yanked at the drawer, and it came out in her hand, the contents spilling.

A batch of old receipts.

She sat staring at them, passed a damp and trembling hand across her mouth. And now she knew that fear was in the room, accompanying her; it stood just behind her, it had been there from the beginning, waxing tall and enormous, till now it cast a shadow on the desk before her. And she knew, she knew without turning, in whose familiar shape that shadow stood.

SHE had not been afraid when she met him again on the rocky pathway that led to the river, the day after the burial, though the meeting had been none of her seeking. She stopped short when she saw him. Supporting herself against a tree, she stood there immobile, her nostrils distended, her eyes wary as a suspicious animal's. Yet still she was not afraid. The fear she had felt at the graveside was a thing of the moment only. She had been taken off guard, that was all.

The obeah man also leaned against a tree, watching her speculatively.

"Madame will be leaving us, I fear." His mellow voice held a note of liquid sadness. "It is told in the village that madame has engaged passage on the *Lady Essex*. Madame will be missed, yes?"

Adela drew back, her eyes still on his alertly.

"Go away!" Her voice was hard; it held authority. This man was nothing to her. A mere ragged native from the village, a madman who dabbled in witchcraft, in this forgotten island of the Caribbean. On Friday she would turn her back on this island forever. "You're trespassing, you know! If you annoy me I shall have you reported!"

He gave a little secret laugh, almost under his breath.

"Ah, that give me a very bad feeling! You forget your friends so soon, madame!"

A thrill of anger went through Adela. How dared he!

"I don't know what you're talking about!"

Almost, as she said the words, she was able to believe them.

"There was a bargain between us, madame." Sebastian's eyes were hard as black rocks ground smooth by the sea. "A matter of \$50."

A sword had been drawn between them, flung clanging on the rocky ground at their feet.

All of Adela's being rose hard and fierce to meet the challenge. Never had she felt so sure of herself, so strong. The presumption, the cunning, the audacity! He had laid a trap for her feet: she would not be caught. Jim had sickened and died of a disease that was almost commonplace; his death had been medically certified. She had called the doctor, she had visited him in the hospital, she had done everything humanly possible. It was common knowledge.

She could have laughed in this madman's face. Yesterday's fears lay at the bottom of yesterday's grave. There had been no bargain. She was sailing on Friday for England.

The obeah man looked her full in the eye, unsmiling.

"That is your last word, milady?"

Adela's whole body seemed to swell, to tingle with an intoxicating sense of power and contempt. This man was nothing, nothing! What a fool she was, ever to have been afraid!

"My last word!" she said, her voice very clear and strong. "Now be off! If you stand there playing the fool for another instant I shall call for help! Be off with you!"

No, she had not been afraid of him then!

He had turned and gone without a word.

At thought of her triumph, a little smile curved her lips now. Almost imperceptibly her body relaxed. Her nerves had been running away with her. A sleepless night, nothing more. A sleepless night, a spider bite on her arm, and she had seen goblins where no goblins were.

And as if the thought had been a happy omen, her fingers, reaching down past a little partition at the back of the desk that had been hidden by his account-book, closed on Jim's worn old leather purse. England lay in her hand.

Such a great burst of emotion as she had never before known she would feel engulfed her now. Tears coursed down her pale face, splattered unheeded on the notes. England and safety and sanity, all the beauty of an ordered life, the heritage of ancient peace, lay waiting in her grasp.

Through the open window she could hear Divina still singing in the kitchen as she clattered her pans, and she felt a sudden rush of tenderness for the black girl.

It seemed as if she had never loved anyone half so much. She wanted to throw her arms about the girl, to cry, "Oh, darling Divina, forgive me for every harsh word I've ever spoken! You were my only friend, and I never shall see you again!"

She wanted to throw her arms about the whole world; the radiance of it almost blinded her. It was as if she had never seen it before. Her heart felt too big for her body. She laughed aloud with the glory of it. All her weariness had dropped away, like a shroud from one revived.

She must call the steamship company at St. Mark's, tell them the money was ready. She would send Zotty down with it today.

She turned the crank of the telephone, her eyes very bright.

"St. Mark's, please."

"St. Mark's is engaged," said Exchange regretfully.

Later, later! Now she would pack. She would not stop for breakfast. Breakfast was an impertinence.

"Divina!" she called, smiling. "Divina!"

AND then all at once she heard the silence. Like a sudden thunder of drums it came crashing across the carefree babble in the yard.

Adela stood very erect, without breathing, like one desperately wounded who must in a moment fall. Only her eyes moved, as they followed the obeah man in his slow implacable progress across the silent yard. His bearing was aloof, majestic; his face in repose looked sad and stern.

Slow, staring, fixed, her eyes pursued him unwinking as those of a hypnotized bird. At the door of the house she lost him for a moment, only to hear his footsteps approach down the passage. A little behind him was a hesitant terrified shuffle, and the sound of Divina weeping.

The door opened. He stood on the threshold for a moment. Adela's eyes never left his face.

"Then thousand pardons, madame," he said gravely. "It is only—"

At that instant the telephone shrilled. As in a trance, Adela took it down, her eyes still on the man who confronted her across the room.

"Mrs. Mountford—er, Miss Leigh?" whispered a faraway voice from St. Mark's. "Brown here, at Huggins Steamship. I say, I'm frightfully sorry, Miss Leigh, but the *Lady Essex* came in ahead of schedule this trip. She just left an hour ago. Captain wouldn't wait; he had orders to land his cargo at Barbados today; I tried to get word up to you yesterday, but the telephone wire was down. But your passage—I say, are you there?"

"Yes," muttered Adela. Her face was wooden.

"Your passage is all in order, you know, and the *Lady* will be back in three weeks. Gives you a bit of extra time, what? Well, cheerio!"

Adela's gaze dropped to the telephone in her hand with a kind of wondering interest, as if at some ingenious contrivance she now beheld for the first time. A roaring was in her ears.

"The Lady-boat will be back in three weeks," she said stupidly.

She raised her eyes again to the obeah man's. He was smiling.

"Oh, mistress, I afraid him!" bawled Divina. "Send him away!"

He made a little deprecating grimace.

"It is nothing, milady, nothing! My apologies for disturbing you. It is only that I have come to ask for a piece of string."

The room grew very still. Divina's hand, clutching at a corner of her apron, stopped halfway to her face. The obeah man stood with folded arms and somber eyes on Adela. Over his head a lizard, outstretched on a rafter, looked down motionless. Adela was cold and still; all sensation was gone. And so they stood for a long moment like figures on a frieze, like creatures caught centuries ago in amber, henceforward forever immobile.

And then, through the window by his shoulder, like a noble white bird with outstretched wings, Adela saw the stately Lady-boat come into sight, gleaming and splendid in the sun. Slowly, majestically, irrevocably, seen like a dream, the white ship held to its course across the little square of sunlit sea. Then, like a great burst of triumphant music stilled at a blow yet vibrating on in the silence, she rounded the dark headland and was gone.

