

Priya didn't like it, but he left us.

I waited for those words. But they were not the words I feared. The man from Bombay didn't speak of my old employer. We continued to exchange courtesies. Yes, I was well and he was well and everybody else we knew was well; and I was doing well and he was doing well. That was all. Then, secretly, the man from Bombay gave me a dollar. A dollar, ten rupees, an enormous tip for Bombay. But, from him, much more than a tip: an act of graciousness, part of the sweetness of the old days. Once it would have meant so much to me. Now it meant so little. I was saddened and embarrassed. And I had been anticipating hostility!

Priya was waiting behind the kitchen door. His little face was tight and serious, and I knew he had seen the money pass. Now, quickly, he read my own face, and without saying anything to me he hurried out into the dining-room.

I heard him say in English to the man from Bombay, "Santosh is a good fellow. He's got his own room with bath and everything. I am giving him a hundred dollars a week from next week. A thousand rupees a week. This is a first-class establishment."

A thousand chips a week! I was staggered. It was much more than any man in Government got, and I was sure the man from Bombay was also staggered, and perhaps regretting his good gesture and that precious dollar of foreign exchange.

"Santosh," Priya said, when the restaurant closed that evening, "that man was an enemy. I knew it from the moment I saw him. And because he was an enemy I did something very bad, Santosh."

"Sahib."

"I lied, Santosh. To protect you. I told him, Santosh, that I was going to give you seventy-five dollars a week after Christmas."

"Sahib."

"And now I have to make that lie true. But, Santosh, you know that is money we can't afford. I don't have to tell you about overheads and things like that. Santosh, I will give you sixty."

I said, "Sahib, I couldn't stay on for less than a hundred and twenty-five."

Priya's eyes went shiny and the hollows below his eyes darkened. He giggled and pressed out his lips. At the end of that week I got a hundred dollars. And Priya, good man that he was, bore me no grudge.

NOW HERE WAS a victory. It was only after it happened that I realized how badly I had needed such a victory, how far, gaining my freedom, I had begun to accept death not as the end but as the goal. I revived. Or rather, my senses revived. But in this city what was there to feed my senses? There were no walks to be taken, no idle conversations with understanding friends. I could buy new clothes. But then? Would I just look at myself in the mirror? Would I go walking, inviting passers-by to look at me and my clothes? No, the whole business of clothes and dressing up only threw me back into myself.

There was a Swiss or German woman in the cake-shop some doors away, and there was a Filipino woman in the kitchen. They were neither of them attractive, to tell the truth. The Swiss or German could have broken my back with a slap, and the Filipino, though young, was remarkably like one of our older hill women. Still, I felt I owed something to the senses, and I thought I might frolic with these women. But then I was frightened of the responsibility. Goodness, I had learned that a woman is not just a roll and a frolic but a big creature weighing a hundred-and-so-many pounds who is going to be around afterwards.

So the moment of victory passed, without celebration. And it was strange, I thought, that sorrow lasts and can make a man look forward to death, but the mood of victory fills a moment and then is over. When my moment of victory was over I discovered below it, as if waiting for me, all my old sickness and fears: fear of my illegality, my former employer, my presumption, the *hubshi* woman. I saw then that the victory I had had was not something I had worked for, but luck; and

that luck was only fate's cheating, giving an illusion of power.

But that illusion lingered, and I became restless. I decided to act, to challenge fate. I decided I would no longer stay in my room and hide. I began to go out walking in the afternoons. I gained courage; every afternoon I walked a little farther. It became my ambition to walk to that green circle with the fountain where, on my first day out in Washington, I had come upon those people in Hindu costumes, like domestics abandoned a long time ago, singing their Sanskrit gibberish and doing their strange Red Indian dance. And one day I got there.

One day I crossed the road to the circle and sat down on a bench. The *hubshi* were there, and the bare feet, and the dancers in saris and the saffron robes. It was mid-afternoon, very hot, and no one was active. I remembered how magical and inexplicable that circle had seemed to me the first time I saw it. Now it seemed so ordinary and tired: the roads, the motor cars, the shops, the trees, the careful policemen: so much part of the waste and futility that was our world. There was no longer a mystery. I felt I knew where everybody had come from and where those cars were going. But I also felt that everybody there felt like me, and that was soothing. I took to going to the circle every day after the lunch rush and sitting until it was time to go back to Priya's for the dinners.

Late one afternoon, among the dancers and the musicians, the *hubshi* and the bare feet, the singers and the police, I saw her. The *hubshi* woman. And again I wondered at her size; my memory had not exaggerated. I decided to stay where I was. She saw me and smiled. Then, as if remembering anger, she gave me a look of great hatred; and again I saw her as Kali, many-armed, goddess of death and destruction. She looked hard at my face; she considered my clothes. I thought: is it for this I bought these clothes? She got up. She was very big and her tight pants made her much more appalling. She moved towards me. I got up and ran. I ran across the road and then, not looking back, hurried by devious ways to the restaurant.

Priya was doing his accounts. He always looked older when

he was doing his accounts, not worried, just older, like a man to whom life could bring no further surprises. I envied him.

"Santosh, some friend brought a parcel for you."

It was a big parcel wrapped in brown paper. He handed it to me, and I thought how calm he was, with his bills and pieces of paper, and the pen with which he made his neat figures, and the book in which he would write every day until that book was exhausted and he would begin a new one.

I took the parcel up to my room and opened it. Inside there was a cardboard box; and inside that, still in its tissue paper, was the green suit.

I FELT A HOLE in my stomach. I couldn't think. I was glad I had to go down almost immediately to the kitchen, glad to be busy until midnight. But then I had to go up to my room again, and I was alone. I hadn't escaped; I had never been free. I had been abandoned. I was like nothing; I had made myself nothing. And I couldn't turn back.

In the morning Priya said, "You don't look very well, Santosh."

His concern weakened me further. He was the only man I could talk to and I didn't know what I could say to him. I felt tears coming to my eyes. At that moment I would have liked the whole world to be reduced to tears. I said, "Sahib, I cannot stay with you any longer."

They were just words, part of my mood, part of my wish for tears and relief. But Priya didn't soften. He didn't even look surprised. "Where will you go, Santosh?"

How could I answer his serious question?

"Will it be different where you go?"

He had freed himself of me. I could no longer think of tears. I said, "Sahib, I have enemies."

He giggled. "You are a joker, Santosh. How can a man like yourself have enemies? There would be no profit in it. I have enemies. It is part of your happiness and part of the equity of

the world that you cannot have enemies. That's why you can run-run-runaway." He smiled and made the running gesture with his extended palm.

So, at last, I told him my story. I told him about my old employer and my escape and the green suit. He made me feel I was telling him nothing he hadn't already known. I told him about the *hubshi* woman. I was hoping for some rebuke. A rebuke would have meant that he was concerned for my honour, that I could lean on him, that rescue was possible.

But he said, "Santosh, you have no problems. Marry the *hubshi*. That will automatically make you a citizen. Then you will be a free man."

It wasn't what I was expecting. He was asking me to be alone forever. I said, "Sahib, I have a wife and children in the hills at home."

"But this is your home, Santosh. Wife and children in the hills, that is very nice and that is always there. But that is over. You have to do what is best for you here. You are alone here. *Hubshi-ubshi*, nobody worries about that here, if that is your choice. This isn't Bombay. Nobody looks at you when you walk down the street. Nobody cares what you do."

He was right. I was a free man; I could do anything I wanted. I could, if it were possible for me to turn back, go to the apartment and beg my old employer for forgiveness. I could, if it were possible for me to become again what I once was, go to the police and say, "I am an illegal immigrant here. Please deport me to Bombay." I could run away, hang myself, surrender, confess, hide. It didn't matter what I did, because I was alone. And I didn't know what I wanted to do. It was like the time when I felt my senses revive and I wanted to go out and enjoy and I found there was nothing to enjoy.

To be empty is not to be sad. To be empty is to be calm. It is to renounce. Priya said no more to me; he was always busy in the mornings. I left him and went up to my room. It was still a bare room, still like a room that in half an hour could be someone else's. I had never thought of it as mine. I was frightened

of its spotless painted walls and had been careful to keep them spotless. For just such a moment.

I tried to think of the particular moment in my life, the particular action, that had brought me to that room. Was it the moment with the *hubshi* woman, or was it when the American came to dinner and insulted my employer? Was it the moment of my escape, my sight of Priya in the gallery, or was it when I looked in the mirror and bought the green suit? Or was it much earlier, in that other life, in Bombay, in the hills? I could find no one moment; every moment seemed important. An endless chain of action had brought me to that room. It was frightening; it was burdensome. It was not a time for new decisions. It was time to call a halt.

I lay on the bed watching the ceiling, watching the sky. The door was pushed open. It was Priya.

"My goodness, Santosh! How long have you been here? You have been so quiet I forgot about you."

He looked about the room. He went into the bathroom and came out again.

"Are you all right, Santosh?"

He sat on the edge of the bed and the longer he stayed the more I realized how glad I was to see him. There was this: when I tried to think of him rushing into the room I couldn't place it in time; it seemed to have occurred only in my mind. He sat with me. Time became real again. I felt a great love for him. Soon I could have laughed at his agitation. And later, indeed, we laughed together.

I said, "Sahib, you must excuse me this morning. I want to go for a walk. I will come back about tea time."

He looked hard at me, and we both knew I had spoken truly.

"Yes, yes, Santosh. You go for a good long walk. Make yourself hungry with walking. You will feel much better."

Walking, through streets that were now so simple to me, I thought how nice it would be if the people in Hindu costumes in the circle were real. Then I might have joined them. We would have taken to the road; at midday we would have halted

in the shade of big trees; in the late afternoon the sinking sun would have turned the dust clouds to gold; and every evening at some village there would have been welcome, water, food, a fire in the night. But that was a dream of another life. I had watched the people in the circle long enough to know that they were of their city; that their television life awaited them; that their renunciation was not like mine. No television life awaited me. It didn't matter. In this city I was alone and it didn't matter what I did.

As magical as the circle with the fountain the apartment block had once been to me. Now I saw that it was plain, not very tall, and faced with small white tiles. A glass door; four tiled steps down; the desk to the right, letters and keys in the pigeonholes; a carpet to the left, upholstered chairs, a low table with paper flowers in the vase; the blue door of the swift, silent elevator. I saw the simplicity of all these things. I knew the floor I wanted. In the corridor, with its illuminated star-decorated ceiling, an imitation sky, the colours were blue, grey and gold. I knew the door I wanted. I knocked.

The *hubshi* woman opened. I saw the apartment where she worked. I had never seen it before and was expecting something like my old employer's apartment, which was on the same floor. Instead, for the first time, I saw something arranged for a television life.

I thought she might have been angry. She looked only puzzled. I was grateful for that.

I said to her in English, "Will you marry me?"

And there, it was done.

"It is for the best, Santosh," Priya said, giving me tea when I got back to the restaurant. "You will be a free man. A citizen. You will have the whole world before you."

I was pleased that he was pleased.

SO I AM NOW a citizen, my presence is legal, and I live in Washington. I am still with Priya. We do not talk together as much as we did. The restaurant is one world, the parks and

green streets of Washington are another, and every evening some of these streets take me to a third. Burnt-out brick houses, broken fences, overgrown gardens; in a levelled lot between the high brick walls of two houses, a sort of artistic children's playground which the *hubshi* children never use; and then the dark house in which I now live.

Its smells are strange, everything in it is strange. But my strength in this house is that I am a stranger. I have closed my mind and heart to the English language, to newspapers and radio and television, to the pictures of *hubshi* runners and boxers and musicians on the wall. I do not want to understand or learn any more.

I am a simple man who decided to act and see for himself, and it is as though I have had several lives. I do not wish to add to these. Some afternoons I walk to the circle with the fountain. I see the dancers but they are separated from me as by glass. Once, when there were rumours of new burnings, someone scrawled in white paint on the pavement outside my house: *Soul Brother*. I understand the words; but I feel, brother to what or to whom? I was once part of the flow, never thinking of myself as a presence. Then I looked in the mirror and decided to be free. All that my freedom has brought me is the knowledge that I have a face and have a body, that I must feed this body and clothe this body for a certain number of years. Then it will be over.

*Tell Me Who to Kill*



JUST LIKE MY brother. He choose a bad morning to get married. Cold and wet, the little country parts between towns white rather than green, mist falling like rain, fields soaking, sometimes a cow standing up just like that. The little streams have a dirty milky colour and some of them are full of empty tins and other rubbish. Water everywhere, just like back home after a heavy shower in the rainy season, only the sky is not showing in the places where the water collect, and the sun is not coming out to heat up everything and steam it dry fast.

The train hot inside, the windows running with water, people and their clothes smelling. My old suit is smelling too. It is too big for me now, but it is the only suit I have and it is from the time of money. Oh my God. Just little bits of country between the towns, and sometimes I see a house far away, by itself, and I think how nice it would be to be there, to be watching the rain and the train in the early morning. Then that pass, and it is town again, and town again, and then the whole place is like one big town, everything brown, everything of brick or iron or rusty galvanize, like a big wet rubbish dump. And my heart drop and my stomach feel small.

Frank is looking at me, watching my face. Frank in his nice tweed jacket and grey flannel trousers. Tall, thin, going a little bald. But happy. Happy to be with me, happy when people look at us and see that he is with me. He is a good man, he is my friend. But inside he is puffed up with pride. No one is nice to me like Frank, but he is so happy to make himself small, bringing his knees together as though he is carrying a little box of cakes on them. He don't smile, but that is because he is so wise and happy.

His old big shoes shining like a schoolteacher's shoes, and you could see that he shine them himself every evening, like a man saying his prayers and feeling good. He don't mean it, but he always make me feel sad and he always make me feel small, because I know I could never be as nice and neat as Frank and I could never be so wise and happy. But I know, oh God I know, I lose everybody else, and the only friend I have in the world is Frank.

A boy writing on the wet window with his finger and the letters melting down. The boy is with his mother and he is all right. He know where they are going when the train stop. It is a moment I don't like at all, when the train stop and everybody scatter, when the ship dock and everybody take away their luggage. Everybody have their own luggage, and everybody's luggage so different. Everybody is brisk then, and happy, no time for talk, because they can see where they are going. Since I come to this country that is something I can't do. I can't see where I am going. I can only wait to see what is going to turn up.

I am going to my brother's wedding now. But I don't know what bus we will take when we get to the station, or what other train, what street we will walk down, what gate we will go through, and what door we will open into what room.

MY BROTHER. I REMEMBER a day like this, but with heat. The sky set black night and day, the rain always coming, beating on the galvanize roof, the ground turn to mud below the house, in the yard the water frothing yellow with mud, the pará-grass in the field at the back bending down with wet, everything damp and sticky, bare skin itching.

The cart is under the house and the donkey is in the pen at the back. The pen is wet and dirty with mud and manure and fresh grass mixed up with old grass, and the donkey is standing up quiet with a sugarsack on his back to prevent him catching cold. In the kitchen shed my mother is cooking, and the smoke from the wet wood thick and smelling. Everything will taste of smoke,

but on a day like this you can't think of food. The mud and the heat and the smell make you want to throw up instead. My father is upstairs, in merino and drawers, rocking in the gallery, rubbing his hands on his arms. The smoke is not keeping away the mosquitoes up there, but mosquitoes don't bite him. He is not thinking of anything too much; he is just looking out at the black sky and the sugarcane fields and rocking. And in one of the rooms inside, below the old galvanize roof, my brother is lying on the floor with the ague.

It is a bare room, and the bare cedar boards have nothing on them except nails and some clothes and a calendar. You build a house and you have nothing to put in it. And my pretty brother is trembling with the ague, lying on the floor on a floursack spread on a sugarsack, with another floursack for counterpane. You can see the sickness on his little face. The fever is on him but he is not sweating. He can't understand what you say, and what he is saying is not making sense. He is saying that everything around him and inside him is heavy and smooth, very smooth.

It is as if he is going to die, and you think it is not right that someone so small and pretty should suffer so much, while someone like yourself should be so strong. He is so pretty. If he grow up he will be like a star-boy, like Errol Flim or Fairley Granger. The beauty in that room is like a wonder to me, and I can't bear the thought of losing it. I can't bear the thought of the bare room and the wet coming through the gaps in the boards and the black mud outside and the smell of the smoke and the mosquitoes and the night coming.

This is how I remember my brother, even afterwards, even when he grow up. Even after we sell the donkey-cart and start working the lorry and we pull down the old house and build a nice one, paint and everything. It is how I think of my brother, small and sick, suffering for me, and so pretty. I feel I could kill anyone who make him suffer. I don't care about myself. I have no life.

I know that it was in 1954 or 1955, some ordinary year, that my brother was sick, and from the weather I can tell you the

month is January or December. But in my mind it happen so long ago I can't put a time to it. And just as I can't put a time to it, so in my mind I can't put a real place to it. I know where our house is and I know, oh my God, that if ever I go back I will get off the taxi at the junction and walk down the old Savannah Road. I know that road well; I know it in all sorts of weather. But what I see in my mind is in no place at all. Everything blot out except the rain and the night coming and the house and the mud and the field and the donkey and the smoke from the kitchen and my father in the gallery and my brother in the room on the floor.

And it is as though because you are frightened of something it is bound to come, as though because you are carrying danger with you danger is bound to come. And again it is like a dream. I see myself in this old English house, like something in *Rebecca* starring Laurence Olivier and Joan Fountain. It is an upstairs room with a lot of jalousies and fretwork. No weather. I am there with my brother, and we are strangers in the house. My brother is at college or school in England, pursuing his studies, and he is visiting this college friend and he is staying with the boy's family. And then in a corridor, just outside a door, something happen. A quarrel, a friendly argument, a scuffle. They are only playing, but the knife go in the boy, easy, and he drop without making a noise. I just see his face surprised, I don't see any blood, and I don't want to stoop to look. I see my brother opening his mouth to scream, but no scream coming. Nothing making noise. I feel his fright - the gallows for him, just like that, and it was only an accident, it isn't true - and I know at that moment that the love and the danger I carry all my life burst. My life finish. It spoil, it spoil.

The worst part is still to come. We have to eat with the boy's parents. They don't know what happen. And both of us, my brother and me, we have to sit down and eat with them. And the body is in the house, in a chest, like in *Rope* with Fairley Granger. It is there at the beginning, it is there forever, and everything else is only like a mockery. But we eat. My brother is trembling; he

is not a good actor. The people we are eating with, I can't see their faces, I don't know what they look like.

They could be like any of the white people on this train. Like that woman with the boy writing on the wet window.

I CAN'T HELP ANYBODY now. My life spoil. I would like the train never to stop. But look, the buildings are getting higher and closer together and now they are right beside the tracks, and you can see rooms and washing and other things hanging up in kitchens behind the wet windows. London. I am glad Frank is with me. He will look after me when the train stop. He will take me to the wedding house, wherever it is. My brother is getting married. And inside me is like lead.

When the train stop we let the others rush, and I calm down. No rain when we go outside, and it even look as if the sun is going to break through. Frank say we have a lot of time and we decide to walk a little. The streets dirty after the rain, the buildings black, old newspapers in the gutters. I follow Frank and he lead me to streets I know well. I wonder whether it is an accident or whether he know. He know everything.

And then I see the shop. Like a dirty box with a glass front. Now it is a jokes-shop, with little cards in the dusty window. Amuse your friends, frighten your friends. Card tricks, false false-teeth, solid glasses of Guinness, rubber spiders, itching powder, plastic dog-mess. It isn't much, but you wouldn't believe that once upon a time for a few months the place was mine.

"This is the place," I tell Frank. "The mistake of my life. This is where all my money went. Two thousand pounds. It take me five years to save that. In five months it went there."

Two thousand pounds. Pounds don't sound like real money if you spend most of your life dealing in dollars and cents. But in ten years my father couldn't make two thousand pounds. How a man could revive after that? You can say: I will do it again, I will work again and save again. You can say that, but you know that when your courage break, it break.

Frank put his arm around my shoulders to take me away from



the shop window. The owner, the new owner, the man with the lease, look at us. A yellow little bald fellow with a soft little paunch, and everything in his window already look as if it is collecting dust. Frank stiffen a little, the old pride puffing him up, and he is acting for the bald fellow and anybody else who is watching us.

I say, "You white bitch."

It is as though Frank love the obscene language. He get very tender and gentle, and because he is tender I start saying things I don't really feel.

"I am going to make a lot more money, Frank. I am going to make more money than you will ever make in your whole life, you white bitch. I will buy the tallest building here. I will buy the whole street."

But even as I talk I know it is foolishness. I know that my life spoil and even I myself feel like laughing.

I don't want to be out in the street now. It isn't that I don't want people to see me; I don't want to see people. Frank tell me it is because they are white. I don't know, when Frank talk like that I feel he is challenging me to kill one of them.

I want to get off the street, to calm down. Frank take me to a café and we sit right at the back, facing the wall. He sit beside me. And he is talking to me. He talk about his own childhood, and I feel he is trying to show me that he too as a child had ague in a bare room. But he win through in life, he is in his city, he is now wise and strong. He don't know how jealous he is making me of him. I don't want to listen. I look at the flowers on the paper napkins and I lose myself in the lines. He can't see what is locked up in my mind. He will never in a hundred years understand how ordinary the world was for me, with nothing good in it, nothing to see except sugarcane and the pitch road, and how from small I know I had no life.

ORDINARY FOR ME, but for my brother it wasn't going to be like that. He was going to break away; he was going to be a professional man; I was going to see to that. For the rich and the

professional the world is not ordinary. I know, I see them. Where you build a hut, they build a mansion; where you have mud and a pará-grass field, they have a garden; when you kill time on a Sunday, they have parties. We all come out of the same pot, but some people move ahead and some people get left behind. Some people get left behind so far they don't know and they stop caring.

Like my father. He couldn't read and write and he didn't care. He even joke about his illiteracy, slapping his fat arms and laughing. He say he is happy to leave that side of life to his younger brother, who is a law clerk in the city. And whenever he meet this brother, my father is always turning his own life into a story and a joke, and he turn us his children into a joke too. But for all the jokes he make, you could see that my father feel that he is very wise, that it is he who pick up the bargain. My two older sisters and my older brother are like that too. They learn just so much in school; then - it was the way of the old days - they get married, and my older brother start beating his wife and so on, doing everything in the way people before him do, getting drunk on a Friday and Saturday, wasting his money, without shame.

I was the fourth child and the second son. The world change around me when I was growing up. I see people going away to further their studies and coming back as big men. I know that I miss out. I know how much I lose when I have to stop school, and I decide that it wasn't going to be like that for my younger brother. I feel I see things so much better than the rest of my family; they always tell me I am very touchy. But I feel I become like the head of the family. I get the ambition and the shame for all of them. The ambition is like shame, and the shame is like a secret, and it is always hurting. Even now, when it is all over, it can start hurting again. Frank can never see what I see in my mind.

A MAN USED TO live near us in a big two-storey house. The house was of concrete, with decorated concrete blocks, and it was in a lovely ochre colour with chocolate wood facings, everything so neat and nice it look like something to eat. I study this

house every day and I think of it as the rich man's house, because the man was rich. He was rich, but once upon a time he was poor, like us, and the story was that he had a few acres of oil land in the south. A simple man, like my father, without too much education. But in my eyes the oil land and the luck and the money and the house make this man great.

I worship this man. Nothing extravagant about him; sometimes you could see him standing up on the road waiting for a bus or a taxi to go to town, and if you didn't know who he was you wouldn't notice him. I study everything about him, seeing luck and money in everything, in the hair he comb, in the shirt his hands button, in the shoes his hands lace up. He live alone in the house. His children married, and the story is that he don't get on with his family, that he is a man with a lot of worries. But to me even that is part of the greatness.

One time there was a wedding in the village, the old-fashioned all-night wedding, and the rich man lend his house. And on the wedding night I went in the house for the first time. The house that look so big from the outside is really very small inside. Downstairs is just concrete pillars, walls around open space. Upstairs is five small rooms, not counting galleries back and front. The lights dim, dim. It is what I remember most. That and the dead-rat smell. You feel dust everywhere, dust falling on you even while you walk. It isn't dust, it is the droppings from woodlice, hard smooth tiny eggs of wood that roll below your hand if you put your hand down anywhere.

The drawing-room choke up with furniture, Morris suite and centre tables and everything else; but you feel that if you press too hard on anything it will crush. Just the furniture, nothing else in the drawing-room, no pictures or calendars even, nothing except for a pile of Christian magazines, Jehovah's Witness or something like that, things that the rest of us throw away but he the rich man keep, and he is not even a Christian. The place is like a tomb. It is as though nobody live there, as though the rich man don't know why he build the house.

And then one day somebody shoot the man. For money, for

some family bad blood, nobody know. It is another country mystery. The black police nail up Five Hundred Dollars Reward posters everywhere, as though the village is suddenly like Dodge City or like something in *Jesse James*, with Henry Fonda and Tyrum Powers just around the corner.

Everybody wait for the drama. But no drama happen. The posters fade and tear, the police forget, the house remain. The ochre paint discolour, the galvanize roof rust and the rust run down the walls, and the damp run up fast from the ground like a bright green bush. The bright green get dark, it get black, real bush grow up in front of it. Mildew stain the house, the roof is all rust. The paint wash off the woodwork, the grain of the wood begin to show, the wood begin to get hollow, the soft parts melting away, until only the hard grain remain, like a skeleton. And all the time I live there the house just standing there like that.

I see now that the man I thought was a rich man wasn't rich at all. And from here, from this city which is like a country, I feel I could look down and see that whole village in the damp flat lands, the lumpy little pitch road, black between the green sugarcane, the ditches with the tall grass, the thatched huts, water in the yellow yards after rain, and the rusty roof of that one concrete house rotting.

YOU WONDER HOW people get to a village like that, how that place become their home. But it is home, and on a sunny Sunday morning, nobody working, see everybody relaxing in their front yards, a few zinnias growing here and there, a few marigolds and old maid and coxcomb and lady's slipper and the usual hibiscus. The barber making his round, people sitting down below mango trees and getting their hair cut. And in my mind it is on a morning like this that I can see my father's younger brother coming up the pitch road on his bicycle.

My father's brother is living in the city. How he get there, how he get education when my father get none, how he get this job with the lawyer, all of this happen a long time ago, before I was born, and is now like a mystery. He is a Christian, or he

take a Christian name, Stephen, as a mark of his progressiveness. My father does mock him behind his back for that name, but all of us are proud of Stephen and we well enjoy the little fame and respect he give us in the village.

It is a big thing when he come to visit us. The neighbours spreading the news in advance, my mother chasing and killing a chicken right away, my father getting out the rum bottle and glasses and water. Fête! And at the end, just before he leave, Stephen sharing out coppers to the children for the Sunday 4.30 matinée double.

Or so it used to be. I adore Stephen when I was small. And adoring him like this, I used to think that he live alone in the city, that we was his only family. But then I get let down. I realize that Stephen have his own family, that he have a whole heap of girl children, going to the Convent, and that he have his own son, a bright boy, a great student, and he worship this son. The boy is my own age too, or just a little older. Once or twice he come to see us. He is nice and quiet, not pulling any style on us, and you could see that in a special way my father is prouder of him than he is of me or my younger brother, that Stephen's son is what he expect, different, a bright boy and a future professional. My father don't give him coppers for a matinée. He send him a Shirley Temple fountain pen, a Mickey Mouse wristwatch.

Stephen never tell us when he is coming, and you wonder why a man like that would decide to leave his family on a Sunday morning to come and have a country fête with us. My father say that Stephen is glad to get away from that modern life sometimes, that Stephen is not happy with his Christian wife, and that Stephen, because of his progressiveness, is full of worries. I don't know what worries a man like Stephen could have. And if he have worries, they don't always show.

Stephen is a joker and a mocker. Even before he put his bicycle in the shade, even before he take off his hat and bicycle clips, even before he take the first shot of rum, Stephen start mocking. I don't know why he find our donkey so funny; it is as though he never see one before. He mock us because of the donkey; he

mock us when the donkey die. Then when we buy the lorry and it get laid up for a few weeks below the house, blocks of wood below the axle, he mock us because of that. Everything we do is only like a mockery to Stephen, and my father encourage him by laughing.

Stephen mock me a lot too, in the beginning. "When you marrying off this one?" he used to ask my father, even when I was small. My father always laugh and say, "Next season. I got a nice girl for him." But as I grow older I show I don't appreciate the humour, and Stephen stop mocking me.

He is not a bad or cruel man, Stephen. He is just a natural joker, with all his so-called worries. Sometimes he mock himself. One time, when he bring his son to see us, he say, "My son never yet tell a lie." I ask the boy, "It is true?" He say, "No." Stephen burst out laughing and say, "My God, the influence of you people! The boy just tell his first lie." This is Stephen, a little seriousness always below the mockery, and you feel that one reason he mock us is because he would like us to be a little more progressive.

Stephen is always asking my father what we are doing to educate my younger brother. "The others are lost," Stephen say. "But you could still give this one a little education. Dayo, boy, you would like to take some studies?" And Dayo would rub his foot against his ankle and say, "Yes, I would like to take some studies." It was the beauty of the boy that attract Stephen, I feel. He used to say, "I will take away Dayo with me." - "Yes," my father would say, "you take him away and give him some studies. In this school here he learning nothing at all. I don't know what teachers teaching these days."

I always think it would be nice if Stephen could take an interest in Dayo and use his contacts to get Dayo in a good school in the city. But I know that Stephen is just talking, or rather, it is the rum and curry chicken talking, and I don't see how I can talk to him seriously about Dayo. If Stephen was a stranger it would have been different. But Stephen is family, and family is funny. I don't want to give Stephen or his son the idea that I am running

them competition. Stephen would more than mock, if he feel that; he might even get vexed.

So I let Stephen talk. I know that he will drink and mock, that his eyes will get redder and redder until his worries begin to show on his face in truth, and that when the fête is over he will jump on his bicycle and ride off back to the city and his family.

I know that Stephen can't really take an interest in Dayo, because Stephen's whole mind and heart is full of his own son. For years Stephen talk of his son's further studies, and for years he save for these further studies; he don't keep it secret. Even when the time for these studies get close, when everything is fixed up with the university in Canada, Stephen don't relax. You begin to feel then that Stephen is more than ambitious for his son, that he is a little frightened too. He is like a man carrying something that could break and cut him. Even my father notice the difference, and he begin to say behind Stephen's back, "My brother Stephen is going to get throw down by his son." Like a happy man, my father. He educate none of his own children to throw him down.

Then one Sunday afternoon, some months before the boy leave, Stephen come. Without warning, as usual. This time he is not on a bicycle and he is not alone. He is in a motor car and he is with his whole family. From the pará-grass field at the back of the house I see the car stop and I see all Stephen's girl children get out, and I remember the condition of our house. I race up in a foolish kind of way trying to sweep and straighten up. But my heart is failing me, because I can see the house as the girls will see it. And in the end, hearing the voices coming up the steps at the side, I pretend to be like my father, not caring, ready to make a joke of everything, letting people know that we have what we have, and that is that.

So they all come upstairs. And you could see the scorn in the face of Stephen's Christian wife and his Christian daughters. It would be much more bearable if they was ugly. But they are not ugly, and I feel that their scorn is right. I try to stay in the background. But then my mother, rubbing her dirty foot against

her ankle, grin and pull up her veil over the top of her head, as though it is the only thing she have to do to make herself presentable, and she say, "But, Stephen, you didn't give us warning. You had this boy" - and she point to me - "running about trying to clean up the place." And she laugh, as though she make a good joke.

The foolish woman didn't know what she was saying. I run out of the house to the pará-grass field at the back and then through the sugarcane, trying to fight down the shame and the vexation.

I walk and walk, and I feel I would never like to go back to the house. But the day finish, I have to go back. The frogs croaking and singing in the canals and the ditches, the dim lights on in the house. Nobody miss me. Nobody care what they did say to me. Nobody ask where I went or what I do. Everybody in the house is just full of this piece of news. Dayo is going to live in the city with Stephen and his family. Stephen is going to send him to school or college and look after his studies. Stephen is going to make him a doctor, lawyer, anything. Everything settled.

It was like a dream. But it come at the wrong moment. I should be happy, but I feel that everything is now poisoned for me. Now that Dayo is about to go away, I begin to feel that I am carrying him inside me the way Stephen is carrying his own son, like something that might break and cut. And at the same time, forgive me, a new feeling is in my heart. I am just waiting for my father and mother, for Stephen and all Stephen's family, for all of them who was there that day, I am just waiting for all of them to die, to bury my shame with them. I hate them.

Even today I can hate them, when I should have more cause to hate white people, to hate this café and this street and these people who cripple me and spoil my life. But now the dead man is me.

I USED TO HAVE a vision of a big city. It wasn't like this, not streets like this. I used to see a pretty park with high black iron railings like spears, old thick trees growing out of the wide pavement, rain falling the way it fall over Robert Taylor in *Waterloo*

*Bridge*, and the pavement covered with flat leaves of a perfect shape in pretty colours, gold and red and crimson.

Maple leaves. Stephen's son send us one, not long after he went to Montreal to pursue his higher studies. The envelope is long, the stamp strange, and inside the envelope and his letter is this pretty maple leaf, one leaf from the thousands on that pavement. I handle the envelope and the leaf a lot, I study the stamp, and I see Stephen's son walking on the pavement beside the black railing. It is very cold, and I see him stopping to blow his nose, looking down at the leaves and then thinking of us his cousins. He is wearing an overcoat to keep out the cold and he have a brief-case under his arm. That is how I think of him in Montreal, furthering his studies, and happy among the maple leaves. And that is how I want to see Dayo.

IT WAS AFTER Stephen's son went to Montreal that the jealousy really did break out in Stephen's family against Dayo. They did always scorn the boy. They used to make him sleep in the drawing-room, and he had to make up a bed on the floor after everybody else went to sleep. He didn't have a room to pursue his studies in, like Stephen's son. He used to read his books in the tiny front gallery of Stephen's tiny house. The gallery was almost on the pavement, so that he could see everybody that pass and they could see him. See him? They could reach out a hand and turn the page of the book he was reading. Still, this regular reading and studying he do in the gallery win him a little fame and respect in the area, and I feel it was this little respect that the poor boy start to pick up that make Stephen's family vexed. They feel they are the only ones who should pursue studies.

Stephen's daughters especially take against the boy, when you would think they ought to have been proud of their handsome cousin. But no, like all poor people, they want to be the only ones to rise. It is the poor who always want to keep down the poor. So they feel that Dayo is lowering them. It wouldn't have surprised me to get a message one day from Stephen that Dayo was interfering and tampering with his daughters.

You can imagine how glad they all was when Dayo sit his various exams and fail. You can imagine how much that make their heart rejoice. The reason was the bad school Dayo was going to. He couldn't get into any of the good ones. Those schools always talk about a lack of background and grounding, and Dayo had to go to a private school where the teachers themselves was a set of dunces without any qualifications. But Stephen's daughters don't look at that.

You would think that Stephen, after all his grand charge about progressiveness, would stand up for Dayo and do something to give the boy a little help and courage. But Stephen himself, when his son went away, get very funny. He is not interested in anything at all; hé is like a man in mourning. He is like a man expecting bad news, the thing that would break in his hands and cut him. His face get puffy, his hair get grey and coarse.

But the first bad news was mine. I come home one weekday, tired after my lorry work, and I find Dayo. He is well dressed, he is like a man on a visit. But he say he leave Stephen's house for good, he is not going back. He say, "They try to make me a yard-boy. They try to get me to run messages for them." I could see how much he was suffering, and I could see that he was frightened we wouldn't believe him and would force him to go back.

It is what my father would like to do. He scratch his arms and rub his hand over the stiff grey hair on his chin, making that sound he does like, and he say, as though he know everything and is very wise, "It is what you have to put up with."

So poor Dayo could only turn to me. And when I look at his face, so sad and frightened, I feel my body get weak and trembling. The blood run up and down my veins, and my arms start hurting inside, as though inside them there is wire and the wire is being pulled.

Dayo say, "I got to go away. I got to leave. I feel that if I stay here those people are going to cripple me with their jealousy."

I don't know what to say. I don't know the ropes, I don't have

any contacts. Stephen is the man with the contacts, but now I can't ask Stephen anything.

"There is nothing for me to do here," Dayo say.

"What about the oilfields?" I ask him.

"Oilfields, oilfields. The white people keep the best jobs for themselves. All you could do there is to become a bench-chemist."

Bench-chemist, I never hear this word before, and it impress me to hear it. Stephen's family don't give Dayo any credit for learning, but I can see how much the boy improve in the two years and how he develop a new way of talking. He don't talk fast now, his voice is not going up and down, he use his hands a lot, and he is getting a nice little accent, so that sometimes he sound like a woman, the way educated people sound. I like his new way of talking, though it embarrass me to look at him and think that he my brother is now a master of language. So now he start talking, and I let him talk, and as he talk he lose his sadness and fright.

Then I ask him, "What you would study when you go away? Medicine, chartered accountancy, law?"

My mother jump in and say, "I don't know, ever since Dayo small, I always feel I would like him to do dentistry."

That is her intelligence, and you well know that she never think of dentistry or anything else for Dayo until that moment. We let her say what she have to say, and she go down to the kitchen, and Dayo begin to talk in his way. He don't give me a straight answer, he is working up to something, and at last it come. He say: "Aeronautical engineering."

This is a word, like bench-chemist, that I never hear before. It frighten me a little bit, but Dayo say they have a college in England where you just go and pay the fees. Anyway, so we agree. He was going to go away to further his studies in aeronautical engineering.

And as soon as we agree on that Dayo start behaving as though he is a prisoner on the run, as though he have a ship to catch, as though he couldn't stay another month on the island. It turn

out in truth that he had a ship to catch. It turn out that he had some friends he did want to go to England with. So I run about here and there, raising money from this one and that one, signing my name on this paper and that paper, until the money side was settled.

Everything happen very fast, and I remember thinking, watching Dayo go aboard the ship with a smile, that it was one of those moments you can only properly think about afterwards. When the ship pull away and I see the oily water between the ship and the dock, my heart sink. I feel sick, I feel the whole thing was too easy, that something so easy cannot end well. And on top of all this is my grief for the boy, that slender boy in the new suit.

The grief work on me. In my mind I blame Stephen and his family for their jealousy. And, I couldn't help it, two or three days after Dayo leave I went to the city and went to Stephen's house.

It was a poky little old-fashioned wood house in a bad part of the city, and it shame me to think that once upon a time I used to look on Stephen as a big man. Now I see that in the city Stephen is not much, that all his hope and all his daughters' hope is in that son who is studying in Montreal. He is like the Prince to them. And in that little house, with no front yard and next to no backyard, they are living like Snow White and the seven dwarfs, with their little foreign pictures in their little drawing-room, and their little pieces of polished furniture. You feel you have to stoop, that if you take a normal step you will break something.

It was late afternoon when I went. Everybody home, Stephen rocking in the gallery. It surprise me to see him looking so old. The hair on his head really grey now, standing up short and stiff. Everybody is looking at me as though they feel I come to make trouble. I disappoint them. I kiss Stephen on his cheek and I kiss his wife. The girls pretend they don't see me, and that is all right by me.

They give me tea. Not in our crude country fashion, condensed

milk and brown sugar and tea mixed up in one. No, man. Tea, milk, white sugar, everything separate. I pretend I am one of the seven dwarfs and I do everything they want me to do. Then, as I was expecting, they ask about Dayo.

I stir my tea with their little teaspoon and take a sip and I put the cup down and say, "Oh, Dayo. He gone away. On the *Colombie*."

Stephen is so surprised he stop rocking. Then he begin to smile. He look just like my father.

Stephen's wife, Miss Shameless Christian Short-Dress herself, she ask, "And what he gone away for? To look for a work?"

I lift up the teacup and say, "To pursue his higher studies."

Stephen is vexed now. "Higher studies? But he didn't even begin his lower studies."

"That is an opinion," I say, using some words I pick up from Dayo.

One of the girls, a real pretty and malicious little one, come out and ask, "What he is going to study?"

"Aeronautical engineering."

The shock show on Stephen's face, and I feel I could laugh. All of them are mad with jealousy now. All the girls come out and stand up around me in that little drawing-room as though I am the brown girl in the ring. I just drinking my tea out of their little teacup. On the walls they have all those pictures and photographs of foreign scenes, as though because they are Christian and so on, they alone must know about these things.

"Aeronautical engineering," Stephen say. "He would be better off piloting a taxi between the airport and the city."

The girls giggle and Stephen's wife smile. Stephen is the mocker and joker again, the man in control, and it is all right again for his family. They get a little happier. I see that if I stay any longer I would have to start insulting them, so I get up and leave. As I leave I hear one of the girls laugh. I can't tell you how full my heart get with hate.

Next morning I wake up at four o'clock, and the hate is still with me. The hate eat me and eat me until the day break and

I get up, and all that day the hate eating me while I am working, driving the lorry to and from the gravel pits.

In the afternoon, work over, the lorry parked below the house, I take a taxi and went back to the city, to Stephen's house. I didn't know what I was going to do. Half the time I was thinking that I would go and make friends with them again, that I would go and take Stephen's jokes and show that I could laugh at the jokes.

But that is the way of weakness and it would be foolish and wrong, because you cannot really joke with your enemy. When you find out who your enemy is, you must kill him before he kill you. And so with the other half of my mind I was thinking I would go there and break everything in the house, swinging one of those drawing-room bentwood chairs from wall to wall, from jalousie to jalousie, in all those tiny rooms, through all that damn fretwork.

Then a strange thing happen. Perhaps it was because I did wake up so early that morning. The constipation that was with me all day suddenly stop, and by the time I reach Stephen's house all I want is a toilet.

So I rush in the house. Stephen rocking in the little gallery. But I didn't tell him anything. I didn't say good afternoon or anything to his wife and his daughters. I went straight through to their toilet and I stay there a long time, and I pull the chain and I wait until the cistern full again and I pull the chain again. Then I walk out and I walk through the house and I didn't tell anybody anything, and I walk out on the street, and the feeling come back to my arms, no more stretched wires inside them, and I walk and walk until my head cool down, and then I take a taxi home, to the junction.

And next morning again I wake up in the darkness at four o'clock, but this time I am frightened. I only feel like crying and praying for forgiveness, and I begin to know something gone wrong with me, that my life and my mind not right. Even the hate break inside me. I can't feel the hate. I begin to feel lost. I think of Dayo lying sick on the floor in the old house

and I think of him leaving on the white *Colombie*. And even when I get up in the morning I feel lost.

I expect punishment. I don't know how it is coming, but every day I wait for it. Every day I wait to hear from Dayo, but he don't write. I feel I would like to go back to Stephen's house, just go back and sit down and do nothing, not even talk. But I never go.

And then Stephen get news of his son. And the news is that Stephen's son gone foolish in Montreal. The further studies and his father too much for him, and in Montreal he is foolish, like those police dogs that get foolish, like pets, if you kill their handlers. Stephen get his bad news now! The Prince is not coming, and in that little house in the city the whole family mash up, in truth.

My father say, "I always say that Stephen was going to get throw down by that boy."

He feel he win. He do nothing; he just wait and win. But I remember my own hate, the hate that make me sick, and I feel I kill all of them.

I THINK NOW OF the maple leaf the boy send us in the airmail envelope with the strange stamp. Walking on the street with his overcoat and briefcase, when he was pursuing his studies. The street is still there, the rain fall on it a thousand times, the leaves still on the pavement beside the black railings. Now I feel I walk on that pavement myself, among the strange leaves. Strange leaves, strange flowers that sometimes I pick. I have paper; the paper have lines like a schoolchild's copybook, and a number; and Frank write my name in his own handwriting at the top on the dotted line. But I have nobody to write and send a leaf or a flower to.

THE WATER BLACK, the ship white, the lights blazing. And inside the ship, far below, everybody like prisoners already. The lights dim, everyone in their bunk. In the morning the water is blue, but you can't see land. You are just going where the ship

is going, you will never be a free man again. The ship smelling, like vomit, like the back door of a restaurant. Night and day the ship is moving. The sea and sky lose colour, everything is grey.

I don't want the ship to stop, I don't want to touch land again. On the bunk below me is a jeweller fellow called Khan or Mohammed. He is wearing a hat all the time, all the time, and you would think he is wearing it for the joke. But he is not laughing, his face is small, and he is talking already of going back. I can't go back, I will have to stay. I don't know how I trap myself.

The land come nearer, and one morning through the rain you see it, more white than green, no colours there. The ship stop suddenly and it is very quiet, and there in the water below is a boat and some men in oilskins. You see them move but you can't hear them. And after all the days at sea everything in and around that little boat is very bright, as though a black-and-white picture suddenly turn Technicolor. The rocking water is deep and green, the oilskins very yellow, the faces of the people very pink.

The mystery land is theirs, the stranger is you. None of those houses in the rain there belong to you. You can't see yourself walking down those streets set down so flat on that cliff--But that is where you have to go, and as soon as everybody get down in the launch with their luggage the ship hoot. It is white and big and safe, it is saying goodbye, it is in a hurry to get away and to leave you behind. The Technicolor is over, the picture change. Now is only noise and rush and luggage, train and traffic. This is it, and already you are like a man in blinkers.

I TELL MYSELF I come to England to be with Dayo and to look after him, to keep him well while he is pursuing his studies. But I didn't see Dayo at the dock and I didn't see him at the railway station. He leave me alone. I do what I see other people do, and I manage. I find a job, I get some rooms in Paddington. I learn bus numbers and place names; I watch the season change



from cold to warm. I manage, I am all right, but only because I feel it is not my life. I feel as I feel on the ship, that I lose that, that I throw that away.

Then, after all those weeks when he leave me guessing, Dayo write. He try to blame me; he say he had to write home to get my address. He is in another town. He write nothing about his aeronautical engineering, but he say he just finish one particular course of studies and he get a diploma, and now he want some help to move down to London to do some more studies.

I take the day off from the cigarette factory and draw out a few pounds from the post office and went up by train to the town where he was staying. It is always like this now. You are always taking trains and buses to strange places. You never know what sort of street you are going to find yourself in, what sort of house you will be knocking at.

The street is solid with little grey brick houses. Only a few steps from the gate of the house to the door, and the man who open the door get mad as soon as he hear my name. He is a small old man, his neck very loose in his collar, and I can't understand his accent too well. But I understand him to say that Dayo is owing him twelve pounds in rent, that Dayo run away without paying, and that he is not giving up Dayo's suitcase until he get his money. I begin to hate the little fellow and his mildewed house. Dirt shining on the walls, and when I see the little cubicle he is charging three pounds a week for, I had to control myself. You always have to control yourself now, I don't know for what reward.

In the cubicle I see Dayo's suitcase, still with the *Colombie* sticker. I pay and take it straightaway. I don't know where in this town Dayo can be, where he is hiding these last four weeks, but like a fool with this heavy suitcase, as though I just get off the ship myself, I walk up and down the streets, looking.

Even when I went back to the railway station I couldn't make up my mind to leave. The waiting-room empty, the seats cut up with long knife slashes that set your teeth on edge just to see them. I try to think of all the days that Dayo spend alone

in this town, all the times he too see the day turn to evening, and he don't know who to turn to. And as the train take me back to London, I hate everything I see, houses, shops, traffic, all those settled people, those children playing games in fields.

At the station I wait again and take a bus and then another bus. Then there, outside my house, when I turn the corner with that heavy suitcase, I see Dayo, in the suit he went aboard the *Colombie* with.

He look as if he was waiting a long time, as if he nearly forget what he was waiting for. He is not thin; if anything, he is a little stouter. As soon as he see me he get sad, and the tears run to my eyes. When we go down to the basement we embrace and we sit down together on the sofa-bed. I am ashamed to notice it, but he is smelling, his clothes are dirty.

He put his head on my lap and I pat him like a baby, thinking of all those days he spend alone, without me. He knock his head on my knee and say, "I don't have confidence, brother. I lose my confidence." I look at his long hair that no barber cut for weeks, I see the inside of his dirty collar, I see his dirty shoes. Again and again he say, "I don't have confidence, I don't have confidence."

All the bad things I did want to say to him drop away. I rock him on my lap until I come to myself and see that it is dark, the street lamp on outside. I don't want him to do anything foolish because of false pride. I want to give him a way out. So I ask, "You don't want to go through with your studies?" He don't answer. He only sob. I ask him again, "You don't want to take any more studies?" He lift his head up and blow his nose and say, "It is all right, brother. I like studies." And I can tell he is happier, that he was only a little worried and lonely and down-couraged; and that it is going to be all right in truth.

In the kitchen, as soon as I turn on the light, cockroaches scatter everywhere, over dirty old stove and mash-up pot and pan. I bring out bread and milk and a tin of New Brunswick sardines.

It is full-moon night, and the old white woman upstairs start

getting on the way she does always get on when the moon is full, shouting and fighting with her husband, screaming and cursing until one of them shut the other one outside.

I light a little fire, more firelighter and newspaper than coal, and Dayo and I sit and eat. I just regret the basement have no bath. But Dayo will go next day to the public baths, sixpence with the smooth old towel. Right now the little fire make the room more than warm, the damp dry out a little. The rat smell the food right away: I hear him scratching at the box I put over his hole. It is like living in a camp, in this basement. Not long after I move in I make a joke by putting a tiny lady's hand mirror right in the centre of the wall over the fireplace. Now Dayo is here to appreciate that joke.

We pull out the bed part of the sofa-bed and make it up. I even forget the smell, of dead rat and old dirt and gas and rust. Upstairs, the old woman shut her husband out. When I wake up in the night it is because the husband is either shouting from the pavement or banging on the door. In the morning all is calm. The monthly madness is over.

SO, SUDDENLY, THE sadness and the fright pass, and the happy time come. The happy time come and it don't go away, and I start forgetting. Stephen and his family, my father and mother, the sugarcane and the mud and the rich man's rotting house, the ship at night and the mystery land in the morning, all of that I forget. It is far away, like another life; none of that can touch me again. And in that basement, with the old mad woman upstairs, I feel as the London months pass that I get back my life, living with Dayo alone, knowing nobody else.

I fix up the little back bedroom for Dayo, with a reading-light and everything, and he start taking some regular studies. He get back his confidence and it look as though what he say is true, that he really like studies, because as fast as he finish one diploma he start another. In the new clothes I buy for him he is looking nice, even sharp. He develop his way of talking and he is looking good to me, like any professional. I know my own

ignorance and I don't interfere with his studies. I let him go his own way and take his own time. I don't want anything to happen to him again. It is enough for me that he is there.

And you could say that I begin to like big-city life. At home, where people treat you rough and generally get on as though work is a crime and a punishment, I did always prefer to be my own boss. But here I get to like the factory. Nobody watching you; you lower nobody; nobody mock you. I like the nice sharp tobacco smell, and I get to like the machine I mind, with the cigarettes coming out in one long piece, so long and strong you could skip with it. I never think work would be like this, that it would make me feel good to think that the factory is always there and I could always go to it on a morning.

Every Friday they give you a hundred free cigarettes. These cigarettes have a special watermark, but those fellows from Pakistan don't always appreciate this and some of them get catch. A white fellow start walking out one day like a cowboy on high heels. When they stop him they find his shoes stuff up with tobacco. Things like this always happen. The factory is like a school that you don't like at first but then you like more and more.

No hustling with the lorry, nobody beating you down all the time, and you get your money in a little brown envelope, as though you are some kind of civil servant or professional. Regular work, regular money. After some months I finish paying off the moneylender at home, and then I even start saving a little for myself. I am not keeping this money at home, as my father used to do with his few cents. It is going straight in the post office; I have my own little book. One day I find I have a hundred pounds. Mine, not money I borrow. A hundred pounds. I feel safe. I can't tell you how safe I feel. Whenever I think of it I close my eyes and put my hand to my heart.

BUT IT IS so when you get too happy. You forget too much. That hundred pounds make me forget myself. It give me ideas. It make me forget why I am in London. I want to feel more

than safe now. I want to see that money grow, I want to see the clerks writing in my book in their different handwriting every week. That become like a craze with me. I know it is foolishness, and I don't tell Dayo about it; but at the same time I enjoy the secret. And it is because I want to see this money grow week after week that I take a second job. I look around and I get a night work in a restaurant kitchen.

So I start stunning myself with work, and my life become one long work. I get up about six. By seven, Dayo still sleeping, I leave for the cigarette factory. I come back about six to the basement, sometimes Dayo there, sometimes he is not there. By eight I leave for the restaurant, and I come back about midnight or later. London for me is the bus rides, morning, evening, night, the factory, the restaurant kitchen, the basement. I know it is too much, but for me even that is part of the pleasure. Like when you are sick and thin, you want to get thinner and thinner, just to see how thin you could get. Or like some fat people who don't like being fat but still they just want to see how fat they could get: they are always looking at their shadow, and that is like their secret hobby. So now I am always tired when I go to sleep and tired in the morning, but I like and enjoy the tiredness. That is like the secret too, like the money adding up, fifty, sixty pounds a month. And the tiredness does always go in the middle of the morning.

I feel Dayo would mock me if he get to find out what possess my mind. He don't say anything, but I know that he, as a student in London, can't really appreciate having his brother working in a restaurant kitchen. But as the months pass, as one year pass, and two years, as the life hold out and the money add up, I find the money making me strong. And because the money make me strong I can put up with anything. I don't mind what people say or how they watch me. When I didn't have money I used to hate the basement, and I used to daydream about buying nice clothes not only for Dayo but for me too. But now my clothes don't matter to me, and I even get a thrill to think that nobody seeing me in my working clothes, on that street,

coming out of that basement, would believe that I have a thousand pounds in the post office, that I have twelve hundred, that I have fifteen.

I scarcely believe it myself. Life in London! This was what people say at home, to mean everything nice. I didn't look for it; it wasn't what I come for. But I feel that that life come now, and if I was frightened of anything it was that my strength wouldn't hold out, that Dayo would finish his studies and leave me alone in the basement, and that the life would end.

It is true. This was the happy time, when Dayo live in my basement and I work like a man in blinkers, when I have the factory to go to every morning and the restaurant every evening, when I can enjoy a Sunday the way I never enjoy a Sunday before. Sometimes I think of the first day, and those men in yellow oilskins in the deep green water in the morning. But that to me is now like a memory from somewhere else, like something I make up.

CRAZINESS. HOW A man could fool himself like that? Look at these streets now. Look at these things and people I never did see. They have their life too; the city is theirs. I don't know where I thought I was, behaving as though the city was a ghost city, working by itself, and that it is something I discover by myself. Frank will never understand. He will never see the city I see; he will never understand how I work like that.

He is only querying and probing me about foremen who insult me at the factory, about people who fight with me at the restaurant. He is forever worrying me with his discrimination inquiries. He is my friend, the only friend I have. I alone know how much he help me, from how far he bring me back. But he is digging me all the time because he prefer to see me weak. He like opening up manholes for me to fall in; he is anxious to push me down in the darkness.

His attitude, in the café and then at the bus stop and then in the bus, is: keep off, this man is weak, this man is under my protection. When he is like this he have the power to draw all

the strength from me, he with his shining shoes and his nice tweed jacket. As though one time I couldn't go in a shop and buy twelve tweed jackets and pay in cash.

But now the money gone and everything gone and I only have this suit, and it is smelling. But everything does smell here. At home, at home, windows are always open and everything get clean in the open air. Here everything is locked up. Even on a bus no breeze does blow.

Somewhere in the city Dayo is getting married today. I don't know where he think he is.

I WORK AND WORK and save and save and the money grow and grow, and when it reach two thousand pounds, I get stunned. I don't feel I can go on. I know the life have to stop sometime, that I can't go on with two jobs, that something have to happen. And now the thought of working and saving another thousand is too much for me. So I stop work altogether. I leave the cigarette factory, I leave the restaurant. I take out my two thousand from the post office and I decide to use it.

It is ignorance, it is madness. It is the madness the money itself bring on. The money make me feel strong. The money make me feel that money is easy. The money make me forget how hard money is to make, that it take me more than four years to save what I have. The money in my hand, two thousand pounds, make me forget that my father never get more than ten pounds a month for his donkey-cart work, that he bring all of us up on that ten pounds a month, and that ten by twelve is one hundred and twenty, that the money I have in my hand is the pay of my father for fifteen or sixteen years. The money make me feel that London is mine.

I take my money out and I do with it what I see people do at home. I buy a business. It is the madness working on me, the money madness. I don't know London and I know nothing about business, but I buy a business. In my mind I am only calculating like those people at home who buy one lorry and work that and buy a second lorry and buy another and another.

The business I had in mind was a little roti-and-curry shop. Not a restaurant, something more like a stall you get at a race-course, two or three little basins of curry on the counter on this side, a little pile of rotis or chapattis or dalpuris on that side. A lot of women at home do very well that way. The idea come to me just like that one day when I was still at the cigarette factory, and it never leave me. And because the idea come just like that, as though somebody give it to me, I feel it is right. Dayo wasn't too interested. He talk a lot in that way he have, talking and talking and leaving you guessing about what he mean. I don't know whether he is ashamed or whether he find the idea of a roti-shop in London too funny, a reminder of home and simple things. I let him talk.

The first shock I get was the price of properties. But I didn't get frightened and stop. No, the madness is on me, I can't pull back. I am behaving as though I have a train to catch and must spend my money first. And the strange thing is that as soon as that first piece of money go, for the lease for a few years of a rundown little place in that scruffy street, as soon as that piece of money actually leave my hand, I know it is foolishness and I feel that all the money gone, that I have nothing. I feel the business bust already. I feel I start to bleed, and I am like a man only looking to down-courage himself.

So in just four or five weeks the whole world change for me again. I am no longer strong and rich, not caring what people say or think. Now, suddenly, I am a pauper, and my shabbiness worry me, and I begin to pine for the little things I didn't give myself, like twelve-pound tweed jackets, which now, after I pay decorators, electricians and the catering company, I can't afford.

Then I run into prejudice and regulations. At home you can put up a table outside your house any time and start selling what you want. Here they have regulations. Those suspicious men in tweeds and flannels, some of them young, young fellows, are coming round with their forms and pressing me on every side. They are not leaving me any peace of mind at all. They are full of remarks, they don't smile, they like nothing I do.

And I have to shop and cook and clean, and the area is not good and business is bad, and no amount of hard work and early rising will help.

I see I kill myself. The little courage that still remain with me wash away, and the secret vision I had of buying up London, the foolishness I always really know was foolishness, burst. Without my two thousand pounds in the post office, without my real cash, I was without my strength, like Samson without his hair.

When the men in flannels go, the young English louts come. I don't know what attract them to the place, why they pick on me. Half the time I can't understand what they say, but they are not people you can get on with at all. They only dress up and come to make trouble. Sometimes they eat and don't pay; sometimes they mash up plates and glasses and bend the cutlery. That become like their hobby, a lot of them against me alone. That is their bravery and education. And nobody on my side.

Before, in the days of the hard work, of the two jobs, in the days of money, this was the sort of thing that didn't bother me at all. But now everything is hurting. I can't bear the way those louts talk or laugh or dress, and I feel my heart getting full of hate again, as it used to be for Stephen and his family, that hate that make me sick.

DAYO SHOULD HAVE helped me. He was my brother. He was the man I make the money for. He was the man I went aboard the ship for. But now he leave me alone. He is there with me in the basement; sometimes we still eat together on a Sunday; but his attitude is that what I do is my business alone, he have his own things to do. He is going his own way, pursuing his studies or doing whatever he is doing. Sometimes the light is on in his room when I come in; sometimes he come tiptoeing in afterwards; in the morning I always leave him sleeping. He is there. You can't forget him. And then my heart begin to set against him too.

I begin to hate the way he talk. I begin to look at him. Once

he was the pretty boy, using Vaseline Hair Tonic and combing his hair like Fairley Granger. Now you could see the face becoming just a labourer's face, without even the hardness that my father's face get from work and sun. And when he start talking in that way he have – and he can start talking about anything: all you have to say is "Dayo, give me a match" – he make me feel that something is wrong with him, that someone who is using words in this way is not right. He still have his accent, but he is like a man who have no control over his speech, as though it is the first time he talk that day, as though he have nobody in London to talk to.

So in these days I start worrying about Dayo. The roti-shop is always there to worry about, but that to me is in the past now. I do my hard work, I waste my money and my reward. I can't start again. I can't go back to the cigarette factory and those insulting illiterate girls and that long ride in the cold morning to the factory. That finish. Now I concentrate on Dayo, my brother. I watch his face, I watch the way he walk, the way he shave. He don't understand; he is just talking in his womanish way. I don't tell him anything. I don't even know what I think. I just look at him and study him.

I WAKE UP EARLY one morning with a wet-dream. It was the second wet-dream I had; the first happen when I was a boy. It leave me exhausted and dirty and ashamed. I want to go to Dayo and beg him to forgive me, because this, the thing that just happen to me, is something I never did think about for him. I feel I let him down, that I betray him in my heart, and I feel I would like to go to him and make up and talk as in the old days. I feel I must show him that I always love him.

I go in his little room at the back, the early backyard light showing through the thin curtains, and I look at the boy with the labourer's face sleeping on the narrow iron bed. On the table, that I cover with red oilcloth for him, is the reading-lamp I fix up for him for his studies, and his big books, and the paperbacks he read for relaxation sometimes, and the little transistor