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Not Till The End...

I had only been in the island for a few days and was still struck by its tropical beauty and splendour, when I had to wait for somebody on the Parade, who had promised to give me a ride in his car up to my little hotel in St. George, the residential part of the town.

I was just about to walk over to the bus stop, thinking that my friend must have forgotten about me, when he came up and asked me for a light. Well, I thought to myself, routines seem to be the same all over the world, but — there was something about that brown face and the suggestion of a body beautiful under that loosely worn, gaily coloured shirt, that made me respond and start a conversation. There were the usual questions about how I liked the island and the Caribbean in general and the unspoken suggestion of an evening spent together.

I fell and we went up to my hotel, where I had an independent little bungalow all to myself. By the time we arrived, it was almost dark with only that last tropical afterglow of a short, but magnificent sunset mingling with the shadows of the oncoming night.

As soon as we were inside, Ubot, I knew his name by now, asked for a shower blaming the heat or, more likely, using it for an excuse. I showed him to the bathroom, mixed myself a drink and sat down with the age-old questions in my mind where this ride was going to take me, how much of a fool I was being played for, how deep I was going to get myself involved so soon after arriving in the island. He interrupted my musings by asking for a towel. I took it in and —

«Please, Jack, dry my back for me!»

and

«Aren't you having a shower too?»

At that instant I realised that I had really fallen, and fallen hard. There was something about that brown body that I had never seen or known before. It was just perfect. Also it seemed to be all mine for the asking, or rather I did not even have to ask, it had all been done for me. Forgotten were all thoughts of ride and danger. I was involved, deeply involved. I was in love at that moment and would be for a long time to come. There were no limits that night, no reservations, no restraints, nothing to mar complete happiness.

The next day was a Sunday and we talked and talked about each other and made future plans. There wasn't much to his story — he lived downtown with his sister in a small room and had a job in the market. There seemed to be no other relations or friends to speak of. Only 21 he knew very much what he wanted in life and right now it seemed to be living with me, but not by giving up his job. Little as it was worth. Though I had almost decided then, I did not say so wanting to be really sure. I borrowed a car for the afternoon and we went bathing in the sea. On the way back we saw a little bungalow on the beach near town for rent. First thing on Monday morning I went to see the owner, signed the lease on Tuesday and it was all mine or rather ours. I was beginning to think on those terms. By the end of the week we were very much set up. Recommended by a friend of mine an old maid had been

found, who cooked a reasonably good meal and there was, of course, no shortage of vegetables.

Life was wonderful. After an early morning dip in the sea we went to our respective jobs and, really being wrapped up in each other, we hardly ever went out at night or during weekends except for an occasional movie. Our relationship matured from day to day and I was amazed at the amount of knowledge in Ubot. With only elementary schooling he must have read a great deal to be able to talk intelligently about most subjects. I was grateful for this, because right from the start I had feared that there would be that mental blank, which usually leads to boredom and disinterest in the end.

Once a week he went to spend the evening with his sister and I played bridge on that night picking him up on the way home, and every week on that night for some unknown reason we sort of found each other again, as if we had been separated for days. Life could not have been more perfect — it was just what one always hopes for, yet never seems to be able to achieve, thinking at the back of one's mind that it was really demanding the impossible. Still, I had created myself a little rut and liked it and wanted it to go on for ever and ever.

About four months later one morning over breakfast Ubot all of a sudden said that he would have to leave. Trying to be calm, which one has learnt so often to do, I asked for the reason for this sudden decision.

«Well — I have lost my job and can't get another one and I am not going to live with you without earning my own money», not that I had ever seen or wanted to see any of that money. He seemed very firm about it.

«I appreciate your sentiments» I said «but do you think it is any better living on your sister?» He wasn't going to do that either, he was going to make money in the tourist trade. From that night on he was going to be outside the big hotel in town and there would be lots of foreigners, who would pay lots to go with him. Tourist trade, indeed! Yet to him it appeared the only way out and no arguing or reasoning on my part about the shame and the way he was hurting me, made any difference. He would not live off me, as if he hadn't, yet willingly sell his body to any stranger, who was willing to pay the price. It was beyond me and there was no way to get across that barrier in his mind; it was made up and I had to give up in the end. Whilst I was out during the day he collected his few things — I was glad that he took everything I had given him in those few months and that night I felt more alone, than ever before in my whole life.

But it seems that we can adjust, ourselves to almost anything. Soon I picked up on social connections, took part in a few plays and did my job a little more conscientiously. I had been alone before — the wound would heal gradually.

Occasionally I would see him in town. There was no sign of recognition and I left it at that, if that was the way he wanted it. Naturally there were others now, but none ever struck a similar chord in me.

About a year later on my way home one day, I was still in that little bungalow by the sea, Heaven alone knew why, because it reminded me

of bygone bliss, but perhaps because we always wallow in our heartaches, someone called me in Port Street. I stopped and there was Ubot as charming as ever.

«I got my job back last week and now that I am not a streetboy anymore, I could be your friend again. Please, Jack, take me back now!»

I know I should have refused, but I couldn't. Something of the old fire was still there. Also he seemed grown somehow and more mature. There was more of him now and it was more beautiful too.

Jane's dinner was a masterpiece that night. She cooked for him, not for me with spinach and crab and saltfish and ackee. Just as if there had never been that fading vacuum inbetween he went to his old room to undress and when I went in, there he was — sitting on the bed more beautiful than ever. In his embrace there was the expression of being glad at being back home again. To him there was no difference between the now and the then of months ago, but in me there was no more that sense of utter satisfaction, of not wanting the night to come to an end. There was a tinge of bitterness in me now. Whether it was my hurt pride or that I subconsciously refused to love at somebody else's will, I don't know. Something had gone stale, something was lost, something that I was unable to remake.

I tried very hard for a week or more, perhaps I tried too hard, then I applied to my company for a transfer. Within a few days it was granted and it did not take me very long to tie up the few loose ends. The bungalow's rent was paid for another six months and I had the lease transferred to Ubot. Having told him the white lie, that I could not help transfers and just would have to leave, I thought that I would feel more at ease, yet somehow I could not get away quick enough.

The last night he woke me up at about two in the morning:»

«Jack, you do not have to lie to me. I know that you are running away. By punishing me, you are really hurting yourself more and more, but I guess, nothing can change it anymore now.»

For the first time since I had known him, he cried until, eventually, he fell asleep in my arms like a child. I had made the mistake of my life and there was nothing now I could do to change it. I crept out like a thief in the morning without waking him, or at least, if he was awake, he didn't show it.

As the plane took off, it was my turn to cry. Never was I going to be certain. What right did I have to be so severe? A million thoughts chased through my mind, most of all the question of how long one could wallow in that sense of guilt about one's own unbroken heart.

Months later a friend in the island sent me a newspaper cutting about the arrest of a young man for soliciting outside the Turtlebeach Hotel. The night after his arrest, in jail, he was stabbed by a thief, who said that he had made indecent suggestions. Indecent to a common thief, indeed!!!

Ubot is a name it will be hard for me to forget.

Alan Gordon.

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Wir verweisen auf die Angaben in der Mai-Nummer.

Wer spielt mit?

Das Herbstfest naht mit raschen Schritten, beinahe einen ganzen Monat früher als sonst, und damit auch die Vorbereitungen für das *Mitternachts-Kabarett-Programm*. Wer hat Lust und die Möglichkeit, etwas beizutragen, sei es singend, tanzend, akrobatisch oder mit einem kurzen Sketch? Er melde sich nach den Ferien möglichst bald bei Rolf, der jede Programm-Nummer bis etwa Ende August wissen und auch sehen sollte, um die Reihenfolge wirkungsvoll gestalten und auch da und dort noch raten und helfen zu können. Ein kurzes Spiel in deutscher Sprache und eine englische Grotesknummer stehen bereits fest, ebenso ein Gesangsduett im Schweizer Dialekt. — Wer spielt weiter mit? Dass Berufskünstler und Laien sich einträchtig zu einem übermütigen Brettli zusammenfinden, soll weiterhin der schöne Grundsatz dieser Veranstaltungen bleiben.

Der Kreis, Zürich.