

AVRAM DAVIDSON

Manatee Gal Ain't You Coming Out Tonight

Here's another story by Avram Davidson, whose "The Golem" appeared earlier in this anthology. Many a Grand Master produces weak or inferior work in the last few years of his life, but in this, as in so much else, Davidson was far from typical—in fact, toward the end of his long career, Davidson produced some of his *best* work ever, in a series of stories—that started appearing in the last years of the 1970s and continued through to the early 1990s (the last of them was published in 1993, just before his death)—that detail the strange adventures of Jack Limekiller.

The Limekiller stories are set against the lushly evocative background of "British Hidalgo," Davidson's vividly realized, richly imagined version of one of those tiny, eccentric Central American nations that exist in near-total isolation on the edge of the busy twentieth-century world ... a place somehow at once flamboyant and languorous, where strange things can—and *do*—happen...

... as the brilliant story that follows, one of the best of the Limekiller tales, and one of the best fantasies of the 1970s, will amply demonstrate!

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The Cupid Club was the only waterhole on the Port Cockatoo waterfront. To be sure, there were two or three liquor booths back in the part where the tiny town ebbed away into the bush. But they were closed for siesta, certainly. And they sold nothing but watered rum and warm soft drinks and loose cigarettes. Also, they were away from the breezes off the Bay which kept away the flies. In British Hidalgo gnats were flies, mosquitoes were flies, sand-flies—worst of all—were flies—*flies* were also flies: and if any-one were inclined to question this nomenclature, there was the unques-tionable fact that mosquito itself was merely Spanish for little fly.

It was not really cool in the Cupid Club (Alfonso Key, prop., LICENSED TO SELL WINE, SPIRITS, BEER, ALE, CYDER AND PERRY). But it was certainly less hot than outside. Outside the sun burned the Bay, turning it into molten sparkles. Limekiller's boat stood at mooring, by very slightly raising his head he could see her, and every so often he did raise it. There wasn't much aboard to tempt thieves, and there weren't many thieves in Port Cockatoo, anyway. On the other hand, what was aboard the *Sacarissa* he could not very well spare; and it only took one thief, after all. So every now and then he did raise his head and make sure that no small boat was out by his own. No skiff or dory.

Probably the only thief in town was taking his own siesta.

"Nutmeg P'int," said Alfonso Key. "You been to Nutmeg P'int?"

"Been there."

Every place needs another place to make light fun of. In King Town, the old colonial capital, it was Port Cockatoo. Limekiller wondered what it was they made fun of, down at Nutmeg Point.

"What brings it into your mind, Alfonso?" he asked, taking his eyes from the boat. All clear. Briefly he met his own face in the mirror. Wasn't much of a face, in his own opinion. Someone had once called him "Young Count Tolstoy." Wasn't much point in shaving, anyway.

Key shrugged. "Sometimes somebody goes down there, goes up the river, along the old bush trails, buys carn. About now, you know, mon, carn bring good price, up in King Town."

Limekiller knew that. He often did think about that. He could quote the prices Brad Welcome paid for corn: white corn, yellow corn, cracked and ground. "I know," he said. "In King Town they have a lot of money and only a little corn. Along Nutmeg River they have a lot of corn and only a little money. Someone who brings down money from the Town can buy corn along the Nutmeg. Too bad I didn't think of that before I left."

Key allowed himself a small sigh. He knew that it wasn't any lack of drought, and that Limekiller had had no money before he left, or, likely, he wouldn't have left. "May-be they trust you down along the Nutmeg. They trust old Bob Blaine. Year after year he go up the Nutmeg, he go up and down the bush trail, he buy carn on credit, bring it bock up to King *Town*."

Off in the shadow at the other end of the barroom someone began to

sing, softly.

*W'ol' Bob Blaine, he done gone.
W'ol' Bob Blaine, he done gone.
Ahl, ahl me money gone—
Gone to Spahnish Hididgo ...*

In King Town, Old Bob Blaine had sold corn, season after season. Old Bob Blaine had bought salt, he had bought shotgun shells, canned milk, white flour, cotton cloth from the Turkish merchants. Fishhooks, sweet candy, rubber boots, kerosene, lamp *chimney*. Old Bob Blaine had re-turned and paid for corn in kind—not, to be sure, immediately after sell-ing the corn. Things did not move that swiftly even today, in British Hidalgo, and certainly had not Back When. Old Bob Blaine returned with the merchandise on his next buying trip. It was more convenient, he did not have to make so many trips up and down the mangrove coast. By and by it must almost have seemed that he was paying in advance, when he came, buying corn down along the Nutmeg River, the boundary be-tween the Colony of British Hidalgo and the country which the Colony still called Spanish Hidalgo, though it had not been Spain's for a century and a half.

“Yes mon,” Alfonso Key agreed. “Only, that one last time, he *not* come bock. They say he buy one marine engine yard, down in Republican wa-ters.”

“I heard,” Limekiller said, “that he bought a garage down there.”

The soft voice from the back of the bar said, “No, mon. Twas a co-conut walk he bought. Yes, mon.”

Jack wondered why people, foreign people, usually, sometimes complained that it was difficult to get information in British Hidalgo. In his experience, information was the easiest thing in the world, there—all the information you wanted. In fact, sometimes you could get more than you wanted. Sometimes, of course, it was contradictory. Sometimes it was out-right wrong. But that, of course, was another matter.

“Anybody else ever take up the trade down there?” Even if the information, the answer, if there was an answer, even if it were negative, what difference would it make?

“No,” said Key. “No-body. May-be you try, eh, Jock? May-be they trust you.”

There was no reason why the small cultivators, slashing their small cornfields by main force out of the almighty bush and then burning the slash and then planting corn in the ashes, so to speak—maybe they would trust him, even though there was no reason *why* they should trust him. Still...Who knows...They might. They just might. Well...some of them just might. For a moment a brief hope rose in his mind.

“Naaa ... I haven’t even got any crocus sacks.” There wasn’t much point in any of it after all. Not if he’d have to tote the corn wrapped up in his shirt. The jute sacks were fifty cents apiece in local currency; they were as good as money, sometimes even better than money.

Key, who had been watching rather unsleepingly as these thoughts were passing through Jack’s mind, slowly sank back in his chair. “Ah,” he said, very softly. “You haven’t got any crocus sack.”

“Een de w’ol’ days,” the voice from the back said, “every good ‘oman, she di know which bush yerb good fah wyes, fah kid-ney, which bush yerb good fah heart, which bush yerb good fah fever. But ahl of dem good w’ol’ ‘omen, new, dey dead, you see. Yes mon. Ahl poss aliway. No-body know bush medicine nowadays. Only *bush-doctor*. And dey very few, sah, very few.”

“What you say, Captain Cudgel, you not bush *doctor* you w’own self? Nah true, Coptain?”

Slowly, almost reluctantly, the old man answered. “Well sah. Me know few teeng. Fah true. Me know few teeng. Not like in w’ol’ days. In w’ol’ days, me dive fah conch. Yes mon. Fetch up plan-ty conch. De sahl wah-tah hort me eyes, take bush-yerb fah cure dem. But nomah. No, mon. Me no dive no mah. Ahl de time, me wyes hort, stay out of strahng sun now . . . Yes mon . . .”

Limekiller yawned, politely, behind his hand. To make conversation, he repeated something he had heard. “They say some of the old-time peo-ple used to get herbs down at Cape Manatee.”

Alfonso Key flashed him a look. The old man said, a different note suddenly in his voice, different from the melancholy one of a moment before, “Mon-ah-fe?. Mon-ah-fev is hahf-zttow, you know, sah. Fah true. Yes sah, mon-ah-ta? is *hahi-mon*. Which reason de lah w’only allow you to tehk one mon-ah-fei? a year.”

Covertly, Jack felt his beer. Sure enough, it was warm. Key said, “Yes, but who even bother nowadays? The leather is so tough you can’t even sole a boot with it. And you dasn’t bring the meat up to the Central Mar-ket in King *Town*, you *know*.”

The last thing on Limekiller’s mind was to apply for a license to shoot manatee, even if the limit were one a week. “How come?” he asked. “How come you’re not?” King Town. King Town was the reason that he was down in Port Cockatoo. There was no money to be made here, now. But there was none to be lost here, either. His creditors were all in King Town, though if they wanted to, they could reach him even down here. But it would hardly be worth anyone’s while to fee a lawyer to come down and feed him during the court session. Mainly, though, it was a matter of, Out of sight, somewhat out of mind. And, anyway—who knows? The Micawber Principle was weaker down here than up in the capital. But still and all: something might turn up.

“Because, they say it is because Manatee have teats like a woman.”

“One time, you know, one time dere is a malm who mehk mellow wit ah mon-ah-tee, yes, sah. And hahv pickney by mon-ah-tee.” It did seem that the old man had begun to say something more, but someone else said, “*Ha-ha-ha!*” And the same someone else next said, in a sharp, all-but-demanding voice, “Shoe *shine*? Shoe *shine*?”

“I don’t have those kind of shoes,” Limekiller told the boy.

“Suede *brush*? Suede *brush*?”

Still no business being forthcoming, the bootblack withdrew, mutter-ing.

Softly, the owner of the Cupid Club murmured, “That is one bod bobboon.”

Limekiller waited, then he said, “I’d like to hear more about that, Cap-tain Cudgel. . .”

But the story of the man who “made mellow” with a manatee and fathered a child upon her would have to wait, it seemed, upon another occasion. Old Captain Cudgel had departed, via the back door. Jack decided to do the same, via the front.

The sun, having vexed the Atlantic coast most of the morning and afternoon, was now on its equal way towards the Pacific. The Bay of Hi-dalgo stretched away on all sides, out to the faint white line which marked the barrier reef, the great coral wall which had for so long safeguarded this small, almost forgotten nation for the British Crown and the Protestant Religion. To the south, faint and high and blue against the lighter blue of the sky, however faint, darker: Pico Guapo, in the Republic of Hi-dalgo. Faint, also, though recurrent, was Limekiller's thought that he might, just might, try his luck down there. His papers were in order. Port Cockatoo was a Port of Entry and of Exit. The wind was free.

But from day to day, from one hot day to another hot day, he kept putting the decision off.

He nodded politely to the District Commissioner and the District Medical Officer and was nodded to, politely, in return. A way down the front street strolled white-haired Mr. Stuart, who had come out here in The Year Thirty-Nine, to help the war effort, and had been here ever since: too far for nodding. Coming from the market shed where she had been buying the latest eggs and ground-victuals was good Miss Gwen; if she saw him she would insist on giving him his supper at her boardinghouse on credit: her suppers (her breakfasts and lunches as well) were just fine. But he had debts enough already. So, with a sigh, and a fond recollection of her fried fish, her country-style chicken, and her candied breadfruit, he sidled down the little lane, and he avoided Miss Gwen.

* * * *

One side of the lane was the one-story white-painted wooden building with the sign DENDRY WASHBURN, LICENCED TO SELL DRUGS AND POISONS, the other side of the lane was the one-story white-painted wooden building where Captain Cumberbatch kept shop. The lane itself was paved with the crushed decomposed coral called pipeshank—and, indeed, the stuff did look like so much busted-up clay pipe stems. At the end of the lane was a small wharf and a flight of steps, at the bottom of the steps was his skiff.

He poled out to his boat, where he was greeted by his first mate, Skippy, an off-white cat with no tail. Skippy was very neat, and always used the ashes of the caboose: and if Jack didn't remember to sweep them *out* of the caboose as soon as they had cooled, and off to one side, why, that was his own carelessness, and no fault of Skippy's.

"All clear?" he asked the small tiger, as it rubbed against his leg. The small tiger growled something which might have been "Portuguese man o'war off the starboard bow at three bells," or "Musket-men to the futtock-shrouds," or perhaps only, "Where in the Hell have, *you* been, all day, you creep?"

"Tell you what, Skip," as he tied the skiff, untied the *Sacarissa*, and, taking up the boat's pole, leaned against her in a yo-heave-ho manner; "let's us bugger off from this teeming tropical metropolis and go timely down the coast...say, to off Crocodile Creek, lovely name, proof there really is no Chamber of Commerce in these parts...then take the dawn tide and drop a line or two for some grunts or jacks or who knows what...sawfish, maybe...maybe...*something* to go with the rice and beans to-morrow ... Corn what we catch but can't eat," he grunted, leaned, hastily released his weight and grabbed the pole up from the sucking bottom, dropped it on deck, and made swift shift to raise sail; *slap/slap/...* and then he took the tiller.

"And *thennn...* Oh, shite and onions, *I* don't know. Out to the Welsh-man's Cayes, maybe."

"Harebrained idea if ever I heard one," the first mate growled, trying to take Jack by the left greattoe. "Why don't you cut your hair and shave that beard and get a job and get drunk, like any decent, civilized son of a bitch would do?"

The white buildings and red roofs and tall palms wavering along the front street, the small boats riding and reflecting, the green mass of the bush behind: all contributed to give Port Cockatoo and environs the look and feel of a South Sea Island. Or, looked at from the viewpoint of an-other culture, the District Medical Officer (who was due for a retirement which he would not spend in his natal country), said that Port Cockatoo was "*gemütlich*." It was certainly a quiet and a gentle and undemanding sort of place.

But, somehow, it did not seem the totally ideal place for a man not yet thirty, with debts, with energy, with uncertainties, and with a thirty-foot boat.

A bright star slowly detached itself from the darkening land and swam up and up and then stopped and swayed a bit. This was the immense kerosene lamp which was nightly swung to the top of the great flagpole in the Police yard; it could be seen, the local Baymen assured J. Limekiller, as far out as Serpent Caye ... Serpent Caye, the impression was, lay hard

upon the very verge of the known and habitable earth, beyond which the River Ocean probably poured its stream into The Abyss.

Taking the hint, Limekiller took his own kerosene lamp, by no means immense, lit it, and set it firmly between two chocks of wood. Technically, there should have been two lamps and of different colors. But the local vessels seldom showed any lights at all. “He see me forst, he blow he conch-*shell*; me see *he* forst, me blow *my* conch-shell.” And if neither saw the other. “Well, we suppose to meet each othah...” And if they didn’t? Well, there was Divine Providence—hardly any lives were lost from such misadventures: unless, of course, someone was drunk.

The dimlight lingered and lingered to the west, and then the stars started to come out. It was time, Limekiller thought, to stop for the night.

He was eating his rice and beans and looking at the chart when he heard a voice nearby saying, “Sheep a-high!”

Startled, but by no means alarmed, he called out, “Come aboard!”

What came aboard first was a basket, then a man. A man of no great singularity of appearance, save that he was lacking one eye. “Me name,” said the man, “is John Samuel, barn in dis very Colony, me friend, and hence ah subject of de Queen, God bless hah.” Mr. Samuel was evidently a White Creole, a member of a class never very large, and steadily dwindle away: sometimes by way of absorption into the non-White majority, sometimes by way of emigration, and sometimes just by way of Death the Leveler. “I tehks de libahty of bringing you some of de forst fruits of de sile,” said John S.

“Say, mighty thoughtful of you, Mr. Samuel, care for some rice and beans?—My name’s Jack Limekiller.”

“—to weet, sour *sop*, breadfruit, oh-*ronge*, coconut—what I care for, Mr. Limekiller, is some *rum*. *Rum* is what I has come to beg of you. De hond of mon, sah, has yet to perfect any medicine de superior of *rum*.”

Jack groped in the cubbyhold. “What about all those bush medicines down at Cape Manatee? he asked, grunting. There was supposed to be a small bottle, a *chaparita*, as they called it. Where—Oh. It must be ... No. Then it must be....

Mr. Samuel rubbed the grey bristles on his strong jaw. “I does gront

you, sah, de vertue of de country yerba. But you must steep de *yerba* een de *rum*, sah. Yes mon.”

Jack’s fingers finally found the bottle and his one glass and his one cup and poured. Mr. Samuel said nothing until he had downed his, and then gave a sigh of satisfaction. Jack, who had found a mawmee-apple in the basket of fruit, nodded as he peeled it. The flesh was tawny, and reminded him of wintergreen.

After a moment, he decided that he didn’t want to finish his rum, and, with a questioning look, passed it over to his guest. It was pleasant there on the open deck, the breeze faint but sufficient, and comparatively few flies of any sort had cared to make the voyage from shore. The boat swayed gently, there was no surf to speak of, the waves of the Atlantic having spent themselves, miles out, upon the reef; and only a few loose items of gear knocked softly as the vessel rose and fell upon the soft bosom of the inner bay.

“Well sah,” said Mr. Samuel, with a slight smack of his lips, “I weesh to acknowledge your generosity. I ahsked you to wahk weet me wan mile, and you wahk weet me twain.” Something splashed in the water, and he looked out, sharply.

“Shark?”

“No, mon. Too far een-shore.” His eyes gazed out where there was nothing to be seen.

“Porpoise, maybe. Turtle. Or a stingray ...”

After a moment, Samuel said, “Suppose to be ah tortle.” He turned back and gave Limekiller a long, steady look.

Moved by some sudden devil, Limekiller said, “I hope, Mr. Samuel, that you are not about to tell me about some Indian caves or ruins, full of gold, back in the bush, which you are willing to go shares on with me and all I have to do is put up the money—because, you see, Mr. Samuel, I haven’t got any money.” And added, “Besides, they tell me it’s illegal and that all those things belong to the Queen.”

Solemnly, Samuel said, “God save de Queen.” Then his eyes somehow seemed to become wider, and his mouth as well, and a sound like hiss-ing steam escaped him, and he sat on the coaming and shook with almost-silent laughter. Then he said, “I sees dot you hahs been

ahproached ahlready. No sah. No such teeng. My proposition eenclude only two quality: Expedition. Discretion.” And he proceded to explain that what he meant was that Jack should, at regular intervals, bring him supplies in small quantities and that he would advance the money for this and pay a small amount for the service. Delivery was to be made at night. And nothing was to be said about it, back at Port Cockatoo, or anywhere else.

Evidently Jack Limekiller wasn’t the only one who had creditors.

“Anything else, Mr. Samuel?”

Samuel gave a deep sigh. “Ah, mon, I would like to sogjest dat you breeng me out ah woman...but best no. Best not...not yet...Oh, Mon, I om so lustful, ahlone out here, eef you tie ah rattlesnake down fah me I weel freeg eet!”

“Well, Mr. Samuel, the fact is, I will not tie a rattlesnake down for you, or up for you, for any purpose at all. However, I will keep my eyes open for a board with a knothole in it.”

Samuel guffawed. Then he got up, his machete slap-flapping against his side, and with a few more words, clambered down into his dory—no plank-boat, in these waters, but a dugout—and began to paddle. Bayman, bushman, the machete was almost an article of clothing, though there was nothing to chop out here on the gentle waters of the bay. There was a splash, out there in the darkness, and a cry—Samuel’s voice—

“Are you all right out there?” Limekiller called.

“Yes mon...” faintly. “Fine...bloddy Oxville turtle...”

Limekiller fell easily asleep. Presently he dreamed of seeing a large Hawksbill turtle languidly pursuing John Samuel, who languidly evaded the pursuit. Later, he awoke, knowing that he knew what had awakened him, but for the moment unable to name it. The awakeners soon enough identified themselves. Manatees. Sea cows. The most harmless creatures God ever made. He drowsed off again, but again and again he lightly awoke and always he could hear them sighing and sounding.

* * * *

Early up, he dropped his line, made a small fire in the sheet-iron caboose set in its box of sand, and put on the pot of rice and beans to cook in co-conut oil. The head and tail of the first fish went into a second pot, the

top of the double boiler, to make fish-tea, as the chowder was called; when they were done, he gave them to Skippy. He fried the fillets with sliced breadfruit, which had as near no taste of its own as made no matter, but was a great extender of tastes. The second fish he cut and corned—that is, he spread coarse salt on it: there was nothing else to do to preserve it in this hot climate, without ice, and where the art of smoking fish was not known. And more than those two he did not bother to take, he had no license for commercial fishing, could not sell a catch in the market, and the “sport” of taking fish he could neither eat nor sell, and would have to throw back, was a pleasure which eluded his understanding.

It promised to be a hot day and it kept its promise, and he told him-self, as he often did on hot, hot days, that it beat shoveling snow in Toronto.

He observed a vacant mooring towards the south of town, recollected that it always had been vacant, and so, for no better reason than that, he tied up to it. Half of the remainder of his catch came ashore with him. This was too far south for any plank houses or tin roofs. Port Cockatoo at both ends straggled out into “trash houses,” as they were called—sides of wild cane allowing the cooling breezes to pass, and largely keeping out the brute sun; roofs of thatch, usually of the bay or cohune palm. The people were poorer here than elsewhere in this town where no one at all by North American standards was rich, but “trash” had no reference to that: *Loppings, twigs, and leaves of trees, bruised sugar cane, com husks, etc.*, his dictionary explained.

An old, old woman in the ankle-length skirts and the kerchief of her generation stood in the doorway of her little house and looked, first at him, then at his catch. And kept on looking at it. All the coastal people of Hidalgo were fascinated by fish: rice and beans was the staple dish, but fish was the roast beef, the steak, the chicken, of this small, small coun-try which had never been rich and was now—with the growing depletion of its mahogany and rosewood—even poorer than ever. Moved, not so much by conscious consideration of this as by a sudden impulse, he held up his hand and what it was holding. “Care for some corned fish, Grandy?”

Automatically, she reached out her tiny, dark hand, all twisted and withered, and took it. Her lips moved. She looked from the fish to him and from him to the fish; asked, doubtfully, “How much I have for you?”—meaning, how much did she owe him.

“Your prayers,” he said, equally on impulse.

Her head flew up and she looked at him full in the face, then. "T'ank you, Buckra," she said. "And I weel do so. I weel pray for you." And she went back into her trash house.

Up the dusty, palm-lined path a ways, just before it branched into the cemetery road and the front street, he encountered Mr. Stuart—white-haired, learned, benevolent, deaf, and vague—and wearing what was surely the very last sola topee in everyday use in the Western Hemisphere (and perhaps, what with one thing and another, in the Eastern, as well).

"Did you hear the baboons last night?" asked Mr. Stuart.

Jack knew that "baboons," hereabouts, were howler monkeys. Even their daytime noises, a hollow and repetitive *Rrrr-Rrr-Rrr*, sounded un-canny enough; as for their nighttime wailings—

"I was anchored offshore, down the coast, last night," he explained. "All I heard were the manatees."

Mr. Stuart looked at him with faint, grey eyes, smoothed his long moustache. "Ah, *those* poor chaps," he said. "They've slipped back down me scale...much *too* far down, I expect, for any quick return. Tried to help them, you know. Tried the Herodotus method. Carthaginians. Mute trade, you know. Set out some bright red cloth, put trade-goods on, went away. Returned. Things were knocked about, as though animals had been at them. *Some* of the items were gone, though. But nothing left in return. Too bad, oh yes, too bad..." His voice died away into a low moan, and he shook his ancient head. In another moment, before Jack could say any-thing, or even think of anything to say, Mr. Stuart had flashed him a smile of pure friendliness, and was gone. A bunch of flowers was in one hand, and the path he took was the cemetery road. He had gone to visit one of "the great company of the dead, which increase around us as we grow older."

From this mute offering, laid also upon the earth, nothing would be expected in return. There are those whom we do not see and whom we do not desire that they should ever show themselves at all.

* * * *

The shop of Captain Cumberbatch was open. The rules as to what stores or offices were open and closed at which times were exactly the opposite of the laws of the Medes and the Persians. The time to go shopping was

when one saw the shop open. Any shop. They opened, closed, opened, closed...And as to why stores with a staff of only one closed so often, why, they closed not only to allow the proprietor to siesta, they also closed to allow him to eat. It was no part of the national culture for Ma to send Pa's "tea" for Pa to eat behind the counter: Pa came home. Period. And as for establishments with a staff of more than one, why could the staff not have taken turns? Answer: De baas, of whatsoever race, creed, or color, might trust an employee with his life, but he would never trust his employee with his cash or stock, never, never, never.

Captain Cumberbatch had for many years puffed up and down the coast in his tiny packet-and-passenger boat, bringing cargo merchandise for the shopkeepers of Port Caroline, Port Cockatoo, and—very, very semi-occasionally—anywhere else as chartered. But some years ago he had swallowed the anchor and set up business as shopkeeper in Port Cockatoo. And one day an epiphany of sorts had occurred: Captain Cumberbatch had asked himself why he should bring cargo for others to sell and/or why he should pay others to bring cargo for he himself to sell. Why should he not bring his own cargo and sell it himself?

The scheme was brilliant as it was unprecedented. And indeed it had but one discernable flaw: Whilst Captain Cumberbatch was at sea, he could not tend shop to sell what he had shipped. And while he was tending his shop he could not put to sea to replenish stock. And, tossing ceaselessly from the one horn of this dilemma to the other, he often thought resentfully of the difficulties of competing with such peoples as the Chi-nas, Turks, and 'Paniards, who—most unfairly—were able to trust the members of their own families to mind the store.

Be all this as it may, the shop of Captain Cumberbatch was at this very moment open, and the captain himself was leaning upon his counter and smoking a pipe.

"Marneen, Jock. Hoew de day?"

"Bless God."

"Forever and ever, eh-h-men."

A certain amount of tinned corned beef and corned-beef hash, of white sugar (it was nearer grey), of bread (it was dead white, as unsuitable an item of diet as could be designed for the country and the country would have rioted at the thought of being asked to eat dark), salt, lamp-oil, tea, tinned milk, cheese, were packed and passed across the worn counter; a

certain amount of national currency made the same trip in reverse.

As for the prime purchaser of the items, Limekiller said nothing. That was part of the Discretion.

Outside again, he scanned the somnolent street for any signs that anyone might have—somehow—arrived in town who might want to charter a boat for...well, for anything. Short of smuggling, there was scarcely a purpose for which he would have not chartered the *Sacarissa*. It was not that he had an invincible repugnance to the midnight trade, there might well be places and times where he would have considered it. But Government, in British Hidalgo (here, as elsewhere in what was left of the Empire, the definite article was conspicuously absent: "Government will do this," they said—or, often as not, "Government will not do this") had not vexed him in any way and he saw no reason to vex it. And, further-more, he had heard many reports of the accommodations at the Queen's Hotel, as the King Town "gaol" was called: and they were uniformly un-favorable.

But the front street was looking the same as ever, and, exemplifying, as ever, the observation of The Preacher, that there was no new thing under the sun. So, with only the smallest of sighs, he had started for the Cupid Club, when the clop...clap of hooves made him look up. Coming along the street was the horse-drawn equivalent of a pickup truck. The back was open, and contained a few well-filled crocus sacks and some sawn timber; the front was roofed, but open at the sides; and for passengers it had a white-haired woman and a middle-aged man. It drew to a stop.

"Well, young man. And who are *you*?" the woman asked. Some elements of the soft local accent overlaid her speech, but underneath was something else, something equally soft, but different. Her "Man" was not *man*, it was *mayun*, and her "you" was more *like yiauw*.

He took off his hat. "Jack Limekiller is my name, ma'am."

"Put it right back on, Mr. Limekiller. I do appreciate the gesture, but it has already been gestured, now. Draft dodger, are you?"

That was a common guess. Any North American who didn't fit into an old and familiar category—tourist, sport fisherman, sport huntsman, missionary, businessman—was assumed to be either a draft dodger or a trafficker in "weed" ... or maybe both. "No, ma'am. I've served my time and, anyway, I'm a Canadian, and we don't have a draft."

"Well," she said, "doesn't matter even if you are, I don't cay-uh. Now, sir, I am Amelia Lebedee. And this is my nephew, Tom McFee." Tom smiled a faint and abstract smile, shook hands. He was sun-dark and had a slim moustache and he wore a felt hat which had perhaps been crisper than it was now. Jack had not seen many men like Tom McFee in Canada, but he had seen many men like Tom McFee in the United States. Tom McFee sold crab in Baltimore. Tom McFee managed the smaller cotton gin in a two-gin town in Alabama. Tom McFee was foreman at the shrimp-packing plant in one of the Horida Parishes in Louisiana. And Tom McFee was railroad freight agent in whatever dusty town in Texas it was that advertised itself as "Blue Vetch Seed Capital of the World."

"We are carrying you off to Shiloh for lunch," said Amelia, and a handsome old woman she was, and sat up straight at the reins. "So you just climb up in. Tom will carry you back later, when he goes for some more of this wood. Land! You'd think it was *teak*, they cut it so slow. Instead of pine."

Limekiller had no notion who or what or where Shiloh was, although it clearly could not be very far, and he could think of no reason why he should not go there. So in he climbed.

"Yes," said Amelia Lebedee, "the war wiped us out completely. So we came down here and we planted sugar, yes, we planted sugar and we made sugar for, oh, most eighty years. But we didn't move with the times, and so that's all over with now. We plant most anything *but* sugar nowadays. And when we see a new and a civilized face, we plant them down at the table." By this time the wagon was out of town. The bush to either side of the road looked like just bushtype bush to Jack. But to Mrs. Lebedee each acre had an identity of its own. "That was the Cullens' place," she'd say. And, "The Robinsons lived there. Beautiful horses, they had. Nobody has horses anymore, just us. Yonder used to be the Simmonses. Part of the house is still standing, but, land!—you can't see it from the road any-more. They've gone back. Most everybody has gone back, who hasn't died off. .." For a while she said nothing. The road gradually grew nar-rower, and all three of them began thoughtfully to slap at "flies."

A bridge now appeared and they rattled across it, a dark-green stream rushing below. There was a glimpse of an old grey house in the archaic, universal-tropical style, and then the bush closed in again. "And *they-uh*" Miss Amelia gestured, backwards, "is Texas. Oh, what a fine place that was, in its day! Nobody lives there, now. Old Captain Rutherford, the original settler, he was with Hood. *General* Hood, I mean."

It all flashed on Jack at once, and it all came clear, and he wondered that it had not been clear from the beginning. They were now passing through the site of the old Confederate colony. There had been such in Venezuela, in Colombia, even in Brazil; for all he knew, there might still be. But this one here in Hidalgo, it had not been wiped out in a year or two, like the Mormon colonies in Mexico—there had been no Revolution here, no gringo-hating Villistas—it had just ebbed away. Tiny little old B.H., “a country,” as someone (who?) had said, “which you can put your arms around,” had put its arms around the Rebel refugees ... its thin, green arms...and it had let them clear the bush and build their houses...and it had waited...and waited...and, as, one by one, the South-ern American families had “died out” or “gone back,” why, as easy as easy, the bush had slipped back. And, for the present, it seemed like it was going to stay back. It had, after all, closed in after the Old Empire Mayans had so mysteriously left, and that was a thousand years ago. What was a hundred years, to the bush?

The house at Shiloh was small and neat and trim and freshly painted, and one end of the veranda was undergoing repairs. There had been no nonsense, down here, of reproducing any of the ten thousand imitations of Mount Vernon. A neatly-mowed lawn surrounded the house; in a mo-ment, as the wagon made its last circuit, Jack saw that the lawnmowers were a small herd of cattle. A line of cedars accompanied the road, and Miss Amelia pointed to a gap in the line. “That tree that was there,” she said, calmly, “was the one that fell on my husband and on John Samuel. It had been obviously weakened in the hurricane, you know, and they went over to see how badly—that was a mistake. John Samuel lost his left eye and my husband lost his life.”

Discretion... Would it be indiscreet to ask—? He asked.

“How long ago was this, Miss Amelia?” All respectable women down here were “Miss,” followed by the first name, regardless of marital state.

“It was ten years ago, come September,” she said. “Let’s go in out of the sun, now, and Tom will take care of the horse.”

In out of the sun was cool and neat and, though shady, the living room-dining room was as bright as fresh paint and flowered wallpaper—the only wallpaper he had seen in the colony—could make it. There were flowers in vases, too, fresh flowers, not the widely-popular plastic ones. Somehow the Bayfolk did not make much of flowers.

For lunch there was heart-of-palm, something not often had, for a palm had to die to provide it, and palms were not idly cut down; there was the vegetable pear, or chayote, here called cho-cho; venison chops, tomato with okra; there was cashew wine, made from the fruit of which the North-ern Lands know only the seed, which they ignorantly call "nut." And, even, there was coffee, not powdered ick, not grown-in-Brazil-shipped-to-the-United-States-roasted-ground-canned-shipped-to-Hidalgo-coffee, but actual local coffee. Here, where coffee grew with no more care than weeds, hardly anyone except the Indians bothered to grow it, and what *they* grew, *they* used.

"Yes," Miss Amelia said, "it can be a very good life here. It is necessary to work, of course, but the work is well-rewarded, oh, not in terms of large sums of money, but in so many other ways. But it's coming to an end. There is just no way that working this good land can bring you all the riches you see in the moving pictures. And that is what they all want, and dream of, all the young people. And there is just no way they are going to get it."

Tom McFee made one of his rare comments, "*I* don't dream of any white Christmas," he said. "I am staying here, where it is always green. I told Malcolm Stuart that."

Limekiller said, "I was just talking to him this morning, myself. But I couldn't understand what he was talking about...something about try-ing to trade with the manatees..."

The Shiloh people, clearly, had no trouble understanding what Stuart had been talking about; they did not even think it was particularly bizarre. "Ah, those poor folks down at Mantee," said Amelia Lebedee; "—now, mind you, I mean *Mantee*, Cape Mantee, I am *not* referring to the people up on Manatee River and the Lagoons, who are just as civilized as you and I: I mean *Cape Mantee*, which is its correct name, you know—"

"Where the medicine herbs grew?"

"Why, yes, Mr. Limekiller. Where they grew. As I suppose they still do. No one really knows, of course, *what* still grows down at Cape Man-tee, though Nature, I suppose, would not change her ways. It was the hurricanes, you see. The War Year hurricanes. Until then, you know, Government had kept a road open, and once a month a police constable would ride down and, well, at least, take a look around. Not that any of the people there would ever bring any of their troubles to the police. They

were...well, how should I put it? Tom, how would *you* put it?"

Tom thought a long moment. "Simple. They were always simple."

What he meant by "simple," it developed, was simpleminded. His aunt did not entirely agree with that. They gave that impression, the Mantee people, she said, but that was only because their ways were so different. "There is a story," she said, slowly, and, it seemed to Jack Limekiller, rather reluctantly, "that a British man-of-war took a Spanish slave ship. I don't know when this would have been, it was well before we came down and settled here. Well before The War. Our own War, I mean. It was a small Spanish slaver and there weren't many captives in her. As I understand it, between the time that Britain abolished slavery and the dreadful At-lantic slave trade finally disappeared, if slavers were taken anywhere near Africa, the British would bring the captives either to Saint Helena or Sierra Leone, and liberate them there. But this one was taken fairly near the American coast. I suppose she was heading for Cuba. So the British ship brought them *here*. To British Hidalgo. And the people were released down at Cape Mantee, and told they could settle there and no one would 'vex' them, as they say here."

Where the slaves had come from, originally, she did not know, but she thought the tradition was that they had come from somewhere well back in the African interior. Over the course of the many subsequent years, some had trickled into the more settled parts of the old colony. "But some of them just stayed down there," she said. "Keeping up their own ways."

"Too much intermarrying," Tom offered.

"So the Bayfolk say. The Bayfolk were always, / think, rather afraid of them. None of them would ever go there alone. And, after the hurricanes, when the road went out, and the police just couldn't get there, none of the Bayfolk would go there at *all*. By sea, I mean. You must remember, Mr. Limekiller, that in the 1940s this little colony was very much as it was in the 1840s. There were no airplanes. There wasn't one single highway. When I say there used to be a road to Mantee, you mustn't think it was a road such as we've got between Port Cockatoo and Shiloh."

Limekiller, thinking of the dirt road between Port Cockatoo and Shiloh, tried to think what the one between Port Cockatoo and the region be-hind Cape Mantee must have been like. Evidently a trail, nothing more, down which an occasional man on a mule might make his way, boiling the potato-like fruit of the breadnut tree for his food and feeding his mule the

leaves: a trail that had to be “chopped,” had to be “cleaned” by machete-work, at least twice a year, to keep the all-consuming bush from closing over it the way the flesh closes over a cut. An occasional trader, an occasional buyer or gatherer of chicle or herbs or hides, an occasional missionary or medical officer, at infrequent intervals would pass along this corridor in the eternal jungle.

And then came a hurricane, smashing flat everything in its path. And the trail vanished. And the trail was never recut. British Hidalgo had probably never been high on any list of colonial priorities at the best of times. During the War of 1939-1945, they may have forgotten all about it in London. Many of Hidalgo’s able-bodied men were off on distant fronts. An equal number had gone off to cut the remaining forests of the Isle of Britain, to supply anyway a fraction of the wood which was then impossible to import. Nothing could be spared for Mantee and its people; in King Town, Mantee was deemed as distant as King Town was in London. The p.c. never went there again. No missionary ever returned. Neither had a medical officer or nurse. Nor any trader. No one. Except for Malcolm Stuart...

“He did try. Of course, he had his own concerns. During the War he had his war work. Afterwards, he took up a block of land a few miles back from here, and he had his hands full with that. And then, after, oh, I don’t remember how many years of stories, stories—there is no television here, you know, and few people have time for books—stories about the Mantee people, well, he decided he had to go have a look, see for himself, you know.”

Were the Mantee people really eating raw meat and raw fish? He would bring them matches. Had they actually reverted to the use of stone for tools? He would bring them machetes, axes, knives. And ... as for the rest of it...the rest of the rather awful and certainly very odd stories ... he would see for himself.

But he had seen nothing. There had been nothing to see. That is, nothing which he could be sure he had seen. Perhaps he had thought that he had seen some few things which he had not cared to mention to Jack, but had spoken of to the Shiloh people.

They, however, were not about to speak of it to Jack.

“Adventure,” said Amelia Lebedee, dismissing the matter of Mantee with a sigh. “Nobody wants the adventure of cutting bush to plant yams. They want the adventure of nightclubs and large automobiles. They see it in

the moving pictures. And you, Mr. Limekiller, what is it that *you* want?—coming, having come, from the land of nightclubs and large au-tomobiles...”

The truth was simple. “I wanted the adventure of sailing a boat with white sails through tropic seas,” he said. “I saw it in the moving pictures. I never had a nightclub but I had a large automobile, and I sold it and came down here and bought the boat. And, well, here I am.”

They had talked right through the siesta time. Tom McFee was ready, now, to return for the few more planks which the sawmill might—or might not—have managed to produce since the morning. It was time to stand up now and to make thanks and say good-bye. “Yes,” said Amelia Lebedee, pensively “Here we are. Here we all are. We are all here. And some of us are more content being here than others.”

* * * *

Half past three at the Cupid Club. On Limekiller’s table, the usual sin-gle bottle of beer. Also, the three chaparitas of rum which he had bought— but they were in a paper bag, lest the sight of them, plus the fact that he could invite no one to drink of them, give rise to talk that he was “mean.” Behind the bar, Alfonso Key. In the dark, dark back, slowly sipping a lemonade (all soft drinks were “lemonade”—coke was lemonade, straw-berry pop was lemonade, ginger stout was lemonade...sometimes, though not often, for reasons inexplicable, there was also lemon-flavored lemonade)—in the dark rear part of the room, resting his perpetually sore eyes, was old Captain Cudgel.

“Well, how you spend the night, Jock?” Alfonso ready for a tale of amour, ready with a quip, a joke.

“Oh, just quietly. Except for the manatees.” Limekiller, saying this, had a sudden feeling that he had said all this before, been all this before, was caught on the moebius strip which life in picturesque Port Cockatoo had already become, caught, caught, never would be released. *Adventure!* Hah!

At this point, however, a slightly different note, a slightly different comment from the old, old man.

“Een Eedalgo,” he said, dolefully, “de monatee hahv no leg, mon. Bec-ahs Eedalgo ees a smahl *cox-m-trce*, ahn every-teeng smahl.

Every-teeng *weak*. Now, een Ahfrica, mon, de monatee *does* hahv leg.”

Key said, incredulous, but still respectful, “What you tell we, Coptain Cudgel? *What?*” His last word, pronounced in the local manner of using it as a particular indication of skepticism, of criticism, of denial, seemed to have at least three Ts at the end of it; he repeated “*Whattt?*”

“Yes, mon. Yes sah. Een Ahfrica, de monatee hahv *leg*, mon. Eet be ah poerful beast, een Ahfrica, come up on de *land*, mon.”

“I tell you. *Me* di hear eet befoah. Een Ahfrica,” he repeated, doggedly, “de monatee hahv leg, de monatee be ah poerful beast, come up on de *lond*, mon, no lahf, mon—”

“Me no di lahf, sah—”

“—de w’ol’ people, dey tell me so, fah true.”

Alfonso Key gave his head a single shake, gave a single click of his tongue, gave Jack a single look.

Far down the street, the bell of the Church of Saint Benedict the Moor sounded. Whatever time it was marking had nothing to do with Greenwich Meridian Time or any variation thereof.

The weak, feeble old voice resumed the thread of conversation. “Me grahndy di tell me dot she grahndy di tell *she*. Motta hav foct, eet me grahn-dy di give me me name, b’y. Cudgel. Ahfrica name. Fah true. Fah True.”

A slight sound of surprise broke Limekiller’s silence. He said, “Excuse me, Captain. Could it have been ‘Cudjoe’...maybe?”

For a while he thought that the question had either not been heard or had, perhaps, been resented. Then the old man said, “Eet could be so. Sah, eet might be so. Lahng, lahng time ah-go...Me Christian name, Pe-tah. Me w’ol’grahndy she say. ‘Pickncy: you hahv ah Christian name, Pe-tah. But me give you Ahfrica name, too. Cahdjo. No fah-get, pickney?’ Time poss, time poss, de people dey ahl cab] me ‘Cudgel,’ you see, sah. So me fah-get...Sah, hoew you know dees teeng, sah?”

Limekiller said that he thought he had read it in a book. The old cap-tain repeated the word, lengthening it in his local speech. “Ah boook,

sah. To t'eenk ahv dot. Een ah boook. Me w'own name een ah boook." By and by he departed as silently as always.

* * * *

In the dusk a white cloth waved behind the thin line of white beach. He took off his shirt and waved back. Then he transferred the groceries into the skiff and, as soon as it was dark and he had lit and securely fixed his lamp, set about rowing ashore. By and by a voice called out, "Mon, where de Hell you gweyn? You keep on to de right, you gweyn wine up een *Sponcesh* Hidalgo: Mah to de lef, mon: mah to *lef!*" And with such assistances, soon enough the skiff softly scraped the beach.

Mr. John Samuel's greeting was, "You bring de rum?" The rum put in his hand, he took up one of the sacks, gestured Limekiller towards the other. "Les go timely, noew," he said. For a moment, in what was left of the dimmest dimlight, Jack thought the man was going to walk straight into an enormous tree: instead, he walked across the enormous roots and behind the tree. Limekiller followed the faint white patch of shirt bobbing in front of him. Sometimes the ground was firm, sometimes it went squilchy, sometimes it was simply running water—shallow, fortunately—sometimes it felt like gravel. The bush noises were still fairly soft. A rus-tle. He hoped it was only a wish-willy lizard, or a bamboo-chicken—an iguana—and not a yellow-jaw, that snake of which it was said...but this was no time to remember scare stories about snakes.

Without warning—although what sort of warning there could have been was a stupid question, anyway—there they were. Gertrude Stein, returning to her old hometown after an absence of almost forty years, and finding the old home itself demolished, had observed (with a lot more ob-jectivity than she was usually credited with) that there was no *there*, there. The *there*, here, was simply a clearing, with a very small fire, and a *ramada*: four poles holding up a low thatched roof. John Samuel let his sack drop. "Ahnd noew," he said, portentously, "let us broach de rum."

After the chaparita had been not only broached but drained, for the second time that day Limekiller dined ashore. The cooking was done on a raised fire-hearth of clay and sticks, and what was cooked was a bread-fruit, simply strewn, when done, with sugar; and a gibnut. To say that the gibnut, or paca, is a rodent, is perhaps—though accurate—unfair: it is larger than a rabbit, and it eats well. After that Samuel made black tea and laced it with more rum. After that he gave a vast belch and a vast sigh. "Can you play de bonjoe?" he next asked.

“Well... I have been known to try...”

The lamp flared and smoked. Samuel adjusted it...somewhat...He got up and took a bulky object down from a peg on one of the roof-poles. It was a sheet of thick plastic, laced with rawhide thongs, which he laboriously unknotted. Inside that was a deerskin. And inside *that*, an ordinary banjo case, which contained an ordinary, if rather old and worn, banjo.

“Mehk I hear ah sahng ... ah sahng ahv *you* country.”

What song should he make him hear? No particularly Canadian song brought itself to mind. Ah well, he would dip down below the border just a bit...His fingers strummed idly on the strings. The words grew, the tune grew, he lifted up what some (if not very many) had considered a not-bad-baritone, and began to sing and play.

*Manatee gal, ain't you coming out tonight,
Coming out tonight, coming out tonight?
Oh, Manatee gal, ain't you coming out tonight,
To dance by the light of the—*

An enormous hand suddenly covered his own and pressed it down. The tune subsided into a jumble of chords, and an echo, and a silence.

“Mon, mon, you not do me right. I no di say, ‘Mehk I hear a sahng ahv *you* country?’ Samuel, on his knees, breamed heavily. His breath was heavy with rum and his voice was heavy with reproof... and with a some-thing else for which Limekiller had no immediate name. But, friendly it was not.

Puzzled more than apologetic, Jack said, “Well, it *is* a North American song, anyway. It was an old Erie Canal song. It—Oh. I’ll be damned. Only it’s supposed to go, ‘*Buffalo gal, ain’t you coming out tonight,*’ And I dunno what made me change it, what difference does it make?”

“What different? What different it mehk? Ah, Christ me King! You lee’ buckra b’y, you not know w’ehnnah-teeng?”

It was all too much for Limekiller. The last thing he wanted was any-thing resembling an argument, here in the deep, dark bush, with an all-but-stranger. Samuel having lifted his heavy hand from the instrument, Limekiller, moved by a sudden spirit, began.

*Amazing grace, how sweet the sound,
To save a wretch like me.*

With a rough catch of his breath, Samuel muttered, "Yes. Yes. Dot ees good. Go on, b'y. No stop."

*I once was halt, but now can walk:
Was blind, but now I see...*

He sang the beautiful old hymn to the end: and, by that time, if not overpowered by Grace, John Samuel—having evidently broached the sec-ond and the third chaparita—was certainly overpowered: and it did not look as though the dinner guest was going to get any kind of guided tour back to the shore and the skiff. He sighed and he looked around him. A bed rack had roughly been fixed up, and its lashings were covered with a few deer hides and an old Indian blanket. Samuel not responding to any shakings or urgings, Limekiller, with a shrug and a "Well what the hell," covered him with the blanket as he lay upon the ground. Then, hav-ing rolled up the sacks the supplies had come in and propped them under his head, Limekiller disposed himself for slumber on the hides. Some lines were running through his head and he paused a moment to consider what they were. What they were, they were, *From ghoulies and ghosties, long leggedy feasties, and bugges that go boomp in the night, Good Lord, deliver us*. With an almost absolute certainty that this was not the Authorized Version or Text, he heard himself give a grottle and a snore and knew he was fallen asleep.

He awoke to slap heartily at some flies, and the sound perhaps awoke the host, who was heard to mutter and mumble. Limekiller leaned over. "What did you say?"

The lines said, Limekiller learned that he had heard them before.

"Eef you tie ah rattlesnake doewn fah me, I weel freeg eet."

"I yield," said Limekiller, "to any man so much hornier than myself. Produce the snake, sir, and I will consider the rest of the matter."

The red eye of the expiring fire winked at him. It was still winking at him when he awoke from a horrid nightmare of screams and thrashings-about, in the course of which he had evidently fallen or had thrown him-self from the bed rack to the far side. Furthermore, he must

have knocked against one of the roof-poles in doing so, because a good deal of the thatch had landed on top of him. He threw it off, and, getting up, began to apol-ogize.

“Sorry if I woke you, Mr. Samuel. I don’t know what —” There was no answer, and looking around in the faint light of the fire, he saw no one.

“Mr. Samuel? Mr. *Samuel*? John? oh, hey, *Johhn*!?!...”

No answer. If the man had merely gone out to “ease himself,” as the Bayfolk delicately put it, he would have surely been near enough to answer. No one in the colony engaged in strolling in the bush at night for fun. “Son of a bitch,” he muttered. He felt for and found his matches, struck one, found the lamp, lit it, looked around.

There was still no sign of John Samuel, but what there were signs of was some sort of horrid violence. Hastily he ran his hands over himself, but, despite his fall, despite part of the roof having fallen on him, he found no trace of blood.

All the blood which lay around, then, must have been—could only have been—John Samuel’s blood.

All the screaming and the sounds of something—or some things—heavily thrashing around, they had not been in any dream. They had been the sounds of truth.

And as for what else he saw, as he walked, delicate as Agag, around the perimeter of the clearing, he preferred not to speculate.

There was a shotgun and there were shells. He put the shells into the chambers and he stood up, weapon in his hand, all the rest of the night.

* * * *

“Now, if it took you perhaps less than an hour to reach the shore, and if you left immediately, how is it that you were so long in arriving at Port?” The District Commissioner asked. He asked politely, but he did ask. He asked a great many questions, for, in addition to his other duties, he was the Examining Magistrate.

“Didn’t you observe the wind, D.C? Ask anyone who was out on the water yesterday. I spent most of the day tacking—”

Corporal Huggin said, softly, from the wheel, "That would be correct, Mr. Blossom."

They were in the police boat, the *George*...once, Jack had said to P.C. , Ed Huggin, "For George VI, I suppose?" and Ed, toiling over the balky and antique engine, his clear tan skin smudged with grease, had scowled, and said, "More for bloody George III, you ask *me*..." At earliest day-light, yesterday, Limekiller, red-eyed and twitching, had briefly cast around in the bush near the camp, decided that, ignorant of bush lore as he was, having not even a compass, let alone a pair of boots or a snake-bite kit, it would have been insane to attempt any explorations. He found his way along the path, found his skiff tied up, and had rowed to his boat.

Unfavorable winds had destroyed his hope of getting back to Port Cockatoo in minimum time: it had been night when he arrived.

The police had listened to his story, had summoned Mr. Florian Blossom, the District Commissioner; all had agreed that "No purpose would be served by attempting anything until next morning." They had taken his story down, word by word, and by hand—if there was an official stenographer anywhere in the country, Limekiller had yet to hear of it— and by longhand, too; and in their own accustomed style and method, too, so that he was officially recorded as having said things such as: *Awakened by loud sounds of distress, I arose and hailed the man known to me as John Samuel. Upon receiving no response, etcetera.*

After Jack had signed the statement, and stood up, thinking to return to his boat, the District Commissioner said, "I believe that they can accommodate you with a bed in the Unmarried Police Constables' Quarters, Mr. Limekiller. Just for the night."

He looked at the official. A slight shiver ran up and down him. "Do you mean that I am a prisoner?"

"Certainly not, Mr. Limekiller. No such thing."

"You know, if I had wanted to, I could have been in Republican waters by now."

Mr. Blossom's politeness never flagged. "We realize it and we take it into consideration, Mr. Limekiller. But if we are all of us here together it will make an early start in the morning more efficacious."

Anyway, Jack was able to shower, and Ed Huggins loaned him clean clothes. Of course they had not gotten an early start in the morning. Only fishermen and sandboatmen got early starts. Her Majesty's Government moved at its accustomed pace. In the police launch, besides Limekiller, was P.C. Huggin, D.C. Blossom, a very small and very black and very wiry man called Harlow the Hunter, Police Sergeant Ruiz, and white-haired Dr. Rafael, the District Medical Officer.

"I wouldn't have been able to come at all, you know," he said to Limekiller, "except my assistant has returned from his holidays a day earlier. Oh, there is so much to see in this colony! Fascinating, fascinating!"

D.C. Blossom smiled. "Doctor Rafael is a famous antiquarian, you know, Mr. Limekiller. It was he who discovered the *gravestone* of my three or four times great-grand-sir and-grandy."

Sounds of surprise and interest—polite on Limekiller's part, gravestones perhaps not being what he would have most wished to think of—genuine on the part of everyone else, ancestral stones not being numerous in British Hidalgo.

"Yes, Yes," Dr. Rafael agreed. "Two years ago I was on *my* holidays, and I went out to St. Saviour's Caye...well, to what is left of St. Saviour's Caye after the last few hurricanes. You can imagine what is left of the old settlement. Oh, the Caye is dead, it is like a skeleton, bleached and bare!" Limekiller felt he could slightly gladly have tipped the medico over the side and watched the bubbles; but, unaware, on the man went, "—so, difficult though it was making my old map agree with the present outlines, still, I did find the site of the old burial ground, and I cast about and I prodded with my iron rod, and I felt stone underneath the sand, and I dug!"

More sounds of excited interest. Digging in the sand on the bit of ravished sand and coral where the ancient settlement had been—but was no more—was certainly of more interest than digging for yams on the fertile soil of the mainland. And, even though they already knew that it was not a chest of gold, still, they listened and they murmured *oh* and *ah*. "The letters were still very clear, I had no difficulty reading them. *Sacred to the memory of Ferdinando Rousseau, a native of Guernsey, and of Marianna his Wife, a native of Mandingo, in Africa.* Plus a poem in three stanzas, of which I have deposited a copy in the National Archives, and of course I have a copy myself and a third copy I offered to old Mr. Ferdinand Rousseau in King Town—"

Smiling, Mr. Blossom asked, "And what he tell you, then, Doctor?"

Dr. Rafael's smile was a trifle rueful. "He said, 'Let the dead bury their dead'—" The others all laughed. Mr. Ferdinand Rousseau was evidently known to all of them, "—and he declined to take it. Well, I was aware that Mr. Blossom's mother was a cousin of Mr. Rousseau's mother—" ("Double-cousin," said Mr. Blossom.)

Said Mr. Blossom, "And the doctor has even been there, too, to that country. I don't mean Guernsey; in Africa, I mean; not true, Doctor?"

Up ahead, where the coast thrust itself out into the blue, blue Bay, Jack thought he saw the three isolated palms which were his landmark. But there was no hurry. He found himself unwilling to hurry anything at all.

Doctor Rafael, in whose voice only the slightest trace of alien accent still lingered, said that after leaving Vienna, he had gone to London, in London he had been offered and had accepted work in a British West African colonial medical service. "I was just a bit surprised that the old gravestone referred to Mandingo as a country, there is no such country on the maps today, but there are such a people."

"What they like, Doc-tah? What they like, thees people who dey mehk some ahv Mr. Blossom ahn-ces-tah?"

There was another chuckle. This one had slight overtones.

The DMO's round, pink face furrowed in concentration among memories a quarter of a century old. "Why," he said, "they are like elephants. They never forget."

There was a burst of laughter. Mr. Blossom laughed loudest of them all. Twenty-five years earlier he would have asked about Guernsey; today...

Harlow the Hunter, his question answered, gestured towards the shore. A slight swell had come up, the blue was flecked, with bits of white. "W'over dere, suppose to be wan ahv w'ol' Bob Blaine cahmp, in de w'ol' days."

"Filthy fellow," Dr. Rafael said, suddenly, concisely.

"Yes sah." Harlow agreed. "He was ah lewd fellow, fah true, fah true. What he use to say, he use to say, 'Eef you tie ah rattle-snehk doewn fah

me, I weel freeg eet...' "

Mr. Blossom leaned forward. "Something the matter, Mr. Limekiller?"

Mr. Limekiller did not at that moment feel like talking. Instead, he lifted his hand and pointed towards the headland with the three isolated palms.

"Cape Man'tee, Mr. Limekiller? What about it?"

Jack cleared his throat. "I thought that was farther down the coast...according to my chart..."

Ed Huggin snorted. "Chart! Washington chart copies London chart and London chart I think must copy the original *chart* made by old Cap-tain Cook. *Chart!*" He snorted again.

Mr. Florian Blossom asked, softly, "Do you recognize your landfall, Mr. Limekiller? I suppose it would not be at the cape itself, which is pure man-grove bog and does not fit the description which you gave us..."

Mr. Limekiller's eyes hugged the coast. Suppose he couldn't *find* the goddamned place? Police and Government wouldn't like that at all. Every ounce of fuel had to be accounted for. Chasing the wild goose was not approved. He might find an extension of his stay refused when next he went applying for it. He might even find himself officially listed as a Pro-scribed Person, trans.: haul ass, Jack, and don't try coming back. And he realized that he did not want that at all, at all. The whole coast looked the same to him, all of a sudden. And then, all of a sudden, it didn't...somehow. There was something about that solid-seeming mass of bush—

"I think there may be a creek. Right there."

Harlow nodded. "Yes mon. Is a creek. Right dere."

And right there, at the mouth of the creek—in this instance, meaning not a stream, but an inlet—Limekiller recognized the huge tree. And Har-low the Hunter recognized something else. "Dot mark suppose to be where Mr. Limekiller drah up the skiff."

"Best we ahl put boots *on*," said Sergeant Ruiz, who had said not a word until now. They all put boots on. Harlow shouldered an axe. Ruiz and Huggin took up machetes. Dr. Rafael had, besides his medical bag, a bun-dle of what appeared to be plastic sheets and crocus sacks. "You

doesn't mind to cahry ah shovel, Mr. Jock?" Jack decided that he could think of a number of things he had rather carry: but he took the thing. And Mr. Blossom carefully picked up an enormous camera, with tripod. The Gov-ernments of His and/or Her Majesties had never been known for throw-ing money around in these parts; the camera could hardly have dated back to George III but was certainly earlier than the latter part of the reign of George V.

"You must lead us, Mr. Limekiller." The District Commissioner was not grim. He was not smiling. He was grave.

Limekiller nodded. Climbed over the sprawling trunk of the tree. Suddenly remembered that it had been night when he had first come this way, that it had been from the other direction that he had made his way the next morning, hesitated. And then Harlow the Hunter spoke up.

"Eef you pleases, Mistah Blossom. I believes I knows dees pahth bet-tah."

And, at any rate, he knew it well enough to lead them there in less time, surely, than Jack Limekiller could have.

Blood was no longer fresh and red, but a hundred swarms of flies suddenly rose to show where the blood had been. Doctor Rafael snipped leaves, scooped up soil, deposited his take in containers.

And in regard to other evidence, whatever it was evidence of, for one thing, Mr. Blossom handed the camera over to Police Corporal Huggin, who set up his measuring tape, first along one deep depression and pho-tographed it; then along another...another...another...

"Mountain-cow," said the District Commissioner. He did not sound utterly persuaded.

Harlow shook his head. "No, Mistah Florian. No sah. No, no."

"Well, if not a tapir: what?"

Harlow shrugged.

Something heavy had been dragged through the bush. And it had been dragged by something heavier...something much, much heavier ... It was horridly hot in the bush, and every kind of "fly" seemed to be ready and waiting for them: sand-fly, bottle fly, doctor-fly. They made un-avoidable

noise, but whenever they stopped, the silence closed in on them. No wild parrot shrieked. No “baboons” rattled or growled. No warree grunted or squealed. Just the waiting silence of the bush. Not friendly. Not hostile. Just indifferent.

And when they came to the little river (afterwards, Jack could not even find it on the maps) and scanned the opposite bank and saw nothing, the District Commissioner said, “Well, Harlow. What you think?”

The wiry little man looked up and around. After a moment he nodded, plunged into the bush. A faint sound, as of someone—or of something?—Then Ed Huggin pointed. Limekiller would never even have noticed that particular tree was there; indeed, he was able to pick it out now only because a small figure was slowly but surely climbing it. The tree was tall, and it leaned at an angle—old enough to have experienced the brute force of a hurricane, strong enough to have survived, though bent.

Harlow called something Jack did not understand, but he followed the others, splashing down the shallows of the river. The river slowly became a swamp. Harlow was suddenly next to them. “Eet not fah,” he muttered.

Nor was it.

What there was of it.

An eye in a monstrously swollen head winked at them. Then an insect leisurely crawled out, flapped its horridly-damp wings in the hot and humid air, and sluggishly flew off. There was no wink. There was no eye.

“Mr. Limekiller,” said District Commissioner Blossom, “I will now ask you if you identify this body as that of the man known to you as John Samuel.”

“It’s him. Yes sir.”

But was as though the commissioner had been holding his breath and had now released it. “Well, well,” he said. “And he was supposed to have gone to Jamaica and died there. I never heard he’d come back. Well, he is dead now, for true.”

But little Doctor Rafael shook his snowy head. “He is certainly dead. And he is certainly not John Samuel.”

“Why—” Limekiller swallowed bile, pointed. “Look. The eye is

miss-ing, John Samuel lost that eye when the tree fell—”

“Ah, yes, young man. John Samuel did. *But not that eye.*”

The bush was not so silent now. Every time the masses and masses of flies were waved away, they rose, buzzing, into the heavy, squalid air. Buzzing, hovered. Buzzing, returned.

“Then who in the Hell – ?”

Harlow wiped his face on his sleeve. “Well, sah. I cahn tell you. Lord hahv mercy on heem. Eet ees Bob Blaine.”

There was a long outdrawn *ahhh* from the others. Then Ed Huggin said, “But Bob Blaine had both his eyes.”

Harlow stopped, picked a stone from the river bed, with dripping hand threw it into the bush...one would have said, at random. With an ugly croak, a buzzard burst up and away. Then Harlow said something, as true—and as dreadful—as it was unarguable. “He not hahv either of them, noew.”

* * * *

By what misadventure and in what place Bob Blaine had lost one eye whilst alive and after decamping from his native land, no one knew and perhaps it did not matter. He had trusted on “discretion” not to reveal his hideout, there at the site of his old bush-camp. But he had not trusted to it one hundred percent. Suppose that Limekiller were, deceitfully or accidentally, to let drop the fact that a man was camping out there. A man with only one eye. What was the man’s name? John Samuel. What? John *Samuel*... Ah. Then John Samuel had not, after all, died in Jamaica, ac-cording to report. Report had been known to be wrong before. John Samuel alive, then. No big thing. Nobody then would have been moved to go down there to check up.—Nobody, now, knew why Bob Blaine had returned. Perhaps he had made things too hot for himself, down in “Re-publican waters”—where hot water could be so very much hotter than back here. Perhaps some day a report would drift back up, and it might be a true report or it might be false or it might be a mixture of both.

As for the report, the official, Government one, on the circumstances surrounding the death of Roberto Blaine, a.k.a. Bob Blaine ... as for Limekiller’s statement and the statements of the District Commissioner and the District Medical Officer and the autopsy and the photographs: why, that had all been neatly transcribed and neatly (and literally) laced with red tape,

and forwarded up the coast to King Town. And as to what happened to it there—

“What do you think they will do about it, Doctor?”

Rafael's rooms were larger, perhaps, than a bachelor needed. But they were the official quarters for the DMO, and so the DMO lived in them. The wide floors gleamed with polish. The spotless walls showed, here a shield, there a paddle, a harpoon with barbed head, the carapace of a huge turtle, a few paintings. The symmetry and conventionality of it all was slightly marred by the bookcases which were everywhere, against every wall, adjacent to desk and chairs. And all were full, crammed, overflowing.

Doctor Rafael shrugged. “Perhaps the woodlice will eat the papers,” he said. “Or the roaches, or the wee-wee ants. The mildew. The damp. Hur-ricane... This is not a climate which helps preserve the history of men. I work hard to keep my own books and papers from going that way. But I am not Government, and Government lacks time and money and personnel, and...perhaps, also...Government has so many, many things pressing upon it...Perhaps, too, Government lacks interest.”

“What were those tracks, Doctor Rafael?”

Doctor Rafael shrugged.

“You do know, don't you?”

Doctor Rafael grimaced.

“Have you seen them, or anything like them, before?”

Doctor Rafael, very slowly, very slowly nodded.

“Well... for God's sake ... can you even give me a, well a *hint*? I mean: that was a rather rotten experience for me, you know. And—”

The sunlight, kept at bay outside, broke in through a crack in the jalousies, sun making the scant white hair for an instant ablaze: like the brow of Moses. Doctor Rafael got up and busied himself with a fresh lime and the sweetened lime juice and the gin and ice. He was rapt in this task, like an ancient apothecary mingling strange unguents and syrups. Then he gave one of the gimlets to his guest and from one he took a long, long pull.

“You see. I have two years to go before my retirement. The pension,

well, it is not spectacular, but I have no complaint. I will be able to rest. Not for an hour, or an evening... an evening! only on my holidays, once a year, do I even have an evening all my own!—Well. You may imagine how I look forward. And I am not going to risk premature and enforced retirement by presenting Government with an impossible situation. One which wouldn't be its fault, anyway. By insisting on impossible things. By demonstrating—"

He finished his drink. He gave Jack a long, shrewd look.

"So I have nothing more to say...about *that*. If they want to believe, up in King Town, that the abominable Bob Blaine was mauled by a crocodile, let them. If they prefer to make it a jaguar or even a tapir, why, that is fine with Robert Rafael, M.D., DMO. It might be, probably, the first time in history that anybody anywhere was killed by a tapir, but that is not my affair. The matter is, so far as I am concerned, so far—in fact—as *you* and I are concerned—over.

"Do you understand?"

Limekiller nodded. At once the older man's manner changed. "I have many, many books, as you can see. Maybe some of them would be of interest to you. Pick any one you like. Pick one at random." So saying, he took a book from his desk and put it in Jack's hands. It was just a book-looking book. It was, in fact, volume II of the Everyman edition of Plutarch's Lives. There was a wide card, of the kind on which medical notes or records are sometimes made, and so Jack Limekiller opened the book at that place.

seasons, as the gods sent them, seemed natural to him. The Greeks that inhabited Asia were very much pleased to see the great lords and governors of Persia, with all the pride, cruelty, and

"Well, now, what the Hell," he muttered. The card slipped, he clutched. He glanced at it. He put down vol. II of the Lives and he sat back and read the notes on the card.

It is in the nature of things [they began] for men, in a new country and faced with new things, to name them after old, familiar things. Even when resemblance unlikely. Example: *Mountain-cow* for tapir. ("Tapir" from Tupi Indian *tapira*, big beast.) Example: *Mawmee-apple* not apple at all. Ex.: *Sea-cow* for manatee. Early British settlers not entomologists. Quest.: Whence word *manatee*? From Carib?

Perhaps. After the British, what other people came to this corner of the world? Ans.: Black people. Calabars, Ashantee, Mantee, Mandingo. Re last two names. Related peoples. Named after totemic animal. *Also*, not likely? *likely*—named unfamiliar animals after familiar (i.e., familiar in Africa) animals. Mantee, Mantee-hippo. Refer legend.

Limekiller's mouth fell open. "Oh, my God!" he groaned. In his ear now, he heard the old, old, quavering voice of Captain Cudgel (once Cudjoe): *"Mon, een Ahfrica, dc mon-ah-tee hahv leg, I tell you. Een Ahfrica eet be ah poerful beast, come up on de land, I tell you... dc w'ol' people, dey tell me so, fah true..."*

He heard the old voice, repeating the old words, no longer even half-understood: but, in some measure, at least half-true.

Refer legend of were-animals, universal. Were-wolf, were-tiger, were-shark, were-dolphin. Quest.: Were-manatee?

"Mon-ah-tee ces hahfah mon...hahv teats like a womahn...Dere ees wahn mon, mehk mellow meet mon-ah-tee, hahv pickney by mon-ah-tee . . ."

And he heard another voice saying, not only once, saying, *"Mon, eef you tie ah rattlesnake doewn fah me, I weel freeg eet..."*

He thought of the wretched captives in the Spanish slave ship, set free to fend for themselves in a bush by far wilder than the one left behind. Few, to begin with, fewer as time went on; marrying and intermarrying, no new blood, no new thoughts. And, finally, the one road in to them, destroyed. Left alone. Left quite alone. Or...almost...

He shuddered.

How desperate for refuge must Blaine have been, to have sought to hide himself anywhere near Cape Mantee—

And what miserable happenstance had brought he himself, Jack Limekiller, to improvise on that old song that dreadful night?—And what had he called up out of the darkness...out of the bush...out of the mindless present which was the past and future and the timeless tropical forever?...

There was something pressing gently against his finger, something

on the other side of the card. He turned it over. A clipping from a magazine had been roughly pasted there.

Valentry has pointed out that, despite a seeming resemblance to such aquatic mammals as seals and walrus, the manatee is actually more closely related anatomically to the elephant.

... out of the bush ... out of the darkness ... out of the mindless pres-ent which was also the past and the timeless tropical forever...

"They are like elephants. They never forget."

"Ukh," he said, though clenched teeth. "My God. Uff. Jesus..."

The card was suddenly, swiftly, snatched from his hands. He looked up still in a state of shock, to see Doctor Rafael tearing it into pieces.

"Doña 'Sana!"

A moment. Then the housekeeper, old, all in white. "Doctor?"

"Burn this."

A moment passed. Just the two of them again. Then Rafael, in a tone which was nothing but kindly, said, "Jack, you are still young and you are still healthy. My advice to you: Go away. Go to a cooler climate. One with cooler ways and cooler memories." The old woman called something from the back of the house. The old man sighed. "It is the summons to supper," he said. "Not only must I eat in haste because I have my clinic in less than half an hour, but suddenly-invited guests make Doña 'Sana very nervous. Good night, then, Jack."

Jack had had two gin drinks. He felt that he needed two more. At least two more. Or, if not gin, rum. Beer would not do. He wanted to pull the blanket of booze over him, awfully, awfully quickly. He had this in his mind as though it were a vow as he walked up the front street towards the Cupid Club.

Someone hailed him, someone out of the gathering dusk.

'Jock! Hey, mon, Jock! Hey, b'y! Where you gweyn so fahst? Bide, b'y, bide a bit!"

The voice was familiar. It was that of Harry Hazeed, his principal creditor in King Town. Ah, well. He had had his chance, Limekiller had. He could have gone on down the coast, down into the Republican waters, where the Queen's writ runneth not. Now it was too late.

"Oh, hello, Harry," he said, dully.

Hazeed took him by the hand. Took him by both hands. "Mon, show me where is your boat? She serviceable? She is? Good: Mon, you don't hear de news: Welcome's warehouse take fire and born up! Yes, mon. Ah! de earn in King *Town* born up! No earn ah-tahl: No tortilla, no empinada, no tamale, no *carn-cake*! Oh, mon, how de people going to punish! Soon as I hear de news, I drah me money from de bonk, I buy ahl de crocus sock I can find, I jump on de pocket-*boat*—and here I am, oh, mon, I pray fah you ... I pray I fine you!"

Limekiller shook his head. It had been one daze, one shock after another. The only thing clear was that Harry Hazeed didn't seem angry. "You no understand?" Hazeed cried. "Mon! We going take your boat, we going do down to Nutmeg P'int, we going to buy carn, mon! We going to buy ahl de carn dere is to buy! Nevah mine dat lee' bit money you di owe me, b'y! We going make plenty money, mon! And we going make de cultivators plenty money, too! What you theenk of eet, Jock, me b'y? Eh? Hey? What you theenk?"

Jack put his forefinger in his mouth, held it up. The wind was in the right quarter. The wind would, if it held up, and, somehow, it felt like a wind which would hold up, the wind would carry them straight and clear to Nutmeg Point: the clear, clean wind in the clear and starry night.

Softly, he said—and, old Hazeed leaning closer to make the words out, Limekiller said them again, louder, "I think it's great. Just great. I think it's great."

* * * *