



***The Pirate's Daughter* by Margaret Cezair-Thompson**

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I

Of his early life and motive for turning pirate we are as yet ignorant. He declared himself an Irishman by birth, but his real name and place of nativity was, he said, a secret he would never disclose. To the windward of Jamaica his ship ran afoul.

T R E A S U R E C O V E

s h i p w r e c k e d

IF HER FATHER HAD NOT BEEN a justice of the peace, Ida might never have come to know the movie star.

On a sunny morning in 1946, Ida Joseph stood outside her house in Port Antonio, leaning against her father's car. She was glad to be thirteen because it meant the end of childhood and the beginning of womanly responsibilities like picking out her own shoes. Her shoes that day were white and went well, she thought, with her pink-and-white dress. It was good to be outside after three days of rain. Looking around, she saw no sign of the bad weather. The ground was dry. The early sun revealed a patch of mountainside and warmed the car behind her.

The street she lived on, Plumbago Road, was in the hilly part of the town, foothills of the Blue Mountains. From where she stood she could see the sea. Any minute now the ship would appear on the horizon. It was Saturday and that meant she would drive down to the harbor with her father.

Eli Joseph wasn't paid for his services as a justice of the peace. He earned a living operating a small taxi business. There were two taxis: a hired man drove the old gray Morris, and Mr. Joseph drove the black Chrysler that Ida now leaned against. Most Saturdays she would go with him, first to the courthouse to see if anyone needed him to notarize documents. After that they made a few stops, maybe at the pharmacy or the Cricket Oval. Then they would drive to the harbor to pick up passengers.

When the United Fruit Company ships arrived, all the life of Port Antonio drew to the harbor. They were huge, sleek ships, part of the company's Great White Fleet, and they impressed Ida. Her father, who often went aboard, told her that above deck was "luxury, pure luxury," with air-conditioned lounges and spacious rooms for the American passengers. Below deck, the real business of the vessel took place: bananas—thousands of them, loaded into the refrigerated holds for the ship's return voyage to America. The loading of bananas always took place at night. During the daytime bustle of arriving and departing tourists, the banana workers were practically invisible. Instead, there would be cart men selling coconut water and souvenirs, straw weavers with jipijapa hats, calypso singers with maracas and guitars; the crazy man who called himself King George the Fifth would be there too, and taxi drivers would guide the passengers through the crowd.

"Ida!" she heard her mother calling from inside the house.

Ida turned to face the car window, where, after a quick approval of her reflection, she took in the beige seats of the Chrysler. It was a big car with room for four passengers in the back. One of the things she liked best about driving in the taxi was the way the foreigners smelled. She wasn't sure what it was exactly—it

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wasn't on them; it was around them and around their luggage as if they'd brought some of the foreign air with them.

It was unusual for a man like Eli Joseph—a white man and a Syrian—to drive a taxi. He was actually Lebanese, but in Jamaica they were all called Syrians: the Jews, Lebanese, Arabs, and actual Syrians who had come to Jamaica and made fortunes, all of them except Eli Joseph. A man of great ideas, he was often heard saying, “If I could just raise enough capital.”

He was considered a “character,” not so much by the people of Port Antonio as by his family in Kingston, the wealthy Joseph-Hanna clan who owned the beer and soda business. To the black people of Port Antonio, the fact that he was a Joseph, a white man, and a justice of the peace guaranteed him a certain amount of respect; that he played dominoes and drank rum with them earned him their affection.

“Ida! You don't hear me callin' an' callin'?”

Her mother, Esme, had come outside.

For a moment the mother and the daughter stood and eyed one another.

Esme was a stout black woman whose overweight body moved with surprising grace. She had small Chinese eyes and a saintly expression that concealed how strict a parent she was. Her daughter looked as if she belonged to a different race: fair-skinned with long black hair pulled back from her forehead with a tortoiseshell bandeau. Her dark eyebrows drew attention to large, expressive eyes. It was hard to describe her as anything but beautiful. But Esme, who did not want her to grow up vain and stupid, made little of her daughter's good looks.

“You out here idlin' while you father waitin' for the newspaper?”

Ida had forgotten that this was why she had come outside. She picked up the *Daily Gleaner* and walked up the paved path between the gate and the trellised veranda. There was a row of conch shells on either side of the path. Her grandmother, who had put them there, said conch shells protected homes from natural disasters. They were pretty. The little garden was pretty too but crowded; her mother worked hard to contain the lush flowers in the small space—bird-of-paradise, heliconia, bougainvillea, and tree-orchids—vibrant things that clawed, latched, and climbed if they were not constantly pruned.

Inside, the house smelled of buttered toast. It was a shining, clean house with furniture that was too large for the rooms.

Her mother looked at her and frowned. “Why you let out you hair? Go plait it,” she said and went into the kitchen.

Ida's father was drinking his coffee and listening to the radio. He took the newspaper from her, not seeming the least bit annoyed about having waited. He was a slender, unmuscular man, with deeply tanned skin that sometimes led people to think he was Indian. Like his daughter, he had large, dark eyes, and he had long eyelashes that might have made him look effeminate if he hadn't had such a wide, square jaw.

He was still wearing just his undershirt, and Ida could see the gold Virgin Mary pendant he always wore.

“Eh-eh, Ida. Look here,” he said, opening the paper. “Errol Flynn is in Jamaica.”

She looked over his shoulder and saw a picture of a man with wavy hair and a sword. She read:

W O R L D ' S H A N D S O M E S T M A N I S H E R E
Actor Errol Flynn Arrives in Jamaica Unexpectedly

“He’s a big movie star,” her father explained.

Ida had seen only one movie, *Tarzan the Ape Man*, when someone had donated a projector to Father Reynold’s school down the road.

Eli called to Esme back in the kitchen, “You hear that, Esme? Errol Flynn in Jamaica!”

Flynn leaned against the railing of the hotel balcony, letting the sights and sounds of the tropical morning minister to him. The sun warmed his face and the green hills unrolled before him to a bright and tranquil sea.

He was almost forty and looked all right, he thought, in spite of the extra pounds around his waist. Yes, he looked all right but felt like a man who’d reached the end rather than the prime of his life. If only it worked like a sandglass—life, the accumulating years—now would be the time, he thought, to turn the whole thing upside down.

He’d made more than twenty films and was proud of only one, *Gentleman Jim*. His second marriage was doomed, just as his first had been. He had a son and two daughters he never saw; in fact, he had no idea where they were. And he’d been tried for rape! The statutory rape of two girls he swore he’d never even seen before they appeared in the courtroom. He’d been acquitted on all counts, but the long, highly publicized trial had dragged him through a stench that still lingered. How had he, Errol Leslie Thompson Flynn—son of the respected zoologist Professor Thompson Flynn—gotten himself so deep in the muck? He wouldn’t have known what to do with himself if it hadn’t been for the *Zaca*, his schooner. Its name was a Samoan word for “peace.”

In an earlier century he would have been an explorer, he thought, like Magellan. Maybe a poet too. He’d always loved the sea, dreamed of a life at sea, and often felt nostalgic about his childhood on Tasmania’s coast (darting in and out of the marine lab where his father had studied the platypus—an animal without a scrotum!).

A month after the trial, he’d set sail with his man Ramon, a first-class Mexican sailor, steering the *Zaca* through the Panama Canal, heading for Haiti.

At night watch he’d lain on his back on deck, looking at the stars, feeling like a weightless speck on the planet, or a kind of deviant Ulysses willing to sail anywhere but home. His house on Mulholland Drive was about as appealing to him as a pile of unread newspapers. Good Lord, anywhere but home.

One night during his watch the air grew unusually still. The next day the sky turned red like a puffy wound. The barometer fell. The radio signals went. Then the hurricane winds hit suddenly, unlike anything he’d ever seen or heard, ripping the storm sail. They’d put out the heavy anchors but even then the boat had skittered across the water. Then the galley put out, washing away all their supplies, their maps and passports.

There’d been hours when he hadn’t been able to distinguish between the elements—black sky, black water. Strangely, the thought of death hadn’t crossed his mind. Death wasn’t action, and this was action:

straining muscles and nerves. It had revived him. Yes, it had taken a hurricane to lift him out of his middle-aged slump.

The storm passed quickly, but for two days they'd drifted in a shark-filled sea with no radio, no supplies, and no idea where they were.

Then he saw a body of land in the distance, a hazy outline of mountains against the sky. They drifted toward it, almost running aground at a small desert island along the way. It was another hour before the current pushed them close enough for him to make out a harbor town nestled below the most serene mountains he'd ever seen.

As he got closer, he grew puzzled. He knew he'd never been to the place before, but there was something familiar about it, especially the stone fort at the edge of the water with its black cannons pointing to sea.

There were some boys sitting along the fort's wall watching the *Zaca* drift in.

"What is this country?" Flynn shouted across to them.

"Jamaica."

He laughed. Jamaica!

"Onward to Jamaica and to victory!" had been his battle cry on the set of *Captain Blood*. His first leading role, it had made him a star. Of course, the whole thing had been filmed at the studio, not on location, but hadn't he defeated a Spanish fleet here—not once but twice—and saved the island? And won Olivia de Havilland's admiration to boot?

Some fishermen towed the boat in. They seemed unfriendly, and particularly suspicious of Ramon, whom they mistook to be Cuban. "Cubana? Turtle? Tortuga?" they kept asking Ramon, who looked at them, baffled.

Flynn saw a sign that said, "Welcome to Port Antonio." A coastguard officer led them to a small wooden office that looked like an army barrack. Like the fishermen, he seemed agitated by Ramon's presence. Later Flynn learned that there'd been trouble with Cuban fishermen stealing sea turtles from Jamaican waters.

The coastguard officer telephoned his superior: "I have a Cuban here, sir, and he's with an American named Earl Flint. What should I do, sir?"

Flynn found a scrap of paper and wrote out his correct name, and the man spelled it out over the phone. "Awright, sir, yes."

Flynn looked around. The boys who had been sitting on the seawall had gathered outside and were peeking in the doorway. No one seemed to know who he was. For a moment he had an odd feeling, like a man suddenly aware of himself dying, that something real and unfilmable was happening to him.

"Police car comin' to take you to Kingston," the coastguard officer said.

Flynn asked if he and Ramon could have something to eat, and they were taken to a cart man selling food and soft drinks along the pier.

And it was there, out on the pier, that he was recognized by the Indian ladies selling bangles and khus-khus perfume. The usually demure sari-clad ladies became agitated. One of them ran down the pier shouting, "Errol Flynn...oh, God!"

Soon there was a small crowd around him—tourists and Jamaicans, including the previously

distrustful fishermen. The harbor's infirmary nurse appeared because in the commotion someone either fainted or fell. The coastguard officer was overwhelmed as the crowd started getting bigger. Finally the police jeep arrived; Flynn and Ramon were given raisin buns and sodas and taken to Kingston.

The evening *Star* reported:

F L Y N N ' S F A N S F A I N T
Women Fall Unconscious at Movie Star's Feet

It was not the sari-clad ladies who had fainted, and actually, the report was wrong: only one woman fainted, an English tourist buying straw baskets. She looked up when she heard the commotion and saw him—disheveled, unshaven, but unmistakably her matinee idol. (“Chu!” Esme said when Eli read this out loud, “it was probably the heat why she fainted.” “No man, is how the women go on when they see him,” Eli said.) After this report in the *Star*, fainting became epidemic among the young women of the island whenever they glimpsed Errol Flynn, or thought they had. Some pretended to faint so they could say they had seen him.

Ida and her father visited the harbor to look at Errol Flynn's wrecked boat.

“If his boat is here, he must come back for it sooner or later,” Eli said.

A policeman was guarding the *Zaca*. He seemed disgruntled, and Ida could see why. He'd enjoyed some fame after appearing in a newspaper picture guarding Flynn's damaged boat from onlookers. Now, a week later, people had lost interest in the wreck, and he had nothing to do but sit all day, waving away flies.

All the attention had turned to Kingston, where Flynn was being royally entertained and courted by the country's richest families. He stayed in their mansions. The British High Commissioner had a dinner in his honor. He had numerous invitations and met with all kinds of Jamaicans—radio-show hosts, the Jamaica Nurses Association. People sent him baskets of tropical fruit, rum, and native artwork. The admiration was not one-sided. Flynn told reporters, “Jamaica's more beautiful than any woman I've ever known.”

A wealthy Jamaican named Aaron Levy invited him to stay at his beach hotel in Ocho Rios. As Flynn was being driven across the island to Levy's hotel, he was aware of a lightheartedness he hadn't felt in ages. Jamaica reminded him of the most enjoyable years of his life, the carefree, spirited years he'd spent in the South Seas before he'd become an actor. It occurred to him as he drove through the mountains, looking out on a landscape so rampantly green that the soil never showed, that he could be happy again. Here was every thing he wanted: warm climate, wonderful food, deep-sea diving, sailing, peaceful countryside—and the people spoke English. He'd spend four or five months of the year here. It would restore him.

“This must be the Paradise written about in the Bible,” he said on a local radio show.

These words of appreciation delighted every one and were quoted in local newspapers, living rooms, and tenement yards. “Flynn Fever” broke out, as one newspaper put it. **FLYNN FANS**

FRACAS, another headline stated, describing the disorder that broke out at a cinema during a showing of *Objective Burma* when members of the audience thought they saw Errol Flynn sitting among them. The article was written by the same reporter who had devised the erroneous headline **FLYNN'S FANS FAINT**. Another of his headlines, in fact his last on the subject, was:

F L Y N N F A N F A L L S D E A D

An elderly female died of an apparent heart-attack as she walked out of the Cross Roads post office around 2 p.m. yesterday. Bystanders claim that they saw a vehicle with someone who looked like Errol Flynn going by. The Chief-of-Police issued a statement saying: "There seems to be no relation between the two incidents."

But there was still the problem of Flynn's passport having been lost at sea. Ramon, who had gone ahead to America, had experienced trouble getting back into the country without identification. The World's Handsomest Man actually had no proof that he was Errol Flynn. His wife in California sent him the only identification she could dig up, a copy of their marriage certificate. But since it was only a copy, he needed to have it notarized.

Aaron Levy remembered that his cousin, Eli Joseph, was a justice of the peace. Port Antonio was forty miles away, and Levy could easily have gotten someone closer to notarize the copy, but this way, he thought, Flynn would be able to see how the repairs were going on his boat, and Port Antonio would make a pleasant day trip for the movie star. "Eli's a bit of a character," Levy told Flynn, "but he'll take good care of you and show you 'round."

Out on the hotel balcony now, Flynn looked at his watch. It was time to get ready. He looked forward to checking up on the *Zaca* and to once again seeing Port Antonio, the little town where he'd come ashore after the sea-storm.

2

day trip

Ida was vexed. She had picked out her best dress, certain she was going with her father, but her mother had shaken her head: “You forget what day it is? You comin’ with me.”

Yes, she had forgotten. On the first Saturday of each month she always went with her mother to see Oni, her grandmother, who lived way up in the Blue Mountains—up in the bush, as Ida thought of it.

Her father had tried to reassure her: the movie star would be in town all day. “When you come back, I take you to see him. Or maybe I bring him ’round to the house later.”

“Errol Flynn comin’ to this house?” Esme wanted to know.

“Maybe.”

Esme didn’t think so. “You father dreamin’,” she told Ida.

Later Eli told his daughter in confidence, “You mother not feelin’ well enough to go up the mountain by herself.”

So why she don’t stay home then if she not feelin’ well? Ida thought.

She was outside now, leaning back against her father’s car, as if stationing herself there would somehow help her cause. She hated going up the mountain even under ordinary circumstances; it was a long journey by bus and by foot.

“Ida,” she heard her mother calling from the house.

She spun around like a compass arrow and faced the harbor. A ship had come in and she was going to miss that too.

Her father was inside getting dressed in his white suit and Panama hat. She thought about her dress, white with red flowers and a red belt, spread out on the bed in her room. Well, she would wear it later. Her mother was inside getting ready too, packing a basket of things for Oni—talcum powder, batteries, Mills & Boon novels, things Oni could n’t get up on the mountain. *Why I have to go with her? If she wan’ go bush, she can go by herself.*

“You ready?” Esme came out on the veranda, wearing the sensible, mannish shoes she always wore for such outings. She swept her eyes over her daughter approvingly, noting that Ida had remembered to carry a handkerchief.

Ida, watching her mother fold her own handkerchief and slide it under her brassiere strap, was immensely annoyed to see that their handkerchiefs were identical—white linen with tatting around the edges. *I’m not like her*, she thought.

“Go inside an’ tell you father good-bye.”

Eli Joseph saw the displeasure on his daughter’s face. It was unfortunate that she had to go with

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her mother, but there was nothing he could do about it.

No one was exactly sure what was wrong with Esme. For almost a year now she had complained about not feeling well. She was often tired and had stomachaches. Much worse, however, was the change in her personality: she had become quarrelsome.

“Mountain air do you good,” he said to his daughter.

They heard Esme calling. Ida looked as if she were about to cry.

“You have on you watch?” he asked; he had given her a silver watch that past Christmas. “Come back by sundown, I take you to meet him. Go now, before you mother get vex.”

Their hankies were scented with cologne so that whenever the smell of the bus became unbearable they could cover their noses and sniff politely. No matter how crowded the bus was, Esme always managed to wedge herself and Ida into a seat. The size of Esme’s hips made this quite a feat. People gave them bad looks, but Esme paid no mind.

Ida drew in her shoulders and huddled between her mother and another woman like an animal in an undersized cage. She didn’t want anyone or anything to touch her. It was market day, so there were chickens on the bus and big smelly parcels and baskets underfoot. She could not believe she was on this stinking, overcrowded bus instead of in her father’s clean Chrysler.

The bus dragged along Harbor Street, past the old trellised houses from centuries earlier, most of them dilapidated, some of them repainted bright pink or yellow like old ladies trying to look young. Large shady trees stood in the front gardens, mosses hanging from them like beards, creating a gray-green, cavernous loveliness. At the end of the street were the windswept cannons of Fort George and then the sea. Ida saw some tourists taking pictures.

This was the oldest part of town, built on a hilly peninsula that split the coast in two—on one side West Harbor and on the other East Harbor. She wondered what Errol Flynn would think of the place—the old Anglican church overlooking the sea, the market, smelling of dried thyme and fruit and noisy with market women. The bus drove by the old brick courthouse where wig-wearing English magistrates had once tried and condemned pirates; that was where the movie star would meet her father later that morning.

She imagined that Flynn would want to know the history of the town. Eli Joseph would be able to tell him. “Lord Nelson,” her father would say, “defended the colony here at Fort George.” And he’d go on to tell his favorite story—the history of the banana.

“You might not know this, but in America ripe bananas used to be a rarity. You could n’t buy them in the shops.” She’d heard him tell this to the tourists countless times. “But that changed in 1871 when a Boston skipper named Lorenzo Dow Baker was sent here to pick up a cargo of coconuts. He saw the locals growing bananas, so on a whim, you know, just a whim, he decided to take back a few hundred stems of bananas too. He made such a profit on them in Boston that he kept coming back to Port Antonio for more. His shipping business grew and became the United Fruit Company. Yes, man, it started here! Ripe bananas! And tourism!”

Lorenzo Dow Baker had come up with the idea of bringing passengers to Port Antonio on the banana boats, and he had built the Somerset, Jamaica’s first hotel. In recent years, though, fewer ships

had been coming. Costa Rica had taken over the banana trade, and there were bigger hotels for the tourists now in Montego Bay and Kingston.

From postcards, Ida had an idea of what foreigners liked about Jamaica: waterfalls cascading to the sea, beautiful old buildings, and tropical flowers. These things filled her with pride. But half-naked children standing around the old clock tower did not seem a good way to show off the island. She had even seen a postcard showing an overcrowded country bus like the one she was on. She would hate to see herself in such a picture.

The bus began its climb into the rain-scented mountains, farther and farther away from Port Antonio. Ida looked at her watch. It was not quite ten o'clock. Her father was right; she would be back in plenty of time.

Her grandmother, Oni, lived about as high in the Blue Mountains as anyone could. Oni was a Maroon, a descendant of the African runaway slaves who had long ago hidden in these mountains. But Oni hadn't always lived up in the bush. She had once been married to a Chinese grocer and had lived on a large property she'd inherited from her parents near Port Antonio. But after her husband had left her for a Panama woman, she'd sold the land to the United Fruit Company ("for a whole heap a money," Ida's father said) and gone to live in the old Maroon settlement up in these mountains.

The bus took them only halfway. Esme and Ida got out at a place known as Guava Ridge. There were no sidewalks, so when the occasional vehicle came by they had to step back close to the mountain edge so as not to get run over. Mountains and shadows of mountains surrounded them. A bit of corrugated tin roof could be spotted here and there in the leafy thickness.

It was there, in that green desolation, that they waited for Mr. Brown and his donkey cart to come along and take them up the steep path to Oni. They never knew for certain when he would arrive.

Across the miles of undulating green, Ida could still make out the sea as a distant, vapory thing.

She imagined her father on his way to the courthouse by now. There were always people stopping to chat with him or ask a favor of him along the way. When she was with him people paid her compliments—"How pretty you growin', Miss Ida"—"What a nice daughter you have there, Mr. Joseph"—and so on. Even the poorest people who had no schooling would try to use their best English when they spoke to her: it made her feel important.

"Ida! Come out a de road! All day you actin' stupid," Esme said.

"I not in the road. I'm on the side of the road!"

"You answerin' me back?"

"No, Mama," she said quietly.

The odor given off by the damp tree trunks began to sicken her. Ida looked at her watch. An hour had passed as they stood there. She began to panic. It seemed as if she would be stranded up there in the bush with her mother.

"Lawd, it hot," Esme murmured.

Ida saw her mother wipe perspiration from her neck.

Though Ida could not have been more annoyed with Esme for dragging her up the mountain, she was also worried about her. Her mother was not all right, and this "not feeling well" was part of something else, Ida thought, something bigger.

It seemed to Ida that it had started around the time the two strange women had come to the house.

She and her mother had returned from the mountain one Saturday and found them sitting on the veranda with Eli. They had been strangers to Ida, but her mother had known immediately who they were.

“Ida Delores,” she had said Ida’s whole name, which she sometimes did when she was displeased, “these are your sisters, Enid and Kay.”

Ida’s first thought was that they seemed too old to be sisters of hers, and then she remembered something about her father having been married before to a Lebanese woman. But she’d thought that that wife was dead or in another country and anyway it had been a long time ago. The sisters, it turned out, were from Kingston. They wore a lot of gold jewelry and had bad yellowish complexions. One of them was plump and quiet; the other one wore glasses and was thin and talkative. They had wanted Eli to go back to Kingston with them, and the thin one with glasses said something unpleasant about Ida: “She looks like she could be any white man’s daughter.”

There had been a quarrel, loud and frightening, with Eli threatening to turn the dog on them if they didn’t leave. The neighbors had come out of their houses to see what was wrong, and Ida had run across the street for Father Reynold, who had calmed every one down.

After the sisters left, Father Reynold and Eli stayed up for hours playing dominoes and chatting. The two men had become friends long before Anthony Reynold had entered the priesthood, when he’d been an itinerant calypso singer known as King Tobago. That night Ida overheard Father Reynold telling her father: “In God’s eyes, Eli, you are Esme’s husband, and that is more important than any marriage license.” He spoke in a slow, lilting way, partly because he was Trinidadian and partly because his full attention was on the dominoes in his hand.

“Esme want license,” Eli said. “She don’t like this common-law thing and I see her point. Is for Ida’s sake.”

“When water throw ’way, it cyan pick up again. Wife number one not goin’ divorce you, so what you goin’ do?”

“If de bitch-dem come back, I kill dem.”

Until that day, Ida had not known that her father and mother were unmarried and that her father had a wife who lived in Kingston.

After that, Ida began to understand certain things about her mother: why she often had such a severe, strained way about her in public, why some of the ladies in town talked down to her, and why there were places that Eli went without her. Esme, though she tried not to show it, was ashamed of being Eli Joseph’s common-law wife. She was a Christian and the proud daughter of Mrs. Oni Sen-Choy. After the disturbance on the veranda that the neighbors witnessed, Esme’s shame had grown.

She saw her mother tucking the handkerchief back inside her blouse and heard her sigh tiredly.

“Maybe something happened to Mr. Brown,” Ida said hopefully.

She was about to suggest that they return to Port Antonio on the next available bus or truck that

came by. It was almost twelve o'clock. Just then Mr. Brown's donkey cart arrived and the old man greeted them: "Hello-good-mawnin'. How you feelin' today, Miss Esme?"

"Not so well, but I managin'."

Esme always had "a little something" for him, a cake or pudding, along with the shilling that she paid him for transportation, and while they rode in the cart she chatted with him about his health and family. They passed his cottage, where there were children and cooking pots scattered about the yard. The children stopped playing and stared as they went by. There was also a gray goat tethered to a tree, happily chewing something.

"What a nice goat you have there," Esme told Mr. Brown.

Ida could not believe how slowly they were moving. At times it seemed as if they weren't moving at all. The path was so steep, the donkey kept stopping and the whole cart would slide back a little. She was glad to be far from the road, where no one would be able to see her bumping along in the back of a donkey cart. It was horrible at the age of thirteen to be transported like that, with her legs hanging off the edge and having to hold on to the jiggling sides of the cart.

The jangling of the silver bangles on her arm distracted her pleasantly for a moment and brought her father to mind. She could not wait for this ordeal to be over so she could be with him and the movie star.

As Eli had told his daughter, he had a lot planned for Errol Flynn and himself that day. Once the important business of notarizing the certificate was over, he took Flynn, whom he now felt entitled to call Errol, out for lunch at the Somerset and offered to drive him around the region. Eli didn't forget about Ida: "My daughter wants to meet you," he said, "if you have time later...."

Errol sat in the front of the car, wearing all his usual accessories of disguise, sunglasses and the rest. No one expected a movie star to sit up front with the driver, and he'd found that by doing so he attracted less attention.

The more he saw of Port Antonio that day, the more he liked it. The banana industry was waning. The town was in decline, but because of that, it would offer him privacy. Also, the deep harbor was perfect for the *Zaca*. He decided to stay for a couple of days and look around at some available properties.

Eli had been thinking about venturing into real estate. So he told Flynn—Errol, "I'm in the real estate business, you know. I can find you a good piece a land."

The two men liked each other immediately. Errol found the black Chrysler extremely comfortable and thought Eli an agreeable, pleasant man to talk to. He appreciated Eli's generosity (Eli had paid for lunch and several rum cocktails). It seemed to Flynn that back in America people always wanted something from him. The kindness of Jamaicans made him feel almost humble.

As they drove around the region, stopping several times for rum-and-Cokes and spicy snacks, he found himself confiding in Eli: his second marriage was coming apart; his first wife was a financial strain. "She won't stop till I'm in the poorhouse," Errol said.

“I know, I know all about that,” Eli sympathized. “That song, you know the one—‘Love and marriage go together like a horse and carriage’—not true at all! Only woman I ever love is Esme an’ she not me legal wife. The legal wife turned out to be a curse, I tell you.”

“A curse!” He liked the way Eli put it. “I just don’t think I was made for marriage. I’m forever drifting about and Nina’s over there in a house I never really lived in.”

“A bad marriage is worse than a hanging.”

“You’re absolutely right. It’s like waiting to be hanged.”

Oni’s wood-and-zinc-roof cottage had a fenced garden where she grew plants for bush-medicine. People for miles around knew her as Madda Oni, a bush-doctor and obeah woman; she could cure sicknesses, catch shadows, and predict the future

“Hello, likkle mongoose,” Oni greeted Ida at the gate. She pinched her cheek vigorously. “Wait! Are you a mongoose or a girl?”

It was a game they had played for as long as Ida could remember.

“A girl,” Ida said.

“A girl! Come, then. Me have some sweet-sweet asham for you.”

She was dark-skinned and muscular, with bowlegs which Ida always found fascinating to watch because they didn’t seem to prevent her from walking fast. Her eyes were a lot lighter than her skin, and those jaguar eyes made her seem a bit frightening. Ida tried not to look at her grandmother’s eyes. She stared instead at the raised moles on her neck that looked like ants.

“Come-come. Lunch ready. Miss Ida, you so vex this morning you no eat you breakfast. A true?” Oni didn’t wait for an answer. She knew she was right. Then she turned to Esme: “I t’ink you not comin’ again. All morning I waitin’ an’ waitin’.”

“Mr. Brown tek time comin’.”

“I tell him eleven o’clock.”

“Him slow like slow-self.”

“How you feelin’?”

“Not feelin’ so well.”

Inside the cottage was a strange mixture of old plantation furnishings and greasy, painted-over things. On the bureau there was a cluttered assortment of bottles, tins, and jars, some of them filled with mysterious-looking liquids and dried bushes, and above that was a large tarnished mirror which Ida always found quite unsatisfactory.

The place smelled the way Ida imagined an African hut would smell, with drying leaves and straw baskets filled with yams and plantains. Now and then the outside smell of the chickens drifted into the cottage. She knew that her own mother must have grown up with these objects and smells, and the knowledge made her uneasy. There was nothing here that she wanted.

As Oni was serving out the callaloo soup, she suddenly looked at Esme and asked, “How is Eli? Him all right?”

Esme didn't like the tone of her mother's question. "Eli is fine." It was clear to her that what Oni really meant was: *how are things between you and Eli?*

When Oni had learned of the incident with the Kingston sisters and the distress they'd caused Esme, she'd made one of her rare trips down the mountain to check on her. As she'd suspected, she'd found evidence of obeah: one of Esme's combs was missing, and there was an unusual, greasy substance on one of the windowsills—oil-a-fall-back. She had wanted to perform a shadow-catching ceremony, but Esme, a serious Methodist, had refused. Esme had no tolerance for her mother's African mumby-jumby. Bush-teas and bush-baths were all right; that was medicine. But the oils, potions, spells, and ceremonies of obeah were to her like blisters on her mother's soul. She wanted no part of it.

Oni continued as though she hadn't heard, "You sure? Last night a bat come in de house. An' all day long me hand-middle itchin' me."

Ida understood that when her grandmother spoke of bats she meant the big moths that were thought to be spirits of the dead. And when Oni's palms itched it was always a bad sign.

Esme's face tightened, but Ida could n't tell if it was from fear or anger.

"Nothing wrong with Eli. Everybody is fine," Esme said firmly.

By the time lunch ended, Esme had become agitated by Oni's talk of bats; she washed up the dishes with a kind of vigor that suggested she was eager to leave soon. Ida was glad. It was already after one o'clock.

But then the two women sat on the veranda for ages drinking pimento dram and chatting amiably. Esme even put her feet up. But Ida took comfort in the fact that her mother hadn't rolled her stockings down as she sometimes did when she was tired.

"Mama, remember you told Mr. Brown to pick us up at two?"

"He don't mind waitin'."

Oni said, "Come sit with us, Miss Ida, have some pimento dram."

"She too young," Esme said firmly. Oni was always offering Ida things like rum punch and pimento dram. She was one of those older West Indians who believed that a drop or two of "spirits" was fortifying.

Ida said, "I goin' for a ride before we go."

"Awright, don't ride too far," her grandmother said. "Mankind goin' blind."

Mankind was Oni's horse. Before Ida had learned to walk, Oni had put her on the horse, and at six Ida was riding on her own. Esme had worried constantly that Ida would fall off. "She too likkle," she would say to Oni.

"She likkle but she not afraid," Oni would point out. "Chu, man, look how she sit up high. She understan' de horse."

Ida pressed her cheek against the horse's face now, greeting him. She didn't like animals in general and was even uncomfortable around her father's dog, Rex. But horses were different. She rode across the river to an outcropping. The air felt cool, and there was a view of the coast. From these heights, the whole country, even the clouds, seemed to belong to her. Peppering all her thoughts and every thing within view that day was the image of the movie star from the newspaper.

She wondered what her father and Errol Flynn were doing: driv ing around and laughing and

telling stories about themselves. She was sure that Errol Flynn would like her father. Eli had been to many places and had a lot of stories to tell. “My two brothers and I,” he’d say, “when we were boys in Lebanon, we worked on the docks loading cloves onto the ships. We were so poor we used to suck the seeds people would throw out in the garbage. You can imagine that? We wanted bad-bad to go to Marseilles. Thatwhere the spices were being shipped to. But we realized we’d never save enough for the passage, so one day we hid in the cloves.” From France his brothers had gone on to the West Indies, while Eli had stayed in Europe. Then he went to Venezuela, where he started a parrot-exporting business (it was in Venezuela that he’d met Anthony Reynold, otherwise known as King Tobago). When the parrot enterprise failed, he joined his brothers in Kingston but found the beer and soda business uninspiring, so he’d moved to the north coast, where he’d met Esme.

Often after a day of driving he’d take Ida to the Somerset for a sherbet. She’d sit by the hotel bar overlooking the swimming pool and listen to him talking to the tourists. He would speak knowledgeably about many places. “You from Brighton? I know Brighton,” he’d say. Then at some point he’d begin describing the beautiful spots in Jamaica. “I can arrange a tour for you,” he’d say, and he’d write, “E. Joseph Transportation Co.” and the phone number on a slip of paper.

The Somerset. That was probably where her father would take her later. She imagined herself sitting at a poolside table with him and the movie star. She would talk to Errol Flynn, who would smile and say something very nice to her. The poor, dark image from the newspaper was all she had, and it had been grafted onto her young imagination. It would be a fine thing to meet him. That she would be one of the few people in Port Antonio to do so fit the regal idea she had of herself.

She rode back to Oni’s. If her mother wasn’t ready to leave yet, she must make her ready.

When she got back, she saw that Esme had rolled down her stockings and that both she and Oni were reading Mills & Boon novels. They didn’t even look up at her.

Ida sat on the veranda steps and exhaled loudly.

“Patience,” her mother said without taking her eyes from the book. “I jus’ restin’ me foot-bottom a while.”

Ida looked at her watch. It was after three. She had to do something.

“Madda Oni, you can tell me my future?” she asked.

Oni put down her book. “I glad you ask. I was thinkin’ to meself—‘I wonder if the bat come here to tell Ida something.’ Wait here, I soon come.”

She went inside to get the calabash that she used for divination and for mediating between the spirits and the living.

The last time Oni had looked into Ida’s future she’d seen her wearing a crown of diamonds. She’d also warned Ida about pirates. An enormous moth had arrived at Oni’s cottage that time too, and Oni had said it was the spirit of her great-grandmother’s sister, Ufuma, who had been captured by pirates during the old slavery days. The pirates were coming back and Ida had to be careful. *Wear silver, not gold. Gold will poison you.* Oni had given her a juju doll for protection and advised her to learn how to swim. Between the juju doll and poison-gold and pirates, Ida’s mother had been so mad that day, she’d sworn she’d never go back up the mountain again.

As Ida had hoped, Esme stopped reading and looked at her watch. “Is what o’clock? Eh-eh, Mr. Brown must be waitin’ all this time.”

Oni came back onto the veranda with the calabash. Esme told her, “We don’t have time for no future today.”

Oni protested, but Esme was adamant.

“Come, Ida,” Esme said, rolling her stockings back up and putting on the big country shoes. “We need to reach home before dark.”

The two men sat talking in Eli’s favorite rum shop. Errol Flynn was as drunk as a man could be without falling over. Eli was merely tipsy. No matter how much Eli drank, he never got fall-down drunk. He had a theory about it: the eight teen-karat gold Virgin Mary medallion absorbed the heat of the liquor, keeping his internal organs cool.

The rum shop, a one-room establishment with dark concrete walls and a corrugated zinc roof, stood alone in the mountains above Port Antonio. Through the open doorway Errol had a wide view of the town and the sea. There was only room for two small tables and a bar with unlit Christmas lights strung across it, but no bar stools. The cooking outside smelled wonderful to Errol: chopped-up pork, peppery and highly seasoned, and roasted breadfruit. He’d already had a plateful and was thinking about ordering some more.

They were the only two sitting there. Other men—banana workers, truck driver s—came in, bought a pint of rum or a Red Stripe, and left again. Errol was grateful to Eli for bringing him here to this quiet, out-of-the-way place. What good instincts! Eli would be his man in Port Antonio. Earlier a small crowd had gathered at the courthouse and he’d been worried all day about people recognizing him, but in this little bar—or rum shop, as the Jamaicans called it—he could n’t tell whether or not people knew who he was. He had shaken hands with a few men and told them how beautiful he found their country. “This man,” he’d told them, putting an arm around Eli, “is my long-lost brother.”

He’d never had a brother, he told Eli, and had always longed for one.

The sun fell behind the mountains and the bar darkened.

“Imagine,” Eli said. “You and me, we come to this place after years of traveling the world. After years of traveling. You. Me.” Here Eli stopped and placed a salt shaker and pepper shaker across from each other, then steadily drew them together in the center. “We meet up here in this banana-tree town. Must be Destiny.”

Ida’s heart was racing. She had managed to outwit her mother and get her moving along. But they had to hurry if she was going to have time to bathe, get dressed, and brush the country dust out of her hair.

As they passed by Mr. Brown’s house in the donkey cart, Esme suddenly realized she’d left something at her mother’s cottage—a package of bush-tea Oni had given her for her stomach pains.

After some discussion and vacillation, Mr. Brown sent one of his grandsons running up the mountain to get the package. Ida waited with her mother in Mr. Brown’s yard.

She waited and waited.

Sunset came. The goat she’d seen earlier lay on the ground of the slaughtering shed, its body split

down the middle. Mr. Brown's oldest son stood over it with a knife, removing its liver.

She knew it was too late to meet the movie star. She thought about her good dress laid out on the bed in her room.

Her mother was saying, "Look like a nice fresh liver there, Mr. Brown."

"I can gi' you a piece fe tek home," he said.

"If is no trouble, thank you. The meat in Port Antonio too tough."

"Dem use too much science," Mr. Brown said, "an' dem no care 'bout de animal."

Something smooth was plucked from the dead goat's body and thrown into a basin with the other organs. One of the smaller children gasped, and the older children laughed.

"A true," Esme agreed with Mr. Brown. "Everybody in such a hurry nowadays."

I'm not like her, Ida thought. I'm not like any of them.

After Eli dropped Errol Flynn off at the Somerset that night, he found Ida alone and miserable on the veranda. Across the street, Father Reynold was setting up the projector to show one of Flynn's movies, *The Sea Hawk*, and Eli tried to use that to console her.

Ida didn't want to see the movie. Anybody could see a movie.

"But Ida," Eli pleaded, "he goin' stay in Port Antonio a few days. I convince him to stay."

They heard Father Reynold shouting from across the road, "You comin'?"

"So I can meet Errol Flynn tomorrow?" she asked her father.

Eli smoothed Ida's hair. "Yes, man. Tomorrow. Come now."

Father Reynold had hung sheets on the clothesline as a screen and set up four rows of chairs in the yard. There were people looking on from the road, leaning over the fence, just as there'd been a few months before when Father Reynold had first gotten the projector and had shown *Tarzan*. A cart man was selling sodas and peanuts.

While she waited for the movie to begin, Ida studied the poster of *The Sea Hawk* taped to the rectory door. Like the picture in the newspaper, this one showed Errol Flynn as a pirate brandishing a sword. A lock of wavy hair fell across his forehead, and he had a smile that revealed both rows of his teeth. It was a wolf-like yet handsome smile. The cleft in his chin held her attention. Father Reynold had a cleft in his chin too, though not quite as noticeable, and he had told Ida, "God tickled me on my chin before I was born and left his finger-print." A mark of joyfulness, he'd said. The newspaper was right, she thought. Errol Flynn was the best-looking person she had ever seen.

The Sea Hawk began. The knob controlling the sound was broken, so the movie was five times louder than it needed to be. The people in the audience knew that Errol Flynn was there in Port Antonio. "He love it here, man," Eli had announced. "He love Jamaicans. I helpin' him look for some property."

A few months earlier, when *Tarzan* was being shown, the members of the audience had watched quietly. Now they smiled and joked and spoke in a casual way throughout the film, especially when the movie star was on the screen: "I think I saw him down by his boat today," somebody said. "Him seem like a nice fellow."

Afterward Ida heard her father and Father Reynold talking about the movies they'd seen in the

cities where they'd lived. They spoke of Douglas Fairbanks and Gloria Swanson, and she heard again about the actress, Ida Lupino, after whom she had been named. *Ida Lupino, Ida Lupino*, the name sang inside her head now.

"Man," Eli said to Father Reynold, "what we need in Port Antonio is a cinema like they have in Kingston, with chandeliers. An upstairs and a downstairs—"

"Shilling seat an' sixpence seat," Father Reynold proposed.

"Yes, man. We could even sell soda an' popcorn. If I could just raise enough capital...."