

Triumph

Where people in England and America say slums, Trinidadians say barrack-yards. Probably the word is a relic of the days when England relied as much on garrisons of soldiers as on her fleet to protect her valuable sugar-producing colonies. Every street in Port-of-Spain proper can show you numerous examples of the type: a narrow gateway leading into a fairly big yard, on either side of which run long low buildings, consisting of anything from four to eighteen rooms, each about twelve feet square. In these live, and have always lived, the porters, prostitutes, carter-men, washerwomen, and domestic servants of the city.

In one corner of the yard is the hopelessly inadequate water-closet, unmistakable to the nose if not to the eye; sometimes there is a structure with the title of bathroom: a courtesy title, for he or she who would wash in it with decent privacy must cover the person as if bathing on the Lido; the kitchen happily presents no difficulty: never is there one and each barrack-yarder cooks before her door. In the centre of the yard is a heap of stones. On these the half-laundered clothes are bleached before being finally spread out to dry on the wire lines which in every yard cross and recross each other in all directions. Not only to Minerva have these stones been dedicated. Time was when they would have had an honoured shrine in a local temple to Mars, for they were the major source of ammunition for the homicidal strife which in times past so often flared up in barrack-yards. As late as 1915, the local bard, practising his band for the annual carnival (which still flourishes in Trinidad alone of the British West Indian islands) – as late as 1915 he could sing:

*'When the rumour went round the town
That the Germans was comin' to blow us down,
When the rumour went round the town
That the Germans was comin' to blow us down,
Some like cowards remain at home*

*Others come forth with bottle and stone
Old lady couldn't bring stone but she come with the pot-chambre.'*

The stones from 'the bleach' were to help even in the repelling of the German invader. A poetic idea, and as is not uncommon with poetry, an anachronism. No longer do the barrack-yarders live the picturesque life of twenty-five years ago. Then, practising for the carnival, rival singers, Willie, Jean, and Freddie, porter, wharf-man, or loafer, in ordinary life, but for that season ennobled by some such striking sobriquet as *The Duke of Normandy* or *The Lord Invincible*, and carrying with dignity homage such as young aspirants to literature would pay Mr Kipling or Mr Shaw, thirty years ago. They sang in competition from seven in the evening until far into the early morning, stimulated by the applause of their listeners and the excellence and copiousness of the rum; night after night the stick-men practised their dangerous and skilful game; the 'pierrots', after elaborate preface of complimentary speech, belaboured each other with riding whips; while around the performers the spectators pressed thick and good-humoured, until mimic warfare was transformed into real, and stones from 'the bleach' flew thick. But today that life is dead. All carnival practice must cease at ten o'clock. The policeman is to the stick-fighter and 'pierrot' as the sanitary inspector to mosquito larvae. At nights the streets are bright with electric light, the arm of the law is longer, its grip stronger. Gone are the old lawlessness and picturesqueness. Barrack-yard life has lost its savour. Luckily, prohibition in Trinidad is still but a word. And life, dull and drab as it is in comparison, can still offer its great moments.

On a Sunday morning in one of the rooms of a barrack in Abercromby Street sat Mamitz. Accustomed as is squalid adversity to reign unchallenged in these quarters, yet in this room it was more than usually triumphant, sitting, as it were, high on a throne of royal state, so depressed was the woman and depressing her surroundings.

The only representatives of the brighter side of life were three full-page pictures torn from illustrated periodicals, photographs of Lindbergh, Bernard Shaw, and Sargent's 'Portrait of a Woman', and these owed their presence solely to the fact that no pawnshop would have accepted them. They looked with unseeing eyes upon a room devoid of furniture save for a few bags spread upon the floor to form a bed. Mamitz sat on the doorstep talking to, or rather being talked to, by her friend

Celestine who stood astride the concrete canal which ran in front of the door.

'Somebody do you something,' said Celestine with conviction. 'Nobody goin' to change my mind from that. An' if you do what I tell you, you will t'row off this black spirit that on you. A nice woman like you, and you carn' get a man to keep you! You carn' get nothing to do!'

Mamitz said nothing. Had Celestine said the exact opposite, Mamitz's reply would have been the same.

She was a black woman, too black to be pure negro, probably with some Madras East Indian blood in her, a suspicion which was made a certainty by the long thick plaits of her plentiful hair. She was shortish and fat, voluptuously developed, tremendously developed, and as a creole loves development in a woman more than any other extraneous allure, Mamitz (like the rest of her sex in all stations of life) saw to it when she moved that you missed none of her charms. But for the last nine weeks she had been 'in derrick', to use Celestine's phrase. First of all the tram conductor who used to keep her (seven dollars every Saturday night, out of which Mamitz usually got three) had accused her of infidelity and beaten her. Neither the accusation nor the beating had worried Mamitz. To her and her type those were minor incidents of existence; from their knowledge of life and men, the kept woman's inevitable fate. But after a temporary reconciliation he had beaten her once more, very badly indeed, and then left her. Even this was not an irremediable catastrophe. But thenceforward, Mamitz, from being the most prosperous woman in the yard, had sunk gradually to being the most destitute. Despite her very obvious attractions, no man took notice of her. She went out asking for washing or for work as a cook. No success. Luckily, in the days of her prosperity, she had been generous to Celestine, who now kept her from actual starvation. One stroke of luck she had had. The agent for the barracks had suddenly taken a fancy to her, and Mamitz had not found it difficult to persuade him to give her a chance with the rent. But that respite was over; he was pressing for the money, and Mamitz had neither money to pay nor hope of refuge when she was turned out. Celestine would have taken her in, but Celestine's keeper was a policeman who visited her three or four nights a week, and to one in that position a fifteen-foot room does not offer much scope for

housing the homeless. Yet Celestine was grieved that she could do nothing to help Mamitz in her troubles, which she attributed to the evil and supernatural machinations of Irene, their common enemy.

'Take it from me, that woman do you something. I's she put Nathan against you. When was the quarrel again?'

'It was two or three days after Nathan gave me the first beating.'

Nathan then had started on his evil courses before the quarrel with Irene took place, but Celestine brushed away that objection.

'She must 'a' had it in her mind for you from before. You didn't see how she fly out at you? ... As long as you livin' here an' I cookin' I wouldn't see you want a cup o' tea an' a spoonful o' rice. But I carn' help with the rent ... An' you ain' have nobody here!'

Mamitz shook her head. She was from Demerara.

'If you could only cross the sea – that will cut any spirit that on you ... Look the animal!'

Irene had come out of her room on the opposite side of the yard. She could not fail to see Celestine and Mamitz and she called loudly to a neighbour lower down the yard:

'Hey Jo-Jo? What is the time? Ten o'clock a'ready? Le' me start to cook me chicken, that me man buy for me – even if 'e have a so' foot ... I don't know how long it will last, before 'e get drunk and kick me out o' here. Then I will have to go dawgin' round other po' people to see if I could pick up what they t'row 'way.'

She fixed a box in front of her door, put her coal-pot on it, and started to attend to her chicken.

Sunday morning in barrack-yards is pot-parade. Of the sixteen tenants in the yard twelve had their pots out, and they lifted the meat with long iron forks to turn it, or threw water into the pot so that it steamed to the heavens and every woman could tell what her neighbour was cooking – beef, or pork, or chicken. It didn't matter what you cooked in the week, it didn't matter if you didn't cook at all. But to cook salt-fish, or ribs, or hog-head, or pig-tail on a Sunday morning was a disgrace. You put your pot inside your house and cooked it there.

Mamitz, fat, easy-going, and cowed by many days of semi-starvation, took little notice of Irene. But Celestine, a thin little whip of a brown-skinned woman, bubbled over with repressed rage.

'By Christ, if it wasn't for one thing I'd rip every piece o' clothes she have on off'er.'

'Don' bother wid 'er. What is the use o' gettin' you'self in trouble with Jimmy?'

Jimmy was the policeman. He was a steady, reliable man but he believed in discipline, and when he spoke, he spoke. He had made Celestine understand that she was not to fight: he wasn't going to find himself mixed up in court as the keeper of any brawling woman. Celestine's wrath, deprived of its natural outlet, burned none the less implacably.

'I tell you something, Mamitz. I goin' to talk to the agent in the mornin'. I goin' to tell 'im to give you to the end o' the month. I's only five days . . . I goin' to give you a bath. Try an' see if you could get some gully-root and so on this afternoon . . . Tonight I g'on' give you . . . An' I will give you some prayers to read. God stronger than the devil. We g'on' break this t'ing that on you. Cheer up. I g'on' send you a plate with you' chicken an' rice as soon as it finish. Meanwhile, burn you' little candle, say you' little prayers, console you' little mind. I g'on' give you that bath tonight. You ain' kill priest. You ain' cuss you' mudder. So you ain' have cause to 'fraid nothin'.'

Celestine would never trust herself to indulge in abuse with Irene; the chances that it would end in a fight were too great. So she contented herself with casting a look of the most murderous hate and scorn and defiance at her enemy, and then went to her own pot which was calling for attention.

And yet three months before, Mamitz, Celestine, and Irene had been good friends. They shared their rum and their joys and troubles together; and on Sunday afternoons they used to sit before Mamitz's room singing hymns: 'Abide with me', 'Jesu, lover of my soul', 'Onward! Christian soldiers'. Celestine and Irene sang soprano and Irene sang well. Mamitz was a naturally fine contralto and had a fine ear, while Nathan, who was a Barbadian and consequently knew vocal music, used to sing bass whenever he happened to be in. The singing would put him in a good mood and he would send off to buy more rum and everything would be peaceful and happy. But Irene was a jealous woman, not only jealous of her man, but jealous of Mamitz's steady three dollars a week and

Celestine's policeman with his twenty-eight dollars at the end of the month. She lived with a cabman whose income, though good enough, was irregular. And he was a married man, with a wife and children to support. Irene had to do washing to help her out, while Mamitz and Celestine did nothing, merely cooked and washed clothes for their men. So gradually a state of dissatisfaction arose. Then one damp evening, Mamitz passing near the bamboo pole which supported a clothes-line overburdened with Irene's clothes, brought it down with her broad expansive person. The line burst, and nightgowns, sheets, pillowcases, white suits, and tablecloths fluttered to the mud. It had been a rainy week with little sun, and already it would have been difficult to get the clothes ready in time for Saturday morning; after this it was impossible. And hot and fiery was the altercation. Celestine who tried to make peace was drawn into the quarrel by Irene's comprehensive and incendiary invective.

'You comin' to put you' mouth in this. You think because you livin' with a policeman you is a magistrate. Mind you' business, woman, mind you' business. The two o' all you don't do nothing for you' livin'. You only sittin' down an' eatin' out the men all you livin' wid. An' I wo'k so hard an' put out me clo'es on the line. And this one like some blame cab-horse knock it down, and when I tell 'er about it you comin' to meddle! Le' me tell you . . .'

So the wordy warfare raged, Celestine's policeman coming in for rough treatment at the tongue of Irene. Celestine, even though she was keeping herself in check, was a match for any barrack-yard woman Port-of-Spain could produce, but yet it was Mamitz who clinched the victory.

'Don't min' Celestine livin' with a policeman. You will be glad to get 'im for you'self. An' it better than livin' wid any stinkin' so'-foot man.'

For Irene's cabman had a sore on his foot, which he had had for thirty years and would carry with him to the grave even if he lived for thirty years more. Syphilis, congenital and acquired, and his copious boozing would see to it that there was no recovery. Irene had stupidly hoped that nobody in the yard knew. But in Trinidad when His Excellency the Governor and his wife have a quarrel, the street boys speak of it the day after, and Richard's bad foot had long been a secret topic of conversation in the yard. But it was Mamitz who had made it public

property, and Irene hated Mamitz with a virulent hatred, and had promised to 'do' for her. Three days before, Nathan, the tram-conductor, had given Mamitz the first beating; but even at the time of the quarrel there was no hint of his swift defection and Mamitz's rapid descent to her present plight. So that Celestine, an errant but staunch religionist, was convinced that Mamitz's troubles were due to Irene's trafficking with the devil, if not personally, at least through one of his numerous agents who ply their profitable trade in every part of Port-of-Spain. Secure of her own immunity from anything that Irene might 'put on her', she daily regretted that she couldn't rip the woman to pieces. 'Oh Jesus! If it wasn't for Jimmy I'd tear the wretch lim' from lim'.' But the energy that she could not put into the destruction of Irene she spent in upholding Mamitz. The fiery Celestine had a real affection for the placid Mamitz, whose quiet ways were so soothing. But, more than this, she was determined not to see Mamitz go down. In the bitter antagonism she nursed against Irene, it would have been a galling defeat if Mamitz went to the wall. Further, her reputation as a woman who knew things and could put crooked people straight was at stake. Once she had seen to Jimmy's food and clothes and creature comforts, she set herself to devise ways and means of supporting the weak, easily crushed Mamitz.

Celestine's policeman being on duty that night, she herself was off duty and free to attend to her own affairs. At midnight with the necessary rites and ceremonies, Ave Marias and Pater Nosters, she bathed Mamitz in a large bath-pan full of water prepared with gully-root, fever-grass, lime leaves, guérir tout, herbe à femmes, and other roots, leaves, and grasses noted for their efficacy (when properly applied), against malign plots and influences. That was at twelve o'clock the Sunday night. On Monday morning at eight o'clock behold Popo des Vignes walking into the yard, with a little bag in his hand.

Popo is a creole of creoles. His name is des Vignes, but do not be misled into thinking that there flows in his veins blood of those aristocrats who found their way to Trinidad after '89. He is a negro, and, as like as not, one of his great-grandfathers (who, it is chronologically certain, began life as a slave) adapted the name from his master. Popo is nearing forty, medium-sized, though large about the stomach, with a longish moustache. He is dressed in a spotless suit of white, with tight-fitting

shoes of a particularly yellowish brown (no heavy English brogues or fantastic American shoes for him). On his head he wears his straw hat at a jaunty angle, and his manner of smoking his cigarette and his jacket always flying open (he wears no waistcoat) will give the impression that Popo is a man of pleasure rather than a man of work. And that impression would be right. He has never done a week's honest work in his life. He can get thirty dollars for you if you are in difficulties (at one hundred and twenty per cent, first month's interest and his commission taken out in advance); or three thousand dollars if you have a house or a cocoa-estate. During the cocoa crop he lurks by the railway station with an unerring eye for peasant proprietors who have brought their cocoa into town and are not quite certain where they will get the best price. This is his most profitable business, for he gets commission both from the proprietors and from the big buyers. But he is not fastidious as to how he makes money, and will do anything that does not bind him down, and leaves him free of manual or clerical labour. For the rest, after he has had a good meal at about half-past seven in the evening he can drink rum until six o'clock the next morning without turning a hair; and in his own circle he has a wide reputation for his connoisseurship in matters of love and his catholicity of taste in women.

'Eh Mr des Vignes! How you?' said Celestine. The inhabitants of every barrack-yard, especially the women, knew Popo.

'Keeping fine.'

'Who you lookin' for roun' this way?'

'I came round to see you. How is Jimmy? When you getting married?'

'Married!' said Celestine with fine scorn. 'Me married a police! I wouldn't trust a police further than I could smell him. Police ain' have no regard. A police will lock up 'is mudder to get a stripe. An' besides I ain' want to married nobody. If I married I go'n' have the man in the house all the time, he go'n' want to treat me as 'e like. I go'n' be a perfec' slave. I all right as I be.'

'Anyway, I want you to buy a ring.'

'Rings you sellin' in that bag? I ain' have no money, but le' me see them.'

Popo opened his bag and displayed the rings — beautiful gold of American workmanship, five dollars cash and six dollars on terms. They

had cost an Assyrian merchant in Park Street ten dollars the dozen, and Popo was selling them on commission. He was doing good business, especially with those who paid two dollars down and gave promises of monthly or weekly instalments. If later the merchant saw trouble to collect his instalments or to get back his rings, that wouldn't worry Popo much for by that time he would have chucked up this job.

'So you wouldn't take one,' said he, getting ready to put away his treasures again.

'Come roun' at the end o' the month. But don' shut them up yet. I have a friend I want to see them.'

She went to the door.

'Mamitz!' she called. 'Come see some rings Mr des Vignes sellin'.'

Mamitz came into Celestine's room, large, slow-moving, voluptuous, with her thick, smooth hair neatly plaited and her black skin shining. She took Popo's fancy at once.

'But you have a nice friend, Celestine,' said Popo. 'And she has a nice name too: Mamitz! Well, how many rings you are going to buy from me?'

Celestine answered quickly: 'Mamitz can't buy no rings. The man who was keepin' her, they fall out, an' she lookin' for a husband now.'

'A nice woman like you can't stay long without a husband,' said des Vignes. 'Let me give you some luck . . . Choose a ring and I will make you a present.'

Mamitz chose a ring and des Vignes put it on her finger himself.

'Excuse me, I comin' back now,' said Celestine. 'The sanitary inspector comin' jest now, an' I want to clean up some rubbish before 'e come.'

When she came back des Vignes was just going.

'I will see you again, Celestine,' he said. 'So long, Mamitz!'

He was hardly out of earshot when Celestine excitedly tackled Mamitz.

'What 'e tell you?'

'E say that 'e comin' round here about ten o'clock tonight or little later . . . An' 'e give me this.' In her palm reposed a red two-dollar note.

'You see what I tell you?' said Celestine triumphantly. 'That bath. But don' stop. Read the prayers three times a day for nine days . . . Buy some stout, Mit, to nourish up you'self . . . 'E ain't a man you could depend on. If you dress a broomstick in a petticoat 'e will run after it.

But you goin' to get something out o' 'im for a few weeks or so . . . An' you can see 'e is a nice man.'

Mamitz smiled her lazy smile.

Celestine knew her man. For four weeks Popo was a more or less regular visitor to Mamitz's room. He paid the rent, he gave her money to get her bed and other furniture out of the pawnshop, and every Sunday morning Mamitz was stirring beef or pork or chicken in her pot. More than that, whenever Popo said he was coming to see her, he gave her money to prepare a meal so that sometimes late in the week, on a Thursday night, Mamitz's pot smelt as if it was Sunday morning. Celestine shared in the prosperity and they could afford to take small notice of Irene who prophesied early disaster.

'All you flourishin' now. But wait little bit. I know that Popo des Vignes well. 'E don' knock round a woman no more than a month. Just now all that high livin' go'n' shut down an' I go'n' see you Mamitz eatin' straw.'

But Mamitz grew fatter than ever, and when she walked down the road in a fugi silk dress, tight-fitting and short, which exposed her noble calves to the knee and accentuated the amplitude of her person, she created a sensation among those men who took notice of her.

One Sunday morning she went into the market to buy beef. She was passing along the stalls going to the man she always bought from, when a butcher called out to her:

'Hey, Mamitz! Come this way.'

Mamitz went. She didn't know the man, but she was of an acquiescent nature and she went to see what he wanted.

'But I don't know you,' she said, after looking at him. 'Where you know my name?'

'Ain't was you walkin' down Abercromby Street last Sunday in a white silk dress?'

'Yes,' smiled Mamitz.

'Well, I know a nice woman when I see one. An' I find out where you livin' too. Ain't you livin' in the barrack just below Park Street? . . . Girl, you did look too sweet. You mustn't buy beef from nobody but me. How much you want? A pound? Look a nice piece. Don't worry to pay me for that. You could pay me later. Whenever you want beef, come round this way.'

Mamitz accepted and went. She didn't like the butcher too much, but he liked her. And a pound of beef was a pound of beef. Nicholas came to see her a day or two after and brought two pints of stout as a present. At first Mamitz didn't bother with him. But when Nicholas found out that a dangerous man like Popo des Vignes was his rival, he made Mamitz extravagant presents and promises. What helped him was that Popo now began to slack off. A week could pass and Mamitz would not see him. And no more money was forthcoming. So after a while she accepted Nicholas, and had no cause to regret her bargain. Nicholas made a lot of money as a butcher. He not only paid the rent, but gave her five dollars every Saturday night, and she could always get a dollar or two out of him during the week. Before long he loved her to distraction, and was given to violent fits of jealousy which, however, were always followed by repentance and lavish presents. Still Mamitz hankered after Popo. One day she wrote him a little note telling him that she was sorry she had to accept Nicholas but that she would be glad to see him any time he came round. She sent it to the Miranda Hotel where Popo took his meals. But no answer came and after a while Mamitz ceased actively to wish to see Popo. She was prosperous and pretty happy. She and Celestine were thicker than ever, and were on good terms with the neighbours in the yard. Only Irene, they knew, would do them mischief, and on the mornings when Mamitz got up, on Celestine's advice, she looked carefully before the door lest she should unwittingly set foot on any churchyard bones, deadly powders, or other satanic agencies guaranteed to make the victim go mad, and steal or commit those breaches of good conduct which are punishable by law. But nothing untoward happened. As Celestine pointed out to Mamitz, the power of the bath held good, 'and as for me,' concluded she, 'no powers Irene can handle can touch my little finger'.

Easter Saturday came, and with it came Popo. He walked into the yard early, about seven in the morning, and knocked up Mamitz who was still sleeping.

'I t'ought you had given me up for good,' said Mamitz. 'I write you and you didn't answer.'

'I didn't want any butcher to stick me with his knife,' laughed Popo, 'Anyway, that is all right . . . I was playing baccarat last night and I made

a good haul, so I've come to spend Easter with you. Look! Here is five dollars. Buy salt-fish and sweet oil and some greens and tomatoes. Buy about eight pints of rum. And some stout for yourself. I am coming back about nine o'clock. Today is Easter Saturday. Nicholas is going to be in the market the whole day. Don't be afraid for him.'

Mamitz became excited. She gave the five dollars to Celestine and put her in charge of the catering, while she prepared for her lover. At about half-past nine Popo returned. He, Mamitz and Celestine ate in Mamitz's room and, before they got up from the table, much more than a bottle of rum had disappeared. Then Celestine left them and went to the market to Nicholas. She told him that Mamitz wasn't feeling too well and had sent for beef and pork. The willing Nicholas handed over the stuff and sent a shilling for his lady love. He said he was rather short of money but at the end of the day he was going to make a big draw. Celestine cooked, and at about half-past one, she, Popo and Mamitz had breakfast – the midday meal. After breakfast Celestine had to go out again and buy more rum. The other people in the yard didn't take much notice of what was an everyday occurrence, were rather pleased in fact, for after breakfast Celestine had a bottle and a half of rum to herself, and ostentatiously invited all the neighbours to have drinks, all, of course, except Irene.

At about three o'clock Irene felt that she could bear it no longer and that if she didn't take this chance it would be throwing away a gift from God. She put on her shoes, took her basket on her arm, and left the yard. It was the basket that aroused the observant Celestine's suspicions for she knew that Irene had already done all her shopping that morning. She sat thinking for a few seconds, then she knocked at Mamitz's door.

'Look here, Mamitz,' she called. 'It's time for Mr des Vignes to go. Irene just gone out with a basket. I think she gone to the market to tell Nicholas.'

'But he can't get away today,' called Mamitz.

'You know how the man jealous and how 'e bad,' persisted Celestine. 'Since nine o'clock Mr des Vignes been here. He can come back another day . . . Mr des Vignes, it's time for you to go.'

Celestine's wise counsel prevailed. Popo dressed himself with his usual

scrupulous neatness and cleared off. The rum bottles were put out of the way and Mamitz's room was made tidy. She and Celestine had hardly finished when Irene appeared with the basket empty.

'You see,' said Celestine; 'now, look out!'

Sure enough, it wasn't five minutes after when a cab drew up outside, and Nicholas, still in his bloody butcher's apron, came hot foot into the yard. He went straight up to Mamitz and seized her by the throat.

'Where the hell is that man you had in the room with you – the room I payin' rent for?'

'Don't talk dam foolishness man, le'me go,' said Mamitz.

'I will stick my knife into you as I will stick it in a cow. You had Popo des Vignes in that room for the whole day. Speak the truth, you dog.'

'You' mother, you' sister, you' aunt, you' wife was the dog,' shrieked Mamitz, quoting one of Celestine's most brilliant pieces of repartee.

'It's the wo'se when you meddle with them common low-island people,' said Celestine. Nicholas was from St Vincent, and negroes from St Vincent, Grenada, and the smaller West Indian islands are looked down upon by the Trinidad negro as low-island people.

'You shut you' blasted mouth and don' meddle with what don't concern you. It's you encouragin' the woman. I want the truth, or by Christ I'll make a beef o' one o' you here today.'

'Look here, man. Le'me tell you something.' Mamitz, drunk with love and rum and inspired by Celestine, was showing some spirit. 'That woman over there come and tell you that Mr des Vignes was in this room. The man come in the yard but 'e come to Celestine to sell 'er a ring she did promise to buy from 'im long time. Look in me room,' she flung the half-doors wide; 'you see any signs of any man in there? Me bed look as if any man been lyin' down on it? But I had no right to meddle with a low brute like you. You been botherin' me long enough. Go live with Irene. Go share she wid she so'-foot cabman. I's woman like she men like you want. I sorry the day I ever see you. An' I hope I never see you' face again.'

She stopped, panting, and Celestine who had only been waiting for an opening, took up the tale.

'But look the man! The man leave 'is work this bright Easter Saturday

because this nasty woman go and tell you that Mr des Vignes in the room with Mamitz! Next thing you go'n' say that 'e livin' with me. But man, I never see such a' ass as you. Bertha, Olive, Josephine,' she appealed to some of the other inhabitants of the yard. 'Ain't all you been here the whole day an' see Mr des Vignes come here after breakfast? I pay 'im two dollars I had for 'im. 'E sen' an' buy a pint o' rum an' I call Mamitz for the three o' we to fire a little liquor for the Easter. Next thing I see is this one goin' out – to carry news; and now this Vincelonian fool leave 'e wo'k. – But, man, you drunk.'

Bertha, Olive and Josephine, who had shared in the rum, confirmed Celestine's statement. Irene had been sitting at the door of her room cleaning fish and pretending to take no notice, but at this she jumped up.

'Bertha, you ought to be ashamed o' you'self. For a drink o' rum you lyin' like that? Don't believe them Nicholas. Whole day –' But here occurred an unlooked-for interruption. The cabby, hearing the altercation and not wishing to lose time on a day like Easter Saturday, had put a little boy in charge of his horse and had been listening for a minute or two. He now approached and held Nicholas by the arm.

'Boss,' he said, 'don't listen to that woman. She livin' with Richard the cabman an' 'e tell me that all women does lie but 'e never hear or know none that does lie like she –'

There was a burst of laughter.

'Come go, boss,' said the cabby, pulling the not unwilling Nicholas by the arm.

'I have to go back to my work, but I am comin' back tonight an' I am goin' to lick the stuffin' out o' you.'

'An' my man is a policeman,' said Celestine. 'An' he goin' to be here tonight. An' if you touch this woman you spend you' Easter in the lock-up sure as my name is Celestine an' you are a good-for-nothing Vincelonian fool of a butcher.'

Nicholas drove away, leaving Celestine mistress of the field, but for the rest of the afternoon Mamitz was depressed. She was tired out with the day's excitement; and after all Nicholas had good money. On a night like this he would be drawing quite a lot of money. And now it seemed that she was in danger of losing him. She knew how he hated Popo.

She liked Popo more than Nicholas, much more, but after all people had to live.

Celestine, however, was undaunted. 'Don't min' what 'e say. 'E comin' back. 'E comin' back to beg. When you see a man love a woman like he love you, she could treat 'im how she like, 'e still comin' back, like a dog to eat 'is vomit. But you listen to me, Mamitz. When 'e come back cuss 'im a little bit. Cuss 'im plenty. Make 'im see that you ain't goin' to stand too much nonsense from 'im.'

Mamitz smiled in her sleepy way, but she was not hopeful. And all the rest of the afternoon Irene worried her by singing ballads appropriate to the occasion.

'Though you belong to somebody else
Tonight you belong to me.'

'Come, come, come to me, Thora,
Come once again and be ...'

'How can I live without you!
How can I let you go!'

Her voice soared shrill over the babel of clattering tongues in the yard. And as the voice rose Mamitz's heart sank.

'Don't forget,' were Celestine's last words before they parted for the night. 'If 'e come back tonight, don't open the door for 'im straight. Le' 'im knock a little bit.'

'All right,' said Mamitz dully. She was thinking that she had only about thirty-six cents left over from the money des Vignes had given her. Not another cent.

But Celestine was right. The enraged Nicholas went back to work and cut beef and sawed bones with a ferocity that astonished his fellow butchers and purchasers. But at seven o'clock, with his pocket full of money and nothing to do he felt miserable. He had made his plans for the Easter. Saturday night he had decided to spend with Mamitz and all Easter Sunday after he knocked off at nine in the morning. Easter Monday he had for himself and he had been thinking of taking Mamitz, Celestine, and Jimmy down to Carenage in a taxi to bathe. He mooned about the streets for a time. He took two or three drinks but he didn't

feel in the mood for running a spree and getting drunk. He was tired from the strain of the day and he felt for the restful company of a woman, especially the woman he loved – the good-looking, fat, agreeable Mamitz. At about half-past ten he found his resolution never to look at her again wavering.

'Damn it,' he said to himself. 'That woman Irene is a liar. She see how I am treatin' Mamitz well and she want to break up the livin'.'

He fought the question out with himself.

'But the woman couldn't lie like that. The man must 'a been there.'

He was undecided. He went over the arguments for and against the testimony of Bertha and Olive, the testimony of the cabman. His reason inclined him to believe that Mamitz had been entertaining des Vignes for the whole day in the room he was paying for; while he, the fool, was working hard for money to carry to her. But stronger powers than reason were fighting for Mamitz, and eleven o'clock found him in the yard knocking at the door.

'Mamitz! Mamitz! Open. I's me – Nicholas.' There was a slight pause. Then he heard Mamitz's voice, sounding a little strange.

'What the devil you want! ... Man, go 'way from me door.'

'I sorry for what happen today. I's that meddlin' woman Irene. She come to the market an' she lie on you. Open the door, Mamitz ... I have something here for you.'

Celestine next door was listening closely, pleased that Mamitz was proving herself so obedient to instructions.

'Man, I 'fraid you. You have a knife out there an' you come here to cut me up as Gurrie cut up Eva.'

'I have no knife. I brought some money for you.'

'I don't believe you ... you want to treat me as if I'm a cow.'

'I tell you I have no knife ... Open the door, woman, or I'll break it in. You carn' treat me like that.'

Nicholas's temper was getting the better of him: he hadn't expected this.

The watchful Celestine here interfered.

'Open the door for the man, Mamitz. 'E say 'e beg pardon. And, after all, it's he payin' the rent.'

So Mamitz very willingly opened the door and Nicholas went in. He left early the next morning to go to work but he promised Mamitz to be back by half-past nine.

Irene, about her daily business in the yard, gathered that Nicholas had come dawgin' back to Mamitz the night before and Mamitz was drivin' 'im dog and lance, but Celestine beg for 'im and Mamitz let 'im come in. Mamitz, she noticed, got up that morning much later than usual. In fact Celestine (who was always up at five o'clock) knocked her up and went into the room before she came out. It was not long before Irene knew that something was afoot. First of all Mamitz never opened her door as usual, but slipped in and out closing it after her. Neither she nor Celestine went to market. They sent out Bertha's little sister who returned with beef and pork and mutton, each piece of which Mamitz held up high in the air and commented upon. Then Bertha's sister went out again and returned with a new coal-pot. Irene could guess where it came from — some little store in Charlotte Street probably, whose owner was not afraid to run the risk of selling on Sundays. In and out the yard went Bertha's little sister, and going and coming she clutched something tightly in her hand. Irene, her senses tuned by resentment and hate to their highest pitch, could not make out what was happening. Meanwhile Celestine was inside Mamitz's room, and Mamitz, outside, had started to cook — in three coal-pots. Every minute or so Mamitz would poke her head inside the room and talk to Celestine. Irene could see Mamitz shaking her fat self with laughter while she could hear Celestine's shrill cackle inside. Then Bertha's sister returned for the last time and after going into the room to deliver whatever her message was, came and stood a few yards away, opposite Mamitz's door, expectantly waiting. Think as she would, Irene could form no idea as to what was going on inside.

Then Mamitz went and stood near to Bertha's sister, and, a second after, the two halves of the door were flung open and Irene saw Celestine standing in the doorway with arms akimbo. But there was nothing to — and then she saw. Both halves of the door were plastered with notes, green five-dollar notes, red two-dollar notes and blue dollar notes, with a pin at the corner of each note to keep it firm. The pin-heads were shining in the sun. Irene was so flabbergasted that for a second or two

she stood with her mouth open. Money Nicholas had given Mamitz. Nicholas had come back and begged pardon, and given her all this money. The fool! So that was what Celestine had been doing inside there all the time. Bertha's sister had been running up and down to get some of the notes changed. There must be about forty, no, fifty dollars, more spread out on the door. Mamitz and Bertha's sister were sinking with laughing, and the joke was spreading, for other people in the yard were going up to see what the disturbance was about. What a blind fool that Nicholas was! Tears of rage and mortification rushed to Irene's eyes.

'Hey, Irene, come see a picture what Nicholas bring for Mamitz last night! An' tomorrow we goin' to Carenage. We don't want you, but we will carry you' husband. The sea water will do 'is so' foot good.' Celestine's voice rang across the yard.

Bertha, Josephine, the fat Mamitz and the rest were laughing so that they could hardly hold themselves up. Irene could find neither spirit nor voice to reply. She trembled so that her hands shook. The china bowl in which she was washing rice slipped from her fingers and broke into half a dozen pieces, while the rice streamed into the dirty water of the canal.