

Maude playing chess was a joke. After ten lessons she was still not averse, in a tight spot, to leapfrogging her pent-up king draughtswise out of trouble; or swerving a threatened knight clean off the board ('One-two-one!' she would say triumphantly, the last emphatic right-angled 'one' landing the piece with a clack on the polished mahogany table); or even, in a tantrum, rising and imperiously sweeping the pieces off the board ('Look!' he would bellow, angrier than he had been in years, and they would glare at each other, old man and girl, sudden murder standing in the air between them) . . .

He sat back. There were other things he had meant to tell Clare – that their only son John has passed through last week en route to some conference in Caracas; that the philodendron had caught itself in the corner; that Julius Sumairsingh had died – but suddenly he didn't feel like going on.

Besides, it was five to five. He waited, folding the unfinished letter (and then, absently, folding it smaller and smaller) and, a few minutes later, the barefooted girl came in with his cocoa and the chessboard, saying 'Afternoon' without looking at him; smoothing the skirt along her bottom with both hands; dropping into the opposite chair. Girlishly, gratuitously, she smoothed the open board once or twice, before applying the appropriate pieces to it; finished, she looked up at him at last, her forehead shining, saying shyly, defiantly, 'Ready, sah.'

He felt the whole house, his life, focus on the board between them. He felt the concentrated presence of her, his unknowable opposition. For the first time that day he heard the radio clearly, a nasal female voice: ' . . . and the slaves, throwing off their chains . . . ' And he rose, baring his teeth slightly against the usual volley of pain, and switched the radio off.

'Okay,' he said, returning, with a grim glance at her, to turn the board around (shakily restoring the white queen that, in the process, he'd knocked down): 'I'm white. You're black. Now pay attention.' Already concentrating hard himself, a crustily frowning old man, unaware of the fleeting womanly smile she allowed herself as she, too, bent over the board.

HAZEL D. CAMPBELL

The Thursday Wife

Shortly after Bertie and Mary got married, things started to get very bad.

Bertie had been a waiter working the hotels in Montego Bay but he had been laid off soon after the wedding and they decided to move to Kingston.

They had enough money to pay the first month's rent for their one room and to buy food for a while. But as the days passed and Bertie could get no work at all, starvation began to stare them in the face.

Still Bertie insisted that his young wife could not go out to work. She was so pretty, he thought, with her light colour skin and brown curly hair, anywhere she went to work the men would want to touch her, and that would cause him to kill. So when somebody told her that she could get a job as a store clerk in one of the Syrian stores downtown, he forbade her even to think about it.

Things went from bad to worse for them. The final blow came when Bertie got food poisoning from the can of sardines they shared over a two-day period. The young wife didn't know that she shouldn't leave the sardines in the can overnight and on the second day made a sandwich for her husband with it. The left-overs weren't enough to share so she pretended that she had already eaten when he came home weary and hungry after another futile day looking for work.

That night as she held the chamber pot for his vomit and watched him writhing in pain, the thought that he might die and leave her penniless in the big, hostile city filled her with great fear. So the next day when he was better but still too weak to contradict her too violently, she suggested that it might be better if she went back to her country, the country from which he had taken her a mere six months before. She could stay with her sister. They would give up the room and he could move in with his cousin until he found a job. Then, when things got better she would come back and they would start again.

They parted reluctantly because they really liked each other and the young love was still burning hotly in their veins, but it couldn't be helped.

For six months Mary fretted in her sister's house. They were all very kind to her and she made herself useful in the house and the shop, but it was not the same. She longed for her husband and her own home once more. And he didn't write. Much later she would find out that he was barely literate and that it wouldn't occur to him to write her a letter. And although she thought about him constantly, she didn't even know his cousin's address to write to him.

One Sunday morning as she was washing her hair in the basin under the pear tree in the back yard, her sister came to tell her, mysteriously, that she had a 'gentleman visitor'. Mary didn't want to see anyone. Of late, some of the country gentlemen aware of her lonely status had been trying to 'talk her up'. She wasn't interested in any of them. So she took her time drying and combing her hair and when she went upstairs she nearly died of shock, because there, sitting on the veranda talking to her sister, was her husband Bertie.

He had come for her. Things had improved. He had found a job, rented another room and got a few things together. So once again Mary left her country home and went with her husband to start a new life in Kingston.

There was only one thing about the new life that Mary did not like. Bertie had a live-in job. He worked for some white people up on top of a hill and had to stay on the premises for he was chauffeur, babysitter, watchman and waiter for their numerous parties – whatever they might ask him to do. He worked hard all week and was only allowed a half-day on Thursdays and that was all the time he had to be at home with Mary. For most of the rest of the week, she saw him only in snatches. Whenever he could, he would sneak away while on some errand with the car and drop in for a quick visit. But on Thursday evening Bertie came home to spend the night, free until six o'clock the next morning.

And on Thursday evenings Mary bloomed. Early Thursday morning she would wash her hair and plait it, twisting it around her head, the way Bertie liked it. She would thoroughly clean their room and the little veranda which served as kitchen and dining room on occasion. She would also make sure that the vase on the bureau was ready, for he always brought her some flowers from the white people's garden. Then she would cook his favourite meal, stewed peas and rice. When everything was ready, she would wash herself carefully and change all her clothes and rest a while so that by two o'clock when he came home she was as fresh as a new bride.

Her heart would lift in anticipation as she heard him whistling as he entered the yard. He would stop and greet anybody who happened to be

about, then he would step loudly on to the little veranda, then rap – pam pa pam pam on their door. And, pretending that she didn't know it was he, she would call, 'Who's that?' and he would answer, 'Who you expecting?' Then she would open the door and he would haul her into his arms and on to their bed and ravish her in the most rewarding ways. Later he would say, as if they were just meeting, 'So how you do?' and she would answer shyly, 'All right you know.'

Then they would eat and dress and he would take her to a movie or to visit his cousin or they would go downtown after the shops had closed and walk through the quiet streets and stop for a while at the seaside at the bottom of King Street laughing at the antics of the little boys diving in and out of the water as naked as the day they were born.

Afterwards they would stop at a little parlour and buy patties and ice-cream and then they would go home for another bout of lovemaking, falling asleep in each other's arms until the clock alarmed at five o'clock next morning and he jumped up to race to catch the first bus so that he wouldn't be late for work – until the next Thursday.

And so it went on month after month. One year passed, two, three, four years. Their love continued bright and shining, fanned into flame on Thursday and smouldering during the rest of the week. No children came to spoil their duet, but Mary was not unhappy.

During this time she had learned how to cope with her loneliness. For one thing there was the church, nearly all day Sunday, two nights during the week with an extra night once a month for women's meeting.

Also she was a visiting sister which meant that many mornings she spent the time visiting the sick and the shut-ins, encouraging them spiritually and doing what she could to help their physical needs.

Since all her husband's domestic chores were taken care of at his work place, she had a lot of time on her hands. She washed and cooked and kept house only for herself, and as Bertie gave her generously from his pay, small though it was, she could always manage to find a little something to take for those poorer than herself and earned a name as an Angel of Mercy. Mary was well satisfied with her life.

The lustfulness of her husband and his liking for the movie house and a drink or two bothered her Christian principles from time to time. But he was so good to her, she felt that she owed it to him to do whatever he wanted on the one day of the week when he could be with her. In fact she took almost sinful pleasure in breaking the church rules without having a guilty conscience. Wasn't she merely being submissive to her husband as the Bible taught?

Then one Sunday morning, just as she was getting ready for church,

without any warning, Bertie descended on her in a taxi carrying all his clothes and belongings. Bertie had come home. He had left the job in the white people's mansion and had got a better-paying one working as a waiter in a restaurant in a hotel uptown. Now he would be with her every day of the week and not just Thursdays any more.

'Isn't it wonderful?' he asked her, enthusiastically. He had kept it as a surprise for her.

Mary agreed that it was wonderful but it was with regret that she stopped dressing for church for they had a visiting evangelist who was hot with the Holy Ghost and made the church walls shake with his message and the strong amens it brought forth.

However, her husband had come home, so she helped him to settle in and set about preparing Sunday dinner, a thing she rarely did, since she had nobody to cook for but herself. And she was happy, as she thought that for the first time since she was married she would truly have her husband by her side. She might even get him to go to church with her.

A couple of weeks passed before Mary began to admit that she was uneasy. At first she couldn't think why. The first time she thought that it might be because Bertie was around so much, she pushed the thought aside. How ungrateful to think such a thing!

But her life had been drastically changed by his continuous presence.

First, there was the problem of accommodating him and his possessions. She had to squeeze up her good clothes in the wardrobe and make room for his clothes in one of the bureau drawers. She had to find place for his shoes and personal things like shaving set and cologne - he was quite a sweet man, she thought. The room looked quite crowded now and was more difficult to keep clean and tidy, but he insisted on tidiness at all times so that it seemed she was always dusting and straightening or putting things away.

He was miserable about his clothes, she found herself complaining to a church sister. He had even threatened to box her because she hadn't ironed his merinos. She didn't iron these because they stretched out so easily that she had folded them neatly and put them in his drawer. But he had taken them all out and thrown them about the room shouting and calling her a lazy woman. She had been so ashamed, for the neighbours could hear every word he said.

He was miserable about his food too, but fortunately he was allowed to eat at the restaurant, so she didn't have to cook for him too often.

Then she had to curtail many of her activities. The first Tuesday night after he came home, she had dressed herself as usual to go to prayer meeting but when she was putting on her hat, he came into the

room and asked her where she thought she was going. Now that he was home, he said, she didn't have to worry with all them church foolishness any more. Mary was so upset she couldn't speak and after that she could only go out on the nights when he was on the late evening shift because if he came home before her he would always quarrel.

When she tried to explain to the parson why she was no longer as diligent in her church duties as before, he was very unsympathetic and thundered at her.

'Sister Mary, God first! Everything else comes after.'

Bertie laughed at her friends.

'Where you know all them meek and mild pious woman from?' he would tease her. 'Them walk like them can't mash ants, but I bet you everyone of them is as sinful as Satan.'

One day he embarrassed her beyond words by ordering them to be quiet in his house. She hadn't been feeling well and three sisters had come to visit her, but when they raised a hymn he had shut them up so violently that they had hastened away without even praying for her.

'Can't stand that damn croaking and wailing,' he told Mary irritably, when she tried to protest.

Yet he expected her to be nice to his friends. Every now and then some of his friends who Mary was meeting for the first time would drop by and she would have to fetch ice and fix drinks while they chatted and laughed.

That was the men.

One evening a woman came to see him. A woman whom he hugged affectionately and brought in to sit on the good chair in their room.

Mary was wary of her from the beginning. But he explained the association innocently enough. She was the house-girl where he used to work and she had washed and cooked for him.

Mary and Bertie sat on the bed while Bertie and the woman reminisced and laughed.

'You remember the day when Miss Levy couldn't find her brown wig to go to the party and how we search down the whole place till we finally find it outside and all the dog them playing with it?' the woman said - Corrine was her name.

'And how them used to leave salt fish for we dinner when them wasn't eating in, but we used to tek out steak and cook it,' Bertie added his story.

'Remember, the day we was going on outing to Ocho Rios and we cook and tek away so much things Miss Levy couldn't help but notice.

But we swear it wasn't we but must be her beg beg sister who did come up and tek them.'

Bertie didn't laugh so heartily at this. In fact he glanced a little nervously at the very quiet Mary who had started to wonder what else Corrine had done for him besides washing and cooking.

The way they laughed and joked together made Mary feel like an outsider, that she didn't know her husband.

Corrine, it seemed, was tired of working for the white people and Bertie had promised to get her a job at the hotel so she had come to find out what was happening.

Mary couldn't help but notice how Corrine's eyes darted around the room as if she was taking notes about how they lived. Mary decided that she didn't like her.

When she was ready to leave Bertie offered to walk her to the bus stop and Mary made up her mind to ask him point-blank about her suspicions. But Bertie didn't return and Mary seized the opportunity to sneak away to her church service. When she returned, Bertie was in bed, but strangely he didn't ask her where she had been nor did he fuss about not finding her at home when he got back.

Shortly after that, Bertie began to stay away from home one night in a week or a fortnight, then one night per week regularly, then two and three nights every week. He told Mary that the hotel restaurant at which he worked had started closing very late especially on weekends and that they had set aside two rooms for the staff to sleep rather than have them travel home in the wee morning hours.

Mary said nothing. Not even after the night when she suddenly became ill and on the way to the hospital in a taxi, she begged the neighbour who was accompanying her to stop at the hotel to tell Bertie.

The neighbour was told that Bertie had left for home long ago as the restaurant closed at ten o'clock.

She never asked him about this.

Gradually Mary found that life had returned to its old pattern of regular church-going as Bertie was either not at home or showed no interest in her comings and goings.

Things were like this for some time before it finally dawned on Mary that he was now coming home only once or twice each week. And that since he wasn't wearing the clothes he had there, she had little washing and ironing to do and she didn't have to be constantly cleaning and straightening the house. In fact she was a Thursday wife once more – almost.

And still she didn't say anything, for hadn't the parson insisted – 'God

first and all things after'? If this was God's way of giving her the time to serve Him, then she would accept it without murmur or complaint.

When Bertie began to make excuses for not paying the rent or for not giving her any money, she used her savings to buy a sewing machine and went to the Singer classes to refresh her memory. A long time ago she used to sew when she was in the country.

Mary started taking in sewing. She spoiled a few dresses but slowly got the hang of it, and soon enough between the church sisters and others she had more work than she could handle. So between serving the Lord and earning a living she had little time to be lonely and was often surprised when she returned from church to find Bertie in bed on the nights he chose to come to her.

He rarely attempted to make love to her any longer and she was glad because for both of them it was now a joyless exercise.

This pattern continued. Mary didn't know what he did with his time, and she didn't ask him any questions. But one afternoon when she returned home after being out most of the day on a mission of mercy, her neighbour told her that a woman with two small children had been looking for her and had waited some hours hoping to see her. When she asked what the woman looked like, she realised that it was Corrine, who had visited them some years before. Corrine who used to wash and cook for Bertie. Instinctively she knew that this was the reason why he had all but left her. She wondered what Corrine wanted from her. Why she had visited her.

Mary brooded on this for some days so that the next time Bertie came to visit her, she broke her vow of silence and told him about the woman's visit.

She could not quite understand Bertie's reaction. At first he seemed frightened, then angry, then embarrassed and when Mary said, 'I wonder what she want?' he shrugged his shoulders and said, 'I tired. I going to bed.'

Mary sat in the best chair, worn now and faded like her marriage. She sighed. He wasn't even interested enough for them to have a quarrel. Since he was there she couldn't use the machine so what could she do to pass the time? It was too early to go to bed, she thought.

She sighed again and got up to fetch her sewing. At least she could do some handwork.

She sighed another time as she sat down and looked across the room at him lying on the bed in his underwear.

He wasn't even handsome any longer, she thought. Middle age was creeping up on him. Then she acknowledged with surprise that she

didn't have any feelings for him any longer. She didn't love him. She didn't even like him. It wasn't that he was no longer physically attractive, for she too had put on weight and her stomach had started its middle-age swell. It was more the fact that he was a stranger to her. As if she had never ever been truly married to him. She didn't know him.

She wondered when he would make up his mind to leave her altogether. She didn't know why he bothered to keep up the pretence.

She could not know that Bertie was not asleep. That he lay there wondering how he had got himself into so much confusion. That most of all he was wondering how he had left this good woman to get involved first with Corrine and now with the devil who was out to mash up his life.

He thought of Corrine and her two children and how lately she had started nagging him, and how the children were getting on his nerves as they always seemed to be crying.

And he thought of Mary, patient Mary, who through all the years had never even questioned him when many other women would have made a stink. He thought how she always welcomed him, never turned him away even though she had more than good reason to do so.

He thought also of the other woman who had recently begun to pursue him. He had met her at the restaurant. She was a customer. She had invited him out after work and he had accepted. At first it was exciting to be with this superior, polished lady, but lately the things she wanted him to do in bed made him feel rebellious.

Corrine, he thought, had come to see Mary because she was wondering why he was staying out so often.

What a mess! he thought. The best thing to do, perhaps, was to come back to his wife Mary. He was getting tired of those other demanding women.

'Cho! Mary,' he said, turning around suddenly and startling her. 'Turn off the light now, and come to bed.'

Mary, dutiful as ever, sighed. She hoped he had no amorous thoughts. That night more than ever she would not be able to accommodate him. Perhaps she wouldn't ever be able to accommodate him again.

FAUSTIN CHARLES

Signpost of the Phoenix

As a carpenter and sign-painter, Blake gets a lot of work for the two days of Carnival: painting flags, decorating brass and copper, building wooden structures, bending wire and designing costumes for the many band-leaders and others who sought his services and advice. Carnival time was his supreme triumph; he always felt outside himself and bigger than himself, a king, king of the world. The few weeks preceding the two-day festival, he would sit alone in his room in the city, thinking and planning about the bands, the masqueraders and the spectacle; the unforgettable beauty of past Carnival bands, and the greater glory of the things to come.

O God Ah seein dem comin down de road like fire burnin up de place de sun happy forever in meh life Papa an Mama dat is mas in yuh mas an dont name me but Ah higher dan a kite yuh never see action like dat movin in yuh face an outa yuh face creation killin dem wid handiwork an footwork an bodywork over an under ontop an below yonder an beyond anyting yuh ever dream of in dis world an de nex musicman in yuh born days steelban is yuh sweetest saviour pan makin an shakin yuh ways wid de free spirit yuh eyeball comin outa yuh head an yuh soul takin a flight to de ends of a rainbow all a dem should win firs prize wid dey heart turnin inside out for love an rejoicin O lord for de two days Ah is King Ah bigger dan anyting on dis side of de eart Ah provin mehself better dan mehself in so many ways for everybody to see an put a crown on meh head so many time Ah tellin people dat Ah is de greatest inventor wen it come to make an remakin costume jus look at dat history ban call Carib Warriors & Hunters man some wounded men lookin like dey really really hurt in battle Papa sailor ban will always be popular cause dey does make every dem people danein like dey real for true look at dem rhinestone glitterin an dem beadwork flatterin in de sun look how dem frill cuttin de light an shapin up ripples in de sky to make yuh eye pop out dey mus win someting if not firs prize dey mus make some kinda impression on everybody min an soul look at de jumpup in sagating everybody watchin dat dazmlin yellow an crimson slicin nice nice allyuh move let dem pass nice great an keep rememberin dem for de