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# The White Woman on the Green Bicycle

## Monique Roffey

### CHAPTER ONE

### The Blimp

Every afternoon, around four, the iguana fell out of the coconut tree. Bdup! While sunbathing, it had fallen asleep, relaxing its grip, dropping from a considerable height. It always landed like a cat, on all fours, ready to fight. The dogs always went berserk, gnashing and chasing after the creature as it fled, scuttling across the grass, a streak of lime green disappearing off into the undergrowth.

'It never remembers the day before,' Sabine remarked. 'Never remembers its dreams, either, I suppose. Brain like a peanut.'

The lizard's daily plummet acted like an alarm clock, prompting Sabine to make their afternoon pot of tea. She went to put the kettle on.

'Jennifer, tell your son Talbot to come and kill that damn lizard.'

But Jennifer only rolled her eyes. She'd dominated the kitchen all day, baking gooey cakes and sweet-breads, stewing chicken with brown sugar. She'd been making pellau for the weekend. On the kitchen table, two halves of Madeira sponge were just out of the oven, cooling on racks.

'Why?'


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'It upsets the dogs.'

'So?'

'It's driving me crazy.'

'Let de dog go bite it, nuh, den dey go see somptin!'

'I don't want it to bite the dogs.'

'Dem dogs chupid.'

'Not my little one, ma petite.'

'She de woss.'

'Oh Jennifer, how can you say that?'

'If dat lizard go fall on she, she go dead.'

'Don't say that.'

Jennifer chuckled, enjoying the thought of the lizard falling on Katinka's glossy Pomeranian head.

'I want Talbot to kill it.'

'He won't kill it.'

'Why not?'

'Talbot 'fraid dat lizard too bad.'

'Don't be ridiculous. He can cook it, or do whatever he wants with it.'

'Put it in a pot,' Jennifer teased her.

'Uggghhh.'

'Stew it up.'

Sabine flinched, making a wincing-chewing face.

'It taste nice, boy.' Jennifer stifled a laugh.

'No, thank you.'

'You never taste it?'


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'Of course not, eh, eh,' Sabine steupsed, sucking her teeth.

Jennifer laughed and Sabine poked out her tongue in response.

Jennifer was mostly African, mixed up with some Spanish blood, or so she claimed. Her arms were heavy and her hips had spread, but she was proud of her heart-shaped face, her round polished cheekbones. She waxed her kinky hair and pinned it up. Jennifer smelled rich, coconut oil and Paramin mountain herbs, fresh rosemary, wild thyme, scents she knew well. And yes, these days Jennifer was much too fresh by half, never did what she was asked any more; did what she liked and when she liked, in her own time. Jennifer hoovered when she wanted to, polished the silver and cleaned the crystal only when she felt like it. Jennifer ran things now: good for her.

'Oh Gyaaaad,' Sabine complained loudly. 'The heat! Jennifer, I cyan take it.' She lifted up her voluminous house dress and fanned it up to her face, exposing her pink cotton knickers.

'Phhhhhut!' She made a loud hissing sound, fanning herself. 'C'est un fourneau.'

Jennifer shook her head. 'Take cyare Mr Harwood ent come in and ketch a fright.'

'Ha ha,' Sabine cut back. As if George looked at her any more; as if he cared to look.

'You can talk. You're almost as fat as me.'

Jennifer gasped. 'I not fat.'

'You were skinny once, like a piece of spaghetti when you first came to us. Now look at you.'

Jennifer pursed her lips. 'I does look healthy.'

'You'll get fatter if you're not careful. Your daughter Chantal is already getting fat.'

Jennifer stopped her mixing at the stove; she turned and fixed her hands on her wide hips. 'Oh gorshhh, nuh. I don't want to see your panties.'

Sabine kept fanning herself. 'Oh, don't be so prudish. Who cares?'

'I does care.'

'Oh! It's too hot to wear clothes.'

Jennifer stared as if Sabine was crazy.

Sabine smiled and slowly fanned her dress downwards. She made the tea and carried the tray out to George, who was reading out on the porch, researching his

next article for the Trinidad Guardian. Reading, reading, reading, he was always reading, sometimes not speaking for hours. But at four, he'd put down his book. They would discuss their plans for tomorrow. It was about all they had, these days, this teatime catch-up. But at least her husband wasn't boring. Or short. Sabine detested little men and boring people. George was still brilliant, somehow, despite it all, maybe even more so. He turned heads, George did, with his skin turned red as rum and his hawk-like nose. In his later years, he'd come to resemble a totem pole. And his eyes shone brighter, his blue eyes were turquoise now, like a wild liqueur. No, despite it all, she'd never stopped wanting to talk to George.

'Jennifer is baking cakes in the kitchen,' she told him.

'Oh, good. What kind?'

'Banana.'

'The best.'

'I know you like to eat banana cake when it's still warm. She'll bring it out.'

'Thank you. Give an Englishman cake, tea and cake every day of his life.' George rubbed his hands with impending pleasure, trying to catch her eye, his gaze shy of hers.

Tea. At 4 p.m. every day on the porch out back. Tea and cake and the keskidees swooping to drink from the swimming pool. Earl Grey. White sugar in lumps. No one else around drank tea like this, no one on the island cared for tea, not like them. 'Allyuh white people crayzee wid all dis tea.' That's what Jennifer always said.

'So. Who's next to be interviewed?' Sabine pressed; George often didn't say.

'The coach.' His voice was hesitant.

'Beenhakker?'

'Yes. Why not?'

Sabine grimaced.

'I'm going to ask Ray later.'

'They've spent a fortune on this man.'

'Indeed.'

'Football, they spend millions. Hospitals, zero.'

George stared at his tea.


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Sabine stirred hers. The Soca Warriors, Trinidad and Tobago's national team. A ragbag collection of players, some just out of high school. Only two professionals, both almost forty. She made a sarcastic smile.

'It's an important event.'

'Of course, darling.'

'Trinidadians are good at football.'

Sabine nodded. 'I know. Talented bunch. Good all-rounders.'

'Try to see it as a good thing. Try, darling.'

Sabine squinted. 'Ugh. Football, football. The world loves football. Men kicking a ball around, so proud of their countries, most run by imbeciles.'

'Oh, Sabine!'

'Eric Williams loved football, didn't he?'

'So? Where did that come from?'

'Never mind,' Sabine brooded, surprised at herself.

'Pass the cake, please.'

But she didn't want to pass the cake. She watched the keskidees swoop at the pool. The air was like glue. Her face glistened. George reached forward and speared banana cake onto his plate, his long hair undone. A strand hung over his face. His eyes were a little vacant. She'd made him angry again.

'Sorry, darling. I'm so hot. Phutt!' She fanned herself. The black-blue birds shouted Qu'est-ce qu'il dit - What's he saying? He wasn't saying anything; he was just trying to understand her, as usual.

*

After tea, George escaped Sabine and her holier-than-thou ideas. Pain in the neck with her righteous questions: as if he didn't know or care either. Well, mosst times he didn't: caring never helped things along. He drove away from the house towards the chaos of Port of Spain. It was March. Dry season. George melted in the pickup truck. The liver spots on the backs of his hands seemed to double before his eyes, the windscreen acting like a magnifying glass.

How he loved this city. Port of Spain. Poor old blind-deaf city. It spanned back, in a grid, from a busy port and dock; worn out now, ruined and ruinous and suffering, always suffering. It had survived military invasions, great fires, meek hurricanes, riots, mutinies, half a century of jouvay mornings, carnival Mondays and Tuesdays.

No wonder it looked fatigued. Port of Spain: assaulted again and again and risen again and again, each time leaving the remnants of what had once been. Parts of the city still renewed themselves, rising up against the odds. These days it was garish and glittering office blocks, government housing projects, Honda showrooms. But in other parts, the ornate balconies and balustrades, the twee romantic town houses and gingerbread cottages of Great Britannia, of French Creoliana, were visibly tumbling into the dust.

George peered upwards and cursed. There it was. Staring, just like the sky stared, another pair of eyes. Something very new had risen in recent months. Not up through the streets, no. It hovered high above, farcical, spectral.

The blimp. Or, more commonly, de blimp, for great fun was made of it.

'Where was de blimp, nuh?' people joked every time another murder was reported.

Every day, the blimp now circled over Port of Spain. Sabine hated it, of course. It had cost 40 million dollars. This was the second blimp, in fact, the first having had problems staying up. Its mission, officially, was surveillance. The PNM had informed the country that the blimp was part of their crime-busting initiative, stationed up there to spy on the slums of Laventille and Belmont and other trouble spots, where the gangs roamed.

The blimp hovered high above the coughing city. A stout blue mini-zeppelin, it puttered around, resembling a huge udder escaped from a pantomime cow. George often fantasised about shooting it down. But it wasn't just the blimp. Sometimes the air above Port of Spain hammered with the drone of metal wasps. Attack helicopters. These, according to reports, were supposed to strike the slums from the sky, snatch and scare bandits, run them down. So far they hadn't been lucky either.

*

The Trinidad Guardian offices stood on St Vincent Street, a stone's throw from the Red House, in the west of the city, close to some of the colonial buildings which still survived. An air of academia faintly existed, what with the infamous Woodford Square and the National Library. Two black women, bulging in their security uniforms, ate warm nuts at reception. They both had large dolorous eyes and wore their hair coiled in ringlets; they rang up for him without so much as meeting his eye. He studiously overlooked their manner.

The newspaper offices spread across the first floor, air-conditioned and open-plan, existing in a moody, far-too-quiet smoked glass environment.

Ray looked relaxed, recovered from a busy afternoon, eating Kentucky Fried Chicken from a box, feet up on his desk.

'George, how yuh goin.' Half-Chinese, Ray was young and good-looking. Most of the Guardian's staff had quit a few years back, following a conglomerate takeover, leaving George with a steady stream of work, increasing his profile. The new owner


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was an economic superpower on the island. People thought him in favour with Patrick Manning, the supreme leader.

'De Tineke interview a big hit. She sexy, eh?'

'Yes, a nice girl. Clever, too.'

'Who you wanna do nex?'

George's heart surged. Ray was in a good mood.

'The coach. Beenhakker.'

'Ahhh.' Ray laughed in appreciation, sucking up a French fry. 'Somptin tell meh you go aks dat. De Warriors comin' soon, yes. We already try him. He not givin' one-on-one interviews yet or even at all as far as we know. An' if he do, de editor go give him to de boys in de newsroom. Dey already fightin' over it. It go be a big ting, George.'

'I see. Of course.' George tried to hide his disappointment. Trinidad and Tobago had qualified for the 2006 World Cup. Thanks to their expensive Dutch coach, the Soca Warriors were going to Germany. A huge story. He was OK with his status at the paper. Crazy-ass ol' white man; good writer, though. Besides, he'd invented himself; the personal interview was his forte. George Harwood - Soft News Man. He covered features, fluffy stuff. He interviewed women, children, elderly people, award-winners, priests, nuns, monks, comedians, calypsonians, businessmen, birdwatchers, dog lovers, forest-dwellers, potters, painters, Rastamen, Baptist shouters, and, occasionally, members of the government. He'd interviewed almost everyone on the island and wrote his interviews with love and care. He did all the upbeat stories, the good-news stories the younger men on the paper refused to touch.

'I'd like you to do Boogsie for me.'

'Again?'

'Dey name a trophy after him.'

'A Boogsie Sharp trophy?'

'Yeah.' Ray laughed. 'At de music festival. Just do us somptin small. For next Sunday.'

'Anything else?'

'I hear Lara coming back after New Zealand.'

'Brian Lara?'

Ray nodded. 'Have you met him?'

'Actually, I haven't.'

'If he come, ah go ring yuh. I know you hot on cricket.'

'Thanks.'

George left Ray's office whistling. Lara, he was happy with that. Brian Lara was a great man.

The newsroom boys were back from an editorial meeting, a young bunch, all in ties and Clarks' desert boots, hair slicked back.

'What are the stories for tomorrow, boys?' George asked.

'Cop on murder charge,' Joel read from his screen.

'Cop on drugs charge,' Ramesh read from his.

'Policeman chopped chasing drug traffickers,' chipped in Corey.

'Family claim police brutality charges,' said Joel.

'Surely there must be one baby rescued from a burning building?'

'Yeah, right.' The boys smirked at him pityingly.

'You wanna interview my mother?' Joel laughed. Joel was the chief reporter, serious about his work, but also the office joker.

'Is she as ugly as you?'

'Uglier. But she like your interviews. She aks meh if yousa single man. Ah could fix you up.'

George walked past them, shaking his head.

'Goodbye, boys.'

'Bye George,' they chorused.

'Ay, how de lips dese days,' Joel called after him.

George turned round, blushing and smiling with shame. 'Get lost,' he mouthed.

The boys fell about laughing.

At the last Christmas staff party George got rat-arsed, taking a shine to a pretty, skinny Indian girl in the subs department. He stayed on far too late, fancying his

chances, that she had liked him back, for he hadn't completely vanished, damn it. The girl was at least ten years younger than his daughter; tiny tits, round and hard as apples, tiny backside, tiny T-shirt, tight jeans. Finding himself alone in the lift with her on the way down, he became confused, missing the curves of his wife, the luscious wife of his youth. Knowing he'd always been lucky with women. He lunged. The girl dodged. He'd ended up kissing the wall.

*

Sabine smoked in their air-conditioned bedroom, curtains drawn, the covers pulled up over her knees. She liked to smoke in the cool and the dim light. At least she no longer took pills, no longer slept for days at a time. Lucy, many years she worked for them, years ago now; her tonics had brought her some relief, pleasant fragrant drinks made of hibiscus petals. The Cavina, the banana boat which had delivered them to the island decades ago, she saw it drifting towards the dock. Those black birds in the sky, corbeaux. She still saw them, too, circling overhead. Saw them every day, picking at her carrion flesh, the dead meat she was. Now she couldn't remember how to leave the island. And to where? Her skin was black now, just like them. Being like this was a soft experience, as though she were nearing death. Of course she was near death. But at last she was from here now, like it or not. She was part of things. She no longer lived in the past, or dreamt of the future, no one could accuse her of that. She lived day to day, thinking for the moment. She avoided the newspapers, of course, never even read George's articles any more. Life was simple, like a hermit's. She ate very little. She drank a lot, though. Never mind about that. She smoked her cigarette to the nub and crushed it out, then rolled over and curled herself up into a ball under the covers. Eric Williams - the football. She remembered taking him in her arms. Those bleak days, Port of Spain in flames. She shut them out but they returned again and again. The letters she wrote. Hundreds. The air-conditioner hummed. It lulled her into a vague, comforting doze and once again she forgot.

*

On his way home, George slowed his truck to let cars pass at the bottom of Morne Cocoa Road, at the T-junction joining Saddle Road, next to the gas station, opposite the route-taxi pickup spot. La Pompey stood in the gas-station forecourt in ragged shorts and a bright white pair of trainers, his mahogany chest aglow in the evening's dim heat, his girlish pointy nipples erect. He counted through a roll of red dollar notes, the money he had earned from washing cars.

'Yess, Mr Harwood.' La Pompey grinned across at him.

La Pompey wasn't mad. Maybe a bit simple. But no madman.

'Good evening, sir.' George waved from the cab of the truck.

'Man, yuh truck a state. Looking like it been tru de pitch lake.'

'Yes. Sorry about that.'

'How yuh could drive dat ting so wid no shame?'

George shrugged. The rust was so bad it resembled a spray of machine-gun bullet holes, but he was very attached to it.

'It need a wash, man. Ah comin' to fix it up.'

'Yes, sir. Come round any time.'

'How's Mrs Harwood?'

'Very well.'

'You is keepin' her well den. You know what dey say.'

'What's that?'

'A kiss a day keep de doctor away.'

George made an amused half-sour face. 'You should write greetings cards, sir.'

'Yes, man. Kiss your woman every day and keep her sweet and she will always be a treat.'

'You're a poet, too, Mr La Pompey.'

'Just La Pompey, La Pompey,' he corrected. 'Yes, man, ah does write a little verse from time to time.'

'And your favourite poet, do tell.'

'William Shakespeare.'

'Shakespeare?'

'Yes, man. Learn him well in school and ting.'

'And what poems did you learn?'

La Pompey smiled, only three teeth showing before his face went calm and serious. He studied George with careful attention, his eyes a little wet. 'Shall I compare de to a summer's day?'

George stared.

La Pompey mock-wooed George through the car window. 'Dou art more lovely, man, yes, man - an' more tem-per-ate!'

George wanted to kiss him.


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La Pompey slow-winked. 'Nice, eh?'

'Yes.'

'Poetry say everytin.'

'Maybe.'

'Summer, man.' La Pompey grinned. 'Summer all de time in Trinidad. Heat in de place. Heat an' sunshine.' He glowed, his face like a big sun.

'I like that poem.'

'You know it?'

'Of course.'

'You does speak poems for Mrs Harwood?'

'Not these days.'

'I'm sorry to hear dat. You should speak more poems fer she.'

'She wouldn't like it if I did.'

'Really? You never know.'

'Yes, I know.'

'You mus speak of de love inside you, man. Or else where it go? It go rot, form a lump inside you. Rot and swell and make you sick.'

'How did you know...that's how it feels?'

'I's a sweet-man.' He winked again. 'Can't you see? Ah does love plenty women. Keep me healthy.'

'Good for you, La Pompey.'

'Yes, man. Take care Mrs Harwood. Treat she sweet. Mrs Harwood a plenty good woman an' yousa lucky man. Summer every day, man, in Trinidad.'

A car behind beeped George and he turned left, driving on through the village.

Winderflet village spread itself beneath the green hills of Paramin. The valley, rich in soil, once boasted nine flourishing estates, several mills and four rum distilleries. A

brown river, Winderflet River, sometimes slim, sometimes fat, according to the season, slithered through the valley and the village embraced its shallow curves. Our Lady of Lourdes dominated the settlement, a grand square church peering down from an excavated mound; French, Catholic, it was carnivalesque with its gaudy red and vanilla exterior. The church cast a long shadow from up there on the mound, a shadow which fell directly onto Winderflet Police Station, much to the disdain of Superintendent Bobby 'Big Balls' Comacho. Between the church and the police station, they had things all sewn up. A quiet place, Winderflet. The church boasted a robust choir, tenors, a soprano, the whole range of gospel voices. Sometimes, when driving through the village during choir practice, George listened to the hymns sailing out, songs to God, songs floating upwards, lifting his heart. One voice was always very particular, more celestial than the others, mournful: the boy's voice.

It was dark by the time he arrived home. The house he had built nestled at the foot of the same imposing green hills. Sabine had always seen a woman in the hills, a colossus, asleep on her side, half-exposing her loins. The house was a Spanish finca in design, arches and courtyards and wide porches all around. Sliding glass windows opened so the hummingbirds could flit through, siphoning nectar from the cut ginger lilies. A pool out back in which George paddled like a duck. He stopped at the wrought-iron gates which stood seven foot tall and peered through the bars.

The sticky Julie mango tree nodded at him.

Don't look at me like that.

Like what?

Like you know how.

No, I don't.

One day she lit up, one day I lit her up; the next, nothing. When did it happen? I don't recall the day.

It's not your fault.

Sabine was right about this country. She punishes me.

It's not your fault. Anyway, you're sure it all happened in one day? Think.

What? Think?

Eric Williams, remember him?

Yes.

It's all his fault. More than you care to know.


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George snorted. You going to quote Shakespeare to me, too?

I am going to let down my bucket where I am, right here with you, in the British West Indies.

Who said that?

Eric Williams.

When?

A long time ago.

Yes. Poor bastard. Whatever became of him in the end?

Ask your wife.

What's that supposed to mean?

You know.

No, I don't.

You do, you just don't want to remember.

I miss her.

Yes.

We survive off our past glory.

It's not your fault.

No.

Her eyes are evasive, that's the worst part. I should let her go.

Maybe you should.

But I would miss her so.

*

George clicked the buzzer. The gate slid backwards and he drove through. The big sandy ridgeback dogs woofed and jumped up at the doors to greet him; they wagged their whole bodies with delight, trailing the truck.

'Good evening, boys,' he greeted them, taking each by the muzzle and rubbing it down, rubbing each dog, especially his favourite, Henry, into a shambling stooping ecstasy. 'Good, good dogs, that's right.' They crowded him as he entered the courtyard out front.

The television was on too loud, as usual, blaring American cable TV. Sabine lounged on a sofa, the back of her head to him. Her hair had recently been clipped to an inch of her skull, because of the heat, she said.

'Hello, dear,' he called.

Sabine turned, dabbing her face with a tissue.

When, when did this Sabine materialise? Her face so clammy, her skin diseased. Chocolate-brown flecks, eruptions of melanin, splattered her forehead, her cheeks, her shoulders, too. Large brown spots on sun-ravaged skin. Bumps had clustered on her once enticing cleavage. Her face and chest were scourged, mapped with crevasses.

'You're late,' she said, turning back to watch the television. She smoked, nursing a rum and soda. Katinka flopped next to her, head buried in Sabine's lap, eyes rolled upwards as a form of greeting.

'I've seen Ray,' he said, tucking the tag of her dress back in. 'I'm going to interview Brian Lara.'

'This is incredible, what's going on!'

'What is?'

'Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?'

'Oh.'

'This man is two questions away from winning a million dollars.'

'Good.' He checked his watch, 7 p.m. Time for the local news. 'Can we turn over?'

She shrugged.

'Please.'

Sabine flicked channels reluctantly, stroking her lapdog. The animal lifted its tiny glossy head and yawned.

CNC came on. George sat down in his armchair. The newscaster, Carla Foderington, spoke in posh creole tones. She was a starchy-looking, well-dressed black woman whom he rather fancied.

Sabine rose and disappeared into the kitchen. The little dog jumped off the sofa and trotted after her, also bored by what was happening in Trinidad.

George pressed his fingers along the line of his brow. Hello, my love, she used to say. Hello, my love, my loving love-cup, my darlingheart. How was your day? Once, she'd glowed when she saw him. She would throw her arms around him, reach up to kiss his cheek. Sometimes she would pull him into the bedroom.

Sabine returned with a two-foot canister of Flit, blasting a thick mist of insecticide ahead of her, crop-dusting the once expensive Spanish rugs. If the sun was her primary enemy, mosquitoes were a close second. George tried to watch the news but she stood in the way, spraying. Mist everywhere. A newly lit cigarette was clamped in her other hand.

'Darling, one day there'll be an explosion.'

'What?'

'I can't see.' He waved the mist away, coughing. 'Could you move over a bit?'

But she was now engrossed in the local news, too, watching with an air of impatience.

'Oouf. Another murder,' she snapped. Even her tone of voice had changed. It made him ashamed of himself. Sometimes, when she spoke to Jennifer, it was in Jennifer's way. She steupsed just like Jennifer, and eh, eh, ohoed. Her third language, after French and English. Sabine was an excellent mimic. Her French was Parisian, her English like the Queen's, her Trinidadian dialect, whenever it emerged, was bold and rhythmic.

The news stories of the day:

Basdeo Panday, the leader of the opposition, in court on charges of corruption.

The murder toll had reached a hundred in a hundred days.

Thirty-nine police officers were flying to the island from Scotland Yard to help with the kidnapping epidemic.

A shoot-out in Laventille, the infamous slum of Port of Spain. Images of a man lying dead in a gutter, thick black blood pooling from his stomach. Laventillians standing around watching.

The Soca Warriors in training.

Sabine disappeared in disgust, still Flit-ing, mounting the stairs, bent on poisoning the entire house.


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Later, she brought out two trays with plates of microwaved leftover goat curry. They ate on their laps, watching the weather report. Then Sabine flicked over to watch ice-dancing, dabbing her sweat-damp face and feeding titbits to Katinka. After game shows, Sabine mostly glued herself to foreign events, watching hours of figure-skating and tennis; always a tournament on, always something big somewhere else.

George heard a familiar whistling from the opposite sofa.

'Darling?'

Sabine sat in a half-fallen position, the ballast of her swollen stomach keeping her from toppling completely. Her lips billowed, reverberating, the sound like a small puffing engine. He rose quietly and went over to her, kneeling next to the sofa. He liked to look at her while she slept, so unguarded. His eyes wandered over her, picking over the bulges and sloping lines of her form. He'd caught sight of this body, here and there, in mirrors, in the bathroom. Under her house dress, her stomach looked like an uneven pile of red clay. Her breasts had grown slack, pendulous, running to her waist. Her arms were thicker, the tender white underskin yellowed and doughy. Her legs were pudgy now, marbled with blue-purple veins. Her toenails were dry and papery. No trace of her former beauty; the sun had taken it.

Sabine stirred. Her eyes flickered sleepily, then flew open. 'Oh.' She jumped awake.

'What's wrong?' she asked accusingly, as though he were an intruder.

'Nothing, my love.'

'What are you doing?'

'Looking at you.'

'You frightened me.'

'I'm sorry.'

'I was dreaming of the Cavina.'

'Were you?'

'The day we arrived. Laventille Hill, remember that? I thought we'd live there.'

George nodded. 'You were nervous, weren't you?'

'I was...sick with nerves.'

George gazed at her. How he still liked to look at her, puzzle at her face, how it once was, how it was now. He smiled, daring to put out his hand, look into her eyes. She watched his hand as he placed it on her belly. These days it was like trying to touch a wounded bear, which made caressing his wife somehow more thrilling. Sabine's eyes were suddenly full, expectant.

'What are you thinking?' he asked.

'My green bicycle. Remember it?'

'Yes, of course.'

'Arriving from the hold. People laughed when they saw it.'

'Yes.'

'I travelled everywhere on that bike - at first. Didn't I?'

'I remember it well.'

Often, Sabine would arrive at the dock to meet him after work. Her shorts revealed long, slim, honey-coloured legs. A halter-neck top, Dior sunglasses. Blonde curls. Every man behind her stopped dead in their tracks to watch her pass.

'Riding round the savannah, I liked that.'

'Holding up traffic with those legs.'

'I saw Trinidad on that bike. You know...saw the sights.'

'And you were seen, my love.' George smiled. 'Don't we still have that old thing, somewhere?'

She nodded carefully.

'Where?'

'I don't know. Somewhere.'