

*An unnamed narrator has recently married Antoinette, a white creole, whose family offered him money to marry. The scene takes place at Grandbois, Antoinette's inherited estate. The man feels increasingly uncomfortable around the servants and his strange young wife. Hostility grows between the man and Christophine, Antoinette's black servant, who wields great power in the house. The man has received a letter warning him of Antoinette's depravity, saying that she comes from a family of derelicts and has madness in her blood. The night before this extract he had sexual intercourse with the maid, Amélie, a brown girl.*

The door of Antoinette's room opened. When I saw her I was too shocked to speak. Her hair hung uncombed and dull into her eyes which were inflamed and staring, her face was very flushed and looked swollen. Her feet were bare. However when she spoke her voice was low, almost inaudible.

5 'I rang the bell because I was thirsty. Didn't anybody hear?'

Before I could stop her she darted to the table and seized the bottle of rum.

'Don't drink any more,' I said.

'And what right have you to tell me what I'm to do? Christophine!' she called again, but her voice broke.

10 'Christophine is an evil old woman and you know it as well as I do,' I said. 'She won't stay here very much longer.'

'She won't stay here very much longer,' she mimicked me, 'and nor will you, nor will you. I thought you liked the black people so much,' she said, still in that mincing voice, 'but that's just a lie like everything else. You like the light brown girls better, don't you? You abused the planters and made up stories about them, but you do the same thing. You send the girl

15 away quicker, and with no money or less money, and that's all the difference.'

'Slavery was not a matter of liking or disliking,' I said, trying to speak calmly. 'It was a question of justice.'

20 'Justice,' she said. 'I've heard that word. It's a cold word. I tried it out,' she said, still speaking in a low voice. 'I wrote it down. I wrote it down several times and always it looked like a damn cold lie to me. There is no justice.'

She drank some more rum and went on, 'My mother whom you all talk about, what justice did she have? My mother sitting in the rocking-chair speaking about dead horses and dead grooms and a black devil kissing her sad mouth<sup>1</sup>. Like you kissed mine,' she said.

25 The room was now unbearable hot. 'I'll open the window and let a little air in,' I said.

'It will let the night in too,' she said, 'and the moon and the scent of those flowers you dislike so much.'

When I turned from the window she was drinking again.

'Bertha,' I said.

30 'Bertha is not my name. You are trying to make me into someone else, calling me by another name. I know, that's obeah<sup>2</sup> too.'

Tears streamed from her eyes.

35 'If my father, my real father, was alive you wouldn't come back here in a hurry after he'd finished with you. If he was alive. Do you know what you've done to me? It's not the girl, not the girl. But I love this place and you have made into a place I hate. I used to think that if everything else went out of my life I would still have this, and now you have spoilt it. It's just somewhere else where I have been unhappy, and all the other things are nothing to what has happened here. I hate it now like I hate you and before I died I will show you how much I hate you.'

*Wide Sargasso Sea, Jean Rhys, 1966*

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1 Antoinette witnessed her mother being raped by a black man.

2 Jamaican version of voodoo (black magic)