

At the end of the small hours . . .

Get away, I said, you bastard of a cop, swine get away. I hate the livery of order and the fish-hooks of hope. Get away foul ju-ju, bedbug of a monk. Then I turned to dream for him and his lost ones' paradises more calm than the face of a woman telling lies. Rocked there on the breath of inexhaustible thought, I fed the wind, set monsters free and heard a river of turtledoves and savannah clover rising on the far side of disaster: a river in my depths as deep as the brazen twentieth storey is high: a river to protect me against the corruptions of the dusk that are paced day and night by a damned venereal sun.

At the end of the small hours delicately sprouting handles for the market: the West Indies, hungry, hail-marked with smallpox, blown to bits by alcohol, the West Indies shipwrecked in the mud of this bay, wickedly shipwrecked in the dust of this town.

At the end of the small hours: the last, deceiving sorry scab on the wound of the waters; the martyrs who refuse to bear witness; the fading flowers of blood scattered on the futile wind like the screeches of chattering parrots; an old life's ingratiating smile, lips apart in deserted anguish, an old wretchedness decomposing in silence beneath the sun; an old silence broken by tepid pustules, the dreadful zero of our reason for living.

At the end of the small hours: the strand of dreams and the senseless awakening on this frail stratum of earth already humiliated by the greatness of its future when the volcanoes will erupt

and naked waters sweep away the stains ripened by the sun till nothing is left but a tepid molten simmering pried over by sea birds.

At the end of the small hours: this town, flat, displayed, brought down by its common-sense, inert, breathless under its geometric burden of crosses, forever starting again, sullen to its fate, dumb, thwarted in every degree, incapable of growing as the sap of its earth would have it grow, set upon, gnawed, reduced, cheating its own fauna and flora.

At the end of the small hours: this town, flat, displayed...

And in this town a clamouring crowd, a stranger to its own cry as the town, inert, is a stranger to its own movement and meaning, a crowd without concern, disowning its own true cry, the cry you'd like to hear because only that cry belongs to it, because that cry you know lives deep in some lair of darkness and pride in this disowning town, in this crowd deaf to its own cry of hunger and misery, revolt and hatred, in this crowd so strangely garrulous and dumb.

In this disowning town, this strange crowd which does not gather, does not mingle: this crowd that can so easily disengage itself, make off, slip away. This crowd which doesn't know how to crowd, this crowd so perfectly alone beneath the sun: this crowd like a woman whose lyrical walk you have noticed but who suddenly calls upon a hypothetical rain and commands it not to fall; or makes the sign of the cross without visible reason; or assumes the sudden grave animality of a peasant woman urinating on her feet, stiff legs apart.

In this disowning town under the sun this desolate crowd which rejects everything expressive, affirmative or free in the daylight of the earth which is its own earth. Which rejects Josephine¹, Empress of the French, dreaming high above the niggers. Rejects the liberator bound in his liberation of white stone. Rejects the conquistador. Rejects this contempt, this freedom, this daring.

At the end of the small hours: this disowning town and its wake of leprosy, consumption, famines: its wake of fears crouching in the ravines, hoisted in the trees, dug out of the soil, rudderless in the sky, piled together. This disowning town and its fumaroles of anguish.

At the end of the small hours, the forgotten Heights which have forgotten how to jump.

at the end of the small hours, the malarial blood of the Heights, wearing the shoes of worry and docility: reversing the sun of its own feverish pulse

At the end of the small hours, the banked fire of the Heights, like a sob gagged before it breaks out in blood; the fire awaiting a spark that hides and denies itself

At the end of the small hours, the Heights squatting in front of hunger pains, wary of thunderbolts and potholes, slowly vomiting their exhaustion of men, the Heights alone in their pool of blood, their bandages of shade, their gutters of fear, their great hands of wind.

At the end of the small hours, the famished Heights, and no one knows better than this dismal bastard of a hill, this Morne, why the suicide abetted by his epiglottis killed himself by rolling

back his tongue to swallow it; why a woman looks like she is floating in the Capot river (her luminously dark body obedient to her navel's command) and she is only a patch of ringing water. Despite the energetic way they both have of drumming on his cropped skull, neither the teacher in his classroom nor the priest at catechism can get a single word from this half-asleep nigger child because his famished voice has been sucked down into the marsh of hunger (a-word-a-single-word and you can forget about Queen Blanch of Castile², a-word-a-single-word, just look at the little savage he doesn't know a single one of God's ten commandments)

for his voice has lost its mind in the marshes of hunger

and there is nothing, nothing to be got out of the little good-for-nothing

nothing but a hunger which can no longer climb the tackle of his voice

a heavy, flabby hunger

a hunger buried in the deepest heart of the Hunger of the famished Morne.

And the end of the small hours, this nondescript beach for wrecks, the exacerbated odour of corruption, the monstrous sodomies of the host and the slaughterer, the unscalable ship's prow of prejudice and stupidity, the prostitutions, hypocrisies, lusts, betrayals, lies, swindles, concussions—the breathlessness of petty cowardice, the wheeze of gushing enthusiasm, the greeds, hysterias, perversions, the harlequinades of misery, cripplings, itches, rashes, the luke-warm hammocks of degeneration.

This is the pageant of comic scrofulous swellings, of festers begun by the strangest microbes, of poisons without known antidote, of pus from old wounds, of unforeseen fermentations in rotting bodies.

At the end of the small hours, the great still night, the stars more dead than a burst of balafong, the monstrous bulb of the night, germinated from all our meanness and renunciations.

And our gestures, idiotic and mad, trying to bring back the golden shower of privileged moments, the umbilical cord redrawn in its frail splendour, the bread and wine of complicity, the bread, the wine, the blood of a true wedding.

My far distant happiness which makes me aware of my true misery: a lumpy road plunging into a hollow where it scatters a handful of huts: a tireless road charging at full speed towards a hill at whose top it is brutally drowned in a stagnant pool of dwarfish houses, a road madly climbing, recklessly descending, and the wooden frame comically hoicked up on tiny cement legs which I call 'our home', its skull of galvanized iron buckling in the sun like a drying hide, the dining room, the rough floor with its glistening beads of nails, the rafters of pine and shadow which run across the ceiling, the ghostly chairs of straw, the grey light of the lamp, varnished and quick with cockroaches, the lamp buzzing till it hurts . . .

At the end of the small hours, this most essential country restored to my greed which wants no foggy tenderness but is the twisted sensual concentration of the Morne's fat nipple with the accidental palm tree as its hardened germ, the jerking spunk of the streams, the great hysterical tongue of the sea from Trinité to Grande-Rivière.

Then time passed by quickly, very quickly.

August when the mango-trees sport moons: September—midwife of cyclones: October—burning sugar-cane, November which purrs in the stills. And now Christmas beginning.

Its coming was first felt in the prickling of desires, a thirst for new tenderness, the budding of vague dreams, then suddenly it took wing in the violent silk rustle of its great wings of joy, and over the borough it plunged down and burst open the life inside the huts like and over-ripe pomegranate.

Christmas was not like other holidays. It did not want to run in the streets, dance in the public squares, straddle wooden horses, take advantage of the crush to pinch women, throw fireworks in the face of tamarisks. Christmas was agoraphobia. What it wanted was a day of continual bustle and preparation and kitchenwork, a day of cleaning and anxiety

in-case-there's-not-enough,

in-case-we-run-short,

in-case-they-think-it-dull,

then in the evening a small church, not intimidating, allowing itself to be filled benevolently with laughter and whispers, confidences, declarations of love, rumours, and the keen, throaty discords of the choir leader, and hearty men and tarty girls and homes with their entrails stuffed with succulence, no counting pennies today, and the town now nothing but a bouquet of songs, it is good to be inside, to eat well and drink with warmth, blood sausage two fingers thin like a twisty stalk, or blood sausage broad and thick, the mild sort tasting of wild thyme, the hot kind blazing with spice, scalding coffee sweet aniseed cordial milk punch, rums of liquid sun, and good things to eat which brand your mucous membranes or distil them to delight or weave fragrances across them, when somebody laughs, when another sings, and the refrains speed like coconut palms as far as you can see

ALLELUIA

KYRIE ELEISON . . . LEISON . . . LEISON

CHRISTE ELEISON . . . LEISON . . . LEISON

Not only the mouths are singing, hands, too, feet, buttocks, genitals, the whole fellow creature flowing in sound, voice and rhythm.

When the jy reaches the highest point of its ascent, it bursts like a cloud. the songs do not stop, but anxious and heavy they roll now along valleys of fear and tunnels of anguish, through the fires of hell.

Everyone tries to tweak the tail of the nearest devil until imperceptibly fear is abolished in the fine sand of dreams, and you live truly in a dream, drinking and shouting and singing in a dream, and also you doze in a dream with eyelids like rose-petals, the daylight comes velvety like the sapodilla berry, the smell of liquid manure from the coconut palm, the turkeys picking off their red pimples in the sun, the obsession of the bells, and the rain,

the bells . . . the rain . . .

ringing, ringing, ringing . . .

At the end of the small hours, this town, flat, displayed . . .

It crawls on its hands without the slightest wish ever to to stand up and pierce the sky with its protest. The backs of he houses are afraid of the fire-truffled sky, their foundations are afraid of the drowning mud. Scraps of houses that have settled to stand between shocks and undermining. And yet this town advances. Every day it grazes further beyond the tide of its tiled corridors, shame-faced blinds, sticky courtyards, dripping paintwork. And petty suppressed

scandals, petty shames kept quiet and petty immense hatreds knead the narrow streets into lumps and hollows where the gutter pulls a face among the excrement . . .

At the end of the small hours: Life flat on its face, miscarried dreams and nowhere to put them, the river of life listless in its hopeless bed, not rising or falling, unsure of its flow, lamentably empty, the heavy impartial shadow of boredom creeping over the quality of all things, the air stagnant, unbroken by the brightness of a single bird.

At the end of the small hours: another house in a very narrow street smelling very bad, a tiny house with within its entrails of rotten wood shelters rats by the dozen and the gale of my six brothers and sisters, a cruel little house whose implacability panics us at the end of every month, and my strange father nibbled by a single misery whose name I've never known, my father whom an unpredictable witchcraft soothes into sad tenderness or exalts into fierce flames of anger; and my mother whose feet, daily and nightly, pedal, pedal for our never-tiring hunger, I am even woken by those never-tiring feet pedalling by night and the Singer whose teeth rasp into the soft flesh of the night, the Singer which my mother pedals, pedals for our hunger night and day.

At the end of the small hours, my father, my mother, and over them the house which is a shack splitting open with blisters like a peach-tree tormented by blight, and the roof worn thin, mended with bits of paraffin cans, this roof pisses swamps of rust on to the grey sordid stinking mess of straw, and when the wind blows, these ill-matched properties make a strange noise, like the sputter of frying, then like a burning log plunged into water with the smoke from the twigs twisting away. . . . And the bed of planks on its legs of kerosene drums, a bed with elephantiasis,

my grandmother's bed with its goatskin and its dried banana leaves and its rags, a bed with nostalgia as a mattress and above it a bowl full of oil, a candle-end with a dancing flame and on the bowl, in golden letters, the word MERCI.

A disgrace, Paille Street,

a disgusting appendage like the private parts of this town, whose sea of grey-tiled roofs extends to left and to right all along the colonial road; whereas here there are only roofs of straw, stained brown by sea-spray, worn thin by the wind.

Everyone despises Paille Street. It's there that the young people of the town are led astray. It's there that the seas especially dumps its refuse, its dead cats and its dogs. For the street ends on the beach, and the beach is not enough to satisfy the foaming rage of the sea.

A misery, this beach of rotting garbage, the furtive rumps of creatures relieving themselves, and the sand black, dismal, black and such as you never saw, the sea-scum slides over it, yelping, and the sea hits hard at this beach like a boxer, or rather the sea is a great dog licking and biting the shins of the beach, and in the end the biting dog will surely devour this beach and Paille Street along with it.

At the end of the small hours, the rising wind of the past, of broken faith, of an undefined duty slipping away . . . and those other small hours, the early morning of Europe . . .

To leave.

As there are hyena-men and panther-men,

so I shall be a Jew man

a Kaffir man

a Hindu-from-Calcutta man

a man-from-Harlem-who-hasn't-got-the-vote.

Famine man, curse man, torture man, you may seize him at any moment, beat him, kill him—
yes, perfectly well to kill him—accounting to no one, having to offer and excuse to no one

a Jew man

a pogrom man

a whelp

a beggar

but can you kill Remorse with its beautiful face like that of an English lady stupefied at finding
Hottentot's skull in her soup tureen?

I want to rediscover the secret of great speech and of great burning. I want to say storm. I want to
say river. I want to say tornado. I want to say leaf, I want to say tree. I want to be soaked by
every rainfall, moistened by every dew. As frenetic blood rolls on the slow current of the eye, I
want to roll words like maddened horses like new children like clotted milk like curfew like
traces of a temple like precious stones buried deep enough to daunt all miners. The man who
couldn't understand me couldn't understand the roaring of a tiger.