

The Second Pasture

By CHRISTINE WESTON

Singh murdered Sir Alfred—of that I have no doubt. His motive was pride, and, in a way I may never understand, pride was his weapon, too

W E BURIED Sir Alfred this morning, very early, before the day's heat really got started, and all his friends who were able to come to the funeral, and all his people, were there—the people who had worked for him to the day of his death, which, when I come to think of it, was only yesterday; last evening, to be exact—and now my watch tells me it is four forty-five, only three quarters of an hour less than a day since Sir Alfred was killed by the Brahman bull beside the barbed-wire fence of the second pasture below his house.

At four forty-five yesterday afternoon Sir Alfred was alive, and he and I were sitting in this screened gallery which overlooks the valley and the great raft of cocoa and immortelles—those pink-flowered trees which we grow to shade the young cocoa—stretching from the terrace below the gallery to the end of the valley, where mist was just beginning to rise, as it usually does at this time of year in this region. It was an afternoon just like this afternoon, a West Indian afternoon, but cooler up here on Sir Alfred's estate in the hills than down in the gullies and savannas which fan out from the city of Port-of-Spain.

I'd been passing by on the terrace on my way to the kitchen to speak to Mrs. Penny, the cook, who is a relative of mine, when Sir Alfred called to me from the gallery, where it was his habit to rest for half an hour or so and drink a glass of rum and water before he started on his habitual stroll across the pasture to visit his old friend and neighbor, Mr. Cornelius Holmes, on the Merryvale estate next door.

"Frank," said Sir Alfred, "Frank, come up here a moment, will you?"

I went up the short flight of masonry steps and through the screen door into the gallery and there was Sir Alfred seated in his usual chair, with Mary, his fox terrier, lying at his feet, and his leather-topped cane balanced on his knee. Remembering him now, the thought comes to me that there was never anything especially surprising about Sir Alfred; he seemed always to fit into a situation or into a picture, as certain figures in real pictures seem to fit, or to belong, and I suppose that this must have been because of his appearance: he was a tall, erect old man with white hair and calm gray eyes and a nose which reached out from his face like the prow of a ship. He had a quiet manner and yet one got the feeling of strength and agility, and that was not to be wondered at either, for everyone knew that he had been a fine athlete when he was a schoolboy in England and, in fact, throughout his life, riding horseback to the last, when he was past seventy. Yet he had not the knotty muscular build of an athlete, being, on the contrary, slender and delicately made.

I keep wondering, though, how I can possibly describe him to people who never knew him. One can talk for hours about a person and not succeed in making him clear to the listener. I think that perhaps there may be a word, a single word, which

would be sufficient to describe Sir Alfred, but it would have to be a word that conceals as much as it describes, for that is how I remember him, that is why I am putting it down like this, on paper, before the memory is lost, as I fear it will be lost to many who imagine they knew him better than others knew him and who made a great to-do about loving him—loving Sir Alfred! Love is a word I never remember hearing from his lips, nor did I ever surprise the look of it on his face as one sometimes does on certain faces, or in his actions either, though I would not presume to say that the feeling was unknown to him. He must have loved his wife when he married, perhaps even when he divorced her, though that was many years ago. Perhaps he'd loved his sons, too, before they became estranged from him for reasons none of us ever found out.

Y ESTERDAY afternoon, when Sir Alfred asked me to come up into the gallery, I found him seated in the cane chair with that cushion which still has the slight hollow where his head used to rest. He held a glass in his hand. "Come in, Frank," he said as I opened the screen door. "Come in. Have a drink."

"Thank you, sir," I said, and I always said "sir" even though he had once asked me not to bother with it. "We're both too old," he'd said, with his faint smile, "for that sort of thing." It was not like him to ask me a second time, leaving it up to me thereafter, but I continued to sir him partly from habit and partly because I felt that for me not to do so would affect my relations with, for instance, George Singh, the overseer, and also the other people who worked for Sir Alfred, none of whom would have lasted a day in his employ if they'd omitted that title of respect. This singling me out was not favoritism; at any rate, I don't think it was. I think it was something else: I like to think that it might have been a kind of affection which made him ask me not to sir him. I will not presume so far as to say that a man with as many friends as he had could ever have been lonely, but I do imagine that there were moods when he had special preferences, when he enjoyed the company of a person with whom he was not in the least obliged to make conversation, with whom he found it comfortable to stay quiet, and just to feel a presence which was not a dog or a servant only, nor yet an intimate friend—I do imagine that that was how Sir Alfred may have felt about me.

This was probably a feeling he'd had from the beginning of our association ten years ago, when he engaged me first as a chauffeur, then as a kind of personal secretary to do odd jobs of accounting and letter writing for him. And in his calm way he taught me things—a proper way to speak, for instance, and a correct way to write, and even to think—all of which I learned somehow by watching him and listening to him, or just by sitting quietly on such occasions as yesterday afternoon, when he called to me to come up and have a drink.

"Thank you, sir," I said, and helped myself to a

tot of rum, taking a glass from the tray which Mrs. Penny always set out in the gallery at this hour, with not just two glasses on it but half a dozen, for we never knew when some of his friends might come driving in from a neighboring estate, or even all the way up from Port-of-Spain, thirty miles away.

I took my glass and sat down on a chair beside him so both of us faced the valley and all we could see was the tops of those trees and the gray mist rising above them, and in the silence I could hear familiar sounds from the house and the grounds which surround it. I could hear Mrs. Penny moving in the great dim rooms behind us, and somewhere in the background a snorting of pigs and the shrill crowing of bantams, for in addition to growing cocoa, Sir Alfred kept livestock, including cattle, Brahman cattle, those crossbreds which have been found to thrive better in our West Indian climate than the

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purebred English or European stock. From where we sat we couldn't see the pastures, which lay to the south of the gallery and slope down to the road which connects Sir Alfred's property with that of his friend, Mr. Cornelius Holmes.

Thinking about it now, I find it quite easy to recall everything that was said yesterday afternoon, and most of the things that then passed unspoken in my mind. These afternoons have always been more or less the same, and the hours, and the seasons. A long procession of time, with Sir Alfred and me marching in the procession, and all his friends in it, and George Singh, the man who killed him, though everyone believes it was the Brahman that did it. Certainly nobody could deny that Sir Alfred was gored to death, which is one reason we had to bury him so soon, not being able to wait for some of his friends to come from distant parts of the island, cer-

tainly not for his sons to come all the way from England, even if they had wanted to. The dead go bad so quickly in this climate and Sir Alfred was in no condition for embalming or anything of that sort. The Brahman had got him in the middle and had practically cut him in two, and by the time that George Singh and I and the others managed to drive him away, and I knelt down beside Sir Alfred, he was dead, and I could see on his face some of the things he felt when the bull was killing him.

I don't know whether the others saw it, but I saw it. I don't want to boast that I knew him better than anyone else did. It is often our special feeling for a person that makes him appear different from others, and that, in a sense, sets him apart from others. He and I were within a year of the same age, and certain things had happened to him that had likewise happened to me, though of course in quite a differ-

ent fashion. I too had lost my wife—she found out that I had been untrue to her and she divorced me, not being the forgiving sort. Naturally it never occurred to me to ask Sir Alfred what it was that had come between his wife and him; I had a feeling that the case had been reversed, here. That would, of course, have been an even stronger reason for his never speaking of it. The strongest reason of all was that he never discussed his private affairs, not even with his friends, which is something I'd learned partly from gossip, and partly, I suppose, by a kind of instinct.

On the dressing table in his bedroom there is a photograph of his wife and his two sons, taken when the boys were about nine and twelve. They stand on either side of their young mother, who is seated, and all three gaze straight at you. Sometimes, when I was tidying (Continued on page 36)

ILLUSTRATION BY JOHN PIKE



LEONARD STECKLER

He was staring into a woman's hostile eyes. She was all alone, waiting

Bill for Damages

BY ROY B. WILSON

ROY BENSON came to the turn his brother had described, and then drove up the lane between autumn-colored trees. His face was grave with distaste for the mission, but he had to see the woman who had got herself so foolishly involved with his brother.

Roy was sure he knew his brother's taste in girls by this time—a tall thin girl with a fine-boned, gauntly handsome face and aloof eyes. The description that fitted Dorothy would just as easily fit all Dick's girls before her, and it was probably going to fit this Catherine Hurley. But Dorothy was Dick's wife, the mother of his two children, and Catherine Hurley was Mrs. Hurley. Well, it just had to stop.

"We've been meeting in the empty Schaeffer house," Dick had finally confessed. "Catherine's waiting for me there right now."

The Schaeffer house was large, white, eminently respectable. In front stood an old convertible—Catherine Hurley's. For all his disapproval, Roy pitied her, for in another two minutes he was going to break her heart; that is, if the affair was as serious for her as it seemed to be for Dick. He stepped out of the car and let himself into the house with the key Dick had listlessly surrendered at the end.

The foyer had an unlined coldness. Through an open door, he saw a mirror. He was startled to find himself staring at the reflection of a woman's hostile eyes. She was all alone, waiting. Even though he had come all this way to see her, to see her at last shook him more than he had expected. Deliberately, he walked well into the room before he turned to face her.

She was not at all what he had imagined. She was handsome in a different way. She was watching him, as aware of his theatrical entrance as he was. Defensively, he revised his estimate. She was neither helpless nor frightened. She was simply angry.

"Mrs. Hurley, I'm Dick's brother. Dick is not coming," Roy said quietly. "He's not coming," he repeated. "And I doubt that he ever will again. I shouldn't say I doubt it. I know it. This thing has been a tragic mistake, and, when I heard, I came up to straighten Dick out. He's now straight," he added in a softer tone. "I saw no reason to put you through the agony of wondering what had happened. It was much fairer—and his voice grew meaningfully firm—"to tell you what had happened."

Surprisingly the anger left her eyes. As she sat down, she looked thoughtful. "Mr. Benson," she said slowly, "you may not know it, but you're having a hell of a good time!"

"What?" he said.

"You heard me. That concern that's half threat, the pity that's half contempt—you haven't had such a good time in years. Sit down, Mr. Benson," she said politely. "Relax, and settle down for a little talk. That's the way. Now, Mr. Benson, did it

ever occur to you that you have the instincts of a Peeping Tom?"

"No," he said. "It did not."

"Well, you do. Also, did it ever occur to you that you like to play God, and your results are as atrocious as your performance is hammy?"

"Apparently a lot of things haven't occurred to me."

"Apparently. Next question, Mr. Benson. You're not married, are you?"

"No." He smiled. "But that falls short of the other insulting questions."

"I've been insulting only myself," she said.

He began to enjoy himself. "Then whom am I to defend, you or me?"

"Yourself. I have no defense. I'm guilty."

"Guilty of what?"

"Of being like you. Now, Mr. Benson, I assume a man of the world like you would certainly understand how two perfectly decent people in a moment of weakness or loneliness might be trapped by passion into a regrettable affair, an affair that when exposed would have to appear cheap and ordinary."

"I certainly never meant to imply—"

"And you didn't. But with all this pity of yours, why couldn't you have left this last shred of privacy? Why did you have to come here?"

"I told you." Unaccountably, his heart began to pound. "I was only trying to do the decent thing."

"But that's not the truth. I knew it the moment you walked in. You began to know it just a moment ago. But let's go down another line."

"Let's not!" He rose, glancing at his watch.

"There's plenty of time," she said. "Sit down, Mr. Benson, sit down!"

He sat, bewildered by his obedience and by the incongruity of this woman being in Dick's life. Her dark controlled eyes showed neither victory nor resentment, but were so full of pity that he felt a sudden urge to confess everything, without knowing what he had to confess.

"As I understand it, you brought up Dick."

"That's right," he said, suspicious of the warmth he was beginning to feel for her. "Our father left no money, but I was determined that Dick at least would get the best."

"And while you worked, Dick went to school—the best you could afford."

"Look, I wanted Dick to go to Harvard."

"And he knew what you were sacrificing for him?"

"I didn't consider it any sacrifice. After all, I'm a partner now. And Dick's doing well in the branch up here. At least, he was doing well."

"And he likes the business?"

"It was the only thing for him. He once spoke about university teaching, but naturally, he saw how impractical it was."

"When you pointed it out."

He laughed again. "I didn't force him."

"No, you just let him know what you wanted." He tightened his lips. "Why not say that, for brothers, we're very close?"

She nodded. "All right. And you approved most highly of his marriage?"

"I did," he said deliberately. "Dorothy's a fine woman, exactly what he wanted. I could tell as soon as I met her. I introduced them."

"You sound defensive, Mr. Benson. Why didn't you marry Dorothy?"

"I? Well, I—I suppose Dorothy and I could have made a go—" He pressed his lips together. "She's just not my type, that's all."

"But you never married," she insisted softly. "Just what is your type?"

"Well," he said explosively. "If you must know, you're my type!"

She leaned back, startled, a little amused. "Wait a minute, this is getting out of hand."

"It's been that way since we started this lunatic conversation. Good-by!"

"It's foolish to keep saying good-by. We're leaving together."

"You're crazy! Where are you going? What about your family?"

"I've been too thoroughly exposed in my own eyes to see anyone now."

"I'm sorry," he said unhappily. "I can't tell you how sorry I am! For Dick, for Dorothy, for you. You're not at all what I expected you to be."

"You mean someone who would do what you wanted. Like Dick."

"All right," he said miserably. "But it was always for his own good."

"What you thought was his own good. However, you're right, this thing can't go on. But remember, it started because of the people involved, and Dick is what you made him, or what he made himself trying to please you."

"Well, it's too late now," he admitted finally. "The damage is done."

"I'm talking about the damage to you. Look at yourself! You've been living two lives, yours and Dick's. You may not have gone to Harvard yourself, but you went through Dick. Just as you went out with all Dick's girls through Dick and married Dorothy through Dick. You came here to see the other woman who was yours through Dick!"

"I did not!" he protested, profoundly shocked.

"You did," she went on calmly. "I know you did from the moment you walked into the room. It was all over you. Am I right?"

"I don't know. I can't think."

"You can." With all her gentleness, she hadn't a shred of pity. "Am I?"

"I suppose you are," he said in a low voice.

AFTER a long moment she said, "Very well. I'm sorry, but I had to show you because you showed me so clearly when you came in." She held out her hand, and smiled—compassionately. "I'll see you at the airfield, after I get the convertible back to Catherine. You see, Catherine Hurley is my sister. I left my office and came up here for the very same reason you did."

He stared at her. "And you let me make a fool of myself! Why, I was even beginning—! You really do have a cruel streak!"

"And so do you!" she said just as strongly. "That's the damage I meant all along. I've made the same mess of my life and Catherine's as you did of yours and Dick's. I realized it the moment you came into this room with that self-righteous cruelty, laying down the law—"

"Don't!"

"Well, the damage is done, all right. We've broken it up and they're resigned, but you and I know where the blame really belongs." She whirled suddenly with a passion that had finally burst out of control. "When you came in that way, I could have struck you! I should have! And now, I suppose, you'd like to strike me."

"No," he said, smiling weakly. "At least not yet for a while."

"Then . . . it's time to go."

Without a word, he followed her out of the beautifully furnished house that was cold because no one lived there: a coldness that had been familiar because it was so like his own well-tended emptiness up until the moment he had met this woman. Now there was hope. Outside in the open air, the afternoon had a warm radiance, and he was grateful for the feel of the sun on his drawn face. THE END