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IVAN GREET'S MASTERPIECE.

I.

'TWAS at supper at Charlie Powell's; every one there admitted Charlie was in splendid form. His audacity broke the record. He romanced away with even more than his usual brilliant recklessness. Truth and fiction blended well in his animated account of his day's adventures. He had lunched that morning with the newly-appointed editor of a high-class journal for the home circle—circulation exceeding half a million—and had returned all agog with the glorious prospect of untold wealth opening fresh before him. So he discounted his success by inviting a dozen friends to champagne and lobster-salad at his rooms in St. James's, and held forth to them, after his wont, in a rambling monologue.

“When I got to the house,” he said airily, poising a champagne-glass halfway up in his hand, “with the modest expectation of a chop and a pint of porter in the domestic ring—imagine my surprise at finding myself forthwith standing before the gates of an Oriental palace—small, undeniably small, a bijou in its way, but still, without doubt, a veritable palace. I touched the electric bell. Hi, presto! at my touch the door flew open as if by magic, and disclosed—a Circassian slave, in a becoming costume *à la* Liberty in Regent Street, and smiling like the advertisement of a patent dentifrice! I gasped out——”

“But how did ye know she was a Circassian?” Paddy O'Connor inquired, interrupting him brusquely. (His name was really Francis Xavier O'Connor, but they called him “Paddy” for short, just to mark his Celtic origin.)

Charlie Powell smiled a contemptuously condescending smile. He was then on the boom, as chief literary lion. “How do I know ye're an Oirishman, Paddy?” he answered, hardly heeding the interruption. “By her accent, my dear boy; her pure, unadulterated Circassian accent! 'Is Mr. Morrison at home?' I gasped out to the Vision of Beauty. The Vision of Beauty smiled and nodded—her English being chiefly confined to smiles, with a Circassian flavour; and led me on by degrees into the great man's presence. I mounted a stair, with a stained-glass window all yellows and browns, very fine and Burne-Jonesey; I passed through a drawing-room in the Stamboul style—couches, rugs, and draperies; and after various corridors—Byzantine, Persian, Moorish—I reached at last a sort of arcaded alcove at the further end, where two men lay reclining on an Eastern divan—one, a fez on his head, pulling hard at a chibouque; the other, bare-headed, burbling smoke through a hookah. The bare-headed one rose: ‘Mr. Powell,’ says he, waving his hand to present me, ‘My friend, Macpherson Psaha!’ I bowed, and looked unconcerned. I wanted them to think I'd lived all my life hob-nobbing with Pashas. Well, we talked for a while about the weather and the crops, and the murder at Mile End, and the state of Islam; when, presently, of a sudden, Morrison claps his hands—so—and another Circassian slave, still more beautiful, enters.

“‘Lunch, houri,’ says Morrison.

“‘The effendi is served,’ says the Circassian.

“And down we went to the dining-room. Bombay black-wood, every inch of it, inlaid with ivory. Venetian glass on the table; solid silver on the sideboard. Only us three, if you please, to lunch; but everything as spick and span as if the Prince was of the company. The three Circassian slaves, in Liberty caps, stood behind our chairs—one goddess apiece—and looked after us royally. Chops and porter, indeed! It was a banquet for a poet; Ivan Greet should have been there; he'd have mugged up an ode about it. Clear turtle and Chablis—the very best brand; then smelts and sweetbreads; next lamb and mint sauce; ortolans on toast; ice-pudding; fresh strawberries. A guinea each, strawberries, I give you my word, just now at Covent Garden. Oh, mamma! what a lunch, boys! The Hebes poured champagne from a golden flagon; that is to say, at any rate—for Paddy's eye was upon him—“the neck of the bottle was wrapped in gilt tinfoil. And all the time Morrison talked—great guns, how he talked! I never heard anything in my life to equal it. The man's been everywhere, from Peru to Siberia. The man's been everything, from a cowboy to a communard. My hair stood on end with half the things he said to me; and I haven't got hair so easily raised as some people's. Was I prepared to sell my soul for Saxon gold at the magnificent rate of five guineas a column? Was I prepared to jump out of my skin! I choked with delight. Hadn't I sold it all along to the enemies of Wales for a miserable pittance of thirty shillings? What did he want me to do? Why, contribute third leaders—you know the kind of thing—tootles on the penny-trumpet about irrelevant items of non-political news—the wit and humour of the fair, best domestic style, informed throughout with wide general culture. An allusion to Aristophanes; a passing hint at Rabelais; what Lucian would have said to his friends on this theme; how the row at the School Board would have affected Sam Johnson.

“‘But you must remember, Mr. Powell,’ says Morrison, with an unctuous smile, ‘the greater part of our readers are—well, not to put it too fine—country squires and conservative Dissenters. Your articles mustn’t hurt their feelings or prejudices. Go warily, warily! You must stick to the general policy of the paper, and be tenderly respectful to John Wesley’s memory.’”

“‘Sir,’ said I, smacking his hand, ‘for five guineas a column I’d be tenderly respectful to King Ahab himself, if you cared to insist upon it. You may count on my writing whatever rubbish you desire for the nursery mind.’ And I passed from his dining-room into the enchanted alcove.

“‘But before I left, my dear Ivan, I’d heard such things as I never heard before, and been promised such pay as seemed to me this morning beyond the dreams of avarice. And oh, what a character! ‘When I was a slave at Khartoum,’ the man said; or ‘When I was a schoolmaster in Texas;’ ‘When I lived as a student up five floors at Heidelberg;’ or ‘When I ran away with Félix Pyat from the Versaillais;’ till I began to think ’twas the Wandering Jew himself come to life again in Knightsbridge. At last, after coffee and cigarettes on a Cairo tray—with reminiscences of Paraguay—I emerged on the street, and saw erect before my eyes a great round Colosseum. I seemed somehow to recognize it. ‘This is *not* Bagdad, then,’ I said to myself, rubbing my eyes very hard—for I thought I must have been wafted some centuries off, on an enchanted carpet. Then I looked once more. Yes, sure enough, it *was* the Albert Hall. And *there* was the Memorial with its golden image. I rubbed my eyes a second time, and hailed a hansom—for there were hansom about, and policemen, and babies. ‘Thank Heaven!’ I cried aloud; after all, this *is* London!’”

II.

“It’s a most regrettable incident!” Ivan Greet said solemnly.

The rest turned and looked. Ivan Greet was their poet. He was tall and thin, with strange, wistful eyes, somewhat furtive in tone, and a keen, sharp face, and lank, long hair that fell loose on his shoulders. It was a point with this hair to be always abnormally damp and moist, with a sort of unnatural and impalpable moisture. The little coterie of authors and artists to which Ivan belonged regarded him indeed with no small respect, as a great man *manqué*. Nature, they knew, had designed him for an immortal bard; circumstances had turned him into an occasional journalist. But to them, he represented Art for Art’s sake. So when Ivan said solemnly, “It’s a most regrettable incident,” every eye in the room turned and stared at him in concert.

“Why so, me dear fellow?” Paddy O’Connor asked, open-eyed. “I call it magnificent!”

But Ivan Greet answered warmly, “Because it’ll take him still further away than ever from his work in life, which you and I know is science and philosophy.”

“And yer own grand epic?” Paddy suggested, with a smart smile, pouncing down like a hawk upon him.

Ivan Greet coloured—positively coloured—“blushed visibly to the naked eye,” as Paddy observed afterwards, in recounting the incident to his familiar friend at the United Bohemians. But he stood his ground like a man and a poet for all that. “My own epic isn’t written yet—probably never *will* be written,” he answered, after a pause, with quiet firmness. “I give up to the *Daily Telephone* what was meant for mankind: I acknowledge it freely. Still, I’m sorry when I see any other good man—and most of all Charlie Powell—compelled to lose his own soul the same way I myself have done.” He paused and looked round. “Boys,” he said, addressing the table, “in these days, if any man has anything out of the common to say, he must be rich and his own master, or he won’t be allowed to say it. If he’s poor, he has first to earn his living; and to earn his living he’s compelled to do work he doesn’t want to do—work that stifles the things which burn and struggle for utterance within him. The editor is the man who rules the situation; and what the editor asks is good paying matter. Good paying matter Charlie can give him, of course: Charlie can give him, thank Heaven, whatever he asks for. But this hack-work will draw him further and further afield from the work in life for which God made him—the philosophical reconstitution of the world and the universe for the twentieth century. And that’s why I say—and I say it again—a most regrettable incident!”

Charlie Powell set down his glass of champagne untasted. Ivan Greet was regarded by his narrow little circle of journalistic associates as something of a prophet; and his words, solemnly uttered, sobered Charlie for a while—recalled him with a bound to his better personality. “Ivan’s right,” he said slowly, nodding his head once or twice. “He’s right, *as usual*. We’re all of us wasting on weekly middles the talents God gave us for a higher purpose. We know it, every man Jack of us. But Heaven help us, I say, Ivan: for how can we help ourselves? We live by bread. We must eat bread first, or how can we write epics or philosophies afterwards? This age demands of us the sacrifice of our individualities. It will be better some day, perhaps, when Bellamy and William Morris have remodelled the world: life will be simpler, and bare living easier. For the present I resign myself to inevitable fate. I’ll write middles for Morrison, and eat and drink; and I’ll wait for my philosophy till I’m rich and bald, and have leisure to write it in my own hired house in Fitzjohn’s Avenue.”

Ivan Greet gazed across at him with a serious look in those furtive eyes. “That’s all very well for *you!*” he cried half angrily, in a sudden flaring forth of long-suppressed emotion. “Philosophy can wait till a man’s rich and bald; it gains by waiting; it’s the better for maturity. But poetry!—ah, there, I hate to talk about it! Who can begin to set about his divine work when he’s turned sixty and worn out by forty years of uncongenial leaders? The thing’s preposterous. A poet must write when he’s young and passionate, or not at all. He may go on writing in age, of course, as his blood grows cool, if he’s kept up the habit, like Wordsworth and Tennyson: he may even let it lie by or rust for a time, like Milton or Goethe, and resume it later, if he throws himself meanwhile, heart and soul, into some other occupation that carries him away with it resistlessly for the moment; but spend half his life in degrading his style and debasing his genius by working for hire at the beck and call of an editor—lose his birthright like that, and then turn at last with the bald head you speak about to pour forth at sixty his frigid lyrics—I tell you, Charlie, the thing’s impossible! The poet must work, the poet must acquire his habits of thought and style and expression in the volcanic period; if he waits till he’s crusted over and

encysted with age, he may hammer out rhetoric, he may string fresh rhymes, but he'll never, never give us one line of real poetry.”

III.

He spoke with fiery zeal. It was seldom Ivan Greet had an outbreak like this. For the most part he acquiesced, like all the rest of us, in the supreme dictatorship of Supply and Demand—those economic gods of the modern book-market. But now and again rebellious fits came over him, and he kicked against the pricks with all the angry impetuosity of a born poet. For the rest of that night he sat moody and silent. Black bile consumed him. Paddy O'Connor rose and sang with his usual verve the last new Irish comic song from the music-halls; Fred Mowbray, from Jamaica, told good stories in negro dialect with his wonted exuberance; Charley Powell bubbled over with spirits and epigrams. But Ivan Greet sat a little apart, with scarcely a smile on his wistful face; he sat and ruminated. He was angry at heart; the poetic temperament is a temperament of moods; and each mood, once roused, takes possession for the time of a man's whole nature. So Ivan remained angry, with a remorseful anger; he was ashamed of his own life, ashamed of falling short of his own cherished ideals. Yet how could he help himself? Man, as he truly said, must live by bread, though not by bread alone; a sufficiency of food is still a condition-precedent of artistic creation. You can't earn your livelihood nowadays by stringing together rhymes, string you never so deftly; and Ivan had nothing but his pen to earn it with. He had prostituted that pen to write harmless little essays on social subjects in the monthly magazines; his better nature recoiled with horror to-night from the thought of that hateful, that wicked profanation.

'Twas a noisy party. They broke up late. Fred Mowbray walked home along Piccadilly with Ivan. It was one of those dull, wet nights in the streets of London when everything glistens with a dreary reflection from the pallid gas-lamps. Pah! what weather! To Fred, West-Indian born, it was utterly hideous. He talked as they went along of the warmth, the sunshine, the breadth of space, the ease of living, in his native islands. What a contrast between those sloppy pavements, thick with yellow mud, and the sun-smitten hillsides, clad in changeless green, where the happy nigger lay basking and sprawling all day long on his back in the midst of his plaintain patches, while the bountiful sun did the hard work of life for him by ripening his coconuts and mellowing his bananas, unasked and untended!

Ivan Greet drank it in. As Fred spoke, an idea rose up vague and formless in the poet's soul. There were countries, then, where earth was still kindly, and human wants still few; where Nature, as in the Georgics, supplied even now the primary needs of man's life unbidden! Surely, in such a land as that a poet yet might live; tilling his own small plot and eating the fruits of his own slight toil, he might find leisure to mould without let or hindrance the thought that was in him into exquisite melody. The bare fancy fired him. A year or two spent in those delicious climates might enable a man to turn out what was truest and best in him. He might drink of the spring and be fed from the plaintain-patch, like those wiser negroes, but he would carry with him still all the inherited wealth of European culture, and speak like a Greek god under the tropic shade of Jamaican cotton-trees.

To the average ratepayer such a scheme would appear the veriest midsummer madness. But Ivan Greet was a poet. Now, a poet is a man who acts on impulse. And to Ivan the impulse itself was absolutely sacred. He paused on the slippery pavement, and faced his companion suddenly. "How much land does it take there for a man to live upon?" he asked, with hurried energy.

Fred Mowbray reflected. "Well, two acres at most, I should say, down in plantain and yam," he answered, "would support a family."

"And you can buy it?" Ivan went on, with surprising eagerness. "I mean, there's lots to be had—it's always in the market?"

"Lots to be had? Why, yes! No difficulty there! Half Jamaica's for sale, on the mountains especially. The island's under-peopled; our pop's half a million; it'd hold quite three. Land goes for a mere song; you can buy where you will, quite easily."

Ivan Greet's lip trembled with intense excitement. A vision of freedom floated dimly before him. Palms, tree-ferns, bamboos, waving clumps of tropic foliage; a hillside hut; dusky faces, red handkerchiefs; and leisure, leisure, leisure to do the work he liked in! Oh, soul, what a dream! You shall say what you will there! To Ivan that was religion—all the religion he had perhaps; for his was, above all things, an artistic nature.

"How much would it cost, do you think?" he inquired, all tremulous.

And Fred answered airily, "Well, I fancy not more than a pound or two an acre."

A pound or two an acre! Just a column in the *Globe*. The gates of Paradise stood open before him!

They walked on a hundred yards or so again in silence. Ivan Greet was turning over in his seething soul a strange scheme to free himself from Egyptian bondage. At last he asked once more, "How much would it cost me to go out by the steerage, if there is such a thing on the steamers to Jamaica?"

Fred Mowbray paused a moment. "Well, I should think," he said at last, pursing his lips to look wise, "you ought to do it for about a tenner."

Ivan's mind was made up. Those words decided him. While his mother lived he had felt bound to support her; and the necessity for doing so had "kept him straight," his friends said—or, as he himself would have phrased it, had tied him firmly down to unwilling servitude. But now he had nobody on earth save himself to consult, for Ethel had married well, and Stephen, dull lad, was comfortably ensconced in a City office. He went home all on fire with his new idea. That night he hardly slept; coconuts waved their long leaves in the breeze before him; dusky hands beckoned him with strange signs and enticements to come over to a land of sunlight and freedom. But he was practical too; he worked it all out in his head arithmetically. So much coming in from this or that magazine; so much cash in hand; so much *per contra* for petty debts at home; so much for outfit, passage money, purchase. With two acres of his own he could live like a lord on his yams and plantains. What sort of food-stuff, indeed, your yam might be he hadn't, to say the truth, the very faintest conception. But who cares for such detail? It was freedom he wanted, not the flesh-pots of Egypt. And freedom he would have to work out his own nature.

IV.

There was commotion on the hillside at St. Thomas-in-the-Vale one brilliant blazing noontide a few weeks later. Clemmy burst upon the group that sat lounging on the ground outside the hut-door with most unwonted tidings. "You hear dem sell dat piece o' land nex' bit to Tammas?" she cried, all agog with excitement; "you hear dem sell it?"

Old Rachel looked up, yawning. "What de gal a-talking about?" she answered testily, for old Rachel was toothless. "Folk all know dat—him hear tell long ago. Sell dem two acre las' week, Peter say, to 'tranger down a' Kingston."

"Yes, an' de 'tranger come up," Clemmy burst out, hardly able to contain herself at so astounding an incident, "an' what you tink him is?" Him doan't nagur at all! Him reel buckra gentleman!"

A shrill whistle of surprise and subdued unbelief ran sharply round the little cluster of squatting negroes. "Him buckra?" Peter Foddergill repeated to himself, half incredulous. Peter was Clemmy's stepfather; for Clemmy was a brown girl, and old Rachel, her mother, was a full-blooded negress. Her paternity was lost in the dim past of the island.

"Yes, him buckra," Clemmy repeated in a very firm voice. "Him reel white buckra. Him come up to take de land, an' him gwine to lib dere."

"It doan't can true!" old Rachel cried, rousing herself. "It doan't can possible. Buckra gentleman doan't can come an' lib on two-acre plot alongside o' black nagur. Him gwine to sell it agin; dat what it is; or else him gwine to gib it to some nagur leeady. White buckra doan't can lib all alone in St. Tammas."

But Clemmy was positive. "No, no," she cried, unmoved, shaking her comely brown head, with its crimson bandanna—for she was a pretty girl of her sort was Clemmy. "Him gwine to lib dere. Him tell me so himself. Him gwine to build hut on it, an' plant it down in plantain. Him berry pretty gentleman, wit' long hair on him shoulder; him hab eyes quick and sharp all same like weasel; and when him smile, him look kinder nor anyting. But him say him come out from England for good becos him lub better to lib in Jamaica; an' him gwine to build him hut here, and lib same like nagur."

In a moment the little cluster of negro hovels was all a-buzz with conjecture, and hubbub, and wonderment. Only the small black babies were left sprawling in the dust, with the small black pigs, beside their mothers' doors, so that you could hardly tell at a glance which was which, as they basked there; all the rest of the population, men, women, and children, with that trifling exception, made a general stampede with one accord for the plot next to Tammas's. A buckra come to live on the hillside in their midst! A buckra going to build a little hut like their own! A buckra going to cultivate a two-acre plot with yam and plantain! They were aghast with surprise. It was wonderful, wonderful! For Jamaica negroes don't keep abreast of the Movement, and they didn't yet know the ways of our latter-day prophets.

As for Ivan Greet himself, he was fairly surprised in turn, as he stood there in his shirt-sleeves surveying his estate, at this sudden eruption of good-humoured barbarians. How they grinned and chattered! What teeth! what animation! He had bought his two acres with the eye of faith at Kingston from their lawful proprietor, knowing nothing but their place on the plan set before him. That morning he had come over by train to Spanish Town, and tramped through the wondrous defile of the Bog Walk to Linstead, and asked his way thence by devious bridle-paths to his own new property on the hillside at St. Thomas. Conveyancing in Jamaica is but an artless art; having acquired his plot by cash payment on the nail, Ivan was left to his own devices to identify and demarcate it. But Tammas's acre was marked on the map in conspicuous blue, and defined in real life by a most warlike boundary fence of prickly aloes; while a dozen friendly negroes, all amazement at the sight, were ready to assist him at once in finding and measuring off the adjacent piece duly outlined in red on the duplicate plan he had got with his title-deed.

It was a very nice plot, with a very fine view, in a very sweet site, on a very green hillside. But Ivan Greet, though young and strong with the wiry strength of the tall thin Cornishman, was weary and hot after a long morning's tramp under a tropical sun, and somewhat taken aback (as well he might be, indeed) at the strangeness and squalor of his new surroundings. He had pulled off his coat and laid it down upon the ground; and now he sat on it in his shirt-sleeves for airiness and coolness. His heart sank for a moment as he gazed in dismay at the thick and spiky jungle of tropical scrub he would have to stub up before he could begin to plant his first yam or banana. That was a point, to say the truth, which had hardly entered into his calculations beforehand in England, he had figured to himself the pineapples and plantains as

a going concern; the coconuts dropping down their ready-made crops; the breadfruits eternally ripe at all times and seasons. It was a shock to him to find mother-earth so encumbered with an alien growth; he must tickle her with a hoe ere she smiled with a harvest. Tickle her with a hoe indeed! It was a cutlass he would need to hack down that matted mass of bristling underbrush.

And how was he to live meanwhile? That was now the question. His money was all spent save a couple of pounds, for his estimates had erred, as is the way of estimates, rather on the side of deficiency than of excess; and he was now left half-stranded. But his doubts on this subject were quickly dispelled by the unexpected good-nature of his negro neighbours. As soon as those simple folk began to realize, by dint of question and answer, that the buckra meant actually to settle down in their midst, and live his life as they did, their kindness and their offers of help knew no stint or moderation. The novelty of the idea fairly took them by storm. They chuckled and guffawed at it. A buckra from England—a gentleman in dress and accent and manner (for negroes know what's what, and can judge these things as well as you or I can) come of his own free-will to build a hut like their own, and live on the tilth of two acres of plantain! It was splendid! it was wonderful! They entered into the spirit of the thing with true negro zest. "Hey, massy, dat good now!" They would have done anything for Ivan—anything, that is to say, that involved no more than the average amount of negro exertion.

As for the buckra himself, thus finding himself suddenly in the midst of new friends, all eager to hear of his plans and intentions, he came out in his best colours under stress of their welcome, and showed himself for what he was—a great-hearted gentleman. Sympathy always begets sympathy. Ivan accepted their proffered services with a kindly smile of recognition and gratitude, which to those good-natured folk seemed most condescending and generous in a real live white man. The news spread like wild-fire. A buckra had come who loved the nagur. Before three hours were over every man in the hamlet had formed a high opinion of Mistah Greet's moral qualities. "Doan't nebber see buckra like a' dis one afore," old Peter murmured musingly to his cronies on the hillside. "Him doan't got no pride, 'cep de pride ob a gentleman. Him talk to you and me same as if he tink us buckra like him. Hey, massy, massa, him good man fe' true! Wonder what make him want to come lib at St. Tammass?"

That very first day, before the green and gold of tropical sunset had faded into the solemn grey of twilight, Ivan Greet had decided on the site of his new hut, and begun to lay the foundations of a rude wooden shanty with the willing aid of his new black associates. Half the men of the community buckled to at the work, and all the women: for the women felt at once a novel glow of sympathy and unspoken compassion towards the unknown white man with the wistful eyes, who had come across the great sea to cast in his lot with theirs under the waving palm-trees. Now, your average negress can do as much hard labour as an English navvy; and as the men found the timber and the posts for the corners without money or price, it came to pass that by evening that day a fair framework for a wattled hut of true African pattern stood already four-square to all the airts of heaven in the middle frontage of Ivan Greet's two acres. But it was roofless, of course, and its walls were still unbuilt: nothing existed so far but the bare square outline. It had yet to receive its wattled sides, and to be covered in on top with a picturesque waterproof thatch of fan-palm. Still, it was a noble hut as huts went on the hillside. Ivan and his fellow-workers stood and gazed at it that evening as they struck work for the day with profound admiration for their own cunning handicraft.

And now came the question where Ivan was to sleep, and what to do for his supper. He had doubts in his own mind how all this could be managed. But Clemmy had none; Clemmy was the only brown girl in the little community, and as such, of course, she claimed and received an acknowledged precedence. "I shall have to sleep *somewhere*," Ivan murmured, somewhat ruefully, gazing round him at the little cluster of half-barbarous cottages. "But how—Heaven help me!"

And Clemmy, nodding her head with a wise little smile, made answer naturally—

"You gwine sleep at mo fader, sah; we got berry nice room. You doan't can go an' sleep wit' all dem common nagur dah."

"I'm not very rich, you know," Ivan interposed hastily, with something very like a half-conscious blush—though, to be sure, he was red enough already with his unwanted exertion in that sweltering atmosphere. "I'm not very rich, but I've a little still left, and I can afford to pay—well, whatever you think would be proper—for bed and board till I can get my own house up."

Clemmy waved him aside, morally speaking, with true negro dignity.

"We *invite* you, sah," she said proudly, like a lady in the land (which she was at St. Thomas). "When we ax gentleman to stop, we doan't want nuffin paid for him board and lodgin'. We offer you de hospitality of our house an' home till your own house finish. Christen people doan't can do no less dan dat, I hope, for de homeless 'tranger."

She spoke with such grave politeness, such unconsciousness of the underlying humour of the situation, that Ivan, with his quickly sympathetic poet's heart, raised his hat in return, as he answered with equal gravity, in the tone he might have used to a great lady in England—

"It's awfully kind of you. I appreciate your goodness. I shall accept with pleasure the hospitality you offer me."

Old Peter grinned delight from ear to ear. It was a feather in his cap thus to entertain in his hut the nobility and gentry. Though, to be sure, 'twas his right, as the acknowledged stepfather of the only undeniable brown girl in the whole community. For a brown girl, mark you, serves, to a certain extent, as a patent of gentility in the household she adorns; she is a living proof of the fact that the family to which she belongs has been in the habit of mixing with white society.

"You come along in, sah!" old Peter cried cheerily. "You tired wit' dat work. You doan't accustom' to it. White gentleman from England find de sun berry hot out heah in Jamaica. You take drop o' rum, sah, or you like coconut water?"

Ivan modestly preferred the less spirituous liquor to the wine of the country; so Clemmy, much flattered, and not a little fluttered, brought out a fresh green coconut, and sliced its top off before his eyes with one slash of the knife, and poured the limpid juice (which came forth clear as crystal, not thick and milky) into a bowl-shaped calabash, which she offered with a graceful bow for their visitor's acceptance. Ivan seated himself on the ground just outside the hut as he saw the negroes do (for the air inside was hot, and close, and stifling), and took with real pleasure his first long pull at that

delicious beverage. "Why, it's glorious!" he exclaimed, with unfeigned enthusiasm (for he was hot and thirsty), turning the empty calabash upside down before his entertainers' eyes, to let them see he fully appreciated their rustic attentions. "Quite different from the coconuts one gets in London! So fresh, and pure, and cool! It's almost worth coming out to Jamaica to taste it."

Clemmy smiled her delight. Was ever buckra so affable! Then she brought out a spoon—common pewter, or the like—which she wiped on her short skirt with unaffected simplicity, and handed it to him gravely. After that she gave him the coconut itself, with the soft jelly inside, which Ivan proceeded to scoop out, and eat before her eyes with evident relish. A semi-circle of admiring negroes and negresses stood round and looked on—"Hey, massy, massa! him da eat de coconut!"—as though the sight of a white man taking jelly with a spoon were some startling novelty. Now, Ivan was modest, as becomes a poet; but he managed to eat on, as little disconcerted by their attentions as possible; for he saw, if he was to live for some time among these people, how necessary it was from the very beginning to conciliate and please them.

The coconut finished, Clemmy produced boiled yam and a little salt fish; she brought forth butter in a lordly dish, and sat down by Ivan's side to their frugal supper. Being a brown girl, of course she could venture on such a liberty with an invited guest; old Peter and her mother, as two pure-blooded blacks, sat a little apart from their new friend and their daughter, not to seem too presumptuous. And still, as Ivan eat, the admiring chorus ran round the semi-circle, "Hey, massy, but dat fine! hey, massy, but him no proud! My king! you see him eat! You ebber know buckra do de same like a' dat afore?"

That night—his first night in the Jamaican mountains—Ivan slept in old Peter's hut. It was narrow and close, but he opened the wooden window as wide as possible to let in the fresh air, and lay with his head to it; he was young and strong, and had a fancy for roughing it. Next morning, early, he was up with his hosts, and afoot, for his work, while still the Southern sun hung low in the heavens. Fresh plantains and breadfruit, with a draught from a coconut, made up the bill of fare for his simple breakfast; Ivan thought them not bad, though a trifle unsatisfying. That day, and several days after, he passed on his plot; the men—great hulking blacks—gave him a helping hand by fits and starts at his job, though less eagerly than at first; the women, more faithful to their waif from oversea, worked on with a will at the wattling and thatching. As for Clemmy, she took a personal interest in the building from beginning to end; she regarded it with a vague sort of proprietary pride; she spoke of it as "de house" in the very phrase we all of us use ourselves about the place we're engaged in building or furnishing.

At last, after a fortnight, the hut was finished. The entire hillside turned out with great joy to celebrate its inauguration. They lighted a bonfire of the brushwood and scrub they had cleared off the little blank platform in front of the door; each man brought his own rum; Ivan spent some five of his hoarded shillings in supplying refreshments for his assembled neighbours. Such a housewarming had never before been known in St. Thomas. Till late that evening, little groups sat round the embers and baked yam and sweet potatoes in the hot wood-ashes. It was after midnight when the crowd, well-drunken, began to disperse. Then they all went away, one by one—except Clemmy.

Ivan looked at her inquiringly. She hung her head and hesitated.

"You tink buckra gentleman can lib alone in house widout serbant?" she asked, at last, in a very timid tone. "You doan't want housekeeper? Buekra must hab someone to cook for him an' care for him. You no want me to go. I tink I make good housekeeper."

"Of course," Ivan answered, with a gleam of comprehension, "I never thought about that. Why, just the right thing. How very kind of you! I can't cook for myself. I suppose I must have somebody to manage about boiling the yams and plantains."

VI.

So, for eight or ten months, Ivan Greet lived on in his wattled hut on that Jamaican hillside. He was dead to the world, and the world to him; he neither wrote to nor heard from any friend in England. In the local planters' phrase, he simply "went nigger." What little luggage he possessed he had left at Spanish Town station while he built his hut; as soon as he was fully installed in his own freehold house, and had got his supplies into working order, he and Clemmy started off for Spanish Town together, and brought it back, with much laughter, turn about, between them. Clemmy bore the big box on her head, whenever her turn came, as she was accustomed to carry a pail of water. It contained the small wardrobe he brought out from England, and more important still the pen, ink, and paper, with which he was to write—his immortal masterpiece.

Not that Ivan was in any hurry to begin his great task. Freedom and leisure were the keynotes of the situation. He would only set to work when the impulse came upon him. And just at first neither freedom nor leisure nor impulse was his. He had his ground to prepare, his yams and bananas to plant, his daily bread, or daily breadfruit, to procure, quite as truly as in England. Though, to be sure, Clemmy's friends were most generous of their store, with that unconscious communism of all primitive societies. They offered what they had, and offered it freely. And Ivan, being a poet, accepted their gifts more frankly by far than most others could have done: he would repay them all, he said, with a grateful glance in those furtive eyes of his, when his crop was ready. The negroes in turn liked him all the better for that; they were proud to be able to lend or give to the buckra from England. It raised them no little in their own esteem to find the white man so willing to chum with them.

Five or six weeks passed away after Ivan had taken possession of his hut before he attempted to turn his hand to any literary work. Meanwhile, he was busily occupied in stubbing and planting, with occasional help from his negro allies, and the constant aid of those ever-faithful negresses. Even after he had settled down to a quiet life under his own vine and fig-tree, some time went past before the spirit moved him to undertake composition. To say the truth, this *dolce far niente* world exactly suited him. Poets are lazy by nature—or, shall we put it, contemplative? When Ivan in England first dreamt of this strange scheme, he looked forward to it as a noble stroke for faith and freedom, a sacrifice of his own personal worldly comfort to the work in life that was set before him. And so, indeed, it was, from the point of view of the flesh-pots of Egypt. But flesh-pots, after all, don't fill so large a place in human existence as civilization fancies. When he found himself at last at ease on his hillside, he was surprised to discover how delightful, how poetical, how elevated is savagery. He sat all day long on the ground under the plantains, in shirt and trousers, with Clemmy by his side, or took a turn for exercise now and again in the cool of the evening through his sprouting yam plot. Palm-leaves whispered in the wind, mangoes glowed on the branches, pomegranates cracked and reddened, humming-birds darted swift in invisible flight from flower to flower of the crimson hibiscus. What need to hurry in such a land as this, where all the world at once eats its lotus in harmony?

After a while, however, inspiration came upon him. It came unsought. It hunted him up and constrained him. He brought forth pen and paper to the door of the hut, and, sitting there in the broad shade (Clemmy still at his side), began from time to time to jot down a sentence, a thought, a phrase, a single word, exactly as they came to him. He didn't work hard. To work hard, indeed, or, in other words, to spur his Pegasus beyond its natural pace, was to Ivan nothing short of sheer worldly infidelity. Literature is the realization of one's inmost personality in external form. He wanted freedom for that very purpose—that he might write the thing he would in the way that occurred to him. But slowly, none the less, a delicate picture grew up by degrees on the canvas before him. It wasn't a poem: the muse didn't move him just so to verse, and he would be true to the core to her. It was a little romance, a vignette of tropical life, a *Paul et Virginie* picture of the folk he saw then and there on the hillside. And, indeed, the subject exactly suited him. A Bohemian in the grain, the easy, Bohemian life of these children of nature in their wattled huts appealed to him vividly. For a month or so now he had lived in their midst as one of themselves; he had caught their very tone; he had learned to understand them, to know them, to sympathize with them. "I'll tell you what it is, sir," a dissipated young planter had said to him at Kingston during the few days he spent there, "people may say what they like about this blessed island; but what I say's this, it's a jolly good place to live in, all the same, where rum is cheap and morals is lax!" Not so did the poet's eye envisage that black Arcadia.

To Ivan it was an Eden of the Caribbean Seas; he loved it for its simplicity, its naturalness, its utter absence of guile or wile or self-consciousness. 'Twas a land indeed where the Queen's writ ran not; where the moral law bore but feeble sway; where men and women, as free as the wind, lived and loved in their own capricious, ancestral fashion. Its ethics

were certainly not the ethics of that hateful Mayfair from which he had fled in search of freedom. But life was real, if life was not earnest; no sham was there, no veiled code of pretence; what all the world did all the world frankly and openly acknowledged. Censors and censoriousness were alike unknown. Every man did that which was right in his own eyes, and no man hindered him. In such an environment what space for idylls! Never, since Theocritus, had poet's eye beheld anything like it. In the midst of this *naïf* world he so thoroughly understood and so deeply appreciated Ivan Greet couldn't help but burst into song, or at least into romance of Arcadian pattern. Day by day he sat at the door of his hut, or strolled through the hamlet, with a nod and a smile for black Rose or black Robert, noting as he went their little words and ways, jotting mentally down on the tablets of his brain each striking phrase or tone or native pose or incident. So his idyll took shape of itself, he hardly knew how. It was he that held the pen; it was nature herself that dictated the plot, the dialogue, the episodes.

In the evenings, whenever the fancy seized him, he would sit and read aloud what he had written during the day to his companion Clemmy. There, in the balmy glow of tropical dust, with the sunset lighting up in pink or purple the page as he read it, and the breeze rustling soft through the golden leaves of the star-apple, that simple tale of a simple life was uttered and heard in its native world, to the fullest advantage. But Clemmy! As for Clemmy, she sat entranced; was there ever so grand a man on earth as Ivan? Never before had that brown girl known there was anything other in the way of books than the Bible, the hymn-book, and the A, B, C, in which she learned to read at the negro village-school down yonder at Linstead. And now, Ivan's tale awoke a new interest, a fresh delight within her. She understood it all the better in that it was a truthful tale of her own land and her own people. Time, place, surroundings, all were wholly familiar to her. It made her laugh a low laugh of surprise and pleasure to see how Ivan hit off with one striking phrase, one deft touch, one neat epithet, the people and things she had known and mixed with from her earliest childhood. In a word it was Clemmy's first glimpse into literature. Now, Clemmy was a brown girl, and clever at that. European blood of no mean strain flowed in her veins—the blood of an able English naval family. Till Ivan came, indeed, she had lived the life and thought the thoughts of the people around her. But her new companion wakened higher chords, unsuspected by herself, in her inner nature. She reveled in his idyll. Oh, how sweet they were, those evenings on the hillside, when Ivan took her into his confidence, as it were, and poured forth into her ear that dainty tale that would have fallen so flat on the dull ears of her companions! For Clemmy knew now she was better than the rest. She had always prided herself, of course, like every brown girl, on her ennobling mixture of European blood; though she never knew quite why. This book revealed it to her. She realized now how inheritance had given her something that was wanting to the black girls, her playmates, in the village. She and Ivan were one, in one half their natures.

VII.

Ten months passed away. Working by fits and starts, as the mood came upon him, Ivan Greet completed and repolished his masterpiece. It was but a little thing, yet he knew it was a masterpiece. Every word and line in it pleased and satisfied him. And when *he* was satisfied, he knew he had reckoned with his hardest critic. He had only to send it home to England now, and get it published. For the rest, he cared little. Let men read it or not, let them praise or blame, he had done a piece of work at last that was worthy of him.

And Clemmy admired it more than words could fathom. Though she spoke her own uncouth dialect only, she could understand and appreciate all that Ivan had written—for Ivan had written it. Those ten months of daily intercourse with her poet in all moods had been to Clemmy a liberal education. Even her English improved, though that was a small matter; but her point of view widened and expanded unspeakably. It was the first time she had ever been brought into contact with a higher nature. And Ivan was so kind, so generous, so sympathetic. In one word, he treated her as he would treat a lady. Accustomed as she was only to the coarsely good-natured blacks of her hamlet, Clemmy found an English gentleman a wonderfully lovable and delightful companion. She knew, of course, he didn't *love* her—that would be asking too much; but he was tender and gentle to her, as his poet's heart would have made him be to any other woman under like conditions. Sometimes the girls in the village would ask her in confidence, "You tink him lub you, Clemmy? You tink de buckra lub you?"

And Clemmy, looking coy, and holding her head on one side, would answer, in the peculiar Jamaican sing-song, "Him mind on him book. Him doan't tink ob dem ting. Him mind too full. Him doan't tink to lub me."

But Clemmy loved *him*—deeply, devotedly. When a woman of the lower races loves a man of the higher, she clings to him with the fidelity of a dog to its master. Clemmy would have died for Ivan Greet; her whole life was now bound up in her Englishman. His masterpiece was to her something even more divine than to Ivan himself; she knew by heart whole pages and passages of it.

In this delicious idyllic dream—a dream of young love satisfied (for Clemmy didn't ask such impossibilities from fate as that Ivan should love her as she loved him)—those happy months sped away all too fast, till Ivan's work was finished. On the morning of the day before he meant to take it in to the post at Spanish Town, and send it off, registered, to his friends in England, he walked out carelessly bare-footed—so negro-like had he become—among the deep dew on the grass in front of his shanty. Clemmy caught sight of him from the door, and shook her head gravely.

"If you was my pickney, Ivan," she said, with true African freedom, "I tell you what I do: I smack you for dat. You gwine to take de fever!"

Ivan, laughed, and waved his hand.

"Oh, no fear," he cried lightly. "I'm a Jamaican born by now. I've taken to the life as a duck takes to the water. Besides, it's quite warm, Clemmy. This dew won't hurt me."

Clemmy thought no more of it at the time, though she went in at once, and brought out his shoes and socks, and made him put them on with much womanly chiding. But that night, after supper, when she took his hand in hers, as was her wont of an evening, she drew back in surprise.

"Why, Ivan," she cried, all cold with terror, "your hand too hot! You done got de fever!"

"Well, I don't feel quite the thing," Ivan admitted grudgingly. "I've chills down my back and throbbing pain in my head. I think I'll turn in and try some quinine, Clemmy."

Clemmy's heart sank at once. She put him to bed on the rough sack in the hut that served for a mattress, and sent Peter post haste down to Linstead for the doctor. It was hours before he came; he was dining with a friend at a "penn" on the mountains; he wouldn't hurry himself for the "white trash" who had "gone nigger" on the hillside. Meanwhile Clemmy sat watching, all inward horror, by Ivan's bedside. Long before the doctor arrived her Englishman was delirious. Tropical diseases run their course with appalling rapidity. By the time the doctor came he looked at the patient with a careless eye. All the world round about had heard of the white man who "lived with the niggers," and despised him

accordingly.

“Yellow fever,” he said calmly, in a very cold voice. “He can’t be moved, and he can’t be nursed here. A pretty piggery this for a white man to die in!”

Clemmy clasped her hands hard.

“To die in!” she echoed aloud. “To die in! To die in!”

“Well, he’s not likely to *live*, is he?” the doctor answered, with a sharp little laugh. “But we’ll do what we can. He must be nursed day and night, and kept cool and well-aired, and have arrowroot and brandy every half-hour, awake or asleep—a couple of teaspoonfuls. I suppose you can get some other girl to help you sit up with him?”

To help her sit up with him! Clemmy shuddered at the thought. She would have sat up with him herself every night for a century. What was sleep or rest to her when Ivan was in danger! For the next three days she never moved from his side except to make fresh arrowroot by the fire outside the hut, or to bring back a calabash of clear water from the rivulet. But how could nursing avail? The white man’s constitution was already broken down by the hardships and bad food, nay, even by the very idleness of the past ten months; and that hut was, indeed, no fit place to tend him in. The disease ran its course with all its fatal swiftness. From the very first night Ivan never for a moment recovered consciousness. On the second he was worse. On the third, with the suddenness of that treacherous climate, a tropical thunderstorm burst over them unawares. It chilled the air fast. Before it had rained itself out with peal upon peal and flash upon flash, in quick succession, Ivan Greet had turned on his side and died, and Clemmy sat alone in the hut with a corpse, and her unborn baby.

VIII.

For a week or two the world was a blank to Clemmy. She knew only one thing—that Ivan had left her two sacred legacies. To print his book, to bring up his child—those were now the tasks in life set before her. From the very first moment she regarded the manuscript of his masterpiece with the profoundest reverence. Even before six stalwart negroes in their Sunday clothes came to bury her dead poet on the slope of the hillside under a murmuring clump of feathery bamboos, she had taken out that precious bundle of papers from Ivan's box in the corner, which served as sofa in the bare little shanty, and had wrapped it up tenderly in his big silk handkerchief, and replaced it with care, and locked up the box again, and put the key, tied by a string, round her neck on her own brown bosom. And when Ivan was gone for ever, and her tears were dry enough, she went to that box every night and morning, and unrolled the handkerchief reverently, and took out the unprinted book, and read it here and there—with pride and joy and sorrow—and folded it up again and replaced it in its ark till another evening. She knew nothing of books—till this one; it had never even struck her they were the outcome of human brains and hands: but she knew it was her business in life now to publish it. Ivan Greet was gone, and, but for those two legacies he left behind him, she would have wished to die—she would have died, as negroes can, by merely wishing it. But now she couldn't. She must live for his child; she must live for his idyll. It was a duty laid upon her. She knew not how—but somehow, some time, she must get that book printed.

Six weeks later, her baby was born. As it lay on her lap, a dear, little, soft, round, creamy-brown girl—hardly brown at all, indeed, but a delicate quadroon, with deep chestnut hair and European features—she loved it in her heart for its father's sake chiefly. It was Ivan's child, made in Ivan's likeness. They christened it Vanna; 'twas the nearest feminine form she could devise to Ivan. But even the baby—her baby, his baby—seemed hardly more alive to Clemmy herself than the manuscript that lay wrapped with scented herbs and leaves in the box in the corner. For that was all Ivan's, and it spoke to her still with his authentic voice—his own very words, his tone, his utterance. Many a time she took it out, as baby lay asleep, with tender eyelids closed, on the bed where Ivan had died (for sanitary science and knowledge of the germ theory haven't spread much as yet to St. Thomas-in-the-Vale) and read it aloud in her own sing-song way, and laughed and cried over it, and thought to herself, time and again, "*He* wrote all that! How wonderful! how beautiful!"

As soon as ever she was well enough, after baby came, Clemmy took that sacred manuscript, reverently folded still in its soft silk handkerchief, among its fragrant herbs, and with baby at her breast, trudged by herself along the dusty road, some twenty-five miles, all the way into Kingston. It was a long, hot walk, and she was weak and ill; but Ivan's book must be printed, let it cost her what it might; she would work herself to death, but she must manage to print it. She knew nothing of his family, his friends in England; she knew nothing of publishing, or of the utter futility of getting the type set at a Kingston printing-office; she only knew this—that Ivan wrote that book, and that, before he died, he meant to get it printed. After a weary trudge, buoyed only by vague hopes of fulfilling Ivan's last wish, she reached the baking streets of the grim white city. To her that squalid seaport seemed a very big and bustling town. Wandering there by herself, alone and afraid, down its unwonted thoroughfares, full of black men and white, all hurrying on their own errands, and all equally strange to her, she came at last to Henderson's, the printer's. With a very timid air, she mustered up courage to enter the shop, and unfolded with trembling fingers her sacred burden. The printer stared hard at her. "Not your own, I suppose?" he said, turning it over with a curious eye, like any common manuscript, and evidently amused at the bare idea of a book by an up-country brown girl.

And Clemmy, half aghast that any man should touch that holy relic so lightly, made answer very low, "No, not me own. Me fren's. Him dead, and I want to know how much you ax to print him."

The man ran his eye through it, and calculated roughly. "On paper like this," he said, after jotting down a few figures, "five hundred copies would stand you in something like five-and-thirty pounds, exclusive of binding."

Five-and-thirty pounds! Clemmy drew a long breath. It was appalling, impossible. "You haven't got so much about you, I suppose!" the printer went on, with a laugh. Clemmy's eyes filled with tears. Five-and-thirty pounds! And a brown girl! Was it likely?

"I doan't want it print jes' yet," she answered, with an effort, hardly keeping back her tears. "I only come to ax—walk in all de way from St. Tammas-in-de-Vale, so make me tired. Bime-by, p'raps, I print him—when I done got de money. I doan't got it jes' yet—but I'm gwine home to get it."

And home she went, heavy-hearted; home she went to get it. Five-and-thirty pounds, but she meant to earn it. Tramp, tramp, tramp, she trudged along to St. Thomas. Between the pestilential lagoons on the road to Spanish Town she thought it all out. Before she reached the outskirts, with her baby at her breast, she had already matured her plan of campaign for the future. Come what might, she must make enough money to print Ivan Greet's masterpiece. She was only a brown girl, but she was still in possession of the two-acre plot; and possession is always nine points of the law, in Jamaica as in England. Indeed, with her simple West Indian notions of proprietorship and inheritance, Clemmy never doubted for a moment they were really her own, as much as if she were Ivan's lawful widow. Nobody had yet come to disturb or evict her; nobody had the right, in Jamaica at least: for Ivan Greet's heirs, executors, and assigns slumbered at peace, five thousand miles away, oversea in England. So, as Clemmy tramped on, along the dusty high road, and between the malarious swamps, and through the grey streets of dismantled Spanish Town, and up the grateful coolness of the Rio Cobre ravine to her home in St. Thomas, she said to herself and to his baby at her breast a thousand times over how she would toil and moil, and save and scrape, and earn money to print his last work at last as he meant it to be printed.

IX.

And she worked with a will. She didn't know it was a heroic resolve on her part; she only knew she had got to do it. She planted yam and coffee and tobacco. Coffee and tobacco need higher cultivation than the more thrifless class of negroes usually care to bestow upon them; but Clemmy was a brown girl, and she worked as became the descendant of so many strenuous white ancestors. She could live herself on the yams and breadfruit; when her crop was ripe she could sell the bananas and coffee and tobacco, and hoard up the money she got in a belt round her waist, for she never could trust all that precious coin away from her own person.

From the day of her return, she worked hard with a will; and on market-days she trudged down with her basket on her head and her baby in her arms to sell her surplus produce in Linstead market. Every quattie she earned she tied up tight in the girdle round her waist. When the quatties reached eight she exchanged them for a shilling—one shilling more towards the thirty-five pounds it would cost her to print Ivan Greet's last idyll! The people in St. Thomas were kind to Clemmy. "Him doan't nebber get ober de buckra deat'," they said. "Him take it berry to heart. Him lub him fe' true, dat gal wit' de buckra!" So they helped her still, as they had helped Ivan in his lifetime. Many a one gave her an hour's work at her plot when the drought threatened badly, or aided her to get in her yams and sweet potatoes before the rainy season.

Clemmy was an Old Connexion Baptist. They all belonged to the Old Connexion in the Linstead district. Your negro is strong on doctrinal theology, and he likes the practical sense of sins visibly washed away by total immersion. It gives him a comfortable feeling of efficient regeneration which no mere infant sprinkling could possibly emulate. One morning, on the hillside, as Clemmy stood in her plot by a graceful clump of waving bamboos, hacking down with her cutlass the weeds that encumbered her precious coffee-bushes—the bushes that were to print Ivan Greet's last manuscript—of a sudden the minister rode by on his mountain pony—sleek, smooth-faced, oleaginous, the very picture and embodiment of the well-fed, negro-paid, up-country missionary. He halted on the path—a mere ledge of bridle-track—as he passed where she stood bending down at her labour.

"Hey, Clemmy," the minister cried in his half-negro tone—for, though an Englishman born, he had lived among his flock on the mountains so long that he had caught at last its very voice and accent—"they tell me this good-for-nothing white man's dead who lived in the hut here. Perhaps it was better so! Instead of trying to raise and improve your people, he had sunk himself to their lowest level. So you've got his hut now! And what are you doing, child, with the coffee and tobacco?"

Clemmy's face burned hot; this was sheer desecration! The flush almost showed through her dusky brown skin, so intense was her indignant wrath at hearing her dead Ivan described by that sleek fat creature as a "good-for-nothing white man." But she answered back bravely, "Him good friend to me fe' true, sah. I doan't know nuffin' 'bout what make him came heah, but I nebber see buckra treat nagur anywhere same way like he treat dem. An' I lubbed him true. And I growin' dem crop dah to prin' de book him gone left behind him."

The minister reflected. This was sheer contumacy. "But the land's not yours," he said testily. "It belongs to the man's relations—his heirs or his creditors. Unless of course," he added, after a pause, just to make things sure, "he left it by will to you."

"No, sah, him doant make no will," Clemmy answered, trembling, "an' him doan't leave it to anybody. But I lib on de land while Ivan lib, an' I doan't gwine to quit it for no one on eart' now him dead and buried."

"You were his housekeeper, I think," the minister went on, musing.

And Clemmy, adopting that usual euphemism of the country where such relations are habitual, made answer, hanging her head, "Yes, sah, I was him housekeeper."

"What was his name?" the minister asked, taking out a small note-book.

"Dem call him Ivan Greet," Clemmy answered incautiously.

"Ivan Greet," the minister repeated, stroking his smooth double chin and reflecting inwardly. "Ivan Greet! Ivan Greet! No doubt a Russian!... Well, Clemmy, you must remember, this land's not yours; and if only we can find out where Ivan

Greet belonged, and write to his relations—which is, of course, our plain duty—you'll have to give it up and go back to your father." He shook his pony's reins. "Get up, Duchess!" he cried calmly. "Good morning, Clemmy; good morning."

"Marnin', sah," Clemmy answered, with a vague foreboding, her heart standing still with chilly fear within her.

But, as soon as the minister's ample back was turned, she laid down her cutlass, took up little Vanna from the ground beside her, pressed the child to her breast, and rushed with passionate tears to the box in the hut that contained, in many folds, *his* precious manuscript. She took the key from her neck, and unlocked it eagerly. Then she brought forth the handkerchief, unwound it with care, and stared hard through her tears at that sacred title-page. His relations indeed! Who was nearer him than herself? Who had ever so much right to till that plot of land as she who was the guardian of his two dying legacies? She would use it to feed his child, and to print his last book. She could kill his own folk if they came there to take it from her!

For weeks and weeks after that, Clemmy worked on in fear and trembling. Would Ivan's friends come out to claim that precious plot from her—the plot that was to publish his immortal masterpiece? For she knew it was immortal; had not Ivan himself, while he read it, explained so much to her? But slowly she plucked up heart, as week after week passed away undisturbed, and no interloper came to destroy her happiness. She began to believe the minister had said rather more than he meant; he never had written at all to Ivan's folk in England. Month after month slipped away; and the mango season came, and the tobacco leaves were picked in good condition and sold, and the coffee-berries ripened. Negro friends passed her hut, nodding kindly salute. "You makin' plenty money, Clemmy? You sell de leaf dear? Hey, but de pickney look well? Him farder proud now if him can see de pickney."

At last the rainy season was over, and the rivers were full. Mosquito larvæ swarmed and wriggled by thousands in the shallow lagoons; and when they got their wings, the sea-breeze drove them up in countless numbers to the deep basin of St. Thomas, a lake-like expanse in the central range ringed round by a continuous amphitheatre of very high mountains. They were a terrible plague, those mosquitoes; they drove poor little Vanna half wild with pain and terror. A dozen times in the night the tender little creature woke crying from their bites. Clemmy stretched a veil over her face, but that made little difference. Those wretched mosquitoes bit right through the veil. Clemmy didn't know where to turn to protect her baby.

"Him buckra baby; dat what de matter," old Rachel suggested gravely. "Nagur baby doan't feel de 'skeeter bite same like o' buckra. Nagur folk and 'skeeter belong all o' same country. But buckra doan't hab no 'skeeter in England. Missy Queen doan't 'low dem. Now dis 'ere chile buckra—tree part buckra an' one part nagur. Dat what for make him so much feel de 'skeeter."

"But what can I do for 'top him, marra?" Clemmy inquired despondently.

"It only one way," old Rachel answered, with a very sage face, "Burn smudge before de door. Dat drive away 'skeeter."

Now a smudge is a fresh-cut turf of aromatic peaty marsh vegetation; you light it before the hut, where it smoulders slowly during the day and evening, and the smoke keeps the mosquitoes from entering the place while the door stands open. Clemmy tried the smudge next day, and found it most efficacious. For two or three nights little Vanna slept peacefully. Old Rachel nodded her head.

"Keep him burning," she advised, "till de water dry up, an' de worm, dem kill, and it doan't no more 'skeeter."

Clemmy followed her mother's advice to the letter in this matter. Each morning when she went out to work on her plot, with little Vanna laid tenderly in her one shawl on the ground close by, she lighted the smudge and kept it smouldering all day, renewing it now and again as it burnt out through the evening. On Thursday, as was her wont, she went down with her goods to Linstead to market. On her head she carried her basket of "bread-kind"—that is to say, yam, and the other farinacious roots or fruits which are to the negro what wheaten bread is to the European peasant. She walked along erect, with the free, swinging gait peculiar to her countrywomen, untrammelled by stays and the other abominations of civilized costume; little Vanna on her arm crowed and gurgled merrily. 'Twas a broiling hot day, but Clemmy's heart was lighter. Was there ever such a treasure as that fair little Vanna, whitest of quadroons?—and she was saving up fast for the second of those thirty-five precious pounds towards printing Ivan's manuscript!

In the market-place at Linstead she sat all day among the chattering negresses, who chattered for quatties, with white teeth displayed, or higgled over the price of breadfruit and plantain. 'Tis a pretty scene, one of these tropical markets, with its short-kirtled black girls, bare-legged and bare-footed, in their bright cotton gowns and their crimson bandannas. Before them stand baskets of golden mangoes and purple star-apples; oranges lie piled in little pyramids on the ground; green shaddocks and great slices of pink-fleshed water-melon tempt the thirsty passer-by with their juicy lusciousness. Over all rises the constant din of shrill African voices; 'tis a perfect saturnalia of hubbub and noise, instinct with bright colour and alive with merry faces.

So Clemmy sat there all day, enjoying herself after her fashion, in this weekly gathering of all the society known to her. For the market-place is the popular negro substitute for the At Homes and Assembly Rooms of more civilized

communities. Vanna crowed with delight to see the little black babies in their mother's arms, and the pretty red tomatoes scattered around loose among the gleaming oranges. It was late when Clemmy rose to go home to her hamlet. She trudged along, gaily enough, with her laughing companions; more than a year had passed now since Ivan's death, and at times, in the joy of more money earned for him, she could half forget her great grief for Ivan. The sun was setting as she reached her own plot. For a moment her heart came up into her mouth. Then she started with a cry. She gazed before her in blank horror. The hut had disappeared! In its place stood a mass of still smouldering ashes.

In one second she understood the full magnitude of her loss, and how it had all happened. With a woman's quickness she pictured it to herself by pure instinct. The smudge had set fire to the clumps of dry grass by the door of the hut; the grass had lighted up the thin wattle and palm thatch; and once set afire, on that sweltering day, her home had burnt down to the ground like tinder.

Two or three big negroes stood gazing in blank silence at the little heap of ruins—or rather of ash, for all was now consumed to a fine white powder. Clemmy rushed at them headlong with a wild cry of suspense. "You save de box?" she faltered out in her agony. "You save de box? You here when it burning?"

"Nobody doan't see till him all in a blaze," one young negro replied in a surly voice, as negroes use in a moment of disaster; "an' den, when we see, we doan't able to do nuffin."

Clemmy laid down her child. "De box, de box!" she cried in a frenzied voice, digging down with tremulous hands into the smoking ashes. The square form of the hut was still rudely preserved by the pile of white powder, and she knew in a moment in which corner to look for it. But she dug like a mad creature. Soon all was uncovered. The calcined remains of Ivan's clothes were there, and a few charred fragments of what seemed like paper. And that was all. The precious manuscript itself was utterly destroyed. Ivan Greets one masterpiece was lost for ever.

Clemmy crouched on the ground with her arms round her knees. She sat there cowering. She was too appalled for tears; her eyes were dry, but her heart was breaking.

For a minute or two she crouched motionless in deathly silence. Even the negroes held their peace. Instinctively they divined the full depth of her misery.

After a while she rose again, and took Vanna on her lap. The child cried for food, and Clemmy opened her bosom. Then she sat there long beside the ruins of her hut. Negresses crowded round and tried in vain to comfort her. How could they understand her loss? They didn't know what it meant: for in that moment of anguish Clemmy felt herself a white woman. They spoke to her of the hut. The hut! What to her were ten thousand palaces! If you had given her the King's House at Spanish Town that night it would have been all the same. Not the roof over her head, but Ivan Greet's manuscript.

She rocked herself up and down as she cowered on the ground, and moaned inarticulately. The rocking and moaning lulled Vanna to sleep. His child was now all she had left to live for. For hours she crouched on the bare ground, never uttering a word: the negresses sat round, and watched her intently. Now and again old Rachel begged her to come home to her stepfather's hut; but Clemmy couldn't stir a step from those sacred ashes. It grew dark and chilly, for Ivan Greet's plot stood high on the mountain. One by one the negresses dropped off to their huts; Clemmy sat there still, with her naked feet buried deep in the hot ash, and Ivan Greet's baby clasped close to her bosom.

At last with tropical unexpectedness, a great flash of lightning blazed forth, all at once, and showed the wide basin and the mountains round as distinct as daylight. Instantly and simultaneously a terrible clap of thunder bellowed aloud in their ears. Then the rain-cloud burst. It came down in a single sheet with equatorial violence.

Old Rachel and the few remaining negresses fled home. They seized Clemmy's arm, and tried to drag her; but Clemmy sat dogged and refused to accompany them. Then they started and left her. All night long the storm raged, and the thunder roared awesomely. Great flashes lighted up swaying stems of coconuts and bent clumps of bamboo; huge palms snapped short like reeds before the wind; loud peals rent the sky with their ceaseless artillery. And all night long, in spite of storm and wind, the rain pelted down in one unending flood, as though it poured by great leaks from some heavenly reservoir.

Torrents tore down the hills; many huts were swept away; streams roared and raved; devastation marked their track; 'twas a carnival of ruin, a memorable hurricane. Hail rattled at times; all was black as pitch, save when the lightning showed everything more vivid than daylight. But Clemmy sat on, hot at heart with her agony.

When morning dawned the terrified negroes creeping forth from their shanties, found her still on her plot, crouching close over *his* child, but stiff and stark and cold and lifeless. Her bare feet had dug deep in the ashes of Ivan's hut, now washed by the rain to a sodden remnant. Little Vanna just breathed in her dead mother's arms. Old Rachel took her.

And that's why the world has never heard more of Ivan Greet's masterpiece.



Transcriber's Note

This text has been preserved as in the original, including archaic and inconsistent spelling, punctuation and grammar, except that obvious printer's errors have been silently corrected.

[The end of *Ivan Greet's Masterpiece* by Grant Allen]