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***IAN FLEMING***

# WHERE SHALL JOHN GO?

## XIII—JAMAICA

MY DEAR JOHN,

You are one of the million or more English citizens who intend to seek fortune and freedom abroad and I would like to encourage you because I don't believe we can go on borrowing money indefinitely to feed forty-eight million people. But I know you are vacillating between various corners of the world which have these essential virtues: English-speaking, sterling area, good weather, food, friends and 'freedom' (whatever you mean by that). I also know from your letters that although you have considered many refuges which have these blessings, you are alarmed by the social ambience of all of them.

On the one hand you are appalled by the tea-and-tennis set atmosphere in many of the most blessed corners of our Empire. You smell boiled shirts, cucumber sandwiches and the L-shaped life of expatriate Kensingtonia. At the other extreme you fear the moral 'dégringolade' of the tropics, the slow disintegration of Simenon's 'Touriste de Bananes'. In your imagination you hear the hypnotic whisper of the palm trees stooping too gracefully over that blue lagoon. You feel the scruffy stubble sprouting on your chin. The cracked mirror behind Red's Bar reflects the bloodhound gloom of those ruined features which contort painfully as you cough into a soiled handkerchief. You know you'll be dead before the next monsoon.

So it is in your mind's eye, and so it might easily be if you plumped for tropic sloth and had not the leather morale of a Scottish missionary.

But a middle way between the lethe of the tropics and a life of fork-lunches with the District Commissioner's wife can be achieved and I believe you will achieve it in Jamaica. In a desultory fashion I have examined a large part of the world—most of Europe, some of Canada and Australia, bits of Africa and a few islands, including Hawaii, Capri, Cyprus, Malta and Ceylon. America, including San Francisco and Florida. Even two short periods of work in Moscow (like the Gorbals but much larger and much, much duller when you've finished sightseeing). After looking at all these, I spent four days in Jamaica in July 1943. July is the beginning of the hot season and it rained in rods every day at noon, yet I swore that if I survived the contest I would go back to Jamaica, buy a piece of land, build a house and live in it as much as my job would allow. I went back in January '46, chose a site, designed a house, chose an agent and an architect and by last December all was finished. This year I had five weeks' holiday in the new house and I wish it could have been six months.

I live on the North Shore, opposite an invisible Cuba, on the eastern corner of a tiny banana port called Oracabessa (Golden Head). My neighbours, both coloured and white, are charming and varied. I have no regrets.

Jamaica, one of our oldest colonies and the most valuable of our British West Indian islands, is slightly smaller than Northern Ireland. It contains 1,250,000 souls, ten per cent of whom live in Kingston, the capital. At a *very* rough guess, I should say that there are 50,000 white inhabitants or constant visitors, and another 100,000 who would seem white to you or me. No more statistics. You can find them all in the Encyclopædia, Whitaker, the Handbook of Jamaica or the Handbook of the West Indies. One of these will be in your public library. From your subscription library, you can borrow any amount of travel books and novels about Jamaica (*High Wind in Jamaica* is mostly about Cuba), and you will note extensive literary associations with 'Monk' Lewis, Beckford of Fonthill and Smollett. You may also care to explore accounts of the Trial of Governor Eyre, for the Jamaica Committee for his prosecution included John Stuart Mill as chairman, with Huxley, Thomas Hughes and Herbert Spencer as members. Carlyle was chairman of the committee of

defence with Ruskin and Tennyson in support.

Cyril Connolly spent part of his 'blue' or post-graduate period here and Augustus John is amongst its many portrayers.

An atlas will show you that the island looks very like a swimming turtle—side view—with a range of mountainous hills stretching along its middle from its tail to its eye. At its tail, where also Kingston the capital lies, is a real mountain, the Blue Mountain, 7,000 feet high, which grows the finest coffee in the world (with the same name). You will drink this coffee cold-distilled. That is, the coffee, freshly ground, is percolated over and over again with cold water until a thin black treacle is produced. This is very strong and contains all the aroma which, by roasting, would otherwise be lost on the kitchen air. A third of a cup with hot milk or water added will spoil you for all of the more or less tortured brews you drink in England.

The Blue Mountain precipitates a good deal of rain at the Eastern end of the island and this end is therefore wetter and perhaps even more fruitful than the rest; but the spine of mountainous country which runs the length of the island has the same beneficial effect and gives Jamaican weather a variety which is stimulating and extremely healthy. (I can assure you that sun and calm blue seas and brassy heat can be more wearying and exasperating than the grey but ever-changing porridge in which you live and make sour moan.)

Another pleasant peculiarity of the weather, which has some simple but immaterial cause, is that at nine o'clock on most mornings throughout the year the 'Doctor's Wind' blows lightly in from the sea until, at six in the evening, the 'Undertaker's Wind' comes on regular duty and blows, from the centre of the island, the stale air out again. (Your room, or your house, should face so as to take advantage of this benefice.) On most nights of the year you can sleep with a light blanket if your room is fortunately placed on the island, but it will be clear to you that one cannot generalize about the weather or the temperature on an island with mountains all along its spine. This also applies to the humidity which, in the hot season, can be considerable at some corners and some levels, but unimportant at others. You must just find these things out for yourself and not listen to generalities.

As you can imagine, the landscape varies with the altitude. In parts the uplands, with their stone-walled meadows and Friesian cattle, remind one of Ireland or the Tyrol—except for the orchids and the backdrop of tropical trees and the occasional green lightning of parrakeets or Bengal flame of a giant Immortel. Then you drop down, often through a cathedral of bamboo or a deep-cut gully of ferns, into a belt of straight tropical vegetation—palms, cotton trees and Jamaican hardwoods such as ebony, mahogany, mahoe, red bullet and the like. Amongst them grow thick the tribe of logwood, and dogwood. Indigo comes from logwood and the bees make particular honey from its yellow blossom. (There is another variety of dogwood called 'Bitchwood', but this is politely referred to as 'Mrs. Dogwood'. I will tell you more of this likeable Jamaican *pudeur* later on.)

You will pass through meadows of sensitive plant (local name 'Shamelady') and pick some of the 2,000 different varieties of flowers. There are innumerable butterflies and humming-birds and, at night, fireflies of many kinds. In the distance, the sea will be breaking in silver on the reef and, because of the phosphorus, you will look like an Oscar if you bathe in some of the bays after dark.

The lowlands, and the valleys which comb the flanks of the hills, are all sugar cane, citrus, cultivated palms and bananas and various fruit-vegetables like mangoes, bread-fruit, guavas, sour-sop, naseberries and the like. The cattle here will be mostly sleek Indian herds, imported (and now thriving), because of their tick-resistance. Another import you will see every day is the mongoose, brought in to kill the snakes. He has killed them all and has long since started on birds' eggs with disastrous consequences to all who build their nests in banks and near the ground. The only bird you will see too many of is the carrion crow, protected because he scavenges impeccably and with hideous magic the dead dog in the forest and the fish spines in your 'yard'.

The coastline is very varied. Coral rocks and cliffs alternate with 'South Sea island' coves and bays and beaches. The sand varies too, from pure white to golden to brown to grey. The sea is blue and green and rarely calm and still. A coral reef runs round the island with very deep water beyond and over the reef hang frigate birds, white or black, with beautifully forked tails, and dark blue kingfishers. Clumsy pelicans and white or slate grey egrets fish at the river mouths. There is every kind of tropical fish from big game to breakfast. The latter are caught in seines or boxnets. All

varieties of shellfish, of course, and beautiful sea-shells from conches to cowries (better on the South coast beaches like Negril and Black River). Black crabs are a great delicacy and are eaten highly spiced. Every now and then they march inland in herds (cf. lemmings in reverse) and if your house is in the way they march through it or over it and if your body in your bed is in the way, they march over that too, and your face.

On your drives (New Standard, drive-yourself, costs about £10 a week) you will come upon many of the famous Jamaican 'great houses', particularly if you leave the excellent main highways and venture along the quite viable parochial roads. Such are Cardiff Hall, just sold by the Blagrove family after unbroken tenure since Cromwell gave it to an ancestor; Bellevue Plantation belonging to the Bryces; Harmony Hall in its fine palm-grove; Prospect, belonging to Sir Harold Mitchell; the ruins of Rose Hall (read the *White Witch of Rose Hall*, by De Lisser, hot-blooded sadism and slaves set in the 1850s) and many others.

A curious part of the island is the Cockpit Country 'known', the map says, 'by the name of Look Behind'. When taxes were introduced (?1790) the Maroons, the Spanish negro inhabitants of this province, would not pay. The Governor sent a company of redcoats up into their hills to enforce payment, but the Maroons repulsed them, set up their own government and refused allegiance to the Crown. They still refuse it, and are the only corner of the British Empire to do so. Their 'colonel' is a coloured man who with all his 'government', wears a Sam Browne belt as a badge of office. He does very little governing except to maintain the rights of his people *vis-à-vis* the Governor. His people work and mix with their neighbours, intermarry and go and come as they please. But, since they pay no taxes, no roads have ever been built in the province and there are no public facilities such as post offices and social services. The terrain has never been surveyed and, if you look at the map, you will see a large white patch with the red veins of the roads coming to a full stop at its perimeter. There is nothing more to it than that, and the inhabitants are quite uninteresting, but it's pleasant to live in a Colony where a touch of zany persists.

A most remarkable feature of Jamaica is the abundance of mineral springs and baths. Some of these are already modestly developed and commercialized but only to the extent of some fifty bedrooms at the two main spas—Bath and Milk River (there will be 500 in twenty years). Milk River has the highest radio-activity of any mineral bath in the world—nine times as active as Bath, England, fifty times as active as Vichy, three times as active as Karlsbad and fifty-four times as active as Baden in Switzerland. While you are curing your rheumatism or sciatica (or just having an aphrodisiac binge) you can fish for tarpon or shoot yourself a crocodile suitcase, all at fourteen shillings a day (crocodile one pound extra).

As an amateur speleologist you will like the caverns and sinkholes which abound in the limestone hills. Up to a mile long, few of these have been explored and many are doubtless stuffed with pirate treasure including Sir Henry Morgan's hoard and the saving accounts of rich visitors from Columbus onwards.

The local music is Calypso, not as inventive as the original Trinidad varieties, but with the same electric rhythms. You can hire a good trio for upward of ten shillings an evening and they will play happily (happier with some rum) until the small hours. There are cheerfully unprintable versions of most of the songs, but you won't notice the words unless you master the Welsh intonation of the Jamaican voice and the occasional colloquialisms.

Bad or indecent language is almost absent from the native vocabulary. Thief, liar, badman are about the strongest words you will hear and these will mean real hate or rage. 'Will you do me a rudeness?' means 'will you sleep with me?', to which a brazen girl will reply 'you better hang on grass, I goin' move so much'.

Despite your visit to the Milk River, you would be very ill-advised to try any 'rudeness' with the local beauties. It would be unpopular with both coloured people and whites. For other reasons I would advise you to give a miss to the stews of Kingston although they would provide you with every known amorous constellation and permutation. One of the reasons why our Atlantic Squadron is based on Bermuda instead of Kingston (the Americans wanted us to contribute to the defence of Panama) was the veto of our naval health and welfare authorities. Kingston is a tough town—tough and dirty—despite all the exhortations of *The Daily Gleaner* (my favourite newspaper above all others in the world) and the exertions of the quite admirable Jamaican police force.

Apart from the shortcomings of Kingston, the only serious drawbacks to the island are the mosquitoes, sandflies, grass-ticks and politics. None of these are virulent hazards. Mosquitoes will only be met near swamplands and rivers,

where they will force you to use netting and DDT. Sandflies are quite damnable on some beaches. They are tiny midges which bite hard and I can only advise you to use Milton on the bites and avoid some beaches. Grass-ticks will fasten on to bare skin if you walk thoughtlessly in cattle country. They will cause you intense grief. It is most unlikely that you will try much cross-country walking owing to the nature of the country and the heat. If you do, wear high boots or tuck your trousers into your socks.

Politics; Well, it's the usual picture—education bringing a desire for self-government, for riches, for blacker coats and whiter collars, for a greater share (or all) of the prizes which England gets from the colony, for motor-cars, race-horses (a Jamaican passion), tennis clubs and tea parties and all the other desirable claptrap of the whites. Two men are fighting each other to take over the chaperonage of Jamaica. Bustamante (a gorgeous flamboyant rabble-rouser, idol of the labour unions) and Manley, K.C. (the local Cripps and white hope of the Harlem communists. Brilliant and perhaps wise, he controls the black coats and white collars and has the right wife to help him. Between them they are the intellectual focus of the island.) You would like both of these citizens although they would both say that they want to kick you out. Neither has an able deputy and it is impossible to say who will succeed to and perhaps fuse this forked leadership. Holding wise and successful sway is the Governor, Sir John Huggins, with an admirable Colonial Secretary, H. M. Foot, brother of Michael and the rest of that remarkable brood. Lady Huggins, 'Molly' to the whole population, is a blonde and much-loved bombshell who wins tennis and golf tournaments and wrestles with the Colonial Office about the rights and concerns of all the women of Jamaica. Heaven knows what the island will do without her.

I do not believe that you will find Island politics a grave danger in the future or that you will get your throat cut in the night as some Jamaican penkeepers (landlords) will have you believe. I expect that Jamaica should slip fairly quietly into a Caribbean Federation (perhaps with Dominion status) and that the liberality and wisdom of our present policy will take the edge off passions which were high some years ago. There will always be a racial simmering and occasional clashes between coloured and white vanities, but personally I rely on liking my neighbours at Oracabessa, on a dog called Himmler and on a Spanish tomb in my garden which is full of 'duppies' (local ghosts).

Well, those are the hazards of Jamaica and I think you will agree that they compare quite favourably with the more civilized risks—spivs, road-death, flu and vitamin deficiency—which infest your English life. (I have cancelled out Russians and atom bombs against the Jamaican hurricanes which may, in the autumn, blow you over and your roof off at about five-yearly intervals.)

Food is delicious and limitless, but the cooking uninspired and 'english' unless you fight against it. Unbounded drink of all sorts (rum at six shillings a bottle up, Dutch liqueurs from Curaçao, French wines from Martinique and Guadeloupe, gins and whiskeys from England) and infinite cigars rolled in Havana or Jamaica thighs. New motor cars from England, America and France, and excellent textiles from Britain. (Good tailors and seamstresses will make you anything in one day to three, but best give them a model to copy.) There are no permits or coupons and prices are reasonable (cheap outside Kingston or Montego Bay). Servants are plentiful but varied and are twelve to twenty shillings a week. They require exhortation and a sense of humour, which the majority appreciate. Hired labour will cost you three shillings a day (female) and four shillings a day (male) and furniture-makers are many and good. All labour requires exact instructions, constant reminders and an absolute veto on making things look 'pretty' (food, furniture, gardens, clothes). There is too much cruelty to animals, which are regarded as strictly expendable. Drivers tip their whips with heavy wire and attack the tender parts of their beasts with malignant and unerring precision. There is, of course, plenty of heavy drinking, particularly on Friday and Saturday nights, after pay-day, and there is some smoking of Indian hemp, or Marihuana or 'ganja' as it is called locally. (If you are caught at this, or at cockfighting, you will get about twelve strokes of the Tamarind switch, which I fancy is more painful than it sounds.)

Local black magic (obea) is scarce and dull but credited by most. It consists largely of brewing love potions and putting on hoodoos. If you find a white chicken with its head cut off lying on your doorstep you have, or should have, had it. But the Jamaicans are most law-abiding and God-fearing and have a strictness of behaviour and manners which will surprise and charm you. Don't mistake me, these are no angels. The people go to law constantly over trivialities to give their neighbours evidence of their social advancement and often for the simple fun of hiring a white man. They fervently adhere to one of the many religious denominations as you or I might join a club, and when they go to church it is to swing 'Rock of Ages' and go right to town with 'Come all ye Faithful!' (The Salvation Army plays their jazz straight.) Nevertheless and for whatever reasons, law and the church are a great counterweight to the human extravagance which the hot sun breeds. I think you will appreciate the fairly solid civic framework which contains this tropic luxury. It is just

enough to raise in you that moral eyebrow which the heat might otherwise have drugged.

I have not talked about the intellectual and artistic life in Jamaica because I am not particularly intellectual or artistic and I might misinform you. Nor have I mentioned the sort of people you may meet and make friends with in the island for there is the whole gamut, from Lord Beaverbrook to a glorified beachcomber with a fixation on swans.

Now, John, while I strongly advise you and your friends to come here for a holiday I cannot urge you to immigrate because I haven't done so myself and I really don't know how you would all stand up to it, what you would do when you got here, or what all your standards of living are. Jamaica is a small world with few industries which can afford learners. If you are all competent in your trades and professions (outside the middleman professions) you should be able to find a niche, but you must have enough money to live on while you look round and enough for your return passage if you don't succeed or don't like it. Remember that unless you are exceptional, you will be competing with coloured people in the lower ranks of all the jobs, and you will find this difficult and perhaps exasperating. If you are thoroughly competent, with really solid references, you may find a short cut through friends, or friends of friends. But, to begin with, work will be very hard and earnings small. Later, I guess you should do well since I am sure many new industries will come to Jamaica and much foreign capital and, if you are on the spot, you may get into one of the new enterprises. But don't forget, nearly all offices are in Kingston and I am not at all sure how you would like living there.

If you have your own resources, both material and spiritual, I think you could live a happy and modest life on £500 to £1,000 a year, with a house, servants and all the rest. It will cost you about two to three thousand to build a house. The land will be about ten to a hundred pounds an acre, depending on situation. You *must* have a good water supply and a clear title. Rents vary all over the island. Income Tax is much the same as in England, but I fancy rather easier on the lower brackets.

If you come for a holiday, come between November and June. The other four months are hot and rainy. You can fly direct by British South American Airways in two days (£130, single). If you are very lucky you can travel in a banana boat, which is the cheapest way. The easiest in these days would be to get across the Atlantic by ship or plane and then fly down via Miami (three hours to Jamaica). Order your rooms in advance through a travel agency, but take a chance if they say 'full up'. You can send any amount of money to Jamaica by ringing up your bank and telling them to do it.

Well, that's enough, John. I can't think of anything else and if you want to know any more you must read some books or write to the Jamaica Hotels Association, Kingston, or one of the other addresses you will find in the Handbook of Jamaica. You could also get in touch, but very politely, because they are not a travel agency, with the West India Committee, Norfolk Street, London.

Come soon and bring Ann and the children. The schools are excellent and the new West Indian University is just going up. I will give you a feast. The menu will be; Booby's Eggs, Black Crab, Roast Stuffed Sucking Pig with Rice and Peas, Guavas in Syrup with Cream, Blue Mountain Coffee, Yellow Chartreuse (pre-war). Pork-Chop's trio will play 'Gimme a shilling with a Lion upon it', 'Linstead Market', 'Iron Bar' and 'Saturday Night' and we will watch the fireflies and listen to the distant surf on the reef.

Tell the others,  
IAN.

[End of *Jamaica*, by Ian Fleming]