It had been raining for six days. For six days I had sat on the hotel terrace, watching the mist rise across the lagoon, the black sky, little tempests agitating the swimming pool. Because I was not half of a honeymoon couple, because I was not a scuba diver, because I was not a superannuated leisure seeker, I sat with a crossword, marking time instead of words, watching the prevailing absence of motion in the courtyard.

Occasionally I would glimpse guests on balconies—but these visions were only ghosts, representations of humanity. I felt no particular bond with them. The visions appeared, then vanished back to their rooms. I continued to sit on alone.

But the native staff would speak to me. Strange friends, they became a source of contact in this alien world. I called them Eddie. Or Leonard. Or Peter. I would laugh and say, 'How can you have a name like Peter? That can't be your real name.'

'At the mission school they give us a Christian name,' Peter replied, his skin oozing shiny dots of sweat.

'Do you like that? To lose your family name?'

'The hotel like it. So guests remember us.' He is polite, he has been trained to answer this way. But I can see his smile is fake.

'What's your real name, Peter?'

'Jahbur. Jahbur Irini.'

'Can I call you that? Jabor.'

'Jahbur.' He laughed, this time sincerely. 'Jahbur, miss.' He had an infectious laugh, shaking his head. The natives from the villages would never laugh this way. They seemed always so sullen, unfriendly. We were rich tourists on their island nation. And they had been displaced.

I offered him a tip. 'We cannot take money, miss. It's against the rules.'

'No one will know, Jahbur. Just you and me.'

But he focused on the tray of glasses in his hand.

'Have I insulted you?' He did not speak. The laughter drained from his eyes. 'I have, haven't I? I didn't mean to. I thought... perhaps... the hotel doesn't pay you well.'
'This is the best job I will ever have, miss. Everyone wants to work here.'
'Tm sorry.' And I was—deeply. As though I had insulted his mother, or committed a crime. His face returned slowly to its resort smile as he collected my empty glass and walked away.

And this was Paradise! I waited for the sky to clear. Sent postcards home full of sunshine and swaying palms. Pretended to be having a wonderful time. And dreamt of the beginning of a Rain Age.

Just when I thought of checking out, the sun arrived—hesitantly, exasperatingly, disappearing now and then, disheartening me. But finally, it was there.

The resort lost its malnourished look. Suddenly the honeymooners reappeared, the divers came back from their fossicking among wrecks. There was activity in the resort lounge, striped chairs reappeared around the pool.

I could walk into the township now. Past the little jail, with its chicken wire walls, the relatives lined up, tossing parcels of food to the sad inmates. Eyes followed me along the road—eyes of women, prisoners, dogs and children. A woman, a white woman, walking with them, unafraid.

In town the palms really swayed, the way the postcards showed them. Other tourists, proper tourists, jostled each other in the duty free, sipped ice tea, wandered the flat, yellow sand on the make-believe beach. I acknowledged them dutifully, but once again felt an outsider.

In the open markets, I talked to barefooted women who sat with their bright fruit in cane baskets buzzing with insects. I touched their sarongs and leis, soft flowers beneath my fingertips scented with tropical rain. But to buy a souvenir would make me a tourist, another foreigner, playing native.

By the noon the sweat coursed down. The rain had done nothing to lift the air and the humidity made breathing uncomfortable. I felt giddy with heat. Alone, I waited while the crowds dispersed—to restaurants, to hotels, crowding on to tourist buses. Watching them drive away I felt glad.

At six o'clock the streets were bare, shutters down on white apartment blocks. Shadows followed me down alleys, into the heart of town. I crushed my hat and used it as a fan.

Six o'clock. I saw them, 'boys' as they were called. They were drunk, but I wasn't concerned. I noticed Jahbur among them. They passed a bottle,
singing merrily. Jahbur saw me and called out, but his words were consumed by the distance between us.

As a group they fell together beside the road, laughing at nothing, happy and harmless. I smiled, a mere reflex.

And then, quickly, the police van was there, screeching around the corner, tilting to one side. Two officers jumped out, uniformed in brown. The boys stopped laughing, passive in their drunken state. The officers tried to lift them from the roadside, lift them stubbornly as they began to protest, then fiercely, until at last they became violent and smashed each one against the tailgate of the truck.

I backed into a corner—windows opposite shut down tight. They all began to run, but the youngest of them, more drunk perhaps, fell down and could not stand. I saw his arm raised, heard a snap of bone, watched the baton strike his head. He buckled as they threw him in the truck.

I was there when they bashed the young boy. But I was not alone, listening like a dreamer to his splintered sobs, listening until his crying levelled off.

In the hotel, he would no longer speak.

'The boy, Jahbur,' I said, 'they beat the boy senseless. Don't ignore me. You saw them.'

'No, miss,' he mumbled. 'I did not.'

'You hid near me. When the others ran off.'

'No, miss,' he said, 'I did not.'

'Jahbur! We saw it. Both of us were there.'

But he bent his head, and whispered, 'My name, miss, is Peter. And I was never there.'