The Pelican · *Bob Shacochis*

IN THE QUIET KITCHEN, the old woman slowly prepared a breakfast of mashed sardines and cocoa tea for the white man and set it before him on the rickety, oil-stained table. She stood back then, watching him begin to eat, sucking her teeth at his hesitation, his reluctant acceptance of the food.

It was Saturday morning, no need to work, but Bowen rose early in his room at the guesthouse and decided to walk up the mountainside to the museum. No one bothered him in the streets. Walking Victoria Drive he looked down on the waterfront to the crowds gathered in the open market but could not hear their noise. The peace of the early morning was strengthened by the sea beyond, crystalline and windless, two fishing boats out with sagging sails, frigate birds circling and circling high up off the harbor point, a wheel of black dots that gave Bowen an impression of magnification, seeing beyond the visible, microbes swimming soundlessly on a laboratory slide. To the west, off the point, a line of four big-winged birds, probably pelicans, swooped down toward the barrier reef.

The air was fresh and sweet, unbroken by weekday noise, until he crossed the block that separated the government houses from the shanties of the ghetto, and then the city smelled like rotting fruit and kerosene, urine and garlic, and the sun burned deeper. It was a reggae bass line he heard first, syncopated and booming, unmistakably provocative, narcotic. The music fizzed at high volume from the cracked speakers of the Black Cat Bar—the Black Cat open all night, a chapel where men came to release the pain of hard living. A beam of daylight edged past the entrance to a man asleep on a board bench, a Guinness bottle on the dirt floor. Bowen walked by a group of fellows leaning against a parked taxi, but nobody said anything. He nodded amiably but instantly regretted it. He was an easy mark now; the gesture was an unwitting invitation to sell him dope, beg his money, to let the antipathy surface.

But nobody said anything and he walked by unmolested.

He was from the States, too new to the island to be relaxed, but beginning at least to be annoyed by the endless rituals of the street. This world stunned him, filled him with guilt and yet excited him. The field work was his first as professional archaeologist, free of graduate school and swept up by Smithsonian omnipotence and a rebirth of interest in

the pre-Columbian Conference of the Antilles. Stepping from the LIAT Avro onto this land, he felt like something brought up from underground and deposited in the sun.

Behind Bowen a car honked and it scared him, awakened him. He jumped quickly off the pavement into the dry, scattered sawgrass that pricked his sandaled feet. A chip of red pottery lodged in the black dirt drew his attention and he stooped to pick it out. The piece was embedded in the hard soil and he was forced to dig around it with his pocketknife. Wherever Bowen walked he searched the ground, eyes downcast like a penitent, for clues to a new site: shards and shells, a rock worn smooth, a discolored patch of earth; or colonial rubbish: old bottles, oxygenated crumbs of iron, the verdigris of a copper nail, anything that spoke honestly of the past, a mindprint or a voice that he must hear first before the distortion, the objectification, of exposure. The cataloguing, the collected data thereafter would always be an accessible, public curiosity; the pleasure of the first touch would remain private and real. Bowen turned the shard in his hand and rubbed the dirt away. The surface was pebble-polished, diagonals scratched through a white slip glaze with a fishbone or thorn. He slipped the fragment into the pocket of his khaki shorts. The horn, he realized, was still bleating impatiently.

An old Morris Minor, once bright red, scarred from front to back by bad roads and haphazard driving, had pulled over. Bowen couldn't see down inside so he came over and bent to the window for a look. He saw a dark, indelicate face, kinky hair longish and combed up and back where it curdled into short locks. The man had a big smile for him, friendly and familiar, his pale palm beckoning Bowen into the car.

"You goin up?"

Bowen crammed his large body, as pale and sharply pink as the man's palm, into the passenger seat. "Marcus," he said, acknowledging the driver. The car struggled forward. "It's getting hot."

"Everyday, mahn."

"I forget what I'm doing."

"No problem. I see you stop to make a study ahnd I tell myself you goin up de hill."

"Yes. That's right."

Marcus was the deputy agricultural officer, a prize for the Ministry, young and talented, willing to forsake the lure of the north for his homeland. He was responsible for the care of the Botanic Gardens, the hemisphere's oldest. His predecessors to a man were British and white:

dutiful adventurers, disciples of Kew and The Royal Society. Bowen saw Marcus frequently, for the fledgling museum was housed inside the Gardens in the cottage of the old overseer. The colonial residence was ramshackle when Bowen first saw it, the interior filthy from livestock allowed to roam through, a room filled with spoiling copra, the gables alive with bats, the tin roof perforated by rust. The house was the only blemish in the extraordinarily ordered world of the Gardens. Bowen spent his first month on the island helping Doctor Kirby, the veterinarian turned archaeologist, clean and renovate the Victorian ghost. They straightened bent nails pulled from termite-eaten boards, cut and milled their own lumber, added thinner to the gluey sediment of old paint cans. Marcus was always somewhere nearby, willing to help if needed, patiently abiding the growth of this new addition to the old Gardens.

They made their turn off the main road and started up the hill. Where the land leveled to a small plateau, the jungle had been stripped and the Gardens laid out two centuries ago. From here the countryside soared, rising to the vertical peaks that flanked Kingstown. Marcus accelerated to the right to bypass a taxi that had slowed in front of them. An elderly white woman had twisted herself halfway out the window to photograph the view of the harbor below, the Grenadines stretching into the blue, undivided horizon. She screamed girlishly as the Morris Minor passed close to her head on the narrow road and popped back into the cab, losing her sunhat in the process. Marcus laughed at this, certain he had not endangered her, and Bowen, frowning, disapproved of the woman's ostentation, her blatant tourism. Another few minutes and they were at the main entrance to the Gardens, the tall, wrought-iron gates chained across the road. Marcus stopped the car but left the engine running as he got out, pulling a keyring from his belt. He unlocked the gates and swung them back on their stops. The taxi they had overtaken pulled up alongside Bowen. Marcus stood proudly in the center of the road underneath the arched iron letters, *St. Vincent Botanic Gardens.*

"Open to de public, right now," he announced with a laugh. He walked back to the taxi and chatted with its occupants. "Lady, I hope you okay. I doan want you comin ahll de way here to find de gates closed up." The woman and her companions seemed delighted by the incident; it would transform into a grand story of adventure, she was having one of the best times of her life, she said. She made Marcus stand straight and still by the entrance while she photographed him. He graciously accommodated her, while Bowen remained in the car, smirking at his

fellow countrymen. Marcus told the group to enjoy themselves and not to pay more than two dollars to the shantytown boys he had trained as guides.

He returned to the car and drove slowly ahead into the Gardens through a channel of purple bougainvillea cresting overhead. Bowen waited for the man's mood to turn sour over the incident, but it did not. He asked, "Does it bother you to have them running all over the place like that?"

"What? Dem people?" Marcus answered, swinging his head back. "No, mahn. Dis place is made fah visitahs to come see, see someting done right in dis shitty-ahss country." He said it without irony, no inflection of regret. Bowen was surprised by Marcus's reply, and unsure if he was telling the truth. He knew, at least, that he resented the tourists more than the black man did.

They turned behind a tall hedge of crimson ixora that hid from public view a double row of long ramadas canopied with black nylon screening. This was the propagation center for the Gardens; cool, thick half-light filtered down upon line after line of seedlings, their rich, black scoops of earth girdled in plastic sleeves. The air was damp and sweetly sensual. Marcus was already out of the car, had his seat pushed forward and was unloading trayfuls of young plants, mint-like but fat and deep green, from the rear seat and floor. Bowen had not noticed them before; now he was aware of their peculiar fragrance.

"Can I help?"

"Ahlright," Marcus replied, but it didn't sound like it mattered to him one way or the other. Bowen lifted one of the trays. It was heavier than it looked.

"What type of plants are these?"

"Here, mahn," said Marcus, breaking off one of the leaves and crushing it below Bowen's nose. "You tell me."

The pure aroma of the sap swelled hotly into Bowen's nostrils, triggering a rush of memory. It was the smell of women he had slept with, of people that crowded against him in bars, of hitchhikers—the smell of an era in his life.

"Patchouli! I've never even thought of it as a plant."

"Dis a good cahsh crop," Marcus said seriously. "We has a guy in Chateaubelair tell me he want to try it, so I bring some down fah him from de Windwahd Station. When de bush young like dis, it doan smell much. But a mahn in Rocky Point keep ten acres of it. In de rainy

season, when de plahnt is juicy ahnd de fellow staht to cuttin it, you smell de scent on de whole mountahn."

Bowen said, "Will you take me there with you when the harvest begins? I'd like to see it."

Instead of answering, Marcus continued removing plants from the car. Bowen stood waiting for some sort of response but when it was not forthcoming, he shrugged his shoulders and put himself back to work, a little hurt at being ignored. When they had finished, Marcus showed him a spigot where he could wash the dirt from his hands. Sharing the stream of chilly water, they were very close together, squatting on their heels. Marcus looked carefully at Bowen. The white man felt he was being judged and returned the look. Marcus's eyes were impenetrable, monochromatic like the highland rain forests, as dark as the soil they washed from their hands. Bowen saw something in them he recognized but could not name. If they communicated anything, it was in a language he did not know. Then Marcus smiled, not fully, not in the exaggerated island way, but with a tentative acceptance, a softening of his black eyes.

"So you interested in plahnts, eh?" he asked.

"Sure." Bowen was uncertain whether he should say more. He did not want to commit himself too readily.

But the agriculturalist started talking and didn't stop. He explained how the patchouli was harvested and the oil distilled from its leaves and stored in five-gallon drums. He led Bowen through the hedge that separated them from the Gardens proper.

"See dis," he said, pulling out a branch from a wall of rampant vegetation, shifting and shaking in the breeze falling down the mountains, a bank of organic flags collected from every nation. "*Amherstia nobilis.* We cahll it Flame Amherstia. Dis tree very rare, mahn. She comes from India or somewheres like daht. A British fellow bring it here in 1906. Lots of guys bringin stuff here den." He snapped off a branch of the flamboyant, orchid-like flowers, the spray almost three feet in length, the vermilion petals tipped with gold like a dollop of butter, and presented it to Bowen.

"Ahnd see dis white greeny stuff with stickahs? We cahll dis Wait-A-Bit. It grow too fast ahnd everywheres daht I must send a mahn to chop it every week. A next British guy bring dis too long ago."

They walked over to a tall tree shedding its large compound leaves for the magnificence of a downpour of yellow blooms. "*Cassia fistula.*

You like de sound of daht? Golden Shower. Mothers like dese fruit pods very much for a sick child. *Monstera deliciosa.* Some cahll it Cerimahn. It's big, eh? I cahll it Delicious Monster. You cahn eat dis spike comin out of de bloom, you know.

"Milk-ahnd-Wine Lily. Lobster Claw. Fire Brush. Womahn's Tongue. Jerusalem Thorn. Look here. Pelicahn Flower. Feel how nice de leaves are. Nobody bring dis plahnt from somewheres else."

The unopened flowers of the vine were pelican-shaped, a pointed, beaked crest arching into two wide wings folded down in rest. Bowen plucked one of the larger flowers and cradled it in his hands. The flower seemed like a womb, an egg, something ready to give birth to a small creature. It was too big and awkwardly shaped to be stuck in a vase in the museum, so he passed it over to Marcus. Marcus examined the blossom for a moment and then tossed it on the ground.

The tour continued. Ornamental and blandly functional, toxic or medicinal, aquatic and xerophytic, Marcus revealed them all, sometimes naming family, genus, or land of origin for Bowen. *Dis one make a stinky fruit. Dis one only good fah shade, come from Ahfrica, mahn. Dis one here kill you. Dis one, Cannonbahll, de bloom dead aftah one day. Dis one de best fah keepin dirt on hillsides. Some crazy guys eat ahnd smoke dese seeds to feel nice.* He pulled the milky green buds from the ilang-ilang and squeezed them between his fingers so Bowen could smell this, the flower of flowers, the most exotic fragrance in the world.

They walked down a colonnade of royal palms, the hard gray lines of the trees framing the visual softness surrounding them. At the terminus of the avenue was a lily pond, its pastel cups set domestically on glossy green plates. Then a white gazebo where they sat and rested, absorbing the vista, and Bowen realized how much he admired the black man beside him, a master of his craft, a shepherd, the keeper of a silent, perfect world. Outside the gates and hedges, nothing was the same. Both city and jungle grew untended, never satisfying themselves.

Marcus's enthusiasm made Bowen anxious to get on with his own work, to immerse himself in the chaos of the inanimate morsels of the past, to puzzle the fallen world back together again by matching cracks, designs, colors. The agricultural officer wanted to walk over to the museum with him to check on the progress of the Amerindian plants he and Doc Kirby had cultivated there. Doc's Carib garden—lemon grass, mauby, tobacco, cassava, jimson weed—did not really interest Bowen; they were too ordinary, too plain to merit his appreciation, but

he liked the idea that Doc was using flora as a passageway for the past to enter the future.

After passing through a grove of ginger, the arrowlike stalks drooping with clusters of pearly buds, they stepped into a grassy glade surrounding the long shell of a tree toppled years ago. A sign nearby on a post explained the historical importance of this, the Gardens' most popular attraction. The park had filled with tourists by now. Many of them stood around the smooth, branchless husk of wood and photographed it. Bowen had known the tree was in the Gardens somewhere but he had not seen it until now. The sight was anticlimactic, a contrived presence, a false relic. This dead thing, though, useless for so many years, still exerted an unnatural power for Bowen, like a ghost that never vanishes but remains behind to guard the treasure it cannot touch.

"Bligh's gift to niggahs," Marcus said, grinning contemptuously. Bowen didn't expect this bluntness, but he was not offended by it, hoping now that a deeper alliance was forming between them. For the first time he heard cynicism in the black man's voice. "Dem wicked slaves won't eat cotton, cahn't stew sugah cane. Mahn, what you goin do?" Captain Bligh's breadfruit tree lay in the grass, a fallen idol rotting back into the earth. The sailor had risked his life to bring the young tree here. It spread its roots throughout the islands; it fed the bodies of souls abandoned in purgatory, kept their feet and hands and backs on earth; its fruit was the land speaking to itself to live on, to continue.

The lady from the taxicab stepped out from a group of admirers and approached them. "Just think of it," she said breathlessly. "This tree was right there with Captain Bligh on the *Bounty*. It survived so much!"

"No, no," Marcus corrected her. "Daht voyage de specimahns ahnd de cahptain did not fare well. But dis mahn Bligh was stubborn. He try it ahgain. Now everybody eatin breadfruit, even de hogs.

"Den he bring some teak. Soon teak tree everywheres you look. Now people prayin strong to de Cahptain, prayin *Ol Mahn Bligh, come bahck. Bring me womahn, bring me husbahnd, bring me pot to cook in, bring me piece ah fish to eat with dis breadfruit.*"

"Oh, I see," the woman said. She tried to smile, thanked him and hurried back to her companions. Bowen could hear her repeating the information to the group. Marcus turned to him self-consciously but hesitated. Bowen raised his eyebrows to encourage him to speak.

"I know what it sounds like, mahn," Marcus explained, "but I was only jokin with she."

They started to leave, but Marcus left Bowen's side and walked along the length of the tree to where it had broken in two from its impact with the ground. Impatiens grew everywhere in St. Vincent; the pink and white flowers, immodestly perched on their gangly stalks, were pretty enough, a schoolgirl's bouquet. You could see the flowers planted around unpainted shanties in the countryside, or thriving tenaciously in the rubbish of city lots. In the loose mulch between the two sections of Bligh's tree, Marcus had discovered the plant growing. Bowen watched as he kicked it up with the toe of his polished shoe. The act seemed childish and undignified and ineffective, scuffing at the plant instead of digging it out properly. And the tourists had turned to watch, eager to record all curious behavior. Marcus knew, Bowen thought, that things must be put into the ground carefully. Bowen knew that they must be taken out the same way.

Marcus returned gripping the crushed stalks. "Dis plahnt a weed," he said, "ahnd too bushy if you let it be." He got rid of it instantly whenever he found it in the Gardens. You're the boss, Bowen thought, but the act still seemed rather unnecessary.

"Let's go," he said to Marcus. "Doc must be waiting for me."

The approach up to the museum had once been terraced, perhaps to make the premises more English and impressive, to assert the dominion of the residence over the lush grounds. Marcus had recently restored the house's rose garden, returning it to the precision that had once comforted the lonely wives of the men sent here from Devon or Lancaster, transferred from Bombay, Kabul, Singapore. On the other side of the walkway, antithetical to the roses, Marcus had planted the Amerindian flora for Doctor Kirby. Bowen left Marcus to tend to these, climbed the wooden steps of the museum's veranda, tested the front door but found it locked, knocked loudly but Doc was not inside although he had said he would be there.

Bowen dug in his pockets for his own key but he did not have it. He turned back to Marcus who had forsaken the freshly-rooted Amerindian plants and was on his knees in the rose garden inspecting the browning leaves of a flowerless bush.

Bowen called down to him. "Do you have an extra key?"

"What?" Marcus said absently, barely audible across the short distance. Bowen was going to repeat it but then Marcus pushed himself up off the ground, brushed his pants with his hands, the problem, the mystery that had attracted him to the roses, forgotten. He was coming up.

"Well, I remind myself to stop by you anyways for a look. Doc tell me dis place gettin full of rocks ahnd bone ahnd broken pot."

He tried several keys until he found the proper one. Past the door the air was noticeably drier. The front rooms were empty, the old wood floors coarse and noisy, gray with dust. Doc had still not settled on the design for the display cases, although a cabinetmaker had been commissioned and set to work on storage shelves. Marcus followed Bowen down a center hallway to the rear of the building. The work area resembled a garage and had once served as both carriage house and kitchen. The floor was rough cement, artifacts everywhere upon it—in loose piles, in burlap bags, in boxes, in coffee tins. Rock carvings, some weighing hundreds of pounds, were stacked against two walls. The men stepped carefully through the jumble to a table alongside a set of windows which Bowen shoved open for fresh air. Marcus examined the room with severity.

"Stone ahnd bone ahnd broken pot," he said. "Indiahns doan leave much."

Bowen wanted to return to the intimacy that was between them when they were walking the Gardens. There was a level in each man's work that bonded to the other, but Bowen could not identify it. The feeling needed expression, but Bowen felt doomed to the visible, the prosaic, for only this was left in each piece after the burn of the first touch.

"All the pottery fragments on the table here are called *adornos,*" he said. "They are images of an animal, a fish, a bird, or sometimes humanoid, that were formed onto vessels. Like cooking pots or bowls. Water jugs."

Marcus picked through them. "Why?" he asked.

Pick them up and feel them and listen, Bowen wanted to answer but couldn't. Doc can tell you better than me. He has seen them, a vision in the Yambou Valley; he swears he was among them for a morning. Before our history, there was this, this silent world of men and birds and fish. Am I saying it right? Bats filled the air at night and were gods or devils or something not men, not man, with knowledge and power. In the silence everywhere, manatees somersaulted in the lagoons, sea turtles rasped lungfuls of air on the empty beach, squeezing their eggs into the sand. Man was no different and when he killed he was satisfied with that act. Women spoke a spirit language of clay and fire. Here the clay suffers, here the clay honors man and here it pities him. The potter, a girl, a young woman, marked these lines with her fingernail. In these

indentations, put your own flesh; she has found you then and the pot knows your touch, the pot is whole again, has waited and waited for it and remembers the day of its creation. The blood moves again into the head of the lizard-thing that lives in this pot, that watches through this image. Do you understand, she was just a child and forbidden to speak the same words as the men. She took the dolphins from the waves and twisted them into clay. I do not know if there was happiness in this act, but there was knowledge.

Bowen finally answered, his sense of futility lessened by the interest evident in the black man's stern expression. "We are classifying them in terms of period, character, function—whatever helps us identify them. Usually they were formed as handles or spouts. Occasionally they were merely ornamental, although ornament is most often expressed through geometrical patterns and color." He stopped. The words were not what he wanted, only what he couldn't prevent. But Marcus was listening so he continued. "Some, like this frog, have the nostrils hollowed out. A powder, primarily jimson weed, would be placed in these small bowls and sniffed during ceremonies."

"You only got de heads?"

"Only the heads, mostly, were sculpted, growing out from the wall of the pot. The bodies of the images are sometimes inscribed along the rim of the bowl or down the wall. When the pot broke—by accident, or in war or flood; mostly floods, then war after colonization—the head came off in one piece. They're everywhere, all over the islands."

Marcus turned an adorno over and over in his hands, put it down, looked for another. "Very simple work, mahn. Very stylized, like a cahrtoon, no? Beautiful." He took another piece, made of darker clay. It had been burnished to make it shine like vinaceous enamel. "What is dis?" he asked.

The face itself was flat, the features plain but inscrutable. Triangular jaws erupted from it into a peaked snout, thick, fanged, forceful. "A bat," Bowen said. "Bats were special to them."

"How you mean 'speciahl'?" Marcus persisted. "Dey worship dem? Dey eat dem?"

"I don't know—the Indians were primitve people." Bowen stopped to think. Tiny mammals that flickered through the night sky like hallucinations. They were whirling shadows, blurry visions full of magic. "I think the bats, and some of the other animals, were totems for them. The Caribs identified with them and wanted their power."

Marcus took up one of the rare shards that showed the man-image. Rarer still was the emotion of the face, grief-stricken, eyebrows swollen down over deep eyes, the mouth a hole, utterly helpless. Both men were mesmerized by the clay's countenance. Nowhere in the room was there another piece to balance it, to match or offset the pathos. The rest of the work, a millenium's worth—demigod, man, animal, reptile, bird, fish—was all expressionless, detached and accepting.

Marcus stared at the hundreds of images spread before him on the worktable, the thousands of shards scattered on the floor, and shook his head sympathetically. Bowen believed the artifacts were not inconsequential to Marcus. There was something there in the inanimate fragments, a weak memory or emanation of humanity, but he suspected that here, as they stood together, the past bothered them both more than they could admit, it suffered mutely in the pale orange face of the man-image, a tiny death mask denied mortality.

Outside the windows, a pickup truck had stopped at the maintenance shed across the drive from the museum. Two men rode in the cab, a third rode back in the rusty bed, clinging to the sides to keep from bouncing out. Marcus marked their arrival and returned the adorno he held to its place on the long table.

"Daht's Henry Wilkes. He comin to collect dem patchouli."

Through the windows, Bowen watched Marcus exit the building and approach the truck. The black man had left without saying anything more; Bowen realized that there was something in him reacting like a missionary who had lost his first convert.

Driver and passenger had climbed out. The third rider reached into the bed and raised aloft a large broken mass of brown feathers. Marcus spoke to the man but Bowen could not hear what was said. He knew he should get on with his work, most of the morning was gone, but he wanted to see what the man had held up from the truck so he walked out to it.

Steamy, oversweet air was oozing out of the jungle above them. Back toward Kingstown, above the treetops, the horizon of ocean was canescent with glare. The carnival colors of the Gardens were drained and shadeless. A single-barrel shotgun and several red-papered cartridges were placed precariously on the truck's sloping dashboard. Marcus was laughing enthusiastically at the driver's story of the hunt. The man's two companions held the bird between them to measure its wingspan. It was a pelican. The long, cane-like bill was missing, and without it,

the lolling head, only eyes and skull, looked mammalian, monkey-like, its mouth a bloody hole. Bowen's revulsion was immediate.

The men began plucking the bird, tearing out the soft, chocolate feathers in patches. Bowen watched aghast as the pelican was reduced to a purplish, bloated lizard-thing. In the air, the bird was so stylized, such a bold silhouette, a pterodactyl soaring effortlessly through history, adjusting but rarely flapping its tremendous wings, intelligent and masterful—an aviatic dolphin. Now it was an obscenity. Bowen turned to walk back to the museum, commanding himself to forget about this business, there was nothing he could do, but as he passed the rear of the truck and looked in he saw there two more pelicans. One was limp, its chest split by buckshot. The other was alive; one wing raised at his approach, the other wing hung loose and bloody. The bird clacked its bill defiantly.

One of the men came up beside Bowen to get the second bird, the dead one, for cleaning. "Dis bird meat very sweet," he said. "Bettah dahn chicken." Because Bowen frowned he explained further. "Pelicahn is fish-fed, mahn. Daht make it very tendah. Fowl is pebble-fed. It just eat de dirt ahnd grow tough."

For the first time on the island, Bowen spoke in anger. "Why don't you kill the damn thing?" he demanded, pointing at the remaining bird.

The man widened his dark eyes in mock surprise and laughed. "Yes, mahn. Doan worry. Cahn't eat him live like daht." He winked and walked away, already pulling feathers from the bird.

When the man refused to respond to his sense of outrage, Bowen felt abandoned, tricked by his own emotion. He was not a man of action but now an obligation seemed to follow his words. Several of Marcus's boy-guides had gathered around to see what was happening; tourists wandering by came over. "Poor thing," Bowen heard an American voice saying. He turned and saw the old woman from the taxicab.

Bowen climbed into the truck, taking his pocketknife from his shorts, and pinched open the single blade. He looked at the pelican before grabbing it, expecting to see sadness there, and a final dignity, but the bird's eyes were remote. Marcus and the hunters had stopped to watch him, and their eyes too, when he glanced over at them, were indifferent. As he reached out, the pelican snapped his hand with its ridiculous, hooked beak; it felt like bamboo, hard but almost weightless. He took the bird up. Its body seemed pathetically small in his hands, awkward in design, all elbows and knees. In his fingers the neck was a long silk

cord. He laid the edge of the knife against it and started to cut. The bird struggled against him but he held on. The pelican's soft neck, covered in short, dense feathers like fur or velvet, would not cut. He stood above it, sawing and sawing, waiting for the gush of blood, but the blade had been dulled by digging shards out of the dry volcanic soil of the island. It would not open the bird's throat. He was determined to kill the bird, and when the knife wouldn't cut he began to feel foolish, slicing at the bird's neck. Someone laughed, and someone called out, "What de hell, mahn, bite de head! Step on its belly."

Bowen looked up. The three men from the truck were no longer paying attention; they joked loudly with each other and had begun to gut the first two birds with a machete. Marcus looked at Bowen and the pelican and shook his head. He called over one of the small boys and spoke to him. The boy searched the ground, found what he wanted and leaped into the truck. Bowen only saw the small black hand gripping the rock and then the rock smashing the bird's head. He dropped the pelican and stared at the boy standing there, unconcerned, smiling. The boy took the pocketknife from Bowen's hand and pressed a finger down along the cutting edge.

"Dis knife no good, mistah. You need a stone to rub it."

From the crushed eyes of the pelican, the blood flowered in little round blooms, ixora-like pinwheels. Bowen's legs had been splashed by blood and he tried to wipe it off with his hands. Marcus was there, offering him a work rag to clean himself. When Bowen looked at him sheepishly, the black man shrugged his shoulders; there was nothing to say. He took the rag back when Bowen finished, said he would stop by the museum again soon to see how everything was coming. Then he ordered the boy to take the white man's knife and sharpen it.