

The Island

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The Island
by R. C. Smith

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THE AUDIO BOOK

The audio book is narrated by Luxie Maxwell

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1.

When I woke up, I was alone upon the island.

I was alone, and I knew it was my own fault. I had overslept, I had missed the early dawn deadline when all had to assemble at the beach, to get into the boats.

Had I been there, they would have been obliged to take me. Staying behind on the island during the winter meant certain death, or certain enough death, and no one, whatever their status, could be sent to their deaths without a cause and without the proper proceedings.

But, as I had not shown up in time, they would not have hesitated to load into the boat in place of me a few bags of much more profitable objects — no slave girl in the Queendom is worth her weight in semi-precious stones, rare fossils or exotic spices, those riches that the island yielded, and that made the yearly trips across the sea worth all the efforts and the dangers.

I was alone, and I was without any possessions. I had the clothes that I wore — a slave girl's summer dress, designed to be worn open in front, though it did have a few ribbons which could be tied to keep it closed, and a short leather jacket without pockets to protect against the chilly evening breeze, but not against the winter cold. This was all — as a slave I did not have shoes, my feet were bare.

Walking barefoot had been the worst thing about being a slave, at first. Worse than the whippings, the hard work, and the rapes. This has been a long time ago, though. The whippings had become less as I had learned to obey. The hard work I did not mind. And the rapes — well, a slave girl also has to learn that she cannot be raped, she can only be used. Over time, my feet got used to walking on rough surfaces, though ragged rocks under my soles still hurt them, and my body got used to

being used. Fortunately it did — that was what it was good for, after all. Also this got less, as there came younger ones, with larger breasts.

The huts in which the expedition had spent the summer were still standing, but they were light buildings made of wood, erected anew each spring, not meant and not able to survive the autumn storms and the winter snow. And, they were empty — there was some makeshift furniture in them, like the huts themselves only built to last one season, but except for some half-eaten leftovers from breakfast, which I ate as I found them, there was no food left behind, no clothing, no cloths, no tools, no household stuff, nothing of any value, or of any possible value to me. Of course not.

Well, I knew there was a cave in a low hill near the settlement where some heavy iron tools were kept, wrapped in oil cloths to protect them against rusting — tree saws, sledgehammers, crowbars, even an anvil — but, not only had I no right to them, and might even endanger next year's expedition if I lost or damaged any, but also I would hardly be able to use them, least of all to any conceivable good purpose.

No, I was alone, and I had nothing.

Except a dress, a jacket, and a whole island to myself.

Mine for half a year — a slave girl's own island! And for a month or two of that half year, until the autumn storms would ravage the island and then the Arctic cold and snow set in, I might even survive. Water was not scarce here, and the vegetation would provide enough food.

So, what was there to do but to enjoy those two months and to make the best of them?

And, never to give up hope. What did I know? If I kept on searching, I *might* find some way to leave the island? A seaworthy boat, hidden somewhere, on which I might *try*, even with chances ever so

slim, to reach the continent? To face punishment and pain, of course, but to survive?

No, I knew there wouldn't be such a boat left behind.

But then, a new idea came to me: I had, of course, never been to the forbidden part of the island: the mountain range in the West, and whatever may lie behind it.

Forbidden ... by whom? to whom? and why? These were not questions for a slave girl to concern herself with, my duties had been here in the settlement, I had never given that part of the island any thoughts. But now, as the day went by and the sun followed its path which, as it did each day, would finally make it sink behind the mountain, this forbidden area began to exert a strange and growing attraction upon me.

What was my choice? To stay here, in the place that I knew, to live from the fruits and nuts that the trees still bore, and to know that I'd die when the weather changed?

Or, to explore the unknown, which offered few promises except a probably even earlier death, but where my end was not so predictable, where I might see things I had never seen before, and never would have dreamed to see?

The whole island was now mine, after all!

This first day of my exile I rested, enjoying the hours of leisure after the many exhausting months of work and use. During the night I slept dreamlessly and undisturbed.

And when the sun rose on the second day, I had made up my mind.

2.

There was a creek that ran into the sea close to the settlement, and I followed it upriver through flat terrain, until after several hours I reached its spring at the foot of the steeply rising mountain range that transected the island like a giant wall from North to South, some six or seven miles wide. I knew that on both ends where the mountains reached the sea the terrain was so precipitous that it was impassable, so that the only way to the other side, if there even *was* another side except another steep declivity into the sea, was to cross the mountain. The best, or only place to attempt this was what seemed to be a saddle, right in the middle of the range.

The altitude of this saddle was not high, maybe two thousand feet, but for someone who was not a trained mountaineer there was no direct ascent; crevices, screes and pikes frequently forced me into arduous detours, and often the routes I followed ended in impasses from which I had to retrace my steps and try a different approach towards my goal, a task not made easier by the fact that in the craggy landscape of the slope the saddle often disappeared from my view, and I could only guess at its direction.

The slope was so steep that little vegetation had managed to secure a foothold, so mostly my ascent lead across bare rock — only further up, near the saddle where the ground was more level, trees and larger bushes were growing. Up there I could hope for soil and softer ground below my feet, but I soon realized that long before I might possibly reach it the sharp edges of the limestone would have cut my already bleeding soles to the bones.

I took off my dress, and with the help of a sharp rock tore it into two pieces of cloth which I wrapped around my feet, tying them with

the ribbons that came in quite handy for this purpose. A dress wantonly destroyed, which had been my owners' property — for a moment I smiled at the thought how unlikely it was that I'd live to face the punishment.

From now on my leather jacket was my only garment — as it only reached down to my hips, I would have offered a nice view to anybody climbing up that mountain behind me, but, alas, there were no other human beings, and not even larger animals, for probably hundreds of miles around.

As I kept climbing and the sun first reached and then traveled beyond its orbit's zenith, heat, thirst and exhaustion began to take their toll upon my strength and slowed me down, but I knew I had to keep on going, and finally I gained the top of the scarp — from here on the ground still rose, but much more smoothly, trees and a fresh breeze that came from the West provided shadow and cooling, and patches of soft grass comforted my weary feet. Another half hour or so, and I reached the saddle, and what was waiting for me there was a little paradise – a shallow recess of lush green vegetation, trees bearing nuts and ripe fruits, plants with spicy edible leaves, and a spring. After drinking I sat down for a while on a moss-covered stone next to it, with my feet in the cold clear fresh mountain water, and then I indulged in the pleasure of washing the sweat and exertion of the climb off my whole body.

A wonderful place, I thought — it would provide me with all I needed, should I prefer not to die from hunger and thirst but to freeze to death in the winter's first cold.

But this was still a while off, no need to worry about it now, where each day was a new gift that I was determined to make the best of.

To the left and right the mountain's shoulders rose, but I had done

enough climbing for today. Ahead of me the ground sloped down, at a grade that made it comfortable to walk. Through the trees I could glimpse the sun and the blue of the sky, which at some line that I could not clearly make out turned into the blue of the sea below.

I walked fast, and I had not realized how long and how far down again I had walked, until I got to the precipice. I stepped out of the wood, suddenly face to face with the evening sun that was hovering above the horizon, and a few feet in front of me the ground ended abruptly — fifty feet below me lay a small bay, and, maybe five hundred feet away, the sea. I had finally reached the other side of the island!

I had to admit, though, that from what I could see it did not hold many promises for someone seeking hardly less than a miracle salvation. Could I even get down to that bay? There seemed to be no way to climb down that cliff — maybe, if desperate enough, I could climb around the bay until I stood right above the sea and then dive into the water, hoping not to hit a rock — but how could I ever get up again?

It was then that I saw the rope. It was tied to a strong tree — a thick sturdy rope, with knots at each foot of its length — this, I had no doubt, was a rope ladder that was here to provide access to the bay.

For today it was too late, and I was too tired. This place above the precipice was not as paradisiacal as the saddle recess by far, but it did offer some thorn bushes which bore edible berries, and a thin trickle of water that emerged from underneath a stone, so I was content. I found a small recess with a soft mossy ground, broke off a couple of leafy twigs from a nearby tree to cover myself with, rolled up, and fell into a deep sleep.

~

When I woke up the next morning I needed a while to remember where I was, and I missed the rays of the morning sun, until I realized that here on the western flank of the mountain it would be late in the morning until it rose over the ridge. By the color of the sky it was still quite early, which suited me fine, and after a frugal breakfast of water and berries I went over to the rope, unwound it, and let it fall down the precipice. As I had been confident it would, it reached down unto the pebble-littered sandy ground of the bay.

I climbed down easily, ignoring the aching muscles of my legs, and walked the short distance towards the shoreline. The sea was calm, clear and inviting, and despite the water being freezingly cold I took off my jacket and went in, and swam out as far as I dared, cautious of temperature loss and possible dangerous currents. Turning around and scrutinizing the coast, my small bay in the middle of the cliff line that stretched to both sides was the only place I saw where I could get back on land — it seemed that my expedition had reached a dead end indeed.

I swam back, got out of the water, jumped up and down to dry and get warm, smiling at some imaginary watchers, put on my jacket again, and walked back towards the rope, when I saw something I had not noticed before: the dark narrow shape on the bay's northern wall was not a shadow cast by a protruding rock, it was an opening!

Its lower end was some five feet above the ground and easily reached, the aperture itself was high enough that I did not have to bend my head, and wide enough for me to walk through without having to squeeze. Of course I went in without hesitation.

Inside, after the end of a short curved tunnel, it was pitch black dark. I knew that after a few minutes my eyes would be able to see in the dim light that crept in through the narrow opening, but out of

restlessness, or out of cockiness, I did not wait but stretched out my arms in front of me and proceeded into the darkness.

I kept on walking with careful steps, and finally my hands touched something — something round — with a hole in it — another hole — a jagged edge — oh my god! A *skull!*

I emitted a shriek and retracted my hands, and then I dared not to move until my eyes were finally able to penetrate the darkness, and then I found myself not just inside a cave, but inside a nightmare.

The wall in front of me was *covered* with skulls. I turned around, the entrance was now to my right; to my left still inscrutable blackness, and in front of me, on the opposite wall, blurred rotund shapes that could only be more of those skulls. But, what really caused the horror that I felt, was the dark looming figure that instinctively I knew to be the ghastly idol of some dreadful death-bearing deity, and in front of it a large block of stone could be nothing but the deity's heathen altar. Even though the idol faced the entrance, not me, I felt as if its fiery red eyes were staring straightly into mine, its full attention directed towards me, its intense burning presence piercing my brain.

I stood transfixed, unable to move or even to breathe, until I pulled all my strength together, resumed my breathing with a piercing scream, and ran towards the cave's mouth, not caring about the uneven ground or possible obstacles, just *out* as fast as I could.

Not even thinking about the height of the entrance, haunted by all demons of hell as I emerged into the daylight, I fell down the five feet, jumped up, ran a few steps, tripped over a boulder and fell flat on my chest, the pain and the impact and the lingering shock from what I had seen in the cave taking my breath away again, and for a few seconds it got dark before my eyes. When my breath and my sight returned, and I tried to get up, I saw the man standing in front of me.

He was nude, and he was beautiful. His skin was the color of bronze, and there was no hair on him, except the straight black hair that fell from his head down to his shoulders, held back from his forehead by a thin cord. His body was that of a warrior, slim but muscular and strong. His dark eyes looked at me as I lay before him on my side, first at my face, then this gaze moved down and rested upon my bare shaven crotch. I watched him in awe. I saw the knife he held in his hand, I saw his penis grow to a full erection.

I stood no chance against him. I slumped back, and then, without thinking, I turned to lie on my back. I shut my eyes, and waited for his penis or his knife to enter my body. Or both.

Suddenly and unexpectedly I felt a wave of arousal shaking me, I felt my vulva opening up, I felt my heart pounding, and my breathing becoming faster. I felt deep shame that he saw me like this, and the shame added to my arousal. I opened my jacket to expose my breasts and my erect nipples to him. When I could not stand the strain anymore, I opened my eyes again. He was not there. No one was.

I jumped up and ran towards the rope. I climbed up the rope faster than I had ever thought I could, filled with an irrational fear that was worse than just fear for my life, I screamed while I climbed, but still I felt the sensual touch of the rope between my legs, the pressure of each knot against my crotch, and when I reached the top and pulled the rope up I could not help from making it run across my thighs again, and when I had pulled it up completely, I coiled it up, and then I lay down on my belly upon the heap of rope with its knots, and pressed my crotch against it, and moved my pelvis in small circles, until a series of orgasms quenched the fire that was flowing through my veins.

I had masturbated frequently, from my childhood to the time at the

University, but to a slave girl it was not allowed, and I had soon learned to adhere to the rules. So, this had been the first time in many years now, and I enjoyed it deeply, the orgasms and their afterglow, even though, as soon as my thoughts became clear again, I was thoroughly confused by what had triggered my arousal.

Also the fear came back, though it was not as strong as it had been, it did not border on panic anymore, it had no irrational depth, it now just felt like the natural reaction of someone doomed to die to stumbling across such a persuasive display of death, and the reasonable wish to get as far away from it as possible.

Which, I had to admit to myself, on a small island could not be very far.

And the nude bronze-skinned warrior whom I had seen? I decided not to think about him anymore.

3.

What could I do now? Was there another place on this island that I could try to go to, not back to the main part to wait for the winter to kill me, not back to the cave of skulls to wait for whatever horrors were lurking there to overcome me?

I had little hope to find anything better, but then I had little else to do but explore my surroundings. It was still rather early in the morning — my climb down, my swim, my visit of the cave, my encounter with the mysterious stranger, my climb up, my masturbating — all this, measured by the sun's inexorable progress on its eternal orbit, had not taken much time.

From the point at which I stood, the rim of the precipice above the bay, the only passable route led back to the saddle, and after wrapping

my feet in the shreds of my dress again I took it. From the saddle, I could turn left to the North or right to the South — in both directions the ground rose steeply, and progress would be difficult, but not impossible.

I drank water from the spring and ate some of the sweet fruits, and then I arbitrarily chose one of the two directions, South, and then I just kept walking, or climbing where it was necessary. After a while, it was past noon, I got above the tree line, and I had a great view over most of the island — I enjoyed it, but it did not tell me much I hadn't known before. I could see the summit in front of me, and I reached it after another hour or two — I did not try hard to guess the time, as it had little importance for me.

When I arrived at my goal, I saw that I had not gained anything useful — below me lay the sea, no land or islands in sight, and in all directions but the one I had come bare rock sloped down steeply. To an experienced climber these rocks might provide a viable descent, but if I were to try it, I would very probably fall to my death — and, there was nothing to make me believe that down there would be anything worth taking the effort, and the risk.

Turning around, I could see where the saddle was, and the intersection that led to the precipice above the bay, and behind the saddle I could see the other shoulder of the mountain range rising to about the same height as the one upon which I was standing.

From what I could see, this other shoulder held no promises that it might have more to offer than this one had, but still I felt the urge to visit it. Checking the position of the sun, I decided I'd be able to reach the summit before the night, and maybe even make it back to the saddle — if not, the thought of spending the night in the open, the

hard rock below me, the crescent moon and the distant stars above, held no fear, as long as the weather was mild and calm.

This, in fact, was how it turned out — when I had reached the northern summit and found it to be identical, in almost every respect, to its southern twin, I saw that dusk would fall soon, and anyway I was so exhausted that I thought it better to rest for the night than to descend the cragged path with weak legs and in near darkness.

The night was uncomfortable, I was hungry, thirsty and cold, but it was beautiful too, to see the sun sink into the sea in the West, to see the almost full moon take its path across the sky, to be so close to the stars of which there seemed to be so many more here than I had ever seen before, and finally to see the sun rise from the sea again in the East.

My own mountain, on my own island, I smiled, even though I knew that they would not be mine for long; nothing would.

I rose with the sun, turned towards it and took off my jacket, and spread my arms to take in its rays with my whole body, then I did some exercises to get warm, put on my jacket again, and started my descent towards the saddle — what I would do once I got there, after drinking and eating a breakfast of fruits, I did not care to think about.

What it was that caught my attention, already back down below the tree line, I cannot really tell. The route that I had followed I thought of as a path, but it was not a path made by man, it was just as if the mountain and the trees themselves suggested a trail for the wanderer to follow. And here, branching off to the left, was something that looked like a trail leading nowhere.

Nowhere was as good a place to go to as any other to me, so I turned left, and climbed down a scarp overgrown with thicket, and then I stood at the mouth of a small cave. I went in, and waited until my eyes adapted to the darkness, to be relieved that it held no skulls or

bones or heathen idols, but also to be disappointed that it held nothing useful, either. Just a small cave, a good shelter against a thunderstorm, but no place to survive a winter.

And then, again I cannot say what made me look closely into the dark recess next to the opening, I saw the lamp. An oil lamp with a glass cylinder, nothing special about it, except the fact that I had found it here. It was filled with oil, and there was a box of matches lying next to it.

I struck one of the matches on a dry piece of rock and lit the lamp, and then I started to explore the little cave again, aided by the light I now held in my hand. And indeed, what before in the darkness had seemed to be only a shallow niche in a back corner, the lamp's light revealed to be a narrow corridor, leading further into the mountain.

I had to crawl, I had to hold the handle of the lamp between my teeth, I grazed my naked knees, I bumped my head against the low ceiling — and I had to laugh, thinking once more what a sight I'd be from behind, and I almost let the lamp drop, and when the corridor got even lower I started to worry whether I'd ever be able to crawl back out in reverse, or whether I'd die slowly and horribly stuck in this hole, and then I was through.

To my confusion, despite the lamp there was darkness all around me. How could that be? But it only took my eyes more time to adapt, then I saw it: the subterranean hall that I had reached was *huge!* Two hundred feet long or even more, nearly half as wide, and, at the center, almost as high. The walls and the ceiling were cragged, but the ground was flat and smooth. And, along one of the walls, boxes were stapled — I looked at them closer — they were *food*. Canned bread, canned meat, canned vegetables, canned fruit juices, there must be *tons* of them. And more lamps, and oil canisters, and boxes of matches, and

blankets — piles of blankets — and, yes, there was also a batch of can openers! Nothing else, though — no dishes, no cups, no clothes, no tools — but, to survive I did not need any of these, did I?

I looked at the canned food again — these were civilian provisions, not military. I had not found a secret navy base, as for a short moment of panic I had thought I might have, in which case I would survive the winter only to face execution. No, in all probability this was an emergency shelter for the expeditions — a place where, should any calamity prevent them to leave in time before the winter storms set in, all men and women could survive.

I did a quick calculation — yes, the food would suffice for them all. Not for the slaves, though. Well, it would be too expensive to stock this repository and renew its content every few years, on the off chance it were ever needed, if it had to provide food for the slaves, too. And, this explained why I had not known about it — it had not been meant for the likes of me.

I took half a dozen blankets, spread them on the floor to make a bed, sat down on it, and cried. Whatever this was, into whatever place I had stumbled here, it meant I was safe, here I could spend the winter and wait for next year's expedition to arrive. Could the savages who had brought the skulls and the idol to this island find me here if they returned to perform some dark ceremonies in their cave? No, I did not think so — why would they even search? And, had they ever found this cave before, I was sure they would not have left it so tidy and unspoilt.

Another issue — whatever food I took would surely be considered theft, and my back, breasts and thighs would amply taste the whip for it. But, as I myself was property, I also had the obligation to keep myself alive, as long as it did not cause disproportional loss, so after my punishment I would be forgiven.

After my punishment ... there was only one thing this meant to me now: I would *live!*

I ate, I drank, I lay down, and, with so many rules already broken, I started to masturbate again. A few more strokes of the whip, for which I would have to spread my legs, when I admitted to this offense — but what did I care about pain in the future now? I did not reach an orgasm, though, until at last, no matter how hard I tried to keep him from my mind, the nude warrior entered my thoughts again, his bronze skin, his knife, his erect penis, and the memory of how I had lain before him, naked, helpless, and aroused.

4.

Was it the secret desire to meet the savage warrior again that made me go back to the cave of skulls? Or was it the urge to confront my irrational fears — after all, I had begun to study archeology and anthropology at the University, and neither the sight of human bones nor of human artifacts should send me tumbling into a panic. Or maybe it was simply the prospect of the endless months that I would have to spend enwombed in a cave, with nothing to do but keeping the body alive by ingesting food and drink, that made me want to fill my mind with new sensations as long as it was possible, something for my thoughts and fantasies to dwell and feed upon in the upcoming time of loneliness and darkness.

Whatever it was that made me go back, go back I did. And this time I already knew what was there, and I was determined not to panic but to investigate the findings with a rational mind, drawing upon whatever scientific education I had received, determined not to succumb to delusional encounters of any kind again.

And one more thing was different this time: I had a lamp with me now!

The hike from the cave of cans to the cave of skulls I could do with bare feet, so I unwrapped my feet again, and the half of my former dress that had served as my left shoe I knotted into a satchel that I filled with a few cans of food and drink, and with an oil lamp and a few matches. When climbing down the rope I hung it around my neck, and so I arrived at the bay shortly after noon, feeling well prepared mentally and physically to investigate the place that had horrified me so much only the day before.

Despite my determination, in front of the narrow dark opening I hesitated, considering to take a little snack before entering the cave, but this attempt at delaying what I had come for failed due to the fact that I had forgotten to bring one of the can openers with me. So, I lit the lamp, braced myself, and entered the cave.

Even with the lamp, all I could see at first was darkness, but then my eyes adapted, and I took in the same scene that I had seen once before, only I saw it more clearly now: the skulls on the walls, the altar, the idol, but this time all this did not seem to be so frightful to me, and neither did I scream nor did I run.

I walked up to the altar — yes, I was sure that this was what it was — and had a closer look at it. It was an almost perfectly rectangular block of stone. Its sides were raw, but the top was smooth and carefully polished. The color of this surface was dark, darker than the original color of the rock from which the stone had been hewn, reddish-brown, irregular, as if blotched — blood, I thought with a shudder, as if the stone had been *drenched* in it. I touched it with my hand — it was dry, of course, but I could not say whether I touched stone or a coating of

blood or of something else, and I do not think that I really wanted to know.

Near the four corners there were holes two or three inches of diameter that led across the vertical edges, close to the top, connecting the short and long side faces. I took in the altar's size, and another shudder ran down my spine — a vision appeared in my mind of a human sacrifice, a naked girl stretched out upon the stone, spread-eagled on her back, her strained ankles and wrists tied with ropes that were threaded through those holes, and a nude priest was approaching her with a knife in his hand, and then the voices of many men and women filled the cave, chanting, shouting, laughing, and then they were standing in front of me, crowding the altar, blocking my view of the stone and the tied girl, and then I heard a scream, and then, as suddenly as this vision had appeared, it was gone.

The scream had been my own, I realized.

And the priest — had it been *him*? In the flickering light of the oil lamp I had not seen his face clearly, and I could not say for sure.

I took a few deep breaths to quiet down, and then, staying where I was, I looked across the altar at the idol. It was a life-sized figure in a comfortable sitting position, made out of dark polished stone — black marble, it seemed to be, though I knew there was no such stone on this island. As I was not standing at the center of the altar I was looking at the idol slightly from the side, and so I could see how the body of the deity merged into the solid block of stone upon which it sat, or rather, how it seemed to grow out of it, a three-dimensional alto-relief, with a fully elaborated front side, from its head to its feet; the arms rested close to the upper body and thighs.

Most striking about the figure was that it was both female and male — it had full breasts, and it had a penis, a huge penis that was fully

erect, proudly pointing upwards, and below the penis, visibly because the idol's legs were slightly spread, it had a scrotum that was divided, and in between the halves there was a vulva, the pubic lips open in arousal, and I saw the dark opening of a vagina.

And the face, that had scared me so much when I had seen it the first time, with its fiery stare — the eyes were indeed inlaid with a dark reddish stone, but there was neither life nor fire in them, and in the light of the lamp its expression seemed peaceful now, not threatening, but rather — how could I call it? Expectant. And alert.

I turned my head away from it, to look at the skulls — they were everywhere, on the left and right walls, there must be hundreds of them. I went and inspected some of the skulls closer. They all rested in niches that had been cut into the rock, and they were all undamaged, complete with lower jaws and teeth. From their sizes, they were all of grown-ups, and, to judge from the state of the teeth, of rather young ones — not past my own age, the unpleasant thought came. I was not an expert, but some of the skulls seemed to be rather new to me, while others seemed to be older, and some very old, maybe several hundred years.

Several hundred skulls — several hundred years ... another chilling thought forced itself upon my mind: was there a skull for each year? Something that had begun a long time ago, and maybe was still going on? Was there another skull due this year? Who would the unlucky victim be who would have to die for it, if he or she had not already died?

I stepped deeper into the cave, behind the altar and the idol, where the light from the cave's mouth did not reach. I had not been close to its back wall yet, assuming there even was one and the cave did not extend further and further into the mountain.

But yes, soon I saw that there was a back wall indeed — and by the light from my lamp I saw that it held a surprise!

The wall was smoother than the side walls, and, across its width of maybe thirty feet, it was covered with pictures. Simple drawings, no colors, only black — probably drawn with sticks dipped into soot — but clearly legible, and, if showing none of the artistry that the idol displayed, they were still done carefully and with attention to details. Arbitrarily I started to read the pictures from left to right, and this proved to be the right direction.

The first picture showed three boats out on the sea — open boats, outrigger canoes, each with one small triangular sail, and a crew of paddlers sitting in a row behind each other — I counted their tiny heads, there were exactly twelve in each boat.

The next picture (or was it still part of the first one?) showed an island — *this* island, this must be the silhouette it presented to someone approaching from the West. Then there came a diagram with lines and circles and half-circles that I did not understand, and then again a picture with the boats, and the crews pulling them ashore — yes, this was the bay in front of this cave! The sailors of the first boat could be seen clearly, they were of both sexes, and they were all nude; there was no reason to assume that with the two other boats it would be different.

I looked back at the diagram, and suddenly I realized that it was not difficult to read at all — there was the Sun, the Earth, different phases of the Moon, lines that indicated the Sun's and the Moon's paths — it was a calendar. This must be the summer solstice, this the first full moon to follow it, this the second, this the third ... and this was the rising Sun ... and this line led to the picture with the arriving boats —

yes, this was the date and the time, the morning of the day of the third full moon after the summer solstice!

The third full moon — I did a quick calculation. Yes, there was no doubt — the boats were going to arrive tomorrow! Only one day — but I felt safe for now. Was it careless to trust them not to be early one day? To my own surprise, I easily shrugged that thought off, and went on to study the pictures.

With the next one, the horror began. It showed a scene of torture and rape, and so did the next one, and the next ... All the victims were female, and their sufferings upon the altar were shown in detail: the cuttings, the flayings, the burnings, the breaking of bones, the rapes ... and then, in a sudden revelation, I understood that these pictures did not show the tortures of many girls, but of a single one, of one who had to suffer it all.

Her agonies must be beyond comprehension, and the pictures showed that, whatever was done to her body, she still lived. She still lived when there was nothing more left of her but her bleeding torso, her breasts long gone, but also her arms and her legs — and in another horrible picture, one that showed a scene outside the cave, one of her legs roasted over a fire, while a woman cut off slices of meat from an arm, and several men and women stretched out their hands to receive their shares.

She still lived, and they raped her again, not sparing her mouth, and the final picture showed her with the idol — I was not quite clear about it, but I had already seen enough, more that I had wanted to see. I turned back to leave the cave, but then, passing the idol, I halted. I stepped closer, and watched in fascination how by my lamp's light the huge penis cast flickering shadows on the cave's opposite wall.

I had not noticed *how* big the penis was, how long its shaft. And its

head, it looked more like the head of a mushroom, its rim protruding over the shaft's diameter, and curved like an umbrella. A woman forcibly impaled on this instrument would have her cervix penetrated, and then she would be stuck — oh my god, I understood the last picture now!

I saw the dying girl, or what was left of her, her mutilated arm- and legless torso one single bleeding wound, I saw her stuck upon that phallic stone spit that invaded her vagina and uterus in a terminally violent sexual act, I saw her shaken by convulsions, I saw her bleeding debreasted chest heave in a desperate attempt of her broken ribs to suck in another painful gasp of air, I heard gurgling sounds emerge from her throat, I heard her trying to form words to come out of her mouth together with the flow of blood, I heard her speak those words, I heard what she said, and though I could not believe it I heard her clearly, there was no doubt about it, I heard her say “Thank you!”

The upper part of her torso fell forward from exhaustion, her face coming to rest on that of the idol in what looked like a last passionate kiss, and still she lived.

All the nude savages stood in a large circle around us now, keeping their distance, enclosing the altar, the idol, the dying girl, and me. They were silent, their faces were solemn. Some of them masturbated slowly, but otherwise they did not move. Time seemed to be frozen. Then, slowly, one of them, a man, turned towards the cave's mouth and in a measured stride walked off, and when he had left the cave the next one followed, equally silently and slowly, and then the next one, and the next, until they were all gone.

The ceremony was over, and soon the impaled girl would be dead, and then the birds and the insects and all the other small agents of nature would devour what had been left of her flesh, until nothing

would remain of her body but her bones, and then her skeleton, not held together anymore by tendons and muscles and tissue and cartilages would fall to pieces and finally be free. And now I saw, in confirmation of this harrowing mental scene, the bones that were lying on the ground on both sides of the idol — her ribs, breast bone, hip bones, shoulder blades, vertebrae — the skull ...

“Be careful not to touch her skull, it is sacred!”

I had not heard his voice at our first encounter, but I knew who the speaker was, without having to turn around. I felt my knees getting weak.

“It must not be disturbed, before we have determined its proper place upon the wall.”

I turned around now, and now my knees gave in. The lamp slipped from my hand, fell to the floor, and went out. I felt his arms catching me, keeping me from falling, letting me softly glide to the floor. I was now kneeling before him, his erect penis touching my lips. I opened my mouth and took him in, and my mind went blank, overwhelmed by desire.

And then I felt his hands upon my head, pushing it gently back, and he withdrew. “Not yet,” he said. With soft force he turned me around, made me face the idol, guided my head — and then it was the idol’s stone penis that my mouth enclosed, open as wide as possible to accommodate the cold hard glans that pressed against my teeth, my tongue, my gums. There were no hands to hold me now, I was alone.

I stayed like this, my feet pressing against the altar, my hands resting on the idol’s thighs, my head impaled on its sex; I did not move, I did not make a sound, I cried silently — for how long, I do not know.

Finally my tears dried up, and I raised my head, and started to move — not easily, all my muscles had cramped. My left foot touched

something that was lying next to the altar, half hidden in a small crease — not a bone, and not the lamp either, but something sharp and cold.

In the near dark I grabbed for it, glad to have something to distract my mind. It was a knife. I held it up so that some light from the entrance fell upon it — on the slightly curved blade the color of which made me think of his skin, on the smooth sturdy hilt of polished black wood, and on the large glass crystal that was embedded in the hilt's end.

Was it such a knife that he had carried the first time I had seen him? Was it such a knife, was it *this* knife, the unfortunate girls were dealt their fates with upon the altar? I sat down upon the altar, facing the cave's mouth, my feet dangling. I still wore my leather jacket, but my ass and legs touched the cold stone.

I licked the blade clean, careful not to cut my lips or tongue, then I drew it across my thighs, and once more, higher, and then I let it touch my crotch. I did not cut deeply, and I hardly felt the pain, but I felt the blood flowing down my legs. With an effort, I stopped. What a place of madness this cave was. With even more effort I got up and walked towards the light, and through the opening, and I was out again, in the bay, under the blue sky, the clear water of the sea before me. I took off the jacket and entered the icy water — the salt stung on my cuts, but it also healed, and the water washed away the blood, and the chill cleared my mind, and when I got out I felt almost all right again.

I put on my jacket, and found the knife lying under it, I had taken it with me without thinking. I looked at it again in the bright sunlight.

Yes, I had seen right, back in the cave, the blade was bronze, and the hilt was polished ebony. And the glass crystal — the glass crystal — again my legs threatened to fail me, I stumbled towards a rock, and sat down, my back resting against it. The glass crystal ... I closed my eyes,

I waited for my heart to regain its step, I opened my eyes again, and the crystal was still there. And it was still the size of a small sea-bird's egg. And it was still a diamond.

5.

I did not sleep much that night. Back in the cave of cans, lying on a soft bed of blankets, covered with two more, enshrouded in darkness but with a lamp and a box of matches within reach, and with the priceless knife next to me, I should have felt relaxed and secure, but my thoughts raced and sleep did not come.

The stone was not mine, of course; I was a slave, after all. It would not make me rich. But still, for finding a treasure like that and giving it to my owners, *its* rightful owners, I would be entitled to a reward. A small reward, for them, compared to the inestimable value of this marvelous stone. But for me, more than I had dreamed of for many years. I would get my freedom back!

What would I do with it? To be *free* — what a wonderful thought! But when I tried to enjoy it, tried to think of the future that lay ahead of me now, tried to envision all the possibilities that I would have once I was a free woman again, my imagination, as well as my rational mind, failed me. What would I really want to do, who would I really want to be? And what of this could I actually hope to achieve? And how? A ceaseless procession of unfocused images of future *me's* swirled before my eyes in the dark, until my head swirled with them, disoriented and confused.

With an effort of will I stopped those racing thoughts. There would be time enough to think them slowly and carefully in the forthcoming

months. To calm down I tried to masturbate, but it made the cut across my vulva hurt and even to start bleeding again, so I gave it up.

Why did I feel so uneasy? Whatever my life would be, once I was free again, it would be better than being a slave. Or would it? This thought crept up at me from behind, unanticipated, uninvited and unwelcome, yet suddenly it was there. Did I really, truly, with all my heart, want to be free? Or was there a comfort in being a slave, a quietude, a deep satisfaction, a secret desire fulfilled that I had never been consciously aware of?

I chased this thought away. Who in her own sane mind would not rejoice at the prospect of losing her chains?

I masturbated now, never mind the pain and the bleeding — I needed that orgasm! And, I became aware, for this orgasm I needed *him!* Again I was kneeling in front of him, but this time his hands that held my head did not push me away but pulled me towards his crotch, this time his penis stayed in my mouth, throbbing with arousal as I worked on it with lips, tongue and teeth, this time his moans of ecstasy were so loud that they drowned out my own, this time his hot sperm spurted out so richly while his penis pressed against the back of my mouth and his grip did not relent that I almost suffocated, swallowing as hard as I could, desperately gasping for air, knowing he would not let go of me, knowing he was completely absorbed in his own lust, knowing it meant nothing to him whether I lived or died from it.

This time, it was perfect. Only, this time it was not real.

And then, when my mind slowly returned from my own ecstasy in which it had been so breathlessly lost, when I was capable of thinking again, another thought began to take shape, and it was an uncomfortable one.

I would have to tell where I had found that stone, that was obvious.

But equally obvious was what a treasure like this would provoke: greed. Where this one had come from, many more must be. And once we'd be looking for them, we would find them.

We would come in peace, of course. We would offer them beautifully colored glass in exchange for their drab uncut colorless stones. We would offer them things they'd never dreamed of, like liquor and guns. And only if they did not trade with us fairly, we'd have to use our much bigger guns on them.

Nightmares of conquest and carnage haunted the uneasy sleep into which I finally fell, pictures coming alive that I had seen in history books long ago, piles of disemboweled bodies cut open in the search for hidden gems, burning forests and villages and rivers of blood flowing through corpse-littered scorched barren landscapes, and through those scenes of terrible terminal destruction I was straying, naked, my hand clutching by its blade a knife with a broken hilt, searching for its owner whom I knew to be still alive among all those dying and dead, to push the blade into his heart to relieve him of this unbearable pain that I had caused.

When I awoke from those horrible dreams a pale glimmer from the direction of the cave's entrance told me that dawn had arrived.

I could not stay in the cave — I felt it was safe to go to the bay one last time, though this time of course I would not go down, I would watch the sea from the vantage point on the rim of the precipice, just to make sure that I had read those drawings correctly, to know that they really had come.

I stood on the rim of the precipice, next to the tree with the rope, before the sun had risen above the mountain behind me, and as I had expected I found the bay still as empty and deserted as it had been.

I looked out over the sea — did I see three small sails on the horizon, or was it only the glistening of distant waves?

As I strained my eyes to scan the horizon, I knew he was standing next to me.

Before I turned around to look at him I took off my jacket and let it fall to the ground. I wanted to be as naked as he was, when we faced. The chilly morning breeze on my bare body made me shiver — or was it his gaze that caused the goosebumps all over my skin?

This time his penis was not erect. Also, his hands were empty.

“You forgot your knife,” I said. “You should be more careful, if the wrong people find it, it can turn against you and kill you all.”

He shrugged. “Our fate is in the hands of the gods.”

He took the knife out of my hand, and held it against the inner side of my left breast. The blade played with my breast, circled it, made it swing, then its tip touched my nipple, caressed it, then it moved to the other breast and did the same there. It did not cut the skin. I did not flinch, and my nipples got hard.

“Good,” he said, and handed me back the knife. “Bring it with you to the cave.”

“Oh no!” I said, “I will never go down there again. You cannot possibly think that I would?”

“But that’s what you are here for,” he said. “Didn’t you know it?”

It took a while for his words to sink in.

“Oh my god, no! I thought ... this horrible ceremony ... I thought that you’d bring this wretched girl with you?”

“Did you really?” he asked. “No, we meet you here, or we come here in vain.”

“Oh my god,” I said again, “so you are saying that you need me? *Me*? You ask me to suffer and to die for you?”

“*Need* you? *Ask* you? You want it to be made easy for you, don’t you?” he said. “What else do you expect? Gratitude? Respect? Admiration? *Love*? That’s a lot of things to demand, without giving anything.”

“But you — you *want* me to give?”

“I said this is what you are here for. I said this is what we come for. This is what many will die for. I said nothing about *wanting* anything.”

“Die?” I asked.

“The sea is dangerous on the return trip, of three boats one or two may get back.”

“So why do you take this terrible risk?”

“For you,” he said.

There was a moment of silence.

“Are you in one of those boats?” I finally asked. “Will *you* — this ceremony, all that I’ve seen, is it like this, was it all *real*?”

He did not reply. I looked at his beautiful bronze-skinned body.

“If I do it, will I meet you there?” I whispered.

He turned away.

“Please, *wait!*” I shouted.

He was gone.

I could see the three approaching boats quite clearly now. It was time to creep back, to hide behind a bush as long as I dared to watch, then to pick up my jacket, sneak off, away from the precipice, into the wood, and then hurry to my hiding place and larder, cover my traces, crawl into the dark safety of my cave.

It was time.

I folded the jacket, and carefully weighted it down with stones — it was made of good leather, I did not want it to be blown away by the

storms. I took the rope, and wound it several times around the tree. I threw it down, its end was now ten feet above the ground.

I took the knife between my teeth and climbed down the rope as far as it went, then I jumped — its end hung several feet above my head, safely out of my reach. I went to the cave, and laid down the knife at its entrance. A few feet away, I sat down. The sun had just risen above the precipice, and its rays felt pleasantly warm upon my naked skin. I put one hand between my thighs, closed my eyes, and listened to the sounds of the waves, and the birds, and the wind.