

A White Woman and A Black Man

Domingo lost his father when he was six years old, and his mother died of sorrow at having seen her husband die from his master's ill treatments. All Domingo had ahead of him was tears and slavery when old Marguerite, Madame de Hauteville's trusty servant, saw him cry, learned about his misfortunes, and led him to her mistress. Madame de Hauteville was a good, sympathetic, sensitive woman. She was what every rich colonist's wife should have been. Who can say exactly what spark lights the fire of revolutions? Who can say exactly what drop of water can put out the fire? The balm that provident nature puts in the hands of women to heal so many kinds of wounds is more powerful, more effective than we think, but too often women neglect it or fail to apply it. Perhaps Saint-Domingue and many other colonies would still have masters if the owners' wives had not scorned their sweetest power so often. Would it have been a blessing? Fewer horrible events would have ravaged the world but some poisons are necessary!

Madame de Hauteville took Domingo in, bought him from his master, wished to have him brought up in her household, and obtained permission from her husband to devote him exclusively to her newborn daughter's service. Here was Domingo who grew up side by side with his little mistress, here he was, having no other duty than to serve her in her games, to guide her steps, to rescue her with all his little boy's strength. Really, Domingo was not ill treated. He was so good, so obliging, he grew so fond of the one who was one day to command him; and, on her side, the young Pauline was by nature so affectionate that the poor little negro was happy. The idea of slavery did not yet spoil his innocent joy; Domingo did not yet feel his chains.

While growing up, the little black boy attended Pauline's lessons. It was even his mistress' pleasure to have him receive some instruction so as to tempt the little girl to emulate him. Domingo applied himself and learned how to read and write in a short time. He was even given a few drawing lessons, It was a lot for a negro and for a negro like Domingo. Gifted with an ardent soul and a thoughtful character, he very much enjoyed the pleasure of acquiring knowledge and the charms of learning, which were denied to most all his peers.

However, in becoming enlightened he observed the brutalized blacks, his wretched brothers. Soon he shuddered when beholding the degradation of the species and the fatal effects of a bloodthirsty power. This kind of natural philosophy was quite dangerous at the time, when the arrogance of a caste wanted to crush everything beneath it.

Monsieur de Hauteville was arrogant, haughty, full of prejudices. He was like all the rich colonists of his caste, who would have almost preferred to see the colony burn rather than follow in the steps of the American colonists. One can imagine what was his contempt for the slaves. In his eyes, they were only some kind of animal without souls, whose ears and eyes were made only to see and hear hard work and strict orders, But Monsieur de Hauteville was a father. He loved his daughter and he happily saw her at twelve shaped like a sixteen year old girl is in our climate. Pauline, who was brought up by her mother in perfect innocence with a charming naivete, had at twelve a mature character, high principles, a steadfast firmness. She had beautiful eyes, a kind demeanor, and a fresh, shapely form. To carry out long standing plans, Monsieur de Hauteville had welcomed into his family young Leopold, the son of one of his childhood friends and whose parents lived in France.

Leopold was eighteen years old; he was charming, witty, subtle, gracious. Nothing was more elegant than his manners, nothing more attractive than his language. He was more learned than most eighteen-year-olds; his conversation was varied, striking, animated. A constant originality embellished his countenance and shined in his speech. His voice had a charm beyond

words; and when he was silent, one forgot what one was about to answer in order to think only about what he had said. Leopold was easily moved by generous actions, but for only a moment; soon he moved onto something else, talked, laughed, did a pirouette, felt moved again, and started laughing all over. He was truly a charming young man: many belles had thought so, many eyes had told him so. Leopold had known pleasure but not yet love. He knew of his father's intentions and eagerly came to FAITH them, As soon as he saw Pauline, he congratulated himself on his obedience; as soon as he got to know her, he became quite eager to prove to her that submission was not the only feeling that kept him at her feet.

A storm was brewing in the French Caribbean. Every day clouds were gathering, troubles and disturbances broke out everywhere. For a long time, Monsieur de Hauteville, who was busy attending to his estate, took no part in the seditious and murderous affairs brought on by the hatred among parties and the fatal divergence of opinions. Soon he openly shared the prejudice against men of color. Soon he too, like his peers, made the fatal error of putting into the hands of the blacks the weapons that they were later to turn against their masters.

Domingo, devoted through his employment to the personal service of Mademoiselle de Hauteville, kept to the plantation; but he was among the first to have been struck by the electric spark of freedom. The hope or rather the possibility of freedom had come to him as a strange but entrancing dream. Still not able to explain his thoughts himself, the entrancing idea of freedom had made his heart pound. He looked everywhere worriedly, he sought solitude, he gave out long sighs, and became remarkably absent minded. Sometimes he would go near the blacks, ask them questions, pity their fate more bitterly than usual, attempt to impart some energy to them, to pull them away from the state of lethargy into which suffering had thrown them. The overseers watched him with suspicion. They called him an impudent favorite, and denounced him to Monsieur de Hauteville, who frowned, threatened Domingo with the most terrible punishments; and Domingo, when threatened, shook. A secret indignation stirred his blood.

Meanwhile, Monsieur de Hauteville announced his plans regarding the marriage of his daughter. Leopold, authothed by his father, offered his wishes and his hand to Pauline: "Shall I be fortunate enough," he said to her, "to obtain your hand because you wish to give it? Dear Pauline, will you deign respond to all the love of a husband?" --"What is love, my dear Leopold?" Pauline asked, blushing. --"It is an exclusive and delicate feeling. The person who inspires it in us is for our heart the dearest of beings, the joy of our life, and our greatest good." --"Leopold, my father and my mother are dearer to me than you are. I even prefer a few childhood friends to you; I feel friendship for you, of course, but I do not feel love" --"Charming friend, be mine. Your heart is free and pure. My attentions will do the rest."

The education of the mind broadens the soul and extends natural dispositions. Domingo, raised above the common fate of slaves by the circle of his occupations and the knowledge he had acquired, dared to think, and develop within himself all the feelings of a free man. Love, that impetuous feeling, was made for this new and burning soul. It was meant to tear it apart and make it pay dearly for the expansion of his whole being. Although still a slave because of all the institutions, his mind was beginning to lift its chains. He could thus experience the feelings of a free man, without the joys that accompany them.

Love, dearest son of freedom, you who can only bear the chains that you give, you changed your pleasures into a cruel poison for the unfortunate black! You fired him with your devouring flames for an adored mistress. You distressed his eyes with the horrible spectacle of a triumphant rival. Finally, you broke all the faculties of his heart, and filled it with a barren despair, an impotent furor.

The news of Pauline's marriage had opened poor Domingo's eyes. He wished he could have escaped from himself. All he could do was make senseless vows and strike his limbs with rage. A convulsive agitation had overcome him.

The threat of major disaster loomed on the horizon; and Monsieur de Hauteville, despite his daughter's extreme youth, wanted to move up the day of her union with Leopold. Suddenly the most sinister news circulated. On all sides great uprisings took place. Blacks advanced with fury. Everywhere massacres and fire followed in their wake. Already numerous properties belonging to Monsieur de Hauteville were burned and destroyed. Fields of sugar cane only offered the spectacle of ashes to tenor-stricken eyes. Monsieur de Hauteville's plantation in the middle of his lands could no longer be defended against these destructive torrents. The city of le Cap offered the only refuge. He hastened to escape there with his family, his slaves, and his whole household.

But self-interest and resentment speak louder than fear. A colonist's arrogance takes nothing into account, not even safety. He becomes even more of a tyrant when he should be making minds more reasonable. He seeks to vanquish by cruelty those whose hearts should be won over and whose souls should be calmed and soothed. From then on the slightest fault that a slave committed was pursued with severity and punished by a barbaric torture. The most inoffensive speech, even the slightest word, was treated as a sign of revolt and silenced by execution.

Domingo himself could no longer claim to be a favorite. Perturbed by his sorrow, he would lose his temper and get carried away. One moment he would appear brazenly before his master; one minute he would look at him haughtily; one second he would stand up to him It was enough. His punishment was imminent and would be awful! Domingo wouldn't wait for it. This time the orders were given for the next day. A lingering concern for him kept them from putting him in shackles. Knowing all the property inside and out, he stole away at night to Pauline's room and threw himself at her feet: "Until now I was able to adore you as a white and suffer as a black," he said. "I can no longer bear slavery. Its tortures are not made for me. Farewell, my mistress and my idol. Freedom awaits me. In gaining my rights as a man, my right to love and be happy, may I be able to protect you from the furor of the blacks and their attempts at vengeance! Domingo will watch over you." He fled as the new day appeared. Domingo had joined the rebels.

Soon the city of le Cap would be destroyed with all its riches. Soon the disastrous troubles of the colony would be at their worst! Madame de Hauteville wouldn't live to see them. All the fears, the sorrows experienced by a wife and mother, tore her soul apart. The cruelest agitations completed the ruin of a temperament already withered by the burning climate. She succumbed. With her last glance upward to heaven she asked for her husband to be forgiven and her daughter to find a protector.

There was no more salvation. All the factions were on the scene and broke out with fury. They no longer had allegiance to any country. The rights of France were ignored by all of these madmen. There had never been any concessions, nor would there be any compromises. Chaos was at its deepest. The commissioners of the government--enemies among themselves, terrified by so many dangers, uncertain in all the steps they took--finally chose the most decisive and dangerous path: crushing the whites whom they came to help and losing the colony that they came to save. The general emancipation of black soldiers was announced, and from all quarters blacks were summoned to come to the aid of a government that soon they would no longer want

to recognize. They ransacked the treasures, torched all the properties, assassinated those they had called their assassins. The city of le Cap was plundered, gunfire covered the congested streets.

Monsieur de Hauteville, fighting at the head of his family, defended himself bravely against a band of blacks hounding him. Leopold used his own body to shield Monsieur de Hauteville, but to no avail. Both were on the brink of defeat. "Stop," cried a familiar voice; "have pity on this old man whose son seeks to rescue him from your blows; stop, I implore you - - But, watch out, a terrible ouaga¹ protects them from your fury."

Indeed the sky darkened, and the sun disappeared for several instants.² The frightened blacks dispersed. But unfortunate d'Hauteville had received a mortal blow. Domingo lifted him up in his arms and, followed by Leopold, laid him down in a garden adjoining the house in which d'Hauteville had lived until that time. Daylight returned gradually. D'Hauteville recognized his slave. He looked at him with astonishment and shook his hand. Domingo raised his eyes to heaven and then, looking straight at Pauline's father, he cried: "Oh my master, oh unfortunate old man, can't I save you?" --"No," Monsieur de Hauteville answered with difficulty, "but do not linger. Save my cherished daughter. Run, Domingo, and carry my farewell to her, Go hither. You deserved to be white."

These were the old man's last words. Domingo ran off, crossed courtyards, and arrived at the main plantation. In disarray Pauline had fled from her slaves and was running desperately, wildly, to come to the aid of her father. She recognized Domingo and fainted in his arms. The brave black man felt his forces redouble in strength. He pressed his precious weight against his beating heart. He wanted to save Leopold too. He found him near the remains of his friend. Together they made their way through the last houses in flames. They went deep into the swamps, they climbed lonely hills. Finally they arrived, breathless, in a thick forest that could protect them from their pursuers. Then, happy to have saved his beloved, Domingo knelt near her and prayed to God. In turn he gave in to his enthusiasm for having gained his freedom, and then to the human feelings that arose in him at the thought of the sorrows that would befall the whites. Like anyone else, perhaps, he could have let himself be led astray by the desire for vengeance. But love lifted him above color prejudice; love taught him clemency.

Domingo then led Leopold to the seaside. From there small vessels were sailing to neighboring coasts. After exchanging several signals Leopold finally conceived the hope of fleeing to some friendly land, from whence he could then set sail for France. "Pauline," he said to Mademoiselle de Hauteville, "will you deign to trust yourself to the one whom your father chose to be your husband? I swear to escort you to the heart of my country, and there, at the foot of the altar . . ." Pauline interrupted him: "No, Leopold," she said with a firm tone; "no, I shall not compound the rigors of your destiny and the difficulties of your travels. No, I shall not leave this place where so many cruel memories would inevitably bring me back. What would I do in another place? Domingo's honor will be my protection here where I wish to finish my days. Farewell, Leopold, the ship is leaving. Go, it is my wish; my resolution is unshakable."

The certainty of being unable to bend her resolve or be of use to her settled the question for Leopold. With atom soul he left and directed his thoughts to his family. Domingo, kneeling before Pauline, his eyes shining with gratitude and love, swore to himself to live and die for her. "Ah," he cried, "would that were worthy of being your husband!" --"Domingo, you calmed my father's last moments and saved the life of the one whom my father called his son. You have risen above prejudices. I will follow your example. But I want to flee these scenes of carnage.

¹ ouaga: spell, enchantment

² Solar eclipses occurred at the time in the Antilles.

May a forest be our refuge, may it hide us from the whole universe. Agree to live for me alone, and I will be yours.”

For a long time Domingo remained prostrate before his divinity. Twelve years later, when the Republic of Haiti was gloriously established on a solid basis, a carefully built hut was discovered by chance in the heart of a thick forest. A black man and a white woman lived there. They lived by hunting and picking wild fruit. Everyone admired the love and the good character of the couple, but the blacks were unhappy that a black man worshiped a white woman. The object of his adoration was respected, however. “It’s too bad,” they said longingly, “she deserved to be black.”

Translated by Doris Y. Kadish (University of Georgia) and Françoise Massardier-Kenney (Kent State University)