

PATRICK WHITE

## COCOTTE

Allez, viens! Viens, Cocotte! Viens à Maman! Non, non, non! Mais elle vous dérange, Monsieur. Ah, vous êtes English. That is nice. I am always interested in the intercourse of nations. Ne fais pas ça, méchante. See, she is anxious that you throw stones. Perhaps if Monsieur throws a stone, Cocotte will fetch it back to Maman. C'est ça. La mignonne! Then we are all playing. I spend many hours like this when my husband is away. My husband has gone to Marseille. He comes back in four days. He is ingénieur. It is agreeable for him to make this journey to Marseille. And I am seldom triste alone in the apartment with Cocotte. She even sleep with me when my husband is away. Elle est si douce. But it is difficult sometimes for the bitch-dogs. And Papa ne veut pas de petits, petits enfants. He is tout à fait decided, my husband, that Cocotte ne se marie pas. Yes, Monsieur, you should find it more agreeable on the bench than sitting there on all those stones. Altogether it is agreeable at St. Grégoire. I watch the ships. I have a great wish to go to Martinique. Assez, Cocotte. Je parle à Monsieur. Tu m'ennuies. You are a sailor? Mais officier? One can see that. I have not meet any English seamen. On dit they are difficult to meet. But I have always this great wish to see foreign parts. I am very interested to see an orange tree. Qu'est-ce que tu cherches? Eh bien, donne la patte à Monsieur. See, she is anxious that you shake a hand. She like also that you tickle her. Tu n'es pas bien élevée avec ce monsieur qu'on ne connait pas. Elle est tellement sensuelle. Ah oui, les chiennes! My husband cannot understand when he goes away for four days that I am not triste alone in St. Grégoire. Mais enfin, on s'amuse. One talks to interesting strangers. Enfin. . . . That is a pretty watch, Monsieur. One can see it is an

English watch. It is so chic, the English leatherwork. It is funny how the wrist does not sunburn underneath the watch. On dirait that the skin has quite a different touch. The English are smoother than the French. Then there are also les Espagnols. I go last night to see Carmen—we are abonnés at the Casino. I go alone, though my husband say it is not convenable, but then my husband is at Marseille. And I am so sensible for the music, Monsieur. I am artiste. I make my début in Iphigénie at Dijon. I play in Bordeaux Camille. Many people have not seen such a Camille. I still have what the papers say. That is before I marry, of course. My husband say it is not pudique, le théâtre. Eh bien! I do not say anything. As Monsieur sees, je suis femme du monde. Oh pardon. You have not enough place to sit. Only once I am not enough femme du monde. It is when Jules go to Marseille the time before. I am with Cocotte just like this. I am walking home with my paquets. I see a man, une personne très commune, vulgaire. I see him in the Rue Jaurès, under the plane tree, near the Pâtisserie de Mme Godet. I might say that is where we live, Monsieur, my husband and I, above the Pâtisserie of Mme Godet. Her son is about to finish his service militaire. Eh bien, I see this type near the plane tree. It is also near the church. You have seen the church? Il est bien musclé, ce coquin-là. Il me fait peur. He is perhaps a seaman, but not a nice seaman. He is tatoué with obscene objects. I have time to see that before I call to Cocotte: Viens vite, petite salope! Because would you believe it, Monsieur, she has taken a fancy to this monstre. I go quick. And she comes skipping very joyfully. I give her a bath only that morning. She is very white. And I am sur l'escalier, where every time it is so musty I mean to tell Mme Godet, when I hear, what do you think? I hear the steps of this type from out in the street. He is quite close to me. J'ai peur. I cannot even shriek. And then, what do you think? He has hit me on the backs of the legs. Pan! Pan! just like that. Every step I take, it is pan! pan! on the backs of the legs. So that

I am only dead alive when I reach the top. Because I can also feel his breath. It is on my neck opening the door. I go inside facing ce vicieux. I nearly fall over the mat of la Tante Marie-Claire. And he is standing, he has a blue chin, il est très fort, he is perhaps not seaman but boxeur. I look at him. I say: Allez-vous-en, salaud! Just like that. And he look at me. He say: Tant pis, ma belle! And he is off like jack-knife, while I am left holding Cocotte, she is so excited, she thinks Maman is having a game. I never tell my husband this, because he can misunderstand. I only tell Monsieur because he is sympathique. Oui, il est gentil, notre Monsieur, n'est-ce pas, Cocotte? Embrasse-moi, embrasse! Ah maladroite! It is what time, Monsieur, by your pretty watch? Tiens, it is time I walk back to the Rue Jaurès. Regardez! Ça me rend triste. The sail-ships with their blue sails. Monsieur, he is seaman, he will also understand that. He will understand the extreme fascination of these blue sails, why I sit nearly always in the evening, tous les soirs on the balcon above the Pâtisserie de Mme Godet. Toujours avant d'aller me coucher. Toujours when my husband is not there. Toujours. Eh bien, good-bye, Monsieur. J'espère. . . .