

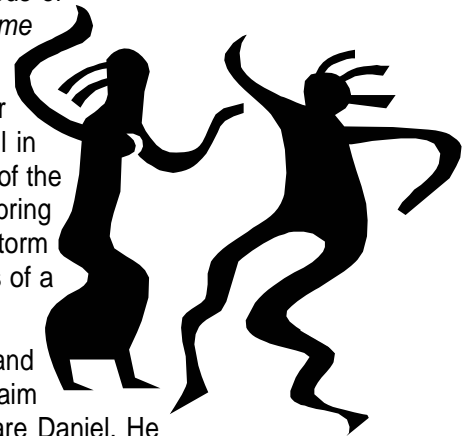
Synopsis of Once On This Island

In the midst of a raging storm, peasants on an island in the French Antilles huddle together around a fire to wait out the wind and rain. As lightning flashes and thunder roars, a little girl cries out in fear. In order to calm her, the peasants begin to tell her the tale of Ti Moune who fell in love with a *grand homme*. They describe how she was saved from a flood by the gods when she was a child and raised by loving adoptive parents, Tonton Julian and Mama Euralie.

Ti Moune grows up and yearns for something more than her peasant upbringing. She sees a grand homme drive past her and she decides he will someday carry her off to a grand new life. The gods of Earth, Water, Love, and Death decide to allow Ti Moune to have her *grand homme* to prove whether love or death is the more powerful god.

Agwe, the God of Water, causes the young *grand homme* Daniel to crash his car on a dark road and allows Ti Moune to discover him. Ti Moune cradles Daniel in her arms, believing the gods have answered her prayer. Despite the objections of the peasants, Ti Moune cares for Daniel. The peasants fear Ti Moune's folly will bring the wrath of the gods down upon them and pray to ward off evil as a terrible storm rises. Tonton Julian discovers that Daniel's family live behind the guarded gates of a fine hotel.

Ti Moune pledges her love to the unconscious Daniel. She imagines him well and pledging his love to her in return. Papa Ge, the Demon of Death comes to claim Daniel. Ti Moune promises to give up her own life and soul if Papa Ge will spare Daniel. He gleefully agrees to her bargain.



The storytellers interrupt the story to tell the history of the island. An aristocrat fathers a son with a peasant girl after the French conquest of the island. The son grows up and drives the French from the island, inheriting their wealth but also a curse—he is to remain forever on the island, rejected by the French because of his peasant blood.

Tonton Julian leads Daniel's family to him and they carry him off in a stretcher. Ti Moune insists on following Daniel. Although her parents plead with her to remain with them, they finally allow her to leave with their blessing.

Ti Moune's journey begins as Asaka, Mother of the Earth, promises her that she will provide all the things Ti Moune is likely to need on her way. Ti Moune ventures to the Hotel Beauhomme and enters Daniel's room where he lies in bed, still feverish from his injuries. After she convinces him she has come to heal him, he agrees to let her stay the night. As Ti Moune lies down beside him, Erzulie, the Goddess of Love, appears to preside over them.

Gossips comment on the unlikely union of a *grand homme* and a peasant girl as Daniel and Ti Moune fall deeply in love. They insist Ti Moune may be Daniel's mistress, but will never become his wife. Ti Moune tells Daniel of her dreams for their future. He replies she is different from other girls he has known and says "some girls you marry, some you love."

A ball is held at the hotel and Ti Moune arrives. Daniel introduces Ti Moune to Andrea Devereaux, the woman he is promised to marry. At Andrea's request, Ti Moune dances, enchanting everyone at the ball. Andrea asks her to perform at the wedding as Daniel bluntly tells Ti Moune that he cannot marry her.

Papa Ge appears and reminds Ti Moune of her promise to him. He gives her a chance to save her life: instead of surrendering her own soul, she may choose to kill Daniel. He gives her a knife. Ti Moune is about to kill Daniel when Erzulie appears. Ti Moune hurls down the knife, choosing her love for Daniel over her desire to live.

Ti Moune waits outside the hotel gates until Daniel and Andrea pass by her after their wedding, tossing coins to the peasants. She calls out to Daniel and he pauses by her side for a moment, then moves on. Ti Moune dies in despair, but the gods take pity on her and resurrect her from the earth as a beautiful tree, one which will shelter peasants and *grands hommes* alike for years to come.

