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Scribe's Tale

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12/4/12

“Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts of the City College of the City University of New
York.”

Keeper's House

Down the way, around the bend, there's a place. It has no end.
But on directions we won't dwell, this is a road that leads to hell.

Things happen to be lurking, pass a brush of dying trees.
It's a dark and murky forest; all a person hears are pleas,
And when you find a path, it only leads to the unknown
At your feet lies a cove of blackened dirty bones.
Side to side, with furtive stares, through the muck you pave.
This place is of terror, for both the quaint and brave.
Your knees begin to tremble, your heart submerged in fear
It becomes too much, but look the end is near.
The destination is ahead, but its conviction that you lack.
The darkness closes around you, should you go forward or turn back?

- J.A.G.G

Prologue

He was finally leaving Waterford and going to Shantytown. He grieved for his great nephew. The boy would only have Linda to turn to, and although she often meant well, Linda's overwhelming desire to protect those she loved sometimes caused more harm than good. Winston had stayed with Norman as long as he could, but he could not fight his desires any longer. The woman called to him. Her love brought him through the woods and her power saw to it that he was not harmed. Even so, he stuck to the shadows because he remembered what his own mother, dead many years now, used to tell him about those creatures in the woods. The desire they had for flesh, the need they had to corrupt and capture.

When Winston finally arrived to Shantytown he made sure to keep out of

sight. He kept weaving between sheet metal homes, and he would stop when he heard a noise, and then continue to move when the darkness became still again. As he was ducking and turning, twisting and moving, he heard singing. He followed the sound and it came from a dwelling that was cut off from all the other places. He knew this was where she would be, because most of Shantytown's residents were not there by choice, but their status of outcasts united them. Each sheet metal home crowded to the next, bound in their exclusion from the world. For someone to be shunned, by those who were shunned, led Winston to believe this was where his lonely love dwelled.

As he drew closer and closer, he discovered that it was indeed his lover's voice. He moved to the house, on hands and knees, so he would not be heard, hoping to see her before she saw him. He approached a window next to the door leading inside. He slowly rose up off his knees, and peeked inside.

Inside, the most beautiful woman he had ever seen and would ever see, and she was his! Her thin ropey hair moved with a life of its own, her wine colored eyes, sometimes purple or red, were alight with passion. The scent flowing to him, freshly crushed grapes...and another scent he could never place, something smoky. The woman was wearing a shift of white, barely covering her entire body, and she was spinning slowly in place as she sang.

The interior of the house, if it could be called a house, was sparse at best. There was a dining table on the far left; the table was complimented with two

chairs, and a bed was vying for space right next to the table. The right side of the room was completely empty, and this was where she danced. Strangest of all was what she danced next to. It was a gigantic mortar. There was a door behind her, slightly ajar, but he could not see what was in it. There was barely any light inside except for a single solitary candle, and although this should not have been enough to light the room, Winton could make out almost everything, except for what the barely opened door hid.

He watched her as she danced; she began to twirl around the mortar, all the while singing her strange song with her words sound half beautiful and half harsh. But as her voice quickened and as she danced faster, her voice grew increasingly harsh. She danced and her flimsy dress got damp, sticking to her clothes. Her radiance caused Winston to forget he was a man who had seen fifty-eight years. He felt as if he was eighteen again, with a desire to match.

She danced and danced, and sang and sang, and then all of a sudden she collapsed on the floor out of his view. Winston had to pull himself up a little further to see her, and as he pulled himself up to get a better view, she pulled herself up right on the other side of the window. When she had fallen, she had somehow managed to crawl over to stand by the other side of the window. She had him in her gaze, and her smile both enticed him and terrified him. He always felt this way when he was with her, the two emotions always confusing him, but not repelling him.

The woman stayed where she was for what seemed an eternity, only the window separating them, all the while smiling at him. After some time, he smiled back. The woman turned suddenly and went back towards the mortar, and continued to sway gently back and forth. She beckoned him inside.

Winston, a man of his passions, performed true to form and opened the door next to the window. As soon as he stepped inside the smell of wine and smoke rushed into his nostrils making him giddy. Seeing her swaying in the sweat soaked shift made him reckless. As he took a step towards her he noticed the oppressive heat of the room. It was so hot that he lost some of his giddiness, wiping his forehead. That was when he noticed her expression darken. She called him urgently onward, and he took another step, but was beaten back by a wave of heat. He was caught between his burning desires, and the actual thought that he might burn up. The woman spoke.

“What’s wrong with you, Winston, don’t you want me?” her voice throaty, as she touched herself between her thighs.

He nodded frantically, not noticing the heaviness of her words. He tried once again to move to the woman, only to slip in a pool of his own sweat. Winston noticed that he was barefoot, and his feet were bruised. With some shock he realized that he had come this entire distance without anything on his feet. The woman made a sound that sounded like a gasp and a chuckle at the same time. Winston pulled himself off the ground and wiped his nose, only to come away with

his fingers bloody. Upon slipping, he had banged his nose on the floor. All of a sudden, the woman stopped swaying and stood inert. He noticed a stillness of the air, the chill from inside his body that did nothing to lessen the heat in the house, the expression on the woman's face when he finally looked at her.

She was looking at his bloody fingers and moaning. The moan became a sharp keen that came from the back of her throat. It was unlike any sound Winston had heard before. It was mixed with desire, loss, hatred, and envy. And as he looked upon the woman, she began to sweat rapidly, as if she finally felt the heat of the room. But as he looked her skin began to smoke, and he heard a popping sound, as if she was sizzling. She took two steps forward.

“You've come so far on your own, only a little closer. Fulfill your promise to me!”

Staring into her purple eyes, Winston realized he could not move. He could only watch. He began to feel as if he was standing right next to flames, and his skin began to sizzle. Winston wondered what brought him here, how could he leave his sister, Linda behind? And what would become of Norm? How did he let this woman...no! Not true! How did he let another woman lead him so far from his family?

He felt arms grab him. He was pulled out of the inferno, and he heard the door slam shut. The next thing he knew he was thrown on the ground and many figures surrounded him. Then he heard the scream. It came from inside the house.

It was the woman, and in her scream he heard anger. Soon he realized that one of the shapes was pouring salt in front of the main door. When the salt first hit the ground, the scream increased in volume and the window exploded outward. One of the shadowy figures shrieked in pain as the glass shards found flesh. There were gasp of shocks and the woman's scream of rage from inside swiftly subsided.

The shapes finally began to take form. Winston saw many of the Shanty-people before him. Some were kneeling before the unfortunate soul who had suffered from the glass; others were standing around him, forming a semi circle. He could only tremble on the ground, and look from the crowd to the house. His eyes kept on darting back and forth. Before he could ask what happened. One of the people, a man pointed in the direction away from Shantytown.

"G'weh" Was all he said.

Winston, was compelled to listen, as the man's words robbed him of any and all will to stay and help. He fled Shantytown, hearing whispers behind him.

Linda Lowe screamed and opened her eyes. Her fingers were red, and she had a deep puncture in both hands, where blood issued forth, soaking into her nightgown and thin bed sheet. Despite the injury, in her right hand she clutched a quill, the tip stained with the blood.

All scribes kept a quill with them, it was tradition. And all scribes dreamed like everyone else did, but their most significant dreams where those of

the present, because more often than not, these dreams contained danger to themselves or their family, and these always came true. The scribe's own blood was necessary to tie to the present, to show the scribe who was in trouble.

If a person were considered to be of the scribe's own blood, then that person's story would be spilled on paper. But it was a curse! Dreaming of the present was a trap from which they could not wake from until the present became the past. Once the occurrence happened, the scribe would wake.

In Linda's left hand was a scroll so long that it disappeared over the side of her bed. On the scroll she recognized her own handwriting, warning her of the danger her younger brother was in.

Chapter 1

Linda stared at her bruised hand before pushing open the front door of her house. She squinted as the glaring sun assaulted her eyes. She reached in her pocket and withdrew flimsy sunglasses, resting them on her nose. She sucked her teeth at the sun for daring to shine directly on her, and stepped onto the veranda. Linda reached down and slowly rubbed her knees, trying to restart circulation. Finally satisfied, she unlocked the gate that protected her precious veranda from the outside world. Before taking off the thick and heavy metal lock, Linda stuck her head so close to the gate; it seemed as if she was trying to force her head

through. What Linda was trying to do, unsuccessfully, was make sure no one was hiding to the side of the house; someone who would be waiting for an older defenseless lady to come outside, so they could rob her of her possessions, possessions of wealth and body.

“Me nah gwan gi unno de chance,” Linda said this savagely; her entire stance was rigid and wary, almost as if she suspected some foolish predator waiting. When no one appeared, she relaxed.

“Jamaica isn’t as safe as it used to be,” Linda breathed, eyes still darting back and forth. Despite being alone, Linda had long ago discovered that when speaking to herself, she usually received the best answers.

Satisfied that no one was there, she opened the gate, and stepped out into her garden. Linda looked down at the pea plants littered around the front yard. She once again sucked her teeth and wondered if she should rip the dying things out. Her grandchild, Norman, who at the age of five fashioned himself a gardener, put them there. But within a week it became apparent that he did not have a green thumb. Norman would plant several different peas all over, watered them for a few days, and then forget them.

Five years later and any of the plants that still survived only did so due to nature’s whims, and currently it appeared nature was not in a giving mood. The plants were turning brown, and Linda may have been a devoted grandmother, but she wanted to turn the pretend- garden, to a real one. She silently vowed that she

would begin her own garden that very week, when she came back from her task. Raising her vision back to the hateful sun, it was apparent to her that the sun decided if it couldn't blind her, then it would roast her. She scowled, and continued to walk through the garden to the last gate that protected her home.

All the houses on Graffiti Way were built similar to Linda's. An outside gate separated the street and the lawn. This gate was flimsy and, usually left unlocked. A much sturdier metal gate separated the lawn and veranda. Finally, there was a front door.

The houses had little to no space in between them. Every home had a tiny backyard that contained a laundry basin and a clothesline, and the backyard also had steps that led to the roof. Most of the residents of Graffiti Way had chairs on the roofs, so that they could enjoy the breeze in the morning before the sun came up, or enjoy the breeze at night when the sun went down. In the past, Linda refused to put chairs on the roof, because she would rather not see all the other people outside at night. People in Waterford loved talking, and Linda hated listening. But when Norman came to live with her and Winston, she had put out some chairs. The boy loved looking at the stars.

As Linda stepped out into the street to find her wayward brother she heard a voice whisper behind her.

“Grammar?”

Linda looked back toward her green and white house and saw her

grandson open the door. His golden-brown hair and light eyes flashed, as the sun touched him. Linda thought, not for the first time, what a handsome boy he was. He had features like his father...and although Linda hated to admit it, his expressions sometimes mimicked his White mother. She closed the front gate and quickly made her way back onto the veranda; bending as low as she dared, she scooped up the little boy causing him to giggle.

“Of course it’s me. Who did you think it was...a jumbie?”

The boy’s laughter subsided, but he still retained a grin.

“No Gramma, I know that they aren’t allowed here.”

Linda returned Norman to the floor, and stared at his smiling face. Many of the kids in Waterford rarely exuded this amount of joviality; they knew how dangerous their world could be. Once again, she thanked the skies that he was untouched by any and all seriousness. If there were innocence in this world, it would be in her grandson...except when he listened to Sati, Linda amended. She pushed his golden locs out of his face, inhaling. They smelled of sage and myrrh. She had recently re-twisted the roots to have his hair looking slightly neater.

“No they’re not,” she agreed, “Not as long as your Gramma is here.”

Linda turned back toward the front gate and thought about the boy’s great-uncle. She was worried about Winston. Her brother had not come home last night. Linda knew that he had gotten himself into some kind of trouble. She knew because she wrote herself a warning last night while still sleeping, one that

warned of a family member being lost. She only did this a few times in her life, and each time her writing proved to be true.

The last time she did this was when Norman's mom and dad died. She had awakened to her hand frantically writing a message of its own volition. Her hand was moving faster than her eyes could follow, and the pain was excruciating, blood everywhere... When her hand finally stopped she rushed to the phone to call her son, but it was too late. Linda dragged herself out of her thoughts when she heard Norman speak.

"Where is Uncle Winston, Gramma?" Norman asked, as if he read her mind.

Linda kneeled down, until she was level with the boy. She rested a hand that was only now beginning to show its age upon his head. Linda's dark brown eyes peered into Norman's golden ones.

"You know your uncle, Norm. He probably has gotten himself into no end of trouble. Either gambling, or cheating, or lying." Linda's pursed her lips, knowing that she was lying. She saw the boy frown, concerned at his seriousness.

"Or even worse...he may be story-telling," she said smiling.

The child laughed. He tugged on her matted hair. Linda grimaced slightly at this, wondering if she should put on a hat.

"I like Uncle Winston's stories, Gramma. I thought you did too?"

Linda took Norman's hand and together they walked out the gate. She told

him to wait in the front, and went back inside to lock everything up, grabbing a pink hat before she returned to the road. This being done she reclaimed Norman's hand, put on her favorite hat, and walked to the Persaud's house. The Persaud's were their neighbors for at least fourteen years. She then shook the gate loudly, hoping someone was home.

"I like Winston's stories just fine. But me nah kno why im feel fi chat to de hole worl bout we bizness," Linda's voice grew sharper, as she continued. "Im chat to de bwoys on de street, to de pickneys walking to school, im even chat to dat rass-clat Fatman. Dem stories not fi everybody, hear me Norm?"

Norman heard his grandmother perfectly well, and with familiar ease he stretched out his hand to her, palm up. Linda pulled her sunglasses down slightly, fixing him with a perplexed look, and then sighed as she realized what she had done. Linda reached into her skirt pocket and dropped a dollar coin into his hand. Norman quickly stuffed the coin in his own pocket, and grinned up at his grandma.

"You are only supposed to use that on Winston," she said, only half joking.

Linda had decided, when she first took Norman in, she would continue to raise him as his father did. His father did not encourage the usage of Patois, and neither would she. Linda had been an English teacher for twenty years, and then a principal for ten. She believed in proper grammar. Furthermore, Norman's dad

had traveled extensively, and knew how unwelcome Patois was to the rest of the world. He wanted his son to be understood by anyone when he spoke. Despite these reasons, Linda was a Jamaican through and through; she often would slip into Patois when agitated or around people who spoke it exclusively.

“Anything for a buck,” the boy returned. Linda’s eyes widened, as she heard the familiar phrase her brother always said. She had to make sure that Norman was never left alone with Winston again, imagine...anything for a buck? She had visions of what this “anything” could possibly be for Norman. She thought about Winston’s activities with women, and unconsciously rubbed her knee.

“Are you alright Gramma?” Norman pointed at her knee.

Linda stopped rubbing her leg and winked at Norman.

“You know how tough I am, Norm. Of course I am okay.”

At this point, Sati Persaud opened up the front door and when the little half-Indian girl saw Norman; she brightened up and yelled for her parents. Sati’s mom came outside, opening her two gates, and beckoned Linda and Norman inside. Norman immediately disappeared inside with Sati, both children yelling and screaming. As the children headed deeper inside, Linda heard Mr. Persaud yelling for quiet, his voice going unheeded. Mrs. Persaud looked at Linda inquisitively, as she held the gate open for her. Linda came inside but stopped in the front yard, looking at her younger friend.

“No Rad, I am not coming any further.”

Radica quickly glanced back inside to make sure the kids were not coming back out. She then shut the veranda’s gate and came into her yard. Radica bent down quickly, scooping up some gineps from the floor, and placing them into her pocket. In the time since Radica’s family moved to Jamaica from Trinidad, it was apparent that she took great care of her garden. She had a mango tree, two apple trees, jackfruit, ginep and a starfruit. Radica made a good amount of money selling it to her neighbors who swore that her trees bore the sweetest and most delicious fruit for miles around. No one asked how she got the trees to grow so quickly, or how each fruit always seemed to be in season. It was one of the many things that were understood in Waterford, Radica was one of “those” people. She sat down on a bench between two of the larger trees in her garden, indicating that Linda should sit also. Checking her irritation, and reminding herself that Radica was helping her, Linda sat down next to her.

Seeing Linda’s difficulty in sitting, Radica chuckled, earning a furious glance. The younger woman was not affected.

“You’ve been using too much of the salve Linda,” Radica said, “You know these things have consequences.”

“No lecture today Radica, I need you to watch Norman.”

Radica raised her eyebrows, “Why?”

Linda paused, considering her answer, which caused Radica’s eyes to

narrow. The younger woman answered her own question.

“Winston has gone missing, Linda?”

Linda did not respond immediately. Instead she inhaled deeply; she smelled the jackfruit in Radica’s garden. It made her mouth water slightly. She looked out on the street and saw that a few people had begun to wander back and forth. Some of them looked at the two women and waved. Radica would return the wave to each person; Linda chose whom she acknowledged more carefully. She saw Mr. Clark walk by, waving at them. Mr. Clark worked at the police station down the road. Linda remembered when she had thought that someone had been trying to break into her house to rob her. She told Mr. Clark, and he dismissed her, saying that she probably imagined it. Linda responded to his wave with her middle finger.

“Yes, he is missing,” Linda finally said. She smirked as Mr. Clark marched away.

Radica was a short but buxom woman, and her bare feet dangled a few inches above the bench. She twirled her waist length hair in her brown fingers, glancing up at the sky as small beams of sunlight found access to her face, through tree branch and leaves. With her eyes closed, Radica opened her left palm and Linda reluctantly rested her large left hand, palm down, into Radica’s own.

Radica opened her eyes, still gazing at the sun. She began playing with Linda’s palm, running her finger back and forth over the small gash. “But he has

disappeared many times before this hasn't he? Why chase him this time?" she asked.

Linda paused, wondering if Radica knew this from gossip or by other means. All the descendants of Gang Gang Sara knew what they should not, and knew what they could not. Their intuition was not as precise as the scribes of Waterford, but they still got by. Radica's line was purer than any other in Waterford. Linda jerked her hand out of Radica's hand.

"Keep your gaze away from me Rad!" Linda whispered savagely. She forced herself to calm down, and then looked inside the house where Norman vanished.

"Please just watch Norman for a little while. Winston has indeed gone missing before. But..." she paused again. Wondering how much she should tell her friend.

Radica remained silent during the rapid change of emotions her friend exhibited, and she flexed her fingers because they began to stiffen. She was surprised at her body's reaction from the little reading she just tried to do on Linda. Age was a factor at the limited success at her reading, but scribes were always hard to read. It took Radica twice as much effort to peer into Linda, as it would take for anyone else. Radica now looked at Linda, wondering if she would finish what she was going to say; however, Linda stood up abruptly, frowning.

Taking a deep breath the older woman exited the Persaud's yard. She

stood on the other side of the gate leading to the road, and looked back to where Radica was sitting. Linda could've told Radica how she knew that her brother was in trouble, it would not have surprised the other woman, and in their small community, aid was always given to those who needed it. However this was a family issue. And the Lowes' were a private family. Furthermore, Linda did not want to bring any trouble to her friend's doorstep. Radica seemed to intuit that the conversation was over and ran inside her house. A minute later she came back with a bottled salve and handed it to Linda, as she shut the gate.

“For your knees, this will help keep you up and about for a while.” Radica paused, pressing the salve into Linda's hand, watching it disappear into the folds of her skirt before continuing. “You are my own, and Norm, is too. I will watch over him.”

Linda nodded quickly and thanked the woman. She opened her mouth, on the verge of telling Radica where Winston had gone, but abruptly shut it again. Linda then walked briskly down the road.

“Don't use it too much, Linda! You know the consequences,” Radica yelled out.

If Linda heard she gave no indication. Radica glanced in Linda's direction long after she vanished. She wearily rested her hands on the gate, feeling the warm metal. After a minute Radica shuddered and glanced across the street, feeling eyes on her. She saw Fatman looking at her.

He was the neighborhood candy man. His skin was dark brown in some places, and in others an unseemly white. Some said this was due to afire; others said he was born this way, but no one knew for certain. If he had a real name, it was long forgotten, and he seemed to like “Fatman” just fine. He would sell treats to the children of Waterford, and he also ran a grocery shop. No one truly liked Fatman, some because of his poor bedside manner, others because it was rumored that he was an obeah man. Radica knew that this was not true, she knew those who practiced obeah; they had a certain feel about them, a nature that Fatman lacked. However, she still found the man revolting, in appearance and spirit. All the children in Waterford knew not to go past his gate, and would gingerly and quickly place money in his hands, not wanting the contact to linger.

From across the street, behind his gate, Fatman continued to look at Radica with his expressionless eyes, and as she had done when she first met him, and continued to do over the years, Radica used her powers to gain inner access to his nature. And just like all the times before, she was repelled. She rubbed her forehead and averted her eyes. Some people were like that; they could consciously or unconsciously resist her readings. Fatman’s eyes suddenly gleamed with purpose and he gave her a cunning smile. She shuddered a second time, promising herself that neither Sati nor Norman would ever buy anything from him again. She then spun around and walked back towards her house, before she closed her front door, she heard a whistle. Turning back around she saw

Fatman left his house and was now outside her gate, she blinked in surprise at how quickly the big man could move. Radica coolly asked him how she could help him.

He was silent for a long time, and then he smiled, and pointed in the direction where Linda went.

“She's not coming back.”

Radica tilted her head, a look of puzzlement on her face. She thought to ask him what he meant, but her disdain and disgust for the man would not allow her to have an extended conversation with him. Radica went inside her house and slammed the door behind her. Then she reached into her pocket and withdrew a jar of salt, sprinkling the contents at the foot of the door.

Chapter 2

Sati and Norman heard the slamming of the front door from the back of the house. The two children were in Sati's bedroom, and Norman was playing with bread-wire men, figurines of men made from the tiny pieces of wire. The same wire was used to wrap around the plastic wrappings surrounding loaves of bread, to keep it fresh. Sati's mom did not buy much toys for her daughter, and neither did Norman's grandmother; the result of this was the two kids used whatever material was available to create many different toys that entertained them for hours.

After hearing the sound of the door, Sati stood still for a moment, and then

grabbed Norman's hand, pulling him out of her room. Together they ran to the backyard, and from there they went up the stairs that led to the roof. Once there, Sati rested on her belly, and motioned for Norman to do the same thing. Norman followed the older child, wondering what game they were playing. She crawled forward on the roof until she was looking down at her mother's garden in the front of the house. Sati saw Fatman, and wondered if he caused her mom to slam the door. Her mom usually reserved slamming things for arguments with Sati's father. Norman crawled to where Sati was lying and followed her gaze.

"Fatman!" he yelled, "What is he doing here?"

Sati grabbed at Norman trying to cover his mouth, shushing him.

"Shut up Norm, he will hear you!" Sati hissed. She looked down again and saw Fatman looking at them. Norman saw Sati stiffen and followed her gaze. When he saw Fatman looking in their direction, Norman did not think twice. He screamed and ran back downstairs. He did not stop screaming until he was indoors.

Sati remained on the roof, returning Fatman's blank gaze with a steely one, after several moments she lowered her eyes. *The man did not blink!*

Fatman smiled, "Hello young Ms. Persaud, spying again?"

Sati shook her head, blinking.

"I don't spy," she said in offended tones, "I was just curious."

He nodded at her, in a dismissive manner. Sati cautiously backed away. When he could no longer see her, she turned around and left the roof, returning indoors. Her mother was blocking the door to her room, holding onto Norman's arm.

"Why are you screaming, Norm?" Radica asked. Her voice, which was normally low, even, and calm, was now frayed and taut.

Norman tried to pull his arm free, "Fatman's here. He's by the front yard."

Radica finally let go, "I know that. Don't worry; he isn't staying. But that is no reason to yell." Radica fixed a stern eye on Norman. The boy lowered his head and looked contrite.

"I'm sorry Mrs. Persaud," he said.

Radica tugged on his locs, causing him to laugh. "Okay, okay. But don't do it again. I am going to make some ackee and saltfish; do you want any?"

"Yes, please." He ran into Sati's room, jumping on the bed. Radica winced at the sound of the springs straining to support his weight. She turned to go into the kitchen, gently running a hand through Sati's straight long hair.

"Mom?" Sati said.

Radica turned back, "Hmm?"

"Why are you so tired?"

Radica moved her neck in a circular motion, trying to loosen the knots. "I tried to help Linda, no...that's not true. I tried to help myself. Just paying the

price.”

Sati nodded, “I guess no lesson then?”

Radica shook her head, “No, Sati. At least not from me, maybe ask one of the other members of the council.”

Sati nodded again, trying to hide her disappointment. Radica smiled at her, and reached into her pocket, taking out a ginep.

“Maybe a quick one,” she said, pulling her smiling daughter into the living room. Together, they moved the coffee table against the wall, pulled couches backwards, and rolled the carpet up and out of the way. When the middle of the living room was clear, Radica dropped the ginep into Sati hands. She cupped her daughter’s hands in her own.

“What do you feel, Sati?” she said.

Sati knew her mother did not mean her own hands, but the ginep she clutched within. Sati closed her hands, as much as she could without bruising the ginep. Its sturdy green shell absorbed most of the pressure anyway. Sati imagined that her vision could pierce her mother’s hands, covering her own. She saw the ginep resting between her sweating palms.

“There’s a pulse, Mom. A tiny one.”

Radica tightened her grip on her daughter’s hands, forcing Sati to puncture the shell. The juice stained the little girl’s palms. “That is the freshness of the fruit. As soon as it fell from the tree it began to decay. As it decays, the pulse

lessens and lessens.” Radica squeezed her eyes shut, concentrated on the ginep, causing the rate of decay to quicken. The orange jelly that was contained inside the green shell turned rotten, the green shell blackened. The ginep expired in Sati’s hands; she let out a tiny gasp.

“There is nothing left, Mom.”

Radica shook her head, and when she spoke her voice was sharp. “Then you are not reaching deep enough. There is still something within this death, although easily overlooked. Most casters would not find it. But you will learn where to look.”

As her mother spoke, Sati felt something unlock within the ginep. A spark still existed, and through the spark was the connection with the parent tree. Through that tree, Sati traveled backwards to its youth, when it was a seed, and then through that seed, she went further. The process continued. It was frightening, as if a hook caught her navel, dragging her back. She would have been lost had not her mother spoken.

“When you reach deep enough into death, you see that it reflects life. And if you see the reflection, if you know it for what it is...”

Sati’s mouth widened as she felt something tickling her palms. She jerked her hands away from her mom and the ginep fell free, bouncing on the floor.

“Look at it Sati,” Radica said.

Sati knelt, closer to the ginep. Growing out of the seed was a tiny green

stem. And soon without Sati's and her mother's touch, the stem turned brown and crumbled into nothing. Sati picked the ginep off the floor. Now all that remained was a dried up seed. Radica held her daughter's chin in her hand. She wasn't too gentle.

“Keep it with you. Let it serve as a reminder to the power that casters wield. Let the unease that you felt humble you to the burden of that power.”

Her mother tousled Sati's hair and walked towards the kitchen; Sati rose, and grabbed her mother's hand.

“One more lesson, Mom?” she asked, “Just one more, please?”

Radica shook her head, “Everything in its own time, daughter. You are not ready. More importantly...” Radica pulled her hand out of her daughter's grasp, “I am not ready to show you.”

Sati was disappointed but she murmured a thank you. Her mother nodded and walked into the kitchen, leaving her daughter to herself.

Sati watched the seed for a few moments more, and then with a sudden viciousness, she stomped down on the seed.

Sati found Norman sitting on her bed; she drew her lips together and folded her arms as she glanced at him.

“You're quite brave,” Sati said.

“What took you so long to come down!? You know why Fatman's so fat,

right? I heard he eats kids! That's why he's giving us all the candy."

Sati scoffed, "He does not eat kids."

"Did you get in trouble with your mom?"

Sati shook her head, fingering the remnants of the ginep, hidden in her pocket, "No," she said. "I got a lesson."

"About what?"

"That I can't count on Mom to teach me what I want." She saw his puzzled expression and frowned. "It's none of your business, Norm! I can't believe you left me up there by myself."

Norman frowned, confused at first, but he quickly recalled the rooftop. He thought of something he could say in defense, but realized what he did was not very brave. He wanted to be brave; his grandma and his uncle were brave. He picked up a bread-wire man and played with it without any real interest.

"Fatman scares me," Norman started quietly, but then burst out. "I don't want to be eaten!"

"Keep your voice down, Norm," Sati whispered, "I told you he doesn't eat kids...he lets those rumors continue because it means that most here in Waterford leave him alone. I think he prefers to be left alone."

After saying this Sati lapsed into a deep silence. Norman did not know what Sati meant, *'I think he prefers to be left alone'*, but Sati always said strange things. As a matter of fact so did her mom, and his grandmother, and his great-

uncle. Norman began to laugh, Sati looked at him questionably. Norman mimicked her stance, folding his hands and feigning a serious air.

"*I think he prefers to be left alone,*" Norman said in his Sati-voice, which to him would be part serious, and part mysterious, but far too snotty for a thirteen year old.

"Are you making fun of me?" she said, picking up her pillow and shaking it at Norman.

"Weren't you just making fun of me? *You're quite brave,*" Norman still used his Sati-voice.

Sati glared at him, and tried to maintain a straight face.

"I do not sound like that!" she said.

Norman giggled. After a few seconds of trying to build back up a serious face, Sati completely gave up, and joined in. Both kids soon returned to silence, and stillness, unconsciously allowing the sounds of Waterford to encapsulate them. A car backfired outside, which led to some exaggerated screams from women, which caused laughter to erupt from a group of men. An airplane thundered overhead swiftly receding to the west, probably heading towards Montego Bay, a vacation area for the whites or rich blacks. A bell sounded, signaling the Coolie Coolie man who sold ice cream to the neighborhood kids. He was Fatman's only competition because Fatman did not sell ice cream. There was a steady sound of crickets that one would not hear unless they listened. Then the

realization would come that the chirping never stopped. Sati wondered if anyone ever went mad from listening to that sound. She didn't think so, because just when the sound became overwhelming, she would forget that she was hearing it. The chirping would fade into the background, becoming part of the many sounds of Waterford. Sati pushed Norman over, so she could have room to sit, after joining him she unconsciously copied his position. Norman always sat with his legs crossed, Indian style. She looked out of the only window of her bedroom. It led out to the backyard, and beyond that was Yellow-Flower Field, around two miles long. Many people used this field as a shortcut to the main road or the woods. It could have been beautiful at one point but was now filled with refuse. It had a few clumps of grass that seemed to cling desperately to life. This vegetation did not ease the dismal view. It only added to it. Sati sometimes wondered why her mother didn't use her influence to make the field more beautiful, she even asked her once. Radica answered cryptically, saying that some things needed to be ugly. She said that the ugly made the beautiful stand out all the more.

“You look sick.”

Sati jumped and realized that Norman was staring at her. He was lying down on his side.

“What?”

“Your eyes were all crossed and you were drooling a bit,” he continued.

Sati wiped at her mouth and tried to hit him, but he rolled away from her,

falling off the bed.

“Ow,” he groaned.

Sati pushed her pillow off her bed, and on top of his head. “Serves you right,” she said.

Eventually he crawled back on the bed, leaving the pillow behind. He lay down, and continued to play with the bread-wire men. Sati hopped off the bed and pulled her journal, sometimes castbook, out from the top desk draw. She sat down at her chair and began to write down what she just learned from her mother. Two minutes into writing she frowned, and spun around to find Norman staring at her again.

“What?” she asked.

Norman gave up any pretense of play; he put the figurines aside, “Are you scared of him, Sati?”

“No,” she said.

“Really?”

“Really.”

Norman narrowed his eyes at her, “Really?”

“He’s not so bad.”

“So you don’t think he eats kids?”

“I think that’s stupid,” Sati said, as she went back to writing.

Norman shrugged and picked up the toys again. Radica yelled for the kids

to come for lunch.

Chapter 3

As Linda hurried away from Radica's house, she wondered briefly if she should have told Norman her fears, but quickly discarded the idea, as she always did. She couldn't burden him with this. Besides, he would not be able to handle it. He was not like Radica's daughter. Sati was old even when she was young. Linda sighed to herself, and quickened her pace. It was a breezy mid-morning, which was not so unusual seeing how it was hurricane season. A particularly strong wind pushed her in the direction she wanted to go.

Eventually Linda came to the barren field that was behind the houses on Graffiti Way road. This was the quickest way to get to the edge of town, and into the woods. Her steps did not slow as she plodded through the dying grass. She forced herself not to look behind, knowing that she would see her backyard and Radica's and this would further diminish her will in going on with her appointed task. If she had turned, at that very moment she would have seen her grandson and Sati running up the stairs, a minute from finding Fatman.

She took in the abandoned box-cars, destroyed kites, discarded bag-juice, and other refuse scattered in the soil, and allowed herself a moment of despair at what looked to her to be a graveyard of childhood, and then angrily shook her head. Trying to dispel nostalgia, that she always thought the least admirable traits

of those who matured, Linda nevertheless allowed her mind to wander back to when this field had still been beautiful.

She was still young when it started to change, maybe twelve or thirteen, Sati's age. The field was known to have countless yellow flowers that bloomed year round. The decline was gradual, one year someone noticed there were patches between some of the flowers, and the soil was dry and crumbly. No one paid much more attention than that, but then the following year they did not grow as far or as fast, and the patches increased. The residents of Waterford began to whisper that it was the fault of an Obeah man, or a voodoo priestess, or something. Some even said that some legendary she-demon had returned, and since the she-demon could not attack the men of Waterford she attacked the land, as a result the land shed its beauty, turning barren. The residents turned to the casters and to the very obeah user they had previously blamed, thinking that there were answers to be found in the mystical. Some of the resident casters had blessed the fields, assuring all that the next season they would come back in full force. Obeah users chased away any new people who tried to set up houses in Waterford, sure that the strangers could be demons or spirits in disguise. But the next season there was even less flowers. And this continued, year after year. When she was about twenty years old, there were no more yellow flowers, and slowly the field became what it was today, and the people of Waterford began to complain and curse at each other, wondering who was at fault. Why the sudden

decline? No one ever gave a promising answer.

Her quick pace soon brought her to the edge of the field. A gully was the final obstacle between Linda and the woods, and the gully had such a strong odor that anyone walking near, could not help but gag. It was bad now, but it was worse in the evening, at that point the sun would have baked the refuse that mingled with the mud and water on the bottom. There was no bridge leading across this gap of dirty water and garbage. The only way through was to find the shallowest area, grit one's teeth, and plow straight through.

Reaching into her pocket, Linda took out the salve that Radica gave her. She dabbed a little bit on her legs, focusing on her knees. She felt a mild tingling. Radica took several steps backwards away from the gully and exhaled.

Linda exploded forward towards the deep gully; instead of slowing down when she reached near the edge, she put on an extra burst of speed, jumped, and soared over to the other side. The expanse was about thirty feet across; Linda's leap took her forty feet over. She landed gracefully and looked back across, cackling to herself.

“Not bad for an old woman. Not bad at all.”

Her legs trembled suddenly, and Linda gritted her teeth in pain. This was the side effect of the salve. She knew what Radica would say about her using it.

She would have told Linda to cross the gully the hard way, and save the salve for when she really needed it. But Radica wasn't here. The pain would last for some time; the more she used it, the longer it lasted. Linda turned back around, before her loomed the woods to Shantytown, her destination.

The woods that lay between Shantytown and Waterford often hid creatures, demons, and other wild things, rumored to be very protective of their lands and not fond of intruders. However, they were unlikely to be this close to the border for many reasons; paramount among them was that the council had decided many years ago to erect a barrier between the wood denizens and their town. Anyone from Waterford could easily go through the barrier, but the opposite was not true.

When Linda was younger, her mother had told her that Shantytown was a carefully crafted lens, to distort the truth. In Waterford people used their powers. They had control over the properties that they manipulated. However, in Shantytown, the powers used the people. The power kept an illusion firmly in place, so that all anyone saw, was what he or she wanted to see, what they were allowed to. Those in Waterford who were not 'gifted', those in most areas of Jamaica, wanted to see a community of poor people who kept to themselves, and that was all they saw.

Linda felt something cold and wet on her right leg. Looking down in surprise she saw a dog licking her leg. The poor creature was obviously

malnourished and it looked up at her with large hopeful eyes, wondering possibly if this two-legged protector could help it. Linda rarely felt compassion for those weaker than herself, always thinking that either the weakness was deserved, or the person would soon deserve it. Animals were another case. She always had a soft spot.

Linda reached into her skirt pocket and took out a piece of smoked meat. She gave it to the dog, and it gobbled it up instantly. The dog looked back up at her with a hopeful expression. Linda scowled at the creature.

"G'weh from me, me no av nuting else fi yuh."

The dog looked mournfully at Linda, and tail between its legs, the animal began to scurry away. A sudden thought occurred to her. She whistled to the dog and it immediately returned to her. Giving it her last remaining meat, Linda rubbed the yampee from the corner of the dog's eyes. She remembered that Radica told her long ago the cold from a dog's eyes would allow a person to see and not be seen. The bearer of the yampee would just need to rub it over his or her own eyes. Thankfully, this creature had an ample amount. Linda then put her prize in a pouch and stuffed her treasure into her pocket, next to a container of salt. She always carried a container of salt with her. All in Waterford did. She had some writing parchment on her, just in case she received the urge to write. Thus prepared, Linda looked at the foreboding trees ahead of her.

"It is time for you to go boy," Linda said forcefully to the dog.

The dog looked up at his new friend, and must have heard something in her voice, because it scampered away. Linda smiled absentmindedly and walked to the border of Waterford and the woods; she paused, listened for the inescapable sounds of cricket's chirping, and noticed there was nothing. Even though Linda was at the border of the woods, she was apparently close enough for it to start seeping through. Nothing dared to make a sound here. Sweat began to drip down her back. Her breath came out in rushed gasps. Linda suddenly felt the full magnitude of her age, wondering to herself what a sixty-year-old woman hoped to do in this place. She shook her head as if to shake off the tension. The woods were playing tricks on her, making Linda doubt herself. She squared her shoulders.

Linda heard a whine behind her. Turning around she saw the thin dog looking at her with its plaintive eyes. It seemed to be giving her a cautionary warning.

Don't go! Stay with me. Continue to feed me meats from your voluminous skirts, take me home with you, isn't there a young boy there who would love me?

Linda smiled sadly at the dog, and then reaching down swiftly, she picked up a stone and hurled it with surprising accuracy at the animal. It hit the dog squarely in its side. With a startled yelp at this betrayal, the dog took off down the

gully, and then across the field. It soon was gone from the edge of Linda's vision. She turned back around, once again facing the forest. She could not help but realize, through a parting of the trees, that no sunlight was allowed through the dense foliage of the mysterious place. It did not matter that it was a bright and unforgiving morning. In the woods to Shantytown, darkness was the default. Linda found herself missing the sunlight already, forgetting her earlier hatred of it.

She walked into the forest, unable to shake the feeling she was being consumed by some dark, malicious, silent beast.

Chapter 4

Norman flicked through the television. He would remain on a channel for a few seconds, and then he would find another. He pressed a button on the television remote, and the time came on the screen. It was three o'clock in the afternoon. Where was his grandma?

After Radica had fed Norman and Sati, she had retired to the bedroom with her husband. When she had opened the door, a sharp odor of rum spilled out. Norman had heard the two adults exchange bitter words, and then the door shut behind them. The door had not reopened, but every now and then, he would hear Radica's voice raise, and Boris's sharp replies. Sati had turned on the television as loud as it could go, and they had spent the next couple of hours in front of the

screen. Norman eventually got lost in the cartoons before him, and thought Sati did as well, but she had eventually left the couch, and slammed her door. That was about an hour ago. Norman was bored.

He pressed the “off” switch on the remote, and walked to the right of the television, examining the pictures of the Persaud family. There was a picture of Sati when she was a little younger, with shorter hair. She was sitting on her father’s lap, and glaring at the camera. She was clutching the journal that she carried with her everywhere. Boris Persaud’s long straight hair parted at his neck, and flowed down both shoulders. He was craning his neck over, so he could see his daughter’s face. It appeared that he was laughing at her serious mien.

Norman’s eyes went to Radica. Her arm rested on Boris’s muscular shoulder, her face partially covered. A half-smile was evident on her face as she bent down, and looked at her husband and daughter.

Norman remained in front of the picture for several seconds. He then moved slightly to the left and picked up another picture. This one only contained Mr. Persaud. He was at a beach holding a fishing pole. At the end of the line, on the hook, was a tiny fish. Mr. Persaud looked annoyed. Then Norman moved on to the next picture, Radica and his grandma. They were both dressed in saris, and Linda had taken the time to comb her thick hair, twist it, and plait it. Norman knew that his grandma was secretly proud of her hair and how long and healthy it was. Whenever she took the time to style her hair, it would always extend mid-

back. Nowadays, she kept her hair tightly wound up, and hidden, beneath her hat. Both women had their backs to the cameras.

Norman glanced to the bedroom door of Mister and Missus Persaud room, before climbing up the shelf, and retrieving a picture from the top. This was always the last picture he observed, but the one he often thought about. He saw a picture of a short and thin man, with a slight Afro, and intense light brown eyes. The man's skin was darker than Norman's own, but still of a tone that he would be called a "yellow man" by most in Jamaica. Next to the man was awhile woman with shoulder-length, blonde hair. She was a head taller than the man, wore glasses, and had a friendly smile. They both had their arms wrapped around each other.

"Mom...Dad," Norman whispered.

His grandma had told him this picture was taken right before his parents had been married. Norman barely remembered his parents, so whenever he came over to Sati's house he always tried to look at the picture. In his home, there were no pictures to be found of his parents. He put the photograph back, and climbed down the shelf. On his way down, he felt something feathery and fine on his hand. There were cobwebs on his fingers.

In general, Waterford had a lot of insects, but Mrs. Persaud had twice as many due to the amount of fruits in her home and the fruit trees in her front yard. Norman wiped the cobwebs against his shorts and looked around for the culprit.

On the underside, of the middle shelf, was an exquisite web. Norman saw the tiny house spider responsible for the web, in the center. He stretched his finger, and gently tapped the web.

“Come on little guy, come on.”

The spider scrambled rapidly across the web to the source of disturbance. It climbed onto Norman’s finger, and the boy pulled his hand away. He turned his hand, palm facing him. The spider crawled from his finger to the center of his palm, remaining still.

“You are so tiny,” Norm said, “Where are your parents?”

The spider didn’t respond. It moved to the right of his palm, and then to the left. Finally, it settled back in on the center.

“Did you lose them too?” He continued, as his fingers curled inwards. He heard a door creak open. Norman turned and saw Mrs. Persaud exit her bedroom. She closed the door behind her. She still looked tired.

Seeing Norman, Radica walked over to the boy. She brushed his hair backwards, out of his face.

“Norman, why are you out here alone? Where is Sati?” she asked.

Norman hid his hand behind him, closing his fist around the spider. He felt it moving.

“She’s in her bedroom Mrs. Persaud,” he began. “I think she’s angry.”

Radica narrowed her eyes and cupped Norman’s face, “About what?” she

asked.

Norman squirmed, resisting the urge to move backwards, “You and Mr. Persaud were fighting again.”

Radica released the boy, lowering her hands to her side. “Of course,” she said, “You both heard.”

Norman rubbed his cheeks, and backed up into the shelf. The shelf moved back and forth, and the picture of Norman’s parents fell over. Radica caught it before it hit the floor. Norman’s mouth formed an “O” of surprise. Then he flushed guiltily, as Radica caught his eye.

Radica stretched up and replaced the photo frame to the back of the shelf, where it originally was. She then pulled Norman’s hands in front of him, and opened his fist. The spider began to scramble around wildly, looking for escape. Radica opened her hand. The arachnid scurried over. She stretched up a second time, and deposited the creature back to its home.

“Norman do you know that most spider hatchlings don’t get a chance to know their mothers? Definitely not their fathers! They are left to fend on their own,” Radica said as she brushed her fingers over the pictures, lingering on the ones that portrayed her family, when they were happy. Norman looked on with wide eyes.

“Hatchlings are born as tiny predators, ready to take on the role they were meant to, born with all the skills they need to survive,” Radica smiled down at the

boy's face.

“However, there are some spiders that will care for their young. They carry them on their back; regurgitate the food for them.”

“Ewww,” Norm said appreciatively.

“Eww indeed,” Radica agreed, “Anyway, these spiders will carry their young around, despite the fact that they may not need to. Bonds exist between them that we can never fully understand.”

She stroked Norman's hair. Bent down and whispered in his ear.

“Your parents were like the second type of spider.”

She gave his hair a final pat, and then walked back to her bedroom. She was about to open the door when Norman called her name. His voice was shaky when he spoke.

“Mrs. Persaud, were you and my parents friends?” he asked, wiping his eyes.

Radica stared off into space, thinking about Norman's father...Bobby.

“I knew your father fairly well, I didn't really know your Mom, but she appeared to be a lovely and kind woman.”

Norman nodded. He opened his mouth, but then closed it again, debating if he could trust Mrs. Persaud with his question.

“Yes?” she said. Her hand still hovered on the doorknob.

“Grammar doesn't keep pictures of them anywhere,” Norman said.

Radica stared back at the boy. The sun was shining in through the living room windows behind him. She could not make him out clearly.

“She doesn’t, does she?” Radica responded, she walked back to the shelf and took down his parents’ picture. She placed it in his hands, “It’s because she’s as protective of her young as the second type of spider...actually even more. But feel free to borrow this anytime you want.”

Norman beamed, and held the picture to his chest. Radica returned his smile.

“Mrs. Persaud?” Norman said.

“Yes,” Radica answered, this time her voice warned of impatience, Norman knew he only had one more question.

“Will Gramma be back soon?”

Radica face stiffened. She thought about the evasiveness of Linda’s departure. She thought about Fatman’s words.

“Yes Norm,” It felt like a lie as soon as the words spilled from her mouth, “She will be back soon.”

Radica returned to her bedroom, shutting the door quietly behind her, and turning the lock. The window curtains were drawn shut, shrouding the room in almost near darkness. The windows themselves were closed, and the smell of rum and sweat battled their way into her nostrils. Grimacing, Radica shook her husband awake. Bleary eyed and still hung over; he sat up on the bed, grasping

his head.

“A wah wrong wit yuh, woman? Yuh want kill me?”

He had gone into Kingston last night with some of the other neighborhood men. His breath stank of meat and alcohol. He also smelled of ganja. They would have to talk about that soon. For now, Radica need to air her concerns.

“I think Linda’s in trouble,” she said without preamble.

Boris shook his head and groaned, squeezing his eyes tight.

“What happened?” he said.

In the living room Norman stared at the closed door, still clutching the photo. He walked back to Sati’s bedroom, and raised his hand to knock on the door, before his fist could connect her door swung open. Sati raised a finger to her lips, silencing him. Her expression so severe, Norman didn’t ask any questions. She knelt on the floor and opened her book, flipping through several pages before she found what she was look for. When she did find it, she placed the book on the floor, flattening the pages. She rested one hand on the door, and then began to sing. Her words were soft as they fell from her lips.

**“EYE DAT CYANT SEE,
EAR DAT CYANT HEAR,
TRADE ONE FOH DE ODDA,**

MAKE DE WORDS CLEAR.”

Whenever Sati casted, it always felt to Norman as if someone were speaking directly into his ears, but in a low tone, to try and muffle the words or...as if someone blew gently into his ear, an annoying tickling sensation. His brain would feel heavy, even if she didn't use the casting on him. This time she used it on both of them, and there was an added effect.

Norman noticed that the room started to get darker and darker. It happened so quickly that he thought it was a hurricane, and the storm clouds were settling in. He looked to Sati in panic, but could just make out her features. She saw his alarm, and spoke.

“DON'T WORRY, IT'S BECAUSE OF THE CASTING!” she said, wincing and covering her ears.

He covered his ears as well, and would have cried out at how loud she spoke, but Sati covered his mouth. Swallowing, she tried again.

“IS THIS-” he shook his head rapidly and she stopped, trying again, “Is this better?”

Norman nodded in relief. Sati removed her hand and spoke.

“Speak as quietly as you can. I traded some of our sight for better hearing,” she whispered.

“Why?” he asked.

“Because mom's up to something and I want to find out what, now shut up

and listen.”

Both children quieted down, Norman pressed his ear against the door, causing Sati to roll her eyes. He didn't need to do that; the cast would allow him to hear perfectly. Her mother was speaking about Linda.

“Something is going on! Her hand was wounded, and Linda seemed frazzled and concerned, and Winston is missing-”

“Winston is always missing. Probably chasing some pretty young thing,” her father chuckled.

“And Fatman's warning? He said she would never come back-”

“Since when do you listen to Fatman?”

“Please,” Radica pleaded, “Just listen to me, and believe. Something is wrong. The duppies are restless on the Otherside. I've felt it for some time now.”

“The dead are always restless, Rad...”

There was silence on the other side of the door. Norman looked at Sati, his brows furrowed. His grandma's hand was cut? She would never come back? What was Mrs. Persaud talking about? Gramma always came back. He opened his mouth to speak, but Sati shushed him again. Radica spoke.

“There is more.”

A groan from Boris, he did not respond.

“She has had a dream about her brother. You know what it means when scribes start dreaming. The last time Linda had a dream it was about her son. I

don't have to remind you about the consequences of that.”

Another long stretch of silence, the bed creaked from huge weight being settled on it. A sigh from Boris.

“Damn scribes. They are a curse on Waterford. And you had to befriend a family of them.”

“You don't believe that! They were born as scribes, just as Sati and I were born as casters. Do you despise us as well?”

There was no answer from Sati's father. Norman looked at Sati, and saw that her lower lip was trembling. She moved away from the door, bringing her hands together in front of her chest. She swiftly separated them and whispered the word:

“G'WEH.”

The children's eyesight was restored and the enhanced hearing faded away, so abruptly Norman's ears popped painfully, and his eyes began watering. He lost his balance, and would have fallen if Sati didn't catch him. He reached up to his ears, and wiped away blood.

“Sorry,” she murmured, her ears bleeding as well. She led him away from her parent's doorway and going into the kitchen.

The kitchen had a dining table, the counter top of which was made of brown marble, with tall black chairs with brown cushions for the seat. There was a built in microwave above a futuristic oven, both of which had several dials to press for to heat up. Boris was in construction and wanted anyone entering the house to know that the Persaud's had money. There was a chandelier fashioned after the Indian god, Shiva. In each of Shiva's hands there was a bulb with the appearance of crystal. Mahogany shelves lined the kitchen walls, and two large windows, to the back of the house, opened out to Yellow Flower Field. Below the windows was the sink. Sati poured herself some tap water, and got orange juice out of a gigantic fridge. The orange juice was for Norman, who only drank water if there was nothing else.

“Why's your dad so crabby?” Norman asked after taking a sip of his juice.

Sati shrugged. She had a sullen expression.

“What's his deal with scribes and casters?”

Sati shrugged again.

“Your mom was talking about my father and how he died,” Norman said, lowering his voice a bit.

“Yeah, and about the dream your grandma had when he died.”

Norman put his glass down, “Gramma knew about it right? She had a dream about it and couldn't do anything.”

Sati nodded but said nothing. A gloom settled on both kids, and they fell

into silence. After they finished their drinks, Norman took both glasses and began to wash them. Sati stood next to him, towel in the hand, ready to dry them. After Norman had been washing one glass for nearly a minute, staring out the window, Sati snatched it from him.

“Stop thinking about it,” she said.

“I’m not thinking about it,” he lied, changing the subject. “Gramma is late, right?”

Sati looked at his troubled expression and nodded, “She is.”

“Is she okay?”

Sati thought about her mom and how often she seemed to guess things with surprising accuracy.

“I don’t know,” she said.

Norman finished the last glass and handed it to Sati; she dried it and put it away. She was thinking about her parents’ conversation, and she had an idea how to get the truth, she turned to Norman.

“Wanna find out if she is?”

Chapter 5

Linda did not know exactly when she realized that she was being followed, but it began with a feeling of slight unease. She would cast glances behind, above, and then finally below her, in an effort find her follower. But each time she turned around she would just see the faint shapes of animals moving

through the trees or grass.

Even as her worrying was increasing, Linda was amazed at the height of the trees that surrounded her. They were hundreds of feet tall, and Linda was certain that if there were ten more women, holding hands around the tree trunks, they would still find that they couldn't close the circle. The grass was a welcome difference from the bleak field that she traversed to get here. When she first entered the woods, Linda had reached down and stroked the grass, and found it silky and inviting to touch. In different points, there would shoot up a dazzling array of flowers: reds, blues, pinks, and greens, big, small, twisty, or straight. From these flowers and plants, pollen would float gently through the air, carried by a constant light breeze, causing Linda to feel like she was swimming through a pool of feathers. She had only allowed herself this whimsy for a moment when she began to sneeze viciously as her allergies took hold. Linda withdrew a cup of boiling water from a pocket in her skirts, and added a powdery substance to it. The powder was a gift from Radica, a cure-all for Linda's allergies. She felt the mixture taking effect, and she sat down on a patch of grass to allow her nasal passages to completely recover before she shook her head and continued on. Soon enough she came to a small clearing devoid of the gargantuan trees. There was a small pond in the center, which had a thin ray of moonlight illuminating it. Linda sat by the edge of the pond and drank her fill when the whispers began.

An errant breeze caused the surface of the pond to ripple and with it came the sound of murmurings, so low that Linda could not make them out, though she strained to hear. Each time the breeze and the whispers died down, it left such a void that it was like the woods were sentient and it was holding its breath, even Linda's own breathing felt muted. She remained by the edge of the pool, sweaty and shaky palms and stomachaches were added to her anxieties as she felt as the whispers steadily increased in volume.

It wouldn't be so bad if she could understand what the voices were saying. Linda found that when she tried to understand the words they would slip away from her memory, teasing her with their elusiveness. Between the unease of being stalked and frustration at whispers of the woods, Linda came to discover that even though she had been walking for at least five hours, she had not said a word. This shocked her because she always said words, *especially* when she was alone. This silence that felt forced upon her, more than the mutability of the forest and its invisible spirits, caused her to suddenly stop and look around her angrily.

“Yuh nah gwan teke me unno hear? Me nu ‘preciate all dis ting dat a gwan. First yuh tawk real low, den yuh nah tawk at all. An me no something dey a chase me. Me a bad ooman yuh hear. No mess wit me. Stop all dis nonsense!!!”

Linda stood still, shoulders tense, ready for something, though not sure what. Seconds went by and nothing happened. Linda exhaled a breath that she did

not realize that she was holding when she heard a voice.

“You are not going to take me, do you hear? I do not appreciate all these things that you are doing. First you talk very low; then you do not talk at all. And I know something is chasing me. I am a bad woman you hear? Do not mess with me. Stop all this nonsense!!!”

Linda whirled around, eyes darting back and forth, seeking out the feminine voice mocking her. If the stalker thought to scare Linda by parroting the words, she would get the surprise of her life. Reaching into her voluminous skirt, Linda drew forth the pouch containing the dog's yampee. Dipping her finger inside, she quickly wiped the contents over her eyes.

At first nothing, and then slowly it seemed like ripples were running through the air and everything the ripple touched changed. Colors became more vibrant; she clearly saw the animals that hid in the darkest shadows of the trees. Linda also had the vague impression of translucent things floating through the air...the source of the earlier whispers perhaps? The faintest beam of moonlight was thrice amplified, but still no sign of the speaker.

“You crash through these woods like you belong here,” a voice echoed from above. “With noise, and clamor, and an undisguised bravado that stinks of human. Why are you here?”

Linda's eyes shot upward. On the outskirts of the clearing, sitting on a tree branch, was a beautiful woman. Her skin was the color of dark chocolate, and her hair was in locked, similar to Norman's, but longer, dripping down her body and parting at the shoulders. Her hair ended somewhere below her waist, and rested on her buttocks. As far as Linda could tell, the vine-like hair was the only thing covering the woman's shame, and just barely at that! Her eyes had the purple hue of freshly crushed grapes, and were slanted. Her lips were full and pouty. Even though she was so far away Linda swore she could smell the woman, a scent of wine. The woman wore a mischievous and mocking smile, both of which were currently aimed at the Linda.

“Hmmm...how interesting. You can see me. I wonder if you are a caster. No...probably not, you carry a different odor. Are you a scribe? I think so,” the woman said all of this quickly, without needing or wanting an answer. Then she stretched, smiling as if she were performing before an adoring public. After a lengthy pause she continued.

“How can you see me then, a gift from a caster? What did you use? I heard no words of casting? Yet there is a dash of otherness to your being. What did you wipe in your eyes before? Some concoction to reveal what is concealed?”

The woman hopped off the tree branch and floated gently to the floor. Instead of landing on the grass, she hovered two feet above it. She had landed on

the other side of the pond, far from the water. Linda frowned at the woman's loveliness. The expression caused the strange woman's smile to grow. She remained floating on the ground, twirling one of her locs in her finger, staring at Linda.

“You disturbed my peaceful thoughts with your harsh words. I have not heard patois in a long time in this forest. I welcomed the absence. Of all the deplorable talent that you Jamaicans possess, your speech is the worst.” Her smile was still sweet, as if she was discussing the weather, or complimenting Linda on her dress. She spoke while circling the pond, closer and closer to Linda yet she made sure never to go nearer to the water.

“I so prefer civilized speech. Don't you? And I know you can speak like a human being, if you try.”

Linda did not answer. She wondered why the woman did not touch the floor, and why she did not move close to the water. As casually as she could, Linda shifted so the woman could only see her right side. Then she slipped her left hand into one of her many skirt pockets, and took out a container. The dark haired beauty was only a few feet away, her eyes glowed and her words became hushed.

“Why don't you come away from the water, and speak to me? Speak to

Sou. I would love to know your name?"

Linda bared her teeth at the woman, showing her what she had in her hand. It was a saltshaker. Sue didn't lose her smile for a moment; indeed it got sweeter and wider. It was like looking at the face of a ceramic doll. Linda then gave the salt a shake and the woman stopped moving.

"I don't know exactly what you are Sue-" Linda began.

Sou shook her head, making 'tut-tut' noise. "No, no, no. I hear it in your voice. You are saying Sue, as in s-u-e. It isn't s-u-e; it is s-o-u."

Linda blinked at the woman, surprised at her directness. Sou appeared to be in her mid to late twenties, and Linda was not used to anyone so young correcting her, or speaking to her with such condescension. Linda's grip tightened on the salt. This dark woman was doing nothing to improve her mood

"I don't know *what* you are *Sue*, but I suspect you're not human. I know what I am though. I am your elder and you will respect me..."

"You are my elder?" Sou cut her off, tilting her head to the side, and narrowing her eyes. "Age is something that is determined by the passing of years...no? Are you quite certain that time even exists in this place? And even if it does, are you of my age or wisdom? I will agree with one thing that you said," Sou lost even a hint of a smile.

“You do not know *what* I am. The things you and the rest of your kind know can fit in that container you carry.”

“How do you know my kind?” Linda asked. She feared what the woman might know.

Sou ignored the question, “What is your name?”

“I have no intention of telling you my name. I am going to continue through these woods. I am going to enter Shantytown, and then I am going to find my brother.”

Sou’s eyes crept all over Linda and she laughed, “Oh you are amusing. Convince yourself of whatever fabrication you can! But what makes you think you can get to Shantytown? Do you know the other things that lie between you and your destination?”

Linda refused to be baited. “Right now you are the only thing between me and my destination. Don’t worry about how I am going to do this. I am more formidable than you think.”

Linda said all of this with more confidence than she really felt. She had many different tricks within the pockets of her skirts to get her to Shantytown, but they would soon run out. Or would they? Linda thought about this for a second. She truly did not know how many pockets her skirt had, or how deep each pocket

ran. Maybe she had an extra tidbit in one of them from the past. She would have to search later. Linda forced her mind back to the present. Sou still eyed her.

“You are indeed a scribe, part of those who will record history as it happens,” Sou scoffed dismissively. “You are as powerless as a pencil lying on paper. You require others who actual have import to enact any changes. Scribes should be concealed, indoors somewhere perhaps? Closed off to the world as you sit, and record; judge and blame. Some say scribes are the most hated of the sects in Waterford. They are so ineffective, and so weak; that the only pastime granting them any pleasure...is despising everything and everyone they come across. You scribes eye the world and those who inhabit it with disdain, and oft times the world responds similarly. Isn’t that so...kin of Winston?”

Linda’s eyes widened as Sou continued with satisfaction.

“How many people have you let down as you sit and write. As you commit to paper what occurs in reality. I can see from your eyes that you have already failed. Was it a close friend, family, or a lover? Have I now struck you old one? Have I reached your core?”

Linda gave a strangled cry, thinking of her dead son. She tried desperately to marshal her defenses, to gain the higher ground, to say something that brought this dark hateful creature to the ground, where it belonged. But she realized that

she had never had the higher ground with this woman. How did Sou know so much about her? Scribes were not opened books; even those mystical creatures and casters that could gain access into other minds had trouble with scribes. The only time something else could have access to Linda, was when her guard was down, or if it was someone who she chose to let in. Linda could count on one hand, people in her life who she let that close to her.

“How do you...how do you...?” Linda stammered as the saltshaker fell from nerveless fingers. It then rolled into the pool.

Sou floated closer to Linda, she gently rested a finger on the elder woman’s temple. When Sou’s finger touched her skin, Linda shuddered at the unnatural heat. The smell of wine was stronger now. Not an attractive scent, but cloying and oppressive. It made her dizzy, and she soon found that she could not focus. Sou then leaned over and whispered into Linda’s ear the answer to the question she could not ask.

“I know because Winston told me about you.”

As soon as the last word was uttered Linda shrieked in anger, catching Sou off guard. She pushed the woman away from her with as much strength as she could muster. Linda then spun towards the woods, hoping to escape, and wishing that she never came for her treacherous brother. As Linda ran, she heard Sou

whisper something behind her but refused to stop. She did however; turn her head to look, and what she saw caused her to run even faster. Sou was standing in the same spot, and where her left hand should be, was a jet of flame. Linda kept on going. As soon as she reached the woods she decided she would double back around, finding something in her skirt to teach the bitch a lesson.

She never got a chance. Suddenly a fireball flew over her head and exploded in front of her. The flame quickly spread around her in a circle, having a mind of its own. Linda threw up her hand to protect her face from the searing heat. Smoke soon flew into her lungs, causing her to cough uncontrollably. The smell of wine had disoriented her, and the flames obscured her vision. Linda collapsed to the floor, reaching into another pocket. Her hand closed around an object, just as the world went black.

Chapter 6

The kids snuck out from the back door, to the roof, and ran across to the Norman's family's roof. They ran through his house, and then through the front door, and then the house-gate. Once in the Lowe's yard, Sati kept glancing to her own home, afraid that her mom or dad would come out and surprise them. After biting her lip for about five minutes she opened the gate to the street, and peered across to Fatman's house.

Whoever designed Waterford must have loved the idea of a tight-knit community because in addition to most of the houses being wall to wall, or with barely any space between them, the houses across the road were only meters apart. And the “road” was no longer a road; nature had taken issue with being paved over, so over time it fought back. The “road” now was covered with so much weed and grass, one had to truly look to find pavement. Furthermore, due to a series of earthquakes, hurricanes, and poor construction, the pavement had thoroughly sunk and cracked open in some areas, allowing even more room for nature. In other areas construction workers had long since left tons sand or rock behind, and they became new mountains. It was not pleasing to anyone’s eyes, but the adults stopped caring a long time ago, and the kids used the newly elevated and sunken in parts of the road to play King of the mountain or hide and seek. It was in one of these depressions, that Norman pulled Sati into, so they could hide from the view of her parents. They breathed noisily, hiding from everyone, debating the timing of their next move. A dog spied their movements, and moved closer to the delight of Norman, who began to beckon the animal closer. Sati’s eyes widened in horror and she shooed the animal away. The confused animal stopped moving entirely, and stared down at the kids in the hole.

“That mongrel probably has eight undiscovered diseases,” Sati hissed, waving her arms at the dog, which began to understand that the little human wanted to play with it, so it inched closer, amazed at the increased speed of the

little human's arms.

Norman shook his head at this, "You don't know that, Sati. It looks like it belongs to the James' from down the road. Let me just pet it."

The dog must have gotten a whiff of something because it soon took off. Sati breathed a sigh of relief.

"You would have to wash your hands for days if you touched it, Norm," she said before picking herself up from the ground, and dusting her knees off. "Now come on, let's go."

Norman stared wistfully after the animal before following her. She walked up to Fatman's house, and without pausing, opened the gate, entering his front yard.

Like the road, Fatman's yard had been covered by cement, unlike the road; nature did not reclaim her rightful place. The house was two stories high, a noted and frowned on difference from the majority of homes in Waterford. Two stories were a sign of wealth, and a local candy-man should not have been able to afford this, many people muttered that Fatman also dealt ganja to the neighborhood teenagers. Of course the teenagers denied this, but that only caused the idea to take further hold of the adults.

The first story had the customary house gate, and behind the gate were a

wide array of sweeties, bullah, bun, gizzarda, spiced and dried shrimp, and many more treats to tantalize children. The second floor had a balcony, which hosted only one chair, which as far as Norman could tell, Fatman never used, because he never saw him out there. The house was stripped red and white, and reminded Norman of a candy-cane. Although the house had a welcoming appearance, he could not shake the feeling of unease. After considering the implications of running away, twice in one day, Norman reluctantly followed.

Once inside, Sati reached a shaky hand up to ring the bell, reconsidered, opened her mouth to yell, but nothing came out. She took an unconscious step back, and bumped into Norman.

“Are you sure you want to do this?” they both said at the same time.

Norman shook his head, no. Sati did the same. They both turned around to leave the house. They had almost reached the gate, when they heard a door creak behind them. Spinning around they saw Fatman resting on the metal grill of the veranda’s gate. His fat pressed against the tiny openings in the metal, and Norman was reminded of a movie he saw about a living gelatinous blob, that devoured a town. Fatman had on a tiny red vest and no shirt, billowy white pants, and brown loafers. His dual colored skin, looked like strange island formations, from a bird’s eye view. The man stared down at the kids.

“How can I help you?” he said, face blank.

Sati, once again, had nothing to say. Norman was having trouble speaking himself. He swallowed his saliva and blurted the first thing that came to mind.

“Two sweeties, please!”

The candy-man blinked in something that resembled surprise. He then shook his head, and chuckled.

“Is that all you want, Mr. Lowe?”

Norman glanced back to Sati, urging her to say something with his eyes. She shook her head back and forth.

“Sati?” Norman pressed.

She continued shaking her head.

“I think you have something to say,” Fatman directed his question to Sati, and leaned his cumbersome fat off the metal gate, resting his hands on his stomach.

Sati still didn’t speak.

“Not being “curious” again are we, Ms. Persaud?” Fatman’s deep voice held humor, though his eyes showed none.

After it became obvious that Sati had lost her voice, Norman moved closer to the gate, and said the second thing that came to his mind.

“Why are you so big?”

As the last word left Norman’s lips, air shot out of Sati’s mouth. She looked equal parts horrified and authoritative. She finally spoke.

“You can’t ask people why they are so fat, Norm!” she pulled at his collar, to get him away from the gate where Fatman still had his tremendous girth, to the smaller gate leading to the street, in case they needed to run. “It may be glandular,” she whispered into his ear.

“Oh,” Norman responded, not really understanding. Fatman’s face had resumed its prior passivity. Sati could not tell if he was angry.

“I live in a candy store,” the man returned, “Why do you think I am fat?”

Sati felt the blood rush to her cheeks; she eyed her home and wondered how quickly she could get back there.

“Well you can go to the market like Gramma does. If you ate more veggies-”

He did not get a chance to finish because Sati covered his mouth, and spoke again, if only to shut Norman up.

“You were talking to my mom earlier, and said Linda would not be coming back. Why did you say that?”

The words came out quickly, and when Sati was done she felt like she had just run a marathon. Fatman tilted his head to the side, his dark eyes fixed on Sati. He waited a few moments before answering.

“Ask Norman,” Fatman answered, “Doesn’t he know?”

Both kids turned to the other, Sati’s eyes narrowed questioningly. Norman shrugged back at her.

“How would I know?” Norman responded.

“Scribes know things, don’t they?”

Norman shook his head, “I am not one.”

“Oh?”

“It skipped me, Gramma says.”

Fatman eyes glowed, “Lucky you,” he said.

No one said anything for some time. Finally, Fatman cleared his throat, shaking his head. “My apologies, I was mistaken,” he said. His eyes bore Norman’s.

The boy waited and waited. Thinking there was more of a response coming. Fatman seemed content to lean and observe. Once more, the kids exchanged glances.

“And...?” Norman tried to help him out.

“And what?” Fatman responded.

“Is my grandma coming back?” Norman repeated the question.

Fatman scratched his stomach with one hand, and reached into his vest pocket with the other. He placed a sweetie in his mouth, and sucked on it noisily before shaking his head.

“She is chasing your great-uncle at a time when the woods, and Shantytown, are less welcoming, than both places usually are. I don’t see how a scribe can survive by herself. No one, no matter how resourceful, would be able to. Isn’t that right, Sati?”

Norman eyes widened and he looked to Sati for confirmation. But she had her eyes on Fatman, who now was looking at some point above both children’s head.

“She will not be back?” Norman demanded.

“Aren’t you concerned about your great-uncle,” Fatman said.

Norman was confused at the questions, and upset that Fatman would not answer his questions.

“Uncle Winston always disappears and comes back.”

“Where does he go?” Fatman smiled.

Sati moved forward, placing herself between Fatman and Norman.

“Is Linda coming back?” Sati interjected.

Fatman shook his head, “I don’t see how she can.”

“You didn’t answer. Please, answer the question.”

“Clever girl,” Fatman’s smile widened.

He reached into a jar filled with candy. He beckoned Norman closer.

Norman shook his head.

“Do you want an answer?” Fatman said.

Norman reluctantly moved in. Fatman stretched out his hand, Norman reached out the remainder of the distance. Two candies dropped in his hand.

“What-” he began.

Fatman grabbed Norman around both wrists and pulled him closer. Sati yelped in alarm, as the boy was pressed against the gate. Norman pulled back, but

it was the man's grip was unbreakable. He didn't hurt Norman, but his hands were warm and fleshy. Fatman leaned close, and whispered into Norman's ear.

“She will not.”

Norman looked up into Fatman's moon-shaped face. When the man spoke his voice was flat, his words held no emotion, but Norman thought he saw a glimmer of sadness in Fatman's eyes. As if it hurt him to tell Norman what he just did. The boy stopped struggling.

“What are you two kids doing there?” A voice yelled from behind them.

“Come out now!”

Both kids jumped and turned around, seeing the Danii family from a few streets over. Mr. Danii and Mrs. Danii looked in alarm at Fatman. Their two twin daughters looked terrified, as they saw the resident monster holding onto a kid. Mr. Danii approached the Candy-man's store.

“Let go of the boy,” he said.

Fatman released Norman, and the boy slowly moved away. Sati pulled him out through the front gate, and to the street. Mr. Danii grabbed both kids and ushered them back to their side of the road. Mrs. Danii picked up her own crying kids.

“Are you two okay?” Mr. Danii asked.

Sati nodded quickly, Norman followed her example a bit slower.

“What were you doing there?” he continued.

Sati put her head down, slipped her hand into Norman’s, and started to cry. Norman looked at her in surprise, and she looked up at Mr. Danii.

“Norm tried to steal some candy and Fatman caught him. I tried to tell Norm not to, but he did anyway. That’s why Fatman had grabbed him, he was angry.”

Norman’s eyes widened and he opened his mouth to protest when Sati squeezed his hand painfully. Norman shut his mouth, and lowered his head, half in pain, and half to hide his face.

“I was so hungry,” he mumbled.

Mr. Danii stared at both kids in surprise. Mrs. Danii was less forgiving. She gave Norman and Sati a speech about thieving and how she thought they were raised better. When she was satisfied, she picked her girls off the ground, and walked away. Mr. Danii gave Norman and Sati one more look mixed with disapproval and suspicion, and followed his wife. Norman turned to Sati.

“Why am I a thief?” he demanded.

Sati looked satisfied, “Fatman helped us. Did you wanna get him in trouble?”

Norman thought about it, “So, I got in trouble instead?”

Sati didn’t answer, because she saw something on Norman’s wrist.

“What’s that?” she said.

Norman followed her eyes, around his hand was a bracelet formed with red and white twine. It was adorned with several ebony stones.

“I don’t know,” he said. He looked back in the direction of Fatman’s house. The man had disappeared back into his house.

“Weird,” he whispered.

“What are we going to do?” Sati asked.

Chapter 7

Sati and Norman waited until the sun almost entirely set before beginning what Norman titled, "Operation Rescuing the Old", O.R.T.O for short. Sati complained that this took away the seriousness of their mission, but Norman reasoned that it was his grandmother, so he got to choose the name. Sati reluctantly agreed, but tried to drill into Norman's mind that this was not an undertaking for children, and they should not act as such. Norman readily agreed,

while stuffing bread-wire men and boxcars, and frozen bag juice into one of Sati's backpacks. Catching her glare, Norman said defensively that they might come in handy.

"Handy for what Norm, what can we possibly use toys for, and you do know that ice melts right?" Sati asked.

Norman paused, rapidly racking his ten-year old mind for an answer, sifting through many, and discarding them as he intuited Sati's contradicting response. After a minute of looking at his abstracted expression Sati breathed out a sigh of exasperation and dropped the issue. Norman sensing that he achieved yet another victory, silently gave himself kudos.

"So, if Fatman was telling the truth, and you and I go, we can rescue Gramma right?" Norman questioned, expertly changing the subject.

Sati thought for a moment, "He said she can't survive alone. But with us there, she won't be alone."

She had already packed her bag with essentials, but now doubled, and then tripled checked the contents. Her mom and dad had left the house to talk to get advice from other adults about what to do about Linda. Sati had used this as an opportunity to take a few key supplies. A salt-shaker, two flashlights, three containers, Norman saw one filled with clear liquid and the other filled with

something that looked like it belonged in his nose, the last was empty, a large conch shell, a bag of rice, and some dried parchment, apples, pears, bun and cheese (more for Norman than herself), carrot sticks, Vicks vapor rub, two walkmans, and a jar of peanut butter (exclusively for her, peanut butter being delicious). Sati packed as lightly as she could, and ended up with a huge backpack that was twice her size. Norman mentioned that this might slow them down, but when she recommended that he put some of the stuff in his sparsely packed bag, Norman had excused himself and went to the bathroom. Finally, she folded her arms in satisfaction, Norman nodded at her.

"You think of everything Sati."

Sati rolled her eyes at this, "Cuz you don't think of anything Norm."

He chucked a marble at her head in response, which she caught and pocketed.

"Norm, can I see the bracelet," she said.

Norman tried to take it off his hand, but the knot was tight. Sati came over and tried to help, but found that she couldn't release it. Norman walked over to her dresser, and removed a scissor.

"What are you doing?" Sati asked.

“Cutting it off so you can see it,” Norman said, preparing to do just as he said.

Sati grabbed the scissor away from him, placing it back in the dresser. She placed a finger on the bracelet.

“I didn’t mean that type of seeing,” she said. “I meant ‘seeing’.”

Trying to figure out if an object was easy, and anyone who followed the practices of casting, or obeah, had the ability. And while Sati was not versed in Obeah, and could not change a bracelet’s properties, she could still see if anything was altered. She touched the bracelet; she dropped her hand.

“Well that was anticlimactic,” she said.

Norman looked at her, “What do you mean?”

“Just that nothing happened. It’s just a bracelet.”

He looked down at the bracelet, “Did you think it would be more?”

She shrugged, “Kinda.”

Norman pursed his lips, and patted the bracelet securely, “Well it’s ugly, but thanks Sati.” He pretended to check his bag again, before giving up entirely.

"Do you truly think Gramma is in trouble?" he said.

Sati tried to slide the bag under her bed. When it didn't fit she placed it carefully in her closet and threw a blanket over it. Then she took the bag that was designated to Norman, and threw it unceremoniously under the bed, ignoring his sound of protest, she looked at Norman.

"Yes I do. You can't sense anything because you're normal, Norman. You haven't been trained, as I have." Sati said this last part with a slight air of superiority. Norman frowned as he heard the tone.

"Didn't your mom *just* start teaching you to cast?" he asked.

"She didn't *just* start anything. My mom has been teaching me a bit since I was born, and she formally began training me when I turned ten, but I have shown great promise in a short time," Sati answered loftily. "What's more I picked up a thing or two from..."

Norman narrowed his eyes questioningly at this causing Sati to falter.

"...I mean...picked up...some stuff...here and there..." Sati finished lamely.

"Where is 'here or there'?" Norman asked suspiciously.

"Does that matter Norm? Shouldn't we be focused on your grandmother?"

Sati fired back.

Norman continued to stare for a few more moments, and then shaking his head, he let the matter drop. Sati would eventually tell him, Norman reasoned. She told him everything.

One hour passed surprising quickly for the two children. Sati chose the back exit of the house because the gate in the front made too much noise when opening. She ushered Norman in front of her and when he exited she followed, sprinkling salt behind her. Norman had seen his grandmother do the same thing many times before. The salt blocked the lesser spirits from entering a building that housed living people. Rice was used to repel stronger things.

The children ran across the Yellow-Flower field, despite being worried about his grandma, Norman had to admit he was having fun. He didn't really think she was in trouble, how could she be. Gramma would never abandon him, and no matter what Fatman said, or what Sati thought, Gramma would be back. O.R.T.O was just for fun. And Norman had to admit, he wanted to see the woods.

He easily outdistanced Sati who was burdened by the large bag on her back. Every child growing up in Waterford had spent some time creating castles, fighting spirits, real or imaginary, or flying kites here. Sprinkled around Norman and Sati's feet, were the remnants of such imagination. Sati almost tripped over a

kite as she tried to catch up with Norman, and when he saw her stumble he slowed down and picked up a dried yellow flower, pretending to examine it. Sati adjusted herself and gathered up her dignity, shooting him a suspicious look, but seeing that he was just chewing on the end of a plant, Sati resumed walking. When she got close to Norman, she planned to push him on the floor and run past him, but he spun around as soon as she got close and started running.

There was a game that many of the kids played here. A person would hide a bunch of yellow flowers in the middle of the field, remaining close by. Then the other players would split into two groups, flip a coin, and the losers would have to go all the way next to the gully, the winners would go back towards Waterford. Then using mirrors and the sun, each group would shine a signal to the child who hid the flowers. When the groups signaled, the flower bearer would then raise his or her mirror, flashing sunlight to both teams and the game would commence. If there were no sunlight available, the children would just count to two hundred. The objective of the game was to catch the person who hid the flowers, and force him or her to reveal them. The flower bearer was usually the fastest or the strongest kid in Waterford. The team that won would then take the flowers and spread them out around the field, in hopes that they would take root and grow. Norman was one of the faster kids in Waterford and now had been the flower bearer fourteen times.

Shantytown was located to the west of Waterford; past the gully and a large expanse of woods. The sun was just setting, and it seemed liked both children were running into the sun. This actually helped them by shielding them from most eyes. As Norman had, Sati soon forgot her serious mien, and both began to laugh. Tears streamed down both of their faces as they tried to see who could stare into the sun the longest. After running for a few minutes the children slowed down to a brisk walk, sharing a companionable silence, until Norman broke it. He had been thinking about something for some time now, but he knew if he asked Sati she would adopt her Sati-voice...and he really hated the Sati-voice. Norman finally realized that in order to get answers he would have to show how little he knew of the inhabitants of Shantytown and Waterford. Instead of showing his full ignorance he threw out a question.

“Sati, why does salt scare away duppies?” Norman asked, fingering his newly acquired bracelet.

“Why does silver hurt werewolves? Why not gold? Why does garlic stop vampires and not onions? Onions are much worse and more potent!” Sati responded, not really expecting an answer. She was not surprised that Norman did not give her one.

Norman fell silent once more, feeling that he was foiled in his first attempt. He was happy that he was with Sati, but sometimes being around her was

like being around a smaller adult. A smaller adult who accepted any wisdom handed down to her, but didn't care to explore the "whys". Norman loved "whyness", as his grandma called it. It was his first word... "why?" Regardless, Norman decided he would have to admit more to Sati if he wanted her to share her knowledge. She knew much more about these things than he did. And he knew his grandmother did too. This led Norman to his next question.

"Why won't Gramma teach me more about duppies and jumbies and..." Norman stopped here, not really knowing the rest. Sati supplied the end for him.

"...And douens, soucouyants, Lajables, and the lugarhoos?" Sati said with her nose slightly tilted in the air, and her hand in front of Norman's face, counting off each supernatural creature on her light brown fingers.

Norman gritted his teeth as the 'Sati-voice' fully emerged, but he swallowed his comment, and just nodded. Sati tried to hide her smile.

"You're not old enough, Norm," Sati answered simply.

"Says who?" Norman shot back. "I am old enough to go to school, and to learn multiplication, and...and..."

Sati groaned at Norman's simplicity and began in an exaggerated slow voice. "There is *that* education, and then the type my mother is teaching me. That is the type your mother or father would ha..."

She stopped as she realized what she was going to say. Sati turned her body to see Norman out of the corner of her eyes, to survey his reaction, but she saw the comment was heard and the damage was already done. His lighter skin, which betrayed his mixed heritage, turned a deep red. His mouth clamped shut. A dark cloud had appeared over the two kids.

“I am sorry, Norm; I didn’t mean to bring them up...” Sati began, trying to dispel the awkward atmosphere.

“Well you did. Cuz you’re stupid,” Norman said quietly, his words had no force behind them; his was staring straight ahead into the rapidly setting sun. It gave him an excuse for his moistening eyes. The silence resumed, but this time it carried a rigid and frozen quality. Sati wondered how to break it when Norman did it for her.

“Who is gonna teach me Sati? I don’t have a mom or dad to. Unlike you, who has both,” Norman responded.

Both children stopped walking and turned to face each other; Sati’s long dark hair whipped around her face, being pulled to and fro by the wind. Norman’s heavier and thicker locked hair lay straight down; it could only be affected by the strongest of gusts. Sati smiled at him, and Norm reluctantly returned her smile, the bad mood forgotten.

“I will of course, silly,” Sati answered. “And I will start now. But let’s hurry. I want to get to the woods before we completely lose the sun.”

“Aren't your lessons only for Gang Gang Sara's line?” he asked as they continued the journey.

Sati stopped and thought about this. What Norman said was true. There were some things that she would not be allowed to tell him, they belonged to different groups after all. Sati's was a caster, and even though Norman was not a scribe, he still belonged to a long line of scribes. Sati disregarded this and reasoned that there were things everyone in Waterford needed to know, especially those who went wandering into the woods between here and there. This is what Sati would share with Norman.

Chapter 8

Only a few rays of sunlight pierced the horizon as the two kids continued to walk. Sati securely hooked her hands into the straps of her backpack.

“What do you know of the douens?”

Norman thought back to what he had heard about those creatures, realizing with dismay that it was not much.

“Well...I know they are faceless. They are short, and grey. And they hate

us...they hate people.”

Sati nodded, accepting the answer that many would give who had basic understanding of demons and spirits, most did not need to know more because they thought them superstition.

“Kinda,” she said. “But why do they hate us so much?” Seeing Norman's blank face was answer enough, so Sati continued.

“My mom says the douens are children who have never been baptized, and are killed before they could ever be. Kids who aren't baptized have...I think my mom called it...wayward souls. Souls not granted protection. A douen is the combination of a jumbie and a child...do you know what a jumbie is?”

She asked this last part because she could swear Norman was struggling against yawning. His face was contorted, and he jumped guiltily when he realized that he was caught. He paused, trying to remember what she just asked. Then his face brightened.

“A spirit!” he said. “A jumbie is a spirit.”

Sati was slightly pained at the simple answer, but nodded anyway. “Jumbies are *evil* spirits. Jumbie's can smell an un-baptized child from miles away. If the child dies before they reach the age of twelve or thirteen, the jumbie steals the soul and the body. My mom said that twelve and thirteen stands for the

loss of childhood, and it must be a child. Or something like that...but anyway; it enters the leftover shell, and turns it. Eventually the child's face will mirror its missing soul.”

Here Sati paused, shivering slightly from the breeze that increased in ferocity and from an inner cold brought on by the story. She signaled to Norman and they stopped. She then took a long-sleeved shirt out of her backpack. After putting it on, she sighed in contentment, warm at least from the outside cold. Sati reached into her backpack a second time and then took out her journal. Sati tugged on Norman's arm, signaling him to start. When he did not budge she turned to him. His eyes were wide and he looked terrified.

“But Sati,” he said quietly. “I am ten. What if I die? Am I gonna turn to one of them?”

“Whoops,” Sati said, pursing her lips, considered for a second.

“Yup...probably.”

Norman turned, heading back to the village at a run, waving in the air.

“Goodbye Sati. Thanks for saving Gramma for me. O.R.T.O owes you a lot.”

She ran after him and pulled him back in the direction.

“Buttttt,” she started, stressing the word. “You’ll be fine with me!

Remember I am a full-fledged caster.”

Norman did not look too convinced, but he allowed himself to be led back towards the woods.

“Do you want me to continue?” Sati asked.

“Not really,” Norman said sulking.

“Well I am gonna anyway,” she said with sparkling eyes, obviously warming up to her own storytelling. Sati flipped to a page in her journal and breathed a sigh of delight at finding what she was looking for. It contained more information on douens than she could store in her head. She began to recite what she had written.

“The child part of the douen eventually realizes they have done nothing to deserve their punishment, except to die.” She paused, looking at Norman. “You’re not baptized and neither am I. It’s the same for these other children. And with time, all douens come to realize this. It is all they can think of, the unfairness of their circumstance. With realization comes anger, and with anger comes hate. Hate at being so unfairly treated, and having no chance, no way out.” Sati looked back to her journal. “They may not grow up. But the longer they exist, the more vicious and cunning they become.”

“You will know a mature douen by how aggressively it hunts and hurts a person. A young one still clings to the last threads of childhood it remembers. But

all douens eventually succumb to the jumbie inside them.”

Sati paused here, as she came across some untidy scrawl, she squinted but was unable to make it out. She closed the book briefly, trying to bring back something important about douens by memory. It was on the tip of her tongue. Finally she remembered.

“My mom recently told me the end purpose of possessing a child, and it showed the true evil of the jumbie. A jumbie can only physically attack a child under ten; they can terrorize and trick anyone...but not do physical harm. However, a douen can and does attack everyone. That is why the jumbie go to such lengths to find a child.”

Sati's voice faded away, and it seemed to Norman that as this happened the sounds of the field slowly came back. Sati walked with her head down, hair falling forward, covering her face. She did this when she was thinking or hiding something. Norman walked on, thinking of what it would be like to be a douen, to be punished for something you had no control over, and to then have no chance of release. He wondered what it would be like to see a person with a soul, through a douen's eyes, a person who had not been so cruelly judged. Norman couldn't understand the anger or the hate. He grappled back and forth for words to say to explain what he felt. He wanted to say something wise like Sati would, something that resonated...but he could not. He just felt sad. So instead, Norman said the first

thing that came to his mind.

“That is terrible, Sati. It is not fair.”

Sati nodded in agreement. She looked like there was more to say, but suddenly something ahead of her caught her attention. She swung her backpack off and placed her journal inside.

“That is enough for now, Norm. I will tell you about the others another time. Look ahead,” Sati pointed in the distance, bringing the gully to Norman's attention. Norman took an experimental sniff, and almost threw up the meal that Radica had prepared for them earlier. As they got closer the smell increased, Sati took off her backpack and after fiddling around for a few seconds she withdrew the Vicks and put a liberal amount under her nose, she motioned for Norman to do the same. After this was done, both found they could handle the odor better. When they reached the gully, Norman looked down and saw that it sloped dangerously and was at least forty feet deep. As Norman prepared to climb down he noticed that Sati was frozen next to him, peering down nervously into the soupy, dank, dark water. He patted her shoulder sympathetically.

“It is not so far down, Sati,” Norman said comfortingly. “If you want, I can go first.”

The wind was picking up and the sun was almost gone. Despite the chill in

the air, Sati was sweating slightly. Sati was the bravest thirteen-year-old that she knew, and the most sensible, she thought to herself. But she had an unreasonable and persistent fear of heights. It was completely at odds with Norman, who must have been half goat, due to the fact that he could climb up or down anything. He had a knack for finding nooks and holes and edges even on a seemingly flat surface. It was uncanny at the least and unnerving at the most.

Not even waiting for an answer Norman took an expert and dangerous leap down the slope and without pause upon landing, he leapt down further. A few more hops brought him to the bottom. He halted here right above the water, his body at an acute angle to the hill, grabbing on to a strong tree root to steady himself.

Norman looked up over his shoulder motioning Sati forward with his free hand. Pale with fear, Sati licked her lips, willing her body not to tremble, but unable to move forward. Norman shrugged slightly, hopped across the water, and impossibly landed on the other side. Then he scrambled up with remarkable agility to the other side. Sati stared at him as he plopped down, crossing his legs Indian style.

“Sati, come on!” Norman said, “You can do this; it isn't as hard as it looks.”

Sati was not happy to see this shift of power and the fact that Norman did all this humbly did nothing to improve her mood. She stuck out her lip petulantly. “Easy for you to say, your goat ass just cleared that in under a minute.”

Norman smiled and nodded in agreement. He still beckoned her forward. “Remember my grandma found a way to get across this, plus the sun's almost gone. You wanted to be in the woods before night. Hurry up-”

“I am hurrying. Just leave me alone for a second,” Sati shouted back crossly. Her mood was not improving as she was reminded that Norm’s grandma did this earlier. Sati got even more upset when she saw Norm throw himself backward, and stretch out on the ground, to rest. She would show him! She would do it. All she had to do was get her body to agree with her mind. All she had to do was send the signal from her brain to her foot...to take one step forward...and another...and another. She was right at the edge; this was where Norm had gone down. All she had to do was follow the path that he had forged. But now Sati was frozen again. She looked across at Norman, and then closed her eyes in frustration.

“I can't Norm! I just can't. I am trying but my body won't let me,” Sati screamed in frustration. She quickly scrambled back, away from the gully's edge, breathing heavily.

Norman lost his smile, noticing that Sati was quite serious. He began to make his way back down, with the intention of helping her over when he saw something speeding up to their general direction. At first he thought it was some kind of dog, as Waterford and Shantytown had many. The strays were harmless enough, rarely attacking unless they were backed into a corner. But he quickly saw that from its gait that it was no dog. He cursed because the sun was quickly vanishing, and with barely any light, he could not identify the animal. It was also too large for any Jamaican bred dog and Norman cried out in dismay as he realized it was heading straight towards Sati.

“Sati,” Norman yelled to her, pointing at the creature. “Cross now! Something is coming.”

Sati spun around so quickly her hair circled around her, whipping her face. When she saw what startled Norman, her eyes widened in fright and she backed away quickly, almost forgetting that the gully was behind her. A few steps backwards reminded her, as she soon found there was no more room to retreat. Almost stumbling backwards into the gully Sati gave a cry of fright. This seemed to spurn on the creature, it increased its pace, intent on the small girl. Norman noticed the creature picked up speed and yelled again at Sati, urging her to cross. At the same time Norman scrambled down the gully as fast as he could. His carelessness caused him to lose his footing, and he tumbled head over heels into

the deluge.

Meanwhile, Sati faced the creature, making out shiny horns, long shaggy brownish- blackish fur, and a narrow face in the diminished light. It would be upon her in moments. Realizing that she could not outrun such a fast creature, and that she could not reach the other side of the gully because of her fear, Sati did the only thing she could. She quickly removed her bag, and after fumbling inside, she withdrew the saltshaker. She then emptied a hefty amount in one hand, putting the shaker back inside. Sati evenly separated the salt between her left and right hand.

“What are you doing Sati!?! Run away!” Norman screamed as he rose from the muck trying to climb to reach her, but found his hands slick with things he didn't want to think about.

“Where to?” Sati shouted back, not looking over her shoulder at him. “I can't climb down. I have to do something else.”

“What are you going to do?” Norman was crying at this point, half from terror and half from the stench that clung to him.

Sati closed her eyes for a second that she didn't really have. She was back in her house, and her mom was giving her a lesson on casting a spell of protection.

“What is the main thing when you are calling on protection Sati?” Radica

had asked her.

“To focus Mom, you must clear your mind, and see what you are conjuring inside and out. Once it becomes so clear that you are convinced that it really exists. Cast the salt in the direction that you desire. A shield of light will materialize. The strength of the shield and how quickly it appears depends on the power of the person.” Sati had answered.

“What does the spell do, Sati?”

“It protects you and those with you from anything that intends harm. Those who intend no harm can pass by as if it was not even there.”

“How long does it last Sati?”

“Each grain of salt equals to one second, and with a handful of salt, this can be forever.” Sati had answered.

Sati opened her eyes. The creature was seconds away. With determination and speed born from terror and practice, Sati thought of the words for protection and threw the salt in a wide arch.

**“MOTHER OF ALL HYEAR ME PLEA
LISSEN TO YUH DAWTA’S NEED
SHIELD ME FROM DIS ENEMY”**

Instead of obeying laws of gravity and falling to the dirt, or even obeying

laws of nature and being scattered in the wind...the salt hovered in the air as if it were caught in glue. Then it glimmered in front of Sati with such intensity that she could see the tiny individual grains easily. It looked like minute stars had fallen from the sky and landed at eye level in front of her. Sati's eyes reflected the glow in front of her, as she was lost in the power of the casting. Each grain's light got even brighter and larger until they eventually began to touch one another becoming smaller in number but larger in size and intensity. A thousand grains became five hundred; five hundred became two hundred, until a light wall ten feet tall was formed. Sati concentrated, pouring more of herself into the light wall and then it began to grow. When the light wall was forty feet high it trembled and toppled over to Sati. Instead of crushing her, it bent into a dome all around her. The dome of light was transparent enough to allow Sati to see the silhouette of her attacker. The creature jumped at her as the light dome flashed a final time, hinting the end of the spell. Sati grinned in triumph, her first casting outdoors done correctly. Her smile quickly faded as the creature batted through the spell made-wall in mid-air, scattering it to the wind, and causing an explosion of salt. Sati covered her face with her hands to protect from the stinging barrage, screaming as she heard a thump. The beast had landed in front of her. How had she failed? Sati prepared herself to be gored, eaten, clawed, or all of the above.

Seconds went by and nothing happened. Sati decided the creature was waiting to see the whites of her eyes before attacking. This caused her to close her

eyes more tightly, defiant to the last, and still nothing happened. She felt a gently nuzzling on her shoulder, and then the creature bit into her backpack at the shoulder strap. The nuzzling became a rough shake. Sati screamed but still didn't remove her hands. She heard Norman shouting something, but couldn't really make it out. She heard a popping sound and wondered if her shoulder was broken. Just as suddenly as the attack had begun, it was over. Sati opened her eyes.

She remembered her earlier thought as she watched Norman hop down to the bottom of the gully. Sati had compared him to a goat. She wondered if her thought had conjured up this actual goat in front of her.

Sati had seen many goats before, but this had to be the largest and the ugliest goat she had ever seen. It had scraggly patches of brown, and white, and black fur. It looked incredibly scrawny and undernourished, despite being the size of a horse. Its smell rivaled the gully behind Sati, and the goat's horizontal slit-shaped pupils were freaking her out. The only pretty thing on the animal was its horns. Two pearl colored horns stuck out of the creature's forehead. They were the longest that Sati had ever seen, easily over two feet long, and wickedly sharp. The popping sound Sati had heard was the sound of the shoulder strap of her backpack coming loose. The goat was right now munching contentedly on something that it had taken from her bag. It was munching on her carrot sticks.

Sati's stunned visage became one of anger, not so much at the goat eating

her food, but at the fact that she did not do scared very well. But anger was something that she was a specialist at. She now realized why her casting failed. The creature had meant her no harm, but now she was out of some valuable salt. She ran forward and grabbed the zip lock bag with her carrot sticks.

“Give that to me right now!” She yelled at the goat. At this time a drenched and stinky Norman had joined them, his golden eyes round and wide filled with delight, awe, and desire. His locs were a dripping sticky mess, but he did not notice.

“Sati, can we keep him?” was the first thing Norman asked.

Sati did not answer him because she was afflicted by a bout of sneezes. The goat used her momentary distraction to tear the zip lock bag in half, causing it to rain carrots. Once its rump was in Sati's face it continued to chew on its prize, ignoring the little Indian girl beating at its side demanding what the goat now believed was its own food. Sati gave up, grabbed her backpack, readjusting the strap and slipping it back on her shoulders. Only then did she turn her flashing eyes to Norman.

“*Can we keep him!?* Of course we cannot keep him! Do you smell him? Do you smell you?” Sati demanded pinching her nose in disgust. This irritated her nose further and she sneezed herself into dizziness.

He sympathetically patted Sati on the shoulder, removing his hand quickly when she tried to twist it.

“What’s wrong with you? Do you have a cold?” he asked.

When the sneezing stopped, Sati shook her head, “I don’t think so,” she said. “It’s probably the side effects of the casting. I did a protection cast, and the trade off is that I-” She began to sneeze again and waved Norman away. After seeing that she was digging in her backpack for something, Norman walked up to the goat. The animal had finished its meal, and was looking around for more. When its eyes rested on Sati, she shrieked and hid behind Norman.

“There isn't anything else for you,” she said, between blowing her nose. “Shoo! Go away.”

Despite her vigorous “shooing” motions, the goat did not leave. It gave Norman a long sniff; it zeroed in on his bracelet and sniffed it aggressively. When it began to chew on the bracelet, Norman pushed its head away. The animal satisfied itself by licking the boy's face. Norman giggled and patted its side, at the same time wiping away the goat saliva. Since Norman's hand was already dirty, Sati did not know the point in wiping away the saliva, it only made gully-muck stick to his face. The goat then pushed past Norman and stood in front of Sati.

It lowered its head to Sati, until the horns were right above her head. The

goat paused, as if waiting for something. Sati put her hands on her hips.

“Well? What do you want? You have already damaged my bag, drained me of salt, and ate some of our snacks. I have nothing else for you.”

The goat still remained in front of her, staring with its strange eyes. Sati's sigh seemed to start from her toes, and then rush out of her lips. She cautiously patted it on the forehead, between the horns. The goat bleated loudly in her face, voicing its appreciation. Sati moved to the creature's side facing Norman.

“It's okay I guess...AHHHHHH!” Sati ended with a scream, because as soon as she had moved to the goat's side, it had kneeled down and pushed its head between her legs. With a tilt of its head the goat caused Sati to slid back and land on a scrawny, yet strong back. Sati opened her mouth to voice her disapproval, but almost swallowed her tongue as the goat bit onto Norman's collar and lifted the boy off his feet. With the two kids in its possession the goat leaped into the gully. Then following Norman's path, the goat's feet found purchase as it went down, over, and up the gully, and to the other side. Once there it opened its mouth, dropping Norman, and shook its back until Sati slid off. Sati stared in shock at the creature. Norman stared in delight.

“That. Was. WICKED!” Norman yelled in pleasure. “Billy rocks the socks!”

Then Norman proceeded to pat the goat appreciatively, and began telling the goat how great it was, and how nice it was for helping, and to ignore the cold stare of Sati because she was often mad but forgave easily, and asking the creature if it wanted more snacks. Sati stared at the two of them in dumb amazement. The goat bleated in pleasure at being rubbed down by Norman. Sati could think of nothing to say to discourage Norman in his praise of the creature, so she settled on holding on to her glare. When minutes went by and both boy and goat did nothing to even hint that they were paying her any attention, Sati cleared her throat loudly...and sneezed.

Norman finally looked her way, and seeing her incline her head towards the woods, Norman gave Billy one more pat, and walked towards the sneezing girl. Both kids turned and walked into the woods; neither evinced any of the foreboding feelings that had so unsettled Norman's grandma hours before. Billy, who had been chewing enthusiastically on a discarded can while enjoying the praise, followed behind.

Chapter 6

“Soooo...Are we lost?” Norman asked after they had been walking for a couple of hours “That tree looks very familiar.”

Sati didn't bother to look up. She was aiming a flashlight at her castbook,

oft-times journal, and she was researching some things to avoid in the woods. She finally found what she was looking for and brightened.

“How are we supposed to find Gramma?” Norman continued, but directed the question to the goat. He was riding Billy, as if the goat was a horse. The goat didn’t seem to mind; it would bend its head every now and then, and tear some shrubs, or weed, or plant from the earth. “How big are these woods?”

Billy bleated in response and went back to chewing, Norman wondered how shrubs tasted. Probably like cabbage, he thought. He hated cabbage. He looked at Sati as she traced her book with a finger, and murmured to herself.

“Probably really big,” he finished, realizing that his only audience was Billy.

“Let’s stop for a bit,” Sati said before hunkering down, beneath a tree.

Norman slid off Billy, and walked over to Sati, peering over her shoulder, she stiffened, irritated.

“You are blocking the light, Norm,” she said.

“What are you doing?” he asked.

“Reading,” she shut the book.

“Why?”

“Because I have an idea.”

“What?”

“I don’t know yet,” she opened her book and pulled it up to her nose, effectively blocking Norman. “If I could finish, I will let you know.”

Norman remained where he was, trying to see the scribbles in Sati’s book, but she made it hard by continuing to move and squirm away. He heaved a sigh, and jumped on Billy’s back.

“Mush!” he yelled.

The goat shrugged Norman off its back, and settled on a patch of grass a few feet away from Sati, who was leaning back into the tree, in an attempt to get comfortable. She continually alternated the flashlight between both hands.

Norman circled the tree, and sat on the other side. Billy the goat closed its eyes, belly full on shrubs, a discarded can, a piece of plastic with a hint of curry sauce on it, and carrots.

“Norm?” Sati called.

“Hmmm?” he responded, fingering the newly acquired bracelet, the gift from Fatman.

“What are you doing?”

“Sitting,” he said, taking off his backpack.

“Don’t wander off,” she said.

“Okay,” Norman took the photo of his parents out of the backpack. He tried to see the similarities between his father and himself; he traced his mother’s face with a finger, wondering if he had her nose. He couldn’t tell, he didn’t think so. He had a longer nose than she did. His mouth seemed to be a mix of both of them, and his eyes, so light brown that it appeared gold, looked like neither of them. Norman put the photo away, feeling sad, in addition to feeling lost. He looked at the surroundings.

It had gotten very dark, very quickly. But thankfully, the moon provided ample light. A constant breeze caused the ankle high grass to sway gently back and forth, and the leaves on the tree branches rustled in response. Norman hung his backpack on a particularly low hanging branch above, taking out a bottle of water, and taking a sip. Overhead, the stars twinkled, and Norman wondered why he couldn’t see any planes. He wondered about the accident that took his parent’s lives.

He wasn’t sure if he remembered the accident, what he thought he knew, was only what Uncle Winston told him; he was at Norman Manley Airport, with Norman, when it happened. His parents were constantly flying back and forth,

between America and Jamaica. His mother worked for a travel agency, and flew for cheap. His father was studying International law.

Uncle Winston told him that something was wrong with the plane's engines. An unexplained fire had spread. And from the ground looking up, onlookers' joyous waves turned to screams of terror as the explosion rocked the sky.

Norman didn't remember any of it, his great uncle told him he was crying on that day, and wouldn't stop. That somehow, Norman knew what happened and what it meant. Winston told him that for about month after the incident, Norman was still not the same.

But Norman did not remember any of that. When he thought of his parents, nothing came to mind. When he thought of the incident that kept him in Jamaica, he could not recall a plane or a trip to the airport. For Norman, life began and ended at 1204 Graffiti Way, Waterford...his home.

A small ball of lights, glimmering a few inches above the grass directly in front of Norman, captured his attention. At first, Norman thought they were fireflies, but on closer inspection, he realized that this was not the case. He got to his feet and tried to clasp one of the tiny balls of light, and they separated, before floating away. Curious, Norman moved a few feet forward, reaching again, only

to have the lights float a few more feet away.

“What are you?” Norman whispered.

“Hmmm?” Sati asked from the other side of the tree, barely hearing Norman, and not really paying attention.

Norman didn't hear her either, so intent was he on following the lights. With each gentle gust of wind, they moved farther and farther away. Norman dropped the water bottle to the floor, and thought briefly of getting the second flashlight that Sati had packed, but the moon was bright in the sky, and there were no clouds, just the occasional branch. He chased after the fleeing lights.

“...Although they have useful abilities in finding anything lost, jackalantans are known to be mischievous spirits and novice casters and novice obeah users are warned away from them. They cause many a traveler to lose their way, wander into rivers, veer from a known destination, fall into pits, or worse. They delighted in attracting the unwary into unfortunate circumstances. Jackalantans do not care if they bring about the demise of those who followed them; human life to them is generally interchangeable with termite life or something else on a lower level. However, they were not evil. They existed for fun and new experiences, and get bored extremely easily. A bored jackalantan's

idea of fun is to see how long a person will follow them, and where they could lead a person. While not evil they can be deadly...”

Sati closed her book and considered the pros and cons of her plan. In order to find Linda, she and Norman would need to find a jackalantan, but how to find one? And was it worth the risk? She stood up and stretched, before circling the tree to find Norman.

“Guess what Norm; I know how to find Linda, but it could be dangerous...”

Sati eyes widened as she came to the spot where she had last heard Norman speak. He wasn't there.

“Norm?” she called.

There was nothing, the wind had died down. Her voice sounded unnaturally loud. She thought about what could be listening to her out in the dark.

“Norman,” she said, quieter this time.

Billy the goat, raised his head, and stared at the girl. She stared back.

“Do you know where...?” Sati began, before realizing what she was doing. She was talking to a goat. She was as crazy as Norman.

Billy rose from the floor and surveyed the area, Sati swore he was looking

for Norman, and her thoughts were confirmed when the goat circled the tree, just as she did before.

Sati saw Norman's backpack on a branch, and an almost full water bottle in the distance. Her fright for her friend made her forget any and all fear of what might have been listening.

"NORMMMMMMM," she yelled.

"Geez, you move fast," Norman muttered, as he ran after the lights.

He didn't know how long he had been chasing them, but his legs had begun to burn. Norman had not been so far into the woods without an adult before, and he had never been here at night. He didn't know enough to be worried at the fact that he could not hear any of the sounds that insects made at night, he didn't realize that the wind had died down, he did not pay attention to how far from Sati and Billy he had strayed until it was almost too late. Norman abruptly stopped. Some yards away, the lights stopped as well.

"What am I doing?" he asked himself. He could not give an answer.

Norman turned back in the direction he came and realized he was more lost than he was before. Worse than that, he was alone. He felt a prickling sensation of fear for the first time since coming to the woods...the woods. Was he still in the

woods? Something was wrong, he couldn't think straight.

"Don't be afraid," a voice said from behind him.

Norman turned around and saw that lights were a few feet from him.

"Did you just talk?" he asked.

The lights collected together until they formed one round shape, the size of volleyball.

"I'm with you," the light said, "There's no need to be afraid."

The spherical light elongated and took on the shape of a man. As the light dimmed Norman saw a familiar face. His mouth dropped open, as the man smiled.

"Dad?" Norman said, his voice breaking.

Sati ran through the woods, yelling out Norman's name and hearing no response. Her vision was blurry, and she held back tears.

Why didn't he listen? Where did he go? When did he go?

She was encumbered not only by her own bag, but Norman's as well. Directly in front of her, Billy led the way through the steadily decreasing grass. Sati also noticed the ground, which was firm where they had first stopped, was

now soggy. The trees became straggly and thin, and the branches were sharp and grasping. Sati had to stop several times, and pull her long hair and billowing sweater sleeves from reaching trees. One particularly violent pull left a long bloody line on her arm.

“NORM,” Sati cupped her hands to her mouth and yelled.

Billy had stopped moving, and bleated back at her repeatedly.

“I don’t know where he is,” she said. She wasn’t sure if she was talking to herself or to the goat.

Billy bleated again, coming back to Sati as she tried to catch her breath. None-too-gently, Billy butted the little girl, in her back, urging her onward.

“I said I don’t know where to go,” Sati repeated.

Billy suddenly stopped and trotted away, Sati looked at the direction he moved in, and squinted. Off in the distance, she could swear she saw lights.

“Where have you been?” Norman asked again, following the retreating figure of his father.

“Not now, just a little bit further,” his dad said.

“Why didn’t you tell Gramma you were still alive,” Norman continued, “I think she misses you.”

“Don’t fall behind.”

“What about Mom, is she alive?”

His father didn’t respond. Norman usually was not bothered by people not responding to his questions, he asked a lot of them. But this time, it bothered him. He stopped moving.

“Have you been here this entire time,” he made a wide gesture around him, to indicate the woods.

“I will answer all your questions if you follow me,” his father stopped moving, but looked at Norman impatiently.

“Why can’t you answer now?” Norman asked

His father began to stamp his foot angrily, “Because I don’t wanna answer here.”

The pleasure that he felt when he first saw his dad began to be replaced by something else, as Norman saw his father stomping his foot. It wasn’t something he would expect from an adult. Norman looked around again.

“What happened? Where are we?” he asked.

They were no longer in vibrant woodland; they were now in a swamp. Norman looked at his sneakers and saw that they were covered in mud. He inhaled and smelled decay...and rot. The trees appeared twisted and wrong, mocking the inviting and vibrant plant life before. Norman's father began to jump up and down in frenzy.

“You ruined everything you silly human, everything!”

His father's body began to shimmer, and Norman could see straight behind him.

“You're not my Dad,” Norman said.

“Of course I'm not.”

Norman could barely hear the thing as it spoke; it seemed to be losing its voice.

“He's dead!” the thing continued.

Norman took a few steps away from the thing. It burst into little balls of light and surrounded him. The boy batted at them and screamed, running forward, but unable to see because of the dancing lights. He felt a sucking motion on his foot, his momentum arrested. Norman fell, face first, into thick and smelly mud. It caked his face, and some of it got into his mouth. He felt like he was going to

retch. Norman heard something speaking in gleeful tones.

“I got one!”

Chapter 7

Linda dreamt of the past, and her son was still alive. She dreamt that she found out ahead of time that the plane was going to crash, and she found a way to tell him. She dreamt that she was not such a strict mother, so her son did not have to flee from her to that white woman. Linda ignored the fact that her own father was mixed, and that her skin was a fairer shade than most in Waterford. She dreamt knowing it was a dream, and refused to wake up. She suffered no memory loss, quite accurately remembering the woman who attacked her, the woman who knew of Linda, even though Linda knew nothing of her.

No, this dream world was better. In her dream, even though Norman's mother was not around, Norman still was. Her brain whispered to her that this did not make sense. If Norman was alive, then his white mama must be alive also. But Linda ignored her brain; it only got her into trouble. Wasn't that the reason she was out here in the first place, searching for a worthless brother? A brother who betrayed her to whatever that thing was!

The thing was Sou. And Linda's anger, more than anything else, caused her to open her eyes, and look around. Green, she thought to herself. There were

green leaves everywhere. And her butt hurt badly. She cupped her ear, as she heard something. Linda exhaled wearily; the whispers of the woods were back.

Linda rolled on her side, off the prickly bush she was lying on. In her hand was a john crow feather. She had used it to escape the woman, another gift from Radica. It was given to Linda a few years back, for a birthday. The feather of a john crow would transport the bearer up to one mile away from the spot they first used it. The only problem was the feather would take the user absolutely anywhere, as long as it was deemed safer. Many a person, found himself or herself, appearing a mile away, in a lake, over a waterfall, or on a busy highway because these locations were safer than whatever it was they were fleeing from. There was a story about a man fleeing a group of lugarhoos, who used the feather, only to find himself a mile up in the sky. Linda counted herself lucky that she only suffered from a few thorns in her ass.

She picked herself up; wondering how much time had passed. It was still dark and the forest was alive, not only the whispering, but with chattering and chirping. She quietly and quickly patted the ground making sure she was not missing anything, satisfied that nothing was lost, at least nothing of importance, Linda started walking again. She reached into one of her many pockets, and pulled out another saltshaker, congratulating herself on her forethought. As she walked, a clear line materialized in front of her. This was a line that connected

Linda to her twin brother. Regardless of where they were, they could always find each other. Linda stopped, and stared at the scouting line, hearing a rustling behind her.

She ran silently over to a thick copse of bushes and hunkered down, trembling slightly. What next? What could possibly happen now? She was still a little bit shaky from using the feather, and did not have the desire to use it again. She did not even know how many times she could use it. She stared in the direction of the sound. Her eyes still contained the true-seeing properties, bestowed by the yampee; however she noticed it was fading. Colors were not as vibrant as they were when she first rubbed it on her eyes; it was enough to see a shape emerging from behind a tree, not even twenty feet from where Linda was previously laying. The shape was short, and hovering above the ground, with vine-like hair trailing behind. Sou had found her!

Linda closed her eyes in exhaustion, but she felt herself rising. Her instincts told her to attack the woman. It was common sense, and slight nausea that slowed down her actions. Before she could reveal herself, she felt something pinch her hand. She looked down and saw that it was a spider. Linda raised the spider until it was level with her face, peering at its features; it was a small black spider, not venomous. Linda shook her hand and the spider disappeared below her. Linda returned her gaze to Sou, she was talking to herself...no. Linda realized

Sou was talking to someone else as a shape materialized from the darkness.

“I said ‘where is the old bitch’?” Sou repeated.

The shape next to the Sou was no more than four and a half feet tall. Like the woman who floated next to it, the creature was nude. It stood up straight at times, shivering slightly, and then, as if it did not have enough strength in its feet, it would squat down to the floor. It was in constant motion; never remain in one position for long. Even from this distance Linda saw that the creature had long pointed ears.

Instead of responding using any commonly understood language or dialect, it made a sound from deep within its throat. Sou seemed to understand this, because she abruptly made a slicing motion with her hand.

“No more excuses. I need her; she is an excellent bargaining chip. Have you spoken to your brothers and sisters?”

Another sound from the creature.

“Good. Where are they?”

This time there was nothing from the creature, only motion. It raised a thin arm, and indicated different areas, all around. Linda was momentarily frightened because it seemed to point in her direction, however its hand soon returned to its

side. It was then Linda noticed movement in the shadows, all around her. More diminutive shapes began to materialize. Linda covered her mouth, shocked at the number. There must have been at least fifty moving within the shadows. Linda hugged herself, as the temperature in the woods began to drop, as all sound faded, and the creatures began to squat and shiver in unison. She saw movement next to her, and bit down on her tongue to keep from screaming. One of them separated from the darkness, it was so close to her she could reach out and touch it. It was then that Linda got a clear look at the creature, and was able to name it.

It had grey skin and its face was completely blank, not in the way that it had no expression...*it had no face*. Where the eyes should have been, was sunken and smooth flesh. No nose from which to breathe, instead there was a slight rise that hinted where the nose should have been. No mouth from which to speak, not even a hint of a mouth. Its legs appeared normal from the pelvis to the ankles, but the creature's feet were backwards, causing it to move strangely and awkwardly. The hands ended in razor sharp claws, some jagged and others pointy. It was a creature Linda had wrote of many times before. It was a creature that everyone knew of in Waterford. It was a douen.

They were small and strong and vicious. Driven by a desire to hurt and fueled by rage. Anyone in these demons' path was prey. Thankfully, the lack of eyes and nose robbed them of vital ways to catch their prey. But their hearing was

spectacular. Many were under the misconception that the douens could smell their prey. Linda did not think so. The douens were drawn to souls, and they could sense the soul from a great distance. Since many did not know how the douens managed this feat, they attributed it to an advanced sense of smell.

Being so close to the creature further convinced Linda. Her clothes had an odor of smoke and wine on them, that she was sure carried to the creature. The lack of reaction from the douen meant that it could not smell her at all. The creature's body shook with such intensity; Linda felt the vibrations through the soil beneath her. She was surprised that she had not noticed the creatures before, and wondered how long they were here. With shock Linda thought of the woods around her. Did everything go silent before the douen arrived or after?

The woods! These shift in sounds, the whispering that she heard. Did it possess meaning? Linda's heart began to beat faster as her thoughts began to bleed together. There must be a connection, Linda thought in excitement. She brought her fingernail to her teeth, chewing as she thought, her actions halting, as she noticed the douen closest to her moving.

Its head had been turning slowly in her direction. At first Linda did not pay it any attention, but soon it became obvious that it sensed her. Inch by inch, the douen started to face her. Linda's heart began to race, as if she had run a marathon. The creature's head turned faster. It began to move toward her, and in

her fear, Linda stayed put.

What was it doing? Had it heard her? What gave her away?

All of these thoughts flashed through her brain, the douen shifted its stance, now completely facing her. The douens raised a hand to its ear. Linda's heart was pounding in her chest like a drum; she feared it would break right through.

She stared in horror into the creature's sightless eyes, inhaling softly. The creature's reek was of long unwashed skin. As it inched closer to Linda she saw behind its hideous veil. She could almost make out the child the douen had been. Linda could see a small black boy, with a wide smile, and a curious nature. His head was large, but he would eventually grow into it. But regardless of the size of his head, he had beautiful brown eyes. Did he come from her town? Maybe not. The kids were guarded fiercely in Waterford, because they were few in number. Maybe he came from Ocho Rios? St. Anne? He would have been Norman's age wouldn't he?

Norman.

...Norm

...Her grandchild.

Linda brought Norman's face to her mind, and felt her heart slow. She had left him in the capable hands of Radica. He would be okay. She had failed him, she would not be able to bring back Winston, and Linda added this to another list of failures in her life: her husband, her son, her grandson...But she knew that Norman loved her. What was more, Norman knew that she loved him, and he would be okay. Linda smiled sadly; her hand inched to her pocket. There was just too much in these woods. The fire-bitch and now the douen! She knew rice and salt worked on douens. She had a bag of rice in one of her pockets from a few weeks ago, unfortunately she was no caster and could not manipulate the properties of either salt or rice, and she did not have enough grains for each and every one of them anyway. But she would die fighting. Norman would never know how she died, but Linda imagined that if he did, he would be proud that she died fighting. These thoughts calmed Linda down, her heartbeat slowed down. She was ready.

The creature suddenly cocked its head; a low groan escaped its throat. It began to squat and stand repeatedly, agitated. Linda did not move, she confidently held onto the bag of rice. Finally, the douen stopped moving, and eventually it turned away from Linda, shoulders sagging in disappointment. Emitting another groan it moved closer to Sou, and the other douens. Linda didn't dare to breathe, as the creature focused its attention back on Sou. After a few seconds, and finally convincing herself that she was safe, Linda followed the douen's example, and

listened to Sou's words.

“Yes. This is enough for now. I want you to spread out and find the woman. I need her to help convince Winston.”

Sou paused at this point, pouting slightly. The douens who surrounded her tilted their heads, waiting for her to go on. Sou smiled at the attention from her audience. She stretched her arms up to the sky, her breast showing through her long locs. Some of the elder douens, those who were male, began to moan, shivering with excitement from the woman's display. Linda watched all of this from the relative safety of her hiding point. She felt a moment of pity for the douens; some of them must certainly have the desires of men, despite the bodies of boys. The douen who had first communicated with Sou, quickly and daringly, stroked one of her locs. The reaction was swift and severe.

Sou snarled and withdrew from its touch, and at the same time her hair wriggled, grew, and shot forward. The creature sensing its plight hunkered down, gathering strength in its legs and hopped into the air. Linda's mouth dropped open, at the height the douen attained. However fast the creature moved, the hair moved faster.

Sou's hair encircled the douen's leg and slammed it down viciously to the floor. The douen put up a desperate fight, ripping away chunks of hair, as it coiled

around the douen's tiny body. However each time it would rip of one of the locs, another would grow back and take its place, lifting the creature in the air and repeatedly slamming it back to the floor. The other douens gathered around their fallen brother, some of them beating at the hair while others tried to pull the entrapped douen from its prison...nothing worked. Finally the creature lay still on the grass, its brothers and sisters let go of Sou's hair, dropping their hands to their sides.

Walking forward, Sou stared at the body on the ground, her teeth visible. She tilted her head quickly to the side, causing the locs to give a final constriction. The force from her hair caused the dead creature's body to explode, showering the forest in red droplets. Linda gasped as a droplet hit her face; she covered her mouth quickly to stifle the rest of the sound. Sou was focused on the remnants of the douen; strips of skin were still caught in her locs. The remaining douens glared at Sou. She was oblivious to their anger, wringing the blood from her hair.

"No one touches me," she said quietly, still intent on her task. "None may touch me without my permission."

Nothing happened for some time. No breeze dared to enter this deadly foray, no errant beam of light found avenue through the dense foliage, and Sou continued twisting her hair, pulling out flecks of skin and sinew. The douens kept their faces and eyeless glances on her, and Linda still hid in the bushes. Linda

now grasped the feather. Nausea or not, she realized she could not hope to challenge this woman. Her only option would be to flee. She was about to do just that when she noticed a change coming over the douens.

They tilted their heads to the east, back in the direction of Waterford. Sou sensed the change and let go of her hair. She lowered herself to the ground, resting her feet gingerly. The creatures began to move as one, eastward. Sou's eyes widened, as did Linda. What new madness is this, Linda thought uneasily.

“What has happened?” Sou asked, mimicking the older woman's thoughts, grabbing the closest douen by the shoulders, and forcing it to turn towards her, “Do you know where the old woman is?”

The douen shook its head slowly, and grunted at Sou. The woman's face first registered shock, and then she slowly smiled.

“Children...? Where are they? How many...?” Sou questioned, shaking the creature slightly. It issued another sound. Sou let it go and spun around a few times, giggling like a little girl. She floated back to the air and her happiness melted from her face, to be replaced by greed.

“Go. Find them! Bring them to me.” The command appeared to be unnecessary as half the douens already left. Some were stumbling out of sight, while others bent down and then leapt impossibly high into the air. Linda heard

the impact their landing made in the distance. Sou's face twisted in a grimace at the fact that many of them appeared not to follow her lead. She yelled after their retreating forms.

“Do not turn them! I want to see them first!”

By then they were too far away to hear, but Sou nodded to herself anyway. Her command would be followed by the few douens who were completely under her control. And they were the strongest ones anyway, so that was all that mattered. The others were newly transformed douens. They had only been turned for two months to half a year. They still held on to their humanity, they still remembered childhood. That would change soon. Sou regained her smile, and sat on the air. She ran her hands through her hair.

“I wonder if she was fool enough to bring kids here,” Sou spoke to herself, “No matter. I will soon find out.”

With that Sou vanished. Linda blinked in shock. One second she was there, and the next she was simply gone. Such a tidy teleportation; any caster would be envious. Linda waited another couple of minutes and then emerged from the bushes. She tried to speak, but found that her throat had gone dry. Linda reached into her pocket and pulled out a glass of ice-cold water. She drank her fill and then returned the glass to her many-pocketed skirt.

“Children,” Linda said out loud. “What children would be in these woods?”

A horrible thought occurred to her. She brought to her mind an image of Norman, she then sent out a scouting line, similar to the one she used to find Winston. For those experienced in using a scouting line, they could tell by the color, the intensity, and the visibility, how close someone was to them. The line Linda sent out to Norman should have been dull and more of a whitish color. It would have indicated to her that Norman was a safe distance away, in Waterford. However, this line was of a medium yellow, hinting that Norman was close by. He was here in the woods.

Linda fell to the ground. The children the douens had sensed...Norman and Sati? What were they doing here? How could Radica let them get away from her Linda swore savagely. She caught herself before slipping into a rage. Radica would not have let them just leave. No, Sati was probably the architect of this debacle. Linda rose quickly from the dirt, brushing off her skirt, and straightening her hat. Now was not the time to blame...later she would put it squarely on Sati. Now was the time to find them, and save them. The john-crow feather? No! It would not take her in any one location; it may take her further away. She would have to walk, but she would have to move quickly.

Ignoring Radica’s voice, echoing in her head not to over use the salve,

Linda rubbed some all over her legs. First they felt numb, then as if they were on fire. Linda felt energy that she hadn't since she was a teenager. She put away the salve and ran towards Norman, using the scouting line. As she ran, she thought about her brother, but he would have to wait.

Chapter 8

Norman frantically moved his arms through the mud, trying to paddle to solid ground. However, he could only move one foot; the other was caught on something. Norman thought of all the horrible things that could be grabbing him, trying to pull him below the mud. He also remembered Uncle Winston telling him that the trick to getting out of quicksand was not to move, but he didn't remember if not moving, meant not sinking, and he was too afraid to find out.

“HELP,” he yelled out.

He could barely see because of the mud in his eyes, but he still could feel the warmth of the lights, and he saw the vague circular outline it made, after it coalesced into one form. The ball of light was silently hovering over him, and the mud was up to his stomach, and he was still sinking. Norman sucked in a deep breath, preparing to bellow again, when he heard something crashing through the woods.

“Norm?” the voice said.

“Sati?” Norman cried out in relief.

“Yeah,” Sati responded, “What are you doing?”

He noticed the lack of concern in her voice and cried out, “I’m in quicksand and I’m going to die.”

Billy had been eyeing the ball of light warily; it had floated above the three, as if it didn’t want to be within reach. After determining that the light would not come closer, Billy waded into the mud. Due to Billy’s unnaturally large size, the mud came right below its knees. Sati watched as Billy tried to pull Norman back to solid ground. The boy wasn’t making this easy, as he thrashed, back and forth, in the mud.

“Norman, stop moving,” Sati shouted.

“No, I’ll drown,” Norman moved faster.

Grimacing, Sati made a quick decision. She took off her backpack, and placed it on the ground with Norman’s. Then she waded into the mud. When she was next to Norman, she wiped the mud from his face. He blinked and looked into her face. Her hair was a mess, she had a long scar on her cheek, and she looked frustrated. She slapped him behind the head.

“Stand up,” she said.

Norman stopped his frenetic movements, and cautiously stood. The mud still only reached his waist. He reached down into the mud and pulled on what had caught his sneaker. A branch, still half concealed beneath the mud, was in his hand.

“Oh,” he said sheepishly.

“Why did you leave!?” Sati demanded, pulling him out of the mud and onto solid ground.

“That thing,” Norman pointed to the ball of light, which hovered back and forth, resuming its gentle motion that attracted Norman in the first place, “Turned into my dad. It tricked me and then I fell in here.”

Sati stared at the light, “That is a jackalantan, Norm,” she said as she wiped her hands on her pants. “They’re spirits that lead.”

“I know!” Norman said angrily. He chucked a stick at the jackalantan. It moved out of the way.

Billy’s eyes moved between the two kids and the jackalantan. The goat seemed content to remain in the mud.

“Help me kill it, Sati,” Norman picked up another stick, but Sati hit it out of his hand.

“Wait Norm,” she entreated, “We need it to find Linda.”

“Huh? How?” Norman was in the process of searching for another projectile to pelt at the jackalantan.

“They lead a people wherever they want to go.”

“It tried to kill me.”

“They do that too,” Sati said, inching closer to the jackalantan.

Billy had finally come out of the mud and onto firmer ground. He was sniffing in the direction of the spirit. Norman thought the goat did not look pleased.

“How does it change into people?” Norman asked.

Sati shook her head, “It doesn’t. Hand me my flashlight.”

He reached down and picked it up from the floor, handing it to her, “It did.”

Sati pointed the flashlight at the Jackalantan. The creature immediately reacted, moving towards the light. It pulsed, like a heart.

“It lured you away, to see how far you’d go. In order to do that, it showed you what you want to see. It’s either young...or stupid, because it didn’t know

what to do with you once it had you. Let's hope for the former. I don't know what to do with a stupid jackalantan. Get the clear bottle out of my bag. It's towards the bottom."

Norman fished around in her bag, and retrieved the bottle. "Now what?" he said.

Sati grabbed it from Norman, held it in front of the flashlight, and shined the light through it. The jackalantan seemed enchanted by the light, it came within arm's reach of Sati, and she inched even closer.

"It's warm," she whispered.

"I know," Norman said.

She quickly swung the bottle at the spirit. There was a sound like a vacuum, and Sati covered the bottle with its lid. She then let it go, and it remained in the air. Inside was the jackalantan, in condensed form, and trapped.

"I got one," Sati smiled in delight.

"...they can key in to what you desire Norm. You saw your parents, your dad specifically. Linda would've seen...I dunno, maybe Winston. I would've seen...something else. That's how they get people to follow them."

The three were walking behind the jackalantan in the bottle. Sati had asked it, in Patois, to lead them to Linda Lowe. She wasn't sure if it would work, but the jackalantan had responded immediately. It had begun to float off and when Norman had asked her how she knew it wasn't taking them to more quicksand, she could not think of an answer, so she told him to shut up. Then Norman had begun to ask questions about the spirit.

“You sure it can find people? It doesn't have a nose. How does it work?” he asked.

“It works better than a bloodhound,” Sati said, picking at her arms. Dry mud caked her them and her legs. She was dirtier than she could ever remember being. “And I don't know how it does what it does,” she finished.

Norman tried to climb on Billy, but the goat kept on shaking him off, as if it was upset. Norman shot the goat an offended look, which the goat returned. It was strange, having a staring match with a goat. Norman finally gave up, feeling bad for losing.

“I don't know why we're following an attempted murderer!”

Sati threw her hands in the air, “How did it attempt to kill you? How were you going to drown in mud up to your stomach!?”

“Something was grabbing me-”

“A branch-”

“It’s mean-”

“It’s in a bottle-”

“It said Dad was dead!”

Sati looked at him, not sure what to say to that, not sure what Norman meant by it either. Norman knew his father was dead, so instead of answering directly, she focused on what she did know.

“It cannot say anything, Norm; it spoke in your head. All an illusion-”

“I’m not having fun anymore!”

Norman shouted the last part. His hands balled up and to his side. His voice cut through the frogs croaking and the insects chirping in the swamp. Sati stopped and stared at him.

“This isn’t supposed to be fun, Norm,” she said.

“Gramma has always been okay before, Sati.” He returned.

“You heard what Mom said,” Sati began. “You heard what Fatman said. She is not okay now.”

“They can’t know that,” he whispered, “They can’t know for sure. She’s

strong.”

“What do you mean Norm? Do you want to go back?” Sati said.

“Yes,” a quick and quiet response.

Sati didn’t speak.

“I almost died, Sati. And I don’t want douens to get me. It’s dark and I’m cold, and I’m wet. I want to go home.”

Sati paused. Norman looked away into the woods. The sounds of the swamp resumed. Somewhere in the distance, an unknown animal was grunting and keening, another unknown animal responded with the same noise.

“The douens can’t hurt you, Norm. I will protect you,” she said.

“NO YOU WON’T,” Norman shouted into the night. “How can you? You’re not even a real caster!”

Sati’s mouth dropped open in anger. She abruptly closed it, and considered. She looked like she was going to try and convince Norman. He was ready though. He folded his arms, like Gramma did, when serious. Sati saw this, and recognized it for what it was. She raised her hands and the jackalantan in the bottle floated to her.

“Take us back to Waterford,” she looked down at her clothes, “But first,

take us to the Weeping Tree.”

Norman head jerked up, “The what?”

“One more stop first. Then home, ok?”

He looked suspicious but relented. Norman nodded.

“Ok.”

Chapter 9

The jackalantan led them out of the swamp and back into the woods. They walked for another hour, before coming to a thicket of young poplar trees. In the middle of the trees was one that dwarfed the rest. The branches and the leaves drooped downwards, as if the tree was sad, and even though it wasn't raining, water dropped from its branches and leaves, forming a two foot pool of water by the base.

“The Weeping Tree!” Norman said in excitement.

Sati looked at him, surprised. “You know it?” she said.

He nodded, “From Uncle Winston's stories.”

“Then you don't know about it,” she said shortly. Norman gave her an angry look, but she had already turned away from him. She took off her backpack,

and walked underneath the tree, collecting some tears in a few vials. She carefully put a stopper on the top of the vials, before returning to sit down on a plush section of grass, rubbing mud from her legs. The jackalantan was circling the crying tree, having found its target. Sati looked expectantly at Norman, as he examined the tree. He soon realized she was waiting for something.

“What?” he asked her.

“What are you doing?”

“Why are you looking at me?” Norman asked

“Because you stink,” she said.

“I do not...” Norman began, and then he took an expert sniff of himself, and flinched. “Well, maybe I smell a little,” he admitted.

“And your pet goat does too,” Sati said pointedly, moving from rubbing her legs to her toes.

Norman glanced quickly at Billy, who was chewing something in the corner, he then whispered to Sati.

“There is no need to be rude to Billy. He can't help his smell.”

Sati continued with her feet, wondering if she should let Norman know there was no way Billy could understand what they were talking about, but she

decided against it. After her legs were a cleaner, she took out her journal and began to write. She noticed Norman had not moved and put down her journal and pen.

“Norm, go stand under the Weeping Tree and let one of its tears fall on your head, make sure that Billy does it also.”

Norman looked at her, “Why?”

“Just do it.”

Norman motioned to Billy, who came over immediately. After Norman’s experience with the jackalantan the goat did not seem willing to leave the boy’s side. “Okay boss,” Norman said to appease Sati.

Norman took off his sneakers, and began to place them on the floor, but Sati shook her head.

“Carry the shoes with you,” she instructed.

He shrugged, doing what she asked, and soon enough he stood underneath one of the boughs. He let a tear fall on his head. Where the tear made contact, Norman felt a tingling. The tingle soon enveloped his head, spreading to his neck, then his arms, then his belly, and eventually all over. The odor wafting from his body for the better part of the day vanished. His body felt refreshed. Mud, grime,

and worse disappeared from his skin, clothes, and hair. He was cleaner than he had ever been or ever desired to be in his ten years of life. Norman looked at Billy and saw that the goat was similarly clean, but not as happy.

“Rockstone!” Norman swore out loud, holding his sneakers out in front of him. They were white again. Even the grime from under his fingernails was gone. Sati walked to where Norman stood. She uncorked a vial and caught some of the tears from the tree.

“The tears of the Weeping Tree are known for its cleansing properties. It’s able to heal, too.”

As they both left the tree, Norman looked at Sati questioningly. “Aren’t you gonna too?” he inclined his head to the tree.

Sati shook her head, “I’m not as dirty.” She went back to the spot where she deposited her bag and journal, resuming writing. Norman jumped on top of Billy and kicked him in the ribs, urging him forward, hoping to ride the giant goat through the woods. Sati's mood must have been contagious because Billy paid the boy no attention.

“I hate O.R.T.O,” he whispered in a loud voice to the goat. To which Sati gave him a glacial look, and Billy did not respond at all. He was much more interested in why his coat that previously smelled of ripe strong goat, suddenly

smelled like nothing at all.

Realizing that Billy had no desire to carry him anywhere, Norman got off and sat next to Sati. He stayed quiet as long as he could, trying to give her time to write. His mind wandered to his grandma and his great-uncle.

“I know a story about the tree,” he said.

“Yeah, a ‘Winston story’, right?” She didn’t look up.

“One day a group of men went deep into the woods, chasing a deer with machetes and guns. Uncle Winston said the deer was beloved of Papa Bois, and she was under his protection-”

“Who’s she?” Sati put down her book, curious despite herself.

“The deer,” Norman said.

“The doe,” Sati corrected.

“Are you telling the story?”

Sati rolled her eyes, but quieted down.

Norman smiled, allowing himself a moment of triumph before continuing.

“The men just did it for fun, not for food or anything! And even though it ran for a long time, the deer...” he saw Sati’s look. “The doe got tired and stopped here. And instead of using their guns, the men used their machetes and killed it. The tree saw this and started to cry.”

“Papa Bois heard the doe’s cries, and came here to find them, but he wasn’t fast enough. All that was left was the crying tree. He felt bad for the tree so he mixed the blood and dirt together and rubbed it into the tree, so that the doe could live on forever.”

Norman scratched his head, trying to remember if there was anything else. Sati waited impatiently for him to continue.

“The end,” he said.

“The end?” Sati scoffed.

Norman’s face turned red, “Yes. The end!”

“That’s dumb,” she said. “Why does it still cry then?”

“I dunno,” Norman shrugged. “It’s still sad?”

Sati put down her journal, “The truth is that Papa Bois used to be a gentle god, but over the centuries he found that man got more and more vicious, the death of his favorite doe caused him to finally do, what he promised himself he never would. He interfered. Papa Bois spoke into the winds, invoking powerful rites, and forever altering these woods. Each time someone entered, they would leave a bit of themselves behind. The more they entered the woods the harder it would be to leave; soon they would not be able to separate from it. When this happens, when a person is one with the woods, Papa Bois would come, and stare into their hearts, to see if they were the hunters that have escaped him, or just like them.”

Norman fumed, “It was my story Sati, not yours. If you knew about it why didn’t you say something?”

“Oh come on, Norm. You know what hunters’ do, right? They hunt! And when those hunters who killed his doe, came back to these woods, Papa Bois did things even more horrible to them, than they could ever did to his prized pet.”

Norman paled, inching away from her. “I knew that,” he said.

Sati shook her head, and picked up her journal. “Wake up, Norm,” she said, “According to the story, the reason why the tree with the doe in it continues to cry is because it’s sorry for Papa Bois. The truth is the doe cries because Papa Bois is supposed to change men, men aren’t supposed to change him. A god gave up!”

Norman stood up. “What the other kids say about you is true. You’re mean,” he returned to Billy’s side, and threw himself on the soft grass, his back to Sati.

Sati re-emerged from the journal.

“And *you’re* stupid if you think that just because you *will* things to happen, or because everyone tells you nice stories, that bad things don’t happen. The only good endings that you are gonna get are from Winston’s half-finished stories.”

Billy bleated at her; Sati thought it sounded angry. Norman covered his ears, and didn’t respond.

An hour passed, and both kids had not spoken to each other. Sati knew that she could play the silent game better than Norman could, and after inspecting him closely for a few minutes, she guessed that he was sleeping. She put her journal in her backpack, and called the jackalantan, which she named Obo, to her. Obo floated to her and she instructed it to hover over to Norman. Billy raised its head, as Obo's light disturbed its sleep. Sati moved closer to Norman, Billy watching her every move. She shook Norman gently. He didn't move. She heard his snores, and she quickly and carefully removed the bracelet that he received in Waterford from his arm. She was so unnerved by the goat's eyes that she hurriedly backed away, and left the clearing with the Weeping Tree. Obo followed her, providing light. When she was a few feet away, she tapped one of the ebony stones. It flickered in the light but nothing happened. She hit it a little harder.

"I know you are there, Fatman," she said. "Back in Waterford I sensed that you put a little of you in the bracelet."

Still nothing from the bracelet, Sati put it on the largest rock she could find, and took a step backwards, looking uneasily in the direction where Norman and Billy rested. Crickets sung back and forth in the night, and dragonflies floated

lazily in the breeze. She then looked around, and picked up a heavy rock. Holding it above her head she stood over the bracelet.

“If you won’t stop pretending, I’ll smash you,” she threatened.

“The young Persaud,” Laughter poured out of the bracelet, then a voice, “You are playing a dangerous game, Sati.”

Sati knelt close to the rock; peering into one of the ebony stones, “I need your help, Fatman,” she began. “Norm is scared and wants to go back. I’m not ready yet. I need to complete my Casting Quest, in order to be a full-fledged caster. I have to face a real challenge, and nothing has happened so far. I thought you said these woods would give me a challenge?”

“Didn’t I already help you get Norman Lowe to join you on your quest? By telling him his grandma was in trouble?”

“Mom...mom said she was in trouble as well,” she stammered.

“Did she tell you to go rescue her?”

Sati cheeks burned, “We are going to help Linda!”

A dry chuckle, “How are you going to help her? What can an apprentice caster and a normal boy do to help a grown woman, especially a woman who has traveled these woods before?”

Sati fell silent, doubts sifting through her mind.

“Nonetheless, I have helped you find the danger and challenge you seek. So much can happen to two kids who stray from home...”

“So what has happened?” Sati said. “We have barely seen anything so far, only a jackalantan, which I already caught.”

“Some would consider that a challenge...a quest.”

Sati frowned, “But that bottle wasn’t my casting. That was obeah.”

“And how did you get a bottle enhanced with obeah? Your mom would not approve that you are in contact with those from obeah.”

“That isn’t important,” she kept her voice down, even though she wanted to scream. “Help me. What should I do to convince Norm?”

There was silence from the bracelet, as if it was considering. When Fatman spoke, his voice was slow and measured.

“You mean manipulate him? Lie to him?”

Sati didn’t respond for a few seconds.

“Yes.”

Fatman breathed out, satisfied. “Two birds with one stone. The way to get

Norman Lowe to remain is to take care of what has protected both of you since you've entered the woods. It is the same thing that has denied you from a challenge, from proving to your mother that you are ready to take your place as a caster."

Sati waited. He would talk. He liked to play with her, but she found out a long time ago if she were patient, he would give her all she needed.

"Get rid of the goat," Fatman said.

"The goat?" Sati whispered.

"Yes," Fatman's voice floated up, sounding fainter. The bracelet's power was fading, Sati panicked.

"The goat," he continued. "Are you sure about this? Norman Lowe thinks you are solely here for him and his grandma. You are his closest friend and you are putting his life-"

"How do I get rid of the goat?"

There was nothing from the bracelet, and Sati feared it was drained completely, and she didn't know what else to do. She thought about going back to Waterford, still an apprentice caster, and the thought chilled her. She had to prove to her mom that she could handle anything. That she was smarter and stronger.

That she could surpass her mother, who became a caster at the age of fourteen.

She was about to tap the bracelet again when Fatman spoke again.

“You have a jackalantan...”

His voice faded away towards the end. The charm was out of power. But Fatman had told her what she needed.

Sati looked at the jackalantan and smiled, calling it closer. Obo hovered over to her. She caught it in her hands, and sunk to the floor, where she moved the trapped spirit to her lap. She thought back to what she read in her journal about them.

“Due to this quick descent into boredom, some jackalantans remain with humans who exuded otherness because these humans imbued with otherness lead a more interesting life. They love casters, obeah-users, and myalist above all others. They are passed down through the generations; either through slavery or by choice.”

Making a quick decision Sati unscrewed the top of the bottle, and got off the floor. The jackalantan seemed unsure of its freedom, but soon enough, it poured itself from the top. Instead of flitting away the jackalantan stayed. It faced the girl, and the girl faced the spirit. It began to morph and change in front of her, taking her true desire’s form.

“Don’t you dare!” Sati said in her most severe whisper. The spirit stopped, resuming its lighted form. Sati breathed a sigh of relief.

“You like me, Obo?” she asked.

The spirit let out a hum, but remained where it was. Once again Sati breathed quietly. She didn’t like the idea of having to enslave a spirit. She didn’t even know how to do that. Thankfully, she wouldn’t have to know.

“And you like games, right?”

A louder hum this time.

Sati moved closer to Obo, she rubbed it on what she assumed could be its side. If a circle of light had a side.

“You wanna play one with the goat?”

Billy the goat, dreamed quite differently from other goats, but like most goats, he didn’t like to be awoken from them. He had previously eyed the annoying screeching girl, and her equally annoying ball of light, as they had departed the clearing of the big tree. He had originally planned to bite the girl, when she moved nearer to him, but she hadn’t come too close. All she did was take the bracelet off the boy, and the goat allowed this since it did not like the

smell of the bracelet anyway.

No, he did not like to be awoken, but now something warm and bright shone over him. It whispered his name, and when Billy the goat opened his eyes. He was in quite a different place, warm obsidian stones and blue light. A huge man called to him in a mirthful voice. He was home. The man told Billy to follow him. Billy was concerned about the boy, but the call of the man was too compelling. Billy stood up, and followed after the man. The compel-charm of the jackalantan was so strong that the goat didn't see the annoying screeching girl, though she was right in front of him; staring in satisfaction as he was led away by the spirit.

Norman woke up to a rough shaking. Light shone down through cracks in the branches above. It was morning, his sleep encrusted eyes focused on the worried face of Sati Persaud.

“Wake up, Norm,” she said, “Billy’s gone.”

Chapter 10

“Didn’t you see or hear him go?” Norman asked as he followed Sati, who followed Obo.

Sati shook her head, “No, I was sleeping too.”

“But why would he just leave without saying...” Norman flushed,
“Without doing anything?” he finished.

“What would he have done?” Sati asked.

“I dunno, something.” Norman said. He plucked the stones on his bracelet, wondering if it was always on his left hand, he thought it was on the right hand before.

Sati stopped moving, looking back at Norman, “Are you sure you don’t wanna go back to Waterford?”

He stopped fiddling with the bracelet, and shook his head, “We can’t abandon Billy. I have to make sure he’s okay.”

Sati nodded, “If you’re sure.”

“Are you sure Obo will take us to him?”

“Yes,” she said. “That’s what I asked it to do.”

Norman glanced uneasily at the spirit. He still didn’t trust it.

“Sati, why is it out of the bottle?” he asked.

Sati didn’t answer, she kept walking.

“Sati?” Norman called out.

“Hmmm?” she still didn’t look back.

“Why is it out of the bottle?”

“Oh, I did a casting on it. Obo cannot leave, and must obey us.”

“Oh…” Norman said, “Why is it bigger?”

The jackalantan was now three times the size of a basketball.

Sati pointed up at the sun, “It’s eating.”

“How big does it get?”

“I dunno. Some say the sun was originally a jackalantan that fed on stars until it gained its size. All the other jackalantans are jealous, and trying to catch up.”

Norman didn’t know if she was telling the truth, but a bigger jackalantan seemed worse than a smaller one.

“Do you think we can put it back in the bottle?” he asked.

She shook her head, “It’s faster this way.”

With Billy gone, the kids soon noticed that the forest was much louder, and busier, than before. Above their heads, several creatures that looked like a

cross between a monkey and a hawk jumped and flew from branch to branch. Norman and Sati had to run away from beneath them, because the monkey-hawks began to throw apples at them. Vicious mosquitoes attacked them, when they came upon a lake. Norman was angry and determined to refill his water bottle, and tried to brave the bugs, but Sati pulled him back and pointed to the several things that looked like a floating green logs in the middle of the lake. The logs drifted closer, and Norman recognized the bumpy green back, and they both scrambled away from the water's edge as the alligators revealed themselves. The kids moved on, and about an hour later, they heard a series of howls behind them, and Norman's quick thinking got them up into the lower branches of a tree – Sati refused to go further – just in time to escape a pack of wild dogs. However, these dogs were the size of rats, but their barks were twice as loud as a normal sized dog, and they had wickedly sharp teeth. After trapping their prey for an hour, and showing no sign of relenting. Norman turned to Sati in exasperation.

“Send them away!” he demanded.

Sati was contemplating living in a tree for the rest of her life, what would she eat? How would she use the bathroom? She was jolted out of her grim thoughts by his voice.

“How?” she asked.

“You know,” he said. “Cast!”

“Why bother? They can’t get to us.”

“Because we have to get to Billy! He could be in trouble. The longer we wait here, the more danger he could be in.”

“If we go after him, we’ll be in danger.”

“If we get him, he will protect us from danger!”

“To get to him,” she stomped her feet, “We will be in danger!”

Norman narrowed his eyes at her, “So stay here forever then?”

“They will leave soon, they’ll get bored or hungry.”

You don’t even want to get him, do you?” Norman asked.

Sati looked away, “Don’t be ridiculous,” she said.

“Then why won’t you cast?”

She didn’t respond.

Norman got up and began to climb up the tree. Below him, the rat-sized dogs, worked themselves into frenzy, in hopes that he would fall, but Norman had a sure grip. He kept climbing until he was in the upper boughs of the trees. Eventually, he spied a sturdy, but smaller branch above him. Norman jumped up,

and held on to the branch.

“What are you doing,” Sati yelled up to him.

“Wouldn’t you like to know, Miss Liar,” Norman said under his breath.

He began to shake his body up and down, as he held to the branch, trying to break it.

Sati stood up, shielding her eyes from the sun. “Norm?” she called.

“Let’s see how you like not being answered,” Norman muttered, shaking the branch with all his might. There was a snapping sound, and the branch broke off into his hand. He landed like a cat, and began the more difficult climb back down, holding on to his prize, carefully.

“What’s that in your hand?” Sati asked, when he returned to the lower boughs.

“What does it look like?” he said.

“What’s it for?”

“If you aren’t gonna help me get to Billy, I’m going to do it myself.”

With that said, Norman climbed lower. The dogs began to jump and snap at the boy’s sneakers. One got a hold of his laces, and with an expert swing, Norman sent it sailing through the air. Instead of deterring the other dogs, they

seemed more incensed.

“You can’t do that Norm! That’s dangerous!” Sati face showed worry.

Norman began to swing at the jumping dogs, not doing much damage. “I know that, but I have to save Billy! He helped us get here, and he saved me from the quicksand.”

Whack! Another dog flew through the air.

“I think he was protecting us from animals in the woods too,” Norman said. “Look how many things attacked us this morning without him!”

Whack!

“I’m just surprised...”

Whack.

“At how mean...”

Whack, whack, whack.

“You are...”

Whack.

“That you won’t help a friend.”

Norman was sweating from his effort, and more of the tiny feral dogs had gathered under the trees. Norman looked at a branch that was slightly lower, and a jump away. It would be risky. He bent down and prepared to leap.

“NO,” Sati yelled at him.

Norman almost fell, but righted himself quickly. He looked at Sati and saw that she looked like she wanted to cry or yell.

“Don’t jump, Norm,” she continued. “I’m sorry. I will help.”

Norman relaxed; he climbed back up to the bough where Sati was. She opened her journal, sometimes castbook, and flicked through the pages, looking for the perfect cast. Norman looked back down at the tiny dogs. They were doing the strangest things. Around half, had ceased jumping and were looking off into the woods. They began to whine, and their tails sank between their legs. After a couple of quick barks in the direction they faced, half the dogs quickly ran off. Those remaining looked at the children in the trees in hunger, and then to the rest of their fleeing pack. They raised their nostrils to the wind and sniffed, and then just as the rest of the pack had done, the remainder took off. Soon enough, there were no dogs around. Norman looked at Sati in amazement. She returned his look.

“What did you do,” he said.

“Nothing,” she responded.

“Well good job!” he cried. He scrambled back down to the ground, Sati followed, more cautiously. Squinting after the dogs to see if they would return. Obo was the last to float down. Norman set his backpack and stick on the floor, before fixing the jackalantan with a nasty look.

“Thanks for helping out,” he said in disgust. “Just take us to Billy, quickly.”

Obo started off in another direction, Norman breathed out angrily.

“No,” he exclaimed. “After Billy! You are going in the wrong direction! You were taking us this way the entire time.” The boy pointed west. However, Obo continued to go east. Norman scratched his head and turned to Sati, the girl looked at him with wide eyes.

“Was it going after Billy?” he pointed a finger at the jackalantan.

Sati’s nodded.

“Then why is it now taking us in another direction?”

Sati spoke quickly, “Maybe Billy’s moving.”

Norman slowly nodded, “Ok...but-”

Sati ran forward and grabbed his hands, “Come on, I thought you wanted to find Billy?” she pulled Norman after Obo. Norman pulled his hand out of her

grasp, retrieved his stick, and put on his backpack

“You don’t have to touch me; let’s go.”

With that he started after the ever expanding Oboist had retained a vague orb-like shape, but it now left a little sparkling trail of light behind it. He would give it directions from now on. He knew Sati didn’t like Billy, but would she lie to him about trying to save him? He didn’t know. All he knew was that he didn’t want to be near her, so when he heard her scream he almost didn’t turn back. But he did anyway, and then he screamed as well.

A grey, faceless creature, with sharp raggedy claws, and feet twisted impossibly behind it, held on to Sati’s throat, lifting the girl into the air. Norman could see that she was struggling to breathe...or maybe not to breathe, because from where Norman was, twenty feet from the creature, he could smell it. It smelled rotten. He could also identify it. Pictures of the creature were in every child’s book in Waterford.

“Douen,” he breathed.

Chapter 11

Moments before the douen had Sati in its grasp, the young girl was thinking of the conversation Fatman had with her about Norman. Fatman had said she was manipulating him. Sati didn’t think so at the time, she just wanted him to

keep her company, so that she wouldn't be alone on her quest to prove that she was ready. Furthermore, she was helping him find Linda. Everyone won in the end. Why didn't Norman understand that in order to gain you had to give?

It was a lesson that Sati's mom had told her when it applied to casting, or life, or friends. A caster had to use his or her own energies to fuel a spell. It was not only about rhyming or speaking in Patois. It was being able to give some of yourself. The first caster, Gang-Gang Sara gave, when she tried to defy the White men who ripped her family from her, and spread them over the Caribbean. Sara had to give herself over to the Otherside. The place where all casting came from, she gave her life to bring her family back together again.

In school, where Sati learned the traditional subjects, she excelled. She studied and studied, and when that was done she studied some more. When she was done with that, she would go to her mother or to the other members of the council to learn from the casters. Her mother said that right now, Sati's life was in books. The more she learned from page, the better off she would be.

Friends were something that she didn't easily make. She didn't understand how Norman was friends with the neighborhood kids, even the ones that were normal. She thought it was because he was normal too, but his family wasn't...and no one seemed to care. If a person couldn't help her achieve her goals, then why bother with them? She had decided a long time ago, she wouldn't

spend time fostering friendships with the normal kids of Waterford. She had nothing to learn from them. However, the special circumstance was Norman. And as Norman had pulled his hand out of her own, and had walked away from her, Sati felt a moment's true panic that she couldn't quite easily explain. It was a variety of reason. She thought he found out about her, and that made her feel guilty, it was also because she wanted him to understand her. She opened her mouth to speak, and that's when a shadow fell over her. Sati looked up, and saw a shape dropping from the sky, and smelled something foul.

She reacted instead of acting. She thought to run instead of running. She opened her mouth to cast something, but nothing came out. And the douen landed, and gripped her neck at the same time. Then she was lifted from the floor, in a grip of steel, and Norman looked at her in fright.

It was a douen! The thought entered Norman's mind and remained. A soul-stealer. A monster that went after children under the age of ten, like him! He wanted to run away. He wanted Gramma to protect him. She always knew what to do. But there wasn't anyone else here. And Sati was in danger. In fact, Sati's eyes looked red and watery. She was fumbling with the creature, trying to dislodge it, but her movements were getting slower...and more desperate.

“Let her go!” he said, brandishing the stick as a weapon.

The douen didn't let her go, in fact it tightened its grip, and Sati saw stars. The douen brought her close to its face, as if it was inspecting her. But how could it when it had no eyes?

Norman ran forward and swung his makeshift weapon at the creature's side. It dropped Sati, and caught the stick. She fell to the ground, and immediately began to suck air back into her lungs. Norman tried to pull the stick from the douen's grasp, but it was too strong. He continued to tug at the stick, and on one of his more aggressive pulls, the douen let go, sending the boy flying back into the grass and dirt.

Sati, finally recovering, rolled away from the douen, and pulled Norman to his feet. She then took off her bag, and began to fumble with it. The douen began to advance on the two kids, and Norman swung the stick again, it hopped backwards, emitting a sound from its throat. It was laughing at them, Norman thought.

"Cast something now, Sat-" Norman began.

The creature tilted its head as if it was listening and at the same time Sati screamed at Norman.

"DON'T SAY MY NAME!" Sati resumed her normal tone as Norman's mouth slammed shut. "If it hears my name it will always know where to find me."

Norman looked at the creature in surprise; it still appeared to be waiting for something. Sati held salt in one hand, and grabbed Norman with her other. Both kids began to move away. Obo floated downwards, rejoining them. Sati whispered in his ear.

“When I say run, run!”

“In what direction?”

She didn’t have a chance to answer. The douen got tired of waiting for a name; it jumped into the air, easily clearing fifteen feet. A second jump brought it closer to the kids. Sati threw the salt in its face and pushed Norman.

“RUN” she screamed.

Norman waited just long enough to see the creature, fall to the ground, writhing. And even though it had no mouth, a horrible sound of pain rose from its throat as it batted at the salt. Then Norman saw no more, as he ran through the woods, Sati close behind.

“Follow Obo!” she shouted.

“Where is it going?” Norman yelled back.

“Where you asked it to,” she said. “Just run.”

The two kids kept on running, not sure if they were being followed, but

not wanting to find out. And although neither of them wanted to say it. They noticed the woods were very quiet. But unlike when Billy was with them, this silence seemed threatening, as if the woods knew the unnatural creature that was present. This thought drove them on. However, they soon began to tire. It first started with Sati, slowing down to a jog, then a walk. Soon, Sati began to drag her feet. After tripping a second time, and almost causing them both to roll down a steep hill. They had to stop. Breathing heavily, the two kids hid behind a tree. Obo shone magnificently above them, a beacon to anything that cared to look. Norman had to shield his eyes.

“Can you put it back in,” he said when he caught his breath.

Sati shook her head, “...why...do...I...need...to?” she was still out of breath.

“Because it will see us and get us.”

Sati shook her head again, “Can’t...see...us. No...eyes.”

Norman thought about it, and nodded. However, he thought about the rats with the sharp teeth.

“What about everything else that can see us?”

Sati looked up at the shining jackalantan. She frowned.

“You’re right, Norm,” she said. She began to take off her backpack, when Norman snapped his fingers.

“Rockstone!” he said. “I have an idea.”

Moments later, two kids, rode atop a jackalantan through the woods. They were high enough to avoid most animals on the ground, and low enough to avoid other animals that preferred to stay high among the tree branches. But most importantly, to Sati and Norman, they were putting a lot of distance between themselves and the douen. Norman sat upright on the creature, while Sati buried her face in what she imagined would be its back, she didn’t want to see the forest floor beneath her. It felt as if she was on a heated beanie bag chair. When she did look up, it was only to look at Norman in admiration.

“This was a really good idea,” she said, trying to hide her surprise.

“Just wanna find Billy, and go home,” Norman said. He still held his stick as it rested in his lap.

“I know,” Sati said. He was still mad at her. “Obo will take us to him.”

“Or into trouble.”

Sati was quiet. She remembered that in her book, there was an entire

paragraph about the fact the jackalantans did lead travelers into danger. Was that what Obo was doing? No! She had everything under control. Norman was biting his lip, staring straight ahead.

“Thanks for saving me, Norm.” she said.

He looked back at her, appearing stern for a second, but then a ghost of a smile appeared on his face. However he said, nothing. He resumed looking ahead.

“You could say thank you,” Sati said under her breath, “Jerk.”

As the three continued, they noticed that once again the trees began to disappear, and a fog floated over the ground. Both children were fascinated, as this only occurred in the mountainous regions of Jamaica. Soon there was only scraggly grass, similar to the kind that grew in Yellow Flower Field. As Obo continued, the mist started to rise, until they were skimming right above it. Soon after, Obo stopped. A wind blew away some of the mist, revealing a house. They headed towards it, Obo indicating this was where Billy had gone.