Bakra

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bakra
By Camille Wanliss Ortiz
May 7, 2011

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
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prologue</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter One</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Two</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Three</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Four</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Five</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Six</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Seven</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Eight</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**bakra** (back-raw) noun

1. A colonial era Jamaican term used to describe members of the ruling class or slave master.

2. One who, though not white, lives or moves comfortably within white society.

3. Hindi slang for a fool or a scapegoat; one who can be used and fooled by others.
PROLOGUE

St. Elizabeth, Jamaica – 1854

In Black River, at the hill-top barracks overlooking the bay, Seamus fingered his musket and counted the number of warships stationed out on the water; wondering which would transport him to the Crimean battlefront in mere days. Though surrounded by fellow servicemen, he stood alone. He was not an outcast by any means but there was rumor he married his apprentice and was acquainted with other persons of low pedigree, so most kept their distance. One dare not mock him about the company he kept for he was proud and his fists were as heavy as a hogshead of rum.

Seamus heard urgency in the footsteps behind him. He turned and saluted his approaching superior, who handed him a letter. Upon opening it, he read the following message:

Dearest Brother, The plague has come to Pride. Father Flanagan has given Daddy his last rites. I would not have written had he not pleaded for you with such vigour. Please make haste. Your sister, Colleen.

Their father, Quinn, was dying of cholera. Only a few years prior had the outbreak claimed Seamus’ children. Of his seven sisters only Colleen came to the funeral. The remainder, like their father, had disowned him long ago. Now the old man was sending for him; wanted Seamus to disregard their troubled past and be at his side. Seamus recalled what had severed their relationship but he also remembered how his little Meghan and Patrick suffered in the end. He would not wish that pain upon anyone.
Conflicted, he went to find his regiment’s chaplain. Inside the confessional Seamus held the letter tightly within his fist.

“Bless me Father, for I have sinned,” he said through the lattice. “It has been a fortnight since my last confession.” He paused then to flatten the letter on top of his lap.

“There is hate in my heart,” he continued. “I have not seen my father since my fifteenth year. My sister has written to say that he is near death but I have often wished for this day.”

“Why is that, my son?” The chaplain wondered.

“His cruelty…it knows no measure.”

“The bible says forgiving one another is the work of God, just as he has forgiven you.”

“That is not possible.”

“Surely it is.”

“When my father flogged me without reason, I forgave him. When he marched me through town wearing disgraceful signs, I forgave him. When he left me tied to the mill for days and only cut me loose when my sister found me limp from thirst, I forgave.”

The chaplain stirred in his booth. “And now your well has run dry…”

“He sold my Rose, Father, and forced me to enlist. I have no more cheeks to turn.”

“Even if you have forgiven him seven times, the Lord asks that you forgive seventy times that.”

Seamus heard the chaplain turn the leaves of his bible. He then told him the parable of the king who forgave his servant’s debts. Yet that servant refused to forgive another
of their own. “How can you expect the Lord to pardon you if you can not pardon the sins brought against you.”

“Show pity,” the chaplain added. “Show patience.”

Seamus was granted permission to leave the barracks and untied a horse from a nearby carriage. He rode the back roads to get to his childhood home in Middle Quarters. He was a blur as he barreled through town. When he arrived at his family’s estate, he pulled on the horse’s reign and as it halted, he flung his left leg over and hurled himself to the ground. A servant accepting parcels at the entrance was nearly thrown back by the force of him entering the great house. He apologized and as he bent to retrieve the package, the servant realized she was staring at a face she had not seen in two decades.

“Mista Seamus, is you that?”

“My God,” she exclaimed. “Is been a long time, sah.”

“It has.” he said, looking toward the staircase. “How is father?”

Millie shook her head. “Him no long fi the world.”

Seamus squeezed her hand and rushed up the stairs to the landing. He proceeded toward the east wing of the house. Outside his father’s chamber stood his estranged sisters; each cloaked in mourning capes and black bonnets. They turned to him, their faces expressionless at first. When recognition set in, several gathered around; crying as they pawed at him and adjusted the collar on his uniform. The two youngest stood aside for they did not know him; were mere babes when he was banished from the estate.
The creaking chamber door announced Seamus’ arrival. The stench of tobacco instantly took him back to his childhood. Colleen sat near their father’s bed; clad in her usual men’s shirt and trouser pants. Seamus noticed she had shorn her hair since their last encounter.

“Who is there?” Quinn asked.

Seamus removed his helmet and placed it against his chest. His heart thudded against his medals. He hated that his father still had the ability to turn him into that scared little boy.

“It is I, Father.”

Quinn strained his neck to see. “Seamus? I can hardly see you, my lad. Come into the light.”

Seamus was surprised. His father addressed him as though it had been mere days they had not spoken, not years. Colleen rose and hugged Seamus before exiting the room. He took her place then; felt the warmth from the chair on seat of his pants. He moved closer to his father who lay with his head against the headboard, the bed sheet pulled up to his chest. Quinn’s skin was ashen, his face gaunt. His fiery red hair, once as infamous as his temper and as thick as a lion’s mane, had all fallen out.

Quinn had a hard time distinguishing his son’s face from the rest of the room. All he could make out was the crimson of Seamus’ coat. “I know we have had our differences,” he began.

Seamus wondered if it was the beginning of an apology, something he had longed to hear, but when Quinn began to spit up, he urged him not to speak. Quinn reached into
the top drawer of his nightstand and pulled out several loose leafs of paper. Seamus saw that the heading read “Last Will and Testament of Quinn McGann.” Quinn handed the will to his son.

Seamus quickly read it through in disbelief. “You would bequeath it all to me?”

“Aye.”

“The house? The distillery? All of it?”

Quinn nodded.

“And the girls?”

“They have their own families now. Pride is not their home.”

“But Colleen –”

“Colleen can go about like a lad if she pleases...” Quinn’s voice trailed off. “But you are my only son.”

Seamus realized it was inheritance by default. Though his sisters had remained loyal, they were left nothing. He was reminded that Quinn treated his lily white daughters with the same reverence as his mulatto offspring. Seamus’ presence was not about penitence after all. He thought about the chaplain’s words and tried with all his might to exercise pity and patience but nothing had changed. Quinn was still a hypocrite; a swindler, and in deep denial about his past transgressions.

“But I am not your only son,” Seamus said through clenched teeth. “Have you forgotten Caleb and Reuben?”

“Do not be foolish,” Quinn said before hacking phlegm into the sleeve of his night shirt.
“They are not invisible, father. They are not spirits or phantoms. They are your children. And you have forgotten them; denied them just as you denied me.”

“Denied you? I am giving everything to you.”

“What do you mean?”

“Why have you bequeathed Pride to me when we have not uttered a word in twenty years?”

Quinn’s breathing became labored. “Please get Colleen,” he said.

Seamus ignored him. “Because I am your only legitimate male heir?” His father said nothing. “With your last breath, speak!”

Quinn remained silent.

Seamus sighed with disappointment. He folded the will and placed it in his coat. As he headed toward the door he saw his father’s reflection in the looking glass. He paused. “I am no more legitimate than they are,” he said, holding onto the doorknob.

“Some things never change,” Quinn said suddenly. “You still speak in ciphers.”

“We had a boy,” Seamus continued. “He is named Kenneth.”

“After my daddy?”

“After Rose’s brother. The one you sold to Aunt Myra.”

Quinn’s eyes flickered with anger; his face frozen with disgust. “You found that whore?”

“You should mind how you slander a man’s wife.”

“I should have cut her throat when I had the chance.”
“And yours would have been next!”

“Your mother was right to name you that. I knew one day you would bring shame upon us all.”

Seamus walked to the side of the bed and lowered his lips to his father’s ears. “With so many of your kin running the gangs, it is no revelation one would someday run your house.”

He walked out of the room and his sisters ran to their father’s side. Quinn cursed Seamus and his generations; spewed hate until his body gave up his ghost.
They had to keep Percival McGann's casket closed for the wake. And nothing the mortician did – not the air-tight sealing of the gold embellished pine box or the wreaths made from woven palm fronds, hibiscus and hydrangeas – could mask the stench of the burnt corpse inside. Scores of mourners, mainly old cronies, distant relatives and current plantation workers in their wide brimmed hats and stained overalls, stood in line to cast their sweaty visages on what would be the last vestige of the McGann way of life.

A morbid fascination with the legend surrounding Percival's death spread throughout the parish until the man himself had been reincarnated in anecdotes to scold unruly children and the term "McGanned," to threaten adversaries and foes. Onlookers from as close as Lacovia to as far away as Maggoty flocked to Pride Estate as though the image of Christ had materialized on a piece of bulla cake. And although the horde dared not pass the pillars of palms that lined the entryway of the property, they could at least say they had been to where a phenomenon had taken place; had stood in the same vicinity where a man had burst into flames by a forceful shove or depending on who relayed the story, a slight touch. This same man who was so towering on his own two feet, that when he prowled the cane fields on his steed he was like a giant; whose roar-of-a-voice was so deep and booming, that when he rebuked his field hands, they prayed to be swallowed up in the black hole he called a mouth.

Perhaps it was fate. Perhaps revenge. Whatever the case, the nature of Percival's demise seemed to verify what the townspeople had long suspected – that the McGanns were cursed. Not since the last breath of slave driver Quinn McGann, more than a
century before, had any male from his line died naturally. Like a genetic disorder it seemed Percival had inherited more than the sprawling two-thousand-acre sugar estate of his fathers before him.

A beacon of the countryside Pride was. Built on a hillside just beyond Bamboo Avenue (a stunning four kilometer tunnel of arching bamboo), it had remained virtually unchanged in its 167-year existence. A cobblestone walkway led to the portico entrance of the great house, with windows as tall as men. Its façade, painted pumice gray decades prior, resembled a steel fortress. Behind it rested the massive sea of yellow-green cane stalks; the wind-powered sugar mill; the boiling, curing and still houses; a stable for its two horses; and a massive, decrepit stone edifice that in a bygone era served as the plantation’s main mill until the bulk of it was destroyed in the great storm of 1912.

Despite its imposing appearance, Pride was not what it used to be. Its yield had been on a slow but steady decline, and as of late, several workers decided they would rather take their chance in the city. Production wasn’t the only thing that had changed. So had Jamaica; her people, her politics, even her landscape. Those giving to the earth now had those mining it to contend with and tractors were no match for bulldozers or beach resorts or golf courses. Pride was like an aging figure head in the wake of a new democracy.

Down the hollow hall from the parlor where the wake was being held, Percival Jr. was coming to terms with his father’s mortality by removing any evidence that he had existed. Balanced atop a stepladder in his new office, PJ struggled to unhook from the
wall a massive oil painting depicting the elder McGann in his prime, the embers of life aglow in his gray eyes. He had made laborious changes to what, only four days prior, had still been Percival Senior’s study – a dimly lit, dank space yellowed by the past and crumbling under the weight of tradition.

Wooden shutters were opened like wings. Scarlet hued carpeting was torn away from the floors, revealing the original rosewood. Long white sofas, which had been prohibited from use for years, were removed and replaced with cushioned arm chairs. Bookshelves were emptied of old artifacts, heirlooms, and spineless, loose-paged tomes then filled with the things that mattered most to this man holding up the four corners of his inheritance – textbooks on accounting, economics and statistics from his days at university; books about business; books on how to make money, how to save money, how to invest money and how to coerce others to spend their money; notebooks upon notebooks filled with scribbles and notations that exposed the long hours slaved over failed ventures and deferred dreams; and for inspiration, binders with newspaper and magazine clippings on young men, not unlike himself, who had made empires out of ideas, who could illustrate their success in pie charts and graphs, and who could count their dreams in pounds and pence.

Soon after toppling the portrait of his father, PJ propped its gilded frame against the office door and made his way over to the dessert table in the hallway, brushing dust and lint off his tailored gray suit. As he cut a large piece of the rum cake left over from Christmas, Clara, a stocky burnt umber beauty clad in white, approached the table carrying a silver tray; a pitcher of sorrel balanced carefully atop it. She too was in the
midst of a balancing act, weaved back and forth on an internal precipice. A regrettable, albeit brief, stint in PJ’s bed had left her dazed. She was still finding her way through the fog and tried to remain stable during a time overripe with instability. It oozed from the workers’ fears of an uncertain future, the manic pace of PJ’s remodeling, and the vehemence of his mother’s commands.

“Are Petey and Howard here?” PJ inquired.

Clara responded with an affirmative moan and then turned her back to him as she replenished the half-empty punch bowl on the table.

“I haven’t seen those boys all day.”

“Them out back...near the old mill,” she responded. “Some people can’t face the dead.”

“No one’s asking them to bury the man,” he said as he let a finger trail up the side of her arm. “I just need them to take some boxes to the attic.”

PJ’s touch was like the kindling of a small fire and it took everything inside Clara to extinguish it. He made her forget the magnitude of her own strength; that her scent alone could knock men out of their right minds, steal precious moments from other people's lovers, and even cause them to break allegiances with their mothers. Even more so, was the near blinding of her foresight. During their relationship she had ceased from being the voyeur of things to come. PJ had, for a time, stripped her of this truth. He seemed to possess his own abilities – the power to disarm, to make her oblivious to everything in and around her. It was her inability to "see" Mr. McGann's death and PJ's subsequent reaction to it that finally caused her to break free from his snare.
Clara turned suddenly to face PJ and when he saw that she was once again wearing a thick mask of scorn, he became irate.

“Why you always cut me bad eye, ee?” he inquired loudly. “What me do you now?”

There was a time when Clara was enamored by PJ’s use of patois. It made him seem familiar, common even, like the boys from her childhood in Accompong; the ones she would seduce into scaling soursop trees; who would help her carry zinc pans filled with water to wash clothes. But soon Clara came to the realization that it was all a ruse, that their time together was executed with the same precision he used in maintaining the general ledger. And like a record of gains and losses, his exploitation of patois was calculated, was just a tool to get her into bed; to fool her into believing that despite his fancy suits and waxed Cadillac, he was just like her.

“Me?” Clara scoffed. “You can’t do a blasted thing to me...not anymore. Is your poor father me a think ‘bout.”

PJ kissed his teeth. “Just make haste and go on, man,” he said, dismissing her with a flick of his wrist. “I’m in no mood for your foolishness. Not tonight.”

“That man cuss the day you born,” she said, ignoring him.

“You too bad mind, you know that? You no know what you’re talking ‘bout.”

“I know what I see, though.”

PJ laughed. “Yeah? What the hell the devil show you now?”

“No one more devil than you,” Clara declared, “a wait fi you daddy die. And the moment you get word, you fly like rolling calf and dash him things ‘way. If them never say Midas was the one...my God...I woulda swear it was you.”
“You and your Poco shit. Always a talk ‘bout what you see. I wonder why you never see you no good…always wasting my time.”

Clara was suddenly too ill for words. It was at that moment she felt a slight twinge in the pit of her belly, like a fireball of pain and regret. She placed the silver tray under her arm and made her retreat down the hall. PJ watched her disappear into the kitchen. Not long after, Maude, unhinged by her new role as widow, and suffocated by the pungent stench of death and body odor, escaped the ceremony and joined her son in the hallway. A mulatto, she wore a black dress that offset the shock of her copper-colored hair which hung down her back in a thick, unfinished braid like a rope with a frayed end; the only hint of her age being the wisps of gray at her temples. She stood clutching an accordion fan in her fist. PJ hadn’t spent much time in his mother’s presence since the news of his father’s death. He now noticed how her loss had sucked the vibrancy out of her olive complexion.

“Is like a dream, no?” Maude said. Her gaze went straight through him.

“More like a nightmare,” PJ responded, placing her in a chair near the table. “We lost five workers this week alone. Michael’s mother sent him to work in that new resort in Port Antonio. Even ol’ Clayton’s gone…rather sell saltfish on the side of the road.”

Maude shook her head in disbelief. “Just the other day I picked out a suit for your daddy wear to the New Year’s Eve party and now is the one he’ll be buried in.” Her voice trailed off. “I never saw this coming.”

“No one did,” PJ reassured her.
And although they hadn’t, PJ certainly didn’t shy away from imagining the possibilities. During the moments when the study was slowly transforming into his own sanctuary, he would pause in disbelief to ponder on what he had dubbed “The Boxing Day Miracle.” For PJ McGann, independence had come twice that year.

Several men in houndstooth caps exited the parlor; the solemn chorus of “I’ll Fly Away” trailing behind them. When one saw Maude and PJ, he removed his hat and nodded in acknowledgment before lowering his eyes to the ground.

“There’s too many of them in here,” Maude declared, blowing her nose with the monogrammed handkerchief she retrieved from the cave between her breasts. “Every time one of them come in smelling like molasses I think is him. I watch the door expecting him to walk through.”

“No use dwelling on it, Mama.”

“He’s not coming back,” PJ said, more to himself than to her.

“I know that,” Maude snapped, suddenly gaining color. “Why everyone keep telling me that?”

Maude began fanning herself furiously. PJ threw his arms in the air then abandoned her for his office. She followed behind him and for the first time noticed the changes he made to the study; the several boxes brimming with her beloved’s belongings.

“You must be mad!” she yelled as she took a seat opposite her son’s new desk.
PJ leaned back in his leather chair, sipped on his very own glass of Pride Estate Rum and flipped through the estate’s financial statements. But it was hard for him to ignore her.

“Go on, Mama,” he urged calmly. “Pull out your hair, rip your frock, call on God.”

“Is this why I hardly see you all week, why you never find time to peek your head into the wake?”

“You think ‘cause Daddy’s dead the work’s done?” he snapped.

“You never even wait ‘til him in the ground.”

“Look around you,” he said, cutting the air with a sharp gesture of his hand. “Is not just land you live on, is a business. With Daddy gone, Pride may never be the same again. There’s no way we’ll recover if we don’t act now. Things can’t be done the old way, Mama. There’ll have to be some changes ‘round here.”

“And what exactly are we changing for?”

The look in her eyes reminded PJ of his father. He too was bound by custom; shackled to it. PJ sat calmly as his mother adjusted her glasses. He wanted to inform her of his aspirations but knew it was futile. Maude McGann was not in the business of hopes and dreams.

“Is complex,” he said after awhile. “No worry yourself.”

“What’re you really up to?”

“Why must everything I do have a hidden agenda?”

“I know you better than you know yourself,” she countered.
PJ’s sigh was like a bicycle tire being released of all its air. “I’m sure you’d find out anyway,” he said, shuffling his papers. “I’ve scheduled a meeting with Trevor Hills.”

“The politician?”

“The director of St. Elizabeth Tours,” he corrected. PJ paused, waiting for her reaction. There was none. “Is a tourism company,” he explained.

“But we deal with rum and sugar,” she said as if informing him for the first time.

“What business we have with that?”

“Is just another way for us to increase revenue.”

Maude rolled her eyes. “You mean another way to fill your pockets.”

“Like I told Daddy, we’re living in a new age. The export of rum is on the decline. Imagine what that will mean in ten years. I want to capitalize on this new wave of tourism; make the estate an attraction.”

Maude stared at her eldest son. At thirty-two, with his honey-brown skin and fair eyes, he was the spitting image of her late husband. But the comparison ended there. Where Percival Sr. was calculated, PJ was impetuous, driven by his lust for success and wealth. Where Percival Sr. was shrewd, PJ relied on limited knowledge; was a grade A dunce. When Percival Sr. came upon a stumbling block, he could always rely on his years of experience. When the same happened to PJ, he had nothing to fall back on; just fell on his ass.

For Maude, PJ’s “attraction” would be just another of his botched schemes, like the time he tried to turn the parlor into an art gallery. On full display were ancestral portraits dating back to the era of Quinn and landscapes detailing the beauty and brawn
of Pride. On one occasion, PJ set up a private viewing for collectors only to have it thwarted when Maude revealed at the top of her lungs, and to his dismay, that none of the artwork, which belonged solely to the estate, would be for sale.

“Why you want every stranger walking through here…with cameras?” she wondered.

“What do you think this is…a zoo?”

PJ remained silent. Maude leaned back in the chair and crossed her arms against her chest.

“So this is your big idea.”

PJ came to a boil. “Why can’t you trust me? I never ask you for anything; not a thing. I’m finally at a point where I can make my own decisions. I just want your support.”

“I don’t think is something your father would have approved of,” she said, shaking her head.

“What did that man ever approve of when it came to me?”

“Oh, bite your tongue,” Maude snapped. “Your father never disapproved of you.” She removed her cat-eye frames, placing them lens down on the desk before squeezing the bone between her eyes.

“Do you know what his favorite saying was?”

Maude abruptly rose from her seat. “You always remember the bad,” she said as she went to leave the room. “There was some good too.”

PJ, always swift, sprung in front of her and obstructed her path. He held out the palms of his hands as if there was something within them he wanted her to see.
“He would always say ‘If you never did favor me, I wouldn’t think you were mine.’” PJ smiled, but pain resurfaced causing his lips to tremble into a frown. “Might as well have jook out my heart.”

Maude stared at her eldest son vacantly. “But you were always so different…” she revealed.

It was at that very moment, something inside PJ broke. She couldn’t see it and if it were audible it would have made the most awful sound.

“You would defend him.”

Maude tried to recover. “What I mean is you never cared much for the estate. You were always off doing your own thing; never hitch-up in the fields like your brother. But when you came back from university, said you were going to work for the family, you should have heard the way your father talked about you. You were his pride and –”

“Daddy’s only pride was Pride itself,” PJ interjected. “Not even your golden boy, Donny, was a match for this place.”

Maude glanced up at the empty space above the mantle place where the portrait of her husband had been for decades; the wallpaper around it darkened by time. It wasn’t until Petey and Howard entered the room and waited on her for direction, like dogs wanting to play fetch, that she found the strength to muster up words.

“Don’t look at me,” she said crossly. “Is PJ king and conqueror.”

PJ instructed the twins on where to place the boxes and as they were leaving, Maude spotted the family bible among the heap.

“You can’t throw this away,” she protested.
PJ scoffed. “Since when you read bible?”

“Is an heirloom,” Maude informed her son as she opened to the page with their family crest and tree. “Is a record of the births and deaths of your ancestors.”

“Tombstones,” he said, pushing the book away.

“Your father was going to pass it down to you when you started your own family,” she tried to explain.

“If it means so much, you keep it,” PJ said sternly, before taking leave. “Add your husband to the lot.”
CHAPTER TWO

From where she sat at the burial, Violet Small could make out row upon row of long flat headstones, and further down, the unkempt, unmarked graves of the forgotten McGanns. Those still remembered, including her long-time love, Donovan, sat solemnly on white fold-out chairs listening to the Lord’s Prayer. Everyone else stood behind with bowed heads and clasped hands. Attendance was small, but that seemed to be the point of this private affair. Only those truly impacted by Percival Sr. were there to witness the man’s return to the earth; a sentiment reiterated by the reverend who presided over the ceremony. Every so often, Donovan would lean toward Violet and point out the various individuals he recalled from his youth – women from his mother’s social club; Julius Richards, a career-long member of the People’s National Party; Bashir, a Syrian businessman known only by one name; and Errol Smith, his father’s most loyal worker.

If years later any of those present were asked to recall a special moment at the event, for sure the consensus would be the eulogies, sans that of the widow Maude, whose exaltation of her beloved Percival was barely audible through her sniffling and bee keeper-like veil. One of the few to speak was Bruce Harrison, a fellow planter from Middle Quarters who slowly made his way before the crowd. Although bordering ninety, he appeared strong. His hair, parted on one side, was the color of fresh snow and reminded Violet of the storm they had left behind in Brixton. He wore brown trousers and the last button on his shirt was a different size than the ones that preceded it. As he spoke, he often used a handkerchief to wipe away the tears that streamed endlessly.
down his face. He said he’d only known Percival a decade and for a man in the twilight of his life that wasn’t very long. They met after two Americans landed on his farm with talk of buying his land.

“Me no hear good so when them say ‘bauxite’ me think them a talk ‘bout somebody rass,” Bruce mused.

The crowd’s laughter caused him to reveal a mouth full of missing teeth. Then he became serious. He had heard of other farmers being forced off their land, uprooted with nowhere to go and no way of making a living. He was frightened to think what would become of him and his grandchildren. An acquaintance suggested he contact Percival, who had begun organizing a coalition of black farmers to speak out against mining in the area.

“Them say him have influence, him have connections in the PNP. God bless the day me meet the man.” Bruce nodded in the direction of the coffin. “Because of him me keep me land and white man stop knock ‘pon me door.”

The last to eulogize Percival was Errol Smith who had been born in a cane field in West Moreland. The red shirt he wore complemented his buttermilk complexion and although he was just shy of forty, the bi-focal glasses that rested on the bridge of his freckled nose forced everyone’s perception of him into middle age. Errol talked about his tenure at another estate called Frome, that he burned bagasse to fuel boilers as his mother cut cane. He reminded them of the labor unrest of 1938 and the riot that broke out at Frome. On a crazy day in May, workers were fired on by policemen. Among the four killed that day was Errol’s mother – the only woman. He suddenly found himself, at
fourteen, an orphan. It did not take long for him to find family in a local street gang, who along with a group of nationalists, helped fuel his hatred of those ruling the colony. He could not recall the number of times he was arrested for vandalizing homes, businesses, and plantations owned by whites.

“I was out of order,” Errol declared.

On one of his rampages, he hurled a large rock at a car he had seen a red-head exiting, cracking the windshield. It was in fact Maude McGann and the car belonged to her husband Percival. Several men accompanying him grabbed Errol and were about to pummel him when Percival ordered them to stop; said he was only a boy.

Errol laughed. “He was a big man; had to bend down just to look me in the face. He ask why me mash up him car and when me tell him, he gave me one look, you see. Me think him gone lick me down but instead him say ‘Boy your eye-glass so thick it turn colored woman white. You can’t see she as red as you?’”

The mourners erupted in laughter.

Percival offered to take Errol home to his mother. When the young man said he had neither, Percival brought him back to Pride, took him under his wing, and he’d been with him ever since. After concluding his eulogy, Errol threw a white rose onto the lid of the coffin. Violet then watched as the twins began filling the gaping hole in the earth with dirt as dark as their skin.

The distillery at the back of the estate was closed for the day but the aroma of fermented sugar still clung to the air. Violet was thankful for the hilltop breeze. The wall of humidity that hugged her the moment she stepped onto the tarmac was enough to
cause heatstroke. As much as she had tried to forget her birthplace she still remembered it for being a cauldron of stifling heat. In some ways, Jamaica had always been foreign to her; a place of bad memories and neglect. A place to cringe at and steel herself against.

Despite the heat, the view from the plane had been a glorious one and the main road they sailed through to get to the plantation was shaded in towering bamboo. Staring out of the car window and into the hilly bosom of banana trees and tangerine groves, Violet had finally come face-to-face with Donovan’s mistress. St. Elizabeth, particularly his beloved Pride, was all he had talked about for years. Back home she was always in awe of his visceral reactions when he reminisced about his days on the plantation. She would envision Donovan under the blaze of the sun, his burly shoulders stocked with loads of cane. He was built for the field his father had told him proudly. So Violet was not shocked when, bewitched, he released the fingers that gripped hers the instant he re-laid eyes on the two-story mansion that had once been his entire world. For years he had prophesied his return to his nation, his Pride. But then again he promised many things.

When the couple first entered the house, Violet was immediately overtaken by the airy vestibule, with its high ceiling, sage-colored walls, and large arched windows that illuminated the entrance with diagonal beams of sunlight. And despite it being a week into the New Year, a Christmas tree still stood abandoned in the corner of the room, like a child on punishment. Donovan called out and they were immediately greeted by the servants, Clara, Petey and Howard, who although meeting them for the first time,
addressed them as if they had been old friends who had simply lost touch. Violet stared long and hard at the twins. She was reminded of her own siblings, who would have been around their age had they lived.

Maude soon appeared and with wide arms enveloped Donovan in a long embrace, after which she chastised him. Eight years was too long for anyone to be away from their mother, she’d said. Donovan held her tiny face in his large hands and asked how she was holding up. She remarked that her strength would remain firm now that he was home. They both turned and stared at the petite, sepia-hued woman in the canary-yellow shift dress and matching pillbox hat. Donovan told his mother proudly that he had someone he wanted her to meet. Maude’s greeting was cold, aloof. She did not so much as make eye contact with Violet as she did look in her direction, as if there was something just behind the woman’s shoulder that caught her attention. After Violet offered her condolences, Donovan was whisked away, leaving her alone in the vestibule with their luggage at her feet. She stared down at the circular green rug she stood in center. The twins grabbed Donovan’s things and carried them up the staircase and to his old room in the east wing. Clara then began escorting her to the west wing.

Violet was puzzled by Maude’s reaction. She couldn’t understand why the woman’s dislike was so apparent. Surely Donovan had written about her in his letters home. She was so taken aback by what had just occurred that she did not notice Clara had abruptly stopped mid-way up the stairs, causing them to collide.

“Oopsy daisy,” Violet said. “Are you all right, dear?”

Violet stared at the young woman of no more than twenty. Clara looked green.
“Yessum,” she said, as she regained her bearings. “Me get off balance sometime.”

Clara opened the door to the elegantly furnished guest room. The dresser, armoire and writing desk were all crafted from the same dark mahogany. The walls were painted lavender and the green of the cane field was neatly boxed by the window frame. Clara dropped Violet’s bags by the base of the four-post bed.

“There’s a bathroom at the end of the hall...if you wan’ freshen up.”

Violet thanked her then sat at the edge of the bed and lit a cigarette. Waves of anxiety radiated off Violet and the muscles in Clara’s body tensed. In a flash Clara saw several images in quick succession, not in the colorful and clear way she was used to, but gritty and blue. They were of Violet’s passport – of a black and white photograph of her sporting her signature bouffant; her date of birth (Violet’s youthful face betrayed her twenty-seven years, Clara thought to herself); and under “Special Peculiarities” the faint imprint of a word, all uppercase, that Violet had written and hastily erased – SPINSTER. Clara was engulfed by the word; it wrapped around her and constricted her, almost to the point where she felt she could not breathe. And though Violet had not said so, Clara knew those eight letters did the same to her; that despite being together so long she had memorized the choreography of his teeth brushing, Donovan had not kept his promise. Clara saw all these things until there was nothing left but a blur and a profound sense of loneliness. She leaned her head against the wall for support but could still sense Violet’s uneasiness, especially about being roomed separately from Donovan. The last thing the woman wanted was to sleep alone.

“Is Miss Maude,” Clara said, and the room finally stopped spinning.
“Pardon?”

“Why unno no together.”

Violet stared at the young woman and wondered if she had read her mind.

“She say is out of respect for her house...since you no married.”

Violet gave a hearty laugh, and Clara was not lost on the irony.

“A so she operate,” she continued. “You would think woman no made for man the way she go on sometime. No make her get to you, you hear?”

“And how do I do that?”

“You have to outsmart her. When she step one, you step two. She always did hate me ’cause me know what she go do before she even do it.”

“Like a game of chess,” Violet mused.

“Just no be the pawn.”

Hours after the burial, Violet and the McGanns gathered in the drawing room for supper. She was struck by the immaculate nature of the space: the chandelier of large, sparkling white orbs; the stark white walls; the marble fireplace; and the floral print on virtually everything – the thick window curtains, the table cloth, the rug, throw pillows and even the teacups with their matching saucers. The McGanns, who hadn’t occupied the same space in close to a decade, made small talk about politics and the changing economy. Violet didn’t feel confident entering the conversation, and no one really acknowledged her presence. Only Clara, who moved back-and-forth setting up the dinning table in the adjoining room was immune to her invisibility; would smile at her as she passed or would ask if she needed anything. Violet did not even feel slighted by
Donovan’s older brother, who would at least shoot her a side-eyed glance every now and then. And that meant something because PJ barely spoke a word to Donovan. No, it was Maude’s uncanny ability to treat Violet like an inanimate object that vexed her the most.

When Clara brought in the final plate of food, Violet went up to her and said the smell alone was making her hungry. Clara lifted the lids off each plate as the family gathered around the table.

“Is that curry goat?” Violet asked.

“Mmmhmm.”

“The gal don’t eat curry?” Maude wondered from across the room.

Donovan laughed. “Vi doesn’t have a Jamaican bone in her body.”

Violet shook her head and rolled her eyes. How he loved to tease her.

“Look who’s talking,” PJ said, breaking the air with his deep voice.

He looked at Donovan and couldn’t help but think that he too had turned into something he was not. PJ had always been the brain; the one who graduated top of his class at the University of the West Indies. Donovan was more of the athlete; the one who’d rather ride horses than study; the one who got two teeth knocked out of his head playing rugby. And still, their father chose him to go to London, to head the export side of the family business. PJ sneered at his brother; at the way his musculature ruined the silhouette of his glen plaid suit as if it could mask the void between his ears. He looked like a pit bull in professor’s clothing. But there he was, with the job he was meant for;
with the kind of woman that surely should have been his. PJ appreciated Violet’s quiet
grace; that her beauty rivaled The Supremes. She was blessed with high cheekbones and
large almond-shaped eyes. He liked the way her jet black hair curled just as it reached
the base of her jaw line. And though she was too slender for his taste (PJ had a thing for
big girls), she at least had what his best friend, Roy, would refer to as “shape.”

After dinner, PJ took to the window sill, Maude to one of the single chairs and
Donovan sat with Violet on the sofa, his legs wide apart. He contemplated whether or
not he should break the silence, and finally decided it was best to ask what had been on
his mind the entire week.

Maude shot PJ a distressed look. “You never tell him?”

“I thought you did,” PJ retorted. “Weren’t you the one who sent the telegram when it
happened?

Maude began sobbing. Donovan left his seat, squatted down in front of her and
began rubbing her back. His eyes darted back and forth between his mother and his
brother.

“Could someone please tell me what happened to Daddy.”

PJ got up from the window to put ice in his rum punch. “I don’t even know where to
start,” he said after a long pause.

It was in fact several field hands who had told the family a most fantastic tale.
Percival Sr. had been handing out Christmas bonuses to the workers who had far
exceeded their normal yield when Midas, a lush who consumed more rum than he
made, appeared on the grounds expecting to receive his own stipend. Percival became
incensed; informed Midas, who was still in his Junkanoo costume from a day of scaring children, that he should have gotten rid of him the moment he was discovered passed out behind the old mill with an empty bottle of rum at his side.

It was common knowledge that Midas was...unusual. Although he did not show up to work everyday, when he did manage to make it in, he always did double that of the average worker and in half the time. He also drank more than the average man; at the expense of the estate. And there was always something slightly different about him than from the time before. His eyes would be a lighter color, his ears a little larger, his height a bit taller, or his voice a little deeper. After awhile, everyone forgot who the original was. There were some who said there was only one Midas but because he had a penchant for shifting himself into the likeness of others, whenever he shifted back, there would always something left of that person on him; like a graft on a burn victim.

Percival berated Midas with unmatched ferocity; compared him to his wife’s menstruation cloth and even told him the various sex acts he could perform on his own mother. After shaming Midas, Percival turned to make his way back to the house. Suddenly his opponent was upon him, forcing him to the ground. Some said there was a yellow mist; others just remembered the sickening funk of sulfur. But no matter which witness the family spoke to, all said Percival was incinerated the instant he hit the ground.

Clara, who had been listening intently while removing the dirty plates from the table felt compelled to interject. “Was off that day but me know just when it happen,” she said. “Me belly start twist-up inside, like when you a wring wet clothes.”
Violet looked at Clara in disbelief.

“Where is this Midas now?” Donovan asked. “Do the police have him in custody?”

“They found him face down in a gully same night.” PJ responded. “As dead as a doornail.”

Violet sat quietly, watching the change in Donovan’s reaction. How he calmly took in the information, became incensed for want of justice, and finally erupted in tears. She knelt beside him and wrapped her arms around his neck.

“There must be something we can do,” he said.

Clara shook her head. “There’re some laws no man have access to.”

Maude sniffled. “Is true,” she said. “There’re some things that can never be explained.” She then began to tell a tale of her own; of an incident that took place while she was in prep school.

“How many times are you going to tell this story?” PJ wondered aloud.

“Bite your tongue,” she advised.

As a child, Maude had a teacher named Miss Bly; a woman so sweet she would bounce her on her lap during class just to play with her hair. She remembered waking one night to find the silhouette of a woman in the doorway of her bedroom. At first she thought it was her mother and just as she was about to tell the old woman that she had scared her half to death, the figure was suddenly at the side of her bed. It was Miss Bly. Her complexion had grayed; her lips blue. When she reached out to touch the child’s locks, the skin of her fingers were wrinkled and wet to the touch. Still, a great fear did not manifest itself until the following morning when Maude found all her schoolmates
bawling out their eyes. When she asked what happened, they said Miss Bly had

drowned the night before.

“I frightened so ‘till I didn’t know what to do. I ran all the way home and slept in my
mother’s bed for a month.”

PJ stirred in his seat. “Clara sees all kinds of things.”

“Is that true?” Violet asked, turning to see her reaction.

Clara shrugged. “Me see things, but not the kind you a talk ‘bout. My grandmother
had that gift, though. Saw duppy all the time. Saw pickney turn old man right before
her; him hair turn gray, him lose teeth, body get frail and wrinkle-up.”

Violet made it a point to look at every McGann, but no one seemed fazed. They all
lingered in silence, as if the timer on things to say had finally run out. She realized that
her twenty year absence had given her a unique perspective of the island. There was no
way she could see the things taking place there happening anywhere else. They had all
become so numb to these occurrences that they spoke of them with the same
indifference they might have when talking about what they ate that morning. Violet was
clearly the odd one out and something about the whole thing filled her with a sense of
uneasiness. Clara must have sensed it too because she suddenly darted out of the room.
She only made it halfway down the hall before dropping to her knees to vomit. Violet
ran after her but stopped short of helping. Clara tried but nothing dislodged, nothing
expelled itself from her pit. As she tried and tried, Violet stood transfixed, got lost in the
incessant sound of her retching as it echoed off the mansion walls.
Violet laid awake in the emptiness of the bed listening to cicadas sing; watched as the sheer window curtain danced from the early morning breeze. Off in the distance, a rooster tried summoning the dawn, but its call was impotent and ended prematurely.

Violet draped her peignoir over her nightgown and felt for her case of Lucky Strikes in the dark before making her way slowly and quietly down the stairs and out of the house. She toured the grounds out back, walked barefoot along a dirt path until she reached the ruins of the old mill. Overgrown vines snaked its way around the edifice. It was hallowed ground as far as Donovan was concerned; the place where his father would often give him advice and strong words of encouragement. Violet paused there to take in the rest of her surroundings: the brick exterior of the distillery, the idle machinery, the tractor, the plow, and off in the distance the wooden stable.

The rooster she heard from the bedroom called out again from its perch. Violet thought about what kind of place it was where not even the cocks could crow. She leaned against the cool, stone wall of the mill and began pondering on the events of the prior evening; how disoriented poor Clara was; how it seemed as if she had tried to release her entire soul on the rosewood floor. Donovan too was emptied. All he had left of his father was obeah and scarred earth. Before he locked himself away in his room without so much as a goodnight, Violet could see that full knowledge of the tragedy had taken its toll.
“Fly away,” Violet called out to the rooster. She was counting down the hours until she would be doing so.

Some time had passed before Violet heard the sound of tires on gravel as a car made its way onto the premises; its driver’s side door slamming loudly. She soon saw PJ headed in her direction, still clad in his black two-piece.

When he happened upon her in the dark, he seemed hesitant at first but as the smoke cleared he was relieved that it was only Violet in her powder blue nightgown, the curlers in her hair covered by a pink scarf. She was still wearing her pearls. Even under the blue glow of the moon she was Technicolor.

“Goodnight,” he said, then after peering down at his watch muttered, “or should I say good morning.”

Before she had a chance to respond, he was upon her, removing a cigarette from the gold case she held in her hand.

“May I?” he asked, even though the cigarette was already dangling from his mouth.

Violet could feel his eyes all over her as she lifted the lighter.

“I take it you couldn’t sleep either.”

PJ shook his head. “And look here,” he said as he extended his left hand out towards her. “I’m still shaking.”

Violet looked down at his manicured hand, which did indeed tremble.

“Don’t tell me a big man like you is still afraid of ghost stories,” she joked.

“Not at all,” he responded, using the same hand to dismiss the notion. “I’m just a ball of nerves. I’m giving a big presentation in a few hours.”
“Yeah? On what?”

“A new venture I’m trying to get off the ground. I’m going to open the estate up to the world; make it an attraction.”

“And give tours?”

“Yeah, man.”

Violet thrust her hands to her chest. “I give tours,” she gushed. “For an art museum of course, but, that’s...that’s essentially all I do.”

She realized she sounded pathetic. She had meant to say ‘what I do.’ And there was more to her than expounding on the brush strokes of Kandinsky and Cézanne. What she really desired, above all else, was to be a keeper of exhibitions and to curate a show on the contemporary artists’ take on biblical icons. A lofty idea if there ever was one.

“An art girl,” PJ said finally. “I never thought that was Donny’s type. Has he shown you the family’s collection yet?”

“No, I didn’t know your family owned any art.”

PJ smiled. “You have to see it, even if I end up showing it to you myself.”

Violet nodded and began moving back toward the house. “Your idea is brilliant,” she said, stopping abruptly. “From what Donny’s told me, I know Pride’s been in your family for generations. This place holds so much history. I’m sure people have been dying to know how it operates.”

“I tried telling my father that for years but he never listened. There’s this perception of us that I want to change. What may have been true at one time certainly isn’t true today. I want them to see how far we’ve come.”
“And what do they think of your family?”

“Donny never gave you the history lesson?”

Violet shook her head.

“Well, for one, there was my great-great grandfather, Quinn. He was of Irish nobility, but there was nothing noble about him. He was a wicked man. When I was a boy, I wondered if the cane he grew back then was red ‘cause they used to say more blood ran through the fields than rain water. They say he cursed us all.”

“But you don’t believe that.”

PJ shrugged. “Who knows what to believe?” he said dryly. “I think my father was like him.”

Violet’s eyes grew wide with shock. “I’ve never heard a bad word about him.”

“Propaganda,” he said simply. “’Cause who you think is paying for their sins? When I walk through town everybody bad-eye me; call me all kinds of names, as if is only bakra I come from. And I have to really think to myself, ‘I wonder if Daddy garnish that man’s wage, if he break that man’s back today, or if he made that man feel as small as he knew how to make people feel...as he made me feel sometimes. They work long hours under the hot sun, for little to nothing and they know they’re no better off than their grandfather and his father before him. And in a way I’m not either. But if you think I’m going to die in the fields like my father you’re sadly mistaken. Is not getting my blood.”

Violet took in his every word. PJ didn’t know it but they shared a strange connection. She too was a paying the price for familial sins; suffered from recurring nightmares of her mother, a woman so notorious the press nicknamed her “Evil Annie.” Her dreams
were always of drowning; of her mother’s blurred face as she forced Violet’s head beneath the water.

“Funny isn’t it?” she said, placing her palm on the inside of his forearm. “Everyone thinks that because you share the same blood, it means you’re exactly like them. But they don’t understand that sometimes the people that are closest to you are usually the ones that aren’t like you at all. They’re strangers, and you wonder how God chose these people for you to come into the world.”

For someone who hadn’t claimed the gift of clairvoyance, Violet had certainly read PJ’s mind. It wasn’t just her words that rang true, it was as if she had slipped inside him and was seeing things from his point of view. For the first time in his life, what he thought was not met with pity or even apathy, but with acceptance.

PJ looked down at his arm. The spot where Violet was touching him felt as if it had come ablaze. Like a child tasting something bitter for the first time, he was suddenly aware of a part of himself that he hadn’t been before. He began to compare it to the sensation he had when he first saw Clara nude but soon came to the understanding that it was another animal; species and all.

Violet and Donovan sat cuddled on the couch in the parlor watching a cricket game on the new color television set. The Jamaican bowler could not quite get the best of the Trinidadian batsman and as the television cameraman panned over National Stadium,
he could not help but marvel at the fact that the Union Jack was no where to be seen, just a sea of flags boasting yellow, green and black.

At that same time, Maude was just beyond the veranda pruning dead wood from her rose bush when PJ, fresh from his meeting with St. Elizabeth Tours, stormed up the walkway. When he reached the porch, he flung his briefcase down in anger.

“You know just how to turn sweet into sour, don’t you, Mama?”

Maude turned to face her son. “Why you so haunted?” she inquired.

PJ loosened his tie and paced the white wooden floor of the veranda. From inside the house, Violet and Donovan heard the muffled sound of someone yelling. Violet turned the volume down on the television set before heading over to the window to see what the commotion was.

“I am sorry it never work out,” Maude was heard replying.

“I never stood a chance,” PJ retorted.

Maude moved toward him but he maneuvered his way to the other side of the porch; leaned with folded arms against one of the pillars supporting the house. What had been rage slowly deflated into sadness.

“You know how much I slaved over that business plan? I researched the market for two years. Two years. And in three quarters of an hour it was all in vain.”

“And is my fault?”

“You’re the one who knew the man was a politician! It didn’t register at first when he brought up the coming election. I thought it was to boast about how important he was. But then he said working together would be a conflict of interest since you were
contributing to his campaign. Is then I realize you pay him off. Tell me, Mama, how
much is the death of a dream worth?”

“What’re you really saying, PJ?”

“You have a black heart!”

Upon hearing that, Donovan left Violet’s side to assist his mother.

“Your own son you do this to,” PJ continued.

When Donovan arrived, Maude turned to him for reason. “You hear what the boy
accuse me of?”

“Just calm down, Mama,” Donovan replied. “You’re saying you never gave the man
money, yes?”

“As God is my witness, I never even spoke a word to the man.”

PJ kissed his teeth in disgust. “You wouldn’t know the truth if you gave birth to it.”

Donovan took his brother aside. “Did it ever occur to you that maybe, just maybe, his
decision was based on your level of work? I mean, I’ve never really known you to have
an original idea.”

PJ scoffed. “Level of work?” he questioned. “What you ever work for in all your life?”

“You start with that again?” Maude asked.

PJ turned away; his features hardened by betrayal. He would have spewed a
thousand curses if not for the sudden flash of red in his peripheral. It was Violet at the
entrance of the house, balancing her weight on one foot as she struggled with her shoe.
She looked up and realized she was the object of his attention. And though no words
were exchanged something about the look in her eyes softened him; made him forget (if
only for a brief moment) what had happened, what was still happening. PJ’s mind went back to their early morning encounter; to how she branded him with one touch; to how her slender fingers fit perfectly in his. And long after Maude had put her gloves back on to continue pruning and Donovan and Violet had returned to the game, he could still feel the linger of her gaze.

Donovan followed close behind the twins as they descended the massive staircase, carrying several cases of luggage. Through the large vestibule windows, he could see the purple haze of the setting sun. And just as the day was waning so too was his time in Jamaica. Though he would have preferred his homecoming to have been longer and under different circumstances, he was still pleased to have been back at Pride; to see that his old room was almost the same as how he left it; to have consumed anything other than the typical British fare; and to gaze upon acres and acres of sun-kissed palm and cane.

He slowly made his way down the hall, looking for his mother. He went to the drawing room but she was not there. He stopped by the parlor, thinking she may have been hosting guests, but it too was empty. Finally he heard rustling coming from PJ’s office and went to see if his brother knew where their mother was. He stopped abruptly in the doorway when he saw Maude at one of the file cabinets behind PJ’s desk, rummaging through his paperwork.

“What are you doing?” he asked.
“I hear PJ have some dealings with that coolie from the mining company. Your father must be rolling in his grave.”

“Make haste and come out before he finds you in there.”

“He’s gone drinking…won’t be back ‘till early morning.”

“Come,” he urged.

“I’m not going anywhere,” she snapped. “You forget this was your father’s study before he go and change things? Now is all he talks about. Change this and change that. I don’t know what’s going on anymore.”

Maude resumed her search. When she couldn’t find anything to satisfy her curiosity, she slammed the cabinet shut. She used the back of her hand to cover her mouth and when Donovan saw that she was about to cry, he rushed toward her.

“What will become of me when you’re gone?” she wept.

Donovan held his mother close to him and tried to comfort her. “I’m only a phone call away, Mama,” he said. “And I’ll come back to visit…won’t let another year pass without seeing you.”

Maude lifted her head from his chest and glared at him with tear-filled eyes. “If only your daddy would have been alive to see you. You were his pride and joy.”

He smiled, stroking some of her stray hairs back into place.

“He would have wanted you to pick up where he left off,” she added.

Donovan sighed. “You know I want to…but I can’t right now. There’re shipments to handle and all the distributors. And I’d have a hard time convincing Vi to move here.”
Maude looked away; trying to control the roll of her eyes. All she could think of was
the old adage that men look for women who remind them of their mothers. Imagine her
shock when she finally gazed upon the kind he had brought home; and one with such an
unsavory past. Maude couldn’t care less what the girl wanted and she certainly was not
going to sit back and let her be the reason Donovan left home again.

“‘I’m afraid she’s not the only one who’s forgotten where they come from. All that
time you’ve been living in England, you’ve lost your love for Pride.’”

“That’s not fair, Mama.”

“No? If your daddy was here now, he’d be so disappointed. One son wants to stay
away. The other wants to destroy everything he worked so hard for. But is my fault,
y’know. I suppose I wasn’t much of a mother after all.”

“Rubbish.”

“But what should I expect? The moment I had you boys, I wanted nothing more than
to be treasurer of the club that I left you in the care of that bitch, Bertha.”

Donovan stood in silence as Maude was not finished.

“I’m afraid for my own safety sometimes,” she added. “You know how PJ gets. He
won’t stop ‘till he turns Pride into a circus. I can’t fend him off myself, boy.”

Donovan appeared unfazed. Maude could tell he had not been swayed. She thought
quickly, recalled the letters he wrote home that were often bitter and reeking with
discontent.
“You’re better off here, Donny. Look how bright you are and they still call you out your name. You don’t tire of being called ‘nigger’ everyday? I don’t know if I could live in a place where not even my money makes a difference. But you’re better than me.”

Donovan lowered his head and clenched his jawbone. She could tell it was starting to work.

“In Jamaica, just your name alone means something.”

Maude opened the door leading out to the back of the estate. Before them laid the empty fields; Percival’s dying legacy. As a boy, he was transfixed by the harmony coming from the workers during harvest. Their voices would float above stalks so tall that from his vantage point they looked as though they extended into the heavens. With his bare hands, his father would rip away at cane’s joints until he was begging to suck on the sweet flesh inside. Donovan would then follow the wheelbarrows to the mill where it was crushed; the expelled juice flowing into large cast iron pots in the boiling house. The fermenting process was his least favorite. It was too slow for his attention span and the stench alone would send him running to the still house, where he would sit in awe as clear bottles adorned with the Pride Estate seal would fill with rum as golden as his father’s face.

As he stood with his mother, Donovan swore he could hear singing in the fields, the hum of the mill, and the hooves of his horse.

“Look what your daddy leave you,” Maude said, her arms extended wide. “You have to be proud of that.”

“I am, Mama.”
“Then show him.”

On the floor above, Violet double-checked the closet and the dresser to make sure she was not leaving anything behind. She took a look at her watch and was startled that the car that was to take them to the airport still hadn’t arrived. As she made her way to the ground floor, she heard Clara instructing the twins to return the luggage to their respective rooms.

“What’s the matter?” Violet asked. “Was the flight cancelled?”

Clara shrugged. “Miss Maude just tell we fi put them back.”

Violet called out to Donovan who opened the office door with just enough space for his head to poke through.

“Was the flight cancelled?”

“We’ll talk about it later,” he said.

“Can’t we talk about it now?”

“I’m talking with Mama,” he revealed. “But just now...soon come.”

Donovan then went back into the room, shutting the door behind him. Violet had heard that phrase before but nothing ever took place “just now” and rarely did he ever “soon come.” After five years together it seemed Donovan used that phrase for everything – from avoiding serious conversations to his refusal to commit.

Just before bed, Violet sat before the vanity mirror in the guestroom. She was clad in her nightgown, tying her hair up in a silk scarf. She could see Donovan’s reflection as he
stood behind her in the doorway, hesitant to enter the room. There was no way of ignoring the troubled expression on her face.

“How long?” Violet asked after a long pause.

“For awhile,” Donovan replied, “until things settle.”

“But how long?” she repeated.

“Six months.”

“Six months?”

“Maybe a year.”

“Donovan.”

Violet tried to remain calm but her tears betrayed her.

“There’s no overseer,” he explained. “Pride needs me right now.”

“I need you too,” she said. “Can’t your brother handle this?”

“PJ can’t stand dirt under his fingernails. He wouldn’t last five minutes in the fields.”

Donovan took her by the hand. “You’re not going to lose me. If there’s anything my father’s death taught me it’s that I can’t live without you. That’s why I wanted you here with me in the first place. That’s why I want you to stay with me now.”

Violet took back her hand. “I have a life back home. You can’t expect me to just uproot it.”

“Imagine the life we can have here, Vi. Don’t you want to be around people that look like you, that sound like you?”

“They don’t sound like me. I have no connection to this place.”

“But I do...”
Violet held her face in her hands.

“If you’re worried about your job, I’m sure you can find one here,” he assured her.

“That’s not the point. You made this decision for us. You didn’t even consult me.”

“It happened so fast,” he said. “I know...you’d be giving up a lot.”

And that’s when it hit Violet: she could give up a lot if he just gave a little. Before Donovan could explain what her sacrifice would mean to him and the family, Violet said, “All right...I’ll do it.”

“You’ll stay?” Donovan asked happily.

She nodded. “But under one condition.”

Donovan grew silent, and Violet knew it was the last time she would ever worry about the SPINSTER on her passport.
CHAPTER THREE

If first things first, then it’s no wonder Violet made the nuptials top priority. Long before her resignation letter journeyed to London in her stead and before Donovan had appointed his interim replacement, she had already purchased a gown – an ivory knee-length number with a full petticoat skirt. Clara even volunteered to craft her mantilla veil and gloves from five yards of webbed lace. And before Violet had truly settled in, had recruited friends to ship over her most prized possessions (clothing, personal photographs, type writer, art books, projector, and slides of artwork), she had already discovered the site for the ceremony – a renovated nineteenth-century courthouse in Santa Cruz; a place of utter beauty that boasted air conditioning, a garden with ample shade, a white marble fountain, and iron settees. But when Maude threatened to boycott the wedding because they weren't marrying “under the eyes of God,” that plan was quickly scrapped.

It was Donovan who had broken the news; had come to Violet like a doctor about to tell a patient they were terminal. He told her it was time to get back to tradition, to knowing neighbors by name, to church weddings and services on Sundays. He sounded as though he were preparing her for a long life in a small town. It dawned on Violet that if tradition were a religion, Donovan had done a serious conversion, or more aptly had found his way back to the flock. And it was only because he looked so grave that she did not laugh. She knew he was overcompensating for his inability to stand up to his mother. Violet was proud of the way she had handled Maude though, or “two-stepped”
her, as Clara would say. If Maude thought coaxing Donovan into moving back home would have separated them, she was sadly mistaken. It was just the catalyst Violet needed to get him to commit.

The couple exchanged rings on a breezy Sunday in February. As they stood at the altar, an eastward wind blew into the church, carrying with it the smell of the sea. Donovan was clad in a charcoal three piece; the boutonniere pinned to his lapel a perfect match to Violet’s bouquet of yellow carnations. And though PJ declined the invitation and Maude only came out of obligation, Violet was more than content with this simple affair. She knew from a young age there would be no escort down the aisle, no mother bawling happy tears, and no siblings to toss rice like in the picture shows.

No, unlike Donovan who now spoke incessantly of his birthright, her only legacy was loneliness. After her mother was locked away in Fort Augusta Women’s Prison, Violet was sent to live with her grandmother, a blitz nurse she called Gong-Gong. And though she was raised with love, sadness was always at its heel. It was as if they were always on opposite sides of a great divide; made them feel that though they had one another, they were inexplicably alone. Violet knew it was the void of the missing generation between them, the only other living Small. She could not understand why her grandmother still loved the woman she hated; who caused tragedy twice over. Then again Evil Annie and the girl in all those yellowing photographs, whose head was always nestled in Gong-Gong’s neck, were one and the same.

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The newlyweds spent their two-day honeymoon in the capital. For Violet, Kingston was a far cry from the country. Not only did it boast paved roads but burgeoning high-rises and shops and plazas and boulevards. From her hotel window she could see clusters of construction crews in the distance, some on scaffolding and others on the ground; steel beams reaching toward the heavens; men hoisting equipment and materials in pails; and white dust clouds from the drilling of concrete. But it wasn’t until she stumbled upon the Capital Museum on Harbour Street that she realized Kingston was truly a metropolis on the rise. The art museum was housed in a wide, two-story building with heavy roof tiles made from orange clay. The old canons out front gave it some semblance of its former-self; a fort that once defended Port Royal.

When Violet returned to the room she assumed Donovan was still out gambling with the Americans he had struck up a conversation with at the hotel. It was not until the curtain moved that she saw he was out on the balcony overlooking fishing boats and the low-lying mountains on the other side of the island. She joined him then; feeling the sweet sea breeze that took her back to their wedding. The waves below were foam-capped and washed nets of algae ashore. Donovan gathered her in his arms. He was shirtless and only wearing pajama pants. Violet began to tell him of her visit to the museum, how pleasantly surprised she was to learn that they had added a black artist to their permanent collection.

Donovan scoffed. “Black black?”

Violet did not see a need for the distinction and returned to the room. She unzipped her dress and pulled it down, past her hips, until it crumpled to the ground. She stepped
out of it without picking it up. With only her panty and brassiere on, she made her way into the bathroom and turned the water on to fill the tub. Soon something caught her eye. A playing card was wedged in the bottom left corner of the bathroom mirror. The ace of hearts.

“Do you remember?” Donovan whispered from behind her.

Violet took the card in her hand and was immediately transported back to a flat party in Brixton. She remembered the smell of her own cigarettes and the gin everyone poured themselves; the women cackling on one side and the men playing straight poker on the other. She remembered there being four players before two folded. She remembered approaching the table as the game intensified and the loser walking up to her afterward saying she cost him 200 quid and a new watch before he even asked her what her name was. She remembered specks of green in his hazel eyes and his thick, calloused hands as he held hers.

And there was something else she remembered. Weeks after their first date, Violet had come home to find the ace of hearts inside her postbox and her grandmother’s favorite broach pinned to her neighbor’s blouse. Inside their flat, Gong-Gong sat at their cramped table over a half empty plate of food. Her skin was like black alabaster, dark and glossy; the contours of her face reflecting the kitchen light. She wore a house dress and an oversized sweater. Her hair, in four silver plaits, made her look like an overgrown child.

“Gong-Gong,” Violet said softly from the doorway.
Her grandmother lifted her head and forced a smile. “You home early,” she said, staring at the clock above Violet’s head. “No class today?”

“The professor cancelled it.”

Violet placed the mail on the table but held the ace in her hand. She leaned against the kitchen counter. “Pauline said you gave her your broach.”

Gong-Gong made a gesture with her hand that suggested such a thing was trivial. “She was admiring it the other day and I have no need for it anymore.”

Violet watched her get up, empty the food in the trash bin, and wash the plate in the sink.

“You have to stop giving your things away. Pauline doesn’t care how hard you worked for it but she’s so eager to take it from you. That’s worst than thievery in my book.”

Gong-Gong turned away from the sink to face her granddaughter. She reached into her sweater pocket, pulled out a navy-blue bank book and placed it in Violet’s hand, just on top of the ace.

“There comes a time,” Gong-Gong’s voiced quivered, “when you have to let things go.”

Violet took the bank book and flipped through it. Her grandmother had opened an account in her name. The balance seemed to be Gong-Gong’s entire life savings. Violet was knocked into silence; terrified that if she said was she was thinking it would be true.

“You don’t have to pay the landlord next month. I made sure that was settled so you have time to move. And Miss Toogood...you remember Miss Toogood?”

Violet nodded.
“She said she always have a room for you, you hear? She’s expecting you the first of April. And on the shelf next to my nightstand, there’s a black box…”

“Why are you doing this?” Violet asked.

“There’s a box with the insurance papers,” Gong-Gong continued.

“What did the doctor tell you?”

“Nothing I haven’t known for a long time, baby.”

Violet felt like she would implode. She saw a look in Gong-Gong’s eyes; the look of resignation, of grief to come. It was the same look her mother had just before she discovered her baby brothers face down in a tub full of water.

Donovan turned the faucet off and proceeded to remove the rest of Violet’s clothes. She stared silently at the bathwater, flowing so close to the brim. There were things that Violet remembered and there were things she wished she could forget.

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One of the twins (Violet wasn’t quite sure which one) had promised to drive her into town. When the day came she approached him again but he said he did not know how to drive and that one she had actually spoken to had already taken Maude to her club meetings. Clara chimed in then, said that she was heading to town that very minute and if Violet did not mind taking the bus, they could go together. The “country bus,” as they called it, was a red and blue jalopy with a rusted pen on its roof to hold the passengers’ belongings. Violet and Clara found two empty seats near the back and as it wound its
way through the parish, a gust of wind blew dust up behind it. In the country, travel was an art form. The roads, if they could be called that, were rugged. The bus constantly swerved and thumped over potholes. Violet marveled how the one way streets were treated like two-ways. She had to hold on for dear life when the bus and other large vehicles would pass one another, especially high in the mountains where there were no barrier between them and the cliffs. To make matters worst, the jutting mountainside would at times block the view of oncoming traffic and a symphony of horns had to be honked to avoid head-on collisions.

Violet stared out the window and marveled at what she saw: landscapes right out of a Belisario; an assortment of pastel hued homes; girls and women incessantly working, washing, walking and selling. They would run up to the window of the vehicle, shoving bags of mangoes, breadfruit, ginup, ackee, bananas, fried fish and anything else they could think to sell. And shirtless, sinewy men made love with their words; their skin so dark every muscle seemed magnified.

Suddenly the bus stopped. Violet nudged Clara and pointed to the sight of cows holding up traffic; said there were more livestock on the roads than hanging in the butcher shops on Electric Avenue. Clara laughed and uncovered the four pieces of fried bammy she had in her kerchief. Violet thanked her and realized it was the first time she had really gotten a look at the girl.

Clara was built like a monument – solid and strong. In recent weeks, she had begun to wear ill-fitting dresses that did nothing for her body. Tufts of hair, like black cotton, found its way under her head tie and though she needed no make-up, her eyebrows had
yet to meet tweezers; though Violet had to admit that there was something quite striking about her simplicity.

When the bus dropped them off in the middle of town, Clara pointed Violet in the direction of the post office and proceeded down the street. Violet watched her disappear among higglers selling their wares from make-shift booths and multi-colored spices on picnic blankets. As Violet made her way around the corner, she wished she had the common sense of the old folks who fended off the blaze of the sun with parasols. Loitering teens listened to rock steady on transistors and men holding bottles of Guinness in one hand and domino bones in the other were too preoccupied to make passes at her. She soon arrived at the post office but a sign on the door said the postman was out to lunch. Violet heard a gentleman singing mento off to the side of the premises. When she walked toward him, she saw he had a conked pompadour and a guitar painted periwinkle.

“Beg your pardon,” she interrupted. “Do you know when the postman will be back?”

The man mentioned that there was a sign on the door and continued singing.

“Yes, but do you know when he’ll be back?” she repeated.

The man completely ignored her and Violet returned to the entrance to wait. It was another ten minutes before Clara joined her.

“You still here, Miss V?”

Violet shot her an exasperated look.

“No worry yourself. Him soon come.”

“Did you see it in a vision?” Violet mused.
Clara turned sullen. The way Violet talked made it seem as if she was mocking her. She confessed that she hadn’t been able to trust her gift in months, not since she found out she was with child. Violet glared at her midsection but couldn’t make out a bulge under the girl’s loose clothing.

“Wow!” Violet shrieked. “Have you told the family?”

“Cha!” Clara said, rolling her eyes. “Baby father no even know.”

“You haven’t told him?”

“No, sah.”

“Why not?”

“Cause him no love me.”

“Is that what he said?”

“Him no say a thing.”

“Then how do you know? Most men can’t say it.”

“Is not that alone,” Clara said after some time. “You know a man no love you when him want stop you from being you. The baby father never believe in the things me do. And for a long time, I stop believe it too. I stop...being, you understand? Me give the man me heart, me body, me gift. And the worst thing a woman can do is give a man everything ‘cause him will gladly take it.”

“I’m a prophet,” she added. “Is not a job, is not something I get paid to do. Is who I am. And mi no give it up fi anybody.”

Violet knew then that no matter what one’s age was or where they were from, a woman was a woman. Clara’s situation was really no different from her own. It wasn’t
long after the move that Violet begun to feel like a fraction of the woman she once was.

After the high of the wedding, she had gone full force into the lows; was still adjusting to
dirt and grass under her feet, to dragonflies the size of fists, to the bizarre ability to walk
in and out of rain storms, to no Benny Hill. And time always seemed to stand still at
Pride. She longed for immediacy, for the urgency of the city, for gallery tours and
impromptu lunches in Clissord Park, for the latest picture shows at the cinema. With
nothing to do, days felt like weeks and a girl could only spend so much time in her head.
She had helped Donovan at first, hoped that a little something to do would help her gain
some semblance of the woman she left behind. But in the end, she was still doing for
others. Donovan on the other hand seemed twice the man he used to be. He had
quickly assimilated back into his old lifestyle; had taken over the fields with the same
fervor as his father. It was like he had never left and like she been away too long.

Pompadour finally stopped singing and left his post to place his guitar in the trunk of
his car.

“Oh, thank heavens,” Violet said to Clara. “If I had to hear another bloody song about
a mango or a banana...”

Soon he returned and maneuvered his way in front of them to open the door to the
post office.

“Please tell me you do not work here.” Violet said, exasperated.

“How may I help you today?” he asked, waving them in.

Violet let out a moan and looked at Clara, who could only shrug her shoulders in
response.
“I’m expecting a letter,” she said. “For Violet McGann.”

Violet had never said her married name out loud before. It felt strange. Pompadour disappeared into a back room but returned shortly, empty-handed.

“Perhaps it’s under my maiden name...Small.”

He disappeared again and from the back she heard him yell out. “Small? Yes, is here.”

Violet took the letter from him and tore it open. She immediately recognized the meticulously neat cursive of the author. She read the words that would arouse the interest of any employer. Hannah Toogood had come through once again. Violet folded the letter and placed it, along with her resume, in a separate envelope she retrieved from her purse. After sealing it, she handed it to Pompadour.

“Can this get to Kingston by week’s end?”

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Donovan hadn’t backed a horse in years; not since he was a teenager. Weeks after the wedding, Percival Sr.’s steed, Maybelle, had dropped dead and the remaining horse, a wild yearling, had yet to be mounted. Training the beast was no easy feat. Initially, he could not recall the basic steps and on top of that the horse was stubborn and easily spooked. Day after day, in the middle of a dusty clearing, Donovan struggled to earn the horse’s respect. When he would lunge it in one direction, it would buck and refuse to lunge the other way. And when he commanded it to walk or trot, it would do so initially then stop and shake its head at him, as if telling him “no.” Training wasn’t the only thing
that overwhelmed Donovan. As each day passed it grew increasingly clear that his father’s shoes were impossible to fill. There was no way he alone could oversee the fields, manage the distillery, and keep track of inventory without going mad in the process.

One afternoon while Donovan was in the middle of training, Violet came out onto the back porch with her art book in hand. Even from a distance, Donovan could tell by the alternating black and white letters on the cover that it was “Vierges Noir”—a book she had read so many times most of the pages were either dogged-eared or could no longer accommodate hand written notes in the margins. Something about her sitting there in the shade while sweat poured down his balls had him smarting on the inside. Donovan could count on one hand the number of times she had helped him in the months since they moved to Pride. She had quickly lost interest, just as the things that seemed to matter most to her arrived, one-by-one, in neat little parcels.

“Vi!” Donovan yelled from across the clearing.

Violet placed her finger on the spot where she had stopped reading, but soon wedged a bookmark in its place when she saw that Donovan was calling her over to him. He untied the horse from its line as she approached. He then tried to guide it to one side and when it refused, he lashed it with his whip.

Violet shook her head. “Do you have to strike him?”

Donovan laughed. “It’s a mare,” he corrected. “And if I don’t, she won’t mind me. You don’t want her bucking me off, do you?”

“Of course not,” Violet said stroking the horse’s side. “What’s her name?”
“Haven’t named her yet.”

“Why not?”

“Because she still needs training. I haven’t broken her in.”

Donovan took Violet’s book from under her arm and flipped through it. He took the make-shift bookmark out of its place and saw that it was actually an article ripped from *The Gleaner* about a Jamaican priest who had been appointed to a church in Trinidad.

Violet’s face lit up. “What do you see in the photograph?”

“A priest.”

“But what’s behind the priest?”

Donovan let out a sound. “One of those statues you like.”

For as long as he had known her, she had been nursing an obsession with artwork depicting the Virgin Mary as a black woman.

“I can’t believe there’s one so close,” she said, her hands shaking from excitement.

“When can we go on holiday? I’d fancy a trip there one weekend.”

“Soon come,” he said, handing her book back. He then told her where she could find the horse’s saddle and instructed her on how to tie it to the horse. Afterwards, he placed one foot in the stirrup and positioned himself on the mare’s back.

“She won’t be broken in for a few more weeks,” Donovan announced, “so I’ll need your help Friday in the warehouse.”

Violet had to step back just to look him properly in the face as he now towered over her. “Oh…I have an interview this Friday,” she said.

Donovan’s clenched his jaw as he looked away, toward the house.
“Not the one in Kingston.”

This wasn’t the first time Donovan expressed his concern. When she first brought up the idea of applying for the assistant keeper position at the museum, he told her it was not a good idea. Although it was just the kind of experience she needed to ensure a better job in London, Kingston was half a day’s journey. The job would require her being there two days out of the week and along with the travel time, Violet would be away from the estate for at least four.

“I thought we discussed this, no? Your time is better served here.”

Violet followed his gaze. “Isn’t Errol helping you?” she asked.

“He’s managing the houses. I’ve got three jobs and two hands, Vi. I need your help.”

“Surely there’re others more qualified,” she protested.

“Don’t quarrel me on this.”

“I’m not. I just think if anyone should be in charge of inventory it’s PJ. Bloody hell, even that boy, Owen, has more experience than me.”

“You just want me to say it…”

“…so you can lift your plumage.”

She shook her head. “What on earth are you talking about?”

“That you’re the only one I trust.”

That, in fact, was not what Violet had wanted Donovan to say. If lifting her plumage was the intended effect his words only served to do the opposite. She felt as though he were placing all his weight on her. Despite giving up her life so he could return to one he
wanted, he insisted she give up more. Despite replacing her big country for a small island, he now wanted to dwindle even that to just two-thousand acres.

The country club in Santa Cruz had much to offer – a large club house for billiards and table tennis, a golf course, and an adjacent field for its cricket, football, and rugby teams. PJ was not a fan of contact sports. Give him a cue stick any day and he would play you under the table. But thanks to his friend, Roy Singh, he had begun to play in a few cricket games as a goalkeeper. PJ thought Roy was annoying but found his loyalty refreshing. Roy had wanted to join club the moment he became an engineer at Reyser Bauxite. For years his name would come up for consideration and PJ would shake his head at the level of contemplation.

“Have you seen his arm?” PJ would ask. “I’ve seen him at away games. He’s very good.”

“But he’s a coolie,” the others would respond.

During one of the meetings PJ and a few like-minded individuals led a coup; ousting the incumbent committee and forming their own. They resurrected the club, which was near closing due to disrepair. They ordered new uniforms and equipment; manicured the greens, which were overgrown; and repainted the club house. They also cultivated more tournaments by removing the club’s strict color policy.
At the end of the latest match, Roy rushed over to PJ. “Eh, bakra,” he said with one arm around his shoulder. “Maybe the game isn’t for you after all. How many times did you quint at the ball? You ‘fraid or something?”

PJ looked at him sternly. “What did I tell you about calling me that?”

Roy put up his hands in defense. “Sorry, mon. Sorry” he said, laughing. “Don’t lick me down in front of everybody. I’ll never hear the end of it.”

PJ did not respond. Roy decided to change the subject to something he knew he would enjoy talking about – himself.

“So have you come up with a new business plan?”

PJ shook his head as he removed his padding and gloves.

Roy looked confused. “Something’s not right,” he said aloud.

PJ said that it was a good thing his mother ruined his dream because he was finally able to look over his proposal and old notebooks with fresh eyes. And for the first time, he saw what everyone else saw – mediocrity.

“If you change your mind, I know someone who might want to invest. Reyser’s daughter is looking to make a name for sheself.”

Roy wrote down her contact info the back of his business card and handed it to PJ, who simply placed it in his trouser pocket as he made his way to the parking lot.

“Even if she says no,” Roy called out after him, “try to get some punani out of it.”

It was while driving down Bamboo Avenue on his way back to the estate that PJ began to think of the business card. He had buried his dream months ago and like a wild street dog Roy had dug it up. The question was if he looked at it now what would he
find? As he mulled it over, he happened upon Violet walking in his direction. She was wearing a navy-blue dress and yellow heels. He almost didn’t recognize her with her up-do and white sunglasses.

Violet was on a mission. And nothing would stop her from going after the job interview in Kingston. She had not informed Donovan of her departure or that she had no intention of helping him in the warehouse. It had occurred to her that day he rode off on his new horse that she too was being broken in, was being groomed. He wanted to mold her into the typical planter’s wife like the women she had encountered; the ones that stood behind their husbands and only spoke when spoken to. Donovan must have forgotten who she was; that she looked everyone square in the eye; that she said what she meant and never once was asked to repeat herself.

PJ slowed his vehicle down as she approached. “Look here,” he exclaimed with a sly smile. “Donny finally let you out? Or you escaped?”

Violet had been smiling when she saw PJ sitting in his silver convertible in his cricket whites but it faded the instant he opened his mouth. She stood in place lifting each heel to prevent them from sinking further into the grassy knoll she stood awkwardly on. PJ could not see her eyes through the dark lenses but he could feel the chill they gave off. He knew all the subtle signs of a vexed woman; being the son of Maude McGann had taught him that.

“Is tease I’m teasing you,” he explained.

“I should go.”
As Violet continued down the avenue, PJ hopped out, still holding on to the driver’s side door.

“Where you going?”

“I need to catch the eleven o’clock to Kingston.”

“You’ll never make it,” he said. “Let me take you.”

“No, thank you. I’m sure you’re plenty busy...”

“Never busy for you,” he called out, causing her to stop in her tracks. She turned slowly to face him as he gestured toward the car. “Come, no?”

When Violet was settled in the passenger’s seat, PJ inquired if she was all right and before she could answer he was leaning over her to roll her window down. She lamented over the futility of schedules in the country. She explained how she had departed early that morning, just as the workers were arriving, and had waited for the bus for more than an hour but nothing came. PJ blamed the government; said the last thing on their minds were the citizens of St. Liz.

“Just look at the roads,” he added. “’Nough hole to fill with their empty promises.”

For sometime the only sound between them was a song by The Maytals on the radio, which PJ tapped in rhythm to on the steering wheel. There was something about the air blowing through the window and the constant movement of the car that lulled Violet to sleep. When she awoke hours later, PJ said they had gotten to Downtown Kingston with time to spare and for some minutes that followed acted as a tour guide, pointing out government buildings and the newest branch of the Nova Scotia bank. Suddenly, Violet demanded he stop the car. Taken aback, PJ quickly pulled over to the curb. She sprung
from her seat and onto the street. He followed her mad dash through the rear view
mirror before turning off the ignition. When he finally reached her, she was staring in
awe at a massive sculpture in front of one of the ministry buildings. Carved in stone was
a voluptuous woman whose body was painfully contorted to one side, while she faced
the other. The piece reminded PJ of Clara, not merely for its large breasts that curved
into full thighs but also it’s sad, heavy-lidded eyes, which he attributed to the fact that
she was a maroon.

“Edna Manley,” Violet said rather disappointingly after reading the plaque at the base
of the sculpture.

“The former premier’s wife,” PJ added.

“Of course.”

“Why the face?”

“I thought it was by someone else…Hannah Toogood.”

“Toogood?”

“An artist I know in England.”

“What a name,” PJ mused.

“And she lives up to it.”

In the car, Violet told PJ of sailing across the Atlantic, of landing in a world that
seemed like hell on earth. It was 1944 and London, at the time, mirrored what she felt
like on the inside – sullen and fallen-to-pieces. She remembered being chased through
the streets of Hackney by a gang of school children; a few stopping only to pick up a
handful of stones from leveled buildings. When Violet finally reached the residence
where her grandmother rented a room, she knocked furiously on the door. The children
caught up to her and just before she could be pelted with rocks and a stinging chorus of
“wog,” she was quickly pulled inside. Her landlady, Miss Toogood stared wildly at her as
a hail of stones was heard hitting the door.

“What is going on?” Toogood asked in an accent that seemed so strange to Violet at
the time.

“Please don’t tell grandma I come through the front door,” Violet had responded;
bent over and out of breath. “If she find out she’ll have my backside.”

“Were those children chasing you?”

“Yes.”

“And they do this often?”

Violet nodded.

“Mon dieu. Have you told your grand-mère?”

Violet nodded again. “She say find another way home. But I can’t walk down Well
Street. I almost break my foot last time, walking over all them rock stone.”

Toogood shook her head in disappointment. She looked out one of the windows to
see if the young mob had gone.

“Why don’t they like me?” Violet asked suddenly.

Toogood turned beet red. What the child was asking about was hate. The kind that
caused wars; the kind that desecrated synagogues and defiled Torahs; the kind that
painted Juif on the window of her father’s jewelry store; forced people she knew –
extended family members, friends, and former schoolmates – to wear yellow stars like
scarlet letters. Toogood wanted to tell Violet about intolerance but how does one make sense of the senseless?

Toogood asked Violet to follow her to the basement, a reinforced bomb shelter that she converted into an art studio. At the bottom of the steps, she pulled the cord for the light. With the room illuminated, Violet saw long tables with completed sculptures and works in progress; chisels, hammers, and other carving tools; shelves not only stocked with art books and nick knacks but loads of canned goods, a radio, and in the corner, a mattress with a lone pillow. Toogood walked toward a concrete sculpture of a man in a bowler. “I made this from the police station that was bombed. And this,” she said, pointing to one of a girl lying flat on her back, “from the hospital on Mare Street.”

Violet raised her eyebrows in interest and Toogood saw something in her that day; not the flickers of a candle fading out but the spark of potential, of hope.

“You must miss Jamaica,” Toogood said.

“No,” Violet said, frankly. “Don’t miss it at all.”

“Though I’m sure moving here was hard for you.”

Violet shrugged. Toogood stared at the little girl in her pleated skirt and sweater, seated on the stool, and sighed.

“You know what I would do when I felt someone did not like me?”

Violet shook her head.

“I would sculpt. And whenever I carved wood or stone, my anger and sadness would go away. It was something that I could control. And though I could not change what
others thought about me...with art...I could change what they thought was rubbish into a thing of beauty.”

“There’ll be those who say you can’t do certain things or go certain places,” Toogood added. “You may even be chased again…”

Violet was playing with the nick knacks on the table. Toogood leaned over so that she was directly in her line of sight. She held onto the little girl’s shoulders.

“No matter what they say or how they make you feel, know that you will always have a place here.”

It was in this studio she taught Violet form. It was in this haven she gave the girl color when her days seemed the bleakest. And years later, it would be Toogood’s book detailing her journey restoring the Black Madonnas of France that would change Violet’s life; would have her touring Spain and Portugal for its replicas the summer after her grandmother’s death.

Back at the estate, Donovan was returning to the warehouse as the last trucks were leaving the grounds. He had had no choice but to recruit his mother for help. It was the second Friday of the month after all and distributors from several parishes traveled to Pride to stock up on their load of rum and sugar. As he pushed a red wheelbarrow through the doors, he saw his mother pulling bottles of rum from a crate and stocking them onto one of the shelves. She was wearing brown trousers, which meant she had come to work. One of his fondest memories as a child was of her rounding up a herd of horses that had gotten out of the stable. What a sight it was to see her decked in a pair
of Percival Sr.’s enormous pants with suspenders that prevented them from falling down. He knew then he would have to marry a woman like his mother.

“I have to thank you again, Mama,” he said helping her stock the shelf. “Don’t know what I would do without you.”

“You don’t have to thank me. Is a mother’s job to help her child. Just a shame that gal don’t know what a wife’s supposed to do.”

Donovan removed his gloves and sat on the back of the empty crate. “I can’t believe she’s gone behind my back and done this.”

“From the moment you told me you were marrying her, I knew she was using you.”

“Using me?”

“For the McGann name,” Maude clarified. “Why you think you got married so fast? She knew it would open doors for her.”

“Is not that,” Donovan said.

“Then what?”

“She says art is apart of her. Is who she is.”

“Horse shit, as your father would say.”

Maude stared at her youngest son for a long time. Though Donovan took after her, he was very much like his father. There was a sense of duty about him. He always did the right thing the right way. She was sure Violet was undermining him; taking advantage of his good nature. The girl would have to be put in her place.

“Grace’s husband is the director of that museum, y’know,’ she added. “I could speak with him...”
Donovan turned slowly toward her. He could tell where this was headed. “Don’t bother,” he interjected. “It won’t come to that. No matter how independent we think we are, white man still run things and if you think they’ll give a black girl the job, you’re sadly mistaken.”

“Is just a dream,” he added. “And you and I know those rarely come true.”

It was sundown when PJ’s car pulled into the estate. The sky was a stunning tangerine and lavender. PJ opened Violet’s door and when she stepped out she thanked him profusely for driving her there and back. He asked if she thought she had the job.

“It’s hard to tell,” Violet said. “Virginia, the woman who did the interview, had no expression on her face until she read the letter from Toogood. After that she seemed...impressed.”

Violet smiled, thanked him again and turned to walk up the porch steps but PJ took her by the upper arm and gently spun her around. He said on the way home all he could think about was one of the many conversations they had; the one about Toogood’s job restoring thirteen and fourteen century sculptures and making them look new again; that in a sense that was what he had tried to accomplish with the estate – take something as old as distilling rum and make it novel and interesting to people today. PJ brought up the investment opportunity his friend, Roy, had presented him with.

“But after everything that’s happened,” he said. “I can’t see myself taking a chance.”
After a pause he added, “Have you ever seen the look in someone’s eyes when they’ve given up on your ability to achieve anything? That’s the look my father used to give me. Now it’s the one I catch in the mirror sometimes.”

As Violet stood watching this grown man oblivious of his own power, she was reminded of a BBC program she had seen a year earlier about an Ethiopian boy who graced the cover of what was the best selling issue of *National Geographic*. The boy’s hair was black ringlets; his skin was a glorious brown. He looked as if God had bathed him in nutmeg. Violet remembered seeing the image as a young girl and the gasp that escaped her when her eyes first fell upon it. Years later the photographer returned to Addis Ababa to present the image to the young man and to update the world on what had become of him. But when the photographer found him, in a hospital for wounded soldiers, Violet was disappointed. The child, now a man, resembled nothing of his youth. His hair was shorn and his skin was dry and thick like leather. His right eye was missing; flesh encased it like a mouth with no teeth. His other eye wandered as if in eternal search for its twin. The photographer too was taken aback but handed the magazine to the man and told him that he had captured the heart of the world. The man beheld his image and began to sob. His dead eye oozed a clear, thick substance like discharge. He asked everyone, and no one in particular, why he had not been informed of his beauty, that his face alone had men wealthy. Maybe he would have held himself in better esteem, he said; would have taken better care of himself; would have become a teacher or a doctor because in those professions people trust the authority of your face and the
words that came from it. Had he known, he certainly would not have sacrificed himself to war.

Violet could not help but see this young boy in PJ. No one had informed him of his beauty; no one had told him that his ideas alone could capture the world. “I think your idea was complete, like a building with four walls and a roof,” she explained. “And after your mother sabotaged it, all that remained was one bloody wall. But even if only one wall stands, isn’t that a testament to the resilience of that structure; to that idea? Does it mean that the other walls and roof can’t be rebuilt?”

It was through the kitchen window that Clara spied Violet and PJ. There was something about the lack of space between them, the way Violet was gently squeezing his forearm that did not rest easy with her. At sixteen weeks, the queasiness had finally disappeared along with the heartburn and her visions. She was now left with a hard abdomen and the occasional tingling sensation, an aftershock of her dying gift. Seeing them together gave Clara another sensation. Though she had grown to admire the woman, Clara couldn’t shake the nagging feeling that someday soon she and Violet would be enemies.

Violet was in the parlor waiting for the television to sign on when she heard Maude yelling for her. When she reached the hallway, Maude handed her the phone but stood close enough that she would not be ensured any privacy. Since the day of the interview Maude had taken every chance she could to show her disdain. It was usually in subtle
ways, like giving Violet cross looks or ignoring her all together. Over the past week, Donovan had slowly come around though, and in the end that was all that mattered to his wife.

Violet turned her back to her mother-in-law and said hello into the receiver. It was Virginia from the museum.

“Yes, of course,” Violet said excitedly. “I will be there on Monday. Thank you, thank you.”

After hanging up the phone, Maude followed her into the parlor.

“So...they gave you the job?”

Violet squinted. “You seemed shocked.”

“I’m disappointed,” Maude said, shaking her head. “I never knew what a selfish gal you were.”

Violet struggled not to raise her voice. “Selfish? Have you forgotten I gave up everything to move here?”

“You see my boy running ‘round here like a chicken with no head and what you do? You make sure you run as far away from him as you can. The boy needs you.”

“No, he needs someone to tell him its all right to be afraid. He thinks what happened to his father will happen to him and the only people he can trust are his family. And who does that consist of right now, you and me? I can’t encourage his fears.”

“And what about what I need?” Violet quickly added. “I can’t give anymore of myself away.”
“Is that the way you see it? That’s the problem with you young people today; think marriage is about you alone.”

Frustrated, Violet walked to the other side of the room and lit a cigarette. “You know what? It doesn’t matter what you or anyone says. Donny and I have talked about this in great length. He knows he has to seek help from others. I’m just not equipped for this line of work.”

Maude walked over to Violet and stood directly in front of her. “Then you’re not equipped for my son,” she said, defiantly.

Down the hall, Clara entered PJ’s office and was startled to see him seated behind his desk. With the shutters from the window wide open, the room was filled with so much light that it seemed unnecessary for the standing lamps to be on. Without his blazer and tie, PJ almost didn’t look like himself. He was practically buried under a mound of paperwork, mainly blueprints and sketches of floor plans. Clara saw him crumple two sheets and hurl them towards the waste basket behind him.

“A man from the bank come asking for you this morning. Him leave this.” She held up a large envelope filled with bank statements.

PJ pointed to the chair opposite the desk. “Leave ‘em there.”

The instant Clara placed the envelope down her legs refused to budge. It was as though they were locked in place. It was the first time they were alone together since she found out she was pregnant, and a moment she had been waiting for since she saw him and Violet standing so close to one another. She contemplated telling him about the baby. It was not the only time she had kept a secret from a man she loved, and one
that would change the course of their lives forever. The difference this time, however, was not having her gift to guide her. So Clara created her own vision. She would reveal that his child was growing in her womb. He would run to her and fall on his knees. He would say, at long last, that he loved her; that they would be a family; that losing her power did not make her powerless.

PJ looked up and saw that she was still standing there. “What are you waiting for?” he asked. “The rapture?”

Clara wanted to take him back to that evening last November when the twins were away visiting their mother and Maude and Percival Sr. had gone to a PNP function. She wanted him to remember the taste of her inner thigh, to make her shatter the stillness of the house with shrills of ecstasy.

“Well?” he asked.

Clara watched PJ knowing everything would change the moment she uttered the words. She gripped the back of the chair as her lips parted.

“You’re a strange girl, you know that?” PJ said suddenly. “I don’t know what spell you under today but you better come out of it.” He stared at her sideways. “I hope you not here to put something on me,” he added. “There’s a bottle full of holy water in the drawer so watch yourself.”

Clara shook her head. “Dinner soon ready,” she said.

“Is that you shoulda said from the start,” PJ quipped.

She had missed her chance. Defeated, she ran into the kitchen and turned on the faucet; let the sound of running water mask her cries of cowardice.
It was a sun-drenched day in Kingston and Violet was feeling at her best. She tapped the rusty canon in front of the museum before making her way through the glass doors. The lobby was white, sterile and reminded Violet of a hospital. It was filled with visitors, mainly American tourists. She walked over to the receptionist who sat at the front desk, clutching the strap of her purse, and leaned over so the woman could hear her over the soft mutterings throughout the lobby.

“I’m here to see Virginia Babcock.”

The receptionist, a short woman with a pudgy nose, then telephoned Virginia’s office. Violet turned to survey the lobby once more but when she turned back, the woman had a sour face on as she hung up the phone. She waited for her to say something but the woman’s attention was preoccupied with incoming visitors. Violet stood aside another five minutes until she was finally able to ask the woman if Virginia would be coming down to meet her.

“She’s in a meeting,” the woman said dryly. “Take a seat.”

Violet did as she was told. On the chair beside her was a single brochure with an image of one of the works in the current exhibition, Augustus John’s *The Two Jamaican Girls*. Violet gazed at their faces and wondered for a long time if it was the artist who told them to have such a sullen expression or if it came naturally. After some time had passed, Violet went back to the front desk.
“Pardon me. Is there any way I can go to her office? I’ve been here since half nine and I don’t want to give the impression that I arrived late. It’s my first day,”

“No,” the woman said simply and went back to answering the phone.

Violet’s frustration was growing. She knew something was not right. The sound of high heels making their way down the steps suddenly had her undivided attention. Believing it was Virginia, she made her way to the bottom of the steps but was disappointed when she saw that it was only Virginia’s secretary, Maxine; a lanky fair-skinned woman about her age. Maxine went over to the receptionist and whispered something. The woman responded with a pointed finger at Violet. Maxine summoned her over with the nod of her head and the two walked toward the exit but stopped just shy of the doors. The first word out of her mouth was “I regret to inform you.” The rest, Violet was sure she had imagined. She grabbed at her pearls in such shock, the clasp at the back of the necklace broke and the entire thing collapsed into her hand. She almost allowed Maxine to escort out the building without so much as an explanation but she quickly caught her bearings.

“I don’t understand. How could this be?” Violet wondered.

“The department has hired someone with more experience. I’m sorry you weren’t notified.”

Maxine turned to leave but Violet followed along side her. One of the guards made a move in their direction.

“Did someone speak to Virginia?”
Maxine looked at Violet as though she had guessed correctly. As much as she had tried to uphold a façade with rehearsed words, in an instant Violet had torn it down. She was not, however, given an answer, not even as the guard escorted her through the glass doors.

Violet arrived home late that night. When she got to the bedroom, Donovan was sound asleep on his side of the bed. She kicked off her heels, placed her purse on the dresser and laid down on her side; too tired to remove her blouse and skirt or roll her hair. Donovan felt for the night stand and turned the lamp light on.

“It’s midnight,” he said, rubbing his eyes. “I wasn’t expecting you back until tomorrow afternoon.”

Violet moaned in exhaustion.

“Guess what?” he said, sitting up in the bed. “I named the horse Matilda. Do you know what this means?”

“You’ve broken her,” Violet responded.

Donovan could hear the quiver in her voice. He rolled her over and saw that her eyes were puffy and red.

“What’s the matter, love?”

Violet sniffled. “They gave it away.”

“Gave what away?”

“The job. They gave it to someone else.”

Donovan got out of the bed to be at her side. “How can that be?”

Violet wiped new tears away with her fingers and hoisted herself up on her elbows.
“On the train home I was wondering the same thing.” Then after looking him in the face said, “I think your mother had something to do with it.”

Donovan got up and walked to the window.

“You’re jumping to conclusions, Vi.”

“Am I? This is just the kind of thing she would do. She’s done it to PJ –”

“Don’t,” he warned. “PJ’s middle name is ‘No Blame Me’. He’s never taken responsibility for his own failures. Daddy was always the villain in his eyes and now that he’s gone, I suppose Mama’s been promoted. I don’t need you following in his lead.”

“I don’t want to, Donny, but you should have seen her when she learned they chose me for the job. She was bloody pissed. I know she’s to blame.”

Donovan came over and knelt before her. “In God’s name, stop it,” he pleaded.

“Since we moved here it’s been one battle after another. It has to stop. Now you have no proof Mama had anything to do with it, yes?”

Violet bit her lower lip. “No,” she said, as if she doing so against her will.

“Then leave it alone. For once, let peace reign.”
CHAPTER FOUR

Winston Ashbery was a stern old chap; just ask the staff at his firm. Good mornings and good evenings would go unreciprocated; inter-office phone calls were answered with growls; even clients were afraid to approach him. Though he was an exceptional lawyer, he often treated them with as much disdain as the opposition. Most chalked it up to his style; said he was just living up to the description of him in *The Gleaner* as a “force to be reckoned with.” Ironically, the only person who seemed to break through this barrister’s barrier was someone just as coarse.

Ashbery had had a thing for Maude for years. It was quite evident to the other partners and associates when she was on the other end of his line. His feet would prop themselves on the desk or his index finger would twirl around the phone cord. Most often, he would spend the duration of the call with his chair facing the back of his office. He would have to focus his eyes on a car parked in the lot outside the window just to stop the chills he felt when her husky voice would call him “Winnie.” And no one called him that. During those rare times when Maude would make an in-person appearance at *Ashbery Myers & Gray*, Ashbery himself would pull out all the stops: would order one of his clerks to make her favorite blend of tea and go to great lengths to find an assortment of pastries and fingers foods to her liking. And though she would only show up to ask his advice on unscrupulous dealings within the legal limits, Ashbery never failed at gazing at her as though she was the first step in the second coming of Christ. Maude was well aware of the effect she had on the man but he was nothing compared to her husband.
Ashbery was short with horn-rimmed glasses and a thin salt-and-pepper moustache that hugged his top lip. Maude was more into the tall, strapping type.

So imagine Maude’s surprise one rainy day when Clara announced that Ashbery was at the front door; his black fedora braced tightly against his chest. He stood in the vestibule with his briefcase in hand, staring at everything around him. He was dripping wet at that point and when Clara offered to take his overcoat, he refused to part with it, glared at her as if she had just tried to steal it. Maude emerged then and escorted him to the parlor. She did not bother to offer him a seat.

“Why on earth are you here?” she wondered aloud; annoyed. In the past she had made it clear that no interaction of theirs was ever to take place at Pride.

“It’s urgent, my dear,” Ashbery muttered as he used a kerchief to pat his face dry.

At that moment, Violet was making her way down the hallway but stopped suddenly when she heard hushed voices coming from the parlor. She put her ear close to the door.

“Please,” he continued, “please tell me you didn’t take more money from the account.”

Maude sighed heavily. “Is that all? I still don’t see why you coming here was necessary.”

“One of the partners was this close to catching wind of it.” He demonstrated by closing his index finger in on his thumb. “I wasn’t supposed to give you access until your husband’s debts were paid in full.”

“I needed it for the funeral, you know that.”
“But that was months ago. What about the recent withdrawal of then thousand pounds?”

Maude turned away from him. How dare this man come to my home and address me in this manner, she thought to herself.

Ashbery walked up behind her. He told her he did not mean to be cross but if the partners found out they would have his head. He asked that she be more prudent in the future and as he said this, he placed his hand on the small of her back and kissed the back of her neck. Maude backed away; flustered.

“Have some control,” she stuttered. “My Percival hasn’t been gone four months and already you’re after me.”

Ashbery looked insulted. “What is this?” he asked, adjusting the cuffs of his sleeves. “You’re like a broken faucet. One minute you’re hot, the next you’re cold.”

“What is that supposed to mean?”

“All these years you kept me away so your husband wouldn’t know about our relationship.”

“You’ve gone mad.”

“Yes, madly in love,” he said, stepping toward her.

“Stay back!”

“The moment he died, you came straight to me! I thought it was your way of saying it was time.”

“Yes,” Maude said, angrily. “Time to nominate an executor...not a boyfriend.”
Outside the parlor, Violet held her hands over her mouth to prevent her laughter from being heard.

Ashbery was red in the face. “Obviously there’s been a grave misunderstanding. I should go.”

Maude said nothing else as he took his hat and briefcase and walked to the door. Violet scrambled to the vestibule only to realize they would be heading there as well. She had done a better job avoiding her mother-in-law over the past week, a feat that required great maneuvering at times. She even enlisted Clara as a sort of Maude detector. It had taken everything inside her not to confront the woman about what had happened at the museum. Ashbery walked quickly through the front door and without waiting for Maude, slammed it behind him. Violet pretended she was looking for an umbrella in the stand near the entrance.

“That must have gone well,” Violet mused.

Maude glared at her from the corner of her eye. She adjusted her blouse and tried to feign indifference but Violet could sense how uncomfortable she was.

“Mr. Ashbery is a busy man,” Maude stated.

“Apparently too busy to bid you farewell,” Violet responded with a sly smile. She reveled in seeing Maude squirm.

Donovan descended the staircase then and before he reached the last step, he commented on how wonderful it was to see his two favorite ladies spending time together. Suddenly his face lit up. “Why don’t you invite Vi to join your club?” he asked his mother.
Violet looked at Maude just in time to catch her wince.

“It’s not that simple,” she responded.

“Why not? Just this morning you were saying they need more people to help plan the gala. If Vi could put a wedding together in a month imagine what she could do by August.”

Maude didn’t doubt Violet’s event planning skill. The obstacle, along with her apparent disdain, was the woman’s skin color. As long as Maude had been treasurer of the St. Elizabeth Women’s Social Club no member had ever elected a full black woman to join. And she surely was not jumping at the chance to be the first one.

“I’m sure the girl has enough to do,” Maude simply stated.

Donovan assured his mother that Violet had been working long hours by his side the entire week.

“She’s gotten used to smelling like a horse’s arse. Her exact words. If that isn’t need for a break I don’t know what is.”

“Donovan!” Violet exclaimed.

“Mama’s not deaf,” he said. “She’s knows you cuss bad word.”

Maude stood in silence. To Violet’s amazement she actually seemed to be mulling it over, which only made her consider it as well. Besides being stuck in a room full of elderly women, Violet realized the gathering may serve to her advantage. What better way did women efficiently socialize if not through gossip. She was sure that Maude had boasted her chicanery to some if not all the members of the club. And like most individuals who – despite their differences – join a group for a common cause, Violet
knew there had to be someone among the bunch that disliked Maude as much as she did.

“The next meeting is this Thursday,” Maude said to Violet. “And you must wear a proper hat. The yellow one you have certainly will not do.”

Donovan was happier than his wife. “She has plenty of them,” he called out to his mother, who had begun her retreat up the stairs.

April proved to be quite a wet month. No sooner did one storm end than another start. On this particular day, Violet did not mind the showers as much. She liked when it rained while the sun was still shining. She was in the warehouse, sweeping water into a drain and did not notice that PJ was standing at the doorway watching her. He had never seen her dressed down in short pants and a head tie. Only she could make yard clothes look so good. He knocked on the door for good measure and she turned toward him. He was carrying a large roll of paper under his arm.

“Where’s Donny?” he asked suddenly.

Violet shrugged. “Likely in the fields.”

“Think he’d mind if I steal you?”

PJ led Violet to the old mill. He walked over to a column in the middle of the ruins and laid the roll down.

“I want to show you something,” he said.
Violet stood beside him as he unrolled the sheet to reveal a neat, hand-drawn floor plan.

“A friend who’s a draftsman made it for me.”

“What is it?” she asked.

“It’s your idea.”

She laughed. “Mine?”

“Yeah,” PJ smiled. He always seemed to be undressing her with his eyes. “Remember a few weeks ago when you told me not to give up on my dream?”

Violet nodded.

“When you said that it should be rebuilt, it reminded me of the mill,” he continued. Was like lightning struck.”

“You’re rebuilding the mill?”

“Into a visitor center.”

PJ was excited and spoke rapidly as he walked Violet around the edifice. At the entrance there would be someone to greet the visitors and distribute pamphlets about the estate; and bathrooms; and a gift shop where people could buy rum, sugar, and souvenirs. Finally he pointed to another room on the floor plan.

“A gallery,” he said, “where any art you want from the estate will be on display.”

PJ took Violet by the hand. “I know you only here ‘til the end of the year but is yours, you hear? And you can give as many tours as you want.”

In the four months Violet had been at Pride, PJ had done something that not even Donovan had been capable of. He had given her the chance to have something of her
own. Like Toogood’s studio back in Hackney, the gallery could become her sanctuary; a place where she could have her own thoughts and do the things she wanted to do, at least until she departed from that godforsaken place.

Donovan made it a point to see Violet off that Thursday before his mother’s club meeting. His kiss goodbye was interrupted by the honking of the car horn; a signal from Maude no less, who sat stoically in the back seat. As the vehicle drove off the estate, Violet and Maude traveled in complete silence. Violet sarcastically asked her mother-in-law what she thought of her hat; said with all the time working on the estate, she was just happy to finally look like a lady again. Maude said dressing up was not all there was to life. Violet did her best not to burst with laughter; this coming from a woman who once wore her Sunday best to the racetrack in Caymanas Park.

The club meetings took place at a hotel in Lacovia. When Maude and Violet walked through the door, everything came to a standstill. Several women stopped dead in their tracks; conversations ceased mid-sentence; and poured tea missed its intended target. All eyes were on the visitor, whom Maude simply described as her “son’s wife.” Violet surveyed the room. Each woman was dressed to the nine. They wore silks and satins and shiny baubles and despite the heat outside, some had fur stoles. Their faces were like porcelain; their make-up and hair immaculately done. It seemed being a colored woman was mandatory for membership. Violet was suddenly conscious of herself in a way she had not been since she was a child. To her, their stares conveyed a blend of
both confusion and intrigue at the fact that despite neither of her parents having her with a mate that could ensure her place in a higher social status, she had still managed to marry up.

Violet had been wrong about one thing, though – their age. Some were in her range but most were in their thirties and forties. Only Maude and three others were the older women of the bunch.

Just when Violet thought it might be best to make a slow retreat, one of the younger women approached her in haste from the back of the room; her fingers pointed as if in accusation.

“Is that a Sergio Ribiero?” the woman asked, wide-eyed.

Violet looked down at her red suit with its signature gold buckles at the shoulders.

She realized then if there was one thing that could unite her with these women, it was fashion.

“It is,” Violet said proudly. “I bought it from a boutique in Lisbon.”

Maude rolled her eyes.

“And those shoes,” said another who made her way before the crowd. “From a cobbler in the Canary Islands,” she boasted. “Y por gratis! Though I suspect he fancied my feet more than me.”

The room erupted with laughter. Soon she was surrounded. Almost everyone was pawing at her clothes; her handbag; her pillbox hat. Some asked her questions just to know the answers, others just to hear the cadence of her accent.
Violet knew at some point she’d have to get what she came for. She began mingling with the crowd; talking to them in separate groups. Whether the topic was European fashion, the pastoral and architectural beauty of England, or mass transit in London, Violet managed to always lead the conversation back to what she dubbed her “abrupt dismissal” from The Capital Museum. Her listeners, however, had nothing to contribute, no gossip to give. She was only met with “so-sorries” or “how-unfortunates.” One said she had an uncle who loved the museum; another had only passed by the building. Violet was not sure if they did not know anything or just were not willing to reveal it. Either way, Maude had certainly covered her tracks.

Just before the meeting commenced, Violet was introduced to Doris, a woman whose husband owned a 300-acre cattle farm and aviary. She confessed that she had more in common with her yellow crested cockatoo than with most of the women in the club. Violet imagined all types of birds perched on Doris’ shoulders, which reminded her of twigs. Doris spoke incessantly about how fortunate Violet was to have Maude as an in-law. There were so many things Violet wanted to say in rebuttal but since the subject of the conversation was standing to her immediate left, she simply nodded her head and smiled. Maude made her way into the conversation by touching Doris’ abdomen and remarking that she was soon to make her mark in motherhood.

“You’re expecting?” Violet asked.

Doris’ face lit up with excitement. “Due in August.”

“It’s a boy,” Maude declared. “I can tell from the way you’re carrying.”

“Everyone says that,” Doris frowned. “I want a girl.”
“Rubbish,” Violet said. “Girls take away your beauty.”

Doris laughed. “I’m sure your mother was just pretty the day she had you.”

Violet stopped smiling. “My mum…” she said without knowing how to finish the sentence. She tried again but her voice trailed off.

“…she passed on,” Doris said with empathy, as if it was not assumption but fact.

Violet began to tear up. She could not even correct her. Though Annie Small was still among the living, to her only surviving child she was surely dead. Violet could not pinpoint exactly when the memory of her mother began to fade but gradually, over time, she forgot what she smelled like; that the sound of her singing voice was like the clang of coins in pregnant pockets; that the crease at the side of her mouth was caused by too much laughter. It wasn’t until she could call herself a Brit that their connection was finally severed. When her Caribbean accent disappeared, she was thrilled. She was no longer what her mother was – a Jamaican woman.

Maybe it was the tears streaming down her face or the strange vacancy in her eyes, but for the first time Maude saw Violet in a different way. She realized her son’s burden being associated with the child of a murderer was nothing compared to that of the child itself. Someone clanged a spoon against glassware and asked everyone to take a seat as the meeting was about to commence. Not sure of how to deal with Violet’s sobbing, Doris quickly made her way to the other side of the room, leaving them behind. Maude then gave Violet her kerchief, led her to a passage way, and pointed to the ladies room. Inside she turned on the faucet and gathered the stream of water in her hands. Slowly she lowered her face into her palms and let it wash over her. Violet heard someone exit
one of the stalls and wash their hands at the adjacent sink. The woman was much older and wore a uniform with the name Bertha sewn into the breast pocket. She smelled like cleaning fluid. Violet could feel the woman staring at her as she dabbed her wet face with the kerchief.

“You think she easy?” Bertha said; holding onto the sink with both hands.

Violet looked behind her to see if someone else had entered the room. She turned back when she realized the woman was addressing her.

“That Maude...she no easy. She shoulda never bring you here.”

“How did you –”

“Me know everything; been here too long. Everyone chat them business in front of me.”

“And you’ve heard Maude talk about me?”

Bertha shrugged. Violet felt it was a strange time to be coy. She wondered if the woman was toying with her. She looked in her cloudy eyes and asked if she had heard Maude mention anything about what happened at the museum.

“Don’t know ‘nothing ‘bout that,” Bertha said, shaking her head. She then went to retrieve a small brush from a pail behind the door and got on her knees to scrub the floor. Violet watched her intently. She looked a lot like Gong Gong.

“I’m sure Donovan is as pretty as ever though.”

Violet stared at the old woman for some time before asking, “You know my husband?”
“Is me raise him,” Bertha said matter-of-factly. “Him and that facety one, Likkle Percy.”

“He isn’t so little any more. I’ll tell them you said hello.”

“Don’t!”

Bertha said it with such force that it startled Violet. Before she could inquire what she meant, Maude opened the bathroom door.

“The ladies are going over the gala,” she said to Violet, while giving Bertha the look of death. “I thought you might want to contribute.”

On the back porch of the great house, Violet sat reading an article with a headline that blared: BUSTA DECLARES ‘JAMAICA IS WITH THE WEST.’ The Prime Minister was siding with the United States and their crusade against Khruschev. In the same article a medical student studying in Cuba lamented the United State’s recent policy limiting travel between the two islands. “Jamaica’s not independent,” he was quoted as saying. “We’ve gone from Queen Elizabeth to King Kennedy.”

Violet had the paper before her and didn’t notice that someone at the bottom of the steps had been watching her for some time; not until the person sneezed. She lowered the paper to her lap and did not hide her disappointment when she saw that it was Roy Singh. She did not like when PJ brought him around because he always spoke in explicit
detail about his dalliances with women in front of her and that was the mark of a troubled man in her eyes.

“Mr. Singh...” she said, coldly.

“Come now. You know me long enough to call me Roy.”

“Are you looking for PJ?”

“No, I’m looking for you,” he said with a wink. “PJ’s showing Reyser’s daughter ’round the property and I’ve seen the place plenty.”

“Is she looking to invest?”

Roy laughed. “Not at first, y’know. But when she get a look at PJ in his cricket uniform, you shoulda see how quick her mind change.”

He winked again and something about the implication sent Violet reeling on the inside. It was a feeling she could not understand in the moment. It was like stumbling upon something that had yet to be discovered; something unnamed. PJ came around the corner then and trailing behind him was Gayle Reyser. Seeing her was like a shock to Violet’s senses. Her hair was chestnut brown, her breasts like perfect missiles, her thighs in glorious disproportion to her waist. In England, they had a word for her type – buxom. Gayle fanned herself with a deep pink hat that matched her floral print dress. Her skin was pink too, as if she had applied blush all over. Violet looked back and forth between them. They seemed to have just shared something; a joke maybe, because they wore matching grins. When PJ saw Violet he toned down the wattage of his smile.

“Gayle,” he said sweetly, “this is my...Violet...uh...my sister-in-law.”
Violet wasn’t sure if it was his blunder or the difficulty he had in describing her that made them start laughing again.

When PJ was finally able to complete the introduction, Gayle greeted her while Violet merely acknowledged her with raised eyebrows. They continued on their way with Roy joining them. Violet was suddenly aware of appearance. She looked down at her clothes and realized she might as well had been wearing rags.

Could that have been what they were sniggering at? she wondered to herself.

The headline in paper caught her attention again. Apparently Jamaica’s attraction to America was not only political but sexual too.

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“I gave my sister two tickets,” Doris said at the next club meeting.

“You’re supposed to sell them, dear,” Maude pointed out. “That’s why it’s called a fundraiser.”

“Oh, my,” she responded as the other woman shook their heads in annoyance. “Since the pregnancy I don’t know where my common sense is.”

“It’s gone,” one of the women quipped. “Right along with your figure.”

Violet yawned. They had been on the topic of the gala for the past hour and discussed everything from silent auction items to what kind of china would be used. Prior to that they had gone over the minutes from the last meeting, discussed new member dues, and announced upcoming birthdays. Maude finally steered the
conversation over to the club’s 35th anniversary, which would take place the following year.

“Any suggestions on what we could do?”

“What about a boat ride?” Violet suggested.

The entire room turned around in their seats to face her.

“Thank you,” one of them said, feigning kindness. “But only member ideas will be taken into consideration.”

Violet smirked. She noticed a shift in everyone’s demeanor this time around. Her novelty had apparently worn off. She grabbed her purse and headed out the door for a smoke. Just then, Bertha turned the corner to throw out the garbage.

“Remember me?” Violet asked.

“I’m old,” Bertha said, “not senile. Of course me remember you.”

Violet laughed.

“What you doing out here? Shouldn’t you be inside?”

Violet sighed. “My membership has been revoked.”

“Eh, eh…before you even apply.”

“I swear Maude brought me here as a joke.”

“I tell you she no easy.”

“That you did. And you would know since you two clearly have history.”

“Who tell you that?”

“C’mon,” Violet said. “The other day in the loo…I mean if looks could kill…”

“What you want fi know?” Bertha asked out right.
Violet seemed taken aback by her sternness. “Nothing,” she said.

“That cigarette’s not the only thing blowing smoke.”

“I’m sorry,” Violet said. “I didn’t mean to offend.”

Bertha threw the last bag of trash in the bin. Violet offered her a swig off her cigarette.

“I worked for the family,” the old woman said finally.

“When?”

“Long time ago. I knew her husband when we were just youths. Even though him rich and me poor...he was my friend.”

Bertha admitted to being envious of Maude when Percival Sr. married her. After his mother had passed, she had felt like the woman of the house and when Maude took over, she lost all sense of self. Bertha did not mind making her presence known. For years she would tamper with Maude’s things just to annoy her – put on her clothes, wear the scent of her perfume, even misplace her things. After PJ and Donovan were born, she found ways to manipulate them to hurt Maude’s feelings. It was easy since she had been more interested in the club than she was in her own children. Maude would complain to her husband but he was defiant in his defense of Bertha. As long as she had him on her side she knew she would remain a staple at Pride. When the boys had enough sense to think for themselves Bertha knew Maude would ensure her time at Pride would come to an end so she devised a plan to send her into a jealous rage; one that would force her and her husband apart. One night when Percival was drunk in the study with his friends, Bertha saw that Maude was discreetly watching them from the
doorway. She snuck up behind her and whispered in her ear. Strangely, Maude did not react. There was a reckoning in her eyes that frightened Bertha. Maude had figured out a way to destroy her by digging up an indiscretion in her past. There were things about her that she did not want out there in the world; something so unspeakable she did not dare utter what it was. In exchange for her silence, Maude forced Bertha to quit Pride and work as a porter at the hotel, where she had been ever since.

“Unbelievable,” Violet said.

“Me see a likkle of myself in you.” Bertha said.

“How so?”

“You playing a game you no know how fi win.”

Violet and Maude entered the great house together with the latter placing her large pruning shears in a box in the closet. The former had just come from the warehouse when Maude instructed her to put on the gloves that lie idly on the ground and assist her with the rosebush. Though Violet was exhausted, it was because of the strange nature of the request that had her go along with it. Even more surprising was the fact that they had had a real conversation; one that wasn’t laden with rolled eyes and deep sighs but with pleasantries. Maybe Maude was simply keeping enemies close and if that was the case, Violet didn’t mind getting closer. She was still smarting at Bertha’s
insinuation that she was playing a game she wouldn’t win. Maybe it was Bertha who
hadn’t played it right.

Clara approached Maude in the hallway with news that a call had come in for her.

“Boy, you get fat,” was Maude’s response, before taking leave. “I hope you’re not
eating everything before it hits the table.”

Violet’s draw dropped. She instructed Clara not to pay the old woman any mind.

Clara said she saw them spending time together. “Since when unno friend?” she
wondered aloud.

Violet laughed but Clara was not amused. She warned about getting close to Maude
because her intentions were always questionable. Then she said the same went for PJ.

“I’ve only had good encounters with him,” Violet said.

“Yes, because him love you.”

There was a strange look in Clara’s eyes that Violet chalked up to indifference but
inside the girl was in agony; as if someone had just told her the most horrific news.

Violet looked uneasy as well.

“Why would you say something like that?”

“You no see the way him look at you when unno tog
gether?”

Violet insisted there was nothing going on.

“Him no good,” Clara warned. “When him have you trust, he’ll want to you give up
everything for him. You watch if you think is joke me a make.
Ask Violet how she knew Gayle Reyser was back at Pride and she say it was her perfume.

The moment she realized the woman was behind closed doors in PJ’s office, she made every excuse to pass by. When it seemed like pacing was leading to nowhere, she stationed herself at the top of the stairs so she would hear when the door opened.

Inside, PJ offered Gayle a drink. She sat languidly in one of the armchairs, her hair in a structured beehive, a multi-colored scarf tied around her neck. She patted the cushion on the adjacent chair so he could join her. PJ sat down and just stared at her.

“What?” she asked.

“No, no…is just when I didn’t hear from you…”

“And the verdict?” He appeared as though he did not want to know.

Gayle fingered the rim of the glass with her finger. “Why do I get the feeling you know what I’m going to say before I even say it?”

PJ shrugged. “I’ve had my fair share of rejection,” he confessed. “I’ve come to know the signs.”

“And I suppose the call from Roy didn’t help.”
“That too.”

“Look,” Gayle said, crossing both her arms and legs. “Your family’s business has had a long history in St. Elizabeth so you’re obviously doing something right. But after talking to my father’s advisor he thinks with tourism being a fledgling industry here and the island still in transition there’s risk investing at this time.”

PJ got up from the chair and moved to the other side of the room.

“I’m not trying to tell you your idea isn’t viable,” she added.

“Then what’re you saying?”

Gayle went to his side. “I’m saying save your money – get a loan if you have to – but gain experience. Build your audience and don’t just rely on tourists. Think school groups, universities. Talk to history and economics professors. They should be your base. Once you’ve proven you have the stamina to make it in the industry then we can revisit the topic.”

“When?” PJ asked coldly. “In a year…maybe two?”

“Of course it sounds dismal if you think of it that way,” she said, rubbing the sleeves of his blazer. “It’s not the end of the world. We can still meet for dinner until then.”

PJ laughed. “Dinner with a black man? You find risk in investing but you don’t find none in that?”

“Let’s just say it’s one risk I’m willing to take.”

Gayle then looked at the clock above the mantle place and realized she was going to be late for another appointment. She went back to the chair to retrieve her purse.
“I’m due at a meeting in Westmoreland,” she said as she placed her card in his pocket.

“Call me if you need the name of a good contractor...or for any other needs. Don’t be a stranger.”

From the top of the stairs, Violet saw PJ escort Gayle to the door. She descended the stairs just as he was heading back to his office.

“Did you get the money?” Violet asked point-blank.

PJ stared back at the door as if Gayle’s figure still lingered there. Her scent certainly did.

“No,” he said, entering the office. Violet soon followed, closing the door behind her.

“I’m shocked,” Violet said. “I thought she was willing to give you that and more.”

PJ remained silent. He began organizing the items on his desk. He clearly did not want to talk about it. Violet was unsure whether to be happy or sad that things had not worked out. There was a strange stillness about him and she realized he was trying his hardest to compose himself.

When Violet said the words “I’ll give you the money,” she thought it was all in her head until PJ looked up from the desk.

“What did you say?” he asked.

Violet scratched her head. She told him her grandmother had left her some money and though most of it was spent, she still had a good sum.

“I had hoped to spend it on a lavish wedding in London,” she mused.
PJ simply stared at her. What he did not know, could not know, was that deep down she was testing him. Violet did want to help him but apart of her was only offering to see if Clara was right; to see if he would not think twice about taking what was hers.

“Someone has to have their dream come true,” she added for good measure.

Upon hearing this, PJ made his way over to her and pulled her in for a long embrace. With their chests so close, she felt the rapid succession of his heart beat, which only made hers feel like it would leap out of her mouth for she was certain he had failed. But then he let her go and looked deep into her eyes.

“I have to find the money on my own,” he said. “You don’t know how much your offer means but the only thing I would ever want from you is your heart.”

Violet blushed. For the first time she permitted herself to think that if the occasion ever presented itself maybe, just maybe she would give it to him.

One by one they were led into the drawing room. PJ poured two glasses of red wine. He handed one to Violet and the other to his mother.

“What’s this for?” Maude inquired.

“In due time,” he responded then turned to Donovan, who stood across the room. “I bet you’re still a gin man, no true?” he asked. “All that time around rum...”

Donovan didn’t respond. PJ poured him a glass anyway but when he went to hand it to him, his younger brother waved him away.
PJ shrugged his shoulders, raised the same glass in the air, and said, “I’d like to propose a toast.”

“To what?” Maude wondered.

“Why to a dream come true, Mama. It won’t be long before we break ground on Pride Estate Tours.”

“You must be mad.”

“You don’t believe me?”

“Over my dead body!” Maude exclaimed.

PJ smiled. “Be careful what you say, Mama. Those may have been Daddy’s last words.”

Violet contemplated whether to chime in. She hated getting in the middle of things but the timing of recent events was just too good.

“Did Gayle give you the money after all?” she asked.

“You knew about this,” Donovan inquired from across the room, “and didn’t say anything?”

PJ turned to Violet and laughed. “I never know you have to report every conversation we have. Remind me to take minutes next time,” he quipped.

Donovan grew angry. “This is going to alter the integrity of the estate. Daddy must be rolling in his grave.”

“One can hope,” PJ retorted.

Maude walked to Donovan’s side and began rubbing his back to calm him down.

“Don’t worry yourself,” she said. “He won’t get away with it.”
“I have a permit that says otherwise.”

“We’ll see about that. Your father left everything to me. You’ll be hearing from my lawyer, mark my words.”

“You don’t mean Ashbery?”

Maude froze. She spun around in time to catch the devious look on PJ’s face.

“I got an interesting call from him this week. I never even know Daddy had a will so imagine my surprise when I learn the ol’ man left me money. Granted, it was nothing compared to the amount he left Donny but…it will do. And you know what’s best of all? Because I’m the next heir in line, all the land goes to me.”

“That can’t be true!” Donovan was yelling now.

“You can thank Quinn for that one.”

“Is a lie,” Maude said confidently. “I get the property.”

“You know what, Mama? You’re right. You can have the sofa and the television. Crosses, you can even have his car. But you have no right to the man’s land. You must’ve forgotten you’re just a woman.”

Distribution day had been brutal on Violet’s back. More rum flew off the shelves that month than any prior. And this time, along with the twins, she was forced to help load a few crates into the back of trucks. Donovan said distributors were stocking up for Labour Day, when all the unions planned celebrations after their rallies. Violet was not lost to the significance. By the end of the day, she had toiled so long and hard, all she
wanted to do was rest. Just as the last empty crate was stored away and the last pile of debris had been swept up, Maude showed up at the warehouse. She looked so clean and polished (the complete opposite of Violet’s appearance) that she was certain she had just come from a club meeting.

“I have something for you,” Maude said, holding a small brown box out in front of her.

Violet wiped the dirt from her hands onto her overalls before taking the box. When she opened it, cradled in cellophane was a porcelain dove; its tail feathers pointing upward. Except for the hand-painted black dots it had for eyes and its orange beak, it was stark white.

“It’s lovely,” Violet said.

“Doris wanted you to have it,” Maude said, taking the pin out of her hat so she could remove it. “She wanted to give you a real one from the aviary but I told her I didn’t want any wild animals in the house.”

Violet laughed. “She’s giving me a gift and I have yet to get something for the baby.”

“Oh, there’s plenty of time for that; perhaps at the next meeting.”

Violet placed the dove back in the box. She had no intention of returning to the club. The members had given her information she could not use and Bertha had given her more than she needed to know.

“I appreciate you bringing me to the meetings, I really do,” she said. “And the ladies have been so kind—”

“But is not your cup of tea,” Maude interjected. “I understand.”
“I’d still be happy to help with the gala if you’d like.”

Maude smiled and cocked her head to the side. “Actually, there’s something else I could use your help with.”

Violet realized she had made it all too easy. She had learned long ago that conversations with Maude were like small boats on stormy seas – they could overturn at any moment. “All right,” she said with some hesitation.

Maude pulled a stool from behind the main table and took a seat. She laid her hat gingerly on her lap.

“PJ trusts you,” she said after a moment.

Silence ensued, mainly because Violet was unsure if that was all Maude was going to say, and Maude wanted to study Violet’s reaction to the statement. The only thing the younger of the two offered as a reply was a creased forehead.

“I know he trusts you,” Maude began again. “He confided in you his plan to take over the estate.”

Violet shook her head violently. “He certainly did not,” she corrected. “PJ only shared with me a thought; an idea to build something. I was not privy to any wills or deeds, or anything of that sort.”

“But he confides in you.”

“He…tells me things, yes. But…that’s because I’m only one he feels he can talk to.”

Maude fell silent for a second time and from where Violet stood, she could see tears welling up in her mother-in-law’s eyes.
“There’s nothing I can do about the land, y’know. I talked to a friend of mine who’s a lawyer and he said as a woman I have no right to my husband’s land. Is all his. He will be the end of us all, I know it.”

“You can’t think that way.”

Maude scoffed. “He’s gonna throw us out like yesterday’s trash, you wait and see. And you’ll be in the heap along with us. Just remember who you’re married to. This is Donovan’s livelihood. He would die for Pride. What will he do if he’s forced out? Have you even thought of that?”

Violet had not and she did not know if she wanted to. The whole situation was filled with irony. If Donovan was no longer apart of the family’s business, maybe they would return home sooner than anticipated. But on the other hand, their roles would be reversed. They would be away from his home and he would be the one unfulfilled. He would not even be able to manage the export side so what kind of life would they lead?

Maude left her seat and walked over to Violet. She said it was about survival; about birthright and legacy. She said Donovan deserved half of what PJ had, if not more. She said Violet should use PJ’s trust to her advantage; to find out what his next steps were and to convince him to give his brother what he was owed. Violet agreed, but only to end the conversation and even then she was unsure if PJ would show them the kind of mercy he had not been afforded.
The first thing Violet did after Maude’s pitch was slip a note under PJ’s office door telling him when and where he could find her. They met under the cover of nightfall at the old mill; hid themselves behind a section in the ruins where the view was obstructed by overgrown shrubbery and grass. PJ retrieved his cigarette case from the inside lining of his blazer and offered one to her. She refused, instead told him to put it away; said the smoke would surely reveal their position. Violet was a ball of nerves; sweat beads glistened on her upper lip under the moonlight. She knew when she returned Donovan would ask her where she had been and she was already conjuring up an excuse. PJ, on the other hand, seemed to get a rush from the covert nature of their meeting. It reminded him of the first time they spoke. Only this time he imagined they were paramours on a secret rendezvous. Violet ruined the moment for him by bringing up his mother’s fear of forced exile from Pride.

“PJ kissed his teeth. “What this lady take me for, ee? Sometimes I have to wonder if is really she give birth to me.”

“I don’t know what to say,” Violet responded. “I felt sorry for her.”

“You should have seen her, PJ. She was crying.”

“Crocodile tears,” he assured her. “She could never do those things in front of me…I’d laugh in her face.”

“But you can see why she’s concerned.”
PJ wondered why Violet was taking up Maude’s crusade. He then remembered that both women had but one common interest – Donovan. Violet wasn’t asking for her sake but his.

“I think you should give Donny his half,” Violet said suddenly.

He turned quickly to face her. “Half of what?” he asked sternly. “You know how much money he got?”

“You own the land, PJ. Just give him control of the export side.”

PJ laughed. “How the tables have turned. I was the one stuck here for years while he gone a foreign. That was supposed to be my life,” he said, striking his chest with a balled-up fist. “Y’know when he set foot back in Jamaica, all I could think about night and day was how I wanted to hurt him.”

“That’s your brother…,” Violet reminded him. “My husband.”

“I know that, and that’s why I would never do a thing. You’re the last person I’d ever want to end up hurting.”

“So you’ll give it to him?”

PJ shook his head to the contrary. “When you go back…” his voice trailed off, “he’ll still be head of exports. I can guarantee you that. But no one will ever get in my way again. I give him half and he won’t stop ’til he finds some way of gaining control of my half too.”

He took her by the hand. “There’s something else at work here, can’t you see? Certain things have led me to this moment. This is my time, Vi.”
Violet leaned back against the stone wall and sighed. She knew that just as there were events that led him to where he was, there would be others that would surely try to steer him away. This notion inspired her to reveal the final prong of Maude’s scheme – to gain his trust so she could report back what his next plans would be.

“And how she expects you to do that?” PJ wondered.

Violet shrugged. “Well, if it means spending more time with you then I’m all for it.”

It was then they devised a scheme of their own, one that would involve a certain level of chicanery. It would begin with Violet recounting to Maude what she knew so far – that PJ had no intention of throwing them out of Pride; that Donovan’s job in London would be secure. But Maude knew all of this already. She had only used her son as an excuse to prey on Violet’s sympathies. The young woman was merely skimming the surface. What Maude wanted was the bloated underbelly. This was all Violet needed to segue into the crux of her and PJ’s plan. She would tell her mother-in-law that PJ had asked her to give several tours of Pride to groups of primary and secondary school teachers and college professors specializing in art, history and economics. They would learn everything about Pride and the plans for the new facility in order to schedule tours for their students upon its opening. When the appointed days arrived for the tours, and Violet invited the groups to the parlor room for tea and refreshments, they knew Maude would hijack the conversation to plant seeds of doubt about PJ’s intentions. But what she did not know was that the individuals were imposters; decoys meant to distract her while PJ showed the real groups around the premises. Violet knew the plan was going
well when Maude – so hell bent on destroying PJ’s prospects – did not notice that one of the decoys had brought his tool box with him from his real vocation.

Some time later, Violet handed her mother-in-law a copy of blueprints for the visitor’s center, which she claimed to have taken without PJ’s knowledge. Maude almost choked on her bread pudding in excitement. And while she took her time examining the design thoroughly, even identified a few discrepancies she thought might go against certain building codes, PJ was going over the true blueprints with a contractor recommended by Gayle Reyser.

They pulled their scam off for weeks. Violet and PJ constructed a cage of deceit while Maude worked aimlessly in her hamster wheel. If Violet had had any reservations regarding her role in the sham, they were dissolved by PJ’s incessant justification that his mother deserved it for her role in Violet’s workplace demise.

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Donovan threw the newspaper across the bed in disgust. He was appalled at the full page article PJ had garnered. Splashed across the front page was an image of his brother posing confidently in front of the estate; the headline suggesting he was following in Percival Sr.’s footsteps.

“They’re calling him the new face of Pride,” Donovan said in disbelief.

Across the room, Violet sat in front of the vanity applying lipstick. Her hair was pulled up in a French bun and she wore a nude-colored slip.
“I’m tired of this, Vi. I won’t hold my tongue any longer. It’s bad enough I can’t work in peace without people watching what I’m doing. Now this? The workers don’t like it; I don’t like it. Next time PJ brings them around I’m gonna cuss them out.”

“Don’t say that, Donny. Not all the workers mind. When I’ve brought groups to the houses, Owen didn’t have a problem. I think he quite fancied the attention. You should have heard him explaining the distilling process.”

“Oh, please,” he huffed.

“It’s true. Hear what...next time a group comes by, I’ll have you talk about what you do in the fields.”

Donovan’s lipped curled in anger. He felt she was mocking him.

“You may be surprised,” she added. “This may bring more business to the estate than the rum ever did.”

“I thought you were on my side,” he said defensively.

Violet cocked her head back and chuckled. “I’m just having a laugh,” she said. “Of course I’m on your side. I’m not really up for PJ’s party but your mother insists that I go. Are you sure you don’t want to come with?”

“Not even if you paid me,” Donovan said harshly. He then watched as she pinned her garter to her nylons and stepped into her dress. “Y’know, when I suggested you and Mama spend more time together I didn’t mean like this.”

“We’re getting along better now, aren’t we?”

“I suppose.”
Violet asked him to help her with the back of her dress. Donovan hopped off the bed and after zipping her up, spun her around locked her in a deep kiss.

“You’ll muss me,” she said, playfully pushing him away. He took a seat on the edge of the bed. She grabbed her purse and stole one last look in the mirror.

“I hope he hasn’t asked you to invest anything,” he said.

“Just my time.” Her kiss left a trace of lipstick on his forehead.

That night, Violet attended a celebration thrown in PJ’s honor at the country club. Sports equipment, from cricket bats to footballs to nets, were stored away to create space for the dance floor. The billiard and ping pong tables were covered with cloth for the spread of food and guests including Reyser employees and PJ’s old classmates from U.W.I. danced to Jimmy Cliff on the record player. PJ wore a green suit that looked as crisp as a one pound note. He stood with hands in pockets next to Roy, who was hosting the bash. He felt on top of the world. When he opened up the newspaper that morning it was less validation than it was a vindication for the years he spent defending his ideas to his parents.

Suddenly, the needle was lifted off the record and the music came to an abrupt stop. Roy called out for everyone’s attention. “No worry, the party’s not over,” he said. “More food’s on the way. I just want to toast the man of the hour. Him so big, he wants to be called Percival from now on.” Roy made a snobbish expression that caused everyone to laugh. “Seriously...he’s doing big things and I just hope when he’s making more money than he already has, he’ll remember who called and got him that article in The Gleaner. I
hope you all picked up a copy. If not, there’s a whole heap of them near the
doorway…and the bathroom…and the kitchen.”

Everyone laughed. Someone in the crowd yelled out when PJ was going to make his
television debut.

“Ask my agent over here.” PJ nodded toward Roy.

The crowd erupted in laughter again then went back to drinking, dancing and eating
when the music resumed.

“What’s that?” PJ asked, pointing to a thick bulge in Roy’s breast pocket.

“Oh,” Roy said. He pulled out a small black box and handed it to his friend. “It’s for
you, from Gayle.”

PJ opened the box to find two shiny gold cufflinks staring back at him.

“She sends her apologies for not being here tonight,” Roy continued. “She had to fly
back to the States this morning. Family emergency.”

PJ nodded with understanding. “I hope everything’s all right.”

Roy nodded. “She love you gone to bed,” he exclaimed. “You get in she punani yet?”

PJ shoved Roy aside, laughing, but the latter wanted an answer. He pursued the topic
was PJ was more preoccupied with the vision across the room in off-white. It was Violet.

He watched as she made small talk with a group of women. And though she was not
dancing, he loved the way her body swayed side to side in place. It took all his might not
to rush over there and take her in his arms.

Several of the ladies left to refill their drinks in the kitchen but Violet stayed back as
she had barely touched hers. She walked to one of the tables to pick at a tray filled with
finger foods. When she asked the person blocking the table to excuse her, the woman
turned around to face her and offer an apology.

“I know you,” Violet said suddenly.

“Do you?” the woman responded. She scanned Violet over like a batch of fresh fruit
and though her face was familiar, she couldn’t quite place it.

“You work at the Capitol Museum,” Violet said. “Virginia’s secretary.”

Maxine suddenly perked up; her dour expression changing into one of serendipitous

Violet felt strangely comforted knowing that she had not been the only casualty of
that establishment. “Sorry to hear that.”

“You should be. You’re the reason they let me go.”

Violet’s jaw dropped. “Me?” she asked in disbelief.

Maxine sighed and hurled a patty in her mouth. “Or maybe I just knew too much.”

“What do you mean?” Violet asked before downing the rest of her wine.

Maxine seemed to revel in Violet’s curiosity for a sly smile move across her face. She
placed her own drink down on the counter and moved closer to Violet. She told her that
just one day after she had accepted the job, an internal call came in for Virginia from the
director. It was the tone of his voice that made her listen in after she transferred the
call. He told Virginia he had been contacted by someone.

“Who?” Violet asked.
“Don’t know,” Maxine shrugged. “I suppose someone who didn’t think you should work there...said your history would bring the wrong kind of attention to the organization.”

“My history?” Violet wondered aloud. She knew the woman was alluding to her mother. If that was not a page out of Maude’s book she did not know what was.

“The director said if Virginia let you go, the museum would be given a large donation. I was instructed to terminate you over the phone but with everything going on and the new show opening up that week...I didn’t get to it. When you showed up a few days later, Virginia was so vex she let me go.”

Violet stared at the ground and shook her head. “I can’t believe this.”

They stood without saying anything for a short time then Violet asked, “Do you know how much was donated?” She remembered PJ had confronted Maude about the bounty she had put on his dream. Now she wanted to know what hers had cost.

“It was a check...for ten thousand.”

“Ten thousand quid?!” That was the exact amount she overheard Ashbery telling Maude was missing from the estate’s account. “She really made it worth their while. And it was from Maude McGann?”

Maxine thought back for a second. “No. I remember distinctly because the person signed the check with the initials – D.M.”

Violet dropped her glass and it shattered on the floor. Someone yelled for the porter to clean it up. She stumbled through the crowd feeling like she had been drugged; like someone had dropped something large and heavy on her head.
It had been Donovan all along, she thought. He had lied to her; had given her his best poker face. Even worst, he had used her mother against her. All that time she had placed the blame on someone else when it was really the man she slept beside every night. The Donovan she thought she knew seemed so strange now; so foreign. 

When PJ saw her heading in his direction, he pulled her aside to introduce a gentleman whose lover owned a small art gallery in Brighton. There was talk of an open position and her meeting with the owner when she returned to London but Viole had not been listening at all. She excused herself and stumbled into the kitchen. PJ followed behind her and watched her pour herself a glass of Bourbon. It was the most luminous he had ever seen her. The kitchen was dimly lit except for a few working ceiling lights. Violet was standing under one with a cigarette in one hand and her wine in the other. Between the light ricocheting off the rim of the glass and her pale dress, PJ knew that that was not the woman Donovan had the opportunity to become acquainted with. They had not even met. The woman before him was not the kind you contemplate marrying; not the type you let walk out of the door, into the dark, into another man’s car. She was the type you gave it all up for. Violet suddenly saw him watching her and she stared back long and hard. She seemed to be calling him over with only her eyes. When PJ noticed the tears, he faded in and out under the lights until he reached her. He stood close to her out of concern. Violet did not want him to ask her any questions. She did not want to have to tell him that she did not know the man she was married to. Instead she boldly stood on her toes and leaned in until her mouth touched his. Then something marvelous happened. PJ
began to tremble. This grown man weakened from her touch. Violet had never made someone lose their strength before and knowing this suddenly made her stronger.

It was not long before PJ was escorting her to one of the back rooms. She did not resist; not even when it felt like he was leading her to the edge of a cliff. She simply held onto him for dear life. In the dark, she allowed him to press her against the wall, to prop her up on something, to remove her clothing with quick hands and make her wet with his tongue. Every kiss against her skin was like cool water on the hottest day and every thrust inside her was like being pushed too high on a swing. He made her forget gravity and time and that she had unknowingly given the wrong man everything.

Donovan knocked, and when there was no response, he slowly opened the door. Violet was still clad in her party dress and laid in the same position he had found her in that morning. That morning when he woke, he noticed that her side of the bed had not been slept in and went searching in the various guest rooms until he discovered her. He assumed she had come home in the early hours and had not wanted to disturb him. But when she had not shown up to the warehouse, he learned from his mother that she had not left the room at all, and he became concerned.

Violet heard her name being called and someone trying to rouse her by stroking the side of her face. She raised her tear-stained face from the pillow and moaned.

“What time is it?” she asked, her eyes adjusting to the light.

“It’s half past two.”
She slowly rolled herself out of bed and went to the vanity. She stared at her reflection. Her mascara had drooled down her face; her hair was disheveled; and her eyes were red with veins.

“How much did you drink last night?” Donovan scolded. “You know you can’t hold your liquor.”

Violet glared at him through the mirror.

“I can’t right now,” she whispered. “I just can’t.”

“What’s wrong?”

“Just go,” she pleaded as she pulled out her hairpins.

When Donovan walked up behind the chair she was sitting in, Violet turned around and yelled for him to get out. He backed away; hesitating at the door. She sat with her head in her hands; still aware of his presence. “Please go.”

When Donovan closed the door behind him that day, Violet did not open it again for another three days. She stayed confined, drifted in and out of sleep and hazy stupors; refusing food and company. It was as if she were in mourning. She grieved for the life she left behind, for the husband she thought she knew; for her unwilling role as pawn in his sick game. She wondered if their marriage had been for sport; a gamble. For years he had offered no hint of commitment yet how easily he accepted it the moment his mother wanted him back home. What a hand she had been dealt. She spent her lucid moments crying and staring at the movement of shadows on the wall and listening to the drone of the sugar mill and the singing coming from the fields; anything to get her mind off of Donovan’s deception. And whenever it became too unbearable, Violet
would remember the scent of PJ’s aftershave and get lost in the memory of their pitch-black affair.

They came en masse from the distillery and the fields; reeking of rum and glistening with sweat. They wiped the day’s work from their brows and swatted mosquitoes that buzzed at their ears and landed on their arms. They washed their hands at the garden hose; fresh wounds caused by rusted machinery and the sharpened blades of cutlasses smarted as the water met them. They chewed raw cane; the peeled stalks hanging from their mouths like white cigars. They laughed and yawned and instinctively gathered in one long line.

Donovan sat behind a wooden desk in the section between the houses and the fields. It was rickety and only large enough for one person to occupy. He slid two fingers over the initials he, his father and grandfather, Kenneth, had all carved into its surface. It gave him hope that one day, when he had a son, he too would be added to the roster.

One by one the workers approached the table and waited as Donovan consulted the ledger for their wages. A quarter of the way through, a bagasse burner named Noel Foster shook his head in disgust at the few notes he held firmly in hand. As the following worker approached the table, Noel maneuvered his way in front of him, held out his palm and asked, “A what this, boss?”

Donovan looked down at the ledger but PJ’s handwriting did not suggest there had been a discrepancy. “Is something wrong?”
“Yeah, mon.”

“You didn’t even burn fifty kilos this week. I’ve got seven carts outside the boiling house filled with trash. It’s not burning itself.”

Donovan dismissed him but Noel did not leave, instead he stood off to the side and waited. As time passed several other men, including Reuben Campbell and Solomon Harry from the fields and Owen Lynch and Errol Smith from mill and houses, stayed behind and joined him. When the line looked as though it would not move, they waited. When dusk fell, they waited. When it felt like they could wait no longer, they waited. Finally, when the last person received their pay, all five men surrounded the table. Donovan sized up each and every one of them. They were not an angry mob, though, just men who felt uneasy about their declining income.

“Don’t tell me you all received the wrong pay,” Donovan said. “The book don’t lie.”

They all glanced at each other as if there was something that had gone unsaid. Because Errol had been at the plantation the longest, he was nudged to speak.

“It may not lie, boss, but is still not telling the truth. We work long hours. We work and we work but we get less and less.”

Donovan shrugged. “I don’t know what to tell you.”

“When them people come, it slow us down from doing what we suppose to. How me fi manage the houses them if you want me fi explain to everybody how things work?”

“And me can’t bun the trash,” Noel interjected, “if me a explain how the boiler work, you understand?”
Owen cleared his throat. “Is truth. How me fi cut cane if me haffi stop every time
tem come through here?”

“We woulda never do it if we did know we gone lose money,” Errol said.

“We should be paid for our time,” Solomon added.

Donovan understood it now. They had become a casualty of the guided tours. They
were slowing down their level of productivity to explain the various processes involved
in cutting the cane and turning it into rum and sugar. And because their wages were
dependant on a quota, their pay had gradually decreased. Donovan realized he had
nothing to say. They were not to have any involvement in the tours. It had been unfairly
required of them and they had every right to be compensated.

Later that night, Donovan went to PJ’s office. He knew the task at hand would be a
difficult one. Though they were related, he could not relate to his brother. Even as
children, when Bertha would bribe them with jackass corn and grater cakes to turn
against their mother and behave inappropriately in her presence, PJ always took it
further than it needed to go. He seemed to thrive off chaos; off confusion.

“This can’t be good,” PJ mused when Donovan walked through the door. He ushered
his brother to a chair but he refused to sit.

“I don’t want to quarrel with you, PJ, but sometimes you leave me no choice. You do
everything backwards. I don’t know how you think you’ll ever succeed.”

PJ laughed. Donovan did not know he had succeeded at making love to his wife and it
felt amazing to have that secret; to hold it over someone so smug and condescending.

“Nothing new. You’ve never had much confidence in me.”
Donovan flung the ledger on the desk. “How could I when you do such foolish things?

I had five workers confront me this evening because of something you failed to do.”

PJ picked up the ledger. “Did I not have the numbers right?”

“Oh, it’s right. But the work is suffering ‘cause you have these men doing things they’re not supposed to. They don’t work for you or your damn business. You want someone to explain how the estate works, you hire them.”

PJ’s raised his eyebrows. “Fair enough.”

“And you pay these men for the time they’ve spent helping you.”

Donovan made motion to leave but stopped abruptly at the door. “You know…you are so selfish sometimes. You have no consideration for anyone but yourself.”

“I said I would pay them.”

“And who will pay for what happened to Vi?”

PJ’s face dropped. “What do you mean?”

“You were the last person to see her, no? Ever since she came back from the party, she’s been acting…strange.”

“I didn’t notice,” he said. But that was a lie. When he caught wind of her so-called illness he was highly concerned. He wanted to know if Violet regretted their tryst but several attempts to see her were thwarted due to Donovan and Maude’s constant presence outside her bedroom door. They always seemed to station themselves there in shifts like palace guards.
What finally revived Violet was a note shoved under the door in PJ’s handwriting pleading with her to meet him at their usual spot. When he saw her approaching the old mill he was not only shocked that she had actually come but also by her appearance. She looked fragile; like if she was not handled with care she would break. Her hair was pulled away from her face. She wore no make-up, instead donned a pair of black sunglasses. She quickly removed them, revealing weary eyes. PJ, however, looked more distressed than she did. He was convinced he had authored her pain. And when she finally told him about Donovan’s betrayal, he was relieved. If she had been anyone else, he would have gloated; would have given her a list of told-you-sos. Instead he gathered her in his arms for a kiss.

At that very moment, Clara was removing dry bed sheets from the clothing line when she witnessed Violet and PJ’s public display of affection. A burning sensation burrowed its way into her chest and for a split second she thought her visions had been resurrected. But it was no apparition, what she had seen was happening right before her eyes. Clara watched as PJ escorted Violet to the front of the property. She followed close behind until they drove away in his car.

In town, PJ made love to Violet. He was thrilled by the way her body seemed to have longed for his; the strength of her arms as she pulled him deep inside her. He began to think about the next time they could steal away and the time after that. Violet turned over in the bed and lay facing him. He wanted a daughter with her cheek bones; a son with her eyes. And when she opened them and they settled on him, he wished time would stand still so he could gaze in them forever.
“Thank you,” she said.

“For what?”

“For allowing me to breathe.”

PJ pulled her in closer to him until her head was lying on his chest. He traced the smooth skin of her shoulders with his hand.

“What now?” he asked. “I mean, where do we go from here?”

Violet shrugged. “Don’t know. This wasn’t exactly how I planned things would go.”

“I’ve only dreamed of this,” he confessed, laughing. “It still feels like a dream.”

Violet got out of the bed and pulled her slip over her head. Suddenly she said, “I’m going back.”

“Not to him,” PJ said as he raised himself on his elbows.

“Back home,” she corrected. “There’s nothing left for me here. I feel like I’ve been adrift for a long time; like I’m marooned.”

PJ came up behind her and rubbed her from the shoulders down. “When you feel that way again, you come find me, you understand? I’ll always be here for you. I know you think you have no reason to stay…but…let me be reason enough.”

As she was led back to bed, Violet thought of a better reason. If sleeping with Donovan’s brother wasn’t revenge enough, she would also find solace in knowing she helped ensure that Pride Estate Tours had come to fruition.
When it was time to return, PJ let Violet out down the road so they would arrive back at the estate at different times. Violet entered the house and Maude was surprised to see that she had been out

“When you didn’t come down today I had a mind to call Dr. Ellis,” Maude said. “Is a good thing I didn’t waste his time.”

“I went out for a little air,” Violet responded then hastened herself up the staircase.

“Supper soon ready,” her mother-in-law called out after her.

Later that night, Donovan was heading to bed when he noticed a light under the door of the guestroom Violet had been staying in. He opened the door slowly to find her admiring the ceramic dove Doris had given her.

“Lazarus awakes,” he said.

Violet feigned a smile but also appeared nervous and fidgety. She chalked it up to not having eaten much that day.

“Are you sure you’re all right?” he asked. “You still look bad.”

“I’m fine...really.”

“Mama said you went out today.”

“Yeah... to Alligator Pond.”

“What did you do, fish?” The very thought of her with a rod and bait had him chuckling.

Violet cleared her throat to control her anger. “After being shut-in for so long, I just wanted to smell the air...to sit on the sand and watch the sea.”

He sat beside her on the bed and gently turned her face toward his. “Your eyes...”
“What about them?” she asked wearily.

“They don’t smile anymore. Not like they used to.”

Violet placed the dove on the night table and stood to pull the bed sheet out from under the bed.

“You’re not coming to our room?” he asked.

“I’m staying here tonight,” she said, without looking up.

“Why?”

Violet sighed heavily. “I don’t want to have to row with you, Donny.”

Donovan’s patience was being tried. “What’s going on? You’ve been acting so strange since the party. Now, I’ve given you some time to yourself but something tells me you aren’t sick at all. It’s not right for you to keep secrets, Vi.”

She scoffed. “Y’know that’s the first thing you’ve said since we’ve been here that’s true. You of all people should know that at Pride, secrets are like currency. It’s what you people live off. You mean to tell me you’re not keeping any secrets from me?”

Donovan stared at his wife for a long time. He wondered if she really knew about his hand in her termination. He had gambled enough times to know when someone was calling his bluff.

Violet felt the moment she had rehearsed in her mind for days had finally come. He would deny any wrong doing and she would have to expose him for the liar he was. But Donovan refused to give her the satisfaction of such a confrontation. He simply said that he would give her another night to come to her senses and then retreated to his own bedroom.
Donovan paced the floor of the parlor in anticipation of his mother’s arrival. He was consumed with enough fear and guilt at Violet’s veiled accusation that it kept him up all night. He wondered what she knew, how she knew it, and what affect it would have on their marriage. When his mother initially brought up the idea, he had wanted nothing to do with it; did not want to be an accomplice in the scheme. But when Violet had indeed been hired, he strangely felt that the changes everyone talked about on the island had directly affected his home. He then took the lead, borrowed 10,000 pounds on the estate with his mother’s consent, and boldly carried out his plan. He knew it was wrong; that the end did not quite justify the means, but then again, he never believed Violet would have discovered the truth.

When Maude finally entered the parlor, Donovan led her to the couch so they could talk. He appeared nervous, lowered his head to his lap and held onto his mother’s hand. She patted his head and asked what was wrong.

“I think she knows,” he murmured from his lap.

“Who knows what?”

“Vi,” he said simply.

Maude slowly removed her hand. She knew it was inevitable that the girl would find out about the bribe. She had wanted to handle it herself; knew the only way it would truly work was if there was no paper trail. Donovan, however, disagreed; insisted on having full control.
“How she track it back to you?” Maude asked.

“She didn’t say.”

“But you certain she know?”

Donovan raised his head. “What else could she have been hinting at?”

“You tell me, Donny. But this doesn’t surprise me at all. I tell you from the start to have me deal with it but you’re just as stubborn as your daddy.”

“What should I do, Mama?”

“Oh,” she said, feigning shock, “now you want my advice.”

Donovan slouched back in the couch; appeared defeated.

“What you should do,” she continued, “is what one should always do in this situation—lie ‘til even you believe is true.”

PJ was not the least bit surprised when the parish building inspector made an impromptu appearance on the estate. In fact, he had been expecting it. PJ merely led him to his office and ordered Clara to get him a glass of water. The inspector pulled several folded sheets from his briefcase, said he had been made aware of a three story, 10,000 square-foot monstrosity in violation of several building codes. Maude had taken the bait after all, PJ thought to himself. He wanted to laugh. Instead, he pulled out the original designs of the one-story building he was actually constructing; one that included complete electrical and plumbing features. He then introduced the inspector to the contractor and an engineer who would be supervising the construction process.
Afterwards, PJ made it seem as if the man had been duped; as though someone has wasted his time. When word got back to Maude that there were in fact no violations, she encouraged Violet to step up her surveillance and report back to her. But this only created a domino effect with severe repercussions.

It seemed the more information Maude wanted meant the more time Violet and PJ were expected to spend together. And the longer the affair went on only served to fuel Clara’s discontent and animosity towards Violet. PJ certainly cared for her more than any woman that had ever come before and Clara did not need any vision to see this. When she would spy them at the old mill, her insides would churn and whenever Violet claimed to be out shopping but would return with no evidence of her excursion, Clara felt as though someone had been sitting on her chest. All she thought about was PJ making love to Violet. She wondered if he touched her in all the same ways; if he believed in her abilities even though there was nothing extraordinary about them.

In hindsight, Violet had noticed a change. When a friend wrote asking why she never returned her calls, Clara claimed to not know anything about it. When the necklace PJ bought her went missing, Clara claimed she was not sure but it may have accidentally been thrown out when she was cleaning the room. And when Violet went in her closet and found that her clothes had been torn with surgical precision, Clara claimed they may have gotten snagged on something when she was washing them. Things did not come to ahead until the evening Violet returned from one of her hotel romps with PJ to find Clara hunched over the dresser in the guestroom, crying; shards of porcelain scattered at her feet. And even though Violet was angry that the young girl’s actions had
once again led to something of hers being destroyed, her first instinct was to see if she was all right. Clara spun around and when she realized it was Violet, she glared at her with hate-filled eyes.

“Me smell him all over you,” she said with disgust.

“Pardon?”

“You must think me blind but me see unno. As soon as him inherit everything you run into him bed.”

Violet finally understood that she was referring to PJ.

“I can explain...”

“Cha!” Clara scoffed.

“You don’t know the whole story,” Violet said.

“Explain what? That you’re a whore? You no satisfied ‘til you screw every man in the house? Is a good thing Mr. McGann dead and gone.”

“You have no right to speak to me in that manner,” Violet exclaimed. “I’m still the lady of the house.”

“Lady? Not every bitch come from England is a lady.”

“You’ve forgotten your place. I suggest you find it.”

“Or what?”

Violet looked down at the remnants of her beloved dove and became incensed. She knew it had been no accident. For sometime she had chosen not to see the kind of wickedness Clara was capable of. All was revealed now.

“What business is it of yours who I sleep with?” Violet wondered.
“You forget you have a husband?”

Violet laughed. “When did you become so virtuous? Was it before or after you found out you had a bastard growing inside you? You should spend less time in other people’s affairs and more time finding your child’s father.”

“Me know where him deh,” Clara said matter-of-factly. “And me know you was screwing him today.”

Violet looked startled. She had once noticed an odd level of familiarity between PJ and Clara. She knew the girl certainly never thought of him as her superior. Violet thought it had something to do with the way Maude had broken PJ down. All this time she assumed the girl did not respect him but now it seemed maybe she had wanted him all for herself.

“You’re mad!” Violet yelled. “You have no class. He would never lower himself to be with a girl like you.”

“You as evil as you madda,” Clara shot back.

Violet slapped the girl just as Maude entered the room.

“What’s going on?” Maude asked. “I can hear you yelling all the way from downstairs.”

Instead of answering, Clara rushed from the room in great haste. Violet bent down to pick up the broken pieces of her dove. Maude repeated the question and Violet knew it was her only chance to take advantage of the situation; to make a preemptive strike before Clara did. She sat on the edge of the bed and tried her best to look as grave as possible. It certainly was not difficult.”
Violet sighed and said, “Clara’s having Donny’s baby.” She paused; letting the absolute shock of the declaration hit Maude like a ton of bricks before adding, “And now she’s flaunting it in my face.”

Maude was more confused than anything else. As far as she could tell Clara and Donovan’s interaction were limited to simple greetings or to inform him of phone calls or people who were looking for work. Just like with the hands on the plantation, he always made it a rule not to fraternize with the help; a lesson he learned from his father.

The more Maude thought about it, the more Violet could see that she did not believe her lie. If there was anything the young woman had learned in her time at Pride, it was that Maude had an uncanny way of tapping into insecurity, of preying on everyone’s weakness. And thanks to Bertha, Violet had uncovered hers.

“I didn’t believe it at first but then Clara began doing wicked things; began treating me like her enemy – she stole my jewelry, ripped my clothes. She also broke the dove Doris gave me.” Violet held up the pieces in her hand; like a fist-full of teeth. “I never thought I’d be the mistress in my own marriage.”

Violet accepted the kerchief Maude handed her. She could see that her demeanor had changed. She had done her best to jog the memory of Bertha – the parallels were certainly uncanny. In an instant, Violet had resuscitated a ghost from the older woman’s past; the one time in her life when she was her weakest, when she was not in control.

Maude thought back to time she found Bertha on the street in her clothes; to what she said to her one day that changed everything. She had been keeping tabs on her husband while he entertained his friends. Bertha had walked up and whispered, “That
Percy is a McGann through and through. Him drink him rum, him cuss a likkle bad word and him love a black woman.” As a proud colored woman the mere implication of infidelity almost snapped her in two. It would not have meant anything if Maude did not suspect there was some truth to her statement. Her beloved Percival did have a thing for the dark ones after all.

Maude wanted to explain to Violet that men were of a certain ilk, prone to vice and temptation. She wanted to say that it had also happened to her; that there were days she too wanted to barricade herself in a room and not see the light of day. Instead she said nothing. Violet let the pieces of the broken dove cascade onto the bed like a witch with her bones. She had cast a spell of silence over Maude. She shook at the thought of such power for she knew a silent Maude was dangerous.

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She even hold the knife better than me, Clara thought to herself. When she entered the kitchen that morning, she was stunned to see another woman standing where she always stood, before the stove, meticulously cutting into a large green plantain. She was even wearing her apron. The woman was older, possibly in her mid-fifties and had bad skin. When she dropped several slices of the plantain into the frying pan, the hot oil popped; flew upwards into her face and all over her arms. But she did not run to sink to put her hands under a running stream of cold water like Clara would have; did not even apply butter to salve her wounds.
The replacement turned toward her direction, stared through her as if she were not there at all and resumed cooking. Clara felt like a figment then; like a duppy that had no clue it had died and had come back to reclaim its place in the world.

So this is what is like, she thought, to have no power.

Clara felt out of sorts because she had always had power, even before she knew what it was. She could recall visions as early as the age of six, of scenes flashing before her eyes like film projections, only more vivid as though they were taking place in real time. One minute she would be in the middle of sewing clothes or cooking stew, her tiny plump frame hunched over a dutch pot atop an open flame, and the next she would be locked in a trance. Her father would slap her on the least fleshy part of her, the back of her knee, just to snap her out of it; would yell at her for skylarking.

It was not until the visions started coming to fruition that she realized they were not daydreams. And they were becoming too close for comfort, like the time she saw her uncle soaring through the air, surrounded by sparkling shards of glass. She had thought nothing of it until she found her Granny waiting for her and her father on the steps leading to their house.

“Brown come this morning,” Granny uttered.

Clara’s father looked shocked. “Him come back? I thought nothing could take him away from the bank?”

Granny began to cry and Clara’s father finally understood what she meant.

“S’maddy put the root on the bwoy.”
Granny said that she had been in her kitchen kneading dumplings when Brown appeared with vibrating hands. He told her he was sorry; that the painting his colleague had given him kept ordering him to do terrible things. For weeks the orders persisted and he would refuse. On the forty-first day, the voice found its way inside him. He barricaded himself in his office and did the only thing he believed would make the voice cease – jump from his twelfth story window. Clara had seen it right before her very eyes.

There was also the time Clara was walking to the market. As she past a house held up by bricks, the home of a girl who had gone missing, her chest became heavy; felt as though her lungs were being filled. She saw in rapid succession, images of the missing girl in the river; struggling to keep her head above the water. But her attempts were in vain for she disappeared beneath the dark waters. Clara learned, not long after, that a fisherman had discovered the girl’s body wrapped in the entrails of a dead gator.

Clara remembered when her presence alone could command a room; when no one dared try anything for fear she had already foreseen it. Not only was her gift gone but because of Violet’s deceit so had everything that mattered. She wondered how she had convinced Maude that the baby was Donovan’s. When confronted, it was futile to protest, to utter the name of the real father. She cursed herself for not having told PJ when she had the chance. Now every word out of her mouth would sound like an attempt to cover up a lie she never created.

After grabbing her belongings, Clara made her way to the vestibule. Petey and Howard put her in the middle of their embrace; gave her a teary goodbye. Maude came
between them and took back the house keys; banished her from Pride in a hailstorm of hopes for the baby.

“I hope is a girl child,” Maude said.

“I hope she’s blacker than your nose hole.”

“I hope she drops your womb.”

“I hope her face favors ol’ cow.”

“I hope she’s born blind so she can’t see how wicked you are.”

“I hope she’s born deaf so she can’t hear your lies.”

“I hope…”

“I hope…”

“I hope…”
CHAPTER SIX

It was a small room. The walls were a mute shade of tan. No images adorned them, not even Bustamante’s portrait; a staple in all ministry buildings. Violet took a seat at the back of the room. Three individuals wearing suits soon entered and made their way to the front; each carrying with them a stack of files that thudded against the wooden desk they crammed behind. Violet counted five microphones, which meant two members of the panel had yet to arrive. She studied them and tried to gauge their personalities; the likelihood that they might have compassion for a convicted murderer.

As she anxiously waited for the hearing to begin, Violet checked her make-up in her compact. She had spent so much time on her appearance that she nearly missed the train to Kingston. It had been a week since that she opened The Gleaner and read that her mother was seeking freedom under the Parole Act, which had recently been passed by Parliament. The chance that Evil Annie might see the light of day was a miscarriage of justice. Violet wanted to be there on behalf of the victims, yes, but there was also the nagging curiosity of what had become of her mother. She wanted to show the woman that despite her actions, she had turned out nothing like her.

The door opened again, and behind the two remaining panel members, entered Annie and her attorney. The face that had been a blur for all those years was now as clear as day. Violet was struck by how much she resembled Gong Gong. Annie was diminutive in size; much shorter than she remembered. She wore a short sleeved top
and her jeans skirt reached her ankles. Violet watched as she sat across the table from
the panel, with her back to the viewers.

So that’s her, Violet thought. The monster in her dreams was just a frail middle-aged
woman. She felt no pity though; knew a cold blooded killer lurked inside.

“We will begin the hearing,” the female panel member said. “Please state your name
for the record.”

Annie used her shackled hands to push her glasses against the bridge of her nose.

“Ann Small,” she said. Her voice was just above a whisper.

“And your age today?”

“Forty-eight, Ma’am.”

“The panel has reviewed your case. According to the constable report, on the evening
of March 27, 1944 two male infants were found deceased in your residence on Burke
Road, St. Andrew parish. Is this true?”

“It is.”

Violet calculated the dates in her head and a chill ran down her back. She was now
the age Annie had been when she committed the crime.

“You plead not guilty before Judge Morrison on April 20, 1944. Is this true?”

“Yes,” Annie’s voice had gotten a little stronger.

“During your trial you testified that you filled the tub with the intention of bathing
the infants but were suddenly struck ill and went to lie down. You awoke when you
heard the screams of your eldest child. That was when you learned the infants had
drowned. It was your belief that they had crawled into the tub while you were asleep.”

Violet could not believe that had been the woman’s excuse. She clearly had no
remorse for ending two young lives.

“Yes,” Annie replied.

Violet made an outburst from her seat, which briefly halted the proceedings. When
the panel could not locate the narrator, they continued with the interview.

“The court found you guilty of two counts of murder and you were sentenced to life
imprisonment at Fort Augusta, where you have spent the past nineteen years. Is this
true?”

Annie wiped the tears that fell from each eyes. “It is.”

“Do you still maintain that their drowning was accidental?”

“No…I believe it was at my own hand.”

Violet was upset. “You believe?” she yelled.

The outburst caused Annie to turn around and face her opponent. She locked eyes
with Violet but quickly turned back when she saw that they were filled with anger.

One of the panel members put his lips up to the microphone. “Ma’am, sit down or
you will be removed.” Violet backed down when Annie corrected her statement.

“I know it,” she said.

“The panel would like for you describe, in your own words, the events of March 27,
1944.”
Annie Small clutched her hands together and held them close to her chest. “They never suffered,” she began. “I made sure of that.”

“Just the facts,” the female panel member said. “You will be given additional time to explain your actions.”

Violet watched Annie turn to her attorney, who nodded back as if willing her on. “I put Sam in first. I held his head in the water and when he stopped moving I did the same to Stan.”

“What did you do after that?”

“I went to bed,” she admitted, lowering her head.

Violet used her kerchief to stop the flow of tears. The panel sifted through the mounds of paper that littered the table.

“Was your intention to drown them?”

“Yes.”

Violet lowered her head to her lap and hugged her knees.

“Prior to March 27, 1944, had you thought about killing your children?”

“I had thoughts.” Annie covered her face. “Of ways I might harm them.”

One panel member leaned over to the other and whispered, causing her to shield the microphone with her hand.

“Do you believe you were of sound mind?”

Annie shook her head.

Violet wanted to yell, “Rubbish,” but controlled herself.

“In your own words, explain why you believe it happened.”
“I never expected two,” Annie said. “Their father never even want one so when the second baby came out, I knew I’d be caring for them on my own; like with my girl child. After I bring them home all I want to do is sleep. But I have these thoughts. I take them down the stairs and I think ‘what if I just drop them?’ I take them outta door and I think ‘what if I fling them pram in the street?’ Bad things like that. That day, I feed one and the other need changing. One crying and the other wake up. And it start all over again. Then when one cry, the other start cry too. And I can’t get no sleep. When I set them bath, the bad thoughts come back and I just…” her voice trailed off. “I just want to sleep.”

Annie’s attorney took the minutes that followed to detail her exemplary record in Fort Augusta; her job as a porter and her work assisting the prison chaplain. “Miss Small is an example to other inmates,” she said.

The panel took their time verifying that she had received no disciplinary citations. The female panel member spoke directly into the microphone. “Before we deliberate, there is someone here who would like to make a statement. Would Violet McGann please step forward?”

Violet jumped to her feet; dropping her purse. She was asked to sit at the table between the panel and Annie. She did not turn to her mother but could feel the woman’s stare.

“I’ve sat here and listened to the court refer to my siblings as ‘the infants’ and ‘the deceased.’ Annie called them ‘one’ and ‘the other.’ Their names were Samuel and Stanley Foster, and they were seven months old. Sammy was quiet but playful. He
would do this bit where he would make eyes at you then turn away. Stan was very outgoing. He loved the sound of his own voice and would make the same rubbish noises over and over just to make you laugh. I was only eight when they were killed but I was more of a mother to them than Annie ever was. She wasn’t there when they learned to crawl or when they sniggered at something for the first time. She said all she wanted to do was sleep.” Violet turned to Annie then. “All they wanted was to live.”

The panel paused for a short recess. Violet left the room and went to get a drink from the water fountain in the hallway. When she turned, Annie was standing behind her with two warders at her side. Her attorney stood a few feet behind.

Annie’s face lit up as tears welled in her eyes. “I’ve thought about you everyday,” she revealed then reached forward with her shackled hands. As a reflex Violet stepped back. Annie stopped and placed her arms down in front of her. Violet noticed they had the same slender fingers. Annie looked her over again. “You’re so pretty. You must be doing all right for yourself.”

“Looks are deceiving,” Violet responded. “Funny, isn’t it? I came here so you could see what a great life I was living, but I might as well be wearing rags. You ruined me. Because of you I grew up thinking the people I loved would all end up leaving me. I valued my worth in their eyes. I lost a job because of you. I’ve had nightmares my entire life because of you. But y’know what? After today, I don’t think I’ll be having them anymore.”

“You hate me.” Annie sounded pitiful.
“I hate what you did. I hate that you thought Sammy and Stan’s lives weren’t worth a damn. I hate that I was raised without a mother; that I wasted years fearing you; that I gave you so much power.”

“I don’t expect you to understand,” Annie said.

“What is there to know, except why?”

“You heard what happened. I lost my mind.”

“But you’ve found it now,” Violet mocked. She wanted to thrash her fist against her face. “Gong Gong said you did it for a man.”

“What?”

“She heard you fell in love with a man but he didn’t want a woman with three children.”

“Someone was telling her lies. No wonder she never write me.” There was a brief moment of silence before Annie asked, “Is she here?”

“No,” Violet answered coldly. “She’s dead.”

Annie looked ill. She shook her head in sadness.

“Stop crying,” Violet urged. “You don’t have the right to mourn her.”

“She was my mother.”

“One you could never be.”

“That’s enough,” Annie’s attorney said, forced her way into the conversation.

The bailiff exited the room to tell everyone the panel had come back from deliberations. Inside, the panel was quick to say their decision.
“Upon careful review and debate of your record and interview, the panel has decided to deny your application for parole.”

Annie covered her face with her hands as her attorney rubbed her back. Violet did her best to control her elation.

“During your interview,” the panel added, “you acknowledged that you committed perjury and that your actions had been premeditated. You are to spend the remainder of your days in Fort August Prison. This hearing is adjourned.”

Annie was taken into custody. She left the room but not before giving Violet one last look. Her attorney packed her briefcase and walked up to her.

“She has had nothing but remorse.”

“It’s over,” Violet responded. “You can stop defending her now.”

“She has spent twenty years trying to right her wrongs. Now I know you have gone through your own trials during that time but at some point you have to take responsibilities for your own failures.”

“Oh, bugger off.”

“You’ve never done anything in your life that you regretted?”

“If you mean murdered someone…then no.”

“But you’ve never hurt anyone? You’ve never lied or cheated? If the answer is no, then by all means, cast your stones. But if the answer is yes, then you’ll be living in your own cell until you learn about forgiveness.”
At the back of the estate, PJ could not only smell the sawdust, he could taste it. As shirtless men in boots and shorts unloaded stacks of wooden planks and concrete blocks from the back of pickup trucks, he maneuvered his way through the obstacle course of construction workers. He ducked under moving steel rods and hopped over over-turned plastic pails, just to get to Dean, the contractor, who sat on a mound of powered cement sucking ginup from its shell. PJ immediately began inquiring about the schedule. There was anxiousness in his voice that Dean picked up on. He said they were right on schedule; that the demolition would take place the following Thursday. PJ screwed up his face and placed his hands on his hips. He needed the bulldozer there that Saturday. Dean was puzzled and informed PJ that he could not spring demands out of thin air. PJ remained adamant; said that everything – from the mill to the bushes around it – needed to be cleared away by that Tuesday. It was the only day a photographer from *The Gleaner* could stop by to shoot the groundbreaking; threw in that Dean’s company would be mentioned in the article for good measure. Dean threw the empty ginup shells on the ground near PJ’s feet. “I’ll see what I can do,” he said.

PJ was certain of two things; that the mill had to come down and that he could not be present when it happened. He knew there was no way he could be around for the look on his mother’s face when she saw yet another remnant of her husband obliterated before her eyes or the wrath in her voice when she cursed that of all the acres he owned, he had chosen the site of the old mill to build upon. To PJ, it was not a monument but merely rubble and ruin; a constant reminder of man whose blood and features he shared but whose heart he had been estranged from.
After talking with Dean, PJ sat in his car and waited for Violet. She was just the excuse he needed to get out of town. Since her reunion with her mother, her demeanor had changed. She was often distant; her mind in a constant state of wander.

In the house, Violet could hear PJ honking but she was running late and hadn’t dressed yet. She brought down her ironed, red sheath dress, which hung on the bathroom door and the instant she put it on she knew the new maid, Eunice, had used too much starch. It was stiff and did not conform properly to her body. Clara ran across her mind then. Everything was different now. She could never take this servant aside and school her on how she liked things done. Eunice was very defensive and her facial expression always looked as though she had smelled something frowsy. As Violet finished packing, Donovan walked into the room; the olive green travel bag on the bed immediately catching his attention.

“Going somewhere?” he asked.

“We have a meeting in Kingston this afternoon.”

Donovan’s gaze traveled around the room. “We?”

“Yes,” she said. “Me and PJ.”

“Tomorrow evening.”

Donovan was annoyed. Whether this was apart of his mother’s plan or not, he had had enough of PJ. He couldn’t stand all the time his brother was spending with his wife. He was suspicious of him; knew he was nurturing some ulterior motive.

“I don’t like you going anywhere with him overnight.”
Violet continued packing. “You pick an odd time to be jealous.”

He reached his hand out to her but she did not take it.

“You can’t still be vex about Clara,” he said. “She told Mama herself I’m not the child’s father.” He took her by the hand. “You know I would never do that to you. I would never be unfaithful.”

Violet was thunderstruck. She laughed a long, angry laugh; a laugh that said she was done pretending. After the incident with her mother, she had no problem putting it all on the table. She wondered what he would do if she spat in his face; if she clawed at him. She shook her finger at him instead.

“Your mother taught you well,” she said after composing herself.

“What do you mean?”

“I mean I expected nothing less from her. But you…you really had me fooled. To bribe the museum was one thing, but you used my own mother against me…”

Donovan’s face dropped. He contemplated admitting the truth but his mother’s words echoed within him, so he feigned frustration instead. “I can’t believe you would think I could do that.”

“I gave up everything for you and you couldn’t let me have the one thing I wanted most.” Violet was raising her voice now.

Donovan convinced himself that she would grow tired of the back-and-forth; that over time she would learn to get over it; that she would forget.

“I don’t know who you are anymore. You used to be a lion, Donny. Now look at you…can’t even stand up to your mother.”
“You’re want a scapegoat, Vi. I’m not it.”

“I’m want the truth.”

PJ honked again. Violet grabbed her travel bag and headed for the door.

“Don’t go,” he said.

She spun around; tapped her index finger on his chest. “When PJ got everything, I fought for you. Why couldn’t you fight for me?”

Donovan’s voice was almost at a whisper. “Stay, no? I’ll make a reservation in town. We’ll get away from all this...from everyone?”

Violet removed her wedding band and placed it in the Donovan’s hand. “The only one I’m getting away from is you.”

In the car, Violet let PJ do most of the talking. She would nod in acknowledgement at his statements or half-smiled if what he happened to say was witty but mostly, she just sat there flipping lazily through an imported copy of *Cosmopolitan*; marveled at the frankness of American women or gazed out of the window as the route changed from pasture to pavement. She noticed he was overly excited to have been given the opportunity to meet face-to-face with John Pringle, the newly appointed director of tourism; and not just of one parish but the entire island. After what had taken place with Donovan, Violet, however, was not filled with the same enthusiasm.

As they drove near Palisadoes Airport, PJ made a sudden detour inside. Violet thought he was taking a shortcut but then he stopped his convertible just short of a private hanger where rows of jets were being stored. Before she could ask what was going on, he stepped out and proceeded to remove their bags from the trunk of the car.
In the rearview mirror she saw him throw the keys to an attendant, who made his way over to the driver’s side.

PJ opened her door then and when she looked as if she wasn’t going to get out, he began laughing. “You plan on staying here?”

She grabbed the hand he held out to her. As she exited the car, she could feel the heat from the sun-beaten tarmac rising up her dress. “What are we doing here?”

He refused to answer, instead led her inside one of the hangers with sparkling pearl-colored linoleum floors that she could see her reflection in. The jet was just as sparkling, just as white and emblazoned with Gayle Reyser’s name in navy-blue script. PJ handed their bags to a blonde stewardess in a silk, red neck scarf but before he could ascend the jet stairs, Violet pulled him aside.

“What’s going on?” She looked puzzled and angry all at once. “Where are we going? Is Gayle coming?”

PJ smirked. “There is no meeting.”

“What? You said…”

“You thought Pringle would meet with me? Boy, you’re easy to fool.” He began laughing.

Violet appeared offended. He made her think of Donovan; of how quickly she put all her trust in him. When he made no effort to explain where they were going and what Gayle’s involvement would be, she questioned his motives; wondered if he too was deceiving her. Though she sat in close proximity to him on the aircraft, she distanced herself emotionally. It was as if something inside her shut down. The only sound
between them was the buzz of the engine. Soon Jamaica was like a birthmark on the face of the earth. Through the clouds, she saw the sandy white beaches and greenery fade into varying shades of blue beneath them. It suddenly dawned on her that they were leaving the island.

Violet broke through the wall of silence. “But I don’t have my passport.”

PJ then pulled it from his jacket pocket and held it out to her. When she reached over to take it he refused to let go, which forced her eyes to meet his.

“I’m not him, baby,” he said simply. “I got you.”

Several hours later they landed in Port of Spain, Trinidad and were greeted by a gentleman named Kidd, who threw their bags in the empty passenger seat so that neither would attempt to sit there. On the way to Siparia, a small town in the south, Kidd talked incessantly about how having to transport them was taking him away from his favorite weekend activity – “sexin’ his wife.” He was a man of many words and though he had told them they were an inconvenience, it was the kindness of his delivery that did not make it seem as such.

Siparia was an industrial town with large oil refineries, winding paved road, bustling shops, and people of African, East Indian and Spanish descent. Violet could tell its history from the faces of its inhabitants alone. Just after four in the afternoon, Kidd dropped them off in front of blue and white church.

Violet was exhausted and when she saw the house of worship, she laughed. “You brought me all the way here to attend church?”

PJ shook his head. “You ask a lot of questions, you know that?”
Before they entered the church, Violet saw a priest conversing with a beggar on the street. The church was dark except for the sun backlighting the stained glass windows. A few parishioners knelt before a copper crucifix situated above the altar and as they walked down the aisle toward the front, Violet noticed that the pews were crafted from the same wood as the ceiling, which seemed to point upward toward the heavens.

PJ turned to Violet. “You don’t know where you are.”

She shook her head. “Should I?”

He led her to the right side of the church and through an arched doorway. Immediately, she gasped. Hung high on the wall, clad in billowing white lace, a crown, earrings, red roses and an assortment of pearl necklaces and clutching a staff, was the holy trinity of saints – La Divina Pastora, the Soparee Mai, the Black Virgin; revered by Catholics and Hindus alike. Violet told PJ that on Holy Thursday and Good Friday, devotees of the Virgin gave offerings of money, jewelry, rice and even locks of their children’s hair in order to receive blessings of prosperity and fertility. She clutched her chest and approached the shrine beneath the Virgin with rows of lit candles. The effect gave the statue a warm glow. When PJ went to stand by her side, she grabbed him, enveloping him in a long embrace. He planted sweet kisses on the nape of her neck. He soon let her go, wiping tears from her face.

“How did you know?” she asked through tears.

“I know what makes you happy,” he responded.

He stepped back to give her some space. She stared up at the dark face of the Virgin. She thought about Toogood and Gong Gong; the women in her life that were more of a
mother than her own. They stood at the shrine until they heard the low hum of murmurings emanating from the pews. Parishioners were slowly filing into the church.

“They must be getting ready for service,” PJ said, taking her by the hand.

Before they could leave, a wedding procession began. PJ and Violet hurried to the back and stood against the wall, watching the party slowly make their way down the aisle. As the procession ended, the doors were closed. They were shut in. They made their way to two empty seats in the last row to wait it out. Violet had not anticipated the length of the ceremony, which began with a nuptial mass. It was however, a lovely event. The bride and bridegroom were deliriously in love yet she had a difficult time watching them. She could not reconcile her happiness for them with her envy. The priest expounded on love and faithfulness and as the vows were recited, Violet thought only about how young they were; about how they did not know about sacrifice; that he might deceive her someday; that she might discover affection for another.

PJ shifted in his seat, leaned his lips to her ear. “I want a wedding like this,” he whispered.

“I want a divorce,” she responded.

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For some it would be remembered as the day the bulldozers came. For others, the time man went up against machine. For the McGann family, it was the day everything changed.
Donovan was still reeling from the argument he had with Violet; the ring she returned burned a hole in his tightly wound fist. He couldn’t fathom that his marriage, yet another constant thing in his life, was on the verge of ending. So when he heard the rumble of construction equipment make its way onto Pride, everything came to a head. It felt like an invasion; like an assault on tradition and his fear of change quickly manifested into anger. He marched toward the old mill, his mind going back to all the time he had spent there with his father.

Donovan watched the bulldozer gearing up for demolition. He moved forward, tried to get the driver’s attention from the cage, but his cries were lost in the rumble of the motor. The machine’s scorpion tail rose then smashed into the lone wall, causing bricks to cascade and an eruption of thick dust plumes. Donovan disappeared behind the other side of the wall, convinced if he was just able to look into the driver’s eyes, he could physically stop its destruction. The tail came crashing down then and as the entire wall buckled and began leaning toward him, Donovan thought of his great-grandfather, Seamus and the lesson the mill had taught them both – that there was more to living than merely existing.

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Clara hiked up boulders, past trees as tall as sky scrapers and through bush up to her thighs just to get to that crudely constructed home with the rusted zinc roof. Along the way, she was recognized. Her people padded her steps with blessings and called her by her old moniker, “Governess.” Others noticed the belly boasting seven months; offered
horses and mules and carved wooden canes and the back seat of their vehicles but she refused. Even as her swollen feet ached, the arches bleeding from blisters, she was determined to make the journey unassisted.

She had not set foot in Accompong in four years. And though she would never admit it, the only reason she had returned was because Maude had cast a net of lies parish wide. It was so broad that from Black River to Santa Cruz to Leeds, there was not a soul – living or dead – that did not know of her so-called reputation. When every prospective employer slammed their door in her face, she realized she had been given another name, “The Whore of Pride.”

But Accompong was different. It was home. A sequestered colony in the hills, it had no government or jail or electricity or baseless innuendo. It was an independent nation within a nation; a relic of a people who had resisted conquest. Perhaps here she could escape from the trials of the outside world. Perhaps she could go back to her band, reclaim the divinity she had once possessed.

Hours after her arrival, Clara sat in an ornate chair in the back room of Madda Louise’s residence; a place she had personally spent countless days consulting the current leader’s predecessor, the great Shepherd Bell. Nailed to the wall were images of saints, hastily written scriptures and duties – long tables covered with white cloth adorned with singed wick candles, kettle drums, cymbals, fruits and other paraphernalia; remnants of a ceremony that had recently ended. Clara stared out the back door and into the Balm Yard, where the sacred pool her mentor and one-time lover had arduously dug and filled was located. She was pleased that Louise, a Zionist, had not made any changes since his
untimely passing. The same tall red and blue flag poles still stood in place, circling the tranquil waters of the healing baths. She was soon flooded with memories of assisting Bell with cures, of old ceremonies in which her voice sang in accompaniment to his chanting, of whipping the crowd into spiritual frenzies with her premonitions and revelations.

Louise wore a long white dress, her head wrapped in a sequined turban. She listened intently to Kato, the Governor, as ganja smoke billowed from the pipe she held between her large purple lips. Kato was making his case against Clara; spoke passionately about the impossibility of her retaining her rank in the band’s hierarchy.

Pointing an accusatory finger he said, “When we need her most, she leave us. And fi what? To clean rich man house, to wash him duty underwear? She have no right coming back here. She dash ‘way her gift and now it want dash her ‘way.”

Clara wanted to lurch forward and shake Kato still but she had to remain poised in the presence of authority. She wanted to say that he was wrong; that he knew nothing of what he spoke; that he was as much a fraud that day as any day prior; that she still possessed it; and that whatever was left twitched and fought to come out of her as much as the baby did.

Kato had always been jealous of her, ever since that one fateful Sunday when she was eleven. No one at the service had anticipated the presence of the pint-sized prophet; not even the great seer himself. When the drumming started and the band was led in a counterclockwise dance around the yard, she joined in. Round and around they went for what seemed like hours; the air filling with a roaring chorus and heavy
breathing. When that gave way to chanting, the singing ceased and both Bell and Clara were seized by the same spirit. Clara felt thin, weightless; saw vision after vision. She grabbed the abdomen of one of the believers and began speaking in a foreign tongue, the voice speaking through her throaty and deep. Bell then began interpreting her warnings; the first a foretelling of sickness. This went on for sometime as Clara passed from member to member. She made pronouncements about ailments and curses and unusual deaths by natural disaster. All the while Bell interpreted.

Before the bath was filled and the ritual of curing could take place, Bell needed to consult with the next in command. He turned to the crowd and declared he was making Clara his Governess. From behind the drums, Kato rose to his feet in protest. For years he had waited to be promoted and in an instant the dream was stolen from him. Bell ignored the distressed look on his face and surveyed the crowd.

“Where the child mother?” he asked.

Granny stepped forward. She held her granddaughter close and said, “She just a baby. She can’t have the gift.” Granny had only brought Clara along because her father needed someone to look after her that day. She almost cried knowing Bell would take her from them; would want her living at the commune.

Louise waited for Kato to give his closing argument. When it seemed as though he could say no more, the Madda’s lips parted. “Go find me inhaler,” she said to Kato. “Meganja done.”

When the words registered, his shoulders dropped. Clara watched a humbled Kato make his way toward the yard.
Louise waited until the door closed behind him. “You can’t have that baby.”

The words stung Clara as much as the first time she had heard them. She nodded in acknowledgment. “It coming soon,” she explained.

“You shoulda never make that child. If you give birth, you sight gone fi good, you know that.”

“It’ll come back.”

Louise shook her head to the contrary. “The spirits will not move. Them no give nothing back ‘til you give them what them want.”

Clara knew they wanted the baby. She held her hands over her face to hide the hurt. It would not be the first sacrifice she made but it certainly would be her last.

It was early afternoon when Violet and PJ returned to the estate. They had only been gone a day, but to Violet, Pride seemed different somehow. There was an eerie stillness about it. It was Sunday after all, a day of rest. She could not expect to see plantation workers milling about or hear the contractor yelling out orders to the construction crew. But there was something else. For one, Maude and Donovan were nowhere to be found. Usually after morning service, her mother-in-law would bring a few parishioners back to the estate and entertain them in the parlor. Violet expected to walk through the front door and hear Maude speaking over everyone as she used her limited knowledge of the bible to give her take on what the sermon meant that day. In the same vein, Donovan would usually be out back playing football with the twins or “No Money Poker” because
his mother had repeatedly scolded him for gambling on the Lord’s day. But nothing was going on. Like the exterior of the house, inside was just as quiet.

In the vestibule, PJ called out for the twins to retrieve their bags but after some time no one came. Violet’s head shot upward when she noticed someone moving at the top of the staircase. Out of the shadows, Eunice appeared. She stared down at them, holding a fresh load of folded laundry.

“Miss Maude been trying to reach you since yesterday.” Eunice said calmly; not distinguishing who she was addressing.

“Reach who?” Violet asked.

“You,” she responded. “They rush him to the hospital.”

“Who, Donny?”

PJ seemed worried as well. “What happened?”

“A terrible thing,” Eunice answered. “A terrible, terrible thing.”

On the way to Black River Hospital, Violet’s mind conjured various scenarios of what could have happened. Perhaps Matilda bucked him off, she thought. Perhaps his arm had been tied up in the reigns, his leg caught in the stirrups and he had broken it. When they entered the hospital, the sun was reflecting off of everything silver – the nurse’s pin, the stretchers, the passing wheelchairs, the medication trays. Violet was blinded for only a moment before asking a nurse in a stark white uniform and cap where she could find Donovan. She was directed to a desk in the lobby.

“And are you family?” The matron asked.

“Wife and brother,” PJ responded.
The matron addressed the chart in front of her. “Room 3-Zed,” she said, pointing down the hall. “Critical Care Unit.”

Violet let PJ steer her through the hallway. She focused her attention on the floor; trying not to stare at a patient writhing on a stretcher in the hallway yelling for his mother. She marveled at how her feet fit perfectly in the alternating black and white square tiles. When they finally entered the room, the first thing Violet saw was Donovan; his head was bandaged and the tubes in his nose and mouth were secured in place with tape. He was hooked up intravenously from the arm; his bed surrounded by a chorus of beeping medical equipment. His face was swollen and bruised as if he had gone ten rounds in a boxing match and lost. The doctor had been talking to Maude, who was seated just off to the side of the bed, but when they came in he stopped. When Maude saw PJ she went after him with flying fists; asked if he was proud of his work. She pummeled his chest but because he was larger and stronger he was able to stop her and she collapsed in his arms; crying like a newborn baby.

Over all the commotion, Violet managed to say that she was the wife.

“It was touch and go,” the doctor said. The pin on his white coat said Niles. “He has yet to wake from the coma. We’re not sure when he will.”

“And there’s something else,” he added.

Violet could not bear to hear anything else. She stared out the window then and noticed for the first time how close the hospital was to the sea. The doctor resumed talking but everything Violet heard was muffled. It was as if she was hearing him
through the canal of conch shell – all whoosh and waves. She tried to focus but she could only decipher every other word – crushed...knee...amputate. She stepped back slowly realizing then that her hands had been over her ears the entire time. Doctor Niles suddenly lowered the sheet from Donovan’s waist. All that was left of him was thighs and two bandaged stumps. She could see his blood seeping through the gauze. She stepped further and further away from the bed until her back was against the wall.

“The dressing needs to be changed,” Doctor Niles stated before calling out for a nurse.

Violet suddenly pushed past the incoming nurse, the mother crumpled on the floor and the son hunched over her. She ran and ran until she reached the lobby and all the silver bathed in light.

Violet clutched her legs closed to her chest and rested her chin to her knees. She sat barefoot on a blanket, staring at the gulls flying near the horizon; the smell of fish and saltwater permeating the air. At Alligator Pond, men in boats threw wide nets, other brought their catches to the beach-front restaurants. Violet watched small children pluck white seashells out of the sand and several teenaged girls in blue school uniforms blush from the attention of grown men.

PJ made his way towards her carrying his blazer over his right arm; his tie lowered to half mast. He held his shoes in his other hand and his trousers were rolled up past his ankles. When he reached Violet’s blanket, he hovered above her for awhile.
“I thought I’d find you here,” he said.

She said nothing.

After he lowered himself onto the blanket, placing his belongings near her burgundy-colored pumps, she finally broke the silence between them.

“Do you believe dreams can come true?”

PJ watched a horse gallop down the beach. “If you work hard and is something you put your mind to.

“I mean the ones you have when you’re sleeping.”

“Oh…” PJ stared at her again; but her eyes remained on the sea.

“That night in Siparia,” Violet continued, “I dreamt I shoved Donny in front of a train.”

The dream had been so vivid. She stood at the edge of the gray platform in the Underground, staring into the station’s tunnel. Donovan stood nearby, his back to the black abyss. He was saying something and though his lips were moving, words remained unspoken. Her gaze remained on the tunnel, and then began alternating rapidly between the approaching train and his mouth. Train. Mouth. As it neared, Violet shoved her hands forward and Donovan descended into the track. Commuters gasped and screamed. Someone said he had jumped. No one seemed to notice that her arms were still extended; frozen in a final act of betrayal.

PJ laughed a nervous laugh and she finally turned her head toward him. “You’re not serious,” he said, his face blank.

Violet shivered and PJ put his blazer over her shoulders.
“You can’t blame yourself for what happened. It was a nightmare.”

“Yeah,” she said. “But those are dreams too.”

Clara entered her father’s house carrying several bags from her trips to the market and the medicine man. She lit two kerosene lamps in the kitchen, placing the groceries on the counter. She carefully transported one of the lamps to her father’s bedroom; the floor boards beneath her squeaking from the decaying wood. Her father lay flat on his back, snoring. He was balding and the arthritic hands he laid on his chest were puffy at the joints and crooked. Those were the hands that patted her head and swatted her behind; that refused to wave back when she left for Shepherd Bell’s commune. Clara sat at the edge of the bed and pressed the palm of her hand to his wrinkled forehead. His eyes popped open.

“Oh,” he said when he saw the glow of the lamp on her face.

“How you feel, Papa?”

“Ah,” he moaned. “Just pain-up, pain-up.”

“You still have a fever.”

“Yeah.”

“Me buy bush tea,” she said.

At the kitchen counter she placed the cerasee vine into a kettle half-full with water. She struck a match to light the stove then threw the burning end into the make-shift sink – a black pail with a pipe extending from the wall above it. Her father was one of
the first individuals in the village to receive a stove; just one of the privileges of being the parent of a Governess. Villagers would come out in droves just to gaze upon it; some carrying with them jealousy at still having to cook over open flames in their yards. It had been a peace offering from Bell, who was never quite able to attain approval from her father.

Clara loved Bell no matter how much her father hated him. He was not a tall man but he was larger than life. His voice was thunderous that his sermons were heard miles over; his laughter caused mountains to tremble. Though his expression was sometimes intimidating, his large eyes were always warm. He smelled of fruits; of incense and oils. He was a great healer and knew hundreds of cures for the common cold, a snake bite or a bad spell. Everyone wanted to be a part of his band including the Colonel himself.

Bell was a gentleman. He did not touch Clara until she was fourteen. One night when they were in bed, he asked if she stopped bleeding.

“Yessum, fi two months,” Clara responded.

He already knew it, he said. He had dreamt it.

“You have to get rid of it,” he added.

“Rid of what?” she asked. She didn’t even know what the stopping of her cycle meant. She had gone from one man’s house to another.

“The baby.”

Clara was shocked that she was pregnant but it did not take her long to come to terms with it. She asked Bell if she could keep it but he refused; said doing so would steal her gift. He took her to the home of an obeah woman, who lived in the woods. It was a tiny
shack near a ravine. Clara was stripped naked; her body rubbed down with olive oil before she was told to lie on a cot covered with bed sheets and banana leaves. She could hear the flow of the river nearby as she stared at the woman’s wiry black hair.

“I’m going to teach you how to make Dead and Wake,” she said. “You young, so me know you’ll go through this again. Is your cross fi bear, child.”

Clara had known of a weed that grew out of stone. She watched as the woman threw five of its leaves into a pot and placed the sixth in a jar for future use.

“Never boil all of them together. Five keep you alive. Six kill you and the baby.”

With a mortar and pestle, she grinded the leaves and a tiny piece of tree bark into a thick paste. She tapped Clara’s inner thigh in order for the girl to open her legs wide. The nurse then scooped the dark paste onto her fingers and inserted them inside Clara until enough had reached the bottom of her uterus. She performed this maneuver three times before leaving her there overnight to bleed out. Before passing out, she remembered the howling animals and life draining out of her in hot thick clots like lava.

Hours after drinking the tea, Clara’s father felt well enough to leave the house to meet up with friends. She then made her way to the stove to make a batch of Dead and Wake. As she grounded the leaves she thought of her burden; of always having to be the sacrificial lamb. Bell had made her one, and PJ. So too did Violet and now Louise. She was always expected to give up a piece of herself for others. She finally resolved to do something for herself.

Clara sat naked in a large zinc tub. She lifted one leg over the edge so she could insert the paste. In the distance, she could hear the pulsating beat of kettle-drums. There was
a ceremony under way. She lay back knowing that soon the pain would be more than she could bear. She looked to the ceiling and asked the spirits for absolution. When the baby stopped moving she thought about love and loss and how one leaf could be the mere difference between life and death.

On the back porch of the great house, Maude sat stoically in the shade; clutching the arms of her chair until her knuckles went white. She refused all phone calls and visitors. It was like she was shut up within herself. Violet soon exited through the screen door to join her; gently pulled the older woman’s long braid from out the back of her dress. Only three days had passed since the accident but Maude’s hair had finally caught up with her age. Violet marveled at how many grays had cropped up overnight.

“You left your glasses on the sink,” Violet said, handing them to her.

“Thanks,” Maude responded, placing them in her pocket.

“It’s a beautiful day. You’re not going to wear them?”

Maude grew silent. What Violet could not know was that she did not want to see the beautiful day or the barn or the fields of cane. She could not stand the sight of Errol now that he had taken over all of Donovan’s duties. She did not want to think of her son lying disfigured and unconscious. Instead she imagined him as the blurry figure riding atop Matilda, wild and free.

PJ appeared then with Gladys Reyser, Roy Singh, the contractor, the engineer, the architect, and a photographer. That morning they all participated in the photo-op of the
groundbreaking. Violet waited until the rest made their way to the front of the estate before going over to him.

“I missed you at the event this morning,” PJ said when he saw her. “We were shoveling when I found this.” He held up her wedding band.

Violet took it from him and stared at it gravely. “Can I talk to you?”

He looked concerned. “Is everything all right?”

“Maybe we should go inside,” she said, making a gesture with her head. “I don’t want your mother to hear.”

In the drawing room, Violet opened the window to allow fresh air to flow in. PJ went over to the bar and poured rum into two small glasses. Violet took hers but placed it on the napkin on the table.

“You should stop construction,” she said.

PJ laughed. “You’re not serious.”

“Out of respect for your mother and Donny, I am. I just think the timing of today’s groundbreaking was...insensitive. That’s where it all happened.”

“It was scheduled long ago.”

“I’m not saying forever, PJ. Just until we’re sure Donny will pull through.”

He sat back and sighed. “What if he never wakes, Vi?”

“Don’t say that.”

“You’re asking me to put everything on hold for him. How long you gonna put your life on hold, ee? How long you gonna wait for a man who would never wait for you?”
Violet shook her head. “You’re so selfish,” she said. It was like a spell had finally been broken. She saw him with new eyes; realized what everyone had been saying about him was true.

“I’m right here...right now,” PJ said. “Yet still, after everything he’s done to you, you run after him and turn me into the bad man.”

PJ wanted to tell her that he too was suffering, just not in the way she could ever understand. When he saw Donovan hooked up to all those tubes he felt bad but it did not affect him the way it should have. It was like learning of a complete stranger’s misfortune on the evening news. Even in all the commotion, his first thought was that it could have happened to him.

He wrestled with his lack of empathy; wondered why he could not feel more. When had their relationship severed? Was it when Donovan was chosen above him to go to England? PJ was sure it happened long before then. In a way they had always been like strangers who occupied the same spaces – a womb, a crib, a bedroom, a house, an estate. PJ remembered stumbling upon Donovan and a few members of his rugby team years ago. A friend was surprised that he even had a brother.

“If you weren’t brothers,” the friend asked, “would you be friends?”

“Never,” Donovan answered without hesitation.

The revelation did not hurt PJ, though. He knew if he had been posed the question, his answer would have been the same.

The day before the groundbreaking, PJ visited the family plot; stood in the thicket of grass and slid dirt and dried leaves off the limestone markers with the bottom of his
shoe. He traced his tragic lineage from Quinn to Seamus to Kenneth and to his father.

The only graves missing were that of the current generation. This made him obsess
about his own mortality; of the need to complete his dream before he too became a
casualty of the curse.

“The war is over,” Violet said. “You win.”

When she left the room, PJ knew for certain that she had left him too. He realized
then that in some battles even when you win you lose.
CHAPTER SEVEN

When the morning sky became overcast by a plague of ravens, the nurses knew it was an omen of things to come. They hastily washed the body down by the river and tried to ignore the storm of black feathers raining down on them. In Accompong, death was a one-day affair. The heat alone could rot a corpse in hours. After they patted the body dry, the nurses transported it to a secluded room in one of their homes and rubbed it down with oils. They dressed it in a white robe and wrapped its head in a red turban.

Across the village, lumber had been carved and fashioned into a coffin.

Just before the procession, one of the nurses gathered her skirt in her hands and ran to Kato, who was overseeing the transport of the body to the wake.

“John Crow come,” she warned, trying to catch her breath. She then gave Kato specific orders. “Before them put she in the ground, kill two fowl.” Kato nodded and tried to proceed on with the rest of the band but was held back forcefully. “Place this under she tongue,” she added, handing him a tiny pouch filled with garlic, pimento and rosemary. “And make sure them nail she frock to the coffin.”

When Kato finally made his way to the front of the convoy, he slung a thick rope tied to a drum around his chest. He stood before the crowd in silence then beat the head of the drum with a stick to commence the procession. The body was hoisted onto a bed made of bamboo and carried through the village by four pallbearers as the blaring beat of drums and mournful song echoed for miles. Along their journey, the roads were lined with spectators. It seemed the entire village came out to witness the pomp. For how
rare it was that someone of her caliber would be taken from the earth long before her time.

The procession concluded in front of a small wooden shack with a thatched roof. The entrance had been painted blue. The aisle and altar were laden with lit candles. The smell of jerked pork wafted through the open windows. The body, shrouded in what looked to be mosquito netting, was placed inside the coffin. Kato had allowed all of this to take place without relaying any of the instructions the women had given him. In fact, he had thrown the pouch entrusted to him into a pocket of dense brush off to the side of the road. He figured after the wake, he would be leading the nine night services needed to prevent the ghost from leaving the grave yard.

The wake began with a hymnal and the reading of several passages from the bible. From where he stood, Kato could see straight through the light-filled entrance to where a frenzy of ravens had gathered. Someone in the back of the room then erupted in a fit of whelps; spun in a circle so fast her skirt ballooned with help from the air. The crowd gathered around her. Kato moved from behind the coffin just as the silhouetted figure began to speak in tongues. He took another swig but choked. He stared at her, mouth agape, as though he had seen a ghost. It was Clara, alive and well. The last he had heard, she was knocking on death’s door. How quickly she had traded places with Louise.

Kato grew angry. “What sorcery is this?”

While Clara was in the spirit she saw a vision of Louise collapsing; her inhaler falling just out of reach. As she gasped for air, Kato stood over her but did nothing to help. He waited there until he was sure she had passed from this life into the next. When Clara’s
eyes and Kato’s made four, she pointed to him; continued to speak in a language he could not comprehend. Those gathered followed her finger and gasped. Kato turned around as well until he realized he was the intended target; that they all saw what he could not – shadows billowing off him like flags in the wind.

“What she say?” he implored from the band but the only one with the power of interpretation was lying in a pine box feet away.

“Death on you,” Clara announced, “like a tick ‘pon a dog’s back.”

Several ambulances greeted Violet and Maude at the entrance of the hospital; halting their steady gait. Paralyzed, they watched as doctors scrambled to meet the paramedics. As the wounded were rushed in, each wailing from the pain of their tortured limbs, head, innards, Violet instinctively covered her ears. In the past month she has counted the sound of forty-seven sirens; each a reminder of the day that tipped the balance of their lives.

Maude entered the room first just as the nurse was adjusting the bandages over Donovan’s stumps. She soon took the arm of the nursing assistant who was replacing the bedpan; causing urine to drop to the floor.

“Have you bathed him?” she asked.

Violet saw the assistant turned to the nurse and roll her eyes. The bedside vigil they had expected. The nightly phone calls inquiring about Donovan’s progress they could understand. But it was the meddling – the constant questioning; the investigations into
every single medication being administered; and the double-checking with Doctor Niles
behind their backs – that earned Maude the title of “That Red Bitch.” They were also
annoyed that the question about him bathing was the first thing she would utter every
morning, as if hello had gone out of style; as if the answer would be any different; as if
she could comprehend the difficulty in lifting and turning dead weight.

“Yes,” the assistant answered.

“His hair is in need of a cut,” Maude added.

Violet could feel the tension in the air. She retreated to her usual seat, taking cover
behind her newspaper. When the assistant returned with the razor and a pair of silver
clippers, the nurse took them from her and proceeded to groom Donovan. She shaved
the beard that had grown in the past three weeks – an act of rebellion by the staff – but
left patches of hair under his chin due to the bandage covering his throat. After
Donovan’s hair was cut, Maude looked up from the paper she was sharing with Violet.

“No,” she said suddenly.

“What?” the nurse asked.

“You’re not doing it right.”

“What’s wrong with it?”

“That’s not the way he combs it.”

“Ma’am, if he wakes now he wouldn’t care what his hair looked like.”

Maude stood to her feet in anger. “Don’t tell me that. You know him better than
me?”

“It’s all right,” Violet said, trying to prevent the situation from getting worse.
The nurse placed the comb down on the night stand in defiance. “Something tells me he wouldn’t mind a little change.”

Maude walked over to the nurse’s side of the bed, took up the comb and began styling Donovan’s hair the usual way.

“It’s not going to undo what happened,” the nurse continued.

“I know that.”

“I’m not sure you do.”

Maude wondered why the woman was testing her patience. “You know who you’re dealing with?” she asked suddenly. “I personally know everyone on the board.”

The nurse crossed her arms and stepped closer. Violet felt compelled to walk over and stand between them.

“I want to speak with your superior,” Maude said.

“You’re talking to her,” the nurse responded.

Maude left the room in a huff to seek the nurse’s desk and the assistant followed.

“Is that your mother?” The nurse asked when they were alone.

“Mother-in-law.”

“I don’t know how you deal with her.”

“She has her moments,” Violet said, laughing.

When she found her seat again but could feel the nurse’s gaze burning a hole through her. She lifted her head and when they made eye contact, Violet smiled. The nurse, however, had a concerned expression on her face.

“Can I ask you something?” the nurse wondered.
“I suppose.”

“Why you never look at him?”

“My husband? Of course I look at him.”


“I don’t know what you mean.”

Violet fiddled with her wedding band as she gazed down at Donovan; her eyes finally surveying the aftermath of a most foolish act. He certainly did not resemble himself. He remained in a coma, and in addition to the amputation, his usual brawny frame had deflated from having to be fed intravenously. He was the shell of his former self. Violet stepped back, as though frightened. She suddenly realized she was not staring at the man she had married but the physical manifestation of the man he allowed himself to become. His character had changed longed before his body had. She understood then that Maude was trying to hold on to the last remnant of the old Donovan and the one thing that hadn’t changed about him – his hair.

Violet picked up the clippers and handed it to the nurse. “Cut it off,” she said.

There would be no more blooming flowers. There would be no more splendid things.

Beauty no longer lived at Pride. When Maude was not looking, PJ dug up and destroyed her rosebushes. She came home to find that her prize-winning plant had been treated no better than weeds. Stems were chopped like lumber. Petals were strewn everywhere
like giant blood drops. When the twins exited the house and found her red with anger, they almost tripped over themselves to get back inside.

“Who did this?” she yelled after them.

Petey shrugged; stared at his brother.

“Is better you find Mister PJ,” Howard said matter-of-factly.

When Maude bust through PJ’s bedroom door, she found him passed out on the floor, drunk. She bent down and beat him about the face with the back of her hand. He awoke defending himself.

“How could you do that to my roses?” Maude asked when he got to his feet.

PJ held his head with both hands. “Is my land. I’ll do what I please.”

“Your daddy planted that bush on our wedding day.”

PJ laughed. “Not a day goes by that you don’t talk about that man. Sometimes is like he isn’t gone at all.”

Maude began to cry. “That was one of the last things I had to remember him by. I don’t know why you must take away everything I love.”

“Hold onto that feeling, Mama. If I could bottle it for you I would.”

“You certain is only rum you take?”

PJ checked his appearance in the mirror. “Now you know what it feels like.”

Maude wiped away her tears. “You have everything you want. I don’t know why you’re always after me.”

“Everything I want?” PJ began rummaging through his dresser drawers, then scanned the room until he realized what he was searching for had been on his pillow all along. He
unfolded the sheet of paper and handed it to his mother. It was a letter that read as follows:

19, July 1963

_Dear Mr. McGann,_

_The Jamaica Landmark Commission has reviewed your petition. As of 25, June 1963, Pride Estate officially received landmark status. This bestowment gives The Commission, authority over any exterior changes to the historic buildings or monuments on site._

_It has come to our attention that a building on the estate was demolished without notification. Any alteration to the preservation of the landmark is in violation of our agreement. We must insist that you cease and desist from any future alterations until The Commission has had chance to review them or we will be forced to take legal action._

When Maude concluded the letter, PJ said, “You can’t take away what’s mine and not expect me to retaliate. You just can’t…”

“I don’t understand you. You can’t read? It says you filed the petition.”

“Serious? Why would I do such a thing?”

“As God is my witness I don’t know.”

“I would like nothing more than to take credit…but it wasn’t me.”

Maude took a second look at the letter. PJ watched as her eyes enlarged.

“It doesn’t say Junior.”

“What?”

“Is addressed to your father.”
PJ snatched the letter from her hand. He had not even looked there. After reading the correspondence again, he realized his father had filed the petition. Even from the grave he was ruining his dream. But it was not as if he did not warn him. The year prior, PJ had passed Clara in the hallway as she was setting up the Christmas tree to get to Percival Sr.’s study, where he awaited. The room smelled of cigar smoke. It was stuffy; the ground hot from the carpeting; and it had a piss-colored glow from the lamp light.

His father’s portrait loomed over him from the mantle place. Its subject stood at the window, watching the mill workers through the shutters.

“I hear you’re trying to sell fool’s gold,” Percival Sr. said, mocking his son’s idea.

PJ stared at the ground. “Don’t call it that.”

“I want you to bury this thing.”

“It’s the only way Pride will survive, Daddy. In twenty years plantation life as we know it will be a thing of the past.”

“Who told you that?”

“The experts. I read about them in the paper. I hear them on the radio. They say Jamaica’s wealth will come from its new industries. Even America is getting in on it. I’m trying to look out for us...for our future.”

“Experts,” Percival Sr. scoffed. “They were saying this same thing when you were a boy. But they don’t know ‘bout this thing. They ever cut cane? They ever hold shit in them hand to make earth? You forget Jamaica thrive ‘pon sugar? It pumps through her veins...has since the first McGann came to this country and will when your children are running Pride.”
“Me and my seed will not be bakra,” PJ declared.

“What you say?”

“That’s what the folks call us, Daddy. When I walk through town, they spit that word at me. They swear I’m no better than Quinn. They have not forgotten what our people had done to theirs. Now, I can’t see my children having it any easier. The next generation will not be working the fields. And mine will not be overseeing it.

Percival Sr. kissed his teeth. “Your mouth runs like water. You like chat ‘bout change and the future but you know one thing that hasn’t changed?”

He paused, but PJ did not respond.

“I said you know what hasn’t?” he repeated.

“No…what?”

“Hunger. I’m talking ’bout when is like a lion’s roaring in your belly; when you feel like the next ting you gone gnam is your own shit. When that happens, you’ll work no matter what task is at hand. But you don’t know what that’s like so you talk foolishness; have silver spoon underneath your tongue from the moment you born.”

Percival Sr. sighed. “I’m trying to tell you there’s nothing more sacred than tradition. It’s what you make of it, boy. You say you don’t want to be bakra but you already are. You’re willing to sell us to the highest bidder. As long as God spare my life that’ll never happen. Not even when my days are done.”
Violet and Maude could hear Donovan screaming from down the hall; his refrain of God’s name reverberated off the white walls. Dawn had just broken when they received the call that he had woken, but the news was marred when they learned he was confused and in an agitated state. The attending doctor tried to explain to Donovan all that had happened, but all he could focus on was the searing pain of his two missing limbs. And though visiting hours were still a few away, the McGann women were urged to come to the hospital to see if their presence would at least pacify him.

When Maude stepped into the room, the nurses stepped back. She felt like a woman who had been unprepared for the birth of her first child. Donovan’s eyes were open, he was wailing, and she was suddenly overwhelmed by his existence. It was the only time in her life she wished he was not hers. Violet noticed a change in his demeanor the instant his mother took hold of his hand.

Donovan sat erect in bed and gulped for air.

“Shh,” Maude soothed him.

He fell back then, his eyes searching for someone at the door.

Violet stepped forward from the other side of the room. “I’m here love.”

Maude used her kerchief to wipe away her tears. “You’ve been in an accident,” she said. “The doctors did their best but had no choice.”

“Oh, God,” Donovan cried.

“It’s going to be all right,” Violet said, burying her head into the side of his bed.

“How long...?”

Violet turned to Maude.
“How long,” he repeated.

“Have you been asleep?” Violet wondered.

He nodded.

“A month or so.”

He looked as if he were about to start a second round of wailing when Violet took his other hand.

“If I could have half your pain…”

Donovan took his hand back and began clawing at his gown. He seemed feral; wild. It was not the kind of reunion Violet had anticipated. She figured it would be an adjustment but she had not taken into consideration the sheer panic he would feel upon waking from a long slumber into a living nightmare. Donovan pulled at his bandages and at his IV. “I have to get out of here,” he said, but made no motion to get out of bed. He looked drained, tired.

Violet noticed that every now and then he looked to the doorway as if he were expecting someone.

Maude noticed it too. “Doctor Niles is on his way,” she said.


Doctor Niles arrived a little after Donovan was sedated. He accompanied Violet and Maude into the hallway. He was a tall man and liked to stand close to whomever he was addressing. Violet could see pieces of food in between his teeth.

“He’s asking for his father…” Maude said in disbelief.

“…who died months ago,” Violet added.
Dr. Niles nodded. “He’s disoriented.”

“He’s gone mad,” Maude announced.

“I understand your concern, but you have to remain optimistic. He knew what year it was. He knew the name of the Prime Minister. But he’s confused at times. It’s like being a child and falling asleep one place only to wake up in another.”

Violet and Maude nodded.

“Now imagine if those few hours were five weeks. And when you woke you looked nothing like you did when you had fallen asleep. That is what your son is going through. Is not going to be an easy transition.”

Maude sighed. “When can he come home?”

“We’ll have to keep him a little longer to run tests, but he could be home within the week. In that time you should make adjustments.”

“We’ve built a ramp,” Violet said.

Doctor Niles smiled. “That’s a start. But I meant to your attitudes. Donovan’s need for support will not only be physical.”

Clara had been tidying the house since the wee hours of the morning. It was difficult for her to sleep nowadays. Ever since the funeral, her dreams had been commandeered by black dogs and shadowy figures that gnashed their teeth. A few nights prior, as she turned out the lamp, she had heard Bell’s voice imploring her to leave the village. He said her existence was pointless; that giving another child to the spirits had been in vain.
Was better she had died, he told her; his voice like thunder, his cackle as quick as lightning. She knew it was not really her former love but a demon that had taken on his guise. Yet there were many times she had told herself the very same thing. She questioned her purpose; how the spirits could instruct Louise about the sacrifice but not reveal that Kato would be the author of her own demise.

She began cleaning the kitchen; the repetitive movements helping to take her mind off everything. Suddenly, her head began to ache and she felt faint too, like her lungs were being squeezed. But she continued to clean. As Clara swept the floor, something moved rapidly in her peripheral. Whatever it was had gone into her father’s room. Undaunted, she detached the sweeper end of the broom and proceeded into the room with the stick. But when she entered she found no one, just the haze of ganja smoke lingering in the air. Clara was suddenly struck with panic. This was not from a vision. She realized she was suffering all the symptoms of a haunting.

“Come out!” Clara shouted.

She waited sometime until the smoke cleared. It was Louise – her head uncovered; her feet bare. At times, her apparition flickered in and out of view.

“Madda!” Clara ran to her but stopped abruptly when Louise extended her palm.

“No come,” Louise said; her voice like the howling wind. “Dem surround you.”

“Who?”

“A legion of foul spirit. Me can’t stay long.”

Clara’s forehead wrinkled with frustration. “But why?”

“Him want destroy me. He’ll stop at nothing.”
“Kato have no authority over any of we. Him weak.”

“But his forces are strong,” Louise said. “He’s taken over everything…even the yard.”

Clara leaned the broom stick against the wall. “They make him Papa now,” she said, shaking her head with disappointment. “Me try fi warn them.”

“And, me come fi warn you. You next ‘pon him list.”

“Me see what him do, Madda.”

“And worst is what him have plan fi you.”

“What me fi do?”

“Leave here.”

Clara outright refused. She had given up far too much to allow Kato to have his way.

She tried to think of what she could do to stop him. Then she remembered a ritual she was taught that would pit loosed demons against the one who had conjured them.

Louise began to fade. “Me can’t protect you.”

“Madda?” Clara cried after her.

“Leave…”

That afternoon Clara made the trek to Louise’s home, where Kato was now living. When she arrived, she spied several bags filled with tobacco seeds nailed to the entrance. That’s how him keep duppy out, she thought. With a closed fist she banged steadily on the door until it was answered by a nude girl. Clara was not surprised he would allow a whore to enter sacred ground.

“Sacrilege,” she said to herself, then to the girl, “Me here fi see Kato.”

The girl called out to the darkness behind her.
“Who that?” Kato yelled back.

The girl shrugged. Clara could hear him cursing as he made his way to the door. He was shirtless and his pants unbuckled. When he saw that it was Clara he spat on the ground.

“What you want?”

“Madda leave a box of things fi me.”

Kato smirked. “Is mine now.”

“Me never know you wear frock.” Clara quipped.

Kato washed his tongue over his top row of teeth. “Me give it to me girlfriend.”

“Then me want her red robe.”

“That’s mine too.”

Clara shook her head. “You have a bad habit of taking things that are not yours.”

“Is joke me a make,” Kato said, laughing. “Is still in the closet.” He made a gesture for Clara to enter the house but when she moved forward he stopped her. “You must think me fool.”

“You?” she asked sarcastically. “Not at all.”

Kato stared suspiciously at something behind her.

Clara sighed. “You gone let me in or not?”

He looked down at her. “How me know she no mount you?”

“What you talking ‘bout?”

“Stop the foolishness,” he ordered.

Clara realized he was on to her. “You still alive, don’t it?”
Kato figured Louise had told her everything. “Is you fi blame,” he began. “She was always sick with the asthma. Me know it was only a matter of time before she step down. But then you come along and me couldn’t allow you fi do me like you do before.”

“So you allow her fi die?”

“Is no different from what you do to Bell.”

Clara appeared shocked. She had not spoken the truth about what had happened between them to anyone. After Bell forced her to give up her baby, she looked at him differently. She could not imagine how he could make her go through something like that. She thought he had loved her. Over time resentment grew into anger and one day, when she envisioned his car running off the road, she refused to warn him. He disappeared not long after that but she was too afraid to say anything. A week later his body was found halfway down a cliff; he had been thrown through the windshield. He could not even have a proper funeral. She was so ashamed she fled from Accompong like a thief in the night.

“No you alone have the sight,” Kato said.

Clara felt like a fraud. How could she avenge Louise’s death if she was accountable for someone else’s?

There was revelry in the streets. One his way home from the hospital, Donovan could hear music coming out of every byway. Couples danced. Women were decked in dresses made out of the Jamaican flag. They blew whistles, sat on the hoods of cars, even hung
out of balconies. Donovan was not up for the celebration though. It was Independence Day but he did not feel independent at all. When he finally arrived at Pride, he struggled to transfer his torn body from the seat of the car into his wheelchair. One of the twins had to lift him out like he was a child. The moment he saw Maude and Violet on the porch, watching, he turned away; embarrassed. He remembered once carrying a bushel of sugar in each arm; of once wading through floodwater with two friends hoisted over his shoulders. But now he could not even lift his own weight.

As Donovan wheeled himself up the ramp the twins had built, Maude extended both arms. “Welcome home,” she said, tearfully.

He pointed to the ramp. “Weren’t your rosebushes here?”

Inside, Violet and Maude escorted Donovan into the parlor. He noticed a bed there, and a chest of drawers, and a nightstand. They had converted the space into his new bedroom. He stared around in silence.

Violet glanced at him nervously. “We had to bring everything down…”

“…no way to get you up all them steps,” Maude added.

Not only could Donovan no longer sleep in his own bedroom, he had been relegated to the first floor. He made his way down the hall with a puzzled expression on his face.

He did not seem sure which direction he should be going in.

“Is everything all right?” Violet asked.

“Fine,” he said. “I can’t seem to find Daddy’s study. I thought it was close to the parlor…”

“It is…or was, I should say. PJ remodeled it.”
“Shit,” he yelled, bringing his fist down on the arm of the chair. “How can I keep track of anything if everything’s changed?”

“You’re exhausted,” Maude said, as he returned to his makeshift bedroom. “Rest yourself.

Hours later, when Maude had left for the gala, Violet saw Donovan struggling to get into the barn. She ran out the back door, down the porch steps and over to him.

“You can’t ride Matilda,” she said, out of breath.

Donovan was quickly annoyed. “I know that,” he said through clenched teeth. “You and Mama are just the same. Why do keep reminding me that I’ll never ride again, or play football? You think I’m stupid or something?”

“Not at all. But you do get confused, Donny. We’re just trying to help.”

“I don’t want your help.”

“The doctor says it’s normal.”

Donovan laughed. “What’s normal about feeling legs that aren’t there? What about not being able to wipe your own ass? That’s normal?”

Violet opened the barn door and Donovan went inside. He positioned himself just before Matilda’s stable. The horse lowered her head into Donovan’s hands. As he stroked her mane, he seemed less agitated.

“I know what you’re feeling,” Violet said.

Donovan shook his head. “Don’t do that. Don’t pretend you know what is like.”

She lowered her head and appeared as though she were going to cry. “I’m not trying
to compare myself to you...what I’m saying is I know what it means to have to adjust to a new way of life. It feels like nothing will ever be the same.”

He realized she was referring to the transition she went through when they first arrived. How frustrating it must have been to be thrust into this strange, new world. And he had not even tried to ease her fears like she was doing for him now.

Violet squatted down to get into his line of sight. “But it gets better,” she said softly. “You hear? It gets better.”

In Santa Cruz, PJ and Gayle were at a bar called Patsy’s. Gayle was in the middle of explaining why she was leaving Jamaica for good. Her father had taken ill and her brother was trying to take over the company.

“And you want to help him.” PJ said.

“I want to take it from him,” Gayle corrected.

PJ found it wrong. “That’s the problem,” he said. “A man can’t run his business without family trying to bring him down. No wonder Cain kill Abel. Who needs the competition?”

Gayle downed her soda and played with the decorative lights and streamers hanging from the ceiling. “It’s not like that,” she said. “When my father suffered a stroke, I was the one who flew back every weekend to take care of him while Thaddeus did nothing. And now he wants to swindle his way into the helm? It’s not going to happen.”

“And what are you gonna do about it?” PJ wondered.
“Well…my lawyer found a loop hole where I can buy a controlling stake but I’m going to need your help.”

“Me? Why?”

“I don’t have as much as I thought. I’m hoping we could pool our resources.”

PJ watched as a band of four men went on stage and began playing the new national anthem. “I dunno,” he said.

“You were saying the other day there’s nothing left for you here. Do you want to sit around wondering what could have been or do you want to come with me and make moves? You’ll make more money as partner of Reyser Industries than as CEO of Pride Estate Tours.”

Gayle smiled. “I was gonna get to that.”

“Right.”

“We’d have to get married.”

PJ was silent. Gayle reached over the confetti that was strewn all over the table.

“Partners have to be American citizens. It’s merely a stipulation.”

“If that’s true, something tells me my status would be the least of their worries.”

“Why?”

“C’mon,” he said.

Gayle sighed and leaned back in her chair. “We’re not all raised that way, PJ.”

“No?”

“We Reysers don’t see black or white.”
“No,” PJ said. “You only see green.”
CHAPTER EIGHT

Clara foretold the flood. She warned her neighbors, the barmaid at her father’s favorite haunt, and the senile woman who yelled obscenities at passersby. She warned the Colonel and the headmaster at the only school in the village. She even warned Kato’s band while during a prayer meeting. Two months had passed since their last encounter and he had convinced himself she would no longer be an issue. Clara interrupted him; told everyone present that she had seen the river maid and implored they leave for Trelawny. Everyone turned to him for confirmation. Clara could see the venom in his eyes.

“Shall we build ark too?” he mocked.

She heard laughter ricochet through the crowd.

“A lie she a tell,” someone yelled. “The sky clear.”

“She a false prophet,” Kato announced. “She lose her gift but want use you fi her own gain.”

“What me fi gain outta this?” Clara wondered.

Kato pointed at members of the band. “She want to claim your salvation,” he said.

“And yours. And yours too.”

Clara shook her head. “You are the devil in hell.”

“Ask her why she here. Ask her why she saw the last days of the Great Shepherd and never tell him. Ask her why your soul is worth saving but his was not.”
There were murmurings throughout the crowd. She could feel them turning against her. They shouted at her to leave. They cursed her; called her names. They spat at the ground she stood on.

At home, her father walked in on her stuffing clothes into a sack. Clara took him by the hand. “We haffi leave, Papa. Flood a come.”

She was one for the record books. They named her Flora but called her biblical. For weeks she ravaged the Caribbean; destroying any and everything in her wake. Nothing was spared – not land or sea, not man or beast. As the storm approached Jamaica, Donovan and Maude spent hours boarding the windows. The twins helped Violet pack the cellar with sandbags but left early before the worst of it. It was one thing to hear the advisory, another to see the doom of black clouds; to startle every time the wind howled, the shutters banged, and the rain clawed against the house.

In the drawing room, with the windows covered, the space felt tighter; cramped. Violet sat with The Gleaner in hand as Donovan hunched over his plate of leftovers, listening to her list the number of casualties in Haiti and Cuba. Maude came in then after taking a call in the kitchen.

“That was PJ,” she said. “His flight landed in New York.”

Violet lowered the newspaper. “He just beat the storm.”

Maude sat next to her daughter-in-law on the couch. “He and that gal getting close it seem.”

“He’s just there for the funeral,” Violet said.
Donovan put his fork down. “I bet he’s going to give her some of the land to mine.”

Maude shook her head. “Pride is a landmark now. “It’s protected.”

“Thank God,” he said but no one heard him over the rattle of thunder overhead. “Is gonna be as bad as the one Daddy waited out.”

Maude shook her head. “I hope not.”

Violet inquired about it and Donovan recounted what was told to him by his father.

Percival Sr. was sixteen when a mighty hurricane approached the island; causing widespread panic. While his father, Kenneth, boarded the house, Percival rode the carriage into the barn and secured the horses in their stalls. As the storm pounded the house, everyone including the servants, took shelter in the cellar – everyone except his grandfather Seamus. When the storm finally passed the family found him tied to the sail of the collapsed sugar mill. He was clad in his old regiment’s red and white uniform, which was then too large for his ninety-one-year-old frame.

“No one knows how he climbed to the top...with only one arm... during a hurricane,” Donovan noted.

“How odd,” Violet said.

“Maybe he wanted to look in the eye of the storm,” Maude added.

Donovan raised his eyebrow. “Or maybe Quinn finally got him.”

Violet stared at him curiously. “What do you mean?”

“He tied him up there before when he was just a boy; left him there to die.”

“Who tell you that?” Maude asked.

“Cousin Cecily. She said Quinn was angry that he married a black woman.”
Violet nodded. “That’ll do it all right.”

Donovan turned to her. “Daddy said the mill was a monument to Seamus’ memory. That’s why he didn’t want it torn down. If Quinn had gotten his way the first time we wouldn’t be here.”

Maude pointed a finger at him. “You better thank the good lord you never end up like him...walking in the path of a bulldozer.”

“Mama, please.”

“No, you please.”

Donovan left the room and wheeled himself into PJ’s old study. Violet went after him.

“Your mum’s right,” she said when she finally caught up. “It was foolish thing to do. You’re only human.”

Donovan turned to her then. “Things were happening so fast, Vi. You were gone and I couldn’t stand back and watch everything I stood for be destroyed. I dunno...I thought if I saved the mill then maybe I could save us too.”

The water was rising. Clara gathered whoever she could into a waiting vehicle. She would have given anything to travel along with them, but at the last moment she closed the van door and told the driver to go on without her. Her father reached his hand through the window and told her to be safe. She had a mission to complete. After the first rainfall, the band had come to their senses and had left for higher ground. But Kato refused to leave; refused to believe her vision was real. She ran through the balm yard
and entered Louise’s house through the back door. Kato was wading through a pool that
had gathered inside. He turned when she called his name.

“Gweh,” he advised.

“We must go.”

He laughed. “We?”

“The wind will blow. The house will fall. The water will rise and wash it ‘way.”

“You see this?”

Clara nodded.

“Then it won’t come to past,” he said stubbornly.

She grew annoyed. “There’s no time fi waste.”

“The only thing a waste is you breath.”

Clara grabbed hold of his arm.

“Why you want help me?” he wondered.

“God spare me life and him want me fi do the same fi you.”

Kato did not struggle. He allowed her to lead him to the doorway. But when she
crossed the threshold, he shoved her down into the water and shut the door behind
him, locking it. She scrambled to her feet but was knocked down again by the wind.

When she got up again she went to the window and saw him lie down in the water. She
banged on the side of the house with her palms.

“You damn fool,” she yelled.
Thunder rolled overhead and Clara swore she heard the crackling of wood. If she stayed any longer it would be the end of her. She ran down the road; her head and body soaked, her shoes caked with mud.

“Governess!” someone yelled. It was one of the band members. “Come, nuh,” he said, motioning toward his motorbike. She climbed on the back, gripping his chest tightly. As they rode off, Clara turned in time to see the house buckle to its knees.

“Pride goeth before a fall,” she uttered. How she cursed Kato’s arrogance.

On the second day of the storm, pots and pans lined the hallway to collect the steady streams of water that poured down from the ceiling. And kerosene lamps were lit, like in the olden days, after the power line fell. Violet brought one of the lamps to Donovan’s room after hearing him try to place plastic tarps over the furniture in the dark.

“Did you give one to Mama?” he asked.

“I left one in her room and another in the hall.”

Violet turned to leave but he called her back. He motioned for her to sit on the bed.

“I was cleaning up earlier when I found this.” He wheeled himself to his bureau and removed a playing card from the middle drawer.

“The ace of hearts,” she said, placing the lamp down. She held the card in her hand and smiled. “You gave this to me on our first date.”

Donovan positioned himself in front of her. “I gave that to you in Loughborough Station.”
“That was our first date,” she said, laughing.

“No. You were so vexed with me, I thought I was gonna get on the train with a black eye.”

Violet laughed. “Because you told me you were going to call.”

“And I did. You just never answered.”

“Well, the truth is I gave you the wrong number.”

Donovan was surprised. “On purpose? Why?”

Violet looked away. “I loved you the moment I saw you. Gong Gong always said there was no such thing as love at first sight. I thought ‘how could he ever love me.’”

He put her fingers to his lips. “We had our first kiss there.”

“You had soft lips,” she said.

“True?”

“…and kind eyes.”

“My eyes aren’t so kind anymore,” he said. “And yet you stayed.”

Violet turned serious. “Why did you do it?” she asked point-blank.

“I was stupid, Vi…just stupid.”

“You can’t begin to fathom how much you hurt me.”

“I didn’t want to. But I was…scared. I needed you badly and for the first time you didn’t need me.”

Donovan lowered his head in shame. Violet listened to the melody of rain drops as they hit the pans.

“You could have told me that,” she said
“What kind of man would I have been?”

Violet cupped his face in her hands. “The one I married.”

Petey yelled for Howard to steady the ladder as Violet climbed down; carrying with her a small, empty pail. She spent the morning working alongside the twins – handing them nails as they mended the roof – stopping only for a drink of water or to gaze out at the landscape below her, a virtual wasteland. It was as if they had survived the end of the world.

When the storm ended, Maude and Violet left the house to survey the damage. They checked the cellar first and breathed a sigh of relief. The sandbags had prevented any flooding. The exterior was a different matter. Debris and splintered wood was strewn all about the estate. The storm had plucked shingles off the roof and blew the barn door off its hinges. But it was the fields that sustained the most damage. Eighty percent of the sugarcane crop had been destroyed. Violet covered her mouth in shock. Maude dropped to her knees and wept. It was as clear as the skies that Pride would never be the same again.

Violet recalled the not-so-distant past when the estate was a sea of green with perfect place settings and endless rooms. It was so vast, so wide; its own private island. There were cracks in the wall now; like slender fault lines threatening to swallow them
whole. There were dust balls too, and mold and rust stains. Pride was flawed, fragile, and teetering on ruin.

When her feet hit the ground, Violet heard someone approaching from behind. She turned just as Errol strode up the walkway. The storm had hit the workers the hardest. With the fields virtually obliterated, no one had been able to work in weeks. Each morning they gathered at the property line begging for work; a lucky few chosen only to aid in clean-up and small repairs. Whenever she ventured off the estate she always felt overwhelmed by their desperation.

“What can I do for you, Errol?” she asked, shaking his hand.

“Is Miss Maude home?”

Violet shook her head. “At the doctor’s with Donovan.”

“How is he?”

“Stronger. He goes to therapy three times a week. They’re casting him for prosthetics today.”

“God bless him,” Errol said.

Violet responded with a smile. “I’ll tell them you stopped by,” she said and began walking to the back of the house.

“Me walk with you.”

Violet hesitated but Errol was not one to be dissuaded. He accompanied her to the warehouse, watched as she rummaged through various tool boxes searching for nails.

“We want know when we’ll get paid.”

Violet’s eyebrows rose. “Have you talked to Maude?”
“Yeah, mon. She say soon.”

“Then you should trust that you’ll be paid.”

“We need fi know a date.”

Violet found a stash of nails in a box. “I can’t tell you that,” she said as she filled the pail. “The damage is estimated in the tens of thousands, Errol. And with no revenue coming in from the crops...I suspect she’ll have to keep a tight purse for some time.”

Errol put his hands on his hips and lowered his head. “When Boss die we don’t get paid fi a month. Only God know when we a get we money now. We have families, Miss Violet. My wife just have baby. Me need that money ‘til me find another job.”

Violet was taken aback. “A new job?”

“Yeah, mon.”

“Just see with us. I’m sure the workers will start planting soon.”

Errol laughed. “Even if that true,” he said. “Cane don’t harvest fi a year. I can’t wait that long.”

“But Pride’s been a home to you since you were a boy.”

Errol shrugged. “You haffi leave home some time, don’t it?”

“He’s right,” PJ said from the entrance of the warehouse.

Errol nodded at him in greeting and turned to Violet. “You talk to her.”

“Of course,” she said. When he left, Violet walked up to PJ. “I’m happy you got back safe. How was the States?”


Violet laughed. “And Gayle?”
“Not so good. She was a daddy’s girl.” PJ gazed at Violet as though he were seeing her for the first time. “We’re getting married,” he said.

“What?”

“I didn’t want you to have to read about it in tomorrow’s paper. I wanted you to hear it from me first.”

“That’s ridiculous, PJ. Pride needs you more than ever now. Did you not see the house, the fields?”

PJ shrugged. “This only confirms that I’m doing the right thing. Could you imagine if I pursued The Commission’s request for a review? The storm would be just another setback.”

“So that’s it? Pride is in turmoil and you’re going to leave?”

“Come with me,” he offered. “You always talked about wanting to live a foreign. Now we can finally be together.”

“On Gayle’s dime? Never.”

“It’s just business.”

“And some pleasure.”

PJ caressed the side of her cheek. “What you gonna do, stay here?”

She picked up her pail of nails and walked past him. He followed behind her. “He’ll never love…not like I do.”

Violet was annoyed by his assumption. “You don’t love,” she said, “You plot and scheme.”
PJ was insulted. “You’re one to judge. You only pretended to have feelings for me to get back at Donny.”

“And apart of you wasn’t doing the same? Admit it.”

“Maybe at first, yes…but I truly grew to love you.”

“Love.” Violet let the word hang in the air. “Is that what you promised Gayle? Or did you leave her with an I.O.U?”

PJ shook his head.

“I pity her,” Violet added.

“You shouldn’t. She’s a big woman.”

“Who you’ve turned into a school girl. You have more power than you know, PJ. You even had Clara swearing you were her child’s father.”

His eyes widened. “What’re you saying? She was pregnant for me?” He clutched his chest like his heart had dropped. “She never said anything.”

Violet realized then that Clara had been telling the truth. She had done to the poor girl the very thing she accused Donovan of doing. She stood before him then and placed her palm on his chest. “Forgive me,” she said through tears. “You shouldn’t have found out this way.”

PJ watched her turn and walk away. He did not take his eyes off her until she disappeared into the house. As much as she had hurt him and as much as he wanted to hate her, he could not deny that she still had power over him.
After the deluge, when the waters had abated, the inhabitants of Accompong returned home to salvage what they could. Most residences were destroyed; collapsed in the wind like a house of cards. Only the roofs and sidings – large silver sheets of zinc and tin – remained. Some owners had fared better than others; their homes erected on stilts. But even they had been targeted by looters. The roads were thick with mud. Dogs rummaged through piles of garbage, looking for food. Their howling rivaled only by those who had come home to discover the bodies of loved ones who had stayed behind.

Clara and her father thanked God and the spirits. Their belongings were strewn all over the place and the flood had damaged the stove but their home had been spared. Not long after they started cleaning did Clara’s father tap her on the shoulder.

“Look, nuh,” he said and pointed out the window.

A multitude of people had gathered in their front yard. Some were on their knees. Some were crying. Clara dropped the bags of trash she held in hand and joined them outside. She recognized a majority of them were from the band. The man who had driven her on his motorbike stepped forward. He offered her bottles of rum and loaves of bread as thanksgiving.

“Kato say if you word truth, him would die a lying man,” one said.

“Both of unno vision come to past,” said another.

“We shoulda listen to you from the start.”

The crowd began uttering their apologies. Clara waved her hand in the air to quiet them. “Give thanks to the Master,” she began. “’Cause like Noah, you find grace in the eyes of the Lord.”
“The bible say when God saw the wickedness of man and the evil in him heart, him open the windows of heaven and mash up the fountains. Him bring flood to destroy him own creation ‘cause him vex with what him make.”

“Not all of we make it through the flood, and if God spare you life it was so you could repent of your sins.”

“Amen!” they shouted.

Clara made her way through the crowd. She could sense that they were still forlorn.

“Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Be not discouraged. We are a strong set a people. Nothing can conquer us.”

“Preach, Madda!”

Things had come full circle. She thought maybe she was not meant to be a mother in the physical sense but one to the children of God. As she ministered to them, she felt as though she had been made whole; as though she had been healed in spirit. They broke out in song then and she noticed a change in their demeanor. As she laid hands on them and prayed, a woman with her hair wrapped in a t-shirt stepped up to her. “Me lose me husband and me son.”

“And me lose me cousin,” said another standing close by.

“How many in mourning?” Clara asked. Several hands flew upward. “Daddy, get me pen and paper.” When her father returned, she took the names of the deceased.

“Tomorrow we hold funeral fi the dead.”

“We come here?” they asked.

In the days that followed, she made her house their home. They cooked for her, sewed new garments. They built a balm yard and an altar. She knew she may never be as great as Shepherd Bell but she had found her flock.

Maude spent the better part of the afternoon in PJ’s former office reviewing the estate’s accounts. Since his move to America, Maude had not been able to make head nor tail of the statements. Her thirty-odd years as treasurer of the club had not prepared her for a financial crisis of this magnitude. Violet poked her head into the room. “Errol came by again,” she announced.

“Yeah...but you’re going to have to speak with him at some point.”

“I’m just trying to get things in order.”

Violet moved toward the desk. She picked up the elephant-shaped paper weight on the desk and examined it. “How are things, really? And don’t say ‘all right’.”

“We’re running low but there’s money coming in from the sugar we shipped last month and we still have a few crates left in the warehouse.”

“That we have yet to sell?”

“Yes.”

“And when all is said and done?”

“We’ll just about break even.”

“What does that mean?”
“It means we’ll give them their back wages but I’m afraid we won’t be able to afford pay anyone to plant.”

“So…what’s going to happen to Pride?”

“You love ask a lot of questions, you know that?”

“And I’m still waiting on an answer.”

Maude sighed. “I’m trying not to think ‘bout that.”

“Trying not to think about it? Bloody hell.”

“Bite your tongue.”

“I’m sorry, but this is our livelihood. It’s not like Donny can go out and look for work. And even if I find something, it won’t be enough.”

Violet planted herself on the couch and lied back, staring at the ceiling. She sprang up as if she suddenly remembered something.

“PJ’s building is up for review by the Landmark Commission, yes?”

“What’re you saying?”

“I’m saying that if we get it approved, he can come back and finish it.” Violet paused when she saw Maude wince. “At least we’ll have money coming in.”

“You must have lost your memory,” the old woman said, “and with it your mind,” We’re not traveling down that road again.”

Donovan tapped his fingers against the steel of his wheelchair as he waited for the doctor to return. He had been seeing a specialist in Manchester since he left the hospital
and all the appointments and castings had finally amounted to this. And no lecture or pretty picture in a brochure could prepare him for the feeling he had knowing he would be able to walk again. It was like a modern day miracle. He tried not to think about it, instead focused his attention on the wall covered with degrees above the doctor’s desk, the photos of the man’s family at Dunn’s River, and the map of Asia on the globe across the room.

“I’m nervous,” he said, turning to Violet. “I can’t stop shaking.”

She held his hand and with the other, picked lint off the nylon stocking covering one of his stumps. “It’s expected.”

“You think I’ll be able to ride Matilda?”

Violet glared at him sideways. “Don’t think I didn’t see the twins hoisting you on that saddle.”

Donovan laughed. “You have more eyes than a tarantula.”

Violet shoved him as the door to the office opened. Dr. Campbell, a middle-aged dark-skinned fellow, emerged. “You ready?” he asked, holding the prosthetic legs in each hand. He bent down and placed the device over Donovan’s right stump, fastening it just above the knee and at his thigh. He then fastened the other leg. Violet helped Donovan stand to his feet. As he took his first steps he turned back and saw that she was crying.

“We’re going to need a mop to clean that up,” the doctor joked. “We don’t want him to slip and fall.”
Violet laughed through the tears; said she felt like a mother watching her infant walk for the first time. Dr. Campbell lifted his finger to his mouth as Donovan walked back and forth, unsteadily.

“Now because you’re both an above-the-knee and below-the knee amputee, you may feel off balance sometimes.”

To remedy that, Dr. Campbell gave him a cane to steady his gait. In the car, Donovan tried to adjust to the idea of his new appendages. On the way home, as they passed through a village called Porus, he spoke in great length about new beginnings but Violet strained to hear him over the sound of drums and tambourines in the distance. They soon noticed the abandoned vehicles in the middle of the road and a mass of spectators standing off to the side. When Petey could not drive the car any further, Violet rolled down her window.

“What’s going on?”

A teenaged boy turned to her. “Healing service,” he said, then unfolded one of the t-shirts he was selling with ‘Cure Us in Porus’ sewn on the front. “Buy one, nuh?”

The village had not been hit hard by Flora. Despite the heavy rains, there had not been much damage or any casualties to report. But days after things returned to normal, water began to suddenly spring up from underground. Day after day, the waters rose until a large pool had formed. It was so pristine the villagers could not help but swim in it. News began to spread that the waters had the power to heal. One woman said the lumps in her breast had disappeared. Another said her son was no longer mute. A man swore the waters cured his sterility.
When the singing stopped, several of the spectators walked away; no longer interested in what they were seeing. Through the gaps in the crowd, Violet saw men, women and children clad in white. There was a woman standing knee deep in the pool, which was surrounded by tall poles with flags in varying colors. The skirt of her dress reminded Violet of something out of the Victorian era and her head was crowned in golden cloth. She protected her eyes from the reflection of the sun dancing off the pool’s surface and was able to see the woman’s face. She looked as though she could be Clara’s older sibling. The resemblance was that good. It was not until Violet heard her voice that she realized it was indeed her. She opened the car door and ran out.

“Vi!” Donovan called after her. “Where are you going?”

But she did not hear him; could not over the throbbing in her head. As she pushed through the crowd, members of Clara’s band held her back.

“Wait you turn,” they said.

Clara exited the pool and when she saw that it was Violet, she instructed them to let her pass. For a moment they stood facing one another, like mirror images. They were two women from different worlds that shared a past. They were more alike than they knew.

“What sickness you have?” Clara asked.

Violet was struck by her regal nature; her maturity. “I inherited a bad heart,” she began. “I need a cure of compassion.”

The crowd grumbled. They thought she was mocking them, wasting their time. Clara held her hand up and they quieted down.
Violet began to tear up. “There was a girl I knew. She tried to warn me about certain things and certain people. But I thought her young and foolish for I was a woman of the world and she was...not. She came to me with a secret and instead of helping her, I exposed her. She told the truth but because she was angry and scared I would not listen to her. I lied about her for my own gain. I made her lose her employment. I injured her character in the same way mine had been and for that I am truly sorry.”

Clara stepped forward, took Violet by the hand and led her into the pool. She briefly dipped her underneath the water then filled both palms, dousing her again from the crown of her head to the soles of her feet. The band began to sing and Violet departed with Clara’s blessing. She returned to the car dripping with water. Donovan mouth dropped. Petey stared at her strangely through the rear view mirror.

“Let’s go home,” she said.

Everyone in town was in better spirits. They had needed some good news to cling on to and that came in the form of a local girl, named after a famous film star, who had just been crowned Miss World – a first for the island. Violet walked to the beat of honking cars as drivers joined in on the celebration. At the post office, she retrieved the family’s mail. Among them were two letters addressed to her. The first was postmarked from New York. She recognized PJ’s handwriting on the envelope. She walked a little ways until she found a bench in the middle of the square.
November 7, 1963

My Dearest Vi,

It is a strange thing to not be able to see you when I please. I know we didn’t part on good terms but you’re always in my thoughts. How are you? I miss you all. Yes, you read that correctly. Don’t tell mother but I would give anything to hear her quarrelling. Gayle and I were married last month. When I last visited, there was little opportunity to get acquainted with her family but they’re kind and weren’t the least bit surprised by “her choice.” Her mother said she knew she’d bring home a Jamaican, if you can believe that.

New York will take some getting used to. It is nothing like St. Liz but since I arrived I’ve seen everyone from Belafonte to President Kennedy. As a matter of fact, we are heading to Dallas in Texas later this month to see him again. The President that is, certainly not Belafonte. Gayle says he has done as much for blacks here as Lincoln; though rather reluctantly. I do not blame him. They are a peculiar bunch.

I have come to the conclusion that the black man is, concurrently, the most revered and reviled being in America. In my short time here I have been sought after for my opinion on everything from the conflict with Russia to the Beatles and at the same time have been called a “nigger” and had life threatened for marrying a white woman. But this is America.

There is a politician here by the name of Adam Powell who favors my father in looks, voice and temperament. I swear that man will follow me wherever I go. Be sure to tell mother. I know she’ll find comfort in that.

Until next time,
PJ

Violet placed the letter in her purse with the others. She was unsure if she would write him back. The second letter then caught her eye. It was addressed from The Jamaica Landmark Commission. It was the response to the application she had sent in on behalf of Pride Estate Tours. She was suddenly racked with guilt because she had not told anyone that she had done it. It felt like she was being unfaithful again but this time to Pride. She and Donovan were finally in a good place. He even said he wanted a child,
someone to pass his legacy to. Without reading it, Violet ripped the letter into several pieces. She used to think of the unfinished visitor center as a blemish on the estate but was their monument now – a testament to family, sacrifice and survival.