
**Young Heroes of the Caribbean
Common Destiny**

Fiction

By Gwyneth Harold Davidson

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Edited by Maxine McDonnough

Sections of this work have appeared in an audio form as a part of the 2013 Jamaica Information Service audio drama series Young Heroes.

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Building # 1
17 Ruthven Road,
Kingston 10.
Tel. (876)754-8910 or (876)906-6455
Fax.(876)920-9444

A catalogue record for the book is available from the National Library of Jamaica.

ISBN 978 976 8246 31 8

Text published in Jamaica by
Gwyneth Harold Davidson
Text set in Cambria 13
Written, edited, illustrated and designed in Jamaica

First Edition

Foreword

This novel is a work of fiction that arose from a short story that was written in 2001 and also an idea that historic figures from the Caribbean can be re imagined for enjoyment and inspiration.

In this book, figures from Jamaica's national heroes are featured in alternate histories. Aside from these seven heroes, the Haitian freedom fighter called Bookman (Dutty Boukman), and the former Member of the House of Assembly and Custos of St Andrew, Joseph Gordon, no character in this book is based on a real person living or dead. The story is set in a fictional Caribbean country.

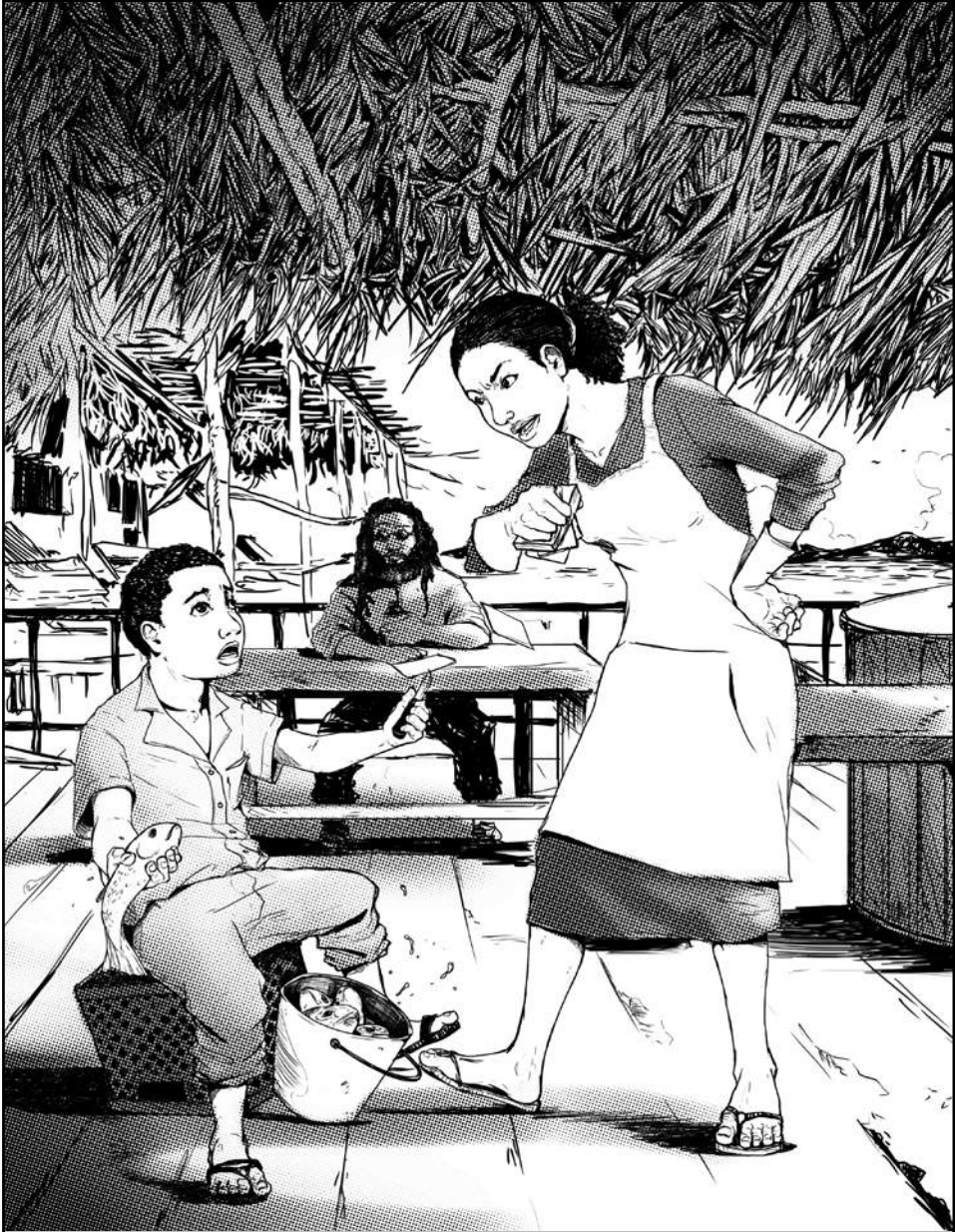


For my brothers.



Life on the beach was comfortable so Ramiro was not too happy that his father decided that the racetrack was a better scene for his ten-year-old boy.

At fifteen, Gail didn't have a family, so with Ramiro gone, she moved to adopt a mother.



You must study your book, and stop dealing with those tings!



Ramiro hopped off the bottom step of the bus and ran across the soft sand so that the heat from the ground, baking hot in the afternoon sun, would not penetrate through the soles of his shoes and his socks to his feet.

Bowing and squinting to keep the flying grains of sand out of his eyes, he did not stop until he entered the shade of one of the long, rectangular huts that seemed to grow out of the cream-coloured sand of Bonny Beach.

The people who used these huts thought that they were the most marvelous gifts from the sea. Everything that they used to build them, and almost everything that they put in them, was connected to the clear waters that eternally bathed the shore.

The roofs were held up by slim posts that were cut from mangrove trees that grew abundantly in the nearby lagoon. The woodcutters usually asked the fisherman Rodney Brydges, the owner the beach dog Scratches, to come with them. Scratches was very good at sensing motionless

crocodiles and would jump and spin, then growl and bark very loudly if one happened to be floating in the still dark water, or had blended into the leaf litter that covered the ground.

Scratches was both a useful and useless companion. His barking was a very good alarm that a crocodile was near, but, because he kept spinning, no one knew which was the best direction to take to run away.

The plank benches in the huts were cut out from every kind of softwood tree that grew in the dry limestone forest that clung to the rocky hills above the beach. The powdery sand of the floor was cool and pleasant to walk on, and tempted you to bury your toes in it.

Ramiro stepped silently inside his mother's hut, his eyes quickly adjusting to the dimness of the one room building that was airy and well ventilated, yet no sand blew inside.

He breathed deeply, taking in the aroma of his mother's cooking and nodded to the one customer in the building. He was one of her regulars, a man in the entertainment business called Ranking Kelvin. Ramiro made his way past empty rows of benches and tables to the back where his mother was steaming red snapper on a stove behind a counter. Ranking Kelvin was sitting on a stool, sipping ginger beer from a dark brown bottle while waiting on his meal. Ramiro greeted his mother with a mumble and put his school bag under the counter. He opened the bag, felt

in-between the books and a small bag of marbles and took out a wood handled ratchet knife. Carefully exposing the blade, he gingerly tested it against his thumb. It was sharp.

Although still in his school uniform, he opened the ice chest and took out a parrot fish, then kitched on an empty soda bottle crate just outside the back door. This was one of his favourite times of the day – the hours between school and dusk when he worked with his mother in her seaside cookshop. With steady hands, and an agile wrist, the glistening scales came flying off the fish in a spray of opal, and where the light caught them, touched with tiny colours. He loved the feel of the blade sliding along the cold guts of fish separating the gills from the head. It gave him a sense of pride to pull out all the entrails in one long piece. Within three minutes he had that fish clean, and he placed it in an aluminium pan and reached for another.

The man who had put down his drink to watch Ramiro exclaimed, “The little youth good man! What-a-way him scale the fish fast!”

Lilly removed the steamed snapper and crackers from the pot and placed them in a bowl. Then she spooned the soup from the pot to cover the fish, and placed two festivals on a separate plate, placing it carefully before her customer.

“Him come after school every day and help me out. The higgler dem fight to pay him to do their gutting because him do it fast and clean and don’t mash-up them fish.”

She felt a good deal of pride for having raised, so far, a helpful son, and enjoyed a moment of luxury just gazing at him, finding small reasons to privately love him more. Her eyes traced the unblemished, youthful curves of his face and his arms. In Ramiro she saw her own father's jaw, and her own mother's eyes and nose and ears. Ramiro was small and muscular, and she knew that his body shape came directly from his father. Her family was tall and thin, he was short and thick.

Lilly looked at his uniform, and like a gentle wave from the sea happily breaking on the shore then sinking through the sand, so did Lilly's smile sink off her face. In this position, sitting bent over with his elbows on his knees, Ramiro's trousers pockets gaped open, and peeking out was a brightly coloured card.

Ramiro followed his mother's gaze and, too late, grabbed his pocket a moment after she pulled a deck of playing cards from it.

"Cards bwoy? Cards? How much time I tell you fi stop gamble? Before you study your book, you deh a school a gamble!"

Lilly made an swipe for the side of his head, and missed. Two of the cards fell from her hand and landed softly at her feet. The Queen of Spades landed face up and was then covered by the Jack of Diamonds.

"Easy deh, Mother", said the customer.

Lilly made a show of ripping up every card in her hand or on the ground and flung them into her rubbish pail. Ramiro sat back down and continued to clean the fish, carefully keeping an eye on what his mother was doing. He could almost repeat what she said word for word. He had heard it all before.

“Gambling is bad! I tired to talk to the bwoy. Every day him go to school and gamble. You must study you book and stop dealing with those things,” she said, again angrily.

The man took a bite from another piece of festival and decided to stay outside of the family affair; time would just have to work everything out. Another customer came in and Lilly moved away to take the order. When she returned to her cooking area she continued to fuss under her breath that “hard-ears pickney nyam rock stone” and “who don’t hear will feel.”

It was a Wednesday in April. Easter holidays were over and Labour Day holidays were more than a month away so business was slow. Ramiro’s mother closed up before dusk and they cleaned up. Ramiro raked the sandy floor, picked up all of the refuse, bagged it and did the long walk from the beach to the main road and added his load to the huge heap that awaited collection.

The day wind died down as the sun descended behind the hazy bulk of the distant western hills colouring the sky in pale orange and blue and grey. In time the wind would

soon turn and come from the land, warmer and filled with the smell of asphalt, exhaust fumes, and the mangroves. Waiting on the land breeze was about the only other thing that Ramiro could expect tonight.

There was no electric light in his mother's home, which was one of a cluster of one-room buildings set behind the dunes between the shore and the main road.

Ramiro considered his options. He could catch the final hour of strong daylight and do some homework, or he could get up early tomorrow morning and get in half an hour before he had to get ready to go to school. He believed that his mother might still have some argument left in her, so he decided to do his lessons in the morning.

Looking west, Ramiro saw that the sunset was still struggling to blush a faint red, and the eastern moonrise was dressing itself in indigo before the unveiling of black night. It was going to be a boring evening.

Ramiro would have liked his mother to allow him to sit, even for a while, by the fishermen and listen at the edges of their conversation. Sometimes he did sneak out anyway, but she was already mad about the cards, so he decided not to cause her any more heartache for the evening.

He looked down the lane from the beach to the road and saw a group of four teenage boys jogging in their school PE gears and he decided to use the rest of the daylight by going on a short walk in the same direction. There was no

sidewalk so he walked in the direction of oncoming traffic so that he could time the approach of vehicles and press himself carefully into the prickly bushes that grew on the roadside, almost into the asphalt.

The bus that had taken him to the beach was making another return trip and he felt the rush of warm air as it whizzed by – too close for safety; and in the shadowy dusk, the driver could easily mistake his form for a small tree. His mother would definitely not want him to be walking out there.

Ramiro crossed the road again to get to a sandy track that led from the main road to a small rocky beach. You could not have a good swim here or beach a boat, so the spot was used mainly by recreational line fishermen who carefully drove their cars onto the beach, parking on the grassy spots so that the wheels would not get stuck in the sand. There were no cars now, it seemed deserted, but Ramiro heard a noise, and realized that someone was digging very close by.

If the sea had not been absolutely still, Ramiro would not have heard the very soft push of arms and hands scooping sand. The digger's head was almost in the hole, and he saw the arms push sand up. The deeper the hole became, the more careful the movements became.

Ramiro put one leg behind him, then another, prepared to make the fastest run of his life, then the head came up, and

he saw that it was one of the girls who lived on the beach. Her arm was outstretched, and in it was the perfect round, whiteness of an egg.

“Hey Boatie, leave the nest alone,” he said, without thinking.

The girl had nerves of steel. Still holding the egg she sprang up and made as if to dash for the rocks, then when she saw who it was, she relaxed, sucked her teeth and grinned.

Ramiro, like everyone else on the beach, called the girl Boatie, but her name was Gail and she had this way of grinning all of the time. She grinned when a fisherman shouted at her after she plucked a fish from a chest being unloaded and ran away – of course without paying. She grinned when she startled someone on the beach by suddenly appearing upside down in front of them dangling from her knees in a sea grape tree.

Some months ago there was a jellyfish invasion on the beach and almost everyone who went in that first day got badly stung, including Gail. She had decided to swim alongside some men going spearfishing. They were protected by their wetsuits but she got properly stung swimming in shorts and a t-shirt. She did the long swim back alone and grinned when someone handed her some aloe vera that she used to rub her swollen face, neck, chest arms and legs. Ramiro still got goosebumps remembering the slight sting that he got on that day.

She was always hanging around scrimmage games on the beach hoping to get in the game. She could handle a ball very well, so after a while the boys did let her play with them, as a boatie. A boatie was someone who could play with a team, but whose points or losses did not count.

No one could really know if Gail was happy or mad or sad because she was just always grinning in a thin face with bold eyes under permanently untidy hair.

“Nothing wrong if I take a few.” She was speaking softly, but behind it was a greedy, craven, direct stare that made Ramiro think of the wild cats that roamed behind the kitchens on the beach.

Ramiro made to turn away. Arguing was not in his nature, and his mother told him to walk away from trouble people, and, in her opinion, Gail was trouble. Anyway, he also realized that he did not even know how to make a report about turtle egg stealing.

“Don’t go ‘way Ramiro. Come back, I have to tell you something,” she called. Gail was still kneeling in a pair of blue jeans that was cut off just above the knees; under one thin, sharp knee was an empty black plastic bag, her flip flop sandals were nearby and she was wearing an old oversized t-shirt. Now that he had her attention, Ramiro decided to taunt her, making her think that he was seriously considering reporting her.

“I don’t want to get in trouble for this,” he said, still half turned away from her.

She ducked in the hole again and after five seconds reappeared holding her hands up, showing that aside for a few grains of sand, they were empty.

“See Ramiro, I put it back. Now come nuh.”

She was now gently covering up the hole by pushing the sand in. He went to her and stooped to help, there were scores of eggs still visible in the hole, and he knew that even more were already buried beneath. As they worked, she pushed a question on him. It seemed impossible for her to be soft or low.

“You would really tell somebody, Ramiro?” her eyes were hopeful, her lips parted in a grin, but now he could see that it was an empty smile.

She was one of the children who lived on the beach that his mother did not like to see him hanging around, but the bigger they all became the harder it was to keep him away from their company.

“Ramiro, you wouldn’t tell on me!” She insisted. He looked away, but felt challenged to let her feel his resistance.

“Of course I would tell.”

“My old Auntie told me that turtle eggs are special food. Good for children....,” she started and he stopped her.

“And will sell at a good price ...” Ramiro finished for her and started to move off again, but she pulled his arm and urged him to sit down. The land breeze had started, causing the bag under her knee to rustle.

“Stay, Ramiro. I have to tell you something else. My old Auntie Pearl who used to be here, you know her, told me a lot of things ...Nothing about turtles. She is from Poland, you know. She was a real Maroon.”

“Your grandmother was a Maroon from Poland? Or do you mean Portland? The name of the parish is P o r t l a n d,” Ramiro said, hoping he could help her out with this point. Then again, he thought at the same time, she probably cannot read or spell, so what was the point? To make her feel bad?

Gail shrugged and grinned. Then he realised that it was one of her little jokes, something to keep them away from the long, empty night of their beach for a little while longer. Gail had no stable home and stayed a few nights with anyone who would tolerate her. She had never been to his mother’s home as Ramiro never played with Gail.

“That girl is drawing the wrong kind of attention,” his mother would mutter if Gail appeared at the door of her shop, as she would from time to time. She would just hang around quietly, and after a while move on.

“Yes, I remember your aunt,” Ramiro said. “She was the only one who cooked jerk fish. Why did she leave you behind?”

Gail rested her hand on his shoulder, compelling him to sit beside her.

“Never mind that. She will come back for me when she can, that’s what she said.”

The sky was now completely black and a strong moon gave them a gentle light. Gail was interesting as she was intense, so Ramiro decided to sit and listen.

“My Auntie Pearl says that far from here, the mountains are very high, the valleys go down narrow and deep, and if you are down there you can spend the whole morning walking through clouds. Well, long, long time ago, way back when, she tell me about a girl named Nanny who was a little different. She would just take off in the bush and you wouldn’t see her again till you start to fret. Then you would just see her coming down the track with wild bird for the cooking pot.

Nanny of the Maroon's Story **Guard Us With Thy Mighty Hand**

The story that Auntie Pearl told Gail

“**O**ne night, Nanny, her brother Quao, and friends Kofi and Yaw decided to go fishing in a lagoon. It was a night like this with a good bright moon, and they believed that big fish would come to the surface and bite.

“It took them more than two hours to walk down the mountain, even though they used all the shortcuts. They got to the sea and had to walk across very sharp rocks to where they knew the fish were swimming and they started to fish.

“Not long after that, they heard the hooves of horses coming along the road. They had to hide because if anyone saw them, they might try to catch them and put them to work on a plantation.

“There were about five men in uniform on horseback. With dogs.”

The group of men and dogs stopped. The men got off their horses. One man stayed to look after the horses and the rest of the group and the dogs disappeared into the thick fern and trees that grew for miles along the coast road. They used the path that Nanny and her friends had used.



The Shotover Incident



There was no knowing when the men would return, and it was not wise to stay until daylight, so the four children pulled in their lines and crept away from the watchman and the horses and made their way back across the road and up the mountain by another route.

As they walked along, Nanny smelled a cooking fire.

“Ji nah,” she whispered, which means “stand” in their father’s language. The group stood and listened. Although the sea was now some distance away, they heard the pounding of the waves on the rocks. They heard croaking lizards that were looking for insects moving in the moonlight. They could also definitely smell smoke, and, very faintly, heard a woman moaning.

Nanny held the hand of her brother and pulled Yaw and Kofi to her.

“It must be the runaways, they found the cave,” she said. We must help them before the militia gets there.”

“The cave was a secret to the Maroons, and sometimes enslaved people trying to run away got directions on where to find the cave and and went there as a place to hide.

“But Nanny, they have guns....” Yaw said.

“Yes, but *Nyame*, who knows and sees everything, will help us. Yaw, it will be your job to stay here and listen. If you hear them coming this way, run and get help from our elders”.

Like shadows, Nanny, Kofi and Quao stepped lightly through the dense bushes and went to the mouth of the cave which was hidden behind a rock. Inside was like a small room and there were cracks in the cave roof that let out the smoke from the cooking fires, but they also let in the rain and that made the ground inside muddy.

“*Agoo*”, called Nanny quietly, so that the persons inside keeping watch would know it was an Akan person outside and not an enemy. Even the slight quiet noises inside of the cave became silent.

“*Agoo*”, called Nanny again.

“*Akwaaba*”, the reply meant that the persons inside were Africans!

Nanny went inside and saw that there was a fire and a group of children and women.

She went to the oldest woman in the group, the elder, and knelt before her.

“Mother, men with guns are near. You must leave now and come with us.”

“We are happy to leave but my granddaughter is hurt. If she moves she may die.”

She pointed to a young woman at the back who was crying and holding a pregnant belly.

“I can take her,” said Nanny. “Mother, please go with my

brother and my friend. They will take you to safety. We have little time.”

“Nyame has sent you, so we must do as you say,” said the woman and she allowed Quao to lead them out and away.

Nanny felt the young woman’s hand, it was clammy. She was carrying a fever that could be deadly. Nanny took up a small clay pot, left the cave and went in search of herbs. Near to a stream she smelled and found ginger, pulled up a root, washed the pot, and filled the gourd she carried on her belt with water. On a drier part of the hillside she pulled a handful of leaves from a clump of fever grass.

Returning to the cave, Nanny boiled the herbs and urged the young woman to have a good draught of the weak tea. After a short time, the young woman agreed that she could travel along, so Nanny stood up and urged the girl to lean on her, and together they slowly started the long walk that would take them to the hidden village, and safety.

When daylight eased its way into the sky, Nanny and the young woman were still far from home. Nanny could hear the men tracking their path, sensing which way they were, and getting ever closer to them. Nanny did not want to give away the location of her village, so decided to take a more secret route to get home. It was also longer and more dangerous as the hillside was steep, and it passed through thick bush which blocked out the sun, and where you could get bitten and gored by an angry pack of wild boars.

The young woman with her was trying to be brave, but she was clearly tired and in some pain.

Nanny was mightily strong, and lifted the pregnant girl on her back and made her way down the side of the gorge, holding on to anything nature presented to her – a low hanging branch, a firmly implanted rock. She carefully tested every step of the hillside before she put all her weight down on each step during the treacherous walk. That is how she got to the bottom safely. It was not yet the rainy season, so she easily waded across the stony bottom of the river. On the other side, the steep face of the mountain faced them.

Even as Nanny started the climb, she knew that the militia had found them. They had excellent trackers who made no noise, but her sensitive ears heard their whispers and breathing and the quiet way that they prepared their shotguns for action. The men could not run and shoot at the same time, so she decided to keep going.

Still holding the young woman on her back, Nanny steeled herself for the strain of a climb.

She heard when the leader gave the order to his men to load their weapons. She carried the young woman to a huge gray boulder, that was perhaps as big as a house, and that was firmly lodged in the hillside. She urged the pregnant mother to lie down behind it.

Nanny did not know what to do, but ended up looking at

her hands. They were her only tools on the journey, and she wondered how she could be guided to use them now.

Kneeling, with her face in the direction of the hunters, she raised both arms up, fingers extended, to the grey sky where heavy, grey clouds with ragged edges moved slowly down from the top of the surrounding ridge. In a few moments, it would drape the valley in a thick cloud, but for now, the night was still clear enough to give the shooters a clear view of their target.

She called out, "Eternal Father, bless our land. Guard us with thy mighty hand."

The first cracks from the guns broke the peace of the valley. A wild boar she had not seen darted from its hiding place and ran past her. A flock of startled parakeets left a tree as if on one pair of wings, their calls adding anxiety to the air.

A volley of gunshots travelled across the valley in the direction of Nanny.

She braced herself, but the metal shots all landed harmlessly into her upraised palms, rolled down her arms and dropped to the stony river bank. Nanny was going to run off, but she sensed that she could do more so she reached down, scooped up a handful of shot and looked at the men on the other side of the river bank. She tensed slightly, and using an overarm motion, bowled the shot back at the men. She bent her elbow in the throw so that the shot left her small hands with the greatest force. The

shot accelerated straight and true into the line of men. The men were screaming when she bent to scoop another armful and bowl again.

The leader ordered the men to reload, and even as the men struggled to do so, an area of bush close to them started to shake, and a family of wild boars, now fully awake and angry, charged the group of soldiers.

Struggling to keep his men alive, the leader shouted for them to get into a circle with their bayonets pointed out, keeping the men who had been wounded in the centre of the circle. There was no way that they could all outrun the wild boars.

Nanny attended to the girl again, and they continued their journey.

Nanny told her story to the maroon council; some believed her and the girl, others were more than a little skeptical.

Back at the garrison, the leader and his men gave a full debriefing on the failed mission to recapture runaways. Their superiors tried to say that the event was not accurately reported, that there must have been a group of men in the hills with guns; but all the men told the same story. The battle was between them and one small girl.

For the records, the secretary who wrote the report called it the Shotover Incident. None of them ever returned to the place, and Nanny's village remained safe.

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Gail stood up. She had now slung the plastic bag around her wrist, and it wafted with the slight but steady breeze that was coming down from the hills to the sea. The bag was still empty. She had not tried to take away any of the turtle eggs, in truth. Her eyes were like two moons looking into his.

“We can go back now Ramiro,” she said.



The next day was Friday, and, as usual Ramiro went to visit his father after school. He found him at his workplace, in the stables near to the Augusta Racecourse, relaxing with the other grooms after that day's exercises. An old man was writing numbers with a piece of white chalk on a portion of the wooden stable wall that was

painted as a blackboard. Three other men stood looking at the numbers.

Two times a day, rain or shine, the numbers would run at Augusta Racecourse. The complex had stables and paddocks that were home to between 15 and 20 horses. Some were being schooled for the racetrack, or had already started a racing career. At the moment, there were a couple of breeding mares. Any day of the week was a day for work as the horses needed round-the-clock care.

Ramiro saw his father snap his fingers and grin, "Me know the old woman and gold would work for me this time."

The old man finished writing down the numbers, straightened up and looked at him.

“Weh de paper deh boss? You can’t collect unless you have de paper.”

Ramiro’s father reached into his shirt pocket and pulled out a small scrap of white paper.

“See it there; gold four times, old woman two times. How much the Chiney man said that is?”

The old man took the paper and studied it. Then he counted out \$275 and handed it over to Ramiro’s father.

“You must play drop han more often Sawdust. See how you lucky!”

“I’m only lucky when I’m lucky,” said Sawdust. “See my other luck here.”

He touched Ramiro on his shoulder and then led him away from the group to a far stall. Inside was a young, dark coloured horse. In that light Ramiro could not be sure if the animal was dark brown or black. Ramiro read the name tacked onto a piece of card on the wooden post. It said “Call Me Thunder”.

Sawdust spoke just above a low whisper, “From a farm in St. Ann and just turned three years. I get to school him.”

Ramiro reached out his hand to touch the smooth, short hairs, but his father grabbed his hand to stop him and said, “No, him is still jumpy. Him mus’ trus’ me firs’ before him get comfortable with other people.”

Quietly, Sawdust slipped under the chain at the entrance to the stall and moving slowly and smoothly stood very close to the horse.

Call Me Thunder sensed him, lifted his head and twitched his ears. Sawdust reached for the harness with his left hand and held his mane with the right, while murmuring softly to him. Ramiro’s heart skipped a beat when he saw the horse rear and snort, exposing his big teeth. Sawdust kept a firm hold on the harness urging the horse to keep his head down, still whispering softly. After a few minutes, Call Me Thunder quieted to the point where Sawdust stroked his back. The horse seemed to be enjoying it because he looked around and nuzzled Sawdust with his nose.

“Him goin’ to be a champion Dadda?”

“I feel so. Him have the attitude, and the strength.”

Sawdust came out of the stall and leaned on the post and looked at his son. He was proud of his boy and noticed that he still had his mother’s face, but his body was just like his when he was his age. Short and muscular.

“You think about what I said the last time, son?”

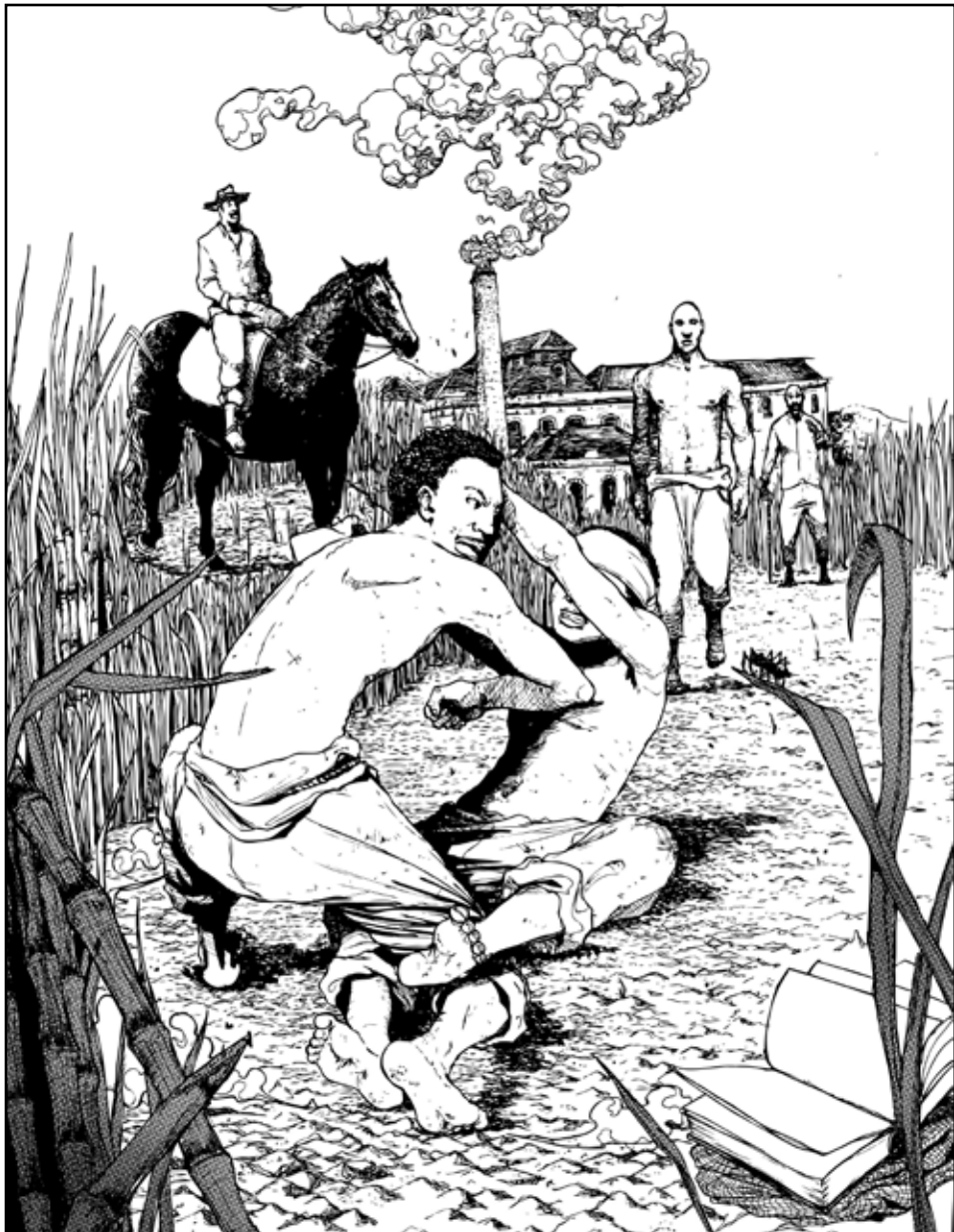
“Yes Dadda. But Lilly still don’t like it. You know how she feel about gambling.”

“So why she take the money that I give you every week? Is gambling allow me to live. She is just looking for an excuse but I am going over there very soon, to tell her that you coming to live here. Time come.”

Sawdust peeled off some money and added the drop han’ winnings he received and gave it to Ramiro. The boy pocketed it and walked out of the stall to the street where he stood at the bus stop to catch the first of the two buses that would take him home, and to his mother.

He moved away from two small schoolboys who were quarrelling and shoving each other. One was slightly older than the other, but they looked like brothers. A woman called roughly to them, and, still fuming with each other, they obeyed her and ran down a lane.

The bus arrived and he sat near the back and used his hand to shield his face from the sun that came directly on his face through the glass window. Ramiro thought, as he sometimes did, that it must be nice to have a brother or a really close friend like a brother. The gentle rocking of the bus and the warmth soon lulled him to sleep and in his dream he saw two friends who were as close as brothers, but they were fighting.



Learn the power of the book and of the web, it gives you greater power.

Sam Sharpe's Story **Grant True Wisdom**

Ramiro dreams

Sitting on his horse, Bakkra Lynch smiled broadly, watching the fight with interest and enjoyment.

On the stubby grass, at the edge of Lowgate cane piece, two small boys were struggling on the ground in a fierce wrestle.

They were both small and skinny, but the tense grit of their teeth and rough handling of each other spoke of the intensity of their battle.

At that moment, Sam had the advantage as he had pressed Cicero to the ground and was kneeling with his elbow pressed into the other boy's ribs. Despite his pain, Cicero managed to get his leg hooked into Sam's supporting knee and gave it the hardest jerk he could. Sam cried out in pain as his ankle twisted and he reached to hold it.

Cicero jumped on him and pummeled the boy's face hard. Sam managed to grab an arm and bit down hard on Cicero's wrist. But at that point, a pair of thick arms dislodged the two and bore a crying Sam Sharpe away.

Annoyed that his sport had been taken away, Bakkra nevertheless allowed Curtis, the plantation's biggest and

strongest gang worker to carry the boy from the angry scene.

Bakkra Lynch instinctively looked around and his eyes met those of the cart driver, Daddy Servius, the oldest worker on the plantation, and the only African born slave. Bakkra Lynch knew that he had given Brownie the order to part the boys, so he left the matter and rode away.

That evening in the village, the mothers of the boys had it out with each other in a loud tracing match. Cicero's mother pointed to the scar on her son's wrist caused by the wicked beast Sam. Sam's mother said that her boy was probably lamed for life because of a thieving snake. No one tried to interrupt them. It was a way of letting off steam and letting go some of the venom that built up daily in estate life.

The following morning, Sam's ankle was swollen and his mother pleaded with the headman that he get some days off for treatment at the slave hospital, and he agreed, and Daddy Servius transported the boy there that day.

Later, as he sat with his back against the cool stones of the hospital foundation, Sam tried to make sense of how things turned out the way that they did. Cicero was his best friend, so how did they end up in that terrible fight?

They were both picking up short stalks of cane left behind in the fields and running jokes with each other. It was their game to have a competition with each other as to who

would have the highest pile before Daddy Servius came with the cart to collect cane for the boiler house.

This time, however, when Sam returned from picking up, there was one pile instead of two, and each boy claimed it as his own. Sam threw a verbal taunt at Cicero, and Bakkra who was nearby laughed and said that Cicero would serve Sam forever. Cicero hit Sam, who then punched him and that is how the fight with his best friend started.

The slave hospital was on its own little hillside far from the factory. It was made of dark coloured cut stone and was cool inside. Fields of cane lands rustled and waved down the slopes from the hospital, and at the bottom of the nearby valley a thick grove of trees sheltered a small river that eventually led to the village where the estate slaves lived.

Sam counted the backs of all the workers that he could see in the fields – he went through all his fingers and toes about three times. He saw his parents and uncles and cousins and neighbours; then he counted the overseers – he could count all of them on one hand; then he looked for the sole man on horseback – Bakkra Lynch. He thought that Bakkra Lynch must be very powerful for him, one man, to have so much control over so many people.

Sam spent three days there watching the workers receive painful treatments for awful injuries. Most of the patients

were there because of accidents in the fields or in the factory rather than to illness.

Sam was glad to be home and as soon as his mother stopped fussing over him, Sam limped to Cicero's family hut. He found his friend sitting on his doorstep. He was, as usual, holding the old book that had been in their village for as long as they knew. Cicero was slowly moving his index finger from left to right along a line of black and white markings on a page in the book. He had been teaching himself to read.

"Hey Bookman," Sam said, and sat beside Cicero. His pet name for his friend was Bookman, because he spent most of his spare time looking into that one book.

"Hey Sam," Cicero replied, with a grateful grin now that he knew they were still friends.

"Bra," said a voice. It sounded like a call.

Daddy Servius, was standing at the path leading away from the village, beckoning to them. He had some curious ways, the old African, one of them is that he often spoke to them in his mother tongue, which none of them knew.

They followed him away from the houses, where the earth was hard from being constantly pounded by footsteps in the village, and he took them to the side of the road where they normally left produce for Sunday market. The ground there had a lot of loose dust.

Daddy Servius made sure that they were paying attention to him, then he used a slim piece of bamboo and drew in the dust.

“That is a crocodile,” said Sam.

“Live like the crocodile Sam, and adapt,” said Daddy Servius.

“And that is the web of Ananse,” said Cicero.

“The spider is a small, weak animal, but the spider’s web is very strong. The spider uses it to go in all directions to survive. The web teaches us that we must learn how to see the options and the opportunities that are always around us.”

“What are you teaching us Daddy Servius?” Sam wanted to know.

“Bakkra is the only one on the plantation who uses books. He values them above all of his other possessions because it gives him power. Cicero is already learning that Sam, he is truly living the special name that you have for him, *Bookman*. I say to you both, learn the power of the book and of the web and you will have greater power.”

The driver nudged Ramiro to wake up. The bus was parked at the terminal point at the beach. Ramiro slung his knapsack over one shoulder, and rubbing his eyes, got off.





Before dawn the following morning, the long, low tone of a conch shell sounded across the beach. In the dreams of the slumbering fisherfolk, it was like the pink rose of morning announcing a bountiful day. Another long blow roused Ramiro and he realized that his mother was already awake, moving around the room, getting ready to buy her take from the boats which would

be now pulled up on the beach.

He joined her and, holding their baskets, they jogged in the dark across the beach to where the boats were to buy some of the catch. A small crowd had already gathered using battery powered and kerosene lamps to guide the pickings. He followed his mother's instructions on which fish to pick as she haggled over the price of an assortment of about 30 fish, plus a lionfish which the fisherman threw in saying that if she scaled it properly, it made a lovely meal.

When the dawning sunlight bathed the early morning in its gentle light, a higgler with a deep chest bellowed that she needed Ramiro to scale and clean for her; the first of several who were aggressively businesslike in their haste to get going about their affairs in the city markets. He got

up and prepared his mind for a hectic morning while he sharpened his mother's gutting knife. He was focused on his work, but Ramiro heard his father coming even when he was still some distance away.

The movement of the sea against the long stretch of fine sandy beach set the tempo of the soundtrack of that shoreline every day. Today the sounds were barely there, just the occasional small wave breaking. Over that was the call and response of sellers and buyers of fish, and of engines taking vessels back out to sea or engines taking vehicles off the beach and on to the road. A small flock of seagulls added rough cries, in between grabs at any pieces that were thrown their way. Beside these normal sounds was the sustained approach of hooves on wet sand, announcing the arrival of a small group of racehorses out for morning bathing exercises.

Six horses with two riders crossed the sand and four entered the sea. Sawdust, sitting on a mare, was corralling Call Me Thunder, leading him closer to the water. The colt was resisting, he seemed dissatisfied with the halt, and wanting to gallop down the beach that was now busy with boaters moving netting and motors and containers from the water to the land. Sawdust had been correct to stop them where he did.

Ramiro dipped his hands in the fresh water basin that he kept beside him, put the sharp gutting knife on the counter and went out to watch his father, but at the same time was aware that his mother would be observing everything.

Sawdust dismounted when he saw Ramiro and called out to him to take the mare. He gave Ramiro a leg up and the boy easily directed her to enter the water and swim, with him astride. He looked back and saw his father walk the colt into the sea and, swimming himself, coaxed the horse to swim before mounting. For a short time, Ramiro and the other groom swam the animals to the point where the bay turned, went ashore and trotted them across the sand and under the shade of a large sea grape tree with long smooth branches that grew upwards as much as they did sideways. The leaves on the longest stretch of branch nearly touched the side of his mother's cookshop.

Ramiro watched how his father and the groom looped the reins and correctly tethered his mare beside the other horses, and then followed them into Lilly's shop, which was only a few steps away. She was nervously kneading a batch of festival dough.

A golden brown festival side order could make or break a seafood meal on the beach; and Lilly had long learned how to get it just right. It had to have the right mix of flour, sugar and cornmeal combined and expertly kneaded not too hard, but not underdone. If it was under kneaded, the sausage shaped dough would break apart in the frying pot. You only knew if the kneading was properly done after the first bite. Would your teeth cut through the festival easily in one crunch, or would your jaws have to clench and tear through?

Lilly's kneading today had more force than the dough needed, she pressed down on it with her full body weight, and when Sawdust greeted her, she did not look up or answer.

Sawdust did not move from the spot where he had stopped, just beyond reach from her. Although he had just been swimming, the sun and the breeze had almost already dried his skin, casing it in a nearly invisible film of salt.

He knew her well, and this was not going to be an easy conversation; but sometimes avoiding a fight can be beyond the ability of two friends.



“I’m taking Ramiro today”, said Sawdust quietly, as if he were calming another skittish horse.

“Why you so anxious to involve him in that sinful life of yours?”

“Don’t be a hypocrite, like you don’t use the money that I give him and send him to school!”

“We can manage without you,” she bit back. Sawdust hardened his voice, just as he had tugged on Call Me Thunder’s bridle earlier, to demonstrate who was in charge.

“Manage how? Hardly anybody comes to this beach anymore, so you barely make anything off the cooking. Plus you think that this is the best place to bring up a boy?”

“Look around you. Ramiro reach Grade Five. Today is a school day and he is out here scaling fish. All the other children around here dropped out of school from Grade Three.”

Lilly started to sob, “You are not taking my son.”

Sawdust pressed on, “I done talk. Ramiro, pack your things.

Johnno will take back the horses to the stables. We will catch the next bus.”

Nervously Ramiro stood and moved to the door. He barely saw when his mother grabbed the gutting knife and lunged towards his father. Sawdust raised his right arm to protect himself and the blade entered his left forearm opening a shallow wound from wrist to elbow.

With his left fist, he knocked her wrist, which caused the knife to fall to the ground and Ramiro ran and picked it up. He watched the blood drip from his father’s arm to the sand and his mother cradle her hurt wrist. He did not think that she would hurt him again, but he was still wary of her.

“Ramiro. Go and get your things,” Sawdust said. He eventually picked up a kitchen cloth and called the other groom to help to wrap his arm.

Ramiro saw that his mother was physically unhurt, but emotionally wrecked. She was crying and looking down. If she were to look up at him, even glance, and let him see her eyes through her tears, he would tell his father that he would not go. Sawdust, he knew, would not force him to go.

Ramiro kept looking at her. If she would even keep her face down, but turn her eyes up so that he would see the whites and her dark pupils, he would read the message “Don’t go.” Lilly and Ramiro had been sleeping on the same bed almost every night for as long as he was alive. Sometimes they had no need for words, a gesture, an expression or a glance was more efficient than words.

“Remember your schoolbag,” Sawdust said.

The boy and his father left the beach with his bags for the bus stop.

Johnno had the job of gathering the horses alone and walking them back down the beach and to their stables. If he had looked up, he would have seen that Gail was lying along the length of one stout branch, she had quietly seen and heard it all.

After her son and his father took the things and left. Lilly turned off her stove, covered her dishes and went to her room. She knew that she would not be able to do anything else that morning, so she shut her door and lay down on the bed feeling broken down, with not even the strength to cry, but many thoughts were playing over in her head. She remembered when she first came on the beach, how a kind cookshop owner took her under her care and over time showed her how to manage a cookshop, and prepare seafood properly. Those were good memories, and her mind relaxed, but took her recollections into places where she did not want to go.

She went through many scenes with angry shouting, feelings of terror and hurt and then the day that she decided that she would not be going home from school, and started a new life.

Lilly's sleep got deeper but still her breathing was light and her body was completely still except for her eyelids which twitched rapidly showing that her thoughts and her mind were very active with dreams, but not everything that she dreamt about was about her.

Paul Bogle's Story
Light Through Countless Hours

Ramiro's mother dreams

Seven-year-old Paul Bogle huddled under the house, alone, nervous, but not afraid. He had been there for some hours and now it was pitch, black night. Normally, at this time on a Sunday, he would have returned from evening service, and his mother would be urging him and his siblings and cousins to go to bed.

But there had been no church service in Stony Gut that day. In the morning when the families were preparing the after church supper, the militia rode into the village, turned over cooking pots and demanded to know where recent runaways, Osonoko the Coromante; and Briton, who was born on the plantation had gone. No one knew, or so they said.

They were especially harsh on Kamina, because she had a history of being defiant. They put her to stand in the sun while they rode a horse through her house.

“Dem not here me seh!” she insisted, and the tone of her voice gave courage to the other villagers who refused to run into the bush and instead sat and kept their eyes trained on the militia men as they rampaged through



He could not ignore the scared crying of the children

huts and kitchens and vegetable plots and hen houses. Then they put Kamina into the cart and ordered all of the young people, the adults and the elders to join her. They drove away – no doubt to the workhouse for punishment – leaving the children alone in the village.

Paul had run under his parents' hut as soon as the commotion started and stayed there. He was hungry, but felt he could ignore the pangs and stay safe until his parents returned. However, he could not ignore the scared crying of the other children, especially when evening and its darkness came.

He crept out and found eight-year-old Phibbah in her mother's kitchen, shivering and frightened. The faint embers from the cooking fire, where a breadfruit roasted until it burned, were dying. Paul went behind the house for some dry banana leaves, tore them up, blew on the embers and used them to feed a small flame. Phibbah placed a few pieces of wood on the flame and soon there was a small but steady fire, giving them courage in the dark. There were still small voices out there that were crying, and also the voices that were silent with fear.

In the night, Paul went from hut to hut, calling out and encouraging the children to come with him. He led them, many still crying, to the flame in Phibbah's kitchen. When he had done that, Paul went out again into the nearby bushes, calling out the names of the children he knew. In all, more than 20 children eventually huddled together in

the kitchen where they roasted fingers of plantain and ate them.

The night was long, but they held each other, and Paul led them in the singing of songs from church, “In this world of darkness, so we must shine. You in your small corner, and I in mine.” The songs fed their courage.

Comforted, the smaller children drifted off to sleep and the older ones told Ananse stories. They heard how the spider man used his wits to stay alive and to look after his own family.

When all the stories were told, the firewood burnt leaving only red embers showing through the ash, only Paul was awake. He listened to the breathing of the children and their somnolent shuffling until daybreak. Finally, as with the dawning light, the cart returned with the weary adults. Despite being away all of Sunday, they would have to work again that morning in the fields, or miss a day’s pay.

The parents were relieved to find that all of the children were safe together and praised them all for their bravery.

When Phibbah’s mother asked them if they were afraid, she said, “No Mama, our Paul was our light through countless hours.”



Still sleeping, Lilly’s lips parted and her breathing became deeper. The door to her room was shut, and the curtain



over the window was drawn, but very bright rays of midday light pushed through the board walls and the heat of the day rose, but still she slept. Her dreams changed to her memories of things that happened ten years before when she first met Sawdust.

The Day Her Prince Came

Lilly Remembers

It was a slow day on the beach, and Lilly had put her head on one of the tables and had fallen half asleep. She thought that she smelled horse sweat and raised her head to meet the steady gaze of a young man who was looking down at her, amused. It was Sawdust. He had been a part of a group that had brought racehorses out to exercise and they had sent him to order some food.

Sawdust was dressed in a faded polo shirt and cut off jeans and sneakers. All Lilly saw, was very fit young man with a face that seemed kind and honest. Even though at the moment he was dirty and sweaty, she noted that he had a low haircut, was clean shaven and had strong white teeth. If he were not with the grooms she would have thought that he was a soldier or a policeman.

“Why you frighten me so?” she reproached him.

“What I do?” Sawdust had said, smiling even more. She liked the soft and calm tone of his voice. It relaxed her even more.

Lilly was not fat and not slim, not tall and not short. She had a very thick head of hair that grew without stopping,

and which she would savagely cut back to a length that she could manage and tied into a loose bun that hung down on her neck. She was self conscious at being discovered asleep.

“You could make some noise in the place,” she said, checking herself to make sure that her blouse and skirt were in their right place. She turned away, pretending to be getting busy for the kitchen, but in truth she was making sure that all the remains of sleep were wiped from her face.

“You have any roast breadfruit?” he asked.

Lilly turned to look at him thinking how strange it was that he asked for the same food that she just had in her dream, and even more amazing, that she actually had one that she was saving for the weekend crowd.

“I can put one on the fire for you now while I fix up some fish. How you want it?”

Sawdust gave her the order and then remained seated in the shop as she prepared the meal. Lilly took extra care, because she wanted him to visit her again, and when it was served, he kept smiling because he wanted her to know how much he was enjoying the meal, and also her company.

In her dream, Lilly saw the images of the first few years with Sawdust move in a flash.

There was Ramiro as a new born baby, then when he started to walk and then go to school. She saw the many

different quarrels she had had with Sawdust and then him coming to the beach less and less often.

She turned in her bed, woke up and did not know what to do as her son would not be coming home from school that day. He was gone.

Education Is More Than School

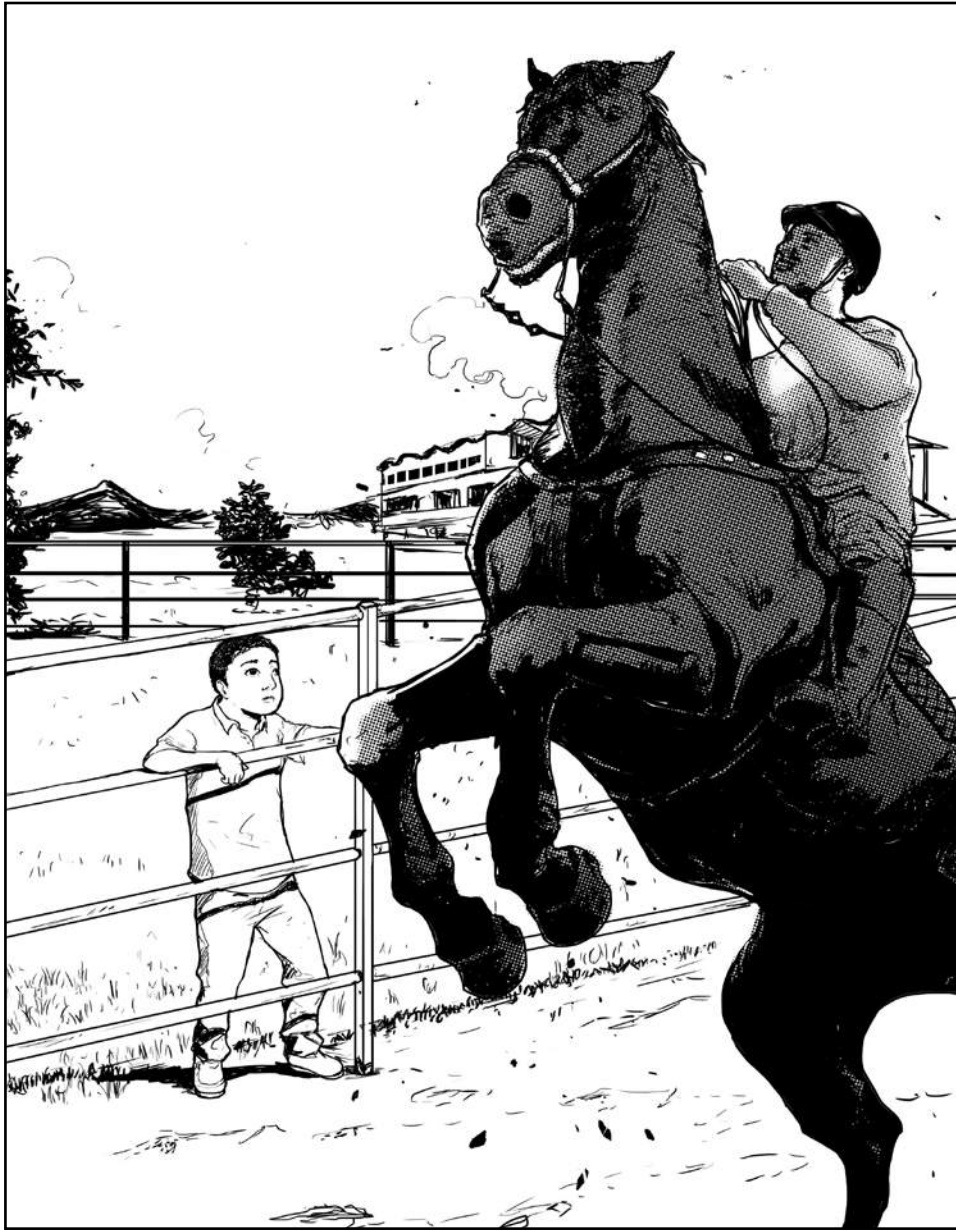


As they settled into Sawdust's rooms that night, Ramiro raised the matter of his mother with his father.

"Who is going to help Lilly?"

Ramiro had shared almost every single day of his life with his mother, sleeping on the same bed and sharing thoughts and conversation on most things except any matter that did not happen on the beach. He did not even know where she was from. When he was with his father, Ramiro tried to fill in the blanks that were left out of conversations with his mother. With Sawdust, Ramiro felt comfortable to talk about many more topics, but his father had no time for exploring feelings.

"Your mother alright, Ramiro. She knows how to take care of herself, and you will see her when you want. I want you to focus on making more friends. There is a football



The colt was being schooled and conditioned for Independence Day

club near here that has a league for your age, and I will take you to the paddock and you can learn how to be a groom like me. I not saying anything against the beach life, but the cookshop thing is not going anywhere. It is a dead end, so put that life behind you.”

Ramiro was not sure he was any more comfortable lying alone in a bed behind concrete walls – sleeping and waking to the sounds of competing street dances straight through the night into daylight; instead of lying beside his mother, quietly discussing whether the wind coming in from the west meant a sign of bad weather.

Nonetheless, he found himself captivated by his father and thrust himself away from his mother’s gravitational pull that had kept him in a steady orbit around her until now. Now he saw how other families lived and he even adopted some of their routines such as doing homework at night, watching the evening news, visiting the shopping plazas after school, wearing ironed clothes, and living in a house with electricity and indoor plumbing.

The housing estate where his father lived had many more children than the beach, and these children were more under control of their parents. Many of them had a churchgoing lifestyle that seemed fun and interesting. After a while Ramiro started going to church on Saturday mornings with one set of neighbourhood friends, and on Sunday mornings with another set. Church had a lot of songs, memory games about the scripture, sporting

competitions, visits to other churches and snacks and food. On Saturday afternoons and on some Sundays he went to visit his father at the track where there were race meets. The security guards got to know him, so he was always allowed to slip in quietly without paying.

In August, after he had lived with his father for three months, Sawdust changed his routine from looking after several horses to caring for only one. The horse that the owner and the trainer and the grooms in his stables believed was the most amazing talent to be bred on the island, Call Me Thunder. The colt was being schooled and conditioned to do his first run on Independence Day. So far, all of their work was being done in secret, and if all went well, they dreamed of him surpassing the achievements of the legendary Streak of Light who collected all the major trophies for three-year-olds some 30 years ago.

The trainer came that Sunday morning to collect Sawdust and Ramiro to take them to a farm where Call Me Thunder would exercise for the day. Also in the pickup was Briggys, the loudmouthed heavyweight jockey who was decked to ride him in the St Leger. The farm was only an hour's drive away, and Call Me Thunder took the journey calmly. When the boxcar opened, he came out and trotted easily around the grounds without any sign of temper. They came to this farm to give him a very private field where he could have exercises at pace, away from inquisitive eyes. For the early part, Ramiro was riding one of the retired racehorses to

run alongside him, after that his father took over.

They put in a lot of work in the mornings as the afternoons were prone to heavy showers which would ruin the ground for good flat running. They were very pleased when the caretaker told them that it had not rained for the past two days, and that conditions were dry.

After his first hard run, Sawdust checked Call Me Thunder for injuries, and then put him in a paddock to rest when he noticed a figure standing under a guango tree to the side of Call Me Thunder's box. He approached the man from behind and became angry when he recognised the person as Lance Lodge, a jockey who the racing commission had long suspected of race fixing but had never had enough material for a conviction. In the past few years, two promising mounts had mysteriously become injured after he rode them in big purse races.

"Lodge, what you doin' here?"

Lodge, slowly and deliberately shifted to glance at Sawdust, then glance away again.

"Wha'appen man? You keeping secret round here." Sawdust did not answer him, Lodge continued, "Chungy promised that he would get me another big horse to ride. I should mount this one."

"Forget it, him deck already."

Lodge shrugged, "Is Chungy's horse. I will ask him."

Sawdust planted his legs firmly on the ground, crossed his hands over his chest and said in his quiet and low way, "Lef' the place Lodge. Nothing nuh deh here for you today."

Lodge hissed his teeth and walked towards the track, "Is your farm bwoy? For a man weh share bed with horse, a lucky you lucky to get dis work."

Sawdust grabbed Lodge's collar and slapped the back of his head, but jockeys were notoriously nimble, and he hooked one of his muscular legs in between Sawdust's leg causing him to lose his balance and they both fell to the ground. Now having cancelled Sawdust's advantage of height, Lodge used his knee to ram into Sawdust's belly, and when he flashed his knife, it was more than a bare threat.

A lone gunshot nearby stopped the commotion. A stocky man in a worn leather hat lowered his hand from pointing in the air where he had fired the shot. It was Chungy, the owner of Call Me Thunder and of the farm. Behind him, the trainer, Briggy, and Ramiro, were running towards the scene.

"Why unno a kill off each other 'pon me farm!"

Lodge got up first and pleaded with a sneer, "Chungy, is look me come look for you, and dis man a order me off your farm."

"Lodge me tell you when I ready for you, I will call you. This place look like any tourist attraction weh people feel dem can come and go as them like?"

It was a question that Chungy did not expect to be answered, and Lodge certainly did not reply.

Briggy, who felt the most threatened by the presence of the other jockey jumped into the fray, "Lodge, since you can't get horse to ride is what? You tun agent 007? Or is the secret service you working for now?"

"Shut you mouth Briggy", said Chungy. "Lodge, go wait on me, on the verandah."

Lodge dusted himself as he walked off. Chungy called the trainer and the two of them drew away to speak in private close to where Call Me Thunder was standing in the shade.

Sawdust hung his head down as he was still in pain from the blow from Lodge's knee. When he spoke he said, "We are going to have trouble with Lodge. If he can't ride Call Me Thunder, he will make sure and mess up his chances."

"You think Chungy will deck me out?" Briggy sounded worried. Sawdust shook his head carefully.

"Not with this boy. Call Me Thunder is too talented to put in the hands of a jockey who does not love horses. Chungy know that."

Call Me Thunder was entered in the following Saturday's nine-race programme and Ramiro barely saw anything of his father as he put everything into his work to ensure that the horse performed well on his debut showing.

On the race day, Ramiro ate breakfast with his father and shortly after six in the morning walked with him to Chungy's stables and together they travelled in the horsebox with Call Me Thunder to the Augusta Racecourse. For the past week, Ramiro watched as his father groomed the horse till his coat shone. The farrier and his assistant had come the day before and spent a short time doing minor, but careful, smoothing and levelling of the hoof walls. When he finished the rasping, the farrier said that all four feet were in good condition and then left.

Their race was the fifth. From the third race, Sawdust walked Call Me Thunder to the parade so that the punters would see him. There were plenty exclamations as eyes saw Call Me Thunder's body for the first time, and calculated how he might perform that day. Although he was only three-years-old, his muscle and skeletal development were so far advanced that a heavyweight jockey like Briggy could mount him. The filly Restless Babe was the favourite, but the rest of the field was soft. It seemed a very safe bet to say that Call Me Thunder would finish in the top two, so punters marked him and Restless Babe for a quinella.

"That Call Me Thunder look razor sharp," said one punter, leaning on the fence.

"These big juice horses look promising and then they let you down on the back stretch. I will hold my money on today and just watch him," said his friend standing beside him.

At another side of the parade a female punter exclaimed, "Why this horse wasn't in the 2,000 Guineas? If he runs as good as he looks, this is what I come to see."

At the starter's gun, all seven in the gate had a good start for the 5-furlong (1000m) race. Briggy, wearing Chungy's black and green colours, was nervous. When the horses came around the bend to the homestretch the crowd saw when Call Me Thunder bunched up his forelock muscles, and held the curve to emerge ahead of the pack. He did not have the experience though to adjust his gait for the straight, and the experience of Restless Babe showed through as she gathered her hooves and propelled herself ahead of him, by under a length, to the winning post.

Ramiro listened as the men talked through the race. His father said that he was satisfied with the run. A win would have been great, but this was a solid start to a career.

Briggy said that the horse was running well until Restless Babe passed him, and he felt him strain to catch up, but it was too late. Briggy felt that Call Me Thunder wanted to win, and that w help him to learn fast.

Chungy agreed and that their job now was to bring out the champion in their athlete. He said that they would continue the work, enter him in a few more run-ups to the race that was the test of the best three-year-olds, the Caribbean St Leger.

Personal Responsibility



Three months passed, and Lilly had not seen Ramiro during that entire time. At first she told herself that he had had only another eight months to prepare for his secondary school entrance examinations, and so was studying the whole time with no time to spare. The holidays brought more

business to the beach every day and Lilly worked hard and tried not to face the possibility that her son did not want to visit her badly enough – and she was too disabled by the thought that it might just be true, and she did not have the courage and the energy to woo him to her again.

Ranking Kelvin came by for a late lunch that afternoon, and was the last customer left so he saw that she was doing all the chores by herself.

“How your son these days?”

“Him all right. I pass by his father’s house sometimes, and his father says that he is doing better in school.”

“You don’t see him?”

“You know boys. He is on the school football squad....”

“Lilly, you go to such extremes. Six months ago you would not even let him have a pack of playing cards. Now you let him go completely.”

Lilly pulled away from the conversation and went outside to the back of her cookshop to privately wipe a tear from her eye, and was startled to see what she thought was a tree stump get up and stretch. It was only that annoying girl Gail.

“Gail, is what you doing sitting out here?”

“Me just looking a little firewood,” she said, smiling.

Lilly thought that Gail was growing into a good liar. She seemed so sincere, but no one collected firewood behind the dunes, you collected them from the shore where they were washed up. She was about to ignore the girl again, then wondered what would happen if a group of unattached youth, who were now too common on the beach, were to see her.

“Come here to me.”

Gail walked over in a blouse that she had long outgrown, her hair was not combed and the overall condition of her hair, skin and nails suggested that she had not taken a bath recently. The way she looked, however, had nothing to do

with her overall mood. Gail was carefree and, as usual, wore a smile.

“You hungry?”

“I could eat something, yes.”

Lilly told her to sit on a crate right there at the back, and she served a bowl of fish tea for the girl, then left her as a group of late customers came in wanting an evening meal on the beach.

Gail was very happy for the soup. She ate slowly and when she was finished eating, the bowl was clean.

She quietly put the bowl in a basin with the other used wares. She picked up a plastic gallon bottle, but not enough water was in it to do the job. Without being asked, she picked it up, and another empty gallon bottle, and went to refill them at the standpipe.

The standpipe was in what everyone agreed a community space, so no houses were built near to it, so everyone had clear access to water. Besides, it would have been a nuisance to live too near to the pipe and be disturbed right through the day with conversations and general movement around and about that space.

Gail felt quite pleased to see that no one was using the pipe at the moment so she could fill quickly and return. The only person around was fisherman Brydges, who was sitting on a bench with his back to her, and with his ear pressed into

his phone, which meant that he was listening to live sports on the radio. Scratches was sitting up beside him, using one of his back legs to take care of an itch behind his ear, then he nibbled a spot on his back, maybe to get rid of a troublesome pest lying under the hair. Aside from the man and his dog, the common area was temporarily quiet.

“Boatie, come over here so. Why we can’t see you?”

The call came from a voice that Gail did not immediately see, but she knew that it was one of the boys that she spent the days with, sometimes.

“Can’t come right now,” she called out to the sound, without looking.

She smelled dust and heard a soft long low noise and she realised that someone, or more than one person, was sliding down one of the dunes. Two of the boys who she ran with now faced her. She knew that they were idle, looking for anything to do. She kept smiling with her hand on the tap as the water filled the container.

One of the boys moved her hand and turned the water off. His name was Carlton, but he told the kids around to call him Megaton, which sounded like a popular cartoon action figure; and he had thoughts about being their leader.

“What you doing? he asked, knowing quite well the routine of filling up containers to wash wares and do household chores. He collected water himself.

Carlton's eyes roamed around, Gail realised that he was looking to see who would be around to report what he intended to do next. Gail knew these boys very well, their little habits and their moves. Even as he looked around, she saw his right leg stand perfectly still, but his other leg, the one that he was proud of as he was left-footed baller poised. The tips of his toes were hovering just a little above the sandy ground where he could be poised for a good hit on his target.

So Gail used her foot and turned the container over herself. He jumped back, startled as the clean water ran over his feet.

"Wha you do that for?" he said.

"Nothing," Gail said."

She knew that if she kept them idle until an adult came, she would be able to finish filling the container and move on, so she kept talking.

"Megaton, you saw the big Batman kite today? The boy who had it could not manage, and it nearly took off when the breeze come up in the afternoon. Could not manage it at all. Ha, ha..."

Carlton used his foot to turn over the container where the letters LLL was painted in red. It was Lilly's mark, three capital L's one after the other. Since everyone used the same pipe for water, the residents marked their gear with

a special symbol so that containers and kitchenware did not get mixed up.

“How comes you helping Miss Lilly but you never help my mother yet, and she give you help all the time?” he said.

Gail shrugged, “A no nuttn. Later I will come by you, ok?”

“Not later, now!” Carlton reached to grab her arm. He did it without warning as he knew that Gail was quick.

“Ow!” she squealed, although it did not hurt.

Carlton scanned the spaces around him quickly. Brydges did not even budge, and aside from him, there was no one else around. Carlton felt confident that whatever he did next would not be observed. Gail saw Carlton’s slight distraction as he reassured himself that he was free to act, and in the few seconds that she had, she used her right foot to scoop up the empty container, kicked it up slightly to give it just enough height so that when she pulled back her leg and squared the container it was forcefully thrust through space in a straight neat line. The line was cut short as the container slammed into the nearest solid object, which was right in the centre of the back of an alarmed, and now angry Brydges. Scratches was barking and spinning around and around, so that did not help Brydges to see immediately where the boys went.

“You are mad,” Carlton said, releasing her arm and he and his companion scrambled away and around the dune to

get to the beach. The man shouted after the boys in anger and annoyance, leaving Gail to quietly recover the dented container, obviously the innocent victim. She was pleased that the impact did not crack the bottle, so she filled them both and went back to Lilly's cookshop.

Lilly only remembered Gail when she went to wash the wares and saw that they were all clean and neatly turned down to dry.

"I can come back tomorrow?" Gail asked Lilly. Who nodded.

"How is Ramiro?" the girl asked.

"Him alright," Lilly replied, her standard answer to anyone who asked.

"Him gone for good Miss Lilly?"

"Gal, stop pestering me with your questions. If you want come back tomorrow, come early so you can help me out."

Gail ran off before Lilly had finished speaking, and Lilly returned to her regrets. Ranking Kelvin was gone, but he left the magazine on the counter, and under it was the payment for his meal.

The daylight was still strong, but it would begin to fade in a few more minutes, so Lilly sat and took up the magazine and looked at the cover. It was an arts journal, and on it was

a black and white drawing of a young man in old fashioned clothes. He had heavy sideburns and was dressed in a jacket and a shirt with a high collar.

It was a drawing of the man on the \$10 coin, she saw a lot of him every day. In this country the heroes were very recognisable as they were painted on the sides of almost every infant and primary school and were a part of the landscape whether it was a rural village, a deep urban area or in the suburbs.



Keep money that is invested in this island, here.

George William Gordon

Mr East tapped gently on the mahogany door of his boss's office before opening it and going in.

The room was large and dominated by a huge carved desk and matching chairs. The varnish gleamed in the bright room which was shielded from the direct rays of the morning sun by a wooden lattice that covered the windows facing the sea.

A side table was piled with rolls of maps of properties all across the colony. Beside that was Mr George Gordon's writing desk – called a secretary. Bookcases, a strongbox safe, and an end table for refreshments, completed the furnishings of the office.

George was speaking, describing a new plan that would advance the subdivision and sale of land. The two men who were seated across the table from him were leaning forward, almost drooling with dreams of large returns on their investments.

As discreetly as his leather soles could be on the bare wooden floor, East walked over to his boss's side of the table and said something softly in his ear.

“Mr Gordon, your father’s messenger is here.”

Without hesitation, George excused himself and saw the messenger in an ante room next to his office.

The messenger handed George a note, which he read quickly. His father was asking to see him at the Myrtle Beach Hotel after his luncheon. It was not, as George anticipated, a polite request for money. George scribbled a reply and handed it back to the messenger, then told him to wait a moment longer.

When he and East stood outside of the room, George told his man to count out a sum of money and dispatch the messenger with it in an envelope.

As the Custos of St Andrew – the first citizen of that parish – Joseph Gordon was extended particular courtesies by the leading hotel in the city including a nook in the lobby that was reserved for his use. Here he could be seen yet have private conversations. On George’s approach, the elder Gordon stood and shook his son’s hand.

This hotel had been their meeting place ever since George opened his own office in the capital. Despite his success as a businessman, his father’s status made him more welcome here than he might have been if he had not had that close blood connection.

In addition, George’s father’s home was out of bounds to George, and he preferred not to visit his father’s offices like

any other businessman or tradesman. His father would see him immediately, he knew, but his father's office, and the former slave system that it used to represent, filled him with resentment. After asking about his son's health and general well being, George's father explained his request for the meeting.

"George, you have been very kind to my wife and I in ways that we will perhaps never be able to repay, but I nevertheless find myself in the situation where I have to sell the estate near Mavis Bank and my home in Cherry Gardens and move into a smaller house. I have found a suitable property in Barbican Pen. I wanted you to hear it from me first."

A wave of anxiety caused by nostalgia rose up inside of George's heart. He thought that he was beyond any pain and embarrassment from his past, but he was surprised that the very idea of selling Mavis Bank brought him close to tears. In his memory, Mavis Bank was the paradise where he was born and where his closest family members went through public embarrassment as enslaved people. He had not seen the property for many years, but the idea that the most beautiful place on earth was being removed even more firmly away from him dimmed his senses, and in a moment he was transported back in time to a cool morning when he was about seven years old and his mother was calling him and his sisters and brother from their beds to breakfast.

She had prepared cornmeal porridge on an open fire under the shade of a guango tree that was not too far from the great house. The children sat on the ground at a safe distance from the pot and waited for their bowl of hot, sweet, morning goodness. Around them, other residents of the plantation were sullen and silent as they and their children made their way to work in the fields.

George, his sisters and brothers were favoured above all the other enslaved persons, because their mother had borne the master's only children. They did not live in the great house, but his mother's quarters were far better appointed than the others and they always had more than enough rations.

In addition, his mother was assigned to the house, and so they were privileged to walk through it. They knew every room, while other children knew the shortcuts between the village, the fields and the boiler house.

That memory led into another where he was in his father's study, standing by his desk, while his father read words that he did not understand, but that nevertheless touched him deeply.

"Farewell to others but never we part. Heir to my royalty, son of my heart," Gordon senior read, and then put a book in his son's hands.

When he was ten years old, George stopped working at the plantation altogether because he was sent to live with a

godfather several days journey away, in Black River, a town some three to four days journey from the plantation by mule cart and by foot. He never saw that house in Mavis Bank again because his father married, and George's mother and her children had to leave the plantation.

George's sister described how they had to pile every single item of clothing, bedding, kitchenware and furniture into the back of a cart, and that their mother sat proudly beside the driver who was hired to transport them into the city of Kingston. George's mother did not flinch from the mocking words that the other workers threw at her and her children at the public lowering of their status.

The city was a very good place for a family in their circumstances. There was work for anyone who wanted it on the ports, in trade services, or supporting professionals in the law, in finance and in entertainment.

They were still enslaved, but being away from the plantation gave them a sense of being free, and they lived like any of the landless urban family townfolk, so when slavery was abolished, life continued as usual for them.

George's mother used the only skill that she had, and she became a respectable community cook dishing up breakfasts and lunches for the working people who lived in their yard and along their avenue, and so she was always in tune with the hot gossip of the street.

When he relocated to the city from Black River, George had

an easy time fitting in. His mother was very well connected to the rhythm of life in the city, and knew just what went on at street level.

His father, at that time, was not only a prominent lawyer, he was a member of the legislature and also the Custos Rotulorum of the parish of St Andrew. When George started his own enterprise, his father's connections gave him immediate entrée into high business and political society. He had the best of both worlds being able to move seamlessly among the creole groups on the island.

George, being born into slavery himself, effortlessly moved with the newly freed people, who were mostly Africans. He found he could do business with them as they were industrious and ambitious people; he attended their new churches – like the Native Baptist Church – he enjoyed their music and their food that his mother cooked so well.

He circulated among the white set of his father's friends; he dressed in their fashion, spoke with them about investment and agriculture and finance, and he valued their access to international business centres.

He also hung out with businesspersons and professionals of mixed race like himself. They were keen to advance in politics. He found their company exciting, and the young men with whom he associated were educated like him; and, like him, were closely connected by blood to the formerly enslaved people, and perhaps also to the White Creoles or

the White expatriates.

All the groups had one thing in common, they were Creoles: persons whose biological ancestry and core culture came from outside of the Caribbean, but whose customs were a part of living in that country.

“...so this is your opportunity to take the seat,” senior Gordon said. George had completely missed the last few minutes of his father’s address.

“I beg your pardon Custos?” said George. He was always very formal with his father.

“Surprised that I would back you?” his father said slightly amused. “Sir, you have shown yourself to be as excellent a man as any in the kingdom, and therefore the world.”

Using his fingers, Joseph Gordon counted off his son’s virtues.

“You have established yourself as a sound man of business; oh yes! I have heard that you and your good friends plan to start an insurance company. It is an excellent idea that will keep money that is made in this island invested here.

“My colleagues tell me that you are negotiating sale of land in St Thomas to subdivide and re-sell. That will bring more land into the hands of hard working people and allow them to prosper as peasants.

“You are a man of God, though I cannot understand why

you have moved away from our Church.

“You have elevated your mother and sisters and set their feet on the path to secure futures. My financial fortunes, as you know, are greatly diminished, but I do have substantial political influence, so, with your permission, I wish to put your name forward as the political representative of the people of St Thomas-in-the-East, where I know you already have significant land assets.”

His father finished his thoughts, spoken aloud. George could not believe quite what he thought that he was hearing. His father was suggesting that with his father’s backing, he should launch a political career.

“But I am just twenty and two...” The words came out of George’s mouth even as he saw that politics would be a very effective vehicle to advance his ideas.

“How is your mother?” Gordon senior asked his son. It was a question that the elder Gordon asked whenever they met, and George had always said, as he did now.

“Sheisdoingwellthanksforasking.” George squeezed all of his words together in an offhand ramble with a response and a tone that demanded that there would be no follow up question on the topic.

“I tried to do the best by her George. I hope that you see that; but true respect for all the people of our country will never happen until more native people, like you, become

the leadership of this country. Will you offer yourself for nomination?"

Gordon senior's Scottish pragmatism was strongest when he was brokering a deal, a trait his son had adopted for himself.

"You honour me, sir," said George. "I will consult my associates in the parish and here in the city and the capital Spanish Town and let you know in short order."

The two spoke briefly about other matters of mutual concern and shortly afterwards, parted company.

George did not immediately return to his office. He stopped at his solicitors and gave instructions that they make an immediate offer to buy his father's Cherry Gardens house, so that his father and stepmother could continue to live in their home. By the end of the day, he had made up his mind to accept his father's support and vie to be the assembly man for the people of the parish of St Thomas-in-the-East.



Lilly put down the magazine and stretched. The last of the visitors were coming out of the water and drying off. The other cookshops were serving their final meals, and when they were gone, all activity on this beach would stop for the night.

Men would dig holes in the sand to bury the garbage of the day, the birds would grab what they could before the rest would go underground. Some of what was buried would be food for the crabs and the ants, others would not biodegrade. In the night, it was a beautiful, peaceful place, and although the beach folks care of nature's creation had not been good – they had to live.



The following Thursday Lilly closed her shop early and went shopping downtown. It was the first time in months that she was leaving the beach and its slow pace. She knew her way around well, so she quickly went to the wholesale district and bought a few items for herself and for her son.



She then ate a beef patty and took the bus back before the after work traffic started.

The following morning, she put on her new clothes and was at Sawdust's house before seven in the morning. He lived ten minutes walk from the track. He and Ramiro were both still there. She knew that the yard had no dogs, so came through the gate and called quietly through the grill.

Shirtless, in shorts and slippers, Sawdust opened the grill for her.

"Hello Nelson. Ramiro wake yet?"

Sawdust looked at her cautiously, "Him just getting ready to go to school."

"Good I not spending long." She stepped past him into the house. "Ramiro?"

Ramiro was eating breakfast and he blinked when he saw his mother. He had never really seen her dress up. He thought that she looked so pretty. She gave him an extended hug. It was a long time since anyone hugged him and he hugged her right back. It felt good.

"I hear you doing well in school. You don't think your mother wants to know?"

Ramiro cast his eyes down. "It's just that I'm kinda busy right now."

"No, my dear. I can't have a son like you and don't see

him. Right, Nelson?" She gave Sawdust a challenging look, willing him to support her. Ramiro's father did not say a word.

Two boys came into the yard and called for Ramiro. They took the bus to school together. Lilly spoke quickly.

"Anyway, I did not come to take up your time today. But I am looking for you soon, soon. Before the end of the holidays, right?"

"Yes Lilly," Ramiro said.

Lilly took out the pack of three men's dress shirts that she bought in a wholesale the day before. You had to buy a minimum of three, and the pack had three different sizes.

Sawdust watched Lilly carefully, saying little. He was not sure of her motives. When Lilly asked Ramiro to see which of the three shirts would fit him, he left them and went alone into his room.

Sawdust's front room, which served as a living/dining space had a small dining table, which had some of Ramiro's school books and some animal care brochures and handouts at one end, showing that it doubled as a study for the both of them.

There was a flat screen television at one end of the room, and grouped around it was a small but new couch, a matching armchair and a standing fan, which Sawdust switched on.

“Nice to see that everything is all right, Nelson,” Lilly said. She had thought about how to approach the matter that was on her heart, and at this moment, risked the pleasantness of the visit to say exactly what was on her mind. “I need to know what is going on with Ramiro. I don’t have a phone so he should come and look for me more often.”

“You can visit him anytime you want, like you are doing now.”

“I don’t want to take him away Nelson. Ramiro is a decent boy, I know because I brought him to this point.”

“So what are you asking for?”

“He should spend a weekend with me, once in a while – maybe during holidays, and I would appreciate the help around the shop. It won’t interfere with his schoolwork.”

“I’ll talk about it with him.”

“Why don’t you just tell him to come visit? Will you turn him against me?”

“Ramiro is a sensible person who should be allowed to say what he thinks. I am not going to pressure him either way.”

Sawdust saw that Lilly was not pleased with his answer, but that she was not fighting with him, so he added. “A boy should have both parents. I’ll tell him that.”

Ramiro came out in the light blue shirt.

“I think it fits OK.” he said.

Lilly started to get excited.

“It looks good on you son, really nice. Turn around let me see how the shoulder fits at the back. Perfect! What you say Nelson?”

His Dad had moved away into the kitchen, but he heard her voice and turned back.

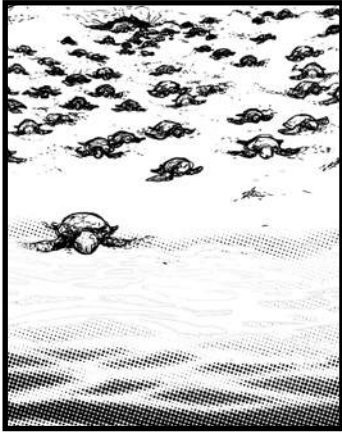
“Nice,” this is your best shirt now Ramiro. Don’t wear it just so to go out in the street.”

Holding back her tears, Lilly then said her goodbyes and left.

Ramiro’s friends watched her walk out of the yard. Two minutes later, now in his full uniform, Ramiro also came outside. One of them said in awe.

“Ramiro. Is your mother that?”

He heard the admiration in the voice, and felt his heart swell, “Yes, That is my mother. She has the best cookshop on Bonny Beach. I going to spend a weekend with her soon.”



Gail was already leaning with one foot on the cookshop wall, the other foot buried in the soft sand, when Lilly opened up for business the next morning.

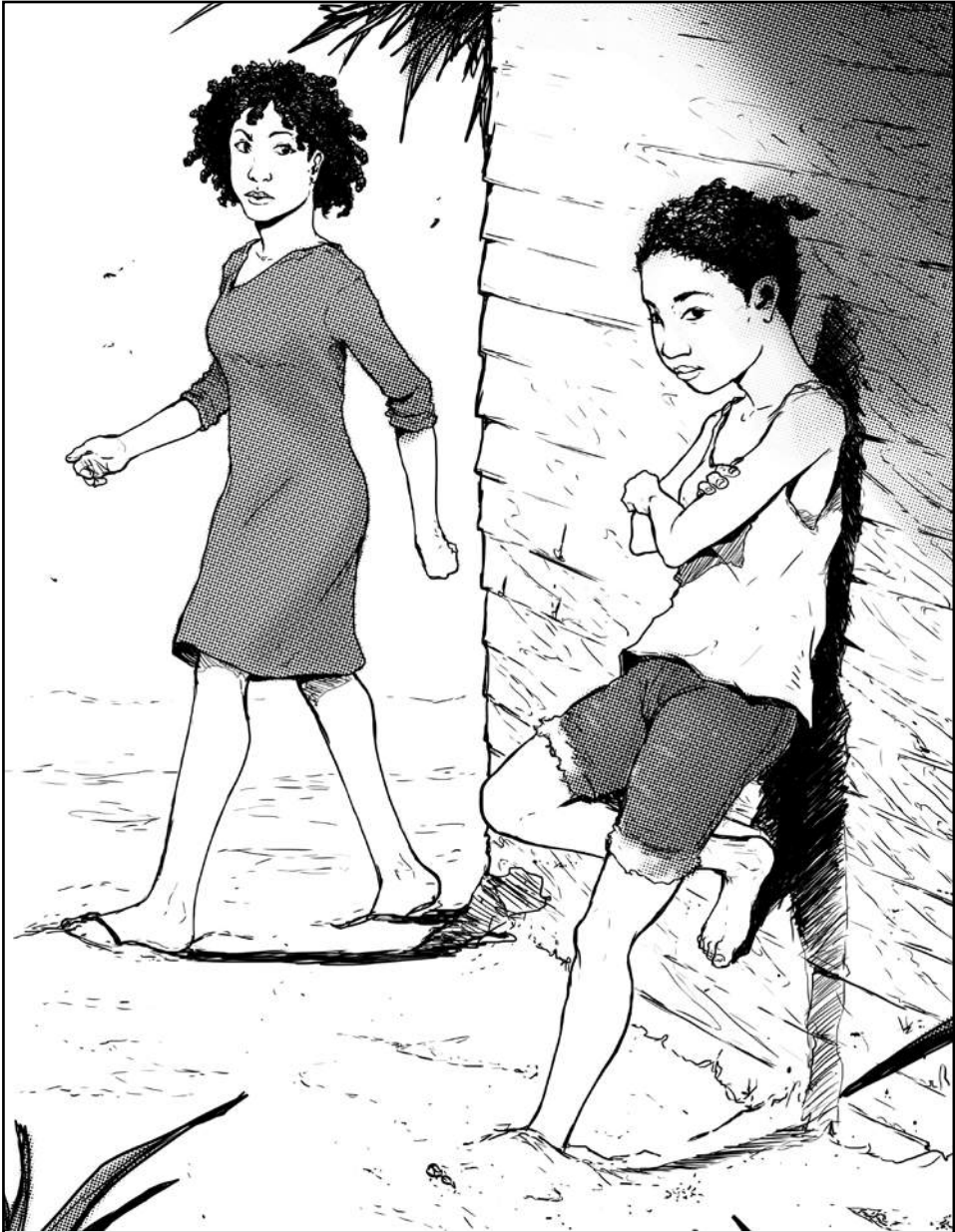
Gail grinned, her eyes sparkling and easy, she shook her head. Drops fell off her hair as if she had just been swimming. She was obviously not in a hurry to

go anywhere that day. Lilly opened her shop and Gail took up a rake and started to make the sand clean and neat.

“Miss Lilly, Ramiro coming back Ma’am?” Gail asked.

“You will see him soon enough, but he is with his father,” Lilly answered, and realised that the truth was not so difficult to face as it had been before.

“Because if he is not coming back, I could do every little thing for you, you know. I can do every little thing around the place. I know how, Miss Lilly.”



The girl was growing herself up.

Lilly thought about it. The girl had been trying her best to impress, and she was doing it without any guidance as she was growing herself up.

“My house is not a ramping shop Gail,” she said. “Don’t you want to go to school?”

That was a trick question for Gail. She knew that all children should go to school, but she would not say so if it would hurt her chances to stay with Lilly. She lifted her chin, raked the sand a bit more firmly and grinned.

“School...not really Miss Lilly. I am alright. School is not going to teach me anything that I need to work here.”

“What a girl can smile,” Lilly thought, and went back to her work.

The customers came early during the holidays, and the beach and its cookshops were busy in the morning.

About that time a group of four persons in sneakers and with laminated ID cards and digital tablets walked cautiously on the beach led by Brydges who was, as usual, accompanied by Scratches. Brydges led the team to Lilly’s cookshop. A few guests were inside and she was busy in the kitchen.

“Hey Lilly, I see you busy, so we will come and check you back later, ok,” he called.

“Later, later,” Lilly said, then grumbled under her breath

that she did not have any time to waste with any survey or census.

Gail decided to find out some more about this group, and as she was not busy at the moment, she slipped away. None of the team noticed that they had a shadow following them from shop to shop, quietly listening from the edges of the conversations.

The group of officials had no problem getting the beach folk to open up and talk as they were escorted by Brydges, who the people trusted and who they believed would not do anything to hurt them. He was the gatekeeper for the little society that they had on the beach, and he had as much to lose or to gain as any one of them.

They were generally suspicious of teams of people trolling the beach wearing IDs and making notes. Those people were usually looking for a way to remove them from the beach, but Brydges would not assist anyone coming there with that intent.

“Hello little girl,” said a voice and Gail felt like an electric bolt had gone down her back. She was not used to people getting close to her without her having seen them a long time before that. She jumped back a little bit and saw that it was a small woman whose skin colour was so mottled that it blended her with the sand and the shade like a camouflage, she almost seemed invisible to Gail, who became a little afraid of her.

“Why you jump like that?” the woman said. “Come here to me.”

Gail did not move.

“What is your name girl?” The woman asked. Her voice was soft, her eyes were steadily holding Gail’s. The girl blinked to take herself out of the woman’s control.

“Gail,” she answered.

“Well, nice to meet you Gail,” the woman said, using her eyes to search for Gail’s again. She found them and held them again with what seemed to be her invisible cord. “I am Mrs Kay Mannas. We are here to share some ideas. Can I take your picture?”

Without breaking her look, she held up a tablet and actually waited for the girl to nod before she tapped the screen to capture the image.

“So what is your last name Gail?” the woman asked. But Gail ran away and back to Lilly where she felt safe.

“Miss Lilly, is some official people asking a whole heap of questions and taking pictures. I think that they want to capture us, take us away,” she said. “I do not like that.” She stopped short as Ramiro was there now talking quietly with his mother. They both looked up and Lilly immediately felt like an outsider. She ran off, and they did not see her for the rest of the day.

The team returned to Lilly's shop around mid-afternoon. Lilly was serving.

"You have a moment now Lilly. It won't take up too much of your time. Glad to see that your son is here." Brydges wanted the officials to get through their business, he seemed to be demanding Lilly now rather than asking her.

Lilly decided that she would not be hurried.

"I don't know about that Brydges, I have my customers to serve..." Lilly was hoping that they would go away and that Brydges would not insist. If he did, she would have to obey or things would become uncomfortable for her.

For the group to survive on the beach, they followed one of several very simple codes. The code that applied here was "you are with us, or you are against us". If she even hesitated to hold the line that everybody else was taking, her life would become uncomfortable. Others would drop unkind words about her; they might not bother to send a message that the delivery van had arrived, and if she needed some flour or cornmeal or sugar. She would be made to feel very much on her own, so she was about to give in when the small woman with Brydges leaned over a bit and spoke quietly.

"That's OK. She has her work to do, just as we do, so we can wait," said Mrs Mannas.

The other members of her team tried not to give her a hard

look as this would cause them to arrive at the base office after five o' clock, the normal time that work ended, and that would throw off the entire evening. They could not look at her too hard though, as Mrs Mannas was the boss, so they could only agree.

“Since we will be here a while, can you get us some soup?” Mrs Mannas finished, which cheered up her group a bit, as they were also hungry.

Brydges shrugged, and said that he would see the group later, and he went to catch up on his sports.

Lilly got Ramiro to serve and continued her work, straining to hear the conversation over the hiss of the frying pan.

When she had finished serving all of her customers, Lilly went over to the table where Mrs Mannas and her group was seated and stood beside them.

“Yes, I can talk to you now,” she said.

“Thank you Miss Lilly, I think Mr Brydges called you that. Am I right?”

“Yes, and you are?”

“Kay Mannas project manager of the Bonny Bay Environmental Trust. These are my colleagues, today we are hoping that you can help us to understand more about the area....”

Lilly despised their politeness, as she knew that they were sent there to sow lies.

“You want to push us off this beach because you have the property lined up for one of your friends.”

Lilly had seen it all before. People coming to take them off the land that nobody else wanted before they, the residents, made something of it. They had refused to be pushed off before, but Lilly sensed that maybe this time would be different. Brydges was being very co-operative, but for Lilly too much had happened in her life recently, and she did not want to hear about even one more change.

“We are not here without permission. We have our support and she said that we are not to move. We are OK,” Lilly said.

“Well you see Miss Lilly,” the calm Mrs Mannas said, “She asked us to come here and get this done. She asked Mr Brydges to take us around. Think about the possibilities for a moment Miss Lilly. You could move to a place where you have all the facilities that you do not have now. A place that you can legally own as your own, over time.”

“But this is a beach that people love,” Lilly said. “Mother, grandmother, father, uncle, children. Everybody loves us. So if we go, who will run this beach? If you tell me that it will be empty, left to the crocodiles and to the sea birds I won’t believe you.”

“I can’t say exactly what will happen to this place Miss Lilly, but what I can tell you is that we are offering all of the fishers and cookshop owners here on Bonny Beach an opportunity to raise their families in a much better environment.....I think that you have a son....” Mrs Mannas leaned her head slightly over to where Ramiro was sitting and playing on his cell phone. He had only got it that morning. His father gave it to him after he agreed that he would spend the weekend by his mother.

Lilly looked at Ramiro as well. She did not know what he was doing on the phone, but she also knew that he would never want to live with her again if she continued to live like this; but it was so difficult for her to make that change for herself. She liked the fact that she lived away from the city and safely away from people who knew her once upon a time.

Mrs Mannas held out a flyer to her.

“I see that you need some more time to think, Miss Lilly. Read this, and we will be back in a few days. It has a toll free number...”

“I don’t have a phone,” Lilly said, for the first time, a bit ashamed and that shame frightened her. “And I have more than one child...”

“No rush today Miss Lilly, take your time and think about things. See you in a few days. The soup was great, how much do we owe you?”

Mrs Mannas and her team walked back to the general open space where vehicles were parked, got into the marked company van and left. Mrs Mannas thought to herself that Lilly was quite correct; there was a development consortium that was very interested in the beach property, and the long lease arrangements were far advanced.

Mrs Mannas recalled a story that she had heard long before about how the civil rights leader, Marcus Garvey, said “Chance had never satisfied the hope of a suffering people”, and she believed even more forcefully that changes had to come to the lifestyle on this beach for any lasting progress to happen for the area in general.

As they made the trip back to the office where they would all part company Mrs Mannas sat quietly, not participating in the chatter. She was remembering a story that an old Garveyite told her that happened in the early 1900s. The Garveyite said that he grew up in St Ann’s Bay, and that his grandmother was the postmistress, who knew everything that happened in the town, and he said that she told him this story.

True Wisdom

Marcus Garvey's Literary Awakening

Marcus closed the gate of his parents' yard and hustled along Market Street. The bag of marbles at the bottom of his capacious shorts pocket clicked softly, keeping time with the pace of his jogging. On any given Saturday afternoon, boys would gather at the side of the printery, and if Marcus selected his challengers carefully, he could increase his cache by at least a third. He never left the outcome of anything important, like a game of marbles, to chance.

The town was usually busy on any afternoon, but at this time of the year when the sugar cane harvest was nearly over and people had money in their pockets, the streets were crowded. Two ships were in port being loaded with raw sugar and the crews could enjoy a few days on land. Marcus watched as a loader man hauled fresh fruits and vegetables from a mule-drawn dray parked at the corner with Market Street. The driver pulled up the brake for the cart and got down and knocked on the side gate of a hotel. A woman and a girl came out and the woman selected what she wanted to buy and the girl gently packed it into a basket.



Chance cannot satisfy hope in this country; we cannot rely on luck.

Marcus stayed on the side of the road and allowed a drover with a small herd of goats to cross before him – he was cautious as rams were known to buck. Marcus decided that when he crossed the road, he would buy an otaheite apple from the driver of the fruit cart.

A motor vehicle honked incessantly urging the goats to hurry along. The driver did not wait, but instead made a wide arc to negotiate the corner; he could not see the dray around the bend, and when he did, he could not brake in time. A fender clipped one of the mules. It reared and kicked at the motor vehicle. His hooves actually hit the driver's shoulder causing him to completely lose control of the vehicle and crash into the brick wall of a doctor's office. The mule lost his balance and if he were still not harnessed to the cart would have fallen over with all that was in it.

There were ample hands to lift the driver inside for help. He was holding his shoulder and seemed to be in extreme pain. The mule got up and looked all right until his driver urged the team forward and it refused to put one of its back legs down. The driver whipped him and it pulled its share of the weight limping on three legs.

“I would have been at that spot a few moments later,” Marcus reflected as he looked at the damage. The crashed car, the limping mule and some wasted vegetables that slid off the cart during the melee.

Marcus was more aware of his safety during the remainder of his walk. The carts and horses and animals and bicycles and pedestrians were more than enough for the narrow streets of St Ann's Bay, but the motor vehicles and their lack of agility made traffic more dangerous.



Marcus had a successful afternoon of marbles and ended the session with two heavy pockets. On his return trip he passed the mangled motor vehicle that had been pushed on to an open lot. Later that evening there was the report of a single gunshot; his father, who had been reading the national daily newspaper, mumbled that it must be the vet putting down the injured mule.

Mr Garvey settled his folded newspaper on a side table as Mrs Garvey came in to serve dinner.

Marcus took up his school slate and started to write. After church the next day, he was still scribbling and erasing and rewriting on his slate. By afternoon he was satisfied and asked his father to read his thoughts.

After Mr Garvey read the short passage he said, "Interesting son, a real vision into the future. What do you want to do with it?"

"I want to print it and circulate it to the custos, the pastors, the magistrates, the governor..."



“What about sending it to the paper son? A letter to the editor.”

Marcus got a sheet of clean writing paper, his pen, a nib and his school ink and, in his best handwriting, wrote:

The Editor Sir,

The industrious people of St Ann’s Bay are suffering from the benefits of mechanical advancement. Motor vehicles can be seen every single day on our narrow streets, which can barely serve the needs of man and beast. All too often it is the reason behind awful carnage where we intended only faster and more efficient transportation.

Only yesterday, the hard labour of an honest farmer was wasted when a motor vehicle critically injured a trusty mule which suffered greatly before it was put down. That farmer may now have to incur debt to replace the mule and perhaps deprive his children, of schooling and his land might be under-utilized. That very same motor car would have killed me. Sir, had my steps been only a few paces faster, I too would have been a casualty of that disastrous incident.

Chance cannot satisfy hope in this country. We cannot rely on luck, we need to put our God-given intellect to create laws that regulate how

motorised vehicles must travel on the roads. These laws should address speed, caution in going around corners, and perhaps which roads must be out of bounds to them. With the power of the automobile, must come additional responsibility on the operators; and those drivers will only respond to binding laws.

Marcus was about to sign his name, but at the last moment felt shy, and instead signed it 'A Youth'. He carefully blotted the ink, folded the letter and placed it in an addressed envelope. His father would mail it at the post office while he was at school.



A week later the letter was published and it stimulated discussion in the marketplace and rum bars of St Ann's Bay. Later that week, the Baptist pastor's topic was "The law, God's protection for the people".

Over the next month, other letters showed up on the pages of the newspaper discussing the issue of traffic. A few were skeptical of laws that restricted travelling speed, which they saw as a personal freedom. Others cited a new law in England that restricted the speed of locomotives travelling through built up areas; and that it was only a matter of time before similar regulations came in for motor vehicles.

Marcus read them all and only wished that he had signed his full name; but he was also sure that there would be



other times, and other issues, on which he could express his 16-year-old mind.



The team had arrived at the office. They told each other good night, and Mrs Mannas went to her car and drove home.





It was almost night when Lilly and Ramiro finished their work and they were alone in the cookshop. Ramiro could not believe what his mother had just told him about her new living arrangements.

“Gail living with you now?”

“She has been helping out Ramiro, and you know that she does not live anywhere.”

“You did not care about that before, but now that she can help you to rake up the place and get water from the pipe you are ok with her? I feel like you wanted me around as a worker, not as a son!” he was angry now.

“She does not replace you son...”

“She has! She is sleeping where I usually sleep, beside you. Now I see that is really how quickly you throw your children away.”

“Shut up Ramiro, stop it!”

“No. I know all about why you had to come to this beach and live this life. You ran away from your other responsibilities. Your parents, your family and your other children. Daddy told me about all of that, about how you just let them go. Now as soon as I am gone, you pick up a girl who you used to scorn? I am sorry that I came here. I should have stayed with my father who shows that he really cares for me.”

Ramiro had run out of steam, but he was breathing heavily. He felt the tears behind his eyes and blinked them back. How could she give away his space on the bed, that special place that he knew all of his life.

He kissed his teeth and walked outside where only a very faint red tint above the hills to the west, that still gave enough light to see the horizon and that Gail was sitting by herself on the sand, not too far away.

Gail was perhaps the last person that he wanted to see much less to be physically near at that moment.

“Hey Ramiro,” Gail said before he could move. “How comes you got a twang and you did not even leave the country?”

“I do not have a twang.”

“But you sound different. I hear you on the phone. You say, ‘Hello’. Before you did move off the beach, if you did a talk to somebody you would say ‘Hello’.”

“That doesn’t even make sense,” Ramiro said in frustration.

“See what I mean,” Gail said, laughing.

She took a deep breath and tried to lower her voice to mimic him and said, ‘That doesn’t make any sense’ ...one time you would say ‘Gail what you saying don’t make no sense’” she laughed again.

Ramiro found himself laughing along with her. She was really ridiculous he thought.

“So tell me,” Gail continued. “Who are you always calling on the phone and sending text messages? You have a girlfriend?”

“No, don’t be stupid,” he said, then regretted saying that she was stupid. “I was talking to my father and talking to one of my school friends, a boy in my class.”

“What do you do? You and your father and your friends?” Gail’s voice was soft. She wanted to know.

“What you mean by that?” Ramiro shrugged and looked annoyed. “We don’t do anything special, just everyday stuff.”

Then he remembered that everyday stuff for him like watching television, sending a text message to a friend, taking the bus over to the major league field to cheer for your school in a football match were not things that he had done before. They were certainly not things that she had done.

Ramiro's hands felt a bit raw, he rubbed them together, and realised that it had been a while since they had been used to do rough work. In a few months, he had changed, gotten softer.

The only light on the beach now was from the half moon and also the stars. Out at sea they saw one or two lights in motion, they were ships moving towards or away from the city harbour.

"Gail you know my school went on a trip to the wharf. I saw one of the ships up close. It is bigger than any house."

"You too lie," she said, but she listened as he spoke about giant cranes and forklifts and men in hard hats until Lilly called to tell them to come home, and together they walked to her.

The Sand Shifts, But Not Only The Sand



Lilly liked the lady who had come to visit her and talk about relocation from the beach. She never pushed for answers and always complimented her on her food. The day that she returned, she watched as Lilly showed Gail how to place, light and sustain a flame in her makeshift coal pot – a motor vehicle tyre rim. When it was fully lit, she instructed the girl how to balance a breadfruit on the flame to roast. Then she went over to greet the lady who had just come in.

Mrs Mannas explained that the relocation would allot her to a one bedroom apartment with a three year lease. The first year is rent free, and she would pay for the utilities and maintenance. They discussed her goals and her fears.

“Where would I work?” Lilly asked. “All I know how to do is to cook and to sell fish.”

“Any of the restaurants near here would want a good cook. You could check them,” Mrs Mannas started, then saw her face sour at the thought. Lilly realised that it was

expected that she would stop working for herself and find a job, any job. The woman asked Lilly if she wanted to rent a one bedroom or two bedroom apartment.

“Well is me and my son...,” then her eyes drifted to Gail who was fanning the flame, as she had been taught by Lilly. Mrs Mannas made some taps and swipes on her digital tablet and then spoke.

“We have no record of a parent or close blood relative for twelve year old Gail Smith. The court will place her in a children’s home, or if she is lucky, she will be fostered by a family.”

“I am her guardian,” Lilly said. She wanted to think that the words talked themselves into existence, that she was not responsible for them; but, even so, she knew that she wanted to protect this girl that she had come to care about.

“Don’t say not a word,” the woman said, and they discussed it no further.

Lilly saw a coin half buried in the sand and she picked it up. On one side was the head of Norman Manley – the only person whose image appeared in profile on the local money, all the other faces on coins looked at you with two eyes, they looked straight ahead.

Mrs Mannas spoke to her again.

“Alright Miss Lilly. Can we go through everything that I

have here about your family and your business to make sure that it is correct, and that you agree with it. We don't want any mistakes. When you are comfortable, you will sign and we move to the next step smoothly.

"Is your name Lilly Nichelle Henderson and you are the mother of Ramiro Christopher Rodney, age ten and guardian of Gail Smith age 15?"

Lilly hesitated, not because she was undecided, but because she was overwhelmed with the feeling of joy to be officially recognised as a parent again – and with a new child, Gail. It meant that she had four children. Behind the joy was sadness, as she knew that two of her children were growing without her proud eyes on them. Having Gail would never fill that void, but she believed that it would feel good to selflessly care for someone else.

"Yes," Lilly simply said.

"Sign here please," said the lady, passing the digital tablet and a stylus. "I will come by with your printed copy next week."

As the lady packed up and went away, Lilly mindlessly rubbed the coin in her hand. She looked at it again, intending to put it in her pocket when the face of Norman Manley seemed to turn to her, and the two eyes looked straight into hers, and the face gave a gentle, smile.

"What have I done?" she thought. They will use this to push

me off the beach. She felt a bit lightheaded and wobbled on her feet. She felt dizzy like her body was going to dissolve from the spot in her cookshop, and reform at another spot. She seemed to be standing in the shade away from a bright sun outside, but she was standing on green grass beside a small group of serious looking men and boys.



When we are called to rule, make us rule with justice.

Norman Manley's Story Justice, Truth Be Ours

Around the table were the school's sports master, other house masters and the head boy. Also, there was the school's star athlete, Norman Manley, who was recovering from winning the heats of the Class One 100-Yard Dash. The sports master signalled to the tent orderly for a glass of water and remained silent, allowing the boy to refresh himself by drinking deeply before he spoke, deliberately measuring each word to match the importance of the moment.

"Overall, headmaster, we are in third place: nine points behind Boys High School, five points behind St George's College," the sports master said, trying to keep his anxiety in check, and deliberately not looking at Norman. "There are three events left to go. We can, at best, place third place in the Long Jump – that is one point – and that is an event that will widen the gap between us and the leaders.

"Mr Manley is the favourite for the 100-Yard Dash finals, which will be five points for us. The best chance that we have of taking the championship home to Old Hope Road is to win the 4 x 100 Relay. Headmaster, we need to field our very best sprint team."

A loud cheer swept the wide expanse of the grounds and both men looked to see that the Boys' High School spectators had renewed their energy and were gloriously waving their maroon and gold flags. Their athlete just won the Class-One Long Jump, pulling them further away from the pack.

Sitting in trees or on carts or simply standing around, hundreds of people who had taken the afternoon off to watch the sports day were also reacting with excitement. Near to the Hope College tents, men and boys hailing from Half-Way-Tree, Matilda's Corner and as far up as Mona and Gordon Town patiently waited on their next opportunity to bruk out – as they expected Manley to lean forward and finish first place in the finals of the 100-Yard Dash.

The first staging of the athletics meet the year before had gone exceedingly well and was so completely covered by the press that the renewal was highly anticipated by the entire city. Even members of the exclusive cricket club, whose grounds they were using, had left their plantations and offices to enjoy an afternoon of sports. Everyone had his or her favourite team, but they all came out to support the boys.

The headmaster considered Norman. This boy was the single most important reason for their sporting achievements last year and also at these games. Manley was a great team member as he was not only leading in his

aces, he motivated the boys to push their own expectations of themselves higher, and to embrace discipline and effort. At this moment, the weight of the school's success at these games rested on his 17-year old shoulders.

"How would you select the relay team Manley?" The headmaster asked.

"Sir, I think I could run a leg..." Norman started, but was interrupted by the sports master who growled through his teeth.

"Yes, yes, that is a given assumption Manley. Who else?" The man was nervous.

"William Scarlett on the first leg; he is fast, but he cannot chase. Francis Beckford on the last leg; he flies when he gets the baton, but can also lose focus and drop the baton during a pass. I will run third and plant the baton in Beckford's hand."

Norman paused because the real reason for the anxiety was his decision on who would run the second leg and pass the baton to him.

"Hugo Grant to complete the team, Sir."

"Why do you not have the island Class 2 champion, Kingsley Millingsworth, or our mile runner, the big Beckford brother, Louis?" The sports master wanted to know.

Norman replied: "They are good strong runners sports master, but I do not know how they will perform in the relay."

"Explain that Manley," the headmaster ordered, but also continued. "Millingsworth and Louis Beckford have performed marvellously for this school. They have helped us to collect medals in cricket, shooting, boxing, they are always willing to serve. Why won't you have them on your team?"

"They did not come to training, sir; Hugo Grant did," Norman said simply. "It is because of him we always had a full side to practise baton changes and know the abilities of every leg of our team. It is fair that he gets the chance to run for Hope College today," Norman ended quietly and firmly.

His headmaster without pressing too much, rejoined: "Son, the entire Hope College community wants this win and are depending on us to make the decision that will be in the best interest of the school. I want you to also think about that Norman, but the final decision we entrust to you."

Norman straightened his back and met every gaze under the tent.

"I am motivated by my school's prayer: 'Create among us the spirit of comradeship and loyalty to one another. When we are called to rule, make us rule with justice.'"

That is my guide for the decision to give Taylor Grant the second leg, sir.”

The announcer called for the finalists in the 100-Yard Dash and Norman left the tent.

He took his place behind the whitewashed starting line. He wanted the championships win as deeply as anyone else in the school, so he had to stay in the moment and do his best to win this race. The other five boys at the starting line were fast, but Norman decided to put them on the offensive by leading from the moment the gun gave them their release.

It was a clean start and Manley heard the boys to his left and to his right breathe and stride with determination; but he kept the voice of his coach in his head, controlled his breathing, pushed harder while staying relaxed until he entered the drive phase of his run and burst the tape for his school. It was not easy and he staggered after winning, nearly falling trying to gasp for more air. He held his head down for a few moments to recover, then jogged back to his tent, beckoning the relay team over as he did. He was already focused on the race to come.

The rejected runners – Millingsworth, Louis Beckford and his father, the old boy Louis Beckford Sr were there along with a handful of other old boys. They formed a wall of serious faces in the tent, silent judges. They said nothing,

but listened as their sons and other schoolboys put the case forward.

“Manley, the old boys said that it is too close to play around with a victory,” schoolboy Louis Beckford said.

“I know how to change baton with my brother, I can run third and you can do the second leg.”

“We can’t distract the team now gentlemen. We have a good team for Hope College that we are going to run,” Norman said.

Millingsworth pushed him on his shoulder in disgust.

“You going to deliberately lose,” said Millingsworth, “And for what Manley, to spite us? We were doing other activities for Hope College, and you know it! Don’t play around.”

The simmering merriment of spectators outside just then burst into bubbling shrieks and excitement. The sports master ran into the tent with the widest smile of the day.

“A national record! Manley, you ran the 100-Yard Dash in ten seconds flat. It’s official!”

Norman nodded and pulled his relay team away from the hubbub; he would celebrate later.

With one event left to go, the points standing had Boys High School in the lead with 26; St George’s second with 24; and Hope College with 17 points. The only chance that Manley’s team had of winning the championship was to

win the relay and hope that the other two front runners did not place. The probability of winning was not zero, but with so many factors at play it was easy to mentally start accepting that the championship would not be theirs that year.

The starter's gun found Scarlett off the line first, just as he promised. He ran a beautiful leg and handed the baton ahead of the others and safely into the hands of Hugo Grant. Although he got a good lead and anyone watching could see that Hugo put his whole heart into his duty, the legs of the Boys High School, St George's, Potsdam, New College and Mandeville Middle School boys left him behind. Hugo plodded on, his eyes locked into those of his captain Norman Manley, filling those unforgiving moments with every ounce of running effort that he could muster. Only when Hugo was one stride away did Norman, in blind trust, turn his back leaving one arm outstretched, palm open fingers extended. When the wooden tube was solidly in his hand, Norman closed his fist around it, and then activated his limbs into action, focused on closing the distance that he had been given, moving up from last place. His legs which had not recovered from the earlier race ached with every stride and in-between every pace. He struggled to keep his breathing deep and regular, every breath scratched the back of his dry throat. It was intense agony.

When Norman safely passed the baton to Francis Beckford,

only two teams were left to pass; Norman had regained third position for his school. Francis put in the work and he managed to clip all but the man from Potsdam. They came second in the relay and not one member of his team could look Manley in the eye. It seemed wrong to come so close to winning and lose it for no reason at all.

Nervously, the sports master and old boy Beckford Sr added up the points. Hope College, 24; St George's 24; Boys High School 26. They were disappointed; but an usher was escorting the Hope College headmaster over to the official tent. A rumour rippled through the crowd wondering if there was something wrong with the last race. Manley was as anxious as anyone else, but he was confident that all four legs ran by his team were legal; then they all saw the meet director shake the headmaster's hand.

The final tally revealed that Hope College was the champion school, Manley's 100-Yard Dash record had a value of three points which put them ahead by a one point lead.

The headmaster wanted Norman to be at his side at that triumphant moment when he received the Challenge Cup. The governor agreed, so they waited and watched as Norman was hoisted on the shoulders of joyful spectators, having their fill of the boy, the hero of a great day of sports on the dusty grounds of Sabina Park.

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“You come back Miss Lilly,” said Gail. It was not a question, she was stating a fact of what she saw. Lilly’s conscious mind had been far away.

Lilly panicked. What could Gail have seen?

“What you talking about? Come back from what?”

“You daydream. I see you stand up like you thinking very deep. The lady give you serious things to think about. I hear that you moving off the beach.”

Gail said this quite clearly, but she was indeed very scared and very sad. She had heard it whispered that Lilly sign off to leave the beach, and Gail was preparing herself for another separation, and to be on her own again.

Lilly held her hand very gently and looked at the girl with skinny limbs and wild hair. She felt a bit guilty when she thought about her other daughters, but at that moment she saw Gail as the sweetest, dearest child next to her son Ramiro.

“Yes Gail, I have been thinking a lot of very serious things by myself and with the woman. I told her that you are coming to live with me and Ramiro, but I never got a chance to talk to you about it first. How do you feel about that? About the three of us being a family?”

The girl was trembling and looking at her feet the whole time, she answered.

“I feel good.”



Three-year-old thoroughbreds in the year's great race.

Something Goes Wrong



It became a busy summer for Ramiro. His mother needed him in her business, and his father wanted extra help with Call Me Thunder. For himself, he did not mind the days out at sea, nor the early morning run around the track. He was available to ride exercise horses and Chungy paid him a small for it!

Aside from his occupations, the biggest change was sharing his living space with his mother as Gail started sleeping in their house and in his bed, so the new arrangement saw him on a new sponge mattress on the floor, covered with a sheet.

Ramiro found that he did not mind the changes at his mother's place as much as he thought, he actually had fun sharing stories with Gail, and making plans for when they would be moving off the beach in the near future.

When he told this to his father, however, Sawdust was more than a little upset.

“She let you sleep where?” Ramiro saw that his father was enraged. “That woman can, and never will be a good mother. Listen to me Ramiro, you are never going to spend another night over there because, sorry to say, your mother cannot help you to reach anywhere in life. She just picked up this girl to work in her cookshop because you are not there.”

Sawdust kissed his teeth to emphasize his disgust.

“No Dadda,” Ramiro quickly said. It’s not really like that, it is just that Lilly...that Mummy does not really have it right now. She is really trying and she is cooperating with getting off the beach.”

Ramiro’s mind went fast because if he did not win his father over, his visits to Lilly would be no more.

“Dadda, what if you could buy me a bed, you know. Then I would be comfortable and still get a chance to stay with Mummy.”

“Any money that I spend on you will be right in my house. I am not giving your mother one dollar,” his father said. “Buy you a bed so that she can make somebody else comfortable? No way!”

“But Dadda, it wouldn’t be a big deal if the girl, Gail, slept on it when I am not there, and when she moves out, then I will need my own bed in the new place anyway.”

Sawdust finally agreed that a bed would be a useful long term investment for his son when his mother got her new home, so it was bought and delivered to Lilly's place.

Lilly had registered Gail in some evening classes in preparation for going to Ramiro's school, and although she complained that the homework was hard, it was clear that she was quite proud that she would soon be a real student with all the trappings of a uniform and a schoolbag and setting off to be early. It was a great time, but Gail had a small concern.

"Do girls play sports at your school?" Gail asked.

"Netball and track of course," he replied.

"Oh," she said. Which did not mean anything, just that she had heard what he said.

He knew her real concern, so added.

"If you want to do football Gail, you will have to get into a club side, and Mummy would have to support that."

"I wouldn't ask her," Gail said quickly. She knew that Lilly would not be able to find the money for club fees and gears right now.

"Or if you do well in netball or track at our school," Ramiro added, "one of the big sports school might see you at a match and recruit you, and when you get in over there you can cross train and start football. I see it happen all the time."

That cheered Gail up a lot, and gave her even more hope.

The day of the Caribbean St Leger came and Call Me Thunder's team members were more than cautious, they were motivated. Over the period, the horse had made six successful starts and won five races. This was the longest of the standard annual races that they called classics, and only a few of the local horses could be eligible for the first class lineup, but the talent that was there that day was good.

Ramiro was a part of the team for the race day preparations. Chungy had bought Briggy new silks for the event – his same green and black, but there was a gold lion with a black mane on the back of his shirt. He said that Mrs. Chung had designed it.

As usual, Sawdust was inseparable from Call Me Thunder before the race. His job was to keep the animal healthy, as well as calm and focused on performing at his peak athletic ability.

It was a big race day and the Augusta Racecourse was full as almost every available horse was on the day's schedule of races. The atmosphere was festive.

In the stables precincts, Lodge was looking for Racing Glory as well. He was decked to ride a horse called March On To Glory. The only reason that Lodge got that chance was that March On To Glory was from another island and the owners did not know the detailed reputations

of the local jockeys. The owners did their research using published racing statistics which showed that Lodge's performance was good. No one that they spoke with gave any negative comments about his character, and when they made contact with his agent, it was confirmed that he was available to ride for them.

Lodge had done his preparations and then pretended to leave the stables, but in actuality he hung around in a concealed spot until the opportunity for his intent arose.

Little Kirk, a stable boy had come out of the stable to tip out some stale bedding from the stalls. Lodge followed him until he turned a corner into a deserted part of the complex, then called out to him,

“Little Kirk, you still in the vet business?” He was referring to the time that Kirk was suspected of doping a horse for an owner. Lodge had actually seen the drugs in his bag, but chose not to say anything at that time, preferring to call in his cards later.

Kirk looked around nervously then said softly, “Hey Lodge. What you saying man?”

“Nuttin. Just getting ready for my race. But listen, I have to look into something this afternoon.”

Little Kirk breathed heavily, and said nothing.

“Yeah, Little Kirk. I need you to give a message to a man for me. Just before his horse goes into the parade, I want

you to tell Sawdust that Chungy needs to see him urgent.” Little Kirk laughed.

“You know that Sawdust not leaving his horse for nothing man. Could be his own sick mother calling him...” Lodge cut him short.

“Could be your mother calling to you from the other side of the penitentiary.” He said that very close to Little Kirk’s face with a very clear threat. “Don’t come to me with no argument man. Just make sure and find a way to get the man out, but just before the parade. Don’t forget.” He walked off leaving Little Kirk shaking.

Ramiro was frustrated. There was no way he would get to watch the race today. It was so crowded and because he had to stay near his father he did not have a chance to secure himself a good lookout early. Just then, the cooing of pigeons caused him to look up. Of course, the roof! If he climbed up there he would have a view of the starting and finishing posts, but not the turn. That was good enough for him!

The stable had high concrete walls and was roofed with corrugated metal held up by iron girders. On one wall leaned a ladder. Ramiro looked around. His father would probably object, but he was settling Call Me Thunder to drink some water. No one else was in the stable at that moment. He climbed the ladder to the ledge that was separated from the roof for ventilation. Then he carefully angled himself

so that his hands were on the roof but body still standing on the ledge. This was the dangerous part. If he missed he would fall backwards some nine metres to the ground. He hoisted himself to the roof and walked along the ridge where the roof formed a broad angle. He felt the heat of the metal roof through his shoes, but it did not bother him as he was used to running barefoot across sand that was baked by hours of afternoon sun. He sat down in the shade of a branch of a tree that overgrew the roof. It was nice and cool and breezy there and he spent a few moments scanning the view. He could also see the parking lot and that a line of cars was backed up from the street as more visitors streamed into the park. He could see the security base beside that, where workmen were fixing a roof. Every now and then the faint sound of their hammering wafted over to him. He saw the housing estate where he lived, but the fruit trees in the backyards prevented him from seeing the house where he and his father lived. Ramiro felt fortunate to have such a lovely view in a comfortable spot, and he settled to watch the race.

He saw Lodge loitering just out of sight of the door of the stable, and then he saw Little Kirk returning to the stable pushing an empty wheelbarrow. There was nothing strange about this scene. Ramiro saw when the two men barely nodded at each other and Little Kirk went inside the stable.

Less than a minute later, his father jogged from the building in the direction of the parade. Ramiro was puzzled to see his father quickly cross the open yard. Sawdust would almost never leave his horse unattended just before a race, much less the St Ledger.

When Lodge straightened up and walked not too fast, and not too slowly, but with purpose into the stable building. Ramiro found that he was trembling. He was sure that something very bad was about to happen. He looked across the open area anxious to see if his father was returning, but Sawdust was still not on his way back. When Lodge walked through the stable door, Little Kirk abruptly walked out and just leaned on a wall outside. Neither of them saw that Ramiro was watching from the roof.

Ramiro really wished his father or his mother was around, he wondered what was the right thing to do? Should he shout and make a noise? He decided that the best action for him at that time was to keep watching, so, as quietly as possible, he crept back along the roof and lay flat on his stomach and looked down inside the stable. From that point, he could see almost all of the inside of the building - but from an upside down point of view.

He looked around until he saw Call Me Thunder's stall. All that Ramiro could see of the horse was his head. Then the horse seemed to shuffle a bit. Then Ramiro saw Lodge walking along the passage between the stalls coming from the direction of Call Me Thunder. He could now see all of

the man's body and Lodge was dusting his hands off on his trousers. Lodge went through the door without looking at Little Kirk who was still outside and continued in a direction that was almost opposite to where Sawdust went and did not come back. The whole episode took less than five minutes and even though he looked around, Ramiro could not see anyone else.

Ramiro carefully made his way down the ladder to the stable and nervously went in. He was not really supposed to walk up and down freely unless he was supervised by his father. Call Me Thunder looked OK, but Ramiro was sure that Lodge must have done something to him. Anxiously he stood watching, as no one but the groom and trainer was allowed to touch the horse. He did not want to leave Call Me Thunder alone again, but his father would not come. Ramiro heard the announcer call for the seventh race; the one in which Call Me Thunder was scheduled to run. After watching him for ten minutes he still seemed fine to Ramiro, except that he was fretting slightly about the front right leg.

Taking a big risk, Ramiro nervously entered the stall. He took the leg into his hand and noticed that a piece of wood with a nail going through it was lodged in the hoof. Ramiro took out his knife and opened it. If Call Me Thunder stepped heavily on the foot or worse, reared up and landed again, the nail might be driven into the soft part of his hoof and he would be injured. Not a moment was to be wasted. He

pushed the blade under the wood and slowly worked it in the space in between the hoof to gently rock it out. It slowly eased up on one side then he had to slide out the blade and work the other side.

“What the hell are you doing Ramiro?” his father said in an angry whisper.

Ramiro leaned back to show him the wood, “It almost out,” he replied.

Then with a last wiggle the boy prised the wood loose and it fell softly on the grass lining the stall with the dull gleam of the dangerous sharp nail pointing directly upwards. Ramiro backed out leaving his father to gently inspect the hoof. It was safe. Sawdust took a few moments to touch his son’s shoulder before rising and silently led Call Me Thunder out to the parade where Briggy was anxiously waiting.

Sawdust shook his head.

“Ramiro, what would have happened if you were not around? Little Kirk came to me and told me that Chungy told me to come by the parade right now. That it was yesterday urgent, and I believed the man!”

He allowed his hand to rest on Ramiro’s shoulder, and the simple touch allowed the son to know that he was respected and loved by his father.

In the racetrack announcer's box, the caller on duty pressed the button to allow his voice to be carried to the thousands of fans who were listening in to the premier race of the year. It was live on radio, on the Internet by pay-per-view and of course to the fans in the stands and skyboxes.

"In line for race number seven for the Caribbean St Leger, the season's final classic. Sixteen quality three-year-olds now secure in the starter's gate. There is a fair start for 2,000 metres.

"*Call Me Thunder* slips out early but on his heels is the tourist March on to Glory, in the hands of Lodge and the filly Strong and Firm from the Codrington stables fills out the top three.

"Putting in some effort is *Coast to Coast*, *Baymen's Clan*, *We Must Prosper*, *Ever Conscious*, *Sons of one Mother*, *Dessalinienne*, *Happy and Glorious*, *Helen of the West*, sorting themselves out are *Common Destiny*, *Hairoun*, *Good to Watch*, *Noble and Beauteous*, and anchoring the field is *Equal Place*."

Coming off the first corner, *Strong and Firm* cantered forward and passed *Call me Thunder*. Sawdust was not fretting yet. He knew that his horse was a superior distance athlete, but he noticed that *We Must Prosper* and *Dessalinienne* were travelling strongly keeping up with the leading pack with a gap of six between them and the strugglers.

On the back stretch, by the five furlong marker at the half-way point, Briggy and *Call Me Thunder* were still striking the front and *Dessalinienne* was tracking in second. Briggy kept to the fence. He would try and hold this position so that no horse could try to sneak up on them on the inside.

Holding at third, Lodge also ran along the fence and raised up a little out of his saddle. He pointed *March to Glory's* head directly at *Call Me Thunder's* flank. He touched her with the whip and let off the pressure from the bit. *March to Glory* snorted and charged ahead, looking for a space between *Call Me Thunder* and *Dessalinienne*, her hot breath catching the left flank of *Dessalinienne*, slightly distracting him. The spectators leapt to their feet. Will a jockey take a tumble today? This move was too close.

Briggy locked his thighs even closer to *Call Me Thunder's* back willing him to open up on the straight, "Don't mind them boy. Gwaan, Gwaan," he urged.

Approaching the second corner, *March to Glory* who had been putting it all on the field from the start was still in her drive phase and used her experience to run the curve on the outside and entered the homestretch level with *Call Me Thunder*. Lodge kept touching her, and now her flank was bleeding. Although she was already a popular superstakes champion at home, this was a difficult race for *March to Glory*. She had never been ridden by such a heartless jockey and in the stands her owner was silently raging against Lodge's treatment of her.

March to Glory had put out all her effort for the early part of the race and did not have her usual strong kick for the last two furlongs to chase *Call Me Thunder*; and now *Dessalinienne* was nose to nose with her, and *Common Destiny* had turned on the afterburn, and was at half a length behind.

March to Glory had the heart of a champion and when she felt the whip touch her again, she breathed deeper and held her gait to maintain speed.

Her trainer sat beside her owner with his eyes shut. He had seen willing horses in the prime of their careers face a rider like Lodge. *March to Glory* would never give her all to a jockey ever again. Her career was over.

The announcer tried to keep his voice clear and level to call the race properly to satisfy the fans watching and listening all over the world. Under his tower, fans in the bleachers were agitated and pretending to ride the horses themselves, flicking and snapping their fingers like whips, and shouting out to the horses that they wanted to win.

“Coming alive at the final stretch is *Hairoun* and *Happy and Glorious* both trying to make up for lost time have passed *Common Destiny* but are still in fourth and fifth positions. *Dessalinienne* makes a move to reclaim second position but *March to Glory* with a peep over her shoulder is still holding on and *Call Me Thunder* will not be displaced

as he crosses the finish line, it is *Call Me Thunder* winning by a head.”

Win or lose, the spectators enjoyed seeing thoroughbred talent finishing a race well run. Sawdust greeted the horse with a gentle pat and looked around for Chungy, who was curiously not around. A tall stranger wearing a tan leather cowboy hat strode towards him and addressed him with a nod.

“I say. That’s a mighty fine colt we got there. Yessiree.”

The man said “we”. Sawdust’s mind raced to the only possible explanation. From where he stood, his eyes searched for Chungy or the trainer. They were nowhere near the winner’s circle. From behind the foreigner a short blonde teenaged girl, not more than 13, in blue jeans and a blouse with fringes grabbed the man’s arm and said.

“Daddy he is just beautiful. Thank you.”

Then Sawdust knew that *Call Me Thunder* had been claimed. Chungy had put up the horse to silent bidders just before the race. This gave him the opportunity to clear his money on the horse, win, or lose. This stranger must have given him an offer that he could not refuse, for *Call Me Thunder* had a promising career ahead of him, even before winning this race. It was the way things were at the track, and even in this moment of victory, Sawdust thought that sometimes he hated this business because he really liked that horse and wanted to be a part of its career.

As the groom for Call Me Thunder, the St Ledger gave Sawdust a nice payday. When he read the receipt for the money that would be lodged in his bank account, it was more than he had ever had in his life.

Call Me Thunder was returned to his stable, in a few weeks all the paperwork would be in place for him to travel to his new home overseas.

Ramiro was anxious to speak privately with his father about what would happen about Lodge, but he waited patiently until his father bought a takeout dinner from a nearby restaurant for them and they were back home.

“Dadda, why does Lodge still have a jockey license? Everybody saw that he whipped March to Glory too much; and is he going to get away with nearly killing Call Me Thunder?”

Sawdust felt uncomfortable. He never liked to stir up controversy, after all, March to Glory’s owner and trainer did not complain; and thanks to Ramiro, they managed to prevent Lodge’s plan to injure Call Me Thunder. It was a matter of just being extra careful around that man.

Business was a rough affair – not Sabbath or Sunday school – someone once said.

“What do you think should happen son? If we make a report, you have to be willing to tell your story to the police. He is going to call you a liar. What do we have to say

but talk about a piece of wood and a nail that could have come from anywhere?”

“I kept it Dadda. I have something to show.”

Ramiro had wrapped the wood and nail into a piece of newspaper and put it in his bag. He took it out now and his father took it from him looked at it a little closer. It was a common fillet that was sold at general hardware stores. It looked like a half cylinder and was used in roof repairs. The workman would nail the fillet to a lath that would then be covered with corrugated zinc and further secured.

“This probably came from a building where they are changing out the zinc,” Sawdust said”

Ramiro immediately spoke up.

“Dadda, workmen are over by the change room for the security guards! I saw them when I was on the stable roof. I did not see Lodge over there, but maybe that is where he was and maybe one of the guards over there saw him!”

Sawdust continued, “And that is not an area that any and anybody has any normal reason to just pass by. As a matter of fact, the security guards don’t like people wandering over to them, they would have noticed if anyone walked over there, day or night.”

Ramiro added, “And if the type of wood and type of nails that are over there match this fillet, then Dadda, we have good evidence!”

Sawdust nodded, but then his phone rang and he answered it. There was a very unfamiliar voice on the other end.

“Is this Sawdust? Good. My name is Tyler Taylor, owner of the Longhorn Thoroughbred Stud Ranches proudly located in Texas. That colt you groomed, Call Me Thunder, is in the best condition as I have ever seen a horse. I have a proposition for you Sawdust. I am a registered owner in the Triple Stakes Series and race my horses all across our great United States.” He chuckled. “I also keep my membership open over here because from time to time this little country has produced some amazing talent for me.”

His voice got serious. “I want you to come and work for me. Now don’t say no just yet. Why not see me tomorrow at the track. It has to be in the mornin’, as the missus is sending the jet for us to go back home in the afternoon.”

Sawdust leaned back in the couch. A trip abroad would mean that he would be separated from his son just when they were getting close.

“Ramiro, that was an offer to go and work in the States for a while,” Sawdust said. He thought that getting to the point was the best way to get through this matter. He felt immediately sorry as he saw a flicker of confusion move across his son’s face.

He read his son correctly. Ramiro had settled with thinking that his father’s most important priority was for them to live together. Now he was not so sure.

Sawdust tried to talk again.

“I can’t lie, I really want to go for myself and my own dreams of working in this business. Your mother will soon move into a better place, and I am alright with that too. So how you feel?”

“Don’t know right now Dadda. But I am happy for you.”

“Thank you son. This is not something I saw coming. You are smart and responsible, but I had plans for me to really be there for you. I had to grow myself and support myself from early, and fortunately I got into a career that I love, but that is not the best way.”

Then, for the first time, Sawdust told his son his own life history. He grew up near a farm in Hanover where in his spare time he helped the grooms who cared for the polo and future racehorses. Early on, he realized that he liked to work with the animals, but was more drawn to the thoroughbreds. He heard about a stable near the Augusta Racetrack that might want a hard working boy who knew about horses, and he saw this as an opportunity to advance. Fully aware that life would be hard, and he might not get through on the first try, he told his family goodbye, got on a bus, and presented himself in his best attitude to the surprised head trainer who sent the boy straight back to the country. He did like how Sawdust handled himself around the property for the few hours that he was there, and told him he could return during the holidays. He did,

and after the holidays he just never went back home. He simply made his bed in the stables, and the name Sawdust stuck.

That was his break, that was his grand adventure, and now he realised that he could be on another. He could work with the best in the world and be paid handsomely for doing what he loved. He talked and talked and then realised that Ramiro was silent.

He leaned over and saw that his son was fast asleep. Sawdust smiled and relaxed and looked at the television.

The scene on the screen reminded him of the place where he was born, so Sawdust decided that he must watch some more. It was a feature on Alexander Bustamante, whose original name was William Clarke, and Sawdust knew that they were born in the same place, if even about a century apart.



With the many ruffians in town, she may not make it home with her money and medicine.

Alexander Bustamante's Story Strengthen Us, The Weak To Cherish

The rain was coming down harder now, and William pressed Señor into a canter. He hoped that the ford between him and Lucea was still passable despite the rain, but the small crowd ahead told him that it might already be too late.

The ford was small, but notoriously prone to flash flooding, and at the moment the water would be knee high for his horse. William made his decision and urged Señor through the cool stream, feeling the willing animal lose his footing more than once on the gravel that was also in motion beneath the water. They claimed the other side, and without pausing, William touched his heels into the horse's sides and they continued their brisk journey to the parish capital, leaving walkers sheltering under banana leaves, waiting on the water to subside.

Reaching his work, where he clerked for a dry goods store near to the workplace, there was a small group at the counter, behind it, the owner was alone serving.

“Good, you reach, cause nobody else don't turn up as yet,” the owner said, which meant that William had to do the bookkeeping, and also serve the customers that morning.

The owner promptly walked out, to conduct business down on the wharf. There were three ships in the harbour, and only a major storm would halt the business of clearing goods and loading goods, mostly sugar and rum, for export.

William had wanted to use the first few minutes to unpack his sack of soaked clothes and hang them up on the rafters, but instead went to the flour stores to fill the first order.

He was excited that today he would be going aboard a steamship to Central America and satisfy his yearning to live in fabulous places and use his wit, intelligence and strength to create an exciting life for himself.

William already had lined up a buyer for Señor who expected the horse to be delivered in the afternoon; but before all of that, saltfish and grain had to be weighed and sold. Every time William went into the storeroom, the bell on the front door would ring as someone else demanded attention.

By lunch time, the weather had deteriorated and the shoppers stopped coming in. William latched the door to keep out the rain, if a customer came by he or she would ring the bell and he would open it. He hung his clothes on the rafters to dry and did some bookwork listening to the loud splash of water gushing from the guttering and hitting the concrete piazza.

A small sound just outside the wooden store wall got his attention. The rain had held up and he could clearly hear a

child complaining, and then the sound of a bottle breaking.

William went around to the front, opened the door and looked around the corner. Under the eave of the building, a man was trying to take away a cloth bag from a small girl who was resisting him. The unmistakable thick drip of honey was seeping through the bag.

“Hey, leave the girl alone!” William demanded. The man quickly looked William up and down, and ran off behind the building where the backyard gave way to bush. He was not in the mood to fight a strong man who was more than six feet tall.

“Come here little girl. What you doing out here. Why you never ring the”

A glance at the bell told William that she was too short to reach the cord that would ring the bell and get his attention. She was about ten years old, but short, and she was looking into her bag with a vexed expression.

“I come to see if you want to buy some of my honey,” she said. “I had five bottles, but one break, so is only four now.”

William led her into the shop where she allowed him to take the sack and clean off the remaining bottles.

“I see when you and the horse cross the river this morning.”

“You were out there?”

“If I never jump, the mud would splash me. I had to turn back and come over the hill to get here.

William looked at the child again, in this weather, the detour would have added a few hours to her journey.

“So why you had to come today?”

“My father sick sir, and my mother send me to sell this and buy some medicine to give him.”

William decided to buy all the honey from the girl for the shop and also footed the bill for the broken bottle himself.

“In this rain, you not going to reach home tonight.”

“I know the way very well, sir, and I don’t believe in no duppy.”

William thought, however, of the man who tried to rob her, and that there were many more ruffians who were roaming the town in this busy period. Even if she made it to the drug store, she may not make it back home with her goods and cash intact. William decided that at the earliest opportunity he would take her home.

William gave the girl enough money to buy the medicine and instructed her to go to the nearest drug store and to come back. She did and by the time that she returned two store clerks had arrived for work, so he left a note for his employer and departed with her.

The mid afternoon sun was now out causing every water

droplet it touched to sparkle like a crystal. It would probably rain again in a while, so it made sense to act with haste.

He knew that going through the ford was now impossible, so allowed Señor to gently and carefully walk along the narrow hillside pass. After a while, the path became too treacherous for a horse, so he tied him to a tree in a safe place, and they continued on foot.

Her home was, as he expected. A small, wooden house set into a stony hillside. Two dogs rushed out at them barking aggressively, and a few chickens were scratching at the roots of the plants around the house. A baby was playing on the front step with a toddler.

The girl went immediately into the house, and William waited outside, carefully watching the guard dogs, wondering if he should leave. Then a young woman came out.

“Thank you for taking Maybelle home, Sir. I was worried about her and the river.”

“She is a brave little girl. How is your husband?”

“Bad sir, but the medicine will give him some rest. We give thanks.”

When William placed the rest of the money for the honey in the mother’s hand, he saw that it was used to hard work.

If her husband was so bad that she had to send her small daughter across many miles in bad weather, who knew if he would get better soon? How far could money for a few bottles of honey support the family?

The woman thanked him very carefully, and William knew at that moment that no matter how far he travelled and who he would encounter, he would not meet more human dignity in adversity than this family. His people must be among the best in the world.

On impulse, William told her that she should go into the town the next day and ask the livestock trader for a female animal that Mr Clarke had left for her. He then took leave of the family and returned to Lucea.

When he finally parted with Señor that evening, William went to the donkey trader, paid him for the healthiest female donkey on the lot, and told him the name of the woman who would collect her.

William thought of the determination of the little girl called Maybelle who could not get his attention because she could not reach the bell.

“Do something for me tomorrow man,” he told the seller. “Tell the woman that this animal will be a very reliable help for her and her family, and that she must name her Belle.”

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Sawdust decided that he would meet with Call Me Thunder's new owner tomorrow morning, listen carefully, make no commitments, and say that he would have to talk things over with his family first. He would also have to have discussions about how Ramiro will be affected, with Lilly.



It was dusk when Ramiro alighted from the bus on the road near to his home. He hailed the group of youngsters who were skylarking on the corner, and when he reached the gate of his complex, he waved to the delivery man who was driving out. The man visited his mother several times a week to collect the seafood that she made to order for specialty food stores.

Lilly was comfortably sitting at her kitchen table with her digital tablet, catching up on the latest agricultural and market news that was buzzing on her social network. She would get up soon to begin preparations for an order to be collected in the morning.

The first year that they moved off the beach was the worst that Ramiro ever had ever experienced because of the tensions that it caused in their family. The house was certainly comfortable, but almost everything else was stressful.

Lilly was anxious about building her small business and

had to go to classes to learn new skills and to qualify for loans and grants. For all of her working life she had kept next to no records about her business, but now she had to keep records in order to stay in business. Learning the new skills was not hard for her, and with the help of Ramiro and Gail she soon became comfortable using the Internet, but her biggest challenge was keeping her records up to date. She also had to get used to presenting information to agencies and financial institutions on her financial status and what she considered to be private affairs.

It took some time for Lilly to transform her business and money became very tight. Setting up a new home had many hidden costs. Sawdust gave Lilly some money to help, but that help came along with several arguments.

Getting recognition as Gail's legal guardian also came with many pressures, but with the help of Mrs Mannas, they were slowly overcoming them, and most importantly, Gail never had to leave the new family.

As much as she was growing to love Gail, living with a teenage girl also had challenges that came daily as Gail loved to be outside playing with the neighbourhood boys, sometimes into the evening. At that time Lilly's strongest mothering instincts came out and each day was a balancing act between Gail trying to have some independence and still keeping Lilly's mind at rest.

Ramiro also had his concerns as he was in trouble for not getting the grades that his teachers thought were good enough for the high school entrance examination. He could not wait for the constant pressure to ease up.

It was not all rough going with the family, however. Lilly would spend the evening doing preparations in her own kitchen and in mostly easy conversations with Ramiro and Gail. Party promoters and caterers knew that she was not available to work out of her home at night because she had school age children.

As Ramiro entered the house he greeted her, then knocked on Gail's room door.

"She just went out", his mother said, "I sent her down to Little Carenage Bay to pay for the lobsters that I took this afternoon. I was so blessed to see when pictures of these fresh lobsters popped up on my social media network just when a higgler down at Little Carenage posted them. I ran down there and got the best and she agreed to give me credit to the end of the day. I reposted the photos online with a note that I will have lobster patties and my regular delicatessen immediately placed an order."

Ramiro put down his school bag in its usual place on the large bottom shelf of the whatnot. Gail's bag was already there, and also her prized possession, her football. He went back out into the yard of the complex where they lived.

Lilly had a long-term lease for her townhouse in the small complex that had only six units.

Their neighbours were a small family, a semi-retired person, a young couple, a single woman, and in the studio was a college student.

Ramiro's cell rang, it was Gail and he was happy to talk to her.

"You deh home yet?" she asked.

"Yeah, going to eat..."

"Come out to Little Carengae now! Don't wait to eat, and run don't walk. I am over by the sea grape patch."

Little Carengae was not a registered fishing beach. It was just a strip of sand beside open land where one or two fishermen were happy to pull up their boats.

The beach was 15 minutes walk from Lilly's house, and the excitement in Gail's voice caused Ramiro to jog most of the way. He was curious to go as she was not flighty as most girls that he knew, so he thought that it must really be worth the urgency.

It was the time of day when shadows were long and the western sky was painted in a wash of orange and blue. He got there while there was still light in the sky and carefully picked his way across flotsam and seaweed and driftwood that had been washed up on the shore, as well as the small shrubs that were steadfast along the coastline.

He saw Gail and when he was close, she held his arm and took him a few steps into the patch of sea grape trees where there was an area of uncovered sand. One spot was moving and wriggling as scores of small turtles were struggling up through the sand, and flopping out of the darkness of the shade trees towards the glimmering sea.

Ramiro crouched beside her. As the sea lapped a gentle, uneven rhythm on the shore, each little hatchling flopped itself across the sand, until it successfully made it to the water.

“They are babies, but they have to find their own way and raise themselves,” Gail said quietly. She was happy that it had been possible for Ramiro to come out and share the moment with her.

He would understand the respect and the relief that she felt seeing each new born turtle successfully unearth itself and reach its home in the sea.

They also shared the private moment when he convinced her to leave a nest of turtle eggs alone. She was far removed from that girl who only saw her environment as something from which she could take, and never have any responsibility.

“Have you heard from your father again, Ramiro?”

“Not since last week. He told me that he will be coming home for the Independence holidays. So I will see him soon.”

“But is he still going to come home for good?”

“His plan was to be away for one year, and it is about that now, so let’s see. He has a plan to save enough to do some science subjects, and that can qualify him to get into a six-month course on equine nutrition or a one-year course on equine sports therapy. He and some other grooms are doing everything so that the Augusta Racecourse management will run more courses locally for them. He says that with the right training, the door is open for jobs anywhere in the world; but he also says that right here we can really develop first class horse breeding and schooling. I guess anything is possible right now.”

Ramiro said it quite easily, but he knew that these were amazingly big dreams that his father had that would not come easy, especially if he were to return home and go back to Augusta instead of living and working in an international equestrian environment.

His father’s ratings had also gone up in the industry as he had reported Lodge to the authorities, and the matter had gone through the system and Lodge was not only banned from ever working in any area of horseracing, but he also had to face criminal charges. That matter had not yet been tried in court.

More than anything, however, Ramiro wanted his father home. He missed the times that they spent together.

The turtles were all gone now so the two children got up and slowly started to walk home. They did not talk and Ramiro hoped that Gail understood what he was saying about his father's desire to move ahead in his career, but still promising to be there. She was his sister now, and having her there was also very important to him. Ramiro wondered if he was being too selfish to want these three people close to him all of the time, but he felt he needed his mother, his father and now his sister. Needing them, and their being close enough to see and to talk to, felt good.

Gail's cell phone rang. She showed Ramiro the screen so that he could see that it was Lilly calling. They smiled and walked a little faster to go home.

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THE END



They are babies, but they have to find their own way and raise themselves.