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Bitter Orange

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BITTER ORANGE

A Thesis

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Writing

Racquel Fagon

Farquhar College of Arts and Sciences, Division of Humanities

Nova Southeastern University

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I

Bevie

Not the same day leaf drop in water that it rotten

--Jamaican Proverb

I was sitting on the carpet in the living room watching Smurfs, but I couldn't even hear the advice Papa Smurf was giving to Lazy Smurf because Morlon and Daddy been arguing for most of the morning. They never even ate any of the fried dumpling and ackee and saltfish Mommy and Sophia made for breakfast.

I could see them from where I was on the verandah, and not even the verandah look like it big enough to hold the two of them. Both of them face swell up like when you throw salt on bull-frog back, and the more them shout at one another is the more them swell up.

"Jesus Christ, just give me a break man!" Morlon screamed.

"Bwoy don't talk to me like that," Daddy shouted. "You think I'm afraid to box you down?"

"You can't threaten me with beating now, Daddy. So you can forget that," Morlon said back to Daddy.

"Listen to me, bwoy, you will do as I say, and that's final!"

"It's I-an-I life. Who gives you the right to decide anything for me? I wasn't the one who tell you not to go to school, and to become some country farmer."

"Is this backside country-farmer money put you into high class Munro College and send you backside to America every summer! Bwoy, don't make me..."

For the whole mid-term holiday Daddy and Morlon either quarreling or not talking to each other at all. Daddy wanted Morlon to start learning about and doing things on the farm, but Morlon neck stiffer than Uncle Cee grey mule. He made up his mind that he didn't want anything to do with no orange woodland—as Morlon call it.

But the argument this morning started when Daddy asked Morlon to help him do something with a part of the navel tree and a part of the ortanique tree. I don't remember the word Daddy used to describe what he wanted to do, but it did have something to do with making a new kind of orange. Anyway, Daddy told Morlon from last night that he needed him to work on the orange thing with him, in the greenhouse on the farm. But this morning, Morlon got up and told Daddy that he got inspiration in the night to write some poems, so he was going to build some vibes in his room and write. Daddy got so charged up. And just like his father, Morlon got charged up too.

“Damn renking bwoy!” Daddy blasted out, and the white part ‘round his hazel eyes turned a deadly red. “And stop talking like you some blasted, dutty Rasta. You think I send you to Munro to become some no good beggar?”

Morlon's face changed like my friend Tom's when Sister Loretta told him he must write fifty times on the board “Jesus doesn't like sloppiness.” Tom felt so bad that by the time he reached line ten, he just started to cry.

“Daddy, why you think all Rasta worthless and fool-fool? You ever hear how them reason and analyze things?”

“I don't care if it was them that part the Red Sea! My son is not going to be a Rasta!”

Daddy stood nose to nose with Morlon, and his nose-hole flared like a race horse.

Little bubbles of spit form at his mouth corner just waiting to spray off, and his fingers squeezed into fists like the green Hulk, with big spider-web veins all over his hand. His was breathing hard in Morlon's face, like he was hoping and praying Morlon would try to lick him. But Morlon never even flinch. Instead, he stared dead into Daddy's eyes and made up his face serious like a judge, with his forehead well wrinkled up.

Morlon's face looked like it was telling Daddy, "If this is the day you going to kick me out, well God strike me dead, so let it be."

"Bwoy, get the hell outta my face, before I have to beat you face into the concrete tile," Daddy hissed.

Morlon never move.

"So you gone deaf too?" Daddy asked, and tighten his fist some more.

Morlon's body and face suddenly looked calm, like it just let out all the anger. He took two steps back. A kinda gurgle came from his throat and turned into a big market-woman laugh. Morlon laughed until tears well up in his eyes. He had to sit down on one of the columns that framed the front of the verandah.

"What the hell is so funny to you bwoy?" Daddy asked very annoyed. "You think this is a backside laughing matter?"

"Dad. . . Dad. . . Daddy, you know you not easy," Morlon said, trying to control his laughter.

"What the hell you talking 'bout, bwoy?"

"Daddy, you don't realize that this is like you fighting yourself. Nobody can force me to do anything, just like how nobody can force you."

"Morlon, don't come with you foolishness right now."

“No, Daddy, it’s true,” Morlon said a little more seriously. “My advice to you is that you just relax and ‘low me. It that simple Daddy.”

“‘Low you? ‘Low you? You know what I’m going to do? Cut you off everything! So find somebody to pay you thirty thousand dollar school fee, give you food and buy everything else you want, you hear me? Go work and find that yourself!”

As soon as Daddy blurted this out, Mommy turned her burgundy Volvo into the gate, and drove up the little hill into the yard.

Without saying another word, Morlon walked past Daddy, came into the living room, winked at me, and then went ‘round the corner into his room. When he came back ‘round, he had his overnight bag in one hand, and his school bag in the other one.

He walked past Daddy, who was still standing up in the same place on the verandah, and went outside and over to Mommy as she was getting out of the car. He kissed her on the cheek, and told her he would call her later. Mommy looked completely confused as she watched Morlon walk down to the gate, stop a Spaldings bus and went inside.

When the bus drove off, she turned and stared at Daddy with her mouth wide open.

“I swear on my mother’s grave, I’m going to kill that bwoy, that good-for-nothing bwoy who is your son,” Daddy said with his face looking like Mas Len’s when the primary school boys stone the East Indian mango tree in his yard.

Mommy was coming from a ladies’ meeting at the Baptist Church, but before she left, she told Daddy not to talk to Morlon about anything until she got home. But as usual, Daddy never listened to what Mommy said. He wanted to talk to Morlon by himself.

“Couldn’t you just wait, John?” Mommy asked, and she sounded so sad.

“I’m not in the mood, Victoria. Just leave it alone.”

Daddy turned and slowly walked into the house like bubble gum was stuck under his shoes.

II

Morlon

If heart was a thing people could see, everybody would know good heart from bad heart

--Jamaican Proverb

Daddy was behaving normal today. Look like the couple of weeks we didn't talk chill him out. But still, I really wanted to go to Tony Rebel's Culture Shock in MoBay. I know the positive Rasta vibrations there would be plenty.

But instead of me having an irie weekend, Daddy came for me at school because he wanted me to be home this weekend. I just didn't understand it. If he really needs somebody to work with him on the farm, why doesn't he just divide up the shares so that his brothers and sister can help him? But no I-yah, is just my life he wants to stress out. All of the arguing just brings bad vibes in and around me.

Spaldings town hasn't changed one bit, though. Every time I passed through to go home, it was the same faces all the time doing the same things. Samfo still squeezing his big self in that little chair so that his large mass was the first thing anybody saw when they went into his supermarket. He didn't think that maybe the customers would prefer to see a sweet browning greeting them at the entrance, and not his obese, ol' Chiney self.

"Morlon, come say hello to Samfo," Daddy told me, when he know I don't like Mr. Samfo at all.

"Morlon, look how you growing good bwoy," Samfo said, as he pressed his big self against the counter and reached over to touch my face.

"Haile bless!" I greeted him, with my right hand over my left breast. I hate when

Samfo try to touch me because for one thing his hand always smell funny, like raw liver or something.

“Even you face a get kinda rough, bwoy. You turning into a man fast, fast,”

Samfo commented.

“Yeah man, big boy now. And bright to,” Daddy said. “He can join in the family business soon.”

“Wha? Goin be a rich farmer like you daddy?” Mr. Samfo asked.

I could feel the blood rushing into my face. These people wanted me to curse some bad words in this place. I could see from Daddy’s pleased look that Mr. Samfo’s comments was what him want to hear.

“Daddy. . .” I started, but Daddy cut me off before I could get everything out.

“Morlon, tell Mr. Samfo how you and the boys kill Calabar in the under-seventeen football finals.”

“How much you beat them by?” Mr. Samfo asked.

I looked at Mr. Samfo and couldn’t get past his Babylonian exterior of falseness and greed. I couldn’t even answer his question.

“They beat them five to one, Samfo. They bad man,” Daddy said.

“But me never know that Munro was so bad,” Mr. Samfo continued. His cheeks jiggled with every word he said, and it just made him look like a caricature of humanity.

“And you are the big captain of the team?” he asked.

What this nasty Chiney man want with me man? I hate when Daddy force me to be chummy with his crawny friends. I hate it! I just feel like cursing everybody right now. But no— Rasta is calm. Rasta don’t allow Babylonians to get him irate. But I

seriously don't get these macho Jamaican men who make boys or other men feel less like a man if they not kicking, lifting, or pushing something.

So I guess Daddy not going to tell Mr. Samfo about how I love to write poetry and how my English literature teacher already give me an A for the class, even though about eight weeks left in the term, because that isn't something Daddy can be proud of 'bout me. No, only becoming a coarse farmer like him would make him proud.

III

When fire at Mus-Mus tail, he think is cool breeze

--Jamaican Proverb

As Morlon and his father followed the narrow, meandering roads through the small district of White Shop, into another unmapped district called Bad Rock, the undisturbed, lush, green, rolling hills of Coffee Piece and the Mocho Mountains emitted a serene energy.

Morlon could always depend on the hills to make him feel calm. He forgot about Mr. Samfo's annoying foolishness and his father's unreasonable wishes, and he embraced the serenity. His father didn't say anything to him about what happened in Mr. Samfo's supermarket. John seemed to be somewhere else in his own mind. But whenever he was ready, he would involve Morlon in his thoughts.

"Your uncles Kenneth and Lance and your Aunt Cynthia are staying at the house tonight. All of them come 'cause they think all of them together can frighten me."

John didn't expect Morlon to have anything to say about all of this, but he needed to get some things out in the open.

"They want all of us to go over the papers that their lawyer draw up about the new division of the shares in the farm."

Morlon continued to look out the window at the mountains as his father talked.

"I don't know why they don't just accept the will Ronald left. The will decided what should happen after he died. So now that Ronald is dead, things should not change, end of story. I don't know if they think I'm going to just give them what they want. Or

they think their lawyer can frighten me—I have a lawyer too,” John said while pointing to himself.

“I wanted you to come home this weekend so that they can see you before they go back to the States. I want them to know I’m not alone in this—that you are with me through this.”

“So when they see me, what happens after that? They just going to get scared and decide to stop fighting for more shares?” Morlon asked, still looking out the window.

“I want them to see how mature and sensible you are,” John said. “I don’t know why you don’t use your feistiness and energy for learning about the farm, so you can help me to quiet them down, instead of always fighting me.”

“It’s my business how I use my energy.” Morlon rolled his eyes as he spoke to his father. “And I am not using my energy to run no orange farm. I know you hate Rasta, but I like where them coming from. Them disciplined and real—they accept themselves—they don’t want to change themselves for other people. Is not what America, England, Canada, or rich people say, it’s what they believe in them heart. And it’s not about separation of rich and poor—white and black—Rasta is about togetherness.”

Scowling, John angled his head to stare at his son. “Sometimes I don’t know if I should be happy or sad that you are my son.”

“I thought parents were supposed to accept their children no matter what,” Morlon offered.

“I accept what I think is right and what pleases me. You not pleasing me right not. You stop cut you hair, you have all kind of pictures in you room with Lion of Judah, Africa, and some Rastas that look like them come from the depths of slavery. And this—

this poetry thing,” John spat out. “What the backside you need to write ‘bout so much? How can you say you understand Rasta? What you think you have in common with them—maybe them hair style. Why you don’t comb your hair, bwoy?”

Morlon looked at his father and felt a searing sadness deep inside. It almost seemed as if his father would never truly understand him nor would he truly understand his father.

“You know you cold, Daddy,” Morlon retorted.

“I am cold? Me, who take care of you for sixteen years, give you everything you want— I am cold?”

“There are greater things than material things, Daddy. You and you brothers and sister at each other’s throats because of land—because of things. As far as I am concerned, all these material things come from the devil himself. That’s why Rastafari teach unity through love, understanding, and humility, not through wealth.”

“Stop chat foolishness, Morlon. As a matter of fact, don’t say anything at all because you obviously don’t see what you need to see.”

They had been driving past the orange farm for the past three miles, yet none of them noticed the very thing they were arguing about.

“You don’t understand where me and you uncles and you aunt coming from. You don’t get it. Make me use words you can understand—you don’t understand the livity of the farm. You just see oranges and wood. I see a community able to send them children to school, to become somebody, not just some ganja-smoking idlers or baby machines. I see more shops and small businesses cause people start to get into the mindset to work hard and better themselves. I see less stealing and violence ‘cause everybody has the

opportunity to get something for themselves. But most of all, I see you and you sister not having to ask anybody for anything, 'cause both of you taken care of. So it's not just about the orange trees, it's something way bigger than that."

As Morlon listened to his father, more negative thoughts invaded his mind. "So is a new- age colonization thing you a push?" Morlon lashed out.

"What?"

"Yeah. You want everybody to work on your farm. So if them get five cents, you get ten. That is real Babylon system, Daddy—very good."

"Is crazy you crazy, bwoy? What the backside you talking 'bout? Out of everything I said that was what you get? This Rasta business really turning you into a living duppy!"

John's anger was so blinding that he didn't see the man on the bicycle crossing the road. He missed the cyclist by a hair, but left him sprawled in the road, as he fell off the bicycle after losing control of it. They had to stop to make sure that the cyclist was unharmed and that everything was alright. As soon as this was confirmed, they continued on their journey in stiff silence. John broke the silence when they got to the gate leading into their yard.

"The point I was trying to make is your uncles and aunt don't see the farm the way I do; maybe that's why Ronald put me in the charge instead of them. They just see themselves and nobody else. I want you to see something bigger with the farm too. That's all."

"Well Daddy, you have your eyes and I have mine, and they're looking in different directions. So we definitely can't see eye to eye on anything. So just 'low it."

As John drove the black Nissan pick-up truck into the large front yard, Morlon could already feel the strain and stress of the weekend.

IV

John

If you cannot satisfy with what God give you, the Devil will make it up

--Jamaican Proverb

Even though we still didn't agree, I feel like this was the first real conversation me and Morlon have about this farm situation. The last time it was like we going to kill each other. Maybe it was because I told him something I've never said to anybody—not even Victoria—or maybe it was just because I wanted to believe it so much. I don't know. But these issues had to wait because I had to concentrate on making my brothers and sister understand what is what.

I made sure to park the pick-up truck under the big mango tree in the yard, a good distance away from the house because I wasn't ready for them to know I was here.

“Morlon, take the things inside, and go find your sister,” I told him.

“Awright,” he said.

“You can tell you family evening, if you get a chance.”

“Uh-hmm,” he said, and with that, he got out the van and walked towards the verandah, looking neither left nor right. I just needed to sit in the pick-up for a little bit, to gear up if there was going to be an onslaught.

Bwoy, this is a beautiful house though. Ronald did really have the eye for luxury and elegance when he bought this property. I wanted to paint the outside off-white in late December, early January because that was the same time I promised principal Campbell I would repaint the infant school. We could just do one big job. A “job of work” as Uncle

Cee would say.

“John, what are you doing out there?”

It was my sister Cynthia. I didn't even see when she walked over to the truck.

“We need to talk about some things now,” she continued.

“Talk about what, Cynthia?”

I came out of the pick-up truck, but still kept one leg inside.

“You can't even give me a chance to relax little bit,” I said to her.

“Jesus Christ, John! Why you make it sound like I want to murder you?” she asked.

I don't know why she even asked that question, as if all of them don't want to murder me. The gospel truth I believe was that none of my brothers or my sister deserved this farm. I grew up with them, played and lived with them, and I know they should not control something so essential for many people. They didn't have that true love for the land and the people. I believe Ronald could also see they didn't.

I remember the day Ronald sent for me from Galina in St. Mary. He told me he had something important to share with me. I was happy to go because it was a long time that I hadn't seen him, and I wanted to see the ol' lady too. That was right about the time Bevie just turned two, and Morlon was going to Galina Primary School.

Ronald told me that he bought the citrus farm from Mr. Newman and that he wanted me to manage it. He didn't want to stay here and manage it himself because he wanted to be with his family in England, plus he was a doctor there. Henry Amos also made an offer to Mr. Newman for the farm, but Mr. Newman skin and mind were white. He wasn't excited for a black man to own what his family worked so hard to upkeep, so

selling it to a half-white man was a little easier for him to stomach.

Anyway, I took my wife and two children and moved back home to Valley Green district to run the orange farm. In truth and in fact though, an immediate weight of responsibility came down on me right away. I knew the farm would take a lot of work, but I felt like the pressure was more than that. So for the first couple of months running the farm, I really wasn't happy, and I told Ronald.

It was the last time he visited the farm before he died. We sat on the verandah, drinking Red Stripe. When I told him how I felt, he looked on me like I was crazy and said, "You expect the farm to make you happy? But you don't easy, John. The farm isn't only about you." And what he said never left my heart.

We called the farm, "Stevenson's Citrus Grove," because it was a family business. All of us names were on the title: Ronald, then me, Kenneth, Cynthia, and Lance; same order of how we were born. Kenneth, Lance, and Beverly lived and worked in America, so they were absentee managers. They only come around when they wanted money and when they want to show-off their big orange farm to them American friends.

I just sink myself into the management of the farm because it was a good opportunity to make something fruitful for myself, my family, and the community. I don't know how to explain it, but every time I dig a hole to drop in an orange seed, it just make me feel proud.

Anyway, five years after I took over the farm, tragedy struck. Ronald drop dead in England from a heart attack one morning he was jogging. That same year was when all the crosses started. I still hate to remember that time.

V

Cow never know the use of his tail until he lose it

--Jamaican Proverb

The Christmas breeze rustled the leaves of the mango and naseberry trees in the backyard, disturbing the parakeets into a chorus of shrieking and flapping. The intoxicating scent of Victoria's signature fruit cake baking in the kitchen married with the zesty aroma of the fresh orange peels piled high on the back veranda floor announced John and his family's contentment. But the other Stevensons were there as well. Ronald was dead and buried for a week now, and everything was different, everything except the almighty oranges.

It was the height of the reaping season, and the oranges were succulent sweet. Three truckloads of oranges were being transported to the factory in Bogwalk, St. Catherine everyday for export. The grapefruits didn't bear as much this year, so they wouldn't be reaped until about late January, early February.

The majority of the oranges exported from Jamaica are Valencia oranges. The oranges sold on the local market to higglers and shopkeepers are ortaniques, tangerines, and navel oranges. The Stevenson's citrus farm supplied thirty percent of the exported Valencia oranges, all the while keeping the local market happily supplied. The orange trees just never seemed to stop bearing fruit. The people in the district say that Mr. Newman's family paid one of the biggest Obeah men in the parish to give long life and prosperity to the orange trees and that was why they were always in bloom and yielding fruit.

The Stevensons took pride in owning the farm now that they had it, and they wouldn't lose it. That was the reason Cynthia, Kenneth, and Lance were spitting bullets when they heard what Ronald said in his will.

"How the raas Ronald left you his shares of the farm?" Kenneth shouted, his face as red as the sorrel growing in the front of the yard.

"Eh-eh. After you can't run this place by yourself," Lance agreed, leaning against a column on the verandah, all the while sucking on his Craven-A cigarette.

"What you want from me, eh?" John asked. "To just say I don't want the farm and hand to you so the three a you can mash it up? Eh? That's what all of you want?"

Throughout the tirade, John was sitting on a verandah chair in the corner, watching them fume and spit because he now owned eighty percent of the hundred shares in Stevenson's Citrus Grove, and now had all the authority to make decisions and judgments as he saw fit. He never once told Ronald he wanted to have majority shares in the farm. On the contrary, he told Ronald that being the manager worked better for him because it was easier for him to be involved in the day-to-day activities on the farm; owning majority shares would make him deal with more official business than he would like. Of course, either way, John ended up doing everything because he was the only one who was always there.

"Jesus Christ, John! How the hell you going to run this place by yourself?" Cynthia asked. "Tell me how?"

"But I don't understand you people," John said, getting up and walking towards Kenneth. "Who's been running this place when the three of you gallivanting all over the place—at the farm expense at that?"

“Ronald give all of us the farm, John,” Cynthia said. “We have a right to it as much as you.”

“Yes, I agree, all us have a right to it. But all your right is just for yourselves, and to hell with everything else. Between the three of you people spend three million dollars of the farm money in only two years, and for what? Lance, some low-life, no good country gal you frighten over in a St. Elizabeth. Kenneth, you go to an expensive hotel every month and stay and spen’ like you is a tourist. And you, miss almighty Cynthia, you shop with the farm money like you’re Princess Diana.”

John finally took a breath then started again.

“All three of you have your family living in America, and all of you have jobs, but you people so blasted craven and bad mind that you think nobody but you should have anything? Eh? This farm is not for any one person; all of us have a part in it. If we work together and build it even more, imagine the influence we can have, and the good we can do. Ronald never have to put any of we name on the will, but him do it because him expect all of us to band together.”

“But a wha’ this man?” Lance asked smirking. “How the raas we supposed to band together when Ronald obviously put you over we, and that can’t work.”

“Oh, so what you saying,” John asked, stepping back to get all of them in his line of vision. “Is better Ronald put all of you over me because all of you better than me?”

Just then, Jukel, the ranger for the farm, walked through the gate. Seeing Jukel at three in the afternoon could only mean that the trucks were loaded and on their way; it was more money in the bank—only this time, the money was in John’s control. This reality seemed to make the heated siblings pause a little in reflection.

John realized what was the cause of his brothers' and sister's anger. And seeing as how he held the handle and his siblings the blade, he dropped some kerosene-infused thoughts on their glowing embers of anger.

“But all in all, I just have two things to tell the three of you. One, if you cannot satisfy with what God give you, the devil will make it up, and two—cow never know the use of him tail till him lose it.”

VI

John

What gone bad a morning, can't come good in the evening

--Jamaican Proverb

Just remembering that day when we had the argument about who should be in charge of the farm made me feel so ashamed of my family. They didn't care about anybody but themselves. I didn't want Morlon to be like them at all. That was why I wanted him to work with me on the farm, so he can be a part of something bigger than himself.

I came out of the pick-up and walked towards the side of the house to go roun' the back. I could hear Kenneth and Lance still continuing their foolishness.

Victoria announced loudly over their argument that dinner was ready, and everybody must go around the dining table. Bevie didn't like curry goat, so more than likely Victoria gave her something else to eat before. Whenever I came home, I always tried to spend some time with her before I do anything else. But I supposed she was in her room doing her homework, so I didn't trouble her.

I sat at the head of the table, facing the back verandah. Lance and Kenneth were on my right side, Victoria and Cynthia my left. Morlon was at the other end of the table, opposite me.

Morlon sat in the chair like him about to fall asleep. By this time his hair had grown out of all form of respectableness, so he look like some street bwoy. I knew it was all up to me to make him look good in front of them.

“Morlon going to do his CXC’s next May,” I said. “He’s taking seven subjects. You can believe that?”

“That’s good, Morlon,” Cynthia commented. “What subjects are you going to take.”

“The sciences,” Morlon answered, like he was slow.

“Morlon tell them what specific subjects you doing,” I said, feeling my blood rising inch by inch inside me.

“All the science subjects—and some business subjects.”

“So what about maths and English?” Cynthia asked.

Morlon was using his fork to move the food around his plate.

“I took those in fourth form,” he said.

“His teachers want him to take the SAT exams as well,” Victoria added and whispered to Morlon to stop playing with his food and eat it.

It was the first time Victoria opened her mouth since we sat down to eat.

“They think he’ll do well enough to get a scholarship,” she continued.

But hold on—what the hell she talking ‘bout scholarship? Scholarship to go where?

“How you going to earn your money, when you leave school, Morlon?”

Morlon finally gave up on the food and put his fork down. “Why, you have a job for me?” Morlon asked Lance.

“No man. Just want to know what your plans are,” Lance pressed.

“I don’t have any plans. Living in peace and harmony is I-an-I plan.”

“What the hell you talking ‘bout, Morlon?” I shouted.

“Daddy, relax you’self. I talking to Uncle Lance.”

I swear on my mother’s grave I was seeing every color of the rainbow right then. So instead of blasting him, I said, “What Morlon saying now is neither here nor there. He’s not sure what he wants to do, but he knows what he must do.”

“What are you talking about, John?” Cynthia asked me. “What *must* he do?”

“He has a responsibility to his family; he cannot only think about himself.”

“So you telling the yout’ how to live his life then, John?” Kenneth asked.

“Listen, this is no argument. Morlon is my oldest child and my only son; that is enough reason for him to listen to me.”

“Suppose Morlon don’t want to have anything to do with the farm, you going to force him to become a farmer?”

“Lance, what I do with my family is none of you damn, backside business! You hear me?” I felt like I could reach over and collar Morlon, Lance, and Kenneth.

“John, let’s just finish our dinner, please,” Victoria pleaded.

The sadness in her voice made me feel bad. Sometimes I wasn’t sure if Victoria understood me as a man though. She never out-rightly disagreed with me about anything, but she never out-rightly supported me either. But for one thing, she was always there through everything; I guess that was more than most women would give.

“Alright, Victoria,” I quietly said.

VII

Morlon

Silent river run deep

--Jamaican Proverb

I wasted my lovely Saturday to look over some legal papers that Uncle Kenneth, Uncle Lance, and Aunt Cynthia's lawyer drafted about dividing the shares evenly between the four of them but letting Daddy still manage the farm. But Daddy's neck was as stiff as a mule. He told the three of them that the way they were behaving 'bout the farm make John Crow look like the Prime Minister. It fine that Daddy was holding on to what was his, but I just didn't want him to drag me into it. He was convinced that I could do something to help him; I really don't know how or why.

Daddy needed to understand that I cannot run this farm; it didn't fit into any of my plans at all. I take my writing seriously, and I-an-I cannot be burdened down with a responsibility I didn't even ask for.

All in all though, the place was beautiful. As far as the eye could see was the Stevensons' orange trees. The next day, the sun was glistening on the fresh dew on the trees—man, it was a really nice Sunday morning. The orange trees carpeted the land like morass at the bottom of the Rio Minho, and every tree was covered with white flower blossoms. Even the black birds perching on the power lines looked fresh and contented.

I just wanted to take in all the wonders of the day, so I didn't want to drive with Mommy and Bevie to the Baptist church that morning. Daddy went to his church, Union United Church of God, from early this morning. I wanted to walk, just to clear my head a

little bit, you know. And it was Mommy who was forcing me to go to her church anyway. I preferred to just chill back at home and write a few lines of meditation since I had to go back to Munro the next day. Mommy claimed that I need some salvation in my soul— or something like that.

I heard some whistling coming up the road, and my first guess was that it was Jukel. This man look like he didn't age at all. Daddy said he was about forty-five, and that was about three years ago. Ganja definitely do some people good.

“You make it out of the Babylonian Inquisition alive?” Jukel joked.

“Barely, I-ya!” I said. “I-an-I had to i-dure the foolishness for a while.”

“Heh, Babylon is strong. Don't be in the lion's den and expect not to be a part of the feast.”

I just never understood how a man who only went to primary school could reason this way? It was like being a Rasta give a man some different level of intelligence.

“So where you going, the house of the children of vipers?” Jukel asked

“That make sense,” I nodded and said. “Any place that have Mr. Thomas as a Deacon must be a place of wrongness, after he get little fourteen year old Anika pregnant. And then swear on the Bible that the baby boy wasn't his.”

“Young Stevenson, before we reason some more, let we trod over there and hol' a seat,” Jukel said. He pointed to a broad grapefruit tree that was beside the zinc shed Daddy used to store oranges and farm equipment.

“I never know you did hear 'bout that too,” he said, took out a cloth pouch of ganja from his shirt pocket, and started to share some on a rizzla paper.

Jukel made the spliff and lit it up. The scent of the ganja slapped all of my senses

into alert mode. My eyes automatically followed the trail of the smoke that pushed off the spliff with every puff Jukel made.

“You want a draw?” He asked.

I nodded. “How you mean man!” I gently took the spliff and brought it to my lips for a nice, long draw.

“Easy, young you’. Don’t burn it out so quick,” Jukel said.

He took the spliff from me and said, “To more serious matters—you still feeling the Rasta vibrations?”

I smiled and nodded. “I been taking in a book called. . . ahm . . . oh yeah—*Rastafari: Roots and Ideology* by a you’ name Barry Chevannes. It open up my eyes to some decent meditations.”

“Yes, I-yah!” Jukel responded. “Well, I never meditate on the words of that Rasta, but I know that when you serious ‘bout penetrating the Babylonian concepts in your mind, the I must have an open acknowledgment of the Rastafari identity.”

He lifted his left arm to the sky and shouted, “A Rasta is never ashamed of himself. If a Rasta be ashamed, him is a disgrace to the order of his Imperial Majesty, Haile Selassi-I.”

“I know. I not ashamed. The road is just not easy to tread, you see me, I-yah.”

“Conscious talk I-yah, but check it—you see the I cannot let him father keep him from the higher calling of Rasta and speaking and writing of the higher levels of Rasta. I respect your father plenty; him is a good man. But I believe every man have to choose him own path.”

I believed what Jukel saying was true. I shouldn’t be forced into anything, even if

it seemed good for me, for the simply reason that it's not what I want.

“And seriously though, Jukel, I really don't want sink myself deeper into Babylon by taking over this farm business with Daddy. Knowing my cultural identity and fighting the principalities and powers in society through my writing is the way I want to live.”

“True, I-yah,” Jukel announced and passed the spliff to me. “And because of that livity, don't starch the cloth of confusion that you are wearing in your mind over this farm business; it will only stiffen you overstanding of bigger things.”

That made sense. If I kept stressing over the farm and what Daddy wanted me to do, the real important things in my life were going to mess up. Is like I wouldn't be true to myself at all.

“I-an-I a level with you young yout. Babylon system never fair, so the I have to bring the righteousness there for himself,” Jukel continued. “If the I feel true to the I-an-I ways and know it's the right way in him heart, then embrace it and live it. Jah-Jah will see the I through.”

“Well I don't know if God too interested in my life, but I believe that if something is right for me, then I must follow it. Forget everybody and be true to myself,” I responded.

“Anyway, Jukel, I going touch road. I don't think Baptist Church going see me today. I just going up the house and hol' a sleep,” I said and took the last of the spliff from Jukel for a final draw.

“Ailalu grow where its mind take— so all when them a force you I-ya, it don't make no sense,” Jukel concluded.

I left Jukel and walked up the road to go back to the house. I decided I would just

go to sleep for the rest of the day. I knew Mommy would come home and make up pure noise in my head bout not coming to church, but cho!

Daddy wasn't coming home 'til late, 'cause after church him going to the Central Clarendon Farmer's meeting in Frankfield, about ten miles away. My bones felt like water; the weed was really strong man. I finally got to the house, and the only thing I could manage to process was finding somewhere to drop and sleep.

VIII

Morlon

What sweet Nanny-goat, going to run him belly

--Jamaican Proverb

Jah know star—the next day my head felt like Mr. Samfo sat on it all night last night. That was some serious weed Jukel gave me the day before—I didn't even know what time it was when I woke up. "Seven o'clock and the sun is shining, that means . . . it's Monday morning!" I said to myself.

I felt like Jukel put something in that weed because no weed ever knock me out for so many hours. Mommy and Daddy must have tried to wake me up. I didn't remember anything for sure though, even when I woke up my mind was still fuzzy.

Somebody was knocking on my room door, and I prayed to Jah it wasn't Mommy 'cause I could not deal with the talking at that point.

"Yeah—who is it?" I asked, my voice sounding rougher than a grater.

"Morlon? You wake up?" Bevie asked me.

"Bevie, how you don't gone to school yet?"

"Daddy going to take me now. You alright?" She asked, as she walked into my room and stood in the space between my bed and the door.

Maybe even Bevie was trying to wake me up. I hope I never said anything bad for her to hear.

"Yeah man, I'm alright."

"Uncle Kenneth and Uncle Lance outside," she said, as if she expected me to be

interested in the news. That annoyed me a little, but she looked so pretty and cute in her uniform I didn't have it in me to rough her up at all. Anytime I looked at her, I couldn't help but think what a sweet little sister she was. The red tunic and white blouse, the red ribbons in her hair, the brown socks and shoes, even the pink My Little Pony watch on her right hand made her look like one of those people you see in the picture frames you buy in the pharmacy. She just looked little and perfect. She sat at the bottom of the bed, crossed her legs at the ankles, and brushed out the wrinkles in her tunic like a proper little girl.

"Daddy not making them come in the house. He told them that he doesn't want their crosses to rub off on us." Bevie grew up in this family-farm confusion, and I don't think she ever really understood that these kind of things are bad.

"Don't think about what Daddy say Bevie. Where is Mommy?"

I wanted to throw off the sheet and sit up in bed, but I wasn't sure of the position of my business under there.

"She in the kitchen. Is she tell me to wake you up," she responded.

"Come sit on the bed with me. What you eat for breakfast this morning?"

"Fry egg and plantain. Morlon why you couldn't wake up yesterday? Mommy was trying to wake you up for dinner when we come from church, and you never come to church either."

"I know. I was tired."

"You sick?"

"No Bevie, I'm not sick," I answered and pinched her tiny nose. She wrinkled it and slapped my hand away as she always did.

“I finished reading *Shane*, Morlon.”

“Wha’, already?” I asked. “So you ready for me to throw some questions on you?”

Whenever I came home, I always left a book for her to read. The last book was *Shane*; before that it was *Charlotte’s Web*. I always encouraged her to read. And after each book, I always quizzed her because I knew it would help her comprehension skills. Even though the books I gave her not really enlightening her to any real-life consciousness, it was best she dealt with the lower order skills before the higher order ones.

“Um-hmm. And I read one of your poems too,” Bevie said. “I found it in the dictionary—I guess you forgot it in there. It was something ‘bout parents and children—or something like that.”

She got off the bed and straightened her tunic again.

“What you think about it?” I asked her.

She tilted her head in a thinking pose. “It was interesting, but some of the words I didn’t know them.”

“Bevie, come it’s time to go,” Daddy called out.

“Coming, Daddy! You going back to Munro today, Morlon?”

“Uh-hmm. Remember to behave yourself at school today,” I said.

“Yes,” she answered with the whitest smile on her pretty face.

I turned one of my cheeks to her. She pecked me on the cheek, then skipped out of the room.

I guess it was time to get up and face the talking. I got out of bed and tried to

meditate on some words to give me some vibes in the morning. “Jah be with me and guide me through the problems I must go through because you are my only protector.”

“Yeah ask your Jah to help you, ‘cause I’m going to deal royally with you later,” Daddy said, not even bothering to come into the room. His angry presence was strong enough for me to feel it at the doorway.

“You think I never smell the ganja on you last night,” he began from my door. “I not even going to ask you where you get it from— but just know before you go back to Munro, you and I going have an agreement. . . my agreement.” Then he just turned and left.

But this is foolishness! I didn’t know how else I could show Daddy that I serious ‘bout not dealing with this farm thing. It was like a stick broke in the man ears when it come to what I say. But Bevie said Uncle Kenneth and Uncle Lance are here. I could probably ask them to help me to get out of this thing. Daddy going to screw ‘bout it, but that was the whole point. I need to do something that he would see that I was serious.

* * *

“Uncle Kenneth, Haile Bless! Whad up?” I said as I stepped into the yard and walked towards him as he leaned against his rented Toyota Corolla. Uncle Kenneth looked like him just step out a GQ magazine in him navy blue silk shirt, khaki Dockers pants, navy blue suede shoes, and Armani sun glasses. Slicker than him you can’t find.

“Morlon, I never know you were here. Why you not in school?” Uncle Kenneth asked, leaning on his rental car parked under the mango tree. Uncle Lance was saying something to Daddy, but Daddy cut him short and get into the pick-up and drive off.

Bevie waved good-bye to me and next thing I knew Uncle Lance stood same place Daddy left him and immediately started talking frantically on his cell phone.

“Yes I-yah, I am here, but I go back to school later today.” I said and leaned on the car beside him.

“So, what’s new? Your Daddy still hounding you ‘bout the farm?”

“You done know that it’s the same. It driving me crazy I-yah.”

Uncle Kenneth smiled and shook his head. “Your father is in a world of his own.”

“A farmer like you father can only think of what will benefit his harvest. His mind cannot wrap around anything outside of that,” Uncle Kenneth said.

“I like a certain thing—writing—you know, expressing my feelings ‘bout life. Sometimes I don’t even think Daddy has feelings, or him make damn sure nobody can find them.”

Uncle Kenneth folded his arms over his chest. “Well, in all honesty, you father isn’t a very ‘cultured’ man. I guess that’s why Ronald chose him to deal with the farm because him have this rough, kinda caveman thing ‘bout him. I mean, come on, when you can’t reason with a man, that tell you everything ‘bout the man.”

“You mean you can’t reason with him because he only hear what him want to hear and see what him want to see,” I added.

“Yeah, and your father want to turn you into that.”

Uncle Kenneth made sense still. Daddy is the hardest man to talk to and the hardest man to see the value of something if it not going to produce a sweet orange.

“So Uncle, because we know this ‘bout Daddy and you know how I feel ‘bout writing, maybe we can help each other with this farm business.”

He turned his head to look at me with a curious expression on his face. “What you mean?”

“I mean maybe you and even Uncle Lance can help me really convince Daddy that I don’t want to have nothing to do with the farm.”

He turned his whole body to me, completely interested. “What you have in mind?”

“Maybe I can sign something for you that say I am incapable of managing a farm of this size, or something like that. I don’t know,” I said off-handedly.

“Funny you should mention that though, Morlon, because that’s kinda the reason we come to talk to your father. We thinking that it’s not nice that John is forcing you to do something you don’t want to do. And as you say, you have more interests towards Rasta and writing, not to be some coarse single-minded farmer.”

I nodded. “True.”

“So now, if you sign—what you would call it now—something like a waiver of responsibility, then John cannot force you to run the farm or put you as a prospective manager.”

“Oh, zeen! So that waiver permanent or what?”

“That depends on you, on if you want it to be permanent.”

I didn’t know if I should really trust Uncle Kenneth with this, but it would get Daddy off my back with this whole farm thing.

“So where are the papers? I would want to look them over. And I want to tell Daddy before I sign anything. I just want him to seriously understand the measures him making me take just not to take on the responsibility of this farm.”

Uncle Lance finally finished his phone conversation and walked over to us.

“What’s up, Morlon?” he said with a nod in my direction. He reached into the top pocket of his black shirt for his box of Craven-A.

“Morlon and I were just talking about helping John understand how serious he is about not dealing with the farm. I told him that at his age he shouldn’t be thinking about things like that.”

Then the two of them started to talk ‘bout when they were my age what they used to do. How they used to be in Kingston every weekend at some party or another. And they had enough girls to fill-up National Stadium—yeah right—and they were just having so much fun. They didn’t really get what I want to deal with, but I guess they not really supposed to. Only I could feel what I need to feel still: the natural mystic of the Rastafari that I use as the energy for my writing ‘cause Rasta is life.

* * *

“Who the backside you people think you are? How the hell you come into my house and brainwash my son?”

Daddy’s face was redder than Bevie’s uniform. I stood on the other side of the verandah, away from Daddy, ‘cause him look like him going to strike like Hurricane Gilbert.

Uncle Kenneth and Lance hung around ‘til Daddy came back home at about eleven. As soon as Daddy stepped out of the pick-up, they pounced on him with what we talked about earlier. And of course, Daddy was madder than hell when he heard what we

discussed.

“John, Morlon came to me with the argument. Obviously he really doesn’t want to have anything to do with the farm. Why continue to force the boy?” Uncle Kenneth said.

“Because he has a responsibility to his family—to me!”

No, I was wrong—Hurricane Gilbert didn’t have nothing on Daddy at that point.

“John, calm down.” Uncle Lance stood in front of Daddy with his outstretched arms as a kinda barrier between them. “Morlon wants this. We care enough about him to do this for him.”

“You what? You care about him? But it don’t even backside matter ‘cause Morlon cannot sign anything with you. He is fifteen years old and needs my consent to even wipe his back side,” Daddy shouted.

“John, think about it. Morlon came to us for help. The boy doesn’t want what you want. He wants to do what makes him happy,” Uncle Lance said, still standing in front of Daddy.

“Morlon, you believe going to these parasites would be enough to jerk you responsibility bwoy? Huh? Tell me? You think I was just going to allow you to become some dutty, dread Rasta who want to write about him feelings? Well you going to learn ambition if I have to fist it down your throat!”

I saw the big fist pointing in my direction. I didn’t think I could manage that down my throat. “Daddy . . .”

“You don’t say another word—not another backside word! You don’t even understand what you doing. You don’t realize that you uncler them using you to get what

they want. They don't give a shit 'bout you bwoy. You think them care if you hungry or not or if you have clothes on you back? You think them going to help you if they see you on the street begging, which is what going to happen to you if you don't stop this foolishness."

"But you not taking me seriously, Daddy. You don't take anything I tell you seriously, unless it have to do with what you want."

Daddy squinted and narrowed his eyes like he was in a karate movie, and just pushed Uncle Lance out of the way to walk to me. His face was still red, but now his gorilla veins made him look like he was about to shed his exoskeleton to reveal him true form. Jah know him angry. He was breathing short, short. I thought he was going to hit me, but instead he grabbed me by my shoulders and shook me hard—twice.

"What I want is what's good for you," he said. It was strange though how his eyes looked so calm as he said that.

"You think managing this farm is for me? You think is need I need your help to run it? I am doing it for your future. I'm making your life a little easier, so you don't have to worry 'bout getting a job and keeping it like what most of your friends going to do. I'm helping you to become a better man, one who is doing something to benefit other people, not just himself."

His fingers felt like they were digging holes in my shoulders, but I made sure not to show on my face that I was feeling any pain. Rasta have to i-dure all forms of persecution.

"But you don't even ask me what I want, Daddy. How you know it's not something to benefit other people?" I asked.

“Bwoy, you fifteen, you don’t know what you want. That’s why you have a father. My job is to see what you can’t.”

“John, we just wanted to help Morlon . . .” Uncle Kenneth started to say.

“Go-way, you viperous scum! Get the hell out of my house. Get out!” Daddy turned around and yelled. “Trying to use my own son against me, well I’m not going to supply you with anymore ammunition.”

IX

Victoria

You play fool to catch wise

Jamaican Proverb

Only prayer could have helped us in that time of trouble. Morlon went back to Munro angrier than the devil himself. John didn't give the boy a break at all about this farm business. And then Lance and Kenneth came, thinking they could scheme their way to John. It was like they didn't know their own brother.

Morlon was too young to be worried about things like family responsibility. He was really too young to be making any final decisions about his life, whether relating to the farm or not. He was still a child, but, Lord Jesus, I don't know how we managed.

I spent most of the day cleaning out everybody's closet, gathering the clothes I knew they no longer wanted. I decided to drive down to the church to drop them off for the 'shut-in' drive, but changed my mind after Bevie came from school and told me she threw up in class today.

Sister Woodhouse and Sister Powell were having fasting this evening at Sister Thomas' house. John didn't want any foundation Baptist members in his house. He said they were the Roman soldiers who crucified Christ. Jesus, the way that man thought was beyond me.

But I really needed to pray and fast over this business with Morlon, his father and the rest of the Stevensons, and I needed the brethren to help me. I understood what John was saying about respecting and keeping Ronald's dying wish, but even at his own son's

expense?

I honestly didn't want John to give his brothers and sister any more shares. They needed to be satisfied with what Ronald left for them. On the other hand, I didn't like the animosity and the war between them. It wasn't right for family to behave that way. And I didn't believe it was fair what John was pushing Morlon to do. The best solution I guess was to sell the whole crosses farm, and each brother and sister could pocket his or her money. But John would never do that because he believed he had some kind of responsibility to the district. I just couldn't understand that.

So look at it now— Morlon not talking to his father; he was not even talking to me. This weekend was his weekend to come home, but he said he was going to stay with some friend in Ocho Rios instead. Lord Jesus! And I didn't want him to go to Ocho Rios at all. That place has never held any good memories for me. Thank God Mama moved to Mandeville after Mr. Francois—her long-time boss—gave her the villa there to manage, so I don't have any occasion to go there at all.

“Victoria!” John yelled.

I didn't expect him to come home this early.

He told me this morning that his meeting with the lawyer was at four, but it was only three o'clock now. He didn't even fully explain to me why he went to see the lawyer. He only mentioned something about securing the shares in our name. I guess *our* means him and Morlon, especially since what happened weekend gone. John should have sometimes seriously listened to Morlon though. The child had things he wanted to do; John had to take those things into consideration. But on the other hand, Morlon was just a child, and he needed his father's advice.

“I’m in the kitchen, John,” I yelled back.

“Oh, alright,” he said.

I could hear his loafers screeching as he walked towards the kitchen. He looked really nice when I saw him this morning, wearing a beige, short-sleeved polo shirt and a pair of black rayon pants. He combed his wavy black hair straight back, so his hair was a storm of curls at his neck. He didn’t shave his beard this morning either, so his stubble just looked so masculine, so strong.

“What’s happening, Vicky? What’s for dinner?” John asked me and leaned against the kitchen doorframe.

Lord Jesus, he was a handsome man. He filled out the entire doorframe—with no space to even pass him—with his broad, firm shoulders, and thin waist. When I stood next to him, he was a good foot over my five feet, five inch frame.

Even though being in the sun so much made his fair skin dark, that just seemed to make him look even more sexy. That was one of the first things that came to my mind when I saw John the first time over fifteen years ago in Ocho Rios.

“Escovich fish and gungo rice and peas,” I told him. “I know you like that a lot.”

I could smell his Brut aftershave mingled with the smell of the fry fish; my rough farmer man.

“Daddy, Daddy, what you take home for me?” Bevie shouted, as she skipped through the dining room to her father, her chubby legs barely separated from each other.

She was such a beautiful little girl, with a head full of luxurious hair. She got it from my mother. It was long all the way down to the back of her knees—black, thick, and curly. I wasn’t too sure who she looked like the most, my family or John’s family.

Everybody always said he looked like a Syrian, or one of those Arabic-looking people. Morlon had the same look as his little sister, the only difference was that Morlon had John's hazel eyes and Bevie had my naseberry-brown ones. If I knew anything about my husband it was that he loved his family very much, and he would do whatever was necessary for our well being.

"Come here, Your Highness," John said as he stooped down, and scooped Bevie up in his arms.

"Where's my kiss?" he asked

"I don't know, Daddy," Bevie said and giggled.

"Give me my kiss or I won't give you what I bring for you," he teased.

Bevie screeched and wrapped her plump arms around her father's neck, puckered her lips, and kissed him long and hard on the cheek.

"I hope is not junk food. She needs to eat proper food," I told both of them, but neither of them heard me.

"Daddy, where is it? And how come Morlon never come home this weekend?" Bevie asked.

John was looking at me as if he expected me to answer the question.

"I don't know, Bevie. Maybe he thinks his friends are more important than his family."

"John! Don't say those things to her," I scolded.

"But it's true, Victoria. The bwoy don't want to have anything to do with this family," John continued. "It is like he is ashamed of us."

"Bevie, go and finish your homework," I immediately told her. "I'll call you for

dinner soon.”

“But Daddy don’t give me my present yet,” Bevie whined.

“That’s true, so you ready to see what I bring for you?” John asked Bevie. I was officially out of the conversation now.

“Yes, Daddy!”

“Come, Your Highness, let’s go look in the pick-up.”

I was planning on asking him what happened at the lawyer’s office today, but “dinner is almost ready,” was all I said instead.

X

Sense that them have can barely take them out of fire

--Jamaican Proverb

“Hey, the weekend did mad, irie, everything in one,” Morlon exclaimed. “You know how to entertain people, trust me my yout’.”

“Nuff respect my yout! Yeah man the weekend did seriously wicked,” Enrique agreed.

The two were back at Munro College in the cool, misty hills of St. Elizabeth for another five weeks of learning until their Christmas break. Morlon had spent the past weekend frolicking, frisking, and fantasizing that the weekend would last for his entire life.

He went to hang out at Enrique’s house, his dorm roommate since the beginning of the term. Enrique had transferred from Campion College in Kingston after being expelled when he was accused of smoking marijuana on school premises and then sexually assaulting a girl from Ardenne High School at Campion’s annual pre-Christmas fete. Of course if it were any other student, he would never be given even a second look for admittance into the prestigious Munro College, but because his father was a millionaire hotelier, even the doors that were sealed by the power of the untouchable elites, opened like an awaiting harlot.

They became good friends after Enrique claimed to be neighbors with Mutabaruka. And Enrique would entertain Morlon with stories about the deep meditation sessions he would witness in Muta’s backyard, and that sometimes Muta would be outside, naked,

reciting his poems out loud after smoking too much weed. Morlon wasn't sure whether to believe Enrique's stories, until the day Enrique gave him meditation beads as a gift from Muta.

The solid, austere structure of the Munro gathering hall loomed before the boys as they headed to afternoon service. The hall was framed by towering willow pine trees and the Caribbean Sea stretched out along the horizon. It was the ideal scenery to extend the illusion of tranquility that the presence of the gathering hall evoked; this was the place where the rambunctious teenage boys were admonished for their past, present, and future transgressions. Morlon, Enrique, and two other boys lugged behind the marching crowd as they intended to catch seats at the extreme back of the hall. That way they were far from the accusatory eye of the headmaster and the condemning stare of the school chaplain.

"So did Rosie say anything about me?" Morlon asked, as they each side-stepped into the last bench in the back pew.

"My yout', ask her yourself," Enrique responded. "All I know is you do something to her that she like!"

"She seem like a decent dawta and was giving me good vibes. That's why I ask," Morlon said.

"Yeah, she cool, and she say she really rate you too," Enrique said and pumped fists with Morlon.

Morlon smiled cheekily and nodded. "She come off to me like she conscious, you know—level-headed and not too loose—pun intended."

While the boys snickered over Morlon's pun, they were commanded to stand and to

sing the hymn, “The Lord is My Shepherd.” Morlon and his friends stood up with the rest of the congregation, but he and Enrique sat down as soon as they were hidden by everyone else and continued their whispered conversation.

“Hey, the two Rasta yout did cool though. Them seem decent to hang with, you know.”

“Yeah man, them cool,” Enrique said.

“All of us can hang out again, especially sexy Rosie,” Morlon said.

“Cool. We can come chill out at your place in the country for a weekend,” Enrique said.

Morlon knew his parents, particularly his father would object to that idea without taking a breath, especially since they were having this whole farm-control issue. Maybe he would have to do something concerning the farm to get on his father’s good side. Maybe he could start acting as if he cared about something, anything with the farm, then his father would allow him to have his friends over for the weekend.

“I going work on that with my ol’ man ‘cause him not cool like your father,” Morlon added just before the hymn ended and the congregation sat down.

The boys couldn’t carry on their conversation during the prayer as the hall was eerily silent, only the chaplain’s booming voice echoing from pulpit to pew. After the self-deprecating sermon to the boys was over, they trudged out of the hall to go to their dorms.

Morlon and Enrique continued their conversation in their dorm room.

“We can plan to meet up at your place in Clarendon the weekend before Christmas holiday—me, Lion, and Ras-lee, a so the two rasta them name? I’ll get Rosie to bring two

of her friends with her,” Enrique said, finalizing their plans.

“Yeah you’, that is no problem,” Morlon said, with a subdued expression on his face, knowing he was uncertain of the reality of that happening.

* * *

“Morlon, Mr. McKenzie going to drop off the papers for the contract Friday evening—he said at about six in the evening. When I went to the lawyer the other day, I paid him a good amount of money to make you look like some kinda partner in the ownership of the shares. It not really suppose to happen, cause you under eighteen, but I’m treating you like a man—giving you the power to deal with things.”

Morlon rolled his eyes at his father’s speech that he must have heard a thousand times since he offered his services to his daddy.

John was very surprised when Morlon volunteered to do this. He and Victoria had to go to Miami that weekend for a wedding, and it was the only time Mr. McKenzie had to deal with the signing and the contract before he went abroad again for another six months. John felt quite pleased with Morlon’s gesture and took it as a sign that Morlon was starting to see things his way.

“Bwoy, keep your eyes steady in your head,” John snapped. “This is an important contract. It is sixty-five truckloads of orange per year Mr. McKenzie agree for. You know how much orange that is bwoy?”

Morlon nodded.

“How much?” John quizzed.

“Enough to have my birthday party at Hilton hotel with Barrington Levy

performing.”

John took two steps towards Morlon, until he was nose to nose with him, then spoke in a hushed but stern voice. “I am depending on you to do this. I never suggested that you deal with this contract, you did, because you claim that you now understand the seriousness of the farm and your place in it. Listen to me, if you going to mess up this as a way to prove even more that you don’t want to have anything to do with this farm, tell me now because this would be the last straw.”

Morlon stood in his parent’s bedroom, with his father’s face only inches away from his, and the only thing that resonated in his mind from all that his father said was “the last straw.” That means his father would leave him to live his life if he screwed up this contract. So for Morlon, there was only one thing left to do.

Morlon plastered a grin on his handsome face. “Daddy, relax, everything going to be cool.”

John took a deep breath before he spoke again. “Alright, just make sure.”

The plans Morlon made with Enrique seemed to be working out quite well. His parents would be flying out to Miami on Friday evening for a wedding Saturday morning, and they wouldn’t be back until Sunday afternoon. It was the perfect weekend to plan a party. Even though he didn’t tell his parents about his plans, he agreed to the contract signing so he would have a reason to stay at home for the weekend. If he didn’t, his Dad would have sent him and his sister to spend the weekend with their grandmother in Mandeville. But now, along with the responsibility of getting the contract signed, he was to take care of Bevie for the weekend; that was the only hiccup in his plans.

Morlon wasn’t too sure how he would get to fully entertain his friends, while keeping

his little sister out of their way. Maybe, he would ask the helper to stay over the night to watch Bevie for him. But then she would surely whisper to somebody, and somebody would whisper to somebody else until it reached his father's and mother's ears. So maybe that was not such a good idea.

Anyway, Morlon believed he could find a way around or through that issue. All he was excited about was the wicked weekend he was going to have. Enrique, Lion, Ras-lee, and Rosie and some of her friends should arrive at his house on Friday evening when his parents should be on the plane to Miami. Everything was perfect.

XI

Morlon

If you stop it up here so, it leak out over there so

--Jamaican Proverb

“My yout’, you never tell me a so your people did rich,” Enrique shouted out, as him, Lion, and Ras-lee stood on the verandah and surveyed the width of the Stevenson’s Orange Grove.

My face beamed with pride. “Daddy have it nice yes. He know how to make this place make money man.”

“Wait, where Rosie and her friends?” I asked.

“Oh, she had to go to Kingston to see her grandfather in the hospital, and none of her friends would come without her.”

“So wha’, no girls for the weekend?”

Enrique slowly smiled, cocked his head and then took something out of his knapsack. “I never go out empty handed,” he said and hand me a plastic bad of ganja. “Courtesy of Lion and Ras,” he added.

I grabbed the bag from Enrique. “Bombaats my yout! Where you get this entire weed?”

“Don’t think bout that i-drin,” Lion responded. “There is always sensimeena around. It is the herb Jah-Jah prescribe.”

“Yes I-yah! Jah—Rastafari!” Lion and Ras-lee chorused.

I nodded my head vigorously, getting into the vibe of the weekend, playfully

thumped Enrique in the arm, and all of us walked into the house.

XII

If the head of the stream is bad, then the bottom bad

--Jamaican Proverb

“I told you to find your passport and put it in the bag from last night. When I asked you this morning if you had it, you told me ‘yes’,” Victoria reprimanded John.

Victoria was standing by the passenger’s side of John’s pick-up truck, staring across at her husband disbelievingly. They were in the parking lot of the Norman Manley International airport in Kingston.

John was standing on the driver’s side, rummaging through his carry-on that was opened on the hood of the pick-up truck.

“This is why I told you ‘yes’ this morning. I can’t deal with your backside interrogation. You going on like you never forget anything in your life yet.”

Victoria cringed at that remark, as she knew it was John’s way of hinting at the past.

“This isn’t about me, John,” she sighed, looking at her wedding ring and twisting it on her finger.

“We missed our flight because you were too busy drilling Morlon about the importance of the contract that you forget the one thing you need to get on a plane.”

John stopped abruptly to glare at Victoria. “Getting that damn contract is fifty times more important than going to this wedding. I hardly even know the backside people we spend forty thousand on plane tickets for.”

“John, Ingrid is your first cousin! You grew up together. What you mean you

hardly know her?"

John hissed his teeth. "Lord, Victoria, you know what I mean."

"No, John, I never know what you mean," Victoria snapped. "It's not fine that you made us miss the flight. It's not fine that you are pushing Morlon into something he doesn't want to do. It's not fine, John."

Victoria walked around the front of the pick-up until she was face to face with her husband. "Why in God's name are you even looking through the bag as if you put the passport in there?"

John threw his things back into the bag. "Well, what gone bad a morning, can't come good a evening. Let's just go back home."

Victoria knew it would be like catching fish in the Dead Sea if she tried to convince John that they could get a later flight, as the front airline suggested. But John was obviously more excited about the contract being signed than going to his cousin's wedding, where he was asked to toast the bride. Anyway, she wasn't too happy about leaving Morlon and Bevie alone, but because Jukel said he would stay in the adjoining guest house, she knew he would look out for them. Plus it was only for a day and a half.

Victoria narrowed her gaze at John. "Did you purposely leave your passport, John?"

"Victoria, don't bother with the foolishness," John commanded, as he got into the pick-up truck.

"No, I have to ask, because it wasn't hard for you to decide to just go home after everything we had to do to go away this weekend."

"Victoria, when something doesn't work out, is a sign that something else

suppose to happen. You say you are a Christian—you should believe it's God's will for this to happen.”

Victoria got into the car beside her husband, thinking that maybe he was right—that maybe God was directing their path.

* * *

Morlon and his friends were lounging in the backyard, behind an alcove of orange and grapefruit trees, enjoying the cool breeze. They had just finished eating a dinner of minced curry chunks with butter beans, callallo rice, and carrot and beet juice. Enrique wasn't exactly a fan of I-tal food, but he had to admit that Sophia—the Stevenson's housekeeper—did more than just polish the floors very well. Bevie was in the living room watching Disney channel, courtesy of the huge satellite dish that was sealed in the concrete in the backyard. Since her mommy wasn't around to order her to do her homework and eat her dinner, when she came from school, she threw her knapsack on the dining table, took two bags of Cheese Trix from the pantry, and plumped down in the sofa to watch “Mickey Mouse Club.”

Morlon came in the house to check on her and to make sure she actually ate some real food and took a bath. Even though he didn't want to be the incarnation of his parents with Bevie, he made sure she did her math and reading homework. He would not allow his little sister to be nonchalant about her studies. But after all of this he gave her as much freedom to do what she wanted, as long as she wasn't hurting herself. Bevie also tried to stay out of the guys' way.

Later that evening when Mr. McKenzie drove his blue BMW into the yard, Bevie was still in the living room watching television and trying to decide on which snack she would have next. Morlon and the guys were in the backyard entertaining themselves.

“Hello! Hello, anybody home?” Mr. McKenzie asked loudly, approaching the verandah..

Bevie stood in the centre of the double doors and stared at the stumpy, bald man walking towards her. “Who are you?” she asked.

He smiled at her. “My name is Mr. McKenzie I’m supposed to be meeting with your brother now. Is he home?” Mr. McKenzie sat on one of the walls that framed the entrance of the verandah.

Bevie offered him a slight smile and nodded, recognizing the name. “He’s around the back.”

“Can you get him for me?”

Bevie had a doubtful expression on her face.

“Is something wrong? Is he doing something else right now?”

Bevie nodded.

At that moment Sophia came out of the kitchen and asked if she could help Mr. McKenzie with anything. He relayed the situation to her and she went to the back to get Morlon.

Morlon came to the verandah with his entourage of friends following him. “Hello sir, may I help you?”

“Ah yes, Morlon?”

“Yes? Can I help you?” Morlon asked with an expression of complete confusion

on his face.

“Your father informed me that you would be signing our contract?”

Morlon appeared shocked by this question. “What? I don’t know what you talking about.”

“Well, your father confirmed with me that he would be unavailable but you will be the one to deal with the contract.”

Morlon continued to feign a blank, empty-headed expression.

“Listen son, this is a two-million dollar contract. I’m not here to play games with you. Do you want us to do this or not?”

“Two-million dollars?” Morlon asked. “So you can pass me a one million now, just to smooth down the deal from early?”

Mr. McKenzie cursed. “This is rubbish!”

“There is no need to get disrespectful man; control you self,” Enrique admonished Mr. McKenzie.

Mr. McKenzie’s scowl deepened. “Who the hell are you?”

Enrique cleared his throat and said, “Pablo Escobar,” with a snicker.

Mr. McKenzie had heard enough. He was not going to get anywhere with these boys. He wasted his time driving thirty miles from Mandeville to this place, only to be greeted with ridicule. John Stevenson was definitely not someone to do business with, he thought.

XIII

Take sleep mark death

--Jamaican Proverb

The only signs of life in the smoky, charcoal night were the occasional streaming headlights from passing cars, the peenie wallies' lights blinking, the crickets singing, and the party on the Stevenson hill getting louder.

Barrington Levy's hit "Under Mi Sensi" was blasting from the stereo in the living room. Lion and Enrique were in the yard, smoking their own plastic bag of ganja; Morlon and Ras-lee were on the verandah doing the same; Bevie was in her room watching a video cassette of her favorite cartoon, Snow White.

Ras-lee inspected the spliff between his fingers, then slowly lifted it to his lips and took a deep, long drag. "So Papa Stevenson really give the I responsibility in this farm business Rasta—signing million-dollar contract and everything," Ras-lee drawled.

Morlon didn't know why, but the severity of the situation penetrated his euphoric high. "Yeah. But you already see I dealt with that, Rasta. Daddy going murder me, and then throw the body in a hole," he slurred.

Ras-lee released a huff of air before he took another drag from his spliff. "Rasta never have it easy. Even though it's the Rasta man's destiny to control the land, him still have to fight the oppressors for it—by any means necessary."

"I believe in Rasta, and I believe in the power of Rasta. I just wish my father could see it, but him not even giving it a chance."

Ras-lee stared at Morlon through red, half-closed eyes. His locks were piled on

top of his head and hidden under a red, green, and gold tam. He and Lion could almost pass as brothers, with the same smooth, dark brown skin— full, disheveled beard, and intelligent, brown eyes. They looked like they were in their mid-twenties. It was as if their ages went into the length of their locks instead of their faces.

“It’s hard for some people to see the light because they are so deep in the dark. The I should not be afraid to bring the light to the people— that is the calling of the Rastafari: be the light, I-yah.”

“Yow, Morlon, how your mosquitoes down here so violent?” Enrique said as he and Lion walked over to Morlon and Ras-lee on the verandah. He had a small glass of Appleton and Coke in one hand, and a spliff in the other.

Morlon exploded in laughter, putting the serious conversation aside, and finally feeling the effects of two glasses of Appleton and Coke and about three joints of marijuana.

“You don’t feel nothing yet,” Morlon said. “What time now—seven o’clock— wait till ‘bout eleven or twelve then you will know what violence is. Is like the darker the night, the hungrier they get.”

“Well I don’t want them to feed on me,” Enrique said, drained the remainder of his drink and slumped down in a chair next to Morlon.

“Yow, my yout, that did wicked what we do to the man earlier!” Enrique exclaimed.

Morlon laughed until he spilt some of the liquid in his freshly poured glass of Appleton and Coke. “Yeah! But yow, Daddy going to kill me.”

“Hey, you did see him face when you tell him that you can’t write?” Enrique

asked.

Morlon doubled over with laughter in his chair. “Yeah, he look on me like I was a duppy. When you tell him that Daddy ask you to sign instead of me ‘cause you can’t write, and him ask you, who you be and you say—you say— Pablo Escobar!”

Enrique was on the floor, face down, pounding his fists into the tile and laughing.

“Hey, if he did have a gun, I know he would shoot us. But all him say was”— Morlon deepened his voice, mocking Mr. McKenzie, “this is foolishness. What kind of a dolly house business Mr. Stevenson running here. And he wants me to put my money in this?”

“Is the fastest I ever see a man drive off. It was like the you’ from *Friday the 13th* a run after him,” Enrique continued to joke.

“Hey, Morlon, look like a car a coming up here,” Lion said.

Enrique guffawed and playfully punched Morlon in the arm. “Yow, maybe, the man coming back to teach us a lesson ‘bout manners.”

The gate was still open from Mr. McKenzie’s angry departure. The headlights sliced the darkness as the vehicle veered off the main road, went through the gates, and drove in the front yard. The verandah lights competed with the headlights, making it hard for the guys to clearly see the vehicle that drove into the yard. The car stopped in the yard with the headlights still glaring; the car doors creaked opened, then slammed shut.

“Morlon, I don’t know what you going to tell me, but just try and tell me fast,” John said, stomping through the headlights, heading towards the verandah. Victoria hurriedly followed him

“Morlon, what is going on here—who are these people?” Victoria asked. “Morlon, I

said who are these people?”

Morlon sat transfixed in his chair, blankly staring at his parents now on the verandah glaring at him and his guests. He blinked once, waiting for his parents to disappear, but they were still there. He blinked again, but they were still there. He finally gave up on blinking them away when he realized they were not going anywhere.

“Mommy, what you and Daddy doing here? You supposed to be in Miami,” Morlon asked stupidly.

“Morlon, I’m going to ask you one more time— who are these people?” His parents, now on the verandah, stood before him and his friends like Mama and Papa Bear walking in on intruders in their home.

“People I know, Mommy. They not strangers.”

Victoria’s face went white as her features hardened. She marched towards Ras-lee, her eyes glued to the spot beside his feet.

“What the hell is this?” She hissed as she lifted the now half bag of ganja to have a better view of her find.

Everyone mumbled a reply to her question.

Suddenly, her eyes widened as if a thought just struck her. “Where’s Bevie? Where’s your sister?” She dropped the half bag of ganja at her feet and rushed into the house yelling out her daughter’s name.

Ras-lee and Lion got up and fumbled around, not really sure of what to do next. Enrique sat with his head hung, mumbling something to himself as if he were trying to straighten out some discrepancy with himself. Morlon remained in his chair, staring at the headlights of his father’s pick-up, waiting for the real onslaught to come.

John finally emerged from the darkness behind the headlights, calmly walked up to

the verandah, looked at Ras-lee, Lion, and Enrique and said, “The three of you, pack up you things and get the backside out of my house, now!” Then he mechanically turned his head to his son and said flatly, “Go to your room.” John turned and headed back to his pick up.

The guys all stood up, and Enrique blurted out, “Don’t worry sir, we leaving now—we leaving now.”

John’s look was harsh and deadly, when he turned his head and said, “Hurry up.”

“Hey I-yah, your ol’man serious, eh?” Ras-lee commented as he and the others hurriedly gathered their belongings to escape the Stevenson estate. “You need some strong Rasta vibrations to break your chains my friend,” Ras-lee continued.

Morlon had no words. He simply got up and walked into the house, looking neither left nor right.

“Yow, make we touch road now I-yah, before father Stevenson bury we on him orange farm,” Lion said. “Rique, wha’pen to you I-yah, how you look like you lost so? The weed still in a you my yout’?”

“Me nice man. I just a think ‘bout how Morlon going to work him way through this. I feel like a our fault.”

“Well, think bout it when we not here.” Lion threw his chin in John’s direction.

“Father Stevenson look like he will kill you to, so make we move out fast.”

As soon as the guys got in their car and sped through the gate, John drove his pick-up behind the Volvo, and went into the house. He went to Bevie’s room, but stood at the door, as the light in the passage streamed into the room. He could see that she was fast asleep with her doll beside her head on the pillow. He went inside her room, and sat on her bed, watching her as she slept. His heart, that a few minutes earlier was filled with

anger and resentment, now was taken over by a kind of sad but thankful love. He loved his children and he wanted nothing but the best for them.

Out of the blue, a burdensome exhaustion came over John, that all he wanted to do was go to bed and not think about anything. He wasn't sure what he was going to do about Morlon. He felt so laden, as if someone had just slammed him against the floor, that he just gently pushed Bevie across the bed laid down beside her, closed his eyes and went to sleep.

XIV

Morlon

If sick don't care, what doctor must do

--Jamaican Proverb

It was Grand Market, the day before Christmas Day, and Spaldings town was in a frenzy with excited shoppers looking to spend money they claim to never have during the year. All the stores and shops were decorated with Christmas lights of every color, style, and variation. Posters and cut-out boards of Santa Claus, snow, reindeers, and Christmas trees were inside all the buildings. It never matter that it never snow in Jamaica; it was all about the happy feeling that people got when they saw these things.

The sweet and spicy smoke of jerk chicken and pork floated in the air, beckoning customers to indulge in the charred, fiery taste. There was enough food on and off the streets to feed every person there for the other 364 days of the year. The streets were lined with higglers and their wares, and the width of the street was reduced by several inches, making it impossible to walk without bumping into someone. Among the cacophony of sounds, tooting horns, fire crackers blasting, angry shouts, excited laughter, and excessive chatter, I could hear the shouts of higglers as they tried to get the attention of various passers-by.

“Uuundah pants! Uuundah pants!”

“‘Anbag! ‘Anbag! Get you hot ‘anbag. Guchi, Baybie Phat. ‘Anbag ‘Anbag.”

“Dollie. Dollie baby. Batman. Superman. Police car!”

It was like an orchestral performance of background sounds that accompanied the various colorful scenes of the day.

Me, Bevie, and Mommy walked through the crowd of buyers and sellers, trying to find our own Christmas treasures. Bevie clutched Mommy's hand in order to not be carried away in the flood of arms and legs. I dragged behind, willing myself to feel the Christmas spirit, even though, according to the Rastafari, the holiday was a lie. It was just that I wasn't feeling the usual automatic Christmas merriment. Everything was how I wanted it right now because Daddy hadn't said anything to me 'bout the farm since the night he and Mommy came home and found me and Enrique them with the ganja. He never even said anything after he found out I never signed the papers with Mr. McKenzie. It was as if he completely dismissed me, even from his anger and his malice.

But still, I couldn't shake the uneasiness I felt when I thought about the look on Daddy's face when he told me whatever I wanted to do with my life was my business—that he was done fighting me. There was this sadness, this tiredness in his eyes, like he was a dying man giving his final thought to his son. I just couldn't get past that empty look in his eyes. Not even the tapes with the new Mutabaruka poems that Enrique sent to me could make me feel better.

"Morlon, what were you planning on getting your father for Christmas?" Mommy asked as we went into a Juicy Beef Patties for something to eat.

"Maybe he doesn't want anything from me, Mommy," I responded. The idea felt truer in my head than how it sounded.

"Morlon, why would you say that?"

"It's like Daddy always a pressure me into something, you know. Primary school, he pushed me to play cricket, even though I cry to him that I didn't want to. Munro, he forced me into football. Now, it's the farm thing. He only gives me all attention when he

wants me to do something. The farm is the first thing I ever fight Daddy on. Now that he sees I seriously don't want to deal with it, it's like him just drop me."

Mommy shook her head, and her swirling brown eyes were piercing as she glared at me. "That's how you really feel?"

"Yes, Mommy, that's how I really feel." We were making our way to the line that was more like a sprinkling of people than an actual line.

"Morlon, you notice that most things you say your father push you into, you eventually like to do them. You are the captain of the football team now at Munro. In primary school, you were the fastest bowler there," Mommy said with a kinda self-righteous look on her face. "Your father always looking out for your best interest, even if his methods are displeasing."

"I know, Mommy, but that's not the point. I'm old enough now that Daddy shouldn't force me into anything, especially something as huge as dealing with the farm."

"Mommy, can we get the patty now?" Bevie interrupted. "I want two patties."

"Bevie, wait. Morlon, your father hasn't stopped caring about you. He just stopped pushing you into the farm. Wasn't that what you wanted?"

"Yes, but—it just doesn't feel right," I said, and nervously tried to run my hand through my hair that hadn't seen a comb for the past eight weeks.

"By the way, we are going to deal with the bird's nest on top of your head before January first, come hell or high water," Mommy said. I knew her heart wasn't in the threat though. She said the same thing three weeks ago.

I was looking up at the menu board, not even trying to read what was up there. I wanted to ask Mommy a question that was gnawing on my mind for a while now, but I just didn't know how to get it out.

"Mommy, let we get the patty, please no, please," Bevie continued to whine.

"Okay, Bevie, but you're only getting one patty. If you want, you can get a coco bread too," she said, then led us from the middle of the restaurant to join the line to the cashier.

"Mommy?"

"Uhm-hmm?" she answered.

"Did Daddy ever fix the business with Mr. McKenzie?" I asked, feeling a little poke of regret for the trouble I caused.

"Yes, your father straightened the situation out with Mr. McKenzie, and your father signed the contract with him."

"How?" I asked.

"Well, he called up Mr. McKenzie and explained to him that you and your friends were just acting your ages and being silly, and that he shouldn't allow your foolishness to make him throw away millions of dollars—Bevie, stop biting your nails. How many times I tell you to stop doing that!" she hissed out at Bevie, and gently slapped away Bevie's finger from her mouth.

"Anyway," she continued, "Mr. McKenzie wanted the contract as much as your father, so it didn't take much convincing to get him to decide to sign the contract again. But this time your father went to Mr. McKenzie's office to get it done."

By this time, three people were in front of us in the line, and many more were behind us. All the tables and counters were filled with hungry Grand Market shoppers fighting to cool the steaming hot beef patties in their mouths— sometimes even blowing on them before they took a bite.

“Mommy, I’m hungry.”

“Bevie, can’t you wait? Wait!” Mommy said sternly.

“I’m glad it worked out for Daddy,” I added.

“What you mean, *for Daddy?*” Mommy asked, sounding a little confused. “You still don’t get what your father doing, do you, Morlon?”

We were now next in line to order. “We going to talk about this some more, okay?” she added, then turned to the cashier.

I sighed in frustration. “Anything you say, Mommy.”

After we had our patties, we continued to shop in Spaldings. We left Spaldings to go to the next big town, Christiana, and then from there to an even bigger town, Mandeville.

We arrived home at about seven in the evening. Daddy was still on the farm, loading the trucks for the last batch of oranges to go to Bogwalk for the day. Usually, he would make Jukel deal with loading the oranges, but for the past couple of days, he had been the one who dealt with these minor issues. This was the first Grand Market that Daddy never shopped with us. I realized all these things, and they seemed to be the root of some of the negative energy that was blocking my merriment. I wanted some time away from my family, so I asked Mommy if I could take the car and drive roun’ a bit just to try to get myself in the Christmas mood. She said it was fine, but I needed to be home

before twelve. I didn't want to drive down the road, because I knew I would meet up with Daddy. So I decided to go back to Spaldings, as Grand Market during the night was a whole different scene from Grand Market during the day.

Spaldings was like a nest of ants moving together trying to gather as much food as possible before the rain came. In this case, the rain was Christmas Day, the day when all the stores would be closed and there would be a more somber, meditative mood to the day. I parked the car a little distance out of the town because the people traffic was so thick that it would take hours just to drive through the town, much less to find parking.

As I bulldozed my way through the crowd, I stopped and talked to a few people I knew. I even went as far as to have a Vitalizer roots drink in a corner bar with some of the guys who worked on the farm. I asked them how they not working tonight because I know Daddy was down at the shed loading oranges now.

“We don't schedule to work at this time. Some extra fruits on the tree, so boss Stevenson say that anybody who want the money can pick the orange and load it on the truck, and them going to get the money for those oranges,” one of the men named Choppers explained. I could see how he got his name. He had big teeth with a rich tobacco and Guinness stained look to them.

“But Daddy down there with them now,” I said.

“Yeah man, the boss man in the thing, you know,” another fellow named Roy responded. He looked like he was my age or the most a year older than me. “All o' we respect him like that. Him know that these loads a really what most people depending on—you see me?”

“So Daddy never schedule to load oranges now?” I asked just to be clear.

“No man, him a do this for the workers. Plenty respect to boss Stevenson,”

Choppers confirmed and raised his bottle of Guinness in salute to Daddy.

I knew Daddy was into helping the community, but honestly, I never realized how much. On Grand Market night, instead of enjoying himself with his family and friends, Daddy was on the farm, in the middle of grass lice, ticks, and mosquitoes, loading oranges that he was not getting a dime from— only the pickers and loaders were getting the money. This was something I knew I had to see for myself.

XV

Bevie

Every cock has his soon-a-morning

--Jamaican Proverb

“Jukel, tell Ezra that he must try and load as many of the ortaniques on the truck as possible, ‘cause those pay the most money,” Daddy shouted out over the rumble of the three truck engines.

Daddy looked like the other workers, dressed in an old blue jeans pants, pushed into his black water boots. His shirt stuck onto his chest, and his back was soaked wet with sweat like Pastor Brown’s shirt when he preached on Youth Sunday. They set up some light bulbs through the tree limbs, and powered them up from the generator in the shed.

“Mr. Stevenson, Bigga say that he need to get the truck back to Sinclair’s yard before twelve because him have a load of gravel to pick up by four o’ clock Christmas morning,” Jukel told Daddy, with a burnt-out spliff in the corner of his mouth.

“Tell Bigga he must shut him mouth and stop lying. He knows the only reason he wants to leave early is because he wants to go spend time with heavy Madge. Everybody know his Grand Market routine already.”

“Oh, that irie, Mr. Stevenson, cause I already tell Bigga that,” Jukel said and the guys started to laugh. “Plus, we all know that Sinclair make his Christmas money because you give him the job to carry the oranges to the factory.”

“Yeah, Boss, you a help feed all of we right now,” a man in the top of an orange tree said.

“Hi, Daddy,” I shouted from Mommy’s Volvo. Morlon had parked a little way from where they were loading the trucks. He came back home and said he was going to check Daddy on the farm. Even though it was late, I asked him to take me too because I hadn’t seen Daddy all day, and I missed him.

“Bevie, what you doing here at this time?” Daddy asked. He walked towards the car, and Morlon got out and walked ‘round to meet him halfway.

“I wanted to come see you, and Bevie wanted to see you too,” Morlon told Daddy.

“Is something wrong at the house?”

“No, just wanted to check you, see what you doing down here at this time,” Morlon said.

“Well, I still have some work to finish up here, so . . .”

“But you not supposed to be doing this now. Your scheduled loads gone to the factory already.” Morlon’s hands were in his pocket the whole time he talking to Daddy.

“How you know so much ‘bout the farm? I thought you never business ‘bout any of this?” Daddy asked him.

“Is Christmas Eve, Daddy,” Morlon said and walked a little closer to Daddy.

“You supposed to be home with us, like you do every Christmas.”

“You not a little boy anymore, Morlon, so these things shouldn’t matter to you. You have you friends—that not enough for you?”

“Daddy, that’s not the point. Why you here at this time anyway?”

“You see James over there,” Daddy pointed to a man sitting on a truck bed, taking the crates of oranges and emptying them in the truck. “His mother in Spaldings hospital—just do surgery on her knee, and the money he make tonight going to help pay the hospital bill.”

Daddy pointed to a little woman who looked like she hadn’t bathed in a long time. “You see Mary over there— she has ten grandchildren and all of them live with her. The money she make supposed to help feed them for the whole Christmas holiday, plus help them to get started with school in January.”

I could only see the side of Morlon’s face, but even from that view it reminded me of the time his puppy, Rex died, and he found out that he accidentally gave the dog spoil milk. I remember him cry the whole weekend.

“Butcha baby mother just have another baby, and him don’t have not even a nappy to give the baby; this is the money for that too,” Daddy said.

“How you know so much ‘bout these people?” Morlon asked.

“These people? . . . The farm is nothing without—*these people*—and *these people* are nothing without the farm,” Daddy said. “You think your uncles or your aunt would care about any of these things? No, as far as they are concerned, *these people* are nobody. I have a responsibility to this farm because I have a responsibility to these people.”

Morlon nodded his head, agreeing with Daddy.

“I wanted you to carry on this thing with me, because it bigger than you, it bigger than me. But then after the last incident with you and you friends, I realized how different you were from me. When I was your age, I was already making cricket ball with box,

plastic, and elastic and selling them for one cent each. That's the mind I have, but I guess that's not you."

"I'm glad you say that to me, Daddy. I don't have the passion for the farm like you, but I understand now where you coming from."

"Well, understanding is a big step for us I think. Whenever you say I force you into anything, it is because my intentions are good, and I can see how the thing can benefit you in the long run. One thing you have to understand son, life is never just about you."

"Let's start over at this point Daddy, where we finally seeing the differences in each other, and not hating them so much."

Daddy put his hand around Morlon's shoulder and said, "We can try that—we have to start somewhere after all."