

September 23, 2011

Friday - 10 pm

I need to tell you my story before I die. What I am about to tell you, is nothing new. You have heard it all before from so many other voices. Still there is this great need in me to tell you my side of the story to have your undivided attention as I divulge my deepest, darkest secrets to you.

To be honest, truthful in spite of the consequences, often times it is the hardest thing to do. In fact to be completely honest with oneself and the world takes great strength and bareness that I am not sure I possess. Yet here I am, in front of the computer desk writing to you. As I sit here in my bedroom, writing this epistle, I am flooded with thoughts as to whether this is the right thing to do.

Will it change anything – telling you the truth? Will you believe me or be able to handle what I am about to say to you? After all, I have tried to tell you my story before in so many ways, through so many voices. Will you listen now?



The sudden whooshing sound of the wind made her put down the pen and glanced around askance.

*He is on his way here!* The female voice behind her said excitedly.

She frowned, went to unlock the front door, reheated the meal that was on the stove then returned to the computer desk. In an instant, angry, hated heat surrounded her as the whooshing sound of the wind became louder in her ear. She immediately gripped the seat of the chair and began to count to ten as

sweat poured down her face. The angry heat increased followed by a faint wave of sadness. He was at the door! Fear filled her mind with doubt and pain.

She wanted to run.

There was nowhere to run.

She gripped her chest as dark invisible arrows of hate hit her repeatedly.

A feeling of dizziness washed over her.

*Why is he here?*

She wondered but didn't ask those that knew the answer. She heard the knob of the front door turned, felt the gush of fresh air flow through her, felt the cool breeze fanned all around her, watched as the hair stood upright on her arm and shivered.

When she sensed it standing at her right hand, she sighed in relief.

For now, it was over.

She waited until she heard his fork scraping the plate then she picked up the pen and continued writing.

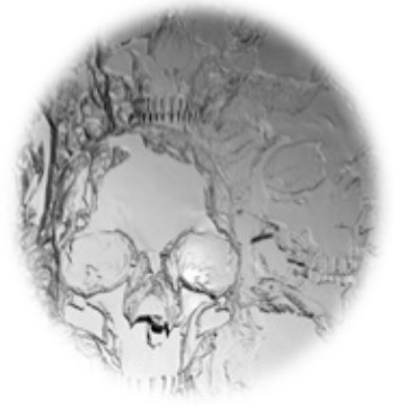
*For so many years, I have remained silent, kept these secrets buried deep within, under the misguided belief that this is how I protect those that I love.*

*Now, I realize, that remaining silent, burying the evidence, hiding the carcass from plain view has only open the door for more evil to occur and has caused great damage to the very ones I was trying to protect.*

*I now know that these secrets must not stay hidden they should be revealed.*

*I hope that in telling you the truth, I will lay to rest these bodies I have tried to bury. These bodies that refuse to stay dead and buried but is continually being dug up and resurrected.*

Here I am, forced to exhume and examine the skeletons once again, but this time I hope that by taking this journey with you, I will not only examine but will put these bones into deeper grounds and finally lay them to rest. In the process I hope to also understand - why?



“Night” He called out from her bedroom.

“Night” She answered from her little hiding place at the computer desk in her brother’s room.

“Should I go?” He asked.

The bed gave its usual squeak as he sat down and waited for her answer.

“No, you can stay.” She replied, afraid to say anything more than those few words.

“Ok.” He said and began to get ready for bed.

Where do I begin, how do I say this and what should I tell you? I was told that the best way to tell a story is to write from the heart – do not worry about what is said but just let the words flow – the story will tell itself. But since of late, words aren’t coming easy to me.

In speech, I fumble for the right words to bring my message across and often times it is the wrong thing that is said and You know once something is already said it is hard to erase what has been already said. So I hope that by writing this, I will be able to tell you what I feel and at any time, if it does not come out right, I can erase and rewrite again until what I need to say get said.

While, for the moment, I am willing, able, determined and unafraid to tell you the truth; I find that I am a bit reluctant to tell you their story. I do not want to hurt anyone in this process of confessions, revelations and purification. It is for this very reason why I remained silent for so long. But, as you know, I do not exist in this world alone, although I am a single, independent entity, my life is entwined with yours and theirs because as you know, we share the same space and oftentimes interact with each other, so it cannot be helped, for me to tell you my story – I must tell you part of theirs. The parts that relate to me of course.

I should tell you this story from the beginning, but I am not sure exactly where the beginning begins and I am not at the end as yet. So instead, I will start in the middle where I first saw you.

It was summer 1992, the last day of school to be exact. I was standing at the bus stop waiting for a bus to take me home. You were leaning nonchalantly against the wall out at Gracey's supermarket in Falmouth, across the road directly in front of my view, a lone figure standing out and away from the crowd. You wore a black baseball cap, white T-shirt, stone wash jeans and white sneakers. The cap hid most of your face and the beard that you sported covered the rest. Someone beside me asked me for a pen and when I looked up, you were walking towards me. I looked at you, expecting you to know me as I knew you. Besides, I was sure that you had been checking me out from across the road. I waited, you looked straight at me and through me as though I wasn't there. My sixteen-year-old heart fell. Your stare had been so cold and aloof. Immediately, I felt as though I had bumped into a brick wall. The pen that was being handed back to me fell to the ground; I quickly stoop to

retrieve it and hid my face in shame. The blaring honk of the bus horn brought me to my feet. I was carried along with the crowd rushing to the bus doors before they were even opened. And before I knew it, I was inside the bus, seated, staring out the window, looking at the back of this man that didn't seem to notice that I existed.



“Where is your computer?”

Tristan looked over at Alex seated at her computer desk, about to write. He frowned as she quickly closed the notepad and looked up at him, surprised.

“What?” Alexandria pulled out the desk drawer and threw the notepad in.

“Where is the computer?” Tristan repeated.

*What is she hiding now?* He wondered.

“They came in di house again.”

“You didn’t lock up,” Tristan stated firmly.

“You should report it to the police.” He added.

Alexandria didn’t see the reason to. So far, whenever she had called the police for help, they had never shown up.

“Alex report it.” Tristan spoke sternly.

The look on her face told him that she wouldn’t. Tristan didn’t want an argument so in a conciliatory tone he said,

“I’m sorry that they took the computer.”

She nodded and came to sit beside him.

He pulled her closer as he slumped down unto the bed and sighed.

It felt good having her in his arms.

“Dave, I didn’t know the door wasn’t locked.” She explained. “*Dave,*” - a shortened version of his last name Davis. It was her pet name for him. *Why did*

*it feel so good to hear her call him that?* He could always tell when and how mad she was at him in which name she chose to use.

Right now, she wasn't mad.

She was explaining how the thief got in – that they or he must have come in from the door leading to her brother's room.

His phone rang.

Tristan stiffened and prayed it was not her.

Alex slipped out of his embrace and stopped talking.

He ignored the call and inquired instead,

“What else did they take?”

“Who is dat?” She asked.

He got up, went for the phone in his pants pocket and looked at the missed call as she watched him suspiciously. He made sure to look her straight in the eye so she would believe him and said,

“It is my friend Clay.” he lied easily.

Her heart sank as she watched him - felt him.

*He was lying!*

She wondered if he knew that at that very moment; her mind was linked with his.

Right at that moment, she was hearing his thoughts clearly, feeling his emotions, reading his actions, and even knowing the mind of the caller. That woman who just called. And so many other things that she could not even begin to explain.

Suddenly they weren't alone anymore.

There were other presence in the room.

*Flighty, ferocious, angry, fearful, fretful, sneaky* fluttering about.

She was being attacked!

Alexandria felt as though she was under attack!

Bombarded with negative energy and heat.

How could she explain that to him she wondered, there were no physical evidence to support her claim, just her senses working overtime.

She stretched out her hand for the phone as she said,

“Let me see.”

“No!” He said angrily, grabbed his pants and began to get dressed.

It wasn't difficult for Tristan Davis to get angry. The anger came over him in an instant. Tristan embraced it and felt safe within its clutches. He wore it like an old familiar cloak and shield. Feeling empowered and justified, he attacked,

“Fuck, I shouldn't have come!” he shouted angrily.

Alexandria winced, holding her chest as though he had hit her there.

“Why ask me a question if you naa guh believe me? FUCK!” he pulled on his shirt.

“It's obvious you lying, if you weren't you would've given me the phone long time.” *or if you had deleted the stuff on your phone, you would have given it to me, Alexandria thought, you have done that to me before.*

*Hell, maybe he's telling the truth.*

*She had deleted Mark's messages, and she wasn't really doing anything wrong with Mark.*

*Besides, all the stuff that happened to her when the phone just rang, well those things can't be trusted and probably just a figment of her imagination,* Alexandria reminded herself as she tried to convince herself that she was wrong in her thinking.

But his next words and actions made Alexandria changed her mind.

“Alex! I'm not giving you my phone mek you search it up like you do all di time!” His voice was loud enough to tear off the roof.

“Mi tell yuh why mi did search di phone the one time and it-” Her voice was just as loud.

“Fuck every time me come here yuh a-” Tristan continued.

“...because of what was happening to me! Why I-” Alexandria bellowed. Neither was waiting for the other to finish speaking.

“Yuh a go on and on about what happen to yuh like ah my fault,”

Tristan had immediately interrupted, seeming agitated and uncomfortable as though he couldn't stand another minute of hearing her speak.

“Figet the past!” He shouted.

But she couldn't.

It wasn't the past for her it was her present.

“Why I looked in d-” Alexandria tried to finish her statement.

“Fuck! Mi tired a dis!” Tristan interrupted.

“Yuh always mek mi feel like shit!”

“When you when a have yuh man dem a call yuh, yuh nevah care how me feel.” He finished buckling his belt, angrily jabbed his foot into his shoe as he continued his accusations.

“Yuh have dem a flaunt in a mi face.”

“They weren’t my man!” Alexandria yelled in frustration. *Why couldn’t she keep her cool with this man?*

She did it so well with others, Alexandria wondered.

How many times did she have to tell him the truth.

*There had been only one man and... there is something wrong with me!*

As though on cue Tristan said,

“You nuh see you a go crazy, mi naa go crazy wid you!”

“TRISTAN!” Alexandria shouted.

She was in his face pointing.

*What was she doing pointing her finger in his face?*

She was a girl, shorter than he was, weaker than he.

He could easily take her.

*What the hell is she doing?*

Suddenly, the rage began to take over.

He became afraid that any moment he would hurt her.

He wanted to.

Tristan was out the door, slamming it shut, locking her in.

He began walking towards the road, tried to calm himself but the anger held its grip, it would not subside. When had he become such an asshole? He wondered. *I am an asshole.* With those words screaming loudly in his head, he brushed the tears from his eyes and walked furiously to the bus stop. Men do not cry, he asserted as he waited for the bus.

Alexandria did not bother wiping the tears from her eyes. She let them run down her face. She hadn't gotten control of this thing yet. It was still taking hold of her. And it was bent on getting her killed. She gulped for air then buried her head in the pillow, curled up in a ball and began to cry hysterically. Now, she could not stop the tears even if she wanted to. They oozed out of her like a forceful, uncontrollable flood rushing through a small village washing away everything in sight. She felt so tired, so drained, so exhausted.

Tristan was slowly convincing her.

When had she gotten so susceptible to other people's opinions – to their feelings - Tristan and Dre's opinions that is? And when had she begun to care what other people think of her?

*Oh, but she wanted him to believe her.*

*Why?* She was not sure.

It was getting harder to remember all the stuff that had happened over the past five or six years.

The memories were fading.

*Maybe it was all in her head...she has oftentimes felt as though she must be going crazy, that these things are just not real.*

How does one convince someone else that “*these things*” are real and are happening to them when they themselves aren't even convinced that “*these things*” are really happening? She asked herself.

I am going crazy!

*Dear God, I do act crazy so many times since of late or maybe all of my life,* Alex conceded.

“Why di RARSECLAAT uno nuh listen to me!”

“Mi seh ah nuh dat mi when say” Rosalind Thompson enunciated loudly.

“Monica! Mi a big rarse wooman,”

The profanity came out again.

Rarse she was trying hard not to curse and she was doing so well with her promise not to use those words until now.

But who could keep calm with these people?

*Dem nuh listen!*

“Monica, mi a big woman, fifty years ole why mi need fi lie bout dat.”

Rosalind Thompson threw off her work shoes, transferred the phone to her neck and began to peel a ripe banana. She listened and sometimes nodded to Monica as Monica explained. The phone beeped. Rosalind checked who was calling and heaved a sigh of relief. It was her daughter.

“Monica me have anaddah call me wee call yuh back.”

“Hello”

“Mom, you busy...can we talk?”

Rosalind knew immediately that the “talk” she and her child was about to have would most definitely be about Tristan.

“Alex, a yuh an Tristan ah argue again?” Rosalind asked gently.

“He’s becoming more and more like Dre` Mom” Alexandria complained.

Rosalind wished her daughter would revert to the woman she once was. The Alex, Rosalind use to know and be proud of, the daughter who would not be calling her to complain about a man!

“Yuh know uno nuh act like seh uno nuh deh”

“Dat need to change!”

“Or uno gone back together again?”

Rosalind Thompson was trying hard to be gentle with her eldest daughter.

While she expected and was used to this kind of behavior from the others, Rosalind had still not gotten use to her daughter behaving insecure, fretful and suspicious and the many other weird behaviors she was now exhibiting.

She was not used to her daughter acting this way over a man, over anything for that matter.

It broke her heart every time she heard the sadness, uncertainty and pain in her child's voice.

Where was the confident, self-assured child she had brought up that faced any and everything in her life with courage, boldness, fierceness and a determination that sometimes bordered on stubbornness?

*This isn't Alex, something is wrong.*

The two of them use to be so good together, but then that was years ago.

Tristan was not the same anymore neither was Alex.

"Mom, you believe me when I tell you that something weird has been happening to me for these past years, right?" Alexandria asked meekly.

Rosalind nodded her head.

Although Rosalind Thompson was not the type of woman who readily gave hugs. At that moment, she wished she was at her daughter's side, holding her.

"How much time, me a go tell yuh me believe you?" She chided.

"Alex, a me you a try convince or yuh self?"

Rosalind pulled the apron over her head and began peeling the potatoes for dinner as she continued talking.

"Why you don't just look at it as a gift, weddah it is a blessing or a curse."

After a whole week of packing peppers at the pepper factory in Hague and dealing with Enid, Rosalind was looking forward to a weekend of rest and solitude.

Solitude she would not be getting.

A couple of her family members from town had given her a surprise visit last night and was staying for the weekend. So, she was now having a few guests for the weekend. But she hoped she would still get some rest.

All Rosalind Thompson wanted to do was to sit and rest her feet. But she was hungry and her family needed to eat.

It was Saturday, she was not going to work tomorrow she will rest on Sunday.

She threw the potato peels in the bag for her compost heap. Turned the stove on and put the potatoes to boil.

"Why yuh don't just accept it?" Rosalind asked.

“Maybe then you wi can manage it.”

Alexandria didn't know how to explain that she was trying to manage it!

“You know, sorry I called... I'll talk to you laytah.”

Rosalind did not want her daughter to hang up. She immediately felt frustrated, angry and concern. She could hear the sadness in her daughter's voice.

Alex was always sad nowadays.

It was as though a constant darkness surrounded her child. That too was not the way she was before. Before, Alex was always positive and filled with light.

*I want my daughter back!* Rosalind silently screamed in frustration.

“Oh, they came in the house again.” Alexandria said.

Rosalind immediately dragged the kitchen stool to her and sat down.

“What!” She was now holding the phone to her ear with both hands.

“Ah last night it happen?” she asked.

“No. Last week.” Alex responded.

“Den something like that Alex you shoulda tell me from long time.”

Rosalind reprimanded.

When the robbery had taken place. Alexandria hadn't seen any reason to let her mother know, what purpose did it served, except to make her mother worry about her more, it wasn't like her mother could catch the culprit or bring back the stolen computer could she? Alexandria was telling Rosalind now because she knew Rosalind would want to know.

“Wha dem tek dis time?” Rosalind asked angrily.

Andre Adam Prescott a.k.a. Dre a.k.a. Steven Adams a.k.a. Alec Thompson sauntered into the pub and ordered a drink.

Andre Prescott, no Steven Adams; for that was the name he was going by for the moment, checked his watch and decided that he had time. He could deliver the stuff and be back at his house in no time.

*Couple g's made easily.*

Carlissa was on the graveyard shift.

She would be home by six am, seven the latest.

She wouldn't even know he had left the house.  
He was careful when he was leaving out.  
He was sure no one had seen him leave.  
He nodded in the direction of the man coming through the crowd towards him,  
took a sip of his drink and waited.  
"The truck is out back," the man said.  
"Here are the keys"  
Andre pocketed the keys.  
"Call me when it's done."  
With that said, the man walked back into the crowd.  
Steven Adams finished his drink and went out back to the truck.

September 25, 2011

Sunday - 11 am

Where am I in this account of my past that I am trying to re-count to you? Yes, I was at the part where I saw you for the first time. After that first encounter, I didn't see you again until I was twenty-one.

I remember that night so clearly. It was a week before the general election, December 1997. That day everyone seemed to be having a good time – carefree, having fun. That December, the energy and vibe in Falmouth was so high. Then, it had seemed as though most of them – the Falmouthians were happy and doing well, enjoying their lives. Of course, I am talking about those people I was around or let's say exposed to, I don't know how the others fared.

You remember? that was the year that the reggae boyz qualified for the world cup football – France 98. Jamaica – well Jamaicans everywhere on a whole was in high spirits because of that win. The "Reggae Boyz" –

Jamaica! was the first English speaking Caribbean nation to qualify for the World Cup soccer finals. And you already know that as a result, the boyz gained worldwide fame and millions of fans and was voted one of the most "colorful" football teams of the tournament which wasn't a surprise to us Jamaicans for we are use to our Jamaican people flaring on the international scene. Remember, Walter Boyd and the other "boyz" was always wearing red or yellow boots and creating antics on and off the field. I remember the excitement and patriotism then just like how we are with Usain Bolt and the rest of the track team now. Ok let me see, Portia Simpson (that was her name at the time – she wasn't married yet) was the sports minister then, the Brazilian Rene Simoes was the coach that had brought the "boyz" to the world cup. Theodore "Tapper" Whitmore wasn't the football coach yet, but he was one of the boyz. So they qualified for the world cup in November and P.J. Patterson the then "first real black man Jamaican Prime minister" for that's how he was dubbed, had declared a holiday in November for pure celebration. Think that was on November 17. Well, P.J. called election right after the boyz "win" to capitalize on our celebrating mood. There was no way P.J. wouldn't win the election that year. So Election Day was December 18 and the Christmas celebration had just kept on after P.J. – PNP (People's National Party) won the election of course.

Let me see, on the other side (the opposition), Bruce Golding had an argument with Seaga about leading the JLP (Jamaica Labour Party) which lead to Bruce and five others moving over to a relatively newly formed unknown political party of their own called the National Democratic Movement (NDM). Think Bruce wanted Seaga to step down, while Edward

Seaga thought he was still “young” enough and “strong” enough to stay as leader. Basically it was a power struggle between the two, Bruce thought that Seaga should step down because “him ole now” and give him Bruce a chance. Seaga didn’t give in, so Bruce walked away from the party and joined that party who was willing to make him President. They ran that year, but you know Jamaican politics has always been between the two major parties, red (PNP) and green (JLP). Blue (NDM) had no chance of winning, though they were the first/third choice if the other two didn’t show up/exist. You also know that eventually Bruce and Seaga “made up” and Bruce and most of his five merged once again with the JLP, deserting the NDM and eventually Bruce finally got his chance at running the country.

Well, while everyone else seemed to be having a good year that year mine wasn’t all that great. Come to think of it I have had many bad years. Anyway, two weeks before that day, I had packed up all my belongings and returned to my hometown, Falmouth. I wasn’t happy living in Kingston. With the exception of my cousin to keep me company, I had no one to turn to when things started going wrong. And things were going wrong. So I made the decision to return home to my family, with the hope that my life would work out better than it was doing thus far.



Alexandria Prescott stopped writing, leaned her head more to the right listened, frowned, glanced at the television on her left and then unconsciously nodded her head.

She searched for the remote control and flicked the tv on.

T.V.J.'s Michael Sharpe came on the screen.

Alexandria listened in surprise, hesitated, then grabbed her phone and dialled her mother's number.

"Mom, you hear the news yet?" she asked.

"What news?" Rosalind shouted over the other loud noises in the background.

"The Prime Minister resign"

Rosalind laughed as she said,

"Bruce always a resign. Alex yuh soon hear seh dem beg him fi stay an him change him mind and nuh resign."

"Oh, this isn't the first time?" Alex asked a little bit surprised.

"Mi wee call you back, the bar a get busy."

Alexandria stared at the television and wondered why it was important for her to see that news flash. She no longer had the energy needed to get up out of bed. She pulled the sheets over her head and went to sleep.

Tristan Davis heard the news in the cafeteria at lunch.

He was seated in the middle, between Monica and Pauline.

They were discussing the news over his head as he munched on the KFC chicken leg while scrolling through his messages in his phone.

He was not really paying attention to their chatter until Monica asked him if he had heard the news that the Prime Minister had resigned then he started really listening.

His first thought was to text Alex but decided that was unwise.

She often texted him.

Sometimes in one of her crazy stints, she would text him even more than ten times within the hour.

So, he would just wait for her to call or text.

He waited.

She did not call or text.

So, he texted this message as he walked out the gate of his workplace that night.

“You Prime Minister resign.”  
“Yes mi see.” Alexandria texted back.  
“I am passing by your house, should I stop”  
“Yes”

Alexandria was surprised at how quickly he knocked at her door, *was she losing time again?* She wondered.

He stood outside in front of the door.

She peered at him from inside.

Tonight, he was happy, feeling in control not stressed or angry at all, she sensed.

He walked in, pulled her in his arms and said,

“I miss you, no arguments tonight ok”.

“Ok.” She agreed.

“Mama Rosa!” Rosalind handed the red stripe beer to the man standing before her, glanced over at the man who had shouted out her name and answered,

“Yes Bola wha yuh a call out mi name fah?”

“Turn up the TV mek mi hear di news deh.”

The bar was getting busy. Rosalind reached for the remote, turned up the TV and got busy serving the usual drinks to her well-known patrons.

“Wha dem a seh about mi Prime Minister now?” Mikey pulled a chair closer to the TV and sat, his eyes glued to the tube.

“Him should a whey resign long time.” Mama Rosa couldn’t help but saying, which resulted in loud raucous laughter from her patrons.

Mickey nudged Bola and said to Mama Rosa,

“Wha yuh a seh true he give up Dudus?”

“Mi nuh bizniz wid Dudus but him nay haffi kill off the 70 an odd people fi get to Dudus, him no betta dan Seaga”

“The whole a dem in a them garrison politics even your gyal Portia” Mickey declared adamantly.

“Mi nah get inna dis wid you tonight - the place a get busy.” Rosalind grabbed the dish cloth and briskly walked towards the recently emptied table.

“Shorty, di usual fi yuh right?” Rosalind asked the man walking towards her as she wiped up the spilled drink off the table.

She was being carried to that cold dark place.

That place that always fill her with fear.

That place where invisible ugly dead looking people lived whom always seem to be silently watching her from the darkness.

She could feel his strong arms carrying her there to that place where she dreaded.

As he walked to that place, she watched the scenery pass by.

It was the middle of the night.

The fear increased.

She wrapped her legs around his hips, holding on tightly to him afraid that she would fall into the darkness and they would catch her. Then, she felt the pain and began to cry.

Her eyes open wide; she sat up in bed and wrapped her arms around her.

This isn't a dream, she thought, *it is a memory*.

Her phone rang.

She glanced at the name of the caller and sighed.

It was him.

She ignored the call.

It wasn't wise to answer; they would only end up in an argument, she thought.

Besides, she knew that she hadn't gone back to him even though she had slept with him the night before.

The sadness crept upon her as she sat there trying to get a grip of her mind and trembling body.

Some years ago, it was as though her mind had open to a whole new level, a level where she couldn't comprehend. Her brain felt like it was short circuiting all the time. Aside from all the other weird things she was feeling and seeing, her thoughts seemed to be going too fast for her to even think straight and she was remembering things in detail that she didn't even know she could remember. Not to mention how her body had started to function. This had been occurring for years now, these dreams, nightmares, "knowings" and visions which even occur when she was awake. It only got worse when she spent time with him. Things only got worse when she spent time with him. She knew deep down in her heart; it wasn't wise allowing him to visit, seeing that they were not together anymore but she kept on hoping that this time it would be different. *It hadn't been different.* She slipped out of the bed and began to clean the house.

Tristan ended the call and resisted the urge to throw the phone at the wall. He had been calling the whole god-damn day. *She was not answering!* He knew what that meant. *Why the hell do I keep on doing this to myself,* he asked himself. He should leave her alone. She keeps on leaving him anyway. It is clear what she wants is to be left alone. He glanced over at the guys waiting on him in the car and made a decision.

September 27, 2011

Tuesday - 7 pm

So as I was saying, the second time I saw you was a week before election day in December 1997.

It was a festive night that night; everybody was dressed in their colours and out to hear the politicians speak at the PNP rally. Then, Falmouth was considered a PNP stronghold and so it wasn't a surprise to see almost everyone I know clad in red and at the campaign venue. So I was on Queens street, you know where the PNP office used to be before they move it to where it is now, I was there among the many followers joining in the clamour shouting and clapping to the speech of jobs for the youths and better roads for the community etc etc. I wasn't really interested in the speech much but just there with Sammy and Clara and their friends revelling in the excitement of politics. Though I wasn't a "staunch" PNP advocate mom and auntie Bobbette was and that night they had dragged us along to hear and see the politicians that were running for the seats, it was just expected that we would vote for PNP, it really didn't matter who was running for the seat. Then it was okay to shout to the labourites (JLP) that they should put the x at the head instead of the bell and only "power" will reign we don't need no "shower" in the place – not sure if you can say that now – now everything is a bit more serious as you already know.

So, in all the excitement I turned around and saw you standing a little distance from me with your friends, my heart skipped a beat as I covertly

watched you watching the show being displayed, it became erratic when one of your friends called to Sammy and all of you walked over to where we were and joined our group of friends.



September 28, 2011

Wednesday - 7:15 am

Although I saw you that night during the election campaign, I really spoke to you on Christmas Eve at a Christmas Eve party that's really when yours and my life became entwined. Let me try to tell you this detail by detail.

It was in the afternoon, Christmas Eve day 1997; I was out at Auntie Bobbette's gate waiting anxiously to see the bicycle man riding towards me with the food we had ordered from Burger Castle. Although the name suggests burgers, that wasn't what we had ordered. We had ordered rice and peas and curry mutton which I had not eaten in a long while. Added to that, I was extremely hungry, so I was waiting impatiently for the delivery guy to show up. I was outside there at the gate when Johnny drove by, (you know him well he's one of the guys in your group of friends that you use to hang out with then) Johnny had honked his horn and shouted for Sammy. She didn't hear him. He saw me and handed the two invitations to me instead. "Tell her to come" he begged, and I immediately asked if I could come too. He hesitated then shook his head, "sure, you can come" he said.

Justin and Ryan had called several hours before, to tell us that they were on their way from Kingston. Justin had invited me to go with them (he and Ryan) to the grand market kept in Brownstown, St. Ann every year. Well that was before they moved it to Falmouth square some years ago, back then the grand market was always kept in Brownstown. I have never been to the grand market but had always wanted to go. However that year, I thought it wise to go to the party instead of going out with Ryan and Justin.

You know, I need to tell you a thing or two about Justin and me. Give you a rough history of our relationship. Well, bring you up to speed as to why I thought it wise to go to a party instead of going with Justin and his friend to the grand market, an event that I had always wanted to experience. Hell, I will talk to you about Justin a little bit later when I feel strong and brave enough to talk about him and when it doesn't hurt so much to talk about him. For now suffice it to say, I thought it was wiser to go to the party than go with Justin and Ryan. In retrospect, maybe I should have gone with Ryan. For sure, my life would have taken a different turn; I would have chosen a different path. Well that is, if there is no preordained destiny for each one of us, right.



Her phone alarm went off, and she pushed the notepad away.

*This will have to wait.*

I must get out of the house today!

Today I must go to Falmouth, she reprimanded herself.  
She hadn't ventured out of the house for days.  
The sinking feeling of trepidation gripped her.  
What would she face once she stepped out of her house today? She wondered.  
What would she come home to find? She asked herself.  
She would come out of the house.  
She should not allow the same thing to happen again, Alex reminded herself.  
Alexandria Prescott mentally shook off the feelings of fear and foreboding and went to get ready.

It was Wednesday. The busiest day of the week in Falmouth. Added to the usual 'bend down day' event that happens every Wednesday, where people from as far as Kingston and as near as Martha Brae came to buy and sell their wares, there was now two cruise ships docked at the Falmouth Pier and tourists were being ferried up and down the streets.



A taxi swerved around the corner and Alexandria jumped out of its way. She slammed the taxi door shut and quickly apologized to the driver who had started to cuss. She had slammed the door too hard, he complained. Alexandria sighed, *yes, my day has begun*. She gave a grateful smile, and mouthed a thank you, at the male driver who had slowed down for her to cross and rushed across the main road. Upon crossing, through the corner of her eyes, she noticed the antique looking sign at the front of Martha's supermarket and quickly glanced around her looking at all the shop signs. She frowned. They were all done in the same black and white Georgian style frames and looked ancient. *Falmouth has changed since the last time I came here, only three weeks ago*, she thought. The big changes were made to the

town of Falmouth several months ago in March when the Falmouth Pier was officially declared open. However, little things were still changing in Falmouth daily. Alexandria was just noticing some of those changes.

She walked around to the Falmouth square. It took her breath away. The old water fountain was spraying water and no longer looked old! There were now beautifully decorated signs posted at the water fountain and at the Albert George Market. Flowers were strategically planted at different locations giving the square a garden look and the square now had old brick tiled floor and even chairs for people to sit on. Alexandria was impressed. It was a great improvement from the last time she had seen it; old, dirty and trodden down, the new look made even the business place located in the square looked well, particularly the furniture store Courts, painted in yellow and blue and the National Commercial Bank, NCB also painted in yellow and blue. *What a pity it was only fixed up because tourist would be coming here*, she thought.



Alexandria walked around the square reading the signs.

The signs planted at the fountain informed her that Falmouth was the first parish to receive piped water even before New York. It also stated that the Falmouth water square was the original Sunday marketplace where the enslaved slaves and later peasants sold their provisions giving the location its second name which was Market Square. It mentioned that “the market remains a major shopping event particularly the Wednesday bend-down market”. Alexandria sighed and



wondered why they didn't state that bend-down was given its name because at the time of its inception, all items were normally located on the ground and people had to "bend down" to pick them up to look at or buy. *That would be interesting information for the tourist*, she thought. The next sign planted at the Albert George Market informed Alexandria that the Albert George Market was more than a hundred years old and was once the largest market in the country. The market was named after the grandsons of Queen Vitoria. *Another thing we got from Britain*, Alexandria thought as she walked away from the sign.

Market Street was busy, crowded with tourist from the cruise ship and with the locals who were busy going about their daily life. The street was filled with colours, white, black and brown people dressed in assorted styles, colours and fashions. Alexandria was standing out at the Falmouth post office. She looked around her wearily and joined the throng of locals who were on their way to work. She stared at the many buses parked on the street side, lining one side of the road from one intersection to the next, listened and watched as the men shouted at their prospective passengers trying to coerce them into choosing their bus to take them to their destination and felt confused and unsure of where she was going. She saw one of the guys they often referred to as the back-up boys for the buses and went over to him.

"Prescott!" he cried out,

"Yuh goin to Mobay?" Alex shook her head in reply and asked,

"Where is the Hague taxis?"

"Ovah deh soh" He pointed to the gas station.

"Thanks!" Alexandria didn't know his name.

"Prescott, you know you still look good!" He said in parting as he smiled at her. Alexandria smiled as the words "still look good" echoed in her head and darted across the road to where the Hague taxis were parked.

In the early 70's to late 80's, Hague district was considered the place to live by those of the poorer Falmouth residents' second generation educated children. At that time, Hague was considered a suburban community who prided themselves in being middle class, educated professionals who were constantly striving to be in a better financial and social position than their forefathers. By the late 90's when the then P.J. Patterson led government with



the aid of the Chinese contractors started their project to build the highway 2000 road that ran pass Hague district the community had increased in numbers but not of the correct kind of community members, in the older resident's opinion. At the time of the inception of the building of the Highway 2000 road, the government was faced with the problem of relocating many of the squatters from the surrounding area where the road was going to be located. Though the government had the right to throw the squatters off government owned land, the squatters had nowhere to live. After many quarrels and demonstrations by the squatters and the public at large, the government finally made provisions for the squatters by relocating them to government land that was in Hague. Hague like Falmouth was now going through some major social changes. Nevertheless, it remains a relatively small community that keeps on growing which houses the only pepper factory in the community and its environs as well as several dilapidated garment factories ran by couple overseas companies, heavily backed by government funds.

Alexandria Prescott gave the taxi driver a five-hundred-dollar bill and slipped out of the front seat of the car. The taxi driver handed her the change and asked,

“Do you know what a man needs?” Alexandria laughed and replied.

“No, I definitely don't know what a man needs, Simon.”

“Alright, I will tell you the next time mi see yuh.” Simon said as he slammed the car door shut. Alexandria sighed and slowly walked into her mother’s restaurant. *No, she definitely didn’t know what a man needs.*

Rosalind Thompson was having a lousy day. Her only employee had called in sick, which meant that she had to call in sick at her job again for there was no one else to operate the little restaurant & bar establishment that she had running. Alexandria wasn’t dependable but Rosalind had called her on the off chance that she could come help her out. Alex walked into the restaurant and Rosalind smiled; *Alex was glowing today.* She looked radiant as though a light was surrounding her and emanating from deep within. It wasn’t often anymore that she saw her child glow like this. Love and pride rushed through her. She resisted the urge to rush to her child and cuddle her, protecting her from the world and everything in it so that she could keep on glowing like that and said instead,

“Alex, mi glad yuh cum!” Alex threw her bag in the chair and looked around.

She didn’t want to be here; she was already feeling it, those awful feelings that always swamped her the moment she stepped into her mother’s restaurant.

“Yuh alright?” Rosalind watched the light emanating from Alex dissipated and began to worry.

“Just the thing that always happen when I am here, I will be alright” She assured her mother.

“So, what’s wrong with Enid?”

“The same ting whey always wrong with Enid me need somebody else fi run di restaurant.”

“Mama Rosa yuh deh yah?” Alex frowned, shook her head as her mother motioned to her to go serve the customer and silently begged her mother to go instead.

“Please just give me five minutes and I will be ready to help.” She whispered.

“Mi caan believe it seh di prime minister resign man, a him mi when vote fah.” The young man stopped talking, laughed, shook his head, took the joint from behind his ear, pulled the lighter from his pocket and lit the joint.

“You know seh a di first time me a vote!”

After taking two puffs he handed it to Tristan. Tristan passed it on to Tommy who was leaning against the car.

“You vote fi him cause yuh a idiot, mi maddah seh a only two kinda people vote fi JLP di very rich and di idiot dem.” Tommy took a draw.

“you nuh rich so you a one a di idiot dem.” Tommy deduced as he took another draw from the joint.

“Mi when vote fi PNP, me when vex when dem nay win.” A young man in the group said laughing hysterically as he puffed heavily on the spliff. A heated argument about politics ensued between the two men until Tommy cut them off by saying,

“Wha yuh a seh you can’t believe, him an Shaw get enough money out ah poor people, him can afford to resign, mi wish me when have sum a dat deh MILLIONS dem get from IMF, you know wha me would ah do wid dat deh money deh bwoy.”

Tommy grinned and looked up in the sky, as the others laughed and agreed that they could use couple millions, even couple hundred thousand would do.

Bradley felt the need to state the obvious.

“But ah Shaw dem ah seh ah go run di country next.” He took the joint and took a long draw passing it back to the young man standing beside Tristan.

“So him must see noh get enough money yet!” another crackle of laughter from the group.

“Or Holness, mi nevah see him as a man fi run di country, him caant even run di education system well and dat a fi him ministry.”

Another marijuana joint was lit and started making the rounds as the conversation continued.

“Fuck!”

“Mi when know seh Golding would ah in a shit from him give up Dudus, Golding own ah people dem a ton pan him an him know seh Christopher dudus

a go give di Americans dem all di information about him, soh it wise fi him fi resign before dat happen.”

Tristan inhaled the scent of the marijuana.

He liked the scent of it even though he did not smoke.

Someone handed him a beer; he took a sip and nodded in agreement with the group of young men who surrounded him.

“From him go in ah power him bruck all him promises to di poor people and di youths dem.” The young man said as he blew out smoke creating circles in the air.

“Whey di free education deh?”

“It noh free at all and whey di new jobs dem deh?”

“Whey dem deh!”

“Lawd deh gyal yah deh come up di road look good!” Tommy slapped Bradley on the back jumping up and down excitedly and shouted,

“Gyal yuh a say one, yuh look good eeeh”

“I would take you home to meet my mother.” Bradley added and the other men began to whistle, laugh and jeer.

“Hi Mr. Davis” The girl called out, smiling sweetly as she passed the men.

“Soh ah so you a do it, you ah go dis me soh,” Tommy gave his bad man stance,

“A only Davis you see out yah?”

He held out his hands for a touch from the girl and screwed up his face to show his disapproval when she only laughed and passed him by.

Tristan’s phone started ringing he glanced down at the number and automatically felt guilty. He walked away from the crowd and answered the phone.

Tristan walked over to the old bus stop which was in front of the Courts building and looked around for Alex.

She was not there.

He was about to call her when he saw her across the road, chatting to two men.

He walked over to her and picked up one of the heavy bags at her feet.

Greeted the men and asked Alex if she was ready.

“Thanks for coming Tristan,”

Kurt, one of the men she was talking to, took up the other bag as Brian said goodbye.

Tristan started walking towards where the buses were.

“I didn’t have anyone else to call.” she explained apologetically.

As they walked over to where the buses were. A barrage of backup boys surrounded them. One tried to take Alex’s bag intent on placing her in the bus he was loading.

Alexandria began to act weird, seemed confused and unsure as to which bus to take.

Ignoring the guys’ comments and calls to come into whichever bus they were packing, Tristan led the way.

He was getting angry, upset even.

Alexandria was acting weird again.

He hated taking the bus, hated when the backup boys acted that way and by now, he should own a car, picking her up and driving her home not taking public transportation.

Alexandria was never alert, he fumed, she took any bus and that could get her in trouble.

And he was tired of her acting weird, of her trying to control his very existence, of her taking things for granted, of her never listening to him, of her being stubborn and, and, and...there were so many things wrong with her!

Alex slipped out of the vehicle and took the bag that the conductor handed her. She slowly walked behind Tristan and watched him walk ahead of her. The dog ran out to meet him, jumped on him excitedly. Tristan barked a command to the dog which went unheeded.

“Alex hurry and open di door noh!” Tristan commanded.

Alex tried to get the dog to move instead.

Tristan got even more upset.

“Just open the damn door!” he shouted.

Alex gave him a look, slowly found the key, and open the door.

“Look at that you always have to do your own thing.” He dumped the bag on the floor and glared at her.

“I was just trying to help.” Alexandria explained.

“How yuh a go help?” he asked,

“All you needed to do is open the door so I could get in the house and away from the dog.”

Alexandria sighed she knew it made no sense explaining to Tristan what she could have done. He would not believe her and there was no proof.

“I could have helped.” Alexandria said firmly and began to unpack the goods from out of the bags.

“The dog would have listened to me if you”

“You have done the worst thing possible” Tristan declared.

He stared at her with hatred.

“How you think that mek me feel?”

Alexandria was beginning to think that Tristan was on something. Sometimes he seemed to get into such rage for the slightest thing she said or do, things that she just could not understand why they got him so mad.

“You slept with Justin, you fucking whore!” His voice was loud enough for the neighbours to hear.

“Alex yuh play me, you fucking bitch!” Alex instantly felt embarrassed and ashamed.

“And wha you doh?” Alex shouted.

“Nutton as bad as you, yuh in love wid him, fuck!”

“And yuh just call me when yuh need me like me noh have feelings, me tired ah you a use me.”

Tristan slammed the door shut.

Alex stood in stunned silence and disappointment.

She was hoping that Tristan would stay. She wanted to spend some time with him. She resisted the urge to run after him and slumped down onto the floor.

*Tristan hates me, she acknowledged.*

*I will not call him again, she promised herself.*

With that resolve, she pulled herself up from off the floor and began to unpack the grocery bags.

But Alex had never been good at keeping that promise.

September 28, 2011

Wednesday – 8:30 pm

As I have said before, I really don't know how to tell you my life's story. It's hard to tell you my story in a long straight line saying this happen, then this happen and then this happen which is how it should be right? Usually, in life one thing happens which leads to another thing which leads to another thing and so on but my life hasn't seemed like that to me and my memories aren't coming out like that. My life has felt more like a circle with many circles within overlapping simultaneously sometimes. Well, let me just say it's a cycle. When I think of my life – how I have been living, a washing machine comes to mind with its water whirling the clothes around the spinner thingy inside going round and round and round. So I've decided to just put my life's experiences that I've had so far into little headings so you can follow the jumbled sometimes chaotic process of my thoughts, my actions – my mind flow.



She screamed, jumped up out of the bed, grabbed the phone with the intention to call him and instantly remembered that she had promised herself not to, so she rushed to the bedroom light switch instead, then laughed because it didn't matter if the light was on. *But it helped!* She decided and went around the house turning on all the lights. I can manage this, she told herself, after all it is not as bad as it used to be. He and I are no longer involved. She reminded herself. What he is doing is not my concern.

“This is just a dream.” She told herself firmly.

“They are all just dreams.” She kept on saying until she felt calm and sane enough to go back to sleep.

September 29, 2011

Thursday – 1pm

JUSTIN

As I sit here writing this letter to you, I get a little scared. I am no longer certain if I can hand these pieces of paper to you once I am finished writing what I need to tell you. My courage is failing me. Now, I find myself thinking that maybe this was not such a good idea after all. While it is a noble idea to want to tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth – tell you the truth, have you get to know the real me, I find myself reluctant to speak this particular truth.

As I've said before, telling the truth is hard. Accepting the horrible, negative truth about oneself is even more difficult. For some people that I know, facing the truth about themselves, the reasons why they do things, accepting all that they have done in their life's span is difficult and remains elusive. They never seem to reach the point of realization that although all

of those experiences – good & bad – have helped in making them who they are at this moment, their past deeds, experiences, mistakes, bad choices does not have to keep them in an eternal prison. At any point, one can make a different choice. Change the flow of things. Change the cycle – the rhythm that your life flows in.

So here I am, trying to change my rhythm – my life's flow and in doing so hopefully get out of my 'eternal invisible prison'. Now, how do I be bare, naked before you? How do I get over this fear that's gripping me, this fear of being embarrassed, ridiculed and look down on by you – my judge and executor? You will see me differently after this, maybe even more so than you already do.



The sound of her phone alarm brought her out of her reverie. It is News Time, the reminder said. She was trying so hard to keep abreast of the events of the day but was failing miserably. She decided not to watch the news and instead got up and got ready for bed. Once in bed, she scrolled through the phone that showed several missed text messages from Tristan. She was about to read the first one when she heard a knock at the door.

“You are not answering your phone.” He reprimanded.

Alexandria moved out of the way so he could come in.

“Are you hungry?”

“Yes.” She answered.

He handed her the KFC bag and walked in.

September 30, 2011

Friday – 5am

You know, I know not everyone can handle the truth that we are all only human beings who are flawed, who will make mistakes but hopefully grow from them. And yet so many of us, me included, uses this very excuse – that we are only human - imperfect beings, flawed individuals to excuse our evil deeds. Yet I have come to see that we can be so much better than we are, I won't use that excuse anymore. "Being only human" doesn't excuse the wrong that I have done or caused. Enough of my musings, this is the part that most don't like about me anyway, here goes, I am just going to go ahead and tell you what I did.



Andre Prescott looked around him and sighed heavily. He told Jermaine never to do this, never to bring the green stuff to his house. Nonetheless here he was in his living room surrounded by stacks of it packaged and ready for shipment piled high in every available space. Luckily Jennifer, his woman for the moment and the official owner of the house - unofficially it was his house, he was the one who had paid for it, knew all about his profession. Still, it wasn't wise keeping the stuff around. The police could stop by at any time. Going to jail was not part of his plan. He carefully, very slightly pulled the curtains aside and peeked out the front window of his house. He scouted the area. Still no cops in sight. The stuff will be safe here till morning, he decided.

Andre slowly, very carefully let go of the curtains and lit a joint. It relaxed him enough that he no longer worried about the cops. Instead, his mind wandered to his family. Those he had left behind when he walked on the plane at

Sangster's International Airport, Montego Bay that Monday night. No one had known that he was leaving. There was no fanfare, no goodbye hugs and kisses. He planned it that way. His passport said Alec Thompson. He had calmly walked through customs and out the door unto US soil. Jennifer picked him up and they had driven straight to the house in Miami. He spent two days in bed with her and then got right down to business. That was several months ago. He hadn't spoken to his family since then. But on occasions like these he remembered them, wondered about them and worried about them. Andre's mind rested on Alexandria.

*"Alex"* It was just a soft gentle wisp of a whisper, not loud or as though he was shouting or even screaming out her name. That meant that he wasn't in any danger. Although sometimes there were many different voices shouting in her head, some she wasn't sure she knew, Alexandria recognized his voice immediately. She sighed with relief. She hadn't heard his voice in such a long time; she had started to believe that she could not hear him any longer. Alexandria didn't know how to turn this thing on or off so she wasn't sure how it worked but Alex knew for certain she could recognize her brother's voice. He was calling her – thinking of her tonight. The images of where he was flashed through her mind. She looked around the living room through his eyes, saw the marijuana and sat up straight in bed shook her head vigorously as though trying to get the images out of her sight and thought...*Dre!*

September 30, 2011

Friday – 9am

I met Justin when I was six years old. He was eleven. Samantha and I were playing in the front yard. Sammy saw him first and thought he was cute. I looked up and over at the boy to see if my cousin was right, so far,

the boys she thought were cute I did not. At that age, I didn't see boys as cute. He had very cool dark, black skin and beautiful white white teeth. He was smaller, shorter than the chocolate brown girl standing beside him. He seemed sad and alone, I thought. He stared at me as though he had heard my thoughts and was agreeing with what I just thought. It was as though we connected across the distance of the yard. I felt a jolt of energy, physical attraction rushed through my body and for the first time, I liked really liked a boy.

They introduced him to me as my half-brother. His full name was Justin Thomas Saunders. Justin and Juleen were my Dad's kids. They explained to me why Justin and Juleen's last name didn't match ours. The story goes like this.

Dad met Justin's mom, Jacqueline Saunders in Kingston when he was in his last year of college. I think it was a one-night stand or something because the day they brought them to our house in Falmouth was the first time Dad laid eyes on them. By the time Jackie found out that she was pregnant, my Dad had already finished college and moved back to Falmouth. At their birth, Jackie hadn't bothered to put the name of their father on their birth certificate, for she wasn't quite sure that they were really Dad's. She gave them her last name instead so that it would match with the other two kids last names that she already had. Justin and Juleen were her third and fourth kids respectively. I don't think Jackie had intended to let Dad know that she had his kids but she couldn't take care of them, and she left them with her mother, when her mother died those that were taking care of them who knew she had been with Dad brought them to Dad.

September 30, 2011

Friday – 10pm

I was six; they were five years older than me and fraternal twins as Andre and I are. Dad was often applauded for his prowess as a man. He had “hit” it twice having twins two times. Must be something in his juice, his male friends would laugh and say. Like me, Justin was the first born. Though Juleen always acted as though she was the older one and Justin often times allow it, unless it got out of hand. He came out ten minutes before Juleen while I came out eighteen hours before Dre. I was born at 9pm on March 22, while Dre was born at 3pm on March 23. So now, I was no longer the older child in the house, I now had a bigger half-brother and sister. I was elated.

From the onset, Juleen and I never got along. And even as a child, I understood why. You know that story; it’s no different from so many others.

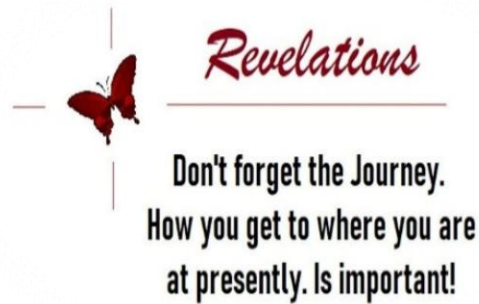
So the dynamics of our family changed after Justin and Juleen came to live with us. Dre and I easily adapted to our new extended family. It wasn’t any big deal to us to have two more persons living at our house. Dad bought another bed and placed it in our room. Juleen and I slept on one bed while the boys slept on the other.

From the start, Juleen and Andre got along immediately. Justin and I warmed up to each other eventually. In the first few months that Juleen and Justin started living with us, Justin and I really didn’t talk much. He had his own problems and I had mine.

When we were growing up, Justin always looked younger than his age. He was smaller than the other boys, enjoyed reading instead of playing football and was the darkest one in our family. A point that Auntie Bobbette often liked to point out, so you know, he had his share of taunts and jeers and for a time, as he grew older those taunts and jeers got worst.

We became friends one weekend down Granny V's house. He found me crying out at the old broken down board house at the back of the yard. It was the kitchen but got burnt out and so Granny V no longer used it. However, it was still intact enough for someone to go inside and close the door. I was leaning against the banana tree glaring at that old burnt-out kitchen and crying my eyes out. He tried to comfort me. I remember that he brushed my tears away with his small dirty hands. Justin had been playing marbles in the street with the new friend he had made and had come around the back of the yard to wash his hands. As he brushed away my tears, I held on to his hands and begged him not to tell. I knew, he knew. He had seen where I was coming from and with whom. He hugged me tightly and promised not to tell. He told me everything would be alright. We both knew it wouldn't. Juleen came around back looked suspiciously at me and Justin hugging, holding on to each other tightly and informed Justin that Granny V wanted him to go to the shop. When Justin left, Juleen grabbed me, shook me hard and told me I was a whore. That she knew and she would be telling. But she never did tell my parents, though she told others. Instead, Juleen used her knowledge of all the accumulated "bad things" I did in those early years as a leverage. For many years, Juleen would get me to do whatever she wanted by just threatening to tell. Well, after that day Justin and I got close. He taught me to do all the guy

stuff that I wanted to learn like playing marbles and such a like. And through the years that followed, we would only get closer. Justin was gentle, attentive, listened to and understood me when I talked. Something no one else seemed to do. Then, it seemed as though, he talked to me about everything and anything. And too, there was that unmentionable secret that we kept between us. As we grew, he became my best friend then lover.



The rooster's cock-a-doodle-doo cut through the silence, a distant signal from a waking world she no longer fully inhabited. Light seeped through the windows in slow, liquid bands, dissolving the edges of the room. The morning sunlight pouring through the windows was bright enough to make the use of her electric light unnecessary. Dimly, she understood that the night had slipped away while she wrote. She closed the notepad, curled into the warmth of the bed, and sank effortlessly into sleep.

October 1, 2011

Saturday – 11:10am

The first time it happened, it happened in Kingston at Cousin Greta's house. We were staying there for the summer. Justin had just turned thirteen and I was eight.

One night, when all the adults were out of the house partying or doing some other stuff and the other kids had sneaked out of the house to

go on the main road to watch and count the cars passing by – a game we played most nights, Justin and I decided to stay in and watch the horror movie that was showing on the t.v. Those times there were only one local station and its name was JBC not TVJ as it is called today. When the movie ended and I went to bed, I became afraid to sleep alone in the room I shared with Juleen and Cousin Greta's daughters Brenda and Cynthia so I crawled into the bed that Justin shared with Dre and Carl - Cousin Greta's son.

He didn't ask what I was doing in his room. Instead, he pulled me close and when his hands began to touch, feel, explore, roam I didn't stop him. I lay still and let him touch me. Then, I showed him what I knew, had been taught and had learned.

The feelings were intense, sexual, sensual, loving, gratifying. I climaxed without the feeling of shame, guilt or fear surrounding me. He was the first person that I willingly, openly gave my body to. And Justin would thereafter hold a special, confusing place in my heart.

The next morning I woke up in my own bed with my night gown soiled and dirty. Later that day Justin told me what I had done. That after he and I had had sex and I fell asleep I scared him by getting up, unlocking the front door and began walking out to the street as though I was headed home. I even crossed the busy road. It took him a while to realize that I was sleep-walking. He had observed me for a while, walking behind me then caught up to me and had lead me back to the room I shared with the girls and had kept watch until the other kids came back into the house then went back to the room he shared with the boys.

After Justin told me what I had done, I remembered what had really happened. That night, after our love making and Justin and I fell asleep I began to dream. Remember, I had been watching horror movies earlier in the night so at the time I thought I was having a nightmare.

I became aware that the room Justin and I were in was filled with darkness. And that Justin and I weren't alone in the room. There were many people in the room with us and they were watching us. Someone came to me and took my hand. It was a woman dressed in pale white. I didn't see her face. I just had an impression that it was a young woman. I felt her determination to take me somewhere far away from where I was and she began to lead me there.

I remember hearing the car horns, walking on the road, watching myself being led by her, hearing Justin shouting my name and finally feeling his hands grabbing my shoulders.

I didn't tell Justin that I had remembered. For some reason I was afraid, scared to speak about the things that I had felt, seen and experienced that night.

The next year, our family unit changed again. Juleen, now fourteen years old was according to Mom, "acting like a big woman" and there would be only one big woman in the house. As you may have guessed, Mom and Juleen had many fights, one in which Juleen declared that she wasn't staying and Mom declared that Juleen didn't have to stay. So Juleen and Justin were sent back to their Mom's relatives in Kingston.

For the first year Justin came to visit every holiday and sometimes even on weekends. I knew he was coming mostly to see me. Well, that was what my little nine year old heart thought at the time. As I am not really sure why Justin came each holiday or why he stopped coming after that first year or why we never saw him again until three years later. There are many things about our past that Justin and I just don't discuss. Memories that I would like to fully understand – clarify. Things that I find I need to know, when I had asked him about them some years ago, his reply had been – no regrets Alex, leave the past in the past, live in the now. Good advice I know but one which I find I don't know how to follow and there are times when I am not even allowed to try to follow this advice. My past keeps on creeping back into my present and seems as though it will be staying as an unwelcomed guest to greet me in my future.



She rose from the computer desk as if pulled by a distant thought, brewed a cup of coffee—the bitter, comforting smell rising into the air—though she barely noticed the heat of the mug warming her palms. Drawn to the window, she stood and stared into her neighbour's backyard as sunlight shifted almost imperceptibly across the ground. Two birds fluttered in and out of the tree near her window, stitching a nest together twig by twig, and she watched as minutes quietly stretched into hours. Shadows crept longer, the light deepened and dulled, and the sounds of the day slowly ebbed away. Hours slipped past her unnoticed. When darkness finally settled, she returned to the computer desk and continued writing.

October 1, 2011

Saturday – 7:47 pm

As I sit here writing, I look at the fact that everyone always have regrets, some more than others, it is a part of living and the past never stays there - dead and buried. Your past experiences have a hand in creating your present and helps to mold your future. It is the building block from which your house – your home is built upon. That house that you have to reside in for the rest of your life.

What you learn as a child is what you build upon as an adult and continues to live out through your entire life time.

The house – your home that your mind resides in can only change depending on the knowledge of the one building it – you the builder. Which blocks does the builder keep to make the foundation strong? Which ones does he reject? How will the builder use the raw materials given to him to build the house so that it will withstand the test of time? That is the question for me today. I cannot change my past; I can't even change what happen yesterday, I don't know how to, but I want to change my future.

I want to use these present materials I have, to build a stronger, sturdier foundation – to build a better, more peaceful, beautiful home to live in. My mind is the greatest asset I have, if it's not functioning right, then my house that I'm building will be filled with cracks hence it will easily crumble and fall.

Well, I have been rambling once again, let me get back to the story I am trying to tell. What I remember is that Justin was the reason why I finally stood up to him.



Alexandria pushed the papers away. *I can't write this!* She thought, the words sharp and final. She turned on the television and spent several hours channel surfing, looking for something that might make her laugh. Nothing did.

She turned the key in the lock and pushed the door open.

The house was in darkness.

She bumped into a pot on the floor, sighed and spoke out loud in frustration, "I need to clean dis place!"

Kicking the pot out of her way, she dumped the two heavy bags at her feet and pulled her handbag open.

It took several minutes for her to find the phone. Using its flashlight to guide her way, she walked to the light switch and flicked it on. Alexandria wasn't surprised when the light didn't come on.

*The kitchen light is out again.* She thought.

Maneuvering her way through the pots, pans and other knick knacks on the floor, she made her way to the nearest light switch and flicked that light on.

She surveyed the messy kitchen, took in the unwashed dishes in the sink, the empty open dusty cupboards, the pots and pans that she had placed on the dirty floor earlier that day in order to spray the cupboards and the dead cockroaches scattered on the floor, and decided to rest a bit before unpacking the goods she had bought at the supermarket.

Alexandria mentally listed all the things she should do before going to bed as she headed to the bedroom. Clean her bedroom for a start!

*Hmmpff*...I'll just lie down for ten minutes or maybe fifteen then unpack these things, she thought.

She noticed the suitcase first.

It wasn't in the place where she had left it.

It was on her bed, open.

She noticed the drawers next.

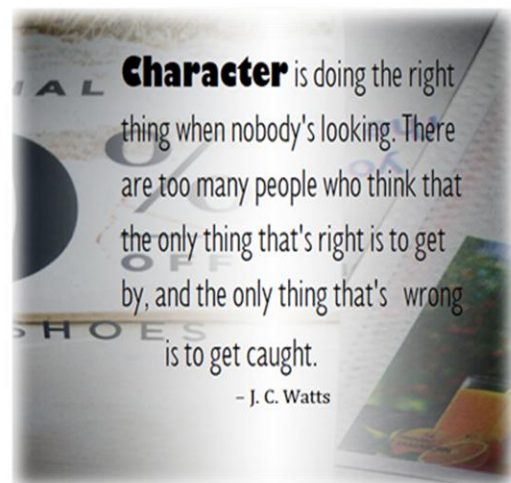
They were all slightly pulled out.

Someone had gone through each one looking for something.

One of her handbags was on the floor, its contents emptied.

Alexandria picked up the purse and looked through it, as expected, the two one hundred U.S. dollar bills that she was keeping for her mother was not there. The thief must not have seen the five two U.S. dollar bills that her Dad had given her for safekeeping because they were still there. How could she have forgotten to take the money with her when she was leaving, she berated herself.

She stared at the piece of newspaper clipping that several days before she had taped in the inside of her purse as a reminder and read the quotation, "Character is doing the right thing when nobody's looking. There are too many people who think that the only thing that's right is to get by, and the only thing that's wrong is to get caught." – J.C. Watts. Alexandria laughed, gently lay the purse on the bed and slowly walked into her brother's room; with a sinking heart she walked around the room looking at the mess the thief had left.



*They came into the house again.*

The doors are still locked, how had they...he gotten in this time, she wondered. Alexandria Prescott walked over to the door facing her, the door leading to the unfinished house her parents were still building and turned the knob. The door wasn't locked, just closed. She must have forgotten to lock it last Sunday when

she opened it to let some fresh air in while her cousin Tanya and her kids were visiting. She thought that they would have liked some cool breeze and so she opened the door. *The thief must have come in through here and closed the door on his way out*, she supposed. Since the last time they had broken in, she had become even more careful when locking up. Alexandria let out a big heavy sigh. *I guess I wasn't careful enough.*

Ting-a-ling...Ting-a-ling...the sound of her phone alarm went off, pronouncing that it was seven o'clock. NEWS TIME the phone reminder prompted. Alexandria searched for the remote, clicked the tv on to the local station. The Prime Minister came on; she didn't hear what he was saying, the tv signal went down. She zipped up the suitcase, placed it back in its place, then brushed aside the clothes that needed to be ironed and slumped unto the bed.

"Where is God?" The old woman cried.

Alexandria was just about to turn the tv off, the image of an old woman looking distraught filled the screen,

"Where is God's angels to protect us?" The reporter took the mike from the old woman and explained the circumstances for her outcry. Gunmen had gruesomely killed an old couple that was well known and loved by those of the neighborhood. The old woman was a friend of the couple, and she didn't see any reason for anyone to want to kill such good people.

Alexandria turned the tv off.

With the old woman's cry echoing in her head, she slowly walked to the bathroom.

Why wasn't there any good news? She asked.

Because good news don't sell. She answered herself.

*Where is God indeed...is there a God?* Alexandria mused.

"Oh, No, No, No!" Alexandria stamped her feet down sturdily on the ground, glared at the toilet water, willing it not to flood over unto the bathroom floor.

*Dear God, what more can go wrong?* She silently asked.

Standing in the foul filthy toilet water now flooding the bathroom, Alexandria began to cry noiselessly.

The tears rushed down her cheeks as she dragged her tired body to where she kept the old newspapers stocked in the corner of the kitchen near the rubbish bin and began to lay the newspapers out on the floor, a newspaper heading caught her eye, “Healing Words” the caption said, “York woman uses words to heal wounds”. Alexandria noted the date of the gleaner, Sunday January 30, 2011 and began to read its contents. It said,

YORK, S.C. (AP):

Ida Neal Lord writes in the same black-and-white composition notebooks used by elementary school children, filling wide-lined pages and adding new ones each day. As Christmas approached, her most recent notebook returned repeatedly to the theme of love, using the word several times while reflecting on how to endure life without it. “Love conquers all,” Lord said at the York Adult Day Care Center, where the 45-year-old spends her weekdays writing, her presence bright despite a past marked by violence. Shot in the head on Valentine’s Day 2008 and forced to relearn how to eat, walk, read, and write, Lord now finds she has more than enough to put on the page.

Alexandria paused, looked up in the ceiling and wondered what she was doing on Valentine’s Day ‘08. She went to the notebooks she recently packed up into a small cardboard box and rummaged through the books, when she found the book dated January – April 2008 she ruffled through the pages and read the page dated February 14, 2008. *Yes, that was what I was doing, the same thing that I did the year before and maybe the year before as well.* She continued reading.

Ida Neal Lord will not be denied, writing down a life forever altered by sudden violence. The story she records is her own: a mother of three who is a hospice nursing aide went to a check-cashing business to send money to her brother in prison and was shot in the head without warning by a man with a history of violent crime. Shot again as she lay on the floor, she survived surgeries, a coma, and the long struggle to relearn how to live. Yet some injuries never healed, the bullets destroyed parts of her

head and spine that once told her body how to move, how to function, how to be whole.

## **NOT A NOVEL**

This is not a novel—it is what happened to Ida Neal Lord on Valentine’s Day 2008, and what she has lived with ever since. Each weekday at the adult day care, she arrives with a metal brace that steadies her steps and a smile that belies the trauma behind it, then opens her composition books and writes. A mother of three and grandmother of eight, Lord has become a fixture there, admired for a determination that staff say never wavers. Known affectionately as “our author” and greeted by applause from strangers who recognize her cane and her story, she documents it all, noting the kindness of others and repeating a simple truth: “I love them all.”

## **HELP**

With the help of one of her adult sons, Ida Neal Lord has found a self-publishing company willing to print her book for about \$1,700—money she does not have. Living in public housing with social-work support after a lifetime of physical labor, Lord asks for little; on her handwritten Christmas list, she requested only a replacement CD player after hers broke. The man who shot her, now serving eight life sentences, has shaped every day of her life since, yet Lord says she forgave him long ago and prays for him each night before going to sleep. Each morning she wakes to the slow work of recovery—learning again how to eat and walk and write with her right hand, her left hand forever clenched—determined to publish a book she has titled *Anu Beginning*, hoping her story might inspire someone else not to give up and, one day, help create a world “with more love in it.”

The other heading read, “Food For The Poor donates computers”. The advertisement below that stated, “ONE conversation can change so much SWITCH to First Caribbean and gain real benefits!”

Why does everything seem to have spiritual meaning to me nowadays? She asked herself as she took note of the words “*one conversation can change so much...*”

Alexandria flipped the newspaper over. Digicel’s logo declared its slogan – Jamaica’s Bigger Better Network. The full-page ad said,

“Good Luck to our Ambassadors in the youth view awards 2011 - Young, Hot & hype.” Alexandria sighed.

This isn’t for me, she thought.

At thirty-five years old, Alexandria Prescott no longer considered herself to be - Young, Hot & Hype. The ad featured pictures of six popular, well-known Jamaicans, age ranging from 21-30. Deejay and dancer Ding Dong, singer/dancehall artist Tiffa, reggae artist I-Octane who had a song with the lyrics “noh bwoy khan play in a mi dread”. Though Alexandria wasn’t sure if I-Octane had accepted the Rastafarian religion or was just sporting the dreads as a hair style, as some of the Jamaican artists were apt to do. T.V. and radio personality Ms. Kitty (who helped to make the word “fluffy” promoting “Big/fat-PHAT” women popular), Yendi Phillips – the previous host of Digicel rising stars, holder of several beauty titles including Miss Jamaica World 2007, Miss Jamaica Universe 2010, first runner up to the now reigning Miss Universe 2011 and current girlfriend of Jamaican sprinter Asafa Powell. Disc Jockey Bambino – one of the three judges of Digicel rising stars 2011 completed the six. Alexandria glanced at the pictures once more, nodded and affirmed,

“Yes, this isn’t for me.”

She placed the newspaper on the floor, brushed the tears from her eyes and chuckled. *Love conquers all*, hadn’t she proven those words to be false, weren’t those words her motto for many years until recently.

She wasn’t sure God was in control.

Or if there was a God.

*What if there wasn’t a God?*

And if there is a God, God and his angels seem to be standing aside, just watching, allowing the evil to take over. Anger and hatred, they seemed far more powerful than love. What was she taught when she was little – God is Love? If God represented love and the devil hate, then it was clear who

was winning the battle for souls... *if there was a battle going on that is. God don't seem to be in attendance...where is he, what the hell is he doing?* Alexandria wanted to know. A thought flashed through her mind.

At least you aren't in that woman's position, crippled, bruised from being shot in the head. Yet she is still praising God. What are you doing?

Suddenly, Alexandria felt oddly calm.

She pushed the clothes to one side of the bed; crawled in, pulled the sheets over her head, wrapped her arms around her and closed her eyes. I will deal with everything tomorrow, she promised herself, as sleep slowly crept upon her.

Rosalind Thompson was worried; her son was getting himself into trouble again. She just knew it. There was an urgent need within her to pray. She got up out of bed, went unto her knees, clasp her hands and began to pray. She didn't pray for long. Soon the phone rang. Enid asked if she was watching tv the Prime Minister was on. Rosalind got up, switched the tv on just in time to hear Bruce Golding say, "My fellow Jamaicans last Sunday, I advised my party's central executive that I would not seek re-election at the annual general conference to be held next month and I would step down as Prime Minister as soon as a new leader had been elected. I had come to this position after deep contemplation and prayer, seeking to do what is best for the country and the party..." She turned the tv up so she could really hear and sat down engrossed in his words.

"Wah gwaan man?" Lennox slapped him on the back, shoved a cold beer into his hand, and kept on talking without missing a beat.

"Mi nuh see yuh fi days a weh yuh when deh?"

"Working." Tristan replied as he flicked the cap off the beer.

"Oh, mi did tink seh a Alex yuh when deh" With another solid slap on the back, Lennox burst into a hearty laugh.

Tristan wasn't in the mood for conversation.

He dug the cash out of his pocket, pressed it into Lennox's hand, thanked him for coming through when money was tight, and pushed toward the bar's exit doors.

"Mi a go een go get some sleep." He said.

Upon reaching his house, he sighed in relief.

No one was home yet.

He switched the television on and sat in front of his computer. Bruce Golding, the Prime Minister was giving his speech to the Jamaican people. Bruce's voice came out loud and strong but modest as he said, "...we are once again creating new jobs even though we have not yet restored the jobs that were lost; the rise in poverty has been cauterized. While the worst may have passed, we are not yet out of the woods. There are challenges that remain on many fronts that will require strong leadership to overcome and absolute confidence in the authority of that leadership. Questions about the role I played in the Coke/Manatt matter have remained a source of concern in the minds of many people. It was never about Coke's guilt or innocence..."

The Facebook logo came up and Tristan logged on.

He was in a heavy conversation with a chick from New York when his phone beeped.

Tristan glanced at the phone; there were several missed calls from Alex.

He frowned; his phone hadn't rung all day.

Tristan glanced at the time she made the calls; it was earlier in the day.

He chose to ignore them.

Let her wait, he thought angrily.

He changed the channel to HBO as Bruce Golding finished his speech with a prayer of blessings on the country and its people and continued chatting with the chick from New York.

She felt the rage.

It was so strong that it woke her up.

The heat of it surrounded her.

Someone or something was very angry at her.  
But she didn't know who it was.  
It felt so hot as though she was burning up.  
The heat was both scary and painful.  
She began to sweat.  
A flash of light.  
Something hard hit her face.  
She opened her eyes and sat up in bed.  
The darkness surrounded her.  
She waited for her eyes to adjust to the darkness and searched for her phone.  
*"He's cheating on you."*  
Something hard hit her face again.  
She felt the fear, the anger, the hate, the pain.  
Sadness enveloped her.  
Whatever was with her in the room was thinking that she was a fool.  
The urgent need to call him overwhelmed her and she grabbed the phone.  
Maybe he will answer this time, she thought.  
She hanged up after the fifth ring.  
He wasn't answering.  
She began to panic.  
She became desperate.  
The urgent need to hear his voice, know where he was, what he was doing and with whom became stronger.  
She rang his phone again.  
Please pick up the phone she silently begged.  
Three rings.  
He wasn't answering.  
The name came to her mind Rhona Simms.  
*"He's cheating on you."* It said again.  
The fear gripped her more intensely.  
*"Dear God, help me!"* She silently cried out.

Tristan Davis gave in to the prompting.

He glanced down at the phone, logged off Facebook and dialled Alex's number.

"Where are you?" She barked.

"Why di fuck yuh a ask mi dat?"

"Weh mi fi deh?"

"Mi deh home!"

He automatically felt the need to defend himself.

She was always accusing him of doing something wrong.

"With who?" She asked fretfully expecting him to tell her the truth. Then silently laughed at herself. *This is madness*, she thought, *he can easily tell me a lie*. Yet having him on the phone helped. She didn't feel scared anymore.

Tristan hanged up the phone.

The anger within him surfaced.

This is why we end up in so much fucking mess, he fumed.

She never used to believe me and now it noh matter.

He threw the phone unto the settee and pulled his shoes on.

The house was suffocating. He needed to get out.

He needed a drink!

"u have won" the text message said.

"You have proven that I am an asshole" Alexandria deleted the message.

The phone lit up again.

"You never understand me or know how I feel" Alexandria angrily forcefully deleted the message.

"I am not an awful person" The next message said.

"u don't know how mi feel about u" Alexandria kept that message.

She couldn't respond.

Alex's phone wasn't "Top up" which meant that she had no money on the phone to make calls or send text messages.

She was out of credit.

It was too late in the night to go buy some.

She quickly pushed the frantic crazy thought and feelings away. That pressing urge to go out and find somewhere to buy credit to text him back.

She won't act like a fool no more, she told herself.  
She went to the computer desk instead.  
There she opened the notepad and began to write.

October 3, 2011

Monday - 1 am

I feel uncomfortable whenever I talk about this, whenever I think about this. In fact, I don't remember ever really talking to anyone – not even Justin – about that night. It was one of those nights when Justin had come to visit for the weekend and we were spending the night at Granny V's house. On occasions, Mom saw it fit to send us to visit Granny V's house for the weekend, mostly when she needed to go out partying and of course when she thought we needed to spend time with our grandmother.

Dre was already sleeping in his and Justin's room exhausted from playing all day long with his friends next door.

Tristan Davis dialled his ex's number for the third time and listened to the same message he heard for the previous calls.

"You have reached the voice mail box of 811 0255," the automated service lady intoned, "Please leave a message after the tone."

There were no more messages to leave.

"Davis, yuh a mis out pon everyting man!" Bryon slapped him hard on the back, handed him a Guinness and grinned excitedly.

"Mi seh dat gyal cyaan WINE." he declared; his eyes fixed on the girl in the red lingerie dancing on the board makeshift stage.

“Wah gwaan man, yuh leavin?” Clay shouted over the loud music as Tristan brushed against him, near the club exit doors. Tristan nodded, swaying on his feet.

“Yuh a go miss someting.” Clay shook his head in regret and pointed to the two women walking towards them.

“Tomorrow!” Tristan shouted over the loud music and scuffled out to the entrance of the club.

That night would be the last night Justin and I made love as children. I remember falling asleep in Justin’s arms after we had made intense passionate love and waking up to the sound of his voice. He slapped Justin awake, rushed him out of the bed, insisting that Justin go to his own room. Justin refused to leave. Justin said no. But he was older and stronger. He just held Justin by the collar and pushed him out the door. From behind the closed door I could hear Justin crying, fighting telling him to let him go. I was awake, almost awake, though my eyes stayed shut. I heard the commotion but went back to sleep anyway. This wasn’t new to me. I welcomed sleep.

He had been to this club numerous times before, he knew couple of the women there and most of the men. It wasn’t one of his favourite hangout spots, but he had promised the guys he would go out with them, so when he walked out of his house and bumped into Clay and Bryon, this was where they ended up. *In Bay View Heights of all the places!* At a sleazy go-go/dance club called Goodaz where you could drink as much as you want, easily fuck a gyal right here and now, if you knew the right lyrics and then go home. Tonight, he wasn’t in the mood for a casual fling. Yes, the women were as free as the drink in his hand and the men were nuff. To be fair though, they weren’t free at all,

he mused as he walked out, and neither were the beers he had been donning for the entire night.

I remember waking again, this time feeling his naked body brushing against my bottom, feeling his fingers stroking me in the familiar way that he often does it. I heard his breathing changed, smelt the alcohol on his breath, and felt the familiar sneaky awful lustful presence surround him and me. And then his penis entered me from behind. His manhood was hard and wet – my vagina slick and slippery from the previous sexual encounter with Justin. And he had also used Vaseline. I felt his arousal, his enjoyment escalate. I tried to pull away- squirmed away from him. He held my small body steady. I tried to pull away again as he pushed deeper in me. He held me tighter, his body already near to fulfilment. And suddenly I was fully awake and angry. I didn't want to do this! Not tonight, not after what Justin and I had just shared. Rage, anger, indignation came over me. Feelings that I have never felt so forceful before gave me the courage to defend. My need to stand up for Justin, defend the boy I could hear in the next room crying from the beating he just received, took control. Upset at him for sending Justin away, for pushing out "my boyfriend" whom I love, so that he could take his place, how unfair! I pushed him away from me and jumped off the bed. I headed for the door and threatened to tell my grandmother. I ran out the door and into my grandmother's bedroom. Granny V was fast asleep as she had been since nine pm that night. I heard him at the door, whispering my name, begging, pleading and silently crying out to me. I sunk under the sheets, covered my head with the pillow feeling embarrassed, ashamed, dirty and most of all guilty. I wouldn't get

him into trouble. I would keep my promise to him. I wouldn't tell. Besides, how could I tell my grandmother – my mother! What I had been and was doing all these years. Instead of telling, I protected – me, him and the others.

It took him twenty minutes to make it to her door.

She hadn't answered any of his calls or text messages he had sent, but he knew she was home.

She was always home.

He pounded on the door and called out her name.

She opened the door.

His heart skipped a beat.

He resisted the overwhelming urge to pull her in his arms.

*God, he wanted to kiss her so badly.*

"It's four O'clock in the night Tristan," She peered out in the night, looked at him from head to toe, shook her head in disapproval and step aside.

"What are you doing here?"

His heart sank a bit as he walked sheepishly into the house, lock the door and inquired.

"Alex, why yuh naa answer yuh phone," his words were slurred and he swayed a bit as he asked,

"You tun di phone off again?"

"No, it's on." Alexandria replied wearily.

He was standing so near to her that she could smell the alcohol on his breath and the... the... what is that scent!

"Yuh start smoke ganja now!" she accused.

His heart sank even lower. If she had known him, she wouldn't have asked such a question. Tristan followed Alexandria into her bedroom. *She hadn't cleaned!* At least the place didn't look as bad as it used to... she didn't seem as bad as she used to be.

“Where are you coming from?”

He slumped down on the bed, began to undress as Alex hovered beside him, waiting for a response.

“Me, Clay and a couple more guys went to a club.”

He failed to mention that it was a go-go club.

He didn't see the need to.

“Di club is in Bay View Heights, jus down di road,” He continued.

Alexandria didn't know the clubs in her area, in fact, she no longer knew many clubs in any area for that matter. But then did she ever know a lot of clubs, she asked herself.

“I didn't want to stay, so I came here.” Tristan was saying.

Disbelief, suspicion and distrust immediately rose up in Alex's heart as it often does when she spoke to Tristan. She didn't believe a single word he was saying. Chances are he's here because he doesn't want his family to catch a whiff of the scent of ganja on his clothes. He doesn't want them to know he's smoking, she decided. As though reading her mind Tristan said,

“They were smoking in the club,” as he continued talking, he pulled his yellow shirt off, revealing the white crewneck undershirt beneath. With his undershirt partially covering his head, his words came out muffled,

“That's why me clothes smell soh.” He stood, kicked off his shoes, unbuckled his belt and slipped out of the rest of his clothes. Once undressed, Tristan grabbed his clothes along with the others and dumped them on the chair nearby. With the bed cleared, he stretched out on his back and closed his eyes. His dick was hard and erect.

“Yuh a come from a go-go club, nuh true?” Alexandria stated, not really asking a question.

“Alexandria! I am here instead of there what is that telling you?” Tristan barked angrily.

“Can yuh stop with all di questions?” He turned his back to her.

“From mi walk inna di house you a nag mi!” His voice raised an octave. Alexandria stopped talking she knew where this was headed. She glared at him instead and marched into her brother's room. *She wouldn't be sleeping in the same bed with him, no way!*

“Mi shouldn’t have come,” he bemoaned.

“Soon yuh a go start tell mi all di fuckin tings weh yuh claim seh a happen to yuh,”

“A nuh claim,” Alexandria interjected, her voice raising an octave.

“When me a tell you seh it all” Ignoring Alex’s outburst Tristan continued his tirade.

“In a yuh damn head.”

“A nuh only inna mi head,” She immediately defended.

“It is happening!” She declared emphatically.

“Yuh nuh know wah jus happen before yuh come eenen,” Alexandria began to explain.

“Bumboclaat, Man!” Tristan let out the expletive, grabbed the sheet and covered himself from head to toe. As though shielding himself from a blow, he curled up in the fetal position and shouted,

“Fuck, Alex just leave me alone.” Thumping the pillow angrily, He placed it under his head and barked,

“Mi nuh waan live innah your world, leave me alone!”

Alexandria Prescott did not know why it bothered her so much - the fact that Tristan did not believe her. It did not matter much that no one seemed to understand what she was going through or seem to understand what was affecting her. But it mattered much that the man she loved did not believe her. That he refused to even listen to anything she had to say about the things that were occurring in her life and what had become her focus – her struggle - for the past five or so years. It hurt that he did not understand or even want to.

Alexandria Prescott looked down at the sleeping figure on the bed and began to cry. She angrily brushed away the tears and wondered when she had become this woman that gave in to tears. So many tears. But she could not turn the tears off, they kept pouring out of her like the water often does from the broken faucet in her kitchen.

Tristan looked so small and frail in the bed.

She felt like a giant towering over him.

Where is the man that she had fell in love with? Where is the woman that had loved him? Why does he always respond the way that he does when she tried to tell him what's happening with her – to her? *Why did she feel the need to tell him?* The phone beeped, signalling that someone had sent her a text message.

“Hey, what’s up... how are you?”

Alexandria smiled as she noted who it was from.

“Hey Mark I am good, Tristan is here” Alexandria text back.

“mmmhh, thought u 2 weren’t together no more..lol..”

“Yes, we aren’t together ...but he drop by” *Why had she felt the need to tell Mark that bit of info.* Alex wasn’t sure. *Was it a warning to him to watch what he says?*

“stop by huh...LMFAO”

“u 2 still fucking”

“yes, on occasions 😊 it’s complicated”

“what does lmfaO mean?”

“@LMFAO - laugh my fucking ass off...just saying...I don’t understand u 2 relationship”

“yea, me 2..lol”

“mmmhh, you staying with him. What does that say about u...deal with u.”

“Any how, just checking up on you. txt me when you can.”

“Ok, will do”

Alex deleted the messages. On the off chance that Tristan should choose to look in her phone, she didn’t want him to see them. She sighed and wondered why she felt the need to delete them anyway. She wasn’t doing anything wrong, was she? Hell, I didn’t even tell Mark about the robbery, Alex thought; then decided not to. What good was it in saying anything?

Yes, what was that saying about me, she wondered.

How many times had she told others in subtle ways and not so subtle ways, the very thing that Mark was telling her now? Then, she couldn't comprehend why those women choose to stay with their men. She still did not understand why women stayed with those "kind" of men. But Tristan was not those "kind" of men, was he? And she was most definitely not those "kind" of women who stayed with that type of men. *At least he never used to be.* And in Alexandria's heart Tristan Davis was still the good decent man she had met and fell in love with so many years ago. He's just going through something, as she is. Eventually, he will be the same old Tristan I know and love, she thought.

October 3, 2011

Monday - 9:35 pm

After that weekend, I stopped sleeping at my grandmother's house. I avoided all situations that would put me in harm's way. I avoided him. Well, after that incident, there was an understanding between me and him, I was off limits. He didn't touch me again so I began to believe that he had changed. Now, I realize that it was just the threat of being told on that had kept him at bay. What does that say - he knew he was doing something wrong? If I had known all I needed to do was to tell - do not remain silent, maybe I would have done that sooner.

You know, up to this day I wonder why I hadn't had the courage to stand up for me, to defend myself from him. And why hadn't I done it earlier when I was far much younger instead of enduring it for so long. Instead, I did it for Justin. A trend I seem to still follow even to this day - standing up for/defending others even at my own peril while doing nothing on my own behalf, as though I do not matter - why do I automatically do that I wonder.

Somewhere along the lines, I had learnt that my needs weren't important, their needs were far more important than mine. That, that's how you show that you love – always putting them first. That it makes no sense crying out – there was no one to help even if I did cry out. Somewhere along the lines, I had learnt to protect myself by becoming cold, by burying my emotions so far down that I didn't really know how I feel. That I was of no value, that something was wrong with me and that's why I deserve to be treated like the scum of the world and it was all my fault. It was no one else's fault but my own. Somewhere along the lines, I had learnt there was no one to rely on, that I was alone, that there was no one to trust, no one to cry out to for help and to expect to be there for me. That all I had was me and all I could depend on was me. And that should be enough. But it isn't enough. And it shouldn't be enough. We do not live in this world alone. The world is filled with people, billions of people they say. Separate beings that should learn to work well with each other and some even becoming one with one another. You are supposed to have people with you in your life that you can trust - that you can rely on, that is there for you. It is a lonely place alone in this whole wide world.

I don't mind standing up for others that's what you ought to do when you care and see an injustice being done. But, you should also have someone, even one person in this whole wide world filled with billions of people willing and able to stand up for you, stand with you, to be there in your time of need. Even more than one person come to think of it. So I find, that although I know I must learn to stand up for myself and stand on my own. I want to have someone stand up, stand with me through the course of this life's journey that I am on. Is this the reason why so many people

often get married? To find someone who stands with them, understand them, be there for them? So far it hasn't felt as though I have encountered that one single body that is willing and able and strong enough to stand up for me and stand with me – so I stand alone.



The phone rang. Alexandria Prescott put down the pen and answered. It was her mother. Rosalind wanted to know if Alex would be at the dinner tomorrow night. Clair was giving Aunt Alison a dinner party for her birthday. Alexandria Prescott was not sure she should go. She was trying to avoid going down to that house and being around those people, but her mother convinced her. After all she needed to get out of the house, Rosalind reasoned and Aunt Alison really would be disappointed. Alexandria knew her mother was right. *She needed to get out of the house and Aunt Alison would really be disappointed.*

It felt good to be out of the house. Alexandria Prescott felt good today—pretty, even sexy. She waited only a few minutes at the bus stop before getting a ride. Within twenty minutes she was in Falmouth, the bus letting her off on Duke Street, where she walked along the road toward Clair's house where the party was being held.

A car horn sounded and Alexandria lifted her hand, waving it off. She didn't need a taxi; she wasn't going to Montego Bay. She paused outside the Falmouth Parish Church on Duke Street and tried to read the newly erected sign, bright, beautiful and carefully designed for tourists. At the top was a picture of the church and its proper name—*St. Peter's Anglican Church*—followed by neatly arranged fragments of history. She lingered, hoping the past might offer her something—an explanation, maybe a clue. A man stopped to

talk, and the moment broke. *Another time*, she told herself and continued walking.

At the corner of Pitt Street, she nearly collided with him—the man she had known as a child. He grinned at her the same way he always had. The instinct to run seized her without warning, sharp and immediate. Alexandria shivered, stepped around him and his bicycle, and kept walking, ignoring both his call and the frantic pounding of her heart. *I'm not a child anymore*, she reminded herself firmly. *I don't need to be afraid of him.*

She exhaled loudly when she reached the house on Pitt Street, as though she had been holding her breath the entire way. Still, she looked back. The man was riding up the road toward Falmouth Infant School. She watched him stop, lean in to speak to a teenage girl dressed in a William Knibb High School uniform, and the old knowing settled heavily in her chest. *He hasn't changed at all*, she thought.

There was a conversation going on over Alexandria's head, she tried to ignore it and focus instead on the people in the house. The dinner party for Aunt Alison was going well. Everyone was laughing, talking, eating. Plates clinked. Glasses lifted—voices overlapping, laughter rising and falling. Each family member arrived with a smile, a hug, a hearty greeting for Aunt Alison. Jokes floated through the air—about her health, her supposed death wish—and the night carried on pleasantly. No one mentioned her age; everyone knew that Aunt Alison was a professed young gal.

She was not participating in the activities around her, instead she was concentrating hard on not acting strange. *Don't act strange*, she told herself. She sensed him. A male presence moving through the house towards her. He stopped right in front of her. She stiffened. Then his voice, directed to the other standing beside her:

“There is an evil spirit in the house.”

The words landed heavy. A rush of sensation followed—fluttering, tightness, heat—like wings beating on her skin. Her chest constricted. *Go home, Now!* The urge was sudden, overwhelming – urgent. *Not now. Not here.* She argued with herself. Leaving would draw attention. It would offend Aunt Alison and the others. It would raise questions. *You're fine,* she told herself sharply. *Sit still. Behave. No more acting like a crazy woman.*

She lowered herself back into the chair, hands clenched in her lap, willing her body to be quiet. Around her, the laughter continued, oblivious. Alexandria Prescott waited, unmoving, for the heavy, burdensome feeling to lift—to loosen its grip and pass.

Several hours later, Alexandria Prescott turned the key in the lock and pushed the door open.

Darkness swallowed her at once.

She stepped inside and struck a pot with her foot. It scraped loudly across the floor, the sound echoing in the stillness. She sighed, the breath heavy with exhaustion and muttered,

“I need to clean dis place.”

Kicking the pot aside, she dropped the two heavy black plastic bags of groceries onto the floor. The thud sounded too loud in the silence. She tugged her handbag open, fingers digging through its clutter, irritation rising with every second.

It took longer than it should have to find her phone.

When she finally did, the narrow beam of its flashlight cut through the dark in trembling arcs, catching corners of furniture and casting long, distorted shadows on the walls.

Guided by the light, she made her way to the switch and flicked it on.

Nothing happened.

The house remained in darkness, quiet and unresponsive, as if holding its breath.

Alexandria Prescott wasn't surprised when the light failed to come on; it wasn't the first time. The kitchen electricity was unreliable, especially when her neighbors blasted music out on the street.

A heavy calm hung in the darkness, too deliberate to be comforting. There was no rush of movement, no startled flutter of wings. No frightened murmurs brushing her ear. The absence of sound pressed in on her, thick and expectant, as though whatever usually lingered there had gone unnaturally still.

"The kitchen light is out again," she murmured softly, as though speaking to the house itself.

Carefully, she manoeuvred around the scattered pots, pans, and knickknacks littering the floor, every step measured. Reaching the nearest switch, she flicked it on, the soft click sounding far too loud in the hush.

She surveyed the kitchen in silence—the dirty dishes sagging in the sink, the open cupboards standing bare and dust-choked, the pots and pans she had dragged onto the grimy floor days ago to spray for pests. Dead cockroaches lay scattered like evidence of a battle barely won. The sight of it all settled heavily on her. As she turned toward the bedroom, her mind automatically ran through the list of things that still needed doing—cleaning, unpacking, organizing—but the thoughts felt distant, stripped of intention. *I'll just lie down for ten minutes—maybe fifteen*, she promised herself, already knowing how easily the night could slip away before any of it got done.

She stepped inside and knew immediately—something was wrong. Someone had been in her room. She was not surprised to find her bags on the floor. This time she had been careful. No cash in her purse, only the five two-dollar US bills that had been there before. They were still there. Untouched. She stared at them for a moment, the words *In God We Trust* stared back at her. A sad smile tugged at her mouth. Slowly, she placed them back into the purse. The piggy bank was empty. The coins—everything she had left—were gone. She had planned to take them to the bank tomorrow. Now there was nothing to take. The doors were still locked. How had he gotten in? She moved toward the bedroom door, already bracing herself. Alexandria examined the frame,

the lock, the damage, studying it with deliberate care, as though distance and scrutiny might dull the impact. The same door. Always the same door. Last time, it had been unlocked. This time, it hadn't mattered. The lock had been forced—jimmied, torn away with practiced effort. Entry had been inevitable. Her thoughts thinned, slowed, narrowing to a single, unwelcome clarity. *They are watching me. They know when I'm not home.* The certainty settled in her chest, heavy and unyielding, leaving no room for doubt.

She knew it was one of them.

A neighbour.

Maybe a man.

Maybe a woman.

Someone right outside her door.

Someone who smiled at her in passing, who said *Good Morning* or *Good Evening* as though it meant something.

Someone who paused to chat when they caught her at the gate.

She hadn't been gone long. Just hours. Not days like the last time.

And still—still they had come in.

She looked around the room. The house. Took it in properly now—the dirt, the shabbiness, the neglect she no longer saw but knew was there. And the question rose uninvited: *What kind of person comes into a place like this and still takes something?* It was obvious she wasn't rich. Obvious she was struggling. Having mental problems. Depressed. Unwell. *Going through something.* They knew. Even if she wasn't close to any of them, they knew.

They had heard the arguments—her voice, Tristan's voice, spilling out into the night. He had shouted her life story often enough for anyone listening to hear. And they weren't strangers, so close enough that as she opened her doors, she could see them. She had grown up with some of them. Shared streets. Shared history. She stood very still, the thought forming slowly, carefully, as if it might break her if she rushed it. *Was it because I wasn't friends with any of them, why they thought it was alright to do these things to me?*

She did not feel safe.

She never had. Not in any lasting way.

Not ever.

And suddenly it felt as though there was no safe place at all—no part of the world where she could rest without being on guard.

She felt exposed, as though there were no longer any barriers between herself and the world. Something inside her felt damaged—fractured in a way she couldn't see but could feel. Uncontained. As if something essential had been stripped away, leaving her raw and unprotected.

Control was gone.

Privacy had been violated.

Protection no longer existed.

And beneath it all was the certainty of being alone.

Alexandria Prescott moved through the house on instinct, checking each door, each latch. The motions were careful, repetitive, as if precision might hold the world in place. When she was done, she turned the phone off. She went to the bed and sank onto it, her body heavy, uncooperative. Pulled the covers over her head and shut the world out.

The police siren screamed by like it had a personal vendetta.

He dove for cover. Jermaine clawed at the gun on his hip—a piece he carried more for show than use—his hands jittering as panic set in. The siren became louder as though the police had stopped right outside. They dropped hard beneath the window in unison, backs against the wall, hearts hammering while the siren slid past and faded into nothing.

Silence. Then slow unsteady breathing.

Jermaine whispered, “Man, mi tink mi heart just stop beat just now.”

They scanned the room through the haze—air thick with smoke and spilled liquor. Four naked bodies lay strewn across the floor and couch, unmoving, trapped in a sloppy, drunken stupor. No one stirred. No one cared.

He peeked out the window, squinting like the glass might snitch on him. Nothing. Still, his gut twisted.

“Time to go. This place don’t feel safe no more.” He muttered, as he flicked the ganja spliff unto the floor. Jermaine didn’t argue. He nodded, already backing toward the door.

It was his day off, but rest felt impossible. The hours stretched ahead of him, empty and uninviting, with no plans to anchor them. Inside the house, the air was already tight with frustration. His sister and mother were arguing again in the living room, their voices sharp and overlapping—old grievances dragged out, accusations flung back and forth, each word landing heavier than the last.

He lingered in the doorway just long enough to feel the familiar knot twist in his chest—anger tangled with exhaustion, the kind that came from hearing the same fight play out too many times. He didn’t have the energy to pick a side or play peacemaker. Quietly, almost guiltily, he reached for his hat, pulled it on and slipped out of the house, using the soft click of the door to shut out the noise and everything that came with it.

At the front gate on Queen Street, he paused. Across the road, the William Knibb Memorial Baptist Church stood quiet and imposing, its presence calm but watchful. He glanced up George’s Street toward the back gate—the road that would lead him straight up to Falmouth Square. He considered it for a moment, then dismissed the idea just as quickly. That route held too many chances for conversation, too many familiar faces.

A man stepping out of Doctor Benris’ office—just a building up from the church—called out to him as he passed. He answered with a brief nod, nothing more and turned onto Duke Street without slowing. He wasn’t in the mood for conversation.

The sun pressed heavy on his shoulders as he walked, heat rising off the pavement in soft waves. He kept walking, letting the town unfold around him. The town slid past one landmark at a time: He passed the Methodist Church first, its quiet presence softened by age and sun. Then Falmouth Resorts, polished and detached, followed by Falmouth Parish Church, standing solemn and weather-worn. Farther along came the Seventh Day Adventist Church and, just beyond it, the old Jewish burial grounds—silent, shaded, heavy with history. Each landmark slipped by like a marker counting the growing distance between him and everything he was trying to leave behind.

At last, the town loosened its grip, giving way to the beach—an uninterrupted sweep of white sand meeting a wide, glassy stretch of blue-green sea that glittered under the sun. The air smelled of salt, raw fish and sunlight.

Near the edge of the beach, fishermen hunched over their catch, knives flashing as scales flew like confetti. He dipped his head in a quick, noncommittal nod and kept moving.

One of them lifted a string of bright parrotfish and pitched it as a “Real good deal,” grinning wide. He laughed softly, waved them off with an easy smile and walked on.

The day burst open with light—bright, sharp, alive. Sunlight poured down from a sky crowded with slow-drifting, cotton-white clouds, their shadows sliding lazily across the sand. The beach stood empty, untouched, as if it had been cleared just for him.

A cool breeze came off the sea and brushed his face, carrying the familiar scent of salt and water. The waves moved gently, folding onto the shoreline with a steady, patient rhythm, while the trees behind him whispered as the wind passed through their leaves.

Without quite meaning to, he walked to a spot he knew by heart—the place where everything between them had first felt real, uncomplicated, full of possibility. He sat down. The memories came fast and unbidden. For a

moment, the past pressed in on him as vividly as the sun on his skin. Thoughts of how it had been—how easy it once felt, how certain things had been assailed him. Time had changed things, thinned what was once solid, but sitting there, with the sea before him and the wind at his back, he allowed himself to remember without resistance.

He missed her more than he cared to admit. The thought settled in his chest, heavy and unwelcome. He looked down at his phone, thumb hovering for a moment before he found her name and pressed dial. Nothing. Straight to silence. Her phone was still off. Three days now. Something felt wrong, a thread of worry tugged at him, though he tried to brush it aside, reminding himself that this was her way— pushing people away before they got too close.

He lifted his eyes to the deep blue sea stretching endlessly before him. The sun glinted off the water in blinding flashes, and the salt-thick air filled his lungs. Out on the waves, fishermen guided their small boats forward, dark figures bobbing gently with the swell as engines buzzed and then softened into the distance.

He forced his thoughts away from her and fixed them on one white boat cutting steadily across the water. He watched it drift farther and farther out, its shape shrinking, edges blurring, until it became a faint mark against the horizon and finally disappeared altogether—swallowed by the vast line where the sea met the sky.

*October 8, 2011*

*Saturday – 1:41 am*

JUSTIN

It's weird that once one villain is out of the picture another steps in. As I grew, I encountered so many others like him. It was as though I was a magnet that drew all sexual perverts to me or was it that I was also one too and they recognized it.

At thirty-five years old I find myself once again dealing with things of my childhood that I thought I had already dealt with earlier on in my life. To be honest, I thought I had already faced these demons and had conquered them. I am sure I did. I got over these things when I was a child. But here I am again, trying to tell you what had really happened. As though it really matters to you. And trying my damness best to conquer these demons all over again. For the sake of continuity let me stick to the part about Justin.

So for three years we didn't really see Justin or Juleen. Dad would go visit them on occasions and would bring back their hellos. Then one day, Justin walked in the house with Dad and began living with us again.

He was now eighteen and I was thirteen. And so many things had changed. I was no longer a little girl of six, eight, nine or even ten but a budding teenager. I had grown breast, something that embarrassed me immensely, something Justin teased me about often and I had started menstruating. Puberty was far more confusing than those books I had been given to read by the adults around me told me it would be. It wasn't only my body that had developed, my mind had too. I now had developed a "conscience". I was now reading the bible on and off, once again as I had done when I was littler and believing in God on and off, you know how it is. I had been taught what was right and wrong from a Christian

perspective, so I comprehended that what Justin and I had done when we were little wasn't something we should have done or be doing now, so I had no intention of doing anything with him again.

Justin had grown taller, was now interested in the girls at the college he attended in Montego Bay – no one called him “homo” anymore. And now, he was just my brother who looked out for me and helped me with my homework. I liked it best when we studied together because that was the only time he talked to me. We mainly talked about his women friends and school stuff. But I still enjoyed listening to him, talking to him, having him pay me some attention as he use to when we were little.

At first, I was an awkward, shy teenager who was terrified of boys and men. I tried to avoid them as much as possible especially Justin's and Dre's friends who often tried to date me. Funny, here I am again, feeling awkward and shy, trying to avoid men.

Two years later, Justin was gone again, off to university in Kingston and I was only seeing him on the holidays when he visited. When he went away to university that is when I began to really miss him – there was no one to talk to, to listen to me talk and understand me as I talk. Then something happen when I was sixteen years old. That summer of 92 when I first saw Tristan. Justin had come home that summer. Although, he hadn't told anyone he was coming I knew several days before that Justin would be home soon. He and I had that sort of connection.

That year, I started noticing some strange stuff about me and I really needed someone to talk to about it - to see if it was really strange stuff or just teenage stuff. I couldn't talk to my mom and I have never

really been close to my Dad in that way. Aside from that, my parents and I were now always arguing. Teenage stuff. At that time, I didn't know what I was doing wrong why they were arguing with me but I seemed to always say the wrong thing, do the wrong thing according to them. I didn't consider talking to Sammy. We had stopped being good friends long before that; she was now just my cousin. Sammy had a tendency to tell her best friends everything I told her. And besides that, I didn't want them to ridicule me. Talking to Dre was out of the question. He didn't have any time for me. He had his friends, his girlfriends, his reputation to uphold, his teenage life living. Besides, Dre and I never had that kind of relationship. At that age, Dre and I were still often arguing and physically fighting on occasions. I began to feel that Dre didn't really want me to be a part of this family. That he saw me as his competition for our parents, relatives and family friend's affection and as such I wasn't really his friend but closer to his enemy. Well, maybe that's putting it too far but I don't know how else to explain our relationship, because even to this day, his actions towards me feels more like one of an enemy than a loving brother. Even though I am told by others that he loves me and I know he loves me in his own way. Anyway, in those days, Dre often complained that everybody compared him to me and he couldn't be me. Which is true, he can't be me. He didn't seem to see that on my side, it was done in the reverse. People also compared me to him and found me lacking. And I can't be him. So in those days I was often, even subconsciously trying my best to stay in the background so that Sammy and Dre wouldn't have anything to complain/talk about me about. I basically, didn't want to get in their lime light. I didn't want them to feel uncomfortable, it took me years to realize

this, that that was what I was doing, for you see I am not someone who really needs the limelight.

As you can see, I wasn't having a happy teenage life. And I was about to make my unhappiness and confusion worst.

Justin had always been the closest one to me when I was growing up. He was the only one I could talk to, who seemed to understand what I was saying or trying to say. Looking back, I now realize that I looked up to him. He was my know-it-all brother who I could count on to talk to me – be kind to me. I was looking forward to seeing him, to hear all about his university school life, about all the girls he had been with, all the parties he had gone to and about the stuff he was learning in school.

I didn't know how much I missed him, ached for him until I saw him walked through that door. I met him at the door and threw myself in his arms. My ever present sexual feelings rushed to the surface. At sixteen, I had romanticized all my sexual feelings, frustrations – needs, unto Justin. I think subconsciously I reasoned that Justin was safe, safe for me to think about in my mind, safe for me to feel something for because it could never be real. And even if it did become real, he wouldn't hurt me like other guys could or would because he loved me and always would. I was wrong about this, so wrong.

At twenty-one Justin had just started looking and acting like a man. His muscles were well toned, his skin soft and smooth. I held him close needing to feel his body pressed against mine. He pulled out of my embrace, held me at arm's length, looked me over, shook his head, smiled then quietly, gently, whispered, "From now on stop greeting me like that. No more

hugging, okay.” He walked around me and went to greet my mom, patted Dre on the back and began talking to all the cousins and aunts that we had staying for the summer. One thing with Justin, he knew well how to seem confident, self assured, articulate, carefree while he held so many emotions in check under the surface.

Once again, I felt that wall, the one that I had bumped into only a few days before when I had looked at Tristan and expected him to “know me”. Now, Justin had it surrounding him, shielding him from my view. And for the first time I looked at Justin and wasn’t sure I knew the man walking away from me. He was different somehow.



The sound of her alarm went off, pronouncing that it was seven o’clock. NEWS TIME the phone reminder prompted. Alexandria Prescott searched for the remote and clicked the TV on to the local station that she normally watched. The news on T.V.J. had just began. She picked up the bags from off the floor, stared at the piece of newspaper clipping that was taped in the inside of her purse as a reminder and read the quotation, “*Character is doing the right thing when nobody’s looking. There are too many people who think that the only thing that’s right is to get by, and the only thing that’s wrong is to get caught.*” – J.C. Watts. Alexandria gently lay the purse on the bed, zipped up her bag and placed it in its place, then brushed aside the clothes that needed to be ironed and slumped onto the bed.

Tristan Davis pushed the door shut behind him and flicked on the television, letting the familiar glow fill the living room. He clicked through a few channels before settling on CVM, just in time for the eight o'clock news. The voices washed over him at first—background noise more than anything—until one headline caught his attention.

They'd found the man who won the lottery.

Two hundred and thirty-two million dollars.

Tristan let out a quiet breath and shook his head. Just like that—one person waking up rich in a country where most people were busy figuring out how to stretch tomorrow's dollar. Imagine that kind of money—no worries, no scraping by, no stress. Maybe he really should start buying lotto tickets. He knew he probably wouldn't, but the thought stayed with him longer than it should have.

The front door opened, cutting through his thoughts. His mother stepped inside, keys still in her hand, her mouth already set in that familiar tight line. She lowered herself into the chair across from him, shaking her head. Then immediately launched into a string of complaints about his sister, her words spilling out in frustration, cornering him before he could escape. Tonight, Tristan chose not to offer his opinion. Instead, he remained silent and listened, nodding now and then, letting her talk.

Andre Prescott cruised along the road as the city fell into rhythm around him. Streetlights slid past in steady intervals, their glow streaking briefly across the windshield before vanishing behind him. He eased deeper into his new ride, letting it carry him. The car answered every touch without delay—the steering wheel solid and assured beneath his palms, the engine murmuring low as power gathered and released at his command.

The tires gripped the road, hugging each curve with effortless precision. Every gear change landed clean. Every turn flowed into the next. The outside world

blurred—buildings, signs, passing headlights reduced to motion and light—until nothing existed but the road ahead and the quiet control beneath his hands. For those moments, Andre was untethered, suspended in smooth, forward movement.

Then the driveway appeared, sudden and final.

He slowed, pulled in, and cut the engine. Silence settled quickly, leaving the faint sense that something had been interrupted.

The ride had ended too soon.

Inside, Andre reaches for the phone he keeps separate from the others. Carlissa’s messages fill the screen.

He scrolls slowly. One message. Then the next. His face softens, almost without him noticing. The room seems to quiet around him—the faint tick of the clock, the low hiss of air moving through the house.

He starts typing, stops, then continues—each word placed with care. A pause between lines. A breath held. As though the wrong phrase might disturb something fragile.

Jennifer walked in while he was mid-sentence. She wore a fitted dress that followed the lines of her body closely, the fabric catching the light with each measured step. Her heels sounded softly against the floor, her makeup precise and intentional. She noticed the phone in his hand. Andre noticed that she noticed.

He finished the message, slipped the phone into his pocket, and looked up, schooling his expression.

“So,” he said lightly, eyes flicking over her, “where we heading?”

Jennifer smiled, slow and assured. “I thought we could grab a drink first,” she said, smoothing a hand down the front of her dress. “Figured you’d like that.”

Andre nodded, the smallest pause before he answered. “Sounds good.”

She reached for her bag as he picked up his keys. The space between them felt familiar but thin, balanced on unspoken understanding. Outside, Andre's gaze drifted back to the car. The streetlight caught its paint just right, the body gleaming quietly, waiting—patient, familiar.

He slid into the driver's seat and closed the door gently, as if the night might overhear anything louder. Jennifer followed, her perfume filling the small space as she adjusted her dress, knees bare beneath the dash light.

Andre started the engine. The car purred, smooth and familiar, grounding him for a moment.

Still, his thoughts wandered. They always did. Carlissa lingered without effort, slipping into the pauses between decisions. He wondered if she was waiting on his reply, staring at her phone the way he'd just been doing.

Jennifer leaned back, scrolling through her own phone. "Nice," she said, glancing around the interior.

"Yeah," Andre replied. She had helped him pick it up earlier.

He pulled onto the road, streetlights flashing across the windshield in steady intervals. The phone pressed against his thigh from inside his pocket, wordless but impossible to ignore. He told himself this was the life he was living now—the one in motion. Carlissa existed just beyond it, unresolved, unnamed.

As the city stretched out before them, Andre understood there was no turning away from what had already been set in motion. Certain lines, once crossed, did not blur with time. They remained—visible, fixed, impossible to pretend weren't there.

*October 8, 2011*

*Saturday - 11:33 pm*

That summer, Dre had to give up his bedroom to all our relatives that were visiting and bunk with me. There were people already sleeping in Dre's room, in the settee and on the floor out in the living room so it was only natural that when Justin showed up, he end up bunking with Dre and me after all, he was family.

I remember the first night he shared my bed. Dre and I had already gone to bed. Dre prefer sleeping at the bottom of the bed, I prefer the top. My dad had also gone to bed, tired from a hard day at work and now resting to start the whole daily monotonous routine of work again the next day. Everybody else had gone clubbing.

At sixteen years old, we – Dre and I – weren't considered old enough to go out drinking and partying with the adults. Dre had whined, cajoled and would have cried if that would have helped in his plea to go out that night but my dad didn't cave in this time. Even though my mom was on Dre's side, she also couldn't convince our dad to let Dre go out that night. I wasn't really interested. If I go or didn't go it didn't matter to me. I was use to my dad saying no to me going out to certain places and so had developed 'an immunity' to the whole process of being let down. And too, I wasn't really hitting it off with my new relatives. I was convinced that they preferred/liked Dre more than me. In fact, I wasn't sure they even liked me. They were always siding with Dre and basically questioning every little thing I do or didn't do in the household – chore wise etc. they thought I should do far more housework than Dre, I disagree, maybe it was just because I was a girl, who to tell, the women in my family often seem to pamper the boys/men and throw the women to the dogs. Well, they also

liked Justin so Justin must not have been around when they planned this little outing because he did not go.

So as I was saying, that night I had already gone to sleep, I woke up to the sound of flapping wings at my right ear and intense heat on me, surrounding me, going through me. It felt as though the wind from outside had somehow gotten in my bed and was now blowing forcefully directly on me. It felt like, I was in front of a giant fan and it was on its highest speed giving off heat and wind. I remember getting this impression that the wind was surrounding me, shielding me somehow from something dangerous. For a time, I lay there semi-awake aware of the wind and the heat. I finally opened my eyes and found Justin lying beside me, watching me. In an instant, I knew that this energy, this whole experience I was having was being caused by him somehow. He was looking at me intently. I looked back at him, saying nothing. The sexual tension was there again. The knowledge that I couldn't be with him only seem to intensify the feelings I was having. This taboo made it exciting, exotic and dangerous. He wanted me. I trembled with that knowledge and stared at him. "Are you cold?" He had immediately asked me. I shook my head saying no. Then Justin told me that he felt cold while my body seemed so warm. He could feel the heat coming from it, he said. Justin slipped out of the bed told me to put my slippers on and suggested that we go sit on the old tree trunk out at the back of the yard.

It was dark, about midnight or later, but he didn't seem to notice. I followed his lead, walking silently behind him until we reached the old tree trunk at the far end of the back of the yard. Huddled close together on

that old tree trunk with only the moon looking down on us we talked all night, at first, we talked about his school, his ex-girlfriend, his current girlfriend, the other women he was sleeping with, the way society is – apparently Justin had gotten rebuffed when he tried to speak to/look a girl who was classified as a ‘society rich girl’ and so now understood the difference between the social classes that existed in the society. He was debunked by it all. He explained to me, the different class system that our society was made up of – you had the two extremes the very rich and the very poor. Then there were the ‘in-betweens’ which the society was mostly made up of. We, our family was classified as the ‘in-betweens’ – we were middle class and within each of these classes of people, it was broken down even more because there were the upper middle class and the lower middle class. According to Justin, we were in the lower middle class but our next door neighbor was in the upper middle class. It’s all about the money, how you live, how you look, the titles you have the position you hold in society etc. etc. – he explained as to why our next door neighbor was in a different class than we even though we lived next door. I remember thinking that there were really a lot of classes weren’t they? It was clear he now wanted to become like the Joneses not the Joes. Justin now wanted to become ‘rich, powerful & influential’ – a Politician, just like the man who had told him that he could not date his daughter. and I finally realized what had changed about my brother. I agreed with him, it was far better to be rich than poor, to have people do your bidding than you doing the bidding. We talked about politics and different philosophies. Then we talked about God and the bible.

I reminded him that he use to believe wholeheartedly in God some years back. "Yes", he said but he wasn't sure any longer if all of this god thing was real. The stuff he was learning at his university was shedding a new light on the whole matter of religion, the bible and the very concept of an 'all-knowing', 'supreme being - God". He asked me if I had known that the King, one of England's king had commissioned a new bible just because he wanted to divorce his wife and marry a new one. In essence the king changed some wordings in the bible to get his way. I told him I didn't know of such a thing. We talked about Abraham and Sarah, how Sarah was actually Abraham's sister yet it is said in the bible that they were married and it was accepted. "Oh, well society do change" he said, sounding wise, very adult and well informed. At that time, there were less people on earth and these people were scattered about. The pickings for a mate weren't as it was today. And the culture was different back then so it was allowed, he explained, more to himself than to me. And of course, it had also been proven scientifically that the off springs of close relations such as brothers and sisters weren't as strong as those that weren't related. These off-springs are normally weak and get sick easily. All valid points as to why it was unwise for us to sleep with each other and be together. But cousins were still allowed to marry, the royal family did it all the time, he said.

I told him about the connection I seem to have with him. He suggested that he and I maybe telepathic. Something else he was learning about in school. Even though the teachers there told him ESP wasn't real Justin was convinced that it really could happen after all, he did have a connection with me. And for the rest of the night, we reminisce about the time when we were lovers. We never discussed him. It was an unspoken

understanding between us that, that part of my past /our past never happened and didn't exist.

In the wee hours of the morning we crept back in the house. Justin decided to make breakfast. I wanted to sleep. But once I reached my bed it took a while for me to fall asleep. In an hour or so my dad and Dre was up. As Dad stepped out for work, my mom and relatives came in. With my head filled with romantic, unrealistic, idiotic fantasies of me and Justin I fell asleep to the sound of laughter and chatter coming from the living room where my mom and relatives were regaling the events of the previous night to Dre and Justin, telling Justin all that he had missed.

My relatives spent most of the summer with us and Justin went everywhere with them. Soon he had met a girl several houses down the road that he found interesting and spent the rest of the summer courting her. So I never got the chance to really talk to him about the strange stuff I was experiencing or what I had felt that night until Christmas when Mom and Dad agreed to send us to Kingston for the Christmas holiday.



October 10, 2011

Monday – 8:15 pm

JUSTIN

Okay, so I was still on the topic of Justin. I had reached the part where I am sixteen and I have seen Tristan for the first time in Falmouth, though we didn't speak and now it is Christmas of that same year – 1992. That year, Dre and I went to Aunt Clara's house in Kingston for the Christmas break. Aunt Clara is my mother's big half-sister. It's best if I just explain my family's genealogy to you. Well, I will only give you the juicy part.

Aunt Clara and Auntie Bobbette have the same mother. My mother, Aunt Clara and Aunt Bobbette has the same father. My mother and Auntie Bobbette is the same age, actually they were born couple days apart, so you get the picture of how my grandfather was. He was married to my aunts' mother but seeing my mother's mother on the side. My grandmother was fifteen when she had my mom, incidentally the same age that my mother had me. Once my grandmother got pregnant the relationship ended between the two, my grandfather had no intention of disrupting or upsetting his life with his beautiful wife. My real grandmother didn't want my mother so once my mother was born, she was sent to the country (Falmouth) to live with her grand aunt, that's my great grand aunt, whom I often call my grandmother, Granny V. At the time Granny V didn't have any children and thought she couldn't have any kids, so she grew my mom as her daughter and not as her grandchild. When Aunt Clara turned sixteen years old and learnt that she had another sister, she decided that she wanted to meet her sister, so Aunt Clara found mom. A year later when my aunts' mother died and their father disappeared, Granny V took them in. Aunt Clara went back to live in Kingston when she got older while Aunt Bobbette stayed in Falmouth.

So that Christmas, when I was sixteen, Aunt Clara had invited us to Kingston and my parents agreed to let us go visit. When I was little, I always enjoyed going to Aunt Clara's house. Although it was always crowded, crammed with people, Aunt Clara knew how to entertain us kids. She always seem to have some thing for us to do, some thing for us to see, somewhere for us to go. I was never bored.

We hadn't gone to visit in years, so Dre and I were ecstatic that early morning when we boarded Sir T bus out at Falmouth square. We sat patiently, waited and watched as the conductor "pack" the bus. When the bus was "full up" we were on our way to town. Dre was sick right through the whole three hours ride to Kingston, but he didn't complain once. The sights in Kingston were different from those in Falmouth. The pace was faster, more energetic, more alive! The place was different; the people were different even the way they talk was different from us country folks. Because you know that's what they called us - country. Dre and I had laughed at that, that first time they called us "country" because we had never seen "the ghetto lifestyle" until we went to visit our relatives in Kingston. We weren't use to using "pit toilet" or having to bathe outside in a bathroom made of zinc with no rooftop.

Anyway, that Christmas Justin found us in Kingston and took Dre and me everywhere. Well that lasted for couple days cause Denton, Aunt Clara's eldest son, came back from visiting his Dad and once Denton was there Dre had no time for me and Justin. Dre and Denton had their own sights to see. So when Justin came by to take us to a club, Dre had already gone out with

Denton, to Denton friend's house. Things changed between Justin and me that night.

I had never been to a club before. It was a new club that had just open near Justin's home. Actually, it was his friend's club, so he was going there to support his friend's new venture. The "club" was just a big room. It was mostly dark, light came from only two places, the disco light ball whirling in the middle of the ceiling that gave the place that club look and feeling and the dimmed light at the bar which was situated at the end of the sound system which was near the club entrance. The bar and sound system took up one small area of the room, leaving the rest of the floor for dancing.

When we got there, there weren't that many people in the club. The music was blaring loudly and every so often the man manning the sound system would come on the speaker to introduce a dancehall artist whose music he was currently playing or he would "big up" a patron. At first, the pulsating reggae beat of the songs playing were drumming loudly in my ear and bouncing off the wall right back at me prompting me to cover my ears. But I soon got use to the loud sound and began to really listen to the words and feel the beat of the songs. I even started swaying slightly to the rhythm of the reggae beat as I slowly adjusted to the dark environs of the room. The club filled up quickly, soon there were many people on the dance floor and I couldn't even find a place to stand comfortably. The music changed to hardcore dancehall. I quickly moved out of the dancers' way and stayed in the corner watching the women gyrate their bodies while the men "bus a move" in front or behind their women. There were guys there too on

the dance floor who were showing off their different dance moves – showing their “skills”. I stood in the corner taking it all in. Everyone seemed to be having fun and I could feel the “good vibes” emanating from the people in the club. It was electrifying, energizing and I could stay there forever, sucking it all in.

Sometime later, Justin’s friend Ran – the owner of the club found us. He greeted Justin with a nod, a slap on the back and a grin, leered at me and begged me to dance with him. I smiled sweetly and told him the truth - I couldn’t because I really didn’t know how to dance. I had never danced before. He looked at me in horrified disbelief. “Every Jamaican woman can dance from dem eye deh a dem knee,” he declared (gross exaggeration which Ran was apt to do all the time), “an even if dem don’t know the dance moves dem know how to wine” he pronounced (another gross exaggeration). How is it possible that a beautiful, sexy girl like me can’t dance, he had asked. As I stood there looking at him, trying hard to hear him over the loud slow reggae music now playing I wondered, what did being beautiful and sexy had to do with knowing how to dance. That night, I really didn’t want to dance with Ran! As though the man on the sound system was over hearing our conversation, the music changed. Whitney Houston bellowed out the words to her song “I want to dance with somebody”, can you believe it! That was the song that started playing. So Ran was now suggesting that I dance with him to the slow music because at least, I should be able to dance that! I told him once again that I just can’t dance. He was sure I was kidding and wouldn’t take no for an answer. At the time, I was feeling horrible – how is it that I could not dance when everyone I knew could. Dre and Sammy were great at dancing and knew all the latest dance moves. My

family prided themselves in being great dancers. And I have never danced. At the time, I was sure I didn't know how to dance. Before that night, I had never even tried to dance. Justin assured Ran that I wasn't lying; I didn't know how to dance. A soft slow music had just started playing Ran grabbed my hands placed it in Justin's and shoved us both on the dance floor. "Show her man!" he admonished and walked off to talk to another friend with the promise that he'd be back later for that dance.

Justin took my hands and wound them around his neck. "It's easy," he spoke in my ear and a tingling sensation run down my spine. "Just follow my lead." He said as he rested his hands at my waist and casually pulled me closer to him. I held my breath as my body brushed against his. My fingers brushed against his neck as my hands wound around his neck. I felt his soft smooth skin on my finger tips and my skin tingled through my dress. The energy, the intense sensual feelings that I had felt a few months ago was back again. I became aware of my head resting on his chest, his hands spanning my waist, our body moving to and fro swaying in the small crowded space. Suddenly, it felt as though no one else was in the room only Justin, me and the music. I could hear when the beat of the music went high then low, fast then slow. My body moved to the rhythm as I listened to the singer's voice giving his own unique melody as he song those notes. I could even hear when he took in a few breaths to complete the verse. And through it all, my body tingled from so many different strange sensations, emotions and scents. Suddenly, everything was so heightened – the sounds, the scents around me. The music became louder, Justin raspy breath against my ear sounded loud, my skin felt alive and overly sensitive. I could smell his cologne mixed with his sweat and that energy, intense sexual

energy was present. I held on tightly to Justin, feeling strange and confused. Something weird is happening to me, I thought, this isn't the way how I am supposed to feel. It was as though I had stepped into a different world – a realm filled with sensations. Then the music stopped. Before the other song could begin, Justin pulled my arms from around his neck, stepped out of my embrace, held my hands and squeezed it gently, giving me a sobering look as he glanced around the room. And I was back into this world of hard cold reality where I was sure everybody could tell by just looking at me how I was feeling about Justin. He directed me to the corner of the room, found a chair and told me to sit as though he knew I couldn't have stayed standing. Sometime later, Ran found me still sitting in the chair alone, in the corner of the room. He pulled; half dragged me unto the dance floor. But it didn't feel the same as it had with Justin. Justin spent the rest of the night dancing with a woman he met at the club.



Bayview Heights is a small, hilly district in the town of Edmington Hall, located about thirty minutes from Falmouth and roughly an hour from Montego Bay. For many years, it was a quiet place, largely untouched by serious trouble. That began to change a few years ago, when individuals from Spanish Town, looking for somewhere inconspicuous to settle, started moving into the area. They did not stand out at first. Instead, they adapted easily, following the same routines and patterns as the long-standing residents.

They basically took up residence on a vacant parcel of land owned by a man who had lived overseas for many years and was known mostly through outdated records. What initially appeared temporary gradually became established. Over time, their presence extended beyond that single lot,

spreading through the community in small, unremarkable ways. Bayview Heights itself had grown largely without formal planning; many residents lived on land they did not legally own, their right to remain based more on time and familiarity than on documentation. With the arrival of the newcomers, that underlying insecurity became more apparent. In the years that followed, the district became increasingly associated with crime, frequent traffic accidents, and incidents of violence, altering how the town was spoken about beyond its borders.

Last year, an ordinary taxi ride became a moment Tristan would never forget. He was seated among several other passengers, unaware that two young men traveling with them—both from the district—were concealing their intentions. When they finally revealed themselves, fear gripped the confined space of the vehicle.

With loaded guns, the men demanded money and phones, their commands sharp and unforgiving. Though shaken, Tristan remained composed. He handed over what he had, explained that it was all he was carrying, and suggested they leave the passengers unharmed. After collecting what they wanted, the robbers drove off with the taxi, abandoning the passengers on the roadside in the darkness.

Alexandria's house was close by and had been Tristan's destination. He and one other passenger walked the remaining distance without much conversation. After reaching safety, he contacted the police to report the incident. His phone was never recovered, though the experience stayed with him.

They argued that night. She had not believed him at first when he had calmly told her what had just happened. Tristan had snapped. She had tried to calm him down, but the damage had already been done.

He got over the fear of going up there in the night, many months ago, when he had braved it to visit Alexandria one Saturday night when she would not answer her phone for several days and was not even answering calls from her

mother. After her mother contacted him out of concern, Tristan went to check on her, believing it was the responsible thing to do.

Now, as the taxi passed the familiar road that led to her house, he found himself wondering how she was doing.

She heard his voice echoing in her head. She felt agitated, awake. She could hear him. It was there, his voice in her head a constant direct throbbing echo, like a pulse beating. He was also awake. She sensed his presence as though he was standing right beside her. His presence surrounded her with his love. His love, a feeling she hadn't felt coming from him and directed to her in so many years. He was thinking of her tonight and this time it was not with anger or hatred but with love. His love surrounded her as though they were his arms. It wrapped around her and held her close. Tonight, she could recognize him easily; this was the way she was used to him being. She felt energized and refreshed.

She felt loved.

Alexandria Prescott stopped writing, turned on the phone and text this message.

“u awake”

“yes” he replied immediately.

“having one of those nights huh” She text back.

“yes, can't sleep, haven't been sleeping well these days...miss u”

They spent the night texting, chatting as two old friends, the way they use to do many years ago when their relationship was filled with love.

October 13, 2011

Thursday - 6:33 pm

Another week is already going by and I am here alone in silence. My mind flooded, no bombarded with memories of yester year. I can hear the loud music playing from my neighbor's yard several houses away. The dogs are barking loudly, the teenage boys are outside laughing and chatting as they play domino, and my thought is, what happen to me, why am I home all alone, all the time instead of out there - outside enjoying my "young" life? Now, I have lived this life, I know the answer to this question. I know what happened and is happening to me. Yet, I still find myself asking - why had it happened, what had gone so wrong, why hadn't I listened, what is wrong with me and how do I get out of this current prison without bars that I daily live in? I hope by writing these letters - going on this journey with you, I will find the key to open the door of this invisible prison and walk free.

So here I am telling you my story, trying to make you understand what I have been trying to tell you for so many years now. I had reached the part where Justin took me to his friend's club "opening". It was the first time I had been to a club and the club experience was enjoyable enough that I didn't really want to leave. After I had danced one song with Ran; the DJ picked up the pace and began to play hardcore dancehall again. I refused to "wine" and "dance close" with Ran, his hands were gripping, groping my butt - my hips, constantly pulling my body to his as he grinded his groin against my front! So I went back to my corner of the room and

spent the rest of the night watching the dancers as they did their moves on the dance floor.

We left the club at around three - four o'clock; I know it was early morning before the break of day so it must have been before five o'clock. Justin's house wasn't far from the club. It didn't take us long to reach it. Before that night, I had never been to his home. When we reached his house, I commented on how big it was, he laughed and explained that he only occupied a small area of the house. That he had chosen the house solely because it was within walking distance to his university. The university life is hard, he said. The area that Justin occupied consisted of a bedroom and bathroom; he shared the kitchen with the other occupants of the house.

Justin gave me a shirt to sleep in. I changed in the bathroom then quickly slipped under the bed covers. A feeling of unease swept over me as I watched him pulled his shirt off and slipped out of his pants. I had seen Justin often in his underpants at home but that night, it felt intimate watching him undressed while I lay in his bed in his shirt barely covering all of my thighs. He spent a very long time at the radio, twisting the radio dial left to right until he found a station that he liked. He then turned off the light and slipped under the covers with me. The feeling of unease increased as we lay there awake, silent and alone in his bed. It was there again, all those energy - feelings I didn't understand. I tried to ignore the tense sensual energy surrounding me and focus on going to sleep.

I was talking before I really know what I was saying. I tried to explain to Justin what I was feeling, tried to share with him "the feelings/sensations" I had experienced that summer the first night he

slept in my bed, and “the feelings/sensations” I was experiencing right now in his bed lying beside him. Because of what followed after, I am sure I didn’t explain it well. Oh well, that’s life!

That night, he spoke quietly, calmly, slowly. “Yes, he felt it too, this thing between us,” he said. It wasn’t going away, it hadn’t gone away over the years, he added despondently. He was no longer denying it, maybe we should just go ahead and do it, he said. After all, I wasn’t a virgin. That was the first time and only time Justin ever mentioned what he knew. Then, I was so sensitive about that particular fact – my absent hymen, though I kept that sensitivity to myself. Most didn’t know I wasn’t a virgin. At that time, I had never had a boyfriend, not been around boys and men much thanks to my Dad so it was just taken for granted - well by those who didn’t know the truth that I was a virgin, and that I was innocent enough to the whole physical experience of foreplay and the sexual act. That night, it hurt immensely just to hear him say those words – I was not a virgin.

I think I am healing, slowly but for sure. I am sitting here writing this to you and there is no pain, I feel no hurt, there are no tears. I am just remembering. Just three years ago, I could not have done this. But then, three years ago, I was at a different place – a different state of mind.

Well, he suggested that maybe we should go ahead and do it, that maybe if we did it; we would no longer want to. That sometimes it’s the not knowing, the fact that it is taboo that made it appealing. That time, I didn’t think about whether it was right or wrong. Justin had made a valid

point, I thought. Maybe this intense attraction was there solely because it was forbidden and I wasn't a virgin, it wouldn't be my first time so what's the big deal, I reasoned. I could easily give him what he desired. I wanted to please Justin as I often did, even when we were children. But we weren't children anymore. Now, he was the one who knew more.

I lay still as he caressed, stroked and kissed me. I felt nervous, anxious, worried – scared. It didn't feel as it did when we were kids. Now, Justin was a man – like him. His hand slipped between my legs and my anxiety increased. I was panicking! At that moment, it dawned on me that, I really didn't want to do this! But I was afraid to tell Justin. My body was programmed, had been programmed long before I could even talk, it gave all the signs that I was ready for penetration. Justin's knees pushed my legs wide apart, he positioned himself and pressed in. It hurt. I wasn't expecting pain. I cried out. He paused and then tried again. I pulled away. Justin's arms wrapped around me and he pulled me close to him. He kissed me on the forehead and my heart began pounding loudly in my ear. I was getting scared all over again. "I am sorry," he said, "You aren't ready for this." He told me we didn't have to do "this" there were other things we could do. Then he showed me.

Dre and I, spent the whole Christmas holiday with Aunt Clara in Kingston and I started living two separate distinct lives - a public one where Justin was just my brother and a private one where Justin was in my eyes "my boyfriend". I accepted and slipped into the two roles so easily: sister/girlfriend. I had played these kinds of roles before during most of my young pre-adolescent life - living a life of deception, acting as though

everything was just as it seemed while beneath the surface there were so many things going on opposite from what was actually seen. I wasn't even really acting or pretending; it seemed natural. In my mind's eye, they were just separate, these two roles that I played and I understood why they had to be. During the course of the one and a half week that I spent in Kingston, Justin and I became inseparable. He took me everywhere he went, exposed me to the "uptown lifestyle" and the "downtown lifestyle" that make up the Kingston way of life. The uptown people didn't mix well with the downtown people it seemed. But Justin knew a lot of people and had friends everywhere. He was bent on meeting and getting to know people in "high places". You see, Justin could also play the two roles very well. He even introduced me to his "uptown" girlfriend – she was the daughter of one of those aspiring politicians in Kingston. He said he was serious about "this one" so I automatically liked her. He wasn't serious about the "downtown" girlfriend she was just for sex. I also liked her too. He had explained his reasons for choosing the uptown girlfriend. The uptown girlfriend was a virgin, educated – going places, had her career path planned out and have a family to back her whom he liked. The downtown girlfriend had none of these qualities. By the time I went back home, I was "in love". Justin got a job thereafter, so he couldn't visit us as often as I would like but he visited whenever he could.

Our "relationship" ended five months after it began. I came home from school one afternoon and found my mother in my room, sitting on my bed holding my diary in her hands. She looked up at me with tears in her eyes and angrily declared that she preferred if I had slept with twenty men than did what I was doing with Justin. I remember clearly that she

had angrily asked me how I could have done such a thing. I had no answer. So I got angry instead. She had no right to read my diary, I admonished. And her reply broke my heart. It was the way she said it, the pain and hurt that I saw in her eyes. She shook her head in disbelief, threw the book on the bed and had told me that it would have been better if I had slept with him than do the things I was now doing with him. Up to this day, I don't know why it had hurt so bad to hear her say that. The tears rolled down her cheeks. I saw the pain and hurt on her face. For the second time in my life, I told my mom how sorry I was and promised never ever to do it again. I promised that I would stay away from Justin. At the time, I meant every single word.

October 14, 2011

Friday - 4:00 am

I was really hurt and felt violated that my mother had intruded on my privacy. Funny, that that was what I was hurt about; somehow it was all her fault for intruding on my privacy, for betraying my trust - reading my private thoughts. My mother explained that she hadn't intruded on my privacy that in fact, I had been careless. I had left the diary out in the living room; she was placing it in my room when the diary fell open on the floor. Something had caught her eye as she picked it up. That something

was my description of the stuff Justin and I had done the previous weekend when he had come to visit. She had sat for hours waiting for me to come home. Besides, I shouldn't have put those things in my diary, a diary that anybody could easily read. You know I didn't think, I made the assumption that no one would read it because I don't normally read other people stuff – my family (Mom, Dad, Dre) wasn't the type to intrude and read other people personal things. Well, that's how I saw them at the time. Well Dre might have read it but he wasn't the reading type. Then, I wouldn't have read someone's personal diary even if it was open and I could see the page. I would have closed it and brought it straight to them. You see that was how I was taught.

“Well, I am leaving now.”

Tristan stood in the doorway watching Alexandria write.

He had awoken that morning and found her already at it, so he got ready, then sat outside and waited for her to stop. He had wanted to spend some time with her before he had to leave, but that was two hours ago.

Now he needed to go home and get ready for work.

Alex looked up at Tristan.

The sadness and anger clinging to him wrapped around her instantly.

Instinctively, she tried to pull away emotionally, but it didn't work.

She was still connected to him—to them.

What had happened between last night and this morning? The question echoed in her mind. When he had come by the night before, he'd been fine—calm, familiar. Suddenly, her thoughts spiraled, shredded by confusion. Tristan

was angry, deeply sad, and burdened by something darker still—an emotion Alex sensed but couldn't name, one that unsettled her to her core.

In an instant, a spirit came to stand in front of her.

*I have a secret;* it quietly imprinted on her mind.

*You fucking bitch!* Another screamed at her.

The force of its hatred hit her squarely in the chest.

She tried not to show her fear.

*I'm going to be late for work. When is she going to stop writing?* he thought, irritation tightening his chest.

She finally closed the notebook, pushed her chair back from the desk and stood.

"Sorry you're going to be late for work," she said.

Then she tilted her head, squinting. "Can you stop looking at the door sideways? I can't see."

"Alex! Stop doing that. Get out of my head. I hate when you do that!"

"I don't know how to stop," she said frustratedly.

"I'm leaving now," he said.

"Okay," she replied.

October 14, 2011

Friday - 9:15 pm

My mother informed me that she wouldn't be telling my Dad. We would be keeping "this incident" as a secret between us. It wasn't wise to

let my father know something like this, she said. It was understood that my little trysts with Justin was over. It was understood that I wouldn't be telling anyone about Justin and me. And another "secret" was stashed away in the vaults of secrets that I kept in my heart. She also suggested that I go see a shrink, which I immediately refused to see. Seeing a shrink meant that something was really wrong with me.

My mother has never really had to hit me or punish me for me to feel bad or punished. All she needed to do is to show her displeasure at a negative behavior of mine that she didn't like and that was enough to get me back in line. This time was no different. My mother stopped speaking to me. She spoke to me often to go do my chores, wash the plates, clean the house etc. but she really didn't talk to me as she use to for quite some time after that. What I had done had put a wedge between us.

I called Justin the first chance I got which was right after "the incident". He had gotten angry and called me a fool. Had actually asked me how I could have been so foolish to write down such stuff like that. That day, even over the phone, I could sense Justin's fear. He hadn't come to my rescue as I had hoped, hadn't rushed in to stand by my side and take some of "the heat of disapproval and cold stares" from my mother as I had to. After all, it was the two of us that had done something wrong. It was only fair wasn't it? But like the coward that he is – that's what I thought of him at the time, Justin stayed in Kingston until the fire had burnt everything out to ashes and the wind had blown them all away. Justin hadn't been my knight in shining armor as they often showed men in the movies to be. In fact he deserted me, left me to stand the heat all alone.

Next, I had called my best friend at the time and told her about it expecting her to understand and console me. After all even though I had not told her before that I had liked my brother in that way, she had said she liked her cousin so I thought she would understand. She hadn't. After all, she had said she liked her cousin not that she had fucked him. She was offended. In her opinion, my situation was totally different from hers, I guessed I didn't explain myself well.

I don't know how Justin got back into Mom's good graces again. He and I never discussed that.

Eventually things went back to normal between them and I found myself feeling betrayed by both of them, by my mother who had banned me from being close to Justin and by Justin who had blamed me for disclosing the things we had done, weird, the way how our mind works.

Here I am again writing everything down. I haven't learnt my lesson as yet have I? But, I am not telling you anything new; you have already heard all of this from other lips before and some from my own. In this life I am now living, I have been forced to become naked before you even though you are unable to see this. Strange isn't it? How things can be in plain sight and so many are blind to it. They don't see the whole picture, just the parts that interest them. They only want to hear the good juicy part of the story but not the awful shameful parts that they as a whole have also contributed in creating. Well, let me continue my story. Maybe I can create something better from these ashes.

This "incident" happened several days before my final exams (C.X.C.) started. As you may have guessed, I didn't do so well in the exams. Out of

the eight subjects that I took, I passed only three, getting a two in all three subjects. My Dad was disappointed immensely, he was expecting great things. My family was expecting me to do well as I was considered by them to be “bright & smart” like Justin. I disappoint them all that year. And disappointed my Dad even more when I told him that I wouldn’t be going to college but would be moving to Kingston to live with my cousin Melonie and seek a job there. He didn’t try to stop me but to my surprise, he agreed. I think my mom had a hand in that. Well you know why I had to leave; I couldn’t stay in the house with my mom’s frowning disapproving sad face constantly reminding me of what I had done. My guilt, shame and despair were killing me!

At my first attempt to find a job, the interviewer was kind enough to let me know that I wouldn’t be getting any “good” jobs without a passing grade in Math and English and having three C.X.C. subjects was just not wise, it was clear to her, the interviewer that I could do so much better. I got the job at “Burger King” and started going to evening classes. The next year I re-sat all the subjects that I had failed. This time I passed all the subjects I took and even got couple “ones”.



She had been carrying his presence with her for days, so the ringing phone felt less like a surprise and more like a confirmation. When she heard his voice—achingly real, no longer confined to the quiet corridors of her mind—it unsettled her. His voice arrived exactly as she had been hearing it—familiar in a way that made time feel irrelevant. At first, she hardly recognized it. It had

taken her years to understand that the thoughts she received were not entirely her own, that sometimes his mind brushed against hers without warning, without distance. As they spoke, their words seemed to bend around what was unspoken, as though the conversation followed a path already traced in her mind. It confirmed the whispers that had accompanied her all day. When the call ended, she was left suspended between calm and disquiet, compelled to open her notebook and write about him.

October 15, 2011

Saturday – 10:40 pm

MARK

I met Mark three weeks after “the incident” with mom. I had just sat one of the hardest C.X.C. exams I had ever taken, Math to be precise and knew without a doubt that I had failed it. It was not that I was really bad at math but my mind wasn’t prepared for the exam, there had been so many things going on in there. I had tried to concentrate on the subject at hand but I just sat there, my mind would stray to Justin, my Mom, him and every other thing except Math. I had done my best, answered couple questions – worked out couple problems but I knew I didn’t do enough to even get a passing grade. After the exam, I wanted nothing more than to reach home.

I was walking to the Granville taxi stand; you know the one out at Market Street in Falmouth when I walked right into him. I must not have been looking where I was going because I don’t know how that could have happened. All I remember is that, I bumped right smack, full body contact into his hard rock, steel firm body. He steadied me. “Wow,” he had said his

tone slow and intimate. "Slow down girl!" and ripples of sensual sensations rushed all over my body. It was something in his voice; it was deep, strong, powerful and even musical. I liked Mark from the very first moment I heard his voice. I looked up, he stared down at me, I smiled my apology, his hazel eyes widen and I knew right away – he liked me too. He followed me to the taxi stand, waited until I got in the taxi, joked about me not bumping into anybody else and waved goodbye. I went home and went to sleep.

Two days later, he came up to me at school, after I had sat another exam – English, that I was sure I had failed and introduced himself. He was in the 9th grade; I was in 11th grade – my final year of high school. I had never seen him at school before which wasn't a surprise; I didn't really mix with 9th graders. In fact, most days I really just went to school then go home. I participated in school activities if I had to, which was on rare occasions when my teachers ever so gently demanded that I should. In 9th grade, I was told by one of my teachers that if I wanted to graduate I needed to participate in "extra curricula activities". So I had joined the required two clubs and didn't decline the positions given to me in the clubs. You know how it is, this school thing. The pressure, the desire to do well, do all the right social things in high school – be nice to the teachers, join clubs, participate in activities etc. etc. with the goal to get into a "good" college or university. UWI has always been thought of as the university to go to, if you are going to university in Jamaica, Utech has often been thought of as the 2nd choice which you choose only if you can't get into UWI or you aren't migrating. Actually, I think back then, UWI was "the only university" around. At the time, UWI and UTECH were situated

only in Kingston and we “country bumpkins” would have to go live in Kingston while going to university, which is what Justin had done, you see all of my information came from Justin later on, he was the one who explained it to me. So the goal would be to get into UWI after you have passed all the required C.X.C. subjects and there at university you make sure to study and meet all the right people who will help you in your quest to get a great job – your “ideal job” which leads you into living the “good life”. Well, I didn’t know any of those things then. And I wasn’t taught, hadn’t learnt how to do any of those things come to think of it. So I didn’t try to meet the right people as Justin had done, didn’t try to do “good” community work in my school, church and community, or participated in any activities etc. I basically tried to stay away from it all for those things weren’t really my things.

I guess, I wasn’t really enjoying high school, enjoying my life in general – I saw everything as unfair, double standard, hypocritical – no different from the life I had been living since I could remember. There were so many required conflicting behaviors, nuances – things beneath the surface, I couldn’t understand it all. Don’t know why I needed to. So, I just functioned, more like a robot processing everything with no feelings, doing what it’s programmed to do. Well, that’s how it had felt. That was my teenage life.

So Mark was fifteen years old and didn’t look or sound like fifteen at all. He mostly hanged around the guys in 11. You remember that then our high school had five grades. It started at 7th grade up to 11th grade.

Let's see, the education system that was working at that time was like this. Then, we normally sat an external exam to get into high school. I think back then, it was called the "common entrance exam". Before we take the exam we normally choose two schools that we wouldn't mind going to - a first choice and a second choice, then if we pass the exam, depending on the grades we got in the exam, we are placed in one of the schools that we had chosen. Usually you were placed in the first choice if your grades were up to par. If your grades weren't that good for the schools you chose you were placed in one that was suiting to your grades. So the bright kids went to the bright school and the 'dunce' - not so smart kids went to the 'dunce' schools. That was my understanding. If I am remembering correctly, there was some other stuff involved in deciding which high school one would choose to go to, for instance the schools in Kingston were considered better schools than the ones in the country, and the schools in Montego Bay were considered better schools than the one in Trelawny, Trelawny being more "country" than Mobay. Montego Bay is considered our second 'big' city, Kingston being the 1st "big" city. I learnt all of this school stuff from the other kids in my class, the other parents and from the teachers who taught us because my Dad had disagreed with them. He believed that the school system needed to change. He believed that the school nearest to our home would have to be good enough for me, and that, it was dependant on the student whether he or she wanted to make the best of his or her learning or not. The school didn't have to define the student that was my Dad's opinion. I really didn't care which high school I went to. Think my parents didn't fuss about the quality of the school and so I in turn didn't

see what all the fuss was about, so they were the ones who choose the school anyway. But I had wanted to pass the common entrance of course.

Anyway, in my high school each grade had three classes, so we had 7<sub>1</sub>, 7<sub>2</sub>, 7<sub>3</sub> then 8<sub>1</sub>, 8<sub>2</sub>, 8<sub>3</sub> and it continued the same way up the grades like that, until you reach 11<sub>3</sub>. According to the students the “ones” had the brightest kids, the “twos” the second brightest you get the picture. I was in 11<sub>2</sub>. I think they may have been right, 11<sub>1</sub> had the brightest kids, because most of the prefects, club presidents, head boy and girl etc. etc. were in this class and normally these kids were often considered “bright” kids. In fact, some of them were really smart.

So, Mark was funny, he knew how to make me laugh and knew how to bring out a certain side of me. He was charming and I needed a friend. I gave him my phone number and we began “phone chatting” each day. Then, mobile phone was not so common. I didn’t have a cell phone, nor did he. So we chatted mostly in the night when everyone had gone to bed. I didn’t see him at school. By then I was only going to school on the dates when I had exams. This was the norm for the 11th graders then. Think it still is. We, the 11 graders were basically out of school. We were expected to show up at school on the days when we had exams and normally left school right after we sat all the exams we had for that day. I think we were expected to use the free time off to study for the subjects we were taking in the C.X.C. while the rest of the school population continued their daily class activities; school was still in session for the rest of the student body.

Now, a week before the last exam that I would be sitting, Mark and I were chatting on the phone as we often do when he came home from

school, when I complained about the fact that I didn't think I had studied enough for the coming exam so I would be failing one more subject. Mark knew about me and Justin. In one of our late night "phone talks" needing to talk to someone about it, I had confided in him – a total stranger about my incestuous act with my brother. Looking back now, maybe I should have taken my mother's suggestion and go to that shrink. Mark in turn had shared that he really would screw couple of his cousins – third cousins; I guess that is considered a lesser sin or no sin at all. So I was complaining that I was having problems studying at my house. He suggested that I could come over his house, we could study together he said. Mark was having internal final exams at the time. Mark's Dad had migrated to England when he was ten years old. He lived with his mother who was a nurse. She worked on shifts at the Cornwall Regional Hospital in Montego Bay. That week, she was working on the night shift. I remember him telling me that he would be home alone. The house would be quiet, perfect environment for studying, he had said. It was early in the afternoon; I was seated at the table with the books open but not really studying. I agreed. I didn't even consider how it would seem being at a boy's home alone or even what could happen there. Knowing my past history, I should have known these things right?

I asked my mom if I could go study at my friend's house, don't think she knew it was a boy's house. She barely glanced at me, shrugged indifferently and told me that I could do whatever I want after all I had already done it. I grabbed my books and rushed out of the house.

At the time, Mark lived in Falmouth. I lived in Granville, the one near Martha Brae, not the one in Mobay. So you know I had to take a taxi to reach his house. He and his mom were living at the house on Duke Street, right near the Falmouth Parish Church. He met me at the gate, took my books and asked if I was hungry. He was cooking dinner for him and his mom. I wasn't hungry. At that moment all I wanted was to cry. His science books were laid out on the table. He placed my books beside his, rushed to close his bedroom door, which I immediately assumed must be dirty and stood there in suspension, watching me. The food on the stove called his attention and I walked to the table, open the books and began to really study.

After three or more hours of having my eyes glued to the book in front of me, I needed a break. Mark had left me alone, only interrupting me twice. Once to ask me if I was sure, "I didn't want any of his food" and the second time to ask me a science question. He was now seated on the settee, watching a movie on the television with the sound turned down low. I went to sit beside him. He glanced over at me said he could see that I did some studying. I laughed and told him thanks. And an awkward silence followed as he sat there pretending to be totally engrossed in the movie he was looking at on the tv I began to feel agitated, wound up; aroused – needing something I couldn't explain. I knew he was attracted to me, I could feel it and see it. I knew what he desired of me. There wasn't anything holding me back from doing it, I reasoned. I made a decision.

I took his hands, dragged him up from off the settee and led him to his bedroom. His room was dark; we didn't turn the lights on. Light shun

through the open window near his bed. I gently pushed him on his bed, stood between his legs and took his face in my hands. That night, I acted out one of those romantic scenes I had often fantasized about and seen in the movies so many times before. I showed him how to kiss me, where to touch me, what to do and when it was over we went back outside. There, someone knocked on the front door, Mark open the door slightly. His friend took one look at his face, pushed the door open and walked in. He grinned at me and Mark as Mark introduced me, took the stuff he'd come to borrow and left as Mark had explained that he and I was just about to leave the house. We walked in silence to the taxi stand. At the taxi stand, he wished me luck in the exam I had coming; I wished him luck in the one he had the next day. The taxi came, I went home.

At home, everything came crashing down. The shock of what I had just done. That night, I sat on my bedroom floor for hours, fretting my heart out if he had gotten me pregnant. And beating myself up about how foolish I had been to do such a thing with Mark – someone I barely knew.

Funny, looking back now, it never even crossed my mind to take a morning after pill or insist that he use a condom. If I had done so I wouldn't have been fretting over getting pregnant and I didn't even think about STDS, after all he had said he was a virgin. Well I could've gotten pregnant still because the condom isn't a 100% safe method and even if I had thought about the morning after pill, would I had been brave enough to go buy it? But you get what I am saying.

Anyway, on the day of the exam, Sheraine (a close friend at the time) found me in the school's cafeteria. "It's all over school that you slept

with Mark," she greeted me with. "Is it true?", "Tell me it's not true!" she had said excitedly as she gripped my arms and dragged me out to the school sports grounds. As though I was standing in front of the police firing squad, I answered all of her questions honestly. "Yes, I had slept with him", "Yes I had enjoyed it", "Yes it was a horrible BIG mistake" and "Yes I won't do it again".

Mark explained that he hadn't told anyone, he "swear!" but his friend had seen us and had told his other friends who told their friends and so on. At seventeen, it was a big deal to know that everyone knew who I had slept with and that I was having sex! I didn't believe Mark, I reasoned that he was a guy and the little I knew about him, I reasoned that he had done what boys/men sometimes do – made sure that everyone of his friends knew that he had had sex. So although we still remained friends, our phone chatting sessions cooled a bit and I continued living my teenage life as did he. Incidentally, I should tell you, I passed that last exam that I took.

Over the years, Mark has always seemed to come into my life at specific times. Always it seems, right after I've had the worst possible thing happen to me and I am feeling deserted, alone and despondent that's when he would call or show up out of the blue. Ever since I met him it has been like that and he never stays in my life for long. Something would happen and he'd disappear out of my life once again. Usually by then, I am emotionally back on my feet. He'd reappear the next time I fall flat on my face again.