

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 soils. 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.



Revelations

**Don't forget the Journey.
How you get to where you are
at presently. Is important!**

As we grew, he became my best friend then lover.

The cock-a-doodle-doo sound of the rooster and the bright sunlight through the windows which indicated that she didn't need the electric light to write, told her that she had stayed up all night writing. She closed the notepad, curled up on the bed and fell instantly asleep.

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 got up from the computer desk, went to get some coffee, stood staring out the window at her neighbors backyard for several minutes and watched for hours as two birds made their nest in the tree near her window. The hours went by without her noticing and suddenly it was nightfall. When night fell. She went back 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 from her. *I can't write this*, she thought. She went to turn the tv on and spent several hours in front of the tube surfing the cable channels for shows that would make her laugh. She didn't find any.

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

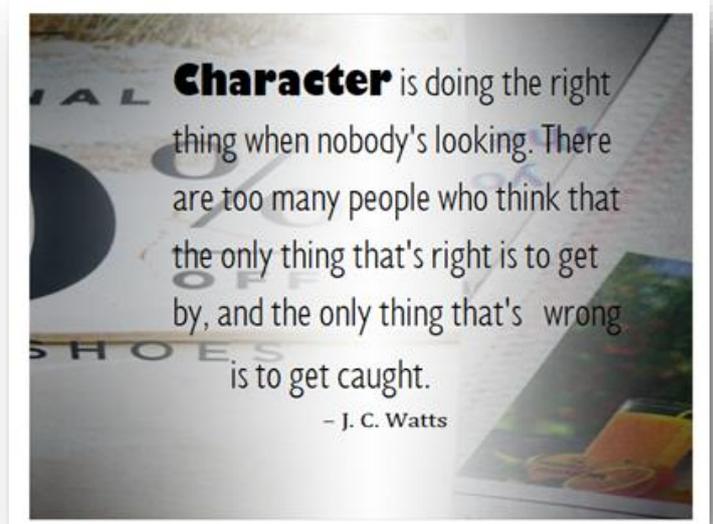
still there. How could she have forgotten to take the money with her when she was leaving, she berated herself.

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):

The composition books she writes in are the same ones elementary school kids use – the black and white bound ones with the white ruled pages and wide lines. She has so many note-books filled with words, and she fills more each day. As Christmas approached, the day that celebrates the birth of her Lord, this woman named Ida Neal Lord used the word “love” at least four times in her latest notebook, which is all about overcoming what happens when there is no love.

“Love conquers all,” Lord said at the York Adult Day Care Center, the place she spends her weekdays every day of her life where she is the one and only author-in-waiting. Where this 45 -year-old woman lights up the place with her face – a face that once lay on a cold floor, covered with blood.

If you get shot in the head by a maniac on Valentine’s Day 2008, and then have to re-learn how to eat and walk and read and write – there is plenty to write down.

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. She writes it all down.

The story she writes is about a mother of three and a nursing aide for hospice patients who goes to a check-cashing business to get money to wire to a brother in prison.

There, somebody who has shot three people before - and robbed even more at gunpoint – shoots her in the head for no reason.

For good measure, he shoots her in the back as she lays on the ground.

The woman somehow survives surgeries and a coma and re-learns how to do everything. But only to a certain point.

Some wounds to her head and body cannot heal. Bullets tore away too much of that head and spine that tell the body what to do and how to do it.

NOT A NOVEL

That is not a novel. That is what happened to Ida Neal Lord on Valentine's Day 2008, and what she has lived with every day since.

And somehow, at that adult day care, Ida Neal Lord walks in, with a metal brace like a cane with four feet, and smiles.

And each day Lord, a mother of three boys and a grandmother of eight, takes out her composition books and writes it all down.

"Ida has such a determination, a spirit, a joy for living, that none of us can figure out where it comes from because she always has it," said Dee Curran, director of the adult day care in York.

"She never gives up."

Nursing assistant Regena Hawes calls Lord, "Our author. Our greatest treasure. Our celebrity."

A woman who gained celebrity because she was shot. A woman who limps through the grocery store or Walmart, and people clap. They just stop and applaud when they recognise the cane, and the smile, wrought from the barrel of a gun held by the worst serial shooter in York County, ever.

She writes it all down, how people are nice to her and help her continue.

"I love them all," Lord said.

HELP

With help from one of her grown sons, Lord has found a self-publishing house that will publish that book for about US\$1,700. Women who have been shot and have had to re-learn every part of life, do not have US\$1700.

Lord has social-work help, an apartment in public housing after a life of living from the sweat of her labour, and little left over. She has asked Santa Claus, in her Christmas list written in one of those

composition books, for a CD player for Christmas because hers just broke.

That is what Philip Watts, serving eight life sentences and deserving every one of them for crimes so brutal and cold, has given Ida Neal Lord every day of her life.

Yet Lord forgave Watts long ago.

“I pray for him every night, when I read my bible,” said Lord.

Then, after prayers for the man who shot her, Lord somehow lays her head down to sleep.

She wakes early and faces another day of trying to eat and walk and using her right hand to write.

Her left hand is clasped shut forever - a reminder of violence unleashed on her for no reason at all other than meanness.

She plans on calling the book *Anu Beginning*. A play on words, instead of ‘A New Beginning’.

“That spelling might be catchy,” Lord said. “I know the right spelling. But I want it to find people.”

“I just hope to get this published, so somebody might be inspired not to give up, like I don’t give up.”

On Ida Neal Lord’s Christmas list is only that CD player. The other thing she wrote cannot be purchased. It can only be earned, then given.

“I want better people, who love each other more,” Lord said.

“That is all I really want.”

“A better world for people, 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.