

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 them 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 ran 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 bodies 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 sang 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's 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 11th. 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 7₁, 7₂, 7₃ then 8₁, 8₂, 8₃ and it continued the same way up the grades like that, until you reach 11₃. According to the students the "ones" had the

brightest kids, the “twos” the second brightest you get the picture. I was in 11₂. I think they may have been right, 11₁ 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.

Although now we are "good friends" Mark still remains elusive. He is good at that though - talking, asking me questions, feeling me out and getting me to talk but sharing only small bits of himself - don't know if it's just "a man thing" they seem to do that often don't they – share only bits of themselves while we women tell everything, need to share everything?

So I find myself thinking that I still haven't really gotten to know this man and may never will. Well maybe that's how it should be.



Andre Prescott resurfaced from the deep area of the pool and playfully flicked water unto Jennifer's face. Jennifer in turn grabbed him, pushed his head under the water and screamed as he dragged her under.

"Andre!" Jermaine shouted.

"Your sister is here to see you!" Jermaine looked worried.

Juleen Saunders-Perez gripped the small black suitcase in one hand and Allison's shaking pale petite white hands in the next. When she saw Andre walking towards her, she smiled in relief and proudly pronounced to Allison,

"This is Dre my brother, he will help."

Andre gave Allison the once over and intuitively knew what had just went down. The speck of blood on her shoes confirmed what he was thinking.

"Here is not the place to talk." He said.

He walked towards one of the bedrooms.

When the door was locked, he turned to Allison and asked,

"What went wrong?"

Allison feverishly grabbed the suitcase from Juleen, flung it open unto the floor and tossed the car keys to him.

"They killed him," Juleen began to count the money in the suitcase.

"I got away" Allison said as tears rolled down her face.

Jermaine took out the coke, stashing them on top of each other.

Allison started sobbing loudly.

“They are looking for me!” She held unto Andre’s hand pleading.

“Please help me! I need to hide.” She said desperately.

“I...I didn’t expect him to do that.” She said in shocked disbelief.

“The rest is in the car?” Jermaine asked as he took the keys from Andre’s hand. Allison nodded. Andre stared soberly at Juleen.

“Why yoh bring er here?” He asked.

“You know a noh my ting dis, me noh inna di coke ting.”

“Mi know man, but ah you alone mi couldah come to” Juleen said with pleading eyes, she too started to cry.

“ah mi fren mi haffi help, you want them kill har? Juleen asked.

“and anuh like me can go to Perez.”

“in a dis business yah you noh have no friend.” Andre stated emphatically.

“And noh start wid di crying, you can’t fool me, me know yuh Juleen” He stated firmly.

“Fine!” Juleen said turning off the tears.

“I met her two days ago, what you expect mi fi doh when she come to me!”.

“a whole heap a money dat and when you sell the stuff you will have even more”

Juleen placed her hands on Andre arms,

“Mi know seh ano your ting this but you did it once fi Matty noh true.”

“Mi wee ask round and see who want it.”

Andre pushed Juleen’s hands off him and walked away.