

# Cousins

## Christmas Eve in Beaufort

### A Gullah Story



By Damon Thompson

This short story was created to build unity in Beaufort County by reminiscing on  
the days when it was all so simple...

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## Chapter 1 Deac, Jakari, and Peezy

When Grumma asked Peezy to run an errand for her on Christmas eve, he willingly accepted, not knowing, Christmas eve in Burton would never be the same... Deac tossed the covers on the floor, rolled out of the bed, pasted his face to the window, grabbed his glasses, and looked up in hopes for snow. The rich Spanish Moss drooped from the oak trees that resembled Cowboy Earp's hair. He would rather have it covered with snow but the low country was not known for a white Christmas.

"Son, get dressed, I need you to help me deliver these meals to the church."

Deac lowered his head and sighed.

"Yes sir."

Next door lived his cousin Jakari with his mother and two older sisters. Merry Christmas Baby by Otis Redding blasted in the house. A tall tree was placed in the corner of the living room decorated with lights, ornaments, and a bright yellow star at the top. Under the tree were neatly wrapped presents that stretched to his mother's favorite chair. Jakari put on a blue hoodie and snuck through the back door. His bike was right where he left it, on the side of the back door with a bent frame and chewed tire. Diamond, a vicious Pitbull, had a thing for tires, especially bicycle tires. They moved her up the hill to Mr. Rufus house who lived by himself,

away from everyone. She was not as dumb as they made her out to be, she had dug a whole and squeeze out of the cage to chew on bike tires like old man Pete chewed tobacco. Mikey, Mr. Rufus only child was the only person that could control the beast once she got hold of a tire.

"Jakari, Getcho behind back in yuh and clean this room up," she said.

The kids outside laughed as they tossed the football in the sky for a round of every man for themselves.

Peezy caught the ball and ran. He juked to the left, stopped, juked to the right; his gold necklace bounced up and down on his chest while he performed his favorite player's dance, the Deion Primetime shuffle in the in zone. Peezy was naturally athletic; he won the 50-yard dash in 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup> grade for field day. He lived with his grandparents while his mama and daddy traveled for worked, they missed the last 2 Christmases but always returned a day after to shower him with gifts. All the kids would run to the dirt road when they heard the horn from the 18-wheeler blaring. Somehow that did not help the pain Peezy felt watching his cousins open their gifts on Christmas morning.

"Peezy, come yuh, and take that chain off yo neck for someone snatch em."

Peezy tucked his necklace inside his shirt, picked up his coat, and jogged over to his grandmother.

"Yes Grumma."

"Listen to me, I want you to go to Mamie house and pick up a package for me. I know I should of went to the sto yesterday like I plan to. Take Jakari and Deac with you. Hurry up fo dark fall."

"Yes, ma'am.

Peezy threw a perfect spiral to one of the kids and ran over to his uncle, Pastor Blacken's house. Gospel music played softly while Pastor Blacken put several meals in a box. Deac eyes brighten when he saw Peezy at the door.

"Good morning, Uncle Zeke."

"Hey nephew, I didn't see you at Sunday school last week."

Peezy scratch his head rapidly, as he always did when he had to think of a quick one...

"Yeah, I was under the weather."

He coughed...

"Uh huh. Whatchu need?"

"Grumma told me to take Deac with me to pick up a package from Mamie house."

"Yes," Deac said under his breath.

Zeke scowled at his son.

"That's Miss Mamie to you. Why mama always do that? She know I got to be at the church this morning."

"Well, I think she meant fo me, Deac, and Jakari to walk there."

"I ain't know bout that, ya'll 3 together?"

Deac's mother walked from the kitchen.

"Peezy, ya'll go ahead, son put on your jacket, hat and gloves," she said.

Zeke looked at his wife who put on a coat.

"I'll help you at the church," she said.

Zeke smiled.

"Okay, ya'll boys be safe, be back in 2 hours. Do not let me have to come looking fo you."

"Yes sir, the boys said as they ran out of the front door.

"Thanks, Peezy, I really didn't want to go to church, again."

"Yeah, ya'll go to church, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday..."

"Okay okay, I get it." What we got to get?"

"I don't know, there's Jakari come on."

"What's up Jakari, you coming with us?"

"Why you got on a hat and gloves? Ain't even that cold outcha."

Deac looked back and swipe the red beanie from his head.

"Grumma told me we have to go get a package from Miss Mamie house," Jakari said.

"About that. My daddy said I have to be back in 2 hours if we go this way it is gonna take all day."

"Exactly, we can go through the path," Peezy said.

"The graveyard, pond, cornfield, and you know Diamond cracky self is tied up to a tree up the hill back dey," Jakari said.

"Why you so scary," Peezy asked.

"I aint messing with that fool dog, she already chewed up my bike tire," Jakari said.

Deac ran into the house.

"See, your scary self-done terrified Deac."

He ran back out with a pack of sandwich meat with thin red layer stripes around the meat.

"This should distract her," he said.

"Hurry before my mama notice it gone.

## Chapter 2 The Graveyard

The boys ran down the dirt road through the woods and followed a path that led to the cemetery. The temperature was cooler in the woods from the large trees that covered the sun.

"Before we go in here, remember not to step on a grave. If you do... You got to stay still for 5 minutes so the dead can go back to sleep," Peezy said.

"Do we have to go this way," Jakari asked.

"Yeah, come on, just stay together, and walk around the graves."

The boys enter the graveyard; hundreds of tombstones were scattered as far as their eyes could see. They pointed out old family members from the 1800's and the more recent ones that had passed. Walking through the family cemetery was frightening, even with-it being daytime.

Peezy walked ahead of the boys and turned around.

"Come on, it's bout a mile until we get out," he said walking around the graves. Deac scratched his nose, took off his glasses, and rubbed his eyes that began to water and turn red. He made a weird nose with his throat like a pig searching for slop.

"What's wrong with you," Jakari asked.

He sneezed and continued to clear his throat.

"You straight," he asked.

"Yeah, go head, I'll catch up," Deac said.

Jakari continued to walk around the tombstones, as he noticed a dark cloud covered the sun that made the cemetery murkier. A gust blew in Deac's nostrils. He held his head back, his mouth opened wide, eyes closed...

"HAA-CHOO!"

Deac glasses flew off his face; he heard a clank and fell face down. He moved his hands around and felt the hard cement tombstone and head piece.

"Wait, you here that," Peezy asked.

They turned around; Deac's scream echoed through the cemetery and out the woods.

Peezy and Jakari ran back in the woods, Deac was on all four, counting and whimpering like a puppy.

"Shhh. Be quiet, you don't want to wake the dead stupid," Jakari said.

"How much longer do you have," Peezy asked.

"About 3 minutes."

"How do you know," Peezy asked.

"Shut up! You messed up my count."

Deac continued to count while Jakari and Peezy remained still with him.

"What's that?"

A tall man in a black cowboy hat with a long trench coat holding a shovel stood off to a distance. He stuck the shovel in the ground; the boys peeled out of the cemetery, leaving only dust behind them.

They erupted out of the woods, bent over, hands on their knees and panted. Deac wiped his glasses with his red beanie and placed it back in his coat pocket.

"I'm never going back in there," Deac said.

Peezy, touched his chest and neck, he looked on the ground frantically.

"My necklace! It must have dropped."

"I'm not going back in there," Deac said again.

Peezy began to walk back to the cemetery; Jakari followed him.

"Wait, what if that grave digger snatches you?"

"I don't care; my brother gave me that before he went to boot camp."

"He's right over there on Parris Island; he can get you another one."

"Shut up Deac, he told me to take care of it."

"Let's get the package, and we can look for it on the way back. That way, the grave digger should be gone by then," Jakari said.

"I don't like this, but okay."

The boys continue down the dirt road in silence, except for Jakari attempting to make them laugh with jokes.

"Peezy."

"What?"

"How do you catch a squirrel?"

"I don't know, set a trap?"

"No, climb in the tree and act like a nut."

Peezy chuckled and shook his head.

"Deac."

"What Jakari?"

"How do you know when a clock is hungry?"

Deac put his hand in his pocket and shrugged his shoulders.

"Give up?"

"Yeah."

"It goes back... FOUR seconds."

"Stale behind," Peezy said.

The boys all laughed as they approached the pond...

### **Chapter 3 The Cattail Marsh**

Jakari put his hood on his head, Peezy zipped up his coat, and Deac put on his beanie and gloves.

"You think it's gonna snow," Deac asked.

"Man, it never snow down yuh," Jakari said.

The boys had to decide how they were going to save time. Either take their clothes off and walk through the pond or walk through the hidden marsh and risk bogging down. The cattails were towering and slender, swaying and brushing up against one another, their tops resembled burnt corndogs. Without warning, Peezy began taking his shoes off.

"If we walk through the pond, that can save us at least 36 minutes," Jakari said.

"36 minutes, that doesn't make any sense," Deac said.

"I'm not walking in that water."

Deac thought about what his daddy said; he did not want to catch a cold the day before Christmas.

"If you go in the marsh, the tide will catch you and bog you down, dummy," Jakari said.

"Whatever," Deac said.

Jakari and Peezy dressed down to their underwear and walked in the pond slowly.

They both jumped out and ran back on the grass. The water was colder than they expected, Peezy watched Deac walk around the pond into the cattail marsh.

"Don't go, if we can stand the cold water for a few minutes, we'll be out in no time, come on," Jakari said.

Jakari went back into the water holding his folded clothes above his head; Peezy followed him.

"Hey guys, guys, I think I'm stuck," Deac said.

He looked down at his feet that were submerged in the marsh. He pulled his left foot out and it sunk deeper. Jakari tossed his clothes and shoes on the dry land and climbed out of the pond. Peezy stepped out of the pond and put his clothes back on quick like a pit crew putting tires back on a race car. He shivered while Deac was waist deep in the marsh. A shirtless Peezy ran over to a tree and snapped a branch and threw it at him. The branch did not reach; Peezy took off his pants and went into the marsh. He extended the pole like branch to Deac who leaned for it. Deac fell face down in the marsh before latching onto the stick.

Jakari ran over and helped Peezy pull a muddy Deac out of the marsh. Jakari and Peezy laughed at Deac as he wiped the mud from his face and body. Deac lips

quivered, he wiped the mud from his face as he was uncomfortable and shame, but it warmed his heart to see Peezy happy again.

## Chapter 4 The Cornfield

The boys could see Miss. Mamie's house as they stood on top of the hill. There was only one thing that stood between them, the larger-than-life cornfield.

"One of these days, this hill is going to be covered with snow and I'm going to slide down on a sleigh," Deac said.

"We don't need snow to slide down," Peezy said.

"Oh boy," Jakari said.

Peezy spotted three tires next to Mr. Rufus house.

"Where are you going?" Deac asked.

"Shhh."

Peezy tiptoed to the side of the double-wide trailer and rolled three old car tires over to Deac and Jakari. The front door opened...

A grey hair gentleman with overalls stepped out on the front step with a toothpick hanging on the side of his mouth.

"Mikey, you need to go get yo dog, she got out of the chain again," he said.

Diamond sniffed around eating scraps; the tires wobbled and collided with Jakari. Diamond head rose; she locked eyes on the tire...

"Run! Diamond is coming," Jakari said.

Diamond jetted towards the tires; her jaw was opened with saliva flying from both ends. The boys jumped on the tires and slid down the hill, faster than the speed of light. That did not stop Diamond from pursing the rubber that she craved. Her legs got from under her; she rolled, got back on all four, rolled again, got back up, and rolled. Peezy and Deac jumped off the tires. Jakari's foot got stuck inside and Diamond locked her jaw on the tire. She forcefully shook her head and sent Jakari flying.

The cornfield extended for endless miles; brown wilted crops stood shoulder to shoulder and made a loud rustling crash as Jakari landed in the middle. Deac and Peezy ran inside the maze, breaking down the seasonal walls in search of Jakari. "I'm over here," he said.

Peezy laughed as Jakari brushed the brittle stalk and crinkle leaves from his clothes.

"What's that?" Deac asked.

A loud grinding from a tractor roared through the field. The metal blades had an appetite for withered stems it chewed into bite size crumbs. The boys bumped into each other, not knowing what direction the tractor was coming from.

"This way," Peezy said as he ran left.

The ground crunched as the tractor revealed its large grill behind them. A long hiss from the hydraulics sounded off while the dried corn snapped. The boys exited the maze and fell on each other. They looked up at Miss Mamie's house that was outlined in yellow and white Christmas lights.

## Chapter 5 Miss Mamie's Place

The crickets started chirping, and the owls began to hoot. The sun had sunk away, for the day, and the temperature had dropped significantly. A blazing fire outside kept loved ones warm as they shared stories and exchanged laughs. All the homes were decorated with Christmas lights, red bows, and assorted wreaths hung on doors. In the middle of the neighborhood stood a large tree with indigo color glass bottles that hung from it to ward off the evil spirits. The mud on Deac's clothes had dried, and he was able to rub most of it off, but the unexpected cold fought through his layers.

"I'm going by the fire, to warm up," he said.

"Me too," Jakari said.

"Okay, I'll be right back," Peezy said.

He waved at a few people that pointed him out.

"Good evening," he said.

Miss Mamie sat on the front porch; she wore a West African scarf wrapped around her head and a long colorful skirt that hid her ankles. Her large hand grasped a hefty wooden stick as she talked to Pastor Blacken.

Pastor Blacken looked at Peezy, his face was dirty, streaks of mud patches covered his shirt, jacket, and jeans. He yawned and rubbed his droopy eyelids. Under his fingernails were dirty.

Miss Mamie picked the straw from his hair and smiled at him.

"You the one causing all that racket round town?"

Peezy lowered his head; he was too exhausted to talk.

"Where my boy at," he asked.

Deac and Jakari walked up to the porch.

"Looka yuh, ya'll churn a mess, stand right dey, don't bring all that mud in yuh."

Pastor Blacken grabbed the large trash bag.

"Miss Mamie thank you; I'll make sure mama get this."

"You welcome, anytime baby. Ya'll need to soak in that tub tonight, that one dey gone need tree bath."

Deac looked at his father and quickly looked away.

"I'll deal with you when we get home."

The boys got inside the truck while Pastor Blacken talked to a few of the church members outside.

"I need to go back and get my necklace."

"I'm sorry, it's my fault," Deac said.

Jakari yawned and laid his head on the window and shut his eyes. Pastor turned the volume up as Silent Night by The Temptations played on the radio while Deac looked out the window at the kids playing tag in the dark. The streets were decorated with lights, reindeer, and holiday figures. Peezy wiped his face to hide the tears that were shed.

## Chapter 6 Life Ever Lasting

Pastor Blacken took the black trash bag in the house as the boys slowly woke up from a much-needed nap.

"Let's get up early and go back to look for it," Peezy said.

"I'll probably be punished for a month after what happened today," Deac said.

The boys walked in the house, their cousins May and Zuzu from the city had made it safe with their parents.

Zuzu coughed uncontrollably.

"I glad to see ya'll finally join us," Grumma said.

Pastor Blacken handed Grumma the bag, she opened it, sniffed inside, and grabbed a hand full. She snapped it into small pieces and placed it in a large pot that was boiling on the stove. After several minutes, she strained it, poured it in a cup with a lemon peel and drizzled honey.

"This yuh is all you need for that bad cough and cold you got."

"Grumma, what is it?" May asked.

"Ly Of Lassen. Yuh, sip it slow but drink it while a hot."

"Alright boys, ya'll go wash up, and go to bed," he said.

"Leave dem churn lone, you did the same thing when you been little, remember where you came from. Sit down boys, and drink this tea, ya'll hungry?"

"Yes ma'am," the boys said together.

Deac woke up and placed his glasses on his face. The ground was covered in white.

It was snowing! He jumped out of bed, threw on his clothes, and ran out the back door. Jakari noticed his old beaten bike was replaced with a brand-new bicycle.

Peezy appeared out of nowhere on his new red bike. Deac looked at his mom and dad as they stood in the door smiling. The boys went to their grandmother's house for the family's Christmas breakfast. While they were all eating, two loud knocks came from the door. A man in a black cowboy hat and long trench coat entered the home. He removed his hat and wiped his boots on the mat.

"Merry Christmas everyone, I just wanted to return this," he said.

Peezy eyes lit up, he walked over to the man and said thank you.

"You boys got to be careful, next time, just take the path to the left," he said.

The Grave Digger left, and they all continued to eat.

"Baby, how you feel," Grumma said.

"I'm feeling much better," she said.

"Peezy, I need you to run another errand for me, go to Frazier house and pick up a package fo me.... Take May and Zuzu with you."

THE ADVENTURE CONTINUES....