

I. Berthas
and
II. Exploring the fictional origins of stereotypes of The Angry Black Woman and
The Strong Black Woman.

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Abstract

Berthas is a novel exploring the Black British Caribbean Identity of Black British Caribbean Women and the notion of 'blackness.' It explores issues arising from leaving the commonwealth in Jamaica to arriving in the Mother Country, Britain.

Set in both the UK and the West Indies, *Berthas* explores the issues of hybridity, diaspora and duality. It follows four women over four generations, beginning with a death in Jamaica, the West Indies, it transitions to Britain. During the novel, the narration flashes back to characters and their experiences in Jamaica. *Berthas* ends in the birth of another character Monica.

It is written in a lyrical style much like Toni Morrison's *Jazz* (1992), *Beloved* (1987) as well as Sam Selvon's *Lonely Londoner's* (1956). Like these novels, *Berthas* has a distinct style that deliberately links with these lyrical novels. And like the characters and people it represents, the structure of this novel is of a hybrid nature. *Berthas* rests within the oral tradition of the Caribbean as well as incorporating the traditional superstitious beliefs that survived African Slavery, combined/compared with the religious Christian beliefs of the West. The language is also reflective of the hybridity of the people, combining English with Patois in order to create a new language for a new people.

The structure combines different voices, exploring Double Consciousness through Dissociative Identity Disorder, and the hybridity of culture and experience through Revisionist Literature. These voices overlap at times, creating a sense of confusion which is reflective of the theorised collective sense of cultural confusion of being Black Caribbean British. *Berthas* also examines the internal voice much like Bessie Heads, '*A Question of Power*' (1973).

The accompanying critical work engages with debates on stereotypes of Angry Black women, and the Strong Black Woman. It engages the debate of globalisation, equality as well as otherness. This thesis seeks to capture an accurate portrayal of the Caribbean Black British female experience.

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Berthas

For my mum Monica.
Thank you

Prologue

Monica was 5. Not stupid. Grandmamma always told her she knew more than the grownups. She was closer to what came before this life and so knew more. They had forgotten. 'It only com' back when' yu ol' she used to say, meaning, that's when they'd remember what came before - when they were old and dying. So, Monica knew death wasn't something to be feared. It was like great grandmamma, you were lucky, you'd die in your bed surrounded by your loved ones. Grandmamma was going. But Monica knew she wasn't going anywhere. She would hang around. In the air. On the wind. In the trees that whispered at her as she ran home from school. In the eyes that watched her as she spied on the neighbours. Just because you died, didn't mean that you were gone. This place clung to you. A fog hung over the island and trapped everyone that ever was and everyone that ever would be. There was no escape.

It was that same white fog that got into Parkie that day. It's what gets into all of us sometimes. The lurking evil that we all pretend that's not there. But Monica knew. Monica saw and Monica felt. Like she said, she wasn't stupid. She could see the Jim Crows circling.

Her aunts crowded around grandmama's bed. Front seats reserved for families. The bedsheets were grandmama's favourite, white cotton with pale blue forget-me-nots. Doll, Doreen and Rose sat around their mother's bed as she stared into the ceiling seeing the mystical beyond. It was well known among the family members that the old woman was mad.

'You don't think she left her hair on the floor, do you? Anything could have gotten at it.' Rose said, flashing a concerned look to her sisters.

'No, don't be fool, fool. She just gettin old,' Doll retorted, her sharp brown eyes flicking from her sister to her mother's pinched face. As the eldest, they always looked to her to talk sense, something she considered she was very good at. 'I never heard her talk so much rubbish. She ask why her daddy gone and left her. I tell her granddaddy been dead near 40 years, what she talk 'bout?'

'She was always granddaddy favourite, now she the las.' Doreen, the middle child considered her own position in the family, and when it might finally be her time. Her aunt Maureen was the middle child also, and because of that, she always felt closer to her, still missed her shrill laughter on the veranda. 'Aunt Maureen went all quiet, as did Uncle Alfred, dem na wan no fuss.'

'Momma though.' Doll's brown eyes lit up as she laughed with her sisters. They thought

of the mother who held raucous parties when they were younger, the woman who caused the scandal with Makeesha's man, and the woman who created hell down at their school because school beat her child just for having nail polish that she herself had put there for a party, and forgotten to wash off. 'Momma don't do quiet.'

Doreen burst out laughing as she fanned herself as the heat of the afternoon made the room stifling. Crickets chirruped in the leafy undergrowth of the mature trees. The window opened wide had a lacy net curtain that their mother prized. It was sent all the way from England. Somehow that net curtain meant that they were a better class of people than their neighbours; that they were more cultured than the common country folk in St Elizabeth; that they were of good breeding. The red-skinned family were accused of being 'speaky spokey,' to which Ivorene puffed her chest out in pride and yelled at the accuser, 'Dat right. *We* speak proper cos we have connexion in h'Englan'!' The white net curtains were responsible for a lot.

Doreen and her sisters sat by their mother's bed, reminiscing about old times. The little wooden house that they had all grown up in seemed smaller - the walls shrinking daily. However, to the old woman whose pale watery eyes stared off to distant climes, the house seemed large and vibrant. It groaned at her as she walked through doorways and had been telling her in its own way, that her time was up.

Stubbornly at she refused to listen, but soon, the house gave her no choice. She'd see visions of her father walking down by the water pit. The house would only show her a glimpse of him so her yearning for a reconciliation grew.

'Yuh knw ow momma loves tuh ave a audience. Always di show uhman.'

Monica regularly snuck around the house listening to things she shouldn't, seeing things she shouldn't be seeing. She was the smallest and the most mischievous child the little wooden house had seen for many years. Her bright lamp-light eyes were sharp in the dark and her step light.

The creaky spot by the front door never creaked when she stepped barefooted whilst eavesdropping. The window never slammed shut when she crept out of her room in her white nightie and not once had the house tripped her up while she was carrying the forbidden kerosene lamp out of the window at midnight to look for the ghost that followed her around and beckoned her into the inky black woods, no. She may not have been allowed by her mum and aunts, but she was allowed, nevertheless. The house was older and had more authority than anyone else.

And so was perfectly justified when she heard the three sisters chatting on the veranda one afternoon after the world took a deep breath after the rain. They were worried about

Grandmamma. She had lost weight and had been muttering aloud, more than she usually did. Monica had chatted to her several times. In the long grass where the wind's hushing of the green blades hid their whispers. She had given Monica coded messages behind hushed hands and side eyes. Her white wire hair coiled upwards to the sun. Sometimes they lay on their backs and watched the clouds roll by in clumps, and at other times they baked in the heat. Monica's skinny legs rested on grandmama's stomach as she stroked her shins. She memorised what she could. It would need some thinking on as grandmamma didn't always make sense. Her words came out garbled. And her bony arms animated. Once or twice she got angry and wandered off alone. Monica learnt patience.

And so now grandmamma was in her bed, hanging onto her daughter's hands told them all exactly what was happening. Monica crouched at the doorway and spied through the crack, careful to keep her breath quiet and steady. She sat, in her vest and knickers. She hadn't had breakfast or brushed her teeth. And her hair needed plaiting. Somehow she knew that didn't matter. Grandmamma was talking and so she was listening. She crouched low, knees close to her chin as she peered through the crack in the door.

'Oh! I'm travelling, I'm travelling!' Grandmamma muttered as her milky blue eyes scanned the ceiling without seeing. She raised her hand as if to grab the air. The three sisters nervously glanced at each other, passing concerned looks but holding their mother's hand tighter.

'What u seeing momma?'

'I see, I see, oh! Mi ago far, far, far. It a clear, de fog a clear. Mi going.' Oh!' she exclaimed. 'Look who's come to meet me!' She grinned exposing the gap where her tooth had fallen out and a dull, dehydrated tongue. The sheer joy spread across her ashy face was contagious. The girls smiled through their tears and clutched their mother's hand tighter.

'Who's dere ma?'

'Daddy? Oh! Maureen! Likkle Mo! Oh!' Tears trickled. She sucked in some air. 'Oh!' she exclaimed again as her eyes flitted back and forth across the ceiling, chest heaving as she smiled and laughed with tears. Her face shone before the release. She let go.

Rose, the youngest daughter cried. She didn't care that she was over 40 years old. Ignoring the ache she had developed these past weeks in her left knee, she climbed onto the bed with her mother and curled herself around the small frame. Doreen, the eldest breathed. No tears. She couldn't quite believe what her eyes had just witnessed. Doll hung onto their mother's still warm arm. Her dusty brown hair was plaited in two and pinned, crossed over, on the top

of her head which bent low rested on grandmamma's chest. They knew what had just happened, they just couldn't quite believe it. Not yet. And Monica watched it all.

For even though Monica was only five, even though she understood about life and death and considered herself a very sensible and mature girl, and even though she knew the house allowed her to see some things her mother and aunts would not, she knew that her grandmother had gone. The house felt still. Monica listened as the women were silent in the next room. She could see grandmamma but... the bed was empty. Grandmamma had gone. As they knew she would. And Monica would need to be more careful in the future for she knew that there would be an extra pair of eyes watching her from the trees. But the house groaned anyway at the loss. And they all felt it. Something was missing. Something was wrong.

When Meredith was born a cold wind had blown in from Siberia that Christmas. Satellite pictures of the country appeared on television screens on news station after news station. A white Britain. People didn't venture out of their houses unless they had to. Dirty London glittered in the magic of an icy white moonlight, and Saly went into labour.

She had planned a hospital birth, adamant that her child would be brought into the world in safety. There would be no screaming or shouting like the ridiculous white women she'd seen on the television. No. She would ease her child into the world with love. She and Owen would be enough.

Of course, her mother should've been there. It was the woman's right to have her mother help her usher in the future. But events had conspired against them.

In the small hours of the morning, when she was on the toilet no less, electric pain flashed up her spine.

This couldn't be it. Wasn't it supposed to start gradually? She considered her options and as the pain ebbed, she carefully stood, breathing heavily and gathering her dignity.

The towel rail gave her support as she hauled herself up. She would not hyperventilate, she would not pass out, she would not panic, and she would not behave like an animal. Mary had told her: having a baby was the most natural thing in the world. She patted her hair down, reminding herself that she would need to plait it ready for the birth. As was the plan.

Hobbling into the living room, she eased herself onto the sofa and grabbed the comb that was stuck down the side. Women were servants of God and you would have as many children as God gave you. She dragged the comb through her tangled quickly and plaited her hair in

two and pinned it to the top of her head. This painful experience was teaching her that God agreed with her. One was enough.

The sofa accepted her weight, hugging her form. Owen slept. This had to be a practice contraction. They were supposed to hurt more weren't they? The voice in her head told her that she was fine. It would go away. Labour would start slowly. It doesn't start with insufferable rude violence, and the pain was a *good* pain. Saly shut her eyes and breathed deeply. Steady and controlled. This is what she planned for. Her hair was plaited now, and her bag packed. Opening her bright brown eyes, she scanned the small room and it felt cold.

'It starts slowly' Saly told herself as she began to methodically breathe like they taught her. 'Breathe, breathe. That's it, gently in and out. I'll go back to bed in a minute.'

The wind shook the window frames and as voices whispered into the room from another place. Pine needles and tinsel hushed a Christmas lullaby to the arriving baby.

This child was wanted. She had its own lullaby, and unknown to Saly, Meredith already began her own tale. Arriving in the dead of night, coupled by the unusual amount of snow. Surely it all had to be a sign. The nameless voice was back. A sign from who though? God? Mary from beyond the grave? Did it really matter?

Another crippling pain immobilised Saly causing her to tense up. She clutched the arm rest for support as a scream that turned into a deep growl rumbled in her throat. Panting furiously, hot tears sprang up.

Owen stirred. Moments later his footsteps could be heard thundering downstairs as he flew towards her, bleary eyed and disorientated.

He stared in shock before turning and running back up the stairs, two at a time, slipping, jarring his vision and banging his toe on the step above. He grabbed her hospital bag. Pulling on his jeans and shirt, he flew back down the stairs. Alert and without tripping, he ran to her.

'You alright?' he said in-between breaths, crouching at her feet. His cheeks blushing as excitement and fear collided in him. Saly nodded with her eyes shut as her hand felt for his. He gently lifted to her feet. Moving slowly to the front door, he was careful to allow her to lean on his as much as she needed to. They stopped again as she was gripped in more pain. Owen cursed and held her up for a moment while she swayed in agony. Her eyes clamped shut as she concentrated furiously. And in the darkness, they waited. It was then that Owen noticed the glow through the glass of the front door: snow.

Panicking, he moved his wife back to the sofa. She sat slumped, holding her stomach and breathing to recover, and outside the weather stormed. Snow circled in on the doormat in tiny tornados before Owen slammed the door in a controlled panic and watched the flakes caught

in the tracks of the mat, melt. The doctor would need to come to them. His fingers fumbled over the numbers by the small table next to the door as Saly gritted her teeth.

The birth was painful. Saly felt Clare in her head for most of it, but it was hard for her to leave. When it did get too much, Clare took over. They both knew without really saying that she was better at dealing with pain than Saly was. But she hadn't asked for the baby, nevertheless, she got it and it was as much hers as it was Saly's, after all, she was also bearing the pain and shoving the brat into the world. Saly knew they shared a lot, but a baby was not supposed to be of those things.

Her child was supposed to be born in the comfort of a warm bath, with serene music and hospital staff on standby, not on the floor of their living room in a painful bloody mess. She was meant to gently slip silently into this world, perhaps naturally, doing breaststroke or something. But she was angry, Lord was she angry! Maybe she objected to being born into this white fog that seemed to follow you around. Maybe it was nicer where she was and because she was new into the world, she actually remembered another place. Whatever the reason, Meredith was angry enough to give her mother a swift kick up the backside as she entered the world. Saly yelped as the little foot hit a sore spot while the doctor and Owen, her wise men minus one, knelt nearby.

Steaming red spilled on the floor as the white snow came down outside the window of a silent night. A full week early. Before Christmas Eve, Saly and Owen got their present. If her Momma Mary was there, she would have said for sure it was a bad sign, but Momma wasn't there. Saly pursed her lips. And so Saly decided, the snow and the baby's unexpected arrival could only be a good sign.

And as time passed, she would remember the snow fell in record breaking amounts and the birth was quicker than anyone had anticipated. The doctor came twenty minutes after the call in the dead of night. He was tall, Scandinavian, with glasses perched on the end of his long nose. His stethoscope lay around his shoulders and as he took off his dark woollen coat with the snow fluttering onto their carpet. Calmly he walked to Saly's side. She would pant and groan and twist her hands and purse her lips. And Meredith would be born too quickly. To an exhausted mother, a flabbergasted father and a relieved doctor. She flopped messily into the world: a healthy, plump, pinkish-brown kicking and screaming baby.

Meredith's 6th birthday

Of course, since hearing all about Sarah Kelly's Pal, Meredith had asked her own parents for a puppy, and didn't forget to inform them that six was the perfect age for a girl to get a new best friend/puppy/sister.

Mum glanced at dad who remained reading his newspaper, so she said she would think about it. Meredith took that for a resounding 'yes' and was satisfied enough to no longer ask but made plans.

An old pink blanket was placed at the bottom of her bed. Lovingly she had shaped it into a basket shape, took some hair from her hairbrush (even though Saly had strictly told her not to do this, something about birds taking it and it ending up cracking your brain, she wasn't really listening) and smoothed it in place; placed a few leaves in there also for comfort (she had heard that birds liked leaves, feathers and stray strands of hair to feather their nests, and she was sure her puppy would like it too) and waited for the big day.

The night before, she was so excited that she couldn't sleep. She was six, and she would have her very first party which was a close second, but the puppy was *the* most exciting thing happening.

Meredith proudly handed out her invitations, enjoying the attention. It was so near to Christmas that everyone was in a party mood anyway. Secretly she hoped it would snow so she could show her puppy how cold and wet it could be.

When the day arrived, she awoke to the sitting room decorated in pink and blue balloons. A 'Happy Birthday' banner was stuck to her chair in the kitchen with her cereal in its place.

'Happy birthday!' Mum and dad chorused as she skipped, suddenly wide awake, into the kitchen. On realising that she should have her puppy, her eyes went wide.

'Puppy! Where's my puppy?' she bounded at her dad, who glanced at mum for help.

'Well, Meredith, we did think about it, and we can't get a puppy, but we got you this instead.' Mum disappeared down the hall but soon returned with something wrapped up in a white blanket.

'He's all yours, and you can call him whatever you want. I know it's not a puppy, but it's the next best thing.'

Meredith furrowed her brows, pouted stubbornly as mum waited. This was not a puppy. But very soon, curiosity got the better of her and she slowly peeked into the crumpled blanket. What she saw made her smile. It wasn't a puppy, no, but she loved him all the same.

Her chubby fingers reached out a hand and stroked the soft sleeping kitten before scooping him up.

‘Careful, careful.’ Mum said and dad rushed over to help her cradle her new friend. She grinned, forgetting all about her breakfast.

It was around 1pm when guests began to arrive. Saly had finished decorating, pale pink and powder blue. She had been preparing food from the night before: ackees and salt fish, sugar dumplings, seasoned rice, banana fritters, cucumber sandwiches, cheese, crackers and pickled onion sticks; fruit bun as well as sausages and chips. She even pushed herself and made some grata cakes. Owen wasn’t sure who she thought she was cooking for.

‘The kids aren’t going to eat all of this.’ He reminded her as she threw some tomatoes into the frying pan. ‘Aunt Ivy is coming with Uncle Glanford.’ He wrinkled his nose. Her aunt Ivy wasn’t his favourite person in the world. Since Saly’s mother Mary had died, Ivy had taken over. She wasn’t even Saly’s aunt, but her grand aunt, or something like that. He found it difficult to keep track.

All the mischievous and naughty behaviour was blamed upon Saly’s grandmother, Monica.

Monica had died while giving birth to Saly’s mother Mary, and so it had been Aunt Ivy who had been like a mother to Mary and a grandmother to Saly. She refused to tell anyone her age. Adopting that old saying about it being rude asking a woman her age. Owen guessed she had to be at least ninety. Her hair was completely white and thin. Scraped up into a bun that she usually covered with a woolly hat of some sort. That or her wigs. She playfully called them her ‘hats’ too. Aunt Ivy never said how old she was, and no one dared to ask.

Full of old-fashioned advice, would tell him how selfish his child would be if it grew up without a brother or sister, and he would agree just to keep the peace. But no baby came. Saly argued that God had given her her fill. But she was quite happy with her ‘oney’.

A large pink cake stood proud on the table. Music blared out of Owen’s sound system and the cold winter sun shone. There was face painting in the garden and the kitchen was alive with the hissing of pots. Meredith buzzed with excitement. Her soft brown hair neatly hot combed into sausage-like ringlets that warmed the nape of her neck. Tigger was in her bedroom all tucked up in his new blanket, fast asleep. He wasn’t what she asked for, but she loved him just the same.

Helium filled pale blue balloons, trimmed and clasped together with curls of silvery ribbon, were in every corner of the room. The patterned white lace kitchen curtains were

pinned back so that Saly could keep an eye on activities in the garden while she washed dishes, set up crisps on the table, and dished food up for the adults. And Meredith waited. It wasn't long before her guests started arriving.

Her hair was clasped together with curls of silvery ribbon. She wore a long silver dress that came down to her knees, and the skirt puffed out like an upside down bowl revealing long white socks and glittery silver pumps.

The girls were ushered into the living room. Meredith bounced with excitement. Present after present was loaded onto the cake table, so much that Meredith thought the table might collapse under the weight. She had dolls, make-up, pink dressing up clothes, felt-tips and colouring books. So, this was what having a party all was about. Getting more presents than she had dreamed of.

Once all the paper was ripped off, screams of excitement and gratitude had faded, and the living room was well and truly trashed, they all ran into the garden to line up for face painting.

It was when she was busy with the clown, Sarah Kelly watching on enviously, that the doorbell rang. Saly left the garden and made her way through the kitchen. She could see the shapes through the rectangle of frosted glass in the wooden door and knew instantly who it was: it was Aunt Ivy and Uncle Glanford. Flicking the catch to let them in.

'Hello!' they chorused.

'Aunt Ivy!' Meredith screamed and rushed into the old woman's arms as Ivy boomed a heavy, rich laugh. She stepped heavily into the doorway, clasping the little girl as she struggled to keep her balance. Merry's senses were flooded with the familiar lavender smell, mingled with moth balls.

Aunt Ivy was a large woman with a square backside that swished from side to side as she walked. Her silver corkscrew hair was tied loosely into a bun and pinned to her head. Lines were faint in her smooth brown face. She walked with an authority and a gait of a West Indian woman at the head of a household, her skirt, a thin material with big blousy tropical flowers printed on it.

'Girl, you a get too skinny,' she said as her eyes already drifted through the house and into the kitchen. 'Lord knows what you eating, but something smells good, your mother cooking up a storm hmm?'

An earthy laugh bellowed and rolled around her tub of her body and bounced in the corridor before her. Glanford, physically her opposite, stepped out from behind her. Where she was large and colourful, he was waif-thin and wore a woollen coat over a pinstripe suit

with a matching brown Stetson hat. He smiled at Meredith giving her a peck on her cheek. His eyes met Saly as she walked towards them from the kitchen.

‘Gud tuh si yuh Sal, it been too lang. Where Owen?’ he said. His watery brown eyes flickered up the stairs as he took off his long coat and hat. He shook it briefly from the brief shower, at the front step, knocking off the droplets before handing them to Saly’s open arms.

‘Glanford! Good to see you.’ Owen, coming from the kitchen behind Saly held out his hand in greeting. Glanford grinned, relieved to see another man.

‘Owen, mi man!’ He slapped, Owen’s open palm. The old man laughed. His cheeks sunk where once they were plump, but now followed the lines made by his dentures. The slap turned into a very English shaking of hands. Owen, slightly surprised at the old man’s firm grip, stood laughing and muttering about how long it had been. His blond-brown hair was long and thin. Shaking Glanford’s hand shook his hair from behind his ears and into his eyes which he blew out automatically before releasing Glanford and scraping his hair back behind his ears.

Ivy soon found herself in the kitchen and began tasting food in the dutchie pot and frying pan, her sleeves already rolled up. She hung over a steaming pot, her round body pressing dangerously close to the gas hob, spoon in hand, smacking lips as her eyes flickered to the ceiling, concentrating on the flavours.

‘Cud use a likkle salt, Saly.’

The clown at this point was blowing up balloons and making animal shapes and the sky was beginning to cloud over.

‘You hungry?’ Saly asked and began pulling out plates before a response was given. Of course, they were hungry. Ivy drew a chair out from under the table and sat down.

‘Lard, what a journey! Glanford drive all de way ‘ere! But we meet upon traffic up roun’ de ring road...’

‘Yes, it can be quite bad round that side.’ Owen pulled up a chair for Glanford, went to the fridge and took out a beer for himself and the old man. ‘Sometimes if you leave early, you avoid the traffic, but not today. Saturday it can snarl up pretty bad round there.’

‘Yessir, me get ketch,’ Glanford accepted the beer gratefully, pulled the ring cap and slurped the liquid, rinsing around his dentures before swallowing and sighing satisfied whilst looking hard at the bottle in his hand. ‘Me jus tek mi time. All of dem ya ina hurry. He chuckled before taking another slurp. Min uh inna hurry tuh meet mi maka.’

‘Likkle bit of everyting Saly.’ He gestured to her as she began to plate him up some food.

Saly dished them all up as they sat, ate and caught up on family news while the clown entertained Meredith and her friends on the garden. Saly could see the clown was visibly shaking from the December cold. His eyes caught hers and he plastered on a smile giving her a thumbs up.

Soon it was time for Meredith to blow out her candles. Owen gathered the children into the living room after paying the clown and the face painter who promptly disappeared into the drizzle at the open front door. He reappeared into the living room, to excited chatter. The air in the kitchen was warm, laced with the aroma of cooked food. Saly placed the birthday cake onto its alter. Ivy, Glanford and Saly stood behind all the children with Meredith in the centre. Reaching into his pocket, Owen brought out his lighter and proceeded to light six birthday candles. *Snick-snick... snick-snick...*

A flame magically jumped to life. Its flickered reflection seemed to dance in Meredith's eyes while Saly led them all in the birthday song. Meredith beamed. Her curls framed neatly round her head as she stood proudly next to her cake. Owen led them all in the 'happy birthday' song. Meredith absentmindedly scratched her nose, unable to take her eyes from the cake and Owen looked on proudly. As he took her picture on his phone, he saw himself reflected in her face. Similar shaped eyes, although hers were brown though instead of blue like his. And she had his nose. Or rather, his dad's nose. Gruffydd. His fair red hair were not passed down but his freckles were. Meredith, like Owen, had his freckles on her nose. Something Owen was very proud of. Although he was sure that Meredith might not like the nose so much when she was a teenager. It was rather large.

Meredith blew her candles out in one breath and made a wish. It wasn't for a puppy like she had wanted, but something else. Her parents smiled, clapping before they all disappeared into the kitchen and the children rushed to the garden to play on the trampoline.

The frosting of the birthday cake seemed to smoulder as the smoke from the candles snaked upwards. Thin pale grey curling ghosts stretched for the window, yawning silent screams as they faded to nothing.

She sniffed.

On the table lay Owen's golden lighter used only for special occasions. She imagined feeling the slippery smooth metal in her hands and -

"Meredith?" Aunt Ivy appeared. Just where you think you a-grow? Me tell you h'already fe stoppit!' She chuckled at the same joke she told every year. Meredith watched her belly jiggle as she thought of escaping to her room to check on Tigger.

‘Aunt Ivy, she’s getting big,’ Saly said, also re-entering the room, followed by Owen. Taking up the knife that was resting on the table, he began to cut the cake in slices and before anyone noticed Meredith grabbed the lighter and left.

Her room hadn’t been decorated since she was a baby. Yellow balloons floated across the warm blue sky while her white net curtains fluttered in cold breeze. A bed was placed where her cot used to be. In the summer she sat looking out of the window and listened to the birds singing her a lullaby as she went to bed, far too early.

On her white metal bed all her teddies lay in a line. Tigger was curled up and fast asleep near her large pink fluffy cat. She slid her hand smoothly under her pillow to hide the lighter. She would examine it later. Voices wafted in on the breeze. Her ears pricked up. She would wait a while until they went home before she looked at the forbidden lighter more closely.

It was evening. Her friends were all gone but the adults could still be heard talking and laughing to more adult music. She walked towards the door, slipped out and shut out the noise of the party from her room for Tigger while she skipped back down the stairs.

In the living room Ivy’s voice was richer than the others and bounded down the passageway and along the orange patterned carpet. Uncle Glanford and her dad were sitting at a small table in the corner slapping dominoes. Glanford slammed down a piece rocking backwards confidently in his chair laughing. Victory was in the air, he could feel it. Owen smiled, not so sure about his own victory, as he looked at his hand. Meredith slipped in and sat on the sofa near her Aunt Ivy. All her friends had gone home by now and darkness lurked. Curtains were drawn and the buttery warmth of the lamp lit up the room.

‘I’ve made up my bed for up for you Aunty, you and Glanford are in there, Owen and I will have the sofa bed.’

‘Thak yuh darlin.’ Mi nuh tink yuh uncle cya mek it all di way back inna one day. Him nuh as chrang as him use fi be.

‘Me get u t’raahthed!’ Glanford yelled, slamming down his final piece as a hacking laugh rattled in his throat.

‘Next time, next time old man.’ Owen placed the white domino bricks together, pursed his lips and folded his hands. Meredith watched as the old man struggled to get to his feet and made his way over to the soft sofa. His bony back side probably needed a softer setting. She smirked.

Once Glanford was settled, Owen switched on the television and Saly went into the kitchen to make a pot of tea.

‘Lemme watch di six ‘o’clock news.’ Glanford said as he eased himself down next to his wife. The soft sofa moulded itself around his frame like clay. Meredith watched his anticipation reminding her of the old ladies that gossiped on the television shows her mother liked watching.

‘It fulla bad news,’ Aunt Ivy started. The news presenter began with breaking news of a kidnapping in Africa. Twenty girls stolen from a school.

‘A school! ‘dem ‘ave no shame! How ‘dem walk in and tek them?’

‘Guns, uncle.’ Owen placed the dominoes into a draw at the bottom of the wooden coffee table as Saly entered with the tea.

‘These people Uncle, they want the girls for something else,’ she said. ‘These people don’t care; God knows what will happen to the poor girls. Sugar Aunt?’ Ivy nodded, reached out a hand and accepted the pale blue porcelain cup and saucer of tea. She pursed her lips together and blew, rippling the brown liquid.

‘Lard knows what dem ah go do. Dese people, dem kidnap de girls dem anna use dem fi sex slaves, get dem doin all ‘eap of sinting -’ Ivy slurped her tea.

‘Aunty!’ Saly nodded in Meredith’s direction and Ivy fell silent. The conversation, according to Saly, was far too adult for Meredith. Glanford’s eyes were glued to the television watching the plight of the girls and the distressed parents. He watched as mothers screamed and cried into the camera, demanding that something be done. The perpetrators were portrayed as masked, armed, ruthless men who had no regard for the girls’ safety. A faceless threat. Their distraught parents cried; their anguish evident through the television screen. Glanford watched.

‘Jesus Christ,’ Saly muttered.

It was Owen who got up, breaking the heavy depression, and began to offer birthday cake with the tea. Ivy gratefully accepted while Glanford’s attention was firmly fixed on the television.

‘You buy dis?’ Ivy said in reference to the cake, while taking a bit of the pink frosting into her fingers carefully, examining it in detail before tentatively placing it into her mouth and softly sucking.

‘Yes aunty, easier than baking it myself.’

‘Your mudder na teach you how fi bake? Lard, how come she na teach you how fi bake? Mi teach *her* how fi bake!’

‘I don’t know Aunty, I guess we were doing other things.’

‘Other tings!?’ Ivy turned to face her grandniece; her face contorted as a verbal challenge laced her lips. ‘Other tings?’ her lips pursed in anger as she turned her body, not without some effort, to face Saly.

‘Perhaps you can teach me some things sometime, hmm?’ She smiled. ‘Your baking is glorious Aunt; Uncle is a very lucky man. You’re a very lucky man uncle Glanford!’ she shouted as if the old man were deaf, smiled in his direction and hoped she’d thrown her aunt off the scent of a lecture. It was the end of a busy day and she really wasn’t in the mood to hear how her mother had neglected to teach her yet another valuable lesson.

Glanford still had his eyes fixed on the television screen. Saly noticed just how old and frail he was looking, he’d lost more weight.

Meredith sat in silence, squeezed in between the two women of the family and she began to get sleepy.

‘Come, Meredith, let’s get your pyjamas on.’ Saly said. ‘Aunt, I will fix up your room for you.’

She stood and held out her hand and Meredith slipped her small hand in as Saly saw her feigning sleepiness.

‘Owen?’

Saly stepped aside as he scooped up his daughter. Meredith snuggled in close and rested her head under his chin as the three of them climbed the stairs to bed.

Saly watched by the door as Meredith quickly dressed for bed and Owen placed her under her pink bed sheets careful to move her brown curls to one side. As he moved her teddies over Rah-Rah flop to the floor.

‘No dad! I sleep with them, and I’ve not brushed my teeth.’

‘Leave your teeth til morning, one night won’t hurt.’ Picking up her stuffed teddies, he lined them up on her pillow for her to see. The door, slightly ajar, was wide enough for Tigger to slink out of the room and make his way downstairs. Owen perched on the bed while Saly hovered at the door. She peered through the crack. Her sharp brown eyes piercing as she leaned in close to the door and rested her face on the frame. Her breath came out long and silent as she observed Owen with her daughter. Jealousy tugged at her heart. She swallowed. And watched.

‘Tell me the story of when I was born.’ She said as Owen switched off her bedroom lamp plunging the room into darkness. Meredith heard him blowing his wispy hair out of his eyes.

‘Again? I thought you were tired?’

‘It’s my birthday! I want to hear my story.’

Owen's voice grew soft as he began. Saly sheepishly entered the room and perched on the bed beside Owen, a willing audience. Her jeans squeezed her stomach uncomfortably, reminding her that they were too small for her now.

'It was dark. And it was Christmas.'

Meredith giggled.

'Outside there was a record-breaking snowstorm. The snow was so thick that when you opened the front door, there was a step of snow high enough for you to step on. The news was always about the weather. "Snow blowing in, wrap up warm!" They said, "Stay indoors if you can help it." They said. There had been a Siberian wind front that was blowing in. There hadn't been weather this bad in a century!' He smiled. 'Those of us in the know, knew that it was just Mary Poppins flying in on a cloud.'

Saly watched how mesmerized Merry was. In the soft blue of his eyes, Saly could almost see Mary Poppins floating on a cloud, past the black of the rooftops. She imagined that she would take a seat on a cloud within the blue of Owen's eye, place her umbrella, parrot side up, who would look at Ms Poppins as she powdered her nose. Her eyes flickered towards Merry and knew she was imagining something similar.

'The air was full of magic that winter, everyone could feel it but no one could explain it. It hovered. Like fairy dust, but it nipped at your elbows and the tip of your nose if you walked outside.'

'Your mother was heavily pregnant with you. She wasn't one of those women who glowed prettily, oh no. Not your mother!'

Meredith laughed out loud as her father took advantage and tickled her tummy a little. Saly smiled.

'No, your mother was huge!' throwing his arms out wide and his eyes to match, Meredith copied him.

'Like this?' She puffed up her mouth like a puffer fish and made herself as big and round as she could before they both descended into a fit of giggles.

'I think this is where I leave you to it!' Saly said. She would go and make up her aunt's bed.

'*Exactly* like that!' Owen said, smiling his goodbye to Saly as she stood and hovered again by the door, 'but bigger! We used to sit on the sofa, that same sofa that's in the sitting room now, and I could see your little hands punching up sometimes through her belly, or sometimes your mother could feel your foot and she'd grab it with her hand.' He smiled at the memory. Owen went on to describe the events that led up to her birth. 'All that snow, all

that magic from Mary Poppins! I reckon you have a bit of undiscovered magic in you missy!’ His hand reached down to her tummy again and tickled as she laughed. Saly shifted on her feet at the door.

‘Now, bed!’ he gave her a swift kiss on her nose as she snuggled down under the sheets.

‘Wait!’ she stopped. ‘Aren’t you going to check?’

‘There’s nothing there!’

‘Please dad?’ Meredith begged. Her little brown fingers clasped the duvet cover, pulling it up to her chin. Owen sighed, strolled back to the bed from the door and bent low lifting the sheets. He peered off into the darkness.

‘Nope, nothing there. Perhaps the monster is at Sarah Kelly’s house on account that it’s your birthday.’ He winked playfully and Meredith smiled, relieved.

‘Night dad.’

‘Night Merry.’

‘See you in the morning.’

Owen walked towards her door joining Saly, taking a final glance at his Merry now settled for sleep and both Saly and Owen left the room.

St Elizabeth, Jamaica.

Jamaica was hot. But Monica, being only a year and a half year old, didn't notice the heat wave that summer. Doll let her baby run wild around surrounding grounds. Naked as the day she was born, even though her mother disapproved. Tempers flared in the heat. What bubbled in the cooler months, spilled over in the hotter ones.

'Kiss mi rass! Is how you can let the child run about like that? Put some clothes on de pickney!' Ivorene shuffled onto the veranda. Moving slowly like one that was getting old fast. The women spent a lot of their time on the veranda, telling tales, gossiping and generally just enjoying being with each other. Doll reached down to the little white vest that was on the floor with the intention of putting it onto her child.

Ivorene was a larger lady like a lot of West Indian women her age. As she walked, her large square backside was rolled and kneaded by the motion of the legs, causing her cheeks to get pushed too high in turn as she shifted her weight from one leg to the other propelling her forward, one buttock rising high while the other fell, in perfect, slow tandem. She served as a constant reminder to slimmer and younger Doll that her wasp-like figure which she and half the men of the village enjoyed so much, would not remain wasp-like forever.

She sucked on the mango she had in her hand as the thought of her waist expanding filled her with horror. Monica was her second child, Ivy the first. Ivy had inherited her mother's dusty brown hair, but Monica's was jet black. Both were thin, just like her. Somehow, she still managed to keep the weight off.

'Yes mamma,' she dutifully replied while taking another long slurp of the sweet mango. Sucking some of the stringy flesh from her front teeth and watched her daughter. Ivy was at school. She enjoyed these moments, as if she only had one child. Sticky juice ran down her neck making her red complexion streaked with orange.

Monica sat in front of the veranda on the grass that surrounded their little house, with a long spear-like twig in her hand which she used to poke into a small hole in the soil. Doll watched.

Clean clothes hung on a low branch of the mango tree even though there was no breeze to dry them. Dinner was slow cooking on the stove in the separate kitchen at the back of the house filling the air with the smell of home. Doll, Doreen and Rose, all sharing the little house with their mamma Ivorene and Doll's children Ivy and Monica, worked together to keep the home running. The three women now, sat on the veranda on white wooden chairs, taking a much-needed break. Rose was the smallest and youngest of the three. Her hair

combed straight and scooped into a tight bun at the back. Her rosy cheeks seemed permanently red in the heat. Doreen, the chubbier middle child, needed glasses they couldn't afford to buy. She squinted, watching Doll eating the mango and reached out to the pile for one herself. Her bare feet thick and dirty, she sat, things falling over the edge of the deck chair, beside Doll.

A stray auburn chicken strutted past the steps leading up to the veranda, all the while a sharp yellow eye fixed on the women.

'Lard, it hot, hot, hot.' Ivorene wiped her brow with her damp palms. Groaning as she sat, she shifted her weight on the bench. Legs spread wide, her knees like hills, formed triangular white valleys with her skirt. Her bare feet were spread flat on the cold stone floor as she hitched up her long pale cotton skirt and began to fan herself.

Doll's head was full of green rollers. Curling her hair in the anticipation of a surprise party-like event that never seemed to happen.

'Yu hear what 'appen to Mikey up yonda?'

She was always the first to get the gossip, although this time, it had been her younger sister Rose who heard this piece at the corner shop whilst picking getting some bread from Super on trust.

Their mother stirred. 'It nat good fi gossip on other misfortune,' she said with a superior air as she continued to fan herself. Her corkscrew pepper hair was tied up in two plaits and pinned to her head like curled horns. Monica turned and looked at the women as she poked harder and harder into the hole. It was deep, black and the soil was rich. The earthy smell filled her nostrils as her bare bottom rested on the grass as she watched them discussing things she couldn't understand. Then something in the grass caught her eye.

Small and orange, an ant stumbled over the tall grass stems. Sharp legs stuck out at right angles as it crossed its terrain. Monica watched. Her big brown eyes narrowed and focused as she watched the climbing ant.

Shifting her bottom to a more comfortable position, she took the stick in her hand and began poking it into the black hole, forcing it wider and wider, stirring up the ant's nest.

'Mikey. Him get ketch.' Doll sniggered quietly to herself as Doreen turned to look at her sister and squinted to see her expression.

'Is wha yu mean get ketch? Dem really ketch him?' Doll nodded her head as their mother pursed her lips watching Monica digging in the dirt.

'Him coming home from St Catherine, so it go. Mi na know if him 'have man dem dere, but it late. And anoder group of boys jump him, t'rated!'

‘Kiss mi rass! Him alright?’

Ivorene gave a shocked glance at her daughter. She knew they cussed but still believed that they shouldn’t do it in front of their mother.

‘Sorry, mamma,’ Doreen apologised immediately for the slip of the tongue.

‘What yu mean, him alright!? Don’t him deserve what him get? Lard Jesus!’ She sucked her teeth in disgust. De Lard na mean for men and men. It is men an’ ‘oman.’ Kissing her teeth again in disgust, she crossed her legs roughly as she sat upright, and continued. ‘Dem is spawn of the devil. De devil me tell uno! How can? How?’ her shocked and questioning face screwed up and her eyes narrowed as she glared at her sister. ‘Sometin like dat, y’know? Dat not normal. Dat not how God wanted it fi be. Dem go ‘gainst de scripture, and fi wat? Hmm?’ Doll kissed her teeth again and began fanning herself with just her hands.

‘Is wa’at yu knw about wha de good Lord waant? Hmm?’ Ivorene intervened. Doll ignored her mother.

‘Dem plenty, plenty ‘oman around fi satisfy him, but hima look fi man! Disgusting. Him asking for it yes? Dem people dem, dem from de devil, mi a tell you!’

Doreen nodded in agreement. ‘Jus’ like likkle Jonsey all over again.’ she said thoughtfully.

‘Likkle Jonsey? ‘Dwayne Jones not likkle!’ she retorted in a burst of anger. ‘Him a big man! Big enough fi tek himself fi party an’ flaunt it in front a people dem, I mean, wat him expeck?’

‘Him na expec fi die Doll. Di girl outta orda! Suh wah eff him dress like a ‘oman? So what if him a like man dem! Dat mean him fi die?’ Now, it was Doreen who was kissing her teeth in disgust. ‘De woman dem, de vicious, vicious, vicious. De boy only 17. Dem na haffi kill him.’

Silence descended upon the women as they thought of the boy who was attacked and murdered at a party by a girl. A good-looking boy as he was, they suspected that perhaps she had her affections rejected.

‘So, wat ‘appen fi Mickey?’ Ivorene, who had pretended she wasn’t listening, had gotten drawn into the gossip.

‘Im get jump.’ Doll replied, annoyed that Doreen had disagreed with her about Dwayne Jones. ‘Him a walk trew St Catherine. Wat ‘him do dere, dat time a night, mi na know, group of byoy dem ketch up. Dem chase him, hollering ‘battyboy’ at him. Him run and run, but him na outrun dem.’

‘Kiss me rass.’ It was Ivorene’s turn to cuss as it hissed out the side of her mouth. ‘How many dem chase him?’

‘Mi tink ‘round 20 or so.’

‘Jesus!’ Doreen muttered as she shifted on her seat. ‘De pickney na stand ah bly.’

‘No! Him gat way t’rated!’

‘Eh!?’

‘Him run faas yu see?’ Doll chuckled as she thought of the skinny boy running through the city area of St Catherine’s followed by a gang of men. All three women chuckled. ‘Him know backstreet. Him lucky.’

It was then that they heard the shrill scream of Monica on the grass. Snapping to life, Doll rushed from her chair, instinctively aware of the perceived danger to her child, and scooped up the screaming Monica. There was a swarm of fire ants all over her legs, torso and crawling onto her shoulder, their distinctive orange forms on her small brown frame, as one attacking entity.

‘Jesus Christ!’ she hissed as she grabbed Monica out of the grass. Hands immediately began clapping and slapping the ants of amid Monica’s howls.

‘Go fetch a pail.’ Ivorene ordered as she busied herself swatting the ants off the young flesh with her skirt while Doreen rushed in the house to fetch the bucket. Rose sprang to life and slapped off as many ants as she could off the baby.

At the back of the house the water pit was covered by wide banana leaves to keep it shaded from the heat of the sun. Quickly shoving the leaves aside, hooked the old red bucket onto the rope and threw it roughly into the pit. It smacked the surface, glugged full of water and was hoisted up again.

Doreen ran around to the front of the house, her feet smacking against the hot packed soil as she moved quickly to a now screaming Monica. All three women worked diligently as they washed the baby down. The nest erupted onto the green grass. Millions of biting ants were advancing and attacking. Legs, arms and fleshy baby bottoms. Anything they could get their pincers into. Cannonballs of scrunched up ant bodies tumbled off after bites caused their bodies to spasm. Their forces attacked in numbers, coordinated charges in the chaos.

Monica howled. Fire ants marched up and into her tall black hair, swiftly finding their way through thick terrain. The wriggling movement caught Doll’s eye.

‘Jesus Christ! Mi a go get the shears.’

She gave her mother the child and ran into the house. Screaming Monica was quickly put in the empty tin bath that they kept in the front room which was filled with sun-warmed water

from the pit. The women then proceeded to shave her head. One held the child in her lap, two held the child's arms, while the third began cutting, freeing her of her black locks and the furious fire ants.

When the ordeal was over, Monica was placed to lie down in her grandmama's bed, the white bed sheets with the blue forget-me-not floral pattern, was a privilege. The sheer white net curtains flapped in the cool breeze which soothed her stings. Her cries disintegrated into hiccups and sobs and the women fussed with the boiling up of bitters. Small red bumps peppered her flesh. Scrunched-up bodies floated in the leftover water amid short black curls.

And as Monica lay in her grandmama's bed, she slept soundly at the thought that she won and they all curled up and died.

Ivy was an early riser. When Saly arose at 8.30, she could already hear the old woman pottering in the kitchen. She lay there in the semi-darkness of her room waiting for body to catch up to her mind. The distant flick of the kettle could be heard followed by the rumbling thunder of boiling water.

As she pulled herself up into a sitting position, her back protested at the springs from the sofa bed. Tigger raised his head and watched her with sleepy yellow eyes. She ached. Better her than Glanford. He was too old and needed a bed.

She swung her feet over the edge of the sofa bed and pulled herself up.

'Morning Aunty,' she yawned. It was cold. Peering through the window, a layer of thick white fog hung over the grass could be seen.

'You don't have any lavender by the door? Your mudder never tell uno about dat?' A steaming coffee was placed on the table for her. Saly sat.

'Aunty, I don't believe in that stuff.'

'No one does, but dem still have it. You na want duppy fi h'interfere wid anyting. Me will bring uno some next time me com.'

'Uncle still asleep?'

Ivy joined her at the table. Saly noticed that she had on an old, worn apron. Faded cream. She must have brought it with her. It was only then that she noticed how clean the kitchen was.

Yesterday's dishes were washed and packed away in cupboards out of sight. She blew her coffee and slurped.

‘Mary always ‘ave it pon de back door, ana de front.’ Saly nodded obediently. ‘Him never did forget what mi tell her.’ Ivy smiled, lost momentarily in her memory. ‘Momma didn’t get fi see she grow.’ Her voice softened.

Ivy was young when her sister passed, and for a time, blame was placed on the child. Of course, she knew it wasn’t Mary’s fault but since when did common sense and logic connect to how one felt? Anger grew and seeped out of her pores so that all she touched was tainted. She became the strict disciplinarian, and of course, Mary rebelled. Ivy hated her for that. The ungrateful country girl had the freedom that Ivy should have had. Instead she was saddled with bringing up a child that was not even hers.

In Jamaica, good family women had their children at home, no hospital births, they were respectable. Traditions should be kept, she was told. She pursed her lips and pushed the memories away. She would get Saly some lavender. At the front of the house as well as at the back.

‘And, er, ‘ow are you Saly?’

‘Me?’ ‘Oh, I’m fine Aunty.

‘And you’re healty? Tinking a’lright?’

She was going to therapy, even though she didn’t think she needed it. And was taking her medication. She was fine.

Standing, chair screeching against the floor, she went for her prescription box. It was hidden in the back of the cupboard. As if to prove to her aunt and herself, that her last statement was true, she flashed the box to her aunt’s relieved face.

She slipped a tablet out of its casing and popped it in her mouth. Next to the box was a second set of medications. Take one 3 times/day. Warning. Do not stop taking this medicine unless your doctor tells you to. Saly didn’t like taking them. They made her feel dull. Lost. Like she wasn’t in control. Taking them for a short period was ok, but for a longer time, she felt disconnected. It was as if the world lost its colour and all she really wanted to do was stay in bed and sleep. She would lose herself. It was just as bad as if she lost herself to Clare. Or maybe it was worse. The last time was just that, the *last* time. She had promised herself. And she promised Clare. Sort of. Under duress. That was not how she wanted to live her life. She didn’t care that these were different pills. How different could they be? She would take them for now. But it wasn’t forever. She would need to think of something else.

Her slippers, on the wooden floor slapped away the warning as she went back to the table and she washed it down with another slurp of too hot coffee. Ivy watched.

‘How’s uncle? He not looking as good as he was.’

‘Glanford, ‘im not good. Him stomach playing him up a bit. Him c’yan eat like him used to y’know?’ Saly swallowed another mouthful of coffee while Ivy busied herself with wiping down the already clean, kitchen table.

‘How old is he now?’

‘Eighty-one laas birtday. Him skinny.’ Taking the responsibility of his weight as a personal burden, it seemed quicker to blame herself rather than wait for Saly to do it.

The insubstantial silence solidified, drew up a chair and sat in-between Ivy and Saly as they slurped their coffee. Her temple throbbed. The tablets would kick in soon. She raised her hand to rub her head and noticed how overgrown her nails were. She wasn’t one for biting them, but they clearly needed clipping.

‘Mi ago look afer’ him break fass. Get somting inna ‘im belly ‘afore we a go. Owen like fri egg, beans and toas’? Any sausages lef?’

Saly motioned her to the fridge where Ivy began to distract herself by preparing the breakfast. ‘Mi a go get yu some lavender.’ She mumbled under her breath as she glanced out into the garden. Saly just was not doing things the right way. She would buy some lavender in the market.

The smell of the cooking breakfast helped rouse Owen and once he was up, Saly packed away the night things. Smoke hung in the kitchen like fog. Glanford liked meat well cooked. The pork chops smelt good even without his appetite.

In the living room, Saly folded the duvet and put the sofa bed back together. Drawing the curtains, she opened the window a crack to let fresh air in.

The cat would need feeding. She reminded herself to also warn Ivy not to open the backdoor while she cooked, the kitten needed to stay in until it was bigger.

Back in the kitchen, she found she was already too late. Cold air rolled in as Ivy cooked.

‘Aunty, we have to keep the door closed.’ She said as she closed the double-glazed door firmly and opened a window instead. Tigger began curling around her bare legs. Pulling out a bowl and kitten biscuits from the cupboard under the sink, she poured Tigger’s breakfast. ‘Mi na know why you ago and lumber yourself with a kyat for, you na have enof onna fi plate?’ Ivy said as she dished up breakfast. The toast rack where triangular bread stood to attention, a plate with fried eggs, a bowl full of baked beans and a jug of fresh orange juice. Saly smiled as was reminded again how nice it was having family stay.

‘Wow! Ivy. What a spread! I could get used to this!’ Owen joked, ‘Let me just go and wake Meredith.’ Saly affectionately patted his paunch as she sidled past him in the narrow passageway. ‘I’ll get her.’

She proceeded up the stairs, favouring the left-hand side, avoiding the sore spot on the fifth step and approached Meredith's room. Uncle Glanford was busy brushing his dentures. Water gurgled noisily down the drain as Saly passed the open door.

Meredith peeled herself out of bed. Her warm bare feet pressed on the cool boards in her room. Noticing her stuffed friends had fallen out of her bed during the night, she quickly picked them up and placed them lovingly under the bed sheets so they they could get warm again. Ushering her daughter forward, she avoided the sore spots again. Saly favoured the now right-hand side and flinched as the fifth stair groaned under Meredith's weight.

'Marnin,' Glanford said as he slowly took a seat at the rectangular wooden breakfast table. He had clearly finished up in the bathroom while Saly was with Meredith. The four-seater was full and so Ivy perched on the climbing steps used to reach the top of the cupboard.

'How did you sleep uncle?' Saly asked while reaching for the toast and scanning the table for the honey.

'Alright, mi cya sleep aniweh.' The lie tripped off his tongue with ease now. Glanford reached out and passed her the jar of honey before cutting a piece of bacon and taking a bite of toast.

'Can I have rice krispies?' Meredith asked as she scratched her nose. Saly glanced at her, the strange thought of her daughter scratching her freckles off fluttered through her mind. Tigger sniffed for scraps near her toes. Ivy jumped up, got a bowl and reached for the box of cereal. Meredith slipped under the table, picked Tigger and lay him on her lap, his purring pleasantly vibrating on her thighs.

'What time you hitting the road? Owen turned and asked Glanford. His mouth spilled a baked bean as he spoke, which landed on his shirt. Cursing quietly, he picked up the stray bean and popped it back into his mouth before blowing his hair out of his eyes and trapping it behind his hair with his left hand. He took another bite of toast.

'Mi want fi watch the news firs', find out what 'appen to those kidnap girls.'

'Nothing happen' to them Glan, 'dem gone! What you tink the authorities can do? Nuttin!' A knot began to form in Saly's stomach at the tension she felt forming.

'Them looking for them girls. Don't know what they gonna do to those when the ketch them.' Owen thought about the men who were responsible, having a daughter himself, made him shudder. If they had gone missing in Jamaica, well, he didn't dare think about the penalties that faced them. As it was, it was Africa, and Owen didn't know much about Africa or Africans.

‘Dem naah guh ketch dem.’ Ivy was final as she poured the rice krispies. ‘Hat or cole milk?’

‘Cold.’ Ivy waited, glaring at Meredith. ‘Please,’ coming to life again, she retrieved the milk from the fridge and drowned the rice krispies. Meredith frowned. She turned to her mother; mouth open in protest but was silenced by a look. Meredith frowned again before picking up a silver spoon that was placed onto the table and shovelled the popping cereal into her mouth. She chewed slowly and deliberately all the while eyeing her Aunt Ivy, who didn’t notice at all.

‘Dem crazy. All o dem.’

‘You’d have to be crazy to be doing stuff like that. Them poor girls,’ Owen chimed in.

‘dem ave death penalty inna Africa?’

‘Ow mi know?’ Ivy snapped at her husband.

‘Well, dem should get di death penalty. Dey ago do terrible tings to dem pickney dem. We haffi pray dem survive.’

Saly glanced at Meredith. Tigger was curled up in her lap and licking milk off her finger.

‘They shouldn’t be giving crazy people the death penalty,’ Saly added. ‘That’s where Jamaica went wrong, locking these people up in prisons without any help.’

‘elp? Wah ‘elp yuh tink dem people should have? Cha! Dem yah people dangerous criminals.’ Glanford was spitting as he spoke and threw his fork around animatedly.

‘I’m not excusing what they did Uncle, I’m just saying, that some criminals, some people that do terrible things have some kind of mental illness. They need treatment not locking up.’ Ivy grew quiet.

‘Shock treatment is de only kind a treatment dem need! Mental illness. What kind of fool fool talk is dat? Dem should lakk dem up an chrow away di key! Eff yuh let dem off lightly inna Jamaica crime wud be through di roof!’

‘I thought we were talking about Africa?’ Owen chimed in.

Saly slurped at a second cup of a hot drink, this time tea.

‘The next minute uno have criminals run rampant, ‘dem killing off dem wife, or dem woman, or dem rob a shop and dem first defence is dem mad!’

‘Uncle, mental illness is a serious thing.’

‘Yes a serious ting, but dem commit a crime! Dat a serious ting! Dem should chrow away di key!’

Saly concentrated on her toast. The charred bread felt like stones rolling around in her mouth. Forcing a swallow, it scraped down her throat. She kept her eyes down.

‘Well.’ The silence cracked. ‘Yuh cya explain away di devil.’ Ivy’s voice trailed away as she couldn’t think of anything else to say.

Glanford closed his knife and fork leaving most of his breakfast. His pork chops untouched. Saly avoided eye contact of her Uncle Glanford as well as Aunt Ivy, preferring to just sip her tea.

It wasn’t long before both Ivy and Glanford were ready for home. Glanford, dressed in his brown pinstripe suit, placed his dark, felt Stetson hat on his head and shuffled to the car. He held in his right hand a black overnight bag that he insisted on carrying, followed by Ivy who was watching him closely, ready to step in and give support should he need her. Their drive was for an hour and a half, but as Ivy pointed out, they were older and so needed to prepare.

A cold wind snatched Saly’s breath away as she sent Meredith inside to wave from the window. Hugging herself to keep warm she accompanied Ivy out of the house. Ivy held out her arms for a hug and folded her niece close to her. She smelled like mothballs, and All-Purpose seasoning salt.

‘Next time I come I will bring some lavender.’

Saly smiled and watched as they laboured into the car. Glanford was awkward and out of breath. Ivy watched, trying to appear as if she’s not fussing. Owen stepped in and grabbed his bag, placing it on the back seat while Saly walked to his side, offered her hand, and helped him sit down before he waved her away. The small car sank at their weight.

‘You have a good Christmas, and we’ll see you in the New Year?’

‘See you in the New Year. Take care Glanford!’ Owen said, voice slightly raised as the wind whipped it away. Saly slammed close the driver’s door as the engine spluttered to life. Saly watched. Ivy sat in the passenger seat; her fingers clasped tightly together.

It was 11am, Saly cast her eyes upwards. The skies were growing big-bellied and dark. Meredith was waving from the living room window. She pulled her woollen cardigan around her as the as the wind picked up began to spit. Ivy smiled as she waited for Glanford to move the car and join the traffic. Slowly he pulled out and the car chugged down the road. Saly and Owen stood side by side watching the old, red car disappear amongst the oncoming traffic.

Meredith’s face was bulbous, her head swelled and narrowed to her too skinny chin. The rosy hue fascinated her as she moved her face up and down as her head grew and shrunk in the reflection of the baubles. A breeze sighed through their warm home as the red bauble tinkled on the Christmas tree. Red, blue and yellow lights winked in the darkness as the light of the television flashed on white walls. Meredith snuggled between her parents.

Multi-coloured presents clumsily lay on top of each other even though it wasn't a household that believed in Father Christmas. No one was going to dress up as a fat Santa and lay presents in the middle of the night. And no one was going to be laying out cookies and milk either.

Meredith was restless. She got up and sat cross-legged near the artificial tree to examine the presents. One of them was surely a scooter. She'd prayed hard enough for it.

The labels on the presents were scribbled on most cases. Mums writing was neater, swirly like circles, it had to be dad's writing.

The large oblong one was clearly a book. Her mum bought her one every year.

Saly watched Meredith as she rolled the eyes at the predictability.

Aunt Ivy and Uncle Glanford were coming again. It had only been a couple of weeks since they had last seen them for Meredith's birthday, but they had already planned another visit. Saly had no idea why she agreed to such a thing.

'It was your idea.' A whisper floated around her head.

My idea? She thought, why on earth would she offer to cook for her Aunt Ivy? Often, she felt sorry for Glanford, but then in the second breath, she knew that all Glanford needed was three square meals, someone to play dominoes with and a warm chair to fall asleep in after he had eaten - truly a charmed life.

She needed to start preparing the dinner. It was after all, Christmas dinner which usually carried with it an enormous workload. Her stomach flipped. She wished again that she hadn't invited anyone, and yet again the voice reminded her, it was her idea. If it was just her, Meredith and Owen, she would probably have had a more relaxing, enjoyable time. As it was, she had carrots to peel, sausages she needed to wrap in bacon, turkey to prepare with stuffing, and in her mind, she listed the jobs one after the other. Her heart rattled on in her chest like a train, and slowly it seemed as if it began to beat out of rhythm.

She took a deep breath to steady it.

'Mum?' Saly jumped. Meredith waited and Saly realised that she had asked her something.

'Yes? Was just, thinking I had better start preparing for tomorrow.' Saly replied, half realising that she probably hadn't answered her question. She stood up and Meredith slid over immediately and took her warm spot. *Would she jump into my grave as quick?* The whispering voice in her head was back, laced with a spite that Saly immediately dismissed.

In the kitchen, the temperature was colder. She opened the fridge. The carrots needed sorting; some were clearly fresher than others.

Just mix them together, no one will know. The voice again, this time not so quiet. Her heart thumped. She waited. Deep breaths, deep breaths, she told herself. Knife - that's what she needed next.

Out came the chopping board, the knife, and then the carrots according to size, colander ready and waiting. Throwing all the carrots in irrespective of their order, she rinsed them before placing them in order again.

She positioned her knife: blade in contact with the board. She began to slice. She got faster. Her fingers were too close the knife and before she knew it the knife nipped the tip of her finger. She flinched before examining her cut and shoving her finger protectively into her mouth.

You can't do anything right.

Her eyes squinted as she examined the damage. It wasn't too bad. The carrot could still cook. Serve it up to her Aunt Ivy.

That would teach her!

Having a bloody carrot on her Christmas dinner plate? Teach her what? she thought. This was Aunt Ivy. She loved her, she reminded herself as she threw away the carrot and continued with the chopping.

Turkey next. Coconut rice is easy enough to cook, what about dessert? Better boil the carrots. In the back of her mind she remembered something about adding honey to the carrots that would glaze them, glazed carrots? She would need to think about that. The room began to steam up as the pots of water came to the boil and Saly tipped the carrots in. Ivy would also be expecting coleslaw. She wasn't that good at coleslaw. Not that it was difficult, but she would need to chop the cabbage finely, add some finely chopped onions, and again, more carrots.

Your idea. The voice whispered in her head as she opened the fridge, reached for the cabbage and began to chop it in fine strips, exactly how Aunt Ivy liked it.

By Saly

This is a reconstruction. I am remembering. It was day. The sun was gleaming in the blue sky and I was happy.

Or -

Rain was in the distance and I was miserable. The thunderous full-bellied clouds were tumbling at speed, endlessly towards me. Brilliant red lightning seared across the sky as it flashed and roared spitting venom.

It's a reconstruction, so I choose and it's night. I opened the window to be met by the cold November air.

I stood, teetering on the ledge, stuffed full of bravery and pious righteousness as the traffic roared below. Tiny droplets of rain from the clouds left kisses on my eyelashes, blessings for the work that I was doing. It was *her* way of saying thank you. There was rain on the horizon, and I was needed.

I could still hear the screams of help echoing at the back of my head. It was time and I wasn't afraid. I had my cape and visor and so I was well protected. I couldn't see clearly but like a bat with echolocation, I could sense my surroundings. Mum was in the shower.

I saw the enormous black tulip of a flower flow towards me in the midnight blue and reach out her delicate petals to my desperate outstretched hands. I closed my eyes. And leapt into the welcoming black sky.

The wind rushed past my ears as I knew I was falling, falling, falling before being snatched up. She held me aloft and lifted me up high as I knew she would. She was me and I was her. I flew and soared above the singing traffic, above the noise, above the poor downhearted and I knew what I had to do, and so did *she*. My midnight cape carried me off into the night and I went to rescue those that needed me.

I am Super Saly.

Saly was a normal child. Mary made sure she went to school every day on time. Punctuality was very important. In this country, social services would check punctuality of the child before anything else. She heard the rumours, she's seen it on television. These white people with their suits were actually allowed to take your children and there wasn't a damn thing you could do about it. No one was taking her child, not Momma Doll, not her aunts, and certainly

not no social services in h'England. There was no father, there never was. It was just her and her child.

'We two,' she would whisper to her brand-new baby as dark eyes looked up at her. Two was a respectable number, a good number. A number that she had come to like. 'Nothing wrong wid two,' she told herself.

Saly was a happy child. She thought everyone had someone else whispering to them, telling them things, secrets. It was a natural.

Mary though, knew. She pursed her lips, clucked at Saly when she acted strange and swept dirt under the rug. Guilt daily flowed through her as she swallowed down hard stones of truth that got stuck in her throat. It was her fault.

When she realised she was pregnant, she thought about it, God forgive her. Her aunts had tried. But like some kind of curse, or miracle, it hadn't worked. God had some purpose for her child. What else could it be? Either way, it was too late to do anything. She bore the child. She felt a desperation to make it up to the child that may have grown from his seed (but was hers too) was showered on the child. In fact, it was more hers than his because she would grow it up, and as far as she was concerned, that meant she had much more influence than whatever seed he had forced into her. It may as well have been the Immaculate Conception. She crossed herself at the blasphemy. 'Similar' she corrected herself, 'like the immaculate conception.'

This was her child, Mary's. No one else's, and no one would ever, *ever* find out that she wished it dead, that she attempted murder. But deep down, she suspected that the child just knew.

When she looked into her daughter's eyes, sometimes she'd see *him* staring back. Sometimes she'd be transported back to that night, where the crickets had chirped in the trees, where the moon watched silently as he climbed through the window. Where he climbed on her bed. She remembered how heavy he was, for one that was so skinny.

She told her aunt Ivy, she told Momma Doll; and she told God. She told everyone and had ended up losing everything. Her friends at school, her good name, and Sally. She even lost a little of her faith which made her pray to God harder than ever.

Other kids sniggered behind cupped hands. Eyes laughed at her behind her back and fingers pointed. Shame heated her face and she refused to go to school when everyone knew what had happened.

At times like these, she missed her mother Monica, more than ever. Her mother would've understood. Her mother would've done something. At the very least she would have shared her pain and her fury, because that's what mothers do. They love and protect their children.

She wasn't sure what she was expecting to happen when she told them, but she wasn't expecting what did happen. Ivy and Momma Doll had boiled bitter herbs. She was made to drink it and then have a very hot bath, laced with strong smelling salts. The women in the family, Momma Doll, Aunt Doreen and Rose and visiting cousins, muttered silently to each other, their disapproval hanging in the air.

After her bath, she was dressed and put to bed. That night, her stomach ached. Sweat poured off her as she writhed in her sheets. Her stomach cramped as she violently vomited, again and again. To her horror, warm urine ran down her legs. Too ill to protest, she allowed Ivy who silently changed the sheets, to wipe her down. Women quietly came in and out of her room. Clearing up the mess, mopping her brow, wiping her sweating body as best they could. The sharp tangy smell of the vomit clung to the inside of her nostrils as she breathed deeply through the suffocating heat of the night.

All knew their job and did it efficiently as Mary convulsed in the bed.

Hours passed. She felt stretched, thin and almost invisible, but alive. She looked out of the window to see the sun winking at her from in between the leaves of the tamarind tree. One hiccup and the heat of pain flashed through her. Keeping still, she learnt quickly that to move was to have pain. Her right hand flickered towards her stomach.

She was watched. Day and night. It wasn't difficult for them because she refused to move from the bed. She went to the latrine outside when she was feeling stronger, but that was all. Refusing to eat, she just stared at the curtain with its swelling white rolls. And when her stomach still swelled defiantly, her aunts tutted and clucked their disapproval and worry.

They called secret meetings when night fell. But in her room, on her bed where she lay, she heard them whisper curses. To God and Nature and even suggesting poison.

Candles were lit in the living room as Cousin Hyacinth and Annette arrived. Mary lay in bed, eyes shut but her ears keen and listening. It was only Ivy who put her head around the door to check on her that day. Only Ivy who, with a damp cloth, wiped her brow, found her favourite patchwork blanket that had been sent from England years ago. That as always, was saved for best. It was Ivy that covered up her shivering body even though she was sweaty. Ivy who brought her soup, Ivy who spooned it into her mouth, and Ivy who cleared away the dribbles of the liquid that refused to slip down her throat that was sore from her constant crying. It was Ivy that did everything.

And many of the times when Ivy came in fussing, Mary pretended she was asleep. She had decided that it was at that time the women of the family decided her fate. And that whatever happened to her next, was out of her control. If they had wanted her dead, then she would die. Surprisingly, this revelation came as a relief.

It was Momma Doll who had helped arrange her fare to England. Ivy was going anyway; she was older and was determined to make a better life for herself. There were jobs in England, and the more she heard of it, the more Ivy had liked it. If Ivy could transform into a butterfly there, so why not she?

Money was raised, much to Mary's relief and sorrow, she was leaving so no one would know of her shame. Ivy was going to train to be a nurse, and Mary would be living with her, they would do it together, just the two of them. Two was a good number.

Coming to England was a clean start. They didn't realise that problems had a habit of following. Even across an ocean.

She looked at Saly. Saly's father was nothing. It was better this way. That lie made her wince but it was one she would need to hang onto so she could survive.

The red bus took her to the hospital. Ivy was working and Mary had no intention of bothering her, and when she was finally born; after all the hate that Mary had felt towards her ever-growing stomach, on seeing the small child looking up at her, was overwhelmed by another feeling. The white English women told her she'd feel love, an overwhelming sense of love. But it didn't happen. All she felt was guilt.

Blinking away tears, she realised that she was the adult now. The baby was bundled up in a blanket and thrust into her arms. The scrunched-up face flustered, red and wrinkly. Her eyes clamped shut and her lip stubbornly jutted forward. This was Saly - she knew it was. For even though it wasn't her Sally back home, and even though she wouldn't have a dancing band of freckles on her nose, she would become her Saly. Half expecting to die in labour like her own mother had, she hadn't really considered a name for it until then. Yet here she was. She was very much alive, in a hospital bed, in England, holding her child. They should both be dead.

She looked again at the tiny sleeping form. She was given another chance. And so, in England, they would make a new life.

Ivy had told her stories about the women in her family, about her mother Monica, and of course, great grandmother Ivorene. Although Mary said nothing, she suspected the old woman might've been mad. It seemed to her, that everyone was mad. So, when her child, Saly, was like the rest of them, she merely shrugged her shoulders.

England was different. It froze. Its mist covered everywhere. Its frosted fingers shocked her breathing whereas Jamaica wrapped her in warmth.

Spewed up from the depths of the sea, the emerald island was full of green gold. Lush leaves covered the landscape with a canopy teased by the winds. And when it rained, water drenched the land in seconds. Steam hissed and snaked upwards in the heat as the cool rain tempered the climate. Magic made everything grow. Never was it more apparent to her that she belonged there rather than the barren rock of Britain.

The essence of the island that was home, was incomprehensible. And she saw it in Saly's eyes.

At times, she avoided her daughter's gaze. She was a fish out of water and suspected they would both die. But they had survived this long.

And as Saly grew, Mary suspected she was like great grandmother Ivorene. Children did not come around to play and there were no invites to parties. Mary's fears were confirmed in Saly's dreams of darkness and death. Perhaps she never should have left Jamaica. Something got stuck in the child - she could see it in her eyes. She felt the mocking curl of his lips as a growl rippled dangerously deep in his throat.

Sometimes Mary would walk over to Saly and hug her hard, trying to squeeze it out of her. The rest of the time, she ignored it as she busied herself with work with household chores. Things were different in England, she told herself as she ironed Saly's school shirt. There was no black shadow lurking behind the face of her child. These things simply didn't belong here. Not in England. They'd be no suffocating fog around this island. This was Britain.

Christmas Day. Saly

It was the day they had all been waiting for and so, on this day, Saly rose early. Dust motes danced in the still air. Owen snored. Saly breathed and Clare buzzed restlessly in the corners of Saly's consciousness.

A sliver of light hummed through the curtains. Slipping out of the room, she counted. Four steps down, then a step to the right. Six steps forward and then feet positioned on the edge of the passage for two steps as she reached Merry's room.

Tigger was scratching at the door from the inside. Her hand folded carefully and deliberately around the smooth, silver handle. The kitten sauntered past, rubbing itself against her legs.

Turn left. Step on the edges of the stairs. Count one, two, three, and four... all the way to twelve and the bottom of the staircase. Follow the kitten to where the KittiBits were kept. Wide saucer-like yellow eyes waited expectantly. Saly retrieved the box and poured some in the bowl to which Tigger rushed at as if she had not been fed in days.

Stars were forming at the corner of her eyes and her head felt light. Clinging onto the back of the chair for support she slowly made her way to the kitchen window in search for some air. The window was heavy and as she opened it, the earth from outside seemed to float up and hang onto her tongue, black, deep and metallic. She breathed deep.

The pimply chicken from the fridge was cold to touch. Owen didn't like turkey.

'You must pray Saly. Pray dat di gud lord wi help yuh inna times of need. Pray dat him wi always be there cum rain or shine. Pray dat yuh kip yuh faculties an remain compos mentis. Widout yuh mind yuh nuh ave nutt'm Saly, nuttin at all! Pray tuh di gud lord tuh kip yuh health an chrent an pray him keeps yuh pan di chriet an narrow.'

The brussel sprouts were next to come out of the fridge and felt cold. It was common to all who knew that green vegetables keep you compos mentis. She reached to the bottom kitchen cupboard to take out the small boiling pot. Her hand, slick with chicken fat, slipped over the silver cold tap as silver crashed into the silver pot. Always Judas' silver.

Was it healthier to part-boil, fully boil or roast them?

'Lef it at God feet. All di decisions dat yuh cyaa face. God wi decide fi yuh' And so, she poured the whole packet of brussel sprouts into the pot of water and placed it on the stove. Unable to decide whether she should cook roast potatoes or rice, she did both, and roasted the chicken in the oven until she could smell it.

She washed her hands in warm soapy water and made her way to the living room with a fixed smile on her face.

Merry screamed. A Drowsy doll lay in her arms. Owen's blonde-brown hair stuck up in light, not too dissimilar from Merry's. His pale skin had a blue sheen to it, like fish. Blue Irish eyes or was it Welsh from his dad? *Same difference* a voice echoed in her head. Laughter lines creaked around his face; he had gotten it right.

As she watched the two hugged and thanked each other for their respective presents. 'Open yours mummy! See what me and daddy have got you.'

'Later baby, I'm just gonna have a quick cup of tea first. Do you want some breakfast?' She suddenly realised that she hadn't prepared breakfast for anyone, just the kitten.

It's h'animal! How you fix it breakfast and forget your own family dem? Big Christmas day, t'rarted. She winced at her mother's curse.

A why you nah go church?

'Ruth!' The name only her mother Mary, used for her. And now, Mary's voice shouted from beyond the grave in Saly's head, waking her from her listless sleep while Clare watched on from the corners of her mind.

It wasn't until much later that anyone noticed. Merry and Owen sat, gorged, on the sofa, watching Christmas films that Saly had no patience for. Merry was searching for her.

'Mum! Where's Tigger?

'Bedtime Merry.' Owen made a grab for Merry to which she squealed happily before skipping up the stairs. It was late, Saly didn't quite know how late but the day was drawing to a close finally. She had cooked, they had ate, watched television, opened presents. All was well. Curling up on the sofa she silently congratulated herself. She survived.

The doorbell rang.

Owen made his way to the door while Saly only had an impression of his muffled voice floating around her head. She had been dozing, dreaming of, something that escaped her memory. But Ivy and Glanford, she remembered. They were there for New Years, was it that time already? Saly hated New Year. The promise of you getting your happy ever after that never materialised.

'How de do! How de do!' As Owen opened the door, he was greeted by Glanford in his brown tweed suit and the same brown Stetson hat.

'Glanford! Come on in, my man, come on in.' Owen reached out his hand and helped the old man in. The smell of tobacco leaked from his mouth and clothes. Only once he was past

the doorstep did he realise that Ivy was by the car, struggling with the bags. He quickly slipped on his shoes and braced the cold night air.

‘Uncle Glanford!’ Saly rose from the chair to greet her uncle, wincing as she realised that he was almost in the living room and he still had his outside shoes on, transferring all manner of filthy germs into the house.

‘Uncle, sit down, let me get some slippers for you, make you more comfortable.’

‘Oh, oh. Alright, alright.’ Allowing her to take him by the elbow, she placed him carefully into the cream chair, bent down, and eased off his good Sunday shoes while he took off his dripping hat.

‘Careful with dem shoes, me ‘had them long, long time.’ Saly, sensing his apprehension, handled them carefully. She wrinkled her nose, resisting the urge to throw them in the bin, and placed them in the hallway instead.

Just then Owen materialised in the doorway. Ivy’s coat flapped around her ankles as she wheeled her case though the wet and dirty ground. Owen quickly placed Glanford’s bag on the doormat, whizzed back to Ivy, and lifted her bag off the floor and onto the mat as Ivy crossed the threshold.

‘Aunt Ivy come on in.’ Her voice tight.

The old woman, not acting her age, strode into the warm house, dripping as she went. Saly rushed to take off her black coat, to reveal what was clearly her Sunday best.

‘Cup of tea?’ Saly disappeared to the kitchen before she even got an answer.

‘Just put it dere so,’ Ivy pointed to the corner of the sitting room where she wanted Owen to place her bags. Instead, he decided it was better to leave them in the passageway. He heard the kettle puffing away in the kitchen as he made his way back into the living room.

‘It’s cold outside. Take a seat Ivy.’

‘Tank yuh son, tank yuh. Mi af fi take de weight offa mi feet now. Nuh as young as mi use fi be.’ Ivy sat down into the corner of the sofa warmed up by Saly, sighing heavily as she half sat, and half fell down. Owen sat on the far side of the same sofa.

‘You get here alright? Glanford?’

‘It coal, coal, coal. Mi feel it bad dis year. Las’ year it was erm, mild but me h’expecting like dis. El Nino or dat global warming ‘ave sinting to do wid it.’

‘Global warming? What oono no ‘bout global warming!?’ challenged Ivy as she straightened out her white skirt, eyeing him playfully. Glanford flexed his toes revealing a bald spot from over wearing.

‘Is wha’ yu mean? Mi watch de news dem. Mi see dese tings a gwanning.’

‘Is what yu see ol’ man? Yu na see nuttin.’

‘Oman, hush yu mout. Mi say mi watch de news.’ His stern face wrinkled as he tried to silence her.

‘Lard ‘have mercy, Owen, yu haffi ‘ol me back fi me a go tump him inna him mouth

‘I’ll just see where Saly is with that tea.’ Saly heard the bickering and Owen’s excuses from the kitchen. She had made the tea and was rummaging around in the fridge. Owen entered and slid the door closed.

‘How long did you say they were here for?’

‘Til New Year.’ Saly took out the white china reserved for guests. While the tea brewed, she retrieved the spiced bun from the bread bin and searched the fridge for a hunk of cheddar. That would have to do instead of Jamaican cheese.

‘How on earth am I going to put up with them for that long?’

‘They’re family.’

‘Yeah, I know, but what’s wrong with coming for a Sunday roast one day, they don’t live that far away, although you talk to them you would think it was Timbuktu!’

‘They’re old, what do you expect?’ Saly, opened the kitchen window and peered out. The empty black stared back. It’s cool breath a welcome relief. Sweat patches were beginning to materialise. She fanned her arms, flapping her long sleeves gently like wings. Traffic rumbled. ‘She’s the closest thing I have to a grandmother. She’s staying.’

‘You know I don’t mind them coming.’ Owen pulled up the wooden chair and sat round the kitchen table, his voice hushed. ‘Not even my mother comes that long!’ he hissed.

‘Your mother never comes. Owen, how long do you think they’ll be around for hmm? I mean, how old is Aunt Ivy? She’s got to be in her 70’s or so, and Glanford? He’s already winding down. Can’t you see it?’

It wasn’t something that they generally talked about, but now she had mentioned it, it was obvious. He was thinner, losing his appetite. He was elderly. Saly smeared the margarine onto a slice of bun.

‘Don’t you think Merry needs to see her grandparents? Know her family?’

‘She does know her family.’

‘Yes, she does. And she will have memories of Aunt Ivy and Uncle Glanford staying with us over the Christmas period.’

Pulling out a silver tray from the cupboard, she placed two china cups on top of matching saucers, the teapot with brewing tea bags in it, a sugar bowl as well as a little milk jug on a metal tray imitating before carrying it all into the living room.

‘Tank yu dear,’ Ivy pulled up the small wooden coffee table that was in the corner and helped Saly place the tray onto it. She served Glanford first.

‘Yu wan’ tea firs’ or sinting fi eat?’

‘Mi belly hot,’ he said whilst rubbing his stomach, ‘Gimmie de tea firs.’

Ivy obediently poured him a strong cup, with two sugars.

‘Yu ‘ave any brandy Sir?’ Glanford looked up hopefully at Owen who began to mutter his apologies as Saly stood and went to the wall unit drinks cabinet. The glass cabinet, stiff with under-use, snapped open as she pulled. The chain eased the cabinet door down gently, revealing the mirrored back and bottles of wine with varying amounts in it, and hidden in the corner, was a half-bottle of brandy.

‘Yes, Uncle. This will help.’ Cracking open the lid, she poured a capful into his hot tea. He waited. She took the hint and poured a little more, and then some more.

‘Top, ‘top, yu try fi drunk mi?’ He chuckled, before blowing ripples over the tea and taking a slurp. Jaws that were slack with age chomped close together as he chewed his tea out of habit, before swallowing.

It was a day before that Merry realised something was wrong, but no one would listen. Apart from Uncle Glanford.

‘She’s gone Uncle!’

‘Is wat y’ mean?’ he asked, his feet resting on the glass coffee table. His feet wiggled comfortably without any guilt.

‘Tigger. She’s gone. I think she jumped out of the window.’

‘De cyat?’ he asked in between glances at the television screen. Merry watched patiently for his reply as he placed his cup on the floor next to his chair, took out his dentures, sucked a piece of stuck food loose from his remaining stumps of teeth, and then slid the dentures back in place.

‘Is h’ animal. Him jus’ gone fi h’ explore. Him be back.’

‘She’s not even a cat! She’s a kitten!’ Merry wailed. Saly made kissing noises out of the window, calling the kitten.

Owen came up with the idea of making posters. Without photographs of their new kitten, Merry had to make do with crayons and her memory. Saly agreed with Glanford, the cat would find its way back. It was just a cat.

By that evening, Owen had taken the picture to the local sweet shop with Merry and made 50 copies. He had wanted to start with 25 but the look on Merry’s face made him tell the

assistant he wanted 50 instead. And for the next two evenings, they trudged the street, placing the copies through letterboxes. The work was exhausting, but a much-needed distraction for Owen as he preferred being outside the house and counted down the days until Ivy and Glanford were going home.

It was New Year's Eve and still no sign of Tigger. Merry had taken to sulking. Saly stood in the kitchen staring into the cupboard where she kept her medication. She switched on the kettle. Gazing out into the garden she saw daffodil bulbs forcing their way up.

Ivy came into the kitchen, her lilac dress hugging her large frame. Her arms brushed the narrow passageway walls. She had in her hands something that looked like brown crusted leaves.

'What's that?' Saly asked as she stood away from the sink, giving her Aunt room.

'Mi ago make Glanford some bush tea... clean up 'im blood. Him not feel too good.'

'Bush tea?' Saly wrinkled her nose at the thought of the magic tea that cured all ailments. Its pungent aroma would fill the house, sink into the soft furnishings and linger for weeks. As grown as she was, the making of 'bitters' her mother had called the herbal drink, meant that everyone in the household would have to have some too. Everyone except Owen. His refusal was acceptable. Hers was not.

'What's the matter with him?' Saly asked. Not needing an excuse to open the window, she cracked it open as Ivy took out a dutchie pot from the cupboard. It was a fair size, big enough for her to cook some curried goat in later but not for bitters. The iron released from the actual pot might be good though, she reasoned with herself, but decided against it. Placing it aside she reached for a smaller steel one. Saly called the kitten again with kissing noises and Ivy got to work.

It wasn't long before Merry, awoken from her sulking by the stench of the bitters as it brewed in the kitchen. The whole household could smell that it was ready.

'Mi make plenty fi las,' Ivy said, scooping out a cup for Saly, and another for Glanford who was spending the day in bed. And as she disappeared up the stairs, Saly sniffed the steaming concoction and recoiled in disgust before pouring it down the sink.

Ruth! Her mother's voice echoed inside her head.

As a child, Saly knew she was serious when her mother used her biblical name Ruth. To refuse her mother Mary anything at those times, was considered a sin against God and nature itself.

'Ruth! Come! Mi boil bitters 'fi you. Drink it!'

The bush tea was thrust in front of her in her favourite pink mug, as if that would make it any better. The magic of the bitters was so strong that it superseded the power of the pink mug, which was fast becoming a dreaded sight.

‘Drink.’

Saly hadn’t been feeling unwell so she didn’t know why this was being doled out. She had told her mother and about the voice that spoke to her in her head, and it hadn’t gone too well. The next thing she realised, she was confined to her bed and her mother Mary was boiling up bitters. Her answer for everything.

The pink cup was brought to young Saly’s lips. She pinched her nose and gulped. Her stomach flipped. She gulped. The heat spread throughout her insides as she tried not to breathe. Breathing meant she would taste it. If she tasted it, she’d be sick. If she was sick, her mother Mary would surely beat her. She gulped in a final mouthful before instinctively dragging in a closely followed breath. And as she did so, the bitter taste filled her throat, head and chest and made her stomach flip.

‘Don’t you dare! You spit it out me ago clap yu, yu hear?’ Mary said, hand raised ready for the smack. Saly sloshed more down her throat while desperately trying not to bring the warm back up in vomit. The pink cup, now devoid of any magic, dribbled herbal drink from her mouth and onto the kitchen table. Saly sobbed.

‘Send it down,’ and sure enough, the whole mug of bitters was in her stomach which shook and trembled against her will, as she battled to keep it in. Promptly her mother shoved in a teaspoon of sugar as a kindness.

The sugar worked its own white magic. As the sweet grain melted on her tongue, the liquid coated the inside of her mouth and slipped down her throat, calming and soothing as it went. Her stomach quietened, distracting it from the black bush tea that was making itself at home. It was supposed to clean her blood. Up until then, Saly hadn’t realised that blood could get dirty.

The day passed in a cold flurry. The short winter day was quiet as Ivy remained most of the time with Glanford in his room. Saly was left to cook dinner as Merry and Owen went out to drop leaflets about Tigger. Saly was told that the fresh air was good for them both, but she thought he may be looking to get away from her, her aunt Ivy and her bitters. It wasn’t until early evening that they returned.

Owen came through to the kitchen where Saly was while Merry took off her coat and went to the living room to watch cartoons.

‘Alright?’ Owen pecked her on the cheek with thin, cold lips. Saly didn’t get too close.

‘You two have been gone a while, left me by myself.’

‘You’ve had your Aunt Ivy. Who I can smell has been busy.’ He leaned over the large pot on the stove full of her bitters and couldn’t help but sniff deeply before recoiling. ‘Don’t know how you can drink that stuff.’

‘Glanford isn’t well,’ she replied.

‘What’s wrong with him? Apart from old age? I mean, how old is he anyway?’

She sat at the table and watched her husband open up the lids of pots and pans, sniffing as he went. Oxtail soup was simmering. It wasn’t a favourite of Saly’s, or Merry’s, but she thought Uncle Glanford might appreciate it. They were due to leave a couple days after New Year, and as it was, with Glanford’s illness, Saly knew that Owen optimistically considered their early departure.

‘We really ought to get some lavender.’ Saly quietly said. Lavender was tradition. Ivy, like her late mother, approved of tradition. It would protect against evil spirits.

Closing the door to stop the smoke alarms going off, Saly approached the back door and pushed it open. She stood, peering into the black. Squinting her eyes, she thought she could see shapes swirling around. What she reasoned was probably just the bushes, looked like a dark looming figure, shifting its shape in front of her. Lamp-like yellow eyes slowly emerged. Without breaking the gaze, the kitten unfolded itself from the black. Slowly, it padded one foot in front of the other and tentatively entered the kitchen.

Saly was suddenly flooded with anger and disgust. ‘Vermin,’ she muttered under her breath before pushing it hard with her foot, sweeping it outside and upwards into the dark. It jumped in surprise, twisted its body to compensate and landed deftly on the concrete patio before darting through the hedge to the safety of the neighbouring garden.

She couldn’t remember firmly shutting the door, the satisfying click-thunk of the lock, or turning key that she placed inside the top draw. But she did remember finding herself dishing up the soup to Glanford who was happily chatting in the kitchen chair. She stood, momentarily disoriented in the blaring light of the kitchen. Merry was screwing up her face, mug in hand as Ivy sternly peered protectively at her and Owen was pretending that he didn’t realise he had a mug of bitters in front of him.

The cooker clock flashed: 19.39. Sweat chilled her goose-pimpled skin. Still holding the ladle, she realised she had frozen. She ladled some Oxtail soup into Glanford waiting bowl, hoping no one noticed.

‘Yeah mon.’ Glanford continued. Saly, having missed the start of the conversation listened carefully to pick up the threads. ‘Mi feel good now. Ivy work di magic and fix me up good.’ He smiled revealing toothy gaps that his dentures usually filled. Saly imagined his teeth in a cup filled with water, on the bedside table in their bedroom, and felt a part of her inside recoil.

‘Of course it work.’ Ivy eyed up Merry who was delaying a sip by slowing ripples on its surface.

‘Cure everyting. Merry, drink up. Drink it quick.’

She ladled some soup in her own bowl that was waiting, placed the steaming pot back onto the stove and sat down to join her family. Ivy and Owen laughed loudly, and Glanford sniggered, hissing through his sparse teeth. Saly smiled realising that a joke had been told. She had missed it.

She sat. Turned her attention to Merry. She motioned her to have another sip of the bitters, to which she screwed up her face further and gestured that she was currently busy drinking her soup. Saly rolled her eyes. She would have to make her toast and drinking chocolate later on.

As the evening progressed, Saly relaxed. She almost forgot about the disconnected feeling she felt as she drank her soup, fixed her smile and relaxed more and more as she realised that no one had noticed.

Much later that New Year evening, they sat chatting on the living room, awaiting midnight. The news was on. Glanford enjoyed the news, keeping abreast.

‘New Year is all ‘bout family. ’Glanford began to crow as his hand reached out and held Ivy’s. She smiled, cradling his wrinkled hands with her own. ‘We na know ‘how long we ‘have. Family, dat is wat life is aaall ‘bout.’

Saly smiled as Owen’s blue eyes looked deeply into hers, and she felt something deep within her stir. Perhaps it was disappointment. Merry was clearly bored.

Suddenly, the house the house groaned, sighed and plunged them all into darkness.

Merry screamed.

‘Oh Merry! Don’t be silly!’ Saly said as she stood up and made her way to the kitchen. ‘It’s just a power cut.’

‘Power cut? Lard! Dat ‘appen in h’Englan too much. Remind me of back home.’ Merry scooted into her father's lap feeling her way in the black with her outstretched arms. Touching fingertips brushed each other before he pulled her close to him. Shadows flashed

and flickered up the walls as Saly entered with a lit candle. Ivy stood, pulling apart the net curtains to check the neighbourhood.

‘All dark. Mi na see nuttin.’ The curtain swished back as she released her hold on them as she hefted herself back into the asthmatic sofa. She chuckled. ‘Remin’ me of rolling cow.’ Glanford laughed as they shared the joke. His milky eyes now dark.

‘Duppy know who fi frighten.’

‘What do you mean?’ Merry asked. Owen wasn’t sure that she wanted to know, but Ivy had already started.

Saly had Owen’s silver lighter and flicked the catch. It snick-snickered before a flame burst out of the metal and lit the wick of another candle that fizzed to life. She placed it on the coffee table that had seemed to be the home for Glanford’s feet, now a coffee table again. Black bodies split and danced as elongated heads and figures stretched at the walls, but they too also grew quiet to listen.

‘In Jamaica, in the country, it was dark. They lived on a hill in the district of St Elizabeth. Monica was visiting her grandfather down yonda, and she had been caught out.’ Ivy had begun.

‘Im get ketch!’ Glanford chuckled. He knew this story well, and was one of his favourites about Monica, Ivy’s younger sister. It was times like these, that Ivy’s words renewed and revived what once was forgotten. Ivy breathed and the air folded.

‘Young Monica stood, in the grounds near her home, in Jamaica. She was in the dark bush alone. Her big sister Hyacinth had run off and left her. She had gone so quick that no amount of yelling at her to wait, would make a difference. Monica stared into the black bushes. He sharp brown eyes used to seeing in the dark, saw nothing. It was only a short run to home, but she was scared. The tree was there in her way and she couldn’t get past. Her heart thumped. The wind blew too close to her ears, mocking her fear. Grandma’s Ivorene’s dinner, which previously sat comfortably warm in her belly, began to churn. The tamarind tree was too tall in the too black sky. She tried to be brave, Lord knows she tried to be brave but something within her stopped her going any further. She shifted her weight as she felt it glaring at her in the darkness. Her knees bent inwards as her legs gently trembled.

She knew what it was. It hid behind the tree and waited for her to pass.

Her eyes were scrunched shut. The rasping of its breathing rattled through the branches. Her heart pushed up through her throat.

The fear within her grew until big fat tears rolled down her cheeks and she began to cry. 'Momma!' She screamed, finding her voice.

Too scared to keep her eyes closed any longer, she opened them, scanning the black bushes. The leaves hushed, he was there. Rolling Calf was there. If she looked, she knew she would see his eyes glowing red. Red in the black, demonic red eyes. Like fire, red sparks would be spitting from its eyes like a Catherine Wheel. And if she listened really carefully, she would hear the moaning and sighing of Rolling Calf, or the laughter of the duppy that could change shape at will. She couldn't move and knew that she had forgotten the pebbles.'

'What's Rolling Calf?' Merry whispered. Saly listened intently to the story of her grandmother who had long since passed.

'Rolling Calf is a duppy, mad cow.' Merry still didn't understand until Owen whispered that a duppy was a ghost.

'Oh!' she said and curled a little further into her dad. Owen reached for the lighter that Saly had placed on the table, intending to keep it. In case he wanted a cigarette later, or tomorrow. He would have to go to the shops. But what about Merry? She would want to come? The lighter lay in his palm as he rolled it over and thought. Merry, reaching her little hand into her fathers, also stroked the smooth metal for comfort.

'And what's the pebbles for?' she quizzed.

'Pebbles are to chrow at di duppy, dem cyant count. So yuh thro dem, and while du duppy counting, yu haffi likkle time fi run.'

'It wasn't a ghost, it was that mad man, what was his name?' Saly cut in.

'How yu fi know 'im name? Hmm?'

'Aunt Ivy,' Saly began, 'I've heard this tale lots of times, and it keeps changing. Last time, it was Omeriah.'

'Dat chupid picky head bwoy!?' Ivy kissed her teeth. 'Him stakki yes. Him wander around at night yes and frighten de pickney dem.'

'What's stakki?' Owen asked flicking his eyes from Saly to Ivy.

'Him mad,' Ivy clarified. Saly always felt sorry for Omeriah in these stories. He was pretty much abandoned. Stories were told of him being unwashed and his hair unkempt. He couldn't have been more than his twenties. He had been thrown out of home, or perhaps walked out, depending on whose story you believed.

He had built himself a shack made out of wood and leaves, and he lived there by himself. He survived on food that he stole, food that kind folk left out for him, and others who turned a blind eye when one of their chickens went missing.

He did not speak to anyone, but he lingered in the shadows when others were close. In some tales he didn't speak. In others, he couldn't. Or he roared or yelled a jibberish while on the path as they passed where he lived. Other tales say that he was set upon by a group of young men and had his tongue cut out so he couldn't scream or shout at anyone anymore. But in none of the stories had anyone spoken to him. He was an outcast, like the lepers in the Bible, untouchable.

She was sure he must have been lonely. She was sure that if she was around at that time, she would've been a friend to him. She would have helped him clean himself up, wash and combed and cornrowed his hair. She had imagined herself and him, sitting by the crackling fire in his makeshift hut, watching the fireflies dancing in the bushes. There would be no need for words. She wouldn't have left him alone in the dark, by himself.

'Momma!' Monica had called, louder this time but all too aware of the duppy's presence. St Elizabeth was a close-knit community. They were all related some way or another. So and so took up with so and so. This one's pickney was always that one's cousin. Family was everywhere.

'Momma Doll! Yu na hear Monica by de tree?' That was Sister Maude, a family member and neighbour who regularly sat on her veranda listening to the voices of their world.

'Monica?' Momma Doll yelled.

'Yes momma' Monica yelled, relieved. 'Rolling Calf is dere, mi cyan pass de tree.' I come to her rescue - again. Monica had hoped she would give Hyacinth a beating for leaving her alone in the dark.

In a few minutes, mi came closer and closer to the tree. Rolling Calf was gone.

'Hmph. Duppy know who fi frighten.' I grabbed her skinny arm and pulled her past the spot where she had seen red glowing eyes in the black. Nuttin' was dere.'

Glanford sighed deeply, revealing the tiredness that ached within his old bones. It was late. Saly glanced at the clock, and seeing it was after midnight, decided that it was time Merry get to bed. And of course, she protested.

'Bed Merry! It's the next day already.'

'How am I supposed to sleep in the dark?'

'Dad will bring a candle.'

'Yep.' Owen said as he stood, cradling his too-big daughter in his arms.

‘What about the Rolling Cow?’ she asked, fear lacing her words. She knew that ghosts were real, she had seen and heard about them on television.

‘Rolling Calf is all the way across the Atlantic Ocean. He doesn’t frighten English girls,’ Owen said as he began to take her up the stairs. Saly, followed with a candle, up the stairs and to her room, leaving Ivy and Glanford chatting quietly. Meredith used her hands and moved his hair out of his eyes.

‘Are you sure?’ her bright brown eyes looked scared. Owen smiled warmly and held her tighter.

‘Absolutely.’

‘Happy New Year,’ Saly said as she left the candle on the chest of drawers and left the pair to say their goodnights. She watched as Owen cradled Meredith stroking her soft brown hair. Her legs dangled by his waist as he carried her into her bedroom and drew the door up gently.

Downstairs the tiredness swept over Glanford. His legs ached. As he tried to stand with the help of Ivy, it felt as if his top half was separating from his bottom.

‘Jesus Christ!’ He winced as he straightened up. Ivy placed an arm under his frame and helped him to stand. As he stretched, sighed and breathed, finally ready to attempt the stairs.

‘Mi tink mi want fi go home in de marnin,’ he whispered as Ivy helped roll in up the stairs in the dim light. They had been there long enough.

Early the next day, Ivy rose early, bags packed. She and Glanford were ready for the drive home. Owen didn’t see the need to have his sleep disturbed as well as Saly’s, after all, they were her family. She could do the goodbyes. They didn’t live far, and he knew that it was just a matter of time before they would be back again. Saly had felt uncomfortable leaving Merry in her bedroom with a burning candle, and so he stayed with Merry until she fell asleep. It was Saly alone who got up, made her aunt and uncle a cup of tea and toast, and helped them into the car with their bags. The year started off quietly, cold and frosty as usual.

Saly’s slippers crunched the frost on the concrete pavement as she hauled the suitcases into Ivy’s boot. Glanford sat in the warmth of the living room until the women had gotten everything ready.

‘Thanks for coming aunt Ivy, it’s been lovely having you.’

‘Aww. Tank you darlin’ mi lef some bush tea inna de pot fi oono.’ She looked at her niece with concern in her eyes. ‘Drink it, it do more dan you know. It fix everything, drink it.’

‘Yes Auntie.’ Hugging herself, she smoothed the goose bumps that prickled. The streets were quiet and empty.

‘Me mean it Saly.’ For the first time during her visit, Saly noticed the concern in her eyes.

‘Dere is real healin’ dere. It cures wah yuh tink cyaa be cure. Try it.’ She paused as if thinking if she should say what she was thinking.

‘Mary, your mudder.’ She paused. Saly waited, but instead Ivy took a deep breath, smiled at her gran niece and rubbed her arms lovingly. ‘Just try it, you might be surprised.

Now, where is dat ol’ man?’ she asked impatiently changing the subject, as she tussled past Saly and back into the house. Glanford was on the sofa, his feet up on the coffee table, shoes on his feet. His Stetson hat lay over his eyes as he softly snored. Ivy tutted, shoving his foot off the coffee table.

‘Glanford? Time fi go ‘ome,’ she said as she scooped her arm under his to pull him up.

‘Me nat sleeping!’ He protested. Groaning, he leaned on Ivy heavily as he pulled himself up and out of the chair that seemed to suck him back down. His bones ached in protest and he had to wait to recover while taking deep breaths.

‘Y’alright?’ Ivy asked while eyeing him nervously. She waited a few moments while his eyes opened. Saly watched while he slowly nodded, placed his Stetson hat on his head and take a tentative step forward. He was ready.

‘Saly? Tank you for de ‘ospitality. Take care.’ The pair shuffled slowly to the car and Ivy levered him gently into the front seat. He closed his eyes momentarily before opening them and smiling gratefully at Ivy who was waiting for confirmation that he was ok. Shutting the door, she walked back to Saly at the front of the house.

‘Me come back soon, y’here? Me ‘have some lavender for uuno.’ Saly smiled, the bitters in the kitchen resting on her mind. Ivy smiled, walked round to the driver's seat, got in and turned the engine. The old car shuddered to life. Blowing the horn, she slowly pulled off down the quiet street.

Saly stood watching them disappear down the grey streets for a few minutes before making her way back into the house.

Owen heard the car drive off and so he knew it was safe to venture out of the bedroom. He preferred it to be the three of them. Him, Saly and Merry. It started when Mary had died and Saly came in touch with relatives again that he had never met. Ivy, more than the others, seemed to make it her responsibility to be the mother that Saly lost that day. Lord knows she’s too old, and she has her hands full with Glanford.

Intruders

Owen stood, elaborately stretched his muscles bringing them to life, and then scratched his growling pale paunch. Glancing at the flashing clock, it saw that it was still early. 'Food,' he thought as he gently tapped it, letting it know that his master had heard his call.

Dressed in just his boxers and a white vest top, Owen shuffled out of his bedroom. His fair thinning blond hair flopped lifelessly over his side parting to the left. It was the holidays and he hadn't greased it down since before Christmas. Reluctant to wake Merry, he slipped silently past her bedroom door and down the stairs.

At first glance he could see that Saly had drawn the curtains in the living room. It was cold, and dim, but sunshine was still stubbornly there. The chill in the air made him think of his blue dressing gown hanging on the back of his bedroom door. His stomach growled again. Turning to towards the kitchen, his eye caught movement which he knew was Saly.

She was shuffling, scraping, doing something. He stopped. Unaware of his presence, he saw that she was busy by the kitchen sink, scraping, banging pots. Instinct froze him to the spot while he watched. Something wasn't quite right.

Owen watched while Saly turned the hot tap on. Owen edged closer towards the kitchen so that she came into full view, and just as he was at the entrance, Saly turned her back and walked towards the kitchen window. She opened the window and took deep breaths of the crisp January morning air.

He should have announced his presence somehow, walked in, asked what was for breakfast, opened the fridge to check what goodies were left over from yesterday, maybe even grab a brioche from the cupboard and munch on it while he made small talk with his wife. But he didn't. He waited. And he watched.

She went back to the sink and the running tap, now hot. And reluctantly reached into the cupboard, behind the crusty bread that Merry loved so much, she reached for the box of Citalopram. Nervous that she wasn't going to take it, he waited.

'You're doing this for Merry,' she told herself. You can be a proper mother, you can stop being so distant, so reserved, so... *wrong*. She didn't want to be alone. Cast out of the family like Omeriah. She didn't want to be the Rolling Calf. She belonged with people, not to be roaming around in the darkness, by herself with others afraid to talk to her. She would not take the damn tablets.

One by one, she popped the white tablets out of the silver packaging and watched them swirl and melt into the hot water. The silver sink stained chalky white as they clung on to the increasingly hot metal. Water tore at them as they slowly disintegrated in front of her eyes. She watched while they disappeared into nothing but a white stain. Gone without a trace. And there she remained, while time, it seemed to her, stopped.

Owen's heart thudded. He knew something was wrong. She wasn't taking her medication. Saly had opened the back door. It was then that he saw it.

Tigger. Tigger eyed Saly cautiously as she tried to enter the kitchen. It had been a while since she had last eaten and must have been hungry.

Owen, surprised, and relieved for Merry, saw the kitten as it slowly walked into the kitchen, not taking its eyes off Saly. The kitten's eyes flicked towards him as it began to walk more confidently into the kitchen, and it was then that she struck.

Saly's foot, swift and firm, kicked the kitten in the stomach and out of the kitchen. It yowled, jumping sideward and high. Its body flipped sideways and landed on its feet. Owen jumped forward.

'Saly!' The kitten, fearful of another kick, sprinted off to the side of the garden and disappeared through a hole in the fence to the safety of the neighbour. 'For God's sake Saly! What on earth are you doing?' He rushed outside, bare feet, to see where Tigger had gone. But she had vanished. The cold concrete punctured his soft, pink, bare feet with each step he took. He turned to regard his wife who looked at him with a stranger's gaze as she calmly turned from the doorway of the kitchen, shut the door and disappeared into the room.

Owen stood on the patio, the cold January wind flipping his hair, while he in utter disbelief watched her flip the kettle on for a cup of tea and left room.

'Vermin. That's all cats are! That's something she bloody well doesn't need! And him trying to save it? Makes you wonder what on earth she sees in that ridiculous man. *I* should have locked *him* out - next time I fuckin' well will.

Owen stared, dumbfounded. Had he just seen what he thought he saw? He had always been the quiet sort. When he was at school, he was reluctant to confront people when he didn't agree with them, he'd rather just leave them let them do what they wanted. He wasn't good at arguing and hated the attention. Seeing Saly doing what she did, he paused, unsure of how to proceed but the cold woke him from his shocked daze, and he let himself back into the kitchen.

He walked quietly up the stairs and to the bathroom, locking the door behind him.

‘What was he going to tell Merry?’ Would Tigger even come back after that? Glaring into the mirror, his troubled reflection stared back without answers. He needed a cigarette.

A vision of the silver oblong flashed into his mind, clasped in little brown chubby fingers. Sighing, he realised that Merry had his lighter.

Almost automatically he reached out towards the cold tap and turned it on. The cold water refreshed his hands and face. He wouldn’t say anything to Merry just yet. Maybe Tigger would come back. He could get to it before Saly. Startled at his own thoughts, he counteracted. He wasn’t sure what he saw but he was sure that Saly didn’t mean any harm. She was there when they got the kitten, she was ok with it. Wasn’t she?

Reaching for the towel, he wiped his face and made his way to their bedroom. Perhaps he would get Merry up, take her to the park and drop a few leaflets off about Tigger as they went. He would visit the neighbour and ask them to keep an eye out. With a newfound determinedness, he decided he would find Tigger and bring her home and then he wouldn’t have to worry about what he saw with Saly, or what he thought he saw. Tigger would be home; he’d sort out everything else afterwards.

Death just strolled in, without asking permission. Saly wasn’t expecting him. But then, there was the issue with the Lavender. Ivy warned her to get some. It would’ve warded him off. She should’ve known it was just a matter of time. She should’ve been prepared. Gone were the days where she thought the melanin in her skin had magical properties which soaked up the sun and gave her protection that her peers didn’t have, her gravity defying hair meant she was a superhero. Gone were the days where she fought in cape, cap and mask. Her anonymity had failed, and, in his arrogance, he had strolled into her life. She would need to do better than this. She would need to get some of that old spark she used to have as a kid. She would need to *be* better, like Super Saly.

It was 6am when they received the call. The phone beside their bed rang breaking the silence. She and Owen were never awake this early. Her hand flew up to calm her pounding heart as Owen pulled himself up and snatched up the phone and croaked a ‘hello?’

She waited. He listened. The silence stretched out forever before he passed her the phone without a word.

The cold receiver pressed against her warm skin. Ivy’s voice twittered. Light, wispy but with a sharp edge. Saly listened. Not knowing what to say she said nothing and handed the phone back to Owen when Ivy’s voice had stopped.

Owen listened. Muttered something unintelligible even to Saly beside him, before placing the receiver down gently. His head slowly turned to observe his wife. She, not acknowledging him, sank back down into the warm bed sheet and silently cursed herself.

He was back. And he had taken Uncle Glanford.

Funerals and Death

Something was missing. Something was wrong. She could feel it. She could smell it in her sleep the night before. The voice whispered in her head,

Give unto Caesar what belongs to Caesar, she should have known that Death was coming to claim her Uncle. She would need to go to church to wash away her sin, to help protect herself, to purify herself and give unto God what belongs to God. She hoped that Death wasn't coming for her too. Or worse still, Merry.

Owen snored. She listened as the dark black swirled around their makeshift island. Owen snorted as he slept on soundly.

It was Clare. She was coming back. She always knew she would be back. She could feel her prickling on the edge of her consciousness. Death followed Clare around. Perhaps things would have been different if she had always had lavender. Perhaps Ivy had suspected Clare and Death all along, with her bitters and her insistence of using Lavender. It didn't matter anymore. Clare was coming and she would help, or she would not.

Even though the year was still new, she still hadn't found time to go to church. What would momma have said about that? She really ought to take Merry. Owen wasn't much into church, but then, what did she expect? She could hear her mother clearly. 'If you go an' pick an Englis' man, what you 'hexpec?'

Her mother Mary was ever present, telling her what she shouldn't do. She never left. But she had Merry too, and Owen, and of course, Aunt Ivy. If she had used the lavender like she was supposed to, Glanford would have been fine.

The silence surrounded her. She blinked in the black as she lay on her back. Unafraid, she remembered a time when she was scared of the dark and as she had said to momma, she was afraid of what was *in* the dark, not the blackness itself, for she was not a fool. She knew about duppies.

The blackness cloaked the horned black devil and his demons. She had to squint in the dark to see his glistening red eyes but here, here there was calm.

Morning arrived swiftly. Owen was still snoring as Saly glanced at the bedside clock. 12.32 am. Sleep was evasive, but she had enough of lying down, so she pulled herself up gently. She could get up, have a cup of tea.

The landing floors creaked as she skipped by the sore spots past Meredith's room.

On entering the kitchen, she immediately poured KittyBits into the overflowing bowl, spilling it onto the checkered kitchen floor and gazed out of the kitchen window. Flicking the switch for the kettle, she stared at her pink slippers as the kettle spat and spluttered before blowing hot steam over the cupboards. She reached for the tea bags. Saly saw them. But she was fine, did she have a tablet the day before? The long slim white box of tablets was wedged at the back of the spare coffee jar. Owen had bought the wrong brand; she was particular about her coffee but saved this for a rainy day. She reached for the packet. It crackled quietly as she opened the end and pulled out the tablets encased in silver foil. They were numbered, or rather, they had the days of the week on them, but it was the holidays. Saly was losing track of days and couldn't remember where she got up to, where she should have gotten up to. She placed them carefully back in the box and placed them behind the bottle of coffee. The second box of pills peeked out at her but, she left them. She'll take them later when she was cooking breakfast.

The re-prescription date was fast approaching. While the house was still, she took a pen from the top of the fridge, reached for the packet of tablets, unrolled the re-prescription and crossed the relevant boxes. When she was next passing the doctors, she would drop it in. It was expected that she should have run out by now and in case anyone was monitoring her, it needed to look as if all was well.

Whether she saw fit to take them was her business, and, if she got too many and didn't want them hanging around, she could always just wash them away. It's easy to wash things away. The tablets made her dull, and she needed to be sharp.

The kettle snapped off, wheezing in the effort. They would be up soon, and so she had better get started. Tea was much needed, even if her tablets were not.

Silence crept back into the room. Gazing out of the kitchen window, Saly listened as she heard birds somewhere, somewhere up high, singing... or complaining. January was such a depressing month.

The next thing she knew, she was sitting in the living room. Heart racing. She'd missed time again. Her tea was cold, but she had the tea. It couldn't have been long. Glancing up at the living room clock, she saw it was after 9am. Eight hours, *eight hours!?* She thought as the panic began to set in. Her hands trembled spilling the cold tea, *eight hours* she whispered, trying to ground herself into the here and now, when her thoughts were interrupted by the shrill of the doorbell. She stood, her bones protesting as she walked slowly at first, to the

door. Opening the catch, the smell of lavender hit her. She hoped it was doing what it was supposed to do. Keep the evil out.

‘Marning. Mi bring a likkle sinting fi oono.’

‘Aunt Ivy, come in.’ She would act natural and think about it later. Eight hours was nothing much, less than a day. For all she knew, she had fallen asleep, yes that was probably it. She’s been tired of late. It was the middle of the night when she got up. She was just sleeping, that’s all.

‘Mi cyan stop. Glanford, me lef ‘im but mi caan lef ‘im long.’

‘Uncle Glanford?’

‘Yes, ‘im staying in the lounge, y’know.’ She paused and eyed Saly speculatively before she almost whispered, ‘you caan stop by? Say goodbye? Funeral next Tuesday.’

Of course! Saly’s mind raced to keep up. Uncle Glanford. The funeral. Of course, his body is in the lounge. Family need to say their goodbyes. Her stomach twisted in regret and responsibility. It didn’t make sense that it was her fault, she knew that, but she also knew that it was true. If she had lavender at the front and the back of her home, as was proper, Death wouldn’t have crept in. He must have gotten sick when he stayed with her. It was her fault.

‘You’re going to keep him at home?’

‘An’ where else mi keep ‘im?’ ‘Him soon gone fi good. Mek me keep ‘im a likkle longer.’ Saly nodded.

Ivy was old fashioned, and tradition in Jamaica meant she would keep him at home until the day of the funeral. Ivy thrust a lavender pot in her hand. The purple leaves were devoid of spring flowers, but it wouldn’t be longer before they would start sprouting like magic. Ivy always paid attention to the traditions. She needed lavender at the front of the door as well as the back and do all she could to protect against the evil spirit that was Death.

The sun was bright now. Owen and Merry were quiet. Ivy stood. She shifted on her feet. Perhaps Saly had let Death in already, but she would fight him, as she always did. She took the lavender from her Aunt’s hands and closed the door.

Ivy stood on the doorstep having had the door closed in her face. Saly had simply took the plant and shut the door. There was something wrong, she knew it, but Glanford needed her at home. Say would have to be Owen’s problem for now.

She climbed into her car, started the engine and lay all thoughts of Saly to one side as she sped to be by Glanford’s side and arrange the final goodbye.

Saly was young. In her twenties when she encountered Death. He was is hard. This is the lesson she had learnt when he came for her mother.

Owen had been a strength back then, while she had been the silent contributor. He cried more than she did. His pale eyes were rimmed with red. Even Merry, still cocooned inside her mother's tummy could feel the grief coursing through her veins like crude oil. She squirmed, curled and curdled in liquid fluidity.

She would have to go outside. It had been days. Her skin tingled as the dress clung to her too tightly. She was her own mountain with a secret inside that tapped and squirmed on the inside. The baby inside was getting heavy.

It took an age to get ready. Owen had called several times. He tried to 'hurry her along.' She didn't want to hurry. Some things took time.

Cars would be arriving. She didn't want to go. Time was moving too fast. What was the good of superpowers if you couldn't stop time? Rewind and change things? What good was she? Wasn't she supposed to be super?

She imagined just sitting there, staying in her room all day. She imagined the funeral going on without her. She imagined. And drifted on clouds that were too heavy, too full.

The warm sun strayed in uninvited. There should be rain. Rain was always considered a blessing. She wondered what her mother would make of it all. If they were singing 'Amazing Grace' her duty was done.

Owen had come up again. She wasn't ready. She pulled on her tights and scooped her hair into one afro puff. Her mother preferred one puff as opposed to two. She was too old for two. Better only have one. Hadn't her mother said two was always better? Or something like that. Should she wear white or black? They wore white to funerals in Jamaica didn't they? Or was that somewhere else? She didn't have an appropriate white dress anyway. And nothing that fitted. She pulled out a black skirt and found a jacket to go with it. That would have to do.

When she was finally ready, she came down the stairs. Her tongue felt big, like it was swelling into her ears, muffling the sound. Owen spoke at her. His eyes were sad. An elephant seal flapped clumsily in her head blocking the outside world. She struggled to stay balanced.

The dark door loomed at the bottom of the stairs. She stepped towards it. Her head felt too heavy for her shoulders and as she stood at the top of the stairs, willing herself to be at the bottom near the front door, she teetered. Rushing by her side, Owen grabbed her elbow to steady her. She leaned into him as he guided her down the stairs towards the front door.

The sun was too bright in the dull grey day. Pressure from the inside hurt her eyes. She allowed herself to be escorted to the black hearse.

The clouds curdled. Traffic was heavy. Gazing up at the sky, she wondered if Death was watching, then felt silly. He was always watching.

She looked back at the clouds, partly expecting to see him, partly expecting to see her mother looking down at them. Death wouldn't be hovering above though; he'd be lurking below. Death liked the dark, suffocating soil. Death swirled in people's thoughts. People like her, whose hair was so receptive to his voice. It's in the coils y'see? Antennae. What did that make her? She already knew that He was lurking. She already knew that she was lining up to make her entrance, she could feel her getting ready to burst onto the scene. She was coming. Ready or not, like it or not. At the corners of her mind she could feel Clare. Sometimes she was there, other times she wasn't. This was one of those times that part of her wished that she would just take over and allow her to sleep.

They arrived at the church. Death couldn't enter the church, as far as she knew.

The hearse slowed. Owen climbed out from his side, walked briskly round to hers to help her out. As she stepped out, Owen opened an umbrella over her head to shelter her from the spitting rain. Raindrops fell heavily from the sky and shattered onto the concrete. Time seemed to slow down. Owen gently nudged her. Taking a deep breath to steady her heart and she carefully walked towards the church.

Bodies milled. Her mother was at the front, open casket as was proper. She would walk down the aisle. The carpet would be red, and there would be people on either side of the aisle watching her as she walked. She would have to make sure she didn't fall, or stumble.

She would walk up to her dead mother; it would be open casket which was traditional. Would she be required to kiss her? She couldn't quite remember the protocol. Mentally she went through, step by step, what she was supposed to do. Owen motioned for her to walk inside. She was still standing outside, looking at the rain on the concrete. Her feet stood surrounded by light. She put her weight on her leading foot. It was too bright.

Father Seamus, who was waiting at the entrance of the church approached her in a confusion of white billowing clouds around his body, which he smoothed down with soft hands.

'Miss Ruth?' Only her mother called her that. These situations were always so formal, surely, he should address her as Saly? His muffled voice didn't quite penetrate. He opened both his arms as if for an embrace, or to pray. She faltered, unsure of what she was supposed to do. He stepped to one side, indicating she enter the building. She stared.

She was dreading this day, but the beginning of it signalled that the end was coming. Soon it would be all over, and her mother would be buried under mountains of black soil. She'd get

cold down there. Should she have shipped her to Jamaica? It was warmer. The black soil there might be a warm blanket. Everything grew there. She could grow, instead of shrivelling up and dead in the cold hard ground. How could she do that to her mother? And yet here she was, just going along with it all. All they wanted to do was to stick her mother in the ground, and like the betrayer, Judas, she would be doing the same. She would be betraying her mother.

As she walked ahead of Father Seamus, the clouds cracked further open and cried in sheets. Silver cascaded, crashing to the ground. While Saly stared at the downpour. Owen guided her onwards, and she just went along with it all as Jesus wept.

The lavender died. It sat on the windowsill, shrivelled up. Perhaps it was doomed to die from the beginning. There simply was no other choice. If she wanted to live, she would need to try again and make this work.

Saly's nose twitched as she rubbed it absentmindedly as she sat in the congregation of Glanford's funeral. Her mind was pondering the afterlife, hell, damnation, 'and all that fire,' she thought. She thought of the flames searing her skin. What would that feel like? She wasn't going to hell. This she decided at an early age. She just was *not* going. But Glanford? Did God remember all that Glanford did?

Most.

Well then, he'll remember, won't he? He'll remember the sins of the father.

But he's not your father.

Mere details that God's not concerned with.

Owen sat in silence cradling Meredith who had scooted as close as she possibly could. Ivy balled. You couldn't even say she was softly crying like the English do. Ivy was West Indian through and through and a funeral wasn't a funeral unless some relative was howling like a banshee. Saly sat, dry eyed, listening to the service, straining to hear the priest. She knew that it was her duty to be crying too. But there were no tears.

The Priest was either good at pretending, or he was used to West Indian funerals. Although, this was half-half. This was something new. Glanford would think this very English. There was no procession with the loved ones walking before the hearse and the mourners at the back. There was to be no party afterwards, no warm Caribbean soil. No. The deeper you dug here, the colder and wetter it became. Glanford's bones would ache for an eternity in the cold. A smile crept on her lips.

Give him something to moan about she thought.

Looking around the church, she saw old faces that she knew she ought to recognise, and the unmistakable sobbing from those older decrepit bags of bones that knew that they would be next.

Why you so harsh?

It's the truth.

Ruth! Mi never teach yu fi be so bad-minded.

I'm not being bad-minded, just look around. They're half dead anyway.

Is that ol' Parkie? Lard Jesus, its Parkie! Yu haffi leave!

Not now.

NOW.

Saly looked across at the old man that she had heard others talk about as she grew up, but not so much her mother. Parkie. The man who liked to think he was an entrepreneur because he was well-off enough to have a fridge and sell ice cubes to those who weren't. She remembered tales of those who would yell 'Parkie'! Through the grates of the house, pushing in their skinny hands stuffed with dollars. 'Mi beg yu some ice Parkie!' Being poor helps shape a certain kind of vulture.

Saly saw through Parkie. In her mind she saw him as having jet black inky feathers sprouting round his neck, bald head and sharp black eyes. He had a golden bill that would have glinted in the liquid sun of Jamaica. Here though, he looked shrivelled, old and dull but even Saly could see the sharpness of his bill. He could still maim.

The service ended. The crying reached a crescendo as they filed past the open casket to say their goodbyes. Parkie wheeled himself slowly, deliberately past Glandford's coffin. His cold face, expressionless. Ivy stood beside his coffin weeping quietly now and shaking hands of those who came to pay their last respects. Before long, the coffin was being taken out towards the hearse to the wailing of women. They would drive onto the cemetery.

Her dead mother looked cold to Saly. Mary's face looked tinged with blue as they lowered her into the ground. The baby squirmed in her stomach. Her heavy head wobbled, but her firm feet planted stood strong. Her arm hurt. An old ache. Perhaps it was the cold.

The sky cleared. Clouds raced towards the horizon creating space. Glandford would be lowered into the ground, pulled down further than she was, but that was natural wasn't it?

She asked herself, and then threw the question up to the clouds that ran from her, that ran from the answer.

Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch, like me. Saly turned to see who was behind the singing. A woman who she did not know. Ivy was still crying. The crowd gathered. A murder of crows huddled around the gaping dark custom-sized hole.

Owen left Meredith beside Saly and picked up a shovel. The men dressed in black. One whose eyes never came above shoulder height, had grey hair swept to one side and lips that turned respectfully downwards. He didn't look strong enough to bear the weight of the casket, but with the help of others, he lowered the wooden box into the ground. She imaged the rope chafing them so much that when it was all over, he would need a good moisturiser to make them soft again. Her own hands were dry. She opened them, her pink palms facing upwards. They were empty. Should they be full? Meredith's hand slipped into hers effortlessly, and she stiffened.

I once was lost, but now I'm found, was blind, but now I see.

Perhaps she should've taken out a loan and had her body shipped back. She could have been buried in the family plot, with her parents, but the money wasn't there. *The mind is willing, but the flesh is weak.* Her mother echoed in her head, soon to become a constant companion, or irritation.

Meredith felt hot and heavy in her stomach. She leaned on her bladder and Saly felt the urge to go the toilet. The funeral was full of relatives and 'friends' that she didn't even know. Aunt Ivy had called. She was in Jamaica at the time, holidaying with Glanford. The phone had been busy lately from close relatives.

Dem jus' tryin' to tek shame out of dem eye.

They were paying their respects, even though they had not seen Mary in years, or even met Saly. She was thankful that she had Owen.

The black men lowered her mother into the ground. Owen stood stony faced next to her while she used all of her energy to stop herself from screaming at everyone and everything. Her ears were still blocked. She suspected if she screamed, the sound might not make it past her own gullet. She wanted to rip her hair out, grab the men who were manhandling her mother. The fury within her boiled and threatened to explode.

'She can't breathe'... she muttered to herself as the panic rose. 'She can't breathe,' she said a little louder, 'she can't breathe! Stop! Take her out!' her frantic voice could be heard

over the voices that sang Mary on and into the afterlife; but to Saly, they were sealing her into a prison.

Owen, sensing her rising panic, stood closer and clasped her hands while a deep, painful groan rolled from her throat. Tears streamed down her face and her throat clogged. Her legs trembled. She shook and cried with an outpouring of grief.

The hall for Glandford's wake was cold and sterile - much like his whole funeral. Saly sat at a rounded wooden table while Meredith ran around the guests. They commented on how much she looked like Saly, others gave a cautious eye to the only white man at the wake. And then there were those who only saw Mary in the eyes of her granddaughter. Parkie was one. Saly pretended she couldn't see his hook beak and beady eyes glaring at her from across the room.

Tell him to tek his rass arse home! Tell him!

Saly ignored the voice of her mother echoing around her head as her eyes drifted absentmindedly out of the social club's window and onto the football field.

'You must be Mary's,' the voice was closer than she realised, although she did hear the wheels squeaking. Placing the smile carefully on her lips before turning around, she greeted her mother's... friend? Would she call him that? She had vague memories of him when she was a child. He was sweaty, old even then, and yet she still remembered him in a white vest.

She turned to face the voice and the chair.

'He he! Mi knew it! Dat Mary sitting dere, it had to be you! How are you?'

'Mum passed some time years ago now.' Her curt words were sharp.

'So, mi 'hear, but mi never mek it to di funeral. Mi sik.' He tapped his wheelchair like it was some excuse. She hadn't missed him at the funeral anyway, and neither had Mary.

'Where oono living now?'

'Same place, just by Leonard Road. You remember Owen?' She motioned with her head to Owen who was at the bar now, buying Meredith an orange juice. Saly's tummy squirmed, hoping for rescue that wouldn't come.

'Yes, yes, yes,' he said, although he eyes never left her face. Saly's drifted, unable to meet his. His hands rested on the wheels of his chair. They were older, but she recognised them. Creases of dry old skin folded among the aged brown edges. Her eyes went further down as she could feel his on her face and her neck grew hot. Like a fire, it spread to her face and she clenched her teeth.

‘Well,’ he said at last breaking the silence. ‘Good to see you Saly, good to see you. Your daughter sure look like you. A young Mary.’ His eyes glinted. She watched the old man who smiled a toothy fake grin, and suddenly she was thankful that Meredith wasn’t there.

Dinner was served via a buffet. Parkie had a foreign woman there who waited on him as he sat on some tables away from her. He was placed next to the toilets. Mary assumed the amount of beer he would consume would make it easier to wheel him into the disabled rooms.

Chicken and rice, some mutton, coleslaw. There was also a table with tea coffee and water. Anything else needed to be bought at the bar.

Saly was tired. She could see the sun getting low through the windows. They would be going home soon. Which was just as well, her arm was aching. Looking down at her hand, she rubbed her knuckles. It hadn’t hurt for a long time. Suddenly again, it was beginning to ache. ‘The onset of arthritis,’ she lied to herself. But she knew this time, like she knew the time before, and the time before that. Something was wrong.

Saly the Saviour

Saly's cape was in her pink backpack. She always had to be ready, just in case she was needed. For she could hear the voices screaming for help. Not even her own super-strength screaming drowned them out. It was Saly herself that needed rescuing from the burden of it all, and this came in the form of Clare.

Clare just appeared one day. Saly couldn't take the noise of the voices. She curled up in a ball she clasped her hands over her ears and cried softly. It was then that she saved her. One-minute Clare wasn't there, and then, like a miracle, she was.

What's wrong?

'Can't you hear it?'

Hear what?

'The voices, the crying.'

But it's bedtime. Mum said it is.

'But I'm supposed to help them.'

A superhero's work is never done. You do need to rest sometimes you know.

'But the crying...'

I can stop it.

'How'?

Just turn it down and then off.

She smiled a child's smile. She reached out a chubby hand that looked identical to Saly's but she assumed without the ache. Times like this the ache increased and stiffened up her arm. This girl had a smooth and easy motion and as soon as Saly grabbed her outstretched hand, the voices stopped. Relief flooded through her.

'Can you make my hand stop hurting?'

What's wrong with it? Sally looked down at her normal looking hand that throbbed and ached in pain.

'I don't know.'

It was a relief to be back in the house. She sat in the chair closest to the window and gazed out at the grey afternoon.

He was in the kitchen fussing. Always fussing these days. She could imagine full well what he was doing, just like last time. He had gone through her medication to see if she was still taking her tablets. Taking those tablets dulled her senses, made her mundane, normal.

Normally normal was good, but not when she had to fight. She would *not* allow Death to take anyone else. She would protect those left in her house the way she should've protected Glanford. She needed to be able to see, hear and be aware, for Death would not be allowed to take her daughter too.

Owen pottered about in the kitchen.

Owen, aware of Saly's presence in the sitting room, knew she would need careful handling.

'Tea?' he called to her. Owen had been here before. When Mary had passed away, it was unbearable. Saly had taken a turn for the worse, and now he was afraid that with the death of Glanford, she would slip away again. And so he checked. The last time he watched, she had washed her tablets down the sink. He needed to know how long she had been doing that for. Maybe it was just that once. Maybe.

While the kettle boiled his fingers found her tablets stashed behind the coffee jar and pried open the box.

Soon she would need a re-prescription. He would fill it in for her and take it to the doctor, just to be sure, and slip the new packets in the cupboard.

Opening the window wide, the drizzle-filled air greeted his upturned face. Breathing deep, he was glad the funeral was over. Now, surely, he would work on Saly moving on, getting back to normal living.

'Tigger?' he called softly. Whistling, he waited and listened before leaving the window open wide enough for the kitten to slip in. He took the cup of unrequested tea he made, to Saly.

Saly was sat in silence in the living room, understandable, though Owen as he passed her the tea. Her eyes had that faraway look. That look he dreaded. The look he pretended he didn't see.

Spring arrived. Early it seemed. Birds twittered outside the bedroom window. Saly's left arm gave the familiar ache. The ground would be softening and the days getting longer. He would be busy.

It was early. Owen snored softly beside her as she swung her legs out of bed, careful not to wake him. She would shower, she would get herself ready. It wouldn't be easy, but it wouldn't be the first time she had done something like this. This time though, she would take the battle to him. She dreamed how she would do it. Carefully, eyes closed, she would just need to step off into the nothing. Perhaps she would meet Clare there. Either way, her head

was itching to leave. She could feel the prickles at the corner of her mind. It was just a matter of time.

Not yet... not yet she told herself.

But soon. We'll just go and see, that's all. Not fighting or saving, we'll just see what's there.

'Ok.' She had to agree. After all, she was older now, and untested.

As she got out of bed, her left wrist pulsed in pain that travelled from her arm. Rubbing it automatically, she walked barefooted into the bathroom.

Why are you having a shower?

'To prepare'.

Prepare for what? We just going to see, remember?

'I just need to!' She said. Clare remained silent.

Clouds of steamed rolled under the en suite door as Owen slept. As she showered, her thoughts wandered.

She remembered when Glanford died that Owen checked her medication.

He thought he was being so clever.

'He is clever. I don't know why we have to fool him'.

It's not fooling him, it's protecting him. That's what we do, and part of that protection is secrecy, you know that.

'Yes, but it's been so long.'

The warm water cascaded down her body, bringing some relief to her aching arm. She knew she should mention it to the doctor but was reluctant to go in for another check-up. Another assessment.

It would just get in our way, Clare interrupted her thoughts. Clare was right. The doctor would give her more tablets, which she needed to keep Owen relaxed and secure, but she was also partly afraid of him telling her she had an old lady disease. That had to be why her hand was aching, what else could it be?

Of course, it's not arthritis, Clare chimed in as Saly lathered her body. *It's them, and you know it's them. We must go back to that place, No Man's Land. For them, to save Merry and Owen, we need to go back.* Saly sighed. Her body felt heavy. Clare was right.

She had tried once before. The traffic below, her cape, how her eyes streamed in the cold.

And that's what this is all about, she reminded Saly. We need to keep them safe. Death has already gotten too many of them and has started again on your family. Time to check back into the family business.

'Family business?' Saly questioned, her mother wasn't into it, and no one else that she knew. The Clare from when they were kids had materialised in the voice.

Family business, Clare whispered. You think it's just you that has one of me hidden away in your head? No. Everyone has one of me. We fight many evils, Death being just one. And it's your turn. You're ready.

The water rushed down the drain, splashing around the white base and then disappearing into the black hole.

It's time, Clare said. So Saly dried herself off and her mind closed to all around her as she detached.

Sideways. Surrounded by black. A hot gust of wind whipped around her naked ankles as the realisation came to where she was. It had been a long time. Turning to her side, she saw her there, Clare. A mirror image of herself.

Can you hear them?

Saly strained. The voices were much fainter than before, they were being drowned out by what could only be described as the roar of flames, but she could hear the voices of the trapped dead, as they wafted above the surrounding black trees. These were the spirits that she needed to save, to send to heaven. The more she concentrated on them the louder they got. Her ears pricked with pins and needles that increased in intensity. The voices, which had started out as faint, were now much louder. Much clearer. She instinctively clasped her ears with her hands to shut out the noise. She hadn't remembered it like this before, but perhaps because she was younger.

'I can't save them!' She instinctively knew how much it would take from her.

I can't save them.

Unsure if it was the complete feeling of helplessness or the pain that was building up in her ears, or indeed, sheer relief that this task would not fall to her, Saly began to cry. How could she get back? To her room, to her home, to Owen.

Clare stood motionless, the opposite to Saly's agitation, and looked on.

'Saly?' Her soft sobbing could be heard from their small en-suite. Owen swung his legs out of the bed, his bare feet on the floor, he walked to where she was.

Saly stood motionless. Her eyes open, frozen as tears trickled.

‘Saly?’ touching her arm, he slowly came around her still frame to her front to see the manikin-like expression frozen on her face. He shook her arm softly whilst calling her name.

‘Saly? Saly? Come on love, it’s ok.’

Blinking softly as her eyes focused, Saly saw Owen’s expression before her mind was flooded with the memory of the screams from the other place.

‘It’s no-where.’ She softly whispered. ‘That’s where they are, no-where. Momma, Glanford and others like them. It’s my fault. All of it.’ Owen gently maneuvered Saly back into their bedroom, placed her into the bed and covered her up.

‘What do you mean?’ His voice, soothing and soft.

‘But I can bring them back! I can make it alright, all of this. I should’ve used the lavender. How could I be so arrogant and stupid!’ She broke down into heavy sobs that shook her body.

Owen looked at his wife as she cried. He knew what he had to do. Didn’t want to do it but had to. It was time to call the Doctor.

The Doctor's Office

Saly didn't fight. There was no point. She was not going mad. This was nothing like last time, but she did need to bide her time to think. He would feel safe if she agreed to do what he wanted her to do. And so, Monday morning, she found herself back in a familiar setting. Deja-vu.

The office looked smaller. Her small frame as a child was swallowed up by the huge leather sofa, the windows yawned at her; bored at yet another situation. The ache in her arm was back.

'Please sit.'

Doctor Donnelly's breathing filled the silence as Honey snuffled at his feet fast asleep. An animal in the room? This was new. Like the blinds and the carpet, and the doctor. But she was an adult now. She'd have to think about it. Were blinds better than curtains? This office used to have curtains. These were white slatted blinds; she wasn't sure if that made a difference. Ones that were difficult to wash. They didn't make rooms feel like home though, they were distinctly for offices. Unless, unless. She thought back and remembered a friend had white slatted blinds and heavy curtains framing them. They worked. They made the home feel like home. Was that all it took to make a home? Curtains? That was something Mary hadn't told her.

'Saly?' He broke into her thoughts. 'Hello.'

Saly stood at the doorway. He wasn't seeing anything. Had her file arrived? What had Owen told him about her? It couldn't be much because she hadn't really told Owen much; but if he read her file, he would know. But it was different this time, she told herself, things were different this time. As she walked the carpet was squashed under the soles of her shoes. The dog breathed loudly like its owner.

'This is Honey,' he said, before she could ask. 'I have had her for many years, she's a friend. He patted the dog's guide dog's sleeping head.

'She won't hurt you. But you have a tasty snack on you, she can sniff one of those out at ten paces.' He chuckled fondly. She imagined him saying the same thing to all new patients. Did he realise she was a grown woman and not a child? Was this how they spoke to you in these places? These places where they think there is something wrong with your head? It didn't matter anyway, the doctor didn't matter then, and this one didn't matter now.

The last time sweets worked on her. Back then, she remembered it was a sunny day. Clare had warned her not to talk, but over time, the doctor had gained her trust. Looking back now,

she completely understood Clare's reluctance. It was because of the doctor that her visits lessened, and eventually, Clare disappeared. It was her fault though. She was responsible for many more atrocities by not acting, not doing something about the awful screams. Now, here she was again. She would need to be better.

The wooden desk was littered with papers. Some were pale blue; others were dusty yellow and frayed at the edges. It was a wonder that he could find anything. Heat filled her cheeks as a voice whispered that it didn't matter anyway because he couldn't see the mess.

'How about we get some air in here?'

Dr Donnelly moved deftly towards the window and cracked it open. The noise of the traffic suddenly blasted confidently in like an old friend to which the doctor's face greeted with a small smile. Saly, still sat in silence.

On a rounded table beside him, was what she assumed was her file. Sighing heavily, he sat down, took out a grey handkerchief from his pocket and mopped his brow. It wasn't hot. It was February.

'Spring is in the air. Don't you think?'

She should probably answer, but she didn't.

Dr Donnelly took out his list of usual questions to ask her before they started, although he knew that the answer to 'Overall, how would you describe your mood,' might not be such a straightforward answer but he had to ask.

'Ok Saly, we just have some medical questions to fill out first, but it shouldn't take long. Let's make a start. With that, he took out his braille note taking device and asked his first question.

Dr Donnelly had prepared for his patient Saly Fairweather. He had obtained her file. It was thick. Children with mental health issues was difficult to diagnose. Saly's file dated back to her childhood. The doctor at the time was woman named Bergfalk.

The thick file was translated into braille. What appeared to be blank pages on the inside was littered with information that flooded his fingers as he traced the raised bumps; remembering the notes he had made for comparison reasons.

'Saly Fairweather presented as a troubled female.' As he read, he learnt of the incident that brought her into Dr Bergfalk's office, she had jumped out of a window and sustained a broken arm, cuts and bruises. If the window was further up, of course, it would have been much worse. Anthony Donnelly's fingers raced further over the braille bumps.

Her mother was reluctant to take her for psychiatric help.

‘Mother presented with anxiety-like symptoms. Her anxiety is centred on her daughter being seen as ‘normal’ and is reluctant for any treatment. It was considered that psychotherapy would be the best course of action at this time.’ Dr Donnelly read on, in preparation for the meeting that he would have with Saly, now a grown woman.

Saly’s social worker had given Dr Bergfalk a thorough account of the situation regarding her domestic setting. Mum was from the West Indies, dad was not on the scene, single, black female parent. No real family support. Saly presented as socially awkward. Friendship groups were an issue. The social worker documented that a visit to the school was required to further assess but was denied by mother. He flicked through the pages trying to find the report that may have been taken at school but found nothing.

Young Saly was nervous as her mother Mary, hovered behind her chair. Her eyes watered and her nose ran as she sat in silence. Dr Bergfalk could hear her sniffing every few minutes from her silent sobs. Reaching out onto her table, she pulled some tissues from the box and held it out in the direction of the snuffling child. Saly took some with her good arm. The left was in a sling and a cast from the fall.

‘Once we wipe our eyes, we’ll begin.’ Her German accent was throaty and rough round the edges. Saly stiffened.

Dr Bergfalk had asked her name, her age, asked about her friends at school, all to which she did not reply.

‘How are you feeling today?’ There was no response. ‘Have you seen a therapist before?’ Again, no response. The standard questions that she had were not going to work. She was very new at all of this and decided to try something different.

‘How did you break your arm?’ Direct. Some children respond to that, perhaps she was proud of her cast, maybe she had signatures on it of someone which might prove interesting, but judging from what she had in her file, she’d be surprised if there were any signatures other than her mother.

Her question was met by more silence. If it wasn’t for the snuffles from her almost silent crying, Dr Bergfalk could be mistaken for thinking she was alone in the room.

As it turned out, that first meeting was as silent as the one that followed. Dr Bergfalk had made the decision that one to one therapy was best at this stage. She had granted the request of the mother to an initial meeting before therapy was started, and during that session, she learnt quite a bit about the mother, Mary.

There were pressures at home, religion was a factor. The mother Mary took it upon herself to tell her that they were a religious family and as such, she did not want any talk or mention of demons, the devil or anything similar. Dr Bergfalk sat and listened to Mary who spent most of the session explaining just what she was and was not allowed to say. Saly was silent throughout. Perhaps she was too afraid.

Dr Bergfalk was patient. The plump woman sat, her legs flopped out away from her knees, covered by a large deep purple skirt that cascaded down to her shins. It became a pattern that after she would ask a few questions, Saly would sob. And as Saly sobbed, she took notes. She had tried talking softly, had tried bringing sweets, and even had a toy box in the corner. She had tried to just patiently wait and see what might come out, but things weren't moving along and so she contemplated other ways she might get through to the child.

'Do you have many friends at school?' Saly just snuffled softly as her eyes remained examining the carpet between her black school shoes. Mary had insisted on dressing her in her uniform. Grey pinafore dress, a black cardigan, and white tights. The soft leather flats of her shoes had a gaping mouth through which her white socks could be seen. It laughed at her constantly.

In some sessions, there were no tears. It was like she wasn't there at all. She would stare off into the distance and drift away. Dr Bergfalk didn't think she aware she was doing it, only that when she came back, the session was over. This developed into a regular pattern that needed to be investigated. Her training told her that this refusal to engage was highly significant. And then one day the doctor thought about trying something different – art therapy. She would introduce it before the child zoned out and went where she went.

'How about we do something a little different this time?'

Saly looked up at the round-faced woman. Her dark hair lay about her shoulders in a long bob. Strands had found their way to her face near her ears. Old acne scars peppered her cheeks as her face, without make-up was a pale yellowish colour, but appeared kind. She stood and walked heavily over to a light wooden cupboard, her weight making her roll from side to side like a weeble doll.

'Do you like my cupboard?' It was painted brown with green trees surrounding it, and flashed in Saly's memory, she'd been there before. The wind whistled in the distance as Saly saw the branches on the cupboard be stirred by the air as the painting came to life. The clouds slowly trundled across the milky blue sky.

'I call it Narnia.' She smiled as she opened the doors and pulled out a tray with what looked like mud in it. Brown plasticine lay within the centre of the box, while other colours

lay on the edges. The tray was placed on a small coffee table in front of Saly, and then she went back for a second identical tray.

To Saly's surprise, the doctor sat in her chair with wheels, and whizzed round near Saly, causing her to flinch a little at the unexpected speed and sudden closeness.

'Now.' She smiled. 'This here, is a sculpture. Well,' she continued glancing at the open trays of plasticine and pushing her black rimmed glasses further up her nose, 'it's not a sculpture *yet*, but we are going to make one. What's your favourite colour?'

'Blue.' The words slipped out of Saly's mouth before she had time to think. Blue skies were her most favourite thing in the world. She daydreamed about soaring through warm blue skies. She'd spread her arms like wings, and soar high above the trees, the playground, all of the noise, all of the dirt and soiled streets, all of the people. In the sky was freedom.

Dr Bergfalk smiled. Her eyes flicked back to the carpet as she clasped her hands firmly under her bottom. 'Blue is a great colour. Always reminds me of sunny days. Here, in this box is some plasticine. You've heard of plasticine before, yes?' Saly nodded. 'Well, we are going to make sculptures that are like us in some way. So, my favourite colour is yellow. Mainly because of the sun, I like the sun, and of course, my favourite food is yellow, chips.' She smiled.

Saly looked at the doctor in the face again. It had brightened up. She sniffed. She liked yellow too, but never thought of it as a colour.

The other place.

After her first session, Saly wasn't sure what to make of Dr Donnelly. Owen was treating her like an invalid and keeping Meredith at a distance. It had been two weeks since the funeral of Uncle Glanford. It was March and there was no air. She loosened the button at the neck of her blouse.

Owen walked in and sat beside her in the chair that was designed for one. She stiffened. He shuffled closer.

'Merry is upstairs reading. I told her to do some homework, give you a bit of space.'

'I'm fine,' she said. Clare's assuring smile found its way onto her lips.

What does it matter that he notices? He's not really helping things, is he?

'He's not supposed to. He wouldn't understand but he does love me.'

Does he? He loves Meredith. I can see that.

Saly looked at her husband as he his mouth moved in a conversation that she wasn't following.

'Tell Merry to come downstairs. You don't have to keep her away from me.'

'Oh! I'm not! No not at all, love,' he said, 'I just thought you might enjoy some time to yourself, or we could have some time to you know, talk.'

She knew what was coming. She sensed it. Her superpowers had predicted it. Clare flowed with a self-righteous 'told you so.'

'What did the doctor say?'

'Nothing much.' That much was true, because she hadn't really given him anything to discuss with her. If he hadn't read her file before, she was sure that he read it after.

'He must have said something; you were in there for an hour.'

'That's how much time everyone gets.' She switched the television over to a game show. Owen liked them. Perhaps it would distract him. She didn't need Clare to remind her that their mission needed the utmost secrecy. Mission. It sounded so ridiculously childish. Bit like Clare sounded sometimes. She was a grown woman now, not a child in her grey pinafore dress. Things were different now.

There is nothing childish about death, and hell, and brimstone. Clare had said. Even though she was in the no man's land for mere moments, she knew what it was. She knew where it was and couldn't bear to think of any of her family there. She was a good Christian girl, that's who her mother had brought her up to be. She was Ruth. How could she in all

honesty, leave them there to burn? To rot? It had been years, and she wondered if her mother was still there.

Of course, she's still there. And that's your fault. It was your responsibility to get her out, but you didn't. You had me sent away instead. Again.

'I didn't have you sent away.'

You may as well have. You had opened the door to him, and he went straight to your mother. You were distracted.

'I like this show.' Owen shuffled and got more comfortable next to Saly. She shifted her weight over until her bottom was halfway up the armrest. Owen was glued to the screen.

'Did you find it useful though?' He said in between the host welcoming the audience to the show. She knew what he wanted to hear, he wanted reassurance. He wanted to know everything was ok, and of course, it was. She was where she should be, and she would protect him like she should've protected her mother and her uncle.

'Well, it's too early to say. You know these things.'

As if he does.

'Talking takes time and it's only the first session. I'm fine you know'.

She patted his arm gently to reassure him as she levered herself out of the chair and slipped off into the kitchen. Owen reassured, became drawn into the television programme.

Saly's footsteps softened as she walked to the kitchen and straight to the cabinet. She had reached behind the coffee jar for her prescribed medication, and she saw that Owen had picked up her prescription. There facing her was another full month's supply. Flicking the silver packets from the narrow boxes, her fingers rubbed them, tracing the shape of the small pink pills.

He's counting how many you take.

Clare wasn't there, but she knew what she would say, she knew her thoughts.

The tablets seemed so small, so harmless, innocuous chemicals that knocked you out and smothered life. At least this time, she was more in control. Popping a tablet out of its silver case, she deftly slipped it into her pocket to flush down the toilet later.

It was much later in the evening that Merry had emerged from her room and her father allowed her into the sitting room with him and Saly. She was still moping around, wondering what had happened to her kitten.

'But he's only a baby, someone *must* have seen him.'

‘There are all sorts of things around.’ Saly said, slightly irritated that this was still lingering. It was a mistake to have gotten her that animal. She was just too young. ‘There are urban foxes around and all sort of animals that can eat a kitten. It’s probably dead.’

‘Saly!’ Owen exclaimed, looking at her in horror. Merry’s face crumpled and began to cry.

‘What your mother means, is that there are many dangers in the outside world.’ Merry’s eyes brimmed with tears. ‘But Mummy doesn’t really know about cats and Tigger is clever! He may be a kitten, but kittens are smart. Did you know that almost straight away they can hunt? Just like a big cat. Like a lion!’

Merry shook her head as the tears rolled down her cheek. With a careful hand, Owen softly brushed them away and smiled at her. ‘Yep, they are pretty self-sufficient little things. Mother Nature knew what she was doing when she made them. They are predators. They hunt and kill other animals because they need the meat to live. It’s just like that for Tigger. Kittens are the same, but smaller. God forbid any bird to come across Tigger’s path. She’ll probably gobble him up for breakfast.’ Meredith’s eyes grew wide at the thought of a helpless sparrow being eaten for breakfast.

‘No, no. Not that he would really eat a bird for breakfast,’ he corrected himself as he saw the horror on her face, ‘kittens and cats prefer to hunt and eat mice.’ He took a deep breath to explain, while glancing up at Saly. ‘Predators are usually bigger than what they are hunting. Nature has made them that way. It’s all to do with the circle of life.’ Merry looked confused as Owen looked for a little help from Saly. ‘We’ll have to watch The Lion King sometime.’ He muttered.

‘Animals need food to live. It’s as simple as that,’ said Saly.

‘How doth the little crocodile, improve his shining tail...’ Owen began the rhyme that he knew she loved, smoothing out Saly’s explanation. Recognising it from Alice in Wonderland, she chimed in with her father. ‘And pour the waters of the Nile, on every golden scale. How cheerfully he seems to grin, how neatly spreads his claws.’

It was then that there was a sudden knock at the door. Owen glanced at Saly who shrugged her shoulders. He rose, walked past his wife whilst resting a hand reassuringly onto her shoulder and opened the front door.

‘Howdoodoo.’ An old man greeted Owen in the doorway. Owen adjusted his eye level when he realised the visitor was in a wheelchair. With a dark coat, and an umbrella hooked onto the chair handle, Owen could see that he had made an effort and yet he still looked as though he hadn’t quite finished dressing. His stubble made him look bedraggled, old and

unkempt. Merry noticed he carried a bag which looked exactly to her like it was made from crocodile skin as his smile revealed too many teeth.

‘I’m lookin’ fi Saly? Mary daughter?’

Merry continued with the rhyme in the living room, ‘And welcomed little fishes in, with gently smiling jaws.’

‘Erm,’ Owen scratched his head at the stranger, as the old man smiled a full mouth of neat, false, white teeth.

Miss Jackson rapped softly on the frosted glass of his office door.

‘Your first appointment is here Dr Bergfalk.’

‘Show her in please? And please, call me Anne.’ Her black-rimmed glasses had slid down her nose. Dr Bergfalk’s chubby finger pushed them confidently back up again.

‘Of course.’

Saly’s voice was elusive, but she heard it for the first time the previous week, it was small and shy.

‘Hello Saly.’ Dr Bergfalk smiled her warmest smile, remembering their last session with the plasticine. ‘And how are you today?’ A direct question about herself. Last week, they made a breakthrough, she really wanted to build upon that if she could.

Saly stiffened. The mother was waiting outside the room. Dr Bergfalk motioned for Saly to sit.

‘You know, when I first came here, I was really quite scared.’ She said, ‘this is a big office, and the people here are busy and aren’t as friendly as they might be.’ Her eyes flicked towards the secretary beyond the door. The new practice felt cold to her, even though it was summer outside. Days like this, she missed her own home, her own mother and her own home comforts. Glancing down at the little girl, who looked so small on the chair, she turned her thoughts back to Saly.

Saly was silent.

Saly knew. Superheroes weren’t supposed to be afraid. She wasn’t supposed to fear the monsters that hunted her or rather, the ones she was supposed to hunt. She was supposed to be brave. Her mask made her feel brave, but she didn’t have it. With her mask she could be anyone. And now she was afraid. But this woman could never know that.

She couldn’t tell her that she had been to that place where she had seen the monster, stared him down and they had a duel. She fought the demon from the deepest parts of the earth, and

she had won. Just her and Clare. Clare was her Robin. Now she didn't have Clare and she didn't have her mask. What did this woman know of being afraid?

Dr Bergfalk sat and waited for her words to fill the air, but nothing came. It would take more time, but he was determined to be patient.

'How is your arm?' she asked.

Saly twitched. Something which Dr Bergfalk noticed and watched closer.

'You ok?' she asked.

Saly's eyes grew wide with a realisation. Dr Bergfalk! Why she hadn't seen it before! She wore a black dress today and looked much like a crow. Her face, although round and plump, reminded her of what her mother called a John Crow, a vulture. Cold glittering black eyes regarded her hungrily behind her glasses. Her heart pounded in her chest as her eyes scanned for an exit route. She had only just realised how much danger she was in.

Saly found herself again in his office all too soon. It was a Monday morning. Owen had helpfully dropped her off here before taking Meredith to school.

She sat in front of Dr Donnelly when she knew she ought to be doing other things. Clouds were rolling in the sky, churning like curdled milk. And something just beyond her reach, was itching inside her brain.

'Something bothering you this morning Saly?' Her large eyes flitted towards his open, clear blue ones. Blue was her favourite colour, so clear, so free.

'His sense is shut,' she whispered to herself, on hand placed deliberately on the other, pinching her flesh creating a sore spot.

You're jumpy because we must go. It's time

'What, now?'

Yes now. Can't you feel it?

Saly listened hard. All she could hear was Dr Donnelly's breathing. His milky blue eyes pricked at her. She could feel the red trickling, trickling under his gaze and wondered if indeed he was as blind as he said he was. Her eyes, flitting towards his eyes and the consciousness that was Clare, was divided. She couldn't very well go now, but she had to. She could feel the prickles at the corner of her brain, itching to go. She needed to detach.

Dr Donnelly sat quietly in his chair and waited, while Saly also waited, thinking. Honey's breathing was steady, sure and rhythmical whereas hers was short, sharp and jittery. Stuffing a finger into her mouth, she nibbled. *I don't even bite my nails*, she thought.

You don't even bite your nails.

Taking her hand out of her mouth, she smeared spit onto her jeans. Honey looked at her. The dog's concerned eyelids forming little triangles which could easily capture her soul. If she wanted. She was torn, should she stay? Could she just, not go? The black butterflies fluttered in her stomach, their wings like led, scratching at her sides. Butterflies were supposed to be colourful, butter yellow.

Perhaps hers would transform, turn bright again once they hit the air, once the rays of the sun shone on their black thoughts, their black delicate, thin wings. She opened her mouth; she would tell him everything. But Clare made her clamp it shut again.

Don't be stupid! she spat.

She closed her eyes, ignored the sharp talons, and the triangle eyes of the dog and the seeing blind man...

and stepped into the abyss.

It was blisteringly hot and humid. Opening her eyes to the dense wood, she saw Clare. Standing beside her.

Can you not hear them?

She listened, and among the roaring of the fire wind just out of sight, she heard them. They were in the distance. She'd have to go and find them but when she got there, what would she do?

Let's make a start.

Clare walked off ahead, deftly slipping in between the dense trees and beckoned Saly to follow.

Her bare feet were warm against the long red grass that was growing on the forest floor, cushioning her walk. Orange clouds wafted in a pale orange sky, and the land, which should've been green was deep orange with flecks of raw red and yellow. In between the deep black-green trees grew. Tall, strong, proud and oppressive. The air was stuffy, it was too thick.

She could feel Death rather than see him, the Black Prince of the place. Or was he White? His mark was everywhere. Hot breath whispered on the nape of her neck. No mask wouldn't help her here.

We'll need to find it and take it back.

'Find what?'

You'll know when you see it. Come on!

Clare ran too fast, her white skirt billowing and flapping around her bare legs. The trees cleared and gave way to an open field of black-red grass. Clare ran on ahead.

The topography of the ground was wild; barren yet teeming with life, Saly could feel it. She could feel the hot wind blowing the red fire grass that rippled like waves on an ocean. The trees behind her whispered warnings and reached out arms to pull her back. She pressed on. She could feel the clouds rolling and running with the wind. Minute life forms were floating in the atmosphere landing on her skin, and she could feel him.

The butterflies banged in her stomach. She could feel his large, round, yellow eyes on her, daring her to act. Swallowing hard, she ran on.

Deep within her shoulder blades, her big black wings which were folded just beneath her skin, but her feet would have to do. These skies weren't ripe for flying. Looking down, she saw that here, she had no shoes. Although the grass looked hot to touch, it was cool between her toes. Steeling her courage, she gritted her teeth and trotted off after Clare.

Dr Donnelly waited. She was agitated. Something had happened, but careful not to overstep the mark too soon and make a mistake, he waited. Something was wrong. Saly's breathing was different. No longer was she agitated but she was calm, it was rhythmical, like she was asleep. Dr Donnelly sat very still. Saly wasn't paying attention to Honey, or him, or anything in the room. If he didn't know any better, he would think he was alone but for her soft breathing.

Leaning back into his chair, his hand reached out automatically towards Honey who shuffled closer. Stroking her, he thought. Had this happened before? What was she doing? For if there was one thing he was certain of, and that was that Saly was no longer there. Her mind was elsewhere, but his instincts told him that it was more than that. Honey licked his hands and snuffled for a treat.

It sounded like Saly was asleep. Could she be asleep? Perhaps there was something in her files which suggested that this happened before. Was narcolepsy playing a part here?

Placing his fingers on his temples, he wrinkled his brow. *Think, think* he told himself. Had this happened before? In his mind, he thought back to her file, the file he had read with his fingers in front of his empty fire grate. Something fluttered, illusive as smoke at the corner of his conscious. It had happened before, or something similar. He *knew* it, he'd read it.

He thought of reaching over to find the file but was concerned about waking her. Something told him to wait. Wait until she comes out of it, see how long it takes and then, he'll need to mull this one over some more.

It was over an hour before Dr Donnelly heard a change in Saly's breathing again. This was a clear signal to him that something had changed.

'Welcome back.'

She sat in stony silence. Reaching towards his watch, he felt the braille numbers and realised that she had indeed gone over her time. Saly stood, calmly walked to the door, opened it and walked out. Dr Donnelly heaved himself to his feet and stood at the entrance of his office, leaning on the wooden frame.

'I didn't like to disturb Mr Donnelly, but Ms Fairweather overran by 20 minutes,' the secretary mentioned whilst typing at her computer.

'Yes, I know. Thank you.'

Saly put the keys into the lock and entered the quiet home. Meredith would still be at school. It was lunchtime and she wandered into the kitchen more out of habit than anything else.

Suddenly something black caught her eye at the window, Tigger. The long-lost cat that she knew Meredith was hankering after. Walking towards it, the kitten's wide eyes grew alert. The kitten remained still while they both observed each other.

What to do with you.

'Meredith wants her kitten. I need to let him in.' Saly's arm moved slowly, so as not to spook the kitten further, reached out towards the window clasp. She opened just enough for Tigger to slip into the house if it wanted to. Tentatively, it pushed its head to Saly's hand and sniffed.

I don't want it here.

'Meredith does, I already said that. Besides, it's cold outside and this is its home.'

It's a bloody cat. Surely we have more important things to be worrying about?

The kitten was frozen; half inside the room and half out, waiting for the deliberated. It sniffed the air, nose twitching slightly, unblinking lamp-like eyes fixed on Saly.

'I'm letting it in. Merry wants it.'

She reached for the kitten biscuits as a lure. Tigger jumped at her sudden movement, and ran outside of the kitchen, disappearing into the garden. Before rushing under the evergreen bushes, two yellow eyes glared back at Saly, who had returned to the window with the cat treats. In a moment, it vanished in a haze of green and black.

'Stay out there then!' she yelled. *Ungrateful thing!* She kissed her teeth loudly before turning her attention to her pills stashed by the coffee jar.

The pink one always looked so harmless, but she knew its strength. It had the power to drown her in a sea of nothing. Slipping it out of the silver foil, she took it and the white one, and slipped them into the pocket of her jeans before flipping the kettle on for a cup of tea.

The old kettle huffed and screamed noisily. Steam billowed at the bottom of the overhanging cupboards, moistening the wood. The boiling water, bubbled noisily, building to a crescendo before...

Pitch black surrounded her senses. She blinked, straining to see in the nothing. Her breath came in rasps. And slowly, like coming up from underwater, sounds emerged. Black turned to blurred shapes which turned to forms that she could begin to make sense of. She was

sitting. In the living room. Owen was sat on the sofa in the far side of the room and the yellow lamp flooded the room giving a warmth that she didn't feel. Disorientated, she sat still while her heart fluttered. Her hands were sweating. Sliding them down her legs, her dress crumpled under her touch. Didn't she have on jeans earlier on? The dress she had on now was a white knee length dress with blue flowers on it, she didn't wear dresses and she didn't have the legs for them.

Likkle bit of sun and h'English bring out dem skirt an' ting.

It was February, wasn't it? And still cold? What was the last thing she remembered? *Think, think...* she told herself.

Therapy with Dr Donnelly. She remembered the kitchen, the cat, and the tablets, but after that, nothing. Her heart pounded in her ears, her breathing too light, too shallow. Stars danced.

'Was this you?'

Who else would it be?

'Why?'

What do you mean why?

'This is mine. My life. We were supposed to be working *together*.'

We are. Don't you think I deserve some me time too?

'No!'

Why? This is my life too!

'My husband, my child'

They didn't even notice!

'How long?'

Pardon?

'How long?'

Saly heard nothing but silence as Owen watched the game show. Had he noticed? Looking at the television, it slowly dawned on her that the show they were watching, didn't come on a Monday.

The remote was next to Owen.

'What time is it?' she asked.

'Eh?' Owen answered whilst his eyes remained glued to the screen. He reached towards the remote and flicked the select button, which clearly gave the time, and for Saly, the date. Two days. She had been gone for two whole days.

Saly's legs didn't quite reach the floor, and she swung them, back and forth. Dr Bergfalk waited. Her black-rimmed glasses slipped down her nose, as she from habit, forced them back in position with her chubby forefinger. Saly's selective mutism was becoming problematic. She had spoken briefly about her arm, but she found that the next few sessions, instead of becoming more vocal she seemed to become quieter and more agitated. She knew enough to know that this phobia-like problem was coupled with other such fears like the fear of the dark. In cases such as these it was better to treat the child in familiar settings with family members but there was an added complication here; the family could not be involved, would not be involved. Still, she would implement the step ladder approach and find something that she just couldn't help but speak about. To do that she would need to figure out what she liked. All little girls liked dolls, and so for the first time in years, Anna went out to purchase herself a doll, all in the name of progress.

Ding-dong!

'Someone's at the door!' Meredith screamed from the sitting room whilst watching cartoons. Owen and Saly were in the kitchen discussing how long it had been since she had called her aunt Ivy.

'Why are you so worried? You don't normally like family members around.' Saly bit her tongue. Why had he noticed now? He was practically desperate for her to contact Ivy.

'I'll call her later.'

She got up, an excuse to leave the kitchen, to answer the door. Aunt Ivy was difficult. Just like her mother was. And as if on cue, she heard her mother 'hmpfh' in her head and she shuffled towards the door in her slippers.

'Howdedoo. Me thought me would drop in, see if uno need anyting.'

Her heart sank. What on earth did he want?

'Why would we need anything? Saly asked rather briskly. Parkie waited to be invited in, and swallowing hard, after a few moments Saly stepped aside for him to wheel himself across the threshold.

'Hello?' Owen got up to greet them. Saly clearly wasn't herself and he would need to take charge.

'Parkie isn't it? Hello there. I'm Owen, we met briefly, under not so pleasant circumstances.'

‘Evening, evening.’ Parkie held out both of his hands to clasp Owen’s hands warmly and shook them vigorously, his smile getting wider and wider like a crocodile. Saly watched. Unbalancing himself in his wheelchair momentarily, Parkie adjusted himself as he wheeled into the living room.

‘Dis must be Merry, Mary gran pickney.’

Saly bristled at his introduction to her daughter and decided to make his visit as short as possible.

‘Merry, go upstairs and finish your homework.’

‘But mum. I don’t-’

‘Merry, go on.’

Saly gave her one of those looks that Meredith knew she couldn’t argue with, and so reluctantly tore herself away from the television, heavily stepping on each step to make her annoyance known.

‘Mi jus passing and mi think dat me should stop and say howdedoo. Mary come kinda distant from we leave home you know? But sintings stay de same, no matter how long it been since you see each other. We family see?’

Saly knew all too well what he was trying to say. He was not family and he never would be. She stood in the doorway of the living room, watching the old man fill her home with his presence.

What de blast is dat man doing here?

Saly’s mother’s voice erupted unexpectedly in her head Saly blanched.

Is you let him in? Jesus Christ may God have mercy pon me soul!

Her mother’s annoyance had told her everything she needed to know and gave her permission to get rid of him as soon as she could.

Dat man, Lard Gad!

Owen was chatting to Parkie, and even Saly could see that he was struggling.

‘Jamaica eh? Can’t say I have ever been. I should go, what with marrying Saly and everything.’ He chuckled nervously. ‘Well, er I mean, my daughter and everything, well, she’s part Jamaican, isn’t she? Part-Jamaican, part English, she should see Jamaica, meet her family. Obviously.’ His voice trailed off and became quiet. Blowing his hair out of his eyes, he placed his hands on his hips to give a confidence he didn’t feel. ‘That’s what I meant.’ A deep blush rose from his pale neck and flushed in his face.

‘Mi na know why Mary keep dem all hidden up here in h’Englan. But, well.’ He rubbed his hands. The sound of his dry chafing skin filled the room.

‘Back home, y’know, tings differen’.’ His eyes wandered towards Saly who hovered at the door. ‘Tings ‘appen dere dat don’t ‘appen dere. Mi us fi sell ice. Sinting so simple but, poor peeples everywhere y’know.’

His voice seemed to become distant as the chafing of his hands grew louder and louder. Saly shuffled on her feet; one hand clasped over the other as she rubbed her thumb with her left-hand thumb and forefinger.

Dat man! Him na know what him talk ‘bout! Jesus Christ! Yu let dat man inna mi house? My house!?

She pinched her arm. The pain was sharp as her fingers dug in, reminding her that she hadn’t vanished. *She* was in charge. *Wake up! Wake up!* Slowly at first, but it began to ease the pressure and so she did it again, and again, and again.

‘Yeah man! Jamaica tings were differen’ differen’ different.’ Saly’s stomach turned and she began to feel sick.

Look pon de man a sit pon my chair, my chair... dat will ‘af fi clean. Saly yu ‘af fi get some bleach from de supermarket. Check out de offer though. Don’t jus’ get de firs one yu see...

Saly pinched harder and harder.

‘Yeah, well. Of course, it’s hot, but I’d wear sun cream. Mum always did tell me I had delicate skin.’

‘Well, uno white skin burn to fas, you haffi tek care ina di hot, hot sun.’

‘I’ve never been anywhere tropical before. Something I’d like to do one day.’

Parkie looked at him blankly before continuing.

‘Y’man. Is hot, hot, hot dere. But is home, y’know? Here? Lard Jesus. It cold!? T’rarted!’

‘im na care about white skin! Di d’yam fool only care ‘bout himself, Saly, get di man outa mi house! Now!

‘But it’s not your house is it? It’s mine!’ Saly shouted angrily, fed up of her mother’s authoritative tone, especially when she was wrong. She and Owen bought this house, she no longer had to live under her rules! She was dead! Why didn’t she stay dead like everyone else? ‘It’s mine! My own house! No one else’s!’ She was feeling the prickles at the corner of her brain as she screwed up her face trying not to detach.

Owen and Parkie froze. Parkie stared. His face confused as his eyes flicked from her now expressionless face, to Owen. Seeing no explanation in his eyes, he watched Saly as if she were a television.

Saly continued to pinch. Her lips pursed together stubbornly as she seemed to stare at nothing but muttered again and again how it was her house now.

Owen's tongue flickered out nervously as he licked his lips. Parkie's eyes glittered.

'Yes, well, thank you for stopping by, Parkie.' Parkie, in his chair, sat beside the coffee table in the centre of the room and looked at Owen who glared back. Clearing his throat again, he rubbed his knees while watching the old man expectantly. Parkie, ignoring the signals to leave, couldn't take her eyes off Saly. Saly muttered gently to herself as Parkie strained his ears to listen. She was arguing with someone. What was she saying? Something about her house, her mother, something. Leaning forward on his chair, he resisted the urge to wheel over to her to listen.

Owen stood now, clearing his throat in a more deliberate manner, indicating it was definitely time for him to leave before taking a nervous step to the man who was refusing to budge, while flicking a glance in Saly's direction, who was leaning in the doorway, staring at the carpet and still pinching.

'So lovely of you to drop by. You know where we are now, so don't be a stranger.'

Walking behind Parkie's chair, he wheeled the old man himself to the front door, and briskly wheeled him out. Parkie's breath was sharp in the bitter air which was clinging onto winter.

'Oh, yes, no, no, I won't.' The confused man was deposited onto the mat out of the house, followed by a 'take care and see you soon,' before the door was shut promptly behind him.

He turned and glared at the red painted door before wheeling himself down the concrete path, out the black iron gate wheezing gate, and down to road towards the bus-stop.

Owen glared at Saly. She stood, still framed in the doorway. Meredith had crept down the stairs and sat in a small ball, watching her parents. Owen, storm clouds in his face relaxing, approached his daughter and sat on the step with her. He sighed, blue eyes shining in concern as he stroked Merry's hand.

'You ok?'

She nodded but started at her mother who seemed frozen. Owen looked at his wife. Saly stood, shuffling on her feet, from left to right; left to right and still pinching her arm.

'Hey,' turning to Merry, his eyes began to sparkle in excitement. 'What do you say we go swimming tomorrow? Would you like that? Or shall I take you to the cinema? There are some good films out now.' Meredith shook her head, still refusing to meet his eyes.

'What's the matter dumpling?'

'Are you and momma going to have a row?'

'No, what makes you think that?'

Meredith sat in silence but began rubbing her hand where Saly was pinching hers. Owen, noticing, furrowed his brows worriedly and stopped Meredith's hand with his own. He scooped his daughter up into his arms and pulled her close.

‘Guess what?’

‘What?’ she mumbled into his shirt.

‘I was coming home from work, and there was loads and loads of traffic. Took me ages to get through it all. So much so, that I did consider taking out my wings and flying.’

‘Flying? Daddy, you can’t fly!’ She giggled excitedly as she pushed her soft brown curls from her face, copying her daddy.

‘Well of course I can! Didn’t you do it in school, in biology?’

Saly felt her own black wings, folded under her shoulder blades, twitch.

Meredith chuckled and looked at him incredulously. ‘No!’ she said. Owen could see her brown eyes sparkle. She pulled back from him slightly, her face lit up as she waited for an explanation. Saly also stopped shuffling and stilled as she listened to Owen.

‘Well,’ he began, ‘People’s evolution is a long, long story. They used to be monkeys y’know?’

‘No, dad. Miss Rogers told us that at school, humans evolved from *hominids*!’

‘Hominids? Well, er, I’ve not heard of that. It was Chimpanzees when I was at school. Anyway, I think at least we considered cousins with chimpanzees, which explains where the saying ‘cheeky monkey’ comes from, although I’m sure if you looked it up in the dictionary, your picture would be underneath!’ His fingers found the sensitive parts in her armpits and tickled her as he spoke.

She giggled and squirmed happily in her dad’s lap. Saly listened intently.

Owen adjusted himself on the stair and moved Merry over into a more comfortable position. ‘Although it is well known that our bodies are similar of that to the chimpanzee, our brains are actually like dolphins. There is also evidence that we used to have a tail. It’s called a coccyx bone at the bottom of your spine.’

Merry, eyes wide with awe, fingered the base of her spine. Her eyes grew big as saucers when she felt the evidence for herself. ‘That is where your tail used to be, but as we evolved, we didn't need it anymore, so it got shorter and shorter until that little bump is all that’s left. And these,’ He gently rubbed her shoulder blades. ‘These are where your wings used to be. But some people can still use their wings, me being one of them.’ His face turned from informative to being quiet smug and proud. Merry looked at him sceptically wrinkling her nose. Owen smiled watching her pale freckles on her nose dance, reminding him of his father.

‘It’s true!’ he exclaimed. ‘Something to do with Welsh blood. The Welsh are known for being the most magical of people in the world, now now...’ he protested when he saw her belief in his words waning, ‘there is a lot of Celtic magic that *you* clearly don’t know yet and I shall have to teach you. It’s in your blood too!’ With that, her face brightened up.

‘Really?’

‘Of course! And as I can access my wings, buried just under the skin of my shoulder blades, I suspect that you will be able to when you grow up too.’ With that, his face turned serious and reached a hand to examine her shoulder blades. Meredith went all stiff and serious as she breathed deeply, concentrating, wishing and wishing that she could one day have wings like her dad.

‘Anything there?’ she asked hopefully.

‘Well, it’s hard to tell, you’re still quite small, but I think I can feel the nub of a feather, just under the surface of the skin.’

Her face lit up with joy as she squealed in excitement.

‘I can fly! I can fly!’

Sally immediately stopped her shuffling and looked at her daughter. Her heart jumped in its chest and Clare fluttered at the corner of her brain.

‘Not quite yet, it’s only small so you need to give it a chance to grow.’ Meredith squealed excitedly.

‘Oh, I can’t *wait* to fly!’

Owen smiled at his happy daughter as she reached as best as she could to feel her shoulder blades.

‘And,’ he continued, ‘as I was flying home, I had to leave my car there but will pick it up tomorrow, but as I was flying, I flew over the green and saw why there’s so much traffic!’

‘Why?’

‘The fair is coming to town,’ he said in his animated singsong voice. He waved his arms around excitedly as Meredith squealed again.

‘Are we going? Are we going?’

‘Of course, we are going.’ He replied whilst laughing at her theatrics. ‘Now, be a good girl and go and keep my seat warm in the sitting room. Let’s snuggle on the sofa and watch a bit of tele.’

Meredith bounded off her dad’s lap and skipped happily into the living room while her dad stood, grew stern as he looked at Sally and motioned that she follow him into the kitchen. Sally

sighed and followed him like a naughty little child. She noted that the blue eyes that sparkled and glittered with excitement for Meredith were sharp for her.

Closing the kitchen door as softly as he could behind Saly, Owen glared at her. Not being able to find words, his eyes lost some of the steely stone blue and softened slightly. She flinched as she felt his pity. While she stood at the doorway, he walked over towards the kettle and flipped it on. Making tea in silence, he felt for her tablets behind the coffee tub, and was relieved to find that the packet wasn't full, she had been taking them.

‘What’s wrong?’ he finally asked her, glancing at her sore hand.

‘What do you mean what’s wrong? Nothing is wrong,’ Saly spat, although, she could feel Clare on the edges of her consciousness. ‘Just listening to the complete shit you’re filling our daughter’s head with, and then you say *I’m* the mad one?’ She guffawed, folding her arms, and unfolding them. Saly could hear herself, speaking, but it was Clare’s words and Clare’s anger. Owen watched her as she shuffled on her feet. Walking slowly to her, he placed his cool hands affectionately onto her restless hot ones and stroked them. Looking deeply into her eyes, he stood, peace and calmness radiating off him. Saly, stubbornly was still shuffling, but as her breathing patterns followed his, her twitching hands and shuffling feet began to calm. When she settled Owen moved towards the kettle.

Although he didn’t want to admit it, he knew what this was but he told himself that she was fine. She just probably needed a good sleep.

He drummed his fingers on the table as he waited to the kettle to boil. He needed a cigarette. His thoughts turned to her criticism of him and magic. He muttered under his breath.

‘It’s better that she follows me then she follow you.’ More to himself than to Saly.

‘What did you say?’

Shame flooded like a pink tide up his neck and to his cheeks.

‘Nothing, I didn’t mean. I didn’t say anything.’

‘You think I’m mad!’ She began to get agitated again.

You are mad. Mad as a box of frogs!

‘I am not mad! I am not mad!’ Her shrill voice rose and echoed off the kitchen walls.

‘Alright! Keep your voice down! No one is saying you’re mad!’

Saly, stared at Owen confused. Hadn’t he just said she was mad? She wasn’t sure anymore. She stood; her fists balled up as she watched him pour hot water into two cups of tea. Reaching into the cupboard his hand brushed past his lighter. Without thinking, he grabbed it, reached into the far corner of the cupboard for his emergency cigarette and

stepped out into the garden closing the glass door behind him; a shield between him and his mad wife.

As he lit up the forbidden cigarette and took the first, grateful, desperate and satisfying drag, as he scanned the garden without seeing. Part of him couldn't help thinking that perhaps it would have been prudent to buy a house with an attic.

Clare

Children were difficult to diagnose. The silent girl who swung her legs under the chair, sat in Anna's office. *Thud... thud... thud* bounced around the sparse office as she wondered just what was going on in the little girl's head.

'And how are you Saly?'

Thud, thud, thud.

'How's things with your mother? School? What are you learning at school?'

Thud, thud, thud.

Anna waited patiently. She was stuck. Kids were tricky, largely it was trial and error.

Thud, thud, thud.

Not having anything to lose, she bent down to the box inside her leather case, a graduation gift from her mother, and withdrew the large box. Pushing her black rimmed glasses up her nose again, she thought now was a good a time as any.

Thud, thud, thud.

Rising from her chair, she placed the package directly in front of Saly. The thudding stopped.

She had imagined small fingers reaching out and stroking the clear plastic gently, curious, excited even though she didn't want to be. She wouldn't be able to help herself. This had to work. All little girls liked dolls, didn't they?

The box rustled. Saly was trying to open it.

'Do you like dolls?'

Saly was silent. It smelt of vanilla. Innocent and irresistible, the small doll had big brown eyes, smooth black hair in a bob, and wore a velvet pink dress. Saly's breathing steadied.

'Two?'

Was that her voice?

'Pardon?'

'Twins. Can I keep them?'

'They're yours while you are here.'

Hoping that didn't sound too harsh, she didn't want to get her into the habit of taking home presents from her sessions. Anna had seen the dolls on sale in the sweet shop near her home. They sold all sorts of brick and brak. Nails, hammers, calendars, magazines, so many other things that the plastic dolls looked out of place. And as their brown sculpted eyes stared

out at her from their plastic sheath of the wrapping, she almost felt that buying them was rescue mission.

She waited for more words, but none came. Saly sat back into the chair. One doll was placed sitting next to her, and the other she cradled in her arms. On closer inspection, the eyes were hazel: stripped. Dark brown, a lighter shade of brown and a deep green.

‘Maybe you could think of a name?’

‘She’s Clare.’ To Saly, that much was obvious. That one was Clare, which meant that the hypnotic eyes she was staring into were hers, this was Saly. And as she sat staring into the eyes of the doll, effortlessly she slipped within the invisible folds of the air.

She was surrounded suddenly by what looked to Saly like smoke.

Where have you been?

What do you mean?

You took ages. Who’s that?

It’s me. The other is you.

There’s only one me, don’t know why you need another.

Saly looked at the second doll and placed it on the floor. It was then that she noticed it, a cat.

It’s a Savannah cat.

What’s a Savannah Cat?

Wild. You can’t tame it.

It sat obediently by Clare's feet.

It looked like a tabby. The cat cocked its head; it’s overly large rounded ears flicked towards her direction. She thought she saw its whiskers quiver.

Looks can be deceiving. Are you coming?

Where?

We need to find him.

Why?

Saly could feel the tears welling up on her eyes, the hot wind blew grit into one as her curled fist tried to rub it out, making her eyes water. Voices swirled on the hot wind of this other land.

Where are we? she squeaked. Her toes curled inwards. She felt the urge to plant herself, grow roots, become immovable. Clare couldn’t make her go anywhere if she was fixed into the earth. The black trees in the distance watched her. She could feel their branches, they wanted to grab her - either to protect her, or to consume her. She was afraid.

Claire's eyes flashed with anger and flitted towards the Savannah cat; whose unblinking sharp green eyes stared. His fur, dappled with black and grey, had a red hue to it camouflaging him with the ruby-black background.

The place seemed empty, apart from the voices.

His paws stood in the dust, steadfast, determined and threatening. His muscles poised. No answer came from Claire, just an expectant look as she turned and walked towards some distant deep red mountains. Saly didn't want to go. Especially as the Savannah was looking like he wanted to eat her. He was large enough.

'Ok,' Saly whispered reluctantly, releasing her toes, clasping the black-haired doll to her chest she followed her twin, leaving the doll Clare, on the floor while the large cat watched.

Saly sat in the similar office but instead of a woman she had a man. He was fat. His head bald was matt, not shiny, which aged him. Maybe he was younger than he appeared, disability can do that.

He had told her to close her eyes, but he was blind. How would he know whether her eyes were closed or not? She examined him instead, then cast her eyes around the plainness of his room. The window was open a crack. Someone was having a cigarette break. She could smell it.

'Are you comfortable?' he asked.

Comfortable? No. She wasn't comfortable. She'd be comfortable at home, in her own chair, with a cup of tea. Maybe watching Countdown. Or something.

'Yes.' She replied shifting her bottom on the hard chair. She placed her hands under her bottom to keep them out of the way. And then, she closed her eyes.

Her breathing slowed. The smoke circled. Its scent, lingering. And she remembered.

'Where are you?'

Well. That was a ridiculous question. Is that how he was planning on starting? She was in his room, of course. She was sitting in his uncomfortably hard chair whilst her daughter and husband was God knows where, she should be looking after them, in the kitchen. No, no, no. Too sexist. In the living room, watching telly. No, that made her look too lazy. Cooking, doing something mumsy or wifey, it didn't matter that it was a weekday, and Merry was at school, Owen at work. Probably. Or at home. Being a better mum than she was. Sanctimonious git.

She pushed that image out of her head as she thought of Owen with snow-white feathery wings soaring over the traffic; speeding his way home to his awaiting daughter. His face set

and determined as his blue eyes squinted in the oncoming cool breeze. Her heart silently flamed as the heat spread to her face. If she was fairer, and the doctor wasn't blind, he would see. She'd be red, not black, or brown. She wasn't black. No one was, well, some people were, but, well. Not that many compared to how many people were brown. Well, she was but. Internally sighing, she stopped explaining herself to herself.

The point was, the thought, as the red swirled around her eyelids, the point was, she was red. And as she thought that, the blood red behind her eyelids pulsed, swirled and became the red of that place. She gasped breathing in the humid atmosphere.

'I'm in No Man's Land.'

The roar of the wind was louder than she remembered, and it stung her skin. She rubbed her bare arms, scanning the vast landscape. Where was Claire? She had on Claire's dress, the white dress with the blue flowers on it. The wind made it flap around her bare legs that should be cold, but the air was warm. Her feet were bare. She wiggled her toes, planting her feet into the soil. She was heavier now and sunk deeper than she did then. She willed roots, as if sheer will was enough for the brown tendrils to shoot down and plant her firmly there in the soil. For she knew the danger would come by her walking on. Tiny tendrils came out of her feet like feelers sucking the red soil, searching. Saly gasped and staggered backwards. Her feet sucked back the root-like tubes into her flesh like recoiling eyestalks of a snail. And then suddenly, there was Clare.

Claire, dressed in Saly's jeans, Saly's top. Clare was dressed in Saly's life.

Although she looked just like her, her skin was darkened by the red dust. Hostility laced her slow steps.

It's about time. Come on

Where?

You know where

Saly felt her heart skip and her palms sweat.

What if I don't want to go?

Claire stopped and looked at her.

Why wouldn't you want to go?

I don't know. Saly hesitated. I have a family now.

Owen?

Yes Owen.

A smile curled on Clare's face.

He's not necessary.

What do you mean?

We don't need him.

He's Merry's father.

He's competition.

She loves him, he's her dad.

He fills her head with nonsense.

What nonsense?

Flying! People don't fly!

Merry likes all that, she's a kid. It's not so ridiculous flying, we flew.

Not like that! Besides, Owen is not us!

It was like that! You made me think I was Super, but, but we still *flew*.

Clare was clearly bored with the conversation in their heads. Her eyes, although very similar to Saly's, had flecks of gold, just at the edge of her dark brown irises. The only visible difference between them.

We need to go. Are you coming or what?

Clare turned around and walked off through the dense trees and towards dark mountains in the distance. The tough material of her jeans felt close around her legs as she walked with purpose, expectantly. Saly followed.

It was 8pm by the time Saly sat in the living room with Owen.

'Out like a light,' he said sitting opposite her in his favourite cream recliner.

'What are you watching?'

Her eyes flicked towards him. His pale face illuminated from the television screen giving his eyes a pallid fish-eye hue.

'Did you tell her more tales of flying?'

He had forgotten their row. Clearly, she was still upset with him. 'No. She's more concerned with the tooth fairy tonight. She thinks she has one wobbling. Have to keep an eye on that, don't want to forget it again like last time.'

'That wasn't my fault.'

'I'm not suggesting that it was. Saly,' he pinched the bridge of his nose, 'do we have to do this tonight? I'm tired, things at work are getting tricky with this new line manager coming in and throwing his weight around.'

‘Do what? We’re just talking. And don’t call me that.’

Owen sighed, watching the television without really watching. A period drama. He hated them, but Saly couldn’t get enough. The match was on the other channel.

‘Give us the remote, just missed kick off.’

Saly muttered under her breath, ‘Why don’t you just fly on over and get it.’

‘What did you say?’

‘I said, can’t you see I’m watching this?’

‘How many times have you watched this? It comes on all the time. I want to watch the match!’

‘Do you realise how childish you sound?’

‘Saly. Give me remote! What’s wrong with you?’

‘I’ve already said that I’m watching this. And keep your voice down, Merry is asleep.’

‘You’re watching this? How many times have you seen it? It comes on every God-damn week, whereas the match doesn’t! I didn’t think I’d catch it tonight, but it’s only just started.’

‘Why didn’t you think you’d catch it? Traffic?’

‘Yeah, bloody traffic.’

‘Hmph. Surprised you didn’t just fly.’

‘Jesus Christ! Saly, what on earth is *wrong* with you!? You taken your tablets?’

‘Nothing is wrong, I’m just watching this programme, and I said don’t call me that!’

Oh, for God’s sake! Saly! Give. Me. The fucking. Remote!’ Owen, exasperated, enunciating every word with the wringing out of his hands as if he wanted to strangle her. Saly fingered the buttons onto the remote. They felt smooth and cool under her hot fingers. She picked it up and threw it at him, a little too hard, and it landed with a crack on the corner of his wrist.

‘What the fu-’ He jumped. The remote fell as he clutched his hand to his chest.

‘Lower your voice,’ she said standing over him before walking into the kitchen, ‘Merry is asleep.’

‘Fucking Bertha!’ he muttered while reaching for the remote to turn over to the football. He needed a cigarette but had no intention of going into the kitchen or the garden to smoke.

He had a stash in the wall unit. Pulling it down, it creaked, releasing the cloying sticky sweet smell of brandy. Bottles stood proud and unashamed, glittering amber like magic potions. Short stout glasses stood next to the bottles, and within one rested two cancer sticks wrapped in a brown paper bag, again, for emergencies.

‘This is an emergency if ever there was one,’ he thought, grabbing both cigarettes, a glass tumbler and the half full bottle of brandy.

Unscrewing the cap to the football songs of the crowds on the television, he knew that Saly could hear the clinking noise, Bertha. She certainly behaved like a mad woman. The last he checked, she was taking her medication and she was going to the sessions. Perhaps though, they weren’t working. The doctor did tell him to be patient.

‘Be patient,’ he reminded himself as he half fell, half sat into a chair opposite the television, and watched the game in the darkened room.

She walked into the kitchen. No, he definitely had to go, Saly was much better off without him. He was practically asking for it. Her brows furrowed as she moved around the kitchen to make herself a cup of tea. She didn’t even like tea. Tea was what Saly liked. She liked alcohol. Scotch. Something she found out during her university days, before the wanker of a Welshman came onto the scene and made Saly want to stick around. It became harder to leave her in that place. He kept an eye on her, but she kept her busy with the ridiculous quest that Saly enjoyed as a kid. Now she was an adult, something else would have to be devised.

She sighed and rolled her eyes as her hands pushed past the natural honey and reached for the white sugar.

Everything in the house was for Saly. Nothing, not one single thing was placed to accommodate her. She would change that. What was it their mother said? Slowly, slowly catchee monkee. She’d even wear the ridiculously tight jeans that Saly had put on that morning. She would allow Saly back, of course she would. But now it was her turn. Aunt Clare was visiting.

She had her tea black. She blew ripples across the dark surface and watched the rings widen in the white mug. It was one thing compromising on the actual tea instead of scotch, she was having the tea *her* way. Hot, black and plenty of white sugar.

The steam whispered in front of her face as she pursed her lips and blew. Her gaze fell to the windowsill and the gift from Ivy. The lavender was dead.

Anger suddenly sparked up within her. That was Saly all over! How fucking ridiculous.

Why keep a dead plant on the windowsill? She pressed her index finger into the cold wet soil. That was just the sort of thing the mad woman would do: feed a dead plant! If she behaved like this for much longer, they would of course think she were mad. Was she expecting it to bring it back to life or something? That fucking mad woman has a screw loose!

Clutching her tea with one hand, she used her fore finger and her thumb of her other hand to pinch the stalks protruding from the soil. The soil gave up the unwanted dead shoot, easily.

Her nose wrinkled in disgust. There were no roots. Of course. No wonder it wouldn't stick. What fucking idiot expected something to grow without roots?

It had shrunk and become diseased. All the flesh was gone. *All flesh is grass*. She sniffed. It smelt of death.

She lifted it out as quickly as she could, her foot pressed the silver pedal of the bin and she cast the dead plant on top of the rest of the rubbish.

Tigger watched in silence from the garden, nose twitching. He caught a whiff of Clare through the open window as she plucked the lavender out of the plant pot. That was enough. He turned and disappeared back into the bushes.

Sally was on her own. Her arms prickled in warning. She remembered this place. She remembered being lost in this place when she was a child; Clare had gone and left her. It was a game. Except it wasn't.

Clouds of red dust rolled across the empty plain. She could see the black silhouetted mountains. She would need to go there.

Straining her ears, she listened. It was barren and she was completely alone. Hot tears pricked up behind her eyes. Feeling like a child again, she wiped them angrily away with her left arm which still ached. She couldn't remember when she hurt it, but it hurt on and off varying degrees over the years. Her mother had said that it was just something she had to put up with. Maybe it started after her accident, she didn't remember properly. No one had any answers. Like with most troubles in her life. No one really knew anything, but they pretended to know. Somehow, that made it worse.

A dull ache radiated up her arm that felt like it was stripping her skin layer by layer, exposing her inner core. But her eyes made her a liar. It looked normal. Rubbing it, she took a deep breath and reminded herself that she was an adult. She would walk, find her way to wherever she needed to go and do what she needed to do.

Furrowing her brows, she realised that she was directionless. She needed to get home or follow Clare who had disappeared further ahead. There was nothing else for it. Follow Clare and figure out a way out of here.

As she walked in the same direction, she saw Clare disappear, she could feel Death. He was not close, but she could feel the sting of his wicked eyes, staring. Quickening her steps, she risked calling out aloud, but the sound was snatched away by the wind which tore at her

clothes and dried out her skin. Pulling her arms around her middle, she pursed her lips and walked into the wall of the wind.

Clare and Merry

It had been three days. Clare had been the dutiful wife. Cooked the dinner. Played with Meredith, even feigned an interest in the missing Tigger. And, she had not sworn so anyone could hear. The clock flashed at her. 9.15am. Time to get them up.

Slipping out of the bed, her cold feet touched the floorboards. She winced. That would need to change. She would get slippers, or carpet. The room was dead. She would need to change practically everything.

Owen snored.

‘Sounds like a fucking freight train,’ she thought. She sneered in disgust as he smacked his lips in his sleep and scratched his paunch. The least he could do was wear decent pyjamas to bed, instead of that horrible off-white vest.

Making no effort to be quiet, she stood, pulled on Saly’s dressing gown and walked to Meredith’s room. Her feet pounded hard on the floorboards as she swung the bedroom door open and walked the short distance.

‘Meredith, wake up! It’s morning. What do you want for breakfast?’ she said loudly as she snapped back the curtains.

Merry groaned as the sunlight streamed in her eyes.

‘Is it a school day?’ she said sleepily.

‘No.’

‘Then why do we have to get up so early?’

‘Just get up!’ she snapped.

Frowning, Merry hauled herself out of her bed, her pink nightie sticking to her thighs.

‘And cover yourself up before you come downstairs. I’ve no desire to see kiddy backsides.’ The last bit of the sentence she muttered more to herself rather than the child.

Clare stomped out of her room and marched downstairs. She would need to cook. In the kitchen, she flicked on the kettle she pushed away the desire for something stronger. The child would want something to eat, of course.

Breakfast cereals were kept in cupboards. She couldn’t have a repeat of the day before where Owen got up, before her, and made Meredith breakfast. The ridiculous man-made bread soldiers and ‘runny eggs’. She snorted in disgust. Meredith had giggled and made some reference to it looking like snot, to which he went on making this ridiculous joke about snot and running. She couldn’t quite remember the joke, but it was nauseating.

Today though, she would do better. Today she would make Meredith breakfast and it would be healthy and wholesome and right. Exactly what a good mother should make.

Little feet padded on the stairs. Deciding on shredded wheat and cold milk, she took out the box which had *We use the whole of the grain*. Proudly displayed as a heading. She placed it on the breakfast table and then reached for the bowls. Meredith should have been there by now, and so she placed the blue willow pattern bowl onto the table, the cereal box's healthy boast facing outward for all to see and stomped off to see just exactly what was taking the child so long.

'There you are. Come on then!'

Reluctantly, Merry was sat on the last step, not wanting to go into the kitchen. Clare paid no attention as she strode back into the kitchen while Merry stood, pulled her dressing gown from between her legs, and followed. Clare sneered.

'Come on!'

The seat farthest away from Clare became Merry's. She took the bowl of cereal dutifully. Clare handed the spoon and stood over her, watching as she sipped slowly on the milk.

'What to do today?' she said.

'Well, I have some things planned. First, I thought we could go to the park? Kids like you love the park, don't you? And then I thought we could go to the shops or something like that?'

'Is daddy coming?'

'Why would he be coming? Of course not. No, I thought it would be just us girls.'

Merry spooned up her cereal slowly and carefully while she eyed her mother.

'No, we'll have just a girl's day today. He probably has something to do.' Clare sat in the chair at the head of the wooden six-seater table and rapped her fingernails on its surface.

She wasn't sure what she was doing, but she did know that she would need the child on her side. Kids like bonding, playground stuff, don't they? She remembered the ridiculous lies that Owen had told her, and how Meredith had lapped it up. She would tell her something more real. Her mouth curled into a smile.

'Come on.' She said as she took the half-eaten bowl away from Meredith.

'Upstairs now and get dressed. And don't take all day.'

It was perfect weather for flying. Clear blue skies that stretched on for miles and miles. Now her memories of flying were tainted by a ridiculous image of a fat white Welshman with wings flying above traffic.

‘How about the swings?’

Merry looked on suspiciously. It was 9am, too early for a trip to the park, especially without her dad.

As Meredith walked to the swings, Clare noticed what she was wearing. Pink pumps, a flowery green skirt and a t-shirt that belonged with trousers, not the skirt she had on. She tutted. The kid couldn’t do anything right. It was obvious that she’d make a better mother than that ridiculous Saly, she was doing them both a favour. Saly was clearly out of her depth.

Merry sat on the cold damp swing and kicked off. The ground was hard, frozen, and kicked back at her. Scrunching her toes up, when she swung back forward again, she kicked the dirt all the harder.

‘You liked that story about our dad with wings, didn’t you?’ Clare leaned on the supportive yellow stands, her hands clasping the cold metal without flinching. Merry nodded her head, not taking her eyes from the ground as she gently pushed herself backwards and forwards.

‘Well, I have a better story.’

Clearing her throat, she began.

‘The world is full of magic, Meredith Fairweather,’ she began. Merry stared at the kicked-up dirt and a small well her toes were opening with each kick.

‘I *am* magic. More than you know. Whereas Owen. He is what I call a pretender. Do you know what that means?’ Merry shook her head. ‘It means that he tells you stupid little stories that are not true. It means he lies and pretends to be something that he is not, something that he *wants* to be. But he is jealous of me. Did you know that?’ Merry remained silent. ‘He’s using you y’know. He’s a liar and he uses you. You’re getting older and so can think more about what is real and what is not. He’s lying to you. Perhaps you ought to sit and talk to him about it.’

Merry, who was now looking at her mother suspiciously, quickly looked away when Clare met her gaze. She stared at the hard ground.

Clare squinted at the cold morning sun. ‘Yes, he’s jealous of me, always has been.’

A small terrier trotted over, tongue lolling to one side as it sniffed around her feet. Merry looked off into the distance, her eyes scanning the green on the empty park. The dull red slide, still asleep, stood in the middle of the asphalt, glittering and frosty. The merry-go-round didn’t go around, and the rainbow coloured fence round the small park sparkled and slightly

steamed in the sun as morning dew slowly evaporated. Her breath misted as she sighed and frowned. It all looked wrong.

Behind a tall thick tree an older man with a grey cap on, walked with a dog lead. His flat feet turned out like a duck; arms clasped behind his back. Merry thought she could hear him whistling. On seeing his dog, he raised his left hand. The terrier, which was snuffling around Merry's feet, gave a quick last sniff of her shoes before turning tail and trotting off towards the man.

'I am *not* your mother, even though I look like her.'

That caught Merry's attention. She looked closely at the woman beside her. She certainly looked like her mother.

'I'm Clare. I'm the real magic person, I'm the one who taught your mother how to fly, and I mean *really* how to fly.'

Merry looked closer, tracking the marks on the woman's face, looking for anything that meant she was someone else.

'I took your mother to a place, when she was a little older than you, and I gave her powers. If you knew the amount of adventures we had, you'd want to leave this boring place and, fly off into the distance. Do you ever imagine what is beyond the clouds? She stared at the sky as thin clouds drifted slowly miles and miles above.

'There's no pot of gold. The air is so thick you'd suffocate. That's the truth.

Merry stared. And it was then that she noticed it. The eyes looked different.

'Where is my mum?'

'Your mother?' Clare hadn't expected that question. She blinked. She had expected the child to be excited about flying. Real flying. Not wondering where Saly was. That's what normal little girls would be concerned with, wasn't it?

She imagined Saly in No Man's Land. The heat, the red dust and Death. He'd be tracking her by now. But it was a flicker of white in the distance, moving fast that caught her eye. Owen.

He was running. The podgy red-faced man came lumbering along, clutching his stomach. He still had on the white vest top he slept in with a pair of grey tracksuit bottoms.

'Your mother is here. Right beside you.' She smiled sweetly, offering a comfort that any good mother would offer, before whispering, 'our little secret.' Her eyes flashed a warning.

'Merry! Merry!' Owen called as he ran closer to the swings.

‘Dad!’ Merry hopped off the swing and ran to her father. He ran fast to catch her and swept her up into his arms, breathing heavily. Merry snuggled close into his chest, hearing his heart pounding as he held her tight, too tight.

‘Where did you go? I got up and you weren’t in your room, you weren’t watching television. What happened?’ He huffed, out-of-breath from the running and the panic. He placed her on the ground and bent down to her level, his blue eyes wide with fear.

‘I just went to the park with mummy, she wanted to play on the swings.’

‘Why didn’t mummy wake me?’ he said sharper than before and glared in Clare's direction, who now stood up from the swings and began to walk towards him.

‘Mummy said you were sleeping.’ Clare walked past the pair of them towards the house. Their silent eyes followed her.

‘I was a bit worried because I had wanted to come along with you and have some fun. But never mind, next time eh? Next time.’ Smiling reassuringly at Merry. She smiled back while he followed his wife, wondering what she was thinking and if he ought to give Dr Donnelly a ring. ‘Why didn’t you finish your breakfast?’ Merry shrugged her shoulders as she bounced happily along in his arms.

‘Well, after all that excitement, I’m starving. How about I make us a proper full English breakfast eh?’

‘Yeahhhh! Crispy bacon! And can I have my egg soft and runny?’ squealed Merry.

‘Yeah of course!’ Owen chuckled.

‘Hey, did I tell you about Snow White's pet?’

‘Snow White’s pet? No...’

‘Well, she had a pet egg, and guess what it was called?’

‘What?’

‘Egg White of course!’

Merry erupted in giggles.

‘What did the egg say to the clown? You crack me up!’

Merry howled with laughter as Owen told her jokes and Clare walked on ahead, straight backed as she heard their laughter echo behind her.

When they reached the house, Clare headed straight for the drink cabinet.

‘Too early?’ she asked without expecting or wanting an answer.

Owen furrowed his eyebrows, looking at the stranger in the living room before ushering his daughter upstairs to get dressed.

‘Put something warmer on darling. It isn’t quite summer yet, nearly, but not yet!’

Merry obediently skipped up the stairs to her room and Owen gestured for Clare to follow him into the kitchen. Closing the door softly he lashed round and hissed at her through gritted teeth.

‘What in the *hell* do you think you’re playing at!?’

Clare mocked a startled look but did not reply as she wandered to the back door.

‘Saly! Saly?’

Owen came up behind her and laid a concerned hand on her shoulder.

‘Saly, what is happening here? Are you ok?’

‘What do you mean am I ok!?’ she exploded and whipped around to face him. ‘I just took my daughter to the park and you seem to think that means I’m mad?’

Although he had never said it, he knew that she must be able to see it written all over his face. ‘I never said that!’ he replied; hands held up defensively.

‘No, but it’s exactly what you mean. All I did was take her to the park. Across the road! Since when was that a crime? Since when am I not allowed to do that?’

‘I’m not saying that you are not allowed to take her to the park.’ Owen’s voice became softer and more apologetic as his eyes pleaded forgiveness from her. And Clare’s eyes welled up with tears.

‘You were asleep and I thought a bit of fresh air would be nice. I couldn’t sleep.’

‘Ok, ok, I’m sorry. I’m sorry.’ He softened as he edged closer to her and enveloped her within his arms. She froze. Defiance flashed at the corners of her eyes as she forced tears, her arms remained in a protective hug around her own waist.

Pulling himself away Owen looked into her eyes.

‘I’m sorry.’

She reluctantly nodded and he softly wiped away her tears.

‘How about I make us all a full English fry up? And, there’s some ackees in the cupboard, tucked away for a rainy day.’ He smiled. ‘And later, how about I pop out, get some salt fish and I make your favourite for tea?’ Clare smiled and nodded. ‘Ok, lemme just get out of these clothes and I’ll fix it. I’ll fix it all.’ Smiling at her, he opened the kitchen door, walked the passage to the stairs and made his way to the bathroom, while she, checking to see that he was gone. Made her way to the drink cabinet.

Billowing clouds of steam soon filled the bathroom as the rushing water echoed. The taps were open as far as they would go. Silver crashed down the white sink like a race, splashes

caught his hands and face. Droplets leapt over the edge wetting the floor. Owen sat on the toilet lid and dialled.

‘Dr Donnelly please.’

He waited. The doctor would know what to do. He must have had cases like this before. He must be able to figure this all out.

‘Ah yes, Dr Donnelly, this is Owen Fairweather. I’m calling about my wife, Saly? Yes. I was just wondering when her next appointment is?’

‘What do you mean? Ah, ok. Well I’m not sure if I would call it progressed, but I’m worried. Something is wrong. Yes, yes, she is, I’ve been checking. Ok. Well, can she come in sooner? Ok, ok yes. Monday? Yes, that’ll be brilliant. First thing, I’ll drop her myself. Ok, Ok. Thank you.’

Clare’s footsteps were soft as she passed the bathroom and approached Merry’s room. Merry was sat on the floor, playing with a mermaid doll. Clearly having forgotten she was supposed to be getting dressed. Aware of a presence, she turned around. Instinctively, she smiled but it faded as she saw Clare’s stern face. Clare stepped in and closed the door.

‘*Yes daddy,*’ she mimicked. Merry pulled her doll protectively towards her chest as Clare grabbed hold of her arm and squeezed. She yelped as the vice grip held her firm.

‘You need to remember something little girl. I am *not* your mother. I am *not* the soppy wet ridiculous creature that she is.’ Merry whimpered. ‘This cute little girl routine you’ve got going on with him? It’s pathetic!’ she spat. ‘Clearly something you’ve gotten from Saly. You think you’re smart, but you’re not. I know what you are doing! Both of you! And you cannot get rid of me that easily!’

Merry began to cry.

Releasing the girl, who was now sobbing quietly Clare strode over to the wardrobe and pulled out a jumper and a pair of jeans. She threw them on the bed for Merry to dress into and walked out.

‘Yesssir! And y’know ‘im never trus me again afi dat.’ Parkie was sat in his wheelchair, slamming dominoes on the wooden table between him and Owen. Owen looked on perplexed at the white bricks that snaked up on the table. Saly blinked.

She was sitting in her normal chair. The television was on. Merry was on the floor watching the cartoons that apparently, she was watching too. Her heart fluttered in her chest as her breathing became shallow and she glanced at the clock. What time was it? She didn’t

remember how she got there. Sweat glistened on her brow. It was afternoon, late afternoon, how was it suddenly late afternoon?

Feeling dizzy, she clung onto the chair for support and slowed her breathing down. What had just happened? Colours spun before her eyes as she felt bile rise to her mouth. Sweat dribbled down the edge of her armpit and steadied her breathing. Once she managed to get some control over herself, she stood and slipped away to the kitchen.

The kitchen looked the same. The garden was the same. Dishes were in the sink, as they so often were, but glancing down, she noticed her clothes were different. She had on a striped grey and white dress, one that made her thighs look large and her stomach pop out. Her left hand ran over her stomach, it felt the same. It felt like hers even though she knew that something was different. Her arm was still burning from that place, she remembered.

Walking over towards the sink, she opened the medicine draw, took two paracetamols from their foil wrappers, popped them into her mouth and washed it down with cool water from the tap.

What's happening? What's happening? she whispered as her breath came out in rasps while she leaned on the sink for support. But she knew. It was her. It was always her.

Stars danced at the corners of her vision, she needed to think.

Flicking on the kettle, she reached into the cupboard for a tea bag and she remembered what was stuffed behind the jar, a sure way to get rid of Clare. Her hand hesitated. It had worked before. There had to be another way though. She had stopped taking them for a reason. She wanted a normal life, to control *all* of her, and Clare was a part of her. It wasn't as simple as taking the tablets. She needed to get control of Clare the proper way. The right way. She could do it; she knew she could.

Whether Dr Donnelly meant it or not, he was telling her that this was her life, and up to her to live it as she saw fit. But to do that, to make the right decisions, she needed to have a healthy mind. *A healthy mind*. She thought to herself, is one that was not dependent on potions and drugs. She was here. She was awake and surrounded by family and she was in control. *I'm in control*, she reminded herself. It was fine. Things were fine.

More dominoes could be heard slamming on the table. She took out the box of tablets. Some were missing. Clare must have hidden them. At least they were working together on that. The last she remembered, it was February? March? Something like that. *Think, think, think*. March, it was March. The calendar told her that it was still March. That was something. She had only been gone days. She didn't need the tablets yet, but she would keep them as a last resort, she told herself.

Her fingers rapped gently on the side as the kettle chugged. *She* was in control. Saly. She was the dominant one. Clare was here because she *allowed* her to be here. It was *her* body, *her* life, *her* family. She was damned if she was going to let Clare ruin all of that. She was around for a reason, and she needed to remember that. With a surety that she did not feel, she smoothed down her trousers and strode back into the living room forgetting all about the tea.

The living room was busy.

Go open the window.

She opened the window. She could feel Parkie's eyes following her. He stared icily, unashamed. Feeling a flush of embarrassment, she turned away. 'Ooonu favor ya mudder.'

'Oh?

'Mi remember when me firs see her. It was the spring dance 1943. He was taking a trip down memory lane and was dragging her with him whether she wanted to go or not.

Parkie. Jamaica.

Parkie was nervous. It was his first dance since he broke up with Sandra. The dutty gyal had told everyone that the pickney she had belonged to him when he and all the young bucks knew that she was the easiest piece of skirt around. That's why he was going with her, to get experience and for a good time, but at 16 he wasn't looking to be no one's baby daddy.

The night was cool and fresh. The lush ferns bowed and shushed in the gentle breeze underneath the black canopy of the coconut trees. Crickets chirped in the bushes as the reggae island music danced on the warm air.

There was one tarmac road. All dirt tracks led to it. And on this road, like an island surrounded by the green of the woods edge, stood the village hall next to the village shop with its corrugated roof. The oppressing night hugged him close as he walked up to the entrance, wearing his best Sunday clothes, freshly pressed black trousers and a crisp white shirt unbuttoned to reveal the top of his thin chest. Doused in cologne, he approached with a smooth swagger.

The door was open like a gaping mouth, inviting. Yellow light spilled on the ground as the shack shook with the bass, the heartbeat of the island. The closer he got, the heavier it felt in his chest. A thumping rhythm into his jumping veins.

'Parkie, whata gwaan!? Yu make it!?'

'Super - Y'man. Course mi make it. Y'nah see me 'ere?' He creased up laughing at his own joke, holding his stomach and folding over. Super, waiting, cigarette in hand, was posing against the wall.

This skinny kid from school was also his neighbour. A cough exploded from his mouth, giving away his secret that this was the first time he smoked. His body shuddered and convulsed as he stifled it. Dropping what was left of the cigarette and stepped casually on the butt.

'You coming in? Plenty girls dem dere!'

Parkie grinned exposing the gap in his teeth that got knocked out the previous year on the playground, and his beady eyes flashed excitedly.

'Yeah man!'

The hut was heaving. Bodies were dancing up close, shadows moulded together in the dim light. All the latest dance hall style dances, grooving and grinding the illegal dances that the mother and grandmother would not approve of, Parkie had been looking forward to it.

He spotted his boys - Bigga, Pop-Eye and Lefty. Pop-Eye was living up to his name, his bulging eyes shining like headlamps, whereas Bigga stood, large and imposing, drinking alcohol he had smuggled in - he would need some of that. Lefty, like always, leaned to the left like he was going to topple over.

‘W’appen bredren.’

The friends slapped hands in friendship as the drinks were passed around.

‘Ivy here?’ Parkie knew to avoid her. She was the only girl he didn’t want to see or get with. Tonight, was for foolin’ and fun. None of her self-righteous crap was wanted.

‘Y’ man. Ivy dere so.’ Bigga gestured by pushing his lips in her direction.

She stood by the drinks table, her face all disparagement and disdain. Parkie wasn’t the only one who wondered why she was even there. He kissed his teeth.

‘Cha man! Is wha’ she ‘ere for. She na like dese tings dem.’

‘Mi na know,’ Super slipped another cigarette from his pocket and lit it. He was determined to smoke properly. Fire reflected in his black eyes as he took a drag before erupting in coughing again and then stubbornly took another long drag. The youngest of the group had much to live up to, and as far as Parkie was concerned, was still on trial as to whether he would be allowed to hang with them. Parkie took the cigarette from him, inhaling deeply, expertly, and blew a torrent of smoke out before handing it back.

‘Me a go look for gal dem.’ He knew exactly who he was looking for. Smiling, he strolled away from his friends and towards her.

She was standing with her friends. Mary. He could never understand how girls did everything together, they travelled around in packs and closed ranks when a boy approached, as if they didn’t like the attention, as if they hadn’t willed him to approach, as if that wasn’t what they had been waiting to happen. But that’s what girls did, they played hard to get.

This one though, he’d seen in church. That ‘holier than thou’ attitude hadn’t fooled him. It got him interested in her and had asked around at school just who this Bright Angel was.

Wanting desperately to appear cultured and smart because he suspected that a girl like this wouldn’t be interested in boys from the local district. No, a classy girl like this would only be interested in style and sophistication. He’d need to have something about him that would attract her, set himself apart from the other roughneck boys, show her that he was his own brand of something special.

And so, he did a bit of studying. Not much mind you, but all girls like romance, all girls read books, well, this one did anyway, and so he had to be prepared. He didn’t go as far as

reading a whole book; just a summary here and there, and the greatest love story of all time that they got taught in school, so he knew a bit of, was Romeo and Juliet.

‘Y’man. Girls go for dis right ‘ere.’ He said to Super in the school playground poking a finger in the text he carried under his arm, mostly for show. Luckily for him there was a copy of the explanatory notes in the school library. He just had to give the *impression* that he knew this kind of stuff. That was his foot in the doorway. After that, he knew that his charm and good looks would win her over. He just needed to jump the initial hurdle, which would be a piece of cake.

Mary stood there in all her pious glory. Truly shining like an angel, he thought. Her white dress glowed in the dark like a beacon, calling him home. Her friends, in unison, seemed to convalesce protectively around her, like petals on a flower, defending that which is most delicate; soft and pure within its centre.

Parkie smiled to himself at his own poetic thoughts and was confident that he could speak them aloud and win the heart of his fair maiden.

As he approached the group of girls by the table, he called her name,

‘Mary? Mi beg uno, a likkle word?’

The music blared. The darkness swirled and surged in the heat of black bodies in the dark. He could smell perfume mingled with the sour smell of sweat, heavy and cloyingly sweet in the air. Sweat beaded on his brow as he waited. Had she heard him? Perhaps not. He said it again, louder.

‘Mary? Mary!’

And then, the parting of the waves. The girls protecting their beauty parted to reveal the piece de resistance, which shone out like a, like a...

His thoughts dried up and couldn’t think of anything other to compare her to other than a flower in bloom. That’s what all the poetry books were full of, ‘let me compare you to a summer’s day,’ and all of that stuff that he couldn’t quite remember, but it didn’t matter. He knew enough. He could woo her, he was sure he could.

And then she looked at him and his ran mouth dry.

‘Is wa yu want?’ she demanded.

He was spellbound, and although he didn’t have the words to express himself, he felt it. Words that he had made themselves accessible to him that evening, had now, it seemed, ungratefully abandoned and left him destitute. An empty black space lurked in his head and sure enough, his nerves flooded in. And so, without words, but stood with his mouth agape.

All eyes were on him; thousands upon thousands of brown piercing eyes, watching him expectantly, waiting for him to shower her with golden rhymes.

He stammered. A crude sound that gave the illusion of him being an illiterate fool, the exact opposite of the image he was going for. Mary waited. Her friend with the band of freckles across her nose, whispered something to her, to which Mary sneered and cruelly laughed. Parkie grew hot. She kissed her teeth in frustration.

‘Boy! Move from me!’ Dismissing him with a swipe of her hand, she turned her back, and the rough petals enveloped her within their centre again, out of his reach. Panic took hold of his heart. Her friends tittered behind their hands, laughing at his impotence. Fearing his moment had gone, some words burst out of his mouth in desperation.

‘Is wah u numba be?’ The petals opened slowly, and she reappeared.

‘Why mi gwan give u mi numba, hmm?’

His chance to show off. She didn’t have a phone, neither did he, but it sounded like he did, and that made him cooler. The fact that she hadn’t dismissed the number idea told him he was in with a chance.

‘Yuh like fi dance?’

He’d missed his moment. She had turned her back. Shame flushed his face, crept up his neck like the rush of a river, taking him over and turning him a deep purple with embarrassment. He stood there, unable to move, unable to speak until a voice in his head made him move. His right foot shuffled reluctantly at first, but shifted itself forward, and then, the rest of his body followed with seeming ease, back to his boys.

He stood and listened to their chatter, embarrassed. It didn’t work, she didn’t even give him chance. He watched her gliding across the room and she slipped out the door and was gone, followed by her entourage. They had laughed at him, all of them. He saw it. The heat of remembrance flushed through him a second time.

She was a beauty, one that he couldn’t just let slip through his fingers. Her white dress was nipped in tight around her tiny waist. The skirt flowed over her large shapely behind, fanning in its wake. He knew she was fifteen, a year younger than him but she had a body better than most of the women he saw around the town. Including Pop-Eye’s 22-year-old sister Ruth.

Many an afternoon had he sat on Pop-Eye’s veranda admiring Ruth in her tight shorts and her tight crop top, hinting to what was underneath, while she hung out the washing, or her bending low, cooking the dinner over the outdoor fire and he’d catch a glance down her top. On those days, he’d be lost for words, fixated in watching the God-given beauty.

She knew that he liked to watch, and he knew that she knew he liked to watch. It was an unspoken thing between them. He knew it was so. Although he wasn't sure of Pop-Eye had guessed that was why he was such a frequent visitor to his house.

In his dreams he dreamt of climbing into her bedroom window at night, of climbing into her bed, of running his hands under her sheets. He dreamt of stroking those fully formed rounded thighs. His eager fingers would creep up and she'd let him. He'd slip his hand up her top in the darkness. Her skin would be smooth and cool, and no one would know he was there. It'd be their secret. He shivered at the thought.

But those thoughts all stopped the moment he clapped eyes on Mary.

Mary. The Virgin Mary he called her in his head. She was a decent girl, the kind of girl that went to church every Sunday with her Ma. The kind of girl that wore a bra even to bed. She wasn't no back a yard loose gyal; she was refined. The kind of girl he would have to work for.

Well, he was never one to give up on a challenge and as he watched Mary entered the dance hall again, chatting and laughing with her friends, and right there and then he made a promise to himself - a promise that he intended to keep. He would have her. It was only fair.

Saly had listened to his brief tale about the dance where he met her mother for the first time and wasn't disappointed, he was thin on the ground in details and suspected he remembered more than he was letting on. But that was fine with her. She wasn't in the mood, and she could feel that her mother didn't want him in the house. She would need more lavender. That was key. The one in the kitchen, she noticed, was gone. It must have died. She couldn't give up just yet. Perhaps the cutting she had been right. Maybe she would get a small lavender plant next time. That would surely grow. She would need to try at the very least. All she needed was the right circumstances and it would grow. Light, healthy soil which fed it, and it'd grow. It was bound to.

Clare

Monday morning. The chill came through the bed sheets and stirred her awake but the thought of getting up and turning on the central heating wasn't appealing. Owen was up and rushing around. She squinted. He had on a grey suit, dull like the weather, her life, like everything. The black cloud of the previous day's mood sat heavy on her heart. Clamping her eyes shut, she pulled the sheets over her head and willed the day away. Maybe if she just stayed there, it would all melt away into oblivion.

'You getting ready?' He asked whilst rummaging through the laundry basket in the bathroom. 'Have you seen my tie? The one with the rainbow stripes?'

'No.' She mumbled from her safe zone.

'Merry! Time you should be downstairs!' he yelled. 'I'm dropping you to Dr Donnelly remember?'

Saly didn't remember but that wasn't anything new. The bedroom clock flashed 7.30am.

'We need to leave soon, get yourself ready, I'll drop you after I drop Merry to the child-minder. There's twenty pounds in the cabinet in the living room, get a taxi home yeah?'

She nodded, dizzy with all the sudden information. A brick lay on her chest making it near impossible to move. What she needed was a sweet cup of tea.

'Actually, no, don't get a taxi, I'll pick you up ok? Er, just wait for me. Merry!'

Saly peeled herself out of bed, stood, and entered their en-suite to splash her face with water.

'Ah-ha.' he exclaimed gleefully before whipping round his neck and briskly rushing out the door following Merry. The room sighed with relief and became still.

The wardrobe door was open. Inside dresses and tops stood back to back. So tightly packed in that they had to permanently hold their breaths to fit. She saw clothes that she would wear and clothes that she knew Clare would prefer. Stubbornly, she pulled at a dress that she, Saly, preferred.

A dark blue three-quarter length dress with a white belt around her waist. She looked like her mother in that one, but first she would need to comb out the stiff plaits on her head. Her hair needed a wash, it was so dry. The red dust must have gotten in it. Her memories were hazy, but she remembered green eyes fixed on her. Shuddering, she snapped her attention firmly to the present and tried to pin it there.

The thick bristle brush had the comb stuck in it like velcro. Busying herself, she tugged the comb from the brush and roughly combed all the dead hair out, dumped it on her bed, before going to the bathroom mirror.

She unravelled the plaits carefully as her hair sprung out of its restraints. Her large light brown eyes shone back at her and she remembered a French class.

‘Mes yeux sont brun clair.’ Clare, she had thought to herself, but pushed her away again.

Her eyes were light brown, of course they were, but the teacher was white and soon corrected her.

‘Non. Mes yeux sont brun foncé’

‘My eyes are dark brown,’ is what she had to say. Her eyes were not dark brown, they were light. Other students were describing their eyes as blue, as light brown and as green. But she was black. To her, her eyes were light. To her white teacher, they were dark. It was all about perspective.

Saly brushed as she stared at her own eyes staring back at her.

Light brown, she thought to herself. It was all about difference and perspective. *Just need to get the right kind of perspective*, she told herself.

‘Saly! It’s 8 o’clock! We need to go!’ Owen’s voice thundered up the stairs. Quickly, she scooped up her hair and tied it in a bun. Taking a deep breath to steady herself, she left the room and the brown eyes that held her gaze until the last minute.

Dr Donnelly’s office was more familiar now. She knew what he would ask; knew what she wanted to say, but only part of her wanted to say it. The other part wanted to run away and hide from the monster that was alive, dangerous and seething.

‘Morning Saly.’

His stomach protruded slightly over his light grey suit trousers. Honey, sat under his desk, paws forward. Could feel her watching him? His tinged yellow glasses left his eyes in shade, but she knew what they were there for. So that you could look into his face and see he had eyes, see that he was just like you, see that there was nothing to be afraid of, that he wasn’t a monster. Of course, he wasn’t a monster. She knew all about monsters.

‘And, how are you? How was your weekend?’

The polite answer was that her weekend was fine, but in truth it wasn’t. She was *there*. She was in the wilderness. Red hot wind had blown up her hair, grit had gotten in her clothes and under her nails. Her breath was hot in her throat, but now she was back. Back to normal. She shifted on the chair and started pinching her arm. Thrown back into normal life, like the red place didn’t exist, like Clare didn’t exist, like she could just continue. Clare had swapped again.

‘Fine.’

Her tongue of clawed at the roof of her mouth while her jaws clamped down to prevent spillage of ill-advised words. But she was in control -Saly. She could talk about what she wanted. After all it was Clare who was the loose cannon. Clare needed to be controlled. Somehow, without medication.

‘It was hot.’

‘And where was that?’

Her thoughts were slow, disjointed. She could feel the heat of that place but couldn’t find the words.

‘She left me there. After dragging me all that way, she walked off into the distance and left me. By the time I realised I was supposed to follow her, I followed but never found her. I got stuck.

And it was hot. She breathed heavily while unbuttoning the top of her dress. Honey under the desk sat up.

Saly’s breathing changed. The heat began to radiate from within her body and sweat beaded on her brow. A soft growl rumbled in Honey’s throat as she sensed that something was changed.

Saly was back there. In the dust and heat of No Man’s Land. And she could feel the sharpness of his gaze. *Death* was behind her. She could feel it. Her heart jumped up in her throat as she froze, ears pricked up, straining to hear. His breath, close enough to flow over her neck, gently ruffled her clothes as she squeezed her eyes shut and tried to steady her breathing and remember what it is she was supposed to do when she was there. Follow Clare. They had a mission. There were people that needed saving. Death needed stopping. She needed Clare for that.

Nothing could make her turn around, and so, stubbornly gritting her teeth, she balled her fists and fixed her gaze on the horizon.

Her feet began moving slowly forward, one after the other. And as she moved, she noticed the soft large paw prints in the red sand. She had seen them before. She remembered Clare showing her the Savannah cat. It was enormous, striding through the black, dense forest. Her breath came in ragged bursts of fear as she began to run after the fading footprints of Clare.

There was a human voice on the air crying. Saly tensed. The pitiful moaning drifted on the hot wind. She could see the *Ohhhhh*’s floating on the air just above her head. It faded as the wind blew it onwards into the sky.

The footprints were leading her to the black mountains. She knew why she was there, she needed to free the souls that the voices belonged to. She needed to stop Death here, so he couldn't get back to her world to claim Owen, or worse still, Meredith. The lavender wouldn't work by itself; she knew that, she would need Clare too. Looking up into the red-orange sky, clouds rolled on at an unnatural speed and the black mountains loomed ahead.

Time was different here. Raising a hand to shield her eyes, she glared at the too-bright sun. Clare's footprints had disappeared. She had no idea where she was going but it was enough to put some distance between herself and Death. If she kept moving, he wouldn't catch her. She just needed to keep going, stay one step ahead.

When she was young it was Clare who kept him at bay. It was only when she got complacent, only when she kept Clare in her box that He crept in. Smooth and slippery like crude oil, the shadow slid silently up the stairs to the still of her room to stab in the black like an adder - administering its deadly poison to those precious to her. She'd seen it all in her head. Every detail. He would not enter again so easily; she would do what she needed to do to keep him at bay. *In Jesus' name* she muttered as she forced herself onwards in the hazy heat.

Although she was sitting in the chair in the cool of Dr Donnelly's office, she sweated. She hoped he wouldn't notice. But what did it matter if he did? He could never see that she was in his office and in No Man's Land at the same time. Even she didn't quite understand how she could be in two places at once. There was a lot that she didn't know. She continued her walk in that hot place, as her mind flitted back to sitting with Dr Donnelly in his much cooler office.

'Tell me about Clare.' His voice cut into her thoughts. She wasn't about to tell him about Clare. How did he know anyway? She closed her eyes, pushing away the image of Clare as she flashed up in front of her eyes, and just like that, she was back there again.

Time seemed to flicker forward as she walked for what seemed like hours in the hot wasteland. The crying on the breeze was the constant soundtrack that wafted in and out. And almost as if it appeared out of nowhere, there suddenly was a playground just before her feet.

A swing creaked. Saly paused to catch her breath; she knew this place. Faint memories, echoes as she walked past the merry-go-round. It greeted her with a groan, slipping to the left so that all she had to do was raise her foot and step on.

Everything seemed disturbed.

Eyes burned into her back. Spinning around expecting to finally see Death approach her, she saw nothing but the vast empty land. The dense wood in the distance looked more like a black smudge than trees. There was no going back now.

Everything around her apart from the park was coated in an unearthly shadow. Hairs bristled on the back of her arm. There was something wrong. Her breath held; her neck prickled.

‘Saly?’ Saly, visibly startled, trembled as her breath came rushing back into her body. Dr Donnelly shifted awkwardly on his chair. ‘Saly? Still with us?’

Saly sat in the chair that was too big for her, her legs swinging back and forth, back and forth as Dr Bergfalk asked her again to explain who Clare was. Should she tell? Had Clare forbidden her from telling? She couldn’t remember. Wrinkling her nose, a small finger reached up and scratched it as she thought about the problem. Telling her couldn’t get her in trouble, could it? Besides, what could Clare do about it? Dr Bergfalk pushed her black rimmed glasses up higher on her nose and pretended to write so as not to focus on staring at Saly. She hoped this would put her a bit more at ease.

‘She’s my twin.’ She began. ‘I think she was born somewhere else because she wasn’t always here, but she was always around.’

‘What do you mean, wasn’t always here?’

‘She came. One day. But I always knew she was around. Somewhere. I know her.’ Dr Bergfalk was silent. The smell of the synthetic doll’s hair wafted around the room.

‘She’s my only friend,’ she said in a small voice. ‘I was in the playground, and Claire and Kelly wouldn’t let me play.’

‘Why not?’

‘I don’t know.’

‘And what happened next?’

‘Clare was there so I didn’t have to sit there on my own.’

‘And what did you do?’

‘Nothing.’

It was break time at Odessa Primary School. Young Saly scratched her nose. Sitting alone on the bench in the playground, she couldn’t remember how she got there.

The heat, a heavy mass pressed in on her as she gulped for air. Beside her was her twin. They must be identical because they looked the same. Mostly exactly.

‘Want to come and play?’ She said. Big brown eyes, just like Saly’s. Saly smiled and her twin giggled, clasped Saly’s hand as the two ran off together.

And as if by magic, they were suddenly in a playground, identical to the one in in Odessa Primary, except this one didn’t have Claire and Kelly being mean to her. This one didn’t teem with other children, screaming and laughing, but the sounds of children playing echoed eerily in the air. This one was just theirs. Saly grinned excitedly as she let go of Clare’s hand and ran towards the merry-go-round that was already faintly moving. And as the girls played and screamed and whooped with joy for what seemed like hours and hours and hours, time stood still.

Saly sat in Dr Donnelly’s office with childhood memories.

‘Saly?’ Saly’s eyes slowly came back into the room as she focused on the blind man in front of her.

‘Yes?’ she blinked as she refocused her thoughts. Had he just asked her about Clare? Yes, Clare. ‘Well. She’s, she’s...’ her mouth was suddenly dry and hot like the arid land she frequented. The thickness of the heat in his office reminded her of that other place. And as she looked at Dr Donnelly, her tongue grew thick, heavy and cleaved to the inside of her mouth.

‘She’s not here right now but she-.’ The words wouldn’t come, and the silence stretched between them. ‘She comes.’

Dr Donnelly noted her inability to be able to discuss Clare and thought to change tact before she clammed up completely.

‘Tell me about your daughter.’

‘Merry? She’s six. She goes to primary school not far from here actually. The same primary school I went to as a girl.’ Her head turned to face the window. She could hear the distant traffic and imagined normal people driving. Picking up the shopping. Going to work.

‘And what does she like doing?’

‘She likes playing with her dolls, she likes playing with her ca-. The kitten she got for her birthday she sometimes plays with. *Played* with.’

‘What happened to the kitten?’

The kitten was gone. Clare was responsible.

‘Ran away.’

‘It ran away?’

‘Maybe it just wanted to be free.’

‘To be free? Wasn’t it free living with your family?’

Saly grew silent. She knew what he was doing. This was what Clare warned her of. She stiffened. Dr Donnelly changed tact.

‘Tell me about this weekend.’ He probed, trying to find out what happened when she took Meredith to the park very early in the morning.

At the mention of it, she was back there in No Man’s Land. The slide sat alone in the centre of the playground. Its shadow yawning across the red dirt.

She moved towards it. And as she got closer to the slide that was oversized, she heard it. Her eyes wide; her breathing erratic. She froze. A voice in her head screamed at her to run but her feet wouldn’t obey.

It hovered above her. Suddenly, it was as if her feet awoke from a dream and heard the frantic screaming in her head, gathering courage from somewhere, electricity shot through her body, causing it to jerk into movement and she ran. As fast as she could from the terrible thing that was in the park, away from death.

When she stopped, her breathing was heavy.

She turned to back and spotted a shape sticking out from underneath the dark silver of the slide. Small, bare brown feet. They stuck out; toes curled under. A small foot covered in a layer of red dust. She had to go back, she had to see what it was. Reluctantly she stepped closer to whatever was under the slide. She knew what it was. It was something she did not want to see. The whimpering that she heard, was a noise that was escaping from her own mouth. She tried to step away but she could not. Instead, feet dragging, she was forced onwards towards the dirty little brown feet.

She saw the feet first. Small brown feet toes curled under; legs sprawled wide. And then came the torso. Skinny with ragged, grey worn clothes. Reluctantly, her eyes moved up the little body at to its haunting, terrible eyes. Empty eyes stared at her, bored into her soul, and there, there between the skinny girl’s legs it crouched. Curled protectively over its prey, its eyes flashed dangerously.

Dr Donnelly waited for something from Saly, but he could see that she wasn’t going to share what she was thinking. Something had happened that weekend. Eager not to fill the silence, he waited.

‘Tell me more about Merry. What did you do with her this weekend?’

‘What any normal mother and child do together. I took my daughter to the park,’ she snapped. Her anger bristled at his impertinent question.

‘What did you discuss?’

‘None of your damn business!’

Taken aback at the sudden change, Dr Donnelly thought back to Saly’s file. He thought back to Dr Bergfalk’s notes and came to a sudden realisation. This could be the manifestation of... something entirely different.

‘Hello.’

She grunted in response.

‘Where is Saly?’

She smiled. ‘I am Saly.’

Dr Donnelly was careful. He quietly thought how best to continue. While Clare glared.

‘Tell me about your weekend.’ And in asking this question, things were suddenly clearer. This was what prompted Owen to make an emergency appointment.

‘We had family time,’ she said, a wicked looking smile curling on her lips.

Parkie. Jamaica

Jamaica was hot. They all knew this, but the heat was still suffocating.

‘Me beg uno, gimmie likkle piece na man?’ Iris said to her friend. The heat was stifling that day, it always made her hungry. She held out her hand expectantly to Martha, who playfully turned her back and shoved the whole slice of sweet carrot cake into her mouth, grinning. Iris grabbed her bag and walked off from under the big tamarind tree in the centre of the school playground. The heat, and her friend’s unwillingness to share had made up her mind. She’d walk home from school. It didn’t look like the bus was coming any time soon anyway. Her navy skirt fluttered around her bare legs, ankle socks bright white in the afternoon sun and her shins; smooth, brown and shiny.

Reaching into her blue school bag, she took out her umbrella to help create a little shade.

‘Want me fi carry dat fi u?’

Iris jumped. His voice seemed to come out of nowhere and where she was alone with Martha one minute, suddenly he skipped alongside of her and inserted himself between the pair of girls and matched his pace with theirs. His khaki shorts were pressed to a sharp crease that stood to attention from his groin to his knees. The uniform white shirt was hanging out of his shorts and his top three buttons undone in the heat.

She handed him her blue duffle bag and rolled her eyes at Martha who hung back, unwilling to talk to Parkie at all.

It was a relief not to carry it. Her science book was too heavy. In fact, she had told the teacher so. She argued that there was no possible way she could carry such a book home. He was to photocopy the relevant pages for her to complete. To which, she received a lash of the strap for her obstinance.

‘Is wa u want Parkie?’

‘Is wat mek u tink me waant sinting?’ The weight of the bag forced his gait lower than normal. Iris raised one eyebrow.

‘You na waant nuting?’

‘Na man! Mi jus waan fi chat. Say how de do.’

‘Dat is waanting sinting.’

‘Gurl! Is why u so fiesty? Mi jus waant fi say marning.’

‘Afternoon,’ she corrected. Parkie just glared at her. They walked in silence.

A John Crow way, way, way up into the sky caught her attention. It’s black shape like grim reaper, circling. A dark silhouette on the horizon.

As they walked the sound of their shuffling feet fell dead onto the dusty pathway. Iris turned off the main road and followed a dirt track. She knew that Martha, who was still lagging behind, would take the opposite path to her house. Nettles and bushes brushed past her ankles as she walked on oblivious of their warning, and of Parkie's presence.

She could feel him fishing around in his head for words. Her steps were now light with him carrying her baggage - she smirked to herself, more fool him.

'Mi know Blacks. You know Blacks?' Iris shook her head. 'Lenkie? Foota?' she shook her head at each mention of the names of boys in Parkie's year. 'Yu must know Bigga?' Iris knew these boys but wasn't admitting to them, then suddenly she changed her mind.

'Yes, mi know Bigga.' Parkie grinned at his success. 'Y'man, mi know Bigga, mi and Bigga are good, good, *good* frein' dem.'

She skipped on ahead a bit and the small narrow pathway lead to a larger expanse of land. The grass, patchy with hay, was brittle and dry. Grass like this was a fire hazard. The least little thing would cause them to ignite and burn. Once that happened, a fire could run on for miles before troops were organised enough to put it out. The damage that was done after, was enormous. But kids, with a dangerous streak, kids with a penchant for danger, had matches in their lunchboxes. Carried flamethrowers in their satchels and they could ignite whatever they desired. These kids were dangerous, carefree. Unhinged.

She skipped along the edge, eager not to walk side by side with Parkie. But for Parkie was there for a purpose.

He knew that Iris was taking the shortcut home. He'd followed her on several occasions. He would need to make his move now before she reached her home. They were at the field, with nothing but cows and God to see them. It was the perfect opportunity.

'Iris?'

Iris carried on walking. Her long strides were one and a half the length of his and Parkie found it difficult to keep up with her, especially with her heavy bag, which he was beginning to regret offering to carry.

'Iris! Me a taalk to uno!' Frustrated, he stopped walking and waited for her to turn around, to which she did, rolling her eyes. It was then that he noticed her chewing gum.

'Is waat you *want* Parkie? Yu follow mi ere. Waat yu *waant*?' He could sense her growing boredom and frustration and told himself it was now or never.

Dropping her school bag in the nettled bushes, he lunged at her to plant a kiss on her mouth.

Iris, on seeing Parkie fling her bag into the hostile grass, opened her mouth in protestation and got more than she bargained for. Parkie's skinny frame had fallen forward creating a startling reflex. She flung out her arms to push him away but instead he landed neatly within her open arms, and close enough for his lips and tongue to fall into her protesting mouth.

She jerked. And in one fluid movement of utter disgust, used one hand to push him off her, and the other she rolled up into a fist and punched him hard in the face.

'Is wa de rarseclart yu a do!?' she yelled, nostrils flaring and eyes flashing.

Parkie landed heavily in the ferns mixed with nettles next to the path. His legs sprawled ungainly in opposite directions as he shook his head. Embarrassment flushed through him; and then anger. Gritting his teeth, he stood up rubbing down his khaki shorts now smeared with grass stains. He turned to face her. Her eyes, rolling, showed him exactly what she thought of him. She stood defiant; fist still rolled up in a fighter's stance.

'Mi a tink yu and me is frien! *Frien!* You try dat again fi ago tomp yu inna ya moat!' Her lips pushed up as her dark eyes glared.

It was safe to say that Parkie didn't feel any amorous affections for Iris anymore.

'Wa mek yu dweet fa? Mi neva said mi fanci! Ef yuh cum bak again, mi a go knock yuh!'

Her threat looked genuine and Parkie didn't doubt it. She saw the anger in his eyes as he and for a moment thought he might try to knock *her* out. She stood as a fighter, her stance that bobbed and weaved. She knew she had the weight advantage as he weighed her up.

'Stupid dumb bitch,' he muttered under his breath as he walked away, and Iris lowered her fists.

Clare

Clare sat in the doctor's office. Her expressionless face stared ahead, yet on the inside, she raged. On the inside, she kept Saly locked up in her box. On the inside, there was heat, flame and fire.

Saly stood beside Clare at the edge of a dead forest. Black trees loomed upwards out of reach.

‘What are we doing here?’ She shouted above the wind that ripped her voice away as soon as it left her lips. The red dust swirled around her head and into her hair as she squinted to see. She had never seen it like this before. The orange sky broiled and boiled like liquid. Clare ignored her. They both stood, staring at the darkness; a dark chasm in the world.

‘Did you do anything interesting this weekend?’ His voice fell dead in the still room. Clare stared ahead, and somewhere, somehow his faint voice reached her. But she was preoccupied.

Reaching into her pocket, she drew out a box of matches. There were ten, white, straight pencils like Her Majesty's soldiers, fluffy black helmets, all pretty and laid all in a row, row, row. Upsetting the set, she withdrew one and struck it. The burst of flame made her heart pop like a hit of good strong whisky, neat.

Gently, she let the flame fall from her fingers into the thirsty forest floor. It snapped and crackled its thanks. Only then did she notice Saly.

‘What are you doing?’ Panic in her voice.

It was already impossibly hot and dry, but the flames spread quickly, devouring the forest giants. The soon grew and roar, licking leaves and grass as it went. Saly turned and ran.

‘The weather was quite dry and bright, I like to think that’s a hint that summer is finally on its way, don’t you? It would have been a perfect time to go picnicking. Tell me about Merry.’

Clare was back in the room, yet she wasn't. She watched, from inside her body but felt distinctly out of it. She floated. Ethereal. Distant, yet present at the same time. Her head felt woozy like she was drunk, but she was there, she was definitely there. She blinked. Steadied herself and blinked again.

One, two, three blinks. Each time, her vision got a bit clearer. And her perspective changed. She was on the inside now, looking out. The blind therapist didn’t see anything.

Clare could hear Saly running. She smiled.

‘I don’t do, picnicking.’ She spat the last word out, insulted at the question.

Her vision was settling, and yet the chairs and table still trailed in reds and yellows as she looked away.

‘So, what do you do?’

‘I swing, and I sway.’

‘What do you think that means?’

‘What do *you* think it means?’

‘Does Merry do these things with you? And Owen?’

‘Don’t talk to me about that idiot!’ She snapped. The room became silent once more. ‘I don’t know why he’s here; we’d all get on much better without him!’

‘Why do you say that? He’s your husband.’

‘Is he?’

‘Yes. You married him.’

‘She married him. She had the child I didn’t get a say!’

Dr Donnelly, taken aback by her outburst, instinctively reached out a hand to reassure Honey, who now shuffled uneasily under the table.

‘And what would you have said if you had the chance?’

‘I’d have said no of course! No bloody way was I marrying some Taffy!’

‘Why not?’

‘Why not!? Why *not*? Cos all he does is interfere. All he does is get in the way! With his endless gibberish he fills her head with! All this ridiculous rubbish. Makes me *sick*. I feel like I want to puke just thinking about it!’

‘And how do you and Merry get along?’

‘We get on fine. I’m her mother.’

‘Are you?’

‘Of course, I bloody well am! What kind of a stupid question is that? Am I her mother...’ Clare guffawed. ‘I’m her mother, and she is my daughter and yes, we get along. We get along just fine! Better than fine! We get on like a house on fire.’

Jamaica

It was one of those hot summers. The usual sighing of the wind had vanished and in its place were long, drawn out gasps. Even the trees were still on that Sunday morning that Mary sat on the veranda with her grandma, shelling peas.

The old woman sat, legs apart, with a wicker basket balanced between her shins. On the floor beside her was another basket. Bright green peas scattered as her grandmother's chubby hand delved into the pea-green sea, pulling out the bright pods which she deftly shed before discarding the shell in yet another basket. The peas filled up in her skirt. Mary counted, for every third or fourth pod she shelled, some found their way into the old woman's soft, gummy maw.

‘Yu nah get ready fi church?’

‘Yes, grandma, mi a just relax and watch di marning.’

The sun beamed down hot for so early and the clear blue sky was bright. This was a day that the Lord had made and as his child, she would go along with her mother and sisters to church where they would sing and praise Him. It was an affair, and as such they needed to be dressed accordingly.

She already knew what her mother would be wearing. A large broad hat that would fend off the beating sun. A delicate white with lace trimming. Doreen would be in church with her eight children and her husband Paul. Mary’s mother and Doreen had an unspoken competition with their clothes, their children, even their husbands. On the husband issue, Doreen held herself superior. Mary’s father wasn’t the type to stay with his family but came and went when he felt the need. And her mother accepted this because as she said, ‘he was not a bad man and when he returned, he brought with him enough food and presents to last them.’

Where he went, no one seemed to know, and no one asked. Although, an inquisitive young Mary broached the subject one evening when he was home.

The fire snapped and crackled merrily as they sat in the warm dark. Her father let her toss green leaves into the flame which caused the fire to hiss and spit.

Thousands of stars hung above their small house with its tin roof and paraffin lamps that gave out a warm, homely light. Crickets chirruped in the undergrowth, and Mary sat on her father's knee. They ate bread warmed by the fire. And she decided to ask what all seemed to know and not say.

‘Daddy, weh du yah guh?’

‘Mi nah go nowhere.’

‘Weh yu come from den?’

Mary’s little fingers stroked her father’s sharp grey whiskers under her flat pink palms.

‘Mi come from over dere!’ He pointed at the kitchen door and began to tickle her under her arms, to which she erupted in a fit of laughter.

‘Lard it hot, hot, hot,’ her grandmother said as she popped another pea in her mouth. The bench that Mary sat on began to stick to her thighs as sweat dribbled down the small of her back. Her thoughts passed by the peach shift dress that her father had bought for her the last time he was around. The sequins had been stitched in by hand, in an intricate pattern that glittered in the sun.

When it was taken carefully out of its wrapping, it rustled like a delicate foreign treasure, too precious for her sweaty, provincial hands. Her father stood back. Black eyes gleaming with pride, the gap in his teeth prominent, watching while she unwrapped the treasure.

The material, like silk, slivered over her palms as the room was hushed into revered silence.

‘Yu were always de favourite.’ Hyacinth said as she pushed up her mouth in jealousy, folded her arms and looked on with dark brown eyes that was reduced to pin pricks.

Mary reached for the brush that lay on the bench beside her and began to un-pick the cornrows in her hair. The edge of the comb was narrow, and she poked it in between the folds of hair, flicking outwards as the plait unravelled. A breeze fluttered gently past her ankles, wafting through her knees but died before it reached her damp back.

‘Is why yu na stay?’

‘Mi a stay,’ he said, while glaring off into the black bushes, bright fireflies danced in the darkness.

‘Yeah?’ Mary’s eyes lit up.

‘Yeah man.’

Mary wiggled happily on his lap as she realised the truth. He hadn’t stayed because no one had bothered to ask him! Well, that clearly had all changed. Her father was now staying.

As Mary brushed the kinks out of her hair, she realised she should have done it the night before. Now her hair would be too frizzy to pull into a bun. It needed time to smooth out, and in this heat, her sweat was surely going to make it shrink into tight curls. Jabbing the sharp

end of the comb into the final cornrow, she unravelled it smoothly and began to comb it through. Small black spirals fell to the wooden veranda floor and waited to be taken away by the wind.

Grandmother shelled peas. They sat in silence as the time dragged on. Eventually, Mary stood, her clammy legs clung a little too long to the white plastic chair as she stood. Her bare feet smoothly slid over the dry floor as another breeze lazily sauntered by. The puffs of black hair rolled along the ground before her grandmother reached out a quick hand and scooped them up.

Mary watched.

‘Uno pickney. Ya mudda na tell yu, yu fi hol on to de hair dem?’

‘Wat ya ah talking ‘bout now grandma?’ Mary had turned from the doorway to watch her crazy old grandma scoop up all the bits and pieces of her hair that had slid down the cracks of the floorboard and rolled underneath her chair. Her grandmother, with difficulty, was bending low. Her bottom raised high and broad in her flowered shift skirt, legs spread wide and her flat feet, balancing as if on a tightrope. Her rough old, dry hands scooped and picked up every scrap and curl of hair she could find.

‘Wat yu a do wid dat grandma?’

‘Yu na know de bird dem come and tek it fi di nest. It nice and sot fi dem.’ Her own hair was plait in two. Grey curls clumped together in the damp heat, framed her wrinkled face as she pursed her lips and squinted her pale blue eyes looking for stray hairs. ‘Yu see de brid dem? Dey tek de hair to feada der nest. Nice fi dem, but it turn yu crazy.’

‘Wat? Grandma!’ she replied incredulously as she watched her strong, small frame busily rolling all the hairs up into a ball.

‘Yu pickney, yu don’t know notin’.’

Mary watched her crazy old grandmother, ultimately trying to stop *her* from going crazy by picking up her dead hair that was falling in between the cracks of the floorboards. She smiled at the irony.

The air had changed, became cooler. It was time for her to get ready for church, but as she turned to enter the house, her eyes glanced towards the bushes at the side which lay just before a small stream, and there, two tiny eyes watched her. Giving a defiant croak, the bull frog hopped off into the bushes as Mary watched before she too, went inside the cool shade of the house as a lizard cuckoo took off from a nearby tree.

Welcome home

The session was over. Owen waited outside as the muffled voices inside the room fell silent. The green office door opened. Owen wondered nervously if he would get his wife back, or Clare. Clare walked briskly up to him. Her eyes bored defiantly into his as his face and as she stared, it became clear to her that he knew exactly who she now was. His heart sank.

‘One moment Saly.’ He said, using his wife’s name instead of Clare’s, as he quickly stepped into the office. He closed the door firmly shut leaving Clare on the outside, pressing her ear against the wood.

‘How can I help Mr Fairweather?’

Owen wrung his hands. His breath was shallow, and his face flushed.

‘Er,’ Clare heard footsteps move further away from the door.

‘That outside is *not* my wife. That, I am pretty sure is Clare. Am I expected to just take her home? I have a daughter for Christ’s sake!’

‘Why don’t you take a seat Mr Fairweather?’

Owen paced.

‘I mean, what am I supposed to do? I have a daughter, a *daughter!*’ His top lip glittered with sweat.

‘She’s not a danger Mr Fairweather. Do you think she’s a danger?’

‘A danger? She took my child! I didn’t know where she was, anything could have happened!’

‘She is your wife, Mr Fairweather, but if you feel she’s a danger and cannot stay in the home with you and your daughter, there are things we can do, avenues we can pursue.’

‘What avenues?’

‘Well, referrals would have to be made, and it would be preferable if Saly went voluntarily.’

Owen was quiet. It was clear that he felt uncomfortable around her. This wasn’t something Anthony had noticed before.

‘You do have options, Mr Fairweather, there are things in place for such situations. But in the meantime, perhaps there is a family member that can help you out at home? It’s just you and Meredith isn’t it?’

Suddenly aware of what he may have done, Owen licked his lips again, and straightened his tie with his sweaty hand.

‘No, no. There’s no need. Things aren’t that bad. Yet.’

He gulped.

‘Thank you, Doctor, but you’re right. She is my wife and I don’t think we are quite at that stage yet. Yes, she is my wife.’ He slowly stepped towards the door, opened it to see Clare still standing in the doorway, watching. Owen walked briskly past her, listening for her following footsteps. She paused, watched Dr Donnelly, before strolling slowly after Owen and to the car.

Saly felt strangely cold in the heat. Clare had left her. Her small black Clark’s shoes dug into the dirt and made patterns. She was alone, and yet she wasn’t. The Savannah cat was lurking somewhere. The hot air made it difficult for her to breathe and her legs ached. She wanted to go home. She squinted as something in the distance caught her eye. A flash in the hazy heat. Was it water? It didn’t look like it. It was large. Very large. Her eyes tried to make sense of the shape. It had a big body, a tail, a long, long neck. Her heart began to pound.

She remembered being in class, Mr Cairns had an article out that they were reading. She knew or suspected what the shape was. Mr Cairns had given everyone a black and white copy of the article: The Loch Ness Monster. The other kids couldn’t decide whether it was real or fake. Saly knew it wasn’t real. And she knew then, as she knew now, that she wasn’t looking at the Loch Ness Monster.

Nearby was the park that she had been to with Clare. She ran as fast as she could, her lungs taking in the blistering hot oxygen that was better than no oxygen at all. She skidded as she came up to the slide and dove underneath it, getting red dirt all over her grey pinafore dress.

Rasping breath filled her ears as her heart pounded. As an afterthought she really hoped it wouldn’t see the red dust she kicked up and come to investigate.

The quiet filled her ears. She tried to be silent. Screwing shut her eyes, she refused to look. Her heartbeat thumped. Her thick tongue cleaved to her roof of her mouth. And then, she heard something.

Just a small muffling sound at first, like a padded foot on dust. *Just* like a padded foot on dust, she thought.

Holding her breath, she remained still. She could hear snuffling. Holding her breaths, she waited and silently prayed that the monster had not seen her.

The snuffling got closer and closer before stopping. She opened her eyes. Something large cast a shadow over the slide. Clamping her eyes shut again, she tested the theory she held as a child: if she couldn’t see it, it couldn’t see her.

Saly's breathing was slow, steady and smooth.

Eventually, the shadow moved, and the creature moved on. The swoop swoop of either padded feet or a tail on the ground, faded into the distance as Saly let out a breath.

Something pricked in her closed hand. She hadn't noticed she was clinging onto something tightly.

Looking down, she opened her palm and there in the centre, pressed deep into her palm, was the most surprising thing.

It was electric blue, a perfect small circular object. She moved it in her hand, prodding it with her index finger. It glittered and shimmered like nothing she had seen before. The blues and greens that shone and blended together were astonishing. And laced with a delicate gold. Here, where everything was red and hot and dusty. This was cool, and clean, and blue. Bright Caribbean-sky blue. Her eyes matched the circular shape as she stared at her newfound treasure. She knew what this was. She knew where it came from. It was so obvious. It had to be, it just had to be! It wasn't a Lock Ness Monster. But could it really be?

Owen had entered the house first with Meredith leaving Clare to fend for herself. She stood, watched her husband, Saly's husband, enter the house with their daughter. She was left to close the car door, make her way into the house and when Owen and Meredith's heads disappeared into the black doorway, she scowled.

Cars zoomed past their side street kicking up dirt and dust. She could be normal, she thought. She could do the shopping, visiting the grandma, even going to work. Her thoughts drifted to Saly, in there. Did Saly think she was normal? Or did she envy others, watching them from a distance? A sly smile whispered at the corner of her lips. Serves her right. She can stay there. It was her turn to live, her turn with the family, her turn to breathe the clean, crisp air. Her turn to have a go at being normal. Saly had her chance and failed. Closing her eyes, she took in a deep breath.

"Beep beep."

Her eyes snapped open as the orange indicator lights flashed on the car showing it was now locked. Owen's figure disappeared from the curtains in the front window. Her scowl returned. Something would have to be done about him. Glancing up at the grey overcast March sky, she walked into the house.

Merry had been sent to her room, and Owen sat in his chair pretending to watch television while the remote balanced on his knee. His eyes glazed over. Closing the front door, she began to walk into the kitchen. The view of the drink's cabinet at the corner of her eyes.

Owen, still ignoring her, withdrew a cigarette from his shirt pocket, felt for his lighter and lit up.

Tea, it was always tea with Saly. Good old English tea. The hand that was Saly's flicked on the kettle and it hummed to life. She brooded. Something would have to be done about that man. He did nothing but get in the way. He had overstepped the mark. Everyone knows that daughters are closer to mothers and fathers are closer to sons. He was taking over her role and he knew it; he was gleeful about it.

The smoke wafted in from the living room into the kitchen as the kettle built up momentum. Puffs of steam began to bellow out of its mouth and curl up underneath the kitchen cupboards. There would be mould growing there if it was left. No doubt though, Owen would dutifully wipe it down, good as new.

Reaching for a cup that she didn't want, she popped in a tea bag in preparation of making the drink that she hadn't any real intention of drinking. It was all habit forming, thanks to Saly, but it helped her think. She was on the edge of an idea. Something that would solve all her problems. In her head, she saw him, sat on the velvety lazy chair, his feet up, hole in one of his grey socks, cigarette perched in his mouth, the epitome of a slob. This was someone easy to despise, this was someone easy to want to dead. This was someone easy to get rid of.

All she had to do was come up with a plan. The snapping of the switch from the kettle brought her thoughts back into the room as she poured the hot water into the waiting cup. Stirring in sugar, she realised that she must be as much like Saly, for now, as she could. She would drink the damn tea. She would go into the sitting room and talk with the husband, even though she knew, and he knew that she wasn't welcome. Wasn't welcome!? This was *her* bloody house! This was *her* body that gave birth to *her* daughter. This, she had no words for the fat fucking interloper which was taking up space and air in *her* living room. He would be sleeping in *her* bed tonight. Her stomach flipped as she realised that she would have to sleep beside him at night. 'For fuck's sake!' she muttered. It was obvious he had to go. She wasn't sure why she hadn't thought about it before.

A smile came to her lips and her icy eyes glittered as she realised that she needn't go back. Ever. After all, her place was here. In the home, with her daughter. The bond between a mother and a daughter is sacred, like the holy trinity, without the spirit. Her thoughts turned to God and she pushed up her lips in disgust. Who said God was a man anyway? After all, it's women who give life, women who create. It was woman and God who created Jesus. Man had nothing to do with it. She had heard those words somewhere, and now they came back to her. Her hand fluttered down towards her stomach and her vague memories of being

pregnant. It was women who grew life, who painfully, expelled life into this world. Women who the world belonged to, women, with so much power, ought to run the world, and this was *her* world, *her* kingdom *Her* castle. It belonged to *her*.

During the old days, she and Saly swapped regularly. Saly needed her. Their mother had died and poor, weak Saly just could not cope. Clare was always there. Always. Even during that labour. But Saly was never there for Clare, because Clare was the strong one, Clare was the one that could survive. She had earned her time in the body which was just as much hers, even more so, than Saly.

She picked up the cup of tea and blew on it gently. The hot liquid began to burn her hand through the porcelain mug. Sighing, she placed the mug on the side and grabbed the handle before swiftly gliding out of the kitchen and into the living room, to take her place, for now, with the husband. This was her home after all.

Jamaica

‘Girl dem, dem walk around in packs.’ Parkie remembered what his friend had told him. Blackie had considered himself as some kind of ladies’ man. The boy was in serious denial as everyone knew that the girl’s preferred the fair skinned boys, not the dark ones like him. Parkie was somewhere in between.

School was over for the day, and he was out with his friends harassing the girls. His eyes flashed around for Iris, but any girl was better than no girl. His special trick which he loved to play with his sharpener, was about to begin.

Girls were like crows, he thought to himself. They hung around in groups, just out of reach. As soon as you went up to them, they scattered in all directions hooping and cawing like you did something terrible to scare them. So, you had to softly, softly creep up to them. That was the game. He’d get closer and closer to the girls, step with his back facing them, pretending to be interested in something else, anything else. Friends giggling in the background, or just underneath a tree, watched eagerly as Parkie the Brave, got closer and closer. And just at that opportune moment, his round sharpener with a mirrored back, would slip out of his hands and onto the floor. If he was lucky, it’d land the right way up.

And he’d bend down, ever so slowly, to pick up his harmless dropped item, but not before looking intently into the reflected surface. Sometimes, he’d spot the soft brown thighs, the white material with red spots on it. Sometimes, it’d just look like a dark forbidden jungle, but most of the time it’d end in shrieks from the girls, clasping their skirts and running away while cursing... and whoops and high fives from his waiting friends, who would run up and congratulate him on his bravery, his boldness, his sheer fearlessness. Hand slapping, back patting. Congratulations all round.

Sally with two l's

The day was still. Rain had come abruptly and left a damp fresh feel in the trees and undergrowth. What was usually a clear blue sky, was a pasty white, as low cloud hung and made the air humid. The bell had gone. Kids swarmed out of open classrooms, buzzing and bubbling with excitement. They whooped as they ran out into the damp air, some straight to the tuck stand, others to adjacent classrooms looking for their friends and the majority towards the now open school gates to congregate at the bus stop.

Mary poured out with her classmates and slinked over to the large, solitary tree in the centre of the dirt playground. Children chattering could be heard in the distance as a lazy breeze whispered in the trees.

Sandra and Conrod were the golden couple in their year. Mary spied Conrod waited for her by the black gates. He stood, his school bag slung by the iron railings on the grass, as he chatted with his boys for a bit before they gave him some skin, slapping hands goodbye before crossing the road to wait for the Mary-Rose which only ran twice a day. Mary knew he would wait for her, as he always did. Offer to carry her bag, as he always did, and ever the gentleman, he would walk her to the front door of her home, as he probably always did. As to what they did after, Mary didn't know, although she often thought about it.

The cylindrical wooden bench curved around the wide trunk of the Green Heart tree. The bench was wet, but not one to follow conventions, Mary stood on the seated area and sat upright on the back of the bench, leaning against the rough bark.

Her blue pinafore-skirt hung around her calves as she looked at her ugly, scuffed black matte school shoes, they were the sensible aunt Ivy's choice. She had wanted little sling back kitten heels for school, but she knew Ivy was right. They'd get ruined inside the first week but at least she would look good in them, and she desperately wanted to look good.

Her hands rested in her lap, hands pink palms up as if in prayer. No one would guess. After all, why should they? She didn't quite know herself, but, here she was. Waiting. She glanced at Conrod. He was leaned up against the iron railings, also waiting.

For a moment, she saw another blue skirt and her heart thudded. Her breath caught at the thought of her close by, but it was a false alarm. It was just Marcy and her friends. Within the giggling group was Sandra, making her way over to Conrod. Clouds parted momentarily, as a weak sun glimmered. Sandra's skirt ballooned. Giggling, she pushed it down with one hand before the wily wind revealed too much leg.

There was a name for girls like her. She had heard the stories that raced round the playground behind cupped hands and I-told-you-so laughter, so she didn't breathe a word, not even to herself. For who knew which duppy was listening ready to spill her secrets to anyone who would listen? Besides, how could she talk and explain something she didn't even understand herself? All she knew was how she felt.

Sandra gave Conrod a peck on the lips. They smiled at each other as he took her bag, slung it (very manly) over his shoulder, and gently held her hand. Sandra waved at her envious friends and disappeared with Conrod through the iron school gates. Mary watched.

The wind rustled the leaves as boys' voices could be heard screaming and hollering in the distance. Parkie's game. He whooped in delight with his friends as a girl's shrieks echoed across the playground.

The sun was getting hot after the earlier shower. A bird twittered. Looking up to the underskirt of the tree, she saw smooth arteries splaying out in all directions, covered in a moist green moss that twinkled in an increasing breeze. A droplet of warm rain fell down on her face. She blinked. Another droplet landed in her hair. Startled by the warm wet, she lowered her head and saw her.

The band of freckles on her nose was clear even from this distance. Wiping her sweaty hands on her blue pinafore, Mary took a deep breath to compose herself as the girl approached.

'Is what took yu so long?'

'Miss Noble a stress me. Come. Me want a cool drink.' Sally had gotten a detention again.

Mary hopped off the bench, steadying her breathing, she wiped her damp palms again on her skirt and walked side by side with the girl with the band of freckles and the frizzy brown hair.

She was in Mary's class at school. In her Science class, Biology and English. The only class they didn't share was Art. And Mary knew that in art, she sat beside that fool-fool pickney Bembe.

Bembe with his high top, and his cologne and his swagger. Boys and their swagger. Mary didn't understand it - Conrod had it too and Sandra clearly understood what it meant. Somehow it was meant to tell all that they were cool, and every girl would fall at their feet. She kissed her teeth loudly.

'Wah yuh ah duh?'

'Me nah doing noting!'

‘So why yu face push up so?’ The conversation wasn’t exactly going where Mary wanted it to go, so instead she changed tact.

The sky was overcast. More rain was coming. She could see the silver-grey shimmer in the distance as the curtain of rain moved forward in a military formation. Maybe Sally could wait it out at her house. Maybe Sally could stay for dinner. Her heart quick stepped in her chest at the thought. She had done it before, but they had sat in the living room. This time, she’d invite her to her room. As to what she was planning on doing there, not even Mary knew.

‘Yu want fi stop fi Kool Aid?’ Mary shot the question at Sally before she talked herself out of asking it. Sally shrugged whilst following, so she guessed it meant yes.

The small house was perched on what looked like a precipice. The kids had nicknamed it The Cliff, but in actual fact, it was just a hill that gave the appearance of a sheer drop of the edge. The little house sat near the feet of a small mountain. Surrounded by lush green trees, the dense bushes jungled up with running pumpkins and beans. At night, the reassuring presence of fireflies flashed their torchlights as the women chatted on the veranda slapping away the mosquitoes.

It made for good views over the village, grandmamma had said, and Mary had to give in to the old woman’s wisdom. There was nothing like sitting at the back of the house in the evening, looking down at her aunt’s houses in the distance and watching the fireflies winking in the black brush.

The wooden house appeared to groan happily as Mary stood on the veranda and called out.

‘Mi ‘ome!’

And it was her aunt Ivy who hollered back.

‘Mary? Dat u? Skool done?’

‘Yes auntie. Mi ‘ave Sally.’

‘Afternoon auntie!’ Sally yelled as Ivy approached the doorway. Her flip flops smacking against her hardened bare feet. The house, having met Sally once before, creaked merrily in greeting.

‘Howdie Sally, how yu mudda? She alright?’

‘Yes auntie.’

‘Good, good. Gwan, go get sometin’ cool fi drink.’

The straw broom Ivy had in her hand, made light work of the veranda as the girls went to the kitchen. Mary quickly poured two glasses of Kool Aid from the fridge, into some long, narrow, thick-rimmed glasses, and strolled casually to her room. Sally followed.

Mary wondered if Sandra had invited Conrod in to wait out the coming rain, or perhaps get a drink after the walk, for he would have missed the Mary Rose.

The glasses were placed on the dressing table while Mary cracked her window open. She could taste the damp air. Rain still threatened to move in, despite the heat. Thunder groaned in the distance as clouds gathered. Sally sat. The springs in the bed wheezed.

She tried not to look as nervous as she felt, while she sipped her Kool Aid nonchalantly. Mary took up her drink in her left hand. Neither of them knowing what to say. They slurped awkwardly as Sally gazed out of the window. The atmosphere in the room became heavy and the room darkened with the oncoming storm. Mary tried not to stare. But she couldn't help her wandering eyes that seemed to find their way to Sally who was sitting on her bed.

Sally was sat on her bed! She couldn't quite believe it. What could she say? What *should* she say? While their eyes wandered and her thoughts danced on the edges of the room, seeing everything and nothing. She slurped. And clumps of clouds curdled in the sky.

Mary wondered if she should ask her about that fool-fool boy in her Art class but decided that it was the wrong time. Sally thought about asking Mary about the English assignment they had to do, but she found that she couldn't find the words.

Mary thought of Conrod and Sandra. She wondered what they did after school every day. If he went into her house. If he was invited into their sitting room. If he was invited into her bedroom. If her parents had allowed him past even the front door! Ivy let Sally in without a second thought - and why shouldn't she? There was no reason why not. Her heart raced as she thought of the reasons why not, most of them to do with Sally's beautiful freckles, her thick lips and her swinging hips.

They sat in silence.

Sally's hazel eyes found Mary's and they grinned. Her freckles danced merrily on her nose as her smile lit up her face. Mary grinned like a Cheshire cat as she sat beside her and took another sip of her drink. Amid the awkwardness, the red liquid sloshed languidly in the glass as Mary raised it to her lips. She sucked it in. The sweet liquid bumped roughly against the glass and spilled over the lip. Drink sloshed down Mary's sucking mouth causing her to explode in a fit of coughs, while the rest splashed down her chin and dress. Kool Aid was snorted up her nose through the back of her throat causing her to jerk and cough.

‘Wha di rass!’ Mary jerked off the bed embarrassed and rushed over to the dressing table to clean up her face and chest. She coughed noisily. Sally laughed. She also stood and walked over towards Mary. Reaching out a hand, she clapped her on the back roughly as more coughs exploded through her body. Embarrassment throbbed through Mary as she wiped her chin. Kool Aid had somehow managed to come through her nose too, but this she wiped deftly away with the back of her hand, before Sally could notice. The red drink burned at the back of her nose and had stained tracks down her blue pinafore school dress. She blinked away reactive tears. A face cloth was just too small but was all that was to hand for wiping up the mess. Dark dribble stains curved down her neck, down her chest and under her white school shirt. The fruit drink bloomed red from the dribbles on her chest through the underside of her shirt. She cursed - Ivy wouldn’t be happy with her. She could hear her still sweeping the room next to hers, fussing as she tidied, and could imagine all sorts of cusses she’d throw at her as she struggled to scrub the red stain from her white shirt.

Mary’s smooth skin was unblemished, even at the age of 15. While others were breaking out in teenage spots, Mary’s skin remained beautiful.

Sally loved how clumsy she was, and how she tried to hide her embarrassment when she got things wrong. And it didn’t go unnoticed that Mary waited for Sally every day under the Green Heart tree so they could walk home together. She even knew that Mary kept an eye on the boy in her art class.

She was perfect to Sally. She looked good in her uniform, even at the end of the day, and as Sally slowly inched nearer to her, she could smell her scent: fresh green and new. It reminded her of the mornings when she was on morning shift at school.

Those mornings were cold. The dark, still and moody night clung on before the sun came up and bathed the deep black with her golden warmth that permeated through to the earth. Weaving her soil with a golden glory that made all things fertile. All things green, all growing things glow. Mary was those perfect mornings.

She was that deep darkness before sunrise. That brilliant warm glow of the rising sun. She was the rich gold encased in the black soil. She was all those things, and more.

And as she wiped the Kool Aid from her chin, Sally found that she could not take her eyes of those lips. They were full, stained red and round and drew her in. They glistened from the flavoured drink that Mary tried to lick off, and Sally watched.

Instinctively, Sally reached out a hand. Mary froze. The hand gently touched her own sweaty palms - and everything vanished.

No longer was she aware of her aunt Ivy bustling around the house with her broom. No longer could she hear the thunder rumbling in the distance or feel the slick still of the house. All she could see and hear and feel, was *her*.

And the world held its breath.

Sally stepped in too close. Her frizzy brown hair was close enough for Mary to smell her hair oil. Her face was close enough for Mary to count the freckles on her nose - if she wanted to. But Sally's eyes were closed. And as she leaned in, Mary kept her own eyes wide open. For if she didn't see it for herself, she'd struggle to believe the lies her brain would be feeding her later. She'd struggle to believe what was going to happen - what *was* happening. Sally was close enough to feel, close enough to touch.

Their lips barely touched. Feather soft skin brushed hers for the briefest moment, and as it did, the sky flashed. An almighty crack echoed through the surrounding mountains, as from the heavens fell a curtain of rain.

And it fell in biblical proportions. Mary's heart erupted like a volcano spilling hot pleasurable heat. Liquid lava flowed, heating her extremities, crashing and cascading round her veins, fantastically, dangerously out of control. She flushed hot as Sally jerked away, startled by the sudden dramatic turn of events.

The rain poured down. By the bucket full, from the heavens, glass-like and jagged, ricocheted off the ground and splintered into bullet-like fragments which shot off in multiple directions. Ripping through branches of trees; tearing through the undergrowth, peppering holes through the canopies of green, and pounding onto the ground with an unknown fury. Fractures appeared in the black soil that quickly filled with gushing rain; transforming fissures into rushing rivers.

And reality flooded in.

Mary held her gaze as they stood there in the room. The violence of the storm their backdrop, they saw each other for the first time. Unwilling to let Sally's hand go, Mary smiled. She watched while Sally's freckles dipped and danced as she laughed, sounding like church bells chiming in glorious celebration as Pastor Cecil Perry called folk to church on Sundays.

And Mary realised that she had never, in her whole life, seen such a beautiful sight. And even though she had no words, even though the sky was crumbling, and the earth was melting from the force of the rain, and even though their little house might be washed away in the violence of Nature. There was nowhere she would rather be, than standing in her room, watching the wrath of the world, with her.

Sally remembered. She scanned the skies, searching for any sign. Her feet hurt, and her arm ached. There were no marks on it, no obvious wounds. It was not scratched, burned or blistered in anyway. Running her hand on it made it tingle but still didn't take away the dull ache that was increasing. She rubbed it harder and harder, squeezing it to ease the internal pain.

Casting her eyes back to the orange skies, she wondered how on earth she was going to make it back home. Meredith must surely be missing her by now, and Owen, well. Clare had no love for Owen. She may not have said much but she could feel the hate rolling off her in droves.

She kept moving forward. One foot in front of the other. The black woods were behind her, far behind her. Whenever she had entered, she had always come at the edge of the woods.

When she was younger there was something comforting about the protective canopy of those branches, now all she felt was the dark presence of the trees whose beady eyes watched her from a distance.

She squinted and looked off into the hazy warm. Sweat trickled down her back as her cotton dress stuck to her skin. Shielding her eyes with her hands, she spotted it in the sky, still tracking her. Something had been following her, and it wasn't the Savannah cat. But as she lowered her gaze, she saw in the distance, a building.

It was large, even she could see that from where she was. The sun glinted off the glass roof as it stood there, bold and sturdy. Stubborn.

Her feet moved in its direction without too much prompting. One foot in front of the other, first stumbling, then as they grew steadier and more confident, they strode ahead before breaking out into a trot. Perhaps there were others there, perhaps there was water there. Or even, crazily, way or help, back. Why else would a building be there? Someone had to build it.

Its glass reflected the red of the outside but as she approached the doors, slid open electronically as the air conditioning blasted her eyes awake. A sterile plastic smell surrounded her as she gazed around, gasping for breath after her running, hot and sweaty.

It was empty, but refreshingly cool. Her dirty shoes squeaked on the crisp shiny white tiled floor. Owen had bought them for her. She was meant to go running. Something about endorphins in her brain. Her heart felt as if it shriveled slightly in her chest. Owen was always doing things like that. Thinking of her, thinking of what's best for her, thinking of

how to make her happy. Hot tears pricked as she approached the stark white unmanned reception desk.

A computer was on the white desk, still on. The cursor blinking, ready.

‘Hello?’ Her voice was weak, and too thin. She cleared her throat. The noise echoed in the still.

‘Hello?’ Stronger. Like she wanted help. She needed help. She needed to get home. She needed Clare. Clare who had never left her here in this place for so long before. The red dust was her favourite as a child. Red was her favourite colour and Clare had said she made it red especially for her. It was hers, all of it. Didn’t seem much of a gift anymore.

‘Hello?’

She walked around the desk. A water dispenser was in the corner. The plastic cup she pulled broke the silence with an echoey snap. Still no one came. Clear water bubbled into the cup which buckled slightly with the weight.

Still no one came. She walked over to the chairs near the reception, sat upright, and waited. Her eyes wandered through the glass and saw a looming shadow.

It cast a shade outside the building. She scampered on the floor and scrambled to hide behind the chairs that were pushed up against the desk. She froze as the creature cast the whole building in full shade.

She knew what it was. She could feel it. Her eyes clamped shut, refusing to look.

She waited. Her heart thumped as she struggled to control her breathing. In her head she tried a trick that always seemed to work as a child. She curled up as small as she could and imagined herself invisible. If I can’t see them, they can’t see me, I can’t see them, they can’t see me, she silently chanted to herself.

After some moments, she opened her eyes. It was gone. Trembling with relief, she sat. It was gone.

Taking some moments to steady her heart, she sat back and just breathed. And as she breathed her eyes flitted to her surroundings in the white. And she saw, that, she wasn’t alone.

Saly could see ghostly figures. These must be the lost souls. The screams and the whispering voices that she had always heard belonged to these poor creatures. Saly didn’t see them fully, but mostly felt them, hovering in her peripheral vision. Faces yawned out in despair. The phantom-like figure drifted past. Unaware of Saly as they were of anything in that place. Was there any real hope of them being saved? Would she recognise her mother after so long? Uncle Glanford? She wasn’t so sure.

Perhaps they were just like her, alive somewhere else. The half-formed consciousness of busy people living what they thought were full lives, when in fact what they were, were half formed ghost people. Ghost people, marrying other ghost people, living ghost lives in which no one really saw them because they were half here and half there, which meant that really, they were nowhere. They were in this No Man's Land. They didn't truly belong anywhere. They just floated in and out of a sort of pretend life. Were these the ones she was supposed to be saving?

Sally watched them as they floated in and around the white furnishings. How could she possibly save them when she couldn't even save herself? What hope did she really have without Clare anyway?

It was dark. The wind whispered in the breeze as Parkie found a spot outside Mary's window. After the fiasco of the party, he decided he would have her anyway. He wasn't about to be humiliated again, not by Mary or any other fool-fool girl. He had had enough of her teasing and her playing, today he would be a man. Today he would be brave and fearless, and his friends would clap him on the back for conquering the unconquerable.

From his perch in the tree, he began to creep closer to the window. White net curtains billowed out into the deep black like innocent angels' wings.

Her room was still and dark; the whole house was silent. Crickets chirruped and fireflies flashed each other in the black bushes.

It was a hot and muggy night. Parkie's face was damp with sweat. Reaching out his hand, he adjusted his trousers to a more comfortable position. His red pointy tongue shot out like a snake, licking his lip, nervous but excited at the same time. He could see her from under her thin bed sheet and guessed she was probably naked. Tonight. It would be tonight.

He leaned in further and slithered onto the ledge of her bedroom window. As silently as he could, he heaved the wooden frame. It shuddered and he froze. Ears sharp, he held his breath. The shrieks of the crickets rang out into the black as the wind blew through the trees, a lullaby soothing his nerves and cooling his heat.

Trying again, he eased the window up further; gently pushed it far enough so he could scramble in.

He stood tall beside her bed. She lay still and silent as he watched her. She was beautiful. A virgin Madonna.

Her caramel skin was smooth in the moonlight. And her lashes, long and thick, reminded him of a movie star. He bent lower towards her sleeping form and, boldly reaching, his hands

brushed her hips as he slowly slipped off the sheets. She stirred. He froze. She breathed heavily. She was so beautiful lying there that he felt dizzy. The breeze from the window flowed over her body under his steady gaze she wore white lace panties that were high-waisted. Parkie could see the curve of her inner thigh.

Unable to help himself any longer, he climbed up on her bed and straddled her as he reached out his hands. She was smooth and cool.

She jerked awake. Her voice snatched from her by panic, she gasped in shock as he hushed her gently as one does a child. He smiled a toothy grin as she recoiled in horror.

But he had to be quick. His hand flew to her mouth to prevent her screams. 'We don't want fi wake everybody,' he whispered as his other hand began to unzip his trousers. Her eyes were wide in fear, flicking to the door, willing someone to come in. Big dark eyes, bugging out of her head, as her body began to thrash about. Parkie deftly unzipped his trousers down with one hand and pushed them to his knees.

She tried to scream as he clamped his hand down harder on her mouth. Struggling to breathe, silent tears ran from the corner of her eyes in fear, frustration and anger. He was still clapping her mouth with one hand and running his other hand hungrily over her inner thighs.

He grabbed her wrist with one hand and she began to punch and kick. Pain registered. He started in shock. Surprised by her strength. He twisted her arm as hard as he could while she whimpered and flopped on the bed, for now his pride was wounded.

Despite her desperate muffled sobs, he would have her. She was strong, but his twisting of her wrist went someway to taming the wild thing.

Suddenly pain shot through his hand and he stifled his own scream. She bit him and bared her teeth like an animal.

He grabbed a handful of her black hair, pulled it as far back as he could so her head was tilted. She screamed in between strangled sobs, arms flailing, alerting her family downstairs. She could hear footsteps thundering towards her room. Parkie, aware that he was running out of time, planted a rough kiss upon her lips.

She bit down again hard, and blood ran freely, welling up in both their mouths. He cursed, pulled away and clambered off her body whilst pulling up his trousers. As he leaned back, she shot upwards in a sitting position, blood trickling down her inner thighs. She rolled up a fist and punched him hard. Screaming hysterically as each thump landed. She screamed and wailed, flinging well aimed punches. Her bedroom door burst open and Aunt Ivy thundered towards Mary.

Parkie flew out of the window like lightning and fell roughly into the waiting branch of the tamarind tree. Missing his footing, he fell out of the tree and landed on the ground with a hard thud. Ivy and Mary were wailing as other members of the family came into her room and rushed to the window. Winded and with stars dancing around the corner of his eyes, he saw light flood the veranda. He didn't have time. He scampered to his feet, kicking up leaves around him and fled into black of the underbrush whilst muttering under his breath, 'frigid little bitch.'

Clare

It was clear what she needed to do. And the more she looked at him on that sofa, snoring, spit dribbling out of the corner of his mouth, his paunch wobbling with each snore, the more the disgust welled up inside her. She couldn't wait any longer. The heat from Saly seemed to flow through her into the now, making her brain overheat and her fingers twitch.

It started in her then. Struck suddenly like a match and began a fierce burning that could not be put out. It was time. Saly could feel it too. She was sure. It was *that* strong.

The evening drew on. Meredith was asleep in her room. Clare sat in Saly and Owen's bedroom reminding herself that Saly wanted him gone too. She could feel it. The disgust for him rolled off her in drives as well. She'd be doing them both a favour.

She would be having a shower, climbing into bed. And then he would come to bed. Unwashed and snore beside her, breathe all over her, take up more room than he should. The thought of doing it made her heartbeat pop like a hit of strong whisky. She reached under her pillow and pulled it out.

It was smooth, cool and shiny. Her fingerprints were already on it from the constant pawing at it throughout the night as she lay awake. Thinking, thinking, thinking. She would need to plan this right. Listening to his snoring. Listening to his snoring, listening to his snoring.

Smoothing away the marks, she walked over to the wardrobe. Saly's clothes were hung up neatly. Her flower dresses, her thin cotton blouses and her fluttery skirts that billowed in the breeze as she walked. She flicked the lighter and held it to them hem of a pale lacy pink dress that was saved for best. Probably a church dress. Seemed fitting it should go first.

It sparked up fast. Then flamed up to a bright, golden glow in the gloom, a flickering reflection in her eyes, and up the wooden wardrobe. She could do with a new wardrobe anyway. It spread fast.

Flames hopped from one dress to another, dancing across the width of the wardrobe, eating through all and hungry as hell.

It went up like tissue paper and in less than half a minute Saly's clothes were raging. The closet started to bubble and blister as the varnish burned away like a layer of skin. Clare was calm as she watched. The more it blazed, the less angry she felt. It was as if she was being cleansed in holy fire.

And as it crackled and spat, she stood back and watched her masterpiece come to life. It whistled through the wood, the increasing pitch of its scream raised above the wardrobe and

began licking at the ceiling. The flames reflected in her excited eyes as she stepped back from the heat. Shadows were flung across the room as the netted curtain caught and dripped like burning blobs of candy.

Clare took a few steps back, calmly walked out of the bedroom and shut the door. Black smoke pumped in the crack under the door flanked by an orange glow. The door heated up, the metal handle began to slightly glow as devouring flames licked its underneath.

She turned and walked towards Meredith's room. Calmly, she opened the door, scooped the sleeping child into her arms and silently slipped down the stairs passing still snoring Owen on the sofa.

They stepped out into the crisp night air. Turning quietly, and thankful that she remembered such a detail, she slipped back into the house to make sure all the internal doors were wide open, and then as she walked out of the front door, she gently closed it. She had even remembered the key. Filching it from her pocket, she placed it calmly in the lock, and turned.

The satisfying click it made, her smile slightly before adjusting with the weight of Meredith and walked towards the nearby park.

The red paint on the front door bubbled, blackened and blistered. Thick black smoke pumped out of the secret gaps of the window frames and the house gasped for breath. Meredith, half asleep, watched as the paintwork blackened and yellow-white flames licked and curled around the door. Her home roared as the serpent-like fire snaked its way up and around their home, trying to satisfy its insatiable appetite. It roared and belched before the bedroom blew out flinging broken glass in all directions. Meredith and her mother were clear across the road as Clare walked away. Briefly, before they turned around the corner in the cool of the night, Meredith saw a solitary shadow of a figure behind the living room curtains. It came frantically to the window and tugged at the catch before being completely engulfed by orange, yellow and red flames. And in the center of that, curling around the wheezing brick building, watching her walk away were two, emerald-green clever eyes that reminded her very much of the Savannah cat.

Sally and Clare were children when Clare showed her another animal. The dragon was all fire and flame. Clare had told her it was just a baby, but for a baby, even she could see it was dangerous. Her mother wouldn't want her playing with something like this.

'Your mother isn't here,' she had said with a sly smile.

Clare was always braver than Saly - she knew that. And Saly should be grateful that she even had a friend, a sister. In the other world where the mother was, there was friend, no sister. Just Saly and her mother Mary. But Clare had come to her rescue. Clare had said she heard the yearnings of her heart and answered them. Clare had said that she was better than an identical sister, they were closer, much closer. And Clare had promised to show Saly amazing and wonderful things. And she was right. This was indeed amazing and wonderful, but it was also huge and also a teeny bit scary.

‘Touch it!’ Clare had said as she strode up to the beast. Its large oblong-like body was like a row of burning terraced houses. All Saly could see were the roiling, rolling bright flames licking its form. Its back was clearly defined among the fire, as were its strong legs, its claws and a huge tail stretched out behind in a streak of yellow flame. The fire snapped and crackled merrily as Saly watched.

What if it burned her hand? What if it decided to blow heat and fire in her face. Her skin would melt off her bones like chocolate. But Clare was her only friend she didn’t like it when Clare got cross.

Besides, she liked Clare. Clare was magical. There were times that Clare was around, and no one saw. Times when her mother was making her porridge for breakfast and Clare, sitting on the chair at the table, sneered and gagged as if she was being sick, which made Saly fall about laughing. They had become firm friends and she didn’t want to ruin that. Clare was just trying to make her happy.

Saly was sitting alone on the bench. No one had wanted to play with her. She had even had the courage to go and ask a couple of girls if she could play their game, but they just laughed and ran off.

The closest she came to play was when they were all playing kiss chase and so, she thought she would just join in, run around with everyone else. And it seemed like it worked at first. Until she realised that no one was chasing her. And if she chased a boy pretending to kiss him, there was no way she was ever going to *really* kiss a boy! He ran away screaming like she was going to kill him. And the others fell about laughing. They ran from her as if she was the worst, scariest, most disgusting thing in the world. It was them against her. She tried to laugh too but felt the hot tears prick at the back of her eyes, which would make it a million times worse. So, pretending she was out of breath, she ran slowly over to the bench and sat down blinking her tears away.

And then there was Clare.

‘Just look at the fat fuck.’

Saly turned to look at the boy nearby. It was blond, David Jones. His off-white shirt was too small and when he ran, you could see his pink belly wobbling underneath. Even *he* screamed when Saly chased him. She knew he was happy that she had replaced him as the bottom of the unpopular pile. Others suddenly didn't think he was so bad when Saly was around. Even though they said that her mother ate dog poop for dinner. Even though they said she was dirty and needed a good bath. Saly had forgiven them, she would have forgiven them anything if she could just get one of them to be her friend.

'His trousers are so tight they're probably cutting off his blood supply. Just look at his face!'

David was wheezing as he half ran. He half-skipped, half-walked as he made after Kelly Miller who ran off easily. All the boys wanted to kiss Kelly Miller. She was lingering around Michael Mason waiting for him to chase her, which he didn't. He waited until it was girls after boys. All the girls wanted to kiss him, he could pick anyone he wanted and so, of course, he got tantalisingly close enough to all the girls and whooped excitedly as they tried to chase him. All except Saly. She knew better than to try with him. David was her best bet, and even that failed miserably.

'Who wants to kiss that fat fuck anyway? No one, that's who. Just look at him.'

Saly watched as all the girls gave him a wide berth. Some of the boys were his friend, after all, he was boy who could play football.

'He's not normal. He can't run properly! For fuck's sake, he can't even breathe properly!'

Clare looked at the boy as she stooped over, hands on his knees puffing away. His chubby hand clasped his side as if it was going to split into two at any moment.

'And you wanted to kiss that?' She laughed a loud raucous laugh. Saly smiled timidly before catching her laugh. She had no idea where this girl arrived from, but she didn't care. The giggling turned into laughing and before she knew it, Saly was holding her stomach laughing out loud, tears streaming down her eyes as they watched fat David chasing the girls, *any* girl to kiss.

'There's no way he's going to catch one!' The girl had said between her belly ache laughter.

'They can walk faster than he can run! Can you imagine him pushing up those sweaty lips?'

Saly laughed and laughed. And it felt good. Tears streamed down her eyes as she held onto her stomach, watching David Jones getting redder and redder before he took out his

inhaler from his trouser pocket and take a couple of puffs. Which just made the girls howl even more.

Just then, the whistle blew for the students to line up for class. Saly wiped the tears from her eyes and stood up from the bench, but when she looked beside her for her friend, she was gone.

Life was always more fun with Clare around. Saly had asked her where she went, and Clare said she had gone back to no man's land. It was somewhere where it never rained, and it was always hot. It sounded just like the sort of place Saly was desperate to go to. Superheroes lived there. People could go invisible; they could run at the speed of light and they could fly. Saly had always wanted to fly and so at the mention of that word, her heart had skipped a beat. Clare felt it too, and smiled, she had her.

It had taken Saly a while to convince Clare to take her to this magical kingdom. Clare also had promised she would give her some of these abilities that Saly so desperately wanted.

And so, after what seemed like months of playing and talking and being the best of friends, finally Clare took Saly to her world, No Man's Land, and introduced her to one of the most magical beasts she could find. The Fire Dragon.

'Touch it!' Clare prompted. Saly reached out a hand that trembled nervously beneath the wild animal whose hide blazed and burned in the heat of the red sun. The very air around it seems to shimmer and bend around its vast form. The corners of the world curved to allow for its bulk. Saly's heart pounded as her shaking hand reluctantly began to stretch towards it. Fire snapped a warning as her small brown hand got closer to its hide. Its long neck bent round and stretched to see Saly as she stood to its back, and viewed her with sharp, clever green eyes.

'Clever green eyes.' Saly muttered as her hand finally touched the writhing flames of its body. Snatching it back, expecting it to be hot, she was surprised when it was just warm, and so, more boldly, she reached again and stroked the wild animal before her.

Its green eyes, sharp and intelligent, viewed her as Saly's little brown hand seemed engulfed in the flames of its body. The flames writhed and burned. In places, it was white hot but it glinted blue in others. Pushing her hand further, she managed to hook her fingers gently under what she thought were scales, scales that were a fiery gold in some places, yet electric blue in others.

'Wow,' she said in awe as Clare beamed at her.

'It's still a baby, big as he is, but he is going to be massive!'

‘How massive?’

‘Massive!’ Clare’s eyes went wide as if that was enough to tell Saly just how big the creature could get.

The sharp eyes pinned Saly with a piercing gaze she tried to ignore, but those emerald eyes burned a hole in her memory so she would never ever forget. Those eyes, the eyes of the dragon, were the same eyes as the Savannah cat.

Parkie's house

Clare pounded on the only door that she knew. Late as it was, there was a soft light burning in the porch. He always left a light on.

There was no reply, so she banged harder to wake the old man up. Moments later she heard him shouting. 'Alright! Alright! Me a come!'

It was late. Although Meredith was slumped heavily over Clare's shoulders, she knew that she was awake. Goosebumps rippled over the little girls' arms, but Clare's eyes were wild with excitement.

Slowly, the old man in the wheelchair got to the door and opened it. He looked confused, looking her up and down before a slow realisation of who she was crept across his face.

'Wha-?' Come in, come in.' Swinging the large door outwards, Parkie moved his chair and made way for them to enter.

Clare stumbled into the small porch. In the dim light he saw her face, windswept and spilling over with tears - nostrils flaring slightly as the smell of urine, she swirled around the old, unshaved man.

'What the...?' was all the words that escaped from his mouth as he watched her hobble into the living room as she placed Meredith slowly and carefully onto the sofa. The room was dark and so Parkie wheeled over to a lamp and flicked the switch. A butter yellow glow filled the room as Clare roughly fell into an easy chair beside the fireplace. Claspings her hands over her face, she stifled sobs as jumbled words spilled out of her mouth.

'I'm sorry!' she whispered. I didn't know what to do. There's a fire! There was so much smoke, I couldn't see, and my eyes,' Her eyes grew wide in realisation as she looked in horror at Parkie. 'The fire. Fire! We have to do something! Owen is in there! She screamed suddenly hysterically as she stood up and ran to the door.

'Wait, wait! Call de fire brigade!'

'Yes, yes!' and rushing back into the living room she grabbed the phone that was on a side table in the corner of the room next to the window and began to fumble with the buttons. Her hands were shaking as she tried to see the number. Parkie wheeled over to her quickly and grabbed the phone. Old fingers trembling, he dialed 999.

Clare glanced at Meredith whom she knew, was pretending to sleep on the sofa. That was fine. It would make everything easier. She pretended to busy herself checking on the child, ringing her hands in frustration and pacing around the carpeted room before finally saying

she couldn't take it anymore and rushed out of the house and back towards the burning building.

The night air hit her as she raced back, cooling her excited, heated skin. She could taste the thick black smoke in the air as she ran. Fists pumping urgently, she ran, bare feet clapping the pavement. And as she turned the corner.

Her mouth gaped open and her eyes shone in glee. She had done it. She had created something larger than herself. It breathed, it roared, and it consumed. It was alive in this world. She had brought it with her. And with each brick and piece of timber that burned and blistered in the heat she felt the release. Her ties to that place were being burned away brick by brick. Her guilt of keeping Saly, also blasted away in the furnace. It was as if a large snake curled around her chest, getting tighter and tighter, and as she saw the enormous fire breathing dragon with clever green eyes, rise through the house, its black tail smoking into the grey muddy sky, it released that tightening snake. She could finally breathe.

The dragon's body, made mostly of flames, engulfed the small brick house that shrunk pathetically under the weight. The roof had fallen in exposing its rib cage, and even from this distance Clare knew that the heart of the house had been burned out. The dragon roared as it saw her approaching, flames spitting out onto the trimmed grass of the front garden, below. A crowd gathered. And why wouldn't they? The dragon was magnificent. She was witnessing Death in all his glory. The shape shifter. Her Savannah cat had a more dangerous form now. One that was more useful to her.

Moments later a fire engine screamed around the corner. People made way as men in uniform raced out of the truck. A cream hose was ripped out of the side of the engine as frantic hands held the hose and pointed it at the fire. Water blasted out and flew through the broken window as Clare thought about the carpets that were being drenched. The sodden easy chair that Owen loved to sleep in so much. The burning body.

She imagined that his pure white skin was transformed to black, his lips blistered and popped in the heat before being burned off completely to reveal hard white teeth that would too, turn black.

His head would be bald from his hair being singed off. And she wondered what had happened to his eyeballs. Would they burst in the heat and fizz into the hot atmosphere? Would they pop and the dribble onto his cheeks? The milky white jelly substance evaporating in the heat? Standing back, she enjoyed the show and imagined while Parkie wheeled up next to her.

He offered her no words of comfort. She didn't need any.

‘You gonna stay with me. Y’hear?’

He was right. Of course, he was. She had no choice. She would need to sit, and think, after all, this was impulsive. For all that thinking and thinking and thinking. She had just decided to act. Just like that. She smiled to herself as the firemen broke down the front door and entered the house. At least he was gone. At least she didn’t have to sleep with him. At least it was now just the girls. And as she looked up at the snake-like dragon curling around the charred house, the clever, sharp eyes held her gaze before slowly disappearing around the chimney stack and in the pulsating black smoke.

Parkie sat on his veranda. His father was out. His father was always out. At 15, he didn’t really have any real memory of his mother. Anytime he had mentioned her, his father’s face turned stony cold.

Apparently, she had had an affair with the pastor down the road. Caused a huge scandal. His father had literally thrown her out for all to see. Her skinny black legs sprawling on the dry stony ground as the locals looked on. He cursed her out to a growing crowd, threw as many clothes as he could grasp in his fury. He even got a jug of water and threw it at her, jug and all, which smashed on the side of her head. Parkie remembered thinking how much her head bled.

All the while she was crying and pleading with his dad. Parkie had long thought he had regretted not listening to her. He acted in anger. But no one expected her to leave her child. Simon James Parkinson was the two-year-old she left, Parkie. Neither he, nor his father, saw her again.

The green of the surrounding trees looked bright against the grey clouds. His eye pulsed in pain. Remembering the punch she had given him, he scowled. Stupid bitch. She wasn’t even that good. He told his friends all about it at school though, how he rode the bitch while she bucked like a wild thing. They howled with laughter when he told them how she liked it rough, and clapped him on the back, congratulated him. Even though he didn’t feel it was as big a victory as he thought it would be. He was expecting her to be a little more grateful, but he had not seen her since.

She was older than him, and was in the more senior playground, but he still expected to see her around. Maybe even have a repeat performance. She was good for his reputation, but already, he was setting his eyes on someone else, it was expected. He could hardly keep himself just for one woman.

Parkie could feel his skin prickling in anticipation, and casting his eyes into the distance, he could see a sheet of rain fast approaching. Licking his still sore lips, he squinted, stood, about to go into his house, when he saw them. He knew pretty much everyone in his neighbourhood, and he had never seen these girls before.

The girls were on the dirt path, walking towards him. He stood, shaded his eyes out of habit rather than there being any sun glaring in them, and looked closer. He recognised them, or so he thought. They walked with purpose. One had on a white string vest, her white bra underneath looked grey with sweat and dirt. Cut of jeans exposed muscular brown thighs, strong, scarred shins and bare feet covered in the dry dust. Parkie rested his hands on his hips as he watched them approach.

The other girl had longer cut of jeans but was also bare footed. An oversized t-shirt hung from her shoulders and her hair, roughly plaited in two, stood erect upon her head. Her eyes were focused, furious, and on Parkie. Something was wrong.

Their faces were fixed, brows furrowed, and they stared. The one on the left curled her lip in a sneer as they came closer and closer, unflinching as they walked on the sharp stones surrounding his house. The girl on the right swung a baseball bat menacingly in her arms and as their strides became quicker, they broke into a trot, gallop and then a more frenzied run.

Parkie froze. He had no idea who these women were, but it didn't look good. Even he could see that and as he watched them break into a run, and he too, whizzed round, darted into his house and slammed shut the iron front grate.

Scurrying to the cabinet in the corner of the room, his fingers fumbled for the front door keys. Grabbing them, ran to the grate, and tried forced them roughly into the hole with his trembling hand.

A hard kick to the security door's metal bars made it sing as it sprung open and banged into Parkie's face, forcing him backwards. He had forgotten to lock it.

Seconds after he heard, rather than saw, the whizzing of the bat above his head came down hard. He fell to the ground as pain erupted. The attack was swiftly followed by a kick in the stomach. Unable to breathe, he felt the bat land heavily on the base of his back followed by an ear-splitting crack.

Pain shot up to his brain as he lay on the floor unable to move, his warm blood pooling. One kick was swiftly followed by another and another as the strangers relentlessly beat him. His eye began swelling. The bat struck him again as he curled into a foetal position. He concentrated on breathing in and out as he listened to the cracking of his bones breaking.

It seemed like moments later that Parkie opened his eyes to a white, sterile room. His ears, straining to work, could hear footsteps. People were busy around him. A window nearby was open and a cool breeze washed in, flowing over his bare arms and face. He was numb. Slowly, he became aware of another presence in the room.

Opening a fat eye, he squinted to see a figure sat beside him, drink in hand, snoring. It was his dad. It was then that Parkie swallowed hard, if his dad was there, that must mean things were serious. His father never turned up for anything in his whole life. And as he came back slowly to his senses, he realised that he was in hospital. A couple of rass girls had put him in hospital.

It was just eight weeks before Parkie found himself back at home, in a wheelchair. The doctors had said he needed to stay longer but Coolie-Man wasn't having any of it. 'The pot was empty' he told Parkie several times with his arms gestured outwards. 'You skin me alive.' Parkie nodded. When he was asked if he remembered what happened, he said everything was blank. And eventually, they had accepted it as truth. He never saw those girls again either, although, he never went back to school. The wheelchair that Coolie-Man bought was the cheapest one he could find. The wheels were rusting and hurt his hands if he held them too tight. Coolie-Man went from being a free man, to being Parkie's carer. The doctors had described Paraplegia, and although Parkie listened, he didn't really understand. Their muffled voices went on and on describing exactly what state his body was in, but all he heard was that he would never walk again. What else did he need to know?

He would need nappies and he would never have sex again. All dignity gone. His life was over. All the cures and help they discussed cost money. Money neither he nor Coolie-Man had.

The wheelchair wouldn't fit on the school bus and he could hardly wheel himself the two miles to school. All he could do was sit on the veranda and watch others live their lives.

When night-time came, he would leave the veranda light on. Just in case. If those girls came back, he would damn well see them and get his own baseball bat to put them. He would swing that thing harder than they ever did, feel the satisfying crack as he smashed it into their faces. He would watch gleefully as their blood ran freely in the dirt while he stood over them and laughed. A couple of girls coming to beat him up? He spent nights reliving, revisiting and adjusting it to a version where he was the victor and they were his victims. Even though he knew that they would never come back, even though he knew in his wheelchair, he wouldn't be standing over anyone.

Young Saly

The afternoon was hot and stuffy. Saly sat listening quietly to Mr Cairns as he read aloud to the class about the Hobbit's clever brown fingers. Warm orange floated behind her eyelids as her head rested on the desk.

'And that is where we shall leave it boys and girls, home time.' He stifled a yawn. Reading on a sunny afternoon always made him tired. Yawns and stretches filled the room as the mimicking children appeared to wake up and get themselves ready to be picked up by parents. Glancing outside the window, he could see year 6 parents already gathering on the playground and the year 1's being led out by Miss Cheal.

'Alright class, please collect your things from your peg and stand behind your desk.' His throat was raspy. It had been a long day and he was desperate for a cigarette and coffee. As the students noisily got their belongings, Mr Cairns reached out to his coffee cup on his desk. Flinching at the cold liquid, he slurped it anyway.

'Justin Reynolds! Please stop that!' His gravelly voice boomed as his slit eyes saw everything that red haired boy did. Justin froze with his index finger shoved too far up his nose. Maria scowled. He had been known to force his finger so far up the little cavity that he caused it to bleed. Gave the school nurse something to do instead of reading her magazine and drinking cups of tea. In disgust, Maria pushed her glasses further up her nose as she edged closer to her Dawn.

Justin was, the class fleabag that no one really wanted to sit next to, and this year it was Dawn who had drawn the short straw.

Kelly Miller, perfect as always, stood straight, nose in the air and ready for Mr Cairns to lead them out. Her blonde ponytail hung neatly at the back of her head and swung slightly as she straightened up. Her high peach-blossom cheeks were reminiscent of the smooth hyde of a piglet as she trotted to the open door, bouncing along as she did in Saturday morning pony club. Her rucksack balanced perfectly, her right pink hand clasped her pink folder with plastic wallets, dividers and pink biro pens hooked over the ring binder, framed by lightly polished pink nails that teachers never seemed to notice.

'Ok, line up by the door. *Quietly.*' The day couldn't end soon enough. He opened the wooden draw on the left of his desk, searching for his lighter, routinely grabbing his packet of cigarettes as the children bustled in pairs to the doors which led onto the playground.

'Settle down, settle down.' He muttered more out of habit than anything else. The battered box he was looking for fell into his hands from a small shelf that was tucked away at the back

of the draw. Clasp ing it tightly, he squashed the cigarette box as small as he could, careful not to ruin the little white sticks, then slipped it into his pocket. He strode over to the door leading the children out onto the playground. His baggy supermarket shop-bought trousers hung loosely around his wide waist, as he straightened the tail of his tie. Shielding his small tired eyes with his aged hand, he halted in the glare of the sun whilst his eyes adjusted before stepping out onto the tarmac.

Saly stood at the back of the line. The class had an off number, no one wanted to be her friend. She hated school but was getting used to hating it, 'the human being can endure most things.' She had heard on a television programme once, but she wasn't sure if that counted school and mean kids. Out of all the kids that others had been mean to, she was at the bottom. Behind the fleabag Jamie and the fat boy David.

It was at that moment that David stood in front of her in the line. She took a slight step backwards to give him room as Mr Cairns led the class out onto the playground. The straight line had gaps as they walked at different paces; and Saly waited until it moved enough for her to start. Like a duck followed by ducklings, Mr Cairns led them out.

One by one, as he recognised the parents, he called the child and dutifully handed the precious one over - all the while fingering his packet of cigarettes. He squinted in the sun and his line dwindled as parents disappeared taking their belongings with them. It had been a long day. The playground emptied. He turned around to see that two of the students were still there. Saly and David.

'Ok you two, you're benched. I'm sure your parents will be along shortly,' he said, motioning for them to take a seat. He would need to wait a little bit longer; irritated, he didn't see why he needed to wait outside in the elements with them, he'd go to the cool of his classroom. And perhaps nip round the back of the school gates and light up.

Saly could see the red thread veins at the end of his nose. His blue shirt was wet at the back with sweat, and his hair, usually neatly slicked down with a side parting, had come loose and was flopping slightly over his forehead. He turned, feet jutting outwards, hands clasped behind his back, and strolled back into the school.

David sat on the wooden bench looking morosely at the empty gate and the road beyond. His mother wasn't usually late. Breathing heavily in frustration, he sighed, blowing his floppy hair which hung over his forehead. His sandy hair flew up with the gust of breath giving him a moment's reprieve. Saly looked at him sweating and felt dribbles of water forming on her own back.

‘Your mum late?’ She asked. He was on his own, perhaps he would speak to her. She had tried Justin before on several occasions, but not David. David might be different.

‘My mum isn’t normally late. I don’t know what’s happened to her.’ Her eyes watched David from slitted corners, she would be casual, like it was normal for her to talk to him.

‘I’m not talking to you.’ He said without meeting her eyes.

‘Why not?’

‘Because.’

Saly swung her legs underneath the bench and frowned in the heat.

‘But Kelly Miller, Dawn or any of the others aren’t here.’

‘So?’ He snapped and shuffled further away on the bench from her. ‘Mum said I’m not to talk to you either, no one wants to talk to you.’

‘Why not?’ She squinted, sweating in the sun. He didn’t reply. ‘Don’t worry,’ Saly tried to hold a conversation anyway. Perhaps he would just talk to her. ‘I’m sure your mum will be here soon.’

‘What do you know about it?’ He snapped without taking his eyes off the iron gate. Saly swallowed hard. Perhaps he had a bad day, and maybe he just needs a friend to talk to. She could understand that.

‘Well, my mum is never late to collect me. She says that if she’s ever late, I should know that she would be rushing to pick me up as soon as she can and that she would never be long, she said I’m to wait for her in the playground and she’ll be there before I know it.’

David said nothing. ‘So I reckon it’s the same with your mother.’

‘My mother is nothing like your mother!’ He forced through gritted teeth. ‘My mother isn’t a nigger. She’s normal.’

Saly’s heart stopped as her face flushed. It flamed back to life again, hammering too hard in her chest as hot tears threatened. Her eyes fell onto the concrete floor as she watched her own black shoes dangling from the bench while the silence stretched between them. Her face suddenly felt hot with anger. The sun bore down on her black skin as it tingled. She took a long deep breath with her eyes closed and composed herself.

‘No. Your mother’s not a nigger, she’s a fuckin’ whore,’ she said, just loud enough for him to hear. David’s eyes shot at her and widened.

‘What did you say?’

‘She ain’t even married, is she?’ Saly turned to look at David directly in the eyes.

‘Where’s your daddy? Hmm? You don’t even know. I don’t reckon no one knows that answer to that *particular* puzzle. That’s ‘cos your momma is a whore. Whores don’t care if

they don't know who they sleep with. And your bastard brothers and sisters? Six of you ain't there? Cos your mother's breeding like a rabbit. That's what whores do. Bet she's got another one in her belly, getting it ready to pop out soon.' She said matter-of-factly. 'Not her fault, probably can't help it.' She added as an afterthought as her eyes roamed the playground nonchalantly. David's bottom lip began to tremble as he his eyes scanned the playground for a teacher. Mr Cairn's shadow could be seen at his desk with his draw open, shuffling his hands around.

'You can't say that! I'm gonna tell!'

A broad smile crept on Saly's mouth and her eyes sparkled with glee.

'Yeah? Who you gonna tell? And who's gonna believe you?' She reached inside her pocket and pulled out a green plastic lighter, flicking it. David's eyes grew wide as she saw what she had in her fingers.

'Where did you get that?'

Saly's fingers flicked the lighter on and off so the flame sprang up and whispered out, sprang up and then whispered out again. David breathed deeply, unable to take his eyes off the orange flame that fluttered in the breeze. Saly sidled closer. Her lips were so close to his ear that her breath fluttered uncomfortably next to his skin. He flinched.

'If you tell,' she whispered, smiling. 'Shall I tell you what I'm gonna do you?'

David swallowed hard, his breath short sharp shocks, staring at the glittering grey concrete at his feet, and Clare smiled with Saly's mouth. 'If you tell anyone what I said, I'm gonna take this lighter...' she held it to the sleeve of his t-shirt and flicked it on. David pulled away sharply as he felt the heat on his flesh, eyes wide. He began to cry.

Just then, his mother materialised at the black iron playground, huffing and puffing. They shared a redness of chubby cheeks that wobbled as she moved, her pregnant belly supported by her left hand. He didn't wait until she reached him but grabbed his bag and ran. His stomach wobbling as he ran lopsided as fast as he could, nearly falling in his desperation to get away from Saly.

'Bye David!' she sing-songed after him from the park bench, smiling and flicking the lighter, waiting for her mother, while watching Mr Cairns through the classroom window searching his desk drawer for his plastic green lighter.

Clare

The police and the fire brigade screeched on the scene. Eventually Owen was bagged up and taken away on a stretcher. A smile fluttered on her lips. *Finally*, he out of the way. She had spent so long watching from the other side, so long listening to Saly simpering and giving into his every need. She'd been in that God-forsaken place, abandoned by Saly, after she had saved her. It seemed too good to be true, he was gone! *Finally* gone.

Anger sparked within her. It was *she* who had saved her in the playground, given her not only a friend but had defended her against those who threatened to hurt her. And it was *she* who introduced her to the magic! And then, after that morning, the one where Super Saly took flight, that was the beginning of the end. That was when Saly was made to get rid of Clare. And that was when Clare had decided that she would bide her time. She would wait until it was her turn, because there *was* no getting rid of her. They were stuck with each other whether she liked it or not. And now, it was her turn. Closer than identical twins, they had to share. He didn't seem to understand that.

They had no choice but to stay with Parkie. In his own way, tried to accommodate them. He got up early and made them breakfast. Fussed around them watching television with cups of tea and Jamaican ginger cake. But, unable to cope long term, he called in reinforcements. Ivy.

When Clare heard, she pursed her lips. The conversation hadn't gone as he wanted. He had started all wrong. He came in from The West Indian Club, wheeled himself in through the widened entrance, sniffing, expecting.

The television blared out cartoons while Meredith and Clare sat on the sofa. He wheeled himself into the living room and waited for a greeting that didn't come. He frowned. This wasn't how things were supposed to be. Saly hadn't been what he thought she was. She was a woman, a wife. It never occurred to him that he might not behave like one. He had even entertained the idea of her staying and looking after him. She should be grateful that he had taken both her and her pickney in, when he really didn't have to. No, she didn't seem to be grateful at all.

'Saly?'

She didn't respond. Her eyes remained fixed on the television. If he didn't know any better, he wouldn't know that she was a living breathing person - she sat there, stone-still.

‘Saly?’ A little louder that time caught her attention. She smiled meekly at the old man as he wheeled closer, closer than she felt comfortable with. She turned and met his gaze head on, waited.

‘Me na smell nuttin?’ he said, concern lacing his face.

‘Excuse me?’ Sitting forward in her chair, she gave him her full attention, to which, he slowly wheeled back to give her more room.

‘It 6 o’clock’ He looked at her expectantly. Clare stared back innocently before a shadow of realisation crept over her face. He expected her to cook dinner.

‘Oh! I’m sorry, were you expecting tea?’ she asked innocently. There was no way she was cooking dinner for the old fool, especially so soon after getting rid of the last one. ‘I didn’t want to just help myself in your kitchen. A man’s kitchen is his castle and all that.’ She smiled up at him as he looked at her before she turned her attention back to the television.

‘Oh, well, of course you can help yourself to anything!’ he said brightly at the anticipation of a woman cooking for him. In the two weeks she had spent there, she hadn’t once offered to cook dinner for them all. It was all him. He had exhausted his repertoire of dishes. Cheesy pasta, readymade pies and plain rice. Seeing as he was out around dinner time, he thought she might cook something. He had dropped hints that he liked West Indian food, but it seemed as though she didn’t catch them. It didn’t matter anyway, as long as it was hot and filled a space. Parkie hated doing women’s work. If he wasn’t in that damn chair, he’d have found himself a woman years ago to be working around the house making the place clean. He was an old man now and reliant on others.

The council agreed that he was entitled to help. And so had a woman coming to his home to clean once a week. He had criticised Mrs Abrego. She was forever opening the windows to let a bit of the ‘south wind in,’ she said. However, she had a heavy Spanish accent and it took a long time for Parkie to realise exactly what she was saying, for as she cleaned and tidied, she spoke Spanish at him.

‘Hola Sr. Parkinson. Voy a limpiar para el día de hoy.’ She would say, and ‘Im sólo va a abrir la ventana un poco, dejar que un poco de aire. Creo que se necesita un cambio, ya que huele a un inodoro aquí!’ He couldn’t decipher any of it, and once she realised, she said odd words in English. ‘South wind’ he took to mean that she would open the window for some air. If Saly made her stay a permanent thing, he wouldn’t need Mrs Abrego, but after a week and a half, he realised that he preferred his own company. Saly was not what a woman was supposed to be, that much was obvious. He preferred his cleaner.

Wheeling himself next to his easy chair, he flopped from the wheelchair into the comfort of the cushioned upholstery. 'Help yourself to any of de pot dem,' he said dismissively as he turned his attention to a newspaper that rested on the rounded wooden coffee table beside him. Good manners had long gone and left a hungry spot that needed filling. Clare stood. Her nostrils flared as she glared at the cheek of him. Busying himself with his newspaper he refused to meet her eyes. She would cook dinner. That was the end of it. It was the least she could do.

'Tek off ol' papa shoes fi me.' He pointed at his feet to Meredith, who slipped off the sofa and took off his shoes whilst Clare walked into the kitchen silently seething. It seemed she had traded one pig for another, this was *not* going to happen.

The kitchen was spacious to account for Parkie's wheelchair, and although the work surfaces were high, there was one bespoke surface which was low enough for Parkie to work on. She was damned if she was going to cook for him. And yet, here she was, in his kitchen. The little woman preparing the food. She would prepare his food, but it would not be what he wanted.

'I'm popping out for a moment,' she said quickly as she rushed out of the front door leaving Parkie in the living room with Meredith.

The corner shop wasn't too far a walk. The man wanted food? She would give him food.

Outside was chilly. Passing her old house, she examined her handy work. She had done a good job. The euphoria from the fire hadn't left her yet. The charred skeleton of a house dominated the sidewalk.

At the corner shop, she mentioned to the keeper that she was with Parkie and needed some things on Trust. He nodded in agreement and motioned for her to look around. Scanning the shelves, she knew exactly what she was going to buy.

Once she had her food, the keeper wrote down the price and added it to Parkie's ongoing shopping list. Smiling, she positively skipped back to the house and entered the kitchen. Whistling a little tune like the good housewife should, she switched on the oven and placed the food inside.

A magazine caught her eye. Fishing Weekly. Inside were men with thigh-high wellington boots and proudly displaying their catch.

As Clare flicked through she saw adverts for fishing tackle, places that were good to fish. Dark glass lakes flanked by perfect green undergrowth. It was clear that Parkie still thought of fishing and Jamaica, and for the first time Clare wondered how he got into the chair. But then she realised that she really didn't care.

She busied herself in the kitchen, wasting the time rather than going into the sitting room with that old fool. She flicked through his magazine and plotted.

Moments later, the buzzer went off and she dished up. She provided him with a tray, a knife and fork, and a cool glass of water. Taking it all into him, she saw his eyes searching the plate to see what she brought him. She stifled a smile as she saw the disappointment on his face, fish fingers, chips and beans. Very English but Meredith's favourite.

He reached out a knobby hand and accepted the tray saying nothing. After a few moments of scanning his food, his eyes narrowed and Clare, pretended she hadn't noticed suppressed a smile as she sat next to Meredith who was slathering tomato ketchup on her chips. Without taking her eyes off the television she watched him with her peripheral vision. He sniffed. Slowly picked up the knife and fork, gingerly shifted a few chips around the plate before stabbing one and folding it into his mouth. Mouth full, he used it as an excuse to tell her, without meeting her eyes.

'Mi call Ivy. She comin for u inna de marnin.'

'Excuse me?' She balked at him shocked. Clare turned to meet Parkie's eyes head on, but the old man still wouldn't meet her gaze. He wasn't thinking it through when he said she could stay.

Sally was a woman in need, and instinctively he had always done his best to meet the needs of women, especially those who needed a man to come in and help but there was only so much, he told himself, that he could do for others. But here was an opportunity he wasn't about to pass up. It was a chance to show her who she was. Her father. A chance to make an impression where before no one had given him a chance before. No one had told him that he had a child with Mary. All those years ago in Jamaica. She had just disappeared.

But here she was. Here was his chance to help his long-lost daughter. Sally was supposed to be a woman, but she didn't behave like any woman he knew. He sniffed. Clearly Mary needed help growing her up. She didn't teach her important things like cooking. Ivy, he remembered from Jamaica. Ivy would be better placed to teach her.

'Mi know yu neea 'oman to help oono. Ivy want fi help. She will come inna di marnin. Yu cyan live wid her for long as yu want.'

Clare's icy gaze returned to the television screen. She could feel the eyes of Meredith on her, so she gave the little girl a weak smile as she inwardly seethed. Not that she wanted to stay with the pathetic old man, but she was fed up of someone else controlling things for her. *She* wanted to decide what she was doing next. As it was, the investigation into the house fire was still going on. She was hoping for the insurance to pay out so she could get a little

something for her and Meredith and then she could decide what she was doing with Saly. For now, Saly was better off where she was, things were hectic in the real world while she rearranged the pieces of their game. It had just started to get interesting.

Parkie continued to eat. The warm chips filled a hole. He couldn't help thinking how on earth Owen survived with her as a wife. She clearly didn't know how to cook properly, although as he chewed the dry chips, he realised that, Owen didn't survive her.

The silence in the room was heavy and sat with a wilful anger while Clare thought about what to do. Ivy could come. Ivy was coming. She couldn't remember the last time she saw Ivy. She had dealings with Mary when Saly was small, but Ivy was always a distant figure that she felt and heard through Saly. Never had she engaged with the old woman. But. This was a new life, a new phase for her, and she was here to stay. Ivy was part of that, it seemed. In fact, it might be good if she came, she could help her look after Meredith and together they could fix things. And things needed fixing. Yes, let Ivy come. This could be just the thing she needed.

Now it was all done, Clare had a new lease of life. She had gotten rid of all Saly's baggage. It was just her and Meredith. She could do whatever she wanted. Ok, she was staying with the old pervert up the road, but it was only temporary until she figured out what she would do. Besides, Ivy, the new player, might just be what the doctor ordered. Part of her felt a bit remorseful at moving too quickly. It would've been better to check for life insurance.

As she sat in Parkie's favourite chair in the living room, she berated herself on what she shouldn't have done to ensure her future. For she had every intention of staying. Saly must have wondered what kind of place she was in. And even though Clare knew very well where Saly was, she felt no remorse. After all, Saly left Clare there for years. She had found a way to exist there. Surely it was her turn now live in the real world without fear of being beaten, of being burned alive by a towering inferno. No, Saly would have to learn survival skills now, for this was *her* world, and this was *her* body.

Now was the perfect opportunity for her to make the body, which was already hers, *hers*. And one way to do that, was to visit the hairdressers.

Meredith, who was asleep as it was early morning, was soon awoken and roughly dressed. Clare had no patience for the child like Saly did. She wasn't going to mollicoddle her. She was going to teach her properly. And her first lesson was that when *momma* wanted to go, she meant *now*.

Meredith was dressed. She wasn't given time to brush her teeth and Meredith didn't let on. Clare scared her. Ever since that night of the fire when she looked back and saw her father at the window, she knew.

She knew something was wrong when she was taken to the park and the mother explained about magic. She called herself Clare.

Meredith dressed, ready for Clare, and stuck her thumb in her mouth.

'Come on, we're going on a little outing,' she said, grabbing the girl by the elbow.

'Where are we going?'

'Hairdressers. Momma just needs a little haircut.'

This news placated Meredith somewhat. She remembered trips to the hairdressers with her mother as something that had always been fun. Her mother was always chatting with the hairdresser about silly stuff, and much of the time was spent laughing. They then would leave, both with new hairdos and get some lunch somewhere like McDonalds.

And so, thumb still in mouth, she allowed her mother to drag her by the elbow and didn't mention that she didn't have her coat. Instead she thought of all the good things that going to the hairdressers meant, the main thing which she liked was ice-cream with sprinkles on top.

When they arrived, Meredith wrinkled her nose. It was early in the morning and she preferred breakfast. Instead she was outside a little run-down shop that looked like it would fall down any minute. Clare pushed the door open and the bell tinkled. She was told they could fit them in.

The material chairs were a deep velvety blue. The whole shop was decorated in silvers and blues and to Merry, felt cold.

Clare was led over to the hairdresser's chair where she began to tell her what she wanted. Saly's hair was tired. It was puffy, dull and just needed sprucing up. Clare had it in her mind to have a colour and told the hairdresser such, whose eyes lit up as she realised she would be able to do something big.

'How about red? Lots of people have red these days?' Clare screwed up her face in disgust.

'No, I was thinking more along the lines of glittering yellow?'

The hairdresser agreed. This was her opportunity to show the owner what she could do.

It took over 3 hours. By the time she was finished, Clare absolutely loved it. Being at the hairdressers really was relaxing as others said it was. It was her first time and even though it was long, and the straightening tongs were hot, and the hair dryer was stifling. She enjoyed it.

As she stood, her neck appeared longer as the hair from most of her head was shaved. On the crown lay hair that was relaxed straight and dyed bright yellow. Clare had wanted it to glitter gold like the sun. Blonde was what the hairdresser managed. Clare liked it. She shook her head side to side, a permanent smile on her face as her hair gleamed.

She paid the woman and left.

The streets were full now. Luckily, even though the weather was dull and a bit chilly, there was no rain in the air to make her hair go frizzy.

She made her way back to the house, stopping in the shops to buy a chocolate bar as she hummed happily to herself. Life was getting better and better. All she had to do was be patient and allow the plans she would put in place, come into fruition. It was March, it would be summer soon and there was nothing she enjoyed more than a beautiful summer's day. It wasn't until much later that her thoughts wandered to her, and it wasn't until she was close to the house that the realisation actually dawned upon her. Merry was gone.

As she approached the house, blue flashing lights bathed the building in a cold sneer. Clare, gulped as she pushed her key in the door, met by Parkie and Ivy. They both rushed towards her, firing questions at her left and right, questions that she did not know the answer to. She scowled as Parkie's wheel scraped her toe.

'For Fuck's sake!' she yelled. 'Take care in that bloody thing will you?'

Ivy stopped. Both Parkie and Ivy looked at her. Probably for the first time, really looked at her. Clare said nothing but scowled while patted her new hair down.

'What's going on?' clasping her hands over her ears to drown them all.

It was some moments before Clare had realised what had happened. Shouting voices had melded into one. The flashing lights gave everything a surreal sheen as she screamed unintelligible sounds back. Hands were placed upon her shoulders and she fought them off. But it was too late. As she was placed into the car. A firm hand forced her head downwards as she sat into the back seat of the police car. It was then that she heard Ivy saying again and again.

'Saly! Where is Meredith? Where is Meredith, Saly?'

The child. Of course. She'd forgotten all about the child. Clare blankly looked at Ivy as the car door was closed by the officer.

Monica. Jamaica

It was dark. Early morning kind of dark. Monica hadn't slept all night. For a five-year-old, she was bright, aware and completely understood what was happening. Her grandmama came into the room with a kerosene lamp and a warm bowl of water.

Slippers shushed on the wooden floor as she swept along and placed the bowl beside her bed.

'Monica? Monica! Yu haffi wake up. Yu big day today!'

She didn't need telling twice. She was already awake. The house never let her sleep with all its moaning and groaning throughout the night. And here it was 4am and she was getting ready for her first day at school.

Outside the crickets chirped in the dark brush surrounding their little wooden house, while her grandmother sponged her down from a bucket containing warmed water and placed her navy-blue pinafore dress on. This was a momentous day, and although Monica was only 5, she knew it. The air tingled with magic and her knees knocked with excitement.

There was no point in eating breakfast, and yet grandmama still tried to force something down her throat. She was old. She had taken lately to staying in her bed, but on a day such as this, she insisted on getting up and getting the child ready herself.

'Me na know if me ago dooit again.' Ivorene was old and knew she wouldn't last forever. But that was okay. She was here now and would make as many memories for her grand pickney dem as she could. And as for what happened next? The child in her was curious to find out, and yet the old woman in her was afraid.

School was what her grandmama talked about for at least the past year and had pushed her mother to be able to get the child enrolled. Most kids who started school were around 8 but Monica's grandmama had other ideas. Only those with money or a higher social status went to school at such an early age - which meant Monica was going. How could she not? Having a grandmama like that with her ties to h'Englan?' It was expected.

It was dark and surprisingly chilly when Ivorene and Monica set off on the two-mile walk to school. They walked in silence. Past the hill with Rolling Cow. Monica kept extra close to grandmama then, glancing around, looking for red shining eyes in the undergrowth.

They walked past the field. John Crows were circling around a dead cow. Monica could smell it rotting from as far away as she was. But after what seemed like an age to Monica, they arrived.

The building was big and circular. In the centre was the playground where children bigger than Monica, buzzed around. They all looked too big and carried matching navy

school bags. Monica didn't have a school bag. She looked up at Ivorene expecting her to tell her what she needed to do next.

'Gwan child.'

With a sharp shove, Monica was pushed forwards into the playground with the other big children. Scanning the playground, she sees some of the children from her preschool. Abigail was sitting on a wooden bench, looking equally lost and so Monica purposely walked towards her and sat down. Her eyes find grandmama at the other side of the playground, who gave a short wave and left.

Monica thought of what she could say, but nothing was coming to mind. Abigail wasn't her friend, but they knew each other from preschool. If Monica was honest, she knew that Abigail didn't like her at all. Abigail knew that Monica crept around the neighbourhood, spying on people, especially the ones who behaved strangely and just seemed to attract Monica's attention. It was almost as if they were inviting her to snoop around their houses while they weren't there - but Abigail was sat alone too and didn't have anyone else.

'Grandma gone lef' me.'

Abigail swung her legs, looking at her already dusty black shoes.

Monica didn't know what else to say. She thought hard but nothing came. And then it was too late.

Abigail got off the bench and ran off in the direction of another child she saw. Monica looked on.

It was a white girl with yellow hair.

A crowd soon gathered around the the only white girl in the school. Monica watched.

They looked the same age. Her face was red, and she looked hot and her yellow hair shone in the sun but what Monica stared at most were her eyebrows. They were yellow too. As were her eyelashes.

Even though Monica was only 5, she had heard of white people before. Once or twice she had seen some tourists pass through her district, but this was different. This one was probably living here. Monica listened.

'Na man! She is my frien.' Another little girl had taken the white girls' hand and dragged her possessively a little away from the crowd. The crowd simply followed and stared at the little girl who seemed to be getting redder and redder.

'Wa yu mean is your frien'? Me see 'er first.' That was a voice that Monica recognised. Shontal. No one usually messed with Shontal, and it seemed that she was staking her claim on the yellow-haired girl. To challenge Shontal meant that you wanted your head kicked in.

A tall white man with equally yellow hair and red skin was in the playground. He wore pale brown shorts and a colourful shirt. His hair shaved low to his scalp, balanced sunglasses on his nose. The sun had come up and was blazing down as he chatted quietly to a teacher, his glasses steadily getting darker and darker in the heat.

Conversation over, the teacher blew the whistle, held her chubby arm high up in the air and motioned for the children to follow her. She wasn't Miss Wilson, who Monica was used to, but she was stern looking.

A steady stream of small children in navy blue pinafore dresses followed eagerly behind the large woman. Monica followed.

The teacher, Miss Noble, had her name badge pinned on her large bosom for all to see, and as she walked her large square bottom rolled under the billowy floral skirt she wore. Around her neck she had a shiny silver whistle that always seemed to have her left hand clasped around it. Monica walked close - her head bobbing dangerously close to the square bottom. If Miss Noble stopped suddenly, Monica and the bottom would collide. Miss Noble though, walked with a purpose and led all the children into a great hall where an organ started up.

As they stood in lines where wooden benches had already been laid out, words appeared on a large screen overhead. It was then that Monica noticed that the hall was filled with much larger children, all standing, all ready. Miss Nobel had brought in the youngest children last.

Suddenly, the voices of the older children burst out into song. 'All Things Bright and Beautiful.' Monica hadn't heard this song before so stood with her mouth firmly clamped shut. The words on the screen above rolled upwards as fresh words appeared below and the students sang. Instead of singing, she looked for yellow hair amid the black.

At first, she couldn't see her among the sea of blue uniform. But then, sticking out in the corner of the room, was a blob of yellow. It glowed gently while Monica squinted. There, in between the navy-blue bodies, was the sun yellow hair of the white girl, perched protectively next to Miss Nobel.

She stared.

The little white girl sat close to Miss Noble as Monica plotted on how to claim her. Her hair glittered and sparkled in the room and the more Monica thought, the more she watched the girl's hair grow.

By the time the song and assembly were finished, Monica had thought of a plan. At some time, they would need to be filed towards their classroom and when they do, Monica would make sure she got a seat next to the white girl. Feeling confident, she stood tall when the row

of infants stood and was led out by Miss Nobel. She pushed and skipped her way closer and closer to the front of the line and the white girl. She elbowed other kids out of the way as she jumped the queue, stepped on toes as she nudged others out of the way and finally, she was two students behind Miss Noble who had stopped them all outside the classroom. Behind her in the line was a boy that she didn't know, one that didn't take kindly to her shoving him out of the way and so stood on her toe as soon as the line started again, jumping in front of her. Monica stumbled and wondered for a moment, if he wanted the white girl too?

'Children. This is your new class. For now, please take a seat where you can, by a table.' That was all she needed to hear. Monica rushed into the classroom followed hotly by other children. She was very close to the white girl, so close in fact that she could smell her hair as it dangled down her back. Her ponytail swayed slightly as she girl walked slowly into the classroom, a little too slowly. Monica stumbled as she tried not to step on the girl's feet. But as she did so, she felt a sharp pain in her ribs, an elbow poked her out the way and shoved her backwards. Shontal.

The girl was bigger than she had any right to be, and as she smiled, Monica saw her swell larger, while Monica shrank slightly. The white girl was still close enough, and as she followed behind Shontal, she got a seat on a round table which seated six. The white girl sat nearest to the front, followed by Shontal, two other boys, Monica and another girl that she didn't know. Shontal smirked at Monica whilst laying a protective hand on the white girl's shoulder.

Miss Noble spoke most of the morning. Monica couldn't really listen. She remembered her grandmama telling her how important it was to sit and listen while she was in school, but she didn't think her grandmama accounted for there being a white girl in her class. That was just too distracting. If she could get the white girl to be her friend, everything would be okay. And that's what occupied her thoughts while Miss Noble talked on and on to the pre-schoolers. But then, as Monica was watching the blonde hair of this little girl something began to happen.

Monica stared, fascinated with the white girl. Her hair was yellow like the sun, and her weird eyes, blue like the sky. Who had seen such a thing before? She didn't know there were people like that in the world, with sun and sky hair and eyes. Were there people with eyes that were the colour of other things? Like grass? Or she couldn't think of anything else except the beetles in her yard and she didn't suppose that God would make people with eyes like beetles, although it would be something to look out for.

When she focused back on the white girl, she noticed that her hair had grown. She was shocked. Did white people's hair grow that quick? Not only had it grown, but it was twinkling golden like the sun. Monica watched as the ponytail that was now in the middle of her back and seemed to be growing at a steady pace.

Miss Noble had given out the exercise books. The white girl picked up a pen that was in the middle of the table in a red square cup and began to write her name. Monica tried to read it. It was an easy name to read. Eva. The white girl was Eva. When Monica looked back at the white girl, her golden eyebrows and eyelashes were also glittering as she wrote. Shontal didn't seem to notice as she tried to write her own name onto her exercise book, but Eva's hair caught Monica's eye again. It hadn't stopped growing. If anything, it sped up. The ponytail was now down to the ground and moving quickly as it gleamed brighter and brighter. Monica watched as the river of gold paved the floor they had just walked on and pushed its way out of the classroom to what looked like down towards the hall from where they had just come. She blinked and watched as it sparkled so brightly that her eyes dazzled.

The black mountains glittered in the oppressive heat. Saly had no idea how she was going to get out of there and after much thought in the cool, decided that she couldn't just sit there and wait for rescue. It was obvious but she had to actively do something to get herself out of the mess she was in. She had time to think in that white building, and she decided a few things.

Firstly, she knew that Clare could come and get her anytime she wished, which meant that Clare didn't want to come and get here, which meant that Clare was angry with her, or something bad had happened. Either way, she was there indefinitely. She didn't like to admit it, but Clare in a temper scared her.

Secondly, if Clare was indeed leaving her there to rot, it means she was taking control of the body. So much for learning to live with her, seems like Clare didn't share the same idea.

And thirdly, she would need to figure out just how to save her own damn self. Which shouldn't be that hard, after all the superhero stuff she did as a child with Clare.

She winced as she thought of all the lives they saved, of the battle she had with the monster, always at a distance, but it was always Clare. Clare had always saved her. Right from the beginning. Her stomach squirmed in guilt. And here she was begrudging her sometime in the body without her?

But it's my body. She retaliated and waited for Clare to chime in with her comments about how it was selfish to try to keep the body to herself. But nothing came.

As a child, she learned early on that it was just best to do things the way Clare wanted. But usually, what Clare wanted was something fun and exciting, it was something that she wanted too, like the day she met the dragon. She remembered its familiar looking eyes.

How many monsters can there be in this place anyway?

Clare had left her here deliberately. For what? She was probably in her home, with her family, doing God knows what there. That's how it had always been in the past. Clare was the one who decided when they came there and when they left. Granted, it had never been this hostile, but she hadn't been here so long on her own before. It was always a place to escape to, never one to escape from. Now it felt more like a prison.

She was not in control. She knew that. It was Clare who was in control. It had always been Clare. Once she accepted this truth, it was easier to decide what to do next. She would go to the black mountains and towards the voices.

She and Clare always meant to rescue the people whose voices she heard, but they never seemed to get around to it.

The voices had always drifted in and out, and whenever there was something more interesting or fun to do, she didn't remember hearing the voices at all.

She stood and walked out into the heat of the never-ending day. She needed to find a way home.

Her eyes scanned the skies looking for something, anything which hinted at a large fire-breathing creature flying towards her. She soon realised she was quite alone, and she continued her walk along the red road in No Man's Land. She began to feel more emboldened.

'I mean, there's stuff I can do.' She told herself. Her voice didn't echo in the vast land but was heavy and fell to the ground instead. 'I don't just have to sit and admit defeat. I can get up and I can do something.' Her breath became laboured in the heat at the effort of walking, but instead of stopping, she took deeper and deeper breaths. 'I have been here before. There's no reason to assume that this place is as hostile as I think it is.' She began to convince herself.

'I mean,' she thought as she strode with an assured purpose, the words flowing from her in a way that they hadn't before. 'I can pretty much do anything I want to do. Mind over matter.

She looked around and saw a path to the right of her. Feeling triumphant, her eyes followed where the path.

Suddenly, it was all so clear. It would lead her where she needed to go. She knew it. She laughed to herself, relieved, as she hurried. Her trotting soon broke out into a run.

She was so busy talking to herself, laughing with herself, that she didn't hear it.

The green eyes spotted her from a distance as the flaming wingspan swooped lower and lower to the figure running in the red dirt. Wind whizzed past its head, fanning the flames of its bulk as it grew while it dived. Swiftly and silently, large wicked black talons unfolded from a curled position under the vast creature. The sharp eyes remained fixed on its prey as the legs lined up the clasping claws. In one fell swoop, the black claws hooked her by the shoulders, piercing into her flesh as she shrieked in pain, clung on tightly and lifted her off into the sky. The blazing fire-wings flapped and roared as they climbed higher and higher and higher into the sky. The only thing left behind was the imprint of her bare footsteps in the red soil. Saly, glared in surprise at the creature that held her. Death finally had her in his clutches.

Ivy, awoke from her frozen position, watching the car disappear around the corner with Saly seated in the back before screaming after her hysterically.

The child was gone and left in her wake a gaping hole. Where was she? Did someone take her? How can she just vanish and Saly continue as if she were never there in the first place?

How can she *not notice*? Her own *child*?

Parkie sat in his chair, looking up at Ivy, unsure of what they should do next. He hesitated. His hand twitched like he wanted to offer comfort, but on thinking of her probable rejection of him, he pushed up his lips and held his right hand down with his left, should it act without his permission.

Moments seemed to drag as they stood there inanimate, him sitting in his chair, staring at the road that the car disappeared down, before Ivy suddenly bustled into the house, grabbed her coat and picked up the phone.

‘Is wa’ u a do?’ he trailed after her, his fingers clasping the cold metal rim of his wheel.

‘Me ago call a taxi mek it tek me to de police station. Me haffi hell dem ‘bout Meredith. Dem need fi fin’ her.’

Parkie watched helplessly as her feet, like lightning, had found a purpose. Swiftly, she flew around the living-room, grabbing her glasses off the coffee table. Whipping her coat off the coat stand next to the front door, with her brown leather handbag and without saying goodbye, she took her mobile and called for a taxi while she strode purposefully down their road.

Parkie watched on.

Saly. One L.

‘Saly Fairweather.’ She was sitting in the plastic chair in what appeared to be an interview room. She blinked. There was no sick. There was no stench, and no nurse. There was no dragon.

‘Saly Fairweather?’

‘Yes?’ her voice croaked to life. A plastic cup of water was placed in front of her.

‘Saly, we can see you are unwell, and we will get you all the help you need. But we must know. Where is Meredith?’

‘Meredith?’

‘Meredith. Your daughter. She was with you this morning, now she is missing. We can deal with the charges for the fire after, but we must find Meredith. What have you done to her?’

‘Done? What are you talking about?’

It was then that she noticed the voices talking were dressed in police uniforms, looking around, she realised that she was indeed in what looked like an interview room that she had seen on countless police dramas on the television.

‘What are you talking about? Owen?’ She looked at them frantically, ‘Can you call my husband please? Owen Fairweather.’

The police officers glanced at each other as the female officer moved slightly closer to Saly and clasped her hands. ‘Mrs Fairweather?’ Saly looked into her eyes, confused. Was she still in that place after all? Was she somewhere in the white building? With the other lost souls? Was this real? Was she truly lost? ‘Why aren’t you writing it down? Fairweather, my husband. Please. I need him.’

‘Mrs Fairweather, your husband died in the fire. Don’t you remember?’

Her breathing became shallow as she fought to take in what was being said. This couldn’t be real; she must still be in that place. Her eyes scanned frantically for a window and found that there was none, she was just in a green room, a dark green room, with a wooden table, two officers and her, and a recorder with wheels that went around and around, recording her every word. His eyes must be somewhere, those clever green eyes always watching. She shut her eyes tightly and listened for his breathing, for his keen eyesight to prickle on her skin. He must be here somewhere. Rocking slowly back and forth, she opened her eyes.

‘This can’t be right,’ she whispered as she searched again for a window but found a mirror instead. Disoriented, she stood whilst leaning heavily onto the desk to steady herself. The

black mirror in the wall blended into the dark green wall. She stared at it. Was it watching her? Who was watching her? This was one of those mirrors that reflected what you see but really, really, there was another side to the mirror, and they were watching you, waiting for you to say something so they could get you.

‘What are you doing?’ she said accusingly as she stood up and glared at the mirror, eyes focused. And as she walked slowly towards it, she realised that she wasn’t back after all. She wasn’t sure where she was, but this wasn’t home and even though the mirror reflected what was in the room, it reflected her wrong. It was all wrong, wrong, wrong! In the reflection, the gaunt eyes of a skinny woman glared back at her, the dark circles deep and distrusting, and her hair.

Slowly without taking her eyes off the reflection, she reached up a skinny hand and touched her head. Her hair was gone. All of it.

‘What?’ she said again as she looked at the poor imitation of her, rubbing her head that was little more than a scalp. Most of her hair was gone. And what was left on top of her head, wasn’t hers. Stepping closer to the mirror, she couldn’t believe her eyes. This had to have been Clare. Her vision began to blur. Blinking it away, she tried to focus. This wasn’t real, it couldn’t be real. ‘Where is the dragon?’ she asked.

‘Mrs Fairweather? Mrs Fairweather...’ The female officer spoke her name softly but Saly heard only garbled sounds. Her hand stretched out, fingers splayed out on the cool glass that gave off warmth and sucked in the cold. She was half expecting it to dissolve and yet it was cool and solid to the touch - like the white room. The big brown eyes that were hers but clearly not hers, stared at her in disbelief, and Saly stared back.

‘Mrs Fairweather?’ Saly couldn’t take her eyes off her, and the hair. Her hands stroked the fluffy fur-like tufts that seemed to be growing from her head. She turned, looking towards the female officer for help.

‘Interview suspended at 18: 57.’ The officer stopped the recording and approached Saly. Saying nothing, she steered her gently to the seat before helping her sit down.

‘Saly?’ It was the doctor. She recognised that voice. Except this time, she wasn’t in his office, she was in a room. It had changed again.

‘How?’ How did I get here?’ She was there, looking at her, and then she appeared here. Everything had changed. She wondered how long she had been gone. ‘I have to hide before he sees me, before it comes back,’ she whispered desperately as she began clambering around

the room, crouching down on the floor behind the chair, trying to calm herself down so she could focus, and think. She would need to think her way out of this one.

‘Saly, you are in the hospital. Do you know who I am?’ The voice came to her while she crouched on the floor, eyes squeezed shut. Wasn’t she in a police station moments ago? Now she was in hospital. Things were changing faster than she could keep up. Something in the corner caught her eye. A contraption. Blinking red. She knew what this was. A camera. Was he recording? She didn’t give permission. The hum of the machine was loud, too loud as it buzzed in her brain.

‘Do you know who I am?’ he asked again amid all buzzing that Saly wasn’t convinced didn’t come from the dragon somewhere. She eyed the recording camera. She knew who he was. The Blind Messiah. He was supposedly going to save her. And where was her daughter? Where was Merry?

‘Where’s Merry?’ she said softly, poking her head from behind the large white cushioned chair.

‘We don’t know. We were hoping you could tell us.’

‘What time is it?’

‘Pardon?’

‘What time is it? The time!’ becoming agitated, she stood from the chair and made her way to the window, crouched down so that if it was out there, she wasn’t easily visible. It was daylight, not red, and she wasn’t Clare. Where was Clare? She looked inside her and felt Clare. She was small, unashamed and stubborn.

‘What have you done?’ she whispered, but Clare remained quiet.

‘Saly? There is someone here to see you.’ This caught her attention. Standing slowly, she looked towards the voice and an open door. Her hands fell to her sides. She had on a gown, a white gown with no pockets. Gulping, she pulled herself straighter, lifted her eyes to meet what was approaching her. And as she did so, whilst standing next to the chair, she saw her. She knew that face. It was Ivy.

‘Ivy?’

‘Yes.’ The old woman’s face creased up into a tired smile. ‘Yes child. Aunt Ivy.’

Relief flooded through her as she rushed at the old woman, clasping her tightly in an embrace. Pushing away all the feelings of confusion and betrayal and hurt, she just hugged the closest thing she had to a mother and a grandmother all rolled into one. And when she finally let her go, they held hands, smiling and walked back to her chair. ‘Aunt Ivy,’ she began to sob.

Ivy sat down. In her hands she clasped something. ‘What’s that?’ she asked in between sniffs.

‘Oh, dis?’ Ivy lifted it with one hand and rubbed it with a second before taking her fingers to her nose and taking a deep breath. ‘Dis is lavender. Me bring yu another one. You don’t seem to have much luck with de plant dem, so me put a cutting in some water fi grow enough roots to plant into some soil. Dis one have roots yu see? It may grow. Me used some good soil. Some soil from me own garden that me use on my beds. It’s not perfect but better than the shop bought compost.’ She looked at the plant closely before handing it to Saly, who took it with both hands. ‘It look like it doing alright. Me thought it would brighten dis place up a bit. Keep duppy away. Next time, me a go bring flowers.’

Brighten the place up? Saly looked around more closely and saw that in the corner of the white room, was a bed. Her bed.

‘Where’s Owen?’ she asked again. Ivy sighed deeply before rubbing Saly’s hand comfortingly, saying nothing.

‘I thought Ivy might help make this easier.’ Dr Donnelly's voice, she recognised.

Saly looked again at the man who sat near them. She had forgotten he was there. ‘I was hoping that we could speak to Clare. Is she there?’ Saly remained silent. ‘Will she speak to me?’

‘She’s...’ Saly didn’t know how to finish off her sentence.

‘What is she?’ he pressed.

‘I don’t know! How do I know? She’s angry. And she’s proud. She’s glad she did what she did.’ Saly could feel Clare on the inside, and as she did, the events that she had missed out of opened like a black flower, inside her heart, and as each petal unfurled, she for what was lost.

She could feel Clare rising defiantly inside her. She didn’t like that she told them how she was feeling. Immediately at having been exposed, the bubbling anger flamed up in defiance.

Dr Donnelly spoke directly to Clare.

‘Where is she, Clare?’

Saly’s eyes changed from large fearful brown, to narrow, defiant eyes. The flecks of gold flashed, and she smiled knowingly at those tinted yellow glasses. ‘Clare. Where *is* she?’

She smiled slowly and held a gaze she knew he couldn’t see, before slowly fading. The brown eyes sparked gold before turning again to the large fearful eyes of Saly. A low, desperate and primal howl emitted from her throat as she realised what had happened. Owen

was gone, at the hands of Clare. She knew it. And Meredith? She searched inside herself and she knew. Her Merry was gone.

And while part of her was distraught and the thought of her daughter being alone and lost in the world, somewhere deep inside her, another part of her giggled while Ivy and The Blind Messiah looked on.

Epilogue

Her distended belly moved uncomfortably in front of her as she weaved her way through the bushes. She was on fire. Monica could see the flames licking her stomach and as she cried, black smoke slowly oscillated from between her legs, pumping out as she walked and whimpered, clutching her belly and the squirming contents.

If she could just reach the house; if she could just lie down in her bed and rest, Everything would be okay. But her stomach was on fire. She would need to pass by the pit first and get some water to put it out. And she would need to be quick - it was spreading.

Her parched throat was like sandpaper that scraped her tongue as she swallowed. Groaning, she waddled through the neighbouring cornfield as quickly as she could. Short steps with her hardened bare feet padded their way through the sun-bleached yellow field that was flanked by the lush green of the island. Her wild hair splayed out around her head like a halo, not having been brushed for months, donned leaves and dry twigs from lying on the ground.

She had been watching the skies and the clouds. They were forming flat, deflated shapes, different to what they normally formed, and they were moving fast. That wasn't usual. They were usually low, lumbering clouds hanging in the heat.

Sometimes, if she sat very still, she could hear things, murmurings, voices on the air. Things that she remembered her grandmamma had told her. She was small then, but she remembered everything the old woman said, and how she felt.

Grandmamma Ivorene hadn't left. People were tied to the land. Even *she* knew that. They stuck around after death. In the air. On the wind. In the trees that whispered at you as you ran home from school. In the eyes that watched you as you spied on the neighbours. Just because you died, didn't mean that you were gone. You were wrapped up and weaved into the fabric of the earth. A fug hung over the island and trapped everyone that ever was, and everyone that ever would be.

There was no escape. She remembered clearly Ivorene's death and the tale of the spirits who came to take her home. Grandmamma still talked to her. Grandmamma never left her.

The shapes in the sky were her messages. All she had to do was figure out exactly what her Grandmamma was trying to tell her. And today, when the clouds were swiftly moving across the sky, she was thinking.

All the thoughts jumbled up in her head needed straightening out, they needed order. And while she was doing all that, somehow, in the heat, somehow, her stomach had caught fire.

She imagined a flare from the sun had burst out of the sky and licked her in her stomach, causing her to double over in pain at the intense violence of the heat.

She screamed at the first stab of pain, but as she waited and breathed, it ebbed like the sea, and slowly, slowly it was gone. But she knew. It would be back. The fire was burning gently but it was spreading. She needed to cool it. She needed water. She needed to go home.

Rolling up in a sitting up position, she was able to move herself and stand. Her hand instinctively went to her arching back which was strained under the pressure of her belly as she moved through the bushes getting closer and closer to her home; her white cotton dress billowing around her bare legs as she stumbled - rolling her weight on alternate legs.

Once she reached The Cliff, the little house seemed to feel her distress and reach out spindly wooden arms to help her along. But she needed water first, so she sidestepped the clingy attachments and went along the path that ran along the edge of the house and to the pit at the back.

The pit was a huge square, deep hole that caught rainwater as it fell. It was as wide as the house and fell away into what appeared to be bottomless. Camouflaged by huge green banana leaves placed on top for as long as she could remember, it blended into the undergrowth. The multi-purpose large leaves would keep the sun off, minimise the evaporating, keep the water cool and keep animals out.

Playing as a child, Monica once nearly fell in as she skittered around it in an unintentional game of chase with her Grandmamma.

‘Me a go ketch yu, yu likkle wretch yu!’ Grandmamma would call after her with the strap in her hand. But Monica always outsmarted the old woman. Sanctuary came in the form of granddaddy's house at the top of the hill. She learnt at an early age, to fall into the pit would mean death by drowning in the deep, cold, inky black. And to fall into the hands of her furious grandmamma was akin to another kind of death.

The old red bucket was perched nearby with a rope tied to it for lowering into the pit. Monica grabbed her tight stomach, squatted on wobbly legs and precariously removed the large banana leaves.

The black looming eye fell away from the sheer edge to the deep centre of the earth. She paused momentarily, gazing into the yawning chasm; imagining its pit-black glittering eye was staring back with an ancient, earthy malice. As if under a spell, she swayed gently as she

stared before dropping the bucket into the pit. She counted. Three seconds before she heard it splash. Her legs smouldered. She had better hurry up. The heat was spreading.

Suddenly the pain intensified, sending electric shooting pains up her legs, round her belly and to her spine. She gasped aloud as stars danced in front of her eyes and the pain increased. A long intense burn radiated through her body as she felt a heavy pressure at the bottom of her stomach. Her head spinning, she lost her balance and slipped, sprawling dangerously close to the edge.

Bare feet, covered in mud, she landed awkwardly. A scream ripped through her. Pain shot up her spine from her coccyx bone, immobilizing her in agony, one foot perilously dangling over the edge as she breathed deeply to ride out the pain. In through the nose, out through the mouth.

And as she lay there, again, predictably, the rolling pain ebbed, leaving a throbbing in her left ankle that swelled before her eyes. Tears brimming, she realised she could not get the water.

Struggling to her feet, she rolled herself up, slipping a little in the mud and wincing from the pain in her ankle. Her breath came heavy and labored, part through pain as the electric shocks snapped up her spine and part through fear as she was too close to the sharp edge. Her feet sent dirt and pebbles skittering into the darkened depths. She froze, listening.

The stones echoed and bounced off the sides, before a faraway splash parroted the reply. Her breathing became wheezy as her heart pounded. She would need to be more careful.

The house, stretched out its knobby, wooden arms again, to which she gratefully grabbed. They helped her round to the front of the house and up the three steps to the veranda and into the cool of the living room.

There was no one at home. Visibly relaxing, she hobbled as best as she could, leaning on the wall for support, past Queen Victoria who eyed her with a concerned gaze, her heart shaped crown was dusty and faded, but still looking regal with her glossy, flat hair stuck to her head and her pale blue sash across her puffed-up dress.

Over she went to her little bedroom off the main room and lay on the cool sheets. And there she lay as the repetitive pain ripped through her body again.

Fire radiated up her stomach, around her back and licked at her chin. The roar of the flames deafened her senses as she was blinded by the brilliant light. Her skin fizzed, bubbled and popped in the searing flames as the fire hungrily ate her flesh. Crying pitifully, her burning eyes mingled tears from pain and fear. The black smoke which billowed, blocked her airways as she coughed and spluttered, desperately clawing in breath. A low, primal growl

erupted from deep within her throat as an intense pressure built up at the bottom of her stomach. Taking a breath, she instinctively pushed.

The fire devoured her entire body, licking and cracking her skin, flesh and bones. She cried aloud; a desperate, mournful cry as she lay alone in the house in pain, which rocked, creaked and groaned along with her moaning.

Something in her made her push. Again, and again, and again, and before she knew it, there was something between her legs, and the pain eased.

Weak as she was, she pulled her cotton knickers to one side and felt a large, hard round lump. Without much time to recover, the waves of pain engulfed her again, pounding her senses. More urges to push amid a confused dizziness, caused her body to force whatever it was, out. With all instinct and urgency, she expelled the mass in a few strong, guttural pushes.

And out it came. Crowned in blood and water and slime; she caught a baby. A baby? Monica stared at the little face, the pushed-up lips, and the curled fist. A baby. And in her relief, the pain was gone; the fire was put out.

Carefully, she cupped the baby and brought it close to look into its face. A baby. She was beautiful.

‘Mary,’ she whispered as she cradled her in her arms, careful not to drop her, and lay back in the bed to catch her breath. If she hadn’t been here to see it herself, she never would have believed it. A baby. Blood and water saturated the good floral bed sheets. Ivy would be cross with her, but she’d be more cross when she saw there was one more mouth to feed. A baby.

And as she breathed, she relaxed. The little wooden house seemed to breathe a sigh of relief at it all being over. It swayed gently, rocking both Monica and Mary, encompassing them in love, life and memory.

She lay back. Her eyes looked towards the ceiling and the wooden beams covered in dust, highway to the fire ants. She stared at the wooden roof of her home, and as she stared, she breathed deeply and fell into herself.

The ceiling became thinner and thinner until it disappeared altogether, and she could see the clear blue sky stretching off into the golden forever over the horizon. She smiled. And fell further back.

There were no clouds lumbering by, but she could see traces of gold weaved into the blue as the sun shone deep and true. And as she watched, small tufts of thin cloud appeared and

slowly drifted, calming her heart and soothing her soul. She relaxed a bit more as Mary snuggled close to her breast. And it was then that she heard her.

‘Monica? Monica. What ‘appen ‘ere?’

‘Grandmamma?’

‘Hmmf. Mi a go tell yu time and time again not fi lay pon mi good bedsheets with yu dutty self! Lard Jesus! De sheet dem from h’Englan! How yu pickney jus ‘ave it pon de bed so? Yu na know yu haffi save it fi best? Fi guest dem!? Wah di rass! Look how me good, good bed sheet dem ruin!’

‘Grandmamma! Mi sorry. Mi sorry.’ Her breath was raspy. Ivorene kissed her teeth in frustration.

‘Na boda ‘bout dat now. Me a go tek yu home.’

Monica smiled weakly. She had missed her Grandmamma despite the way they used to fight. It was never the same after she was gone. Home sounded nice. Home sounded like a rest and she was so very tired.

‘Can she come?’ She looked at the sleeping baby in her arms. Ivorene softened.

‘No, darlin.’ She need fi stay ‘ere. Ivy tek good care of ‘er’. Monica’s lip trembled like it did when she was a child and her grandmamma scolded her for something.

‘Mi na want fi leave ‘er...’ Fresh tears welled in her eyes and rolled down her cheeks, cleaning tracks on her dusty face. Ivorene reached a hand to comfort her granddaughter.

‘Yu na gwan lef her. Not really.’ Monica clasped the old woman’s hand which was firm, sturdy and good. Instantly, they appeared at the bottom of the bed and watched as Monica’s body lay sleeping with the brand-new baby.

‘Ivy coming up de road. She soon come, y’here? She tek care of the pickney.’ Monica’s body lay curled, cradling her newborn babe which slept soundly in its mother’s arms. She smiled. They both looked so peaceful. Mary’s new hair was soft, curly and black and Monica’s was wild and dirty, but good. Her white cotton dress was stained with dirt and blood. And her dirty feet were on the white bedsheets with the blue forget-me-not flowers - all the way from England. And just as Monica and Ivorene left through the ceiling of the little house, she realised she was one of the lucky ones, and for that she was grateful. And, of course, grandmamma was right.

Only the lucky ones got to die in the comfort of their own bed. Her big sister Ivy would take good care of Mary. And she’d watch. She’d be in the trees that whispered at her as she ran home from school. In the eyes that watched her as she spied on the neighbours. She would laugh at her antics and her tricks that she was bound to play. Just because you died,

didn't mean that you were gone. The place clung to you. A fug hung over the island and trapped everyone that ever was and everyone that ever would be. There was no escape. But she didn't want to escape. She would happily be tied to Mary forever and ever.

She looked to the skies as she ascended with Ivorene on her way home, the sky was a clear, crisp blue without a John Crow in sight.

Footsteps could be heard stepping up the wooden slats of The Cliff and entering the house. The house groaned a welcome to Ivy but was mournful. It ached at the loss of Monica. Ivy could feel the stillness in its wood as she entered the living room through the veranda. She stood listening. Her feet afraid of its steps. Her breath stilled, her heartbeat pounding in her ears. Queen Victoria's face was stern and solemn as she looked through Ivy, refusing to meet her eyes. The house felt stifled, stiff and vacant.

Something was missing. Something was wrong.

Glossary

Dere	there
Ah bly	A chance
Chrow	Throw
Bredren	Treated as plural, brothers; especially friends.
Duppy	Ghost or malevolent spirit
Dutty	Dirty
Fi	“for” or “to”
Fool Fool	Foolish person/ idiot
Gwan	Go on
Gyal	Girl
Haffi	Have to
John Crows	Vultures
Pickney	Child/children
Rass	short for Rasclart Rass - Derogatory term for a person of ill repute. An expression of shock, surprise, frustration, or annoyance.
Rolling Calf	mythical creature/undead spirit
Stakki	a mad or demented person
Uno	You
W’appen?	What has happened?

II. Exploring the fictional representations of the Angry Afro-Caribbean Woman and The Strong Black Woman.

I have crossed an ocean
I have lost my tongue
from the root of an old
one
a new one has sprung¹

¹ Nichols,G. (1983) *I Is A Long Memorised Woman*. Karnak House.London p87

1. Introduction

This thesis will examine the stereotype of the Strong Black Woman (SBW) and the Angry Black Woman (ABW) and how these stereotypes are presented within literature as well as the real world. The novel *Berthas* will be analysed within this lens considering relevant historical context to explore stereotypes and representatives of the Caribbean British Woman, descendent of Africa Slavery. In support of this thesis, subjects were interviewed on their experiences of being Caribbean British Women. All subjects spent significant time living in both Jamaica and Britain, can all fluently speak Jamaican Creole, as well as Standard English and all have evidence of being stereotyped by society. The objectives of the interviews were for me to document their experiences and find correlations between their experience and the characters in *Berthas*. I interviewed Caribbean British subjects about experiences within Jamaica, impressions of Britain when they first arrived and of cultural and language difficulties. These interviews took place over the course of 3 years, arranged over the telephone with notes taken. The findings helped inform the construction of *Berthas* as well as being used as anecdotal evidence in support of ideas within this analysis. In order for these women to have survived, they have had to show resilience and elements of the SBW

stereotype.

With its tough exterior and essence of indestructible superhuman strength, on the surface of the Strong Black Woman (SBW) stereotype is a fleeting compliment that co-workers, family and friends reserve as verbal certificates and congratulatory notions of strength and acknowledgement to the collective resilience of Black women. However, guised with adoration and superficial empowerment, for centuries this colonialist racist white supremacist society has been able to use the SBW stereotype to applaud the Black woman for how well she keeps her dynamic emotions and complex issues from being expressed and affecting the lives of other people while simultaneously knocking her down, exploiting her labour, working overtime to destroy her worth and consistently broadcasting on a global level that she has no value.²

The Strong Black Woman (SBW) is portrayed as being resilient, strong and able to cope with all the demands of life. She is a naturally self-sufficient, self-sacrificing superwoman capable of coping in the most difficult circumstances.

Strong Black Woman stereotype (SBW) — [is] a perception that Black women are naturally strong, resilient, self-contained, and self-sacrificing.³

Although sounding like a compliment, it can also be damaging to the black woman, undermining her sense of self and identity; disabling her ability to challenging the status quo.

² Cailyn Petrona Stewart. (2017) *The Mule of the World: The Strong Black Woman and The Woes of Being 'Independent'*

³ R.A Donovan. L M West. (2014) *Stress and Mental Health: Moderating Role of the Strong Black Woman Stereotype* Journal of Black Psychology 41(4) November p4

It can also be suggested that, black women themselves, have advocated this stereotype.

Research indicates that Black women highly endorse the Strong Black Woman stereotype⁴

Arguably, the stereotype and its effects are contributing factor to the mental health issues of

black women today as both the SBW stereotype and the ABW stereotypes presents black

women as indestructible. An image that, possibly, they attempt to live up to.

Anecdotal and qualitative evidence suggests that SBW endorsement limits Black women's ability to cope healthily which exacerbates the negative mental health outcomes of stress.⁵

One of the women I interviewed, Ms Jacqueline Parkinson, a British Caribbean Police Officer in London spoke of how she unconsciously strived to be a SBW and her sergeant, during a conversation, pointed out that she did not have to.

Cheryl (C) Can you tell me of a time when you were stereotyped as a Strong Black Woman?
Jacqueline (J) Well, I am not quite sure if it is a situation that you mean but I had a conversation with my sergeant one day.
C Just tell me and we will see
J He is the kind of man, he's white by way, who checks in on you every now and again and we were just having a chat.
C What did he say?
J He said, "You put out this image that you are a Strong Black Woman all the time but underneath you are just a human being. Stop pretending!"

⁴ Ibid p2

⁵ Ibid p2

Stop pretending you are this strong person, when you are just sad! You're a human being! When you are sad, be sad. You don't have to be strong all the time. Stop putting up a façade. You're trying to live up to what you think you should be.⁶

The stress of trying to live up to the SBW stereotype was evident to her sergeant who was concerned with her general well-being.

I asked a similar question to Ms Monica Clayton, again, a British Caribbean woman in her 70's. I interviewed her on the opinion that Caribbean British Women felt the pressure to be this Strong Black Woman stereotype.

- | | |
|---|---|
| C | Can you tell me of a time where you felt pressure as a black woman to be the stereotype of a Strong Black Woman? |
| M | All the time! Especially for jobs! You have this pressure to be strong and capable all the time. You have to be better and stronger than your white counterparts. Especially in England. You <i>really</i> have to be better than the white person. Even if you have qualifications. If they are prejudice, you're just not gonna get the job. It is such a pressure to be strong and better all the time. ⁷ |

When considering the role of black women, one also needs to consider Intersectional theory; a theoretical framework for understanding how aspects of a person's social and political identities combine to create different modes of discrimination and privilege. This

⁶ Parkinson, Jacqueline. (2021) Feb 8th

⁷ Clayton, Monica 2021. (Feb 15) 15th

can be useful when considering the impact of stereotypes enforced upon black women.

Stress and mental health: Moderating role of the Strong Black Woman stereotype. Intersectional theory posits that multiple social identities work together to influence how we see ourselves and how others see and treat us (Coles, 2009; Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1994; Settles, 2006). Research evidence supports intersectional theory, suggesting that a variety of physical and mental health outcomes are related to the combination of race and gender. For example, compared to White women, women of African descent who reside in the US (henceforth termed Black women) have higher rates of infant mortality (Mathews & MacDorman, 2013) and obesity (National Center for Health Statistics, 2012); compared to Black men, Black women have higher rates of hypertension (Will & Yoon, 2013; Sampson et al., 2014) and anxiety (Breslau, Kendler, Su, Gaxiola-Aguilar, & Kessler, 2005).

The stereotypical image of the Strong Black Woman (SBW), which some scholars theorize can influence the relationship between negative life events (e.g., stress or trauma) and physical and mental health outcomes (Harrington, Crowther, & Shipherd, 2010; Romero, 2000; Woods-Giscombé, 2010).⁸

The Angry Black Woman (ABW) is a stereotypical image that portrays black women as overly aggressive and bad tempered as well as sassy, whereas the SBW is portrayed as indestructible.

SBW is perceived as naturally resilient, able to handle with ease all the stress, upset, and trauma life throws at her. Challenges that would break others just make SBW stronger. Her strength is also shown in her independence, self-control, and work ethic (Collins, 2004; Wallace, 1990; Woods-Giscombé, 2010). She is self-reliant and emotionally contained (Harrington et al., 2010; Romero, 2000). She does not need emotional or financial support to succeed or to take care of her (and others') responsibilities (Romero, 2000; Wallace, 1990). She works tirelessly and without complaint, always able to do more even if what is asked seems impossible.⁹

⁸ R.A Donovan. L M West. (2014) *Stress and Mental Health: Moderating Role of the Strong Black Woman Stereotype* Journal of Black Psychology 41(4) November p3

⁹ Ibid p4

Despite being presented as being resilient, Caribbean black women can struggle. During the interview with Jacqueline Parkinson, she recounted a situation where she was speaking to an elder member of the family about her personal struggles with being separated from her child's father.

J I was homeless at the time because I left. There were issues with domestic violence and I was struggling. I had to be in a Woman's Shelter. I was told to just get on with it! I was told that I am a black woman and it is my job to just get on with it and raise these boys by myself. Stop expecting so much from these men! This is your role. Acceptance is a thing. Stop complaining. You are expected to cope. That is what I was told.¹⁰

These harmful stereotypes of black women have their roots in slavery, the system where one's skin tone could be seen as a visible marker to your position in the hierarchy. Arguably these stereotypes stemmed from this slavery and has strong racist undertones.

Racism, according to Banton (in Kitano 1985), refers to the efforts of a dominant race group from sharing in the material and symbolic rewards of status and power. It differs from the various other forms of exclusion, in that qualification in contingent observable and assumed physiological traits (Wilson 1992). Said traits imply the inherent superiority is then rationalised as the natural order of the biological universe. (Minor and McGauley.1998)

In America, the most zealous proponents of racism profess that those of European descent are superior to African Americans as a matter of biological face (Welsing 1870)¹¹

¹⁰ Parkinson, Jacqueline. (2021) Feb 8th

¹¹ Robert E Hall (2001) *The Ball Curve: Calculated Racism and the Stereotype of African American Men* Journal of Black Studies Vol. 32, No. 1 p104

The racist undertones that pervade the ABW and the SBW stereotypes arguably are a part of the racist legacy of slavery, a system designed to elevate one race above another. Despite using America references within this thesis, it is clear that they are also applicable to the UK. Britain and America's shared history created many shared experiences. Many historical files of Britain's role in slavery have been destroyed. Colonial Officials completed 'destruction certificates,'¹² and so the information specifically detailing to Britain is more limited. Britain also had her slaves in the Caribbean. Whereas America's slaves shared the same space as their owners. After Emancipation, the issues of living together was more explicit. It is also prudent here to mention that there is an argument to suggest 'race,' in the biological the words refers to, can be seen as a social construct rather than a biological one.

Social Constructionists propose that the concept of race – i.e the belief that a classification based on skin color and other skin-deep properties like body shape or hair style maps onto meaningful, important biological kinds – is a pseudo-biological concept that has been used to justify and rationalize the unequal treatment of groups of people by others.¹³

These stereotypes aim to undermine and to 'prove' that white is superior and black is inferior. And so various devices and strategies are implemented to convince that not only in there more than one race, but one race is superior to others. Stereotypes of the black 'race' have been constructed to dehumanize and to degrade in order to elevate another in

¹² "Record Of Destruction Certificates | The National Archives". (2018)

Discovery.Nationalarchives.Gov.Uk

<https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C16852294>. [Accessed 17 Feb 2021].

¹³ E. Machery. L Faucher (2005) *Social Construction and the Concept of Race* Philosophy of Science Vol. 72, No. 5, Proceedings of the 2004 Biennial Meeting of The Philosophy of Science Association Part I: Contributed Papers Edited by Miriam Solomon p209

comparison.

Black females figured in a distinctive way different from either Black men or White women. They were ascribed peculiar derogatory images that were the legacy of a long-lived racism and sexism. Racial and discriminatory representations of Black womanhood which had roots in the antebellum era evolved.¹⁴

Black women are stereotyped and judged in conjunction to their white counterparts. The stereotype's function is to comment on the white counterpart as well as the black subject. Just as the ownership of enslaved black servants commented on the wealth and power of the black owners, 'the black existed merely to reflect upon the white'¹⁵ so stereotypes surrounding black women are co-dependent on their white counterparts.

The mammy's masculinization highlighted the ultra-femininity of her mistress. The bipolar conceptualization of Black and White womanhood assigned Black women all the negative traits of disgrace whereas White women were attributed all the idealized aspects of "true womanhood", such as piety, deference, domesticity, passionlessness, chastity, cleanness and fragility. Conversely, Black women were conceived and pictured as primitive, lustful, seductive, physically strong, domineering, unwomanly and dirty. There was a breadth of stereotypical perceptions of Black women, which placed them outside the enclave of delicacy, femininity, respectability and virtue. As

¹⁴M. Mgadmi. (2009) *Black Women's Identity: Stereotypes, Respectability and Passionlessness* (1890-1930) *Revue LISA/LISA e-journal* [Online], Vol. VII – n°1 | Online since 23 July (2009) connection on 30 October (2020). URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/lisa/806> ; DOI : <https://doi.org/10.4000/lisa.806>

¹⁵ D. Olusoga (2018) *Black and British*. London. McMillian p88

Patricia Morton suggests, “all except Mammy had profoundly derogatory, dehumanizing characterization.”¹⁶

This stereotypical image of black women, is prevalent in the media and continues to destabilize black women. The Sapphire character is an example of this.

The Sapphire [caricature] was born on television. While the Sapphire first appeared on the *Amos ‘n’ Andy* radio show, the stereotype was reborn when it transitioned to television in 1951. Sapphires are angry, emasculating, and loud Black women. The “Sapphire” are three representational stereotypes of Black womanhood, arising at various historical moments in Western media culture.¹⁷

Western culture has been and is heavily influenced by the media. By having these stereotypes on such a medium causes these messages about black women sent into mainstream society. They are weaved into society’s norms and distributed, arguably, on a global stage.

The Sapphire Caricature portrays black women as rude, loud, malicious, stubborn, and overbearing. This is the Angry Black Woman (ABW) popularized in the cinema and on television. She is tart-tongued and emasculating, one hand on a hip and the other pointing and jabbing (or arms akimbo), violently and rhythmically rocking her head, mocking African American men for offenses ranging from being unemployed to sexually pursuing white women. She is a shrill nagger with irrational states of anger and indignation and is often mean-spirited and abusive. Although African American men are her primary

¹⁶ M Mgadmi.(2009) *Black Women’s Identity: Stereotypes, Respectability and Passionlessness* (1890-1930) *Revue LISA/LISA e-journal* [Online], Vol. VII – n°1 Online since 23 July 2009, connection on 30 October 2020. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/lisa/806> ; DOI : <https://doi.org/10.4000/lisa.806>

¹⁷ D Allison. (2016) *Black women's portrayals on reality television: the new Sapphire* Allison Lexington Books, Lanham, MD p. 292

targets, she has venom for anyone who insults or disrespects her. The Sapphire's desire to dominate and her hyper-sensitivity to injustices make her a perpetual complainer, but she does not criticize to improve things; rather, she criticizes because she is unendingly bitter and wishes that unhappiness on others.¹⁸

Both the SBW and the ABW stereotype, constructed during the slavery era, evolved using media and distributed worldwide, has dictated how Caribbean Black British women are portrayed. This thesis explores in more detail where these representations come from and how they continue to oppress and mentally damage the Caribbean British Woman.

From the mammies, Jezebels, and breeder women of slavery to the smiling Aunt Jemimas on pancake mix boxes, ubiquitous Black prostitutes, and ever-present welfare mothers of contemporary popular culture, negative stereotypes applied to African-American women have been fundamental to Black women's oppression.¹⁹

It is these stereotypes that black women have had to cope with in order to survive and attempt to assert themselves as individuals that deserve equal treatment.

Decades-old ephemera and current-day incarnations of African American stereotypes, including Mammy, Mandingo, Sapphire, Uncle Tom, and Watermelon, have been informed by the legal and social status of African Americans. Many of these stereotypes developed during the height of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and were used to reinforce the commodifying of Black bodies and particularly aspects of enslavement. For instance, an enslaved person forced under violence to work from sunrise to sunset could hardly be described as 'lazy,' yet laziness, as well as characteristics of docility, backwardness,

¹⁸ Pilgrim, D. (2008). *The Sapphire Caricature - Anti-Black Imagery - Jim Crow Museum - Ferris State University*. [online] Ferris.edu.

¹⁹ L Rosentha and M Lobel (2007) *Stereotypes of Black American Women Related to Sexuality and Motherhood Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 40(3),

lasciviousness, treachery, and dishonesty, historically became characteristic of African Americans. The Mammy stereotype developed as an offensive racial caricature constructed during slavery and popularized largely through minstrel shows. Enslaved black women were highly skilled domestic workers, working in the homes of white families and caretakers for their children. The trope painted a picture of undying loyalty to their slaveholders as caregivers and counsel that ultimately sought to legitimize the institution of slavery. The Mammy stereotype gained increased popularity after the Civil War and during the Consumer Revolution, which saw her robust, grinning likeness attached to mass produced consumer goods from flour to motor oil. Considered a trusted figure in white imaginations, mammies represented contentment and served as a nostalgia for whites concerned about racial equality.²⁰

Although this quote discussed the ‘Mammy’ stereotype, the ABW and the SBW stereotypes were treated in similar ways. The stereotype was made into a commodity and ‘sold’ through propaganda within the media and directly affected Black British Women. Attached to goods, made as posters, or used for entertainment as in The Minstrel Show which will be discussed in more detail later. Again, in this quote and in others, it refers to African American women, when this thesis is concerned British black women who are descendants of slavery. And so, one must understand the connection between America and Britain to understand why it is relevant.

The media and representation has been instrumental in the construction of stereotypes around black people, and more specifically, women. The role of black people in American society was a topic being debated during the 18th Century. Early examples of this debate are paintings like John Singleton Copley's *Watson and the Shark* (1778) and Samuel Jennings'

²⁰ National Museum of African American History and Culture (2020). *Popular And Pervasive Stereotypes Of African Americans*. [online] [Accessed 30 October 2020].

Liberty Displaying the Arts and Sciences (1792). Jennings' painting represents Africans as passive, submissive beneficiaries of not only slavery's abolition, but of knowledge, which *Liberty*, dressed in the symbolic white, arguably representing wisdom and enlightenment, has been bestowed upon the Africans who are notably below her looking up, gratefully accepting of this 'gift' that for various reasons, they could not attain themselves. This image of the black person's role in society was developing through negative racial stereotypes. The 'black buffoon,' as signified by the minstrel stereotype was created in America.

As a stereotypical caricature of black people performed by white men disguised in facial paint; minstrels, placed black people in sharply defined roles. Created by T. D. Rice and Daniel Emmet these minstrels played the role of the 'black buffoons.'

One of the earliest versions of the "black as buffoon" can be seen in John Lewis Krimmel's *Quilting Frolic*. The violinist in the 1813 painting, with his tattered and patched clothing, along with a bottle protruding from his coat pocket, appears to be an early model for Rice's Jim Crow character. Krimmel's representation of a "[s]habbily dressed" fiddler and serving girl with "toothy smile" and "oversized red lips" marks him as "...one of the first American artists to utilize physiognomical distortions as a basic element in the depiction of African-Americans."²¹

Whereas the 'black buffoon' was delegated to the black male and reinforced firstly through paintings such as the previously mentioned *Quilting Frolic*, an early Jim Crow, and then through the media in programmes such that 'entertain' with minstrels, The Angry Black Woman is delegated to the black female.

²¹ National Museum of African American History and Culture (2020). *Popular And Pervasive Stereotypes Of African Americans*. [online] [Accessed 17 October 2020]

The stereotype is a reference to loud, aggressive, demanding and uncivilized behaviour that is often paired to a lower middle-class black woman.²² The stereotype of angry black women has been, and currently is, apparent in media.

- 1951 - Sapphire, *Amos 'n' Andy*
- 1972 - Aunt Esther, *Sanford and Son*
- 1992 - Pamela "Pam" James, *Martin*
- 2001 - Yvette, *Baby Boy*
- 2003 - Eva, *Deliver Us From Eva*
- 2005 - Helen Harris, *Tyler Perry's Diary of a Mad Black Woman*
- 2007 - Rasputia, *Norbit*
- 2007 - Angela, *Tyler Perry's Why Did I Get Married?*
- 2009 - Aunt April, *Tyler Perry's I Can Do Bad All by Myself*
- 2015 - Cookie Lyon, *Empire*
- 2017 - Grace Walker, *Wolfenstein II: The New Colossus*
- 2005–present - Madea, *Diary of a Mad Black Woman*, *Madea's Family Reunion*, *Meet the Browns* (cameo), *Madea Goes to Jail*, *I Can Do Bad All by Myself*, *Madea's Big Happy Family*, *Madea's Witness Protection*, *A Madea Christmas*, *Boo! A Madea Halloween*, *Boo 2! A Madea Halloween*, *A Madea Family Funeral*.

The black woman in her work, may trivialise her own feelings simply to avoid negative judgement and not show emotion outside of their comfortable spheres. This constant repression may come out as anger towards loved ones. Once they are seen as angry, they are judged accordingly, and their opinions and values can be dismissed. The repression of these feelings by the black woman can also result in mental health issues.

Preliminary findings on the validation of the Stereotypic Roles for Black Women Scale (SRBWS) are presented. A sample of 186 African American women took the SRBWS along with the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale and the Racial Identity Attitude

²²Ibid

Scale–B. A confirmatory factor analysis supported a four-factor structure of the scale, and moderate reliability estimates were found for each of the interrelated but distinct subscales. Stepwise regression analyses revealed that Mammy and Sapphire images were significant predictors of self-esteem scores and that the internalized stereotypic roles contributed unique variance over racial identity attitudes in understanding self-esteem in Black women.²³

Racial identity for black women is complex and tied up in language. Authors like Toni Morrison and Marcia Layne have challenged identity through language and can be compared with the language used in *Berthas*. This idea of re naming and names in general is relevant to *Berthas* because of links with identity through belonging. This will be discussed in more detail later in this thesis, as well as comparisons being made to the names used in *Berthas* to reflect duality as well as the historical reference of renaming during slavery.

Morrison addresses the idea of language in her novel *Paradise* and clearly states that she writes for black people. She creates in *Paradise* a language that is free from being race specific in order to break free from these bonds. British writer Marcia Layne does something similar in her play *Off Camera*.

Guardian critic Billington has his opinion of the play and stated he found large parts of it ‘impenetrable.’ Billington was viewing the play through the white gaze and digesting it in reference to the European language of the slave master. Armed with his glossary, synopsis and published text, he did not understand the rhythms and the sounds of the language that Marcia Layne was portraying. Arguably because it wasn’t written for him but for others who

²³ A J Thomas, K M Witherspoon, (2004). A I Speight *Toward the Development of the Stereotypic Roles for Black Women Scale* Journal of Black Psychology, 30(3), pp. 426–442. Research Article

speak the same language and have the same cultural identity as Layne. Layne, like Morrison, used language to express identity. An identity fraught with a complicated history of race, language and ownership of the black body.

The widespread representations and stereotypes of the black body, more specifically the black female body not only put pressure on Afro Caribbean British women but also informs how others treat them. It can be argued that the Caribbean Woman has warring insides, contributed to by societal pressures of these stereotypes that can lead to mental health issues. The character Saly in *Berthas* is an example of how the warring insides can have a detrimental effect on a black woman's mental health. Saly's mental health issues manifest as something akin to Dissociative Identity Disorder. She is also shown to not only hear the voice of her dead mother regularly, but to have conversations with her.

Her mother was ever present, telling her what she shouldn't do.²⁴

Representations of black women as angry, mad and strong, although at first appears to be a dichotomy, can result in contributing to the mental health problems of Afro Caribbean British women. The stereotype of the SBW can be seen as the ideal that Saly attempt to live up to but also in the character of Ivy. Ivy is placed within the role of the 'steely, no nonsense' matriarch that a lot of Caribbean British families may recognise.

²⁴ *Berthas* p55

2. Unravelling the racist stereotyping of the SBW and the ABW

Racist stereotypes of black women can contribute to the erosion of the identity of self. These stereotypes, it can be suggested, have a negative effect on the mental state of black women. To deconstruct these stereotypes first one must understand the origins of their construction and the purpose of their construction. It is only through understanding the historical context of slavery and colonialism, racism and stereotyping can we understand the modern perceptions of these ideas.

Slavery and the systematic social strategies placed to support it, it can be suggested was used to dehumanized the slave in order to keep them in slavery.

The enslavement of Africans was justified in Britain by claiming that they were barbaric savages, without laws or religions, and, according to some 'observers' and academics, without even a language; they would acquire civilisation on the plantations.²⁵

This dehumanizing, it can be argued, could have a destabilising effect on the mental state of the slave. Friere suggests that oppression causes people to lose their faculties (the powers of the mind eg memory, reason, speech) resulting in them being unable to function as a human being.

The interests of the oppressors lie in "changing the consciousness of the oppressed, not the situation which oppresses them"²⁶
Oppression—overwhelming control—is necrophilic; it is nourished by love of death, not life. When their efforts to act

²⁵ Express, B., n.d. *British Colonial Expansion in the 17th century / History of Britain*. [online] Britain Express. Available at: <<https://www.britainexpress.com/History/Colonial-Expansion.htm>> [Accessed 20 February 2021].

²⁶ Freire, P. (2005.) *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. London: Penguin p74

responsibly are frustrated, when they find themselves unable to use their faculties, people suffer. "This suffering due to impotence is rooted in the very fact that the human equilibrium has been disturbed."²⁷

The aim of this 'revisiting' historical referencing on slavery is to identify the strategies used; explore the negative effects of these strategies (often which themselves create further issues stemming from the original strategy, incorporating white- supremacist thinking) and how it translates into the modern psyche of the descendent of slavery, to begin healing and reconstructing of the said identity. A more holistic understanding of the damage of a people needs to be confronted. This holistic view of healing is held by bell hooks who suggests that

White-supremacist thinking informs every aspect of our culture including the way we learn, the content of what we learn, and the manner in which we are taught. Much of the consciousness-raising around the issue of white supremacy and racism has focused attention on teaching what racism is and how it manifests itself in the daily workings of our lives.²⁸

This white supremacist thinking needs to be confronted in conjunction with racism. Just as the black stereotypes made positive suggestions about their white counterparts; and the ownership of black slaves commented on the financial power and status of their white owner – the two are inter-dependent.

In order to confront the problems stereotypes, the racist origins of them, one also needs to consider the historical racist, white supremacist roots of slavery. This can be problematic for Caribbean British for two reasons. Firstly, according to historian Oluosoga, there is the issue

²⁷ Friere. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.p77

²⁸ hooks, b. (2013). *Teaching Community*. Hoboken: Taylor and Francis. P25

of Britain suffering from a collective amnesia. And as such, colonial and slavery historical records were misrepresented.

The history of Britain and its slavery history has been buried. Across the country heritage plaques on Georgian townhouses describe former slave traders as “West India merchants,” while slave owners are hidden behind the equally euphemistic term “West India planter”. Thousands of biographies written in celebration of notable 17th and 18th-century Britons have reduced their ownership of human beings to the footnotes, or else expunged such unpleasant details altogether.²⁹

Britain has been successful in covering up its slave trading past.

And secondly, Olusoga argues that there is a lack of written sources of significant black (male and female) figures.

Many most significant black figures are mute, silenced by a lack of written sources. There is also a problem relating to gender. A history, largely shaped by migration – both forced and voluntary – is disproportionately male.³⁰

This makes the female slavery descendant’s need to carve a historical identity from a fragmented collective memory and an incomplete record of written recorded from significant black figures, problematic.

Because we are/were products of separations and dis-locations and dis-memberings, people of Africa descent in the Americas historically have sought reconnection. From the ‘flying back’ stories which originated in slavery to the ‘Back to Africa’ movements of Garvey and those before him, to the Pan-Africanist

²⁹ D. Olusoga, (2015). *The History Of British Slave Ownership Has Been Buried: Now Its Scale Can Be Revealed*. [online] the Guardian. [Accessed 1 November 2020].

³⁰ D. Olusoga (2016) *Black and British A Forgotten History*. Macmillan. London pxxi

activity of people like Dubois and C.L.R James, this need to re-connect and re-remember, as [Toni] Morrison would term it, it has been a central impulse in the structuring of back thought... Remembering, or the function of memory means that re-remembering or bringing back all the parts together... the process of re-remembering is therefore one of boundary crossing. (Boyce Davies 1994: 17)³¹

Saly in *Berthas*, is presented as a product of separation and dis-location, much like many Caribbean British Women, and struggles to pull together separate parts of her identity. Her split sense of self is reflective in her mental health issues and as such, she misremembers, and reconstructs.

This is a reconstruction. I am remembering. It was day. The sun was gleaming in the blue sky and I was happy.
Or –
Rain was in the distance and I was miserable...
It's a reconstruction, so I choose and it's night. ³²

Saly 'misremembers' and reconstructs the world around her to replace what has been lost. This fragmentation is reflected within the structural makeup of the novel which fluctuates from the past to the present as well as from Britain to Jamaica. This in turn reflects the disorientation that some slavery descendants feel. It can be argued that many descendants of Africa slavery have issues of belonging.

Black Americans are unique because... every other ethnic group in America has always been able to preserve its heritage and culture. The black America was brought to this country originally

³¹ A Donnell. (2006) *Twentieth Century Caribbean Literature. Critical moments in anglophone literary history*. Routledge. Oxon p132

³² *Berthas* p32

as a slave. His families had been torn asunder and his origins had been deliberately obliterated. In fact, even before his arrival here, a fiendish white plot was fomented to blot out any vestige of culture and tradition for the African, and he was continually drilled in the belief that he was of a subhuman species and consequently had no actual heritage worth preserving. All of the European nations were in on this insidious plot with the British Empire leading the way!³³

Black Britain's share the history of slavery with Black Americans, and where Black British history is fragmented, arguably one can look to Black Americans (as previously mentioned) to craft an understanding of the black psyche and draw parallels to the Black British psyche. The slavery descendent can struggle to find a traceable, historical identity to ground themselves in. This fluctuation, instability and lack of historical referencing can be seen as representative in the structure of the text of *Berthas*. It reflects this idea of 'reconnecting' previously mentioned in the quote that is 'a central impulse in the structure of black thought.' It is this black thought or the black mind that is being examined. It can be argued that the fluctuations of Saly's mind (between being in the state of 'Saly' to being in the state of 'Clare,') coupled with the shifting of point of view and setting, is reflective of this impulse to 'go back' in order to help reconstruct her memory and her identity. But as she suffers from mental health issues, it is flawed despite her minds visceral impulses.

I saw the enormous black tulip of a flower flow towards me in the midnight blue and reach out her delicate petals to my desperate outstretched hands. I closed my eyes. And leapt into the welcoming black sky. The wind rushed past my ears as I knew I was falling, falling, falling before being snatched up. She held me aloft and lifted me up high as I knew she would. She was me

³³ Jones, William L. "The Importance of Black Identity to the Black Adolescent." *Journal of Black Studies*, vol. 4, no. 1 [Accessed 31 Oct. 2020] p81

and I was her. I flew and soared above the singing traffic, above the noise, above the poor downhearted and I knew what I had to do, and so did *she*.³⁴

As Saly loses control of her mind she also begins to lose control of her body. This is reflected in her losing time whilst the alto ego Clare takes over control of the body they seemingly share.

The next thing she knew, she was sitting in the living room. Heart racing. She'd missed time again. Her tea was cold, but she had the tea. It couldn't have been long. Glancing up at the living room clock, she saw it was after 9am. Eight hours, *eight hours!*? She thought as the panic began to set in. Her hands trembled spilling the cold tea, *eight hours* she whispered, trying to ground herself into the here and now³⁵

Saly displays elements of the SBW stereotype, taking on the responsibility to control Clare without medical intervention as well as literally hold death back. And, as with the stereotypes restrictions, when she fails and her Uncle Glanford dies. Instead of giving up, this bolsters her to gather all her strength and come back fighting.

Death just strolled in, without asking permission. Saly wasn't expecting him. But then, there was the issue with the Lavender. Ivy warned her to get some. It would've warded him off. She should've known it was just a matter of time. She should've been prepared. Gone were the days where she thought the melanin in her skin had magical properties which soaked up the sun and gave her protection that her peers didn't have, her gravity defying hair meant she was a superhero. Gone were the days where she fought in cape, cap and mask. Her anonymity had failed, and, in his arrogance, he had strolled into her life. She would need to do better than this. She would need to get some of

³⁴ *Berthas* p32

³⁵ *Berthas* p56

that old spark she used to have as a kid. She would need to *be* better, like Super Saly.³⁶

This can be representative of the ultimate failure of the modern Caribbean British Woman to connect with the slaves of the past. Saly cannot effectively unite her two sides, and she cannot remember or construct the missing pieces of her recent history where Clare had occupied her mind and remains disconnected until the end of the novel.

The SBW stereotype can be seen as invincible and, arguably the ABW can be seen as powerful. Whereas Saly struggles with the SBW stereotype, Clare embodies the ABW. At the beginning of *Berthas*, Saly struggles with childbirth, and it is Clare that takes charge of the situation, displaying her power and strength.

When it did get too much, Clare took over for they both knew without really saying that she was better at dealing with pain than Saly was.³⁷

According to Doctor L. Seltzer, anger can be interpreted as a sign of strength. Clare is the character that displays levels of anger at the situation and ‘shows fight’ rather than Saly who, despite fighting back by attempting to reconcile her fragmented parts, it is Clare that acts.

When you get mad, your throat is roused and your voice gets louder. Inside, you feel a certain indescribable strength. Literally (or, I should say, biochemically), the emotion does in fact "empower" you. For when some opposing force feels threatening—whether it's a contentious spouse or an unnervingly long red light—and, additionally, you feel comfortable *confronting* this perceived danger. Your body automatically secretes adrenaline, which is the hormone that

³⁶ Ibid p53

³⁷ *Berthas* p9

unquestioningly follows the mind's directive and, reacting to the most primitive of dictates, prepares you to do battle.³⁸

It is Clare that 'prepares to do battle' and in some ways triumphs over Owen as she manages to dispatch him, removing what she considers an obstacle to her freedom.

Finally, he out of the way. She had spent so long watching from the other side, so long listening to Saly simpering and giving into his every need. She'd been in that God-forsaken place, abandoned by Saly, after she had saved her. It seemed too good to be true, he was gone! *Finally* gone.

Anger sparked within her. It was *she* who had saved her in the playground, given her not only a friend but had defended her against those who threatened to hurt her. And it was *she* who introduced her to the magic! And then, after that morning, the one where Super Saly took flight, that was the beginning of the end. That was when Saly was made to get rid of Clare. And that was when Clare had decided that she would bide her time. She would wait until it was her turn, because there *was* no getting rid of her. They were stuck with each other whether she liked it or not. And now, it was her turn. Closer than identical twins, they had to share. He didn't seem to understand that.³⁹

It is Clare that is assertive and when need to, makes decisions for both her and Saly:

Of course, it's not arthritis, Clare chimed in as Saly lathered her body. *It's them, and you know it's them. We must go back to that place, No Man's Land. For them, to save Merry and Owen, we need to go back.* Saly sighed. Her body felt heavy. Clare was right.⁴⁰

Ultimately these stereotypes have the overall effect of destroying the black woman.

³⁸ Seltzer. L., (2011.) *The Paradox of Anger: Strength or Weakness?*. [online] Psychology Today. Available at: <<https://www.psychologytoday.com/gb/blog/evolution-the-self/201106/the-paradox-anger-strength-or-weakness>> [Accessed 8 July 2021].

³⁹ *Berthas* p164

⁴⁰ *Ibid* p67

Within the context of real life situations, black women, when displaying any anger in any given situation, or displaying assertive traits, are reduced to the ABW stereotype. Dr Tate discusses this in her lecture at Birbeck University in 2017.

In this talk I equate anger with psychic institutional pain in UK universities as I attempt to decolonize the trope of 'the angry Black woman'. I use pain here drawing from Audre Lorde's (1980) *The Cancer Journals* as an *analytic frame* to explore how as Black women we cope with silencing and erasure within white feminism whilst maintaining personal and Black feminist community cohesiveness. Drawing from Toni Morrison's (1992) *Playing in the Dark*, we can see that UK universities are locations of corporeal and epistemic marginalization/rebellion. As such, psychic institutional pain is developed through the analysis as both repressive and productive of Black feminist critique, politics and theory. Anger as psychic institutional pain can also be productive, agentic when we notice that it is rooted in responses to racist injustice. Showing the depth of Black feminist anger at intersectional racism through the Jamaican creole phrase 'mi vex' recognizes the source of vexation, of Black feminist anger-pain as affects emerging outside of the Black woman's body. This is an important aspect of decolonizing 'the angry Black woman' which is long overdue.⁴¹

Black women can be legitimately angry and are categorized with this racist trope in order to silence them.

In *Moses Ascending* the character Brenda is also presented as assertive and comes under the stereotype of the ABW as well as the SBW. She, like Clare, appears to take control and exudes a certain amount of power over others.

“Hello Moses”, she says begrudgingly, “what can I do for you?”

⁴¹ Tate, S. (2017). *Decolonizing 'The Angry Black Woman': Black Feminist Theory And Practice In 'Post-Race' University Spaces*. [online] Birkbeck, University of London.

“You can clear out of my house with your militant Black Power friends,” I imagine myself saying. But what I say is, “I want to see you.”⁴²

Moses doesn't feel comfortable telling Brenda what he needs to tell her, highlighting the idea that he is intimidated by her, playing into the Sapphire stereotype that dominates men. The character of Brenda is described as the more modern Caribbean woman a 'black Briton.' A second generation black British person schooled in England who sounded as English as the white English. She is close to the modern Caribbean woman of today.

She didn't sound like one of them women that try to put on English and it don't fit them properly. She sound like the real thing. And I know without asking that she was a Black Briton.⁴³

Whereas towards the novel she can be seen, like Clare, as being cruel because she was angry. This idea of cruelty coming to the fore in conjunction with anger is interesting because Clare (the ABW in *Berthas*) ultimately commits the cruel act of murder. Whereas Brenda in *Moses Ascending* is described as cruel because in her anger she is insulting to Moses.

“Like I've always said Moses,” Brenda smirk, “your pretence at intelligence never fooled me.”⁴⁴

Her laughter is described as 'diabolical' – a word which has connotations of evil and the devil, which illustrates just how cruel Moses interprets her to be. She undermines and

⁴² S, Selvon. *Moses Ascending* p81

⁴³ Ibid p17

⁴⁴ Ibid p128

embarrasses Moses by using her education and language as a weapon to elevate herself over him. This can be interpreted as a powerful black woman, within a patriarchal society or she can be reduced to the ABW stereotype.

“The only sentence you know, Moses” Brenda went on, delighting in my discomfiture and misery, “is what criminals get. Your conjunctions and your hyperboles are all mixed up with your syntax, and your figures of speech only fall between 10 and 20. Where you have punctuation, you should have allegory and predicates, so that the pronouns appear in the correct context. In other words, you should stick to the oral communication and leave the written word to them what knows their business.”⁴⁵

Both the SBW and the ABW stereotypes are prevalent in the novel *Berthas* as well as *Moses Ascending*. The character Saly has two sides to her. Where one character, it can be argued, embodies the SBW stereotype (albeit isn't as successful at it as she wants to be) her alter ego embodies the ABW stereotype which is more assertive and takes control of difficult situations. Her anger can be interpreted as a positive element towards the stereotype resulting in a form of power in a stereotype that ultimately strips an individual of power rendering them powerless and lesser. Clare takes control and gets rid of the persona she sees as being in her way. Arguably the two stereotypes of the SBW and the ABW could be seen as two distinct sides to the dominant character of Saly Fairweather. Suggesting that these stereotypes can be broken down and elements identified within personalities/identities. Which reinforces the idea that these stereotypes stemmed from real life image or idea of a person. Brenda, a member of the Black Power Party, also is assertive, and like Clare, uses her anger to assert herself over others that she feels are getting in her way. Moses reacts to

⁴⁵ Ibid p104-105

Brenda like the stereotype of the black male who is dominated by the Sapphire stereotype.

Illustrating this stereotype of the ABW and the STW is also prevalent in Sam Selvon's texts.

CONCLUSION NEEDED

3. Violence and Death

Violence in society can be explained in many ways: as an inappropriate human reaction to frustration, as an uncontrolled or controlled emotive response, as an inevitable part of revolution and social change, etc.

One explanation of aggressive and violent behaviours invoked the concepts of frustration, social learning, and information processing. More than 50 years ago Dollard et al. (1939) speculated that aggressive or violent behaviours are learned responses to frustration (Eron, 1990), that they can also be learned as instruments for achieving goals, and that the learning is facilitated by available models of aggressive or violent behaviour.⁴⁶

As well as violence being a reaction to frustration, it can also be argued that violence can be used as a catalyst for change, either positive or negative. Certainly, when considering the stereotype of the ABW, the issue of violence arises. ABW becomes frustrated and lashes out becoming the perpetrator. But she can also be the victim. In the case of *Berthas*, she is both the perpetrator (Clare killing Owen) and victim (Saly is a product of rape). The threat of violence surrounds the character Saly/Clare from conception to adulthood, contributing to her mental health issues. This threat, is personified for Saly, as Death.

The blackness cloaked the horned black devil and his demons.
She had to squint in the dark to see his glistening red eyes but
here, here there was calm.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Reiss, A. and Roth, J. (1998). *Understanding And Preventing Violence*. Washington, D.C. National Academy Press p104

⁴⁷ *Berthas* p55

And Clare, the more active of the two, responds to her frustrations with the violence of committing arson.

Flames hopped from one dress to another, dancing across the width of the wardrobe, eating through all and hungry as hell. It went up like tissue paper and in less than half a minute Saly's clothes were raging. The closet started to bubble and blister as the varnish burned away like a layer of skin.

Clare was calm as she watched. The more it blazed, the less angry she felt. It was as if she was being cleansed in holy fire. And as it crackled and spat, she stood back and watched her masterpiece come to life. It whistled through the wood, the increasing pitch of its scream raised above the wardrobe and began licking at the ceiling. The flames reflected in her excited eyes as she stepped back from the heat. Shadows were flung across the room as the netted curtain caught and dripped like burning blobs of candy.

Clare took a few steps back, calmly walked out of the bedroom and shut the door.⁴⁸

The violence, instigates the change that Clare requires. The house that she has known through

Saly and Owen does not belong to her, just as the marriage was not something she saw

herself as being complicit to. According to Clare, Owen was 'not necessary.'⁴⁹

In the Morrison's *God help the Child* the character Bride ultimately is a victim. Analysed through the lens of the SBW, Bride appears at first to be a successful strong black businesswoman.

⁴⁸ *Berthas* p150

⁴⁹ *Ibid* p97

I named it YOU, GIRL: Cosmetics for your Personal Millennium. It's for girls and women of all complexions. From ebony, to lemonade to milk. And it's mine, all mine – the idea, the brand, the campaign.⁵⁰

Morrison presents Bride's blackness as powerful and this idea of the power of blackness is connected to the power of money.

I push past her, leading with the Louis Vuitton bag. "You're Sofia Huxley, right?" She nods. A tiny flash of fear is in her eyes. I'm black as midnight and dressed in all white.⁵¹

And yet, Bride soon becomes the victim of violence when the character of Sofia Huxley attacks her.

I search through the blood with my tongue. My teeth are all there, but I can't seem to get up. I can feel my left eyelid shutting down and my right arm is dead. The door opens and all the gifts I bought are thrown at me, one by one, including the Vuitton bag. The door slams shut, then opens again. My black stiletto-heeled shoe lands on my back before rolling off onto my left arm.⁵²

The idea of violence here, (and whether such violence can be deserved) is presented. Bride is seeking to make amends for the past with money and power. This is similar to *Berthas* with the character of Parkie. He rapes Mary and as a punishment for this, is subjected to a violent

⁵⁰ Morrison, Toni. (2015) *God Help the Child*. London. Penguin Random House p10

⁵¹ Ibid p19

⁵² Ibid p21

attack. (quote)

Ironically, where blackness is seen in literature often as a negative, in this text Morrison uses blackness in a slightly more positive way, presenting it as something that could have an associated with prettiness. ‘She’s sort of pretty under all that black.’⁵³ This suggests that she is pretty, despite being black. It is as if her prettiness can be located underneath her black skin and implies that the black skin is not pretty. Although Morrison shows here that blackness is still seen as negative, she presents the idea that one can be pretty and still be black.

Morrison also inverts the negative ideas surrounding blackness and presents it as a sign of power and strength, reinforced with the idea of money as a mode of power and influence, Bride carries a Louis Vuitton bag.

I can’t resist and place the bag on the bed. I reach inside and on top of the gift package of YOU, GIRL I lay two envelopes – the slim one and the airline gift certificate then the fat one with five thousand dollars.

And yet, despite this, Bride becomes a victim of violence. The violence is acted out by the character Sophia Huxley. It is Sophia that uses violence to take back power from Bride.

Whereas Brides power comes from her money, Sophia’s came from violence. This can be

⁵³ Ibid p35

compared to the violence of Clare in *Berthas* who uses violence to get what she wants: Owen out of the way.

Although Morrison's novel is about the African American female experience, there are parallels with the Caribbean British woman through the shared historical reference of African slavery and parts of America historically being a British colony. This idea will be developed more fully later on in this thesis.

Violence and anger can also be seen as a mode of forcing though change. Modern Black Feminist Rachel Griffin states:

Rooted in my desire to “talk back” (hooks, 1989) to systemic oppression as a biracial (Black and White) Black woman, I position anger as a productive force that fuels coming to voice through BFA as an act of resistance.⁵⁴

Anger as an act of resistance implies that the Caribbean Black Woman lashes out due to her frustrations at the inability to evoke the change requested or needed. In *God Help the Child*, Bride falsely accuses Sophia Huxley of a sexually violent crime. Bride also pretends she was the witness to this specific crime in order to win love and affection from her mother, ironically named Sweetness.

My finger still pointed, pointed so long the lady prosecutor had to touch my hand and say, “Thank you, Lula,” to get me to put my arm down. I glanced at Sweetness; she was smiling like I’ve never seen her smile before – with mouth and eyes. As we walked down the court-house steps, she held my hand, my hand.

⁵⁴ Griffin, R. (2012). *I AM An Angry Black Woman: Black Feminist Autoethnography, Voice, And Resistance*. [online] Taylor & Francis.p1.

She never did that before and it surprised me as much as it pleased me because I always knew she didn't like touching me.⁵⁵

Although Bride herself was not violent here, she used the idea of violence to gain what she requires: affection from her mother. Violence, and the idea of violence can be seen as a mode to getting what one needs or wants. In the case with Bride, the accusation of this sexually violent crime, gets her the attention she craves and presents the idea of using violence to gain what one requires.

The French theorist Fanon can be useful here in deconstructing ideas around violence and anger. Fanon suggests that the African slave, subdued and dominated during the colonial era was violent because of mirroring. Despite Fanon writing in French and in the context of French colonial activity his theories can still be applied to the Caribbean British because of the shared historical framework of slavery and oppression.

Fanon argues that the 'native' mirrors the violence perpetrated upon him. This mirroring technique reduces as well as frees him. This contradiction can be seen as an example of the condition of the hybrid identity: being two opposing things at one time. On the one hand, violence for the black man ('man' here, seen in the context of mankind, rather than the gender 'man') can be seen as restorative measure to the enforced system that reduces him:

They are cornered between our guns pointed at them and those desires for murder which spring from the depths of their spirits and which they do not always recognize, for at first, it is not their violence, it is ours, which turns back on itself.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Morrison, T. *God Help the Child* p31

⁵⁶ Fanon. *The Wretched of the Earth*, p.18

This historical mirrored violence is turned upon the black native as they use it against each other unaware that it is the mirroring of the violence of the settlers imposed on them and those like them. Their anger stems from the injustices done unto them.

The native has the impulse to murder. If this suppressed fury does not find an outlet, it turns in on itself resulting in different tribes fighting themselves because they cannot fight the real enemy. This way, tribe against tribe, brother against brother, does the settlers work for him by stopping them fighting him.⁵⁷

This idea that the frustrated black person directs their frustration through violence at another black person because they cannot fight the real enemy is reminiscent of the myth of ‘black on black violence’ which is prevalent in today's society.

Attention is being increasingly drawn to the fact that “street crime” is essentially committed by low-income blacks (so-called “black on black crime”). The prevailing notion being: the physical survival and well-being of the black community (...) is threatened more by blacks killing and stealing from other blacks (“threats from within”) than external of systemic forces (“threats from without”).⁵⁸

In the context of *God Help The Child*, it can be argued that Bride was mirroring the other children who accused Sophia Huxley of sexual assault and was praised and loved for it. She wanted praise and love. And so, she accuses Sophia Huxley of committing this violent act in order to receive praise and love from Sweetness. When Sophia Huxley is released from spending time in prison, she in turn is violent with Bride out of anger, frustration and

⁵⁷ Ibid p.19

⁵⁸ Headley, Bernard D. (1983) “‘Black on Black’ Crime: The Myth and the Reality.” *Crime and Social Justice*, no. 20 pp. 50–62. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/29766208. [Accessed 15 Feb. 2021].

arguably revenge.

In *Berthas*, violence and anger between black characters is shown between the character of Parkie and Mary. Parkie climbs into Mary's bedroom window and rapes her. Mary fights back, mirroring the violence inflicted upon her.

She bit down again hard, and blood ran freely, welling up in both their mouths. He cursed, pulled away and clambered off her body whilst pulling up his trousers. As he leaned back, she shot upwards in a sitting position, blood trickling down her inner thighs. She rolled up a fist and punched him hard. Screaming hysterically as each thump landed. She screamed and wailed, flinging well aimed punches.⁵⁹

The violence here in *Berthas* is linked to several ideas. Firstly, there is the violence of the empirical power who has metaphorically raped countries (within the context of *Berthas*, Jamaica) and exploited the natives and the goods. Secondly, the literal raping of slave women during African Slavery resulting in a dual heritage hybrid slave. And thirdly there is the mirroring of violence inflicted on black people by the invaders looking to colonise and enslave. Mary fights back like the natives fought back against slavery and colonialism. Violence here can be seen as a resistance to the power which seeks to dominate and control.

Violence within *Berthas* does not just occur with the rape of Mary, but there is also the violence of the persona Clare and the murder of Owen.

A solitary shadow of a figure [was seen] behind the living room curtains. It came frantically to the window and tugged at the

⁵⁹ *Berthas* p147

catch before being completely engulfed by orange, yellow and red flames.⁶⁰

Ultimately, Owen is killed by Clare. This act of violence can be seen as a form of mirroring just as Clare can be seen as symbolic of the resistance persona borne out of the violence of colonialism and Empire. She, like Mary in the previous circumstance, mirrors the violence that was inflicted upon her. She can also be seen as the embodiment of violence that resists. She can also use this violence to instigate the change she wants. In this context, she wants a life without Owen and so uses violence to get rid of him from her reality. Clare tried to create a future without the influence of Owen, and so violence here is used as an instigator to change. It is also a response to the frustration of having Owen preventing her from her aim of being with Meredith. As previously mentioned, Clare does not see Owen as “necessary”.

Violence as a human reaction to frustration can also be identified within the context of the assault of Parkie. Parkie, is responsible for the rape of Mary. He is seen coming through the bedroom window and raping her. And so when violence is performed upon him, it is almost seen as justifiable which suggests the idea of violence being seen as a restorative kind of justice.

Seconds after he heard, rather than saw, the whizzing of the bat above his head came down hard. He fell to the ground as pain erupted. The attack was swiftly followed by a kick in the stomach. Unable to breathe, he felt the bat land heavily on the base of his back followed by an ear-splitting crack.

Pain shot up to his brain as he lay on the floor unable to move, his warm blood pooling. One kick was swiftly followed

⁶⁰ *Berthas* p150

by another and another as the strangers relentlessly beat him. His eye began swelling. The bat struck him again as he curled into a foetal position. He concentrated on breathing in and out as he listened to the cracking of his bones breaking.⁶¹

The violence on Parkie can be seen as different to the violence Clare perpetuates. Whereas Clare's violence, arguably, can be seen as unprovoked violence, or a symptom of her mental health issues, the violence inflicted on Parkie is reactive rather than proactive. It is a punishment. Whereas Clare uses violence to create a reality without Owen, the violence inflicted upon Parkie can be seen as a consequence of previous violence: the rape of Mary. And just as Mary is forever changed because of the rape, so Parkie is forever altered because of the attack. Both are forever changed by the violence which brings forth the idea that violence can be used as a catalyst for change. So when one considers violence, one must also consider the type of violence.

Violence can be used as a mode to gain what one requires, or to alter a reality, and it can also be used or seen as a consequence of previous actions and in the context of *Berthas*, this previous action was the violence of rape.

The rape of Mary is a scene that can highlight how the black body is used; it is exploited in society for financial gain bringing the question to the fore of ownership over the black body.

The sexual exploitation of black women arguably stems from slavery. Whereas this thesis is about Caribbean British Women, African American women share the same history of slavery and imperialism. Parallels between the African American woman and the British

⁶¹ Ibid p158

Caribbean woman can be drawn.

The History of Mary Prince, published in 1831, was the first narrative to be published by and about a black woman. It details the violence she received at the hands of slave masters in the Caribbean as well as in Britain. Within her text Prince cites that she was continually beaten by sexually abusive owners. She describes the ‘cool and sinister sadism of her new master whose punishments seem to have been of sexual nature.’⁶² Prince reports the sexual abuse of a master by ‘stripping naked, ordering her to bathe him and beating her if he refused to do as she was told.’⁶³ There is the implication of rape as part of the violence of slavery that women had to endure. E. Butler states in her 2012 dissertation on *Examining the Impact of Sexual Stereotyping in Black Women*, that:

among all women in the U.S. African American women are the most likely to experience denigration and sexualization due to being devalued as human beings and sexually objectified. The U.S. is plagued with a history of oppression of Black women based on their race, gender, and class. These intersecting forms of oppression have resulted in the devaluation of Black women and the promotion of negative stereotypes regarding their sexuality. The hip hop culture has been an outlet where the promotion of stereotypes of Black women has been normalized and accepted. Such widespread and culturally accepted negative sexual stereotypes of Black women can have grave impacts on the way Black women view themselves and negotiate their sexual experiences.⁶⁴

Morrison’s *Beloved* places the issue of ‘female resistance to slavery at the heart of an

⁶² Prince. (year of book used) *The History of Mary Prince. A West Indian Slave*. Penguin books, London p ix

⁶³ Prince, M. *The History of Mary Prince*. Pg xi

⁶⁴ Butler, E (2012) *Examining the impact of sexual stereotyping of Black Women*. Dissertation (2012). [ebook] University of Houston. Available at: <<https://uh-ir.tdl.org/handle/10657/914>> [Accessed 27 June 2021].

exploration of the process of memory, recovery and representation.’⁶⁵

The character *Beloved* can be deemed as a metaphorical representation of black America’s complex relationship with its enslaved past. A ghost of the past highlights the violent actions of the mother who, to save her child, killed it. This reinforces the idea that *Beloved* is a narrative full of contradictions. Characters kill to save, it is a story preoccupied with telling a story and arguably, by presenting what appears to be a mad woman’s actions of killing a child, challenges and explores her actions and point of view.

As a justification of slavery, it was suggested that black people were intellectually inferior to white people.

From their first explorations on the coast of West Africa in the sixteenth century, Englishmen were impressed with their own superiority over black Africans. The Negro’s skin was associated, in the English mind, with darkness of mind and soul. Strange customs and customs were attributed to a lack of civilisation; and Africa religion was seen simply to be “heathen,” that is, not Christian. By the seventeenth century, some English writers were recalling the ancient fable of Noah’s curse on Ham as an explanation of the Negroes’ colour and lower station in the scale of living creatures. A rationale – the supposed inferiority of the Negro – was readily available to the development of the vast system of Negro slavery. Domination and outright exploitation would have been unacceptable without the assumption that the black man was more akin to the brutish animal than to the human being, and assumption which gave the white master every moral and legal right to own and use his slaves as he owned and used his animals.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Plasa, C. (2000). *Toni Morrison “Beloved”*. Duxford: Icon Books. Pg 119

⁶⁶ Baker, William.(1970) “William Wilberforce on the Idea of Negro Inferiority.” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 31, no. 3, pp. 433–440. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/2708515. [Accessed 27 June 2021.]

If black people were less than human, it can be argued that white people could enslave them and it not be morally wrong as they are superior. However, those who fought to abolish slavery identified this argument and exposed it for the excuse it was to keep people in bondage.

William Wilberforce (1759 – 1833), the English parliamentary spokesman for the abolition of the slave trade in the British Empire, saw clearly in the importance of the belief in Negro inferiority. “The advocates of the Slave Trade originally took very high ground; contending that the Negroes were an inferior race of beings,” Wilberforce wrote in a pamphlet in 1807, “It is obvious,” he continued, “that, if this were acknowledged they [the Negroes] might be supposed, no less than their fellow brutes, to have been comprised within the original grant of all inferior creatures to the use and service of man.”⁶⁷

Wilberforce exposed the false logic of black people being inferior to white people.

Another justification for slavery was the implication that the black man had child-like intelligence and was incapable of intelligent adult thought or decision making. It can be argued that this was a direct result of racial stereotyping but can also be used to describe the complicit child-like character which can emerge from a person that has been severely physically and mentally abused with violence.

Douglass, Frederick in the first chapter of his 1845 narrative,⁶⁸ establishes the centrality of violence to the making of the slave and recounts his earliest memory of the violence of

⁶⁷ Baker, William. (1970) “William Wilberforce on the Idea of Negro Inferiority.” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 31, no. 3, pp. 433–440. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/2708515. [Accessed 27 June 2021.]

⁶⁸ Douglass, F.(1849)*The Narrative of Frederick Douglass. An American Slave*. Anti-Slavery Office, Cornhill p7-8

slavery as a child.

I have often been awakened at the dawn of the day by the most heart-rending shrieks, of an own aunt of mine, whom he used to tie up to a joist, and whip her naked back til she was literally covered with blood.⁶⁹

It is this violence that he identifies as an original generative act equivalent to the statement: 'I was born.'⁷⁰ It can be interpreted that at this point a new version or a new type of man was created or borne out of violence, and this kind of man, (in this context 'man' means 'mankind') is different to the man sculpted by the violent system of slavery to be subservient and obedient. Just as Douglass here, was literally 'born' surrounded by this kind of violence, it shaped his perception of the world he found himself in and arguably was instrumental to him becoming an Abolitionist, so on a wider scale, the slave surrounded by violence has an altered perception of life based on their experiences. Violence can be seen as a tool to force individuals to be subservient, yet it can also change an individual, fracturing the psyche and altering perceptions which in turn can contribute to them behaving in ways they would not behave is if they were not exposed to such violence.

Violence is also expressed within the perspective of Mary Prince who detailed the horrific working and living conditions she endured at the hands of abusive owners. Price states she was

⁶⁹ Douglass, F. *The Narrative of Frederick Douglass*. p6

⁷⁰Ibid. p1

licked and flogged and pinched. To strip me naked - to hang me up by the wrists and lay my flesh open with the cow-skin, was an ordinary punishment for even a slight offence.⁷¹

The use of violence to break slaves and create a subservient individual was commonplace and integral to slavery. Prince states an account of another slave woman, her friend Hetty,

One of the cows had dragged the rope away from the stake to which Hetty had fastened it and got loose. My master flew into a terrible passion and ordered the poor creature to be stripped quite naked, notwithstanding her pregnancy, and to be tied up to a tree in the yard. He then flogged her as hard as he could lick, both with the whip and cow-skin, till she was all over streaming with blood.⁷²

The violence was used to break people into submission, therefore creating a version of the slave that was obedient and subservient. Slaves were controlled through violence.

The lawmakers “legitimized” “white power” and “authority” over slaves because the slave owners and legislators perceived the need for slave control to be a paramount interest.⁷³

The slave that was controlled through violence also had the slave masters blood. Fanon demonstrated that a new kind of slave was created through violence and the mingling of white blood by the raping of black women. This created the mulatto mixed race slave. Douglass was an example of Fanon’s theory of this new kind of slave.

⁷¹ Prince. *The History of Mary Prince. A West Indian Slave* p15

⁷² Ibid Pg 15

⁷³ Fede, Andrew. (1985) “Legitimized Violent Slave Abuse in the American South, 1619-1865: A Case Study of Law and Social Change in Six Southern States.” *The American Journal of Legal History*, vol. 29, no. 2, pp. 93–150. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/844931. [Accessed 2 July 2021.]

My father was a white man. He was admitted to be such by all I ever heard speak of my parentage. The opinion was also whispered that my master was my father; but of the correctness of this opinion, I know nothing; the means of knowing was withheld from me.⁷⁴

Although it wasn't factual knowledge that Douglass's father was his white owner, it was suspected. Slave owners raped their slave women as an intentional increasing of stock. This stock looked different to the black slave. 'A very different looking class of people are springing up in the south and are now held in slavery, from those originally brought to this country from Africa.'⁷⁵ These slaves were of a lighter skin complexion to the darker slaves brought from Africa but they too would have suffered as a slave under their white owners and witness violence, just as Douglass had, which, arguably affected him and those like him, mentally. Fanon noted the connection of the mental health of those under forced colonial rule but it is the creation of a new people borne from the violence of slavery and colonialism which has resulted in the fractured psyche, and the creation of a violent antithesis in order to struggle against enforced mental and physical restraints to survive.

Fanon recognised mental illness as a real experience that people endure. But he also offered an understanding of it as being influenced by society as well as culture. It opened up the possibilities of linking madness to the intractable contradictions of colonial and post-colonial societies. In doing so, Fanon tackled the quintessential question of the relationship between the individual and social structure – especially when the social structure itself is oppressive.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Douglass, F. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*. P2

⁷⁵ Ibid p5

⁷⁶ Stevens, G. (2018). *What Fanon still teaches us about mental illness in post-colonial societies*. [online] The Conversation. Available at: <http://theconversation.com/what-fanon->

Fanon's theories can be used here to read female characters such as Morrison's *Beloved* and the character of Clare in *Berthas*. The violence that slave women suffered at the hands of slave owners helped split a psyche and from the broken pieces form a new one, arguably one that is presented as mad.

The stereotype of the resistant slave woman that was punished through violence, goes some way to contribute to the 'mad(angry) black woman' stereotype, which suggests that a black woman who is assertive in standing up and defending herself, can be dismissed as being mad. Sethe in Morrison's *Beloved*, is an example of this.

Literature can be used as a tool for teaching about the human psyche. In this context, Morrison's writing of *Beloved* challenges the stereotype of a mad black woman. Perspective and gaze is integral to understanding the Black British woman. When examined through a white gaze, black woman can be interpreted as negative. The gaze influences the linguistic expectations and meaning of representation. And as such, a white racist society produces a white racist language. Alternatively, the black slave language is a 'race specific' language integrated with bias reinforce certain stereotypes. According to Jennifer Trainor, white

racist language functions in a metaphorical way. It acts as a rhetorical bridge between the affective domain of feeling, on the one hand, and the political domain of racial belief and racism, on the other. It connects common racist ideas and non-racist feelings, values, beliefs, associations and desires.⁷⁷

still-teaches-us-about-mental-illness-in-post-colonial-societies-102426 [Accessed 22 Jul. 2019].

⁷⁷ Trainor, Jennifer Seibel. (2005) "'My Ancestors Didn't Own Slaves': Understanding White Talk about Race." *Research in the Teaching of English*, vol. 40, no. 2, pp. 140–167. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/40171701. [Accessed 27 June 2021.]

Although, not all white writing partakes in white racist language, and when they do it does not necessarily mean they are racist. Trainor argues that white writing/talk 'functions metaphorically makes clear that although such talk often promotes racism, racism hardly begins to explain its meaning or appeal for individual Whites.'⁷⁸

Morrison and Layne change the focus of white gaze and that of white language to that of black women themselves. Whereas Morrison writes for 'black people' and Layne uses a language 'impenetrable' to the white audience, this is evidence that the audience of Caribbean British women understood the play. At the line "'I always felt like a square peg in a round hole", there were cries of approval from the Leeds ladies behind me.'⁷⁹

This reinforces the idea that Layne, like Morrison, was writing for the Caribbean British Community and this specific quote it can be suggested, states the common feeling of the Caribbean British Woman of not belonging. Layne places the Caribbean Black experience at the centre of her narrative.

Morrison takes the black female audience, which is marginalised within America society and also places them at the centre of her narratives. Black women, arguably are below black men in the social structure of society. There are marginalised and at the same time, praised for their strength. Zora Neale Hurston in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* stated that 'de

⁷⁸ Ibid

⁷⁹ Billington, M. (2003). *Off Camera, West Yorkshire Playhouse, Leeds*. [online] the Guardian. Available at: <<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2003/jul/03/theatre.artsfeatures>> [Accessed 20 February 2021].

nigger woman is de mule uh de world.’⁸⁰ Which suggests black women carry burdens that no one else wishes to carry, but also that they are strong enough to withstand the burden. It is for these women, marginalised, that Morrison presents in the centre of her novels as characters and as an audience that reads her narratives. Morrison states:

I write for black women. We are not addressing the men, as some white females do. We are not attacking each other, as both black and white men do. Black women writers look at things in an unforgiving, loving way. They are writing to repossess, rename, reown.⁸¹

Both Morrison and Layne write to empower black women. Their texts can also be seen as and informative and restorative. *Berthas* seeks to do something similar by informing and restoring elements of the Caribbean British identity.

The black Caribbean British experience has been unique. ‘It began with slavery and with a rupture of continuity and an annihilation of the past. Many individual blacks feel a desperate aloneness not readily explained.’⁸² Freedom and companionship are basic human needs, as well as having a history and an untarnished language. Instead, the black British community feels the loss of these essential components.

Black woman’s existence in a colonial context has been constructed in such a dynamic that she is by default a natural endurer of stress and pain as she carries on the onerous weights and trickle down effects of society’s oppressive systems. In the

⁸⁰ Redmond, G., (2013) *Mule*. [ebook] Duke University Press. Available at: <<https://read.dukeupress.edu/meridians/article-abstract/11/2/25/138571/Mule?redirectedFrom=fulltext>> [Accessed 27 June 2021].

⁸¹ Pal, S. (1994) “*From Periphery to Centre: Toni Morrison's Self Affirming Fiction*.” *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 29, no. 37, pp. 2439–2443. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/4401756. [Accessed 15 Feb. 2021].

⁸² Grier, C. *Black Rage* p 28

words of Zora Neale Hurston in *Their Eyes were Watching God*,
“De nigger woman is de mule uh de world so fur as Ah can see”
And she must mule alone. Here is where the myth of
independence is converged with the SBW stereotype.⁸³

⁸³ Stewart, C. (2021). *The Mule of the World: The Strong Black Woman and the Woes of Being 'Independent'*. [online] Jps.library.utoronto.ca. Available at:
<<https://jps.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/knots/article/view/29187>> [Accessed 20 February 2021].

4. Language and Loneliness

Berthas is written in Standard English but it also uses Jamaican Creole. The language a character speaks demonstrate an aspect of their identity. In order to explore the language used within *Berthas*, one must examine Jamaican Creole and make links as to why it is integral to understanding specific identities and why it informs understanding of the stereotypes of ABW and the SBW. British colonialism was instrumental in the creation of Jamaican Creole.

Colonialism was responsible for Jamaican Creoles status; it was usually regarded negatively by both master and slave alike. This negative status had such an impact upon Jamaican Creole that it is still struggling to rid itself of this [image]. It is this negative status which originated in slavery that renders Jamaican Creole a "broken tongue" and questions its authenticity as a living language. One reason for the low opinion of Jamaican Creole is precisely in how it came about under conquest and humiliation. It is perhaps a consequence of being oppressed that one's cultural trappings generally are suspected by those who may feel that they are the only group with culture and with the "right" and "proper" language. Because the Africans who spoke Jamaican Creole were slaves, what they spoke was not a language but a broken tongue; and this, in turn was due to their "inability" to speak "pure" English. That this stigma has continued down through the years, reveals more the ethnocentricity of the remaining British systems than it serves as evidence of there being an inherent weakness in Jamaican Creole.⁸⁴

Berthas is set in Britain as well as the Caribbean island of Jamaica and mixes characters using Standard English as well as Jamaican Creole/Patois. As well as the different languages being placed side by side, the colourful image of the West Indies is juxtaposed with the cold

⁸⁴ Henry, P A *Sociolinguistic Analysis Of Jamaican Creole*. (PDF). Pg46

grey of England.

Spewed up from the depths of the sea, the emerald island was full of green gold. Lush leaves covered the landscape with a canopy teased by the winds. And when it rained, water drenched the land in seconds. Steam hissed and snaked upwards in the heat as the cool rain tempered the climate.⁸⁵

In comparison, Britain is presented as the opposite.

England was different. It froze. Its mist covered everywhere. Its frosted fingers shocked her breathing whereas Jamaica wrapped her in warmth.⁸⁶

The comparison of the two islands (Britain and Jamaica) as well as the two languages (Standard English and Jamaican Creole) combined with the unique history of Africa Slavery articulates the complex hybrid identity of the characters within *Berthas*.

Jamaicans, ‘due to their "inability" to speak "pure" English’ were considered a broken people, speaking a ‘broken’ language. One that they did not have total claim over. The language that they spoke was entirely due to British influence. ‘British colonialism primarily was responsible for the creation and subsequent development of Jamaican Creole, since it brought about a situation where Africans came into contact with Europeans.’⁸⁷ This highlights a connection between Britain and Jamaica, not only through ownership of land and people, but through language and with language, identity.

⁸⁵ *Berthas* p 36

⁸⁶ *Ibid* p 36

⁸⁷ Henry, P. *A Sociolinguistic Analysis Of Jamaican Creole*. (PDF) p44

European colonial models and, to date, continues to implement to a greater or a lesser degree many of the colonial linguistic and cultural policies and is thus instrumental in perpetuating colonial discourses.⁸⁸

Creolisation of a language is a result of having an absentee language and another used in its place. Slaves had to learn the language of their masters.

Contact between two groups with an obvious differential in power, like that between masters and slaves, tends to skew the amount of each language that is spoken. For instance, field slaves will be expected to understand the master's language, while there is less reason for the master to learn the language spoken by the slaves.⁸⁹

Often slaves were bought from different countries in Africa, so that they could not communicate with each other in a common tongue, therefore forcing them to learn the master's language to communicate with their owners as well as each other. They were also prohibited to read with the sole aim of preventing them from planning revolt or escape.

In 'A Sociolinguistic Analysis of Jamaican Creole,' Frederick Cassidy, a Jamaican linguist stated:

The slaves were brought from several places in Guinea, which were different from one another in language, and consequently they could not converse freely.⁹⁰

The practice of having slaves without a common language was a common occurrence and

⁸⁸ Henry, P A *Sociolinguistic Analysis Of Jamaican Creole*. (PDF) p44

⁸⁹ Duane, C., n.d. *What Is Creole Language?*. [online] Study.com.
<https://study.com/academy/lesson/what-is-creole-language-definition-phrases.html>

⁹⁰ Henry, P A *Sociolinguistic Analysis Of Jamaican Creole*. (PDF) p 43

used to elevate the importance and power of the colonizer's language above the slave.

Slavery itself, which forced European language(s) upon the Africans who had no choice but to adopt the alien tongue if they wanted to survive.⁹¹

The slave, had to learn the language of his master in order to communicate. Communicating and understanding would have been a tool to aid him in survival.

Language, aside from coloring our perception and influencing our thoughts and actions, is also a cultural tool; by this I mean it is a tool of identity. It separates us from each other in fundamental ways and creates division along racial, cultural, sexual and social class lines. Language, therefore, is the soul of a people; it informs them of who they are, what group they belong to and with whom they can or cannot identify.⁹²

The business of slavery was violent and in order for the slave to survive, he had to adapt. The slave would learn to code switch from a language that he spoke in a more relaxed setting, to the one he spoke with his slave master. This code switching is something that still occurs today and will be discussed later in this thesis.

Within the identity of the Caribbean Black Woman, which arguably informs the SBW stereotype, is this desire to survive. Whereas the command of Standard English may have gone some way to help the slave survive, today the understanding of this is shifting.

If y'all actually believe that using "Standard English" will dismantle white supremacy, then you not paying attention! If we honestly believe that code-switching will save Black people's

Henry, P A *Sociolinguistic Analysis Of Jamaican Creole* p 43 (PDF)

⁹² Ibid

lives, then we really ain't paying attention to what is happening in the world. Eric Garner was choked to death by a police officer while saying "I cannot breathe." Wouldn't you consider "I cannot breathe" "standard English" syntax? ⁹³

Language is integral to being a member of the human race. Therefore, the slave without a language of his own is reduced to less than human. Language was also seen as a mode to survival; survival being a common idea from the African slave first taken into bondage to black people today still grappling with a system that supports white supremacy.

These practices played an instrumental role in assigning low prestige to non-European languages and cultures, including cultural and linguistic forms that emerged due to Europe's colonial expansion, and in establishing the superiority of the colonizers language and culture.⁹⁴

The white was seen as superior to the black and therefore any form of communication not recognised as language, was seen as inferior to the white Colonial masters that were promoting white supremacy. This resulted in the black person speaking to the white person in an 'acceptable' way: using white language or 'Standard English.' And he would speak in a more natural way to him, to those that were like him. Ultimately creating a split.

The black man has two dimensions. One with his fellows, the other with the white man.⁹⁵

Arguably this two dimensional black man ('man' here refers to mankind, e.g black people,

⁹³ Baker-Bell, A. (2020) *Linguistic Justice*. Routledge p?

⁹⁴ I. Léglise, B. Migge. *Language and colonialism. Applied linguistics in the context of creole communities*. Marlis Hellinger, p1

⁹⁵ Fanon, F. (1986) *Black Skins, White Masks*. Pluto Press, UK p17

and so is applicable to black women also) has different languages for each side: Standard English and a creolised version. Within the context of the Caribbean British, the creolised language would be Jamaican Patois/Black Language. 'That this self-division is a direct result of colonialist subjugation is beyond question,'⁹⁶ however this division is further exacerbated when the individual faces environments they find difficult to navigate in. How well one converses with the colonialist's language determines the eligibility of the subject to be a member of the human race. There have been 'various theories that have tried to prove that the Negro is a stage in the slow evolution of monkey to man'⁹⁷ therefore the command of a language sets aside the said individual away from animal.

To speak means to be in a position to use a certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this or that language, to support the weight of a civilisation.⁹⁸

The black individual, through their use of the colonizer's language, seeks to become white.

The Negro of the Antilles will be proportionately whiter - that is, he will become closer to becoming a real human being - in direct ratio to the mastery of the French language.⁹⁹

Therefore, according to Fanon, to speak a language intrinsically links one to a culture. In the case of the black individual, a culture that seeks to eradicate them.

What is constructed as the solution can be seen as a symptom of the illness.

The black psyche must heal, and yet, paradoxically, in order to function, it can be argued that

⁹⁶ Fanon, F. *Black Skins, White Masks*. p17

⁹⁷ Ibid p17

⁹⁸ Ibid p18

⁹⁹ Ibid p18

the black psyche has instead formulated split personalities to negotiate certain spaces within society.

One of the ways the splitting into personalities has happened is to attempt to reform a past from the fractured or lost history. Or mould a new one in its place. Writer Derek Walcott through the text *Omeros* had written himself into the narrative of the world. He inserted Caribbean history into his novel *Omeros*. By writing about Caribbean characters mixed in with English and Greek characters and history, he is writing about himself and others like him, therefore helping to fuse together black history/presence within the society they find themselves.

Walcott's *Omeros* fills hundreds of pages with rolling hexameters in terza rima; alludes abundantly to Homer, James Joyce and Aimé Césaire; and ranges historically from precolonial Africa to contemporary Ireland and St Lucia. Interwoven with the story of Philoctete's would be plots of a Saint Lucian Achilles and Hector struggling over a beautiful Helen, of an English Plunkett and an Irish Maud seeking peace in the Caribbean and of a composite poet – part Walcott, part blind pensioner – striving to tell the history of his island.¹⁰⁰

Walcott created something new from a fractured past. This idea can be used to explain the conception of Clare in *Berthas*. The character Saly/Clare has evolved from this fractured past, and the duality of the personalities can be seen as a literal representation of this historical splitting of a person's psyche. The broken history, broken culture and broken language collated in one body. The solution: to create personalities to match situations. Leading to

¹⁰⁰ Ramazani, Jahan. (1997.) *The Wound of History: Walcott's Omeros and the Postcolonial Poetics of Affliction*. *PMLA*, vol. 112, no. 3, pp. 405–417. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/462949. [Accessed 2 July 2021.]

more than one personality within a body: Clare/Saly in *Berthas*.

Walcott contributed to a literary history for Caribbean people by placing his own hybrid Caribbean English history into the English cannon. Walcott's 'Greek' epic poem *Omeros* is a post-colonial novel that writes back, combining the style of Greek epic poems with the Caribbean setting and the hybridised language of Creole and alluding to the Odyssey. Writing back offers a paradigm for the relationship between post-colonial texts and the literary 'canon.

Omeros, a narrative poem rendering the daily hardships of plain people of the Caribbean shores, are significant to observe Walcott's manipulation in its mythological characters, assumed as being adopted from the old Greek mythology, Odyssey. *Omeros*'s discussion on the past reflects its concern about the future.¹⁰¹

It is this concern for the future of the identity of the Caribbean people that is relevant here.

The hybrid people needed a language to survive and efforts at collective survival were made by writers such as Walcott. This is relevant to *Berthas* because like *Omeros*, *Berthas* is concerned with the future survival of the Caribbean Black descendant of slavery. This is addressed in *Berthas* through the identification and exploration of the psychological effects of the history of slavery and the racist white supremacist society that followed in Britain within the context of forming an identity.

Omeros' use of lyric verse focuses on the emotional inner (psychological) life of the

¹⁰¹ Aji, Gabriel Fajar Sasmita. (2021) "*Myth And Postcolonialism In Walcott'S Omeros*". Core.Ac.Uk <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/141657347.pdf>. [Accessed 15 Feb 2021].

character and the narrator is used. Walcott was able to capture the musical quality of the dialect of St Lucia, which is comparable to the swing and rhythm of Jamaican creole.

Touchez-i, encore: N'ai fender choux-ous-u, salope!" "*Touch it again, and I'll split your arse, you b****!*" "Moi j'a dire—'ous pas prêter un rien. 'Ous ni shallope, 'ous ni seine, 'ous croire 'ous ni choueur campêche?"¹⁰²

Walcott writes in the meter choice of Homer. The effect of this is that its lyrical quality lends itself to being sung. The rhythms and almost musical undertones in this lyricized language also reflect the carnival culture of the Caribbean people with which the text *Omeros* is set.

The east Caribbean Island of St Lucia, whose people are a mix of European and African descent provides a context for a sophisticated look at the past.¹⁰³

This lyrical writing is reminiscent of Selvon's *Lonely Londoner* where the novel combines the language of White British English and the West Indies creolised English to form a 'new' English, just as Walcott combined Western literature with a Caribbean narrative reflective in the creolisation of the language – again, like *Berthas*, Selvon was also concerned with the survival of the descendant of African Slavery by continuing the work of establishing a language within literature.

This same hybridisation happens with the lyrical language to again, (lyricism being linked

¹⁰² Walcott, D. *Omeros*. Faber And Faber p15-16

¹⁰³ Morrison, James V.(1999) "*Homer Travels to the Caribbean: Teaching Walcott's 'Omeros.'*" The Classical World, vol. 93, no. 1, pp. 83–99. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/4352373. [Accessed 15 Feb. 2021].

to the musical element of the Caribbean culture) to create a new language made from fragments, just like a new kind of culture. This lyrical style of writing is also prominent in Toni Morrison's *Jazz*, incorporating the idea that infused within the black culture (be it African heritage or Caribbean) is a musical element. This musical element can be linked to the Negro spirituals that slaves sang embedded with hidden messages of escape and freedom. It can be argued that this lyrical style of writing still has embedded messages of resistance, escape and freedom reinforcing the idea that although the physical shackles are gone, the mental shackles are not. The broken mind is compounded with loneliness, isolation and marginalisation. Healing this mind, is problematic but it is only through healing that freedom is attainable.

Playwright Marcia Layne has a similar approach in her play *Off Camera*. The language that she uses is a hybrid creolisation of the English language. This form of Jamaican English is often described as a lyrical language. This lyrical language that Layne uses, presents black people, more specifically black women as belonging to a culture and having an identity all their own. Ironically, the play centres around two second generation immigrant women returning to Jamaica in order to discover an estranged father. The mode with which they characters conduct themselves, highlights the identity issues that Caribbean Women face with belonging and identity, yet Layne compounds this issue with the absent father. The lyrical quality of the language, again connects ideas of freedom and resistance to the enforced language of slavery.

Authors such as Selvon, Morrison and Walcott and Layne have gone some way to reconstruct a language for these invisible people, developed within literature. The creation

and utilisation of this language is a direct contradiction to the stereotype of the ABW as well as the SBW. This lyrical style of writing, reflective of the identity of the Caribbean British has the same theme which pervaded the Negro religious spirituals sung during slavery which encapsulated a people and contained embedded messages of freedom hidden in the religious references. .

African Americans were conscious of their enslavement and therefore they naturally drew connections between their experiences and those of the ancient Israelites. The same may be true in regard to chosenness, even if Blacks did not label their divine favor in such a way. But it is improbable that African Americans, or anyone else at the time besides Bible scholars, knew that their coded songs had parallels to biblical books such as Daniel and Revelation. Nevertheless, this connection between the Spirituals and the Bible may still be applied and studied.¹⁰⁴

In Frederick Douglass's autobiography *My Bondage and My Freedom*, Douglass observed slaves singing Negro spirituals. He observed the double meanings of these songs recognising that slave owners took them at face value: that the slaves were religious. However, Douglass recognised that some songs were messages of escape. He wrote that these songs meant

a speedy pilgrimage toward a free state, and deliverance from all the evils and dangers of slavery¹⁰⁵

It is yet again freedom, which is perpetually chased by the descendant of slavery, through

¹⁰⁴ Greenan, M., (2020.) *African America Spirituals and the Bible: Selecting Texts For Secondary Education Instruction*. [ebook] Purdue University. Available at: <https://hammer.purdue.edu/articles/thesis/AFRICAN_AMERICAN_SPIRITUALS_AND_THE_BIBLE_SELECTING_TEXTS_FOR_SECONDARY_EDUCATION_INSTRUCTION/13331414/files/25681157.pdf> [Accessed 2 July 2021].

¹⁰⁵ Douglass, F. (2008.) *MY BONDAGE and MY FREEDOM*. [ebook] Project Gutenberg. Available at: <<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/202/202-h/202-h.htm>> [Accessed 2 July 2021].

literature with the idea of transcending into a reality.

5. The duality of 'self'

Arguably, the Caribbean British woman has the problem of presenting herself in a way that is acceptable to the society she lives in. The character of Saly has developed a duality to help cope with functioning within the world she finds herself in. A duality with her sense of self, of culture and of language all representative in the duality of the dual aspect personality of Saly and Clare.

Language with *Berthas* changes from the 'original' creolised Jamaican to Standard English. The Caribbean British Woman's demeanour changes as she tries to make herself 'white' to be accepted within a white dominated society. And although she is not accepted, it is somewhat successful in helping her to survive. This is comparable to 'double-consciousness' iterated by Fanon.

The black [man] has two dimensions. One with his fellows, the other with the white man. A Negro behaves differently with a white man and another Negro. That this self-division is a direct result of colonialist subjugation is beyond question... No one would dream of doubting that its major artery is fed from the heart of those various theories that have tried to prove that the Negro is a stage in the slow evolution of monkey into man.¹⁰⁶

Despite being a French theorist of the 60's, Fanon is relevant here because his theories can still be used to help explore the hybrid identity of The Caribbean British Woman, along with DuBois. There are other more modern interpretations but it is imperative that these earlier ones are understood first so that one can understand how these ideas were developed by more

¹⁰⁶ Fanon, F. *Black Skins, White Masks*. p17

modern theorists.

This 'two dimensions' that Fanon writes about can be comparable to one person having two sides. They present their 'sides' depending on the audience. Both are a version of 'self' used to navigate space. This double-consciousness idea was first explored in the 1903 publication *The Souls of Black Folk* by DuBois. When this black broken mind appears to function well in a white dominated society, this is seen as a success.

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness, -- an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.¹⁰⁷

The black man has the pressure of understanding how he is perceived by white people, in order to function in a white dominated society, as well as considering who he is as a black man. Therefore he is split into two sides.

The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife, -- this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He would not Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit

¹⁰⁷ Du Bois, D. and Burghardt, W., n.d. *Du Bois, The Souls of Black Folks.doc*. [online] Sites.middlebury.edu. Available at: <<https://sites.middlebury.edu/soan105tiger/files/2014/08/Du-Bois-The-Souls-of-Black-Folks.pdf>> [Accessed 20 February 2021].

upon by his fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face.¹⁰⁸

This duality is dependent on the colonizer/colonized relationship and although there is some validity in exploring the post-colonial theorists on how this shapes identity in the 50s and 60s, when considering identity and the duality of the hybrid identity, one must also consider Homi Bhabha's Third Space. This Space

refers to the interstices between colliding cultures, a liminal space "which gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognizable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation." In this "in-between" space, new cultural identities are formed, reformed, and constantly in a state of becoming.¹⁰⁹

It is this third space that a new kind of identity can be formed. By the two opposing sides, coming together and forming something new. Whereas the duality of Fanon and DuBois' theories are a more negative identification of the state of the hybrid identity, Bhabha's is more positive and forward thinking. This can be used to examine the Caribbean British identity.

Bhabha contends that a new hybrid identity or subject-position emerges from the interweaving of elements of the coloniser and colonised challenging the validity and authenticity of any essentialist cultural identity.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ Ibid

¹⁰⁹ Amherst.edu. (2008). *The Third Space: Cultural Identity Today* / 2008 / Amherst College. [online] Available at: <<https://www.amherst.edu/museums/mead/exhibitions/2008/thirdspace#:~:text=The%20title%20The%20Third%20Space,of%20negotiation%20of%20meaning%20and>> [Accessed 20 February 2021].

¹¹⁰ Everettsd.org. n.d. *Bhabha's Hybridity and the Third Space in Postcolonial Discourse*. [online] Available at:

Bhabha's Third Space can be defined as a place where two or more cultural or social paradigms could interact to form something new. When considering hybridization and this Third Space, Bhabha, argues in favour of 'double vision' which is comparable to DuBois' Double Consciousness. When using Bhabha to explore the options of the Caribbean British Woman, one can argue that she needs to understand and see her past but also see her future through this 'double-vision.' Bhabha argues this ability is part of the state of the hybrid identity, the Third Space, which is linked to linguistic difference and cultural interpretation. The Third Space is a theory of identity realized through language and education, explaining the uniqueness of each person through the noun 'hybrid.'

The pact of interpretation is never simply an act of communication between the I and the You designated in the statement. The production of meaning requires that these two places be mobilized in the passage through the Third Space, which represents both the general conditions of language and the specific implication of the utterance in a performative and intuitional strategy of which it cannot 'in itself,' be conscious. The intervention of the Third Space of enunciation, which makes the structure of meaning and reference an ambivalent process, destroys this mirror of representation in which cultural knowledge is customarily revealed, as an integrated, open, expanding code. Such an intervention quite properly challenges our sense of the historical identity of culture as a homogenizing, unifying force, authenticated by the originality of the Past, kept alive in the national tradition of the People. In other words, the disruptive temporality of enunciation displaces the narrative. It is that Third Space, though unrepresentable in itself, which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that

<<https://www.everettsd.org/cms/lib07/WA01920133/Centricity/Domain/965/Meredith.pdf>>
[Accessed 20 February 2021].

even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew.¹¹¹

M.Wolf, when discussing Bhabha's Third Space and his agreement of the double vision, demonstrates that Bhabha

argues in favour of the *double vision* that individuals, such as migrants or social minorities, positioned at the merging of cultures possess, and stresses the intercultural tension produced by this merging. Bhabha's "double vision" recalls Norbert Elias's metaphor of man on the threshold of a new age, between what we call the Middle Ages and the Renaissance (1990, 107). Elias's man is standing on a bridge and has the face of Janus—his gaze is turned in two directions: one looking forward, one looking backward. In the "double vision" situation, the complex perspective of the marginalized is transmitted through the creativity of translation and transformation, thereby contributing to transcending social binarities of race, nation, gender or generation.¹¹²

But as in all conception of new things, the revolution-like development isn't smooth.

Arguably the Caribbean British Woman, within this new Third Space, is not as comfortable as he should/or will be, because of invisibility.

Despite appearances, the black individual is still at war within themselves and contributing to this warring self is the invisibility of the individual in society. There is recent research suggesting that not only black men have had issues with invisibility in society, but

¹¹¹ Bhabha, H. (1994.) *The location of culture*. London: Routledge.

¹¹² Wolf, M., n.d. *Chapter 7. The Third Space in Postcolonial Representation*. [online] Books.openedition.org. Available at: <<https://books.openedition.org/uop/2003?lang=en>> [Accessed 20 February 2021].

black women also. There is ‘research suggesting [that] Black women are invisible.’¹¹³

There has been some debate in the literature on the issue of whether Black women experience relative disadvantage or advantage due to their unique dual subordinate category membership. The prominent theory arguing in favor of disadvantage is the “double jeopardy” hypothesis, which posits a “double hit” of racism and sexism (Beale, 1970). From this perspective, Black women are assumed to be worse off than White women and Black men because they are subject to both racism and sexism (Epstein, 1973; Reid & Comas-Diaz, 1990; Settles, 2006).¹¹⁴

Black women not only have the previously mentioned issues of double consciousness, it can be argued they also have issues of invisibility. Fanon and De Bois’ theories on double-consciousness mention men and men alone, reinforcing the idea that women are invisible. Black women are contending with the ‘double jeopardy’ hypothesis. Deborah King, a black feminist explores this idea.

For us, the notion of double jeopardy is not a new one. Near the end of the nineteenth century, Anna Julia Cooper, who was born a slave and later became an educator and earned a PhD often spoke and wrote of the double enslavement of black women and of our being “confronted by both a woman question and a race problem.” In 1904, Mary Church Terrell, the first president of the National Association of Coloured Women wrote, “Not only are we colored women... handicapped on account of their sex but they are almost everywhere baffled and mocked because of their

¹¹³ Burkley, M. (2010). Are Black Women Invisible? [online] *Psychology Today*. Available at: <<https://www.psychologytoday.com/gb/blog/the-social-thinker/201012/are-black-women-invisible>> [Accessed 20 February 2021].

¹¹⁴ Biernat, M, Sesko, A. (2009). *Prototypes of race and gender: The invisibility of Black women*. [online] Metroboard.org. Available at: <<http://www.metroboard.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Sesko-Biernat-The-Invisibility-of-Black-Women.pdf>> [Accessed 20 February 2021].

race. Not only because they are women, but because they are coloured women.¹¹⁵

This mocking because of race, ties in with the ABW stereotype which became popular in the nineteenth century as previously stated and was used as a comic figure in the media.

From the 1800s through the mid-1900s, black women were often portrayed in popular culture as "Sassy Mammies" who ran their own homes with iron fists, including berating black husbands and children. These women were allowed, at least symbolically, to defy some racial norms. During the Jim Crow period, when real blacks were often beaten, jailed, or killed for arguing with whites, fictional Mammies were allowed to pretend-chastise whites, including men. Their sassiness was supposed to indicate that they were accepted as members of the white family, and acceptance of that sassiness implied that slavery and segregation were not overly oppressive.¹¹⁶

Ralph Ellison's novel *The Invisible Man*, highlights this 'double consciousness' and the problems of this invisibility through the general perspective of the male, although is transferable to the Black British woman. This idea of splitting oneself, splitting the language to mean opposites and trying to define the undefinable is key to understanding the Black British psyche - the invisible people. In *The Invisible Man*, Ellison floods the room with light, illustrating his own invisibility to others who refuse to see him, even in the glaring light.

¹¹⁵ King, Deborah K.(1988) "Multiple Jeopardy, Multiple Consciousness: The Context of a Black Feminist Ideology." *Signs*, vol. 14, no. 1 pp. 42–72. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/3174661. [Accessed 20 Feb. 2021].

¹¹⁶ Ferris.edu. n.d. *The Sapphire Caricature - Anti-black Imagery - Jim Crow Museum - Ferris State University*. [online] Available at: <https://www.ferris.edu/HTMLS/news/jimcrow/antiblack/sapphire.htm> [Accessed 20 February 2021].

I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me¹¹⁷

In Morrison's *Beloved*, this invisibility and problematic issues derived from slavery is presented as the metaphorical character of Beloved. Morrison stated:

I [...] blend the acceptance of the supernatural and a profound rootedness in the real world at the same time with neither taking precedence over the other. It is indicative of the cosmology, the way in which black people looked at the world. We are a very practical people, very down to earth, even shrewd people. But within that practicality we also accepted what I suppose could be called superstition and magic, which is another way on knowing things. [...] and some of those things were 'discredited knowledge' that Black people had; discredited only because Black people were discredited.¹¹⁸

This 'discredited knowledge' or lack of acknowledgment, is a form of invisibility. Black British Women, arguably, are 'invisible in a sociocultural way.'¹¹⁹ They are a physical embodiment of all that society refuses to see. In Burkley's 2010 article, *Are Black Women Invisible?*

Amanda Sesko and Monica Biernat examined the intriguing idea that Black women are socially invisible. In their first study, these researchers wanted to test if Black women were more likely to go unnoticed in a crowd, so they conducted a study to see how well people remembered Black women's faces. They showed White participants a series of photos depicting men and women who were White or Black. Later, participants were shown a new

¹¹⁷ R. Ellison. (2001). *The Invisible Man*. The Penguin Group, London p3

¹¹⁸ Plasa, C. (2000). *Toni Morrison "Beloved"*. Duxford: Icon Books p 57

¹¹⁹ Burkley, M. (2010). *Are Black Women Invisible?* [online] Psychology Today. Available at: <<https://www.psychologytoday.com/gb/blog/the-social-thinker/201012/are-black-women-invisible>> [Accessed 20 February 2021].

series of photos-some of the photos were new and some were the same photos they had seen before. Participants simply had to indicate if they had seen the face before. What they found is that participants' memory was worst at remembering whether they had seen a Black female face before or whether it was new. The same did not occur for Black male faces, suggesting it was something more than just the fact that the target was of another race than the participant. As the researchers pointed out, these results suggest that Black women are more likely than Black men or White men and women to go unnoticed by others in a group or social situation.¹²⁰

This marginalisation and loneliness can create many separate layers, as illustrated in *The Invisible Man*.

Ellison describes these pieces as levels in a basement, and as the nameless invisible narrator travels on a journey within the mind, he is seen descending through layer after layer in the basement to find what is at the core.

That night I found myself hearing not only in time, but in space as well. I not only entered the music but descended, like Dante, into its depths. And beneath the swiftness of the hot tempo there was a slower tempo and a cave and I entered it and looked around and heard an old woman singing a spiritual as full of Weltschmerz as flamenco, and beneath that lay a still lower level on which I saw a beautiful girl the color of ivory pleading in a voice like my mother's as she stood before a group of slave owners who bid for her naked body, and below that I found a lower level and a more rapid tempo and I heard someone shout: "Brothers and sisters, my text this morning is the 'Blackness of Blackness.'" ¹²¹

These separate layers could also be viewed as separate versions of the self that had been

¹²⁰ Ibid

¹²¹ Ellison, R., n.d. *Invisible man*. [ebook] New York: Random House. Available at: <https://bpi.edu/ourpages/auto/2010/5/11/36901472/Ralph%20Ellison%20-%20Invisible%20Man%20v3_0.pdf> [Accessed 4 July 2021].

constructed and constructed again, by the fractured mind. These versions could also be described as alter egos.

One such alter ego is seen in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* in the character of Bertha Rochester who is, in fact Antoinette Cosway, a creole heiress. She is given the name Bertha, almost against her will. Her madness is made explicit, as is her marginalisation and loneliness. The theme of loneliness and not being accepted is paramount in beginning to understand the dissociation which can have two outcomes, both a type of madness. Whereas the effect seen in Bertha Rochester, is an obvious madness. The madness seen by Moses in *The Lonely Londoners/Moses Ascending* appears on face value as a more subtle mental adjustment/change (the double consciousness warring inside and one half appearing to win out) which is more accepted by society and seen as the norm. In reference to Moses in *Moses Ascending*, he finds he is lonely and still looks for belonging.

In *Moses Ascending*, Moses begins to live in a big house and is served by a white servant. Since he becomes the landlord of the house, he has begun to put a distance between himself and the Creole fellows. And in Galahad's opinions, Moses has changed. He begins to deny the fact that he was a black and wants to live a peaceful life, enjoy his richness and get rid of his fellows. He [Moses] doesn't want to get restricted in the black circle for his whole life. He wants to flee from his past. So he moves to get rid of those fellows and enjoy the peaceful life and change his lifestyle into a real Londoner. He remembers the days when he first comes to London, poor and difficult. He knows he could not stand that kind of life but he is yearning for that feeling of belonging when so many Creoles live together. But now he gets nobody to talk to and be in accompanying with. He finds himself alone except a white man Bob.¹²²

¹²² Liu, T. (2016.) *Hybridization in Political Civilization in Samuel Selvon's The Lonely Londoners and Moses Ascending*. [ebook] Huaian: Huaiyin Institute of Technology.

Whereas in *Jane Eyre*, Bertha Rochester's violence (her setting fire to the house) can be interpreted resistance to her being imprisoned.

Tongues of flame darted round the bed: the curtains were on fire.¹²³

In comparison to this, Moses, in *Moses Ascending*, appears to have a passive acceptance of the situation and has adapted a personality to suit his surroundings, he has internalised the violence into a form of self-harm.

In the novel *Berthas*, versions of this madness can be seen in Monica, her aunts, as well as in the protagonist Saly and the alternative personality Clare. It is also present in Merry, which is suggestive of this madness being passed down or a learned behaviour in order to cope with harsh realities of living in a black body in a white dominated society.

Berthas explores how Saly copes with this 'double consciousness' or dissociation and hints at the hereditary factor of the mental health issue. Like Toni Morrison's *Jazz* (1992), the past of various characters is explored through the landscape of Jamaica and England.

This mental health issue among black women also has links to Bessie Head's semiautobiographical novel *A Question of Power* where the narrator's inner world is inhabited by characters who enact power struggles between themselves. The characters inside the narrators head engage with each other, similar to how Clare engages with Saly in *Berthas*.

Available at: <<http://www.academypublication.com/issues2/tpls/vol06/05/14.pdf>> [Accessed 2 July 2021].

¹²³ Bronte, C. (1998.) *Jane Eyre And Autobiography*. [ebook] The Project Gutenberg. Available at: <<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1260/1260-h/1260-h.htm>> [Accessed 2 July 2021].

The protagonist Elizabeth converses with inner hallucinations. Dan is representative of evil, and Sello is representative of good. Clare and Saly in *Berthas* journey to 'No Man's Land,' Elizabeth, Sello and Dan journey to hell:

The three of them had shared the strange journey into hell and kept close emotional tabs on each other. There seemed to be a mutual agreement in the beginning that an examination of inner hells was meant to end all hells for ever.¹²⁴

The character Saly in *Berthas* is inhabited with the character Clare. Freedom of movement with both characters is restricted due to the both belonging to the one body, but it is Saly who has ownership of the body in the beginning and restricts Clare's movements. Yet this changes as the narrative progresses.

Berthas also builds upon ideas hinted at in Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* and Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*. It can be argued that the 'mad woman in the attic' becomes representative of the black psyche to the Caribbean Briton. In this case, *Berthas* can be seen as a microcosm of the Black British society. Saly is excluded from society and seen as a figure to be feared. Her isolation and loneliness contribute to mental health issues much like they do with Bertha Rochester. Bertha Rochester is seen kissing herself in the mirror, which can be seen as representative of her mind splitting into two separate personalities,¹²⁵ and creating a doubling effect. It is also important to mention here that the character is of mixed heritage. This mixture has meant that she did not belong to either the black or the white society, and further compounds her loneliness because she isn't accepted by either.

¹²⁴ Head, B (2011) *A Question of Power*. South Africa Pty Ltd.: Penguin Books, pp location 50 of 3270.

¹²⁵ Rhys, J. (2000). *Wide Sargasso Sea*. The Penguin Group, London, p 147

Bertha Rochester found her movements restricted. One of her modes of freedom, was to tie herself to a white man in marriage. This unfortunately backfired as her movements, when returned to England were more restricted than ever as she was locked away in an attic. Thus, suggesting that Bertha did not expect to be virtually imprisoned when she came to England, she expected a freedom that she didn't have in the Caribbean. Much like the Caribbean migrants on arrival in England.

The disparity between what the Caribbean migrants of 1948 to 1971 expected to find in England and what they actually found has already been documented in Sam Selvon's *Lonely Londoners*. It was this confrontation of the unwelcome reception by the white British people which resulted in marginalisation and isolation. George Lamming, a Barbadian novelist, essayist and poet and an important figure in Caribbean literature, who first won critical acclaim with his debut novel, *In The Castle of My Skin*, reconstructed the atmosphere.

Can you imagine waking up one morning and discovering a stranger asleep on the sofa of your living room? This was exactly the situation many English people found themselves in when 'they awoke' to find 'these people' [once comrades on the Second World War battlefields, now strangers and post war immigrants] metaphorically on the sofa's of their living rooms. On one hand, the sleeper on the sofa was absolutely sure through empirical tutelage that he was at home, on the other, the native Englishman was completely mystified by this unknown interloper.¹²⁶

In 1948, the beginning of this migrant wave, The Empire Windrush carried 1027 passengers bound for England because the English economy needed willing hands. Newspapers showed

¹²⁶ Nasta, S. (2002) *Home Truths*. Palgrave. (City missing) p58

that the public were aware of the number of immigrants. *The Evening Standard's* headline was, 'Welcome Home,'¹²⁷ implying these immigrants were returning home, i.e. to the mother country. British industry welcomed these workers because of the demand for work, army reserves went abroad to recruit further willing workers. London Transport recruited from Barbados, Jamaica and Trinidad. West Indian nurses were welcomed to Britain by the Health Minister Enoch Powell and from the 1950s Britain's black community began to grow.

The reader first encounters the theme of loneliness and isolation in the very beginning of *Lonely Londoners*. Moses, reluctantly, finds himself going to meet another immigrant on his way over from Trinidad to England.

Moses vex with himself that his heart is so soft that he always does something for somebody and nobody ever does anything for him.¹²⁸

Moses appears to be helping out another West Indian out of the goodness of his heart. The 'Mother Country' is unwelcoming. From the hostility of the cold weather, to the hostility and chilly reception that welcomes immigrants from the British people. Ignorance of the immigrants was widespread; they were regarded as separate and isolated in every respect. The press at Waterloo station 'greeted' them to 'prove' negative assumptions of the immigrants from the British public. Tany, however, assumes that the British press were there to welcome her and her family to London and proudly poses for a picture. The reporter comments maliciously after the picture, 'I hope you don't find our weather too cold for

¹²⁷ Fryer, P. (1984). *Staying Power. The History of Black People in Britain*. Pluto Press p372.

¹²⁸ Selvon, S. (1956) *Lonely Londoners*. New York: Longman p23

you,’¹²⁹ which Tanty does not pick up on as being offensive.

Moses, in his desperation to be heard, pretends to be Jamaican and gives an interview.

This reinforces the idea of the immigrant’s isolation. However, it isn’t the news the reporter wants, so the interview is cut short.

Moses was sorry, it was the first chance he ever really get a good chance to say his mind, and he had a lot of things to say.¹³⁰

The experiences of these characters echoed many immigrants lives at the time. In the democratic British society, black British citizens felt that they were not being listened to and felt isolated. Much like the lonely characters in *Lonely Londoners*. This supported the idea of immigrants being second class citizens. Between 1958 and 1968 black settlers in England watched racism become legally institutionalized by both Conservatives and the Labour governments. Drilberg said ‘the problem was white racism, created by the very presence of Black people. Racism had become institutionalized, legitimized and nationalized.’¹³¹ Immigrants were known as second-class citizens and the attacks on them did not diminish. Peter Griffiths, a Tory candidate for Smethwick in the 1964 General Election, fought on an openly racist front. He promised the end of immigration and the re-patriotization of the ‘coloureds.’ His slogan was, ‘If you want a nigger neighbourhood, vote Labour.’¹³²

In *Lonely Londoners* this realisation dawns upon the characters slowly, that England

¹²⁹ Ibid p 32

¹³⁰ Selvon, S. *Lonely Londoners* p 29

¹³¹ Fryer, P. (1984.) *Staying power*. London: Pluto Press. p387

¹³² Brown, D. (2001). *A new language of racism in politics*. [online] the Guardian. Available at: <<https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2001/apr/27/race.world2>> [Accessed 20 February 2021].

and is not quite what they were taught it was in the West Indies. Just as the fog cloaked London and made it difficult for the West Indians to see and function, so the true thoughts and feelings of the English are shown to be cloaked in politeness and manners. Other immigrants who are white are put before black immigrants:

And you know the hurtful part of it? The Pole who have the restaurant, he ain't have no more right in this country than we. In fact, we is British subjects and he is only a foreigner, we have more right than any people from the damn continent to live and work in this country, and enjoy what this country have, because is we who bleed to make this country prosperous.¹³³

The Polish immigrants also reject the black immigrants, refusing to serve them in their restaurants.

The Lonely Londoners also explores the theme of reality verses illusions. This is reminiscent of the confusion of reality vs illusions in *Berthas*. In *The Lonely Londoners*, various illusions are unravelled: the illusion of belonging in England, the illusion of being English and the illusion of who the English really are. There is also the illusion of the romantic history of England and that they can be a part of that.

The Lonely Londoners encapsulates the romance and disenchantment of an imagined city that was both magnet and nightmare for its new colonial citizens, a promised land that despite its glittering lure turns out to be an illusion.¹³⁴

This illusion of being at home in the motherland was a lie that was widespread

¹³³ Selvon, S. *The Lonely Londoners* p 40

¹³⁴ Nasta, Susheila. (2018) The British Library. *The Lonely Londoners: a new way of reading and writing the city*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.bl.uk/windrush/articles/the-lonely-londoners-a-new-way-of-reading-and-writing-the-city>> [Accessed 3 July 2021].

throughout the colonial lands.

Selvon's ironic reversal of the El Dorado myth – his colonisation of England in reverse – has important socio-political implications. First and foremost, however, it remains a powerful imaginative work, timeless in its bittersweet love affair with the city and groundbreaking in its creation of an inclusive narrative voice that creates a new means of describing it. Moreover, the heart of this metropolis is elusive; its romance one of pathos and misery. It is a place divided up into 'little worlds, and you stay in the world you belong to and you don't know anything about what happening in the other ones'. It is an unforgiving world where 'men know what it is to hustle a pound to pay the rent when Friday come', a threatening, fractured landscape which Cap, the Nigerian (soon to be black Londoner), describes as 'hell.' For Selvon's characters inhabit a hidden world of derelict spaces that other 'people ...don't really know' they exist in a twilight subterranean enclave of cramped rooms situated somewhere between Notting Hill and the Harrow Road.¹³⁵

The immigrants only had part of the truth; the truth was broken up into pieces. They had these illusions shattered and told this shattering in fragmented pieces 'ballads.' These 'ballads' embraced a 'fragmented' structure and performed the fragmented idea/illusion of a free future. As previously mentioned, skin colour is a visible marker of one's place within society. The character Bart in *The Lonely Londoners* recognised the problem of colour.

Skin colour is central to these characters' alienation. Bart's denial of the implications of his colour is symptomatic of a destabilising of identity resulting from the experience of racial prejudice, a disassociation by Bart from his own sense of self; his outward alienation is mirrored by an inner one.¹³⁶

¹³⁵ Ibid

¹³⁶ OpenLearn. (1999). *Sam Selvon, The Lonely Londoners*. [online] Available at: <https://www.open.edu/openlearn/history-the-arts/culture/literature-and-creative->

The character Galahad also recognises his colour as the issue and his identity also begins to destabilise.

Galahad watch the colour of his hand and talk to it, saying
'Colour, is you that causing all this, you know. Why the hell
can't you be blue, or red, or green, if you can't be white? You
know is you that cause a lot of misery in the world. Is not me,
you know, is you! I ain't do anything to infuriate the people and
them, is you! Look at you, you so black and innocent, and this
time so you causing misery all over the world!'¹³⁷

What the characters are searching for is freedom. This is a recurring theme. They want freedom within a society that does not discredit them or their knowledge. A society which they can belong to.

Selvon illustrates the problems of freedom of movement and of belonging. In *The Lonely Londoners*, the characters have freedom, but it has limitations. The recurring element within the theme or context of freedom and its restrictions on some, is skin colour. Inhabitants of the Caribbean were historically, forcibly removed from the continent of Africa. From the Caribbean, they were 'invited' to the 'mother country,' freedom, here, being an illusion that many bought into. They didn't get the welcome they expected from the mother country, and they didn't get the freedom and the sense of belonging they were also promised either.

The characters in *Lonely Londoners* are similar to real life immigrants that came to Britain on the Empire Windrush in 1948. John Richard, a passenger on The Empire Windrush said

writing/literature/sam-selvon-the-lonely-londoners/content-section-3.2 [Accessed 16 Mar. 2019].

¹³⁷ Selvon, S. *The Lonely Londoners* p88

I know a lot about Britain from school days but it was a different picture from that one, when you came face to face with the facts. It was two different things. They tell you it is the 'mother country', you're all welcome, you all British. When you come here you realise you're a foreigner and that's all there is to it. The average person knows you as a colonial and that's all. You cut cane or carry bananas and that's it. Anybody wants to diddle you they say I just come off the banana boat and things like that.¹³⁸

These, excerpts of an interview transcript are first-hand accounts of how the white British treated their black colonial subjects. Vince Reid, another passenger commented:

I went to school in Kings Cross. I never associated with white people in any significant degree, and then school I came across real hostility. I mean to say I had no friends for several years that wouldn't be far from the truth.¹³⁹

These Caribbean British citizens fought for Britain in the war and believed that England was their home, was the mother country but they experience racism as well as restrictions because of their colour. As Sam King notes in his contribution:

I was born in Jamaica in 1926. The 'mother country' was at war with Nazi Germany, and I did believe in the British Empire. I have been here during the war fighting Nazi Germany and I came back and help build Britain.¹⁴⁰

Selvon demonstrates the existence of the colour bar within *The Lonely Londoners*.

¹³⁸ Bbc.co.uk. (2014). *BBC - History - British History in depth: Windrush - Arrivals*. [online] Available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/modern/arrival_01.shtml> [Accessed 20 February 2021].

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid

Selvon's novel traces not only mobility, but immobility. The *Lonely Londoners* maps freedom and its limitations. The freedom of movement that proves unfree, or of the collision of freedom with the unfreedoms imposed by the systemic racism of the modern state, and of post-war England in particular. It charts where his characters might go and where they might not, where they are free to move and where the colour bar literally bars that movement.¹⁴¹

However, in Britain there is also a restriction of movement on the black inhabitants. It is these restrictions that inevitably contribute to the marginalisation of the Caribbean British, and in turn, the mental health issues they face.

The black community within Britain are a hybrid race. They are not African; they are not Caribbean and they are not considered British.

“Black” meant “other” and “black” was unquestionably the opposite of “British”.¹⁴²

Their future is uncertain because they do not have a tangible past or belong to a present and are marginalised within a society that does not want them. Their broken personality constantly searches for somewhere to belong. This problem is compounded by having their freedom of movement restricted because of the colour bar and can result, in many cases, with Caribbean British individuals having significant mental health problems. This inevitably results in individuals being held in institutions.

¹⁴¹ Kabesh, L. (2011). *Mapping Freedom, or Its Limits: The Politics of Movement in Sam Selvon's The Lonely Londoners*. [online] Postcolonial.org. Available at: <<https://www.postcolonial.org/index.php/pct/article/viewFile/1255/1211>> [Accessed 20 February 2021].

¹⁴² Olusoga, D. (2016). *The reality of being black in today's Britain* | David Olusoga. [online] the Guardian. Available at: <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/oct/30/what-it-means-to-be-black-in-britain-today>> [Accessed 20 February 2021].

In general, people from black and minority ethnic groups living in the UK are:

- more likely to be diagnosed with mental health problems
- more likely to be diagnosed and admitted to hospital
- more likely to experience a poor outcome from treatment
- more likely to disengage from mainstream mental health services, leading to social exclusion and a deterioration in their mental health. These differences may be explained by a number of factors, including poverty and racism.¹⁴³

Racism here, can be synonymous with isolation and marginalisation. Loneliness and isolation (from being a victim of racism) can lead to mental health problems and social exclusion, perhaps in an institution. The idea of madness locked away in an institution, is illustrated in *Wide Sargasso Sea* where Bertha Rochester is locked away in an attic so her madness cannot be seen. This is also prevalent within the black community as mental health illness carries with it a stigma. Within the community in the Caribbean as well as in Britain, mental illness is viewed as shameful rather than an illness, and not confronted appropriately. The character Owen in *Berthas* in the beginning, refuses to acknowledge his wife's illness, illustrating the stigma surrounding mental health which is still prevalent in society. Owen refuses to acknowledge it because of the social stigma of mental illness as well as it being a hard subject to accept. After Owen sees Saly abuse the cat, he watches, is shocked but does nothing because he does not know what to do, or how to process what he has just seen.

¹⁴³ Mental Health Foundation. (n.d.). *Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) communities*. [online] Available at: <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/a-to-z/b/black-asian-and-minority-ethnic-bame-communities> [Accessed 16 Mar. 2018].

Owen stared, dumbfounded. Had he just seen what he thought he saw? He had always been the quiet sort. When he was at school, he was reluctant to confront people when he didn't agree with them, he'd rather just leave them let them do what they wanted. He wasn't good at arguing and hated the attention. Seeing Saly doing what she did, he paused, unsure of how to proceed but the cold woke him from his shocked daze, and he let himself back into the kitchen.

He walked quietly up the stairs and to the bathroom, locking the door behind him.¹⁴⁴

Mental health problems can be difficult for people to understand. This is what contributes to the stigma. Some people 'may have misconceptions about what certain diagnoses mean.'¹⁴⁵

From this lack of understanding can come fear and prejudice.

The character Glanford in *Berthas* illustrates his opinion on mental health as a defence for illegal activity that some people use.

The next minute uno have criminals running rampant, 'dem killing off them wife, or dem woman, or dem rob a shop and dem first defense is dem mad!'¹⁴⁶ 'Mental illness... what kind of fool fool nonsense talk is dat?'¹⁴⁷

Mental health, within Jamaica, is stigmatised. Those suffering from mental illness are often ostracized by others through fear and ignorance, as beyond help and unreachable.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁴ *Berthas* p54

¹⁴⁵ Mind.org.uk. (2017) *Stigma around mental health*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/mental-health-problems-introduction/stigma-misconceptions/>> [Accessed 3 July 2021].

¹⁴⁶ *Berthas* p28

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid*

¹⁴⁸ Hickling, C. H. Robertson-Hickling, (2010) T.Haynes-Robertson,W.Abel. *Mad, Sick, Head Nuh Good" Transcultural Psychiatry* Vol 47(2): 252–275

To combat the problem of belonging that can affect British Caribbean's mental health they use the idea of creating an individualised name to challenge the problem of identity and belonging. For example, the Caribbean British will often adjust a common name's spelling, in order to create an individual name for an individual. One can also change names. Name changing is a solution used in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Antoinette Cosway's new husband changes Antoinette's name to Bertha to avoid the stigma of madness following his wife, yet this does not solve the problems. It only goes to highlight how naming is linked to belonging. In the novel itself it is important to notice that the husband, Rochester, is not named, and Bertha becomes a name for Antoinette with negative connotations. The name 'Bertha' becomes synonymous with madness.

Within *Berthas*, the naming theme is evident within the character Mary as well as her daughter Saly. Mary changes the spelling of Sally, using only one L, and therefore claiming complete ownership over her child who is the product of Parkie raping her. This idea of naming equating to ownership arguably stems from when captured slaves had their names discarded in preference of the European owner's name, the name being demonstrative of ownership.

Names have connotations of race, gender identity and class. In the novel *Berthas* the connection to England is made and not only is England seen as positive one but is also seen as synonymous with whiteness and so elevates the black family above other black members of their society. This highlights the paradoxical relationship that it can be suggested that Jamaicans have with England. They hate the colonial rule but have an affection for the monarchy. Annie Paul is of the opinion that:

Many ordinary Jamaicans feel very warmly towards the Queen, something that dates back to the days of slavery when the enslaved saw the crown as a sympathetic authority, often interceding on their behalf in the face of cruel and callous plantation owners. Perhaps such residual feelings of goodwill explain the otherwise startling finding from polls conducted as recently as 2011. These showed that as many as 60% of Jamaicans surveyed felt that the country would be better off under British rule, while only 17% thought things would have been worse had Jamaica remained a colony. Clues to popular sentiment on the subject of becoming a republic can also be found elsewhere. A surprising number of people in Jamaica are very reluctant to part with the privy council as the final arbiter of justice in this postcolonial society, and the newly constituted Caribbean Court of Justice is viewed with suspicion by many.¹⁴⁹

The characters in *Berthas* that have English connections are seen within the context of Jamaica and their local society as more cultured, more sophisticated, as higher in the social hierarchy. Even the connection that Monica had through her grandmother translates into status within the community.

Most kids who started school were around 8 but Monica's grandmamma had other ideas. Only those with money or a higher social status went to school at such an early age – which meant Monica was going. How could she not? Having a grandmamma like that with her ties to h'Englan'? It was expected.¹⁵⁰

Writing and education by their society is seen as a white dominated sphere. The idea that the association with whiteness elevating black people slightly is an idea that is

¹⁴⁹ Paul, A. (2012). *Jamaicans' love of Britain may yet see the island reject full independence* / Annie Paul. [online] the Guardian. Available at: <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/mar/09/jamaicans-love-britain-island-reject-independence>> [Accessed 20 February 2021].

¹⁵⁰ *Berthas* p 171

reiterated within *Berthas* as well as in other novels.

The window opened wide had a lacy net curtain that their mother prized. It was sent all the way from England. Somehow that net curtain meant that they were a better class of people than their neighbours; that they were more cultured than the common country folk in St Elizabeth; that they were of good breeding.¹⁵¹

In Selvon's *Moses Migrating*, the character Moses 'transcends' his societal position when he begins to write his 'memoirs,'¹⁵² and rises further in *Moses Ascending*, when he becomes a landlord: 'if you are a landlord, it is a horse of a different colour.'¹⁵³ Moses is aware of the colour bar, barring him from elevation, yet being a property owner he hopes will change this. This elevation is reflected in his changed language as well as his changed situation. He begins to live in an attic room, symbolically placing himself higher than the other black members within the house.¹⁵⁴ Class becomes dependent on colour, and associations with whiteness, as in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, *The Lonely Londoners*, and *Berthas*, and is linked to how well one conducts oneself in the slave owner's language.

The 'New Man,' created through the violence of slavery, was remodelled again through The movement to the Mother Country that was unwelcoming and restrictive. One of the ways immigrants challenged this was by attempting to claim an identity through space, language and names. Whereas the freedom of movement was restricted, naming became a way of attempting to develop an identity with so many other elements missing. The presentation of

¹⁵¹ Ibid p6

¹⁵² Selvon, S. *Moses Ascending*. Heinemann Educational Books, UK, p xi

¹⁵³ Ibid p3

¹⁵⁴ Ibid p4

the act of naming in literature helps to challenge the stereotypes of black people and in the context of *Berthas*, of black women.

6. Language and Power

The English language arguably does not belong to the English but is a Global Language.¹⁵⁵

Through Empire, Europeans effectively exported their language and like white skin, it carried with it a certain amount of power that was enforced through Empire. This thesis demonstrates the power of language through the character of Ivorene in the beginning of the novel who elevates her family by speaking 'The Queen's English,' as well as being in possession of items of clothing and bedding from England. In fact, she goes so far as to have the portrait of the queen in her living room. This is seen when Monica hobbles 'past Queen Victoria.'¹⁵⁶

According to Monica Clayton, (interviewed in 2020 aged 71; Caribbean British) it was generally accepted within the West Indies that Queen Victoria helped bring about the abolition of slavery, and so many homes had her portrait within the living room.

- C What can you tell me about the opinion that it was Queen Victoria that abolished slavery?
- M They thought a lot of her! [Jamaicans'] Grandad have a big portrait of her in the living room. They loved her. Jamaicans to this day! Love her. They think it was on her orders. I'm only saying what my grandfather says. Queen Victoria freed the slaves in Jamaica. They look at England as the Mother Land. Africa is the alternate Motherland. ¹⁵⁷

The effect of this admiration for Queen Victoria was to further strengthen the connection with

¹⁵⁵ Mastin, L. (2011). *The History of English - English as a Global Language*. [online] Thehistoryofenglish.com. Available at: <https://www.thehistoryofenglish.com/issues_global.html> [Accessed 20 February 2021].

¹⁵⁶ *Berthas* p 184

¹⁵⁷ Clayton, Monica (2021). Feb 15th

England and therefore claim a form of superiority with it. This is the power a language can have over and within a culture and it is this connection that is referred to in *Berthas*.

During Victoria's reign the British believed their empire was a force for good in that the purpose of empire was to bring civilisation to its colonies. It was the abolition of slavery that enabled the [white] British to claim that their empire unlike all others past and present had a moral dimension. Abolishing slavery and also the slave trade was a source of pride for the British and led to a sense of cultural superiority.¹⁵⁸

This is the power a language can have over and within a culture and it is this connection that is referred to in *Berthas*.

'Dat right. *We* speak proper cos we have connexion in h'Englan'!'¹⁵⁹

This was also the effect of using the English Language: one was awarded with the same superiority that the British claimed for abolishing slavery.

It has already been stated how the hybrid version of English developed and was used within the literary world by writers such as Walcott in *Omeros* and Selvon in *Lonely Londoners*, but when considering the un-creolised English Language, there is a direct connection to be made with the power that conversing in it carries, especially among the Caribbean people. Being accused of being 'speaky spokey' occurs when members of a family dared to speak English the way the English spoke it, rather than using Jamaican English. The accusation is that the speaker giving themselves 'airs and graces,' i.e. elevating

¹⁵⁸ Crowhurst, P., n.d. *Abolition of Slavery*. [online] Britishempire.me.uk. Available at: <<https://www.britishempire.me.uk/abolitionofslavery.html>> [Accessed 20 February 2021].

¹⁵⁹ *Berthas* p7

themselves above their peers. Conducting yourself in ‘better’ English carried with it ideas of being superior, educated and privileged, tied to the political power of the British slave owner on the plantation in Jamaica. The slave owners, contributing to this division, divided the slaves up into house slaves and field slaves. The house slaves had physically lighter work and were generally of lighter skin. The field slaves had harder work and generally were of darker skin. This linked the idea of fairer skin being closer to white meant that these slaves had more privileges. This created a division among the slaves. Malcolm X explained the difference in slaves in his 1963 speech, *Message to the Grassroots*.

To understand this, you have to go back to what [the] young brother here referred to as the house Negro and the field Negro — back during slavery. There was two kinds of slaves. There was the house Negro and the field Negro. The house Negroes — they lived in the house with master, they dressed pretty good, they ate good ’cause they ate his food — what he left. The Negro in the field caught hell. He ate leftovers. In the house they ate high up on the hog. The Negro in the field didn’t get nothing but what was left of the insides of the hog. The field Negro was beaten from morning to night. He lived in a shack, in a hut; He wore old, castoff clothes. He hated his master. ¹⁶⁰

Just as being able to conduct oneself accurately in English, drew a link to the white slave owner and privilege, much like the house slave living in the same house as their white masters divided them from the field slave and gave them a superiority. The house slave would be one that being ‘well spoken’ and educated attributed to black people being ‘more white’. Implying that education is something that is constructed and demonstrated and

¹⁶⁰ X, M., (1963) *Malcolm X, "Message to the Grassroots"* •. [online] Blackpast.org. Available at: <<https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/speeches-african-american-history/1963-malcolm-x-message-grassroots/>> [Accessed 6 July 2021].

utilised by white people, giving them the ownership, which equates to more power.

Therefore, a black person learning and being educated equals to behaving 'more white.' This elevates them above their peers because of the association between privilege, whiteness and education. One could argue that whiteness has become synonymous with privilege, power and education. This is demonstrated within *Berthas* when Monica is sent to school, early. She is being educated, which is seen as their family setting themselves above their peers - they are more 'white' than black.

Most kids who started school were around 8 but Monica's grandmama had other ideas. Only those with money or a higher social status went to school at such an early age - which meant Monica was going. How could she not? Having a grandmama like that with her ties to h'Englan?' It was expected.¹⁶¹

Jamaicans found themselves lacking a recognised indigenous language and, a cultural heritage that they could call their own. And with this claiming came the complex mixed emotional response to their 'mother' country and its culture. It can be suggested that this contributed to the psychological damage to the individual caused by not having 'roots.' Caribbean British people struggled not having cultural roots to belong to, or having a language that belonged to them so the solution of naming attempted to solve the problem of not belonging. However, it did not heal the wound that slavery inflicted. The slaves' language is a creolised version of their oppressors, and their culture is a creolisation of a fragmented past to fill in the missing gaps.

¹⁶¹ *Berthas* p173

In the novel *Berthas*, much is missing for Saly. The hybridity of her cultural makeup contributes to the feeling of unrest Saly feels. Descendants of slavery know from an early age that something is wrong, but they cannot classify it. J Ward in *The Fire This Time* described this feeling of knowing that something is missing but being unable to identify what is missing, or where it could be. What is felt is that something is wrong.

It felt like tracing along the clues of a murder mystery: something was wrong. I couldn't identify the crime, but I was aware of it. Inside of me and in the whole world around me, and both were deeply connected.¹⁶²

The gaps missing from not belonging fully in any place, not having a complete language that is their own, not having a complete culture and identity, is something that cannot easily be found or constructed. This missing information is what contributes to Saly's split psyche. This phrase 'something is missing. Something is wrong'¹⁶³ is repeated within *Berthas* to suggest the missing gaps of culture that slavery but also links with the death of characters as well as the death of countless slaves who lost their lives through slavery and the slave trade.

At least 2 million Africans--10 to 15 percent--died during the infamous "Middle Passage" across the Atlantic. Another 15 to 30 percent died during the march to or confinement along the coast. Altogether, for every 100 slaves who reached the New World, another 40 had died in Africa or during the Middle Passage.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶²J.Ward. *The Fire This Time*. Scribner, New York (2016) p 202

¹⁶³ *Berthas* p189

¹⁶⁴ Mintz, S. and McNeil, S. (2018). *Digital History*. [online] Digitalhistory.uh.edu. Available at: <https://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/disp_textbook.cfm?smtid=2&psid=446> [Accessed 8 July 2021].

The missing gaps of culture stems from the idea that slavery disrupted a people's growth or progression. So, what is missing is what they have not been able to do. There is also the link of the missing evidence of Britain's role in slavery and colonialization, destroyed for fear of embarrassing Britain. (This will be discussed later in this thesis.) And there is the missing black female voices previously mentioned by Olusoga and referred to in Chapter 2 of this thesis. These missing gaps add to the idea of a collective issue with identity and belonging that Caribbean Women face.

Clare in *Berthas* personifies the 'angry aggressive' persona, the stereotype of the ABW that responds to what has been done to and onto Saly. Clare represents persona that fights back against racism that is ingrained into British society, and has been for centuries, mirroring anger and violence, but Clare grows out of control and feels resentment at having been excluded for so long. Clare essentially rises up and takes Saly over.

In *Berthas*, when considering language, one can compare Saly and Ivy. Ivy's language is very different to Saly's. Saly speaks in a more formal English whereas Ivy speaks in creole. Here the intention is that the command of one's English has a direct link to that person's mental capabilities.

Ivy is judged by Saly, and more so by Owen as not being as knowledgeable as they are. This impression derives from her command of the English language. A common occurrence in modern society. If one doesn't speak 'proper' English or if an accent is prominent, one is deemed as inferior. Fanon suggests that

A man who has a language consequently possesses the world expressed and implied by that language.¹⁶⁵

Command of the colonizer's language equates to power, and success depends on the command of the language as well as the accent of the speaker.

To speak a language is to take on a world, a culture. The Antilles Negro who wants to be white will be the whiter as he gains greater mastery of the cultural tool that language is.¹⁶⁶

For it can be argued that 'white' during colonialism became synonymous with power, education and intelligence.

¹⁶⁵ Fanon. F. *Black Skins, White Masks* p19

¹⁶⁶ Sawyer, L. (2011). *Fanon – The Negro and Language*. [online] LaToya Lydia Sawyer. Available at: <<https://latoyasawyer.com/2011/12/18/fanon-the-negro-and-language/>> [Accessed 20 February 2021].

7. *Berthas* and Black Language

As previously mentioned, language can be synonymous with power and privilege. Just as the fairer skinned house slaves were seen as socially superior to the darker skinned field slaves, the command of the colonizers language afforded a more positive impression of the individual in the white dominated society. Having a command of the colonizer's language was synonymous with being privileged in speaking this white language.

Language as communication and as culture is then products of each other and Language carries culture, and culture carries, particularly through orature and literature, the entire body of values by which we perceive ourselves and our place in the world. Language is thus inseparable from us as a community of human beings with a specific form and character, a specific history, a specific relationship to the world. Most of the people believe that "language" is the basic tool used to give identity to a national culture. Language relationship with mind, soul, identity and thought of those who speak in their mother tongue, make most of colonialists societies to colonizing other societies focus on language and language identity of those societies. Being aware of importance of language and cultural domination, during their colonialism, colonialists try to convey their thought, beliefs and their customs through language as a cultural tool in an invisible and imperceptible way. Using this policy they can complete and strengthen their process of penetration and colonialism on others. As the result of lingual and cultural weakness, conquered societies submitted to colonialists¹⁶⁷

This kind of white language is linked with white supremacy. According to A. Gray,

¹⁶⁷ Shakib, M. (2011.) *The position of language in development of colonization*. [ebook] Lorestan University. Available at: <https://academicjournals.org/article/article1379500755_Shakib.pdf> [Accessed 3 July 2021].

The standards of professionalism, according to American grassroots organizer-scholars Tema Okun and Keith Jones, are heavily defined by white supremacy culture—or the systemic, institutionalized centering of whiteness. In the workplace, white supremacy culture explicitly and implicitly privileges whiteness and discriminates against non-Western and non-white professionalism standards related to dress code, speech, work style, and timeliness.¹⁶⁸

When exploring language the ideas around white supremacy in white language, one must also consider the immigrant's language. April Baker-Bell's *Linguistic Justice*, can be compared to the Jamaican Creole spoken in Britain as the Mother Tongue of Caribbean British people. The novel *Berthas* can help to provide ethnographic snapshots on how Caribbean British women navigate their linguistic and racial identities. Many Caribbean British do something called 'code switching,' from a British version of the America Black Language to the more accepted Standard English. This code switching enables a black identity to navigate in a white space.

My mother tongue, Black Language, was the dominant language I came up on. I have always marvelled at the way black people in my community would *talk that talk*. From signifying to *habitual be* to *call and response*, my linguistic community had a way of using language that was powerful, colorful and unique. My mother still remains my favourite linguistic role model. As a young girl I would "try-on" my mother's speech styles in conversations with my siblings, friends, or in instances where I needed to protect myself and others. This language, this Black

¹⁶⁸ Gray, A. (2019.) *The Bias of 'Professionalism' Standards (SSIR)*. [online] Ssir.org. Available at: <https://ssir.org/articles/entry/the_bias_of_professionalism_standards#> [Accessed 3 July 2021].

Language, is the language that nurtured and socialized me to understand the world and how to participate in it.¹⁶⁹

Within the comfortable context of home, a version of Jamaican British Patois is used by parents when conversing with their families. It acts as a guidance or a way to navigate the world they are in and is the basis on which they form their understanding of the world around them. The Mother Tongue, as the name suggests, can be seen as the most valuable of all languages to an individual because it is the language that they speak at home and/or in a familial setting.

Mother tongue is valuable due to several reasons. Mother tongue is vital in framing the thinking and emotions of people. Learning to speak in the mother tongue is very necessary for a child's comprehensive development. Being fluent in the mother tongue, which is also known as the native language, benefits the child.¹⁷⁰

And so fluency of this Mother Tongue helped form the identity of the said individual. As the mother tongue wasn't Standard English, the commonly accepted form of language, individuals spoke what they were comfortable in at home and switched when in public or in a more formal setting. In *Berthas*, within the comforts of the home setting certain characters speak in Patois. Ivy and Glanford visit Saly and Owen and speak patois to reflect identity and social setting. It is placed next to the more formal speech of Owen who uses Standard English as the norm, yet understands and responds appropriately to Patois.

¹⁶⁹ Baker-Bell, April. (2020) *Linguistic Justice*. Routledge

¹⁷⁰ Nishanthi, Rajathurai. (2021.) (PDF) *Understanding Of The Importance Of Mother Tongue Learning*". Researchgate
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/345436020_Understanding_of_the_Importance_of_Mother_Tongue_Learning. [Accessed 16 Feb 2021].

“Lard, what a journey Glanford drive all de way ‘ere. But we meet upon traffic up roun’ de ring road...”

“Yes, it can be quite bad round that side.” Owen pulled up a chair for Glanford, went to the fridge and took out a beer for himself and the old man. “Sometimes, if you leave early, you avoid the traffic, but not today. Saturday it can snarl up pretty bad round there.”¹⁷¹

Glanford makes it clear, through his mannerisms and his use of Patois that he is relaxed and in an informal setting.

“Yessir, me get ketch,” Glanford accepted the beer gratefully, pulled the ring cap and slurped the liquid, rinsing around his dentures before swallowing and sighing satisfied whilst looking hard at the bottle in his hand. “Me jus tek mi time. All of dem ya ina hurry. He chuckled before taking another slurp. Min uh inna hurry tuh meet mi maka.”¹⁷²

Here we see the juxtapositions of both languages side by side: Owen in Standard English and Glanford in Patois. Although there is not a direct miscommunication because of the two different languages, the characters carry with them different preconceived ideas on current affairs based upon cultural expectations and assumptions. For example the kidnapping of girls stolen from a school in Africa, Glanford vocalises his anger, “dem ‘ave no shame!”¹⁷³ Yet he finds he is unable to comment much more. Owen, does not comment at all. Arguably, he feels that these events happening far from him, are irrelevant to him and his life, and so he does not comment.

Both Owen and Glanford are the only two males in the house, and we see that despite

¹⁷¹ *Berthas* p14

¹⁷² *Ibid* p14

¹⁷³ *Ibid* p16

speaking these different languages, they still communicate and find common ground through the game of dominoes, a game which was brought to the Caribbean by the colonizers and plantation owners, yet embraced by the Caribbean people. ‘Glanford slammed down a piece rocking back confidently on his chair, laughing.’¹⁷⁴ However, when settings change, individuals code-switch.

For this thesis interviews have taken place with Monica Clayton, who grew up in both Jamaica and Britain. Monica Clayton was asked about her experiences living in Jamaica up to the age of 10, where she came to Britain to live with her father. She was asked about code switching and of specific examples where she saw it demonstrated.

C When you were at home, do you remember how your mum used to speak to you? What was her language like?

M When we were at home, we used to speak how we want. We were comfortable. It was only when we went outside that momma used to ‘speaky-spokey.’ That’s what we used to call it. Everyone switched when they were outside the comforts of their own home.¹⁷⁵

Another common situation is one where the Caribbean parents are talking to the children in Patois and the code switch to answer the phone. Ms Marie Rowe was also interviewed. Marie, like Monica Clayton (nurse) and Jacqueline Parkinson (police officer) has lived in both Jamaica and Britain. Marie Rowe (Classroom assistant) was also asked about code switching and the use of Patois within the home.

¹⁷⁴Ibid p16

¹⁷⁵ Clayton, Monica (2021). Feb 15th

- C When you were at home, do you remember how your mum used to speak to you? What was her language like?
- M I remember when mum was telling us off in Jamaican patois, but then the phone rang. As soon as she picked up the phone, she began speaking in this forced way. We called it mum's posh voice. The transition was seamless as well as humorous.¹⁷⁶

This idea of code switching, or speaking Patois when one was comfortable is one that is common of the immigrant experience. Within *Berthas*, this is also prevalent. The novel starts with the death of the Ivorene surrounded by her daughters and her granddaughter Monica, who is hiding as she watches the drama unfold. The family are in their home setting, comfortable, and so speak in Patois. When discussing the aging older relatives in *Berthas* Doreen says 'dem na wan no fuss.'¹⁷⁷ But the mother who is dying, is said to be more of a show woman. 'Yuh kno ow momma loves tuh ave a audience. Always di show uhman.'¹⁷⁸ This family are presented as fair skinned or 'red,' which plays into intra-racial racism codes. 'The red-skinned family were accused of being 'speaky-spokey.'¹⁷⁹ This 'speaky spokey' is referring to the code switching previously mentioned. The family, when in a public setting, spoke more formal English. 'Dat right. We speak proper cos we have connection in h'England!'¹⁸⁰ And were known for this type of speaking in public. However, in their private setting they would switch to Jamaican Creole. 'Mi ago far, far, far.

¹⁷⁶ Rowe, Marie (2020). October 21st

¹⁷⁷ *Berthas* p5

¹⁷⁸ Ibid p6

¹⁷⁹ Ibid p6

¹⁸⁰ Ibid p6

It a clear, de fog a clear. Mi going.’¹⁸¹ Code switching was and is a common occurrence.

- C Can you think of another time where there was this code switching?
- M Yes. When I was working in hospital as a nurse. The patients would be well spoken when you talk to them. But when their family came in, they would rabbit away in their own language. They were more comfortable talking to each other that way. But they were in hospital. When I was younger, our teacher, Mrs Cole, used to pass by our back yard to get to her home. We used to shout out, ‘Good Morning Mrs Cole! How are you?’ We used to speak proper English outside our home and talking to our teacher, but as soon as she was gone we would talk to each other in Jamaican patois.¹⁸²

Speaking Standard English, or ‘proper English’ partakes in the legacy of slavery. This ‘proper’ English carries with it the implication of having a certain standard of education as well as a superior status within the social hierarchy.

Code-switching approach requires racially and linguistically marginalized students to switch from the linguistic system of the language or dialect, they are most familiar with to White Mainstream English.¹⁸³

The Jamaican Patois spoken was a language that evolved over time with African words creolised with the European languages introduced through the Slave Trade.

- M - They were forbidden to speak African y’see. And they were forced to speak English, but some of the African words survived. I used to sit and listen to my mother

¹⁸¹Ibid p7

¹⁸² Clayton, Monica (2021). Feb 15th

¹⁸³ Baker-Bell, April. *Linguistic Justice*. Routledge (2020). p29

speaking sometimes and was fascinated by some of the words. It came easy to them, this way of speaking was comfortable. They spoke what you called ‘gibberish’ or ‘Patois.’ Jamaicans do this. And although they may not have the qualifications to prove it, they are intelligent in their own right.¹⁸⁴

Through interviewing Monica Clayton it is suggested that the belief of intelligence lies in the evidence of qualifications provided through the school setting. It is this school setting that providing a superior education and conducted in this superior Standard English that Monica in *Berthas* is sent to at an age earlier than others because of the implied superiority of her family. This superiority is implied through their ‘red skin,’ (fair skin) evidence of plantation politics: the fairer skinned an individual was, the higher the social status. Your command of the Standard English confirmed your position. This type of English is promoted in the school setting in both the UK, US as well as Jamaica.

White Mainstream English tends to be promoted as the acceptable language to be used most of the time, in most places, for most audiences, communicative purposes, and in most social and cultural contexts. [Teachers are taught to] encourage [students] to code-switch without any regard to their racial realities or the role that Anti-Black Linguistic Racism plays in why they are being asked to ‘code’ their language in the first place.¹⁸⁵

Jamaican Patois is also associated with the stereotypes of the ABW. And so, code switching from Jamaican Patois or Black Language to Standard English is a reflex that is seen as negative. In the novel *The Hate You Give* the author Angie Thomas illustrates this code

¹⁸⁴ Clayton, Monica (2021). Feb 15th

¹⁸⁵ Baker-Bell, April. *Linguistic Justice*. Routledge (2020). p29-30

switching in her protagonist Starr. Starr code switches depending on where she is. In the white dominated school, she speaks a more standard America English and in her black neighbourhood, she speaks a Black American English.

I just have to be normal Starr at normal Williamson and have a normal day. That means flipping the switch in my brain so I'm Williamson Starr. Williamson Starr doesn't use slang – as a rapper would say it, she doesn't say it, even if her white friends do. Slang makes them cool. Slang makes her “hood”. Williamson Starr holds her tongue when people piss her off so nobody will think she's the “angry black girl.” Williamson Starr is approachable.¹⁸⁶

The SBW and the ABW stereotype can provide an insight into highlighting prejudices linked with racism and white supremacy of linguistic biases perpetuated through the context of African slavery. The characters in *Berthas* are examples of these stereotypes as well as being placed in situations which comment on the shared experiences of Caribbean British Women. The older generation within *Berthas* speak much like older Caribbean British people living in England – Jamaican Creole and they code switch in a similar way.

¹⁸⁶ Thomas, Angie. *The Hate U Give*. Walker Books Limited (2017). P73-74

8. Translations of Blackness

The representation on blackness in the media matters. The media reflects the values of society around it and if representations are incorrect they can have consequences on this society. Blackness has been misrepresented. As I previously stated in this thesis, black women have been stereotyped as the ABW or the SBW. This in turn has affected their psyche. Black voices and stories have not been represented enough as previously mentioned and evidenced with comments from historian D. Olusoga. The misrepresentations of blackness, or lack of representation, has shaped the consciousness of black people. The split in personality that is demonstrated in Berthas occurs because of many factors. One of those factors is this misrepresentation which affects how Saly views blackness and herself.

In A. Williams Georgia State University thesis entitled *Black Matter: Re-Evaluating Representations of Blackness through Theatre Arts*, she states that

Negative stereotypes of Black people were created and ingrained in the American society, which projected Black people as lazy, ignorant, wild, sexually aggressive and bestial – a stigma that still haunts and defines Black people today.¹⁸⁷

Despite this comment being about African Americans, for reasons already stated in this thesis, these comments are applicable to the Black British community because of the shared history of African slavery and the close British/American ties. A Williams further says

¹⁸⁷ Williams, A. (2018.) *Black Matter: Re-Evaluating Representations of Blackness Through Theatre Arts* p1 [ebook] Atlanta: Georgia State University. Available at: <https://scholarworks.gsu.edu/aas_theses/51> [Accessed 7 July 2021].

My knowledge of the theatre field has shown me thus far that Black people are - misrepresented and underrepresented – especially in the American academic and performing arts curriculum.¹⁸⁸

The mental health of Caribbean British because of marginalisation and isolation is compounded by the misrepresentations on blackness used to form stereotypes such as the ABW and the SBW. A modern stereotyping of this character comes in the form of Serena Williams. 'Black women in America have long been dogged by negative stereotypes rooted in a history of racism and slavery. In the aftermath of Serena Williams' controversial US Open loss, it's the trope of the "angry black woman" that has once again re-emerged.'¹⁸⁹ More specifically, it was the way she was punished for an outbreak during an emotional game of tennis in the US opens. Serena Williams challenged the umpire. Within the BBC article, Prasad states that "'Black women are not supposed to push back and when they do, they're deemed to be domineering. Aggressive. Threatening. Loud.'"¹⁹⁰ in 2009. Williams was fined \$82,500 for a similar angry outburst.

Australian illustrator Mark Wright went further in depicting Serena Williams within the mad 'angry' stereotype within a cartoon which cleared of racism by press watchdog. The cartoon clearly depicted Williams having an infantile temper tantrum. Ironically, her opponent who is Haitian-Japanese is depicted as white with blonde hair illustrating that colour is relevant in the negative stereotyping of black women.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid p5

¹⁸⁹ Prasad, R., (2021.) *Serena Williams and the trope of the 'angry black woman'*. [online] BBC News. Available at: <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-45476500>> [Accessed 20 February 2021].

¹⁹⁰ Ibid

The 19th Century minstrel shows in America which mocked African Americans, helped to catapult this stereotype of angry black women, and encouraged it (and by association, black women) to be mocked and ridiculed within society. 'Blair Kelley, associate professor of history at North Carolina State University, says black women were often played by overweight white men who painted their faces black and donned fat suits "to make them look less than human, unfeminine, ugly". "Their main way of interacting with the men around them was to scream and fight and come off angry, irrationally so, in response to the circumstances around them."¹⁹¹ This mocking of black women within media is demonstrated through the treatment of Serena Williams by the illustrator Mark Wright.

In the USA, Jim Crow laws in the late 19th and early 20th century legitimised the unfair treatment of black individuals whereas popular culture promoted ideas of black women with 'iron-fists, yelling at everyone from children to white men.'¹⁹² It is this stereotype which has lasted in America as well as in Britain and contributes towards the ABW stereotype that has mentally affected societies black women.

In *Berthas*, the protagonist Mary has had her psyche slit and formed Clare as a result of isolation and loneliness that society has compounded through these negative media images and representations of blackness. Which can lead to damaged self-esteem. Although these ideas are explored in *Berthas*, the narrative structure of this creative piece is also important. This nonlinear structure intends to reflect the splintered and damaged psyche of the collective black voice, descendant of African Slavery. It is intended that the reader, to some degree, feels the confusion the character does and is able to empathise the struggles of functioning in

¹⁹¹ Ibid

¹⁹² Ibid

a world where one cannot easily discern fact from fiction; from what is real or imaginary.

This damaged psyche that has connecting ideas to Du Bois' 'new man.'

The slaves and the descendants of African slavery survived and arguably, passed on this damaged psyche that was compounded by marginalisation within the mother country.

Ironically, those that are able to assimilate their personalities seamlessly into different aspects of society are successful as their true self remains hidden.

This psyche is presented as false under the white gaze that the black man finds himself placed under. It is under this white gaze that he is measured, quantified and comes up lacking. Even though Du Bois was concerned with the African-American psyche, again, as I have previously mentioned, the British psyche shares the same traumatic slave past, can have the same effect.

Sally Fairweather survives with the personality type Clare. The reader sees Clare in the playground as a result of isolation. Within *Berthas* this problem of double consciousness is presented through Dissociative Identity Disorder.

Sally first displays symptoms of mental health issues when she is ostracised in the playground. It is Sally here that is compared to her white counterparts and comes up lacking. This is where the reader first sees symptoms of Sally's mental health problems, when she considers the colouring of her shoes.

Her eyes fell onto the concrete floor as she watched her own black shoes dangling from the bench while the silence stretched between them. Her face suddenly felt hot with anger. The sun bore down on her black skin as it tingled. She took a long deep breath with her eyes closed and composed herself.¹⁹³

¹⁹³ *Berthas* p164

While young Saly sits on the school bench, she listens to another student say that his mother is not a 'nigger.' Here, we see Saly dissociate and become Clare. It is Clare, not Saly that fights back.

She took a long deep breath with her eyes closed and composed herself.

'No. You're mother's not a nigger, she's a fuckin' whore,' she said, just loud enough for him to hear.¹⁹⁴

The colour black is synonymous with negativity under the white gaze. This negativity pervades through every aspect of black life, through flippant comments, to subliminal messages sent out through the media. It categorises what is not acceptable by presenting what *is* acceptable and what is considered 'right,' and is linked to identity. Black, in Western culture, is considered a negative colour and within literature is used in reference to death, grief, or evil. William Shakespeare, in his presentation of blackness, used it as a literary device to present characters as evil, deceptive or cunning. Whatever negative trait which is being presented within a character, the colour black is used to reinforce it. In *Othello*, Emilia says to Othello

"O, the more angel she, And you the blacker devil!"¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁴ *Berthas* p164

¹⁹⁵ Shakespeare, W., n.d. *Othello: Entire Play*. [online] Shakespeare.mit.edu. Available at: <<http://shakespeare.mit.edu/othello/full.html>> [Accessed 3 July 2021]. Act V scene 2

As well as viewing blackness in *Othello* as negative, Shakespeare does it again in *The Tempest*. Blackness is presented through the character of Caliban. In act IV scene 1 Prospero refers to him as a

A devil, a born devil, on whose nature/Nurture can never stick;
on whom my pains/Humanely taken, all, all lost, quite lost;
And as with age his body uglier grows/So his mind cankers.¹⁹⁶

and again in Aaron from the play *Titus Andronicus*, who presented as evil. His blackness to the audience is a signal that he is a villain.

'Twill vex thy soul to hear what I shall speak/For I must talk of
murders, rapes and massacres/Acts of black night, abominable
deeds/Complots of mischief, treason, villanies
Ruthful to hear, yet piteously perform'd/And this shall all be
buried by my death./I have done a thousand dreadful things/As
willingly as one would kill a fly/And nothing grieves me heartily
indeed/But that I cannot do ten thousand more.¹⁹⁷

Along with black skins being seen as negative, black hair is also misrepresented.

Black hair is seen as an extension of this negative perception of the colour black which is attributed to Caribbean British people and has connotations of resistance, much like the ABW stereotype who uses anger as a catalyst for change or as punishment. The ABW also resists.

Afro hair has become symbolic of resistance due to the Civil Rights Movement and though this movement, it has been politicised and seen negatively. But to black people, it is

¹⁹⁶ Shakespeare, W., n.d. *The Tempest: Entire Play*. [online] Shakespeare.mit.edu. Available at: <<http://shakespeare.mit.edu/tempest/full.html>> [Accessed 3 July 2021] Act IV scene 1

¹⁹⁷ Shakespeare, W., n.d. *Titus Andronicus: Entire Play*. [online] Shakespeare.mit.edu. Available at: <<http://shakespeare.mit.edu/titus/full.html>> [Accessed 3 July 2021] Act 5 scene 1.

linked with identity and pride.

Black hair has been an integral feature of black history - from African tribal styles to dreadlocks and the afro.¹⁹⁸

This difference in hair type has become symbolic of otherness and difference, but it has also become a symbol of strength. Bound up within the hair of black people is status and identity. A black woman's hair is more than mere vanity, it relates to others who she is. This is a surviving trait from slavery.

In the playground scene of *Berthas* which is set in London, the character Saly does not have the same hair or skin colour as her white counterparts and so she is left out of the games. She begins to experience the exclusion from society that is felt on a wider scale due to marginalisation. It is within the loneliness and isolation that Clare manifests to alleviate it. 'It was Saly herself that needed rescuing,' and 'this came in the form of Clare.'¹⁹⁹

A part of the Caribbean British experience has been about appearing as white as possible to be considered acceptable. In fact, the less 'black' a person looked, the more acceptable they were considered. This all stems from 'plantation politics' previously mentioned, and categorising of blackness- the colour bar.

When captured slaves were first brought to America during the 15th century, their hair was forcefully shaved off in an effort to strip them of their sense of cultural identity. Even after gaining emancipation black people steered away from letting their hair grow out as biology intended. When Madame C.J. Walker

¹⁹⁸ Jahangir, R. (2015). *How does black hair reflect black history?*. [online] BBC News. Available at: <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-merseyside-31438273>> [Accessed 20 February 2021].

¹⁹⁹ *Berthas* p 65

patented the hot comb during the Reconstruction Era, scores of black women took to turning their kink and curls into straight hair — often hoping the metamorphosis would help them assimilate into white society. It was not until the Civil Rights Movement that the afro became "cool." But even then, the hairstyle's popularity was less about being "attractive" and more about being "disruptive." [Worn by] the Black Panthers and iconic activists like Angela Davis, Nina Simone, and Nikki Giovanni, a single hairstyle came to represent the never-ending fight against racism.²⁰⁰

Sally in *Berthas*, finds that her hair, as well as her very being isn't what is considered acceptable or even beautiful. And so even as a child she is excluded by her peers just as black people are excluded and marginalised from society. In *Berthas*, Clare is the result. Sally dissociates, much like how many people of African heritage living in a white dominated society develop a more 'acceptable' personality in an attempt to conform to society's expectations and dissociates developing a 'double consciousness'.

To black people in society hairstyle was/is important, but not in the white dominated society. Within a white dominated society, to leave one's hair as it grows, became a political act of defiance.

Hair is extremely important within the black community. The social significance of hair has deep cultural and spiritual roots. In many African countries hair served as a form of communication and a source of empowerment. During slavery in the Americas slave holders used hair to reinforce slave status. Bryd and Tharps (2001) suggest that "white slave owners sought to pathologize African features like dark skin and kinky hair to further demoralize the slaves, especially women . . . When the slave women internalized the slave owner's racist rhetoric, which was

²⁰⁰ Wheeler, A. (2021). *The radical politics behind afros*. [online] I-d. Available at: <https://i-d.vice.com/en_au/article/zmn454/the-radical-politics-behind-afros> [Accessed 20 February 2021].

almost inevitable, it wasn't long before they passed the pathology on to their sons, daughters, and future generations. Hair denoted a political allegiance to Black Power politics. The Afro served as a clear rejection to white beauty standards. It represented a direct affront to the white power structure. Scholar Noliwe M. Rooks (1996) stresses that "the Afro was understood to denote black pride, which became synonymous with activism and political consciousness" (p. 6). The Afro served as a proud symbol of blackness.²⁰¹

If individuals (women) deliberately did not straighten their hair with straightening irons, or chemicals, or wear European hair 'weaved' into their own hair, then they were deliberately going against what was considered 'presentable' and therefore the act of having natural hair was considered a defiant or aggressive act to not conform. This attitude was reinforced by the resistant and politically vocal Angela Davies - her trademark being her afro. This resistance of black women is seen as problematic to the dominant white political establishment. The stereotype of the ABW woman was reinforced from this resistance.

During the Black Pride Movement, African Americans' newly adopted styles became a visual symbol of resistance and represented a commitment to the racial equality movements of the time. The Black Pride and Power Movements of the 1960s and 1970s changed the aesthetic of the larger African American community, promoting self-affirmation and reclaiming African pride. As individuals engaged in the movement, they began to internalize new meanings and understandings of themselves, leading to selftransformation and collective identity that promoted the specific political ideology and agenda of the group. The lived experiences of African American women who were emerging adults (ages 18–25) during the Civil Rights Movement from 1960 to 1974 were examined, through in-depth interviews,

²⁰¹ Phillips, M., n.d. *Black Hair Politics in White Academia: With Reference to Black Studies*. [online] Academia.edu. Available at: <https://www.academia.edu/4463226/Black_Hair_Politics_in_White_Academia_With_Reference_to_Black_Studies> [Accessed 20 February 2021].

to understand their experiences with wearing natural hairstyles during this time. Seven participants highlighted how wearing natural hair was used in the three dimensions of collective identity formation: boundaries, consciousness, and negotiation. Participants' counterhegemonic use of appearance constructed, created, and negotiated a collective identity that was aligned with demonstration for racial equality of African Americans.²⁰²

Mary Prince also resisted the system that she was living in. In 1828, she challenged the status of slave through the courts in 1828, reporting her master and mistress to the Anti-Slavery Society and so became resistant to the system. Her survival was a protest for emancipation and went on to provoke two libel actions against her, her book *History*, ran through three editions.

The *History* of Mary Prince 'exemplifies in miniature what Paul Gilroy has called the 'Black Atlantic', the 'intercultural and transnational formation' of a culture arising, in the first instance, out of the transatlantic slave trade from the seventeenth century onwards.'²⁰³ Therefore, in a case with widespread publicity as the libel cases created by her novel, one can argue that the stereotype of the problematic black woman, may indeed have roots in the presentation of Mary Prince and how she is actively challenges and is resistant to the white society in which she is not recognised. This challenge can be seen through the 'angry (mad) black woman' stereotype linked to the 'mad, black woman' stereotype. This is the stereotype that Clare in *Berthas*, is reminiscent of.

The duality to this character is not at first presented as a negative aspect. In the

²⁰² Garrin, Ashley R, and Sara B Marcketti. (2021.) "*The Impact Of Hair On African American Women ' S Collective Identity Formation*". Lib.Dr.Iastate.Edu https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1120&context=aeshm_pubs. [Accessed 16 Feb 2021].

²⁰³ Prince. *This History of Mary Prince*. Pg viii

beginning, Clare is deemed a hero; the one who saves Saly from isolation and gives her the companionship she craves. Just as the slave saw violence as the solution (and to some extent, it was) it was also the thing that destroys him. Likewise, Clare has this dual function. She is compared to a superhero in a child's imaginings of solving the problem of loneliness and isolation and yet she attempts to destroy Saly by the end. Many in the Caribbean British community possibly use the anger and aggression they feel as some kind of solution or emotional outlet to the injustices that society has placed upon them. Clare swoops in and saves the day and promises to help Saly do the same to others less fortunate, the 'lost souls.' Therefore, the victim, Saly, also becomes the hero.

The theme of duality with *Berthas* is representative in the character of Saly/Clare but also in their roles. Whereas Clare represents both a violent villain, she is also seen as a hero. Saly on the other hand, appears as a character that is in need of saving, even though it is her who appears to present herself as a hero and aims to save others. This duality, or 'double-ness' pervades black British identity. The Black Briton who constantly battle with warring oppositions within them. Their position is one of conflict, and it is within this space that their collective identity resides. They are unable to reconcile their warring sides, and unable to choose between them.

9. The dichotomy of the hybrid identity.

Everything will be done to wipe out their traditions, to substitute our language for theirs and to destroy their culture without giving them ours.²⁰⁴

The removal of a name helped to remove an identity and therefore fostered the idea that the people being colonized cease to exist as they originally were. This erasure also was prevalent within the literature sphere, as the colonized became invisible with little or no historical writing from their cultures. And results of renaming through slavery many slave descendants in Britain today still carry the slave owners name,²⁰⁵ and have little literary background to embed their hybrid identity.

The Africans who were sold into slavery were repeatedly humiliated by the naming practices of their owners. Enslaved children who had European fathers often took their father's surname. But slaves were sometimes named after their owner, rather than their father, especially if they were hired out to work for other people. In both cases, a lot of slaves ended up with Scottish surnames.²⁰⁶

Since surnames were not so easily changed, first names were deliberately used to create identity. Often, children were registered under one name, and yet referred to by another, for example, in support of this thesis, I interviewed Marie Rowe, a British born Jamaican. She was registered as Marie, but her family called her Grace.

²⁰⁴ Fanon. F *The Wretched of the Earth*, p.15

²⁰⁵ Exhibitions.abdn.ac.uk. (2008) *Scotland, Africa and slavery in the Caribbean · Scotland, Africa and Slavery in the Caribbean: a North East Story · University Collections*. [online] Available at: <<https://exhibitions.abdn.ac.uk/university-collections/exhibits/show/a-north-east-story/scotland-africa-slavery-in-car>> [Accessed 20 February 2021].

²⁰⁶ Ibid

- C What is your legal name?
M My legal name is Marie but mum has always called me
Grace. It's just always been like that.²⁰⁷

A similar situation holds for Sandra Facey, a stay-at-home Caribbean Woman that I also interviewed over the phone. Sandra lives in Jamaica but has spent time in England.

- C What is your legal name?
S Sandra, but Momma call me Rose or Rosie.
C Why are you called something different to what you are
registered as?
S Sometime, the baby born no look like the name you give
it. Wid me it jus cos momma want to. Bit up de road was
call Bit cos when him born he jus' a liccle bit. Dat not
him legal name though. Den there is Jason. Him name
Daniel. An' a cousin in h'Englan', him pickney name
Jaiden, but dem call him Kai. It very common.²⁰⁸

There is also a similar practice in America where African Americans invent names (often creating a variation of more traditional names.) Jean Twenge believes that the shift toward unique Black-American baby names is also the result of the cultural shift in America that values individuality (instigated by lack of identity) over conformity.²⁰⁹

The unique hybrid of the Caribbean British is a mixture of African ancestry, Caribbean parentage mixed with British culture. The Caribbean British, are an amalgamation of different cultures and languages.

²⁰⁷ Rowe, Marie. (2020). Oct. 21st

²⁰⁸ Facey, Sandra (2020). Oct. 20th

²⁰⁹ Livescience.com. n.d. *Baby Names Reveal More About Parents Than Ever Before | Live Science*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.livescience.com/9027-baby-names-reveal-parents.html>> [Accessed 20 February 2021].

In the novel *Berthas* Mary's name has connotations of innocence and purity since it is the name of the mother of Christ. This character Mary names her child 'Saly'. This changing of the spelling of the traditionally English version of Sally, is a direct link to the way that Caribbean people, arguably, use naming as a restorative method. On one level, Mary wishes to claim the identity of her child as belonging to her, rather than the character who raped her. It is also representative of the Caribbean community adjusting/inventing names to help build an individual identity, which suggests issues of identity.

With naming comes power through language. As previously stated, naming was used as a solution of being culturally rootless. The power comes from claiming an identity (through the naming of a person) when there has been no cultural identity due to lack of roots. The idea of giving an individual a name ties them to a particular place, or idea. In *Beloved*, Sethe's secret shame was the fact that she was the innocent party in naming her 'animal-like qualities' for the school teacher. As a black slave, reading was not permitted and so for Sethe to be able to read anything was suggestive that she was human. As previously stated, black people were considered more animal-like than human. This argument justified keeping people in slavery. The irony of Sethe being made to read and name her animal – like qualities, is ironic because if she were like an animal, she would not be able to read. And yet the power of understanding the words for Sethe carried with it pain and shame. She understood what these names meant in terms of what the teacher thought about her. This teacher believed she was like an animal, rather than a human.

This is Sethe's secret shame, her innocent complicity with the violence of schoolteacher's letter, his assumption of the power to name and to brutalize with than naming.²¹⁰

Whereas naming was used to brutalise, it can also be used as a restorative element to heal as Walcott demonstrates in *Omeros*.

The issue of hybridity and language was confronted by Walcott in *Omeros*. Walcott's text *Omeros* is a hybrid. Its structure followed that of the Greek epic poems; some Characters also share names with characters of these poems, such as Helen, referring to the Greek Helen of Troy.

In addition to being resonate of the Homeric story, however, Walcott's *Omeros* is also reminiscent of yet another work, Shakespeare's *Tempest*.²¹¹

Walcott used the hybrid structure of his work to represent a hybrid people. His work writes back to the English canon, as well as incorporates the Caribbean, therefore creating a new form of hybrid writing. Walcott wholeheartedly engaged with the idea of choosing neither but creating one out of two.

Engaging with the epic genre, a form commonly identified as an 'imperial genre' highlights a problematic area for the postcolonial writer whose identity is necessarily 'split' or 'hybrid' as a result of the vicissitudes of colonial history. Marking an inner struggle, his troubled relationship to Western canonical texts has proved a most fruitful zone of inspiration for

²¹⁰ Plasa, C., (2000.) *Toni Morrison "Beloved"*. Duxford: Icon Books p126

²¹¹ J.A. Minkler. (1993.) *Helen's Calibans: A Study of Gender Hierarchy in Derek Walcott's "Omeros"*: Board of Regents of the University of Oklahoma (1993) Vol. 67, No. 2, pp. 272-276

the poet whose own divided heritage causes him to frequently question how to choose 'between this Africa and the English tongue I love?'²¹²

Seamus Heaney has made the point that 'Walcott has made a career out of the impossibility of choosing either.'²¹³ There is no choosing between the two because individuals cannot choose between two halves of themselves. It is the pieces of the split soul that make up the whole individual.

Other writers other than Walcott, such as Lamming and Naipaul certainly made it easier for other hybrid voices to come through, of which David Dabydeen was one.

Where the authors mentioned were Caribbean by birth, Dabydeen who was educated in Britain and therefore can represent the next generation of British hybrid writers, building upon an existing body of work, effectively adding to the collection of voices of the invisible people.

This invisibility ultimately stems from marginalisation which has a detrimental effect on the black psyche and affects every generation following. The oppressed are pushed to the edges and are conditioned to remain there. These names or titles that have been imposed upon them as a form of identity are also problematic. In fact, the term 'Black Briton' itself is problematic. On one hand celebratory, but on another, derogatory. Here Fadahunsi, recalls her conversation with her mother.

"Black British?! Black British?! The shame of it!" Sensing my slight shock, she continued, "'Black British' you are not. You are

²¹² Tynan, M. (2006). *Mapping Roots In Derek Walcott's Omeros*. [online] Seas3.elte.hu. Available at: <<http://seas3.elte.hu/anachronist/2006Tynan.pdf>> p 1

²¹³ Tynan, M (2006) *Mapping Roots in Derek Walcott's Omeros*. P 1

an African! A British citizen, but an African! A Chinese man remains a Chinese man even 6 generations down the line. Would you call him Chinese-British? I know you definitely wouldn't call him Yellow-British! Why is it that you must be reduced to a colour?"²¹⁴

One can argue that this context is slightly different as Fadahunsi does not have the Caribbean slavery heritage, and yet the message of the title 'Black British' remains the same. Where this individual can draw on her African heritage, she understands exactly where her ancestry lies within the large continent of Africa, the Caribbean British, due to slavery, does not.

There is also an issue with ethnosymbolism, or lack of it in the UK. As an invisible culture within the UK, there are no ethno-symbolism that unites the Black British population. What does unite them, is the shared experiences, values and traditions, as well as a shared identity of being invisible or marginalised.

It is hybridity of culture, naming and belonging that the protagonist in *Berthas* struggles with. The title of the narrative is a direct link to Bertha Rochester and *Jane Eyre*/ *Wild Sargasso Sea* where madness is literally locked behind a closed door. But those of African slavery descents have constructed names to help restore their stolen identities, and writers such as Walcott and Lamming, have created a literature within the framework of the English and western canon to help restore a collective identity and give an invisible people grounding or roots, through having a history. *Berthas* also aims to contribute to this tapestry

²¹⁴ Fadahunsi, F. (2015). *Why Me Calling Myself Black-British Troubles My Mum So Much*. [online] HuffPost UK. Available at: <https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/fisayo-fadahunsi/black-british-troubles-my-mum-so-much_b_6704458.html> [Accessed 20 February 2021].

of collective identity.

10. Revisionist Literature

Revisionist Literature seeks to revise, or to change an outcome. It rewrites the fate of black people, similar to restorative fiction. It can be argued that the fate of many black people in reality as well as in fiction is to die. Reality demonstrates that it is dangerous being black.

From 1877 to 1950, more than 4,400 black men, women, and children were lynched by white mobs, according to the Equal Justice Initiative. Black people were shot, skinned, burned alive, bludgeoned, and hanged from trees. Lynchings were often conducted within sight of the institutions of justice, on the lawns of courthouses. Some historians say the violence against thousands of black people who were lynched after the Civil War is the precursor to the vigilante attacks and abusive police tactics still used against black people today, usually with impunity.²¹⁵

For various reasons black people have been brutalised for hundreds of years and it still continues today in the US as well as the UK. The murder of George Floyd in America during the summer of 2020 sent shock waves across the world. In the recording George Floyd could be heard repeatedly saying that he could not breathe.

A video shows George Floyd, a black man, lying in the street in anguish, with his head crushed against the pavement. A white officer presses his knee into Floyd's neck. "I can't breathe," Floyd, 46, says repeatedly. "Please. Please. Please. I can't breathe. Please, man." Bystanders, filming the scene, plead with the officer to stop. He doesn't. As three other officers stand by, he kneels on Floyd for eight minutes and 48 seconds as the life

²¹⁵ Brown, D. L.(2020) 'It Was A Modern-Day Lynching': Violent Deaths Reflect A Brutal American Legacy". *History & Culture*
<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/history/2020/06/history-of-lynching-violent-deaths-reflect-brutal-american-legacy/>. [Accessed 17 Feb 2021].

seeps from his body. “It was a modern-day lynching,” said Arica Coleman, an historian, cultural critic, and author.²¹⁶

There are many other instances of black people being killed and brutalised in America.

Breonna Taylor was fatally shot by police. Being black carries with it risks of being shot and killed, reinforcing the idea that the fate of many black people end in death.

Floyd’s death came six weeks after police in Louisville, Kentucky, fatally shot Breonna Taylor, a 26-year-old black woman, during a midnight “no-knock” raid on her home. It came 10 weeks after the killing of Ahmaud Arbery, a 25-year-old black man, who was chased down by a white father and son in a pickup truck as he jogged in his neighborhood in Glynn County, Georgia.²¹⁷

While these examples happened in America, the problem is also an issue in the rest of the world.

In Australia, protesters relived the death of David Dungay, a 26-year-old Indigenous Australian man who died while being restrained by five guards in 2015. He also cried the haunting phrase, “I can’t breathe.” Meanwhile, just this week, a police commissioner in Sydney said that an officer filmed casually attacking an Indigenous teenager with brutal violence had “had a bad day.”

In the UK, black people and our allies are taking to the streets as I write to wake British people up out of their fantasy that this crisis of race is a problem that is both uniquely American, and solvable by people returning to the status quo.²¹⁸

²¹⁶ Ibid

²¹⁷ Ibid

²¹⁸ Hirsch, A. (2020). *The racism that killed George Floyd was built in Britain* / Afua Hirsch. [online] the Guardian. Available at: <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/jun/03/racism-george-floyd-britain-america-uk-black-people>> [Accessed 20 February 2021].

Black people all over the world are reminded that they live in a system devalues them and can ultimately result in them losing their lives.

What black people are experiencing the world over is a system that finds their bodies expendable, by design.²¹⁹

It is a problem in the UK as well as the rest of the world because of the role the UK played in creating this system that is effectively still killing people worldwide.

It was Britain that industrialised black enslavement in the Caribbean, initiated systems of apartheid all over the African continent, using the appropriation of black land, resources and labour to fight both world wars and using it again to reconstruct the peace. And how, today, black people in Britain are still being dehumanised by the media, disproportionately imprisoned and dying in police custody and now also dying disproportionately of Covid-19.²²⁰

Within literature and films, black characters are known to die first, or be sacrificed so as to ensure the continuation of a white character.

Black characters were mainly cast as the sidekicks of white leads. One prominent example is Scatman Crothers, who appears in *The Shining* as a mystical black man who provides information and protection to a white family; his existence or non-existence seems contingent on what he can do for them, and he is promptly killed once he is considered non-essential. Due makes the point that the character Crothers played does not die in the book, and the film makes him into a “sacrificial negro”. This character, according to writer Ashlee Blackwell, “must put

²¹⁹ Ibid

²²⁰ Ibid

themselves in the face of danger and must die in order to help the white character to survive”.²²¹

A more contemporary example is the film *Bird Box*. Here we see an example of the sacrificial negro. Director Xavier Burgin comments:

“A black man sacrifices himself for the white women and two kids,” he says. “In 2018, we are still seeing some of the same tropes that we are talking about in the film.”

Revisionist Literature seeks to rewrite this fate through fantasy. The black character can survive against the odds. *Berthas* can fit into this category. Although it appears that the odds are against certain characters, they survive. There is the reoccurring idea of the lavender. Ivy does not give up trying to grow roots, symbolising that the Caribbean British community, given time, can grow roots, stabilise themselves within society and become whole with a whole identity despite representations within society that undermine black women, and survive. As previously stated, the problem that the Caribbean British woman has, is forming an identity. This, along with the conflicting ideals around Caribbean British people again, has opposing ideas. The Caribbean British woman, while being invisible to mainstream society in one way, is ridiculed and undermined in another through the stereotypes of the SBW and the ABW. The fate of many black people appears to be death by ‘being black.’ Revisionist literature rewrites this and can be seen as a way to re write reality in the form of fiction.

Revisionist Literature reconstructs the black community within the realm of fantasy

²²¹ Adjei-Kontoh, Hubert. (2021.) "*From Blacula To Get Out: The Documentary Examining Black Horror*". The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2019/feb/07/horror-noire-documentary-black-horror>. [Accessed 16 Feb 2021].

whether it is British or America, and presents it as a reality.

Within the element of fantasy are elements of myths, fairy tales, prophecies, omens, superhuman powers and ghosts. In *Berthas* Saly becomes Super Saly. Adult Saly reconstructs a dream to suit her purpose. History can be reconstructed. Identity can be reconstructed. In fact, Saly is shown actively constructing and reconstructing her dreams and her thoughts. Chapter 6 sees a shift of narrative focus. The reader is suddenly in the protagonist's head as she tries to reorder her thoughts. At this point Saly's madness is evident and yet she is trying to reconcile her duality within herself.

Here, within Saly's voice we also see the duality of culture through the structure of the narrative as well as through the voice. The reference of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* 'a curse of both your houses'²²² is an intertextual link that functions on different levels.

Firstly, there's the repetition of 'of course I can,' highlighting the internal struggle that is going on within Saly. It almost has a rhythm to it like a chant that she is telling herself repeatedly to reinforce that she can and will triumph over her madness. This is reminiscent of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* where the words 'A plague on both your houses'²²³ is said three times by Mercutio after being fatally wounded. This alludes to the superstitious belief at that time that to curse someone, the curse had to be said three times, which Mercutio does, as well as Saly. Saly's curse also alludes to Lady Macbeth who mutters and chants to herself when she goes mad with guilt, 'to bed, to bed, to bed.'²²⁴ Again, the number 3 is relevant. Her

²²² Shakespeare, W. *Romeo and Juliet*. Wordsworth Classics. Hertfordshire (1992) Act 3 scene 1

²²³ Ibid

²²⁴ W. Shakespeare. *Macbeth*. Wordsworth Classics. Hertfordshire (1992) Act V scene 1

madness is being associated with repetition as well as a curse. The almost magical chanting of Mercutio and Lady Macbeth foreshadow the tragic end of these characters in their plays.

Revisionist Literature, while it may provoke action, provides no blueprint for any sort of future programme. It revises the norm, through myths, fantasy, prophecies, omens, dreams, supernatural powers; these elements give the characters power to 'revise' the everyday, but it also provides the black character with a way to make sense of the world. It also highlights the futility of the situation that people find themselves in; perhaps the only solution is through the supernatural.

However, some British supernatural beliefs have its roots within some African cultures, filtered, through slavery, to Caribbean culture and then to the Caribbean British through 'tradition' - although many traditions, cultures and languages were lost, pieces remains.

Religion plays a part in terms of its supernatural power and ideologies. It was historically used to keep slaves in bondage, whilst simultaneously providing comfort and hope to those enslaved.

In the heyday of British slavery, from 1650 to 1750, the ruling [Christian] ideas were unequivocally in favour of the institution of slavery and the trade in slaves.²²⁵

The historical references to Christianity in the novel *Berthas* is reflective of the Caribbean British people who have used religion as one of the solutions, previously mentioned, to the rootless problem. Monica Clayton was asked about her experiences with religion when she was young and living in both Jamaica and Britain.

²²⁵ Craton, Michael. (1978) "*Christianity and Slavery in the British West Indies 1750-1865.*" *Historical Reflections / Réflexions Historiques*, vol. 5, no. 2, p141

- C How important was religion in your life when you were younger?
- M Oh! Very important. There was nothing I loved more than going to church! Momma used to send me to church on a Sunday in my best clothes.
- C What about when you moved to Britain?
- M Well, daddy wasn't as religious as Momma was, but still used to go to church. No matter how bad things were I could always pray and God would be there and answer my prayers. Without prayer, you have nothing. I used to even work in the Sunday school as a teacher when I got older. I really enjoyed that.²²⁶

It is this connection with religion that is identified in *Berthas* through the character of Ivy.

She, like many Caribbean British women prayed and trusted God with their problems.

Lef it at God feet. All di decisions dat yuh cyaa face. God wi decide fi yuh²²⁷

Black slaves were able to identify with Jesus as well as the Israelite slaves held by Pharaoh.

Christianity (through God freeing the slaves) gave hope. It is this form of Christianity that gave and continues to give hope to Black Caribbean Women despite the original intentions of Christianity was meant to do the opposite.

The intention of white slavers, as Frazier describes, was to disrupt the “social cohesion” of the slaves, which was done by separating various cultural units. Not only were mothers and fathers separated from sons and daughters, but entire communities and lingual regions were fragmented and dispersed. These structural means appeared so extensive, so final that the African slaves could have no hope for the continuation of their

²²⁶ Clayton, Monica. (2021) Feb. 15th

²²⁷ *Berthas* p37

cultural identity. The adoption of Christianity amongst slaves appeared to be the final seal on the hegemonic project of slavery, as the Protestant church represented the central propagator of white culture, ideology, and intellect. However, a syncretic fusion of African and Protestant traditions destabilized this hegemony by proffering cultural codes contrary to the “dominant language” of white society.²²⁸

This hybrid Christianity that not only gave Africans hope for the afterlife, but also, arguably, for freedom in their lifetime.

Because of the cruel conditions of slavery, there were many that believed that slaves clung to Protestant Christianity for its promise of salvation in an otherworldly heaven. However, the Christianity of the slaves had less of an emphasis on “other-worldly” salvation and more of an emphasis on “this-worldly” salvation. “This-worldly” salvation refers to the belief that the condition of heaven can be achieved on earth. While the slaves justified this belief by looking at Old Testament stories about the liberation of the Israelites, the belief in a heaven on earth dates back to traditional African ontology. Pre-enslaved Africans did not believe in the eschaton, but rather understood life after death as the living memory of the village’s heritage. Furthermore, a “this-worldly” perspective on salvation has a sense of urgency that more closely fits with the African focus on the here and now. These African survivals of the traditional worldview worked in tandem with Old Testament teachings to motivate African slaves to carve out liberation in the here and now.²²⁹

Between the spiritual magical ‘world’ and the Christian world the natives inhabit, can’t choose; they must have both.

²²⁸ Dwyer, C. (2017). *The Construction Of The African Slave Identity: Defying Hegemony Through Syncretic Religious Practices*. [online] Digitalcommons.denison.edu. Available at: <<https://digitalcommons.denison.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1107&context=religion>> [Accessed 31 October 2020].

²²⁹ Ibid p4

Through magic and fantasy a solution to the problem of identity within the Caribbean British community can be found. What is different about fantasy in black literature is the ability to use it, not as an imaginary part of a world, but as a realistic component of the real world, much like the supernatural within religion is viewed as a component of the real world.. Morrison's novels 'absorbs black lore, music, language, myths and rituals that give her prose a 'special flavour.'²³⁰ Morrison speaks of familial experience where her grandmother kept a dream diary, or certain signs were seen within nature that those in her community not only gave validation to but adhered to it and adjusted their actions accordingly. This experience is common among descendants of slavery. I asked Monica Clayton if she could share any information about any dreams she could remember and if there was any indication that these dreams might come true.

- M My uncle. Daddy's brother. He had a dream that daddy was gonna have a son. Some people's dreams walk straight.
- C What does 'walking straight' mean?
- M It means that their dreams are straight. Y'know, you don't need to look for signs of interpret them. They are more or less straightforward. Uncle's dreams were like that. Uncle dreamt daddy was having a son, but it was me, so very close as I am daddy's only child. I had the son. After speaking to uncle on the phone, daddy called me and told me I was having a son, and yes. I had a son. Uncle's dreams run straight.²³¹

I also spoke to Jacqueline Parkinson, a British Caribbean police officer, about this idea of dreams and whether she had dreamt anything and adjusted her

²³⁰ Heinz. (date?) *The Dilemma of Double-Consciousness* p 159

²³¹ Clayton, Jacqueline. (2021.) July 7th

behaviour because of the dream.

- C Have you had any prophetic dreams?
- J Not really, but I have had dreams where I thought were true.
- C Can you explain?
- J I have two children, and one night I dreamt we were getting up for school as usual. I got the kids in the car, no suspicions that anything was wrong, and we left the house. Moments later we were on a busy A road, and before I realised it, somehow we got involved in a very bad car accident. It was horrible. Felt so real. The children were killed instantly. I survived but I was devastated. Absolutely heartbroken. I couldn't believe it. My chest physically hurt as I screamed and screamed and screamed. When I woke up, I was so damned relieved it was a dream that I cried! It had felt so very real! But one thing that stuck, was that it felt like a warning. So, without hesitation, I called in and cancelled work for the day. I did not take the children to school. We just stayed at home and watched tele. It felt like the right thing to do.
- C **Have you had any instances where your dreams have come true?**
- J Not often, but occasionally. Before I sold my house, I dreamt I was living in this lovely big house with a driveway. In my dream I was planting trees in the front. That is a sign y'know. Planting anything, especially if they are green in your dream is a good sign. If you are planting something it means fresh beginnings. You are planting for the future. Well, I forgot all about my dream. A few months later I had to sell my house and move county. I decided to rent before buying again but I couldn't find a property that would suit us. Then I found a house. It was very similar to the one in my dream. Not that I recognised it, well, some bits I did, like the driveway and the trees at the front, but I felt it. It felt like the house in my dream and as I looked around I had flashbacks of my dream. So, I took the property immediately. And it was a good decision. The house was perfect for us.²³²

²³² Parkinson, Jacqueline. (2021.) July 7th

Both Monica Clayton, and Jacqueline Parkinson saw signs in dreams and used them to interpret life. Evidence that dreams are used in the Caribbean British community as a realistic component to life.

There is also space within the ‘practice’ of reading signs and perform magic through mixing poultices or bitter herbs to cure ailments. Cersei, (often called bitter herbs) a traditional medicinal treatment in the form of a tea is regularly used for skin treatments, constipation, colds and fevers in adults and children. When Morrison uses the supernatural magic in her novels, she is presenting this supernatural as real, as it is to many Caribbean. This supernatural, it can be argued, dilutes the effects of the double-consciousness, the duality of identity, and levels things out by making the supernatural a reality. And where, as previously mentioned, religion is a hybrid of spirituality and Christianity, the element of Christianity and the strength of the idea of a black Jesus, is used as a tool to empower, to strengthen and as a crutch for survival through claiming an identity. A key component to understanding this, is understanding The Sacred Secret.

The belief is that the world is in the power of evil. Satan. This Sacred Secret is that God has destined human glory from since time began.

But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory.²³³

This idea that people have *already* been saved, that all they need to do is survive the evil is something that Morrison has referenced in her novels:

²³³ King James *Bible*. 1 Corinthians. Chapter 2 verse 7.

The purpose of evil was to survive it and they determined... to survive floods, white people, tuberculosis, famine and ignorance.²³⁴

It is interesting here that white people are categorized as a force of 'evil' much like disease, famine, and destruction weather.

These supernatural/fantasy 'cures' act as a crutch to help people cope with the almost unacceptable reality that they are caught in a cycle of pain and suffering from slavery to the modern day. White superiority is a force which perpetuates one ideal, while at the same time, destroying everything that is other. This white superiority, this 'beast' or 'monster' threatens to consume entirely the black individual. The stereotypes of the Black Caribbean Woman belong to the system which places her at the bottom because of her colour and gender. The Caribbean Black woman is trapped within this system. A system where Christianity is used as a coping mechanism.

The Caribbean British community believe they are saved through the Sacred Secret; all they need to do is survive the evil of the world.

The struggles of our ancestors in Africa and the Caribbean were forged in relationship with a belief in the benevolent power of the Creator.²³⁵

By enabling them to have a hope of triumphing in the end, faith the black Caribbean community was more readily accepted as reality. This is because of their belief in the

²³⁴ T. Morrison. (1990) *Sula*. Vintage Books. London p 90.

²³⁵ Anthony Reddie. (2001.) *Faith, Stories and the Experience of Black Elders*. London p15

supernatural being very much a part of their reality. And here we have again the binary opposites: the ‘beast’ or metaphorical monster of society vs the supernatural fantasy to categorize and present a viable challenge for this evil that black people have no control over. This belief gives them power and hope to defeat what appears undefeatable.

This type of response is recognised as ‘indulgence in fantasy as “Negative Rationality.”’²³⁶ This, it can be argued is a subversive response to the reality that is imposed on society by the dominant culture.

In *Berthas* this supernatural element is also very much a part of the reality of the life of the characters. For example, Ivorene dies, and yet Monica is assured that ‘grandmamma is dying. But grandmamma isn’t going anywhere.’²³⁷ The fog that hangs over the island traps spirits as they leave their bodies, tying them to the earthly realm. This is reminiscent of the myths about ‘rolling calf’ or ‘duppies.’²³⁸ The human dies and the spirit is split, half. Half is bound to the earth and the other half goes to the spirit world. Certain rituals need to be performed within a specific time frame if the spirit is to be laid to rest; however, with a rolling calf, this has not happened. Rolling calf is very much a part of Jamaican folklore/myths.²³⁹

This belief in superstition is also prevalent in *Berthas* as an explanation for the madness evident in Ivorene. Her daughter says,

²³⁶ Heinze. *The Dilemma of Double Consciousness* p 17

²³⁷ *Berthas* p5

²³⁸ McFarland, C. Catholics & Cultures (2018). *Obeah, duppies and the spirit world in Jamaica*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.catholicsandcultures.org/jamaica/obeah-duppies-spirit-world>> [Accessed 20 February 2021].

²³⁹ Real-jamaica-vacations.com. (2016.) *Jamaican Folk Tales - Characters and Legends in Jamaican Folklore*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.real-jamaica-vacations.com/jamaican-folk-tales.html>> [Accessed 20 February 2021].

You don't think she left her hair on the floor, do you? Anything could have gotten at it.²⁴⁰

In Jamaican folklore, hair is seen as a personal attribute that needs to be protected.

Interviewee Ms. Monica Clayton verbally passed on to me many old Jamaican superstitions.

One was a warning not to allow birds to get any odd strands of your hair. This 'old wives' tale holds that hair being stolen by birds and used to feather their nest will cause the owner of the hair to go insane. Within the novel, this is a reference to the superstitions of the island and is illustrative of how the unexplainable is explained in a way that they can understand and work with.

Fantasy and the supernatural is subverted and used as a coping mechanism. It is used as a solution to cope with the 'evil' of the world which, in this context, is the dominant oppressive white culture that the Caribbean British woman is trapped within.

Within *Berthas*, this evil is alluded to in the first chapter in the foreshadowing of the Jim Crows. This is alluding to John Crows – vultures. This link to the Jamaican folk symbol is intertwined with the idea of the supernatural and fantasy. This ties into Revisionist Literature because of the revising of the Christian religion to include the supernatural to explain the lives of the Caribbean British, and to give hope.

"John Crow" is a folk symbol. The John Crow is a bird of great symbolic importance. In the Jamaican setting it is associated with ugliness, blackness, evil and disgrace. The John Crow is also an omen of death. It is believed that if the John Crow perches on a housetop, someone inside will die. The connections of John Crow with the spirit world and jumbie may explain the

²⁴⁰ *Berthas* p3

traditional association of John Crow with death and with the color black. However, death wasn't always considered something negative in traditional West African societies, and the color "black" wasn't always and/or wasn't only associated with death. For those reasons, it's possible that the very negative image of John Crow is an old development in Jamaican culture (which is heavily influenced by West African cultures).²⁴¹

In *Berthas* Monica identifies that the deceased are all trapped without any chance of escaping to freedom. The intention of this was to highlight how the Caribbean British woman is trapped within society and her only means of escape is through the Christian religion and the belief that they will be freed or released through death. Jesus will save their souls. Anthony Reddie, an Extraordinary Professor of Theological Ethics at the University of South Africa and a Fellow of Wesley House, in Cambridge, in his article *Reassessing the Inculcation of an Anti-Racist Ethic for Christian Ministry*, states:

For the enslaved Africans, faith in this same Jesus guaranteed salvation in heaven but not material freedom here on earth.²⁴²

In *Berthas* Monica identifies with this idea that once people are dead, they should be free, but instead they are trapped. This foreboding early on within the novel hints to the futility of the black individual fighting against white oppression which hangs around like a 'fog.'

²⁴¹ Powell, A (2016.) *More Information About What John Crow (Jancro) Means In Jamaica*. [online] Pancocojams.blogspot.com. Available at: <<http://pancocojams.blogspot.com/2016/01/more-information-about-what-john-crow.html>> [Accessed 4 July 2021].

²⁴² Reddie, A., (2020.) *Reassessing the Inculcation of an Anti-Racist Ethic for Christian Ministry: From Racism Awareness to Deconstructing Whiteness*. [ebook] Basel: MDPI. Available at: <<https://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/11/10/497/pdf>> [Accessed 4 July 2021].

Grandmamma was going. But Monica knew she wasn't going anywhere. She would hang around. In the air. On the wind. In the trees that whispered at her as she ran home from school. In the eyes that watched her as she spied on the neighbours. Just because you died, didn't mean that you were gone. This place clung to you. A fog hung over the island and trapped everyone that ever was and everyone that ever would be. There was no escape.²⁴³

Berthas uses the revisionist idea to revise what happens after death. Monica's grandmother doesn't leave her. She hangs around in the trees as an extra pair of eyes, watching her behaviour. There is the implication that although her grandmother is dead, she will still play some role in Monica's life. This revision of the Christian religious attitude as to what happens after death, gives a kind of hope that dead does not mean gone forever. Monica can still grow up under the watchful eyes of her grandmother. Although, it does have a contradictory element. Revising death in this way reinforces the idea of the spirit of the loved one being forever trapped, alluding to the idea that the freedom black people are promised after death though the Sacred Secret, may be an illusion.

Jim Crow laws in the United States enforced racial segregation towards the end of 1877. Monica, at five, identifies the 'John Crows' as 'Jim Crows' which is a reference to these segregation laws in America to legalise segregation and which heavily contributed to the restrictions of the Black British individual. Although the Jim Crow Laws were American, they were also implemented in Britain. Jim Crow Laws were practiced in Britain in 1943 despite it not being law, during World War 2.

²⁴³ *Berthas* p6

British authorities seemed willing to accommodate the anxieties of those visitors who were fearful of the consequences of racial mixing away from home. British government took no stand against segregation, and separate accommodation and canteen facilities were provided for the American military where requested. Efforts to keep personnel of different races apart when outside the camps (in pubs, dancehalls, clubs etc) were never challenged.²⁴⁴

As previously mentioned, Jim Crow was the name of a minstrel routine that was performed in the beginning of 1828 and the term became a derogatory epithet for African Americans and became synonymous for segregated life.²⁴⁵ The popular Minstrel shows helped to perpetuate the stereotypes of black people and was televised in Britain up until 1978.

Growing up in Ireland in the early seventies, there was one extremely popular show in 18 million households across Britain and Ireland. In fact, it was the most popular show on television. It was called The Black and White Minstrel Show on the BBC. A stage version of the BBC show had one of the longest runs ever on the British stage and won several prestigious awards. No one ever seemed to question the sheer ignorance of wearing blackface and failed to comprehend how that looked to a growing black population in Britain. A petition was launched in 1967 by the Campaign for Racial Discrimination, calling for the BBC to remove The Black and White Minstrel Show from the schedules. That was in 1967, and it took another 11 years [to cancel the show], with the final episode being broadcast on July 21, 1978. The minstrels continued to perform their racist routine in theatres and, later, holiday camps until 1987.²⁴⁶

²⁴⁴ bulldozia. n.d. / *Jim Crow in Britain*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.bulldozia.com/jim-crow/>> [Accessed 20 February 2021].

²⁴⁵ Urofsky, Melvin I.. "Jim Crow law". Encyclopedia Britannica, 12 Feb. (2021) <https://www.britannica.com/event/Jim-Crow-law>. [Accessed 20 February 2021].

²⁴⁶ O'Dowd, N. (2019). *Growing up in Ireland with the Black and White Minstrels, Uncle Tom and blackface*. [online] IrishCentral.com. Available at:

Black British historian David Olusoga mentioned his interaction with The Minstrel show while growing up:

I was eight years old when the BBC finally cancelled *The Black and White Minstrel Show*. I have memories of my mother rushing across our living room to change television channels (in the days before remote controls) to avoid her mixed-race children being confronted by grotesque caricatures of themselves on prime-time television. I was 17 when the last of the touring blackface minstrel shows finally disappeared, having clung on for a decade performing in fading ballrooms on the decaying piers of Britain's seaside towns.²⁴⁷

The 'Jim Crows' that Monica mentions in chapter one, are intended to be symbolic of the continual struggle against a force that appears to have evolved on its own and supported by laws that perpetuate white superiority, has become almost as 'powerful as nature itself' and is so far ingrained into society that for black Caribbean British people, it is almost like watching the John Crows²⁴⁸ (vultures) circling, waiting for their opportunity to devour the black man.

The black British struggle to survive without roots. As previously mentioned, there have been solutions to this, such as naming and revisionist literature. The elements of revisionist literature enable a person Caribbean to revise or alter parts of the story as a coping mechanism. If in real life one that person has gone. In *Berthas*, an example of revisionist

<<https://www.irishcentral.com/news/irishvoice/black-white-minstrel-show-bbc>> [Accessed 20 February 2021].

²⁴⁷ Olusoga, D. (2016). *The reality of being black in today's Britain* | David Olusoga. [online] the Guardian. Available at: <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/oct/30/what-it-means-to-be-black-in-britain-today>> [Accessed 20 February 2021].

²⁴⁸ Urban Dictionary. (2006). *Urban Dictionary: jancro*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=jancro>> [Accessed 20 February 2021].

literature, one can remain behind with loved ones and still have a connection with them. In *Berthas* Saly actively reconstructs. The Caribbean British Identity, looking for solutions to the culturally rootless problem, seeks grounding in Christianity and revises it in order to help restore an identity and contribute to the growing of roots.

11. The relationship between Literature and Public Life.

The stereotype of the strong black woman and the angry, mad black woman is one that women are still categorised with today, but the construction of this stereotype can be found in the 19th Century and is intrinsically linked with the ideologies of the black body and how it is treated.

Britain has a history of shunning memories of their role in slavery yet the relationship between Britain and the West Indies is inextricable. Britain has historically refused to acknowledge any responsibility for atrocities of slavery imposed upon British citizens and after David Cameron visited Jamaica in 2015, he was evasive about issuing the apology that the citizens wanted. In fact, Britain has paid compensation for slavery but to the slave owners, not the slaves themselves.

After the abolition of slavery, Britain paid millions in compensation – but every penny of it went to slave owners, and nothing to those they enslaved.’ The slave and the descendent of the slave is ignored.²⁴⁹

Compensation was given to the owners of the slaves, not the slaves or their descendants.

Many think there is little good in peeling ‘away the layers of scar tissue that the black body had grown in order to obscure, if into annihilate, the slave body underneath.’²⁵⁰ However, one could argue that Britain's refusal to acknowledge crimes of the past hinders healing.

²⁴⁹ Manjapra, K. (2021). *When will Britain face up to its crimes against humanity?*. [online] Guardian. Available at: <<https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/mar/29/slavery-abolition-compensation-when-will-britain-face-up-to-its-crimes-against-humanity>> [Accessed 20 February 2021].

²⁵⁰ Toni Morrison. (2019) *Mouth Full of Blood*. Chatto and Windus.

This refusal to acknowledge, it can be argued, is rooted in collective white guilt but can also have economic reasons. If Britain apologises, what will follow are financial compensation claims.

The issue of former slave-owning nations compensating former colonies is a contentious one in the Caribbean, where national commissions have calculated the sums could run into trillions of dollars.²⁵¹

Britain has always remained forward thinking when considering Jamaica and reparations for slavery.

Mr Cameron wanted this visit to be about the future - but Jamaica certainly can't forget the past. David Cameron has ruled out making reparations for Britain's role in the historic slave trade and urged Caribbean countries to "move on".²⁵²

African slavery was defined by the visible marker which is skin colour. 'A marked visibility enforced the division between former slave and non-slave and supported racial hierarchy.'²⁵³

It was a system which was racist. In this racism, the slave body disappears and is morphed into a synonym for poor people and criminals. The black female body has been ridiculed in media and literature and negatively characterised in conjunction with the slave/racist ideals of black bodies. It is this idea that influences the stereotypical ideology that surrounds black women today.

²⁵¹ Dunkley, E. (2015). *David Cameron rules out slavery reparation during Jamaica visit*. [online] BBC News. Available at: <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-34401412>> [Accessed 20 February 2021].

²⁵² Ibid

²⁵³ Toni Morrison. *Mouth Full of Blood* p76

Morrison, who writes about women and young girls, defines the state of the black woman. *Beloved*, it can be argued, is a result of external forces. Instead of hiding from the past, Morrison confronts it, but also warns against ignoring it. *Beloved*, the character and the narrative, is a product of a violent past ignored.

There is a necessary for remembering the horror, but of course there's a necessity for remembering it in a manner in which it can be digested, in a manner in which the memory is not destructive²⁵⁴

Beloved deals with the 'desires to forget the terrors of slavery and the impossibility of forgetting.'²⁵⁵ American culture, like British culture, has a history of skipping over the unsavoury parts. Morrison savours the irony that while black writers were delving into their history, white writers were shelving it under the label of Postmodernism. Sistani quoted Morrison in the ebook *To Remember or Not To Remember* on the problem of remembering:

History has become impossible for them. They're so busy being innocents and skipping from adolescents to old age. This culture doesn't encourage dwelling on let alone coming to terms with, the truth about the past.²⁵⁶

But it is by confronting the past that we can move forward. Confronting the past also helps explain and explore our present. When considering the stereotypes of black women, one must

²⁵⁴ Morrison/Sistani, S. (2016.) *To Remember or Not To Remember: Questioning Trauma of Slavery in Beloved*. [ebook] Iran: Bahonar University, p.p1. Available at: <<https://www.journals.aiac.org.au/index.php/IJALEL/article/download/2339/2042>> [Accessed 6 July 2021].

²⁵⁵ Ibid p37

²⁵⁶ Ibid p38

confront the past. Morrison, like other writers, does this through stories.

Narratives are written in a language, and language has its own biases and influences. Morrison claimed she wrote for black people, and within the context of her novel *Paradise*, used a 'race free language'. Morrison argues that language has the ability to 'limn the actual, imagined, and possible lives of its speakers, readers and writers. Although its poise is sometimes in displacing experience it is not a substitute for it.'²⁵⁷ It points to where meaning may lie, but there is a link between reader and written word. Literature makes it possible to imagine a different state, a new state that may not be possible within reality.

As narrative its form is the principle method by which knowledge is appropriated and translated.²⁵⁸

Beloved, *Jazz* and *Paradise* each have in common the relationship of the narrative informing the reader of an ideology informed in the coda of the narrative, with which comments and discussions can be based on.

These coda play an advocacy role, insisting on the consequences of having read the book, intervening in the established intimacy between reader and page, and forcing, if successful, a meditation, a debate, argument that needs others for its fullest exploration.²⁵⁹

Reading becomes a social tool.

The social tool of reading, in terms of it teaching the reader something, is highlighted in the character of Sethe in *Beloved*. Sethe is haunted by the smell of ink that she made for the

²⁵⁷ Morrison, Toni. *Mouth Full of Blood* p106

²⁵⁸ Ibid p100

²⁵⁹ Ibid p100

school teacher to use.

It was the ink made with her hands which was used in school teachers book to place her characteristics on 'the animal side of the paper.'²⁶⁰

The idea that the written word can affect the real-world sphere is visited again in

Morrison's *Paradise*. The novel:

encourages way to experience the public - in time, with affect, in a communal space, with other people (characters), and in language that insists on individual participation. It also tried to illuminate and recover the relationship between literature and public life.'²⁶¹

With the presentation of literature comes a responsibility - one that Morrison was aware of.

Narrative creates and shapes ideas of people in the real world, it has a transformative effect as revisionist literature, or both writer and reader.

'Narrative is radical, creating us at the very moment it is being created,'²⁶² and the mode used is language. When considering Martin Luther King, and his mission, Morrison revealed that as a writer, she was responding to his mission,

his expectation of transforming, appending, cosmic elegy into a psalm of brotherhood. Martin Luther King imagined a better world for black people encapsulated in his I have a dream speech. He imagined something better, and through speech and literature forced this vision into the real world.'²⁶³

²⁶⁰ Plasa, C. *Toni Morrison's Beloved* p126

²⁶¹ Morrison, T. *Mouth Full of Blood* p101

²⁶² Ibid p108

²⁶³ Ibid p130

Morrison lived, like Martin Luther King, in an imagined world within her writing, with the deception of control. ‘Whatever the forays of my imagination, the keeper, whose keys tinkled always in earshot, was race.’²⁶⁴ The ‘race-free’ world is an idealised world imagined by Morrison and is a place where her ‘race-free’ language could exist. Morrison prefers to think of a world where race does not matter, and so in her writing she ‘eliminates the potency of racial constructs in language.’²⁶⁵ Matters of race are linked with language, home and identity. And so the mode of language is vital. ‘As an already and always raced writer, I knew at once, from the very beginning, that I could not, would not reproduce the master’s voice and its assumptions of the all-knowing law of the white father.’²⁶⁶

As a writer, Morrison’s aims have changed compared to Mary Prince. Prince dictated her narrative to the Pringles, abolitionists who literally wrote Prince’s book for her. Critics claim that Prince’s narrative reads much like abolitionist texts at the time, which makes the authoritative claim of the voice more problematic.

Thomas Pringle, A Scottish abolitionist activist, is known for his overbearing presence throughout *The History of Mary Prince*.²⁶⁷

Connected to this idea of it being more Pringle’s work than Prince’s was the illustration on the front of the text: the depiction of the kneeling slave. This image was commonly used as a

²⁶⁴ Ibid p131

²⁶⁵ Ibid p132

²⁶⁶ Ibid p132

²⁶⁷ Banner, Rachel. (2013) “SURFACE AND STASIS: Re-Reading Slave Narrative via ‘The History of Mary Prince.’” *Callaloo*, vol. 36, no. 2, 2013, pp. 298–311. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/24264910. [Accessed 6 July 2021.]

banner for abolitionist groups. Within the narrative, it was clear that Prince skimmed over certain issues that her white reader may have found unpalatable, such as the sexual abuse she received at the hands of her masters. Whereas Prince's text is written for the white reader and has an undertone of begging for the freedom of slaves, Morrison is less apologetic, as previously stated, she writes for the black reader. In Prince's situation, there were fewer black readers because of how slaves were not permitted to read or write. Her audience was the sympathetic white reader. They were the embodiment of the 'all knowing law of the white father,' that Morrison speaks about.

It can be argued that Prince was a representation of this strong black woman who survived slavery, much like Sethe in *Beloved*. And although this image is a positive one of strong females, there is the negative aspect to it that women today have to live up to the stereotype. As previously mentioned, some black women find this perfect ideal difficult to live up to and arguably is contributing to the problems of their mental health.

Black women face an increased risk in terms of their mental health, according to Vige at Mind Mental Health Charity.

The figures around black men are high, but they are also very high for black women too.²⁶⁸

It is arguable that the widespread seemingly positive image of the strong black female can

²⁶⁸ Ferguson, A. (2016). *'The lowest of the stack': why black women are struggling with mental health*. [online] the Guardian. Available at: <<https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2016/feb/08/black-women-mental-health-high-rates-depression-anxiety>> [Accessed 20 February 2021].

have a negative effect on some of the ‘dominant, steadfast image of black woman.’²⁶⁹

²⁶⁹ Cole, M. (2018.) *The ‘strong black woman’ stereotype is harming our mental health* | Marverine Cole. [online] the Guardian. Available at: <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/jul/20/strong-black-woman-stereotype-mental-health-depression-self-harm>> [Accessed 20 February 2021].

12. Conclusion

This thesis has set out to explore the stereotypes that Caribbean British women today struggle with. Black women are presented as the strong matriarchal type where failure is not an option. They are also stereotyped as the Angry Black Woman, ridiculed and dismissed. This arguably can have a detrimental effect on the mental state of the Caribbean British woman.

According to the NHS, BAME women, more than white women are prone to experience common mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, panic as well as compulsive disorders.²⁷⁰

BAME communities are generally considered to be at increased risk of poor mental health.²¹⁷ The APMS (2014) found the prevalence of common mental health problems to vary significantly by ethnic group for women, but not for men. Findings from the 2014 APMS show depression to be more prevalent among black women, while panic disorder appears to be more prevalent among women in black, Asian and mixed or other ethnic groups. Studies show that PTSD is higher in women of black ethnic origin and this association is related to the higher levels of sexual assaults that they experience however, women of black ethnic origin are less likely to report or seek help for assaults or trauma. In a report by the National Institute for Mental Health (2003), it was noted that people of black African Caribbean and South Asian origin are less likely to have mental health problems detected by their GP.²⁷¹

²⁷⁰ Appleby, L. Et Al. (2014). *Mental Health and Wellbeing in England*. [online] Files.digital.nhs.uk. Available at: <https://files.digital.nhs.uk/pdf/q/3/mental_health_and_wellbeing_in_england_full_report.pdf> [Accessed 20 February 2021].

²⁷¹ Edwards, J. Et Al. (2016). *Mental Health Foundation*. [online] Mentalhealth.org.uk. Available at: <<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/fundamental-facts-about-mental-health-2016.pdf>> [Accessed 20 February 2021].

Research from the Mental Health Foundation suggests that Caribbean British people are more likely to be diagnosed with a severe mental illness than any other ethnicity in the UK.²⁷² There are contributing factors to this, one being the reluctance to admit needing help, reinforced by the stereotype of the strong black female that individuals are aiming to live up to. Another is the stigma of mental health issues within the Caribbean British communities, so they are reluctant to engage with services. In an article written by A. Ferguson, interviewee Josefien Breedvelt who is a research manager and lead on the development and management of research & evaluation across a range of projects on public mental health research at the Mental Health Foundation, said

Little is known about black women and mental health as these individuals have been largely absent from research. The majority of the research has looked at ethnic minorities as a whole, rather than providing a focus on the challenges faced by black women.²⁷³

Slavery distorted the social set up of family for the Caribbean. The black woman was and still is seen as the matriarch, the permanent fixture whereas the male father figure was discouraged and absent from the family setting during slavery. The male was a tool to be loaned out, to be sold and made profit from, more than the female, who would more often than not, reside within the 'family' context to take care of children within the slavery setting. Within her texts, Morrison is concerned with the female voice and

²⁷²Mental Health Foundation. n.d. *Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/a-to-z/b/black-asian-and-minority-ethnic-bame-communities>> [Accessed 20 February 2021].

²⁷³ Breedvelt, J. Ferguson, A. (2016). 'The lowest of the stack': why black women are struggling with mental health. [online] the Guardian. Available at: <<https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2016/feb/08/black-women-mental-health-high-rates-depression-anxiety>> [Accessed 20 February 2021].

identity of the black woman. Often, it was the female character that was less likely to run away and escape. She was a more permanent fixture tied by children that she may have borne. Although there were women who did plan an escape with men, there were many who did not. This woman that Morrison presents is comparable to the Caribbean British Woman who is stereotyped the same way and struggles with mental health issues as well. The identities are comparable as are the issues in developing these identities.

Morrison is concerned with a different modern representation of black women through language and the historical context of slavery. Fictional characters that traversed into reality to comment on American society.

The totalitarian system of slavery extended itself into the very place that was inviolable and sacred to both African and European societies - the sanctity of the woman's body and motherhood within the institution of marriage.²⁷⁴

This structure of the family home, marriage and motherhood which was distorted and disrupted by slavery, Morrison seeks to rebuild. Morrison creates a subjective discourse of 'motherhood, daughterhood and sisterhood. A discourse that the institution of slavery would ignore or deny.'²⁷⁵

It can be argued that Morrison also presents an image of the black matriarch, a dogged survivor, but Morrison creates realistic characters based upon historical significance. She shows in her narratives the matriarch that the younger female looks up to. Just as the character Beloved looks to Sethe for answers, so, black daughters look

²⁷⁴ Plasa, C. *Toni Morrison's Beloved* p125

²⁷⁵ Ibid p130

to their mothers for the answers they struggle to grasp. The mother is seen as the strength of the whole family, the one who has the answers. Ivy is this strong matriarch in *Berthas*. She is the one that is in the role of mother/grandmother to Saly. She is there at the beginning when Mary is born and her sister Monica dies, ‘The house groaned a welcome to Ivy but was mournful’²⁷⁶ and not only grows up Mary, but has a hand in the upbringing of Saly too. She is the one who soothes Saly when she is worried and anxious, ‘Where’s Owen?’ she asked again. Ivy sighed deeply before rubbing Saly’s hand comfortingly.²⁷⁷ Here, Saly is distressed while in hospital and does not yet know that her husband is dead. Saly looks to Ivy to answer the questions that others could not answer. And she is the one that is called towards the end of the novel to help the situation, ‘I thought Ivy might help make this easier.’²⁷⁸ Ivy is the constant maternal strong figure that the protagonist looks to for help.

Similarly in Nichols’ also references this strong black maternal figure as the sun. The sun predictably rises each morning, is steady and dependable and immovable. The strength of its rays can be a source of nourishment but can also be deadly. The sun that is a source of light and warmth can metaphorical of a mother. With light being symbolic of knowledge, the maternal figure is often seen as the one who has all the answers. Without this maternal figure, the family would struggle to function in the same way.

‘You were sunrise to me.’²⁷⁹

²⁷⁶ *Berthas* p190

²⁷⁷ *Berthas* p183

²⁷⁸ *Ibid*

²⁷⁹ Nichols, G. (1984) *The Fat Black Woman’s Poems*. Virago Press. *Praise Song for My Mother* p55

It is this mother figure that Ivy is in *Berthas*. The immovability of the sun in the sky can allude to the strength and permanence and resistance again prevalent in another of Grace Nichol's poems: *The Assertion*.

The fat black woman sits on the golden stool and refuses to
move.²⁸⁰

Grace Nichols has also written about the stereotype of the strong black woman, linked with resistance in *I Is A Long Memorised Woman*.

'It has come, Firestorm and bloodrage.'²⁸¹ This poem, entitled '...And Toussaint' makes an intertextual link between the resistant army of Toussaint L'Ouverture and the resisting strength of the black woman. Its language implies not only a threat from black woman, (whose anger can be stereotyped as being mad) but also as a violent response. Fire could depict the rage of black woman at the injustice of treatment, which will result in 'heads on spikes,'²⁸² reinforcing the idea of colonial violence being mirrored and used as a weapon against the oppressors.

The protagonist in *Berthas* has two distinct personalities - Saly and Clare. In my thesis, I have used the violent system of slavery to explain how representations of the Black Caribbean British woman was born. The stereotype of the mad black woman is represented within the character of Saly/Clare as well as the strong black matriarchal represented within the character of Ivy and to an extent Ivorene.

²⁸⁰ Nichols, G. (1984) *The Fat Black Woman's Poems. The Assertion* p4

²⁸¹ Nichols, G. (1983.) *I Is A Long Memorised Woman*. Karnack House. London p 83

²⁸² *Ibid* p83

Whereas one is used as a tool to oppress and diminish black woman as seen in the case of Serena Williams, the other is an ideal that Caribbean women strive to live up to, causing a constant pressure.

Singer Nicki Manaj, stereotyped as an angry black female, fought back. Manaj is a singer known to have political views but when her views are expressed, she is stereotyped as being mad or angry with white people. This is a common theme.

When black women are not being boxed into narrow roles, they are often pitted against white women. A recent headline from the Daily Mail describing Serena Williams as a “human volcano” while Maria Sharapova was labelled as the more favourable “ice queen.”²⁸³

This can serve as evidence that these stereotypes are still prevalent today.

Many efforts have been taken by writers such as Lamming, Dabydeen, Walcott, Morrison and Layne to help fill in the gaps that slavery created as well as explain the state of the slavery descendants’ psyche. Where ‘new man’ was constructed through fear and violence, he was not consciously constructed to last as a fully functioning human being with a future as well as a rooted past, and therefore lacks the roots that his descendants need in order to survive.

Language and culture have evolved over time, and although both are still subject to negative stereotyping from a system of indentured slavery, they are evolving into a better version of themselves. Homi Bhaba’s theories on the Third Space of migrants is

²⁸³ Sinclair, L. (2015). *The ‘angry black girl’ stereotype shows just how little we are respected* / Leah Sinclair. [online] the Guardian. Available at: <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/oct/08/stereotype-angry-black-girls-racial>> [Accessed 20 February 2021].

more positive and forward thinking. Bhabha

insists that a 'transnational migrant knowledge of the world is most urgently needed. This migrant world vision can be attained from the 'truest eye' on the world belonging to the migrants double-vision. For Bhabha, this 'double-vision' comes from the migrants place of inbetween-ness.'²⁸⁴

To build a future, the descendants of African Slavery must have this 'double-vision.'

He/she must confront the past and heal the deep-seated gashes within the black

collective psyche. For without roots, nothing can survive. And what is integral to this

survival is reclamation and memory and reproduction of the Caribbean British

community. But they must also look forward as Bhabha's 'double vision' suggests. For

he suggests that the migrant has the ability to do this. This is what is needed to assure

the survival of the Caribbean British Woman.

²⁸⁴ Pervez, S., (2004.) "*Hybridity is Heresy: "Homi Bhabha and The Satanic Verses*. [online] Taylor & Francis. Available at: <<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/02759527.2004.11932351?journalCode=rsoa20>> [Accessed 20 February 2021].

I am here
a woman..... With all my lives
Strung out like beads
before me²⁸⁵

²⁸⁵Nichols,G (1983.) *I Is A Long Memorised Woman*. Karnak House.London. p86

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