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HOME IS WHERE THE HATRED IS

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

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ST. JOHN'S UNIVERSITY

New York

by

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ABSTRACT

HOME IS WHERE THE HATRED IS

Rich y Reeves

Taking inspiration from my heritage, this project is a fictionalized record of the struggles that prohibit prosperity, redemption, and kinship. These internal and external struggles are fought through the lens of three Caribbean diasporic women amidst the background of Brooklyn, NY. To move forward with their respective futures, Rose, Grace, and Anansi are pressured to confront their past in the presence of each other.

DEDICATION

To my grandmother, Memorie-Rose.

Thank you for your sense of humor and catching me when I was born.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to give my gratitude first and foremost to my mentors Professor Brownstein and Professor Bacote for pushing me and challenging me to be a better writer. Helping me nurture my craft over the years has been a long journey that I am enormously appreciative of.

Secondly, I would like to extend gratitude to my friends who have read and reread every painstaking draft of this project. Your feedback and insightful perspective have been a blessing of support.

Thirdly, and most importantly, I would like to thank my mother for giving me the strength and courage to push through even the most difficult moments of writing.

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HOME IS WHERE THE HATRED IS

Stepping foot out of JFK airport, Rose Powell clutched her wedding broom and suitcase close to her. It was the first piece of advice folks back home gave her as she went around her corner of St. Catherine, Jamaica saying her goodbyes. It'd be horrific for a woman her age and in her condition to have to run down some thief.

There was confusion left, right, and center and too many signs to too many dead ends. She had already spent an hour waiting for her broom, which TSA spent their sweet time inspecting. They were already amazed Rose had made it this far with it and it would have surely ended up being confiscated and disposed of, had she not began wailing about her dead husband and her own mortality to the young pimply man at the counter. The whole ordeal was ridiculous; imagine the broom she had sitting in her closet for fifty years, posing a threat to the great America.

The dried straws of the brush were spread further apart, no doubt searching for a threat, and a few even snapped. The dried white roses were flatter than she remembered and worst of all, there was a black scuff mark on the white ribbon wound around the broom handle.

Rose kissed her teeth just looking at it.

She contemplated calling her daughter for a ride home, but what was the use in that. Grace would try to talk her back on the plane, if she even answered, and Rose had already come all this way. Her cousin had given her enough instruction that she should be able to find her way. In any case, she was here, with no intention of buying a return ticket, instead seeing the end of her life's journey in the reunion of her family.

The news of her arrival was best faced in-person, where Grace could not hide from her. Rose would just have to manage on the subway. It was no doubt in her mind that Grace would be less than thrilled to see her. But what do you do when your child refuses to speak to you? They had gone on twenty-four years without speaking and it simply couldn't go on any longer. Grace was too stubborn to ever make the first move and so it was on Rose to right the ship called Grace. Especially after having sold her house for this endeavor, there was no way Grace could deny Rose.

Excusing herself repeatedly to the people bumping into her, Rose found her way to the airport tram that would take her *finally* out of the airport. By the grace of a stranger's kind help, Rose was on the subway platform with her broom, suitcase, and bright yellow plastic card in hand. As big as Kingston airport was, she never imagined she'd encounter an airport that she'd have to exit by train. Not to mention now that she had found herself to subway, she still had two more trains to board. It wasn't until she made her way to Jamaica Station, a name that made her pause, peered at the chaos of the early-morning rush, smelled the piss all around her, that she kissed her teeth and put herself in a cab. A cab that drove as if she were not a paying customer in the back seat and as if traffic laws were optional. A cab that seemed to be driving right into the rising sun that was making her eyes water trying to look straight. Holding her broom against her lap, (the cab driver was very reluctant to have it in his vehicle; Rose, having had more than enough at this point, promptly asked the driver if he'd never seen a broom before in his life, a sad fact that made her wonder about the condition of his home, and that she happy to explain its function so long as his ignorance and fear did not impede his ability to hold a steering wheel and talk at the same time), Rose stared out the window at the less

than flattering view. Rose muttered the twenty-third Psalms, her pitch momentarily increasing with each bump and dip of the road. For a country so prized, you'd think they'd have smoother streets...especially near the airport. Maybe even some fancy buildings and a garden to attract the eyes of the new arrivals. The industrious hustle of the surrounding area steadied the frown on her face.

The cab driver did not make aims to speak to her but instead rushed across every bump and slowed to every green light given. Not to mention the traffic and the impatient honks of the other drivers, Rose felt a migraine building.

It was long before she finally reached Crown Heights, Brooklyn. As she handed over the sixty dollars and forty-two cents from her wallet, Rose gathered her things and stared at the house number supposedly belonging to her daughter. As the driver dropped her luggage next to her, he held out his palm to which Rose put a nickel in it and moved herself to the sidewalk. The heat of the driver's silent stare warmed her up from the late spring that was still not warm enough. She had been freezing ever since she stepped foot in Kingston airport. She pulled her jacket around herself tighter, convinced pneumonia might catch her before her cancer did.

Here she was now, hours after her landing, at her final destination. She had imagined what the front of Grace's house would look like. She had envisioned tall fences around a big green lawn and a big brown building with high windows. She did not expect the litter on the sidewalk or the men walking by her in their uniformed white button-ups and long black coats. She did not expect the foreign writing on the neighboring buildings or the wide cut of the street. There was no tall fence but concrete steps leading up the front door. The house had no tall windows and with its one story, looked out of place in

the row of brownstones. There was no yard, but an empty driveway fenced off. Peering through it, she could see someone in the back on their knees and the short grass that resided back there.

Rose tried to think of what to say first as she climbed those concrete steps and knocked on the door, but the words had left her as the migraine set in. She could not even think of the right verse for this occasion. Was there anything for estranged mothers in the holy book?

Meanwhile behind the big glaring door was Grace.

Grace Powell sat in her kitchen, head buried over a spread of papers and a calculator.

“Anansi!” she called, irritated as she scratched her head with the cap end of the pen. She examined the cream-colored dandruff and made a mental note to wash her hair. “Anansi, come here nuh?” Grace called again with a slam to the table.

Anansi, who had been in the backyard’s garden, attempting to tend to the tomatoes she haphazardly planted weeks before, silently appeared with a blank but equally irritated expression on her face.

“You don’t hear me calling you?”

Anansi did not respond but instead folded her lips together.

“You get paid yet?”, Grace continued, paying no mind to Anansi’s expression.

“I already told you no, Mom.” Anansi moved to get a bottle of water from the fridge. “And they gave my check early last week. It’s *biweekly* for a reason.”

Grace kissed her teeth as she typed something into the calculator. “It’s your money, you work for the week, you entitled to it. Why you must wait until the week after? Huh? This country don’t make no blinking sense.”

“What if we ask Aunt Nadine for help?” Anansi asked after a big gulp.

“No, you can’t rely on people too much. She’s done enough already...”

“Well how much you need this time?”

Grace paused. She contemplated not telling Anansi. As much as she was a grown woman now, Grace couldn’t help but feel a tad guilty having her child bear the burden of their financial shortcomings. The child should depend on the parent, not the other way around.

Grace was already working with four clients. She literally couldn’t fit anymore in her schedule and according to the doctor, her back couldn’t handle much more either. A home-health aide was a tough enough job with one immobile patient but four? It was brutal. There was really no way she could take on more unless she miraculously found some old rich person ready to have their ass wiped at twice her wages now. She thought that she might have to look for one of those, as her clients were not too far from kicking the bucket. That would be just what she’d need with all these over-due bills piling up.

“Don’t bother,” Grace said, “I got it.”

Anansi looked at her mother solemnly. Maybe this is what it meant to become an adult. Yes, she was an adult herself at twenty-four, but she never felt like one. Anansi Powell was still living under her mother's roof and until a year ago, hadn't paid any bills. There was no need with Grace refusing. It was strange how quickly, "*Thank you but no thank you*" went to "*When's your next check?*". Indeed, Grace was the type to never take a hand-out, even from her own daughter. She was desperate enough now to actually let go of that little piece of her pride.

Without a word, Anansi went into her room, and came back with a three hundred dollars in hand. "Here", she offered.

Grace looked at the money, "Where did you get this? You not doing hairdressing, again are you?"

"Oh my God, no. This is just left-over money I saved." Wordlessly, Grace took the money with a nod.

"You act like it's prostitution," Anansi mumbled as she went back into the backyard, fully showing her annoyance on her face. Grace ignored this burst of attitude. She wasn't in the mood for another argument with her. Either way, Anansi wasn't going to be doing any of that hairdressing anymore and that's all that mattered. The thought of her daughter just going in stranger's homes for a bit of money rubbed her the wrong way. Anansi didn't have the money to own a salon, let alone rent a chair in one, and people sure as hell were not about to just walk up and down in her house for their appointments. As much as she admired her daughter finally picking *something* to be passionate about, it was just not the right profession. People were crazy and a young woman like Anansi was

easy prey. She already looked several years younger than she really was so who's to say she wouldn't wind up missing. No, Grace wouldn't have that. She refused for something to happen to her only child. Her daughter. Anansi would just have to pick something more suitable for her disposition. She was young, she had time.

Besides, she already brought bed bugs to Grace's house on one of these little appointments. It was maddening. They itched for weeks. It made Grace distrust her own hyper sterile cleaning methods. Corporate jobs were better and more respectable.

"We'll just keep doing without light until next week. God invented gas stoves for a reason," Grace said to herself.

Anansi's grumblings continued to the garden where she resumed tending to the tomatoes. She had hoped that her mother had changed her attitude by now. She was wrong of course. Grace never changed unless she wanted to. God forbid Anansi stopped hustling then they'd really be on the streets. She didn't mind contributing to a household she lived in, but it seemed as though her mother was increasingly struggling to make ends meet. If she waited around to do only what Grace found 'respectable', then they'd be poor and hungry forever. It was warm enough now but if they had to go without electricity in the winter when the space heaters were crucial, it would be a nightmare. Whatever Grace didn't know, wouldn't hurt her. She only prayed that she saved enough to be out on her own. Of course, Grace would feel insulted as she does by all ideas not thought up by herself, but she was too old to be micro-managed. She still planned on contributing to the house regardless of how Grace would inevitably see it as abandonment.

Late at night, Grace would sit with Anansi on the couch and muse about the house she was going to buy as she scratched off from her pile of lottery tickets. She would ask Anansi, who was very obvious in her nonchalant-ness, what should go where in their imaginary house. The conversation, without fail, always mentioned Anansi getting her own floor sectioned off. Anansi, knowing her mother better than that, only *mhm*-ed. Even with her own key to her own wing of the house, Anansi would have no true privacy. Grace's rule had no borders.

Grace was full of shit and Anansi was tired of smelling it. Checking her phone for the time, Anansi realized she was soon to be late for work. She needed to change. Her jeans were two inches too short and had as much dirt on them as was in the garden. The black t-shirt she adorned was a little better at hiding the stains. As she patted over the dirt of another plant, she glanced at her phone again before thinking on the clean clothes in her room.

She heard the doorbell just then, followed by a rapid knock. Grace, who was peeling potatoes at the kitchen sink, kissed her teeth as she went to answer the door. "I'm coming!" Grace yelled as she shuffled from the kitchen, through the living room and to the front door. Despite her announcement, another set of knocking echoed through the house. The urgency of it made Anansi freeze with just a head visible through the gated backyard door.

"Ya deaf or dumb?!" Grace said completely annoyed. Grace had a long list of pet peeves and this was among them, her mind immediately thinking to a Con-Ed trying to read the meter or the landlord already smelling the money.

Anansi stood up from her pit of dirt on her tiptoes, barefoot, and moved to peep through the kitchen window right in front of her, hoping to better catch a glimpse of the visitor. Her mother's back was still blocking her view.

"...why are you here?", she heard Grace say.

"A suh yuh answa yuh door? Move nuh, mek mi come in. 'E suitcase here too heavy fi mi." The opposing voice answered. The voice carried with the baritone of an elderly woman.

Grace instead slammed her door shut and locked it. There was not even a moment before the pounding on the front door commenced again.

"Grace Powell, open dis R-A-S-S door right now. How DARE you slam-a door inna my face" the voice yelled.

Grace, on the other side of the door, held her chest as she scrambled to gather her thoughts. For a second, she thought she was hallucinating. There was no way that her elderly, *'the only thing meant to fly is bird so why should I'*, mother was really in front of her door, an ocean away.

Anansi quickly dusted off my jeans as she headed inside. As the backyard door squeaked, Anansi came through the kitchen to the living room where her mother still leaned against the front door. Grace looked to see the little dirt she was trailing behind her. Obnoxious.

"*Anansi!*" she harshly whispered to her daughter as she tip-toped over to her. The pounding hadn't stopped.

Anansi began walking to the door to deal with the offender herself. As she moved towards the door, Grace pulled her away. Anansi looked at her mother like she had five heads. "Is it Craig again? I can just send him away," Anansi said, getting ready to make her move once again.

Grace was on her in a flash, "*Don't go to the door! Just mop up go clean my floor up.*"

"*Ouch!*" Anansi whispered as harshly as her mother had yanked her. "What is your damage?"

"*Go boobo.*" There was more furious pounding at the front door.

"Who's at the door?"

"*Jesus pickney, ya cyan't whisper?*"

Anansi looked at her mother unamused, but the banging had stopped.

There was sheer panic on Grace's face in a way that Anansi had never seen. It was a strange sight. Her mother was never panicked, always stressed but never panicked.

"Grace, if ya nuh let me in, mi an' yuh aguh hav' problem", the voice called out again. Grace looked at the dirt on the floor, and quickly moved to clean up the specks of the backyard.

In this moment, Anansi cracked the front door just enough to ask, "May I ask what you want ma'am?"

Rose took a step back, startled to see this young woman at the door. Rose held up her head as she said in a calm yet pointed tone, “Hello dear. Is Grace inna ‘e house? I’m her motha, Rose.”

Before Anansi’s brain could process the stranger’s thick dialect, Grace slammed the door again.

Rose? Anansi had never heard of a Rose before. Sure, she knew her mother’s mother was still alive but oddly enough, she had never heard her name out loud before. Grace only referred to her relatives by relation. They did not have names. Not unless she knew them directly, like her older cousin Nadine. Nadine was the exception.

Here was Rose, her grandmother, at her door, on this random spring Tuesday.

“What the H-E- two stick is wrong wid yuh gyal?” Grace harshly whispered out.

“Wrong with me? I’m just trying to address the person banging on our door. I have places to be and you’re standing here like a weirdo, worried about some dirt on the floor” Anansi exasperated.

“May I come in? Grace come on nuh man, mi back a hot mi” Rose called again.

Without opening the door Grace called back, “You show up at my house and you want me to just... let you in?”

“Grace. Mi come all dis way...”

“So, you know the way back then?”

“Gyal. Mi nah guh agrue wid yuh from ova a door. Now open dis rass-.” Rose’s sentence was cut short by a coughing fit. Her coughing quickly turned in a dry heaving.

On the other side, Anansi visibly winced at the sound. Moving past her mother to open the door again, Grace beat her to it, finally give full view to their visitor as she opened the door wide. Rose was hunched over the handle of her broomstick, coughing as if dedicated to produce a more troubling sound than the last.

“Come in for a glass of water,” Anansi said from behind her mother’s figure.

Rose’s coughing slowly subdued until she could hold eye contact with her daughter.

“Fine, yes. It’s only because I don’t want you to die on my steps, nothing more”, Grace finished.

“Mom...” Anansi softly reprimanded.

Her mouth turning into a thin line of disapproval, Rose accepted the invitation. Anansi walked out to help Rose with her large suitcase as Grace watched from the door frame.

“Thanks,” Rose wheezed out to Anansi as she finally made it inside. Rose slipped off her brown loafers, careful to set them aside with each shoe facing an opposite direction. She looked around as Anansi moved the suitcase right by the door. Rose’s eyes darted around the living room with serious contemplation. She laid her broom across the *shabby* red couch covered in plastic and walked a few steps to the fireplace that housed a plethora of tchotchkes. There were Russian dolls, porcelain Planter’s peanut figurines, black cherubs, blue glass-goats, casino chips, fridge magnets, tattooed baby dolls, cassette tapes, tabby cats with clocks on the wrong time, you name it.

Rose sneezed a few times as the dust lodged itself into her nose. She considered but thought against taking her handkerchief to cover the lower half of her face. Even if Grace did not know she was coming, surely, she should've kept the fireplace in a better condition. It was a bizarre sight. Oddly enough, the condition of the fireplace did not match whatever else Rose could see. The house was tidy and neat, but that dusty fireplace was enough of an offense. She noted the dust atop of all the little trinkets. She slid a finger across the dust on a bobble-head dalmatian and squinted her eyes to analyze its thickness.

From the corner of her eye, she noticed the horrid armchair failing to hide in the corner. It was a velvet orange that did nothing for the room's décor except scream for help. And in that plastic covering that was starting to take on some orange-ness itself, Rose intended to oblige and put it out of its misery. Who would ever put a red and orange couch in the same room?

The living room gave way for a small rectangular wooden dining table that was clearly made by the most apprentice craftsman. The shape was wobbly and as a result, did not sit neatly against the end of the wall it was pushed up against.

Rose used her finger to push gently down against it and watched as the table teetered. There were only two seats at the table, one at each end. The chairs were quite beautiful. They were a dark wood with a delicate design carved in them. Right above the table was a large open window of sorts in the wall, that made peering into the kitchen no task. Rose did not bother going in to examine it, but she noticed the double sinks. One was full of clothes soaking in soapy water. The fridge with the door wide open, had its contents on the red, gridded clay tile floor. A trash can was pulled close to the mess. The

table was full of papers and a calculator. Rose assumed she caught Grace in the middle of some chores. Besides the obviously notable messes, the house looked preserved and in place. There was not much of a trace of activity like a stray sock, or a coat flung haphazardly.

Grace moved into the kitchen, however, not before taking the broom off her couch and placing it standing up in the corner. Rose was quick to snatch back up again and place it standing up in the orange monster instead. Grace retrieved a glass full of water as promised, right after shuffling her papers together in a neat pile and putting them inside an empty drawer. She handed off the water to Rose, who was still busying herself in judgment, and placed her mother's broom in the corner once more.

Rose turned away from her again, having shot a disapproving look at the water and let herself into the kitchen after all. "Something wrong wid di fridge?" Rose said.

"Ma, can we not play these games?" Grace called again.

"What games?" Rose offered over her shoulder as she browsed through the cabinets. She was particularly interested in a can of cheese sauce. She put the can on the counter, stepped over the scattered food on the floor, and looked through the drawers. Grace tensed briefly as she opened the draw full of her papers on her search. Grace quickly closed the drawer back for her and looked Rose in her eyes.

"Knife." Rose said.

Grace opened an adjacent drawer and silently precured the item. Stabbing the can, Rose began to open it.

Grace hurriedly put some of the food back in the fridge, with little care to how well it was packed up. She would have to come back to this later. Rose had already stepped over the food once and she was getting increasingly disgusted by the second. As if reading her mind, Rose stepped over her and the food, and continued her work at the table. With her mother's back to her, Grace checked the drawer quickly to see what was visible. She sighed in relief to see that calculator obscured whatever was visible from the blank backside of the pages.

Rose was in her house all of two minutes and already was pushing her nose in her business. She had not seen the woman in twenty years and the first thing she did was make her way through her things. Audacity did not begin to cover Rose Powell. She shouldn't've let Anansi's invitation slide. She should have turned that woman away even if it meant calling the police to remove her from the porch steps.

Rushing back to the fridge, she lifted the lazy fridge door up to properly close it. She then grabbed the knife from Rose and stabbed it into the wooden table. Arms crossed; Grace looked down at her mother silently. Rose mimicked the expression and said, "Surely you nuh expect mi fi talk pon a empty stomik'."

Rolling her eyes, Grace grabbed tortilla chips from a cabinet and slapped them in front her mother with a raised eyebrow. "Happy now?"

Rose kissed her teeth in annoyance and dipped the chip in the can of cheese before twisting her face up. She had a feeling she wouldn't like it but hoped that she would be surprised. She wasn't hungry, just stalling. Now that she was inside the house, Rose was even more unsure of what to say. *'I have come to see you once more before I*

pass away and meet my granddaughter' wasn't exactly the conversation starter she wanted to use. Grace wasn't going to make this easy. Rose could already see that she hadn't changed a bit over the years. She was the same stubborn and neurotic child she had raised. She was not going to just let Rose sit in the house without proper explanations and no doubt... apologies. She wouldn't even forgive a bee for stinging her, never mind if it was in the bee's nature or her own fault for coming too close to the hive.

Grace on the other hand, was already talking herself up to being as stern as possible with her mother. There was nothing that her mother could say to her that would truly make her ready to forgive her. She was resigned to her harshness as shown to her years before. Who abandons their pregnant daughter on the side of a highway for an argument instead of helping her to the hospital? Never mind that it was the stress of the argument that made Grace begin her Braxton-hicks in the first place. It was a miracle that she did not lose her child. Anansi had since been all she had and not even her mother would get in the way of that again. It did not matter what Rose wanted Grace thought, she would not let that act of pettiness go as long as she lived.

Remembering Anansi, Grace popped into her room to confirm that she had indeed snuck off there.

"I'm just changing really quick, I'll come in a minute," Anansi said. Buttoning her new and clean jeans, she grabbed a wrinkled long sleeve shirt from a pile of clothes on a chair and sniffed the armpit. It seemed she had hopped in the bathroom for a quick shower as she was finally dirt-free.

Grace fanned herself as she slipped further in the room. “God, yuh nuh hot in here?”

“No Mom” Anansi said with an eye roll. She said this literally every time she entered the room. As if without her declaration, Anansi would never be able to tell the temperature.

“I’m burning up, shit. And you never clean up all these clothes? Since when chair means closet?” Grace picked up a wrinkled sweater off the chair just to drop again. “You don’t know an iron?”

“Mom, did you come in here for something?”

“...It’s your grandmother.”

“Yeah I got that part.” Anansi, satisfied with the low stench on the shirt, slipped it on.

“Just say hi to her and go on to work. You’re already late.”

Anansi was beyond aware that she was late and didn’t care. Her grandmother was here. She had never met this woman and from the stories that only Nadine would indulge her in, Rose was a person to know. Rose was Nadine’s favorite aunt and experienced all the best sides of her. As fond as Nadine was of Rose, Grace was opposed to even the recollection of her mother.

“Rose, right? Should I call her Rose? Or Grandma?” Anansi continued, ignoring her mother’s previous statements.

Before Grace could answer, there was Rose over her shoulder.

“Oh my!” Rose smiled, this time sincerely. It took everything in Grace not to elbow her mother back from over her shoulder.

“Ma! You couldn’t just wait by the table! The girl is changing.”

“What? Mi nah titty just like she? Why cyan’t mi say hello to mi granddaughta? Or ya plan fi keep whisparin’ bout mi like ya ‘a fowl?”

Anansi took note of Rose’s makeup first: a dull red on her thin lips, her eyebrows drawn as straight dark lines against the sparse gray hairs, and the dots of pink sitting unblended on her cheeks. Even through the crack of the door, Anansi even noticed the harsh hairline of Rose’s wig that looked more like a hat than hair.

Anansi mimicked her grandmother’s smile. It was awkward for the moments that followed as they both were obvious in their analysis of the other. To Rose, Anansi looked nothing like her or her mother. Her small button nose was unlike their large fat ones. Her ears were skinnier but just as long. Her lips were fuller than theirs, but Rose chalked that up to youthfulness as old age had changed much of Rose’s face herself. Anansi’s eyes however, reminded her of her daughter’s. Anansi’s eyes were just like Grace’s. Small, hooded, and so brown they appeared black.

But it was in their expression that Rose was hit with profound nostalgia rather than their physicality. Those eyes held the same determined stubbornness that Grace always saw the world with. To Rose, it was the very reason she had run off with that boy and then disappeared again once Anansi was born. She always had to do things as she saw fit. Despite those eyes, the faint whisper of defiance always looming in their depths, Anansi did not look like the other Powell women. Her hair was much curlier and her skin

a shade darker than her elders. Had it not been for Grace continuing the tradition of passing on her maiden name, Rose would've needed more convincing that this was her grandchild.

Rose smiled big with a, "Luk lik Grace finally did sumting right."

"Uhm...it's nice to meet you," Anansi said, fixing her shirt so the seams all lined up. It was clear to Anansi that these women were related. Grace looked more like her mother than she had ever indicated. Anansi had never wondered what her mother would look like old but clearly the answer was here.

"Gawd, 'e hot in here" Rose said as she fanned herself.

"A yuh room?" Grace snapped. Anansi glanced at her mother in question, who motioned for her to hurry as she followed Rose once more back into the living room.

Anansi undid her bun. Taking the black shoelace, she wrapped it neater around her hair and pulled until the puff looked presentable. With a small toothbrush, she dipped it in gel and brushed along her edges. A look at her watch confirmed that she would be late for work. Sighing, Anansi began preparing herself for the write-up she was sure to get. With an exhale, Anansi surveyed herself one more time. Popping in a pair of stud earrings and spritzing a bit of perfume, she finally headed into the living room.

She sat down on the couch next to her waiting grandmother, passing the table with chips and open cheese. "Nice broom," Anansi said taking note of the odd thing in the corner of the room. Rose took Anansi's hand and held it in her lap with a soft "Thank you".

“That-”, Rose continued, “was di broom mi jump when mi marry ya grandfather. If ya momma ‘een marry, then I coulda pass it on lik my madda did wid me.”

“Oh, is it like, the family heirloom?”

“I suppose so. But mi husband did replace the bristles and help mi pick ‘ee flowers pon it.”

It was nice for an old thing with its stiff sand colored straw. The handle was a beige colored wood with initials carved into it and a dull silver ribbon wrapped around it. The flowers in question were unrecognizable to Anansi, save for a dried white rose that wasn’t as squished and cracked as the other flowers along the base of the handle. It had the charm of an old childhood stuffed animal.

“...Did you carry it on the plane?”

“Of course! Yuh expect mi fi leave mi wedding broom behind? No sah, yuh cyan’t do that.”

Anansi smiled. There was a seriousness to Rose’s voice. Anansi did not doubt that Rose went everywhere with this ceremonial cleaning tool. She imagined the broom hung up in Rose’s house like a trophy or chinaware. Was this a common tradition in her family? Did Aunt Nadine have a broom of her own, waiting to be jumped?

“I think it’s beautiful that you carry it so close.” Anansi responded. She envisioned herself, at Rose age, carrying around that same broom with flowers picked out by her and her own husband. It must be wonderful to love a memory so much to carry such a thing overseas.

Rose smiled back at Anansi. She felt immediate affection for the girl. Anansi understood. She could see it in Anansi's eyes that she truly understood. Noticing a loose strand of hair hanging from the back of Anansi's head, Rose used her fingers to comb it back up into the bun. She was surprised at the softness of her granddaughter's hair. She had the urge to continue stroking the spot.

"Oh, thanks." Anansi mumbled as she unraveled her makeshift hair tie.

"Mek mi help?" Rose asked. Obliging, Anansi handed her the knotted shoelace. Rose scooped up her granddaughter's hair, reveling in the soft touch. She could not place the smell exactly, but it was heavenly. "Whey ya put in yuh 'air?"

"My... hair? It's just this treatment I made. Leaves quite a strong smell. Sorry about that."

"No, no. 'E smell good. And it soft too." Rose reassured, as she began looping the shoelace around Anansi's hair. Anansi smiled.

"Yuh 'air luk healthy too. Maybe yuh cyan sell it."

"I used to actually. It helps with strengthening the hair."

"Whey mek yuh stop?"

Anansi paused as she pulled away from Rose to feel the finished product. Rose did not get a moment to follow up before Grace scooped Anansi off the couch and ushered her to the door.

"Anansi. You're going to be late."

Anansi frowned at her mother. "I'm already late, why rush now?"

Here was a relative she had never met, and she was just supposed to go to work and miss out on that? Bad enough that Anansi never got an interaction with an extended family member, (granted her cousin Aunt Nadine was the only one who even lived in America) Grace was also rushing this one.

Grace stared at Anansi unamused.

“Mom. It’s fine. It’s just one day.” Anansi maintained.

“Grace, she seh she fine. Mek mi enjoy ‘a likkle time ‘een?”

“Ma! Di pickney need fi leave dammit!” Grace yelled.

Rose calmly looked at Grace despite the outburst. Anansi was not as skilled in hiding her emotions. It took everything in her not to scream herself. At what age she wondered, would her mother leave her to her own devices. Biting the inside of her cheek, Anansi began to slip on her shoes. “You can’t have them dock your pay for lateness, now, can you?” Grace slowly asked her daughter. Anansi did not answer, she did not need more reminding on their current financial situation but waved to Rose as she grabbed her bag off the coat rack and left the house.

“Of course! Mek wi catch up when ya come back.” Rose called to Anansi’s retreating figure. With the door shut, Rose tried to keep a calm demeanor. She hoped that maybe she’d be able to get more time with Anansi. It was good, she supposed, that Anansi was responsible to show up to work, even if she was tardy.

Turning to her mother now, Grace was too ready to get this woman out of her home. God forbid nightfall hit and this unwanted visitor see that she had no light. She did not need Rose's judgement, only her departure.

"Let's cut to it shall we? Why are you here and when you leaving?" Grace said as she leaned against the fireplace. Rose began to open her mouth to which Grace held up a hand, "I mean this very seriously. Just answer the question."

Rose paused. Maybe she should just come out with it. Grace was obviously not going to keep up a tinge of hospitality so why not cut to the chase. Then again, what kind of conversation would that even be. "I've come to spend some time with you and Anansi", she settled.

"You neglected the second part of the question." Grace scoffed. As if she really cared enough to come spend some time with them. She hadn't cared before so why would she now? So many years ago, she was resigned to her own anger to leave on the side of the road in a time of emergency. Such a woman would not care to come to spend time with the people she could've killed.

Rose shrugged. She truthfully did not know when she was leaving. She bought a one-way ticket. She felt as if buying a return flight was a jinx she didn't need. After selling her house, she had nothing but time and money. Best case scenario, she'd just live out her visa with Grace. "A suh bad if mi want fi see yuh?"

"Yuh neva want fi see nuhbody yet. What do you want? You need me to sign off on something?"

Rose kissed her teeth, “That land sell already. It easy fi forge a signature when yuh already write likka pickney.” It was true. Grace’s handwriting was always atrocious.

“So yuh couldn’t call me fi say you illegally forged my signature and sell mi childhood home?”

“As if yuh ever care ‘bout that piece of dirt. It was my home and mi decide fi sell it.... Mi come fi spend time with yuh, alright? Mi cyan’t come fi try bridge ‘e gap between we and just deh yah?”

Grace let out a hearty laugh. This woman was always persistent in her lies. It was such a shame her mother never became an actress. That was truly a more suitable line of work for her than primary school teacher. “You need your papers?”

“America nah nuttin’ fi mi, mi nuh already get whey mi want outta life.... Fi true Grace, mi just come fi spend time wid yuh and meet mi grandbaby.”

Rose, biting the inside of her cheek, stared at Grace whose amusement overshadowed all other emotions. Grace was not cracking.

“Fine.” Rose finally said. “...Mi ‘a dead soon and them already seh mi blood ‘a poison so mi come ‘ere fi spend some time wit yuh before mi keel ova’....”

“Ma...yuh serious? Yuh nah joke?” Grace’s smile gradually dropped with Rose’s chosen silence before muttering a soft, “shit”.

“Mi nuh sorry fi di way tings go wid we, but mi sorry mi neva there fi yuh when it all happens” Rose finally said after a couple moments of silence.

“What yuh have?” Grace asked, amusement fully flushed from her face.

“Cancer ah di blood. Mi nuh cyan membah ‘e name.”

“How long?”

“Mi hav’ left or how long mi did hav’ it?”

“...both.”

“Mi nuh know and ah couple a months. Mi cyan’t be boddad wid allah ‘e surgery dem. Mi do one round ah kemo and mi tek sick like ah dog. Mi live long enough anyhow... it’s time mi do mi business and guh meet mi husband.”

Grace scoffed with a soft, “Wow.”

“Nuh tell Anansi. I not even want fi tell you but yuh suh stubborn.”

“Let’s backup. You sold the house and came all the way here just to see me and Anansi because you have *cancer*?”

Rose nodded her head. “Mek wi just move on. Yuh not even will know mi here.”

“Wait...yuh see now Ma. Now I’m the bad guy just cause you’re dying. This is unfair and so like you. Now I’m supposed to magically forgive you just cause you’re dying? When do I get to be angry and say no, huh? Yuh not even ask me how I feel about all of this. Because you give up, then I must just say okay and give you everything.”

Rose blinked at Grace. To say she was taken back by the response was an understatement. Rose had never intended to tell Grace she had cancer but to simply spend some time with her daughter before she would admit herself to a hospital and pass away in peace. Now here was this insolent child still crying about herself even in the face of death.

“Ma, I still don’t want you in this house. You can’t come here and expect things to go your way regardless of whatever. And now, just cause you *say so*, not *ask*, mind you; I’m supposed to what? Let you live here until you die? This is too much.” Grace continued as she stood up from the chair, arms still crossed.

Rose had half a mind to fling to knife in her direction. “Too much? Yuh eva considera that *me*, di one datta actually ‘a be affected by dis might hav’ it ‘e hardest?”

“And this is exactly what I’m talking about! You come here with your problems and your wants and not even ask me if you can, or you may. You invite yourself in, you look through my things, you already leave that god forsaken broom all over my furniture, and I’m just to sit here and say okay as you clear your conscious and... *die?*”

Rose was quiet. What was there to say really? Grace was not getting it and her selfishness wouldn’t allow her to ever. “What yuh want eh?” she asked her. What did Grace really want? What would make it all okay?

Neither was quite sure.

“And worst of all, you want me to let you inna my house so I can watch you die.”

“Mi neva mean ‘ee like dat-“

“How yuh mean it then? Yuh not even know long you have left yet you thought I’d want to sit here with you and watch you wither away.”

“Nuh mon, mi will go peacefully. Just one night inna my sleep, I’ll pass away.”

“Yah act like that’s something you can control! And what? Yuh come all this way to meet Anansi, bond with her, just to turn around and die? You would throw so much grief on her like that?”

“Grace...”

“It’s just funny to me that after 8 hours of wiping the shit outta stranger’s ass for the little two cents I make to pay rent, you want me to then come home and do the same for you when you have never shown yourself as deserving of such. You really are a piece of work. You can never be there for me but yet because you say so, I’m supposed to be there for you. That is insane.... I love you Ma, but you really know how to test that love.”

Rose did not have a response. Whoever said time heals all wounds surely never met Grace Powell. She did not let time dull anything. Rose thought that twenty-odd years would be enough to move them on but clearly, she was wrong.

Grace then handed Rose her broom wordlessly. Rose did not take the broom. She only looked Grace in her eyes. Grace had said all she needed to. She did not feel it necessary to speak on anything more. For once, she thought, it’d be nice for her mother not to fight her on something.

“Grace” Rose began, “nuh mek we do nutin’ rash. Tink ‘bout ‘ee more.”

But Grace rarely got what she wanted when it came to this woman. Rose would always push for her own victory. Grace did not have the patience to battle it out. She meant what she said and if her own mother could not respect that, there was no need to exchange any more words. Come hell or high water, Grace has resolved to have her

mother out of her house before nightfall. This was not a person she cared to give refuge to. It wasn't like this was truly the only place Rose could stay.

Grace did not answer but instead opened the door and threw the broom through it. The broom landed with a firm crunch on the porch steps and slid down onto the walkway. Rose immediately moved after it, never minding the pain and cracks that began as she got up from the couch. Gingerly bending down, she picked up the broom to see some bristles had indeed broken. Rose released a sigh of relief. This was something she could fix. Her relic was otherwise fine. Clothes flew past Rose as she looked to see the contents of her suitcase whizzing in the air. Grace had surely lost her mind. This was a level of disrespect that Rose had not prepared herself for.

“Grace?!” Rose screamed.

Door still open, Grace was throwing Rose's things out one by one. “How many ways must I tell you go?!” Grace yelled back. If chucking Rose's things across the lawn would remove this woman from her house, then so be it. Hopefully, Rose's pride and spite would move her to not speak to Grace again.

Rose felt herself swell with rage. This act was beyond insolence and disrespect. Rose felt it in herself then to beat Grace as if she was still a misbehaving child.

Rose screamed in frustration as she grabbed her broom and ran on the porch towards Grace.

Grace did not move fast enough and with a book still in her hand, was barely in time to block her mother's blow to her head. Seeking the opportunity, Grace grabbed the broom stick with her hand and attempted to shake her mother's grip. Rose was not a

skinny woman. She had quite a bit of weight on her for someone so short and with that came quite a bit of strength.

Rose barely shifted under Grace's tugging. Planting her feet firmly, it took everything in Grace to snatch the infernal cleaning instrument. The crackle of the broom resounded once more as Rose's hand disconnected from the broom, with only a few strands in hand. This disconnection surprised her and made her stumble back until she landed firmly on her bottom.

"Did you just try to strike me?" Grace asked firmly, looking down at her mother with just as much fury.

"Mom!" Anansi yelled from beyond the front gate. Grace looked to her, conscious just then of her stance over her mother and the instinctive raised gesture of her left fist.

"What are you doing?!" Anansi yelled again, swiftly moving to help Rose up from the porch floor. Grateful at the sight of Anansi, Rose held firmly onto Anansi's hand for assistance. Kissing her teeth, Grace dropped the broom at Rose's feet as if it had burned her.

"Anansi. What are you doing here?" To say Grace was startled was an understatement. Her heart was racing. Of course, Anansi had to catch her in such a compromising position. Nothing good ever came from Rose's presence. It only ever meant stress and headache for Grace.

Grace watched Anansi help Rose up. She watched Rose play out her age as she gingerly got up with labored breath. Where was this feeble woman a second ago? A second ago Rose had moved to hit Grace, with ample force at that.

There was no good way to explain this to Anansi but regardless, Grace was determined not to let this poor show deter her from getting rid of her mother. She would not fall for her tricks. Grace still felt justified in her actions, as fleeting as it was.

Swiftly, Grace dragged the rest of her mother's things outside. "Anansi come inside now. Your grandmother will be leaving."

"Are you okay Grandma?" Anansi asked Rose who was breathing heavily.

Grace tapped her foot as she stood by the door.

"What's going on?" Anansi asked as she turned to her mother. Grace walked inside, to which Anansi followed. Grace did not address her until she picked up her phone from the kitchen table. "Why are you home?"

"Why are you on our porch hitting your mother?" Anansi countered.

"Do not talk back to me Anansi. Why are you not at work?"

"Is that what matters right now? Not you committing elder abuse for the entire neighborhood to see?"

"I didn't hit her, she tried to hit me."

"What is going on with you two seriously?"

"And why are you not at fucking work, seriously? You think these bills are going to pay themselves?"

"Grace," Rose interjected as she stood by the kitchen entryway, "nuh talk to 'ee gyal suh."

“Don’t tell me how to talk to my daughter. Who invited you back in here?!”

“Mi coat and shoes nuh inside? Yuh expect mi fi leave naked?”

“You know what-“ Grace said as she began furiously tapping on her phone. “I called a cab for you. Collect di rest of yuh belongings and see yuhself out. Find somewhere else fi sleep.”

“You can’t just kick her out like that Mom. What if something happens to her?” Anansi asked as she snatched her mother’s phone from her to cancel the ride request. Grace swiftly snatched the phone back and elbowed her, fury swelling back up again.

It was a mystery to her why the day was unfolding like this. Anansi had spoken to this woman all of five minutes and suddenly she was a champion for her. When Anansi became such a humanitarian was unbeknownst to her. What she really wanted to know however, “Why are you not at work Anansi?”

Anansi did not look in her eyes. Grace noted her daughter’s eyes dart towards Rose like a child ashamed before confession. “What happened Anansi?” Grace asked firmly, taking one of Anansi’s hands into her own. Anansi did not look into her mother’s eyes but at the sudden warm gesture. The gesture felt misplaced among the recent events. Their front door was still as open as Grace had left it and through it, Rose’s belongings littered their porch.

Anansi slipped her hands out of her mother’s uncomfortably. She felt exposed at this realization. She could not see from way in the house if there were any spectators, but her naked feeling remained. There was clearly a lot between her mother and Rose but all the same, she did not understand why things couldn’t be resolved more peacefully. Her

mother was a hothead and stubborn in the purest form. This level of reaction was all the same preposterous to Anansi. She felt cheated in Rose's dismissal and it made her angry. She felt angrier however in the lingering shame of her early return.

"...I was told not to come in anymore." Anansi said, deciding to rip off the band-aid. She had got the call from her manager just after she had swiped her MetroCard. This was apparently the *one* too many times that she had turned up to her job late. Whether those excuses be train delays, rushing in fulfilling a client's hair appointment or plain laziness, Anansi was finally given the boot. It was just her luck to be on the day she finally met her grandmother. Imagine, meeting your grandchild for the first time and they end up being fired. It wasn't the image she wanted to lead with. Not to mention she had already wasted a fare.

On the other hand, this could've been a sign. Anansi did not want to go to work. She wanted to be home listening to her grandmother recount her youth. Likewise, she wanted to fill her grandmother in of stories of her own youth. Was there a better time to be fired? Maybe with her grandmother present, Anansi could convince her mother to let her work as she pleases. She was confident in her hustling as she had always and planned on continuing to help her mother make ends meet.

Grace did not answer for a moment, but Anansi could see the disappointment creep onto her face.

"Don't worry. I have it handled." Anansi said.

"How Anansi? If you had your shit handled, you wouldn't've gotten fired." Grace said as she placed her palms on her temple. "Call them right now and apologize."

“I’ll get money Mom. I don’t need that job. I didn’t even like it there.”

“That’s not the point! Should we just live outside then? Perhaps the subway? They have A/C on all the trains now, that’ll be useful for summer.” Grace said. This was not the first time that Anansi had been fired. It was this fact that infuriated her more. She knew all the arguments her daughter would bring. It always came back to her blasted hairdressing. This day was really testing her strength. Anansi just had to embarrass her in front of her mother.

“You’re being dramatic.”

“Grace, if yuh need help mi dey ‘ere.” Rose interjected. Grace had almost forgot she was there.

“The last thing I need is help from you.”

“Are you kidding me?!” Anansi screamed. “We don’t have light. Of course, we need help.”

Grace had become obviously flustered. Thanks to her daughter, the embarrassment of their situation hung apparent.

“Grace, yuh only need fi ask fi money. Mek mi help an’ stahp stress di gyal out. Mek she do whey she want so long as she do ‘er part” Rose chimed in again.

“No chile of mine is going to do *hair* as if she some wasta. Yuh have ambition, act like it. You not some young gyal nuh more.”

“Stop telling me what to do! I give you money, what more do you want from me? I contribute, why does it matter how I make the money? Be grateful I’m trying. At least I’m not wiping people’s ass like you.”

A slap resounded throughout the house. Grace had not noticed what she did until after she had done it. No one moved for a moment.

Why was everyone testing her today? This day was meant to be a peaceful day off. She had planned on spending it by cleaning out the fridge, vacuuming the floors, and looking for the board games for entertainment. All Anansi was supposed to do was go to work and come home. Maybe in the evening they’d rig up some leftovers and play a game into the night. She did not plan (nor welcome) a surprise visit from her estranged mother. She did not expect to have such a hard time removing this woman from her own home; a home that she already had considerable trouble keeping up. Now, she was fighting her mother and her daughter, who’s chattiness was pushing Grace over the edge. She was not usually this violent but the last thing she would tolerate was Anansi openly disrespecting her in face of company. All Grace wanted was her peaceful day back.

Anansi finally looked her mother in her eyes with the same strong furious look Grace had given her.

She did not want to be here, discipling her daughter, and fighting her ambitions. She wanted her simple day back. Poverty was all she had planned to battle today.

It was all the more surprising when Anansi swiftly kicked her right below her knee. It did not land, as Anansi had never been a coordinated child. Although, the intent of her harm hung in the air just as heavy.

“...Anansi.” Grace began in disbelief, but the girl instead ran and flew out the door before Grace could finish her sentence. Grace was truly shocked. Her daughter had never moved to strike her before.

Grace held up her hand to her mother, who had looked at her. She still had too many thoughts going on in her head, she didn't want Rose adding to them.

Rose wondered again what she expected from Grace, from this visit. This was someone she did not recognize. As much as she disciplined Grace, she had never smacked her in the face. That was beyond the definition of tough love.

It should've been clear from the moment that she walked in the door that Grace had lost touch with her upbringing, but this was beyond belief. To think that she came all the way up here, to America, and she became not a lick of better. What would her father think? How was she supposed to spend time with Anansi like this? Maybe she had come at the right time after all? Grace clearly needed the money and Anansi needed the break. No one should be burdened with money in such a way. Rose did not wait for Grace to compose herself. She was done talking, and fighting, with Grace. Grace did not deserve any more opportunity.

Slipping on her shoes and gathering her scattered items, Rose haphazardly dragged her things away from the Powell household. Rose did not know where she was walking to. For the first time in a long time, she made aims not to think where she was walking. She simply turned left at the gate and made her way past the row of brownstones. It seemed as if the whole neighborhood was mostly made of brownstones as her lefts and rights met the same houses. There were a few apartment buildings, big ones

with courtyards, and odd oblong houses like Grace's but nothing in the capacity for these brownstones. The same uniformed characters shuffled about her it seemed for a couple blocks, until she had turned again to see the hodgepodge of Caribbean flags waving on balconies and a slew of different patois making their way around. Some stores had round characters written on their awnings, while other had plainly "Kingston Pizzeria" or "Top Notch Nails" or "Easy Please Day Care Center".

The last time Rose had made her way through Brooklyn, Grace was living in a small apartment with some friend that had enough glitter on their eyelids to supply a kindergarten class. Not to mention Grace was well into her pregnancy that any day she would've dropped. She couldn't remember what neighborhood that was. That brown apartment building looked exactly like the brown apartments next to her now. Even so, she was surrounded by nothing but Black people all the same. Now, well now she saw Jews, and Blacks, and even a few White people. It was a wonder how much this part of Brooklyn had changed.

She wasn't sure where Anansi might have gone nor did she have her phone number or a phone at that. Coming up the end of the block, Rose could see those White people walking into a big park, that amassed the whole of two city blocks. Aimlessly, thoughtlessly, Rose followed. She continued to ignore the lingering looks on her and her decorative broom. Upon entering, she could hear a piano being played among the shouts of children in the playground and adults playing basketball. Most of all, at least so it seemed to Rose, everyone was with someone. Children were with each other or their parents, people walked and talked in pairs or more, and even the solitary pedestrian, had a

dog of some form for company. With this many people, surely one of them had would've seen Anansi passing.

Just beyond the kitchen, Grace could hear the faint sounds of few cars passing the house. The shabbat siren was going off in the distance, the nearest synagogue still a few minutes' drive from them. Grace sat in the kitchen looking at the drawer that housed the overdue bills.

Wiping the last of her tears from her face, Grace got up. "You wanna be grown? Fine" she said to herself as she let herself into Anansi's bedroom.

Kicking away the clutter on the floor, Grace searched under the bed, in the wardrobe, in the vanity, and under a mountain of clothes. As wrong as she was, which she openly admitted, this was still her house. This day would not continue with any more liberties taken against her. If Anansi wanted to be grown, then she was welcomed to it. But it would be without Grace's help.

Finally, Grace noted the suitcase in the atop the wardrobe. Climbing on top of the coiled silver heater that was thankfully cool, Grace pulled down the luggage. She made quick work packing up Anansi's things. Mostly, she packed up clothes that she didn't buy her. Those clothes, she had decided, would be donated to children more grateful.

Grace didn't understand why her daughter acted like that. As if it was Grace herself that decided to make them poor in the first place. As if Grace wanting her to have a stable job and a stable paycheck was detrimental. Stability was a gift Anansi was too immature to cherish. Grace was not going to apologize for it either. If she was the villain,

then so be it. Rose could take up the slack now. She could be Anansi's anchor if she wanted to.

As Grace opened Anansi's underwear drawer, she came upon a wooden box way in the corner. Inside of it was the one thing that could Grace sigh out of relief.

Anansi sat on the park bench, sulking. She felt so juvenile. She kept replaying the fight and her own running away. And kicking her mother in the shin? There was nothing more pathetic. As she sat on the bench, she imagined herself literally anywhere else than under her mother's roof. She imagined herself richer and freer. She imagined her to be anyone or anything but as she was now. She didn't want to be Anansi Powell anymore. She'd rather be a tree or the dirt under the tree. Indeed, now was a good a time as any to die because Grace was sure to kill her. The best-case scenario was that she would be thrown out and take refuge in Aunt Nadine's house. There was no hope for her now.

"Anansi!" a voice called. She looked to see Rose, and a middle-aged man, not much taller than Rose, dragging her broom and suitcase up the small hill she sat atop.

Anansi looked away. She had half a mind to sprint, but she had already been spotted. Embarrassment settled so deep into her spirit, chewing the inside of her cheek was all she could do not to cry. How could she face this woman after that whole ordeal? This was after all the first time she was meeting her grandmother. To make it better, there was yet another stranger approaching her.

Rose let out a very pronounced, "whew!", as she plopped down beside Anansi. She procured a piece of paper towel stowed between her bosom and began patting her

visibly sweating face. She lifted the front of wig to wipe the paper towel under it, before returning the napkin to its original spot. Despite the workout, Rose looked rather calm and put-together.

“Thank yuh Charles. Mi appreciate all yuh help.”

The man set the suitcase by Rose’s feet and smiled. “It’s no problem Mrs. Powell. I should be thanking you. And you, young lady, don’t lose your grandmother again. A cutie like this is sure to get snatched up by a strange man like me.”

Rose burst out laughing. Anansi gave a meek smile out of politeness but was clearly disturbed by the obvious closeness of the two.

“Charles, yuh nuh good. Thank you anyhow. And ‘mema whey mi tell yuh fi yuh wife feet.”

“Absolutely Mrs. Powell. Hope to see you around!” Charles said as he waved goodbye.

After a few moments, Anansi leaned over to her grandmother. “And who was that?”

“Charles, him down di street from oonuh. Yuh nah know him?”

Anansi shook her head.

“Him live on yuh block fi ten years now. He walk ‘round wid me and help mi find yuh. A real nice mon.”

Anansi nodded silently. Rose was really calm considering all that had happened hours ago. The only indicator of the recent tussle was the pieces of clothes jutting out

from the suitcase and the disheveled/ broken bristles of the broom. She sat comfortably, and if not for her belongings, Anansi would've forgotten that it was Rose's first day here.

Rose didn't say anything immediately. Long after she had caught her breath Rose sat quietly, surveying the commotion of the park. To the average bystander, they looked like two strangers sharing a bench. Though, it dawned on Anansi how that was. It made her increasingly uncomfortable.

"...I'm sorry" Anansi said. She could only imagine what Rose thought of her now. It was shameful.

Rose looked at her. She did not know what exactly her grandmother's face meant but slowly Rose inched her balled fist to Anansi. Rose nodded her chin towards Anansi's own hand, and she brought it over to meet Rose's. Dabbing her up, Rose discreetly slipped what felt like rolled paper into Anansi's palm and closed her fist before she could see what it was.

"Just tek di bly. Mi know ya madda a pree money. Don't tell 'er it from mi." Rose said as she looked away, as if to check for any onlookers.

Rose had indeed given Anansi money. A considerable amount at that. Anansi could count several hundreds just from the notations peeking out. Where did she even get this money and why did she have to hand it over so suspiciously? Nonetheless, Anansi slipped it in her pocket.

"Thank you. Seriously. I wasn't lying when I told Mom I had it but thank you all the same." Anansi said. "I'm sorry about what you had to see back there. I'm not usually

like that. My mother is just so frustrating. I could be taking the lint out of my bellybutton and she'll come over to tell me how to do it.”

Rose laughed, “Nuh worry. I know. Mi raise ‘er. Yuh know, love is only as clean an’ wya as di people who give it. But dat nuh mean dem anymore undeserving of it dan mi an’ yuh.”

Anansi understood that she didn’t experience Rose as a mother and that her side of things would be different. Regardless, she could not get over the overreaction of Grace’s rage. Grace’s default mood was irate but never in the physicality that she had displayed today. All Anansi wanted was to sit down and talk to Rose. She did not plan for this day to get so ahead of her. She only wished to get to know her grandparent. Even if Grace refused to mend their relationship, didn’t Anansi deserve to know her?

“Grandma,” she said, “are you going to be okay?”

Rose nodded with a small but confident smile. Anansi did not feel as confident. There was still a descending night to worry about.

“Why you really came here? To spend time with us?” Rose nodded again.

“Why didn’t you come sooner?”

“...Mi nuh know. Mi suppose life jus’ run weh from mi. Yuh get suh involved inna yuhself, yuh all figet fi pause and do weh yuh need to.”

“I’m sorry Mom talked to you like that.”

Rose waved her off surprisingly casually. “Nuh worry about mi and Grace.”

“...What’s up between you two anyway? If you don’t mind me asking.”

Rose sighed. “Well, di same ting between yuh and ‘er mi suppose. As time guh on dere are so many tings dat add up, dat mek it hard fi identify jus’ one.”

Anansi nodded as if she understood. She was still not where Rose was with Grace but after today who knows. No doubt Grace would take Anansi’s kick with the offensive of a murder attempt. This park bench might be the best place for Anansi tonight.

As if reading Anansi’s mind, Rose spoke up. “Figet ‘bout yuh madda. Whey gwan wid yuh?”

“...me? What about me?”

“Well... mi dear. Where yuh wok? Must be important di whey yuh madda guh’long.”

“Oh, just a call center, nothing major.” Anansi scoffed.

“Is all?”

She nodded, not sure if it made sense to talk about a place she just got fired from. Instead, she decided to revisit their previous conversation. “There is something I’m really good at. Like I was telling you before, I’m a bit of a hairdresser.”

“Oh yes! Yuh madda mek yuh stop.... Well, she nuh dey yah now so, whey yuh recommend fi mi?” Rose asked as she began posing her seat.

Anansi couldn’t help but laugh. “Well I’d have to see your actual hair first.”

Without hesitation, Rose pulled off her wig with sheer comfortability. Anansi could not help dropping her jaw.

“What?” Rose said with a kiss of teeth.

She’s crazy, Anansi thought to herself.

“Well, whey ya hav’ in mind?”

Anansi sat up; she was grateful for Rose’s lack of offense. She had noticed by the unevenness of Rose’s wig that Rose’s real hair was not laid flat to better accommodate for the piece. There was hair but in the patchy and stringy way of a child’s hair just growing in. There were bald spots among the uneven dreads and Anansi noticed the few strands that got swept up as the wig was removed. Anansi surmised the lack of a wig cap or proper protective covering must have contributed to the apparent alopecia.

As Rose sat now, it was clear the bald patches and the few short gray dreads (each varying in thickness), were why she held on to that horrible wig.

“I love the color” Anansi offered. “Honestly, that wig is doing you no favors. You got the perfect head shape for a nice, shaved look and it’s the best way to ensure your hair grows back healthy and evenly.”

Rose’s uncertainty spoke in her silence. Moving into her field of vision, Anansi crouched down and continued, “Imagine how lovely you’ll look in a few years when your hair grows back all long and luxurious. You’ll be calling me like, ‘Ananseeeeeee’”.

Rose began to laugh at her horrible imitation of the family accent. Anansi joined in at the boisterous joy that blew life in Rose once more. Rose reached up to touch a loc and was met with a small amount of hair in her palm as a response. Suppose it was time

to let go her hair. It was not the same as it had been years ago. Back then, she still had her house, her husband, her vanity, and her hair. It was a good a time as any for a change.

“Yuh can cut mi ‘air suh long as yuh neva try fi chat like mi again.”

“Fine but you have to at least teach me.” Anansi laughed. Rose smiled. It was a sound she could get used to hearing.

“Alright. Just book mi fi yuh next available appointment madam.” Rose said as she slipped her wig back on. Rose reached over and patted the hand Anansi had rested on her shoulder. “Yuh madda did gud wid yuh. She must be proud.”

“I doubt it. She’s never content.” Anansi said looking off into the distance. The park was beginning to clear out as the day crept to a close. It was then that Anansi’s pocket began to vibrate.

It was her cousin Nadine.

Anansi groaned audibly. No doubt Grace had told Nadine how she acted in front of Rose. As the child, Anansi was automatically wrong by customary standards. Nadine was involving herself now as a conduit for Grace. Anansi revisited the thought of being a tree.

“Probably should head home now... Aunty Nadine is calling.”

“Nuh worry...” Rose said as she ushered Anansi back down onto the bench. Rose held Anansi’s hand in her own. It didn’t feel right to let Anansi go home yet. There was still so much more to talk about.

“Yuh madda can wait. We have nothing but time.” She continued, as the two watched the neighborhood’s evening activities unfold in the park. There was a serenity that washed over Rose. She could not tell if it was the piano softly playing or the children running to their parents, but Rose felt no better place to be. With the sun going down and the warm night breeze setting in, Anansi laid her head on her grandmother’s shoulder, thinking of nothing but the peace in front of them.

“Wait... how far did you walk to find me?” Anansi asked.

“Well, mi and Charles walk pass di nail salon and dung to di synagogue.”

Anansi’s head shot up with glee. “Did you walk past the bakery?”

Rose shook her head. Looking down to clock on her phone, Anansi shot Rose a face of pure joy that warmed Rose to her core. She had never realized how much Anansi feigned happiness. This was very clearly a real smile. It made Anansi instantly beautiful.

“If we hurry, I promise to give you the best empanadas you’ve ever had.”

“Whey di hell is dat?”

“It’s like a patty but you’ll just have to trust me. They have this awesome guava and cheese and next door? An Irish Potato cookie as big as your face.”

Rose twisted her face up but as Anansi stood up and held her hand out, she took it all the same. Holding her hand, Anansi led the way with Rose’s suitcase in her other.

“We’ll pass my old elementary school as soon we get over there. And over there—” Anansi pointed in the opposite direction, “-is where I went to summer camp six years in a row.”

Rose squinted towards the large three story building they were approaching and then over at the dingy brown community center. With the park right here, Rose could imagine the excitement surrounding this place during the summer. She envisioned Anansi as a young girl, awkward in her own skin, running around other little girls. She envisioned her with the same messy bun, screaming with joy. She envisioned her flying on the swing, racing down the slide, roughhousing until the inevitable scrap. A scrape that would rip the melanin off her knee to reveal a raw pink. She envisioned Grace coming to pick her up early that day as Anansi would cease crying.

Rose never had the privilege of watching Grace attend to her child in such a way. Nonetheless, she knew Grace was capable of such tenderness. No matter how much she pretended to be, Grace wasn't a monster. Grace was a complicated creature, but Rose knew who she raised. Maybe if Rose had been more like her husband Grace would've been kinder to her. Grace showed nothing but tenderness towards her father. If it had years ago, Rose might've fought Grace back with the same brutality presented to her. She could not find the same strength within her now. Maybe it was the cancer. Who had the energy to fight your daughter and your own body?

She did not have much time left and resigned not to spend the little she did have begging for Grace's favor. Grace was grown enough to make her own decisions. She was grown enough to make her own regrets. You cannot force someone to love you the way you want. Rose was not proud enough to admit her defeats.

There was no more anger within Rose as she reflected on the day. Instead, she felt a quiet she could not name. It was not exactly a peaceful quiet. Nonetheless, she accepted its presence. She had done what she came to America to do. She had seen Grace and she

had made it inside the house. Best of all, she had met her granddaughter. Anansi turned out to be all she had hoped and more. She could see within this young woman, passion, creativity, and determination. Anansi made her wish to have all the time in the world. Rose wanted to spend the rest of her days by Anansi's side, watching her find herself.

Rose breathed through these feelings. Anansi was busy detailing the neighborhood for her. She did not want to ruin this moment. Anansi was here with her at least. Anansi was willing to open herself up to Rose.

Anansi, with that smile of hers, would be enough. This place, although not her sweet Jamaica, could be enough. It was quite nice here. She had already made a friend. Rose could imagine herself laying to rest here.

The way Anansi spoke of the space around them made Rose feel alive. It made Rose excited. As far as last adventures go, this could be a marvelous one.

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