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Jamaica the Livity

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Jamaica the Livity

Peter Clayton

In a place of wooded lands and endless mountainous terrain, is a place where Marijuana is king, and is highly coveted by the people as a herb of healing and meditation. In a place where the people move to the beat and pace of a different drum, a drum that beats to Island time where there is never a rush and the fastest thing on four feet is a donkey, we find a small community called Jungle where poverty reins and poor people are the majority. Like so many other slums the streets are gloomy stinks of refuse and are littered by people going about the hustle and bustle of a poor man's life. Except that is when it's night and those of wise minds stay well inside with doors closed, here on such a night we find Teteh standing under a tree and leaning on a nearby wall, awaiting someone.

Looking down at his newly lit ganja spliff rather longingly, he lifts it to his lips and inhales holding the smoke inside him, he removes the spliff from his lips and lets his hands fall to his side. "Marijuana, the magical healing plant," he thinks while holding his breath, "heal my soul." After a few seconds he slowly lets out the tainted air from within his lungs, he looks up reverently at the smoke as it climbs towards the stars. With the smoke went his thoughts and he remembered an incident with his mother when he was a child.

"Come on, Teteh," she said as she dragged him by the hand and led the way up the steep slope to the Police Station. He was about ten and if he was not already terrified he was by the time they rounded the corner and walked into the yard of the Police station.

"Morning, Miss P," called one officer.

"Morning, Kevin. How you doing today," his mother enquired after the officer.

"Not too bad, Miss P, not too bad ahtall."

"OK then, sonny boy, walk good and keep up the good work," she yelled over her shoulder as her fast-paced walk had progressed

slightly out of earshot of the officer, still dragging Teteh behind her in the same hasty fashion she had adopted ever since she picked him up from school a few moments before. Clearly she was very upset after speaking with his teacher and was told about the fight he had with another little boy earlier that day. After making a mysterious phone call at a phone booth outside of the school yard she had proceeded to drag him to their current location. On reaching the front door of the station a tall and rather tough looking officer stepped out with baton in hand. He slapped it repeatedly in the palm of the other hand (slap, slap, slap). He looked down at Teteh with a menacing look.

To Teteh's surprise, his mother stretched his hand that she was holding towards the officer and said, "Tek 'im officah Brown. 'Im all yours."

With these words Teteh fell to the ground with his arm still hanging in his mother's hand and started to cry. His mother looked at him and yelled, "Tan up, boye. Uh nuh bad man? Eh! A fight people pickney a school? Well this is where bad man go, JAIL,. Hear?"

Spinning around on the ground still dangling from his mother's hand Teteh cried and bawled with all his might. "Please, mammy! Mi wont dweet again!"

No one said growing up a child would be easy. Teteh smiled and shook his head at this memory as he retracted from the ganja smoke. He realized the car he was waiting for had arrived. A well dressed man in a white overcoat that people of the medical profession normally wore got out of the car and went to open the gate so that he could drive the car inside the yard. Teteh walked up to him and while the man's back was turned took a gun that he had in his pocket out and placed it to the man's back.

"Douh move, doctah boye. Gimmy yuh wallet an douh try nuhting funny."

While he waited he took another draw of his weed, held it tight in his lungs, then quickly let go and again his thoughts followed the

smoke. He saw himself in the moments of the day before.

He was sitting on his bed of his house which was not much more than a wooden shack, with old zinc layered on top to serve as a roof. The wood was old and had been scavenged from other older houses and did not quite fit together. The result was that at night you could literally see through the seams of the wall to the outside world. Needless to say a safe haven this was not. Looking around to make sure there was no one around he reached up to his ceiling and took down a gun that he had sitting on top of a wooden beam. He then sat back down on the bed and got a piece of cloth and an old tooth brush and began to clean it. No sooner had he done that than his five year old son David ran into the room and dived head first onto his lap. As soon as he landed he saw the gun that his dad was trying to hide behind him.

David's eyes lit up as he asked, "Daddy, a wan play, play gun? A fi mi birthday?"

"Yeah, mon, a yuh birthday present but yuh ceah get it till yuh birthday."

With that Teteh got up off the bed with his son in his arms and walked out of the room leaving the gun on the bed. He took him to what passed as a living room and a kitchen where Sofia his girlfriend was standing over some carrots that she was cutting up for the night's dinner. He handed her the boy and said, "Keep him wid yuh."

She put the knife down and took her son all the while looking directly at Teteh with knowing and concerned eyes. "What are you up to in there," she asked.

"Nuhting, mon. Mi juss a try fi ress." He walked back to the room thinking at least these days they have food to eat.

The smoke disappeared and through the fading smoke came the doctor's hand with his wallet.

"Please don't kill me, I beg you. I have three children and a wife depending on me," the doctor pleaded.

Teteh looked at him and asked, "Hold on. Didn't I tell you not

to move or try anything?”

“Yes, but mi nuh move or nuhting. Mi juss a beg you for my children’s sake douh kill mi.”

The word kill triggered another memory in Teteh’s mind. This time he was taken aback four months. The house was empty with nothing to eat. This was their third day on just sugar and water. The neighbors had helped them out by giving them some bread but that was quickly used up and they did not want to ask them again for more food. After all life was hard on every one. The day before he had spent walking to every construction site and anywhere that he felt could possess a job. He found a few places that were looking for hard workers according to the signs. The employers seemed impressed with his enthusiasm until they saw his address (Jungle), then they quickly found an excuse to deny hiring him. This was the pattern for the last six months ever since his corner shop was broken into and burnt down.

Sofia came into the doorway of the room where he was sitting on the bed. She leaned on the door frame with her hands crossed and looked at him thoughtfully.

“Teteh, David is getting sick. I think it’s the sugar and water. It’s not enough to sustain him.”

Despite their condition he could not help but marvel at her and her words. It seems, he thought, that she always chose to speak Plain English, a language that had no place among the poor. People who are starving and living in a slum should not have to worry about grammar and speech, especially when all those who you speak with are in the same slum and were never educated enough to reply in anything other than Patois. Sometimes he wondered if she did it just to remind him that she deserved better and that her parents were wealthy, and before getting pregnant with his child she was their favorite and it was pretty much his fault why she was disowned, but no, that was Sofia for you he concluded.

He replied, “Mi ago check Cut Throat tomorrow.”

He could see in her expression that her heart sank at those words.

“Teteh, what would your mother say? You know how hard

she tried to raise you to be a good man. What if you end up killing someone?”

He was short with her. “We have already been over this. It nuh have nutting fi do wid mi muddah. Ah nuh shi a stave a we, an mi nah go kill nuh baddy but wi need food, an David ceah last another day wit out food.”

Her lips were ready to form another word but at the mention of her son’s name she stopped. After a while she started to cry and he said, “Come ere, baby.”

She lifted her skirt out of the way and put her knees on either side of him and sat down on her feet and his legs straddling him, then they embraced each other. She cried some more and he held her tight whispering, “Dough cry, baby. Jah wi mek a way.”

“God does not know us,” she replied in a whisper. “God does not care about poor people.”

The next day he went to see Cut Throat to borrow a gun.

He placed the weed in his mouth and left it there to free up his hand. He took the doctor’s wallet then a deep breath of the marijuana. He started to choke and tried coughing, before he knew it the doctor had seized the moment and was reaching for a gun at his waist.

“Dough move,” Teteh screamed over a choking voice.

The doctor was reaching for his gun but froze at the words then saw that his robber was still choking and continued to reach. Pow!!!

The still of the night had been broken by the report of Teteh’s gun. The doctor was holding his waist. His white coat was now drenched red and the red was spreading to cover the enter right side. The doctor looked at Teteh with a look of disbelief. Time seemed to have stopped. Then he fell to the ground with an empty thud.

No, Teteh thought screaming in his mind, this was not supposed to happen. The words “Blood Claatt” came out of his mouth with in a slow whisper. Then suddenly he heard a bag fall and a bottle break. There was a figure behind him. He swung the gun around and adjusted his eyes to see better. It was the figure of a woman.

She yelled out, “Kevin Teteh Morgan! Is that you?!”

He was so shocked that he dropped the gun and did not move or speak.

Walking around the corner she held her bag tight. She had come all the way from the country to see her boy and his baby’s mother. She stopped off to see an old friend and boy how the time had slipped away. Now she was walking at night through a bad neighborhood, so she picked up the pace thinking to herself, why did that boy leave the country to come and live in such a bad place in the town? She had heard from a friend that things were not going so well for them since his shop was broken into and then burnt down so she had taken the last of her savings out of the bank, bought them some food, and was on her way to give them both the food and the rest of the money. She knew her boy was good for it. He would rebuild his little corner store and when he had the money he would pay her back. He was just too proud to ask her. As she rounded the corner she chuckled to herself over the thought.

With those words Teteh was brought back to his first memory of the night, his mother trying to hand him over to the police. He remembered crying and screaming. He remembered telling, swearing in fact to his mother that he would never fight again or get in any trouble. He saw himself on the ground in a pile of dirt crying and begging. Then his mother thanked the officer and picked him up in her arms, and though he was covered in dirt including his face she hugged him tight and covered his dirty face with kisses.

“OK, mi boye, OK. Just make sure yuh membah yuh promise.”

He nodded and held her tight and she walked out of the Police station with him in her arms. She took out a lollypop and gave it to him but he was too stressed to enjoy it so he just hugged her some more and put his head on her shoulders and wrapped his legs around her.

She was startled out of her chuckle by a gun shot. She dropped her bag and looked ahead of her in the direction where the shot came from. She saw her son holding a gun and a man in a white coat lying on the ground. In a loud whisper she screamed, “Kevin Teteh Morgan! Is that you?!”