

21 FAMILIES



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The Solomon Family Story

Emily Solomon struggled against the fear that held her firmly in its grasp. She moaned as the nightmare spiralled, taking her back to that horrible night when the terror was all too real. Her eyes popped open, and she clawed at her throat, desperate to get air into her lungs as the panic attack stole her breath. “It’s just a bad dream! It’s just a bad dream!” she repeated the mantra, trying to calm down.

She was only eight when her nightmare began. Sixteen years later, the details were still as vivid as the night it

occurred. Emily climbed out of bed and walked to the window seat in her bedroom. She opened the curtains and looked into the ink-black darkness. Then, she curled her knees into her chest and wrapped herself in a blanket, pretending it was the security of Nanny's arms as she closed her eyes and reluctantly stepped back in time.

In her mind's eye, Emily traveled the winding road from Kingston to Port Antonio, walking out onto the white sand beach in front of her grandfather's home, stopping as her toes touched the warm waves. The sun was so bright that she was blinded by the diamonds of sunlight glistening on the water. From the safety of this memory, she sat in the sand, closed her eyes, and returned to the island of her birth during a turbulent time in its history.

In 1976, Jamaica was an angry, insecure third-world country with a bankrupt economy. Because of warring political factions, it was under a state of

emergency. It was an island locked in a revolutionary struggle, trying to reconcile its colonial past.

Only in its fourteenth year of independence, after three hundred years of the longest colonial occupation in history, Jamaica was trying to find its way out of an agricultural society initially based on slave labor and then on low wages into an urbanized and industrial future. The identity crisis resulted in a government intent on socialist reform using militant tactics and a populace terrorized by political violence. Emily's father called it the Caribbean Belfast, and the ensuing political war resulted in the massive destruction of property, inciting fear and panic among the Jamaican people. Industrial unrest, strikes, and shutdowns were an everyday occurrence.

The Prime Minister's actions led to the invocation of emergency powers and the postponement of the general election.

This, coupled with the widespread violence and destruction, sent shockwaves through the five percent of the island's population, who owned ninety percent of the country's wealth. These twenty-one families of diverse racial backgrounds were now living in fear. Emily was related to seven of these families by blood or marriage.

As the only grandchild, Emily's safety was a constant worry for her grandfather, especially after the prime minister's visit two weeks ago. Emily overheard her parents discussing it when she should have been asleep, realizing the personal impact of the political turmoil on her own life.

"What did he want from your father?" her mother, Helene, asked. The worry in her voice was evident even to eight-year-old ears.

"He asked Daddy to turn over all the factories and foreign exchange accounts in

the name of the Jamaican people,” Bryan, her father, responded. “He wants to nationalize all our foreign exchange-earning companies.”

“What he wants is to take a privately controlled business and put them under the control of his government,” Helene fumed. “The Jamaican people will never benefit from them because he will run them into the ground.”

“That's what Daddy told him,” Bryan said. “He said he would throw the keys into the sea before he turned any factory over to him.”

“Is that why your father shut them all down?” Helene asked in surprise.

“Yes,” Bryan answered. “No work means no one gets paid. No earnings mean the government doesn't get the foreign exchange it needs.”

“Oh, Bryan, that's a dangerous gamble to take with our lives,” Helene said, the worry in her voice unmistakable.

Emily couldn't hear the rest of their conversation, but three days later, she listened to the Prime Minister's television broadcast addressing the nation along with her parents and Nanny.

"Likkle more ago, Jamaica was a banana republic with seedy authoritarianism ruling us. Now, we bring socialist programs to Jamaica, and the rich do not like it! For hundreds of years, too few have benefited from what Jamaica offers. The rich have been protected! They have bought their way around inconveniences like customs regulations and tax laws. But I am here to close dose loopholes, and everybody wants to run a foreign! So, me a say dis – all who want to run to America, galang! You are cowards, and we not sorry to see you go!"

Emily's parents were visibly shocked at the bold-faced statement. "Well, we can no longer say we are an island that prides itself on being the most politically

sophisticated nation in the Caribbean!” Helene said gloomily.

“Social upheaval may be a new experience for Jamaica, but I fear it will be the norm now,” Bryan stated, looking at his wife, whose unshed tears shimmered in her eyes.

The next day, organized strikes and property destruction started at her family's businesses. Her father stayed in Kingston. He begged her mother to join his parents and sister in Port Antonio, but she refused to leave him, fearing she would never see him again if she did.

Emily's family did not understand how far the government would go to force their hand. They came for Emily the following night while her parents were at a dinner party. As most of Jamaica faced shortages of rice, cooking oil, and soap, Jamaica's elite tried to pretend their way of life was not drawing to a close.

Gordy, the gardener, was sitting in the kitchen as his wife, May, cleaned up. Having finished dinner, Nanny took Emily upstairs to put her to bed. Gordy heard the gunshots while sitting close to the window overlooking the newly erected guardhouse at the gate. Looking out the window, he saw three armed men, one pointing the gun at the security guard lying on the ground, not moving.

“Me, God!” he exclaimed. “Dem shoot de security.”

“What?” May asked, joining him at the window. “Me God!” she exclaimed as she saw the security guard on the ground and three men walking toward the garage.

“Me a go lock de door from de garage!” Gordy said, jumping into action. “Go get Nanny and Miss Mila! Den run to Nanny's room and bar de door.”

“Lawd, Gordy!” May cried. “Be careful, beg yu!”

Gordy smiled bravely at May before he headed down the stairs to the garage door leading to the main house. May took off in the opposite direction, heading to Emily's room.

"I don't want to sleep here alone," Emily sniffed, her small arms clamped tightly across her chest. Her chin trembled, but she lifted it stubbornly, eyes bright with unshed tears as she fixed Nanny with a defiant stare.

May burst through the door, stopping Nanny's angry retort. May motioned for Nanny to join her, then whispered frantically as Nanny's eyes opened wide, and her hand flew to cover her mouth. They both turned to look at Emily, who refused to look at them, still pouting at not getting her way.

"You know what?" Nanny said, forcing her voice not to shake. "I gwen let you sleep wid me tonight."

“Hurray!” Emily shouted, jumping out of bed and grabbing her security blanket. She put her hand in Nanny's and smiled triumphantly up at her.

Nanny took Emily's hand, pulling the child close to her side. They silently crept down the back stairs leading to Nanny's room. May and Nanny had just closed the door and barred it with the dresser when they heard the gunshot and Gordy's cry of pain.

They heard a strange voice shout. “A wey de pickney de?”

“We na come fe kill no black man,” another voice said. “Jus ge we de pickney!”

Nanny and May looked at each other, terror in their eyes. Nanny glanced at Emily, but she was so happy to be sleeping in Nanny's room that she noticed nothing.

“Mila,” Nanny said gently but firmly. “We gwen play a likkle game a hide and seek.”

“Who we hiding from?” Emily asked.

“We gwen hide you so Gordy ca'an find you,” May replied, picking up on what Nanny was doing.

“Den hide me good,” Emily cautioned. “Gordy always finds me.”

“Hide under my bed,” Nanny instructed, pointing to her twin bed against the wall. “Mek yuself small against the wall, and May and I will sit on the bed. Our legs will hide you from Gordy.”

Emily scrambled under the bed as May adjusted the covers, and Nanny got on her hands and knees to ensure she did as she was told.

“Now be quiet as a mouse,” Nanny warned. “Don't mek a sound no matter what yu hear.”

“Okay, Nanny,” Emily smiled back at her as she scrunched up against the wall.

Nanny sat on the bed as May joined her; they held hands. Their legs hid Emily from view. The men didn't take long to get past the dressing table. A battered Gordy

fell at their feet as the women sat as still as statues.

Lying on his side, facing the bed, Gordy could see Emily hiding, her eyes as big as saucers. He turned his battered face away, praying she would stay quiet.

“Wey de pickney de?” the leader shouted at Nanny.

“She not here!” May snapped.

“She gone wid her parents,” Nanny replied, her voice sharp and certain.

The leader turned to one of his men. “Did you see de pickney in de car when dem lef?”

“She was sleeping,” Nanny interrupted. “Lying on de back seat.”

The leader looked at his spy, who shrugged his shoulders. It was possible the spy hadn't seen her. The leader screamed in frustration.

“Just lef here, please!” Nanny begged. “We have nutting fe you.”

“You see people like yu!” the leader said, his voice controlled but angry. “Joshua gwen free all a onu wid de Rod of Correction. Tell de Backra, if we don't get him pickney tonight, we a get her tomorrow!”

As quickly as they had come, they were gone. May ventured out after they heard the garage door slam shut and lock. Nanny helped Emily out from under the bed as Gordy refused to look at her for fear of frightening her.

“Nanny? Who were dose men? What happen to Gordy? Gordy! Gordy, come play wid me,” Emily begged. Something terrible had happened, and she was scared.

“Gordy ca'an play wid yu now,” Nanny said gently. “Him ave work fe do, and I need to call your parents. Stay right next to me and come along now.”

Emily walked over to Gordy, but Nanny pulled her away. “Lef Gordy, I tell yu, Mila!” Dragging Emily, Nanny pulled

the reluctant child behind her to the telephone in the upstairs hallway.

“Goodnight, Prudence,” Nanny said as the helper answered. “Please ask Mr. Solomon to come to de phone; tell him it is very important.”

May took her to her room, refusing to answer any of the frightened child's questions.

“Don't worry,” May said, sitting on the bed and taking Emily's hand. “Nanny soon come to put you to sleep, and your parents will be here when you wake up.”

“But what about Gordy?” Emily asked, her voice shaking. “What happen to Gordy, May?”

Nanny wiped the tears from her face when she heard the little girl's fearful questions. Standing tall and in her most authoritative voice, she addressed the girl's concerns. “Yu don't worry yuself about Gordy; he's fine. Now yu need to go to sleep! Yu parents will be here in ten

minutes, and yu know what yu gwen get if yu eye no close and yu not sleeping.”

Nanny sat with Emily. May went to find Gordy. He was in the kitchen, trying to wash the blood from the gashes on his face. A large knot was visible on his head, where the men pistol-whipped him.

“Lawd Gordy!” May cried. “Dem shot off de gun inna de air? Yu lucky dem neva kill yu like dey did de security!”

“Him not dead,” Gordy muttered. “When de man dem come inna de house, me see him get up and run off.”

“Lawd God!” May said, trying to keep her panic at bay.

May helped Gordy onto a stool and tended to his wounds. Bryan and Helene Solomon arrived to find this scene. Helene rushed upstairs to see her daughter. Bryan stood solemnly as Gordy explained what had happened.

“De man seh every night poor people look up at de bright lights on dis

hill as dey stand in darkness. Time comes now we cut your throat becaw poor Jamaicans don't have any more patience. Kingston is a city on fire.”

“They came for Emily?” Bryan asked, his voice strained.

“Yes, sah,” Gordy answered.

“I will call the security company,” Bryan said. Then we will all go to the country.”

“Nah, sah,” Gordy replied. “May and I will stay here. If yu lef dis house alone, it won't be your house when yu come back.

Bryan disappeared into his study to make the necessary phone calls, his voice low and controlled, as though calm alone could keep the night from unravelling further. In the garage below, the engine of the waiting car idled, its steady hum at odds with the air of tension inside the house.

Helene and Nanny carried a drowsy Emily down the stairs. The child's head lolled against Helene's shoulder, her breath warm and uneven, unaware of the fear pressing in around her. Bryan moved swiftly through the house, gathering passports, cash, and jewellery. Drawers opened and shut in hushed succession. Lamps were switched off. Curtains were pulled tight.

Gordy secured the newly installed sliding burglar doors, the metal grating screeching softly as it locked the bedrooms away from the rest of the house. He handed Bryan the key without a word. The night closed in around them, a dense black shroud.

Minutes later, the security company arrived, two jeeps filled with armed men, their radios crackling, headlights cutting pale tunnels through the night. One jeep pulled ahead of Bryan's car, the other fell in behind, enclosing them in a moving

barrier of steel and vigilance. As Bryan said a brief goodbye to Gordy and May, a driver slid behind the steering wheel. Bryan took the passenger seat, glancing back with a reassuring smile that didn't quite reach his eyes.

Helene cradled Emily's head in her lap. Nanny absently stroked the child's legs as she lay stretched across them. Bryan wedged the bag of valuables on the floor between his feet, guarding it. Then the small convoy rolled forward, tires crunching over gravel, pulling away from the only home Emily had ever known.

The road to Port Antonio was long and unlit. The world beyond the headlights dissolved into blackness. Trees leaned inward, their branches tangling overhead, scraping faintly against one another as if whispering secrets. The jeeps' beams flashed across trunks and shadows that seemed to shift and recoil.

Inside the car, silence thickened.

Emily's breathing changed first, shallow, quick. Her small fingers twitched against Nanny's skirt. In sleep, the images found her again.

Three men.

Guns glinting.

Gordy falling.

Hands reaching to take her away from Nanny.

In her dream, she tried to scream, but no sound came. The men's faces were blurred and stretched, their outlines melting into darkness. They grew taller, closer, until they blocked out everything else.

Her body tensed.

She tore herself awake with a strangled gasp.

For a moment, there was only darkness; the inside of the car, the night pressing against the windows. She turned her head toward the glass. Outside,

branches swayed in the breeze, long and crooked, bending toward the road like dark spectres pacing the convoy. They looked just like the men in her dream, looming, watching, waiting.

Emily sat up abruptly, jolting her parents.

Her eyes darted wildly until they found Nanny.

Nanny's arms were already open.

With a broken sob, Emily folded herself into the familiar softness, burying her face against the steady rise and fall of Nanny's chest. Nanny held her tightly, rocking, as though she could anchor the child against whatever shadows pursued them.

Even if Emily's eight-year-old mind could not fully understand what had nearly happened, her body understood. Her nightmares knew.

And somewhere deep within her, something had shifted, something that

would never again feel entirely safe in the dark.

PORT ANTONIO

Arthur Solomon paced the driveway, waiting for his son to arrive. His daughter Melanie watched him from the entrance. He looked at her but did not stop pacing.

“Social change is now the watchword of third-world countries, Daddy. The symbolic relationship between a man's consciousness and the social setting in which he operates is changing, and that will result in the fall of colonial norms that people like us have enjoyed for far too long,” Melanie lectured.

“Please, Melanie,” Arthur entreated. “I can't take any of your Marxist bullshit tonight. Do you understand what nearly happened?” Arthur stopped pacing to look at her. Her dark blond dreadlocks were tucked neatly beneath the wrap on her

head. Her mother insisted on the covering whenever she was present, and though Melanie obeyed, she chose the fabric carefully. The bold batik print was more than a flicker of defiance. It was her quiet declaration that, if change was coming, she would welcome it with open arms.

“Change is coming, Daddy,” Melanie muttered. “We refused to reform the inequitable society we created and protected. We ignored the widening gap, believing those at the bottom would endure it forever. We tried to suppress the counterculture, hoping that if we silenced it, it would disappear. Instead, our efforts only strengthened it. Now it has risen, and their anger is fierce; its backlash is destructive. And make no mistake: it won’t hold back.”

“Your niece, Melanie!” Arthur shouted. “They came for your niece, an eight-year-old girl child. How can you

possibly justify that?" Arthur stopped pacing and looked at Melanie.

She held his gaze. "Because better must come."

Arthur could only stare at her until headlights pulled into the long driveway. A jeep pulled to the side, and armed guards poured out, establishing a secure perimeter. Bryan's car pulled up in front of Arthur, but nobody got out of the vehicle until the guards in the second jeep surrounded the car, guns drawn and pointed into the night.

Arthur rushed to the car's passenger side as the guards stepped aside. Bryan stepped out of the car and into his father's arms.

"Daddy, we're fine," Bryan whispered. "She's fine."

Arthur released his son and moved to open the back door. Emily's big green eyes stared back at her grandfather.

“Hi, Baba,” Emily said, smiling bravely at her grandfather.

Arthur snatched his only grandchild from Nanny's lap and held her to him. Bryan helped Helene from the car and held her as the magnitude of what happened and could have happened washed over all of them. Bryan and Arthur stared at each other. Nanny stepped out of the car.

“Mas Arthur,” she whispered. “I need to put Emily to bed.”

“Yes, of course,” Arthur said. With Emily still in his arms, he followed Nanny into the house. Together, they settled Emily into her room in her grandfather's house.

Nanny and Arthur watched Emily as she settled into sleep. Arthur's hand rested on Nanny's shoulder for a moment of quiet support; she patted it gently and met his gaze. He gave a small, reassuring nod before slipping away. Once Nanny was

certain Emily slept, she let her own tears fall.

Arthur could hear his daughter and son arguing as he approached the drawing room. When he entered, they stopped talking. Without looking at either of them, he went to the bar and poured himself a strong rum.

“How did this happen?” Arthur asked, his voice tight.

“We were at dinner with David Cohen and a few others,” Bryan explained. “Daddy, we were ten minutes away.”

“They were determined, Daddy,” Melanie chimed in.

“Shut up, Melanie,” Arthur barked, turning to her. “I am not blaming Bryan for what happened.”

Turning to Bryan, he asked. “Why?”

Bryan could not look at his father. “David thinks it was the strike at the factories, the one you instigated after the prime minister met with Fidel Castro.

That may have been the catalyst,” Bryan offered.

“After they started doing cultural and trade exchange programs between Cuba and Jamaica?” Melanie asked.

“They built a school,” Arthur interrupted. “The Cuban Friendship School, donated by Castro himself. The Prime Minister said the school was to be a technical school, but its real purpose is to indoctrinate Marxist principles.”

“Daddy, that's not true,” Melanie interjected.

“Really?” Arthur said, looking at her. “When I asked the prime minister about it, do you know what he said?”

Melanie shook her head.

“As for Cubans, I find them to be the most enthusiastic, hardworking, and above all, honest to work with. We help them with tourism plans, and they help us with schools and fishing technology,” Arthur said, his anger growing. “But what

he did was recruit a leftist guerrilla army financed by Cuba and trained in the Blue Mountains. They call themselves Brigadistas. Ask Emily about them!" Arthur roared.

Turning to Bryan, "What about the strike?" Arthur seethed.

"Our accountant thinks the seven-week strike cost the island more than seven million dollars in revenue from excise duties," Bryan explained. "Nearly a quarter of the revenue from that tax, not to mention the money it cost the small shops all over the island,"

"This government can't afford to lose that kind of money," Melanie mumbled, dismayed.

"So, kidnapping Emily was retaliation for my closing all the factories?" Arthur bristled.

"It would appear so," Bryan mumbled.

The room fell silent.

“And that's why my daughter has a price on her head?” Helene asked. She was looking for her husband when she overheard their conversation.

“Honey!” Bryan put his drink down and walked over to his wife. He saw his mother walk in and go to his father's side.

“No, I want to know why my child has a target on her back,” Helene said, raising her voice.

Bryan wrapped Helene in his arms as she dissolved into loud sobs.

Arthur looked away and gulped down the rest of his drink.

Melanie wrapped her arms around herself as tears filled her eyes.

“Helene, my love,” his mother Paula intreated. “It's been a long night for everyone. Let me give you something to help you sleep.”

Bryan released his weeping wife into his mother's care. He watched as Paula led Helene away. Paula paused at the door to

look at her only son. She smiled, and Bryan's heart broke.

"Daddy," Melanie began.

"Your mother is right," Arthur cut in. "It's been a long night for all of us. Go to bed, Melanie. Give me some time with your brother."

Melanie left the room without another word. Arthur handed Bryan the bottle of rum. He grabbed it without a word and put it to his lips.

"We have some hard decisions to make," Arthur declared.

"Daddy, we're not prepared to go to the lengths this government will go to retain power," Bryan explained, his voice ragged. "We would never try to kidnap a child, then murder her or worse...."

"Don't you say it!" Arthur cried. It was an unthinkable thought.

Bryan took another pull from the bottle of rum.

Arthur felt for his son and softened his tone. "We hold the economic power and control of the distribution trade through our import and export companies. I need to figure out how to utilize that power."

"Daddy, that power has no value outside of Jamaica, and we support the opposition party, not this government," Bryan said. "These men are serious about their revolution. No third-world country has ever achieved a social revolution with an opposition party in place. If this man stays in power, we will become another Cuba."

Arthur turned to look at Bryan, his eyes hard. "In three generations, we built the middle class of this island with apprenticeship programs and employee share options. Hell, twenty-five percent of our management are employees I grew up with, and you grew up with! They won't

give that advancement up so easily," Arthur exclaimed.

"They live in the same fear we do!" Bryan retorted. "The Prime Minister broadcast his message clearly to the entire island. Anyone who wants to become a millionaire in Jamaica today, it nah go happen. We have five flights a day to Miami! And Daddy, those flights are full! Every day. The middle class of Jamaica fears anti-government violence as much as they fear government violence."

"So, what do you suggest, Bryan?" Arthur's voice was sharp. "Are you suggesting we walk away from eight generations living on this island? We built this country stone by stone, fighting for the end of slavery and colonial domination. Your grandfather helped draft the island's constitution. He believed in the motto: *"Out of many, one people!"* Do we turn our back on roots planted so deep in Jamaica that ripping them out of the soil

will condemn them to wither and die? What would you have me do?"

"I don't know, Daddy," Bryan uttered, his voice cracking. "I honestly don't know what to do."

They sat next to each other on the couch in front of the large sliding doors. The moon shone in the sky, and its glow danced on the dark sea below. Armed security guards passed each other as they patrolled the beach, disturbing the scene's tranquillity. The night held no answers to the day's challenges, and the dawn would only bring new problems.

BREAK OF DAY

However long the night, the dawn will break. Nanny recalled the African proverb as she watched Emily playing in the waves. The child seemed to have put yesterday's troubles behind her, and for that, Nanny was grateful.

“Mila, it's time to go inside,” Nanny shouted, jumping up and waving her arms to catch the child's attention.

Emily tried to ignore Nanny, but when she saw Nanny draw closer to the edge of the water, standing with her hands on her hips, head cocked to one side, and her lips pursed, she knew playtime was over. She paused, knowing Nanny would never wade into the water to get her, though it barely reached her knees. Nanny couldn't swim herself, yet she was adamant that Emily learn.

It was the look on Nanny's face that made up her mind. No one crossed Nanny when she had that look. Emily slapped the incoming wave with her tiny fist and ambled toward Nanny in frustration.

“You never let me play in the waves long enough,” Emily muttered as Nanny wrapped her in a towel.

“Yu skin too fair to stay out in the sun too long,” Nanny scolded. “Remember

how yu bun up in the sun, and I had to douse you with white rum? Did you enjoy dat?" Nanny raised her eyebrows to the sky, daring Emily to defy her.

Emily shook her head no and looked out to sea as Nanny rubbed her down with the towel.

"No, I didn't think so," Nanny chastised as they walked from the beach to the house. "If you have a quick bath, you can eat breakfast with yu family.

They could hear the raised voices as they walked into the house. Emily looked toward the dining room, catching her grandmother's eye. Paula smiled reassuringly at the child as she closed the door.

Emily looked up, but Nanny wouldn't look at her. So, she waited for Nanny to draw her bath. The voices from the dining room were growing louder. Someone was crying. Emily thought it was

her mother. Nanny walked out of the bathroom and closed the bedroom door.

“Come! Get in the bath,” Nanny ordered, and Emily complied without question. “Get down in the water and wash the salt off. I going to get a rag.”

Emily waited until Nanny closed the bedroom door before she climbed out of the bath, dried herself, pulled on a sundress, and slipped through the kitchen to the dining room. Standing behind the wall, she peeked through the door to see into the dining room.

Her mother sobbed, and her grandmother wiped away tears as she read from the newspaper.

“This government contends that the concentration of power and control of the corporate economy lies firmly in the hands of twenty-one Jamaican families and their interest groups,” Paula read. “They intermarry to keep the family wealth intact. This ruling elite model

creates a deep bond of unity. "The danger lies in the overlapping of these family groupings with their interlocking directorships fortifying an assembly of control over major financial institutions and corporate firms that act as their own corporate kingdoms," the prime minister cautioned."

"Dear God," Arthur muttered as Paula paused.

"The existing directorships easily identify these twenty-one families in Jamaica's major corporations and the nearly seventy percent of the chairmanships they hold," Paula continued. "Notably absent are Blacks. Not one corporate firm is controlled by Blacks, who represent ninety percent of the population. Two are government-appointed of the six Blacks on corporate boards, the others merely providing a facelift because appointments to the various boards of directors are made from

within the families, creating a network of power shared by these families alone!”

Bryan surveyed the room. His mother was a Stanley before she married his father, and Helene was a Reid before marrying him—both from well-established families in Jamaican society with the same generational connections as his own. The Solomon holdings expanded with each strategic marriage.

Melanie broke tradition by marrying Philip Foster, a man of African, Chinese, and Portuguese descent. Philip's conversion to Rastafarianism halted his family's social ambitions, and Melanie wholeheartedly embraced the religious sect. While Philip's family severed connections, Melanie's parents held fast to their motto: “Family first, family always.”

However, Bryan was starting to worry about Philip and Melanie's embrace of the government's socio-communist

philosophy, especially hearing the article his mother was reading.

“If these patterns are examined closely, a comprehensive picture emerges. In Jamaica, we see varying forms of growth through mergers, takeovers, and partnerships in multinational enterprises. Given this concentration of power and wealth, it is unsurprising that Jamaica suffers from a severe maldistribution of income. In Jamaica, there is a distinct possibility for cartelization, price-fixing, and collusion, creating a system regulated by oligopolistic competition and monopoly practices without the restraining hand of the state to put a stop to this abuse of the Jamaican people. A small elite familial sector within strategic sections of the economy will usurp the political process by either retaining power for itself or diffusing it into nothingness.” Paula paused.

“That's a Leninist assertion,” Melanie muttered.

“What?” Arthur asked.

“Lenin believed a handful of monopolists dictate all the commercial and industrial operations in a capitalist society and manipulate them at will,” Melanie explained. “The only way to control power like that is by restricting the elite's ability for development to hinder their growth.”

“Oh my God!” Paula cried out, throwing the newspaper on the dining table. “The extensive network of family connections is printed on the following pages!”

Helene grabbed the paper and started thumbing through the pages. “Dear God! No! No! No!”

Bryan snatched the paper from her hands. “The family ties are all listed! The Stanleys, the Reids, the Phillips, the Mills,

the Palmers, the Beckfords, and the Solomons!”

Arthur hurried to stand behind his son, reading over his shoulder. “They’ve published the family trees!” Arthur’s voice was filled with disbelief. “Emily’s name is on seven of them!”

“It’s a hit list!” Bryan responded in an agonized whisper.

The pain in the dining room slithered across the dining table, along the cool tile floor, and wrapped itself around Emily, pinning her knees to her chest and forcing her head down between them. Her breath came in fast, shallow gasps as waves crashed in her ears, drowning out the sound of the voices in the dining room.

Nanny found her like that, her tiny body shaking from the fear holding her in its grip.

“Mila? Mila?” Nanny asked, afraid to touch the child in the throes of her terror. “Mila, listen to my voice! Follow my voice

and take my hand. Mila, Nanny, loves you. Mila, Nanny, loves you," Nanny chanted as the child found her way out of the panic attack. Slowly, she reached for Nanny's hand, raising her head to look at Nanny. Her lips quivered, but she made no sound.

"Donkey seh dis yah worl nuh level," Nanny said softly. "Tell me what, donkey seh?"

"Hill and gully here," Emily whispered, curling her fingers around Nanny's. "Hill and gully there."

"What dat tell yu?" Nanny prodded.

"Ups and downs are part of life," Emily answered.

"Dis is just life, Mila. Nothing more," Nanny assured her. Bending to pick up the frightened child, Nanny clutched her little body close to hers, breathing deeply to steady herself.

Nanny settled Emily in the bath and started washing her. Then, she raised the child's face so she could look into her eyes;

Emily's gaze was haunted. As Emily looked away, a tear escaped Nanny's eye and ran down her cheek. Emily's life would never be the same.

In the dining room, the argument raged on.

"Bryan, we have to leave Jamaica!" Helene begged. "Today, please."

"Helene," Bryan said, taking his frightened wife in his arms.

"That's not a bad idea," Paula retorted as all eyes turned to her. "They can go to Cayman." Paula looked at Arthur. This was the very contingency they had planned for.

"Cayman?" Melanie asked.

"Only a fool keeps all his eggs in one basket," Arthur replied irritably. "Do you really think we wouldn't plan for something like this?"

"A tax haven? This government has two weeks of foreign exchange reserves

left,” Melanie argued. “Do you want Jamaicans starving in the streets!”

“Melanie, didn't you see your name on those lists?” Bryan shouted.

Melanie ignored her brother, her focus on her father.

“We took nothing that wasn't ours to take,” Arthur argued. “We have *never* broken any laws.”

“No,” Melanie said bitterly. “You never broke any laws you created.”

“Enough!” Arthur bellowed, turning on Melanie. Softening his tone, he entreated. “Enough.”

Everyone took a deep breath.

“Our family came here with nothing,” Arthur spoke, his face inches from Melanie's. “Everything we have, everything you have, was earned through hard work and sacrifice.”

“Bryan, call our pilot,” Paula instructed, trying to ease the tension in the room. “Ask him to fly the plane into the

Port Antonio aerodrome. He won't need to file a domestic flight plan. You, Helene, and Emily will leave from there and go to Cayman."

"I'm not leaving you both here," Bryan said.

"In my retirement, I spend most of my days at the Liguanea Club. We'll be fine," Arthur assured his children. "We will meet you in Miami after you settle Helene and Emily in Cayman. "

"Come, Helene," Paula said, taking her arm. "Let's get everyone packed and let Emily know."

"She won't leave Nanny," Helene uttered.

"I know," Paula declared. "Nanny will go with you to Cayman."

Arthur, Bryan, and Melanie waited until the women left the room.

"Melanie, you are going to take over all the Jamaican businesses," Arthur announced.

“What?” Both Bryan and Melanie responded at the same time.

“It's the smart move,” Arthur explained. “Philip and his connections with this government will protect her,” Arthur clarified, looking at Bryan.

“Melanie, to not know what happened before you were born is to remain a child forever,” Arthur expounded, turning to her. “Our ancestors came here as Europe's discarded, and along with the world's disregarded, we built this home, teaching our children to cherish it and believe in the talent it inspired in its citizens,” Arthur's voice broke as he spoke. “I love this island! I love the people of this island. They are my blood as much as you are, so never accuse me of doing what I don't think is in the best interest of this island and her inhabitants,”

Bryan stepped between his father and Melanie. “I understand. With Melanie running the Solomon Firm, she will show

foreign entities that the family is still at the helm, instilling confidence in their continued support,” Bryan explained gently, giving his father time to compose himself.

“The companies will continue to pay workers and provide benefits,” Arthur replied, his voice brusque from emotion. “I suspect profits will be paltry, so reinvest them in benefits and infrastructure. Increase profit-sharing margins and pay employees as much as possible. That will inspire loyalty and protect you and us.”

Turning to Bryan, Arthur continued, “The Americans will fight against communism as hard as the Russians will fight for it.”

Bryan noted gravely, “That will cast Jamaicans as pawns in a life and death chess match between America and Russia.”

“I pray it won't come to that, and the love all Jamaicans share for our island home will prevail,” Arthur countered.

“Daddy, by wielding power from the shadows, you will start a civil war in Jamaica,” Melanie said sadly.

Arthur looked at his children before responding; he couldn’t remember ever feeling so tired. “I have no desire to be cast out of the only home I’ve ever known because I’ve prospered in it. There is only today from which a better tomorrow can arise.”

COMING HOME

It was time for Emily to go home, something she had successfully avoided since leaving Jamaica in the dead of night. On her twenty-fourth birthday, her grandfather died. He refused to live anywhere but on his beloved island, respecting her wish never to return. However, there was no avoiding Jamaica now. She had to say goodbye to her

grandfather. His dying wish was she find it in her heart to come home.

She opened her eyes, the nightmare now a distant memory. Her parents and Nanny were already on the island, and Emily was scheduled to board the last flight from Miami to Kingston that day.

“Jamaica is not the same as you remember it,” Nanny told her. “And that’s because of people like your grandfather.”

Emily said nothing in response.

“Yu dreams are holding yu prisoner, Mila,” Nanny pushed.

“They’re not dreams, Nanny,” Emily snapped.

Nanny sighed. “Everything important happens when you’re awake, Mila. In de sunlight, yu conquer yu fears.”

Emily remembered the conversation as she arrived, just as the sun descended behind the mountains. Her father arranged for a car to take her to Port

Antonio, and as she settled in for the drive, memories came rushing back.

The fireflies Nanny once told her were fairies darted in the darkness. She wound the window down and breathed deeply of the night jasmine floating with the breeze. She could smell the rain still off in the distance, but coming soon. Resting her head on her hand, she saw her home as it folded her into its loving embrace. She fell into a dreamless sleep for the first time in sixteen years, waking only when the car turned into the driveway of the last home she remembered in Jamaica.

Nanny was waiting for her. She smiled as she hugged Emily to her. “Yu reach.”

Emily smiled. “I reach.”

They turned to walk into the house arm in arm, but Emily stopped to look behind her.

“You know, Nanny,” Emily whispered in awe. “Only in Jamaica can you smell the rain before it falls.”

Nanny nodded, her smile was knowing.

The next day, the rain fell, turning the sea into a dark, roiling boil. It woke Emily. She walked down to the beach in her nightgown and made her way out to the rock that protruded into the sea. The waves crashed against it, and she tasted salt in the rain.

“Lawd God, Nanny!” the gardener cried. “A what Miss Mila doing standing out on de rock inna dis rain?”

Nanny rose to stand at the window. Emily stood, raised to the heavens, face upturned, arms open, waiting.

“Leave her,” Nanny instructed as he opened the door to call to Emily. “Let her feel her home in its full glory.”

Emily felt it all as her roots expanded beyond the stone surface,

searching for familiar soil. They burrowed, wrapping themselves firmly around Jamaica's bedrock, anchoring her in place.

"Steal my sorrow, sea," she breathed into the wind. "I've made my peace with what I was afraid to let go. The past is just that now—past. And I'm home at last."

THE END.

About the Author

Lynda R. Edwards's novels have garnered critical acclaim for their powerful storytelling, vivid imagery, and insightful exploration of Caribbean society and history.

Critics have praised her ability to weave intricate narratives that captivate readers from start to finish, as well as her skill in delving into the complexities of human relationships and cultural identity, transporting readers to the heart of the Caribbean experience.

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