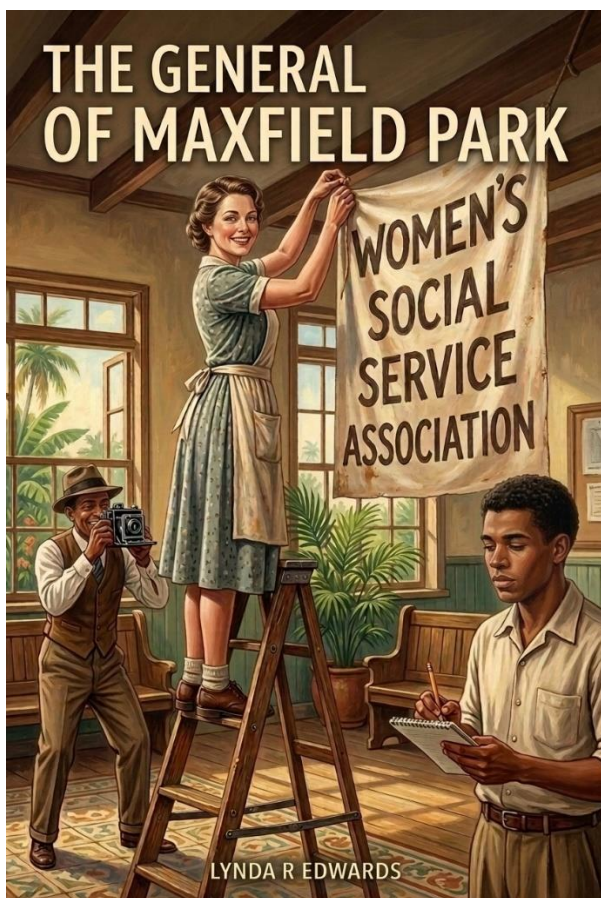


THE GENERAL OF MAXFIELD PARK



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T *The Story of Judith "Jack" Ashenheim-DeCordova*

The Assignment

The editor of the Daily Gleaner did not often laugh out loud in the newsroom, so when he did, every head came up.

"Samuels," he called, and a young journalist of twenty-two, quick, ambitious, and new enough to still polish his shoes for work, rose from his desk and threaded his way through the clatter of typewriters to the editor's door.

"Sir?"

The editor was holding an invitation card, cream-colored and thick as a biscuit, and smiling in a way that suggested private entertainment. "You're covering the opening at Maxfield Park tomorrow. The Women's Social Service Association is taking possession of the old hospital for incurables. They're making it into a home for children."

“The Incurables Hospital? Wasn’t that being sold to developers?”

“Was being the operative word,” the editor chuckled. “Would have made the crown a pretty penny.”

“How did it go from developers to an orphanage?” Samuel asked, perplexed.

“The largest home for displaced and abandoned children in Jamaica,” the editor corrected. “Get the words right. There will be a banner, the Governor’s representative, ladies in hats, and children. Photograph all of it.”

He paused and took a breath. He might as well get it over with.

“And you will be interviewing the President of the Association. Mrs. Michael DeCordova.”

Samuels felt his stomach descend toward his polished shoes.

Everyone at the Gleaner knew Mrs. Michael DeCordova. Everyone in Jamaica knew Mrs. Michael DeCordova. Her husband was the Managing Director of the newspaper, by any measure, a great man.

And behind the great man, or beside him,

or, as the joke ran, slightly in front of him, was Judith. Though nobody who knew her called her Judith. They called her Jack.

Jack DeCordova was in the Gleaner so often with her committees, her fundraisers, her pronouncements that Kingston society liked to joke it was she, and not Michael, who was really the managing director. She was charismatic, flamboyant, socially in demand at every table that mattered, and she was also, as certain gentlemen of the Legislative Council had learned to their cost, as easy to control as the weather.

The people who worked with her on her causes had their own name for her. They called her the General.

“Sir,” Samuels asked carefully, “Are you sure you want to give this story to me and...” he looked around the press room. “And not to a more seasoned reporter?”

The editor studied Samuels for a moment. He was green, but with time he would ripen into a fine reporter. A benevolent smile spread across his face.

“Samuels,” he said. “Let me give you the

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two pieces of advice that will preserve your career tomorrow. First, write down everything she says, exactly as she says it, because she speaks in headlines. Second..." he handed over the invitation card. "...Whatever you do, don't call her Mrs. DeCordova more than twice. She'll tell you to call her Jack. Everyone does. Even, I am given to understand, the Governor."

The Banner

Maxfield Park had been a hospital for those poor souls with incurable ailments, and it looked it with a long, tired collection of buildings that held too much suffering for too many years and had finally been abandoned. But on this bright afternoon, the old place was transformed. The yards were swept. The walls wore new whitewash. Windows that had dulled from silent neglect for years were now washed until they gleamed. And everywhere, carrying chairs, hanging bunting, arguing cheerfully about the placement of a table, were the women of the Women's Social Service

Association.

Samuels arrived with his notebook and the Gleaner's photographer, and he didn't need to ask which one was the General. She was up a stepladder.

Judith "Jack" Ashenheim-DeCordova, forty-five years old, one of the most celebrated hostesses in the West Indies, a woman whose evening gowns were described in print, was at the top of a ladder in her working clothes with her sleeves pinned back, personally hanging an enormous banner across the front of the main building. The banner read:

MAXFIELD PARK CHILDREN'S HOME

"Higher on your side!" she was calling to the unfortunate volunteer on the other ladder. "Higher! It must be level, my dear, the Governor's man is coming, and I will not have him thinking we run a crooked establishment. There. There. Perfect. Tie it off."

The photographer, scenting his front page, was already moving. "Mrs. DeCordova! Look this way, please, smile, that's it!"

The flash caught her exactly as intended.

The great lady of Kingston society on top of a stepladder, banner cord in her fist, laughing down at the camera like a sailor in the rigging. It would run five columns wide the next morning, and Jack DeCordova, who understood publicity the way sea captains understand tides, knew it before the powder had finished smoking.

She came down the ladder, refused two offered hands, and landed in front of Samuels, brushing dust from her palms.

"Mrs. DeCordova," he began. "I'm from the Gleaner."

"Of course you are," she retorted. "You have my husband's harried look about you. It's Jack, by the way. Mrs. DeCordova is what people call me when they're about to refuse me money." She looked him up and down with bright, frank, humorous eyes. "You want an interview."

"If, yes. If you have time."

"I have exactly as much time as your questions deserve," said Jack DeCordova. "So, make them good ones. Ask away."

The First Question

Samuels opened his notebook and asked the question he had prepared, the safe one, the one any reporter would ask.

“As President of the Women’s Social Service Association, what is your goal for this orphanage?”

Jack smiled graciously and gave him the answer she had prepared, the polished one, the one built for print.

“We are building a home,” she replied. “Where children can enjoy a life free of fear and hopelessness, and build one that has purpose.”

Samuels wrote it down. It was a perfect quotation: warm, brief, headline-ready. The editor had been right. She spoke in copy.

And then Samuels did the thing that made his career, though he didn’t know it at the time. He looked up from the notebook, at this famous, formidable, dust-streaked woman standing in front of the derelict hospital she had somehow wrestled away from the colonial government and the developers alike, and he

asked the question that was not on his list.

“Why?”

Jack raised an eyebrow. “Why?”

“Why you, ma’am? Why any of it?” He gestured helplessly at the whole improbable scene, the banner, the whitewash, the ladies, the swept yards. “You are, forgive me, one of the most comfortable women in Jamaica. Your evenings are famous. Your table is legendary. You could spend your whole life being admired, and no one would think one thing wrong with it. Instead, you are up ladders. You march on King’s House. Half the Legislative Council crosses the road when they see you coming. The letters to this newspaper have called you,” he checked himself.

“Oh, do go on,” cooed Jack, with relish. “I keep a scrapbook.”

“...a nuisance,” mumbled Samuels. “Among other things.”

“Among many other things,” Jack agreed cheerfully. “‘Morally deranged’ was my favorite, as though moral derangement is a chill one catches from sitting in a draught.” She laughed, a big, unashamed laugh that

turned heads across the yard. Then the laugh settled, and something older and steadier came up underneath it. She looked at the young journalist for a moment in silence.

“You’ve asked a real question,” she said. “So put away the notebook a moment, and I’ll give you a real answer. Walk with me.”

What Jack Saw

They walked the long veranda of the main building, where the fresh whitewash was still drying, and Jack DeCordova told him why.

“You must first understand,” she began. “What I was given, and what I was refused. I was born an Ashenheim, a third-generation Jewish family, comfortable as you say. I had books, I had music. What I did not have, what no woman of my generation was permitted to have, was a higher education. My brothers could study. I could marry.”

She said it without bitterness. “So, I educated myself. I read, my dear young man, history, economics, law, public health, the great reformers, the parliamentary reports,

and the medical journals when I could get them. People find it charming to say of a woman that she is 'well read,' as if reading were a kind of embroidery. It is not. Reading is how a locked-out person climbs through the window. By the time I was thirty, I daresay I knew more about the administration of poor relief than most of the men administering it, which, I grant you, was not a high bar."

Samuels risked it: "And then you married the Gleaner."

Jack shouted with laughter. "I married Michael," she corrected. "And Michael, poor darling, came with a newspaper attached. Eighteen ninety-eight, and quite the occasion, mind you, a double wedding. I married Michael on the very same day my brother Lewis married Michael's sister Estelle. Ashenheims and DeCordovas, two for the price of one ceremony." Her eyes went warm. "Estelle is my dearest friend. When you marry your brother to your husband's sister, young man, you had better like the family, because there is absolutely no getting away from them."

“And Mr. DeCordova rose at the paper.”

“Michael started at the Gleaner as a junior clerk in 1888, ten years before I got him. He took over as Managing Director in 1902 and turned it from a small island news sheet into a newspaper that is quoted and respected around the world. Lord Beaverbrook, and you may quote this. ‘Lord Beaverbrook called the Gleaner the greatest newspaper of the outer Empire.’ And Michael built it. He is an exceptional man.”

She stopped walking, turned, and pointed one finger at Samuel’s notebook. “Write that down. He is an exceptional man. I’ll not have it said I stole his thunder. I merely,” and the wicked humor came back into her face. “Borrowed his lightning.”

They had reached the end of the veranda. Below them, in the yard, two volunteers were carrying a small iron bedstead between them, the first of dozens, part of the great tide of furniture that Jack’s fundraising had summoned out of the drawing rooms of Kingston.

Jack watched the bed go by, and when she

spoke again, the performance had gone out of her voice entirely.

“You asked why. Here is why. At the end of the war, you’d have been a boy still. I went with two other ladies I knew to visit the poor house in St. Andrew. A charitable call. Tea and inspection. The visit privileged women pay so that they may feel they have done something.” Her mouth twisted. “A poor house takes everyone the world has finished with, the destitute, the dying, the mad, and stirs them all together. And in that place, young man, among all of it, I found the children.”

She pinned him with a piercing stare.

“Children, Mr. Samuels. In the poor house. Orphaned children. Abandoned children. Children whose mothers had died and whose fathers had vanished, and there was nowhere else on this entire island, not one single institution, whose business it was to look after them. They were just swept in with the rest of the wreckage. I saw children who had scarcely been washed. Children with sores no one had dressed. Children who flinched when an adult raised a hand, because a raised hand had only

ever meant one thing to them. Neglected and maltreated, those were the words I used afterward, in print, and I chose them as a surgeon chooses instruments. I said publicly that those children would be better off living on the street, and I meant it, and I was right, and everyone was scandalized. Not by the children's condition, you understand. By my saying so."

She was quiet for a moment. The bedstead had disappeared into the building, and her eyes followed it.

"I came home from that visit," she continued. "And I sat down in my beautiful drawing room, in my comfortable house, with my famous table waiting to be laid for that evening's famed dinner, and I found that the chair had become a bed of nails. Do you understand me?"

A pensive look crossed her face.

"And I thought: I am a woman of intelligence and energy, with connections on this island where money can actually be found, and if I do nothing, then I am not a bystander to what I saw in that poor house. I am a partner

in it.”

She turned and held him with an intense, searching look.

“So, I did something. That is the whole of the answer, though I shall now spend another hour giving you the details, because the details are instructive and you have a newspaper to fill. I founded the Women’s Social Service Association. The first organization of its kind ever started in Jamaica. An association of women, run by women, for the health and welfare of women and children across this island of ours.” Her voice rose with conviction. “Child welfare legislation, the improvement of housing, the whole neglected business of how the poor of this city actually live and die. And mark this, because it matters to me professionally. This spirit of public welfare obligation we hear stirring abroad has barely begun, but Jamaica did not wait for the fashion. We saw the need, and we got right to work.”

The Nuisance

They had begun to walk again, through the wards now, long rooms where rows of iron beds were being assembled and made up with donated linen, where the smell of carbolic soap and fresh paint had chased out the acrid of the building's first life.

"Tell me about the detractors," Samuels asked. He had his notebook out again; she had waved permission.

"Oh, the detractors." Jack's eyes gleamed. "The detractors are the most instructive part of the whole story, and if you are wise, you will study them, because you will meet their sons."

Samuels raised his eyes to look at her, and she nodded.

"When the Association began its campaigns for the children, I was informed, in print, at dinner parties, and once, memorably, across a bridge table, that I had become a nuisance. That was the mild wing of the opposition. The advanced thinkers went further. I was accused, write this down exactly, of encouraging illegitimacy, of taking the

responsibility for children away from their parents. You see the reasoning, such as it is: if a woman knows Mrs. DeCordova's meddling association will feed her abandoned child, why, she will abandon children by the dozen, purely for the convenience. Feeding a starving child, on this theory, is a subsidy to sin. Letting it die, presumably, is a moral education."

"And what did you answer?"

Jack stopped in the middle of the ward, among the half-made beds. When she spoke again, the drawing-room sparkle had burned away, and underneath it was the iron that had earned her the name her volunteers used.

"I answered then what I will answer you now, and you may print every word of it. Civilization and humanity demand that no child should be allowed to die of neglect. And common sense insists that no child should be allowed to grow up undernourished, diseased, mentally and physically unfit, only to become, in the end, a burden upon the state in some pauper home, or asylum, or hospital. That is the whole argument, young man: compassion and arithmetic, walking arm in arm. If a man's

heart cannot be reached, I address his pocketbook: the child you refuse to feed at five, you will house at fifty, at ten times the cost, in an institution like the one this building used to be. There is no economy in cruelty. There never has been. Cruelty is the most expensive policy ever devised; it merely sends its bills to a later administration."

Samuels wrote as fast as his pencil would go. The editor had been right about that, too.

"And the accusation of moral derangement?" he asked, when he had caught up.

"Ah, that." Jack resumed walking, serene. "The gentleman was quite right that something had happened to me suddenly. I had seen something, that is all. I had walked into a room I was not meant to enter, and saw children this society had agreed not to see. If refusing to unsee them is derangement, then I recommend the condition. It is the only illness I know of that improves the health of everyone around the patient."

The March

They came out of the wards onto the back veranda, where the view opened across the grounds: the outbuildings being repaired, the kitchen garden already staked out, the play yard where a delivery of sand had been dumped in a heap that would, within a week, be a haven for children to play.

“Now,” said Jack, settling against the veranda rail like a commander surveying won ground. “You will want the story of how we got the building. Half of Kingston has heard it, and the other half has heard it wrong, so listen closely and get it right. The banner and the whitewash are the end of the tale. The beginning of the tale is the fight.”

“The march,” Samuels said.

“The march,” Jack agreed, with deep satisfaction.

“When this hospital was decommissioned, when the last patients were moved, and the doors were shut, it became, overnight, one of the most interesting derelictions in Kingston. Good buildings. Good land. Close to town. The

developers wanted it, and the developers, I may tell you, do not send ladies with collection tins when they want a thing. They send lawyers. They dine with officials. Matters arrange themselves quietly, and one morning the public wakes to find the deed done and the fences up.”

She paused at the memory.

“But I wanted it. The moment I heard the hospital was to be abandoned, I saw it in its entirety. I saw this,” she swept a hand at the wards behind them, the yards before them. “Exactly as you see it today with dormitories, kitchens, gardens, a home for Kingston’s destitute children, the first the island has ever had. The building existed. The children existed. The need existed. All that stood between them was ownership, and ownership belonged to the Crown”

Her voice took on an animation that was one hundred percent Jack DeCordova.

“So, there we were. On one side, the forces of money and power, arranged as they are accustomed to arranging themselves. On the other side, a society of women, in a colony

where women cannot so much as vote for the men who would decide the question.”

She paused and looked sideways at the young journalist, and her smile in that moment was the smile that generations of obstructive officials had learned to dread.

“They thought that was our weakness,” she said. “Whereas it was, of course, our license. A man in our position must mind his career, his party, his patrons. A woman in our position has no career to mind. We could not be dismissed from posts we were not allowed to hold. We were free to do the unthinkable”

“The unthinkable?” he parroted.

“I organized a march of women on King’s House.”

She let that sink in, and even now, with the banner hung and the battle won, the audacity of it filled the veranda.

“You must picture it, because your readers will not believe it otherwise. Not only the ladies of society, but women of every station. Women who had walked up from downtown. Mothers, market women, nurses, the respectable and the desperate, shoulder to

shoulder, marching, in our numbers, in our hats, in broad daylight, up to the gates of the Governor's own residence, and demanding, not requesting, young man, demanding, to see the Governor of Jamaica."

She waved a dismissive hand.

"They didn't know what to do with us. That was the beauty of it. There is no protocol for it. If we had been men, they could have called us a mob and read us the Riot Act. If we had been humble, they could have taken our petition at the gate and lost it in a drawer. But we were neither. We were the wives and mothers of the colony, conducting ourselves with perfect order and perfect implacability, and we did not go away. I have found in my life that not going away is nine-tenths of strategy. Any fool can arrive. The art is in remaining."

"And the Governor saw you."

"The Governor saw us." Jack's chin came up, and forty years fell away. "I was given my audience, and I made my case in the plainest language I have ever used in an official room. I told him what I had seen in the St. Andrew's

poor house. I told him those children would be better off living on the street; his officials went quite grey. I told them it was apparently permissible for children to rot, but not for anyone to mention it in King's House. And then I made my demand. I demanded that our society be given the abandoned Maxfield Park hospital, this building, and these grounds, to house the destitute children of Kingston."

She grabbed his arm.

"And I will tell you the argument that carried the day, because it was not the argument of the heart. The argument of the heart opens the interview; the argument of the ledger closes the deal. I learned that from thirty years of watching men do business across my own dinner table. I said to the Governor: Your Excellency, the building stands empty and decaying, which profits no one. The children stand neglected and dying, which shames everyone. I am offering to solve two of your problems with one signature, at no cost to the Treasury, using funds I have already raised and will continue to raise from the private purses of this colony. All the credit

of the outcome will attach to Your Excellency's administration, in the columns of a newspaper with whose managing director I have," and here all her years of mischief concentrated itself into one pause, "Some small influence."

Samuels laughed out loud before he could stop himself. Jack looked gratified.

"He signed?"

"He agreed," Jack corrected. "The wheels turned. Wheels always take longer than signatures, but I had secured my demands before we left the room, and both of us knew it. The Association was given Maxfield Park. And we set to work, and the work has taken every day since. The result is what your photographer has been eating up all afternoon: built not by the Crown, not by the Church, not by the gentlemen of the Legislative Council, but by the women of Jamaica, who were told the whole matter was none of their business."

She looked out over the grounds, the sand heap, the garden stakes, the drying whitewash, and, for the second time that afternoon, the performance fell away from her completely.

"They arrive Thursday," she said, her voice soft. "The first children. Forty of them, from the poor house. There are beds for everyone, and a named woman is responsible for every bed. No child in this house will ever again be nobody's business."

A motorcar was coming up the drive, an elegant one, riding low on its springs, its back seat and boot visibly loaded with parcels and bundles. Jack shaded her eyes, and her whole face opened.

A man of Jack's own vintage directed the unloading of the parcels with one hand while advancing up the steps with the other outstretched, an envelope dangling from his fingers.

"Jack, Estelle has sent linens and the clothing from the drive..."

"Mr. Samuels," Jack grinned before taking the envelope, then the man's outstretched arm. "Allow me to introduce you to my brother, Lewis Ashenheim."

"It's a pleasure, young man," Lewis said, taking Samuels' extended hand.

Lewis had the same beleaguered look that

everyone in Jack's presence seemed to acquire over time.

"Now, Jack," Lewis' voice was stern. "You are not to acknowledge this publicly."

Jack opened the envelope and looked at the cheque. Her eyes twinkled, and a slow grin spread across her face.

Lewis groaned. "Jack, don't embarrass me by publishing the amount."

"Lewis, what a horrible thing to say," Jack chastised playfully. "Why would I embarrass you when you've been so generous to my causes?" The feigned sweetness in her voice made Samuels look away to hide his amusement.

Lewis shook his head as he made his way down the steps and disappeared into his car.

Jack waved as he drove away.

The General

"One more question," Samuels asked. "Before I lose my nerve. I understand you have a nickname. Something, well, you're called, behind your back. Not 'Mrs.

DeCordova.' Not 'Jack.'"

"Ah." Jack DeCordova's expression arranged itself into a portrait of innocence.

"And what do they call me?"

"The General, ma'am."

"Do they indeed?"

"Where does it come from?"

Jack laughed, but this time she took a moment before answering, and when she did, she gave the question more honesty than he had expected.

"It comes," she said. "From the money."

She flashed that engaging smile, the one that melted all resistance.

"You see, Mr. Samuels, everyone imagines the hard part of this work is the marching and the speech-making, the parts that photograph. It is not. The march took an afternoon. The audience with the Governor took an hour. The hard part is the part that will take years of continuous fundraising efforts by hundreds of volunteers."

She pointed a finger at his nose.

"Whitewash costs money. Beds cost money. Cooks and nurses and matrons cost

money, month after month, forever. A cause without funds is an opinion. And the true work of this Association, the campaign behind the campaign, has been the systematic extraction of money from the only place in Jamaica where money exists in quantity: the drawing rooms, boardrooms, and vestries of the comfortable.”

She laughed her contagious laugh.

“And that, young man, is a military operation. I say so without a particle of shame. I have planned dinner parties the way staff officers plan offensives. I know, before the soup arrives, precisely which gentleman at my table can afford what, which one is vain, which one is pious, which one is frightened of his wife, and which one merely needs to be asked in front of witnesses. I have seated rivals opposite each other on purpose, so that neither could give less than the other. I have put a subscription list beside the port. I have, and I confess it freely, put it in your notebook, published the names of donors in this very newspaper in descending order of generosity, and then waited, serene as a spider, for the

telephone calls from gentlemen anxious about their position on the list.”

Her tone was serious now.

“My critics call this manipulation. I call it applied knowledge of my fellow creatures. Nobody objects when a merchant studies his customers, or a barrister studies his jury; but let a woman study a boardroom, and it becomes, apparently, dark arts.” She sniffed. “I had the advantage of an unusual education in the subject. Being denied the university, I was educated instead at the dinner table, thirty years of dinner tables, with the men who own this island talking business over my linen as though I were another candlestick. They taught me everything: how money moves, how deals are shaped, what men say when they intend to do nothing, and precisely which words unlock a checkbook. It never once occurred to any of them that the candlestick was taking notes.”

“And the Gleaner? Your... considerable influence?”

“Used without mercy,” replied Jack without a trace of hesitation. “Publicity, Mr.

Samuels, is the artillery of charitable work, and I married into the largest gun in the West Indies. I make no apology for firing it. Every cause on this island is starving for attention; I happen to know how attention is manufactured, what a photographer wants, what an editor needs by five o'clock, which stories run and which die on the spike. When your photographer arrived this afternoon, do you suppose it was by chance that he found me at the top of a ladder? I have been President of this Association for years; I do not need to hang banners with my own hands. But 'Society Lady Presides Over Committee' is not a photograph, but 'Mrs. DeCordova Up a Ladder' is, and tomorrow morning, ten thousand breakfast tables will see this home's name in letters two feet high. Some percentage of those tables will send us money. I climbed the ladder for the two feet of letters."

Samuels stopped writing and looked at her with frank admiration. "The General," he declared.

"The name began as an insult, I am told. One of the gentlemen I had persuaded

complained at his club that being solicited by Mrs. DeCordova was like being requisitioned by an occupying army. The remark traveled, as good remarks do, and by the time it reached my volunteers, it had turned inside out and become an endearment. That is generally the fate of insults aimed at effective women, Mr. Samuels. The words are minted by our enemies and end up circulating as our currency. Nuisance. Deranged. The General. I have been enriched by every one of them.”

She looked out at the yards, where her army was still at work in the failing light, women of every station, carrying linens and hammering nails and arguing about the kitchen garden, and the irony left her voice.

“But I will tell you the true reason the name is right, though not the reason its originator intended. A general is nothing without her troops. Look at them. Look who walks beside me. Women who were told, every one of them, that public affairs were none of their business. Women who cannot vote. Women whose names will not be in your article, or anyone’s. They dug this institution

out of the ground with their hands and their shillings and their Saturday afternoons, and they will keep it alive long after I am a portrait on a wall. I supply the noise and take the fire; that is a general's whole function, to be shot at so the troops can advance. The victory belongs to the army."

She turned back to him, brisk again.

"Put the army in the article," she commanded. It was not a request.

"Yes, ma'am," replied Samuels, and underlined it twice.

"Oh, and one more thing," Jack drew a single sheet of paper from her pocket, grabbed his pencil from his hand, and added something to the top of the list.

"This is my subscription list," she handed it to him. "With the name of every donor and the amount they have given to the Maxfield Park Children's Home. I would like you to publish it in your article."

Samuels took the list. "Ahhmm, Mrs. DeCordova?"

She looked at him, smiling sweetly.

"Ma'am, you put your brother's name at

the top of this list.”

“Because he gave the most money,” she explained as if speaking to a child.

“But...didn’t he ask you...”

She took his hand, still smiling. “When you publish this list, it will shame his friends into matching...” She winked at him. “Or exceeding it.”

Thursday, and After

The children came on Thursday, as promised: forty of them from the St. Andrew poor house, delivered like a reproach and received like a treasure. There exists no photograph of that day; Jack forbade the press because a frightened child is not a public exhibit, but the women who were there described it for the rest of their lives. The children came in silent, wary, holding one another’s hands, flinching from kindness because kindness was a stranger. They were bathed and fed, and each was shown a bed with their own name above it. It was the beds, the women said, that broke them open, child after

child touching the iron frame, the pillow, the name, asking, in one form or another, the same unbelieving question: Fi me? For me? Mine?

Yours, they were told. Yours.

Jack DeCordova stood in the doorway of the ward that first evening, unnoticed in the lamplight, and watched forty children who had been nobody's business fall asleep as somebody's whole occupation. Those who saw her face never described it. Some things do not go in scrapbooks.

The work, of course, was only beginning; the work is always only beginning; that is the first thing the General taught every recruit. The orphanage had to be fed, staffed, funded, and defended, year upon year. Jack did all of it with the same combination that had won it in the first place: her knowledge of business, her utter lack of fear, her genius for publicity, and her swift, unembarrassed use of her influence in every circle in Jamaica where money could be found. She begged shamelessly and strategically. She was, her volunteers said, with exasperation and with devotion, the General,

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and the General did not lose campaigns, because the General did not end them until they were won.

Nor did she stop at Maxfield Park. The Association went on under her presidency to fight for child welfare legislation, for the health of women, for the improvement of the housing in which the poor of Kingston lived, and sickened and died. Years later, when a new Governor's wife arrived on the island with energy and conscience and no map, it was to Jack that she found her way. Out of that friendship, Jack DeCordova and Lady Huggins, the General and the Governor's lady side by side, came the Jamaica Federation of Women, knitting the women of the whole island, of every color and class and parish, into one body. It was the march on King's House all over again, scaled up to a nation: the discovery, made once at the Governor's gate and never afterward forgotten, of what the women of Jamaica could achieve the moment they stopped asking permission.

She had never been allowed to attend a university. She built institutions instead, and

the institutions outlived every gentleman who had called her a nuisance.

The Gleaner, her husband's paper, her paper, reported it all, the day after it happened, as it reported everything Jack did. And somewhere in its files, yellowing gently, is a young reporter's account of an afternoon at Maxfield Park: a banner, a stepladder, an interview, and a question that was not on the list.

Why?

Because she walked into a room she was not meant to walk into, and saw children her society had agreed not to see. Because civilization and humanity demand that no child be allowed to die of neglect. Because the impossible is merely the possible that has not yet been properly organized.

That is why.

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 and to delve into the complexities of human relationships and cultural identity, transporting them to the heart of the Caribbean experience.

She is deeply committed to promoting the unique voices and stories of the Caribbean.

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