

Olga

A Daughter's Tale

In 1994 my mother Carmen Browne was admitted to the Royal Sussex County Hospital in Brighton seriously ill. As she slowly recovered I realised had she died so, also, would the chance for me to find out about our past, her family in Jamaica and, of great importance to me, who my father was, information she had resolutely refused to share with me. So I decided to find out for myself.

My first discovery was that my mother was in fact Olga Browney, born and raised in Kingston, Jamaica and one of eleven children from a close-knit coloured Catholic family. A kind, naive and gentle girl, Olga came to London in 1939 to live with her malevolent, alcoholic aunt and intending to stay only six months. But world events, personal tragedy and malicious intent all combined to prevent her from returning to her family in Kingston.

Based on a true story and written using diary entries and letters, "Olga – A Daughter's Tale" is about cruelty, revenge and jealousy inflicted on an innocent young woman and about her moral courage, dignity, resilience and in particular love. It is the story of a remarkable woman who because of circumstances made a choice which resulted in her losing contact with her beloved family in Jamaica. That is, until nearly half a century later, when her past caught up with her.

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To Stuart and Laurie
my raison d'être

and

my beautiful granddaughter
Emilee

“Beautiful islands! where the green
Which nature wears was never seen
’Neath zone of Europe; where the hue
Of sea and heaven is such a blue
As England dreams not; where the night
Is all irradiate with the light
Of stars like moons, which, hung on high,
Breathe and quiver in the sky,
Each its silver haze divine
Flinging in a radiant line,
O’er gorgeous flower and mighty tree
On the soft and shadowy sea!
Beautiful islands! brief the time
I dwelt beneath your wonderful clime;
Yet oft I see in noonday dream
Your glorious stars with lunar beam;
And oft before my sight arise
Your sky-like seas, your sea-like skies,
Your green banana’s giant leaves,
Your golden canes in arrowy sheaves,
Your palms which never die, but stand
Immortal sea-marks on the strand,
Their feathery tufts, like plumage rare.
Their stems so high, so strange and fair!
Yea! while the breeze of England now
Flings rose-scents on my aching brow,
I think a moment I inhale
Again the breath of tropic gale”.

Anon

Acknowledgement

The majority of events that I have written about were told to me by my mother, Olga with gaps filled in by my Aunt Ruby Shim (nee Browney) during my first visit to Jamaica to meet my extended family. Other events are assumptions based on my knowledge of relevant facts and circumstances.

Regarding my research, particularly relating to the historical and social background of Jamaica as well as its culture, I would like to acknowledge the following:

The Newspaper Archives of The Jamaica Gleaner
The National Archives, Kew, Richmond, Surrey, UK
Jubilee Library, Brighton, East Sussex, UK
BBC Archive Department
The Times Archive (London)
Jamaica in 1905 by Frank Cundall

Marie Campbell

PART ONE
HOW IT ALL BEGAN

Introduction

Christopher Columbus, the explorer, had been so mesmerized by Jamaica's beauty he had described it in 1494 as "...the fairest land my eyes have ever seen" and had been greeted by a kind, friendly, gentle people known as the Arawaks who gave the island its name, Xaymaca – meaning "land of wood and water". But the Arawaks suffered great ill-treatment at the hands of their Spanish conquerors and by the time Britain took Jamaica from Spain in 1655 they had all died.

Throughout the entire period of British rule and, not including the huge numbers born into slavery, it was estimated that upwards of 1,000,000 Africans were imported against their will into Jamaica. People forced to work as slaves on plantations owned by rich white men and women and subjected to extreme cruel and brutal treatment.

During slavery the plantation remained the most important unit and a rigid class system existed. You were

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judged to be important according to the type of work you did, the colour of your skin and how much money and land you owned. There were three groups of people – the whites, the coloureds and the slaves who were black.

Among the whites, the most important in society were the planters who were very rich from the sale of sugar and owned vast areas of land on which they built great houses usually on a hill overlooking the plantations and slave houses. Built by expert slave labour, they were manorial with fine wood panelling, vast rooms, and opening one into another, windows that reached to the floor and wide staircases modelled on the Georgian style. Below these ample living-rooms gleaming with their shining smooth wood polished floors were the quarters of the slaves who lived in cramped airless conditions behind stout iron bars at small windows.

Next in importance were the traders who sold merchandise to the people; tools for the estates, food items such as flour, fish, salt beef, cheese, wine, clothing and candles. They were very wealthy people but because they didn't own any land they were considered less important than the planters.

After the traders, came the coloureds, half white and half black – 'mulatto' the result of a white man having a child by a black woman, although it was against the law for white women to have children with a black man. The coloureds thought they were better than the slaves mainly because they were not fully black, their reasoning being that the closer they came to being white, the more important they were. But some

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planters did free their mulatto children and in this way a large number of coloureds were free to start their own businesses.

Then there were **skilled** slaves. Among these people were midwives, wheelwrights, masons and carpenters.

Next came the **house** slaves, the Blacks who worked as butlers, cooks, nurses, ladies' maids, and coachmen in the kitchen, stable or garden. They worked close to their master and were frequently beaten particularly if he or she was upset about something. Punishment was often brutal, for example when a little girl was beaten and nailed through her ears to a tree for having broken a special cup belonging to her master,

The lowliest, and they amounted to more than half the slaves in Jamaica, were **field** slaves and it was primarily on their backs Jamaica became a jewel in the British Empire. They prepared the land, planted, cut and carried the canes to the mills, then ground it, made the sugar and carried it to the ships.

Jamaica reinvented itself when slavery ended in 1838. The workers legally had their freedom and now the owners of the sugar plantations had to pay the men who had once been their slaves. But many refused to work for the planters. Because they were free the black workers went into the hills and either squatted on Government property or bought small pieces of land from the missionaries who bought land from the Government specially for the purpose of selling it back to the freed blacks and coloureds at a fair price so they could become independent and grow their own crops. They established themselves as free settlers and grew coconuts, spices, tobacco,

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coco, pimentos and, of course, bananas. They formed hardworking, independent small businesses, selling their produce to local markets and, not only were they financially successful themselves, their efforts went some considerable way to making Jamaica economically solvent again after the demise of the sugar market.

The planters needed workers so now free, but poor, immigrants arrived from Africa, Portugal, China, India, Syria and the Lebanon to work. The new immigrants were neither black nor white and many didn't adapt to plantation work so some, like the Chinese, started their own businesses. These people brought with them their religion, language and cultures and enriched an already complicated society.

New shipping routes opened up between London and the West Indies and there was a lot of commercial activity in Jamaica. The British Government and the Institute of Jamaica encouraged men and women from Great Britain to move to Jamaica. Together they instigated a scheme whereby young men could pay a premium to plantation owners in exchange for instruction in the cultivation of crops indigenous to Jamaica. Once they had served an apprenticeship they would be able to buy government land well below the market price.

Chapter One

**CUTTING FROM "THE TIMES" LONDON
July 1900**

**Opportunity for Hard Working Reliable Young Man
Kingston, Jamaica**

ARTICLE PUPIL SCHEME

Pupil for pen-keeping, banana and coffee plantation. Pupil will be required to assist in the management of coffee fields, surveying and laying out roads for plantation purposes, keep the plantation books and accounts in order and superintend labourers. In exchange pupil will receive practical instruction in coffee planting and preparing coffee for market, and instruction in the cultivation of bananas.

Pupil must be sober and honest, write a fair hand. A horse and forage will be supplied. Must have good outfit for working and other clothes, strong boots, riding breeches, leggings, waterproof cloak. Linen, etc. supplied. Polo, shooting, lawn tennis, other British sports. Good society. Will be required to furnish first-class references.

Premium required £100 p.a. for 1 year or 2 years payable quarterly in advance.

(Reference in England. Henry N. Pollock, Esq. Ravenswood House,
Windsor, Surrey.)

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**Letter - from Henry Pollock, Esq., Windsor, Surrey,
England
to
Hon. Lt. Col. Bertram Pollock, Kingston, Jamaica**

September 1900

My dear Bertie

Good news! There has been a splendid response to your recent advertisement in The Times for an articulated apprentice and I have been busy all week interviewing a variety of young men for the position. But I have now finally made a decision on your behalf and I think you will be well pleased with my choice. His background is thus:

John Sinclair, a young man of some financial means, not excessive, but certainly enough for him not only to be able to pay the premium, but also to buy a small estate in Kingston. Both his parents are dead and his money has come from the sale of a small farm they owned in Inverness in Scotland.

He is a tall, strapping young man, with a pleasant demeanour, 25 years of age and recently married to Lucy Ross (there are no children!). Sinclair has had a reasonable education, is quite well read and I must say I thought he held a good conversation. I sensed in him an eagerness to learn new things and gain new experiences which is why I feel sure he will make an industrious and apt pupil and both of you will benefit.

Sinclair and his wife have been temporarily living with her family in Droop Street, Paddington, while they decide what they want to do with their future. He is adamant that he

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doesn't want to return to Scotland. Says he's had enough of the freezing winters and being knee deep in snow! (He'll be alright in Jamaica then, won't he, old boy?) Naturally, I wanted to meet his wife as well, so I arranged a visit to her at the family home. I felt it would be a good idea to see them in situ, so to speak, in order to form a better opinion as to their suitability.

The head of the family is Samuel Ross, a constable with the Metropolitan Police, and a pillar of the community. I found him a bit overbearing and his wife, Harriet, the opposite, timid but pleasant enough. I suspect they are a church going family since what looked like the family bible was prominently displayed along with a number of other religious artefacts in the house – Catholics, I think.

I must say Bertie I was very impressed with Sinclair's wife, Lucy. A sweet, gentle and intelligent young lady who obviously adores her new husband and vice versa. They both impressed me with their knowledge of Jamaica, its politics and social structure. I believe she paints watercolours, so she should be well occupied painting the abundance of beauty and variety of scenery there is in Jamaica, particularly while Sinclair is out at work on the plantation.

Mrs Sinclair has two unmarried sisters, Martha and Becky and clearly has a very close relationship with her younger sister, Becky, who is similar in both looks and demeanour to Lucy tall, slender with fair hair, blue eyes.

Martha is the oldest and most unlike the other two, short and stout, with a badly pockmarked face, result of chicken

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pox I suppose. You know, Bertie, how every now and again in a family, nature produces an offspring that bears little resemblance to either its parents or siblings, well that's Martha Ross. She works as a seamstress for the Drury Lane Theatre in London and didn't hesitate to tell me she is the best they have.

I came away from the meeting with a most favourable opinion of Sinclair and his wife's suitability and adaptability to moving to the tropics. Sinclair's references are exemplary (enclosed herewith) and I have told him that you will write direct to him offering the position assuming, of course, you concur with me.

Yours ever



**Letter from Lucy Sinclair, Constant Spring Hotel,
St Andrews, Jamaica
to
Becky Ross, Droop Street, Paddington, London, England**

March 1901

Dearest Becky

Bertram Pollock is a charming man, born and bred in Jamaica. I like him a lot and John speaks favourably of him as a man who is fair and reasonable. The plantation is a few miles outside of Kingston, at the foot of the Blue Mountains. Because our new home is not ready to live in, John is boarding

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in a room above the stables on the estate and I am staying here at the Constant Spring Hotel, which is quite nearby.

I have been here a short amount of time Becky and have seen little of the island, but already I have discovered so much beauty here.

Jamaica attacks one's senses, the sight of brightly coloured parrots, mocking-birds, sugar birds or to use their more common name, the banana quit and right now, Becky, as I sit here in the hotel's gardens writing to you, flying in and out of the trees and shrubs are beautiful long-tailed hummingbirds.

The other day I saw a sinister looking blue black bird with a huge beak. I'm told it's called a john crow bird and is the most often seen bird on the island. It's a great scavenger, very clumsy and ugly on the ground but so beautiful and majestic in flight Becky.

Jamaica is full of vibrant colour and beauty and is a naturalist's paradise. The spectacular scenery is enriched by the vivid flowers and scent of the roses that abound, roses and bourgainvillea in every conceivable colour, as well as bright yellow allamandas, the annatto which has rose coloured flowers and purplish pods, the ebony which has yellow flowers and always comes out after rain and the pale blue flower of the lignum-vitae which grows over most of the island. To wake early and see the stars fade away and in their place watch a glorious sunrise and at sunset every night the frogs, crickets and fireflies all make their presence felt and voices heard.

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Ackee



Long Tailed Humming Bird



Banana Quit



Black-Eyed Susan



Cashew Nut

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From the fruit trees which are everywhere Becky, you can just pick and eat mangos, guava, papaw, oranges and other more exotic fruits that I have never heard of like ackee, which is very popular here. And if you can find something sharp and heavy enough to crack open a coconut, you can drink the milk from it.

I long to be settled in our house so I can explore the island more and paint instead of the pencil sketches I continually do whenever I'm out and about.

Socially, Jamaica has a lot to offer, but, I do miss the theatres, art galleries and museums in London. But in spite of that, I am convinced we made the right choice about coming here. In fact I have almost forgotten what my former life in London was like because we have both settled down so well.

Tell Martha that Jamaican women are very fashion conscious and do seem to spend a lot of money on clothes which are certainly more expensive here than in London and I'm told they often arrange for material and patterns to be shipped over from London. We must persuade Ma and Pa to let you come for a visit.

Your loving sister

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Lucy". The letters are fluid and connected, with a prominent loop at the end of the word.

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**Letter - from Becky Ross, Droop Street,
Paddington, London
to
Lucy Sinclair, Constant Spring Hotel, Jamaica**

July 1901

Dearest Lucy

It was lovely to receive your last letter. Martha was very interested with your remarks about Jamaican women and how fashion conscious they are. Maybe there is an opportunity for her skills over there, although at the moment she's got a "gentleman friend", a private in the army and they certainly do see a lot of each other.

I'm working as a governess in Kensington for a very nice young couple who have two children, Emily and Robert, but it's only a temporary position because they have an elderly governess who has been with the family for ages (handed down from generation to generation I think) but took a leave of absence and will be returning to her position in about two months. That suits me well because when I finish I want to enrol in a housekeeping and basic cookery course with Marshall's Cookery School in Marylebone Road.

I think the more things I can turn my hand too the less chance I'll be pressured by Pa into marrying a man of his choice. Would you believe it, Lucy, in the past few weeks he has brought home three police constables to dinner with the express purpose of them looking me over to see if I am suitable marriage material. I've no intention of being press ganged into

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marrying someone I don't love even if it means I do end up a spinster of the parish.

It's wonderful to hear about your life over there. I read your letters over and over again, usually on the way home from work, freezing cold and trudging through London smog, snow or rain, Jamaica seems magical, like a fairy land.

Ma and Pa send their love to you and ask if you are going to mass on Sunday. I assured them that we were all too scared of the hell and damnation that would befall us were we not to.

Your loving sister

Becky

**Letter from Lucy Sinclair, "Mon Repose", Jamaica
to
Becky and Martha Ross, Droop Street, London.**

February 1902

Dearest Becky and Martha

It is barely a year ago that we arrived here; such a lot has happened in a short space of time. John has found a small estate for sale, about 1,050 acres, and it is within our budget so, we have bought it and named our first home "Mon Repose".

It's in the parish of St Andrews which is a few miles from Kingston and John says it is in a good position as it is on fairly level land and has a stream running through it. There are

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stables and a large barn which house some 50 or so cattle, 3 horses, 3 mules, a wagon cart and some other equipment that came with the land. The horses and mules will be useful but John is undecided about whether he wants to raise cattle. He is keen to grow more crops and make use of what he has learnt with Bertie Pollock. The land is divided by wire fences, most of which need repairing and has considerable cultivation in bananas, coffee, pimentos, over 150 bearing coconut trees and other bits and bobs.

The house is quite large though it does need an awful lot of renovation because it has been empty for years, but its structure is sound. It has a drawing room, dining room and four bedrooms and is quite well furnished. That takes care of one immediate problem, having to furnish it. There is a kitchen and outside a water closet as well as an outhouse for bathing.

Oh it's perfect Becky. You and Martha must come and visit very soon. There is plenty of room in the house, lots to see, and so much I want to show you. Are you and Martha working on persuading Pa and Ma to let you come for a holiday?

Your loving sister

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Lucy". The letters are fluid and connected, with a prominent loop at the end of the word.

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**Telegram from Martha and Becky Ross, London
to
Lucy Sinclair, Jamaica**

SUCCESS AT LAST!. MARTHA AND I LEAVING AVONMOUTH AT 4.45 PM
ON 16TH JULY FOR KINGSTON ON "S. S. PORT MORANT". ALL BEING
WELL SHOULD ARRIVE ON 28TH. VERY EXCITED. LONGING TO SEE
YOU. LOVE BECKY.

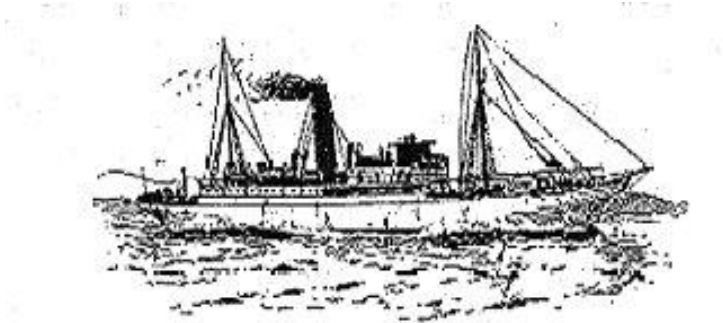
Chapter Two

Becky's Diary

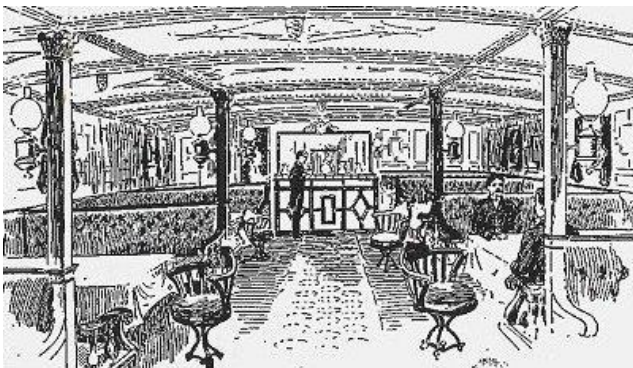
On Board Port Morant: My goodness, Pa took a lot of persuading to let me go. He said I was too young to travel such a distance on my own and only agreed because suddenly Martha announced she wanted to see Jamaica too. For the longest time Martha said she didn't want to go. I know the reason; a man. Alfred Trotter's his name. He's a private in the army. Maybe because he was used to taking orders in the army he didn't mind being bossed around by Martha. If she'd told him to jump off Tower Bridge I think he would have done. No mind of his own. You need one when you're around Martha otherwise she walks all over you, doesn't she Private Trotter. Anyway, Trotter lasted a few months and now he's gone and Martha and I are going to see Lucy and John.

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Ma gave me this lovely leather bound book to keep an account of my holiday. The Port Morant is a beautiful boat and as well as passengers she carries fruit and the Royal Mail. Our cabin is comfortable, spacious and well ventilated and with, of all things, an electric light.



The dining room is decorated with light coloured woods and carved panels and has been divided into a number of recesses, each with a separate dining table with seating for up to six people. The seats are upholstered in royal blue and, this I thought wonderful, the glass in the doors have been hand painted with views of Jamaican scenery.



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Our departure from Avonmouth was delayed because of dense fog and it was not until it cleared some hours later that we were able to proceed on our way. No sooner had we cleared the fog than we sailed straight into rough weather and the Captain confined all passengers to their cabins for safety.

Martha and I have discovered we have no sea legs. I've been ill for days now and am convinced there is nothing more miserable than seasickness. Except perhaps listening to the wailing through the cabin walls of others as miserable as we are. It's all very distressing, I don't think I shall ever forget these last few days.

Martha said she anticipated that there might be rough weather and brought some linctus which she keeps in a silver flask. She says it is good for keeping the contents of her stomach in place. It also appears to be good as a sleeping draught since she sleeps so soundly at night and is oblivious to the pitching and rolling of the boat. I tried it myself but didn't like it. Martha says it is an acquired taste.

7th day at sea: The weather has cleared and is glorious now, calm seas and lots of sunshine. It was a shock to get on the deck and see the chaos that the storm had caused. Deck chairs were lying broken in pieces and wooden benches were on their sides but it wasn't long before the crew got everything shipshape. There is plenty of space on the deck for walking and

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it is wonderful to finally be able to stroll and get lots of lovely fresh air.

There was a “get together dinner” so we could all get acquainted with each other. The dining salon was ablaze with little coloured lights, paper streamers and balloons. Paper hats were provided for everybody and on the table were whistles and wooden things you twirl which make a bit of a racket.

At our dining table were Dr and Mrs Turton who are planning to retire to Jamaica permanently as they do not like the cold and damp winters in England. Many of the passengers are tourists, some are parents taking their children home from boarding school for the holidays and there are a couple of army officers who are going to be stationed on the island, one of whom I think Martha has already taken a shine to; she does seem to like a man in uniform.

After dinner, music sheets were handed out to us all containing verses of several well known songs and the ship's orchestra started playing. At first we all started timidly singing, but it wasn't long before everyone was participating with great gusto.

The closer we get to Jamaica the brighter the sun and the air becomes balmy. It's lovely at night to walk round the deck looking at the stars which are so clear and twinkle in the night sky and feel the softness in the air and a warm breeze that wraps itself around you.

Our last night: Tomorrow night there is to be a last dinner with a special menu and we are going to put on our best

Becky's Diary

frocks, although Martha says we should be wearing evening dresses, but we don't have any.

Diner d'Adieu Menu

HORS D'ŒUVERS

Croutes au Parmesan
Cockie Leekie Soup

FISH

Boned Halibut, Sauce Hollandaise

ENTREE

Coteletes d'Agneau, Sauce Soubice, Asperges eu branches
Roast Fillet Veal, Lemon Sauce
Perdreux á la Anglaise
Jamaican Goat
Roast and Boiled Potatoes, Haricot Verts

DESSERT

Banana Pudding, Pineapple Jellies, Iced Pears

According to the new, soon to be Manager of the Constant Spring Hotel, Mr James McTavis, we drank French champagne, German white wine and Italian dessert wine. He didn't believe me when I told him I'd never drunk either wine or champagne before and then he and Martha seemed to be in competition as to who could drink the most. My money was on Martha.

After dinner Lord Walsingham, who is a well known famous traveller, but not to me, thanked the Captain on behalf of the passengers for his "watchfulness and never ceasing supervision of the ship, particularly during those difficult early days in our journey".

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The Captain replied that the success of the voyage was not only his doing but also that of the officers and crew under his command. If he had not got such an able crew the ship could not have done so well.

Then Lord Walsingham called for three cheers for the Captain and his crew and then the Captain called for three cheers for Lord Walsingham and the passengers. All very friendly.

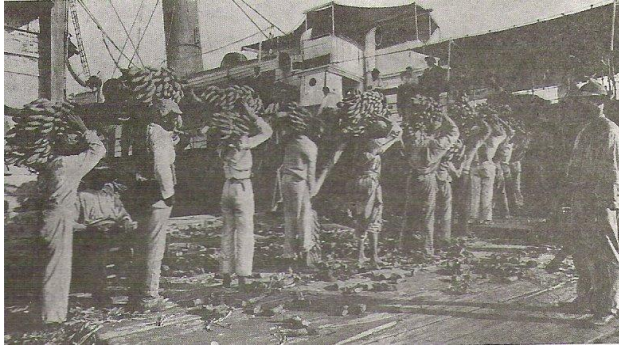
These last wonderful days have been the most enjoyable I have ever spent. Martha has enjoyed herself too and she has been a good travelling companion. She and I are not as close as Lucy and I are, and I don't really know why. I have tried in the past to get close to her but she discourages me. Sometimes I don't think she even likes me.

As the steamer nears Jamaica I can see in the distance the mangroves and waving palm leafs and huge mountain ridges that are thick with acres and acres of vegetation. A blue haze wafts lazily over the top of the mountains like a long pale blue-grey chiffon scarf. These are the Blue Mountains, the back drop to Kingston.

While we waited to disembark from the boat I watched the men tie the steamer to its berth in Kingston Harbour. On the dockside black men, women and children are working at a furious pace loading the boats with bananas for their return journey to England. Great piles of green bananas carefully stacked in sizes are being loaded onto the steamer I'm waiting to disembark from. I watched in fascination as the dirty, ragged

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figures of women and young girls ran up and down the gangplanks, in and out of the hatches in the sides of the boat below carrying the bananas on their heads with such consummate ease.



Some of the men have cutlasses and are using them to slice the stalks off the bananas if they are too long. I've never seen black men before and can't stop staring at them. When they've finished loading the bananas the women and girls are handed a piece of paper from the negro foreman and take it to the paymaster to collect their wages, I think. Watching the hustle and bustle of the Negroes going about their work remind me of armies of ants soldiering away.

Chapter Three

Becky's Diary

“Mon Repose”: I still can't quite believe the news that greeted Martha and me when we got off the boat at Kingston. There was Lucy standing on the dockside heavily pregnant. It came as such a shock because she hadn't mentioned it in any of her letters.

“I wanted it to be a surprise” she said. It was certainly that.

The long journey to “Mon Repose” was in a horse drawn buggy, very uncomfortable because of the rough roads, but scenically beautiful and at times a frightening experience up steep hills, past towering coca palms with their feathery plumes waving in the breeze, around sudden sharp bends with waterfalls cascading down the side of the mountain.

The house is wonderful, spacious and cool with mahogany wood panelling in most rooms and windows that go

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from the highly polished floor to the ceiling and left open all day to let the mountain breeze run through the house.

Lucy has been busy sketching and the house is full of pencil drawings and watercolours of exotic flowers, and ferns, as well as brightly coloured parrots, hummingbirds and the mockingbird. Coming from Paddington, it's taking me some time to get used to seeing such a richness of scenery that thrives under a sun that shines constantly in a cloudless clear blue sky.

John and Lucy are a popular couple on Kingston's social circuit and Lucy tells us that new arrivals, even if they are only staying a short time, always attract interest, curiosity and lots of invitations to different social and sporting occasions abound. A garden party at Winchester Park, a concert at Port Antonio, a picnic on the beach, the theatre and an invitation to Kingston Races, are just a few of the invitations we've received. I haven't the stamina to accept all the invitations but Martha is making the most of the social life here which is why she sleeps late every morning.

But in spite of all that is new to us, there are some things that are very familiar about this island. Britain's habit of colonising a country in its own image has not escaped here. Jamaica, the exotic "land of wood and water" is divided into three counties of Middlesex, Surrey and Cornwall.

The English settlers brought with them their recreations and pastimes. Horseracing is very popular with everyone and race meetings are held in several parts of the island. John says there's a cricket club in virtually every major

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town for the well off Jamaican, and just about every open space has become a cricket pitch for poor blacks who seem to have developed a passion for the game and would use an oil tin for the wickets and the rib of a palm leaf for a bat. All the best hotels have tennis courts and fallow fields have been turned into polo fields.

Yesterday was one of the strangest days I've experienced. It started innocently enough with Lucy and I having breakfast on the veranda overlooking their plantain field. A plantain is almost exactly like a banana and grows in enormous bunches just the way bananas do, but they are bigger and green, not yellow.

From the verandah I could see John at the entrance to a field listening intently to a wizened old man. Standing next to the old man was a small black boy who carried a large basket.

"Who is the old man?" I asked Lucy

"He's an Obeah man and he's going to dress the garden"

"What on earth are you talking about, Lucy?"

Then she explained Obeah was a form of witchcraft and that an Obeah man or woman is the person, or practitioner, as they like to be called, who controls the supernatural world using spirits to harm people with techniques passed down in secret from one generation to another. I was fascinated and wanted to hear more.

"There could be many reasons why someone might want the services of an Obeah man. It may be for a medical

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reason, if someone is ill in which case the patient would be given a bottle of something to take or they would have to follow certain instructions. But often it's to do with getting revenge on someone who has caused you harm in some way; maybe you wanted to discover a thief or sometimes it's for more romantic reasons - you want to make a particular person fall in love with you or you might want to win at gambling."

"But do you and John believe in it, Lucy?"

"We don't, but many white Jamaicans do and John is certainly prepared to indulge in it if it is to his advantage."

"We're being robbed of six or seven bunches of plantain every week in spite of employing extra men to watch the fields and that's why we've arranged for an Obeah man to solve the problem for us" she said.

"There could be something in it, Becky, if for no other reason than the Obeah man's knowledge of poisons is far beyond that of the European druggists. Most practitioners learned how to use herbs for cures. The practitioners knowledge of the roots and herbs brought over from Africa remained with them since most of the same plants grew in the tropical climate of Jamaica and so the customs and practices were passed down from generation to generation."

The old man took the basket from the boy and went into the field where there were rows and rows of plantain trees. He took out from his basket different sized bottles, which had some sort of liquid inside them. Then, he walked up and down the rows of plantains and tied a bottle on to some of the fruit,

Becky's Diary

at the same time muttering some sort of incantation. When he had done that he would wave his arms over the plantain and genuflect. Once that was done he would move on to another row of plantain and perform the whole ceremony over again and continue to do that until he'd done the whole field.

After that he produced, from his basket, a tiny little black wooden coffin which, with great pomp and circumstance, he placed in the branches of a big old cotton tree. Then he took a saucer from his basket and put some water in it and dropped some egg shells in the water and then put the saucer on top of the coffin in the cotton tree. The old man walked right round the field again waving his arms all over the place, still muttering and went over to John who gave the old man some money and he and the boy then left the field.

“And that little exhibition is known as “dressing the garden” and, hopefully, that will be the end of the thieving now”.Lucy said .

She continued, “Once word gets around that the Obeah man has been in the field people will believe he has put a curse on anyone entering it. They will be convinced that terrible things will happen to them if they do.”

According to John the Government made Obeah illegal and it was hoped that after emancipation, with the missionaries bringing Christianity to the freed slaves, Obeah would be wiped out – but it just continued in secret, pretty much the same as now. It's deep rooted in the black and coloured Jamaican's heritage and culture and even though you might come across a

Olga – A Daughter's Tale

family that is both Christian and well educated, the likelihood is that someone in it will be dabbling in Obeah.

It strikes me that emancipation hasn't changed much in Jamaica, her present is still very much tied to her past.

Chapter Four

Lucy's Diary



Becky and Martha spend a lot of time in Kingston doing different things. Becky likes to go to the many markets there are around the city where women and children come down from the hillside, virtually every day, sometimes with donkeys and mules but more often, carrying baskets on their heads, laden with vegetables, sugar, tobacco, coffee, cocoa,

Olga – A Daughter's Tale

pimento, annatto, honey, bananas, ackee, spices, ropes of tobacco and whatever else they have grown and set themselves up with a stall and sell their provisions to the local people. Martha likes to go to the Constant Spring Hotel where I suspect she's taken a fancy to James McTavis, the manager.

It has been good to have them both here. Martha's demeanour has changed since she has been in Jamaica probably because she is happy and has been enjoying herself. I think she is considering settling here and it is understandable, Martha has seen that she can have a standard of living and a way of life she cannot equal in London and her skills with a needle will help her find employment on the island so, who knows, it may work well for her.

Last night: News reached me that Becky and Martha were returning to "Mon Repose" after visiting friends at Mount James and involved in an accident with the horse and buggy they were travelling in. One of the horses slipped under the trace whilst going down the hill and the hind legs of the horse, nearest to the edge of a precipice, slid down the descent and pulled the other horse and buggy down the precipice also. Neither Becky, Martha or the driver had any time to get out of the buggy and they too went, about 36 feet, down the cliff.

Some people, who lived nearby, saw the accident occur and gave the alarm with the result that help was soon on the scene and the girls and driver were rescued. The two horses

Lucy's Diary

were uninjured but the buggy was completely smashed up. Becky and Martha and the driver were taken to a house nearby which was owned by a Mrs Nutall and who very kindly arranged for her buggy to bring the girls back to "Mon Repose". Although they have not sustained any life threatening injuries, they were severely battered, bruised and are in a state of shock. Our doctor will visit them this evening.

**Telegram from Lucy Sinclair, "Mon Repose", Jamaica
to
Samuel and Harriet Ross, Droop Street, Paddington,
London**

BECKY AND MARTHA INVOLVED IN BUGGY ACCIDENT. NO LIFE THREATENING INJURIES. DOCTOR ADVISES GIRLS DO NOT UNDERTAKE JOURNEY BACK TO ENGLAND UNTIL THEY ARE FEELING BETTER. PLEASE ADVISE THEATRE ROYAL, DRURY LANE, MARTHA'S RETURN DELAYED. LOVE LUCY

Chapter Five

Becky's Diary

Strange Folklore: Lucy and John have a baby boy and they've named him Bobbie. Lucy says it was the shock of hearing about our recent accident that hastened his arrival. I'm amazed that Lucy wasn't attended by her own doctor but instead by a black woman called Ernestine who has no nursing qualifications although is well known in the area for having delivered scores of babies, black, white and coloured.

"I was in good hands Becky. Ernestine gave me some herbs which helped me relax and, believe me Becky, I've been long enough in Jamaica to know that old women like her understand how and when to use herbs that grow naturally in Jamaica and I was happy to take whatever medicine she prescribed".

According to Lucy it was a straightforward birth, long and painful, but bearable and both Lucy and little Bobbie are fine. I've learnt a lot about Jamaica's history and culture in a

Olga – A Daughter's Tale

short space of time, but Rosa, one of Lucy's servants, gave me a severe shock a few days after Bobbie was born.

I was lying on the lawn in the back garden, enjoying the warmth of the sun on my body, inhaling the heady scent of the flowers and listening to the hum of the bees as they flew between the flowers when, suddenly, Rosa came running into the garden shattering the stillness of the afternoon and I noticed that she was holding something.

Whatever it was Rosa wasn't very happy about it, running with her arms outstretched and holding her head back and tilted to one side – looking like she wanted to be as far away as possible from what she was carrying. I got up and went towards her and as I did so I saw Rosa was carrying a brown paper parcel and asked her what she was holding.

“I got the plenta thing and string!”

“Ernestine give it to me and tell me bury it in the garden for the new baby tree”.

Rosa put the parcel on the ground and with the tips of her fingers gingerly pulled back the brown paper to reveal a bloodstained cloth. Then she slowly pulled back each corner of the cloth carefully as if she didn't want to disturb what was in there until finally she revealed Bobbie's three day old baby placenta and umbilical cord in all its gruesome glory.

“In the country the placenta and umbilical cord are kept for three days after a baby is born and then buried in the ground. A young tree will be planted in the same spot and the

Becky's Diary

tree would be known as the baby tree. It's our custom" Rosa told me.

"We been doing it this way in the country for hundreds of years. It bring good luck for the new baby."

Later, I told Lucy the story and asked if she known about this particular custom.

"Of course not" she replied, "what's more the thought of keeping a three day old placenta is disgusting and Bobbie will have to manage without his own baby tree.

But it's amazing," she said, "just when I thought I'd learnt everything there was to know about Jamaican customs and traditions, up pops a really bizarre one."

Chapter Six

Lucy's Diary

Constant Spring Hotel: Becky left “Mon Repose” very early this morning leaving a note asking Martha and me to meet her at the hotel in the afternoon as she had something to tell us.

Both girls had recovered from their accident surprisingly quickly but had been reluctant to rebook their passage home to England. Martha is considering staying on in Jamaica and opening a dress salon, but is hesitant about taking such a big step. She has struck up a friendship with Thomas Bonnett who owns a large department store on Harbour Street. Apparently he was very impressed when she told him she worked at the Theatre Royal in Drury Lane and he realised she had skills he could make use of. Thomas suggested she stayed on in Jamaica and work for him, until she felt the time was right

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to start up on her own, or returned to England, whichever she decided to do. Since Becky's recovery I hadn't seen too much of her either. Bobbie keeps me busy and Becky's always been self-sufficient and can amuse herself. Sometimes she takes a boat to Port Royal, the train to Montego Bay or Port Antonio.

One day I asked her if she makes these trips alone and she confessed she had met someone special. I suspect this "someone special" is the reason she has asked Martha and me to meet her here.

The Constant Spring must be the most beautifully situated Hotel in the whole of Jamaica. It's as tropical as you can get, set 600 feet above sea level and at the foot of the Blue Mountains amid sugar, banana, pineapple and coffee estates.

As you come up the front steps of the hotel there is a splendid Royal Palm tree standing in the main entrance. Inside it is cool, comfortable and elegantly furnished and outside there are spacious cool verandas where you can sit and take in the scent given off from the exotic and colourful tropical plants and shrubs that fill the hotel's gardens. The hotel serves wonderful ice cold fresh fruit drinks, like pineapple and coconut or the hotel's specialty, a drink called matrimony, made with the pulp of an orange and a custard apple which is what Martha and I are drinking while we wait for Becky.

On an immaculate green lawn to my left a group of men and women are playing croquet. On my right, elderly guests, who find the sun too hot, sit under shaded arbours and tropical foliage which provides shelter from the unrelenting sun,

Lucy's Diary

either reading or quietly talking; elsewhere some children are shrieking and laughing while playing, what sounds like, a game of hide and seek, in the hotel's specially designed children's garden.

Sitting a few tables away from me are some men and women talking and laughing loudly at the tactics that had taken place at a practice game on the polo field that morning. And in front of me beyond the gardens and shrubbery, is the tennis court from where, in the distance, I can hear a game is being played and the players calling out "well played" and "good shot" as a winning point is scored.

At last I saw Becky coming towards me. She looked beautiful. Her long blond hair tied loosely back with a yellow ribbon and wearing a simple white dress which showed off her perfect, slim figure. She was holding hands with a good looking young man and laughing at something he was saying to her, both of them completely oblivious to the glances the other guests were giving them. I knew immediately they were in love.

They sat down still holding hands and Becky introduced him to Martha and me.

"This is Henry" Becky said and then she paused before she added "and Henry has asked me to marry him."

His name was Henry Alexander Browney and he owned a meat market down by Kingston Harbour. Becky chatted away, telling us how they met and Henry sat quietly listening. There was a pounding in my head and I felt dizzy and slightly nauseous. I reached out for my drink, my matrimony,

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but knocked it over – an involuntary action or a reaction. I couldn't say. Becky was still chattering away singing Henry's praises.

“He's charming, intelligent, articulate, well read and very amusing” she told us. I agree that any man with those attributes one would consider to be a real catch for a woman. But as Becky sat next to him in her pretty white dress I could only focus on the fact that Henry was as black as coal.

It is not an exaggeration to call Jamaica a paradise. But it has an ugly past. Non whites far outnumber whites and the colour and social prejudice, which was the mainstay of slavery, remains today. Slavery has left some legacies.

The white upper classes still have all the economic control, social prestige, political power and status. They still see as inferior the middle class, who range from almost white to pure black and who may be lawyers, doctors, business men or women, teachers, clergy, and skilled tradesmen.. It is true that this class is not barred from occupying a position in any walk of life, including public service, providing they are suitably educated and qualified.

Some of them are magistrates of Petty Sessions, and some are Chief Magistrates of their Parishes. In the capacity of their professional positions they can and do associate with white people on equal terms. But that is where the association stops. In their private social life white Jamaican, with a few minor exceptions, refuse to mix with educated and wealthy coloureds or blacks.

Lucy's Diary

It came as a surprise to me that these middle classes don't want or expect to be invited into white Jamaican circles. Because of indoctrination during slavery, the coloureds believed they were inferior to white people but superior to the blacks and in turn the blacks believed they were inferior to both groups.

But what has changed significantly with the middle classes is the tendency to be very obsessed with skin colour and what they consider to be good European-type features, like the shape of a nose and hair. It seems that with emancipation the question of colour seems to have become more, rather than less, important as a sign of status.

A marriage between a coloured man and white woman would be superficially acceptable if he were very rich and influential, which in itself would be a very rare occurrence, but would also be considered damaging to the purity of the white race. A marriage between a white man and coloured woman would be tolerated. I saw this advertisement recently in the Daily Gleaner.

SCOTTISH MAN, 28, SEEKS ATTRACTIVE WEALTHY COLOURED LADY
WITH A VIEW TO MARRIAGE.
PLEASE SEND PHOTOGRAPH AND DETAILS IN CONFIDENCE TO:
P O BOX 999, DAILY GLEANER, KINGSTON

It was not the first time I had seen something like this and I expect the young man will find what he's looking for since there are quite a few rich coloured Jamaican women. He will get financial security and she will get a very cool and limited

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entry into white Jamaican society being excluded from the more prestigious events that were held.

The only relationship between a white man and a black woman that I have heard of was during slavery. White men don't advertise for black woman to marry, even if they are wealthy and educated.

If Becky, a white woman, plans to go ahead with this marriage to a black man, she can expect, with a possible few exceptions, to be ostracised completely by Jamaicans whatever their colour, after all it wasn't too long ago that it was against the law for a white woman to marry or have children with a black man.

I knew that with Becky's news, Martha's dream of owning a successful dress salon would suffer. I felt sorry for her because she had been tantalisingly close to achieving what she wanted most but being Becky's sister would ensure that she too was excluded from Kingston's elite social circle.

Martha said nothing throughout the meeting, but I read her eyes and her reaction was cold fury. I don't think she looked at Henry but, as she got up to leave the table, she leaned towards Becky and whispered something in her ear.

As Martha left I realised the rest of the guests had all been watching us. Lucy and Henry were still sitting holding hands and maybe the enormity of what they were about to undertake was beginning to dawn on Becky.

I worry for Becky's future but am overwhelmed with admiration and so very proud of her. Prejudice does exist

Lucy's Diary

between Jamaicans and it is a strong person whose voice or actions make it clear that they are not part of the colour and social structure that operates here. As Henry, Becky and I prepared to leave the hotel, I asked her what Martha had whispered.

“Nothing. She was just being silly”.

That evening was a typical tropical night, still, beautiful and clear with the moon riding high in a cloudless sky. A wind slowly started to get up throughout the night and steadily increased in force until by about 2 am in the morning when it must have reached over 100 m.p.h. With it came a ferocious rainstorm and relentless thunder and lightning.

The next day the devastation was awful. Coconut trees that had stood for fifty years were torn up by the roots and thrown yards away as if they were matchsticks. Plantations, including my own, have been hit badly, but nowhere near as badly as the peasants who will have lost their homes as well as their crops. Years of work wiped out in one night. God knows what these poor people will do without money or means to restore the crops on which their livelihood entirely depends. Martha called it retribution for Becky's actions. A little dramatic, I thought.

Shortly afterwards she returned home alone to England.

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**Telegram from Samuel Ross, Droop Street, London
to
Becky Ross c/o “Mon Repose”, St Andrews, Jamaica**

MARTHA HAS TOLD US OF YOUR PLANS TO MARRY. PLEASE RECONSIDER. CANNOT AGREE WITH THIS MARRIAGE. IF YOU PROCEED YOU WILL CEASE TO BE OUR DAUGHTER AND DO NOT WISH TO SEE YOU OR SPEAK TO YOU EVER AGAIN. WE BEG YOU TO RECONSIDER.

PA

PART TWO

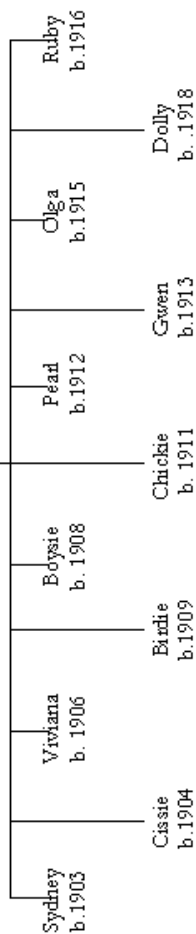
THE BROWNEYS

Browney Family Tree – circa 1930s



The Brownneys

Rebecca Mathilda Ross - m - Henry Alexander Browney
b. 1881 b. 1880



Chapter Seven

Mammie's (Becky) Diary



Holy Trinity Cathedral, North Street: The Cathedral stands in its own spacious grounds and is a very impressive piece of architecture with a great copper dome and four Minarets which can be seen from a distance. The cathedral

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was rebuilt after being totally destroyed in the 1907 earthquake and although it's very big and grand inside I get a great sense of peace in here, perhaps because the delicate shades of the colour scheme are restful to the eye.

White marble steps lead to the Main Altar and the life size figure of Our Lord hanging on the Cross. The rose windows tower above the mosaic decoration on the walls where the 14 stations of the cross hang and there are also the statues of St. Anthony, the patron saint of missing people, St Francis, the patron saint of animals and the Little Flower, St Therese. Left of the main altar is the Altar of Our Lady and on the right of it is the Altar of St Joseph with the Child Jesus in his arms.

Another year, another candle. Eight years since Ma died and six since Pa. I thought he'd go first. Who would have guessed that when I said goodbye to them that foggy afternoon on Avonmouth docks all those years ago, it would be the last time I'd see or speak to them?

I still have all the letters I sent them and which they returned, unopened. They never found it in their hearts to forgive me for marrying Henry.

“Ma, did you find it as heartbreaking as I did to remove me so completely from your life; did I really cease to exist for you?”

“Did you ever think about your grandchildren? Did you ever wonder what they looked like?”

“Why did you punish them, for my actions? You paid a high price for your prejudice, never knowing the love or

Mammie's (Becky) Diary

experiencing the joy of getting to know your wonderful 11 grandchildren.

Settling down: Coming to Jamaica for a holiday was one thing, but settling down to live here permanently was another. I had so much to adjust to in Kingston. The heat, humidity and dust were the worst things to cope with, especially when I was pregnant with Sydney, my first child; the heat drains you of all energy. And then there were the insects – the mosquito bites, oh I was bitten from top to bottom and sometimes I would get ill and develop a fever.

Henry said I had very sweet blood and that's why they would bite me. Hardly any consolation, but night time was better because we slept with a net over our beds. We threw out all our upholstered furniture and rugs because fleas were breeding in them and replaced them with polished floors and cane furniture. Ants were a terrible nuisance; they were everywhere, particularly where there was food.

Earthquakes terrified me. One of the worst happened one day when I was visiting Lucy and I had Sydney, Cassie and Vivie with me. Lucy and I were sitting on her veranda and as she got up to go and make tea, without any warning the ground began to tremble and there was a terrible noise. It was as if we were underneath a railway arch and a very long train was passing over our heads, but the noise was like a great roar and a hundred times greater than a train. The whole experience only

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lasted about 10 seconds. Vivie slept through it but Sydney and Cissie started crying because the noise was so loud.

The earthquake was felt all over the island and the fires which followed just about destroyed Kingston. People rushed out into open to places like Victoria Park and Kingston race course where they stayed for days.

Life was hard then, but manageable, especially when you're in love. Because of my marriage, I became infamous.

"You're a notorious wanton woman now" Henry would say teasing me.

People would point at me or just stand and stare and many, including people I had once considered to be friends, would cross the road to avoid walking past me. White and coloured Jamaicans would spit at me and the name calling was endless; nigger-lover was the most common

I tried to understand how Jamaica's Christian middle and upper classes, supposedly wise, intelligent and intellectual people, could treat others in such a cruel manner.

But these inconveniences, as I called them, were more than made up for by the charm, dignity and generosity of spirit I found among the black Jamaicans in spite of their circumstances. I smile inwardly when I read in the papers how the Government likes to promote the view overseas and, particularly to tourists who visit the island, that whites and blacks live side by side in perfect harmony. What rubbish, what lies! You would have to be blind not to notice that the majority of blacks are uneducated, poor and despised by both

Mammie's (Becky) Diary

the middle and white upper class groups who never bother to disguise their contempt for them. They're more concerned about their own status than those of the black masses.

The blacks live within the twin boundaries of poverty and unemployment and cannot step outside them unless they have education or money and if they can't get those they will remain where they are. Jamaica opened my eyes to the frailties of human nature. Until I came here I hadn't realised that humanity could come in varying degrees and that there could be such a dramatic class distinction in the social structure of one race of people.

Kingston is still an attractive city with wide streets and buildings painted in shades of pink, cream and blue, the gardens full of hibiscus and blood red poinsettias and rich purple splashes of gorgeous bougainvillea vines. But I prefer the old capital, Spanish Town, and even though it's now shabby, neglected and damaged by earthquakes, there still remains some splendid Spanish architecture and the ancient cathedral.

There are shops of every kind in Kingston, but never the one I want when I need it.

There is an increase in motorcars now but I find them a nuisance because their motor horns are so loud and drivers use them constantly. And they are dangerous because of the "Blow and Go" war-cry of the drivers. If two cars are at a cross roads and both blow their horns simultaneously, each one hears only the sound of his own horn and if both "go", which usually happens, there's a crash. The utter and complete disregard of

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the speed limit by car drivers is only equalled by the utter and complete disregard of the police to enforce the speed limit in the city.

The side streets of Kingston are where the blacks live. Women wearing brightly coloured turbans gossip from the windows with neighbours on the pavement below and men standing in the shade discussing something in patois, a language I never learnt. Mangy dogs wandering the streets, full of fleas and with prominent ribs sticking out worry me as well as goats with their kids which amble through the city in search of grass. But my heart breaks for the poor little donkeys with their big gentle eyes, long ears and delicate tiny feet, heavily laden down with goods strapped across their back and the owner perched on top smoking ganja and half asleep.

My marriage to Henry didn't last but it did produce 11 beautiful children. Before we married I knew of his reputation for living a reckless life. Too much drinking, gambling and he had known plenty of women. But I loved him and I thought he would change, in fact, I thought I could change him. But the habits he had before we married continued during our marriage and caused me great pain. I would have put up with his peccadilloes, but not his drinking and gambling. When he drank, he gambled, when he gambled he usually lost all his money and then we had no food. I would have to go to the priest and beg for money to feed our children. That was too much. I couldn't stand begging.

Report

**Fr Frank Butler, Holy Trinity Cathedral, Kingston,
to
His Lordship Bishop Robert Collins, London**

Your Holiness

I, too, have seen the recent articles in the English Times, and share your concerns that Obeah is flourishing unchecked in Jamaica and that it would appear that the people are choosing it as their religion rather than Christianity.

It is an interesting view that The Times puts forward, that “Obeah is a spiritual disorder” but I tend to disagree and think that it is a “psychological disorder” as it seems to me to be based on suggestion. Startling effects can be produced by suggestion and drastic changes in personality. Two persons quarrel over some difference they might have. One throws out the suggestion that he is going to Obeah the other and, whether consciously or subconsciously, the victim accepts the evil threat

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planted into his mind. Obeah's power lies in an Obeah man or woman working on the fears of people who are fundamentally superstitious to start with.

Most Jamaicans are Christian and are certainly aware that Obeah goes against the teachings of the Catholic Church; yet, you couldn't miss seeing how important religion is to the people simply because of all the many churches and chapels of different denominations there are. Baptists, Methodists, Congregationalists and Presbyterians, a few Anglican as well as the Catholic Church.

In Jamaica it is believed by most that when a man dies, his body goes to the ground and his soul goes to God, but his spirit, is known as a duppy and stays for a while or even permanently. There are good duppies and bad ones, but all are feared because, apparently, one doesn't know how they're going to behave. They are deemed to be the instrument of the Obeah man or woman and do revengeful and malicious things.

Just about everywhere on this island any accident, misfortune, illness or death is attributed to the malign influence of the spirits of the dead either initiated by the duppy's own wicked purpose or carried out through envy, or else by someone bent on revenge towards a perceived enemy of the sufferer. Here superstitious rites and practices are observed with regard to every phase of life from birth to death.

Is Obeah a sort of religion with Jamaicans? Instead of offering a prayer to heaven, a man will give three pounds to an Obeah man and then pray to heaven that the Obeah man is

Report by Father Frank Butler

successful in what has been asked of him. The man says that Heaven keeps him waiting. The Obeah man does not because he settles matters satisfactorily and quickly.

Every parish in this island has its corners where the art of Obeah is practised and some localities have a particular reputation for it. An Obeah man's influence is strong because the people believe that he cannot not be harmed by the law or any white person.

It seems to me that people of every calling in life, including well educated men and women, white, coloured or black depend upon it in some shape or form and there are certain people who openly condemn Obeah and yet, to my astonishment, I find them rushing at the first opportunity to consult with an Obeah man to fix something or other.

I realise that my report may sound pessimistic, but I am optimistic that the continued teaching of religious instruction and an essential understanding of the psychology of the people, is the answer to eradicating the belief in and practice of Obeah.

Fr. Frank Butler

Chapter Eight

Olga's Diary



*To my dear sister, Olga
So that you too can keep up with
the family tradition
Your loving sister always
Vivie*

Isn't this beautiful? A lovely rich green leather 5-year diary that must have cost Vivie a fortune. I love the smell of the leather which is so soft touch to touch and it has the tiniest key to lock it. I'll tie the key on some yellow ribbon and wear it round my neck so I don't lose it. It is my most favourite possession and I shall take it with me everywhere I go.

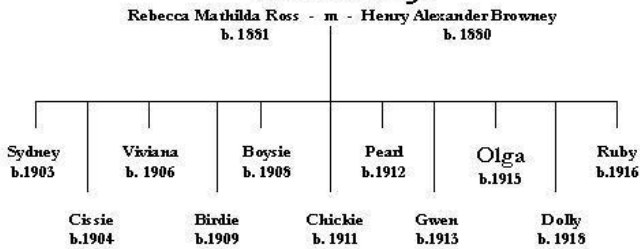
I haven't kept a diary before so I'm not sure what to

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write. Mammie and Aunt Lucy both like to write and they say, write from your heart, talk to your diary as if it’s your best friend, so here goes.



The Browneys



Dear Diary

My First Entry: *Jamaicans love big families and the Browneys are no exception. There are thirteen of us including Mammie and Pops. Now only my mother, Mammie, my brother Sydney, me and my sisters Ruby, Dolly and Pearl live in Mission House.*

That’s what our house is called and it’s in the same grounds as the Wesleyan Church. It’s quite grand, imposing and very big. At the front of the house there’s a huge old cotton tree which always looks to me as if it is standing guard over us. But the tree does more than that, it keeps the house cool and dry protecting us

Olga's Diary

from the heat and humidity in the summer. The house is red bricked and square, with green shutters at all the windows, which are kept open all the time, except when a hurricane is due.

Upstairs there are three very large bedrooms, one smaller one and a drawing room. I share one of the bedrooms with my sister, Ruby. Ruby is the most studious and brightest of the younger sisters and loves reading and writing. In secret she writes short stories which she reads to me when we are in bed. I feel very honoured because Ruby doesn't read her stories to anyone else in the family, just me. Quite often they're romances where the heroine is a simple country girl who falls in love with the son of a rich landowner and he loves her but his father forbids him to have anything to do with her because she's not good enough for him, so they don't see each other any more. But the son can't bear it and they run off together, get married and live happily every after. That's why I like Ruby's stories, they always have a happy ending.

My two other sisters, Dolly and Pearl, share another bedroom. Dolly and Pearl couldn't be more different. Pearl is quiet and thoughtful and very sweet, so is Dolly, but she is a younger version of my older sister, Vivie, lively and outspoken.

Sometimes I think Dolly is jealous of me. She says I'm Mammie's favourite. Maybe. Then there's my older brother, Sydney. Sydney is married but he and his

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wife, Janetha, have been separated for years and he lives with us now.

Everyone says the best thing about our house is the upstairs verandas at the front and back because from the front you can see the Caribbean Sea and from the back you can see the Blue Mountains.

Downstairs there is another drawing room, three more bedrooms, a dining room, the kitchen, a pantry and a storeroom. Outside a veranda made from cedar wood surrounds the entire ground floor of the house and out the back is a yard with a big cooking range under a lean to, a bath house, a water closet and, of course, our lovely garden.

I have another brother, Boysie, whom I adore because he is always laughing and is so much fun to be with. He's happily married to Minah and even though he has his own family he still finds time to visit us. We all go to Boysie with our problems, never Sydney. I like Minah, she's nice, but I must admit some of the family don't like her because she's Jewish. She's very pretty with long black straight hair and is quite dark skinned. They have four children and have a very nice house nearby in Duke Street and we're always in and out of each other's homes.

One of my older sisters, Birdie, is in London at the moment studying dancing at Madame Verschuka's School of Dance. This is her second trip to London and Vivie's been as well and I'm hoping to go soon too.

Olga's Diary

Mammie has a sister, Martha, who lives in Paddington and whenever any of the family goes to England, we stay with Aunt Martha. Birdie says she's an old trout and doesn't like her.

I have another older sister, Cissie, who is married to Dyke and they too have four children. They have a coffee plantation in Montego Bay and have been married for about five years. Dyke is lovely. Mammie calls him a gentle giant because he towers over everyone including Sydney. We don't see much of them at all really, except at family gatherings at Christmas time, or when there's an occasion, like a wedding or a funeral, or a family crisis.

My Pops doesn't live with us now, so Sydney is head of the house and supports the family financially. At school I was always top of my class in arithmetic, and when I left school Sydney told Mammie he wanted me to work for him in the shop and keep the books in order. I didn't want the job; what I wanted to do was go to England but Mammie asked me to take the job, so I did.

Sydney says Mission House is far too big to maintain and now there are not so many people living here we should move to a smaller house. Mammie says he's right but it's difficult for her to make the move. Too many memories she says, good ones and some bad, so for now we're staying put.

We have two servants, our maid Cassie who's nearly the same age as me and I like a lot, and cook

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who gives me the creeps. No one calls her by her name, I don't even know what it is - we just call her cook. One day Sydney decided that Mammie needed help so off he went to find someone and came back with her. But she's a crazy woman. She believes in Obeah and comes to work some mornings and tells me about great big peacocks that come to her front door and talk to her. Mammie says to ignore her and not upset her because she's the best cook we've ever had.

When we were little, Mammie used to take in lodgers and we still have one, Mr Delgado who has one of the rooms downstairs. He is a salesman, from the Cockpit Country and a direct descendent of the Maroons, who, by the way, hate the British. Mr Delgado loves to tell stories, and always the same one, how years ago the Maroons defeated the British when they tried to recapture the slaves that the Spanish set free after the British had taken Jamaica from Spain. The slaves headed up the mountains and forests into the remote Cockpit Country area of Jamaica and set up communities there.

The British soldiers tried to re-capture them several times but the Maroons, led by a woman called Nanny, outsmarted them. Eventually a truce was called and the Maroons won the right to virtually govern themselves. And every year, Mr Delgado tells us how they celebrate the fact that they were the first black

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people in the West Indies to gain their freedom nearly 100 years before Emancipation.

Miss Wedderburn, who was my history teacher when I was at Alpha School, was very impressed the day I told the whole class the history of the Maroons – I didn't tell her I'd heard the story so many times I could repeat it in my sleep and, no doubt, I'll hear it again. Another lodger was a salesman called Victor Condell, a coloured Jamaican who came from Canada He used to sell tractors and other kinds of farm machinery.

Well, Victor Condell lived with us for over a year and one day, out of the blue, he said he was returning to Canada at the end of the month. My sister, Chickie, was heart broken and cried for days. Eventually she stopped crying long enough to tell us that she and Victor had been courting and she'd fallen in love with him. It came as a big shock to me, I can tell you, I never suspected anything.

To stop Chickie crying cook took her to see Annie Harvey, an Obeah woman, to get a love potion to secretly give to Victor to make him stay with her. Annie called it "come to me sauce" and it was in a little blue bottle which Chickie had to mix into Victor's food, and then wait for the potion to work. Once it works, Annie told Chickie, you can then give Victor another potion called "stay at home sauce" and that keeps him from looking at other women.

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Unfortunately, the second potion wasn't needed because the first one didn't work. Victor left. So cook, who has a big collection of voodoo dolls, then asked Chickie if she'd like to choose one and she could stick pins in it so Victor would get sick, but Chickie said no.

One day, long after Victor Condell had left, I heard screams coming from Chickie's bedroom. Mammie told me Chickie was fine, not to worry and to stay right away from her room. But curiosity always got the better of me, so I went up to peek through the keyhole of her bedroom door. Before I could see anything, Sydney had come up behind me, grabbed me by the hair and dragged me to my bedroom and gave me a good whipping. "That's for not doing what you were told" he said. Two days later Pearl, Ruby, Dolly and me were shown Maurice and Mammie told us that Chickie had a little baby boy.

"A gift from God" she said.

Chapter Nine

Dear Diary

Viviana: She's my oldest sister but everyone calls her Vivie. Vivie's my heroine because she is always prepared to speak up, usually against Sydney, for the "tots" which is the pet name the family use when they're talking about Ruby, Dolly, Pearl and me.

At one time we had a lodger called Alfred Moncrieff, a coloured man from Clarendon. I didn't like Mr Moncrieff one little bit and one day he told me to collect his dirty laundry from his room and give it to Cassie, our maid, to wash. Well, I turned my back on him, tossed my head in the air and at the same time flicked the back of my skirt in a haughty manner (I saw Jean Harlow do this once in a film) and told him I wasn't a servant.

That night, when Ruby and I were in bed asleep, Sydney came into our bedroom and dragged me out of bed and gave me a whipping. Mr Moncrieff had told him

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I had lifted my skirt right up and shown him my knickers. It was a lie.

When Vivie heard what had happened she tore into Sydney something terrible. She was fearless and told him that there was something unnatural about a brother giving his sister a whipping on the bottom and that he should be ashamed of himself.

“You’re too free with your hands on the tots” she told Sydney.

“How could you believe that nasty little man with his dirty little mind and not even ask Olga her side of the story before you dragged her out of bed in the middle of the night”.

She called him cruel, a bully and said “you’re just as bad as Moncrieff”.

I can tell you Sydney’s not used to being spoken to like that. As a matter of fact the whole family was very angry about what Sydney did to me but he’s taken over the role of head of the family now and that’s that. I don’t know whether Mammie ever said anything to Sydney about the whipping he gave me, but the next day she told Moncrieff to get out.

Freddie Howell: *Vivie is going out with Freddie Howell even though she’s still married to Carlton Puyatt. Freddie is a very rich white man who, by the way, is also married and has two children. Vivie wants*

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a divorce from Carlton because she is in love with Freddie who owns a gambling club on Harbour Street. Freddie's partner is Roy Mackenzie who is also white and comes from a very rich prominent, family who own three plantations, one of which is near Aunt Lucy's. Roy's really nice looking, a bit of a rogue but the ladies love him. I like him quite a lot myself but he doesn't even know I exist. Boysie says one day Roy will be even richer than his father because he never misses an opportunity to make money and no matter how much money he earns, it's never enough.

Gambling is very popular in Kingston, particularly the Chinese numbers game, peaka pow although it's illegal, but, as with everything else that's illegal in Jamaica, everyone does it in secret.

Every now and again the Gleaner newspaper and the Church elders get all hot and bothered about the gambling that goes on and Freddie's club always comes in for a lot of attention.

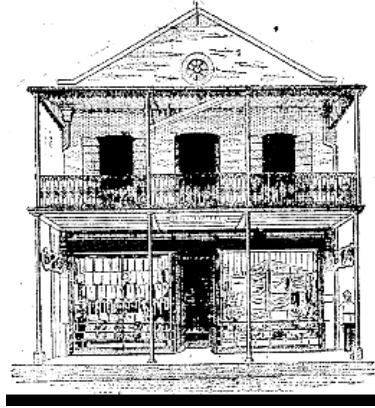
The Church elders call it a den of inequity and Freddie thought the description amusing so that's what he named his club.

The elders wanted the police to close it down, but Freddie has friends in high places and the police tip him off when they're going to raid the club. Then he closes it down for a while and re-opens three or four weeks later.

Every Saturday night Vivie cooks a special meal for the gamblers, something like chicken with rice and

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peas or cod fish and ackee and I often go there during the day to help her with the cooking.



The Den of Inequity

Sometimes Freddie lets me stay on in the evening helping in the cloakroom. Freddie says I'm never to tell anyone who I see coming into the club otherwise I won't be allowed to help any more. I never realised how popular Freddie's club was with so many well known men and women from Kingston and you'd be amazed how much private entertaining is done in the upstairs rooms by members of the government, famous actors and a lot of Jamaica's white and coloured high society.

Sydney: *Sydney was Mammie's first child. As soon as he was born the gossip started up again about Mammie because, would you believe it, by a fluke of nature, he was more white than coloured. That set*

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tongues wagging about Mammie even more. But she didn't care what people were saying. She loved her baby and she loved Pops and went on to have ten more children, all coloured, except Pearl who, like Sydney was more white than coloured.

From an early age Sydney was always determined to be successful and at 14 he started a bicycle repair business from our back yard. He attached a wooden cart to the back of his bicycle and cycled around Kingston asking people if they had any old bicycles they didn't want or were too battered to repair. Sydney did so well he had to hire someone to help him rebuild them and it wasn't long before he bought his first shop and gave people the chance to buy a new bicycle by spreading the payments over a number of weeks.

To keep up with the demand for bicycles Sydney regularly goes to England now. At the same time he needed a partner in the business, someone he could trust, so he asked Boysie to become his partner and, of course, he agreed. (I cut this advertisement out the paper. Good eh?)



Mammie taught us all to follow her example of being proud, polite, to act with dignity and not do

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anything that we would be ashamed of. Her favourite phrase is "civility costs nothing". Sydney says following Mammie's example is the reason he is a successful businessman and people respect him.

Vivie says it's because he's more white than coloured. Unfortunately for Vivie she was born more coloured than white. I say unfortunately because Vivie desperately wants to be white and although she loves Mammie, has always been angry with her for marrying a black man.

Sometimes I think she is more colour prejudice than anyone else I know and I'm not sure how our lives would have been better if Mammie had married a white man. But Vivie says we're all prejudice because all our friends are either white or coloured.

"How many black people are our neighbours or friends or we even know"?

"How many black pupils went to Alpha Academy"?

Of course, none of us have any black friends and black pupils go to other schools, not Alpha – the only black people I know are our servants, and of course, Pops.

But we know lots of Chinese people. There's a Chinese shopkeeper next door and, as a matter of fact, nearly all the shopkeepers are Chinese.

"Well, they're not black" says Vivie always determined to have the last word.

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Sydney is very protective of Mammie. He says he saw for himself when he was a small boy how unkindly she was treated because of her marriage to Pops. I can never remember a time when Pops lived with us, and for a long time when I was growing up I thought Sydney was my father. He always told us what to do and whipped us when he thought we were doing something wrong. We used to ask why Mammie didn't stop him and I think it's because she was scared Sydney would leave and there would be no money coming in. My older sisters say Pops would never have beaten any of us no matter how naughty we were.

Gwennie: *The family don't see very much of Gwennie because she doesn't live at Mission House any more.*

She has a "gentleman friend", Keith Rousseau. He's not a nice man and no one in the family likes him much because he beats Gwennie and recently knocked out three of her front teeth and gave her a black eye. The police had to be called and he was charged with causing Gwennie actual bodily harm. He pleaded guilty and told the Judge in Court that Gwennie had provoked him because she was flirting with his best friend in front of him in the "Nags Head" where she works as a barmaid and he had too much to drink and couldn't help himself he told the Judge.

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The Judge said if Mr Rousseau compensated Gwennie £15 that would be taken into consideration when making a judgement. KR was fined 5/-. We thought that it was disgusting that he was fined so little for doing so much damage to Gwennie.

But she forgave him and now they're back together again. Unfortunately, the incident was reported in the Daily Gleaner and, no doubt people will gossip about the Brownays again.

Poor Gwennie, she's still minus three front teeth and Sydney says he bet Keith Rousseau got his £15 back from her.

Pops: *My Pops lives in one roomed shack behind the meat market now that he doesn't live with us any more. Mammie threw him out because of his womanising ways and drinking.*

He has a meat stall in the Victoria Market down on the harbour side and every Saturday morning, regular as clockwork, I have to go down there and collect the meat for the weekend.

We always have a little talk before he hands over our meat. You see, that's Pop's way of contributing to the family. He always asks after Mammie. I feel sorry for him, he's all alone and I think he still loves Mammie.

My brothers and sister don't often see him. I think it's because he's black. To be honest, I don't like

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being seen with him really either, but he is my Pops and I do it because Mammie asks me to.

In spite of his drinking, Pops is a proud and dignified, but lonely man who collects his memories in a big thick scrapbook, things that have a special meaning, like the letters Mammie wrote to him before they were married. He says when he reads them they remind him of how much they were in love and how they thought they could break down the colour prejudice barriers that there were because a black man and a white woman "had the temerity" to marry.

"That was what people said" he'd tell me.

Pops likes to mimic the posh British accent, "Mammie and I had the temerity to marry, Olga, isn't it simply awful, my dear". He can be very funny sometimes.

Pops has a big stamp collection as well and, do you know, I have no idea where he gets those stamps from because the only people I know who live abroad are my sister, Birdie and Aunt Martha and I know Birdie doesn't write to him and Aunt Martha and Pops don't even speak to each other let alone write, they hate each other so. Pops knows I want to go to England for six months so I can study at the same dance school as Birdie and Mammie will only agree to my going if I stay with Aunt Martha.

It was my Pops who first called Aunt Martha the "White Witch of Paddington" hinting that she was like

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Annie Palmer, a well known, but evil woman, from Jamaica's past.

Annie Palmer was known as the "White Witch of Rose Hall" and married John Palmer who owned a Great House, called Rose Hall, which had been built at great expense on a hillside overlooking their vast plantation and the Caribbean.

Annie Palmer practised Obeah, smoked ganja, drank heavily and was often seen dancing naked in the moonlight. She also tortured her slaves, murdered three previous husbands - poisoning one, stabbing another and then, if that wasn't enough, poured boiling oil into his ears, and she strangled the third husband. Eventually one of her slaves murdered her in her bed.

I didn't think there was that much similarity between Aunt Martha and Annie Palmer, except maybe their height, Annie Palmer was 4' 11" and Aunt Martha's not much more, but Pops said if I was ever unlucky enough to get to know Aunt Martha better I'd be able to work out for myself the similarities between them.

"Don't trust her, particularly if she's being nice, because she's bound to be plotting something" he once told me.

On the front cover of Pops scrapbook, around the edge are photographs of all of us at various stages in our lives, usually to do with a religious occasion.

There's one of Birdie being confirmed, Chickie cradling her son, Maurice, after he had been baptised,

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and a separate one of Dolly, Ruby, Pearl and me, after we'd made our First Holy Communion wearing our long white dresses with wreaths in our hair, and a beautiful wedding photograph of Boysie and Minah and all the family outside the Holy Trinity Cathedral. But in pride of place, right in the middle of us all is a cutting from the London Evening News.

Pops' hero is Marcus Garvey. He gets his cuttings from the supply of old newspapers he keeps to wrap the meat in that he sells.

Extract from Marcus Garvey's Speech to an audience at The Royal Albert Hall, London, 1928

"...you can enslave as you did for 300 years the bodies of men, you can shackle the hands of men, you can shackle the feet of men, you can imprison the bodies of men, but you cannot shackle or imprison the minds of men. No race has the last word on culture and on civilisation. You do not know what the black man is capable of; you do not know what he is thinking and therefore you do not know what the oppressed and suppressed Negro, by virtue of his condition and circumstance, may give to the world as a surprise"

We all know Marcus Garvey. He's a bit of a troublemaker. Mad as a hatter going round preaching and stirring up trouble. The first time I heard his name was a few years ago and I'd gone down to the market to pick up our meat. Wherever I looked on the docks there were hundreds of red, black and green flags tied to everything and anything, all waving in the wind. Pops told me that all the decoration and bunting was for a "glorious man" The Hon. Marcus Garvey, D.C.L. who was arriving from the United States. When I asked him

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what D.C.L. stood for he said "Distinguished Coloured Leader".

Garvey is Jamaican and from a big family too. His parents were poor and as a child he knew about hunger and colour prejudice and some people say that's why Garvey hates white people. But he says what he hates is the system in Jamaica which keeps the poor man down and the poor are mostly black people.

Pops says black people lack self-esteem and Garvey wants them to have sense of pride in their race, colour and country so Garvey encourages them to "study hard and go into business and unite and help each other and become independent of white Jamaican society who have created two Jamaica's, one white or near white and wealthy and the other black and poor".

Sydney hates Garvey and says he's a troublemaker, a swindler, a crook only wanting to get rich quickly and Vivie says he practises Obeah.

Well, honestly, doesn't everybody?

Garvey holds political gatherings in Edelweiss Park where he puts on entertainment, shows, dance contests, musical presentations, plays and boxing for the benefit of the black people in Kingston. Ruby, Dolly, Pearl and I were forbidden to go to his rallies, but in true Jamaican tradition, we went in secret.

Chapter Ten

Dear Diary

Big Scandal: My very favourite nun, Sister Marie-Thérèse, told me one day when I was at Alpha Academy, that Jamaica has the largest number of churches per square mile in the entire world. Many are beautiful, old, stone buildings going back to the 1800s. Religion has always been important to Jamaicans and especially to my family. Mammie says we are high Catholics, which I think makes us sound special, but to be honest, I don't know what the difference is between a high Catholic and a low one. It's one of those questions I don't like to ask in case people think I'm stupid.

We always put on our best Sunday clothes when we go to mass. Mammie says how we dress is important because clothes say a lot about you. Ragged clothes are a sign of poverty but even the poorest person wouldn't dream of going to church without putting their best clothes on, clean shoes and a proper hat, and not a

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scarf, because that doesn't cover your head properly. Mammie is very particular about us all looking clean and smart and when we were at school she would keep us away rather than send any of us off without clean, ironed school uniforms. In Jamaica being well dressed is a sign of your social status and it's important to your sense of self respect and self worth, Mammie says.

Going to church is a social occasion and after mass, standing around outside the Church, you can catch up on all the gossip. Unfortunately, quite a lot of it has been about the Browneys lately so we haven't hung around for too long.

Whit Sunday: *My sisters Dolly, Ruby, Pearl and I had decided to go to an early mass so that afterwards we could catch a boat to Port Royal and spend the day on the beach and swim and have a picnic. We had just returned to our pew after receiving Holy Communion when I was aware of a click-clacking sound coming from behind me and turned round to see what it was. It was coming from Vivie and her silver dance shoes. I couldn't believe my eyes. There she was, still wearing the tight, low cut red dress she had bought to go to Freddie Howell's birthday party the previous night. On her head was a small scarf which didn't quite cover her newly bleached blonde hair.*

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"Is it a wig" Dolly whispered to me?

Vivie must have been aware of the stir she was causing in the Church, but, her faith is as important to her as it is to the rest of us and she knew that even if the congregation and God judged her to be a sinner, God, at least, would forgive her.

All eyes were on her and at the same time varying commotions erupted around the Church. There were plenty of gasps from onlookers as she click clacked down the aisle towards the altar rail. Some people were whispering, quite a few were muttering loudly and some distinct words could be heard..... "common, trash, looks like a whore"..... and some whose mouths were opened in astonishment.

Vivie and her shoes click clacked their way down the aisle heading straight for the altar rail. She knelt down and waited to receive Communion from Father Butler. He had seen Vivie approaching and was aware of the stir she was causing in the Church.

Father Butler told Mammie later that before he reached Vivie he had decided what he was going to do. And he did it. In front of hundreds of people he walked straight past her without giving her Holy Communion.

It was a slight of monumental proportions, and by now you could have heard a pin drop because there was total silence in the cathedral and for what seemed like forever Vivie remained on her own kneeling at the altar rail.

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Then she stood up and turned to face the congregation. She looked around at the faces in front of her, lifted her hand and slowly removed the scarf. That one defiant gesture, or it may have been the sight of the blonde hair, caused the entire congregation to act together and they gasped.

Vivie then calmly walked out of the Church.

Father Frank Butler was a newly ordained priest when he came to Kingston from Ireland shortly after the Great Exhibition in 1891 which, apparently, was Jamaica's way of telling the rest of the world what a lot of opportunities there were here.

Although Father Butler's very old now, he's still a big man and fat. He says he's not fat but "well nourished" and he's got white hair and a very weather beaten complexion from too much sun.

He's taken part in most of the important religious occasions to do with the Brouneys - when we were baptised, our first Holy Communion, our confirmation and our confessions. He probably knows more about all of us than either Mammie or Sydney.

I was never very happy when he heard my confession on a Friday evening because he and Sydney are good friends and every Sunday night Father Butler comes to Mission House to see Sydney and the pair of them would sit for hours talking and smoking smelly cigars in the upstairs drawing room every Sunday night.

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For a long time I was frightened that Father Butler would tell Sydney about the sins I'd confessed to and I'd get a whipping, but Mammie told me that a priest has to take an oath of silence and can never repeat anything to anyone else that he hears in the confessional box even if he was asked to by a judge in a court of law.

In the beginning Father Butler called on us for donations, either money or clothes which we had grown out of and he'd give to the St Vincent de Paul Society which helps the poor people of Kingston.

Priests are important to Jamaican families because if a family has no money they will always go to their priest for help and they will always receive a few pence for food and clothes. But things have to be really awful if you have to go to the priest and ask for money.

Anyway, this Sunday, Mammie didn't attend mass that particular morning and, Sydney was away up country on business, so missed the incident in Church, but Father Butler told Mammie later what had happened and said he was concerned about Vivie's "moral welfare". Having an affair with a married man and committing adultery are mortal sins and were forbidden by the Catholic Church and if Vivie continued on her wayward journey to damnation, he would have to have her excommunicated from the Church. Most Catholics I know would say that being put in front of a firing squad was better than being excommunicated from the Church.

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Mammie tried to explain that Vivie was going to ask Carlton for a divorce because she wanted to marry Freddie.

“You know as well as I do Becky, the Catholic Church does not recognise divorce and will never allow Vivie to marry Freddie”.

But worse was to come: *Carlton heard about what happened that Sunday in Church and there was a terrible row between Vivie and Carlton. She told Carlton she was leaving him. He begged her not to go and when she said it was all over between them and she didn't love him any more, he started to cry and pleaded with her to give him another chance. Vivie told him that she was taking their children and going to live with Freddie. She said he suddenly stopped crying then and there was silence, except for the sound of a clock ticking somewhere in the house.*

Carlton didn't say anything for ages but just kept looking at her. Then he shrugged his shoulders a little, as if to say, “ok, you win” and, without a word, left the house. Vivie said she thought he was going to find Freddie to punch him on the nose but she wasn't worried about Freddie because he could take care of himself.

Carlton and Vivie had a whirlwind romance. Within weeks of meeting they went off to Montego Bay

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and got married without telling any of the family, except for Cissie and Dyke who were their witnesses at the wedding. Sydney said if Vivie hadn't been so desperate to marry a white man she'd have saved both families a lot of heartache and realised that charm, good looks and receiving a small allowance from his parents was not enough to support a family.

Sometime during the afternoon on the day following the big row, Carlton's body was found by some people out walking in a valley in the Blue Mountains. It appears his car went over a precipice just past the army post at Newcastle and his body flung from the car. He'd been dead for hours and to this day no one ever really knew if it was suicide or an accident.

I was grateful that I was asked to look after the children in the family so Chickie, Boysie and Cissie could go to the funeral. Carlton's coffin was left open for mourners to pay their last respects and I didn't want my last sight of Carlton to be lying dead in a coffin. I wanted to remember him how I always saw him – full of life and laughing.

If I had been married to Carlton I wouldn't have minded Carlton being a poor white man because he had other qualities. Tall, fair-haired, very good looking, funny, nice to talk to, always joking. Women were very attracted to him and I think it's easy to see why Vivie fell in love with him. They met when he was playing tennis at the Myrtle Bank Hotel and Vivie said the first thing

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she noticed about him was that his legs were better than hers. He was always invited to the best clubs, parties and social events in Kingston and he may not have had much money of his own but people liked him, because he was nice, and he was friends with all sorts of people. What made him different from other white Jamaicans was that he wasn't prejudice towards coloured or black people in the slightest.

The day of Carlton's funeral was unusually hot for that time of the year and there was a cloudless sky and not a breath of wind in the air. A black choir sang hymns at his funeral and Dolly told me later that this was Carlton's "second family".

As a baby Carlton had a black nurse whose name was Ambrosine Williams and he spent much of his childhood with her and her thirteen children rather than his own white family. When his coffin was being lowered into the ground Ambrosine Williams bent down and picked up a handful of earth and threw it at Vivie. She told Vivie that she was going to set a duppy on her for causing Carlton's death and that she would be cursed until the day she died.

That night the wind began to pick up and get stronger and continued until well into the evening. Then, according to a report in the paper "the lightening started building up in strength until it lit up the whole sky, dancing in fantastic forms in the night sky, whilst the thunder that followed the lightening seemed to shake the

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earth as if to say the end of the world is near and then finally in the early hours of the next morning the rain came down.”

Chapter Eleven

Mammie's (Becky) Diary

Thousands of blacks cannot find work so they have no money to buy food or clothes for their families. Smith's Village is one of the worst areas in the city covered with shacks where conditions of squalor are beyond imagination and made worse by appalling overcrowding.

It makes me furious when I read the Gleaner and they say the reports are exaggerated. I have seen for myself, little children and old men, stark born naked, on the streets begging for money and food. Soup kitchens are springing up over the city to feed these poor people. Is this an exaggeration? Of course, the paper is controlled by the upper white ruling classes – these Jamaicans are a disgrace. While the Catholic Church is doing what it can, the Protestant Church seems to be trying to conceal the gravity of the painful conditions under which thousands of people are living. Children are running around naked because they have no clothes to go to school and those

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that do have clothes, have no food at home, nothing in their little stomachs. When they come home from school it is to a hungry and crying mother, brothers and sisters and a father almost demented because he cannot feed his children. Thank goodness for Bustamante. His constant flow of letters to the Gleaner is making people aware of the problems but I fear for this island's future.

Letter from Alexander Bustamante, Kingston to The Editor, Daily Gleaner, Kingston

.....shame, and because some have refused to do their duty and they want to minimise that which does not need to be magnified – unemployment.

The mongoose and the rats in certain parts of the island are being disturbed at nights, because the cane-fields, their resting places, have now become the sleeping place of many workers. Many of them rush out at nights so nude they dare not come out in the days, just to buy little necessities to return to their shelter – the canefields.

I have been to St Ann, and the poverty there is something I hate to describe. Neither minister nor politician should try to prevent it being exposed. Visit Newton, Kinowl, Mullings Bush Districts in St Elizabeth; Marlie Hill and Plowden and see the poverty – the misery. But why go to such places when we have them next door to us; go to Trench Pen, Smith's Village, Ackee Walk and Rose Town and the apostolic Lanes, etc.

Too late it is for anyone through any peculiar reasons to try and cover up the truth of the lamentable conditions. Things were bad a few years gone by; they were no better last year, this year they are getting worse, there must be better days ahead.

I am etc.

Alexander Bustamante

Mammie's (Becky) Diary

Vivie: She is ill and has become withdrawn and quiet., she doesn't sleep at night and has been vomiting so violently no food stays in her stomach. Sydney says it's all in her mind, after all, the doctor's examined Vivie twice and can find nothing wrong with her, but, whether it's real or imaginary there's no mistaking that she is wasting away. She and her daughters are spending their last few days in Jamaica with us, here at Mission House, before they sail to America to live with Freddie Howell. Roy Mackenzie's family now own the Den of Inequity.

Vivie hates Jamaica and talks as if she is never coming back. America sounds an exciting country with lots of opportunities to make money, but I'm not sure I would want to live there and I'm surprised Vivie does really. I've read that in the some parts of America they are very prejudice towards coloured and black people.

Chapter Twelve

Dear Diary

“Mon Repose”: *Every Saturday Mammie and I come to Aunt Lucy’s. Aunt Lucy took over running the plantation when Uncle John died because Bobbie and Adam, their sons were already living in America and didn’t want to come back to Jamaica. They want Aunt Lucy to sell up and join them, but she won’t. She says her heart belongs to Jamaica and anyway she wants to be buried at “Mon Repose” with Uncle John.*

My Aunt Lucy smokes ganja in a white long handled pipe. She’s been smoking it for years and calls it her “wisdom weed” because it was supposed to have first been found on the grave of King Solomon. The law considers it a dangerous drug because they say if you smoke it you can go mad,

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so it's illegal and you can be sentenced to prison and hard labour if the police catch you with it, but that doesn't stop people from smoking it.

There was a break in at Kingston Police Station recently and someone broke the padlock of a wooden box that had eight bags of ganja in it which had been found by the police when they raided a house a few days earlier

"Did you arrange the break in" Boysie asked Aunt Lucy. She roared with laughter.

"If I'd known the ganja was there I might have done and saved myself the trouble of growing it at the back of the plantation".

The report said that all day an intensive search of vehicles was carried out. But out of the blue nearly all members of the local force were suddenly transferred to other police stations while the Superintendent carried out an investigation.

Dolly and Pearl are with us today because Aunt Lucy pays us for picking pimentos and we've brought Maurice along, Chickie's son, because small boys are very useful for a job like this.

Pimentos are a very strong spice and a pimento tree is very distinctive because the trunk of the tree is covered with a greenish grey bark which is smooth and shiny. The leaves are a dark and very glossy green and if I crush some in my hands they give out a lovely strong smell. It's easy to grow pimentos because the birds do

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all the planting of the seeds. They eat the ripe berries and then drop the seeds onto the ground and that's how nearly all Aunt Lucy's pimento trees have been planted. The field workers say that if you plant by hand the trees will not grow, but I think the workers are being very smart saying that it's hard work planting seeds; they'd rather the birds plant them.

The pimento berry is small like a black currant and grows in clusters on the tree and when there're ripe for picking they are of a glossy black colour, sweet and very spicy and peppery to taste. The berries have to be collected by young lads going up the tree with long sticks and a crook at the end. They catch the long outer branches and bend them back till they can reach the smaller ones with the pimento berries on and then they'll break off the small branches so that the grown ups, that's us, waiting below with baskets can gather up the small branches, pick the berries and put them into our baskets. You have to be very careful not to damage the berries though.

At the end of the day the baskets are all brought to the barbecues, so the berries can be dried and prepared for market, and each person's basket is weighed. Aunt Lucy enters the weight of each basket into the barbecue book and then pays us depending how much pimento is in our basket.

The barbecue is a large paved area divided into 'beds' so that recently picked pimentos are not mixed

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with previously picked ones. When enough have been thrown on to a 'bed' they are spread out and exposed to the sun, and a man with a wooden rake keeps turning them so they dry evenly. You know when the berries are thoroughly dry because if you take some in your hand and rattle them near your ear, you should hear a sharp, dry, rattling sound.

We'd all been working for a couple of hours when Dolly noticed Maurice wasn't moving. He'd climbed much higher than the other boys who were helping out.

"He's frightened, he can't go on" Dolly said.

I called out to him to come down.

"I can't move"

"Yes, you can Maurice. Aunt Lucy's made some lemonade. Come down and have a drink".

"Olga, go and get him down" Mammie said.

So up the tree I go to help him down. Poor Maurice, by the time I got to him he was so frightened he couldn't stop crying. Gently I coaxed him down the tree and the nearer we got to the ground the more his confidence returned until he's on the ground and I'm sitting having a little rest on a thick branch when, my heart leaps because in the distance I can see Boysie's best friend, Roy McKenzie, walking down the hill towards "Mon Repose".

As I go to jump on to the ground my knickers get caught on the branch, tear and leave me dangling four foot off the ground, unable to free myself, my backside

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exposed to all the young boys still up the tree, the old man raking the barbecue, my sisters and worse still, I can see Roy McKenzie getting closer and heading straight for "Mon Repose".

Dolly and Ruby were laughing themselves silly.

"Help me quickly, Roy McKenzie's coming down the hill".

In a flash Dolly was beside me on the branch and while Mammie lifted me up a few inches, Dolly unhooked my knickers and, with only seconds to spare before Roy McKenzie arrives, I made it into the house all of them still laughing at me.

Later: *Roy decided to stay and visit and after a while, with my knickers repaired, I felt composed enough to join him and the rest of the family sitting on the steps of the veranda watching the peenie wallies, little fireflies. They're about the size of a beetle and give off a brilliant light from two orbs just above their eyes and when you see millions of them fluttering among the trees on a dark night it is a spectacular sight.*

My Aunt Lucy is a great Anancy story teller.

Anancy tales are famous in Jamaica and were brought here by the slaves. Anancy is a kind of folk hero because he is a survivor. He is a spider man, clever, intelligent, quick-witted and cunning who likes to trick people for his own benefit. As a special treat, and

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to make up for my embarrassed hurt feelings earlier today, Aunt Lucy’s promised to tell us a story, so Maurice and I collected lots of peenie wallies and put them into jars, with holes in the top so air gets in, and then we put the jars in a long row in front of the stone barbecue, so they look like footlights.

Everyone sits cross-legged on the ground in front of the footlights breathing in the spicy fragrance of the pimentos in the evening breeze and Aunt Lucy sits behind the footlights and in front of the barbecue, comfortably settled in her chair, sucking on her white long handled pipe, which no doubt is full of ganja, and we all waited silently for her to start her story.

To tell an Anancy story correctly you have to use the Jamaican dialect and have lots of grand and dramatic gestures which Aunt Lucy does perfectly.

“A man plant a big field of gub-gub peas (bush peas). He got a watchman put there. This watchman can’t read. The peas grow lovely an’ bear lovely; everybody pass by, in love with the peas. Anancy himself pass an’ want to have some. He beg the watchman, but the watchman refuse to give him. He went an’ pick up an old envelope, present it to the watchman an’ say the master say to give the watchman. The watchman say, “The master know that I cannot read an’ he sen’ this thing come an’ give me?” Anancy say, “I will read it for you.” He said, “Hear what it say! The master say, ‘You mus’ tie Mr. Anancy at the fattest part of the gub-gub peas an’ when the belly full, let him

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go.' The watchman did so; when Anancy belly full, Anancy call to the watchman, an' the watchman let him go.

After Anancy gone, the master of the peas come an' ask the watchman what was the matter with the peas. The watchman tol' him. Master say he see no man, no man came to him an' he send no letter, an' if a man come to him like that, he mus' tie him in the peas but no let him away till he come. The nex' day, Anancy come back with the same letter an' say, "Master say, give you this." Anancy read the same letter, an' watchman tie Anancy in the peas. An' when Anancy belly full, him call to the watchman to let him go, but watchman refuse. Anancy call out a second time, "Come, let me go!" The watchman say, "No, you don' go!" Anancy say, 'If you don' let me go, I spit on the groun' an' you rotten!' Watchman get frighten an' untie him cos he think Anancy Obeah man.

Few minutes after that the master came; an' tol' him if he come back the nex' time, no matter **what** he say, hol' him. The nex' day, Anancy came back with the same letter an' read the same story to the man. The man tie him in the peas, an', after him belly full, he call to the man to let him go; but the man refuse, all that he say he refuse until the master arrive.

The master take Anancy an' carry him to his yard an' tie him up to a tree, take a big iron an' put it in the fire to hot. Now while the iron was heating, Anancy was crying. Lion was passing then, see Anancy tie up underneath the tree; ask him what cause him to be tied there. Anancy said to Lion from since him born he never hol' knife an' fork, an' de people wan' him now to hol' knife an' fork. Lion said to Anancy, "You too wort'less man! Me can hol' it. I will loose you and then you tie **me**

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there.” So Lion loose Anancy an’ Anancy tied Lion to the tree. So Anancy went away, now, far into the bush an’ climb upon a tree to see what taking place. When the master came out, instead of seeing Anancy he see Lion. He took out the hot iron out of the fire an’ shove it in in Lion ear. An Lion make a plunge an’ pop the rope an’ away gallop in the bush an’ stan’ up underneath the same tree where Anancy was. Anancy got frighten an’ begin to tremble an’ shake the tree, Lion then hol’ up his head an’ see Anancy. He called for Anancy to come down. Anancy shout to the people, “See de man who you lookin’ fe! See de man underneat’ de tree!” An’ Lion gallop away an’ live in the bush until now, an’ Anancy get free.”

Chapter Thirteen

Lucy's Diary

I wish Chickie would go back to Mission House for dear Maurice's sake. It would be much better for him than the shack they live in now. I know Becky often asks her to move back, but, she won't go near the place because of Sydney. He says she has brought disgrace on the family and ever since Maurice was born he's hardly spoken to her. And to cap it all her landlord has taken her to Court for not paying the rent. None of us knew anything about it until Boysie read about it in the "Gleaner" of all places.

Sydney's far too harsh with the girls. Becky says after what happened to Chickie she doesn't want history repeating itself. If that's the case then, I say, since the girls are now young women, its Becky's duty to give them some kind of sex education – telling them babies are a gift from God is crazy. Knowledge prevents accidents. Only last night I heard the McKenzie boy ask Olga to go with him into the stables.

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“Come on Olga, it'll be ok, we'll use French letters”.
And what did Olga say?

“I didn't even know you could speak French”.

No wonder he laughed so much, I must admit I couldn't help smiling myself at her innocent remark. Dear Olga, it was not a good day for her yesterday.

I asked Becky if Chickie had finally given up hearing from Victor Condell again. She said Chickie is desperate to marry Victor, because she doesn't want Maurice growing up being illegitimate.

How strange, Jamaica's not like England, where illegitimacy is frowned upon and such a lot of stigma is attached to unmarried mothers. The other day the Gleaner reported that last month there were 137 births in Kingston and 80 were illegitimate. The island has a history of illegitimacy and it wasn't that long ago when marriage was discouraged and even forbidden but I must admit it was at a time when planters could get more money for their slaves if they were sold separately, rather than as a married couple. Becky's says in today's Jamaica, marriage gives a family respectability and, of course, she's right.

Chapter Fourteen

**Letter to Vivie, Miami, USA
from
Olga, Kingston, Jamaica.**

Dearest Vivie

There's been a terrible scandal in the family. You just won't believe what happened last Saturday morning when we came down to breakfast.

"That's strange; I can't smell any burnt toast". Dolly said. You remember how cook insisted we eat burnt toast, because for some reason she thinks it's good for us. Well, there was no toast, no porridge and in fact, there was no breakfast at all.

Then Mammie came into the dining room and said cook hadn't turned up for work and she asked Pearl to go to cook's house and see if she was alright.

Pearl said "No, Mammie, I get frightened when I go near that house, it's full of voodoo stuff". Pearl's

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right. If we have a boiled egg for our breakfast, cook makes us smash the empty egg shell because she said if we don’t then witches can use them as boats and control the winds. What’s wrong with that, I wonder?

“She lives alone and maybe she’s ill or hurt, after all it’s very unusual for her not to turn up for work”. Mammie was clearly very worried about her.

But, as we all know, she doesn’t really live alone. She lives with talking peacocks, voodoo dolls, three scrawny chickens, a pet mongoose and that whopping big black cat of hers, called Lucifer, which follows her just about everywhere she goes.

Do you remember Vivie when cook first started working for us Lucifer used to follow her here and because Mammie wouldn’t allow it in the house, it used to curl up under the cotton tree out the front and wait for her to leave at the end of the day. I tried to stroke it a couple of times but it would hiss at me.

I certainly didn’t want to go to cook’s house and neither did Ruby, so Mammie said she’d go, but in the meantime Cassie was to get breakfast ready while



Lucifer

Ruby went upstairs to wake Sydney, because he hadn’t appeared either. Well, within minutes Ruby came running down the stairs and into the kitchen very excited and announced that Sydney’s bed hasn’t been slept in all night.

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Now that's quite unusual for Sydney I know, but I told Mammie that Sydney had probably been working late and fallen asleep on the couch in the office at the back of the bicycle shop.

"I expect he'll come home shortly to wash and change his clothes. After breakfast I'll go with you to cook's house, Mammie" I said.

So, just as we're finishing breakfast in walks Sydney and we all heave a sigh of relief.

He sits down and says "I have something to tell you" and without even pausing for breath he says "I'm getting married".

Mammie throws her arms around his neck and gives him a big hug; there's lots of excitement and laughter. And then he says "I'm going to live with cook until we can marry".

Well, I don't mind telling you, Vivie, there was silence, a big silence. He's not serious I thought. Never mind she's black, she's a witch for heaven's sake.

How can the head of the Browney family live with a witch? What will people think? What will Father Butler think? It's quite common for Jamaicans to just live together without being married, although respectable people are expected marry. But Sydney is still married to Janetha even though they haven't lived together for ages. The Catholic Church doesn't allow divorce so I suppose that's why they're going to live together.

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Our faces must have shown the disbelief and disappointment we all felt.

Ruby got up and quietly left the room. Dolly and I followed leaving Mammie and Sydney to talk, but the talk didn't last long or go well because Sydney came roaring out of the dining room saying he would never set foot in the house again and slammed the front door as he left. He was in a big rage Vivie. Mammie started crying and in between her sobs she asked me to contact Cissie and Dyke in Montego Bay. So, I left and sent Cissie a message.

**Telegram to Cissie and Dyke, Montego Bay
from
Olga, Kingston**

URGENT. COME QUICKLY. SYDNEY GONE OFF WITH THE COOK .

Dolly ran to Boysie to tell him what had happened. He came round straightaway and gave Mammie a big hug and told her not to worry, he would talk to Sydney and everything would be alright.

Later on, who do you think walked in, Vivie, none other than cook herself, all dressed up and wearing, I must admit, a very nice straw hat with flowers all round the brim.

"I've come for some of Sydney's possessions".

*"Why would you want Mr Sydney's things"
Mammie asked her.*

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"Because we are in love and he's living with me now". Honestly, she was so cocky I wanted to hit her.

"I've brought a suitcase with me so I'll just pop upstairs and get a few things".

"Pop upstairs" sounded funny coming from cook, it's so English and she's so witchy.

And then she said to Mammie

"He won't be giving you any more money. He will need all his money for the family I will give him".

As she turned to go upstairs, Mammie jumped up, rushed over to cook, put her hands on her shoulders and pushed her away from the stairs. Dolly, Ruby and I joined in and the four of us pushed her right out the front door and told her never to set foot in our house again.

The next day Cissie came up from Montego Bay and took charge of the kitchen. She did lots of cooking, baking bread, bulla cakes and biscuits. Oh, she was wonderful and she gave Mammie some money to stop her worrying.

Boysie and I continued to go to the shop but Sydney didn't appear for about a week and when he did he and Boysie went into the back office to have a little chat. Boysie was concerned that even though we were giving Mammie nearly all our wages now, we were still short of money.

"It's not like you can't afford it", Boysie told Sydney. But Sydney wouldn't budge. He said he was going to start his own family now and was not prepared

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to support us any more. Boysie was horrified, and what started off as a calm conversation developed into a huge quarrel with Boysie finally saying he was ending their partnership and wouldn't be coming to the shop again.

Now Sydney was coming to the shop every day but Boysie wasn't. I wasn't happy working there and wanted to leave, but, couldn't. I'm trapped here, Vivie. I hate Sydney.

All my love,

Olga

Chapter Fifteen

Dear Diary

She's put a spell on him: *Later Mammie told us why Sydney had stormed out of the house when he told us he was going to live with cook. He called Mammie a hypocrite and said it was ok for her to live with a black man and cause huge misery and pain, not only for her parents, but also her sister and children. He meant Vivie and Aunt Martha.*

Mammie replied that at least she and Pops had got married and anyway she didn't think cook was the right person for him.

Sydney was in such a rage, Mammie said she was too frightened to say anything more to him. She told us that Sydney had been right about her objections to the cook because she was black.

"I experienced such hatred from people I never dreamt could behave in such an ugly manner and I don't want any of my children to go through the treatment I

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received nor do I want Sydney's children turning on him one day because of their colour.

"We're not all prejudice like some of the others" dear Pearl told Mammie.

But Mammie's convinced that cook has put a spell on Sydney to make him fall in love with her. That's the only explanation she says.

"Why else would he choose a short, fat, ugly black woman who practises voodoo.

"I'm going to turn the tables on her".

"Olga, get Cassie. We're going to see Annie Harvey."

Annie Harvey's the woman we go to for herbal remedies sometimes when we were ill. Well, as everyone knows, she also practises Obeah and Mammie wants Annie to work Obeah on Sydney to make him come home.

But I was worried about us going there because the punishment for practising Obeah is very harsh if you are caught by the police. It can be 20 lashes and a prison sentence of six months with hard labour if you are found guilty and even if you're a woman.

I tried to talk Mammie out of it, but she was determined to go.

Annie Harvey makes quite an impression and is still a very striking woman in her white turban and red cloak. I was surprised when I saw her house, it's rather nice, with a little white fence and pretty flowers in the garden. The sort of house I'd like myself one day. Anyway, Annie took us out to a shack in the backyard.

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Inside it was dark, and it took a few minutes for my eyes to adjust before I could see properly. You couldn't see a single bit of the ceiling because there were dried herbs hanging from it everywhere.

There were wooden shelves on one side of the room with different sized coloured bottles and some were full of liquid, but others only half full. I recognised some zinc powder and ingredients for making a "medicine bath" and poultices. There was also a tin of Epsom salts sitting on one of the shelves, which I thought strange, because we have that at home.

There was another shelf with some pimento leaves and pieces of logwood bark, bird feathers, broken egg shells and some ashes. Cassie told me later she saw a chicken's foot and a lizard's tail.

Mammie explained to Annie Harvey that she wanted Sydney to return to the family. He had deserted us in favour of a bad woman who was a danger to him.

"We wanted to protect him from this evil woman who has cast a spell on him and taken him away from us" said Mammie to Annie.

Annie Harvey left the shack for a minute and when she returned she was holding a bunch of green leaves which she put into a wooden bowl and with a small piece of wood, rounded at the end; then she pounded the leaves together until they turned into a thick green paste.

Then she sprinkled some ashes into the paste and from a small blue bottle around her neck she sprinkled just two drops of a dark brown liquid into the mixture and then mixed it up again. Each time she mixed the paste she

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talked in a strange language that none of us had heard before. She covered the paste with some muslin cloth and then wrapped it in brown paper and tied it up with string and told Mammie to put it in Sydney's food and he would come home.

On the way home, Mammie said we were going to stop at the Holy Trinity Cathedral to offer prayers to Jesus to pray for Sydney's return. When I asked why after having just come from the balm yard, Mammie said she was covering all options.

When we got home Mammie said she was sure Cassie our maid would tell cook that we'd been to Annie Harvey's balm yard and worked Obeah on him.

"It won't be long before Sydney comes home, but, in the meantime, Olga, you're going to have to put the paste into Sydney's food." I knew it!

When Annie Harvey gave Mammie the paste, I thought to myself, guess who's going to have to do that little job Olga".

"I can't do it, I'll get caught" I told her.

"Choose your time, when he's out, make a nice sandwich for him, his favourite, pork with apple and ginger. Spread the paste in between the slices of meat or mix it in with the apples.

"You can do it Olga".

"Mammie, if he catches me I'll get a whipping"

"If he catches you, I'll tell him it's my fault. Please Olga, we need him".

So I agreed to do it and, lady luck was on my side.

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Sydney was expecting a shipment of bicycles to arrive from London the next day and fortunately for me the paper work was not in order, so he had to spend hours down on the docks sorting it out so by the time he got back to the shop he was ravenously hungry. I produced the sandwiches each filled with thick juicy pieces of pork, sliced apple, ginger and the paste and he just gobbled the sandwiches and, obviously, never tasted anything unusual.

Mammie was so happy when I told her. Oh I do hope it works, with all our wages going into the household pot, we have hardly anything to spend on ourselves and Sydney has a whole heap of money, tons of it, he's just being nasty by making us all suffer.

Chapter Sixteen

Dear Diary

Sydney and the Burglar: *It's the middle of the afternoon and, apart from a young woman and an old man, I'm alone in the Cathedral, the only place I know that is peaceful, quiet, and cool. Half my life's been spent in this church, going to mass, confession, benediction, the stations of the cross. Don't get me wrong, I'm not complaining, Jesus is very important to me and I come to church because I want to be close to Him, or, when I want to think, like now. I wonder just how long Sydney and cook's relationship has been going on.*

I bet you it started with the robbery that time Sydney was working late in the shop. There was a knock on the door one evening and when Sydney opened it there was a tall black man with a handkerchief around the lower half of his face. He pushed Sydney back and forced his way inside and put

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a gun to Sydney's face threatening to shoot him if he said a word. Then another man came into the house and started to ransack the place looking for money which Sydney usually kept on the premises, but he couldn't find any money and said so to the man holding the gun.

This turned the man with the gun's attention away from Sydney momentarily, so Sydney tried to grab the gun and there was a struggle when suddenly the gun went off and the robber was shot dead. The second man immediately ran from the shop and Sydney called the police who recognised the dead man as Alphonse Williams and said the other man was probably his brother Didnot.

Didnot was soon picked up by the police and, because he wasn't wearing a mask, Sydney easily identified him as the second man.

Sydney was charged with the manslaughter of Alphonse but at the end of the trial was found not guilty because the jury said it was self-defence and the law says a man is entitled to protect himself.

And that was that, thought Sydney, although to prevent any further thieving Sydney resorted to Obeah.

I bet that's where cook came in. He pinned bits of red rag and some bird feathers to the front door of the shop. If any would-be thief saw these items Sydney said it would be enough to deter them from going into the shop.

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But then strange things started happening. A fire broke out one Sunday afternoon, behind the main shop, in the workshop where bicycles are repaired. Mrs Clarkson, who lives next door, saw a small blaze in the workshop and raised the alarm. The fire brigade arrived very quickly, put out the blaze so not too much damage was done.

And then something else happened that really scared Sydney.

He told us he was walking home one night when he felt warm air on the back of his neck which he described like someone's hot breath. This happened more than once and cook said she had found out that Didnot Williams had set a duppy on Sydney and that an Obeah man must have caught his shadow and now the shadow will do whatever the Obeah man demands. According to cook the best way to stop the duppy from following Sydney was to carry a piece of chalk and, whenever he felt the hot breath on the back of his neck, Sydney was to make an x on the ground with the chalk, representing the figure ten.

Cook said duppies can only count up to nine and will spend the rest of the night trying to count to x.

She said duppies are clever, but I wasn't too sure about that if they can't count any higher than nine. But she said they are because they can do similar things to living people, like talking, laughing, whistling and

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singing, even cooking. That made me wonder if cook was a duppy too.

Anyway, believe it or not, putting a cross on the ground worked for a while and Sydney stopped feeling warm air on his neck and he was more confident walking home.

But then one lovely clear moonlit night Sydney and Ruby were walking home together and they saw a big owl sitting in the cotton tree outside Mission House. When cook heard she got everybody worked up again and said that was a very bad sign because the duppy was still on Sydney. She said he had now to find a powerful Obeah man to remove the curse or he would be in serious trouble. Of course, cook knew one and Sydney agreed to go with her but said I had to go with him. I said I'd only go if Dolly could come as well. And reluctantly Dolly agreed.

So off I go again to another balm yard and went into a very dark, smelly room. I remember it only had one window and the light couldn't get through it was so dirty and grimy. Oh, Lord, was I terrified.

The Obeah man's name was Ali Acquabar, an old man, with a short sharp looking face. He sat at a table in the middle of the room and beside his chair was a walking stick with the head of a serpent on the top. He told us to sit in the chairs facing him. I noticed a nail with three different size rosaries made out of bloodstained beans hanging from it and there was a

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mirror on a wall. On the table was a pack of cards and a dark blue piece of cloth with some sulphur, what looked like human hair, small bones and feathers.

By now I just wanted to get out of there but, once again, my courage failed me and I stayed.

There were two other chairs and on one of these he put a glass and filled it with water and put a 1/- piece in the glass and on the other he put a candle which he had taken from a small bag nearby and asked Sydney to light it. Ali then opened a pack of cards, which he separated into four piles.

He selected one and said to Sydney "this is death"; then selected another and said "this is Jesus Christ";

Then he selected a third and said "this is the Ghost" and with the fourth card he looked Sydney straight in the eye and said

"Your life is in danger".

Then he took a bottle of rum off a shelf and threw some of it around the room.

"I am feeding my ghosts" he chanted and then looked in the magic mirror and turned to Sydney.

"It is a pity you are not able to see, if you could, you would behold two duppies who are working on the case against you". My brother is a tough man, you now, and I didn't think he could scare easily. But, sitting on that chair, he looked very frightened to me.

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Ali looked in the glass of water on the other chair and said

“It is the brother that is after your life. I charge you £5 to take off the ghosts”.

Sydney gave Ali his money and Ali told him they would all have to go to Mission House “to run the duppies out”. Well, we trooped out and walked home.

When we got there Ali told us he would go into the house first and Dolly, cook and I should follow in a few minutes but Sydney was to wait outside until he was called. When we went in Ali had already lit three different colour candles in our hallway and then he took out three bottles – one containing some seeds, one with some kind of powder in it and the third with some dirty looking liquid in it. He threw some of the liquid and some of the powder into a cup which cook had handed him and he struck a match, lit the mixture in the cup and gave it to cook to take outside and bury it at the gateway to the house.

Ali then asked Sydney for a further £5 as the job was now completed. The potion was buried at the gateway and this would ensure that no more duppies bothered anyone who lived in this house.

After that Sydney was more relaxed because one Obeah man had been knocked out by another and the more I think about it the more sure I am that was when things started to happen between the cook and Sydney.

Chapter Seventeen

Mammie's (Becky) Diary

Today started with some astonishing news in the newspaper. Several passengers on the train from Kingston to Montego Bay were seriously injured and taken to hospital when the train they were travelling on derailed at high speed. A trackman, who witnessed the accident, said the train was going very fast, so much so that he said to the railman next to him "that the train is moving as fast as an aeroplane."

Passengers reported that they had to hold on to something when the train went round bends because it was going so fast and the carriages were wobbling badly.

What made this news so startling was that Olga should have been travelling on that train. She had wanted to spend the weekend with Cissie and Dyke but because of the riots in Kingston she didn't want to leave me and her sisters alone, even though Boysie had promised to look in on us from time to time,

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assuming, of course, he could get through the mobs uninjured himself. So she didn't make the journey. Olga has a guardian angel, I'm sure of it.

The rest of the news is still very bad. Industry is in decline and conditions are terrible. Unemployment is high, there is irregular work, wages are low, and there is poor housing, poor nutrition and a high cost of living. This, of course, only applies to the blacks. We middle and the white upper classes still manage to live quite well.

There is rioting on the streets of Kingston and I have forbidden the girls to go outside unless they are accompanied by Boysie.

No cargo has been unloaded from the ships in the harbour for days. The dock workers in Kingston and the sugar workers in Westmoreland and Clarendon have all gone on strike for better wages and working conditions. Everywhere on the island, workers are asking for jobs, higher wages and better living conditions. From early yesterday morning thousands of men and women marched in procession through the streets of Kingston visiting public offices and stopping at the various wharves and forcing work to stop at Myer's Sugar Wharf where some labourers had broken the strike.

The owners of the businesses have threatened that if a solution is not found soon, they will close their businesses down altogether and move off the island. By all accounts it was an ugly scene. The security forces are everywhere eyeball to

eyeball with Alexander Bustamante, who is organising the labourers now. Mobs are forcing shops to put up their shutters and molesting people in cars, sometimes robbing them of their money. Mobs are pulling people off the trams and buses and forcing the drivers to take the vehicles off the road. This is one of the leaflets that the strikers are handing out.

V E N G E A N C E!

JUSTICE AND JUDGEMENT

It is better to die free than to live in this
condition.

No Work. No Food. No Money. Nowhere
to sleep.

Do it now! It must be hell or heaven. We are
all satisfied to face the guns or bayonets for
the better life.

Black men arise and seek your rights for right
must beat might.

DEATH !

DEATH !

Later on I stood on the veranda upstairs and watched an enormous crowd gather at the end of King Street and then march up the street headed by a large negro with a big drum which he was beating vigorously. Right in the middle of King

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Street the crowd was met by a line of police all armed with batons. Behind them were a line of police with rifles. The mob was stopped and cleared right off the street with hardly a blow made.

That same night dozens of cars full of “special constables” armed with any and every kind of weapon patrolled the streets of Kingston and St Andrews. Stones and bricks were hurled at them from all sides, but they chased people off the streets and beat up those who resisted. These are frightening times in Jamaica.

Later that evening: Sydney came to see me, the first time I've seen him since our quarrel because he is concerned for our welfare and safety. We talked, rather uncomfortably at first, and Sydney explained at some length what I had failed to realise. That his business is also feeling the economic downturn just like most others in Kingston. He has agreed to resume helping me financially providing I agree to move to a smaller house.

We talked about Olga wanting to go to England and I have told Sydney I think she should have the opportunity. He agreed that with all the unrest on the island and the bicycle business being quieter these days, it would be good for Olga to go now particularly as the threat of Britain going to war has receded since Neville Chamberlain secured Adolf Hitler's promise that he will not invade Europe further. Sydney has

Mammie's (Becky) Diary

agreed to pay Olga's fare, providing she only stays six months. We both feel this unrest cannot continue for much longer and he is keen that Olga should continue doing his business accounts.

As Sydney was leaving he bent down and picked up an envelope with my name on and had been slipped under the front door. In the envelope was a note from Henry and a newspaper cutting.

Reported Incident by P C Mother and Daughter suspected of practising Obeah

At about 8 pm last Saturday, P C Roberts and myself saw two women, one a young pretty girl and the other a much older woman, approach the grave of Carlton Puyatt. They lingered near the grave and pretended to inspect it. While the younger one remained a few feet away the older woman stamped the soft earth on the grave with her heel to make a hole and then knelt beside the grave as if in prayer. I saw her remove a small bottle from a satchel she was carrying and put it into the hole in the grave. The young girl then took something out of her bag and passed it to the older woman who buried that too with the bottle.

At this point I realised I was witnessing some sort of Obeah ritual and called out to the women to stop immediately. The older woman rapidly covered the hole with the earth and rose quickly to her feet and joined her friend and they fled the cemetery.

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P C Roberts and I took chase and caught both women. When asked they gave their names as Ambrosine and Sara Williams and were taken to Kingston Police Station suspected of practising Obeah.

I later returned to the graveside to remove the contents from the hole Ambrosine Williams had made and retrieved the bottle. In it was some light brown liquid, which when I smelt it, had the aroma of rum, and there was also some bark and a few needles in the bottle. The other items were two limes each cut in half with a penny inserted between each half. The idea being that as the limes rot, so would the person or persons whose name was called out as the limes were put in the ground.

I believe that my swift action in calling out had stopped Ambrosine Williams from calling out the name of the person she was taking revenge on and thus I have saved some poor person from the agonies of a lingering death.”

Henry wrote that the top half of the newspaper was missing so there was no way of knowing how old the article was.

I decided not to send it to Vivie as she is well and happy in America so why stir up bad memories. But it demonstrates the power of suggestion. Vivie thought she was obeahed and suffered genuinely as a result, but here is proof that the act was thwarted, so is Obeah all in the mind?

I have always thought so.

Mammie's (Becky) Diary

I know my sojourns into Obeah are of great concern to Father Butler but there is a method to my madness which I have not confided in him because I know he would disapprove.

I believe that psychologically Obeah is very powerful and I learnt from Lucy and John to use Obeah to get the results I want. I knew that once cook heard I'd been to Annie Harvey, she would change her tune and encourage Sydney to be reconciled with us.

Chapter Eighteen

Dear Diary

Christmas Eve: *Ruby, Dolly, Pearl and me went to midnight mass at the Holy Trinity Cathedral. Mammie never forces us to go to church and we can choose whether we want to. I always want to go, I like the feeling of peace when I'm in Church. The Cathedral bells always start ringing half an hour before midnight and as they died away the Holy Trinity Choir sang "Adeste Fideles".*

Father Butler preached the sermon and talked about the true meaning and spirit of Christmas and that it was a season of love and we should love one another and live happily and peacefully together. Father Butler knows my family well and I'm sure he wrote that sermon just for the Browney family. It certainly felt like it.

Christmas is a special time in Jamaica and we celebrate it in a big way. I love it, there is always so

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much happening and it's one of the few times, apart from family crisis, a wedding or a funeral, when my family is together.

Christmas Day: *Today is such a beautiful day, warm with a little breeze and Mammie is sitting in her favourite rocking chair on the back veranda, pretending she's dozing, but I know she is watching to make sure Cassie and me decorate the dining table for Christmas lunch.*

We nearly always eat in the garden and Cassie and I are laying up the huge mahogany table that's been moved from the dining room onto the lawn and has been in the family as long as I can remember. Mammie had it specially made years ago and told the craftsman it had to be big enough to hold at least twenty people because she was going to have lots of children.

Cassie and I have done a good job with the table, even if I say so myself. At each end there is a large bowl of fruit overflowing with mangoes, oranges, figs, papaw, bananas, star apples, dates, pineapple, naseberry and tamarind. Down the centre we've put sprays of green maiden hair fern with white Christmas blossoms and lots of deep crimson roses. Each place setting has been laid up with a crystal wine glass and Mammie's best silver cutlery, a Xmas cracker and a crisp white folded linen serviette in the shape of a water

Olga's Diary

lily and placed in the middle of each setting. As an extra touch I've put a few tiny silver dishes of sweets, raisins and nuts on the table.

We have a real feast on Christmas Day, lots of different things to choose from. Rice and peas, cod fish and ackee, which grows in pods on a large tree, as well as the usual Christmas lunch of roast turkey, roasted plantain, sweet potatoes, calalou, cassada and yams. For pudding we'll be having boiled Jamaica plum pudding with wine sauce as well and mince pies. Oh, I do love my food. Mammie says my eyes are bigger than my belly. I have a big scar on my upper arm where Dolly threw hot porridge at me one morning at breakfast.

I remember when I was little the family were sitting down to breakfast one morning and we normally had porridge and there was a sideboard where the porridge was laid out in dishes. I usually examined them all to see which was the biggest one. Dolly was standing beside me and I picked up the biggest one and she picked up hers and she threw it at me and said

"Here you take this too" and the porridge hit me on my right upper arm.

I've still got the burn mark all these years later. Mammie was furious with Dolly and she got smacked and Mammie took me to the bathroom and put bicarbonate of soda on it. It stung like anything. I cried a little bit because it hurt and then Mammie took me back down to breakfast.

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After that we got ready for school and Mammie gave us a coconut cake. She made them every day for us. I can see Dolly, Ruby and myself, three little tots, going off to school, crying and hugging each other all the way. We made friends quickly and never kept malice. We were always together and did everything together, went to school together, played together and when we were very little we even slept in the same bed together.

Mammie is lovely, you know, we only have to say we have a headache and she'll cuddle you.

Next to the chairs which have been stacked ready to be placed around the Christmas table is a big wicker basket which will soon be full of Christmas presents.

We have a custom at Christmas where we put everyone's name in a hat and then you pick a name from the hat and have to buy a present for that person, costing no more than 1/-. It takes a lot of imagination sometimes to find the right present for the right person.

John Canoe: *In the distance I can hear the music from the John Canoe celebrations which we'll all go and join up with after lunch. John Canoe parades date back to slavery when Christmas was the only extended holiday the slaves had and it was a very special holiday for them. Some people say John Canoe was a great African chief and loved so much by his*

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people that in his honour a festival is held every year. Men wear "John Canoe faces" which are masks worn by the performers.

One performer will wear a sort of house on his head, some wear a cow's head, one or two of them wear the head of a horse, some of the men dress in women's clothes and all are dancing in the streets accompanied by drums, tambourines, banjos, flutes or homemade musical instruments and there is lots of noise and dancing in the streets.

The Devil carries a pitchfork and wears a cowbell attached to his backside. On his head is a cardboard cylinder which rests on a flat square piece of cardboard and his entire costume is black. He pokes people with his pitchfork and frightens, not only children, but grown ups as well, me included sometimes.

Another performer plays Belly Woman, a pregnant lady who makes her belly move in time to the music. She is very funny and another character, Pitchy-Patchy, has the most colourful costume of all, with layered strips of brightly coloured cloth. He is very energetic doing handstands and cartwheels all the time

In the evening most of us will go to Winchester Park which will be just one mass of people, young and old, rich and poor, all determined to have a good time.

At the entrance to the park last year was a thirty foot Christmas tree brilliantly lit and flooded with coloured lights from a gigantic searchlight and there

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were different booths, some designed to look like English cottages and others had comic cartoons painted on them. In each booth there are usually games of chance and lots of ways of winning prizes.

There is always a special exhibition in the flower booth where the floral creations of school children are on display and when the Browney children were small, it was our custom to display our floral designs there. It's one of my favourite booths and Maurice has told me that his floral design is on display this year. Dear Maurice, I can't wait to see it.

But the booth I'll head for first is the one with the fortune teller. I'm off to England soon, so I must find out what's in store for me.

**Telegram from Rebecca Browney, Kingston, Jamaica
to
Martha Ross, Paddington, England**

OLGA SAILING ON S.S JAMAICA PROGRESS ARRIVING LONDON 1ST
APRIL 1939. PLEASE MEET HER. BECKY.

Dear Diary

On my way: *On a crystal clear morning, the S.S Jamaica Progress steams slowly out of Kingston Harbour into the blue waters of the Caribbean, past small fishing boats with the fringe of the coconut palms that front the Blue Mountains gradually disappearing from view.*

She passes Port Royal and what remains of the buccaneer city that an earthquake sank beneath the ocean hundreds of years ago. Overhead, in a cloudless blue sky, three long-tailed humming birds, so vivid in colour, sweep across the sky in unison and the sight of them takes my breath away.

An omen, perhaps, a sign of good luck, Olga?

Part Three

London

Chapter Nineteen

Dear Diary

“How did you get here?” Aunt Martha asked me incredulously.

She was still in bed even though it was the middle of the afternoon. If it had been Birdie standing at the bottom of her bed instead of me, the reply would have said something smart like “I just flew in on a broomstick” but I just said lamely,

“I thought you were expecting me”.

“Jesus Christ, what day is it”?

“April 1st” I said, shocked by her blaspheming.

And then she started laughing “Trust you to arrive on April Fool’s Day, Olga”.

I didn’t answer not understanding what she meant but I knew she wasn’t paying me a compliment. I was hungry, cold, tired and this was not the welcome I had been expecting.

Olga – A Daughter's Tale

For a start Aunt Martha should have met me when the S.S. Jamaica Progress docked this morning in London. The Progress is a cargo boat carrying fruit, mainly bananas, and the Royal Mail, but also has room for a few passengers. On this trip there were 12 of us including me and, of course, my chaperone, Mrs Brodie, a friend of the family, who was going to England for a holiday and whom Sydney had asked to keep an eye on me during the trip.

Did he think I might fall overboard?

Anyway, it never occurred to me that Aunt Martha wouldn't be there and I was very grateful that Mrs Brodie waited with me a for a while, but eventually she said she had to leave. With a confidence I certainly wasn't feeling I assured her I would be fine on my own. Just in case Aunt Martha didn't arrive Mrs. Brodie showed me where there was a taxi rank and, checking I had enough money to pay for it, kissed me goodbye and went on her way. Sitting in the waiting room I felt very homesick.

After waiting for her for nearly three hours I decided to take a taxi to Aunt Martha's home, 23 Chilworth Street, Paddington. I knew she lived on the third floor of a block of flats because last time she was in Kingston she told us at dinner one evening how Londoners were not very friendly. Aunt Martha likes a drink and one day she was in a pub when a lady sitting a few feet away from her became ill. Aunt Martha

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offered to take her back to her home and discovered that the woman lived in the flat beneath her in Chilworth Street.

As I struggled up the three flights of concrete steps to Aunt Martha's flat with two heavy suitcases I thought, Londoners are not only unfriendly, they're unreliable too.

**Letter to Mammie, Mission House, Kingston
from
Olga, 23 Chilworth Street, London**

Dearest Mammie

I couldn't sleep last night. When I closed my eyes I saw us all on Kingston docks crying. It was hard saying goodbye, wasn't it, and Mammie you looked so worried. Fancy Pops coming down as well. It was nice you were both there. I don't remember ever seeing you together before. And wasn't Sydney thoughtful and kind making sure I had everything I needed. He told me to be sure to ask Aunt Martha if I need anything and he said he'd be coming to London in two or three months, so I would see him then.

Including me and Mrs Brodie, there were only twelve passengers on the boat, two widow ladies, myself and another single young lady and two married couples, three single men, two were students and the third single man was an engineer. We all got on very well together and made up our own

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entertainment in the evening with little concerts which we all took part in. I was persuaded to sing a few times and got a very nice round of applause each time. The engineer performed some magic tricks, which sometimes went wrong, but we pretended we hadn't noticed or else we played card games like gin rummy or canasta while the older people played bridge.

As a matter of fact Mammie, I was invited to sit at the Captain's table four times during the journey; it's a great honour, you know and I felt very important. The crossing seemed to go quickly and it was very good until we got close to England and then it rained a lot and the sea was a bit rough.

Aunt Martha has a nice little two bedroom flat and, guess what, I have my own bedroom but you probably know that.

On my first morning here, Aunt Martha brought me breakfast in bed and later on took me to Lyons Corner House which is huge and there are restaurants on four levels. On the ground floor level is the food hall where you can buy different things like ham and cheese, pastries and specially made chocolates, wines, tea and, guess what, coffee and fruit from, guess where?Jamaica!

And on the floors above are more restaurants with an orchestra playing in each one. Aunt Martha and I went to the tearoom and she ordered afternoon tea which arrived on delicate china plates with some scones, dainty sandwiches and little cakes. I only had a little bit to eat because I thought it was good manners not to eat all the food in front of us. But I was

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wrong, I should have eaten more, because Aunt Martha finished the whole lot.

All the waitresses wore black and white uniforms and Aunt Martha says their called Nippies, when I asked her why ,she said “because they nip in and out of the tables quickly”. Isn't that funny? I thought they looked so smart in their uniforms and said to Aunt Martha that I might change my mind about going to Madame Verschaka's School of Dance and become a Nippie for a few months.

“I don't think so dear,” she said. “To come all this way from Jamaica and end up as a waitress doesn't seem such a good idea to me”

Well, at least it's work, I thought to myself but didn't say anything. With so many out of work back home I bet lots of people would love a job like that. When the bill came, Aunt Martha said,

“Oh, that's a bit expensive, but never mind Olga, you're worth it”. Wasn't that nice?

The weather has been horrible, cold and wet. One day smog covered the whole of London all day and you could barely see in front of your hand and bus conductors were walking in front of their buses to guide them. I missed Jamaica a lot that day. Aunt Martha says its smoke that comes from factory chimneys and buses. There are signs that Londoners are preparing for war. There are air raid shelters being built and sticky tape is stuck across windows to prevent people being cut by flying glass and splinters when the bombs come. Aunt

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Martha says it's difficult to know what to think because one minute the war's on and the next it's off.

My favourite place, Mammie, is Regent's Park Zoo. There are all sorts of animals there, lions, tigers, elephants, monkeys, snakes, beautiful big birds and sweet little birds. Even before I get to the zoo I can hear the lions roaring and the monkeys whooping. I feed the monkeys but you're not allowed to feed the wilder animals, so I watch the zoo keepers feed the elephants, lions and bears.

And I've discovered a beautiful Catholic church called St James in Spanish Place, not far from Aunt Martha but, do you know what, I don't think she goes to church quite so much in London as she does in Jamaica.

I say my prayers every night Mammie and go to mass on Sundays at St James. It doesn't feel the same as the Holy Trinity Cathedral but I still like it a lot.

I miss you all. Please write soon.

Your loving daughter

Olga

Dear Diary

Bad news: *I'm in despair. Madame Verschaka's School of Dance have written to me.*

"We do not have a place available for six months, at which time we will be delighted to accept you as a pupil."

Olga's Diary

That's no good, I need a place now!

I told Aunt Martha and she said she couldn't afford to keep me if I was going to remain in London. I don't know what she means "she can't afford to keep me" because I know Sydney gave her plenty of money to cover the cost of my stay, but she says there's hardly any left because food is expensive and I eat a lot.

Well, honestly, I don't think I do, but I didn't dare argue with her. Thank goodness Sydney will be here soon, but I suppose I'll have to go back to Jamaica with him. So far my visit has been disappointing and I haven't enjoyed myself the way Birdie does when she comes to London.

Dear Diary

Fed up: *Went to Trafalgar Square yesterday to feed the pigeons, but, I was in and out of that Square like a bullet.*

I sat down and as soon as I pulled out my bag of breadcrumbs, pigeons surrounded me and started pecking at my paper bag trying to get the bread out and there were lots of them around my feet picking up the breadcrumbs – it felt like I was being attacked, so I dropped the breadcrumbs and ran.

Now I prefer to sit here on a bench in Regent's Park and feed the little birds, they're much gentler. Took my diary with me today so I could read again

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about my going away party in the Bournemouth Club, Kingston's best night club.

It was a wonderful night with the club decorated with streamers and balloons and hanging from the ceiling, strung across the middle of the room was a whopping big sign.

"Goodbye Olga. We'll miss you". Wasn't that nice?

There was a band and lots of food and all my friends and family laughing, joking, hugging and kissing me and giving me going away presents.

But the biggest shock that night came from Michael Sales. Michael was in the same class as me at Alpha Academy and he was a holy terror. His favourite past time was putting a mirror under some of the girls' skirts, including mine, so he could see what colour knickers we were wearing. He nearly got expelled once for doing it and it was only because his mother pleaded with the Headmistress to give him one more chance, that he wasn't. Anyway, he must have learnt his lesson because he quietened down a lot and was much nicer because of it. As a matter of fact he went out with one of my best friends, Elise Ferguson, for a while.

But at my going away party he handed me a present with a card. Inside, was a pair of beautiful pearl ear-rings. No doubt about it, that is the nicest present I have ever received.

Olga's Diary

“Olga, when you come back, I want you to be my proper girl friend. I promise I will wait for you and I won't go out with anyone else while you're away” he said.

I couldn't believe it. I didn't think he liked me that much. Boys, don't really, you know. They like to talk to me about the problems they have with their girl friends because they say I'm a good listener, but they never like me in that special way.

My friend, Carmen Cadoza, has boys buzzing round her like bees in a honey pot and honestly, sometimes she treats the boys like they don't exist. She says the secret of being successful with men is to play hard to get. Michael was going to be my first boyfriend. I wanted to cry I was so happy, but instead I gave him a little kiss on the cheek and said I would love to be his girlfriend and for a few minutes, I wondered, do I really want to go to England. But I dismissed the thought immediately because it would be something to look forward to when I come home.

On the same page is the holy picture of the Sacred Heart that Father Butler gave me when he came to say goodbye. He'd written on the back:

Dear Olga

Bon voyage and a happy stay in London.

Be a good girl and don't forget to say your prayers.

God bless you,

Reading about that evening and how happy I was then and how miserable I am feeling now made me

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sad and homesick. I felt lonely sitting on that bench in the park. I was hugging my diary with both hands, my head buried in my chest and gently rocking back and forth and I wasn't aware someone had sat down beside me.

"Are you alright". I heard someone say.

When I looked up I saw a beautiful brown face smiling at me.

"My name's Joanne" she said, smiling at me.

My spirits lifted immediately and we started talking. And guess where she came from....Jamaica!! I couldn't believe it because there aren't too many Jamaicans in London, I can tell you.

Joanne comes from a big family, just like me, and they live in St Ann's Bay. We talked about our families and home and even though she's been in London for two years studying nursing at Paddington General Hospital, Joanne still misses her family a lot.

I said I missed my friends and was lonely and whenever someone sits next to me on the park bench, like the nannies who push the babies in the prams, I always smile and say hello and hope that they will talk to me, but they don't, they either pretend they haven't heard me or get up and walk away.

"Thank goodness for the keepers in the zoo".

"They're friendly and they tell me all about the animals like elephants or the tigers and the bears" I said

Olga's Diary

"I like London a lot, but it can be the loneliest place in the world" Joanne told me.

Oh she's really lovely. I'm so happy we met. Joanne says when she's a fully qualified nurse then she's going back to Jamaica to work. When I told her why I had come to London she was surprised and said didn't my parents realise that England could go to war any day. I said that the Prime Minister had Hitler's promise not to invade Europe any more, so Mammie and Sydney felt it was safe for me to come over, and, anyway, Sydney would be here soon and I'd be going back to Jamaica with him.

Two hours later, and much happier, I said goodbye to Joanne, but we arranged to meet in the park the following week.

Chapter Twenty

Dear Diary

The wicked witch: AM (that's Aunt Martha) being horrible. Very bad tempered. There are two versions of her, the English version (the true one) and the Jamaican version (the false one). She still says I'm eating too much and I have to eat less even though I've given her nearly all of my money and I don't think I have enough to last until Sydney comes.

She says I have to pay my way so I must clean the flat and do her washing and ironing. Now she's treating me like a servant.

"You might as well wash and iron Mr Kitchen's clothes the same time you do mine" she said.

"I'll do your chores, because I have the time, but I'm not doing his and if you insist then I'll write to Mammie and Sydney and tell them what you're asking me to do" I threatened.

"There's no need for that, Olga, just do mine".

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Good job done, Olga, a ~~small~~ big victory and very nice it feels too. Mr Kitchen is AM's latest "gentleman friend" and the pair of them go out drinking nearly every night. They always come home drunk and Mr Kitchen usually stays overnight (in AM's bedroom!) and I hear him creeping out of the front door early in the morning. Mammie and Sydney would be shocked if they knew.

AM says they're engaged to be married, but I don't think Mr Kitchen knows that.

Wonder what the neighbours think?

AM is cruel when she's been drinking. Told me that I would never get a husband.

"No man would find someone as plain and boring as you, Olga, attractive. Where were you when God was handing out the looks". She's not a very nice person, you know. I know I'm not as pretty as my sisters, but Mammie says I have other qualities which are more important than looks.

Should have said to her "where were you when God was handing out the looks". But that would have been unkind too and, anyway, after hearing her give Mr Kitchen a good few slaps with the frying pan the other evening, I stay in my room now when she's been drinking.

AM had chicken pox when she was a child and to stop her picking at the sores on her face her parents bandaged her hands. But AM still managed to pick

Olga's Diary

them and as a result her face is badly pockmarked. She was teased a lot at school by the other children because of it and Aunt Lucy says that contributed to AM's "effortless transition from bad tempered child to a cantankerous, mean spirited woman". Had to look up in the dictionary what cantankerous meant and Aunt Lucy's got it dead right. AM's bad tempered and unreasonable.

To keep out of her way I spend a lot of time wandering around London and one day I was walking along Baker Street when this car hooted and when I turned round to see who it was, it was Roy McKenzie from Jamaica. I couldn't believe it, in fact, I didn't even know he was in London.

I immediately remembered that day when I was hanging from a tree by my knickers and felt embarrassed when we said hello, even though Aunt Lucy and Mammie had got me down from the tree before he saw me.

"Olga, look at you, you look good, how nice to see you". He seemed really pleased to see me,

He told me to hop in the car and he took me for a lovely drive around London. He asked me what I was doing in London and how long I was staying. I told him about the dance school and what I'd been doing since I arrived and he told me he ran a gambling and drinking club in London called the Frivolity. He knew I had a good singing voice and asked me to come down and sing

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at his club now and again. Because I had no money I was tempted. Maybe I'll pop down one evening I thought to myself, it might be fun.

I asked him if he thought there was going to be a war with Germany and he said he hoped not because it could be bad for his business.

He stopped the car round the corner from Chilworth Street and wrote down the address of the Frivolty on a piece of paper and handed it to me.

He asked me how things were going with Aunt Martha and I just shrugged my shoulders. He took out his wallet, which, by the way, was full of money, and took out one of the notes in it.

“Here, take this, but don't tell Aunt Martha you've got it or she'll talk you into giving it to her and, definitely, don't tell her that you've seen me. I've seen her operating in the Den of Inequity and I don't want her in my club.” I looked in my hand and there was a lovely big white £5 note. I hugged him. I told him Sydney would be over soon and would repay him.

“Remember, Olga, anytime you want to earn some money singing, you know where I am now”. And then he was gone. I had such a lovely afternoon with Roy, but most of all it was comforting to know there was someone who would help me if I needed it.

Dear Diary

Big surprise: Met Joanne in the park today and went to the cinema to see a romantic comedy called "Too Hot to Handle" with Myrna Loy and Clark Gable. Very funny.

Afterwards, we went to Joe Lyons for our usual treat, a knickerbocker glory, before Joanne had to return to the hospital. She's a bit worried because she hasn't heard from her family for a while and I said I would contact them when I returned to Jamaica. That reassured her a lot and I was pleased to be able to make her feel better because I know she has lots of studying to do for exams but she still finds time to be my friend.

When I got home, guess what, there was Sydney waiting for me in the sitting room. I have never been so pleased to see my brother in my whole life. I threw my arms around him and hugged him. He looked embarrassed and surprised because his presence doesn't usually make me so happy but things have been very uncomfortable between AM and me.

Sydney said "Aunt Martha has been telling me how much she has enjoyed having you here and feels you should stay on and enroll in Madame Verschaka's School of Dance in September".

She also told him that if war did break out he could rely on her to get me on the first available boat going to Jamaica, providing of course Sydney left enough money "to cover that eventuality" as she put it.

Olga – A Daughter's Tale

He asked me what I thought and I said I wasn't too keen on the idea and, thank goodness, Sydney agreed. In fact, he said his instructions from Mammie were to bring me home "safe and sound".

AM looked crushed.

Later, while Sydney and I were out walking I told him what I did during the day to keep busy and all about my new friend Joanne. I told him about seeing Roy McKenzie and the money he'd lent me. Sydney said he had heard Roy was in London and would go and see him. I told Sydney I liked London a lot, even though the people weren't very friendly, but I wouldn't want to stay here if I had to live with Aunt Martha.

"It's obvious you're not happy living with her".

I told him how I do a lot to help her; I told him about her drinking but I left out the bit about Mr Kitchen staying overnight and her blaspheming. Sydney put his arm round me.

"Olga, I'm sorry you've been so unhappy. Look, I'm here for two weeks. I have to do some business but then, once that's done, we can have a good old holiday together."

I thought to myself afterwards, it's a funny old world, who would have thought that the day would come when I'd actually be looking forward to having a holiday with Sydney.

Dear Diary

Fate steps in: *Three days later two things happened one after the other.*

First, Sydney got a big discount, bigger than he anticipated, on some bicycles he ordered for the shops and the second thing that happened was that he took ill and was rushed, by ambulance, to St Mary's Hospital in Paddington with appendicitis. Hours later his appendix was out and he was being looked after by Nurse Megan Lloyd who comes from Wales.

My "good old holiday" with Sydney is now being spent sitting by his bed every day in St Mary's watching the nurses do their work while he sleeps. I noticed that the patients have a great respect for the nurses, which is nice, and as I like the idea of helping people get well, a plan was beginning to develop that would mean I could stay in London and make Mammie and the family really proud of me.

When I thought the time was right I mentioned to Sydney I would like to become a nurse. His immediate reaction was definitely not, you're going home with me and no arguing. So I enlisted help. Joanne and Nurse Lloyd. Sydney had taken a shine to Joanne and she pointed out to him the benefits of being a nurse and how it would help our community back home when I returned to Jamaica a fully qualified nurse whose training had been in a big London hospital. It took both of them to persuade Sydney to at least have an interview with

Olga – A Daughter's Tale

Matron at St Mary's. When AM heard her reaction was disbelief.

"A great hospital like St Mary's only takes white, middle class young ladies to train as nurses" she told us.

"They would never accept a coloured person so don't waste your time seeing Matron just to be told no."

She was right, but, for the wrong reason. Within five minutes of sitting in Matron's office she announced I couldn't study nursing there because I didn't have a school leaving certificate but suggested we try the smaller St Giles Cottage Hospital in Camberwell.

"You'll have more success there because not too long ago and before it became a hospital, it used to be a workhouse and they're not so particular about their nurses", AM told me, when Sydney was out of earshot.

We had an interview with Matron at St Giles, and shortly afterwards I was offered a place on a residential three month basic nursing programme, but first I had to have a medical.

Dear Diary

Good news: *I've been offered a nursing place and the best part of my new job is that I'll be living in the Nurses' Home at the hospital so don't have to live with AM any more. Oh happy days!*

Olga's Diary

I could see Sydney was proud of me and I knew Mammie would be too in spite of being disappointed that I wouldn't be going home now. I had to promise Sydney that if war broke out I would come home immediately. He gave me enough money for my fare and to keep me going until I got my first month's wages which was going to be £2 a month. He also bought all the books I needed for studying, plus three pairs of thick black stockings and my black shoes. The rest of my nurses' uniform would be provided by the hospital.

*The night before Sydney left to go home he took Joanne and me to the theatre to see the Ivor Novello musical, *The Dancing Years*, and afterwards we had supper in a posh late night restaurant.*

If I hadn't met Joanne I'm not sure I would have chosen to become a nurse, but knowing that she would be close by helped me to decide and that was a big comfort, not only to me, but to Sydney too, I think. He could reassure Mammie that I had at least one good friend. Sitting at the dining table watching them dance together, I thought wouldn't it be just perfect if one day Joanne became my sister-in-law. Something else to pray for Olga.

Chapter Twenty One

Dear Diary

St Giles Hospital: *I had to pinch myself to make sure I wasn't dreaming. Not too long ago I was spending my mornings sitting on a park bench in Regent's Park feeling sorry for myself and now I'm standing in a line with other student nurses listening to Sister.*

"These are the rules for student nurses and I expect you to commit them to memory" barked Sister as she handed each new student nurse a rule sheet.

A stout, straight talking woman from Yorkshire with grey hair and voice that only seemed to have one volume, loud.

"It is my pleasure to guide you through your nursing training until you become fully qualified nurses" Sister Tutor was referring to us by our surnames and when someone asked why, she said that's how it is in hospital.

Olga – A Daughter's Tale

"We don't use Christian names, only surnames".

Honestly, I don't like the idea of someone calling me Browney.

RULES FOR NURSES

- walk at all times, only run in case of fire
- stand when a senior member of staff enters
- always open the door for the doctor
- never overtake a senior member of staff on the stairs
- no make up on duty
- hair not to reach your collar
- nails must be short
- black stockings only when on duty and no ladders in them
- low heel shoes
- on duty by 7.00 am
- in bed by 10.30 pm

I felt uncomfortable and awkward in my student nurse's uniform, my black frizzy hair poking out at different angles under a heavily starched white cap which needs four hair grips to hold it in place. My grey dress had a little white collar which fastened tightly round my neck and was nearly choking me and over the dress I wore a starched white apron with a wide belt around my waist. I didn't like the feel of the thick black stockings on my skin and the thick black rubber soled shoes felt like lead weights on the end of my feet.

There are nine other student nurses in my group but Alison Moores, Ethel Richards and me are friends already. I don't really know why because we are so different.

Olga's Diary

For a start Moores is aristocracy from top to bottom; she talks beautifully and I think she sounds very posh, she's tall, with dark hair, which used to be long before Matron told her she would have to cut it before she started her training. Moores has a perfect peaches and cream complexion, is very confident, elegant, and looks more like a film star than a student nurse. Her parents are rich and they make some kind of cold cream for women and sold in jars by the thousands. They sent her into nursing because they said she comes from a privileged background and should give something back to society. Ethel asked her why she wasn't doing her training at one of the big teaching hospitals and Moores said she had thought about it but preferred to be amongst real people in a smaller hospital.

Ethel is from the East End of London, only 5 ft tall with, lovely twinkling green eyes that always seem to be smiling, a round face framed with red curly hair and a cockney accent which I don't understand sometimes and when she smiles she shows off a set of perfectly even white teeth. Sometimes she reminds me of Vivie because she's not frightened of any form of authority, neither Sister Tutor nor Matron. Ethel says it's because she grew up with five brothers and because she's the only girl in the family she always had to fight for what she wanted. And then there's me. One day I asked Moores how she had described me to her parents and she smiled as she said:

Olga – A Daughter's Tale

“Slim, not very tall, brown skin, not particularly pretty, short frizzy black hair which she wears with either a blue or yellow ribbon, slightly bushy eyebrows above huge brown eyes that seem to be in a permanent state of astonishment at everything she sees or hears, a beautiful smile and a soft voice that fits like a glove with her gentle manner”.

Isn't that a lovely description?

It's funny Moores comes from a very rich family and she's not stuck up or anything. I'm the only coloured person in the whole of the hospital, as far as I know, and people do stare at me sometimes. Moores tells me not to worry about it.

“They stare at you because you're a novelty Olga, that's all”.

Ethel says she doesn't care what anyone thinks of her and neither should I, but sometimes I feel a bit uncomfortable.

**Letter to Mammie, Kingston,
from
Olga, Nurses Home, St Giles Hospital, Camberwell,
London**

Dearest Mammie

The weeks fly by, such a lot to do and learn. We are on duty from 7.00 in the morning until 7 in the evening with only a coffee and lunch break. Please don't worry about me because I

Olga's Diary

am happy, tired but happy, and I have made friends with two other student nurses.

So far I have learnt about hygiene, how to take a temperature, how to stack linen, how to put a bandage on a patient and how a treatment tray should be laid up. Once a week we spend a morning on the ward and one of my jobs is to feed the patients.

Oh Mammie, I love it so much, the patients are so grateful when you do something for them. Sister Tutor praised my bed making the other day, you see Mammie it's important to make beds properly with the sheet corners turned in and the open ends of the pillow slips mustn't face the door into the ward – the sewn end must face the door.

The top sheets are folded over the counterpanes and have to be the same width and the fold has to be sixteen inches. I find the best way to check is to measure from my fingertips to my elbow.

Matron is fierce and Sister Tutor stern and doesn't smile at all. I find it difficult to remember things so now I carry a note book around with me and write down as much as I can, especially the things I don't understand. When I meet Joanne she explains the things to me that I've been too frightened to ask Sister Tutor to repeat in case she thinks I'm stupid.

Lectures are nearly always when we're off duty and in one of our first lessons I met Henry who scared the life out of me. Henry's a skeleton that hangs from the ceiling in the lecture room and we have to memorise the names of each bone

Olga – A Daughter's Tale

in his body. Sometimes when I look at all those bones I think of cook. If she could see Henry, I bet she'd love to get her hands on his bones for her Obeah man.

I got into trouble the other day as I was preparing the patients' tea and I was holding the loaf of bread against my chest while I was trying to slice it with a knife and Sister Tutor was furious with me.

“Don't you have any common sense and realize how dangerous it is to try and cut bread like that”.

And then she showed me how to cut it on the table. I told her I'd never cut bread before because either cook or Cassie did it. Sister Tutor said nothing but gave me a very funny look. I'm not lonely any more Mammie because I have three good friends now and that's all I need.

Your loving daughter

Olga

Chapter Twenty Two

Dear Diary

War: *Moores and I were in Oxford Street shopping for a new dress for her date that night with an army officer, when the air raid siren went. We'd just reached John Lewis when it sounded and we knew it meant we were going to be bombed by the Germans. Suddenly people started running like mad in all directions including us. Terrified we hopped onto a bus without even knowing where it was going just to get off the street.*

By the time we got back to the hospital we had learnt it been a false alarm, but our relief didn't last long because we were told that Britain was finally at war with Germany. There'd been lots of talk about war before but I wouldn't listen.

I don't want to go home, I want to stay and become a nurse, but I made a promise to Sydney and

Olga – A Daughter's Tale

Mammie so, sooner or later Olga, you're going to have to leave. Moores and Ethel say I should go; at least I'll be safe in Jamaica. I told them I was frightened of being bombed, but I don't want to return home not having achieved anything after spending six months in England, especially as it has cost my brother a lot of money.

A few days later, great big silver barrage balloons hanging from cables were seen in the sky all over London. They were to stop the German bombs from hitting their targets in the city. I thought they looked like big silver elephants. One of our first jobs when we started our training was to put black material over the windows so that at night time no light from the hospital wards could escape and the Germans wouldn't be able to see London from the air and drop their bombs.

We have all been given a gas mask and Sister Tutor demonstrated how to put it on. You have to thrust your chin forward pulling the black rubber over the face and up over the forehead leaving your eyes peering out from the two holes. There're horrible smelly things and I tore mine off, I couldn't breathe with it on.

Then we had to fill out a form so the Government could issue everyone with an identity card.

And now ration books have appeared, although nurses don't have them because we eat at the hospital. Ethel's family are poor and she says ration books are a wonderful thing because food is distributed evenly and,

Olga's Diary

poor families like hers, get the same as rich ones like Moores.

But some days I'd be so hungry my mind would start thinking about the food markets back home where you can buy lovely meals very cheaply. I find I'm dreaming of gungo peas soup with large pieces of yam and salt beef, vegetables and lovely dumplings or salt-fish and ackee or chicken with rice and peas and yam with half a boiled plantain. And in the end I just feel hungrier than ever. Now I've developed a taste for sugar sandwiches.

Dear Diary

Unhappy news: *War doesn't make any difference to Sister Tutor; she's still very strict and only has to raise an eyebrow to show her disapproval about something I've done or haven't done.*

This morning I broke a thermometer and have to pay 6d out of my wages to replace it. I'm not thinking about the war, all I can think about is passing the exam at the end of the three months.

Moores, Ethel and I test each other whenever we have time and if I get really stuck on something, Joanne helps me. Matron wants to see me. I can't think what I've done wrong.

Olga – A Daughter's Tale

Later: *I couldn't stop shaking waiting outside Matron's office. When I entered she told me to sit down and I knew it was bad news. She never tells nurses to sit down, we always have to stand to attention as if we're on parade like soldiers in the army.*

"I have some bad news for you Olga" she said in such a kindly voice it barely sounded like her.

"I'm afraid you cannot go home to Jamaica. Because of the war the Government has banned all non essential travel out of Britain which means you will have to stay until the war ends"

I suddenly burst into tears.

"It's not so bad really, is it Olga, think how proud your family be will when you do return home as a fully qualified nurse" she said.

Then she sat down beside me and put her arm round my shoulders and I cried even more. I was crying so much partly because Matron was being so kind and calling me Olga, instead of Browney, but also because, although I wanted to stay and finish my training, now I had no choice in the matter, I had to stay and suddenly I had such an urge to see Mammie and my sisters.

"I'm sure the war won't last long and in the meantime we need you here".

"Yes Matron, thank you Matron," I sobbed.

I was still crying as I reached the door to leave and she called out to me. "Wait, I nearly forgot". She

Mammie's (Becky) Diary

was holding a sheet of paper in her hand and there was a little smile on her face.

“Congratulations, Browney, you passed your first exam”.

Mammie's (Becky) Diary

At last, I have been able to talk to Olga on the telephone, not that I could hear very much because the line was poor and crackly and we only had three minutes. The tots and Birdie all managed to say hello and tell her they loved her. At least now I know she's well and safe, but her place is here at home.

I should have insisted that Sydney brought her back. Lucy was right all along when she said Hitler couldn't be trusted and had invaded Poland. It's all very well for people to say that the war between Britain and Germany won't last long, but how do they know, it could go on longer than the first war. No one knows for sure except God.

There are reports that people are starving in England. Could this be true. Olga starving? The Daily Gleaner says that the predicted bombing hasn't happened and many who evacuated London when war was declared are returning to their homes. So maybe things will not be as bad as everyone first thought.

Olga – A Daughter's Tale

Olga says she hasn't seen Martha for weeks. Why, I wonder? What has been happening between those two? Now I have something else to worry about. There was no mention of anything wrong between them in Olga's last letter. There wasn't much of anything really because there was so little to read since most of it had been censored with heavy black ink.

But she has passed an exam we are all very proud of her. I went down to the meat market for the first time for years, just to tell Henry. Olga's status seems to have gone up a lot already as far as the younger girls are concerned and she has certainly impressed the rest of the family with her resolve to come home a fully qualified nurse. As Birdie says "beats working in a bicycle shop".

It sounds as if Olga has become very fond of her friend Joanne.

Do you know what I think? I think the hand of God was at work there. He sent Joanne to look after Olga. But even so, we will still continue to pray for Olga's safety.

Chapter Twenty Three

Dear Diary

Life goes on: *A strange thing happened this morning, a gentleman called out.*

“Nurse”

It took a few moments before I realized he meant me. It was a bit of a shock, but a very pleasant one.

Sister Tutor says even in wartime there has to be a routine in hospital. The day always starts the same with Sister re-arranging the flowers and potted plants which had been taken out of the ward the night before and put in the sluice room because Matron says they give off poisonous carbon monoxide during the night. It’s a hospital superstition, too, that no lilies are allowed in the wards because they’re considered to be unlucky and you never have red and white flowers in the same vase either because that means death.

Olga – A Daughter's Tale

I have to clean each marble-topped locker next to the patient's bed and wipe out the fruit bowl that stands on it. Then the beds are pulled away from the wall for a maid to sweep the floor and which Matron likes highly polished, which is fine if you are wearing rubber sole shoes, but for the patients wearing slippers it can be a difficult.

I was helping an old man to the toilet yesterday morning and he was fairly steady on his feet to start with, but suddenly he slipped, lost his balance and ended up on his bottom and me with him. The other patients had a good laugh at our expense and I thought it was funny too, but Sister Tutor was furious with me.

Everything and everyone has to be neat and tidy ready for Matron's mid morning inspection. The staff, including the doctors, have to line up in a row and woe betide us if the ward isn't up to Matron's standard. She expects us to know all the patient's names and their medical condition.

When war was first declared I was frightened, especially because normal every day things changed. The cinema and theatres closed, and that upset me, because I'm crazy about films and I used to go every week with Joanne, but now we have to find other forms of entertainment.

Moore discovered a pub near the hospital and she and some of the other student nurses go there quite a bit, but I don't drink, so I haven't been there yet.

Olga's Diary

Moores and I are working on the same ward at the moment, which is fun, and when we're doing beds together we get the chance to talk and I hear all about what happened in the pub the night before.

This morning we were changing the bottom sheet of a bed, with the patient still in it, and Moores was telling me about this Canadian soldier who said he can get her some French champagne and silk stockings. Each time we moved the patient he broke a little wind and at first we ignored him and carried on chatting, but then he did it again and we started to laugh and couldn't stop and what's more neither could the patient, which made him break wind louder and more often and then all the other patients joined in and they didn't even know what they were laughing about.

But it was a wonderful moment especially as there was no one around to tell us off. You need little moments like that because it helps to take away the tension and worry for a little bit, and it's amazing how much better you feel afterwards.

*Moores is such fun, you know, she says to me
"Olga, eat life or life eats you".*

So I've decided to have some fun and go out with her tonight, but I won't tell Joanne because she thinks Moores is a bad influence on me. Joanne says the first year examination is not easy and I should be studying hard for it.

Dear Diary

The Rose Public House: *I've never been inside a public house before but, apart from being very smoky, it was really quite nice. Moores always finds someone to talk to but I was happy to sit quietly drinking my ginger beer. For the first time since the war started I felt safe there, perhaps, because it's used by soldiers and watching people enjoy themselves, laughing and having a good time makes you forget about how worried you are about the war and exams.*

I never go out on my own at night because it's so dark with all the street lights turned off, but at least the lamp posts are painted white so we don't bump into them and the edges of the pavements have been painted white too. Moores, Ethel and I each carry a little torch which we have to shine downwards onto the pavement. But we had a nasty shock on the way home from a night out.

We were passing a doorway when Ethel let out a scream. We looked up and there was a woman's face lit up in the doorway. She had a little torch pinned to her coat so that the light shone on her face and she was wearing a fox fur around her neck. The fox's eyes were glinting in the light, its tiny teeth bared in a snarl and it had little paws and a bushy tail that hung loose. I'm not surprised Ethel screamed, it was a frightening sight. Moores said the woman was a prostitute waiting for clients. Moores knows about everything, you know.

Dear Diary

We're being blitzed: *It has been difficult for me to write because we have been so busy in the hospital and to be truthful I haven't felt like it.*

Everything has changed.

Germany's planes have been dropping bombs on London day and night and the devastation is awful. Hundreds of people have been killed, thousands injured and hundreds of thousands are without homes. The bombing raids can last for hours without any let up. But, most of all I dread it when the Germans bomb at night, which they do frequently. Every part of London is being bombed including here in Camberwell.

A landmine exploded nearby and several homes were blown up, many of the casualties were brought here. There seem to be fires burning somewhere in London day and night. Other cities are being bombed as well but the Germans certainly seem determined to destroy London.

I start to shake when I hear the air raid siren sound and even when the all clear is given I'm too frightened to go out. I've been keeping away from Moores and Ethel, using study as an excuse to stay in, because I don't want them to think I'm a coward, but I'm ashamed of myself too, because the people who are homeless and have lost everything still have their fighting spirit and say they won't be beaten by Germany.

Olga – A Daughter's Tale

Joanne came to see me at St Giles during a break between bombings and made me go for a long walk with her. I felt much better afterwards, especially, when she told me that she was afraid too.

“Olga, we must do our job and put our trust in God” she said.

We talked about our families and wondered if they knew how bad things were here in London. The letters Joanne receives are heavily censored too and so we think the ones we write home are as well. It's heartbreaking; I'm desperate to receive news from Mammie and the family and when I do get a letter, line after line has been crossed out with black ink so I'm left with hardly anything to read. And you feel as if someone is spying on you. The censors know more about what's going on with my family than I do.

Joanne says “We should be grateful, at least they open the letters carefully and don't tear them.”

Any day now Joanne's waiting to hear if she's passed her final exam so that when the war's over she can fulfil her dream and go back to Jamaica a qualified nurse.

“And, if you study hard Olga, so will you”

“Who knows, maybe we can work together in Jamaica”. she said

I'll tell you something Dear Diary, I struck gold when she sat down beside me that day in Regents Park.

Olga's Diary

Dear Diary

Oh, damn and blast, I failed my first year preliminary exam. Knew I would. There was so much I didn't understand, but, Sister Tutor says I can sit the exam again, but if I fail the second time, that's it, finished. Goodbye Olga. Moores failed too, but she doesn't care as much as I do.

Chapter Twenty Four

Dear Diary

Watch out, men about: *After a nursing lecture by Sister Tutor, she kept us all behind to give us another one about soldiers and men in uniform.*

“A lot of women are being assaulted and worse, by airmen and soldiers from overseas” she told us.

“Care should be taken at all times because these men have thrown away all sense of propriety because they are away from their home, in a country where no one knows them and are taking advantage of women and the blackout to behave how they like without fear of retribution”

Moore said she'd never heard anything so ridiculous. All the overseas men she'd met were charming and treated her with respect.

Olga – A Daughter's Tale

"They're a darn sight more polite than any Englishman I've been out with. Of course, sometimes there are rotten apples in a barrel" she said.

"But to give the impression that all airmen and soldiers from overseas do bad things and take advantage of women is wrong".

Moore was really quite angry with Sister Tutor.

After the lecture Ethel and I were on night duty together on the men's surgical ward and she asked me if I'd heard about Sara Donahue.

"Yes, isn't it sad. When is she coming back?" I asked Ethel.

Sara is in our group but she had to leave suddenly and go home because a close relative died.

"It's not true about the relative dying, Olga. She left because she failed her three monthly medical. We think she had gonorrhoea".

"Oh," I said. I'd never heard of that so I asked Ethel what gonorrhoea was.

"It's a sexually transmitted disease" said a young male patient, who had been listening to our conversation.

"Couldn't put it better myself" said Ethel.

I didn't know what a sexually transmitted disease was, but I wasn't going to ask because I had a feeling I would look stupid. After all I am a nurse. When we're on night duty and the air raids sound, we have to pull all the beds into the centre of the ward and put each

Olga's Diary

patient's gas mask on their bed. We've been issued with helmets which have to be worn when the bombs start dropping. The first time I put mine on I thought, thank God, the tots can't see me. They'd never stop laughing, as a matter of fact neither could I. It was so big I had to keep pushing it back so I could see where I was going. I looked ridiculous in it.

Ethel and I were sitting at the big table in the middle of the ward writing up our reports and whenever we leaned forward to say something to each other, our helmets would bang together. After a couple of times we started to laugh and then when we laughing so much we leaned back in our chairs and our helmets fell off crashing to the floor and made a terrible din and woke all the patients up.

There's still a routine on night duty, but it's not so hectic. By nine thirty the bed quilts must be folded in four and placed at the foot of the bed, thermometers in mugs, equipment trays fully laid up, false teeth deposited in mugs on lockers and all lights turned off except the green shaded one on the table in the middle of the ward.

While some men snore, others light up cigarettes, not taking the slightest notice of us when we tell them they are not allowed to smoke in bed.

But we do have time to write up our lecture notes and revise. By the end of night duty, when I get to my

Olga – A Daughter's Tale

room I'm too tired to undress and fall asleep across my bed clutching my books.

Dear Diary

Horrible news: *There's a wireless in the student nurses' sitting room where we all gather round and listen to the news to hear how the war is going. Before the war it was a games room but there doesn't seem to be time to play games now, although we do sometimes play music on the gramophone.*

I was listening to the radio when Moores came in. Before she had said a word I could see by her face that something was wrong. But I wasn't prepared for what she told me.

As she sat down beside me she took my hand.

"Olga, Joanne is dead. The rest centre in Morley College was bombed last Tuesday evening and it seems that Joanne was visiting someone there. Some people were rescued but most of them, including Joanne, were trapped inside. By the time they pulled her out, she was dead."

"No, it's not possible".

She had told me she was on night duty all week.

"Joanne changed shifts with another nurse, Olga. Joanne was off duty. I'm sorry". Then she repeated it.

"Joanne's dead" .

Olga's Diary

Alone in my room, I kept repeating the phrase "Joanne is dead" as if it would help me take in the terrible news. The thought that I would never see Joanne's face again gave me the most awful feeling I have ever had, worse than all the bombings and scares that I had experienced these last few months. My world has changed. I feel helpless – as if an invisible wall that once surrounded and supported me has gone and without it I feel disconnected from everyone and everything around me, tiny and insignificant.

I'm so lonely.

Next day: *I went mechanically through my duties until the last one when I was removing the flowers and potted plants from the ward and putting them in the bathroom for the night. I remembered Joanne telling me how she loved doing this job at Paddington General because it turned the bathroom into an exotic florist, rich with perfume and vibrant colour.*

"For a few minutes Olga," she said "I'm back home in Jamaica". That night I cried bitterly for the loss of the best friend I've ever had.

Mammie's (Becky) Diary

These days I spend most nights listening to the wireless for news of the war in Europe. It is so frustrating that I know more about what is going on there than how my daughter and sister are managing in London. It is months since I have heard from either of them and I feel helpless because there is nothing to do except pray.

We now know Germany is bombing London relentlessly and the loss of life and injuries, as well as the devastation to the city, is enormous. I read in the Gleaner of how people have to go to use the underground tube stations to shelter from the bombs. They often sleep there all night and then have go off to work the next morning trying to avoid unexploded bombs or fractured gas mains. How dangerous is all sounds.

I wonder if Olga has to do this too.

What amazing people Londoners are, what spirit they have. The paper said it's not true about people starving in England because there was no food. Irrational, I know, but the thought of Olga starving worried me almost as much as her being hurt.

England needs more fighter planes badly because she is up against such terrible odds and Jamaica has agreed to send a squadron of twelve planes. Six have already been sent and another six promised. The whole island is being asked to rally together to collect money so we can supply the promised six as soon as possible.

Mammie's (Becky) Diary

The Daily Gleaner has set up the Jamaica Bombing Planes Fund and is encouraging communities to raise whatever money they can for the Fund with dances, concerts, fairs, sports events, etc. and every time £5,000 is raised it is sent to London to purchase another plane. There have been some unusual ways of collecting money. One elderly lady who has a dog called Pip had the bright idea of strapping a collection box to his back.

“Pip’s own Bombing Plane Fund, please give generously” it says on the collection box. It’s difficult to walk past Pip without putting a penny or two in his box. I find it heart warming to see how even the poorest people are giving what they can towards the Fund; their generosity is humbling.

The mother country tells us that the Germans don’t regard black people as proper people and see them in same light as Jews and their fate would be the same as the Jews so thousands of men enlisted to help Britain win the war. Thank God Sydney is too old to fight, and Boysie failed his medical because of his asthma.

There are now United States air force and military bases in Jamaica and I see soldiers driving through Kingston and often hear planes flying overhead. People are very afraid because we’ve been told that the Germans want to get control of Jamaica because it is a stepping stone to the coast of America. The war is affecting us here on the island. Some goods like petrol, butter, flour, rice and oil are in short supply so we are only allowed to buy small quantities at a time.

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Of course, the cost of goods has also gone up a lot; but the rich are still able to afford most things. Thank goodness, Lucy is able to supply us with fresh food and we have plenty of fruit we can pick from the trees. We burn candles at night because, like London, we have blackouts too and have to keep curtains closed at night so that planes going over can't see our lights although I don't understand why if they are American planes.

Sydney said tonight he was sure Olga was safe; he says if there was bad news the hospital would have informed us and, of course, he is right. That is some comfort. I pray to the Virgin Mary every night to keep my daughter safe and well.

Chapter Twenty Five

Dear Diary

What did I do wrong: *The water in my bath was so hot the bathroom was thick with steam, burning my skin and I could barely see the bath taps. But I didn't want to cool it down, I wanted it as hot as I could bear it.*

Earlier Moores had said she'd meet me at the pub, but wasn't there when I arrived. So, I got my ginger beer from the barman and sat down. The pub was busy and noisy and though I'd been there a few times before, this was the first time on my own.

From where I was sitting I saw John in the other bar with a group of friends. His name was John Edward, Captain John Edward, and he's a doctor in the army based just outside London. Before the war he was a senior doctor at St Mary's Hospital in Paddington. Very popular, everyone knows him and he has a reputation for being a bit of a ladies man. I'd seen him

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on a few occasions - in the pub and sometimes in the hospital. Moores would often tease me about him saying I had a crush on him and, it was true, I did like him a lot, but he'd never even notice me.

I'd been sitting there for half an hour and Moores still hadn't turned up so I decided to get one more drink. I decided I'd go back to the Nurses' Home if she hadn't arrived by the time I'd finished it. I felt a twinge of disappointment when I went up to buy my ginger beer because I couldn't see John in the other bar.

I returned to my seat and the next thing I knew he was sitting opposite me. He smiled at me but I was overcome with shyness.

"Olga, isn't it?" he said loudly so I could hear above the noise. Goodness, I thought, he knows my name.

"Yes, it is".

I was getting a really good look at him now. I'd never seen anyone so handsome, except, of course, film stars, but most of them were dark haired. John was slim and fair-haired and he had such a lovely smile. By now I was hoping Moores wasn't coming because I wanted John all to myself. He told me he had three days leave before he had to report back to the army. I could see some of the other girls in the bar looking, a bit jealous I thought, at us and I felt so proud that he seemed interested in me.

Olga's Diary

My initial shyness was gone and I was surprised by how easy he was to talk to. I told him where I came from and all about my family and he talked about his life in the army. We talked like two people who had been friends for ages. He offered to buy me another ginger beer and while he was at the bar I went to the ladies toilet.

As I came out he was standing in the passage waiting for me and took hold of my hand.

“Come with me, Olga, I want to show you something.”

We went down the passage, in the opposite direction of the bar and John opened a door and we were in a small dirty yard where there were lots of beer barrels and crates of beer. He closed the door and I wondered what we were doing here.

Then he pushed me against the wall of the pub and started kissing me very roughly. With his knee he forced my legs apart and I was frightened because I knew then that something bad was going to happen to me.

I tried to push him away from me but the weight of his body had me pressed against the wall.

“Stop, please stop, you’re hurting me” I pleaded still trying to push him.

“Stop struggling and it won’t hurt” he said.

He pulled my dress up and my knickers down. He’d undone his trousers and by now I was crying

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“Please, don’t” I said, my fists punching his shoulders. I looked at him and he was smiling and then he covered my mouth with one hand and forced himself inside me.

Suddenly terrible, terrible pain, as he repeatedly pushed himself into me. The pain was so bad I wanted to pass out. I prayed to God to let me pass out so I could not feel it any more. After a few minutes I felt his body relax.

Again I said “Stop, you’re hurting me” and he laughed.

“It’s OK, Olga, I’m finished now”. He buttoned up his trousers and then went back inside.

For a few minutes I stayed in the same position I’d been in throughout my ordeal, leaning against the wall because I couldn’t stand up properly on my own without its support. I could feel fluid running down my thighs but was afraid to go back inside to the toilet to clean myself up.

There was a door in the yard that opened straight onto the street. I tried to run back to the nursing home but my legs were shaking so much I couldn’t. I kept my head down all the way back not wanting anyone to see my tears or to make eye contact with me because I thought they would know what had just happened to me.

Olga's Diary

I felt so ashamed and humiliated and tried to think what I had done or said in the pub to make such a bad thing happen to me, but I couldn't think of anything.

I stayed in the bath until it was cold, crying for Mammie.

Dear Diary

*I have physical pain and yet I feel numb too.
How can that be?*

I'm not the person I was before. That Olga has gone. I cannot concentrate on anything I am asked to do and am always being scolded by Sister Tutor. She asks me

"What's wrong with you, are you sick?"

I can't tell her. I don't tell anyone.

"If you don't pull your socks up there will be no point in sitting the first year examination again" she tells me. I don't care any more. I have nightmares now and am too frightened to sleep. When I close my eyes, I see it all happening again, so I stay awake.

I want to go home, but I can't.

Dear Diary

Matron called me to her office. I'm not surprised. I know my work has not been good lately. I was hoping

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she would tell me I could go home. Dr Randall, who carries out some of the three monthly student medical examinations, was sitting behind Matron's desk. He spoke first.

"I'm sorry to have to tell you Nurse, you are pregnant and I'm sorry but you'll have to leave St Giles".

The room started spinning and I don't remember what happened next, except I was sitting down and Matron was giving me sips of water from a glass. I was in shock. I couldn't believe what Dr Randall had said. Neither of them asked me any questions, which was just as well because I didn't have any answers.

"I don't know how I got pregnant" I told them and I started crying. Matron was very, very kind and said

"Leave things to me, I will arrange everything".

Later Moores came to my room and asked me what had happened, so I told her what Dr Randall said.

She asked me who the father was and I said

"I don't know".

But she didn't believe me,

"You must know who made you pregnant Olga, after all you it's not like you know a lot of men. What man have you been with?"

And then it began to dawn on me that maybe it had been John Edward. I had never mentioned to anyone what happened that day in the pub, even when I saw Moores the next day I didn't tell her. But now I told

Olga's Diary

her everything. By the time I'd finished, she was crying and came over and hugged me tight.

"Oh, Olga, I'm so sorry. I let you down. It would never have happened if I'd been there."

Still holding me she asked hadn't I realised afterwards that I might be pregnant.

I told her "No. Mammie brought us up very strictly at home and we never talked about things like that, so I had no idea how babies were made. When my sister Chickie was pregnant we were never allowed to discuss why she was getting bigger and bigger. We knew she was going to have a baby but Mammie never told us how babies were made. We were always told that babies were sent by God and delivered to the mother. That was the sort of upbringing we had".

"Oh Olga", Moores said, "and you a nurse. Never mind, my family know a doctor who will get rid of it for you. It won't help you get your job back but at least you won't be burdened with a baby and can go back to Jamaica and your family won't know anything about it."

I knew Moores meant well, but I was horrified by her suggestion.

"But, I would know. I can't do that. It would be a sin."

When I went to bed I thought about my family. There had been so much gossip about us over the years, so many scandals and I didn't want to be another one. When I thought of Mammie I ached to put my head on

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her lap, just once more, and feel her hand stroking my head like she did when I didn't feel well.

I don't feel well now Mammie.

Then I said my prayers and prayed for God to forgive me for my wickedness and the shame I had brought on my family

Chapter Twenty Six

Report

Miss Olga Josephine Browney
by
**Miss Geraldine Franks, Superintendent,
Catholic Refuge for Friendless Girls, Barclay Road,
Fulham, London**

Olga Browney was referred to the home by Miss Mary Norton, Matron, St Giles Hospital, Camberwell. Throughout the interview Miss Browney sat on the edge of her chair with her head bowed.

I told her that the first thing we had to do was to complete a registration form for her and she would have to tell me something about herself. As she answered my questions her voice trembled and her hands shook and when she mentioned her mother she started to cry. Miss Browney has made it clear she does not wish her mother, or any member of her family, to be informed about her situation. She says she does not want to hurt them.

We then moved on to the father of the child. At this point she refused to talk about him and no amount of

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encouragement on my part would make her. I decided not to press the matter.

I then asked her what plans she had for supporting the baby once it was born. When I explained that she could put the baby up for adoption, for the first time in the interview Miss B raised her head and said she would keep the baby. As gently as I could I explained to her that she may have no choice in the matter especially since she was not prepared to take the baby home to her family in Jamaica. I asked Miss B, how, if she kept the baby and stayed in England, she planned to manage, support and care for herself and the child. Miss B said she would find a job and work.

It is quite obvious that Miss B feels she has brought shame on her family by her predicament, but I am concerned about her decision not to return home and have tried to persuade her to change her mind.

I am at a loss to understand why the fear of confronting her family with an illegitimate child is greater than choosing to remain in a country at war, without the support of friends or family and treats unmarried mothers with contempt, not to mention the problem that her colour may bring.

Fortunately, there is time to persuade Miss B to place the child for adoption.

Geraldine Franks
Superintendent

Dear Diary

I never knew places like this existed. Matron said I was lucky to be here because this is a Catholic refuge and other girls in my state end up in the workhouse which she says, are very unpleasant places and the treatment of the women in them is often cruel and harsh.

"Here", she said, "they will treat you well and take care of you until you have your baby".

My room is cold and bare with an iron bed, a table, a chest of drawers, a large white enamel jug and bowl. On the wall is a big crucifix of Jesus on the cross. I like the cross being there. It makes me feel I'm not so alone.

There are eight other women here, all waiting to have their babies. I spend my days cleaning the refuge or peeling vegetables in the kitchen. When I'm not working I stay in my room and say my rosary. We are forbidden to speak to each other during the day but can talk for one hour in the evening after prayers. But I don't want to talk to anyone. I feel ashamed. I keep myself to myself.

Why do I dream of the things I can't have.

Last night it was Cissie's wedding. I saw everything so clearly.

Father Baker performed her wedding ceremony at the Holy Trinity Cathedral and there were flowers everywhere. Cissie walked down the aisle on Sydney's

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arm to the music of the wedding hymn, looking beautiful in a simple white silk dress with a long tulle veil and a spray of orange blossom in her hair. The tots and I were the bridesmaids and we wore pale blue dresses with broad hats trimmed with blue lace and chiffon. Over sixty people attended the service, as well as Dyke's family and friends and including three of Cissie and Dyke's children.

After the ceremony everyone went back to Mission House. In the back garden Mammie had arranged for a large booth made of bamboo and coconut leaves to be built and decorated with lignum vitae and pink bougainvillea. This was where all the wedding presents were put before they were unwrapped. There was a table in the garden covered with a white linen table cloth and on it stood the wedding cake with a net over it and pinned in several places. After the bride, the wedding cake was the centre of interest and the guests had to bid money to uncover the cake. They would try and outbid each other and by the time the cake was uncovered Cissie and Dyke would have several pounds, as well as lots of lovely presents. It was such a happy, noisy day with so much laughter. I thought about Michael Sales and the pretty earrings he'd given me at my leaving party in Kingston and how he said he'd wait for my return so I could be his girlfriend. Not now Michael, you wont want me to be your girl friend now.

Chapter Twenty Seven

Dear Diary

Marie: *So many people were in the labour room of St Mary's Hospital, Paddington, three medical students watching as part of their training, two nurses, Sister and a doctor. After eighteen painful hours it was nearly over.*

"One good heave now Olga. I can feel the head" the doctor said and then finally the baby slipped out.

Before the mouth and nasal passages were cleared Sister had slapped the baby on its bottom and it cried immediately. Then it was weighed, washed and wrapped in a blanket and given to me – I had a baby girl. I was frightened holding her because she was so small and I thought I would hurt her.

"Babies are tough, Olga. Give your daughter a cuddle" Sister said kindly. I wish Mammie could see my tiny, perfect little daughter.

Dear Diary

I've christened my daughter, Marie-Thérèse, after my favourite nun at Alpha Academy and I've had to register her birth. When the Registrar asked me the father's name, I just shook my head. I felt ashamed, but he was a kind man and patted my hand and gave me a little smile, but his act of kindness made me cry. I have no idea how I am going to look after my baby. I have no home, no money and no job.

Then the problem was solved for me. Miss Franks came to me and said that because of my circumstances, my baby would be taken from me and put in an orphanage to give me time to think about whether placing Marie for adoption was best for her. She also told me that Matron from St Giles had said I could work at the hospital, as a maid, for a short time, which would give me some money, and I could stay in the refuge for a while until I came to some kind of decision about Marie.

I've asked Miss Franks if she could arrange for Marie to be baptized at St James's Roman Catholic Church in Spanish Place and Moores said she would be Marie's godmother. Immediately after Marie was baptized I handed her over to a complete stranger to be taken to an orphanage in a place I'd never heard of, Gloucester. If Moores hadn't been with me I think I would have ended my life then.

Olga's Diary

"In Jamaica we have Obeah men who can work evil against people who hurt you, you know, Moores. They can make bad things happen to that person. I only have to ask someone back home and it will be done."

"That's voodoo, Olga"

"Maybe it is, but I want to hurt him for what he did to me".

"Would it help if I pop into John Lewis and bought a little doll and some pins, then you can pretend the doll is John Edward and stick the pins in it."

"Don't laugh, Moores, believe me Obeah works, I know, I've seen it working" I told her. I looked at her and there was a little smile on her face.

"Forget all that rubbish Olga" she said putting her arm around me.

"You need to concentrate on finding a way to get your baby back."

Dear Diary

Miss Franks wanted to see me. She showed me an advert from a newspaper. A toddler and baby nursery in Wimbledon wants help in its nursery and she thinks that with my nursing training I should apply for the job particularly as no school leaving certificate is asked for.

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It is a private nursery in a very big posh house at the end of a long drive in Victoria Drive, Wimbledon. I was interviewed by the two trained nurses who ran it. They were called Sister Warner and Sister Pateman. The Sisters told me that the mothers of the babies at the nursery are in the navy or army and when they have finished their tour of duty, or the war is over, they will take their babies back again. I told them I had a little baby, Marie, and asked if she could come with me and unbelievably they said I could bring Marie with me. Oh what joy.

Then they took me round the building and explained how the baby nursery takes babies from six months up to two years old. The baby room is on the top floor of the house and there is a play room next to it which is full of soft and wooden toys made by the local people living in the area and my bedroom is on the same floor.

Then they showed me around the toddler nursery which takes day children from two to five years of age. The day children are able to come to the nursery any time after 7.30 in the morning and have to be picked up by 6 in the evening. The nursery is on the first floor and also has a playroom as well as a sleeping room for the children to rest in during the day. Each toddler has their own overall, towel and flannel, which is kept on their own peg. Sister Pateman and Sister Warner's bedrooms are on that floor.

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On the ground floor are two bathrooms each with electric fires over the bath and the staff dining room. Next to the air raid shelter in the basement is the laundry room where there is a big sink with a wringer.

Each baby has its own cot and bedding and every day nappies have to be boiled as well as washing the cot sheets and towels. When I saw the amount of washing that had to be done I thought I can't do this job, I won't cope, but Sister must have seen my face, because she said I would not be doing the washing. A local girl comes in each day and does it and another woman comes in two afternoons a week to do the ironing.

"They were desperate for some help and you were a godsend to them Olga", Miss Franks said later.

For the first time in a very long time I felt happy, it meant free board and food for Marie and me and I got paid as well. I'd have done the job just for the board and food.

Six months after Marie was taken away from me I've got her back and I will never, never, never, EVER give her up again to anyone.

I miss my family.

Dear Diary

The baby room is painted in pretty pale colours, yellow, pink and blue with pictures of bunny rabbits, kittens and puppies stuck on the walls. There are ten cots in a row, each one containing a precious baby, and now the sisters have put another cot at the end of the row, for Marie. Now all I have to do is look after all of them.

Thank goodness the babies have a timetable. With one of the Sisters help, I bath the babies every other morning. I'm only allowed to make up enough baby food for one feed at a time and although it's against the rules, the only way I can feed so many babies who are crying for their milk at the same time, is to prop up a bottle in the first baby's mouth and then move on to the next baby.

After the babies have been fed I change their nappies and then it seems as if I have to start all over again. It's an endless round of feeding, changing nappies and giving the babies a little cuddle. In the afternoon I put them either in a cot or, if the weather is good, in a pram outside.

When it's quiet, I have to write up the babies' reports. It's the noisiest place to work in because there is always two or three babies crying at once. But I don't mind. I have Marie with me. She is beautiful and so good, she rarely cries. I try to be fair and not pay her more attention than the other babies. Thank God I'm

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always busy I don't have time to think about Mammie and home. I'm so tired by the end of the day. Sister Pateman and Sister Warner are very, very kind to me.

Dear Diary

My good friend Moores wrote to me and told me she's decided nursing is not for her so she's going home to live with her parents. She wanted to come and see me before she left, but I wrote and told her I was too busy but I promised to keep in touch. It wasn't that I didn't want to see her, I did, but I just couldn't bear saying goodbye to her. I'm such a coward.

It's been a long time since any bombs were dropped on London and just when everyone thought the war was nearly over that horrible Hitler has sent over a new type of bomb. It's called a "doodlebug", It makes a low buzzing noise like a motorbike then there is silence, which is its engine cutting out and it glides without a sound for a few seconds, then explodes.

Last night I sat on the stairs and in the distance I heard a doodlebug. It got louder and louder until it seemed like it was overhead when suddenly it stopped and there was silence. I counted to ten and waited for the explosion, but it landed in the distance. We were safe, but maybe somebody else wasn't so lucky. Whenever the sirens went off we are supposed to take

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the babies downstairs into the basement but by the time we've moved the cots down there, the all clear sounds and it's all over. Wimbledon has been hit a few times during these raids but has not suffered as much as some other parts of London where the devastation has been huge. Even during the Blitz moral in the capital wasn't as low as it is now.

Dear Diary

A few nights ago I heard a strange sound coming from one of the cots. As I went down the row checking each baby, I realised the sound was coming from the end cot where Marie was. The sound was her struggling to breathe. Sister Pateman examined her and said Marie was ill. She had pneumonia. She told me to go and look after the other babies and she and Sister Warner would see to her.

They put her into one of the bathrooms, put on the electric fire, turned the hot water on and filled up the bath so the bathroom was full of steam. I was desperate to help my baby and told them that back home when I had scarlet fever, Mammie boiled some onions and put them in muslin cloth and tied them round my ankles, and that helped bring down my temperature.

“Shall I boil some onions”? I asked them.

Olga's Diary

“No, Olga, go and look after the other babies and don't worry, we'll see to Marie”.

Then about every hour throughout the night they took turns watching over Marie, running the hot water so the level of steam remained high helping Marie to breathe. Any spare minute I could, I prayed to God not to take away from me the one thing that made the pain of what happened, the loss of my family and my loneliness bearable.

Two days after Marie was taken ill Sister Warner took her out of the bathroom and put her back into the nursery. With the help of God and two wonderful women, Marie had fought for her little life and won.

Dear Diary

Marie is walking now and we have to leave here because she is disturbing the babies. The Sisters have asked me what I'm going to do. I think I'll get a job in a private house so Marie will be able to come with me.

Chapter Twenty Eight

Dear Diary

Colonel & Mrs Hurt: *Sister Warner sent me to Massey's Employment Agency in Baker Street, London, to apply for a live-in cook/housekeeper position so that I can have Marie with me. The reception room was very big with four cubicles down one side of the room. Two of the cubicles had a curtain drawn across them for privacy and in the other two there was a small table and two chairs.*

There were three well dressed women waiting and behind a big desk was a middle aged woman with glasses that sat on the end of her nose. Her grey hair was plaited into two pigtails, each one pinned either side of her head. She looked very stern, but, when I went up to her she smiled at me. I told her my name and that I wanted a job as a cook, although I couldn't cook, but was willing learn. She told me to go and wait in one of the cubicles and draw the curtain.

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I sat there for a few minutes on my own and then a tall, slender, elegant lady came into the cubicle and sat down opposite me. She said her name was Mrs Hurt and she had a big house in Billericay in Essex. She had two sons Michael and Edward, who were away in the Navy and she needed someone to help keep her house orderly and cook for her, her husband, who was retired, and her daughter-in-law. She said she has a cook at the moment, Mrs Attwood, who has worked for Mrs Hurt over 30 years, but she is old now and wants to retire. Mrs Hurt asked me to tell her something about myself.

I told her my name, but said everyone calls me Carmen. I don't know why I said that really, because it's not true. I've never liked the name Olga and Carmen sounds so much prettier.

I told her I had a baby daughter and I wanted a job where she could come with me. I said I hadn't a husband and, I waited for her to ask questions why, but she didn't. So I continued explaining that I wanted a job in a private house as a cook, although I couldn't cook, but I was willing to learn. I thought it seemed a lot to ask.

"Carmen, Mrs Attwood can teach you to cook, so how would you like to come and work for me". My heart leapt.

"I would love to".

Hendon House: *A week later she picked me up from the nursery in her car and drove me and Marie down to Hendon House, her home in Billericay. It was a great big house and in the hall is a grandfather clock that chimes on the hour, every hour, and always makes me jump when I hear it. There is a wide spiral mahogany staircase with pictures hanging on dark rich wood panelling, Rembrandt and Reynolds type paintings of the Hurts' ancestors, their eyes following you as you climb the stairs.*

Marie and I have the west wing all to ourselves, which sounds very grand I know, but really it is just a bedroom and our very own sitting room and bathroom.

How wonderful! My very own bathroom.

Mrs Attwood and her husband have their own little cottage in the village. Of course, I knew with the war going on it was hard for people like Mrs Hurt to find staff because women were being called up to work for the war effort but even so, I couldn't believe how lucky I was to be offered this job and was determined to do my best.

As soon as I had unpacked, I'd handed our rations books to Mrs Hurt. There was no shortage of fresh vegetables there because they grew their own and had done for years. They also had orchards with apple, pear and plum trees and they kept chickens.

On my first day Mrs Attwood showed me where the vegetable garden was and asked me to pull up some lettuces and then wash them. I returned flushed with

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success with two beautiful lettuces and went to the scullery to wash them thoroughly under running water. When I took them in to the kitchen Mrs Hurt was sitting at the kitchen table reading the newspaper and when Mrs Attwood saw the lettuce.

“What the hell have you done to them?”

“The water was so cold I washed them in hot water” I told her.

She and Mrs Hurt thought it was hilarious and the pair of them couldn't stop laughing.

Every morning I have to make up a breakfast tray for Captain and Mrs Hurt and take it to their room. They are an elderly couple and are usually still in bed when I knock on the door. The pair of them look so sweet sitting up side by side in their bed. They talk to each other with great affection; honestly they are lovely. I call them Derby and Joan to Mrs Attwood but not in front to their faces.

Later on I have to tidy their bedroom and then tidy and dust the drawing room. Although the drawing room is big, it has a homely feel to it. There is a grand fireplace with a mantelpiece above and it has a beautiful marble clock on it.

The sofas and armchairs are big and comfortable and the occasional tables on either side each have a bronze table lamp, as well as lots of photographs of the children. There's a rosewood sideboard with a pair of matching vases and Mrs Attwood told me they are very

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rare and worth a lot of money. I wish she hadn't told me that because now I dread dusting them in case I break them. On the walls are even more pictures of the Hurts' ancestors.

There's a glass cabinet which has their porcelain tea service displayed in it. In the corner is a wind up gramophone and a big pile of records. It reminds me of the Nurses Home in St Giles because we had one in the sitting room. I try not to think about St Giles; I get upset if I do.

Miss Judith, is married to Michael, Captain and Mrs Hurt's youngest son, and has two lovely boys, Patrick, who was nine and Nicholas, who was 10. They are at boarding school in Windsor but home now for the school holidays. Patrick has taken a fancy to Marie and wherever he goes he takes her with him.

Captain Hurt is very fond of Marie too. He came into the kitchen this morning and said

"She'll only bother you here, why don't you let her help me pick some apples".

They have an apple orchard and grow coxes apples and they were the sweetest apples I've ever tasted. When I went to fetch Marie the other day, she was wearing Captain Hurt's hat and they were both walking together with their heads bowed and hands behind their backs.

Oh God she looked so cute.

Olga – A Daughter's Tale

I received a letter with a Christmas card in it today.

It was such a surprise when Mrs Hurt handed it to me. It had been on a long journey. Matron, at St Giles, had forwarded it to the Refuge. Miss Franks had forwarded it on to Sister Pateman, who thank goodness, had put it in a fresh envelope, with a little note to me saying she hoped Marie and I were well and please keep in touch with them. At first I was so excited when I opened the envelope and saw the letter was from Ruby and when I saw the censor and his black pen had been at work again. I cried, there was so little left for me to read. Thank goodness the censor had left the Christmas card alone.

Every year Sydney sends his customers a Christmas card, but not usually one covered with snow. It seems an odd choice really because it never snows in Jamaica, but, anyway, I'm going to keep it. Sydney has three shops now, business must be good.

Everyone is well and sends their love. Darling Mammie told Sydney to tell me that she that she thinks of me all the time. Dolly is getting married to a Syrian gentleman, but the family are not happy about it.

They're all worried about me because I haven't written to them for ages but what can I tell them, not the truth. My life has changed so much. I'm not ashamed of having a little girl, but I wish the circumstances were different. I don't want them to know about my life now.

Season's Greetings

*Our sincere thanks and
best wishes for a happy holiday
to our friends and patrons.*



BROWNEY'S

- ★ Browney's Ltd. — 44½ Spanish Town Rd.
- ★ Bicycles & Supplies — 52 Barry St.
- ★ Browney's Cycle Depot — 54 Barry St.

*I couldn't bear Mammie to see some of the work
I have to do, cleaning out the dirty fireplaces every
morning in the winter and cleaning silver.*

Olga – A Daughter's Tale

Captain and Mrs Hurt are kind to me and especially Marie, I like them, but I know my place, after all I'm their servant.

Dear Diary

Mrs Hurt has an Irish housemaid, named Kathleen Ryan. She doesn't like me and I don't like her. I'd been putting away some linen in the cupboard on the first floor landing and I was in a hurry so I came down the front stairs. Servants are supposed to use the back stairs and Kathleen saw me and told me off. I told her Mrs Hurt didn't mind me using the front stairs now and again and she called me an "uppity nigger with airs and graces".

I was shocked I can tell you.

"I'm not a nigger, I'm not black". I told her straight. Judith heard what Kathleen had said and told her mother-in-law.. Mrs Hurt was furious.

Kathleen said she'd never worked with niggers before.

Mrs Hurt told Kathleen that if she wanted to continue to work for her, she was never to say that word again and if Kathleen didn't want to work with me, "you can leave now". Kathleen was crying and I was unhappy too.

Olga's Diary

Mrs Attwood was very kind to me and made me a cup of tea and said "best thing that could happen would be for her to leave – good riddance to bad rubbish. I've never liked the Irish". Mrs Attwood and I got on well together right from the beginning, but I was surprised that Mrs Hurt stood up for me.

"She likes you Carmen, she thinks you have courage and so do I". Wasn't that a nice thing to say?

Chapter Twenty Nine

Dear Diary

The war in Europe had ended, finally. I was in the kitchen when the news came over the radio. Mr Churchill has ordered the next two days to be a national holiday. The village organised a big party and everyone was invited and Union Jack flags were hanging out of nearly every window and on every tree.

There was bunting strung across from one cottage to another and a tea party on the village green where everyone brought cakes, sandwiches, fizzy drinks and there was dancing and singing. Lovely cakes.

Everyone from Hendon Hall went, all the staff and the Hurts and we all had a wonderful time. It was so nice to see everyone so happy, particularly Captain and Mrs Hurt, because their sons would be coming home.

Dear Diary

Sydney: *A few weeks ago I got another letter from home. This one was from Sydney saying he was coming to England on a business trip and would be staying at the Reynolds Hotel in London during the last week of March. He said he wanted to see me and isn't leaving England until he has done.*

So I went to meet him on my day off yesterday. Sydney has lost weight and some hair, but, otherwise he'd barely changed, but he said I had.

I had bought a new outfit for the occasion because I wanted to look the best I could. I was wearing a new blue dress I'd recently bought and a little hat to match and a grey coat belted at the waist. I thought I looked very nice. Sydney said I did.

It was so good to hear about Mammie and the family. He told me Mammie was well, but worried about me and gave me all the news about the family. Cissie and Dyke had another two children; Dolly had married her Syrian and I felt sad I hadn't be at her wedding; there were no changes in Pearl's life; Ruby had a boyfriend called Jack, whom Sydney and Mammie approved of. Ruby and Jack were very serious about each other and Sydney said he thought there might be another marriage in the family. How nice.

Birdie was working at the Ward Theatre and it seemed as if she might go to America and stay with Vivie for a while. Vivie had got her divorce and married

Olga's Diary

Freddie. I wondered how Mammie felt about that, I bet she was upset. Chickie and Maurice were well but poor. Chickie still hadn't heard a word from Victor Condell and Gwennie was still living with that terrible man, Keith Rousseau. And Boysie and Minah had another baby, a little girl. Once we'd been through the family I waited for the questions to come my way.

"Mammie is desperately worried about you Olga. We know you're not at the hospital any more, what happened?"

I couldn't tell Sydney about Marie, not because I was frightened of him, I wasn't any more, but because I was so ashamed of what happened to me and I hadn't the courage to face my family.

I told him I'd failed my first year's exam and that's why I left the hospital and because of the war I couldn't go home. So I had to find some work and because I had some experience nursing I found a job as a children's nursery nurse.

I told him I had lots of friends and I was very happy with the job because it was well paid and I would never be able to earn so much in Jamaica. I wanted to stay on here in London a bit longer.

"Well, that's fine because I'm going to be here for at least another four months doing business around the country, so, when I've finished, we can go home together". Sydney had it all worked out. "This time", he said, "I'm keeping my promise to Mammie".

Olga – A Daughter's Tale

I gave him a false address and he gave me the date he would be back at the Reynolds Hotel. I told him I would ring him at the hotel when he returned there. It wasn't that I don't want to go home, of course I do. I want to be with my family and I want Mammie to see her beautiful little granddaughter, but I fear seeing Mammie's disappointment in me. That would be too much to bear. I know they will ask questions which I don't want to answer. The memory is too painful.

Then Sydney asked about Joanne and if she was well. When I told him she'd died, I swear there were tears in his eyes. He put his arm round me, but I had to shake it off and he looked hurt. I couldn't help it, these days if anyone is kind to me, I cry.

Sydney wanted to know why I hadn't kept in touch with Aunt Martha. I told him I didn't like her because she blasphemed a lot, was a drunk, a liar and a hypocrite. I must have said it with such venom, because Sydney looked so shocked. I told him how when I was staying with her, Mr Kitchen stayed overnight with Aunt Martha and that they were living together as man and wife. I told him she said mean things to me.

"She makes a great pretence of being a Christian person when she's in Jamaica going to Church but she doesn't go near a Church here and then there's Mr Kitchen"

Olga's Diary

“What about Mr Kitchen” Sydney asked. And before I could stop myself I'd blurted out Aunt Martha's big secret.

“He's a black man”

Dear Diary

The Hunt Ball: *The Hurts have a stud farm in Ireland and, now the war is over, they have decided to close Hendon Hall and move back to Ireland. Mrs Hurt said she would have liked me to come with them, but there are staff there already. I don't mind really. But before they move to Ireland they want to hold a Hunt Ball, like they used to do before the war.*

Fortnum and Mason's in Piccadilly are doing the catering for the Hunt Ball and Mrs Hurt has put me in charge of collecting the programmes which means I have to stand by the drawing room door and as the gentlemen came in they hand me their programmes. I had a peek at one and it's just a list of all the dances with room to write down the name of the lady who the gentleman is going to have a particular dance with.

Mrs Hurt's daughter-in-law, Judith dressed me for the Ball in a long white dress with a wide gold sash around my waist and a gold and white turban on my head. When I saw myself in the mirror I thought I looked

Olga – A Daughter's Tale

like Annie Harvey, the Obeah woman in Kingston, but Mrs Hurt and Mrs Attwood said I looked lovely.

When the first huntsman arrived he gave me his programme. Because he was wearing a bright red jacket I said to him "I think you are in the wrong place"

"This is the Hunt Ball isn't it?"

"Yes, but you're supposed to be in an evening suit".

"My dear girl, the huntsmen come to the Hunt Ball wearing their red hunting jacket" he said.

No one had told me that the huntsmen's jackets were red and that was the correct dress code for them. Captain and Mrs Hurt were coming down the spiral staircase and she looked lovely in a lilac evening dress.

"What's the matter Carmen".

"I was just telling this gentleman that he was in the wrong place because he's not dressed properly"

Mrs Hurt was very apologetic to the gentleman and said she should have explained to me that the huntsmen come in their uniform. I felt very foolish, but the gentleman and Mrs Hurt were very nice about it.

Oh it was a wonderful sight, all those handsome men in their red hunting jackets and the ladies looking beautiful in their evening dresses.

Our last day: *This morning Captain Hurt gave Marie a present beautifully wrapped and tied with a pink ribbon. The present was so big I had to help her open it and out came a whopping big doll. She was the most beautiful doll I've ever seen and she was as big as Marie.*

Marie was speechless, but beaming.

"Susie", she finally said, hugging the doll tight. It was a wonderful present from the Hurts and made my little girl very happy.

Mrs Hurt gave me a month's holiday pay and arranged for Marie to go into a nursery in Basingstoke for two weeks so that I could have a holiday and promised to give me a good reference for my next position.

"Carmen, I don't want to pry into your personal life and I only do so now because I'm fond of you and Marie, but for Marie's sake don't you think you should contact your family".

Mrs Hurt had no idea I had already seen Sydney, nor did she know I had an Aunt in London. I had never discussed anything about my family with the Hurts.

"I don't think you realise how hard life could become for you both. There are many people, including the authorities, who consider an unmarried mother unfit to bring up a child and may even try and take her from you".

Olga – A Daughter's Tale

I was deeply touched by her concern for us and wanted to hug her, like I would Mammie, but I was a servant and that wouldn't have been acceptable, so I just said

"I will think about it".

I hope Mrs Hurt is wrong. I think my guardian angel has returned to watch over me and Marie. We have been lucky so far; we have met nice people like the Sister Pateman and Sister Warner at the nursery, the Hurts, even Matron and Miss Franks have been very, very, kind.

Mammie (Becky's) Diary

We have moved to a smaller house in Tremaine Road and, in the end, I was quite pleased to leave Mission House. The memories are haunting me.



Mr Sydney L. Browney, city business man, returned to Jamaica after a six month stay in the UK where he went in the interest of his bicycle and motor cycle business and to take a holiday

I saw this article about Sydney in the paper and thought I'd save it. It's rather a nice picture of him.

Poor Sydney he feels he has let me down not bringing Olga home. He says she looked smart, but tired and her demeanour had changed. Her sparkle had gone and he thinks there is something wrong, but she's not saying what it is. When he asked Martha if she knew, she said she hadn't seen Olga for months. If something has happened to her in England and she feels she cannot talk to me about it, then I have not done a good job as a mother. I've let her down, otherwise she would be here knowing there is nothing she could ever do or say that could make me love her less. But at least I know she's alive.

Olga – A Daughter's Tale

Last night the tots and I went to the Holy Trinity Church and together with Father Butler we prayed to St Anthony to bring Olga safely home.

When Sydney visited Martha he said the first thing she asked him for was money, but he refused to give her any. That surprised me. He says she's always asking for money and thinks he has an endless supply and, then, almost as an afterthought he added,

“I don't think she was very nice to Olga”.

I wonder if Martha has something to do with Olga not coming home”.

In fact, he says he doesn't want any of the girls to stay with Martha in future because it is not a very nice area now. I doubt that any of the girls will want to go to London; it must be quite dangerous living there with unexploded bombs and much of it looking like a vast building site.

How is Olga managing with the winter cold, I wonder? I remember how the harsh the weather could be and how the temperature could drop to freezing. And what if it snows and there are blizzards, can she keep warm? Britain is still recovering from the war and we know they are still short of certain foods and fuel. It's strange, but I don't think I could bear to be cold now after living here for so long.

Chapter Thirty

Dear Diary

Mrs Hammell: *Went back to Massey's Agency to look for a job looking after children. I don't want to cook any more. I had an interview with a Mrs Gloria Hammell, a widow, and explained that I was a widow too and that my husband, who had been an air force pilot during the war, had been shot down by the Germans over France. She was very sympathetic.*

Mrs Hammell has a daughter called Madeline and she wants a live-in mother's help for her daughter because she has very weak legs and they needed to be rubbed daily with olive oil. I told her about Marie and explained that, although she wasn't at school yet, she would be starting soon. Mrs Hammell said if she offered me the job she was happy for Marie to come with me as she thought it would be very nice for Madeline to have a companion to play with.

Olga – A Daughter's Tale

I showed her my reference from Mrs Hurt but she said she would telephone Mrs Hurt and speak with her personally and would let me know about the position when she had made a decision.

Mrs Hammell has a lovely 3-bedroomed flat in Cheyne Walk, Chelsea and Marie and I have a nice room with a big double bed. It's a good job because all I do is look after Madeline and Marie being there makes it easy because they play together nicely.

Madeline is a kind little girl and doesn't mind sharing her toys with Marie. I take the girls to Hyde Park quite a bit and when it's hot they paddle in the Serpentine or sometimes we will have a picnic.

When I first arrived Madeline was very pale and thin, but she is blossoming because we are outdoors so much. She has more colour in her cheeks and her legs are getting stronger. Mrs Hammell is very pleased.

When the three of us are out together, it's funny, people always assume I am the girls' nurse. I don't bother to tell them that the pretty dark haired one is my daughter.

As a special treat I sometimes take them to the London Zoo. There are hummingbirds there and the sight of them makes me homesick. The girls get very excited when it comes to feeding time and they like to throw nuts at the monkeys. Sometimes we go to Regents Park but I avoid the bench I used to sit on, the one I was sitting on when I met Joanne. I try not to

Olga's Diary

think too much about my previous life. It's over, gone, I have a different life now.

One day when I was rubbing Madeline's legs I told Mrs H how in Jamaica we rub white rum on our joints to ease the pain and would she like me to do the same for Madeline.

"Are you mad, Carmen? What do you think people will say if my four year old daughter goes around smelling of rum".

I hadn't thought of that.

I mentioned to Mrs H I was thinking of sending Marie to a private boarding school and could she recommend one.

"When you told me Marie would be starting school, I didn't realise you meant a private one."

She was surprised by my enquiry and I'm not sure if she believed me.

So I told her my late husband left me some money for Marie's education. But the truth is I've saved enough for the first two terms, and hopefully I can save more from my wages. I don't spend much here.

Mrs H recommended a Catholic convent in Dartford, Kent which would be easy for me to get to from London. The way I see it what happened to me was not Marie's fault and her education is important and she is entitled to have the best I can give her. That's what Mammie did for us and even though Sydney helped out, Mammie took in lots of lodgers when we were young just

Olga – A Daughter's Tale

so we could all go to Alpha Academy which was the best Catholic school in Kingston.

And Marie is definitely not going to end up like me, working as a servant.

Dear Diary

So cold: This is what it must be like at the North Pole. It snows all the time and the temperature is freezing. Last night it was -9°C and it said on the wireless that the sea froze at Margate.

The Prime Minister says everyone must save fuel. Things must be bad because people are being sent home from work and told to go to bed to keep warm.

The army is being used to clear roads blocked by snow and drop food from helicopters to farms and little villages in the countryside and some old people are dying because they cannot keep warm. Isn't that terrible?

Dear Diary

The Convent: Marie is in boarding school now at Our Lady's Convent in Dartford and is very nice and lots of posh people's children go there. Matron thought I was her nanny when we arrived and didn't hide her surprise when I said I was Marie's mother.

Olga's Diary

While we talked Marie was crying because she didn't want to leave me. I gave her a white lace handkerchief to wipe her tears and she was wiping her little face with it saying

"Don't go Mummy, please don't go". It upset me.

"Never mind, when you are gone and she sees the other children she'll be alright" Matron said. In bed that night I cried my eyes out because I didn't have Marie with me..

I know this will be good for her because she will be taught how to become a lady and to speak nicely. The sisters say she will settle down and make new friends and not to worry about her. Poor Madeline is missing Marie a lot.

Mrs Hammell is worried because Madeline is not as strong as other children she might get hurt at school, so she prefers to employ a private tutor for her at home. I think Madeline would be fine at school. Mrs H is over protective of her.

Dear Diary

Madeline and I are getting very excited because Marie is coming home for the holidays.

Then Mrs Hammell said it wasn't really convenient for Marie to come home during half term and

Olga – A Daughter's Tale

would I mind asking the nuns if she could stay in the convent instead.

So Marie stayed in the convent again and I haven't seen her for such a long time.

Will have to give both girls lots of special treats.

Dear Diary

At last Marie is home for the holidays but there is a change in Mrs H's attitude to me. She is off-hand with me.

"Have I done something wrong?"

She said she was unhappy with my work and thinks I am more interested in Marie than in looking after Madeline.

That's unfair, and it's not true, and I told her I go out of my way to pay Madeline more attention than Marie. I took the girls to the Zoo and when we got back home, Madeline came up and hugged me and gave me a kiss to say thank you.

In the evening Madeline likes to come to our room to play with Marie rather than be with her mother. If I tell her she must stay with her Mummy she gets upset and thinks I don't want her.

I think Mrs H is jealous because Madeline is very fond of Marie and me..

Mrs H and I have had a little talk.

Olga's Diary

"I apologise if I was wrong" she said.

"But, really, Carmen, no mother can look after another person's child and neglect her own".

She said she thinks it would be better if I leave.

Oh dear, I don't want to, but I suppose she's right.

Dear Diary

Back to the kitchen: Now Marie is in boarding school I have a better choice of jobs. I'm working for Googie Withers, the film actress, and her husband, John McCallum as an assistant housekeeper in their London home. I keep their house clean and on their cook's day off, I do the cooking. I really like it. They are both very sweet and kind to me. They have all sorts of interesting people to dinner, other actors and writers, and they're not demanding. Mr McCallum is so handsome he makes me swoon. He's like the hero in some of Ruby's stories.

The only problem is Marie can't come home for the holidays. I didn't tell them about her because otherwise I wouldn't have got the job. I know Sister Bernadette is getting cross with me because she thinks I am neglecting Marie. I promised Marie I would go to the sports day. She was running in the egg and spoon race

Olga – A Daughter's Tale

but I had to miss it. I feel simply dreadful and I miss her terribly.

She wrote me a letter and said she was very upset and crying.

“All the other Mummies came to sports day but not my Mummy”.

It's no good, even though I like this job a lot, I will have to find another one before Christmas so I can have Marie in the holidays.

Falling behind on my savings.

Chapter Thirty One

Dear Diary

I had a letter from my friend Moores today. I wrote to her to ask her to lend me some money because I have to pay Marie's school fees. I hated doing it. She's so kind Moores, she always was to me – and she sent me more money than I asked for. She said she was still in touch with Ethel who was married and has two children. But Moores isn't married. She said she hadn't found the right bloke.

Moores still kept in touch with some of the other nursing students we worked with and she'd heard that John Edward, Marie's father, had died in December 1949. He'd married an American girl and moved to New York and was working as a doctor in one of the hospitals there. He was standing on the subway platform and just fell forward onto the railway lines and was hit by an incoming train and killed outright. Witnesses said he just

Olga – A Daughter's Tale

toppled forward. Moores said there was a mystery surrounding his death. An autopsy had revealed nothing unusual and so the medical examiner concluded that he probably had an accidental fall. But some of his colleagues were sure he'd committed suicide. Apparently he suffered from depression quite a lot.

Moores asked me if I had worked Obeah on him for what he did to me. Honestly, how could Moores think I'd do that! Of course, I didn't, but if any of my family knew what he had done to me, they would certainly have worked obeah on him.

Dear Diary

The worst present in the world: *It's my birthday today and God has given me a terrible birthday present. Jamaica has been hit by a savage hurricane with winds over 125 mph. Kingston suffered badly and so far 154 people have died and 50,000 are homeless.*

Please God, let my family be safe, please, please. How can I find out how they are?

There isn't very much in the newspapers about it. Perhaps the newspapers here will print the names of the people that died, like the Daily Gleaner does. If not, I'll have to go and see Aunt Martha; she will be in touch with the family.

Olga's Diary

It must have been terrifying; it's bad enough when a hurricane comes during the day but this one struck at night.

Dear Diary

Aunt Martha: *Went to see her, but what a shock I had. It's a been a long time since I last saw her and AM's changed a lot.. She looks like she's shrunk and looks so much older and her teeth were rotten – breath smelt! I wasn't sure how she would react when she saw me at the door, but, to my surprise, she was very nice.*

"Olga, come in, how nice to see you".

I was shocked too by the state of her flat, which was once pretty and clean, but now filthy, dark because the curtains were drawn even though it was daytime and it smelt of stale cooking fat.

"Excuse the mess, it's difficult to find good help these days". I thought she was being funny, but the look on her face said she was being serious.

"I've fallen on hard times, and can't sew any more, arthritis" she said showing me her knarled hands.

After a while I asked her if she knew how Mammie and the rest of the family were after the hurricane. She said she hadn't heard from any of them since 1946 when Sydney was in London.

Olga – A Daughter's Tale

“You remember when Sydney was here that time, don't you Olga? That was when you told him my secret, wasn't it?”

At first I didn't know what she was talking about. And then I remembered. She had made me promise not to tell the family that Mr Kitchen was a black man. I knew why she didn't want the family to know. It would have shown her up to be the hypocrite she is, after all she was horrible to Mammie for ages because she had married Pops. I started to deny it but she stopped me.

“Don't, Olga, don't lie. It's not important anyway. It's all in the past and what's done is done”.

Aunt Martha is not normally the forgiving type. In fact, I remember Aunt Lucy saying Aunt Martha could bear a grudge longer than anybody else she knew. But, perhaps she had softened in her old age, I thought.

“Why are you asking me about the family, Olga?”. Suddenly I was angry with myself. You fool Olga. I realised my mistake immediately – by asking about the family I was telling her I wasn't in contact with them.

“Why don't you ask them yourself Olga, or is there some reason you can't? Do you have a secret too, Olga, is that why you haven't gone back to Jamaica?” She asked sympathetically. Then her voice got harder.

“You don't have to tell me your secret Olga, I already know it. I phoned St Giles a long time ago and

Olga's Diary

after a bit of digging around, I discovered you'd been kicked out of the hospital because you were pregnant. You had a baby didn't you. Mammie's favourite little girl got herself a little bastard".

"Shut up" I shouted. She made me feel dirty again.

"That's why you won't speak to any of the family or go home, isn't it"? I nodded.

"Oh, don't worry Olga," she was being sympathetic again now

"Your secret's safe with me. I promise you I won't mention it to any of them".

I looked at her and there was a little smile around her mouth but the smile didn't reach her eyes. They were cold.

I don't think age had mellowed Aunt Martha, I think she is still a mean spirited woman.

**Letter to Becky, 3 Tremaine Road, Kingston, Jamaica
from
Martha, 23 Chilworth Street, Paddington.**

Dearest Becky

I am the bearer of some tragic news. I have today been notified by the authorities that Olga died in the winter of 1947.

Olga – A Daughter's Tale

Apparently, at the time of her death, there was nothing to identify her, no identity card, passport, letters, nothing.

This has come to light all these years later because, by chance, I read in the local paper of a woman who was in court recently for shop lifting and gave her name as Olga Josephine Browney. I immediately went to the police and said I wanted to see this woman because she was a relative of mine, but when I saw the woman, it was not Olga.

The woman's real name is Celeste Rodgers and according to Celeste she befriended Olga all those years ago. Olga told her she had nowhere to live. Celeste told Olga she rented a room in a boarding house and she was sure the landlady wouldn't mind if Olga stayed there for a few days until she found somewhere suitable.

While Olga was sleeping Celeste robbed Olga, took all her possessions, including her clothes and moved out. Celeste gave the police the address and I recently visited the landlady who confirmed that over three years ago an unnamed coloured woman was found dead in bed of hypothermia in a room that had been rented to Celeste Rodgers.

Because Olga had nothing to identify her, and it pains me to have to tell you this Becky, Olga was buried in a paupers grave. Some small comfort, however, Becky, at least Olga is with Jesus now.

Your loving sister,

Martha

Chapter Thirty Two

Dear Diary

Hunters Farm: *I applied for a job with a Major and Mrs Langford. They have a farm in Pulborough and live in a big Tudor house. I arrived for the interview and rang the door bell. When Mrs Langford opened the door she looked at me in surprise, so, I told her my name was Carmen Browne and I had come for an interview.*

“But you’re coloured”

“Oh.... yes. I’m sorry” I said.

“Well, now you’re here, you’d better come in”.

I told her I was a widow with a young daughter at boarding school and that my husband had been a doctor and been killed when the tube station he was sheltering in had been hit by a bomb.

She explained that I would be cooking for the family and small intimate dinner parties, but no fancy food as she and her husband liked good plain cooking. I showed her my references and she read them twice. I wonder why, they’re very good.

Olga – A Daughter's Tale

Mrs Langford isn't sure that I am the sort of person she wants and is going to discuss the matter with her husband and will let me know in about a week's time. I won't get the job.

She doesn't like coloured people.

Dear Diary

Good news: *Mrs Langford wrote to me and said she would give me a three months trial period as she would like to see how things worked out when Marie comes home for the holiday. Thank goodness, I was getting worried. I didn't want to ask the nuns to keep Marie again for the holidays.*

The Langfords like her and so do their two children, Emma and Tim. The children aren't snobs like their mother and they play nicely together and tell each other about their schools.

The convent has made quite the little lady out of Marie and listening to her talking with such confidence makes me feel she has more in common with them than me.

The children sat spellbound the other day, on the backdoor step of the kitchen, while Marie told them about a new film, "Never Take No for an Answer", the nuns had taken her class to see.

Olga's Diary

It's about a little orphan boy called Peppino whose precious donkey, Violetta, falls ill and he wants to take the donkey into the crypt of St Francis, who is the patron saint of animals, in the hope that this will cure Violetta, but everyone he goes to for permission says no he can't. So Peppino decides to ask the Pope himself and he and Violetta have a long and hard journey to Rome with many obstacles in his way, but in the end the Pope says yes and Violetta goes into the crypt of St Francis. It's a lovely film and very sad; I cried when I saw it.

Dear Diary

Emma came to the kitchen and asked me if Marie could come for a swim in their pool but I told her Marie had to help me shell the peas for lunch. So Emma offered to help and then Marie could finish quickly. Mrs Langford came into the kitchen and saw what Emma was doing and was very angry with me.

"My children do not do the servant's work" she said.

I was furious with her. Marie is not a servant. I am.

First thing in the morning Emma, Tim and Marie go the dairy and help George, the farm hand, milk the cows. Then after breakfast they all go off riding together

Olga – A Daughter's Tale

and are gone for hours. It's busy at harvest time and everyone is expected to help so they are all out in the fields until nearly dark, including the children.

Marie fits in well with the family and now Mrs Langford doesn't like to see Marie doing kitchen chores, but they keep me so busy in the kitchen and sometimes I need help and it's good to remind Marie that she is not one of them. I think she looks down on me sometimes.

Dear Diary

Last night I dreamt about the day I made my first Holy Communion. There were 200 of us that Sunday morning in the Holy Trinity Cathedral. It was a grand occasion with the choir in the background singing "Mass of the Angels" while the service was in progress. And then we all left the Cathedral to the sound of Mozart's Grand March. Outside the Cathedral there were group pictures of us all taken with our family and then onto a wonderful breakfast and the Alpha Band playing while we ate.

I know why I dreamt about this. Guilt. I was feeling guilty about not being at the convent yesterday when Marie made her first Holy Communion. Mrs Langford said I had to change my day off because she wanted me to cook Beef Wellington for a luncheon party which she decided to give on the spur of the moment. I

Olga's Diary

tried to explain to her how important it was that I went to the convent and how disappointed Marie would be, but her bloody Beef Wellington was more important. She said I could take the day off, but I could have my cards at the end of the week. I need this job, I had to do it.

Letter to Mummy from Marie

Dear Mummy

Please don't be cross with me. Sister Bernadette put my name in the naughty book again? Is that why you didn't come to see me on Sunday? I am sorry Mummy. I didn't mean to be naughty. I'm trying very hard to be good.

Sister Philomena says can you send some money for a new pair of shoes for me. These one squash my toes up and it hurts when I walk. Sister Philomena says they are too small.

I went to mass this morning and it was very nice. This evening we have stations of the cross, my favourite.

I have made two new friends. One is called Leonie and one is called Anne Truelove. Leonie sucks her arm a lot.

Olga – A Daughter's Tale

Please come to the concert Mummy. I promise
I will be good.

Love and kisses from Marie XXXXX

Dear Diary

The Concert at the Convent: What a lovely evening. Marie was so excited when she saw me and I was happy I'd come to the convent, although I was very nervous. I'd been hoping to buy a new outfit, but I couldn't afford it.

Mrs Langford said I looked very smart so that was nice. I worry that Marie will be ashamed of me because I don't dress as well as the other parents and I've put on a little bit of weight, well, quite a lot really.

Sometimes, you know, I find it convenient to let people think I'm Marie's nanny.

A few weeks ago Sister Bernadette wrote to me and asked me to buy Marie a ballet dress as she had been chosen, along with nine other girls, to be swans in the chorus line of the ballet *Swan Lake*.

Once the orchestra started playing, out came the dancing white swans onto the stage, and my heart sank when I saw Marie. She danced on to the stage, the only blue swan amongst a line of white ones.

It didn't occur to me when I bought her ballet dress that it should be white. I saw the blue one and

Olga's Diary

thought blue is her favourite colour, so I bought it. There was a gasp from the audience when she appeared on the stage but she carried on dancing beautifully.

At the end of the performance each swan had to come to the front of the stage and curtsy to the audience and when it came to Marie's turn, the audience gave her a lovely round of applause.

Wasn't that kind of them? I was so proud, I cried.

Dear Diary

I bumped into Mrs Langford when I came out of the betting shop in Horsham. Damn nuisance. I pretended I'd gone into the wrong shop but I don't think she believed me. I don't gamble a lot just a little bit now and again. Just to help me with the school fees.

I wish I'd paid more attention to Boysie when he took me to Kingston races. He always won. He said he knew how to study form. I don't even know what that means. I just stick a pin in the newspaper or else if I like the name of the horse, I'll back it. The first two times I bet I won and it seemed easy.

My luck's not good at the moment.

Olga – A Daughter's Tale

**Letter to Mrs Carmen Browne
from
Sister Bernadette, Headmistress, Our Lady's Convent,
Dartford, Kent**

Dear Mrs Browne

I am disappointed to learn that you have once again fallen behind with the weekly payments we agreed you should make in order to cover the arrears and current fees for Marie at the convent. Please could you make a payment as soon as possible.

Whilst writing, I think you should know that Marie's behaviour has deteriorated and her school work is poor. She has had to be punished twice recently, once with the cane and on another occasion she has had to do 100 lines.

I am sympathetic to your circumstances, but must tell you that Marie's behaviour must improve or we will have to refuse to accept her as a pupil.

Yours truly

Sr. Bernadette.

Sister Bernadette
(Headmistress)

Dear Diary

What can I do? *I have asked Mrs Langford if she could let me have an advance on my wages so I can send the convent some money. She said she would*

Olga's Diary

think about it. Later that day she came to me and said how fond the family was of Marie and she had a suggestion to make.

“You are obviously finding it difficult to bring up Marie. What if I give you a cheque for £250 and we take Marie off your hands.”

I couldn't believe what she was saying.

“No, I can't do that”

“Well, Carmen” she said “you should give the matter some thought.

“Marie is a lovely child and even if you didn't want to leave her with us, you should consider having her adopted. It is obvious you cannot support her.”

Dear Diary

Marie is home for the Christmas holidays. She is unhappy at the convent and wants to leave. She says there is a nun who is very cruel, Sister Claire, and she is the one who keeps punishing Marie. I understand now why Mammie didn't say anything to Sydney when he whipped us.

I think it is wrong that the nuns smack a child, but I cannot say anything because I owe them money. I have to find the fees before she returns in January.

Olga – A Daughter's Tale

Christmas Eve: Marie asked me if she should put a big pillow case or a little pillow case at the end of her bed for Father Christmas to leave her presents.

I snapped at her and told her he's not coming this year. Oh God, the expression on her face. I heard her get up in the middle of the night and look to see if there were any presents. She said nothing about it the next day. I feel terrible. I have no money for presents.

Dear Diary

Good Friday : There is a big crisis going on. Mr Langford has lost the keys to his study. He cannot open his safe without them so everyone has to search the house until they are found.

Mrs Langford asked me if I had seen them and, of course, I haven't. I don't go near his study. She has accused me of taking them and called in the police and asked them to search my room. She has told them that little knick knacks have gone missing for some time and suspected it was me.

A plain clothes policeman searched my room, opening the drawers, taking out our clothes and throwing them on the bed, going through my wardrobe, the contents of my handbag strewn over my bed. Marie was watching and crying. They broke my little statue of

Olga's Diary

the Virgin Mary on the table by the bed. My bible was on the floor.

They found nothing. But they still took our fingerprints, mine and my little girl's.

Shortly after the police left, Tim Langford found the keys in his father's car; they had dropped down the side of the driving seat.

Later that same day I packed our suitcase and Marie and I left the Langfords, but, not before Mrs Langford had insisted on emptying my suitcase to check that I had not stolen anything from the house. I had very little money and I suppose I should have stayed because I was not keeping Marie safe, but my pride wouldn't let me.

Baywood Farm's front drive is about half the size of a football pitch and I knew that, as Marie and I walked unsteadily on the loose gravel into the country lane, the Langfords were watching us. Marie using both hands to carry her suitcase and me struggling to carry the heavier suitcase and trying to make as dignified an exit as possible.

I got a coach to London and went to the Refuge in Fulham to see Geraldine Franks and explained my position. I thought she would help me. She was very sympathetic, but, in the end she said she had no choice but to inform the authorities that Marie and I were homeless. I knew what that meant and left.

Olga – A Daughter's Tale

We went to Victoria Coach Station and got on a coach to Brighton. I had enough money left to buy two coach tickets to Brighton and four 1d buns. When we arrived in Brighton I found the nearest Catholic Church and begged the priest to help us.

Chapter Thirty Three

**Daily Gleaner, Kingston
29th December 1953**

OBITUARY

Rebecca Mathilda Browney

<p>Browney – Rebecca Mathilda (Mrs)</p> <p>In loving memory of my darling sister, Becky, who died peacefully in her sleep. Lucy</p>	<p>Browney – Rebecca Mathilda (Mrs) In ever loving memory of a devoted mother and grandmother who fell asleep on 29th December 1953.</p> <p>“It takes just a little space To say how much we miss you But it will take the rest of our lives To forget the day we lost you”.</p> <p>Sydney, Boysie, Cissie, Chickie, Gwennie, Vivie, Birdie, Pearl, Ruby and Dolly.</p>
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Olga – A Daughter's Tale

**Letter to Mrs Rebecca Browney, Jamaica
from
Miss Geraldine Franks, Superintendent, Catholic Refuge
for Friendless Girls
23 Barclay Road, Fulham, London.**

Dear Mrs Browney

It is with great concern I write to you regarding your daughter Olga as I do not believe you are aware of her circumstances.

I first became acquainted with your daughter when she was referred to this home by the Matron of St Giles Hospital because she was pregnant. Olga remained at the Refuge until she gave birth to her daughter, Marie.

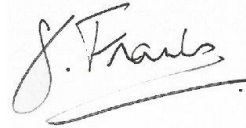
It is part of the Refuge's policy that we try and maintain contact with mothers in order to see how they cope with their baby and, in spite of my initial doubts as to Olga's ability to support both herself and a baby in a foreign country, as an unmarried mother and the stigma associated with that, I was impressed with how well she managed.

However, Olga's circumstances have now changed and she recently came to me with Marie in some emotional and financial distress. Her appearance gave me cause for concern, although, I would report that Marie looked well nourished and cared for. I gave her a little money, but, I suspect that Olga has no job or even a home to go to since she was evasive when I asked where she was living.

I did my best to try and persuade Olga to contact you but, she is as adamant, as she was when I first met her, that you should know nothing of her circumstances. I have respected her decision until now.

I believe your son Sydney comes to London on business. I would urge that on his next visit he contacts me and I will endeavour to help him locate Olga and Marie.

Yours truly

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "G. Franks", with a horizontal line underneath.

Miss Geraldine Franks
Superintendent.

Lucy's Diary

Over the years Martha has been referred to as the black sheep of the family, but my sister has demonstrated that she is much more than that. She is a vengeful and wicked woman who broke the heart of a sister that had only ever shown her kindness and affection.

I realise now the dye was cast for Becky all those years ago when she announced her plans to marry Henry. Martha thought, irrationally, her dream of becoming rich with her own fashion house had disappeared because of Becky's decision to marry a black man. Of course, she was wrong. She could have continued with her plans and ridden out the storm. But she lacked courage, something Becky had in abundance. So as an act of spite for some perceived slight all those years ago, Martha finally got her revenge in a spectacularly cruel way, allowing

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Becky to go to her grave believing her beloved daughter was dead. How could she do that?

As for Martha's hypocrisy, lambasting Becky for marrying a black man when she was secretly living in sin with one in London, I cannot even bring myself to comment on it.

Thank God for Geraldine Franks. What a good woman she is, but if only she had contacted us sooner. Olga is alive and has a little girl. Sydney says he will go to London to find her and bring them home

How The Tale Ends

50 Years Later

My mother, Olga, never returned to Jamaica nor was she reunited with any member of her family again after her meeting with Sydney in 1946. Over the years Mum had been reluctant to talk about her past so I determined to find out what I could myself. I placed the following advertisement in the Sunday Gleaner in July 1994

**OLGA JOSEPHINE
LUCY ROSS BROWNE**

possibly known as "Carmen" Josephine Lucy Ross Browne

Born: 18th August, 1915 to Father: HENRY
ALEXANDER BROWNEY Mother: REBECCA
MATHILDA BROWNEY (nee ROSS) at one time residing
at 58 Duke Street, Kingston (during 1920's), Jamaica, FOR
THE PURPOSE OF COMPLETING A FAMILY
HISTORY.

Would any relation of the above named pleased contact her
daughter,

Mrs Marie-Therese Campbell (nee Browne)
47 Waterloo Street, Hove,
East Sussex, BN3 1AY
United Kingdom

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And then two days later we received the following telegram.

**Telegram from Mrs Ruby Shim (nee Browney), Kingston,
Jamaica to
Mrs Marie Campbell, Hove, East Sussex, UK.**

HAVE SEEN YOUR NOTICE IN THE GLEANER. SISTERS (CISSIE, PEARL, RUBY AND DOLLY) OF OLGA BROWNEY ARE RESIDING AT 9 ANTHURIUM DRIVE, MONA, KINGSTON 6, JAMAICA. TEL: NO: 809-XXX-XXX. VERY ANXIOUS TO MAKE CONTACT. WILL ACCEPT COLLECT CALL. RUBY SHIM (MRS)

Within a day of receiving the telegram I made the phone call and for the first time in over 50 years Mum spoke to her sisters Ruby, Dolly, Chickie and Pearl. Ruby told Mum that Mammie, Pops, Sydney, Vivie, Cissie and Gwennie had all died, but the others were still alive.

She said Sydney came looking for Mum twice in the 1950s, but he said she'd vanished without trace.

Slowly my mother's story unravelled and I discovered much about her family and other things too; I learnt about my grandmother and what courage she showed in following her heart and marrying a black man knowing she would be ostracised by Jamaican white and coloured society; I learnt how the Jamaican social and class structure mirrored the English pattern of behaviour. I knew there was colour prejudice (or racism as it is called today) but I had no idea that coloured people felt the same way about the blacks. I was upset to hear that some of my grandmother's children railed against Becky for marrying a black man.

How The Tale Ends

I learnt a lot about the wonderful Jamaican culture and folklore – anancy, duppies and, of course, obeah, things I knew nothing about until I started my research. A couple of times, when I was a child Mum had mentioned, almost sheepishly, that her mother and other members of her family practiced voodoo in Jamaica and that it was a powerful weapon to extract revenge for wrongs committed.

My Aunt Ruby told me when I met the family in Kingston, that my great aunt Martha narrowly escaped being buried in a pauper's grave in London thanks to the generosity of the family responding to a request from a Catholic priest for money to bury her.

But the most notable information I acquired was how I was conceived. It was obvious as Mum told me her story that the anguish of that event had barely diminished even though it had happened decades ago.

When, over the years, Mum refused to talk to me about my father saying “it's too painful” it never once crossed my mind that she might have been raped and I was the result. I can only imagine what it must have been like for her – an unmarried mother, coloured, no family for support - save for a malevolent alcoholic aunt and alone in a foreign country which just happened to be in the middle of a world war.

My father died in New York in December 1949; waiting on a railway platform he fell under the wheels of an oncoming train and was killed instantly. By all accounts he was a man with a complex personality, mercurial and prone to

Olga – A Daughter's Tale

depression. He suffered from mood swings, failing eyesight and dizzy spells, the latter caused by a serious horse riding accident a few years before his death. Opinion was divided as to the cause of his death. The medical examiner recorded John Edward's death as 'probably an accident' since an autopsy had shown nothing untoward. His family thought it was an accident; his work colleagues thought he'd committed suicide as a result of his depression.

As for how I feel about my father, I take my cue from Mum whom I never heard voice any bitterness about what happened to her.

I wrote this book because I wanted future generations of my family to know something of their heritage and also out of respect to my mother, a gentle and remarkable woman who had huge moral courage.

If the maxim is true, that daughters eventually become like their mother then all I can say is... lucky me.

Marie Campbell

Welcome Home Party for Marie – Kingston 1996



From left to right: My cousin Patsy (cutting the 'Welcome Home' cake), my Aunt Ruby, me and my son, Stuart.



The Brownes

Rebecca Mathilda Ross - m - Henry Alexander Browney

b. 1881

d. 1953

b. 1880

d. 1962

Sydney

b. 1903

d. 1980

Viviana

b. 1906

d. 1992

Boysie

b. 1908

d. 2004

Pearl

b. 1912

Olga

b. 1915

d. 2006

Ruby

b. 1916

d. 2001

Cassie

b. 1904

d. 1976

Birdie

b. 1909

d. 2000

Chickie

b. 1911

d. 1997

Gwen

b. 1913

d. 1973

Dolly

b. 1918

