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IMMACULATE

by Marlon James

Constant Spring

Man, look at Kingston, it so pretty from here, all them light right out to the sea.

1

This is what Ruth Stenton was wearing when she went to the Central Police Station/Criminal Intelligence Branch on East Queen Street in downtown Kingston: a sapphire halter top that pulled her breasts up from her chest but exposed sagging fat ripples on her back; white Dolce & Gabbana jeans with the logo slashed across the backside in red; a white Fendi bag that she wore like an afterthought, constantly pulling it up on her shoulder after it slipped down her arm.

The big station was busy with squaddies rushing in and out, sometimes with boys in handcuffs, papers shuffling up and down, the click-click of one-finger typing, the laughter of tired constables, and the thick cloud of cigarette smoke.

At reception, a policeman pointed left to a glass door with words printed in reverse. She stepped in and waited by the door until a uniformed constable called her over with his finger. He had just dripped ketchup on his shirt and was scowling into a box of fries from Burger King.

—Can I help you, ma'am? he said, looking from his snack to his calendar, where Friday, October 22 jumped out in bold type.
—You don't have air-conditioning in here? she said.
—Can I help you, ma'am?
—Me is here to report a missing.
—A missing what? Cow, donkey, or goat?
—Don't get fresh with somebody who could be your mother.
—My mother don't look like she work New Kingston every
night.
—But you fresh!
—What you want to report, ma'am?
—A missing. A missing girl. Me did call and somebody tell
me to come in and make a statement.
—When you call?
—This morning. Boy, me could use a Rothmans.
—This look like Chinney shop? How long the girl missing?
—From Wednesday.
—Friday October 22, young girl reported missing. Who the
girl?
—Janet Stenton.
—Relationship.
—What? Me look like no sodomite? A—
—Mother? Daughter? Church Sister?
—Oh, she is me daughter. Born 1979.
—Your daughter missing three day and you just coming to
report it?
—She always a take off like she name kite. But never for
so long. Plus she take me two good ears-rings. Not thefting that?
Grand larceny you call it.
—Then you is here to report a larceny or a missing?
—A larceny and a missing. Me ears-ring missing and she
larcen it. That gal just buss 'way like kite. She is a little duty
gyal, that one. Never take no instruction from her mother. From
she born, me say, this little one, this little one going turn slut
like her auntie. Sometime me wonder if is fi her own or fi me.
Anyway, she gone from Wednesday morning. Leave out before
the sun even rise and is not the first time neither. But this time
she take me ears-ring and me Julia of Paris shoes. Me no busi-
ness bout the shoes. Imagine, she take off to go school from four
in the morning? I mean to say, who love school so much that
they leave four hour early? Me can smoke in here?
—No. Where you think she gone?
—How you mean? Where else schoolgirl going if she leave
her house too early by herself? You no know the song? Send the
gal Nicky go a school, Nicky gone turn and gone a man yard—
—No singing in here, ma'am.
—Me did hear things bout this new teacher. Him pants did
too tight so me did think him was a battyman. But is so the
devil deceive, praise Jesus. Anyway, you need to find that damn
girl so me can discipline her.
—Discipline her, eeh?
—You going discipline her youself? Make sure take out me
ears-ring cause is three hundred dollar that cost. She just like
her father. One minute she here, next minute . . . That damn
gyal a take man, you hear me? You going to the school to check
bout the teacher?
—Which school?
—Immaculate.

This is how buses used to run in downtown Kingston in 1993.
Because public buses were shut down by the government in the
late '80s, Japanese sixteen-seaters with names like Terminator 2
and Smooth Operator painted on the sides hit the road by five
in the morning, sometimes already overstuffed with students
feeling up each other's parts on their way to classes that began
at seven thirty or eight.

The girls all loved one bus, Prince Machoperti, because the
driver played Buju Banton, Snow, and Mariah Carey, and the
conductor really knew how to balance on the door ledge off the
heaving, swerving HiAce like he was practicing to surf.
At six thirty on the morning Ruth Stenton went to Central, Machoperi was bustling north from downtown toward Constant Spring, like a runaway carnival float with all those uniforms flashing by. Gray and red for Queens. Blue and cream for Holy Childhood. White for Immaculate Conception High.

As it neared Dunrobin Avenue, five miles north of downtown, the conductor, a boy barely eighteen, dressed in baggy pants, four gold-plated rings, and a T-shirt saying Damn Yankees World Tour '91, asked a Queens girl when last she saw Jacqueline.

—Who?
—The Immaculate girl?
—Not since Tuesday. Don’t she take this bus every day? Nuh she always up front with the driver?

This is what a gaggle of Immaculate girls were doing at the school gate at 7:50 on the Friday morning that the ‘doctor asked the Queens girl about Jacqueline, and Ruth Stenton was going to Central to make a missing persons report.

—Anna-Kaye Frater daddy drop her off in him jalopy yet?
—But Anna-Kaye always walk down from Manor Park.
—No, idiot. Mr. Frater drop her off in Manor Park. She walk down so that nobody would see her come out of a Ford Escort. My boyfriend Patrick say that is what his Hortense drive.

—Hortense?
—The helper, ninny.
—Jennifer Innis father driving a new Volvo.
—That’s not the only thing him driving. And another...Oh my God, Kenisha, how you sneak that hairdo into this school? It ah take life.

—Yes, my girl, it is the lick.
—Well, all you need is a crimping iron and you set.
—You see Jennifer Innis father playing golf last week? He always standing by the fence like him searching for a ball.
—The way him old, that’s not the only ball him have to search for.
—Oh my God, Prince Machoperi coming up the street! Wave, girls.
—Me don’t wave at lower-class boy in minibus.
—Rashid Shatani take that bus.
—Lie you lie. Rashid Shatani have three car.
—You can’t drive and feel up girl at the same time. You going to House Arrest 2? Ambassador Disco spinning.
—All I get at House Arrest 1 was feel up.
—Buy you own drinks and stop take drinks from boys, that is the lesson deh so.
—Anyway, they change the venue from Tavistock Terrace to Morgan’s Harbour.
—We going to Miami next week. I got Daddy to buy tickets to go see Whitney Houston. I’m every woman, it’s all in meeeweee.
—Me hungry. Anybody see Irie Bruce?
—Maybe the Sisters drive him away again.
—But me hungry.
—Gal, everybody know you going vomit it up before lunch break, so this way you stomach already empty.
—Shut you shit, gal.
—But Shelly take the bus.
—Not on a Friday, fool.
—Is near eight o’clock, wipe that lipstick off.
—Is not me using shoe polish in me eyebrow.
—Is not me put on maxipad the wrong way and have to go to nurse.
—Look. Is who that?
—Look like Jacqueline Stenton friend. You know, Miss Goody-Goody, Melissa Leo.
—Which part o’ she good if she run with Jacqueline? She only going on like . . .
—Why she running like that?
—Long way from downtown m’love.
—No, Kenisha, you can see anything? Open the gate wider!
—Car horn honking all the way down the street
—Him don’t care.
—Last week him tell me that my pussy look like it would need two finger. Like me fraid of boy that drive car. So me just play like them dumb girl that boy like and say, But how you mean?
—Jesus Christ, Kenisha, you say it just like him. Mind me get goose pimple at the gate.
—Come inna me car now and deal with me buddy, Did I utter, mutter, or stutter . . .
—My gal, then you hear say the other day Sister Mary Agatha had to come out and tell him to drive off the premises after the nasty rass park him red car in front of the grade ten for one whole hour.
—Yeah, but is a Saab though.
—Listen to me, if I don’t drape up that boy by him little balls one day my name is not Alicia Mowatt. Watch him, rolling down on Goody-Goody like him is cat and she is mouse. Little stumpy fat boy think him is man because him drive a car with a name him can’t even spell. Speaking of Goody-Goody, where is the Jackle to her Heckle? Anybody see Jacqueline from morning?
—Not since Tuesday.
—She sick again? I have words to give that damn girl.

***

Why you don’t tell him to leave me alone? No, it not funny, people at school seeing him taking step with me like me is something to him.

2

This is when they found her: Monday morning, October 25, 1993. This is where they found her: South Parade, below St. William Grant Park in downtown Kingston, a place where morning roosters crowed like it was country, giving the wake-up call for madmen and whores to shuffle away and the starting signal for huggers to cart their fruit, vegetables, and chingum to the nearby market grounds, where minibuses ran a ring around the collar of the old colonial square, and Syrian haberdasheries stayed closed until nine.

This is how they found her. Faceup, legs wide in a death swing to spread-eagle. White skirt up, salmon panties down on one leg, pubic hair pulled up and roughed up. Under a minibus that had not parked there overnight.

The driver, dumpling fat and squeezing into a Michael Jackson Dangerous tour T-shirt shouted to the police that him don’t know how dead gal get under the bus. At first people thought he was lying, that he moved her down and did not stop, not knowing the bus was dragging her along like road kill.

But she was lying beside a patterned burgundy rug as if she was rolled out of it, one hand slung across her chest, and her school uniform was clean, immaculate like the name of her school.

Her straightened hair was parted in two, but strands had slipped out of the loosened plaits. Some hair stuck to her face, heart-shaped with wild brows, a line below her forehead. Her lips, smudged with lipstick, were parted as if to kiss, and she stared at the sky, the whites of her eyes now light blue. Maybe somebody beat her, a higgler said. You think them rape her? What schoolgirl doing out so early by herself? School don’t start till eight.
5. She had already broken her hymen with two fingers.
6. Her chest smelled of Jergens talcum powder and her vagina smelled like a clean floor.
7. The panties on her left leg were not hers.

This is what Alicia Mowatt, student fifteen years old of Immaculate Conception High School, said while squeezing a ball from the nine-hole course next door after a few minutes of listening to a nun telling her class of Jacqueline Stenton’s horrible tragedy that same morning:

—What, you sure is she? Downtown? But she not supposed to be downtown. I mean, she don’t go to school downtown.

Alicia thought of flinging the ball at Sister Rose Maria just to get her to shut the bullshit about praying to God for discernment in this matter. She was no friend of Jacqueline Stenton. Damn girl acted too innocent, when she most certainly was not—that she found out only a few days ago. This was the damn Sisters’ fault, leaving him there to just park his red Saab outside the grade twelve block and watch the girls.

—Fucking monster.

—Alicia Mowatt! No Immaculate student should ever speak in such a manner, no matter the occasion! Oh Mary, mother of God! Intercede blessed Virgin. Show us the true meaning of the heavenly Father, show us the meaning.

Alicia hissed. But then she looked around and saw that another girl was missing and went outside. Fifty feet away, clutching her backpack instead of wearing it, and walking fast, was Melissa Leo.

—Goody-Goody Leo! Where the fuck you think you going?
—Alicia Mowatt, don’t bother with me this morning. Don’t bother with me.
—Where you going?
—Don’t bother with me.
—Where you going?
—You know where me going. Me going home. You uptown people can go to—
—You think is him. Not even him could—
Melissa Leo stopped.
—I don’t know what you talking bout, she said.
—I saw her. I know where she was going.
—Go bout your business, Alicia Mowatt.
—You know where she was going too.
—I say I don’t know what you bloodclaat talking bout.
—You girls come up from Cross Roads like you know how uptown run. If you knew how uptown run, you would know who run it.
—You can keep your bloodclaat uptown then. Me gone.

I tell you a secret. Is not Jacqueline alone I name. I hate the name Janet, you see.

This is what Ruth Stenton was wearing when the crew from JBC TV came to her house at twelve noon, thirty-five minutes after the police had left: a pink halter top and a plaid tennis skirt.

The crew got to her house in Trench Town, a city ghetto six miles west of where the body was found, having just left Immaculate Conception High School where in asking for reactions from the girls, the girls first learned that Jacqueline Stenton was murdered. Ruth was outside her house—blue, yellow, and small with a rusty zinc roof and packed tight beside the others flanking it. The reporter had stepped through the picket fence gate, pausing when she thought of dogs.
—Me don’t believe no police. No sah, not me daughter. After them never show me no picture. Them say me have to come identify the girl, but me nah go nowhere fi go look pon dead body. And now TV camera in me house. You couldn’t make me fix up whatnot and breakfront little bit? Is just like she fi do this. Damn gal probably in some house somewhere a laugh bout how so many people a talk bout her. What a damn gal love when people take notice. Her father she get it from. After she, me just say no more pickney.

—Ma’am, the police are saying—
—Oi, camera man, you can see me from this side? Under the tree no have too much shadow? Are we on the air?
—It’s not live, Miss Stenton.
—Wah? Then me can go put on me other outfit?
—Ma’am, what do you remember most about your daughter Jacqueline?
—Who?
—Jacqueline?
—Me daughter don’t name no Jacqueline. She name Janet. Same thing me tell the damn police, that me daughter don’t name no Jacqueline. Is who playing poppy show with me?
—Ma’am, are you saying this is not your daughter?

The reporter whipped out a photo she stole from the police headquarters. Ruth Stenton fainted.

This is how Grace McDonald made morning coffee. She scooped one more teaspoon than usual into the filter and set it in the coffeemaker. She waited, hummed with the machine, and turned on the TV.

Outside, if she looked hard enough, beyond her second-floor balcony, beyond the trees in the front yard that made her town home look like country to the road, rush hour traffic was already starting up. Across the road was a wedding center that played Celine Dion all the time, especially Saturday nights, making her cringe. That was it, fucking Celine Dion. At work, the nurse would play her at the reception desk, even the hard-
core sky juice vendor with his cart by the hospital gate would be humming that shit song from Beauty and the Beast.

On the morning news, in between Miss Jamaica heading off to Miss World and the rise in gas prices at the pump, was a breaking story about a dead girl from Immaculate Conception High School found at South Parade underneath a bus. Name withheld until the family had been contacted.

What Grace really wanted was a cigarette, cancer in the titty could kiss her rass if it ever showed up. She thought about combing her hair, making herself nice for the man who was going to show up like poof! as her mother liked to say. Her mother also said her black nail polish made her look like a lesbian.

Nothing wrong with jeans, even if the button was getting harder to button, she thought. And she had on an honest-to-goodness floral top this morning, the tip of the neck was even lace. Thank God her lab coat would hide the rest of it, for she already felt like an idiot.

She did agree with her mother to wear lipstick, though, just because of how her mother talked about it like it was the new thing, the lick. Isn’t that what you young people say? The lick?

Dead girl arranged on a blanket underneath a bus in broad daylight. Maybe this going be the lick now in this goddamn place. Pretty but so scrupulously violent. When she was in med school at Georgetown she used to joke with her friends that if they really wanted to be trauma surgeons they should do their internship in Kingston, at Dutty Public—the (un)popular name for Kingston Public Hospital.

The phone rang. It was the director of public prosecutions, Michael "Barracuda" Barracat.

—McDonald, you see this business on the news?
—What business, Mr. Barracat?
—Come, girl, I'm in the middle of bush and hear about it before you?

—Sir?
—The Immaculate girl. My own mother just called me about it. Damn woman bawl so much she almost short circuit her phone. Ole girl went to Immaculate too, you know. Pull!
—Sir?
—Shit.
—Excuse me, sir, I don't get—
—One second, McDonald... How you mean, Busha? Your eyes in the back of your head or the front of your backside? You totally launch that at the wrong angle, you damn ass... Then you go and find it while I shoot the next one... Pull! Ha... yes... McDonald. Sorry about that. Some people think they can cheat at clay pigeon just because they name Sanguinetti.
—Are we back now?
—Yes. Sorry. So, my girl...
—You talking to me?
—Yes, McDonald, back to you. I swear these new mobile phones are nothing but grief. Try holding one with your shoulder and shooting. Impossible. Simply impossible. Don't get one, McDonald. Anyway, I need you to work on that girl today, you hear me? I already getting calls out here that this case need to move fast. Very fast. What nasty business, eh? Murdering an Immaculate girl. Almost make me wish it was Merl Grove girl, but that's a terrible thing to say, don't it? What school you went to, by the way?
—Wolmer's.
—Good enough. I hope to Jesus she's not from uptown. Otherwise this thing could get sticky.

You make me pack big bag and leave my mother house. Stop calling me little girl.

This is what Ruth Stenton was wearing when she went to the
morgue on North Street, two miles northeast of where they found her daughter's body: a cream satin dress with ruffles round the neck and lace down the sleeves. The hem flounced several inches topside her knee.

Her Jheri curl wet look was still damp. She dabbed her neck-back with bath tissue.

Ruth Stenton had fainted at the sight of her daughter in the police photo but still didn't believe it. She was going to know once and for all that very day. First she went to her sister in Rose Town to ask her to identify the body because she couldn't take any stress from people who were bound to start talking about the loose mother who send her daughter out at four o'clock in the morning when school don't start till eight o'clock.

No, the Sister said. If is she then is you why the girl dead, bitch, move you bomboclaat from me gate.

She took a bus right to the morgue but turned away from the entrance three times when she got there. That girl was somewhere at some man yard taking cocky and laughing at her mother, she just knew it. That photo didn't even show her face too good. She was sure now, plus that was not even Janet's school uniform. A higgler across the street was blazing her boombox from a hand-built stall—Nelson Mandela has won the peace prize, the newscaster just said. Ruth went inside.

Outside the cold chamber, Ruth turned to the policewoman standing beside her.

—I'm sick of people telling me that me never want me daughter. If me didn't want me daughter she would have never born.

The policewoman looked at Ruth Stenton as if to say something, but pointed at the door. When Ruth had the urge to slap a woman, usually she slapped the bitch, but the policewoman had a club and a gun.

—Ma'am, you not the only person who have a viewing to-

day, the policewoman said. The room was dark and cold with the whup whup whup of the fan above. Three bodies were laid down on slabs. Two were draped. One, an old man with dried blood below his nostrils, lay exposed.

—What kinda place this? Ruth Stenton said.

A fat man with thick glasses, a white coat, and a large yellow notepad came in. He looked like a doctor at the door, but as he passed Ruth with his hurried shuffle he looked like a butcher. He said nothing and yanked the gray sheet off the head, stopping at the neck.

—Lord Jesus Christ, Lord Jesus Christ, Lord Jesus Christ, Ruth Stenton said. The man had pulled the cloth to the shoulder, but Ruth pulled it down further.

—When them find her?

—She was found in the morning hours, the man in the white coat said. Early-morning hours.

—Is she stiff?

—The process of rigor mortis is almost completely gone, ma'am.

—What that mean? The news reporter say them just murder her.

—No ma'am, they just found her. We still don't know exact time of death.

—You mean they never kill her in downtown?

—You're going to have to ask the police further questions, ma'am.

—Oh. Her breast them just stand up so in this blouse. Is rape them rape her?

—You're going to have to ask the police, ma'am.

—Then you never see things on her that not supposed to be there?

—You shall have to ask the police, ma'am.

—You must did see something when she come in here?
—She's still in her school uniform, ma'am. That is how they found her.
Ruth pulled the cover down further.
—That is not her school uniform. The girl only in grade ten, this is a senior girl uniform.
—Ma'am?
—She didn't have no ears-ring? On her, I mean.
—Whatever is there is what she had, ma'am.
—It worth three hundred dollars.
—As I said, ma'am.
—Uh-huh. You not saying much.
—Maybe whoever is the perpetrator took what you're looking for, ma'am. You'll have to identify the bag at the front desk, since they found it far away from the body.
—Where them find it?
—Let me see. Norbrook Crescent. That's off Norbrook Drive.
—What the bag doing up in Norbrook? After the school not in Norbrook.
—Norbrook on the way if you drive down from the hills, ma'am.
—She look like she drive? What she would be doing going to school from Norbrook? She come from Trench Town.
—Ma'am?
—Stop call me ma'am, me no look like no rassclaat old woman.
—Don't bother with the ghetto behavior in here, lady, the policewoman said.
—A who you ah call . . . I mean, excuse my French, officer.
—Ahem, are you saying these are not her clothes, ma'am? the man said.
—Since ah me is the mother who buy the school uniform, that is what me telling you.

—That's what the victim was wearing—I mean your daughter, that is what she was wearing.
—Why my daughter would wear them things? She didn't even like school too good.
—Ma'am, she was wearing those clothes and a pink under-wear.
—Them make a man check little girl panty? Is what kinda slackness this?
—Look here, lady, I already tell you don't give this man any trouble, the policewoman said.
—Make me see this yah panty.
—Ma'am, you can't just—
—But this is not me daughter clothes. Officer, you of all people must know say is old-time panty this? And why me daughter in this uniform? Why nobody telling me that?
—Your daughter was not a student of Immaculate Conception High School?
—Yeah, but she not in grade twelve. She not even sixteen yet. No that me just say? Lawd a massa, is what deh pon me now, Father? You talk to that teacher yet?

These are three of the five questions that the autopsy specialist had about the girl but did not ask her mother. The other two he forgot after he received a telephone call:
1. Why was her uniform clean when her face, hands, and legs appeared to have all sorts of marks and bruises?
2. Was she alive downtown for any length of time or was she brought to the scene post mortem?
3. In what manner was she placed underneath the bus? How long after filing a report will the police try to forget about it?
You going to get me in trouble, you know. Is bad enough you have me leaving out on Thursday, now you have me doing Wednesday too.

The next day, Tuesday, October 26, the Star newspaper carried as its headline, IMMACULATE GIRL BODY FOUND UNDER BUS. The story had no statement from the police. Her mother said she was a good girl who liked school and was even going to become Catholic, and she doesn't know which demon out there would kill her daughter. The director of public prosecution, the Right Honorable Mr. Michael Barracat, promised a speedy resolution to the case.

The article also quoted the head of the Jamaica Council of Churches, who said Jamaica must be going to hell when even decent little girls whose countenance would never ask for rape, get raped and murdered.

Two schoolgirls said they saw Janet being followed by a red Saab twice, the last time on Wednesday, October 19, five days before the discovery of her body. The same Saab has been seen on the school grounds more than once in the past few weeks.

One of her teachers, whose name is being withheld as the police proceed with their investigation, said she was a fine student, about to do well in the GCE O levels. On Wednesday, the Star had as its second-page headline, THE SEARCH FOR THE SAAB.

On Thursday, on the third page, in the top right column, the headline read, STREET VENDOR WANTED IN QUESTIONING.

This is what the police knew about Irie Bruce, sky juice vendor who parked his push cart every day outside Immaculate's front gate. He said he wasn't running when they caught him. Him was chilling with him queen when man knock pon him door, and in the ghetto when a man knock hard pon a man door it either mean gunman or judgment. No, him never hear no police say, Police! Open Up! Everybody know that police don't make no sound when them pounce, them just sneak in like Nicodemus, a thief in the night. He said he didn't have no reason why he didn't sell outside the school on that day or the days after that. Him was just chilling with him queen when Babylon knock pon him door. You is a nasty rapist who fuck little girl pussy then kill them, that's what you is, a policeman said. Twenty-four hours in the lock-up at Central Police Station, his left eye had swollen shut and he was so dizzy that he nearly shit himself.

Forty-eight hours later his two legs were swollen and he screamed at odd times that them shocking him with current up him balls. A white man, belly pushing out of his gray suit, showed up at the lock-up seventy-two hours after Irie Bruce was detained, asking if he was being arrested for anything other than not selling sky juice on the day Janet Stenton was murdered. He had an American accent. You come too late, him already confess, the policeman on guard said.

What going on? You don't sound like you when you say that. I don't know. You don't sound like you.

These are the specifications of a Saab 900 Ruby:

- Width: 70.9 in.
- Height: 57.1 in.
- Length: 182.9 in.
- Ground clearance: 5.9 in.
- Front track: 60.0 in.
- Rear track: 59.3 in.
- Wheel base: 105.3 in.
- Cargo capacity, all seats in place: 15.0 cu.ft.
- Maximum cargo capacity: 15.0 cu.ft.
EPA interior volume: 108.4 cu.ft.
The Saab 900 Ruby is only available in the UK. The lining of the trunk is gray carpet and not resistant to stains.

This is how you administer the Electric Boogie. Brandish an electric cord, ripped from an old appliance such as a blender, toaster, or table lamp, but preferably an extension cord, which is longer. Cut along the seam to separate the two electric wires and trim rubber from the exposed ends. Wire on left is the fixed electrode, wire on the right is the movable electrode. Have a man in the appliance repair shop across the street attach a box so that it can be switched on and off. Subdue the perpetrator and remove all clothing. Insert dishrag in the perpetrator’s mouth to prevent talking. Suspect’s own T-shirt can also be used. Approach table large enough to hold suspect but keep hands and feet hanging off table. Employ three or four personnel to restrict movement of limbs, and cuff wrists and ankles to table legs. Pull back the foreskin and wrap the fixed wire around the glans of the penis. Insert plug in electrical outlet. Blindfold the perpetrator. Apply second wire to feet, mouth, nipples, anus, and testicles in random sequence. The closer the movable electrode to the fixed electrode, the greater the shock.

This is the transcript of Irie Bruce’s confession after the return to his jail cell: Me did was going to the school like me always do every day of the week. Me did was pushing me cart from the ice factory after me pick up crush ice for the day. Me did was walking from the ice factory down by Tower Street then pushing the cart west, then north until me reach South Parade Circle. That is when me did see the victim waiting at the bus stop for a bus. The place did still dark and streetlight still a glow. Me wonder why a girl all by herself out waiting for the bus when no bus was running yet. Cause me did know that no bus was coming for a long time, me allow lust to full up me heart. And it did full of wicked thoughts. Why me did full of wicked thoughts is cause me was a wicked person. Me walk up to her from behind and didn’t raise no alarm cause me want to perpetrate the act quiet. Nobody was there when me grab her and take her to water lane which did dark. The lane did was like fifty yard from South Parade—no, thirty yard; no, sixty yard. South. Me grab her neck with one hand and cover her mouth with the other one and pull her back away, bout fifty, sixty step till we reach the lane. She struggle and elbow me, which is why me have bruise all over me rib cage and toe and ankle and cheek. And the side of me head. And the cut above me eye. All them cut and bruise is what she do when me dragging her. And when me beat her up. Me did ready and push her down and take me cocky, but she kick after me and the foot catch me balls which is why me balls also bruise up. And me cocky. And why me little finger break. She do it, she do all of it. And cause me never get to use me cocky, me kill her. She make me mad, madder than woman ever make me mad. And me grab her and knock her and squeeze her throat with me hand. Them say me strangle her—yes, me strangle her. And she break me finger. She do it.

Wait ... wait. You hear that? You hear that? Sound like more than one car. You never tell me he was coming back.

This is the medical transcription report that the autopsy specialist at Kingston Public Hospital, the short, fat man with thick glasses who showed Ruth Stenton her daughter’s body, took upstairs to the government pathologist for her approval.

It was Tuesday, October 26, the day after Ruth identified her daughter. The government pathologist, Grace McDonald, a woman, thirty-two years old, in a blue floral blouse and a doc-
The victim's white coat, with gold-rimmed glasses, shoulder-length black hair, and a hard-to-quit smoking habit, was packing her things to leave for the day.

—One more for you, McDonald.
—The Immaculate girl?
—Yeah.
—Shit, I might as well read this before the Gleaner come bothering me again, I don't know how them always find me, she said.

DESCRIPTION, AUTOPSY:
Asphyxia due to strangulation.

EXTERNAL EXAMINATION
The autopsy began at 8:30 a.m. on October 26, 1993. The body is presented in a black body bag. The victim is wearing a royal-blue jacket, a white frilled skirt, both the uniform of a senior student of Immaculate Conception High School for girls, pink panties, white brassiere. Jewelry includes two smooth-textured silver hoop piercing earrings in her left ear, one silver ring on her left index finger.

The body is that of a normally developed young negroid female measuring 61 inches and weighing 120 pounds, and appearing generally consistent with the stated age of 14 years. The body is cold and unembalmed. Lividity is fixed in the distal portions of the limbs. The eyes are open. The irises are brown and corneas are cloudy. Petechial hemorrhaging is present in the conjunctival surfaces of the eyes. The hair is black and woolly.

Removal of jacket revealed two abrasions (known throughout this report as Abrasions A and B) on both sides of the neck below the mandible. Abrasion A is approximately 1.5 inches wide and 1 inch long and is on the left side of the neck. Abrasion B is 2.7 inches wide and 5 inches long with three spaces in between, leaving the conclusion that they were left by fingers. The skin of the neck above and below the abrasions showing petechial hemorrhaging indicates these injuries to be cause of death. There is a bruise with bleeding on the left cheek.

Upon removal of the victim's clothing, a pine disinfectant odor was detected. Areas of the body were swabbed and submitted for detection of pine oil and other cleaning agents. Following removal of the jacket, a ligature mark (Ligature A) was observed above victim's breasts with an abrasion above her left nipple indicative of a bite mark. Four scratch marks are on her left thigh to the front and three on the right. Skin is broken in three of the marks. A second ligature (Ligature B) encircles the waist, and is not consistent with what caused Abrasions A and B. The absence of abrasions associated with the ligatures, along with the variations in the width of the ligature mark, are consistent with a soft ligature, such as a length of fabric. No trace evidence was recovered from Ligature B that might assist in identification of the ligature used.

The genitalia are that of an adolescent female. Limbs are equal, symmetrically developed, and show no evidence of injury. The fingernails are medium length and fingernail beds are blue. There is a residual scar on the right knee.

INTERNAL EXAMINATION
HEAD—CENTRAL NERVOUS SYSTEM: Subsequent autopsy shows a broken hyoid bone. Hemorrhaging from Abrasions A and B penetrate the skin and subdermal tissues of the neck.
SKELETAL SYSTEM: The hyoid bone is fractured.

RESPIRATORY SYSTEM—THROAT STRUCTURES: The oral cavity shows no lesions. Petechial hemorrhaging is present in the mucosa of the lips and the interior of the mouth. Otherwise, the mucosa is intact and there are no injuries to the lips, teeth, or gums. There is no obstruction of the airway. The mucosa of the epiglottis, glottis, piriform sinuses, trachea, and major bronchi are anatomic. No injuries are seen and there are no mucosal lesions. The hyoid bone, the thyroid, and the cricoid cartilages are fractured.

Grace flipped back to the first page, then looked down at her desk.

—Richardson, the printer cartridge run out of ink again? she said.
—Huh? What? No, I don’t think so. The printer wouldn’t make some noise. The page not clear?
—The page very clear, but the report missing one or two.
—What on the last page?
—The cricoid cartilages are fractured.
—No, that is it. Cause of death: strangulation by hand.
—And that’s it?
—That’s it.
—Oh.
—Where you heading off to? Date tonight with that man of yours? That you people from America call it? A date?
—Jamaican just like you Richardson. You fishing for something?
—Ha, ha. I thought you were leaving.
—Soon, but me forget something.
—Well, me gone, my girl. See you tomorrow.
—Later, Richardson.

She couldn’t stand when the four-eyed, fat son of a bitch called her girl. He’d been calling her girl ever since the hospital promoted her over him, and that was nearly a year ago. He’d said it to a coworker, who then told her that he said it was only because she got her medical degree in fucking foreign that they promoted her. That, and because she was clearly fucking the Right Honourable Mr. Mark Barracat, the director of public prosecution, you should see how close, he call her every morning, you know? She is also a lesbian.

Grace kept glancing at her watch until twenty minutes were gone. The lazy fucker had left by now. Richardson was always lazy. There weren’t many doctors trained to perform autopsies these days, so she was stuck with him. But he always preferred to stop the autopsy as soon as the first credible cause of death jumped out into the open and exposed itself. This wouldn’t be the first time she went back downstairs to finish the job he started, and it was not as if he would check back to find that his reports were filed twice as long. Besides, his conclusions were right, just lacking in detail. But this was the worst, with a full half of the report incomplete. No toxicology request, no blood work, no contents of the stomach, no lung investigation—and for a high school girl found murdered with her panties half off, no investigation of the genitalia or anus. There was enough negligence here to acquit a criminal caught on video. She buttoned her coat and went downstairs.

She pulled out the slab with Janet Stenton’s body. Other than a direct light over the corpse, the room was dark. She checked the neck herself and saw all that Richardson mentioned in the report. She saw the bite mark above the girl’s nipple and the scratch marks on her thighs, everything almost making a V to her center that screamed, Look at me, read me, read the final page! His report had mentioned a scar on her right knee, but it was a bruise, not a scar, and in the harsh fluorescent
light it looked green. She grabbed a tweezer and a magnifying glass.

—Fucking idiot. Fucking fool. Either that or this man clearly never see more than one or two vagina in him life.

Grass. Recently fertilized, a lawn where people bothered to fertilize grass. Grass also stuck out from under toenails, so plainly green that she wondered if Richardson had looked anywhere below Janet Stenton’s knee. Grass in her toenails and in a fresh bruise on her knee. She was running, probably in a garden recently watered, and fell. Her fingernails had no dirt or grass but somebody had scrubbed them down with an abrasive, scouring pad maybe. They smelled of Pinesol. The marks on her thighs looked like fingernail scratches, and unless Janet Stenton had a truly disgusting habit, tufts of pubic hair were ripped out by someone else. Grace went over to the door and switched on the overhead lamp. She grabbed the phone on the wall.

—Hey, you have a rape kit upstairs there? ... Yeah, yeah, yeah, I know. Look, I’ve been trying to leave from five... Right, like you don’t know why me down here when I already have a man doing autopsy. Anyway, you have a rape kit?

Grace began to work.

Petechial hemorrhage in the conjunctiva confirmed that she was strangled, but sperm in her vagina, along with Pinesol, meant she was raped and the perpetrator tried to wash away himself post mortem with household cleaner. Or themselves. She took swabs for analysis. She had been raped, more than once, by more than three men, some more forceful than others. The girl was damaged, inside and out. Her chest was still white from baby powder. Grace combed through her arm and pubic hair and collected loose strands for the microscope in the lab right next to hers. Several hairs appeared to match but several did not. Grace took swabs for analysis. She put the hairs in rape kit packets. She made smears of Janet’s body and sealed those in packets as well. She clipped her nails and cut locks of hair. Grace would have to send everything off for DNA testing, a process that still took too long.

She was just about to return to the locker, but a new smell bothered her. No, not new, it had come in faint waves which she’d assumed to be something that Richardson left behind, maybe in the waste paper basket, by the door. Peanut, maybe some shells that he tossed, or a peanut butter sandwich he gave up on. He had a way of eating in the lab that made her sick if she thought about it too long. Grace had almost forgotten about it again when she turned Janet Stenton over.

—Jesus Christ, sweet girl. Sweet Jesus.

Me not going run again me not going run again me not going run yes me like Kelte One no not straight not straight me throat burning not straight not straight yes yes no no no no no no no no me want me mother me want me mother me want me mother me want me mother. Me want me mother.

This is what Ruth Stenton wore on the way to the post office on the same day that Grace McDonald said Sweet Jesus like she believed in God: white leather string slippers that wrapped three times around her ankles and exposed her dark purple nail polish. A black skirt that crested right above the knee but itched, and made scratchy sounds whenever her hands brushed the black velvet stripes. Her sister, the one working for that old woman in New York, had sent it down through Federal Express for the funeral. Ruth had told her not to send nothing through that rassclaat post office because them mangy-foot bitch will thief just bout everything that send from foreign except for book. She hissed, seeing herself in the glass door as she stepped inside.

—Me have this pink slip for a letter, she said to the first clerk in the window.
—There is a line, ma’am.
—Oh, excuse me, please.

Ruth went to the back of the line convinced that everybody was now watching her. Damn woman embarrass her so. And look pon the bitch too. She can’t even spend little bit of her pay to style her hair, and her red blouse soon pink because she don’t know how to wash. This was the kind of woman that don’t care bout no man because she can’t get one. But then maybe she be the one who better off. Only one thing turn a girl from a good girl who love her mother to a backtalking, whoring slut in just one summer, and that was man.

This was not what Ruth had planned. Janet was supposed to go after man, yes, and a man from uptown too. But she was to make sure she get something before she give up the punani. She, Ruth, taught her that from she was eleven. No matter how broke you be or how ugly God make you, you have something that all man in Jamaica want, even the battymen, when them trying to throw the battyboy stink off themself. But first you ask for some Kentucky and Canee before him take you home. Then a box to take home for your family. Then money for just one thing at the supermarket, like cereal, then start to rub you wrist or you finger like you missing something (but not the ring finger cause that going scare them), rub it until he buy you a nice little bracelet, then tell him how you fraid that somebody going see it and rob you and kill you so you going keep it somewhere safe and special, special like him, then you take it to jewelry store and sell it to them Syrian people and give the money to your mother.

But the damn girl never do any such thing. Keeping all the money for herself, saying that she working herself out of this fucking ghetto and nobody going stop her, least of all some damn woman who want to whore out her own daughter, like that was true. The plan was never to whore her out but for her to use the little thing she got to get what she want, and once she get it, don’t ignore the woman who still work hard, with no man to help her to send you to good school, you dutty stinking ungrateful little bitch.

She searched all over the house for that girl’s money, under her dresser, in that shoe box from the shoes she bought her seven years ago. Her school bag, the perfume boxes that she kept under her bed. She knew all the places, checking as she did every few months for ganja or some nasty book, or a love letter from some man, maybe the new teacher. Between the mattress and the divan, every one of her shoes, including the high heels that this man buy for her. Maybe it wasn’t the school teacher since everybody knew that teacher didn’t make no money. Maybe it was a man that she didn’t want to know that she come from the ghetto and who would want that anyway, since once he see that she was a ghetto girl all he would want was the ghetto slam in exchange for two-meal deal at Burger King. Stupid girl, thinking that man was going take her out of something. You had to use the man to take yourself out, something she herself could have done when she had the chance but she made that chance go stale and that man was now in New York since 1979.

By 1984 he stopped promising to send for her and the pickney. By 1987 he stopped sending money every other month, and by 1990 all letters and telegrams to his address in New York returned to sender. And after all that, the dutty stinking little bitch, that woman—no, that child, that girl, my girl, my girly girl girl, oh God—

—Ma’am, we don’t have all day and people behind you.
—W—What? Oh, sorry. Sorry. Me have this pink slip for a parcel.
—Let me see it. Is not a parcel, is a registered letter.
—What that mean?
—Means it’s registered. Wait here, please.
Ruth waited until she returned home to open the envelope. It was bigger than she expected, the size of Janet’s composition book, and brown. The weight in her hand felt strange, not like a letter or a Christmas card. She ripped it open and money scattered around the bedroom. She counted it four times, each time disbelieving it more and more. She checked the envelope for return address but there was none. She panicked, wondering if she was being watched, and stooped down to the floor to count the rest of it. Her other children would be home in a few hours. She counted thirteen thousand dollars.

This is the exact account of the phone call between Grace and Mr. Barracat, the deeepee peepee, the day after Grace said Sweet Jesus like she believed in God and Ruth Stenton counted out thirteen thousand dollars—November 2—over a week after Janet’s body was found.

—Good afternoon, Mr. Barracat.
—How you knew it was me?
—Well, nobody else calls me before my morning coffee, sir.
—Hell hath no fury like a McDonald? Anyway, what is this big folder business you leave on my desk?
—What? You mean the autopsy? I’m still waiting on toxicology. And a positive ID on further things found inside her. Don’t even start to talk bout DNA.
—I don’t know why you even bothered. We got a confession from last week.
—A confession?
—Baby, even the Star and the Gleaner know about it, and as usual, you don’t. You know, McDonald, they call it having a life. Take your backside out of work every now and then.
—What you mean by confession, sir? Who confessed?
—The sky juice vendor who used to sell outside Immaculate High School gate. He strangled her.

—Him and who else?
—What you mean?
—He said he strangled her?
—Yeah man. Grab her from behind then carry her into Water Lane to rape her, but she put up a fight and he strangled her.
—He raped her?
—No.
—No?
—Well, of course the son of a bitch tried to, but she kicked him in the balls. God bless the poor girl.
—Mr. Barracat, you read my report?
—Grace, you know how many sons of bitches I have today that claiming they innocent? I have one who film himself and the four schoolboys he invite into his minibus to rape a schoolgirl and he pleaded not guilty anyway. Thank God for one who finds himself guilty before I have to tell him.
—This girl was not murdered in Water Lane. And she was raped.
—Maybe she was going home from a night orgy.
—Sir, I don’t think that’s funny. Please read my report. The only thing in the man’s confession that matches the report is the strangulation. And she was raped.
—Fine. He raped her. Shouldn’t be a problem getting him to confess to that too, but who fucking cares? We got the son of a bitch on murder anyway.
—There is no way he acted alone, sir. Not unless he raped her multiple times—
—So him rape her multiple times. The brethren can stan pon it long, as the ghetto people say.
—Each time with a different penis? And unless grass growing in Water Lane now, she was never there. And for God’s sake, this sky juice man kill a girl, then somehow find a brand-
new Moroccan rug, not some hire purchase layaway rug. Mr. Barracat, a real Moroccan rug from fucking Morocco, and wrap her in it? You know that rug cost more than my year’s rent?
—No, but I do know I don’t much care for that tone.
—Sorry, sir.
—He stole it. Like a murderer stealing something going to shock anybody.
—And then he leave her under a bus like she’s a damn tableau?
—Don’t understand French.
—Sir, they didn’t even bother to take the damn thing out of her behind. They didn’t even bother.
—Fine, I’ll ask him who he’s protecting when I put him on the stand. You happy now?
—Not going to ask me about her behind?
—Surely he’s not going to take this fall himself if he had company.
—I want to see his statement.
—Then go to the station and knock yourself out.
—Sir, please read my report.

Sometimes she felt that she took the smell home and couldn’t wash it off. The phone rang.
—Yeah?
—Grace, I have some of the lab work.
—Already? You nah joke.
—Barracat know you doing this?
—You don’t worry about Barracat. What you have for me?
—First thing first, you establish time of death?
—Yeah, Sunday, October 24. They discovered the body on the 25th.
—Saturday.
—Saturday?
—Yeah, I did a histology on one of the samples you sent me. She was murdered Saturday.
—They kept the body an entire day?
—Yeah. Somebody who know a butcher or somebody who have a refrigerated room. Also, I checked the hairs you sent me.
—You got all of them? The black one and the other two, which look white? I just couldn’t tell the rest, and then there are the ones on her bottom.
—All the ones from her buttocks come from the same source and they match a few from her front. But the reason why you couldn’t identify the other hairs is that they weren’t hairs.
—Oh?
—No, not hair. Two of them are wool, like from a rug or something.
—Ah, the rug they wrap her up in.
—Maybe, but the others, Grace.
—Yeah?
—Fur.
—What you just say?
—Fur.
—No.
—Yeah.
—They couldn't... they just couldn't.
—It might just be that the person was a dog lover and had just played with his pets.
—Can you tell which dog?
—No. A big black one, though. One that don't shed much.
Grace, I'm going to tell you something. You don't have dogs so you don't know. That thing you found up her rectum, you know, the rubber thing?
—Yeah?
—I assume you know what it is.
—No, I don't. I just know it doesn't belong there.
—It's a Stuff 'n' Chew dog toy. A dog treat holder. You fill it with peanut butter and throw it to your dog. Takes them hours to figure it out. I use it when I just can't be bothered to play with Boxer. Me always busy so that's pretty much all the time... Grace? Grace? You there? Grace?
—You get anything on the grass?
—Yeah, industrial fertilizer. You can't buy it at the hardware just so. Probably a gardening service.
—Gardening service in Jamaica? A who rich so?
—You can check Glidden's. They the only one I know.

This is what the woman who answered the phone at Glidden's Tools and Gardening said when Grace called her immediately:
—We don't release that kind of information, ma'am.
—Confidentiality? Really? What, you have confessional booth behind the Miracle-Gro? I'm asking if your staff use this fertilizer anytime in the past two weeks and where.
—I can't really help you, ma'am.
—Put your supervisor on the phone.
—She stepped out.
—When is she coming back?

—Me no know, ma'am.
—Anway, I'm sure you have record somewhere, so please save me the trouble of coming down there.
—Can't do that, ma'am.
—You know what? That's fine, you're being a good employee. Now just hope that when me and the six policeman come down there, and turn everything upside down, that you have enough time to fix up the place before your boss come back.
—You can't do that.
—Really? You going to see me do it in less than thirty minutes. And by the way, tell your boss that in a month she will be audited too.
—Hold on. Hold on.
—Hello? Who is this?
—No, the question is who is you? I'm going to guess that you're the manager. Had a good walk? Good. Now, listen to what you going do for me right now.

Me want me mother me want me mother me want me mother. Me want me mother.

This is the magazine that Ruth Stenton carried in her hand at the same time Grace McDonald got a call from Toxicology: Elle. Ruth was on her way to the dressmaker she knew. She had browsed a bookshop only hours before and leafed through Vogue, Vogue Patterns, Redbook, and Harper's Bazaar before she found it, a black dress that she wanted for the funeral now that she had twice worn the skirt her sister sent her. The small card lodged at the bottom of the envelope had said, For Jacqueline, and it was for her, but a good dress for the funeral was for her too. That, and a gray hearse and a pink coffin with light gray silk trim. The funeral home had shown her a small box covered in purple velvet like fabric at first, and she cursed them out
shoutingbout if them think iss cause she come from ghetto that she can't get decent coffin for her big daughter. The funeral home director offered her a discount when he recognized Janet Stenton's name from the newspaper and TV reports, which she took, saying there is no situation so bad that you can't appreciate a good bargain, right?

After that, she took the magazine to the dressmaker, a stout woman whose dresses always had lace trim and who lived in Riverton City, a zinc-shack ghetto five miles west of Trench Town. Ruth stuffed herself into a packed taxi that ran the Spanish Town Road highway west and came off by the garbage dump that surrounded Riverton City. The garbage rose as high as hills and boys and women picked through, looking for things that they stuffed in black plastic bags. The slow-burning stink worked its way into everything, so complete that the smell vanished for all but those who visited.

—Boy, me know things tough with you, Miss Ruth, but me can't give you no more dress pon credit.

—But what a way you facety. See it deh, me have money. Me have plenty money. You done now? How much me owe you? Me will pay you. Now, me want this frock.

—White more for wedding than funeral, Miss Ruth.

—Huh? Not that one, the purple one beside it. And me want it in black.

—But that is not no funeral dress.

—Is that me want.

—It don't have no sleeve.

—Is that me want.

—Sequin not cheap, Miss Ruth.

—Me say me have money.

—You want the split too?

—Yes, me want the split.

—You leaving the funeral to go to party or something?

—You know what me tired of? You know what me tired off, lady? People who think they can judge me. Everybody who walk past me think they should leave word like me is bank and what them think is deposit. You know what? You don't know nothing bout me and you don't know how you can do everything you think you can do, and people just do what they want anyway because man tell them to.

—Me never did say nothing.

—You say everything. You a damn Jamaican who think you can talk by looking. Well, me tired of it from people who think them better than me. You is just some little seamstress who can't even get work at the free zone and you should be glad me spending money with you.

—Look here.

—No, you look here. Shut you rassclaat mouth and make me a damn dress.

—Sorry, ma’am. But at least you must be happy them catch the Killer?

—No, me not happy. How any of this to make me happy? Me not happy at all.

Crabgrass is a weed, though some Jamaicans think it is grass. This is one of the things that Grace McDonald was thinking as she drove around Norbrook for hours, turn after turn, avenue after avenue, crescent after crescent, mews after mews, weaving in and out, somehow always looping round again on Norbrook Drive, which cuts the community in half.

She should have taken a map. What the fuck was she thinking? Going out with just the list from Glidden's. Four people had bought their special crabgrass formulation and service in the last three months. For most people, crabgrass in the lawn was fine as long as everything was mowed level. It was like having a head with different grades of hair.
The first house she found, thank God, seemed empty. A beige one-floor bungalow. Spanish-tiled roof. Glass sliding windows and doors.

She parked on the street and went inside, thinking all the time what to say if someone asked what the hell she was doing on their property picking grass.

Must a good thing to be so rich that you don’t need to worry about thief, she thought. Open gate? Glass windows and doors?

This lawn had neither crabgrass nor the smell of the weed killer, the thing that her nose couldn’t place when she’d inspected the corpse of Janet.

The second house had the weed in the lawn but not the smell.

The third house was like the first—tile roof as well—but two floors. As she moved toward the five-foot iron gate, two barking rottweilers swerved into view. Time stopped. They raced. Time moved again. And they were on their hind legs with their front paws flat on the top of the gate, nails out.

Grace backstepped into her car.

She shook her head. They had a suspect who confessed to the crime and she was a doctor, not a detective. Maybe she had watched too many damn episodes of Quincy on TV Land when she lived in D.C. It’s his fault that she switched from pediatrics to forensics, him and his punk rock episode (punk rock is killing the kids!). She laughed knowing that nobody at the hospital would have gotten the reference, not even the Indians. But this case had a stink that would not go away. She kept thinking of how settled her life would have been, how much more satisfying it would have been to just smoke the day away had she not turned the poor girl over.

Raping a girl was one thing. Killing her was another. But this was just a different level, a defiance, some man or men saying, Bitch I’m going to keep on disrespecting you, even as a corpse.

Even a madman killer leave a corpse alone, even he can see that the damage is already done, leave some bit of respect now. But not this man, and it wasn’t a group that do that, come to think of it, it was one man—that kind of shit doesn’t happen by consensus, it happens by ego. That kind of shit comes from a man who want to make it public that the girl was in the palm of his hand, and watch now, Jamaica, watch now, world, while I make a fist.

She was halfway across the lawn before she smelled it.

This is what Alicia Mowatt saw on the day Janet went missing. She was slouching up Norbrook Road at around four p.m. after her Wednesday tennis practice.

Forty or so yards ahead was Stenton, not in school uniform, but a T-shirt and jeans, and wobbling in high heels as she continued uphill. Her hair was parted in two as it usually was, but the halves were loose. She was trying to pull it out and walk at the same time.

Alicia thought to call her name, but they were not friends and she could not think of a single thing to talk about all the way to the top of Norbrook Road. They could always talk about how Spanish turn so boring since grade ten, or it must be something to not need to look good because Sister Mary Clarice would have shaved her moustache by now, or how it long overdue that Georgina stop crimping her hair because 1989 gone and it not coming back, or if she has a boyfriend yet and has the boyfriend touched her breast, or shared a cigarette, or made her listen to Shabba Ranks.

But then a white Land Rover sped past her so fast that she jumped back, even though she was on the sidewalk. The vehicle slowed down a few feet behind Stenton, crawling, then speeding up, then braking fast to draw level.

Stenton was stomping, the wobbly clunk in her heels loud
enough for Alicia to hear. As she stopped, the Land Rover stopped. As she started walking, the Rover rolled. She stopped again, looking down, turning full around so that Alicia jumped back behind a bougainvillea hedge. Her heart was pumping furious. She knew the Land Rover.

Stenton paused again, the Land Rover pausing with her. Stenton leaned toward the door and began to gesture, at one point throwing her arms in the air and just letting them flop down. Then she stepped back and crossed her arms and looked down at her shoes and up at the sky. The door eased open from inside. Stenton shook her head and seemed to smile—it was hard to see—and climbed in.

The big white vehicle drove off but not as fast as before. A hundred yards later it made a left turn and pulled into a driveway through an open gate.

Alicia waited. She had forgotten her Seiko so she counted to sixty, seven times, before she began to walk again. She couldn't care less about Jacqueline Stenton but had hoped so hard that she even whispered it: not that house, not that damn house.

Alicia continued counting as she made her way up the grade. When she got to the house she slowed down and looked, not out of the corner of her eye, although this was what she'd intended. She turned her whole head and stared. Cause she wanted to see what that Stenton was up to in this house she knew. You need details when you take back gossip to the girls. Right, that was it. Nothing to do with her—besides, Stenton could clearly take care of herself if she was running with this type of crew.

But...

There was a but here, a big one that she couldn't leave at the gate. Dig one grave here, you going end up digging two, she thought. The driveway was empty, she noticed. Like the Land Rover was parked in the back.

She was about fifty yards past the gate when she heard a screech ahead of her and saw the red Saab slide out of a side road like it was in a rally, wheels turned one way and back-skidding the next, before it straightened up and came onrush-

ding down the grade. She looked away when it flew past, partly out of shame and partly from the grit it kicked up in her eyes.

She found herself in two places at the same time. On her feet on the side of Norbrook Road, and in an upstairs bedroom inside that house, that house where she knew the car would stop and turn in.

It hurt the first time, she told him. And he wouldn't stop. It hurt the second time. And the third time too, when she felt like she walked right into it. But it was cause she did too tight and fool, he said, so she went home and used her finger in the shower to get looser. She didn't know what to do with her mouth either so he suggested a banana and laughed at her when she told him she tried it. If she rubbed her cheek just right she would remember what it felt like, the backhand, the ring from Daddy, balancing the smart of the pain against knowing she had a real boyfriend who would tell her to never disrespect him. Three years ago. Twelve years old. There's a difference between knowing when to leave and being kicked out. The whole time he made him watch.

4

Why you don't tell your brother to leave me alone? No, it not funny, people at school seeing him taking step with me like is something to him.

I love how you did handle him when him did come by earlier. You bad him up for real. Me never know say is so you can going bad? But truthfully, you don't think him did trail me? Come on. So how as soon as I reach him reach then?

Anyway, I like how you went out and put him in him place, but
still. How long that going last? No, I don't think him badder than you. Easy, baby.

Then tell him again, cause him getting ruder and ruder. You sure him right in the head? And you know say him going after my friend Melissa now. You know why I think him vex? Is cause me choose you instead?

No, I not fraid for him. But is you supposed to handle him because is your brother. And you don't know what him do out at the school ...

Beg your pardon?

Yes, is your brother ... Wha? You think only uptown people care bout family? Don't bring me mother into this ... You don't even know me mother.

Laud ... you no tired yet? You going to get me in trouble, you know. Is bad enough you have me leaving out on Thursday, now you have me doing Wednesday too.

No, do it this way. Slow down, where you rushing to? After this we going to pick up the visa?

We can close the window over there. That one looking out the road. I don't know, it feel weird. Like somebody watching. No, is you the one with guilt conscience.

Me can't just laugh like that. Somebody have to give me a joke. Give me a joke then, ruh?

No, you come over here. This couch bigger and it nearer to the TV. Shut up, I do more things than watch TV.

You not closing the windows? Them so big you must get a whole heap of mosquito. Oh, mosquito fraid of uptown. Ha ha.

Rass. I can't believe how time fly. Night already. Man, look at Kingston, it so pretty from here, all them light right out to the sea. I would want my bedroom right here and with only glass so I can see the view all the time.

You know how hard it was walking up your rich people hill? You was supposed to pick me up at the bottom, not the middle. Imagine,

have me walking up like some household helper. In these shoes. You like me shoes? You really like it?

Make we use the pool, ruh. You no say your parents gone for the whole weekend. Thank God your brother gone.

So you like me shoes? Tell me again.

So when you carry me to Miami you going buy one even better than this for me. You wretch you, I catch you. You think I forgot.

So when we going?

When we going ... What? Me can't remember what me was going say now. You sure you brother gone? All right, is nothing. Maybe I just remembering what him say, why me feel like he's ...

So you would do that to me?

When we going to Miami? No, me never want to get married. You want me do what? Is which little girl you using that with?

You think me is a fool?

My mother still good for teaching one or two thing bout man. What she don't teach me, me learn from her all the same.

No, my mother didn't go to Immaculate.

G'way, I don't talk too much. You talk too much.

Well, if you want me talk less, stop giving me screwdrivers.

Wait ... wait. You hear that? You hear that? Sound like the Saab. But is not it alone. Hear there. Is more than one car. I putting on my fucking clothes.


I don't know. Just tell him that.

How you mean you can't hear me? I don't want him to know I'm here. What you want me do? Bawl it out? Sometimes you just go on like you don't have no fucking sense.

Don't lick me. Leggo off o' me. You see, is only me you have strength for. You no have no strength for your brother, though.

no bloodclaat hear me bomboclaat say leggo me pussyclaat, boy. Me naah make no man rape me! Me naah make no man rape me! Go suck you mother. Do... beg you...

Look what me come to, dear Jesus. Look how you make the man them come open the door. The Lord is my shepherd. The Lord is my shepherd. The Lord is my shepherd. Mewantmemwm Mewantmemwm Mewantmemwm Mewantmemwm Mewantmemwm

This is the phone call Grace McDonald received at one a.m. on Wednesday, November 3, hours after going up to Norbrook Road searching for a smell.

—Grace.

—Somebody better be pregnant or dead.

—First thing you should learn is some manners.

—Who the fuck is this?

—Richardson.

—Well, it sounds like you, but it couldn’t be you at this time of the night. Plus, what the fuck is this attitude about? Listen, it’s way too early for me to tell you I’m tired of you and your shit. And I way too sleepy to tell you to stop going on like say I owe you something or I do you something.

—You done talk, my girl?

—You know what? Me tired of every fucking man in this profession thinking me is his girl.

—Tell it to somebody who care, sweetheart, cause me no give a rass. Two thing this phone call bout, you listening? First thing: learn some manners. Second thing: leave things that too big for you.

—Richardson? Don’t take any step with me.

—You already take enough step for the both of we. What a fucking idiot. You blind or you fool?

—I’m hanging up right now.

—Why you mess with my report?

—You call that a report? And what you mean mess with? It was incompetent. It was fucking incomplete. You don’t just come across a dead girl with her panties half off and don’t check for anything. Is so UWI teach forensics?

—You think you know everything, don’t it? You go to your little poppy-show med school in America feel say you is any big thing. Well, everybody know that if it wasn’t for your DPP boyfriend who promote you, you wouldn’t have position over me. Who the fuck are you to go behind my back and check up and change up what I do? Did I ask your fucking opinion? Did anybody ask your fucking opinion?

—Do your job.

—Who the fuck you think you talking to, girl? I am doing my job. Which country you live in? Cause is sure not this one. Me no understand how the fuck you get promotion and don’t know shit about how this world work.

—Your report stopped at the part where it shouldn’t have stopped.

—No fool. It end where it should end. There’s a big difference between stop and end. You figure it out.

—You know they set a dog on her?

—What you want me to do with that information?

—You know I figured out who did it?

—Yes, little girl. And him already know you know. Why you think me calling you at one in the morning, cause me want to swap recipe? They know, Grace. What the fuck you think you doing? Why you think it come back to me? The fuckers called me three times, Grace. Three fucking times. The last call came ten minutes ago. The bloodclaat people know.
Ruth Stenton still has the memory of how she felt when she got the second registered letter containing seventeen thousand dollars. You start to forget. You start to realize that hard as it may be, some little girl do ask for it.

Grace McDonald still has the memory of what it felt like when she got to work early on the morning after the one a.m. phone call.

You pick up the phone to call the police, then you put it down because the police might be in on it too. You remember a song that you have no reason to remember because you too old for loud American music despite all those years at Georgetown, but it said, just because you're paranoid don't mean they're not after you. You close the door to your office and pull a chair behind your door and a credenza behind the chair and you wait. You try to think but all you can do is wait. You touch your shoulder and wince because the pain is still raw. You try to think, to remember if you saw this Land Rover before Marescaux Road. No, not when you left your home on Lady Musgrave Road. Not when you turned left on Old Hope Road, then right, heading south to downtown. Not when you turned right again on Marescaux Road to bypass Crossroads congestion. The white Land Rover seemed to come out of a childhood fear of blackheart man, it just appeared, fully formed and ready. It rammed into the back of your car first and you cussed, slowed down for a stop to get out and swap insurance docs or something. You stopped but the Land Rover did not. It kept coming and when it rammed into you the second time your head clobbered the steering wheel. It pulled back and you stomped the gas pedal and drove off, but it followed, came up to the side, you saw schoolgirls crossing further down the road and hoped they run fast, but they're not running, they're not running, move! Two dove to the side of the road. The Land Rover swung into yours, shoving you into the sidewalk. It came again and you swerved out of the way, almost hitting a stop sign. The vehicle dogged you all the way around National Heroes Circle and swerved into you again on the driver's side and you screamed. Then, as you drove out of Heroes Circle to head south, to the police station near South Parade, the Land Rover turned and headed north.

You parked your car in two spots at the Kingston Public Hospital and ran five flights up the stairs to your office. You locked the door and you waited. The phone rang. You waited. It rang seven times and stopped. You turned away but it rang again. It sounded insistent. It would not be denied, bitch.

—Hello.
—You want to know a joke about dogs?
—Who is this?
—You want to know a joke about dogs?
—Who is this?
—Did I utter, mutter, or stutter? I said if you want to know one bomboclaat joke bout dog.
—No.
—Most times they have more empathy than humans. The son of a bitch was actually trying to help her. Can you imagine that? Only one person in the room behaving like a decent human being and it was the bomboclaat dog.
—Why you telling me this?
—You seem like you were looking for an answer so I thought I should just save you the trouble and give it to you. Baby—
—Not your fucking baby.
—Rass, baby have one serious potty mouth, though. You mother didn't wash it out with soap? Should I send somebody over to her house to ask her? You want to know, don't it?
—I want to know what, son of a bitch.
—you want to know if I send in Caesar pre or post mortem?
—you think you're scaring me?
—Not at all. If I wanted to scare you I would tell you bout the part of Jamaica that is always night, that you don’t know fuck about. I would have pulled that Sandals Negril T-shirt you were wearing to bed last night over your head and make you choose which one of your nipples I bite off. If I wanted to scare you I’d say look out your window right now, north a few parking spots then center. I’d say wait until you see me wave back at you. If I wanted to scare you I would tell you how many times I have to change the lining of that car trunk. You know how hard it is to find parts for a Saab 900 Ruby? Only 600 made, 599 of them in the UK. If I wanted to scare you I would remind you that is not even me that come after you just awhile ago. Couldn’t, too busy waiting on you right here. And is not me that would come after you again. You know, we used to just set up in the next room when him or me dealing with a bitch. I mean, how else the little boy going to learn? But man, since hidden camera, I can be anywhere and still see everything. You know the other thing about video? You can see what you do wrong and correct it. Now every man in uptown can do the work and is all cause of me. Pity things get out of hand. So you going to thank me?

—Thank you for what, you son of a bitch.
—I don’t know. For starters, that I’m not coming after you.
—What you want?
—I already get it, baby.
—Fuck you.
—In good time, maybe?
You hung up. You wished a phone slam had an echo.

cot Cemetery, an expensive burial grounds usually reserved for the rich and their children.

The prime minister had business, but the ministers of education and national security were there.

Rain threatened to but did not fall. The cemetery was packed with people who never knew Jacqueline, most in black, gray, and white, including seven old women from miles away who bawled throughout the whole service despite asking for the poor girl’s name twice.

Alicia didn’t notice any of this, her eyes were so fixed on one thing, refusing to blink until they burned. Far off, maybe two hundred feet, the red Saab pulled up and paused. She wondered if she was the only one who saw. Nobody else seem to be looking west, only south to the hole in the ground and Jacqueline’s pink box sinking. The red Saab did not stay.

Melissa Leo smoothed out her white skirt and straightened her tie when she got out.

This is what Alicia Mowatt wore to Jacqueline Stenton’s funeral: her school uniform. White blouse, white skirt below the knee, and a royal-blue tie.

The Sisters insisted that Immaculate girls represent the school at so somber an occasion. Jacqueline was buried at Dove-