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Only Trixie is at the gate when he pulls up. She is sitting on her haunches staring at something across the road, her forelegs planted in front of her, solid as tree-stumps. Probably an iguana, Clyde thinks, or an agouti, judging by the look on her face. He glances in that direction as he yanks the handbrake up but can't see what she might be looking at. There is only bush over there on that side of the road: bush all the way down to the river, and then more bush, until you get to the cocoa plantations. The leaves are shiny with the little rain that just fell, the asphalt road steaming. As he walks down to the gate, he pulls off his t-shirt, wipes the sweat from his face, the back of his neck.

He had a little wash before he left work, but the smell of the industrial estate still clings to him – it is in his hair, his clothes, the creases of his joints. 'Oil-smell,' people call it, or 'petrochemical smell,' if they are better informed. Today, Clyde knows, he smells of grease, ammonia and rotten eggs, because he spent the afternoon going round the plant with the engineer, sealing off valves, hauling open chambers, collecting samples in little plastic bags, and then closing back the chambers and opening valves again. Usually, he would have been wearing a blue coverall instead of his own clothes, and he would have showered at the plant before he left. But since the break-in a few weeks ago, he's switched to day-work – just as a temporary measure – so

that he can be at home with Joy and the boys during the night. It doesn't pay as well as shifts, but Joy says she feels safer with him in the house.

Brownie and Jab-Jab come down to the gate, their noses dusty with the red-orange dirt from under the house. 'Aye! All-you been sleeping?' he asks. They stretch and sneeze their hellos, panting in wide, happy smiles. 'Lazy dogs!' he tells them, as he pats them through the bars. 'Lazy!' But they smile and wave their tails: they can tell he is not mad. Anyway, he thinks, what is the point of them being awake during the day? Better they sleep during the day, so they could be awake at night. You can't expect animals to be awake twenty-four hours, even watchdogs.

'Get back, get back,' he calls, as he lifts the top latch. The two pothounds retreat to the scrubby grass at the side of the driveway, but Trixie gets to her feet and stands there squarely, a burly mass of Rottweiler muscle, frowning at the spot where the two halves of the gate join.

'What happen to you?' Clyde says to her. 'You not going out on the road, you know.' He looks again over his shoulder, searching for what might be troubling her. The sun has gone down behind the trees, and the lane is shady and cool and still. The birds have already gone in: there's just that one keskidee left in the guava tree by the gate, the big-talker who's always the last to go in. 'You still here?' Clyde says. 'Everyone else gone home!' The bird blinks, angles its striped head this way and that; then, as if suddenly realising what a fool it is, rushes off.

Clyde opens the gate a tiny bit and grabs Trixie by the collar, trying to push her away. 'I have to bring the car in!' he pleads. She growls: just a low rumble from her throat, eyes fixed on the ground. If he gives her one more inch, he knows, she'll shoot out

onto the road and they'll spend the rest of the evening trying to catch her and get her back into the yard.

Clyde lets the latch fall and rattles the gate. 'Paul!' he calls. 'Paul! Come and hold this dog for me.'

There's a brief movement at the window – someone waving to say they're coming – and then Peter comes out to the patio. The boys are twins but even from here, twenty or thirty feet away, Clyde can tell that it's Peter, not Paul. Paul tends to slink around – like he playing invisible, Clyde always thinks – but Peter walks with a bold step, his head up, his arms held a little way from his sides, not with the elbows tucked in like he doesn't know what to do with them. Peter is only thirteen, but he is nearly as tall as Clyde already, and as hairy. He has changed out of his school uniform into shortpants, the dents from his socks still marking his ankles.

'Aye,' says Peter, as he comes down the steps. He skips quickly over the hot concrete to the grass on the side, the brown, dried-up grass of dry season.

'Where's Paul?'

'Gone out.'

'Gone out? Gone out where?'

'I dunno. By the river, I think.'

'Hold this dog for me while I bring the car in.'

Peter holds Trixie while Clyde drives into the carport, a shelter at the side of the house built of tall poles and galvanise. When he lets her go, she steps away from him and shakes, as if she'd just climbed out of a wet drain. Then she returns to her position in front of the gate, sitting on her haunches, staring at the bush across the road.

Joy is sitting down when Clyde comes in, the fan set to blow breeze straight on her. The sheets that they laid over the sofa and armchair since the break-in are all smoothed out and organised, but the place still looks terrible. Joy looks hot and tired, her hair greasy, pulled back, her bare feet dusty and black with dirt. He feels too grimy himself to go and kiss her hello.

‘Water gone?’ he asks.

‘Yea.’

‘When? In the morning?’

‘About lunchtime,’ she says. ‘I saw the pressure was getting low so I filled up the pots.’ She keeps talking as Clyde goes through to the kitchen to put down his keys. He waves away the flies from the dishes stacked up in the sink. ‘I couldn’t cook,’ she calls. ‘I took out roti from the freezer and I made up some melongene to go with it. I was going to make curry, but I couldn’t cook.’

He comes back to the living room and lifts up the covers of the Pyrex dishes on the table: melongene choka, with plenty onion and garlic, the way he likes it, some cucumber salad, and some warm paratha roti wrapped up in a dishcloth. ‘Don’t worry, man, this is fine!’ he says. He speaks with extra cheerfulness, so that she doesn’t feel bad about the simple dinner.

He washes his hands from a bucket in the bathroom and puts on a clean shirt: that will have to do for today, in place of a shower. Back in the living room, he pulls out the chair at the head of the table, but Joy doesn’t get up. She is still on her corner of the sofa, her right hand twisting at her wedding ring, squeezing it up as far as the knuckle and then pushing it back down again.

‘What happen?’ he asks.

Her eyes flick to the clock on the wall, just behind Clyde’s head.

‘What?’ he asks, again.

'I just wondering how come Paul not home yet.'

He sits, takes a roti skin from underneath the cloth and drops it on his plate. 'He'll come back when he's ready, I suppose.'

'But it's going to get dark just now,' Joy says.

Peter comes in, glances at the two of them, and sits down. Clyde takes a bit of melongene, using the back of the spoon to spread it out on his plate a bit, to make it look bigger.

'I's thinking I would phone Romesh,' Joy says, 'and see if he's by them.' Romesh is her younger brother – he lives with his family about a half-mile up the road, in a two-storey house with carpets and air-conditioners. She watches as he tears a strip of roti. 'You don't mind?' she asks.

He pushes the food into his mouth and chews, his forearms on the edge of the table, scowling at the space in front of him. At his side, Peter keeps his eyes down and busies himself with eating.

'Eh?' she asks again, after Clyde has swallowed. 'You don't mind?'

'Me?' Clyde says. 'Why I would mind?'

'I'll just call them and see,' she says.

He is not there. After she hangs up, Joy comes to the table and the three of them eat together in silence.

When he has finished eating, Clyde takes his plate to the kitchen, but there is nowhere to rest it down. The sink is full of unwashed dishes, and the counters are covered by cooking pots, bowls, ice-cream containers, all filled with water. He waves the flies away.

'Clyde, don't worry about this,' Joy says, coming in. 'Go on the patio. You want a cold Carib or something? Look a cold bottle in the fridge there.' She takes his plate from him.

'I'm working early tomorrow,' he says.

'Well, just one not going to kill you. Eh? One wouldn't be OK?'

'Nah,' he says. 'Just some ice-water. We have ice?'

'Plenty, plenty,' she says. 'Go and relax yourself, Clyde. I'll bring the water.'

On the patio, he settles himself into a chair and lights a cigarette. He can hear the seven o'clock News headlines from next door quite clearly: the usual mix of lies from government ministers, road fatalities, rapes, kidnappings and so on. The same stories day after day.

Brownie and Jab-Jab come up to the little wrought-iron gate at the top step and wag their tails at him, bright-eyed and alert now it's evening. He cranes his neck to look: the street-lamp on their road hasn't worked in years, but he can just make out Trixie's stout shape, still there at the gate.

'The dogs had their food?' Clyde asks Joy, when she comes with the ice-water to sit down with him.

'I don't think so,' she says. 'I think it's Paul's week to feed them. That's why I'm telling you, I'm wondering where he is.'

'He said anything before he went out?'

'No. Not that I remember. But he's hardly opened his mouth since the break-in. You don't find? He's upset about what happened.'

'Well,' Clyde says. 'Upset? Or sulking?'

'Upset,' Joy says.

'You're trying to tell me I was too harsh on him?'

'I'm not saying that. I'm only saying you-all had an argument, not so? And he was upset.'

Clyde clasps his hands over his waist and looks away, out over the front yard. He loosens his feet from his slippers, crosses one foot over the other knee. All these years, Joy has told him he's been too harsh on the boy: now what does she think? Has he been too harsh, or maybe not harsh enough? He takes a sip of water

and sets the glass back on the coaster. He looks towards the front yard again, waggles his foot. Jab-Jab pricks her ears up at something rustling in the bush, then trots down the steps to investigate.

The break-in happened two weeks ago now to the day. Clyde came home to find the gate ajar, the house dark. He sat in his car, his fingers gripping the steering wheel, knowing what might be waiting for him inside. 'CARNAGE,' the newspapers said, most days, above the photos. On other days: 'MORE CARNAGE', or 'WHEN WILL IT END?' Two neighbours, Mr Chin Lee and Mr Bartholomew, came with him, armed with cutlasses and sticks, and they found Joy and the boys in a heap on the kitchen floor, their mouths stuffed with rags, hands and feet bound with wire. 'Alive, praise God!' Mr Chin Lee said. 'All alive!' Clyde sat by the wall with his head in his hands; neighbours brought wire-cutters, food, Dettol, ice. Mr Bartholomew picked up the phone and called his wife. 'Everybody OK,' he said. 'They were just tied up. Nobody dead.'

The next morning, when he woke, he already had a headache starting. He had planned just to make Joy her tea and go back to bed, but when he came out to the kitchen, he felt the sickening squelch of a maggot under his bare foot. They were all over the floor; Paul, wearing flip-flops, was already working his way around with a scrap of newspaper in hand. 'One blasted day late!' Clyde said. Paul didn't say anything, maybe he bent a little lower to the ground. Clyde felt his anger bubbling up. 'One blasted day late with the rubbish, and this is what happens in this blasted place!' He bit his tongue, but the words continued in his head: *And Joy's jewellery gone, and the house turned upside down, and he's missing a day of work. And Paul and his foolishness! All his damn foolishness!* 'Well, you could forget about going to that fete in Port of Spain,'

Clyde burst out. The boys had been talking about nothing except this fete for weeks: Clyde was going to drive them up to Port of Spain in the afternoon and collect them at midnight. 'Nobody's going to any fetes!' He waited, fuming, but there was no reply. 'You don't have anything to say for yourself?' But Paul just stood there with that blank look of his; Clyde had to restrain himself from giving the boy one good cuff in his head to wake him up. 'You know what?' Clyde said. He heard the words spilling out. 'Maybe we should have put you in St Ann's one-time in truth.' Paul made no response, but some small change in his posture – a slight droop of the head, maybe, or a sag of the shoulders – told him that the boy had heard and understood.

On the patio, Clyde stubs out his cigarette. The News has moved on to oil prices. His feet wriggle back into his slippers and he walks through the house – through the dark passageway, through the sitting room, then through the kitchen to the little passageway by the bedrooms. He knocks on the boys' bedroom door.

'Yea?' calls Peter. His voice is a deep voice now, a man's voice.

'It's me.'

Peter opens the door, steps back to give Clyde space. Behind him, on his bed, is an open textbook and a copybook, pens, pencils, rulers. The sheets on Paul's bed are smooth, untouched: a pair of khaki school trousers are folded in half on the edge of the bed, the pale blue shirt crumpled on the floor by his schoolbag.

'Did you look in his schoolbag?' Clyde asks.

'You want me to look in it? What for?'

'Just look in it,' Clyde says.

He stands at the door as Peter takes a handful of books out, flips through the pages. 'I don't think there's anything here,' Peter says. 'What do you want me to look for?' He rummages at the

bottom of the bag, pulls out what he finds: a dried-up wild-pine; a number of salt-prune seeds; a Caramel wrapper; a chewed straw; a few coins. Peter looks at Clyde for a few moments, the empty schoolbag in his hand, and then he slowly puts the books back.

‘Come,’ Clyde says, when Peter is finished. Peter glances at the books and papers arranged over his own bed and then he follows Clyde through the house out to the patio.

It’s properly dark now – the bats are out. Joy puts on the overhead light, a fluorescent tube that flickers and gives Clyde a headache, but at least it keeps the bats away. Paul, when he was smaller, used to say that this light makes everyone’s faces look green. He’s right, Clyde thinks, as he sits down on the patio chair and reaches for his Du Mauriers: it makes everybody look kind of sick. Instead of their normal brown, now they all look bleached-out, half-alive. While they talk, insects keep flying into the bulb above, making little shadows scurry over their faces.

‘Tell me about this afternoon,’ Clyde says. ‘What time did he go out?’

‘It was straight after we got home from school,’ Peter says. ‘Around half past four.’

‘And what he said?’

‘Nothing. He asked me if I wanted to go by the river, and I said no, and then he went.’

From overhead, there is the quiet *bap-bap* of the insects knocking against the light. Joy pinches at her t-shirt to unstick it from the folds of her belly.

‘He had anything with him?’ Clyde asks.

‘No.’

‘He had on shoes?’

‘Don’t think so.’

'I saw the young-fellas when I was coming home,' Clyde says. 'They were playing football in the road by the gas station there. They asked if Peter wanted to come and play, but they didn't mention they had seen Paul or anything like that.'

'Phone the neighbours,' Joy says. 'Phone them and ask if they saw him.'

They listen to the international news, then stock market prices. When the weatherman comes on, Clyde gets up – nobody bothers with the weatherman during dry season: every evening, he takes about ten minutes just to say that tomorrow will be hot with no rain. Peter and Joy follow Clyde to the living room and watch as he dials the number for the Chin Lees next door.

'Hello, goodnight!' Clyde says, when Mr Chin Lee answers. He makes his tone jovial, apologises for calling so late. 'I just calling to see if your water came back. You tried the tap with the tank off?'

He watches first Joy's eyes, and then Peter's, as he listens. Mr Chin Lee has water from his tank; he offers to give Clyde some. 'No, no,' Clyde says. 'Joy put some aside this morning while the pressure was good. But if we run out, we'll send Peter around with the bucket.' As they're saying goodbye, he says, 'Oh, by the way, Paul is not by you, by any chance?'

But Mr Chin Lee hasn't seen him. Clyde tells him not to worry, that Paul is probably just out somewhere around the neighbourhood and didn't notice the time.

He tries the next neighbour on the Trace, then the one further down, at the end. Joy brings him the phone book and he tries people from the new developments, even though he can't think of anyone Paul is friendly with up there. No one has seen him. He hangs up the phone and the three of them look at each other in silence.

'You want me to go and look?' asks Peter.

'You know where he goes?'

'Not really. He used to just go by the river, but I don't know if he still goes there.'

'You don't know?'

'No.'

'Who would know? He's friendly with anyone around here?'

Peter shakes his head slowly.

'Tell us,' Joy says. 'They might know something. Who is it?'

'Well, I don't really know,' Peter says.

'Say it anyway.'

'Maybe Sando.'

'Sando?' Clyde says. The man's real name is something else, something very ordinary, but they all take these silly nicknames nowadays.

'I said, I don't know.'

'But you must have some reason for thinking of him. You're talking about the fella with the dreadlocks? And always wearing shades?'

Peter nods.

'And why you think he would know about Paul?'

'I didn't say he would know anything.'

'Well, what is it then? What connection they have?'

'I don't know. Just, like, in the maxi taxi in the mornings? Sando acts like they're friends or something.'

'Is that so?' Clyde says. Is that so, that the man thinks they're friends? This is who Paul is associating with? The man is over thirty years old, and spends all his time at the panyard chatting up women and smoking weed.

'I don't think Paul is doing anything,' Peter says quickly. 'He's

not taking drugs or anything, if that's what you're thinking.'

'Well,' Clyde says. He's already imagining dragging Paul in here by the ear. 'When he comes back, I'll find out.' And that fella Sando? He will have a word with that wutless man, and he will say, what business do you have with my son? What business do you have with a thirteen-year-old boy?

'I think the two of you should go across the road and look in the bush,' Joy says. 'Let Peter show you where to go. And he could call out. If Paul hiding, he more likely to come out if he hears Peter.'

Clyde taps his fingertips together, thinking. Why should he drag Peter out into the bush in the middle of the night just to please Paul? It's bad enough that one person has to go and look for him, never mind two! And after the break-in and everything, he doesn't want to leave Joy on her own here. 'No. I'll go by myself,' Clyde says. 'Peter, you stay with Mummy.'

Peter finds him a torch, and Clyde changes into long pants and shoes. Shorts and slippers are no good for that bush across the road. Before, when Clyde was small, he used to go in there barefoot: by daylight you can easily pick your way along, avoiding ant-hills, sharp stones, pricklers and whatever else. But it's a long time since he's been in there, and also – who knows what will be out now, at night? Snakes, frogs, agouti, all the night-time creatures, or spirits, or whatever they are. La Diabliesse and Papa Bois and all of them. Not that he believes in all of that nonsense, really. But still – the agreement, as far as he is concerned, is that the humans stay in one realm and the spirits stay in another: to think of walking into the dark bush now feels like trespassing. But, as usual, there is nothing else to be done. Clyde, lacing up his shoes in the bedroom, thinks: this is

the last time. The last time he's jumping through hoops for this child. Next week, after things settle down, Clyde thinks, he will sit him down and tell him straight out: no more. And just two weeks ago Paul nearly got Joy killed? No more of this nonsense. He will say sorry for what he said, about St Ann's. He never really meant that. He will say: I always said we would care for you at home, rather than put you in that place for god-knows-what to happen to you. But enough is enough. You have to stop this nonsense.

Back on the patio, he flicks the torch on, trains the beam on the stretch of road beyond the gate: the long grass is a weird kind of green in the torchlight, a colour that doesn't exist in the daytime.

'You're going to take Trixie?' Peter asks, on the patio.

'No, no. Better she stays with you-all,' Clyde says. 'Lock up after me. And if there's any problem, phone Romesh.'

Clyde goes down the steps, the little light of his torch bobbing in the darkness, Brownie and Jab-Jab trotting ahead of him. Behind him, he hears Peter close the door and slide the lock shut. Trixie is still sitting by the gate. She turns her head: her eyes catch the torchlight, two ghostly discs in the dark.