

CHAPTER 1



IT WAS FINISHED ALMOST as soon as it began. Kitty felt such little intrusion from the overseer Tam Dewar's part that she decided to believe him merely jostling her from behind like any rough, grunting, huffing white man would if they were crushed together within a crowd. Except upon this occasion, when he finally released himself from out of her, he thrust a crumpled bolt of yellow and black cloth into Kitty's hand as a gift. This was more vexing to her than that rude act—for she was left to puzzle upon whether she should be grateful to this white man for this limp offering or not . . .



Reader, my son tells me that this is too indelicate a commencement of any tale. Please pardon me, but your storyteller is a woman possessed of a forthright tongue and little ink. Waxing upon the nature of trees when all know they are green and lush upon this island, or birds which are plainly plentiful and raucous, or taking good words to whine upon the cruelly hot sun, is neither prudent nor my fancy. Let me confess this without delay so you might consider whether my tale is one in which you can find an interest. If not, then be on your way, for there are plenty books to satisfy if words flowing free as the droppings that fall from the backside of a mule is your desire.

Go to any shelf that groans under a weight of books and there,

wrapped in leather and stamped in gold, will be volumes whose contents will find you meandering through the puff and twaddle of some white lady's mind. You will see trees aplenty, birds of every hue and oh, a hot, hot sun residing there. That white missus will have you acquainted with all the many tribulations of her life upon a Jamaican sugar plantation before you have barely opened the cover. Two pages upon the scarcity of beef. Five more upon the want of a new hat to wear with her splendid pink taffeta dress. No butter but only a wretched alligator pear again! is surely a hardship worth the ten pages it took to describe it. Three chapters is not an excess to lament upon a white woman of discerning mind who finds herself adrift in a society too dull for her. And as for the indolence and stupidity of her slaves (be sure you have a handkerchief to dab away your tears), only need of sleep would stop her taking several more volumes to pronounce upon that most troublesome of subjects.

And all this particular distress so there might be sugar to sweeten the tea and blacken the teeth of the people in England. But do not take my word upon it, peruse the volumes for yourself. For I have. And it was shocking to have so uplifting an act as reading invite some daft white missus to belch her foolishness into my head.

So I will not worry myself for your loss if it is those stories you require. But stay if you wish to hear a tale of my making.

As I write, I have a cup of sweetened tea resting beside me (although not quite sweet enough for my taste, but sweetness comes at a dear price here upon this sugar island); the lamp is glowing sufficient to cast a light upon the paper in front of me; the window is open and a breeze is cooling upon my neck. But wait . . . for an annoying insect has decided to throw itself repeatedly against my lamp. Shooing will not remove it, for it believes the light is where salvation lies. But its insistent buzzing is distracting me. So I have just squashed it upon an open book. As soon as I have wiped its bloody carcass from the page (for it is in a volume that my son was reading), I will continue my tale.

