

Name Lafleur Cockburn

Nationality Vincentian

Current Residence Barbados

Yurumein

Yurumein, a Grenadine island off the southeast coast of mainland St. Vincent, is playground for the rich and famous. Mummy says Italian nobility leased the seven hundred and change acres just after World War II, long before she dreamed to come into this world. Yurumein looks uninhabited to newcomers, but the thick almond and palm groves shield over a dozen villas like security guards, tropical fruit trees and shrubs their faithful watch dogs.

Yurumein is a culinary utopia; some of the world's most successful Master Chefs train on the island. Aspiring chefs will sell their own liver for a 'Midas Touch'; Yurumein's annual culinary internship. I tell Mummy, come hell or high water, I'm getting one of them placements.

Mummy supports my dream one hundred and one percent. It's just she and me since Daddy passed on, so we keep one another happy; like when she's in the kitchen mixing scotch-bonnet pepper in tamarind balls 'cause she knows exactly what I crave at the start of my third trimester. I sashay through the door, begging her to take me on a joyride in the countryside. "Who send you? Tell dem yuh never find me eh?" She plays she's resisting me, as if I don't know how to sweeten her up.

"Duh behave so nuh man. Let's go for a lil cruise." I rub my big belly, shameless. Mummy immediately softens. "Yuh teaching lil Angel yuh bad ways before she even born eh?" She points to the car keys, "Lead de way." I scramble the keys and race out the house before she changes her mind. She chases after me hollering to be careful, fussy fussy 'bout the unborn grandchild she's done christen Angela 'Angel' Scott after herself.

We drive up the east coast and turn inland towards Grieggs. I suspect Mummy's killing two birds with one stone; hunting provision for the small restaurant she operates downstairs in Calliaqua, and keeping up her joyride bargain one time. No vendors harkening by the roadside in Grieggs, but we butt up

on a small open market in Mesopotamia valley. Mummy ram-pack the car like sardine with sacks of dasheen, eddoes and yam. She get big discount after she convince the vendor we related; cousins, twice removed. She leave Mespo grinnin' like she win lotto.

All the fresh, country breeze make me sleepy, but me mind on how flawless the sunset does look down Indian Bay beach. I don't have no maternity pictures yet, so me beg Mummy to pass by the beach fuh a quick photography session. I sweetmouth her before she find excuse, "Ah will save the pictures fuh Angel. Leh she know she granny look out fuh her even before she born." Mummy smile and pelt round the blind corner to Indian Bay.

I never like sleepin' alone as a child. Especially after hidin' under the jetty behind we house eavedroppin' on fishermen jumbie stories. We house right next to the main highway; plenty street lights, endless vehicles and bales of people. Yet the fishermen tales stress out me little soul, and every night me use to feel like the only livin' thing in jumbieland. I try not to think 'bout the spirit of light leadin' people to they death, the jack-o'-lantern. How the poor souls suppose to know if is angel or duppy? Eventually, jack-o'-lanterns jump out the fishermen stories and take up residence in me room, circling me head every night, like drunk fireflies. Mummy put a Bible by me head, and hang she favorite blanket by the window. "Not even de devil cud get pass de love in dat blanket." she guarantee. And she was right, the jack-o'-lanterns vanish. I keep up the blanket long after I put two and two together; vehicle lights could turn into fishermen tales.

Anyway, nobody can imagine me surprise when jack-o'-lanterns attack we in broad daylight, on the way to Indian-Bay beach. One minute me and Mummy discussin' the best pose to show off me belly, the

next minute, bright yellow flashy lights take over the car. My chest burnin'. I coughin' in vain to get rid of the black smoke reekin' of burnt rubber takin' over me lungs. I wonder how fireflies shinin' so bright without dark? Them I remember how tired me really is and close me eyes fuh a lil while.

When me wake up, Mummy gone, and me belly flat. "No worries", I tell meself. Angel probably come a lil early, so me not surprise if they drag her off to neonatal care. I can rest though, 'cause me know wherever Angel is in the hospital, she granny go be with her.

Angel sperm-donor, Rick, show up at the hospital when she 'bout three weeks. I don't waste time on he. I write he out we life after he try slip abortion pills in me drink the day he find out 'bout the pregnancy. Rick waltz in me ward wringin' he hands like the night Mummy discover the pill at the bottom of the glass, and chase him out we house. Mummy use to warn me 'bout he 'boy-man' man behaviour. He twice me age physically, but Mummy swear he only have a fourth of my mental maturity. "Boy-men like Rick attracted to fatherless girls like grasshoppers to a lone tree. Dey will nyam off every bush in sight, and den move on to de next tree without a care in the world." Mummy have a proverb fuh every situation. Rick exceed Mummy suspicions. He worse than grasshopper, he is a whole swarm ah locust. That worthless vagabond never give a rats arse 'bout he chile. He come chat 'bout, "Cassita, me real sorry 'bout de accident." I tell him, "Rick, accidents happen everyday. Mummy good, we baby good ___." He never 'low me to finish, he in the people hospital wailin' like he dotish, and screamin' fuh the doctors "tell de trute!" I ask meself what I see in him in the first place, and when I couldn't come up with a proper answer, I make a decision to ignore Rick for good.

I too weak to move 'bout in the hospital. Me body feel as if somebody beat me with ole iron. I visitin' me chile in the preemie ward when everybody else done gone sleep. Mummy grinnin' at me proudly and tellin' me to take it easy. "We never get to Indian Bay beach fuh the maternity shoot, but I thankful all

the same. I still here with me two favorite people.” When Mummy smile, I start bawlin’, and me not sure why. She always escort me back to me bed, and grip me hands tight tight ‘till me fall asleep.

Sometimes me get so emotional, me swear Daddy does be there with she. ***

Three weeks later, Mummy tell me Angel ready fuh discharge, but the doctors monitorin’ me fuh a few more days. I don’t argue, ‘cause I feel tired fuh no reason most time. If they can help me get past that, I go be grateful. Regretfully, I overhear some nurses whisperin’ ‘bout movin’ me to ‘secure’ facilities in Glen, and I find the strength to leave with Angel in the dead of night. Just imagine I now have a young baby, and these heartless people plottin’ to make me miserable. The last time I check, the area they mumblin’ ‘bout have a college, a geriatric sanatorium, and a psychiatric hospital. I graduate from college long time, no part of me geriatric, and me certainly not crazy, so why they talkin’ ‘bout sendin’ me there? The funky hospital mattress lumpy lumpy like it stuff with ole cloth. I only tolerate stayin’ there ‘cause me want to be in the best health fuh me chile.

I head home to me own bed with Mummy pushing Angel in the pram she buy ever since me belly start sowin’. When I reach home, Mummy scent everywhere. I not sure why that is the only thing that register in me tired mind. “Get yuh rest. I go deal with Angel,” she instruct me. She don’t have to tell me twice. I pass out before me head hit the pillow. The next morning, Mummy not at home, but the house echoin’ with she raucous market-woman laugh and she dry jokes. I picture she smile and me chest like it wah explode, ‘cause me miss her. Me had to laugh to meself, ‘cause she probably just step out to do she usual grocery shoppin’. The house feel like one big graveyard, except fuh the sound of Angel gurglin’. I smile. Mummy done bathe she granchile and have she well dress-up and playing in she pram. “Yuh granny duh play when it come to the two ah we, chile.” I tell Angel and laugh when she start gurglin’ even louder.

The phone ring. Something tell me ignore it, but I still pick it up. Is Chad, the family lawyer. “Cas, yuh have me real worried. Is six months since Angela gone. Yuh walk out the hospital, fire everybody and close down the restaurant, and now yuh refuse to even step foot outside the house.”

Mummy love Chad. So me love him too. Me forgive him for all the stupidity he sayin’. He fully well know Mummy close down the place and leave the island after them doctors stress she out ‘cause she help me and Angel leave they hospital without ‘formal discharge papers’. I done tell she to enjoy sheself and not to fret ‘bout comin’ back in this blight country, she deserve a peaceful retirement. I intend to join she once Angel get lil stronger. She growin’ small, but she go soon flourish, preemie babies does take a lil extra time to catch themself.

Chad still yappin’ pan the phone, “Ah comin’ to see yuh dis evenin’, whether yuh like it or not. I duh understand what really goin’ on with the heap ah pampers and baby feed yuh orderin’. Rick say ___.”

I put down the phone. The last person I want to hear ‘bout is deadbeat father of the year. Rick didn’t even have the courtesy to apologize fuh he bahaviour at the hospital. Me sure he hear ‘bout Angel christenin’ party. He didn’t show up. That locust never peep in on he only daughter, not even once.

My Angel is a godsend. She never fuss, and even if I don’t remember to feed her on time, she just sleep ‘til she get she lil sustenance. Chad convince me to take a job as cook at the psychiatric hospital in Glen.

I figure he wouldn't lead me wrong. Is the perfect situation for me. Not a soul have a problem with Angel tuck 'way in a corner of the kitchen in she pram. I fire the job after two of the kitchen staff lambast me and me chile right in front me face.

"Why she always peepin' in dat dutty pram?" a tall box-shape dishwasher ask she log neck housekeeper friend.

"Who knows?" Long-neck reply, "She here for help, just like de rest ah we."

I couldn't believe they really compare theyselves to me. None of them could spell 'kitchen' to save they life. I different from them. I here to perfect my culinary skills, they just there to wash and clean up after me. Damn out-ah-place ingrates. I don't even argue, I take me chile and leave the same blasted night.

I end up at the small jetty behind me house in Calliaqua. I notice a group of fishermen buzzin' 'round the jetty, busy like bee. I follow them to the end of the dock where all size and style of boats tie up; each one pack with provision fuh Yurumein. All except fuh a powder blue canoe-lookin' raft with a faded 'Angel' paint just above the waterline. I know a blessin' when I see one. As soon as the men turn they back, I ease in the boat and cover meself with some fishin' net and old tarpaulin. I wake up to a fisherman shakin' me teeth out me head and shoutin', "How yuh get ine me boat?"

Angel get frighten and start bawlin', and me let him have it. "Dis ah how yuh treatin' a woman with ah young baby?" Me voice hoarse 'cause vexation squeezezin' me voice-box.

The fisherman lose he tongue fuh a few seconds. "Mad woman, get off me boat!" He blast when he recover heself.. The way me roll me eyes at the asinine name callin', I surprise me eyes never tumble out

they sockets by he foot. Me belly hurtin'. Me hungry. Angel hungry. I spy a buildin' in the bushes near the beach. When I get closer, I realize is the famous beach bar and restaurant that make headlines years ago when it burn down with the owner inside. I never realize they rebuild it. A fair skin woman with a red wig sittin' pan the steps. I sense another blessin' comin' me way. I hurry over to she, "Hello, I'm Cassita, I here fuh de job."

"Ciao." She reply, in a sing-song accent, before flippin she red hair over shoulder and inquiren', "What job?"

"De one to cook here." Redwig chew on some gum like she choppin' wood, and squint at me. I don't give her a chance to question me further. "I go work free fuh a month. Den yuh can determine if I worth yuh while." Redwig shrug and extend a wrist jinglin' with one to many bangles.

"Too much jewelry" I say to meself.

"Scusami?" she ask.

"Thanks fuh de opportunity," I say, quick quick, wonderin' how she ears so sharp.

"Welcome then. I'm Fantasma." She bend down to look at Angel. "What's de name of this cute bambina?"

I grinnin' so hard, me jaw feel like it dislocate. Fantasma is the first person who don't act like me chile invisible. We goin' be fine here.

The fisherman come up behind me. He watchin' me strange strange. "You nah de gyal fuh de lady dat get in de accident by Indian Bay Beach gap?" he ask. I don't answer.

“Ah didn’t reconize you at all. Yuh look different.. Yuh free to go back mainland pan de boat.” He stretch out he hand to me.

“I good. I just land a good job, I stayin’.” I tell him.

“Lawyer Chad tell we to look out fuh yuh. I go tell him where yuh is. At least yuh have a solid roof over yuh head.” He say, before headin’ back to his boat.

I don’t want to sound boastin’, but I livin’ the dream. I workin’ and livin’ on Yurumein. Most workers travel back and forth every day. They come ‘cross on the ferry at 6 am. By 6 pm, latest, they on the ferry back to mainland. I don’t have to do all them gymnastics. Fantasma is the best boss ever. She hire me after the first month, and the job come with board and food. She take Angel most of the time when I workin’. She and Mummy like best friends. I introduce them one night Mummy call. They chat fuh hours. Fantasma say Mummy staying in she hometown in Italy, so she visitin’ and takin’ Angel with her sometimes. Angel callin’ Fantasma ‘Tia’ and she callin’ Mummy ‘Nonna’ now. I don’t mind the carryin’-ons at all. I livin’ my dreams and both Fantasma and Mummy supportin’ me.

My workplace don’t have a name, but it have regular customers who show up once the sun dip it head on evenins. It seem like Chad make a business deal with Fantasma. Mainland workmen show up and renovate the whole place, and the fishermen deliver whatever I order every mornin’. I don’t own a watch, so I start preppin’ once the last ferry leave Yurumein, and I lock up before the first one arrive.

The restaurant cater fuh dinner and late night snackin'. Sometimes I put out leavins fuh the fishermen, or whoever else Chad send 'cross. Tonight's special is black fish crisps, roast breadfruit with bake jackfish, golden apple juice and sticky coconut Tulum fuh dessert. I put 'Vincy fish tea' big and bold on the menu, because last independence, two customers almost come to blows over the name of the dish; one callin' it 'Jamaican escovitch' and the other one adamant it name 'Trinidad fish stew' – everybody wrong and strong. The fare set up nice and clean on fresh banana bush on the buffet counter out front, and I excited to see me customers enjoy the nyamins, as usual.

I notice some unfamiliar faces. I don't socialize with the customers, but the way these two knockin' they heads together, I ease up by the side of the kitchen to listen to they conversation.

"This look like spot," a bass voice boom from the thin lips of a tall blond man, "contact said check front step of abandon shack."

"This place not empty, Yakov," a woman tell him in a breathy, high pitch voice, like she swallow hot cocoa tea too fast. "Listen," she instruct him, "prizrak!"

"No ghosts here, Anya!" bass voice reverberated 'cross the suddenly empty space. "Fishermen spread rumors after Italian heiress die in fire long time."

I so shock to hear this stranger callin' the best restaurant on Yurumien 'abandon', I fall flat on me face and knock over couple empty pots. By the time I straighten meself, the two strangers done speed off like them see ghost fuh true. I find a bag of weed on the step. I so vex, I rip it to shreds. ***

Fantasma is the first and only person who acknowledge Angel, but over time, the fishermen develop a sweet relationship with she too. One fisherman, Fitzroy, the one who own 'Angel', even go so far as to inquire 'bout Angel when he bring 'cross provisions from Chad. At first, the other fishermen ignore Fitzroy's questions, but they eventually come 'round, and everybody askin' 'bout me sweet babygirl. "How yuh daughter today, Cassita?" they shout when they see me.

"Well she gettin' bigger dan me dese days, yes!" I tell them, "See for yuhself!" I point to Angel.

"Yeah man. She towerin' over yuh, Cassita! And Lord, she lookin' real good," Fitzroy say, lookin' in the opposite direction from where Angel standin'. I know he deliberately lookin' the other way out of respect fuh me, and mostly Chad, but I glad they don't harass me one chile with the usual catcalls and whistles they does toss behind the villa workers.

"How ole she be again?" one fisherman want to know.

I give he one bad-eye, he step back and trip over he own boat. I tell them, "Alyuh doh play with me yuh hear! Watch and wish me daughter well." Everybody laugh. We live good.

I hear they does give Chad report on me progress over here, and he does celebrate with Hairoun beers, strong rum and roast pork at the restaurant he reopen downstairs the house in Calliaqua. ***

I spend hours on the beach with Angel on the off-season when things slow down on Yurumein.

Sometimes we sit, sometimes we lay on we backs and stare at the sky. The area in front the restaurant pack with all size stones, from fine sands to huge boulders as big as houses. Me and Angel chat fuh hours 'bout every, and anything. I cherish these mother-daughter moments like gold.

The last Saturday in December, when preparation for New Year's celebration at its peak in Yurumein, I notice tourists flockin' to the small jetty. The boats work all day ferryin' people to mainland. By evenin', Yurumein silent and empty. Me and Angel sit pan we favorite boulder observin' the goin'-ons.

Fitzroy boat, 'Angel', pull up with a stranger leanin' heavily on a cane. Fitzroy help him walk 'cross the uneven path towards me and Angel. He stop in front we, take me hands and ask, "Cas, how yuh do?"

I don't recall all the wrinkles in he face, but the voice definitely belong to Chad. I squeeze he hand and wonder why he take the trouble to come visit me after all these years. "A category 5 hurricane headin' we way, Hurricane Piper. Yuh cyar ride out that kindah storm here."

I in awe of Chad confidence with all this wrong information. "Now is Christmas time!" I tell him, "Hurricane season close since November." Angel tug me hand and I tell she wait lil bit. Chad follow me eyes, ignore Angel, and sag onto he walkin' stick as if the hurricane itself restin' right between he shoulder blades. He look back at Fitzroy, who shake he head. "Yuh do de best yuh can, Lawyer Chad. Everything in de Almighty hands now."

Chad get back in the boat and hang he head like he in mournin'. Angel only open she mouth when the fishin' boat almost out of sight. "Is ah good man dat. Me like he spirit. It remind me ah Yurumein."

I know exactly what Angel mean. Yurumein pulsatin' with life, despite it age. Every mornin', frigates, egrets and macaws lead a raucous orchestra. And after dark, crapaud and crickets give the birds a run fuh they money with they own nocturnal band. The coral reefs teemin' with lobsters, eels and all kind of seafood. Yurumein is paradise fuh man and beast, just like how Chad is a champion fuh rich or poor, man or woman, young or old, ravin' or rational.

Hurricane Piper strip Yurumein naked a few hours after sunset, it violate every part of her terrain. By mornin', all structures reduce to floatin' debris on the Caribbean Sea. Brown patches of dirt stand out like scabs on a sick body wrecked by a bad case of chicken pox. Piper rip up and rearrange the trees with they branches shove deep in the ground, and the roots stickin' upright like creepy, ghostly sentinels watchin' over the razed landscape.

A few days after Hurricane Piper, me and Angel lay on the empty beach discussin' Fantasma's resolve to move out of Yurumein fuh good. I don't blame her, the island reelin' after Piper. Most villas refuse to rebuild.

Angel announce that she leavin' too. The shock of her words stuck me dumb. But Angel is a big woman now, I cyar tell she what to do.

"Ma, I goin' mainland to meet Nonna. She back at de restaurant yuh know. I wah yuh come with me."

I still gatherin' me thoughts when I notice a fishin' boat comin' 'cross. Angel run down to meet the boat. She never do that before. Two figures struggle out; Chad and Fitzroy. A woman hop out behind them. I strainin' me eyes to see who she be. Light, bouncin' off the last rays of the evenin' sun, skippin' on the water like somebody toss a stone on the surface. I have to bend down and peep to really make out a familiar face. Me pass out when me behold Mummy.

I wake up to the rockin' motion of the fishin' boat. Fitzroy consolin' Chad, I never see him bawl so much since I know him. Angel huggin' Mummy and the two of them grinnin' at me like two proud aunties. Chad repeatin', "Ah Cas," between sobs, all the way to mainland.

"Easy Lawyer Chad, easy," Fitzroy try he best to comfort him, "we almost reach home."

A group of people, waitin' at the dock near the restaurant, start wailin' as soon as the boat pull up. They refuse to let me stand. They lift me from the boat, and carry me inside like a Soca star surfen' on revelers at a massive bashment. I feel like a bonafide celebrity, especially when they refuse to let me even bathe meself. Mummy and Angel stand in the background observin' and laughin' at me. The women dress me in a white floral gown and they bawlin' worse than Chad. I don't understand all this cryin'.

"Is a thin line between joy and sorrow, me dear," Mummy tell me, as if she readin' me mind. I agree, but all this excitement too much for any soul – livin' or dead.

I sure I see Daddy huggin' Mummy, but I figure tiredness and confusion cloudin' me ability to see clearly at this point, so I embrace sleep when it come.

I wake up to everybody singin' one of Mummy favorite hymn, 'It is well, it is well with my soul'. After they done with that, they cry some more, and somebody start, 'When the roll is call up yonder'.

One young boy I don't recognize ask Chad, "How alyuh find de body? I hear everything flatten pan Yurumein." All man start talkin' at the same time.

"Dat not important," I hear Chad say, "one thing for sure, Cas celebratin' with she mother and chile right now."

Chad words strange, but he right 'bout one thing. I wait 'till the crowd start singin' again before I ease out the front door with Mummy and Angel. I not sure where we goin', but nothing never feel more right.