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# 1

## A WHISPER IN THE NIGHT

FRONTIER PLANTATION,  
ST MARY, JAMAICA 1760

**S**leep was hard to catch on this humid night. I was listening to the chanting of tiny creatures in the fields when I felt a strong palm on my shoulder. I turned my head and opened my eyes. Louis stood over me. His top garment, the sleeves rolled up above his elbows, was stained with soil. His eyes had a red fire in them. Sweat dripped off his chin. Through the open window I saw a fat moon – only days ago full fat. Its pale light reflected off Louis’ forehead.

He bent down and whispered into my ear, ‘Moa, it’s been agreed.’

‘What’s been agreed?’ I asked.

Louis checked around the small room. Ten men slept around me. There was no space to stretch or roll over. Two of them snored. Like me, they had worked fourteen-hour shifts cutting the cane. The endless cane. Like me, their bodies were spent and roasted by a brutal sun. Harvest time was upon us. There’d be long days and weeks ahead of us.

Louis' thick fingers dug into my shoulder. I sensed the power in his forearms. I wanted to grow broad and strong like him. I hoped he could pass on his courage to me too. 'We is going to bruk outta here 'pon what de white mon call Easter Sunday,' he said. 'T'ree days' time.'

'White mon Easter Sunday?' I repeated. Something colder than blood flowed through my veins.

'Yes, mon, their Easter Sunday,' nodded Louis. 'De men and women cyan't tek it any more. Not after Miss Pam drop inna de field and lose her life. Everybody leggo some long, long eye-water. Me sure your eyes sore too. You know dat she was wid chile? Not even we gods - Asase Ya, Nyame or Abowie - coulda save her. Who gonna tell de liccle pickney Anancy stories now? They should know dat Anacy de son of Asase Ya and Nyame. Scallion Mon and me had to dig de hole and dem just fling her inside it. Dem would not allow us to bury her beside ah tree or de stream. Not one Akan song chant.'

I recalled the time when Miss Pam treated the blisters on my hands with some herbs she had boiled. Mama said she had learned tings from the Akan elders. She helped deliver my liccle sister, Hopie, and looked after Papa's wound when it became sore. We all loved her. Sadness shook my heart and rage filled my fists once again.