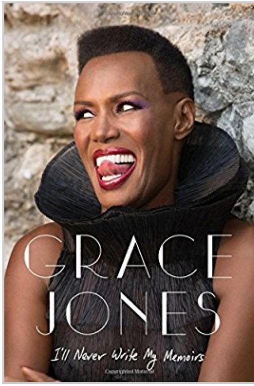

I'll Never Write My Memoirs

By Grace Jones, Paul Morley

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Legendary influential performer Grace Jones offers a revealing account of her spectacular career and turbulent life, charting the development of a persona that has made her one of the world's most recognizable artists.

As a singer, model, and actress—a deluxe triple threat—Grace has consistently been an extreme, challenging presence in the entertainment world since her emergence as an international model in the 1970s. Celebrated for her audacious talent and trailblazing style, Grace became one of the most unforgettable, free-spirited characters to emerge from the historic Studio 54, recording glittering disco classics such as "I Need a Man" and "La Vie en Rose." Her provocative shows in underground New York nightclubs saw her hailed as a disco queen, gay icon, and gender defying iconoclast.

In 1980, the always ambitious Grace escaped a crowded disco scene to pursue more experimental interests. Her music also broke free, blending house, reggae, and electronica into a timeless hybrid that led to classic hits such as "Pull Up to the Bumper" and "Slave to the Rhythm." In the memoir she once promised never to write, Grace offers an intimate insight into her evolving style, personal philosophies, and varied career—including her roles in the 1984 fantasy-action film *Conan the Destroyer* alongside Arnold Schwarzenegger and the James Bond movie *A View to a Kill*.

Featuring sixteen pages of stunning full-color photographs, many from her own personal archive, *I'll Never Write My Memoirs* follows this ageless creative nomad as she rejects her strict religious upbringing in Jamaica; conquers New York, Paris, and the 1980s; answers to no-one; and lives to fight again and again.

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Editorial Review

Review
"[Grace] Jones reflects on a high flying life of celebrity exuberance...In her candid reflections, Jones writes about her lovers...her constant quest for new experiences and willingness to try new things, and the free-flowing social circles of fashionistas, artists, and musicians... [Her] recollections are a passionate reminder of the fabulous, decadent, and manic coupling of life and art." (*Kirkus Reviews*)

About the Author
Performer, actress, and musician Grace Jones has been making a name for herself since she left Jamaica as a twelve-year-old in the 1960s. First finding fame as a fashion model in the early 1970s, then as a sensational disco queen during the Studio 54 years, she is as much surrealist as showgirl, as much performance artist as party animal. She has been Bond villain and Warhol confidante, post-modern icon and avant-garde pop star. *I'll Never Write My Memoirs* is her first book.

Writer, broadcaster, and cultural critic PAUL MORLEY has written about music, art, and entertainment since the 1970s. A founding member of the electronic collective Art of Noise and a member of staff at the Royal Academy of Music, he is the author of *Ask: Chatter of Pop*; *Words and Music: A History of Pop in the Shape of a City*; *Piece by Piece: Writing About Joy Division 1977–2007*; *Earthbound*; *The North*; and *Nothing*, and he collaborated with music icon Grace Jones on her memoir, *I'll Never Write My Memoirs*.

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I'll Never Write My Memoirs

1.

Spanish Town

I was born.

It happened one day, when I least expected it, on an island measuring only 4,411 square miles, a teeming mountainous land of wood and water among a chain of islands in the center of the Caribbean Sea at the western edge of the Atlantic Ocean. That wondrous isle in the western seas.

I came out of my mother feetfirst. I arrived kicking and pissed off, sticky with fury, soaked to the skin. I was what's known as a stargazing fetus as well, my neck fully extended. From the very beginning I was going against the grain and making trouble. Perhaps I was holding on to my mother for dear life, somehow knowing what was about to happen next. I didn't want to leave the one place I had felt at home, where I had been floating for so long, and enter the darkness. Inside, there was light. Outside, instantly, the unknown. The cord was cut. Startled by a strange newness, I didn't immediately make much of a noise, so I was slapped and slapped, to prove that I was normal. I cried out. I'll show you noise. I'll show you normal. I shrieked. In my own uprooted newborn way, I probably cursed.

Here I am.

Grace Beverly Jones. As was the custom, I would be known by my second name. Beverly. Bev. Later, when I was four or five, my skin was so charcoal black I would be engulfed when the warm, sultry night fell, throbbing with nature and a slithering hint of the supernatural. My nickname then was Firefly. You could only make out my eyes and teeth, sparkling in the dark.

My new home outside my mother was Spanish Town, the oldest continually habituated town in Jamaica. Five hundred and fifty years of history, starting a few years after the island of Jamaica was first found—"discovered"—by a Christopher Columbus of Italy in charge of exploring and marauding Spaniards. As St. Jago de la Vega, the town on the plains, at the edge of wetlands in the south of the island, it became the capital when the Spanish settled. They gave it a distinct Spanish Colonial layout, with lots of internal courtyards and walled gardens and a Renaissance-influenced checkerboard of streets placed around a dramatic central plaza. Spanish interest in Jamaica waned when it became clear there was no gold, and it became a backwater of the Spanish Empire. It became Spanish Town in 1655 when the British conquered the island. They kept it as the administrative capital and introduced grand Georgian buildings, reflecting the growing empire's wealth and importance.

Spanish Town was the Jamaican capital until the port of Kingston—better placed on the coast thirteen miles away, with more natural vitality—replaced it in 1872. The town's cathedral, built in the early sixteenth century, rebuilt in 1725 as an Anglican church, was the first such building in this part of the world and remains the oldest ecclesiastical structure from the British Empire still standing outside the UK. When I was born, Spanish Town had traces of grandeur but was showing signs of neglect after centuries of colonial rule and the Great Depression in the 1930s; imposed signs of methodical Spanish life, elegant town planning, and aristocratic British influences peeling back to reveal the undimmed Jamaica underneath. It had a faded glory, a shabby gentility, many parts of it cast aside as useless, and was beginning to meet up with the rough, tumbling edges of the capital city as Kingston's population grew.

They say I'm a lot older than I actually am. In the press, on the Internet, they add about four years to my actual age. I'm often asked how old I am—the world likes to know a person's age for some reason, as if that number explains everything. I don't care at all. I like to keep the mystery. I get onstage and tell everyone I am ten years older than they think, and then I hula-hoop for twenty minutes. That's my age—that's how I measure it. I wasn't born wearing a watch, and I never got used to wearing one, and when I was born I didn't know if it was Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday, and I never really know the days of the week now. Days are days, hours come and go, in whatever order, and I keep up with it, in my own way. It's hard to remember things in the right order, but I will try.

Time for me is an energy. I'm another energy, and the two energies wrap around each other. The present can seem as distant as the past, which can seem as close as the present. The most exciting thing is what happens next, even if it has already happened.

Because I never say my age, and rarely have to write it down, I roughly work it out by basing my life on an historic landmark. I mark time by what was happening in the world rather than how old I was. I remember moving to America around the time that President John F. Kennedy was assassinated. Before then, I was living in Jamaica, caged inside a certain goddamned darkness, even though there was so much sun and life. After Kennedy died, I was moving around like a gypsy, looking for the light, for what happens next.

Every birthday party I had after my teens, I always said I was twenty-something. I would know I was thirty-something, maybe forty-something, but never really the exact age.

I didn't grow older. I grew wiser. The world likes to know the age of someone, so I would be often asked. I am honestly never sure, so when it comes to working it out, to work out how old I am, I take something important, like my son's age, and if he is thirty-three, and I was, say, twenty-nine when I had him, then I do the math. So if you ask me now how old I am, nothing comes to mind straightaway. To some extent, it could be any number. Even then I am not entirely sure; it's not because I am hiding my age, embarrassed or annoyed by it, but because it is not something I keep to hand. It's not the most important thing about me. There are more important things about me than my age that will give you a better idea of who and what I am. I was born. Let's take it from there.

I know just by knowing that the first decade of my life in Jamaica was during the 1950s. The Second World War had finished. It was a few years before Jamaica would win its independence from the British. Many Jamaicans were traveling to the mother country, Britain, to find a new life. To find new opportunities, my parents were preparing to move north, along the East Coast of North America.

My mother was Marjorie, born in 1930; my father was Robert Winston, born six years earlier. They already had two young children when I was born. My mother was extremely fertile and there was no contraception at the time. Five of the children were born in very quick succession; one year, two were born. Lots of juices were flowing. The children kept coming. Robert Patrick was the first boy; later he would change his name to Christian, Chris. Then there Norman Noel, known as Noel. Then, back to front, me, Grace Beverly. After me, George Maxwell, Max. Another girl followed, Yvonne Pamela, and then another girl, Janet Marie. Eventually, there was a fourth son, Randy, born in America, not Jamaican at all, the baby of the family. When she married my dad, my mother was sixteen. By twenty-two, she had six kids. She was a Walters; her grandmother's maiden name, my great-grandmother, was Powell, and some in our family think the first African-American to serve as secretary of state, Colin Powell, might be a relation.

They went to America to get away from her family as much as anything. My mom was definitely stifled by the world she grew up in. She was from a very religious family, among the first to open a Pentecostal church on the island. The very first Pentecostal church was opened in Spanish Town in 1933, three years after the first Pentecostal convention was held in Kingston. This was a missionary venture, a spreading of the word to those who felt estranged from standard religion, because they were too poor, or too otherwise troubled. There was a zeal among the converts based on a determination to be heard and followed; their evangelism was vigorous.

Her uncle was a bishop in this church, Bishop Walters, tight-lipped, with a barren gaze. He was a dominating figure who made the church and its unforgiving belief system the center of the family's life. So I had a bishop grand-uncle whom I thought of growing up as the bishop of Jamaica.

To some extent, his title was self-designated; his was a new untested religion, based on personal calling, its members making up its own rules, following other churches and their categories, so that the leaders became bishops, because that gave them the authority they craved. The Anglicans had bishops; so too would the Pentecostalists. This was one of the attractions of this new religion, that ordinary working people and the lower middle class, who felt snubbed by British and Europe-based churches and their elitism, could claim for themselves a superior religious standing. There were new opportunities for lay and ministerial leadership, which was very attractive. To climb to the top of other religions from a lowly position would take a miracle. Here was a chance to form small communities that could be organized from within, often from within families, instead of having to look to other countries and governments for leadership. There was a whole dynasty of bishops in my family; we are the bishop royal family of Jamaica. I am not sure where I fit into this, although to some extent I have about as much right to call myself a bishop as my grand-uncle Bishop Walters did.

Religion was a way for many Jamaicans to challenge the white-maintained status quo, from eighteenth-century slaves to twentieth-century Rastafarians. It was also a way for those less motivated to resist accepting things as they were. They have every church you can imagine in Jamaica. It's said that there are the largest number of churches per square mile there than in any other country in the world; it seems like there is a church on every street corner. And some religions are more religious than others.

How successful a church is depends how charismatic your pastor is. It's all about aura. It's about conviction. How deeply you believe. My grand-uncle Bishop Walters was an obsessive believer, made religion his whole world and the world of everyone around him. He was in his own way a brilliant performer, and performing is at the heart of the Pentecostal appeal. Jamaicans could identify with that; it is a society of physical performance.

He had an illegitimate son before he joined the church, and he kicked him out, because he didn't fit into his new life. The son grew up in England. We were good friends and I used to see him, but to the family it was as though he never existed. You could easily be cut out and cut off. They take religion to an insane, intimidating extreme, using the Bible, and God, to create a world that they can run in their own image.

Pentecostalism became my religion, as it had been for my mother, because that's what I grew up with. I had no choice. In our religion, according to my bishop grand-uncle, if you strayed, you would be thrown out, into a terrible, hellish exile. They took the Bible literally, all those revamped Babylonian folktales. Eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth. If your right hand offends thee, cut it off. If members of your family do wrong, shun them. Kick them out. Ignore them. "All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for refutation, for correction, and for training in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16.). The leaders of the religion—the bishops, the pastors—ruled with fear, with a rod of iron. Perhaps they justified it to themselves because in the Bible it says that you have to use the rod to correct a child. We had to read that passage out a lot, as though the fact we were saying it in our child voices made it definitive.

My father's side of the family, the Joneses, were politicians and administrators. They brought the first books to Jamaica and started the library system on the island. His sister, my aunt Sybil, became the head librarian of the National Library of Jamaica in Kingston.

My father was a very good-looking man, and was very strong, mentally and physically. He was a keen amateur boxer and studied at Dint Hill Agricultural College. Farming was a major source of employment in the area; domestic and commercial crops included bananas, coconuts, pumpkins, peppers, and coffee, and there had been sugar plantations since the Spanish arrived bringing sugarcane with them from Haiti. After the British arrived, the island was turned into one big sugar plantation. The world craved sugar. There was a lack of local labor, and new workers were desperately needed. Africans were found to be excellent workers, experienced with the land, and used to laboring in a tropical climate. Thousands of them were shipped in against their will. To keep the world sweet, Britain took sugar-producing Jamaica as another jewel in its crown, becoming the largest slave-trading country in the world. The cultivation of sugar and the organization of slavery were intimately tangled up.

My father's family were strict in different ways from the religious way—theirs was an army way. My grandfather on his side, his father, Arthur Patrick, born at the end of the nineteenth century, was a sergeant in the army during the First World War. When Britain entered the war, thousands of colonial men were enlisted in the British West Indies Regiment.

They gave land in Jamaica to anyone who volunteered for the Great War. His land was in the cool, isolated, shamrock-green hills that seem to hover under misty clouds, up above Sligoville, a humble, laid-back village

steeped in its own gentle rhythms. It was the first free village in Jamaica, divided in 1835, after the Emancipation Act started to free slaves, into small, hilly lots for ex-slaves to live in.

Before then, the area had been a haven for escaping slaves, who had been stolen from the mountains in one land and now found sanctuary in the mountains of another. It was very near Pinnacle in St. Jago, the home of the first self-sustaining Rastafarian settlement organized by the founding father of the movement, Leonard P. Howell. Landless Rastafarians would leave the spread-eagled concrete jungle of Kingston and head for the hills. It was a place that yielded rich crops, including, of course, ganja. It's the spiritual home of the Rastas, seen by them as a sacred site, and you could say what became reggae, and Bob Marley, and the whole idea of "one love" began on that secluded rocky hilltop.

There is something in the air up there, and in the earth, and it remained mostly untouched by the Spanish and the British. It was too remote and hilly to build there. Even the Native American Tainos who occupied the land at the time of the Spanish arrival were situated near the coastline and adjacent to life-giving lowland rivers.

My grandfather had a house in Sligoville among a few other houses strewn about that, from a distance, seemed to be abandoned. There are plenty of dirt tracks that lead nowhere, there are acres of gentle sloping land, and the views to Kingston across the hills and the plains of St. Catherine are spectacular. The island beckons in all directions. It's a less familiar Jamaica for many, away from the heavenly shorelines and the overexposed and protected tourist attractions. The Jones family still has some land there, quietly waiting for us, as if this serene, magical place between the rolling mountains and the wide, wide sky is our destiny. Maybe one day I will think of this place as home. I'll walk barefoot in the grass alongside a river unmoved by time, letting things flow forward in whatever way they like.

As a teenager my father would have to climb up the hill from Spanish Town to his dad's house, ten miles there and ten miles back along a steep, winding road, by foot or on horseback. He would ride up with the horse and walk back, or the other way, walk up and ride the horse back. Once, running an errand, he was late, and to make up time, he rode his horse very hard, so as not to be punished. He made it on time, but the horse dropped dead. His father was absolutely furious with him, and gave him a look that was so angry he said it stayed with him for the rest of his life.

I only saw Grandfather Jones on Sundays after church—we weren't allowed to be exposed to his way of thinking, which was far too free, according to the bishop, and therefore nefarious. We would have dinner with him, but it was always awkward. His stoicism and reserve were frightening to a young child, he very rarely smiled, and was probably incredibly uncomfortable with the circumstances he found himself in, with his grandchildren released for a few hours a week from God knew what. He was very disciplined, focused, stern, and incredibly determined, but was confounded by the rules and regulations of the Pentecostal church. It turned out I am a lot like him. I even look like him, especially when I stare in a fierce, unforgiving way. Eventually, I became very good friends with him.

Years later, when my father himself had become a bishop, with his own church and followers, he would react whenever I looked at him in a certain way that indicated I didn't agree with him about something. "Stop looking at me like my father," he would say, only half kidding. He could see my father's disapproval of his choices and his lifestyle in my face. He could see so much of his dad in me, and that fury when the horse died, it unnerved him.

My grandfather never stepped into his son's church until he was in his late eighties, and he died in his late nineties. He was very against my father becoming a pastor. After he converted, they didn't speak for a long

time. My dad did it anyway because he wanted out of his family—even if that meant joining the Pentecostal Church.

The Joneses' strictness was not religious like the Walters'; it was about being the best that you could be. The best politician, the best banker, the best governor, the best professional. It was about making society a better, or at least a better-run, place, rather than planning for otherworldly perfection using the Bible as a grotesque blueprint. My grandfather was very disappointed, to say the least, to see my father go into religion. He was as tough on all of his children, demanding respect, and you can feel how they all hated him for it, for being so inflexible and demanding. One of his daughters never married. She was in love with someone, but her father chased him away. He was never satisfied with any of his children's choices, with whom they married. My dad was as stubborn as him, though, and a fighter, and he got his own way.

Religion as my mom experienced it growing up was not what the Joneses wanted for my father. To such an educated, liberal family, the Pentecostal Church as it evolved in Jamaica from its extroverted America Southern roots—its urgency and lack of decorum appealing especially to slaves—seemed a superstitious kind of religion. It came across more as a cultlike organization than as a traditional religion. It was very much an influence on Jamaica from North America, not from Britain, which meant it broke away from the overbearing colonial influence. But it had its own Jamaican take that was even a little informal compared to the American way—when it arrived on the island, if someone came to a local Pentecostal church barefoot, they would be taken in, and the congregation would praise the Lord. By the time Bishop Walters was establishing rules, no one would be allowed in his church unless they were very formally dressed. The sinners were barefoot; the saints were in their very best clothes, buttoned to the neck. To my dad's father, though—despite, or because of, the dress code—it was an unstable even unruly religion, and opposed to the kind of enlightenment he favored, found in books and via learning.

It did not seem traditional, conservative Christianity, definitely not in the hands of Bishop Walters, but it was a way of establishing an alternative community for people who felt ignored. Established churches in Jamaica dismissed this new arrival as a "clap-happy church," and my dad's dad would definitely have agreed with that. Shamans, clapping to the beat, believing in divine healing.

My father developed an adventurous, rebellious tendency, because he felt oppressed by the Joneses' stubborn need for order and learning. He found it all too orthodox and authoritarian, and, perversely, he had enough space within a relatively liberal upbringing to rebel against his father. The most hurtful rejection of his father he could think of was to head toward this alternative religion, this new, fundamentalist but flamboyant church that had arrived from noisy, unrelenting America.

The Joneses were very British-Jamaican Anglican, very sensible and more accepting of the colonial system, whereas the Pentecostal faith was full of the Holy Ghost, much more mystical and obsessive and consciously or not sympathetic to a rejection of distant British control and superior colonial order where foreign whites were in managerial control. This was their way of dealing with the damage done to the Jamaican psyche by the indifferent British.

I think it became successful quickly in Jamaica because it was a lively mix of two things that had become part of religious convention in a country split between the imported Protestant discipline and an inherited African sense of performance and emotional expression. It was Christian, using biblical symbolism, but it was also spiritual, inheriting traditional ancestral cults. There had been the very Jamaican revival religion that flourished in the nineteenth century, in which African rituals and Jamaican folk traditions were mixed with Christian belief, and many revivalists easily took to Pentecostalism because of its vibrant energy and faith in the power of healing. Pentecostalism incorporated rituals, spirits, and visions, but without seeming

unchristian or unbiblical.

The Jamaicans were very open to the idea of spirits and spirit possession, with their African and indigenous Indian ancestors—they didn’t have to travel far from the spirit-filled world many of them already lived in to accept this Pentecostal Holy Spirit. They also gave this more American revivalist religion a little local strictness introduced by the British, but compared to the formal Anglican Church, their style of worship still seemed quite rowdy. They didn’t shout like in America or play crazy music and leap around; they still sang hymns, much more traditional and familiar, but in its merciless pursuit of an idea of saintly perfection, Pentecostalism did have a very emotional and exuberant side. The basic premise of the religion was that it intended to turn the sinner into a saint. You achieved atonement and salvation through rigorous ethical piety. To those used to an entrenched, relatively undemonstrative and prim British-style religion, this was very off-putting. It did not interest the Joneses, part of a confident new middle class.

It became apparent that there was a young girl in Bishop Walters’s house and no one could get her out of the world of the church, which was very enclosed and withdrawn from the outside. The church needed to establish power over its flock and did its best to limit the number of temptations leaking in from the debased outside world.

My mom became a kind of trophy to local men because she was hard to reach. My dad, always looking for a challenge, made a bet with his buddies that he could get her out of Bishop Walters’s sheltered house. Bishop Walters in Spanish Town resembled one of those cult leaders, where if he said to everyone in his orbit Kill yourself, they all would. He was very powerful and scary, possibly because he was extremely defensive in the face of orthodox religion, rejecting Pentecostalism as a diluted form of Christianity. He compensated with extra fanaticism, convinced he had discovered the purest, most spiritually transformative form of worship, a serious, relevant alternative to sterile established churches.

You had to do what Bishop Walters said. He represented total authority. And he was my mother’s uncle, protecting her from lusty, wayward Jamaicans. Determined to win the bet, and being very enterprising, my father actually changed religions so that he could get inside the new church and its prayer meetings and services, in order to get to my mother.

My dad diligently courted my mom. She wasn’t his usual type. She was too skinny for him, but because of this stupid bet he persevered. As a rule, Jamaican men do not like skinny women; they like them plump, full of health, of life, juicy, and therefore very social and lively. We say mauger, meaning meager and weak and lacking the required level of power. I am considered mauger—dry and brittle, prone to sickness, a hollow shell—and my mother was seen as very mauger. Five foot ten, a supermodel-type body, size zero—by Jamaican standards, almost a skeleton. But nothing stopped my father because of this bloody bet. It became a matter of pride to rescue this girl who seemed so beyond the reach of anyone.

My mom found the Joneses, my father’s family, to be very smug and superior. They were condescending to those they considered uneducated, or even if they were educated but didn’t live up to his fastidious standards. My father’s father thought no one was good enough for his sons or his daughters. My mom and dad therefore had something in common; my mom thinking, Oh, well, they think I’m not good enough for him, and no one could get to her because of the church. The relationship was based on this kind of attraction. They each considered the other out of their league. It became like a Romeo-and-Juliet thing. My mom was not good enough for my dad, according to his father, and they were kept apart by the family. That was the start of the attraction.

My mom and her aloof, unconvinced father-in-law became very close in the end. She was the only one who

could soften him. My mom could soften anyone. Some guys tried to rob us once. We had arrived at my aunt Sybil's house in a more peaceful part of Kingston to have dinner. We all sat around in her immaculate front room. I had brought Richard Bernstein, who did the Interview covers for Andy Warhol and designed my first album sleeves; we were doing some filming for a documentary. All of a sudden some Jamaican guy sauntered into the house. He didn't have a gun. He said, "Give me all your jewelry," and held his hand in his pocket like he had a gun. He obviously didn't; it was a piece of wood. It was still pretty shocking, though, and most of us froze.

My mom walked over to him and said, "Oh, sweetheart," and she put her soothing charms on him, flinging softness in his face. Before he knew it the guy was out the door. "Oh," he said, "I better get some of my guys, and I'll come back." Yeah, yeah, right. They never came back. My father slept through the whole thing in the back room.

The would-be thief had a real cocaine face. Jamaican people shouldn't do cocaine. They should stick to marijuana. Certain things grow in certain places for a reason. Cocaine makes a Jamaican crazy. Crazee beyond belief. The Jamaicans should stay laid-back, have a joint, and chill. That's why God lets marijuana grow so freely there. He put the poppy seeds in one place and the coca plant somewhere else. Jamaica had the ganja, grown as a weed, introduced to the island by East Indian laborers in the mid-nineteenth century, immediately taking root as a beneficial substance. It belongs on the island, like it's been brought back to where it first appeared, and grows abundantly among the native grasses, plants, and weeds. It suits the locals' temperaments, as something that seemed imbued with spiritual, medicinal, and religious properties. Leave everything in its place. Don't mix it up. Especially when people can't control it.

My dad tricked his way into getting the girl whom nobody could get because she was inside Bishop Walters's force field, and everyone was intimidated by the bishop. In Jamaica then, you married as soon as you got your period, so sixteen was a bit late for my mom. If you weren't married by sixteen you were seen as an old maid. It seemed as though Bishop Walters was going to keep her for the church like a nun. The women in the church were called Sister. My father reached in, and he actually got Sister Marjorie, and she became his type.

My mom was a natural and very keen athlete, tall and lithe enough to be excellent at running and jumping. She was good enough to be in the running to represent Jamaica in the 1948 London Olympics in the long jump. There was a photograph in the newspaper of her ready for action wearing gym bloomers, and when the church members saw that, she was pulled out of competition. In the church according to Bishop Walters, wearing shorts was not allowed. They were called batty riders, for the way they slipped up the crack of your arse. And that was too much for the family. There was an Islamic level of intolerance, an Amish severity.

There was this other man who wanted to marry my mom. He was called Cecil Rowbotham and was from a big family. Later on, the Rowbothams became very close to the Joneses—one of my brothers dated one of the Rowbotham girls—so we stayed lifelong friends. Rowbotham was in love with my mom, but my mom said she didn't go for him because she thought his fingers were too short. Her father was a professional pianist, a leading figure in the performing of mento music, the jaunty, abrasive Jamaican and Trinidadian folk music mixed with swing jazz and storytelling blues that was the precursor of ska and reggae, and long fingers on a man became very important for my mom. Her father had very long fingers.

John "Dan" Williams, my maternal grandfather, had his own dance band playing jazzy mento, and would often accompany the legendary calypso pioneer Lord Fly, Rupert Lyon, known as the Calypso King of the world, and one of the first musicians to record homegrown Jamaican music. They made a number of rip-roaring 78-rpm singles together, including a big local favorite in the 1940s called "Trinidad Carnival Song"

an energetic carnival song, with an opening line that went: Jump in the line / Wag your body in time. Their songs were full of life and a subversive, madcap comedy. They recorded a song about a really bad meal called “Swine Lane Gal”: Salt lane gal can’t cook rice and peas / The bottom burn the middle raw / The gravy taste like castor oil. Their regular haunts included the Wickie Wackie club in Kingston and the Myrtle Bank Hotel, Kingston’s first hotel. My mom found a picture of him in his band, a slick-looking group of handsome musicians looking like they knew what a good time was, or at least how a good time should sound. These guys clearly knew that to perform in the Caribbean you need a certain flourish. This is a place that likes big gestures, and a sense of grandeur.

There is music in our family that goes back a long time, but the religious element turned their back on music as any kind of pleasing show business or fun. My mom’s mother became very religious, taken with this ebullient new religion that offered her a role in life, but Dan didn’t have much time for God, so he left. That’s why they split up. She chose the church. He chose entertainment, and would split his time between Jamaica, Nassau, and America, touring with his band and backing singers, including Nat King Cole. In America, he started another family. He had three sons my mother never knew about, her half brothers, and he died at forty-seven after returning ill to Jamaica from Miami in 1958.

At the time, I was kept in the dark about this exciting long-fingered musical maverick, because my grandmother, his ex-wife, had rewritten her life completely as though he never existed. He didn’t fit, he was everything the church rejected, so he was completely exiled. The idea of there being an extroverted, displaced entertainer in the family who made records and got up to wonderful no good in after-dark exotic nightclubs was much too sleazy a distraction from the all-important church. I, though, must have inherited his rhythmical wanderlust through the blood. His banished energy was transmitted through to me.

My parents left for America, my father first, and then my mother, looking to make a new home, or have some space for themselves. They’d had half a dozen kids, and then they sort of eloped, in the sense of running away together, one joining the other later when he had found a new home. We were raised by my mother’s mother and her new husband, whose first name was Peart. My grandmother, with her daughter’s children in her care, married a man who was twenty years younger, and he, as our step-grandfather, became our guardian. We called her Aunt Ceta, and she immediately ceased to be a grandmother in the traditional sense.

Peart was my grandmother’s God-fearing church replacement for the wicked traveling pianist John “Dan” Williams. I don’t know if my grandmother divorced my grandfather. In Jamaica, you often simply walked out, and you remarried regardless of the paperwork. In the church, my grandmother’s brother was a bishop, and he approved or disapproved of any union. Everything had to go through him. If he says yes, it goes ahead.

My grandmother and her sister were both cougars, marrying men much younger than they were. Up to this day I still wonder how both of them managed to marry men twenty years younger than they. How was this allowed? It seems so unconventional. Even now surely it would be frowned upon. I can’t believe they got approval from their brother the bishop. Even though their husbands were in the church, it still seems so unlikely back then. Maybe there were standards I don’t know about, which makes the church seem even more like a cult, with its own dubious morals disguised as religious law. It was all very hard-core Christian—marital monogamy was a must, sexual promiscuity a pure evil; independent thinking was curbed. In moral issues, the Bible was the authority. Somehow, though, if you knew the right people, you could slip through the cracks and do what you wanted.

To this day, if I do such a thing, have a boyfriend twenty years younger than me, it is looked upon

unfavorably. Very unfair—with men there is no limit, but for women, no way. Men get away with it; they can be ninety-eight, with their girls in their twenties. Women have no chance. But there were my grandmother and her sister back in the 1940s, part of a religion transfixed by the Bible, taking up with men half their age, their marriages sanctioned by Bishop Walters—very strange. I'll never unlock that mystery.

My grandmother and new guardian didn't have any kids and didn't want any. A deformed, abusive atmosphere in the household was rooted in his ambition to impress Bishop Walters, and rise up in the church, or it was part of a very demanding and immature personality. He knew nothing about raising kids and was suddenly saddled with a whole squabbling brood, but he wanted to look good to my great-uncle. He looked up to him and wanted to make sure he was next in line to become a bishop. Family was important as its own community: Everyone lived within a few yards of one another, keeping themselves to themselves inside this new, very lively and persuasive church.

He married our grandmother when she couldn't have kids anymore, but he ended up with five of us after our parents moved away. He took us all in while my parents built a new life in America, so you could say he was a great guy, but he treated us like he owned us. Like we weren't human, just something to have to deal with.

Everyone in a position of male authority in the church was a mas because they were a master, and mas was short for master. Master, massa, a name rooted in the history of slavery itself, from the masters of the estate. He was Mas P because he was Peart and you used the first letter of their name. This in itself turned him into a kind of gothic monster with an ugly, stunted name. I absolutely hated him. It makes my skin crawl thinking about him even now.

At the time, the practice of parents going away to earn a living and leaving their children with their grandparents was quite normal, but there was nothing normal about Mas P. His way of keeping us in line was to become a ferocious disciplinarian. I think of him as a real sadist who had an apparent excuse to be so cruel because he was our guardian. He didn't want kids, and suddenly he had a handful to look after, so he used religion and fear—real fear—to keep us all in check.

I presume he loved his wife, because it was an awful lot to take on, this bunch of kids all under six. I don't know if he was beaten when he was growing up, if he was taking out his anger on us. I never knew about his family, his mother and father. We never saw them. I don't know if he left them behind for religion. He eventually took over for my great-uncle as bishop. But once he took over he didn't have the position for much longer, only a couple of years before he died.

There were six of us, but only five were living in our grandmother's house. One of us was living around the corner with our great-grandmother, known as Ma. Bishop Walters is her son—it's like a clan, we all live near each other, we are all connected, almost confined to being inside the family. She wanted to raise Pamela, the fifth child out of the six. We were like a pack of little kitties, and my great-grandmother went into the litter and plucked out Pam—Pam was cute! Ma wanted her like a pet. My mom couldn't do anything about it; anyway, she thought it was the best thing to do. It was part of the culture. It still is. Parents who were too young, or couldn't look after all their children, would farm their children out to grandparents—in this case, a very formidable great-grandmother.

"I like Pam," she said, and you didn't say no to the great-grandmother. She was the matriarch, and in Jamaica the matriarchs can be more powerful than the patriarchs. She was still beating the kids with a broom at eighty, and was strong for many years more. She was six feet tall, half Scottish, hard-boned, the daughter of a slave master who got left behind—the owner took the son but left the daughter, who lacked value. She looked white. You hardly saw her pale, weakened hair; she would always keep it tied, and sometimes at

night when she was too weak and tired, I would have to stay with her. She passed away at ninety-eight. Pam grew up separate from all the rest—we got to see her only on church Sundays.

We had no idea what Pam was going through. We thought she had it easy, but she probably had it worse because she had no brothers and sisters to talk quietly, secretly, with. I think in some ways she has punished us over the years for not being there with her, even though it wasn't our fault.

Pam missed all of our togetherness. We could hold hands when it got particularly bad. She had no one to hold hands with. It must have been very, very lonely. She doesn't talk about it. She didn't come to our father's funeral. She is still as removed as she was when we were young. Pam was there, but not there.

We were all made to dress differently from other kids from the beginning. We had to be the example for the whole church. As children, we were brought up very much to be seen, not heard. We were examples from when we were little pickaninnies. I always thought that was too much pressure. It's a church celebrating perfection, a cleansing of the soul, and we had to appear unwaveringly loyal. Nobody of my age at that time would dare question the absolute authority of the church or this version we were presented with.

I had to be dressed in little dresses over the knee; I couldn't straighten my hair, which was the fashion then. It grew thick and tangled, and was very painful to braid into the tidiness that was expected. Everything I wore had to be long-sleeved. We weren't allowed to ride bicycles too far from our house. We weren't allowed play after school, because that was seen as too frivolous, and allowed chaotic thoughts to enter our minds.

The church seemed to know everything we did outside of the bubble they created. If we played in the gully after school, somehow—I never understand how to this day—someone would always go and tell on us, even if there was no one around. I always thought there was a big eye in the sky that was telling on us if we did something wrong.

The gully was down at the bottom of a hill that gently sloped down from our house, an area of heath and bush that is now full of houses and is very different. We used to pick berries; there were cows grazing. It was like a Garden of Eden, really; a place where everything tasted and smelled good and you could feel happy. Our innocence could bloom. I could find fun in the gully, climbing trees, finding hiding places, discovering new feelings, feeling something unexplained stirring inside of me. Hiding away from the male authority and the Bible, from being banned from exposure to anything that might be considered worldly.

It was Mr. Philpott's land back then, a local neighbor who seemed happy to let it run wild. In my day it was like a little forest. I would pet a little with local boys in the gully. You show me yours, I'll show you mine. There was tall grass, above our heads, and you could hide in there and mess around with cousins. That was okay then, to a point. Cousins married then. It was very British, really. First cousins would marry. Noel was once engaged to a second cousin. Being in the church made it even more attractive, using marriage to keep everything under the same roof, inside the church.

Being found in a barrel at nine years old with a boy, not knowing what I was doing but knowing there was something to be done and really wanting to find out, led to a two-week deliberation about how exactly I should be punished. It was like the convening of a monstrous system for an inquest into my insolence. How extensive should the beating be, how long in duration, how public the humiliation? A little natural, tingling curiosity about how I was really feeling—not how I was ordered to feel—led to a trial that implied I had broken the law and infuriated their malicious God. The blows came thick and fast.

I was far too young, but you knew when you liked somebody, so you would hold hands, mostly with girls—it wasn't sexual or anything. Girls in Jamaica still hold hands all the time; it's very normal, nothing going on, walking down the street from school holding hands, safely exploring a honeyed closeness.

Whatever we did, however innocuous it seemed to us, or whatever other children were doing, there was this huge accusing eye hanging in the sky watching us and reporting back to our stepfather and the church. They always seemed to know where and how we were up to no good. Perhaps they assumed without ever knowing for sure. Or they didn't care if we were doing something wrong or not. Punishment was their way of keeping us in line.

After all, we got beaten a lot. Serious abuse.

There were tough leather belts on the wall with our names on them that were used to beat us. We would be beaten for what we were going to do even if we hadn't yet done it—beaten in anticipation of insubordination. Each belt was a different weight for who we were and how old we were, but sometimes you'd get struck with a belt above your years—the worse the perceived sin, the heavier the belt. If it got particularly bad you had to climb a tree and choose your own switch, which would then be used to whip you. Mother and Father had no idea of the ferocity of Mas P, and we were afraid to say anything to anyone, because that would have made things worse. He would read letters, whichever direction they went in. Everything was intercepted. It was like living in a prison camp, one where your guardian—your step-grandfather—was your guard.

There was one level of chastisement for playing after school, one for turning the corner of the pages over in the Bible to keep your place, another because you were on the verge of doing something wrong, not sure what it was, but you might as well be punished already, and then there was the beating you knew you were going to get at the end of the day. You'd be at school all day knowing that at the end of the day you were going to get a whipping.

My grandmother was a gentle soul, and she was totally dominated by Mas P. I remember sometimes she would try and get in the way when he was going to hit us and stand in between us, but he was so much stronger. She was afraid to stand up to him. He would brush her aside with one arm. If she ever disciplined us, she would hit us with a cloth belt—nothing painful at all, something light torn from her dress, a gesture.

Every night was church night—prayer meeting, Bible class, general service. Saturday was a day off; we could crochet, study a bit, visit family, other church people. Sunday, all day God. It never stopped. You couldn't move for God. It was only a word, but what a word.

We weren't really allowed to play with neighbors. My first love at ten, eleven, was my neighbor, but that was us standing at the fence and looking at each other with puppy dog eyes. He had two sisters, and he became a quite famous cricketer—I remember his name as John Prescott, who played for Jamaica, but never made it to the West Indian Test team. Being with him felt really dangerous—we didn't pet or anything, but he wasn't part of the church. My two brothers liked his two sisters, so we would go over the road to play for a short time, out of sight we thought, hoping that God wouldn't find us in our hiding place.

I wasn't supposed to play with my brothers, because they were boys. I was meant to stay put and crochet. I loved to crochet; it was another form of relief. I used to crochet until the skin would come off my fingers, and then I would put on a bandage and keep going. I would make shawls and doilies for the house. My grandmother's tiny sister, the one married to a man twenty years her junior—Mas K—was the one who taught me to crochet. Mas K's profession was making knitted bed covers, so she was crocheting and he was knitting. For all of us it was a method, I think, of putting God away. It was our form of praying.

I had so many brothers I became very much like a boy, but was also very vain at the same time. I was very concerned about my looks. I was a tomboy in a dress, but then I didn't have a choice—I wasn't allowed to wear pants. I was doing everything the boys did in order to have someone to play with; otherwise, it would just be me and my aunt crocheting while baby sister Janet Marie slept. They played with me, but I was the girl. They would put worms on me, they would try and frighten me, so in order to play with them, I had to keep up. I would play in the stand-on-your-hands competition, but I was in a dress. I would be walking on my hands with my dress over my face, showing my panties, and the maid would catch me. I would always get caught and I would get a beating.

Competing became important, to break away from this permanent justice system set up to convict me. I was a very fast runner. I loved jumping, over the bar, across scrappy potholes in the street or into a gritty sand pit. I was good at netball. I played jacks. I hula-hooped—kept the hoop moving around my whole upper body without it falling down, spinning it around and around like it was a form of protection. I couldn't come home with sweat on my dress, because that would mean I had played after school, and that was not allowed.

We had three or four people from the church who would do the cooking and cleaning, and they were like spies for God. God's spies telling on us for the slightest misdemeanor. They would get us beaten, so we couldn't stand them.

There was one in particular, Sister Leah, spying on us all the time. She would get us beaten so much; one time we all attacked her because we couldn't take it. We all jumped on her back and started to hit her because we were so upset. She was getting us whipped again and again.

I protected my brothers as much as they protected me. We looked out for one another. If one of us got caught, the others would feel bad that we hadn't protected each other. I would feel bad because their beatings as boys were more ferocious, although I had to watch them get beaten, and that was really bad. I think that bonded us, because it is not something that boys want girls to see. If I was there watching them getting a beating, without clothes, it was a shaming thing, but it brought us together. The girl would get a lot of punishment on the hand, or he would put you over his lap and lift up your dress and smack you that way. Since the attacks on the boys were more violent, I always felt responsible if they got caught. I was supposed to be looking out for them, up the tree, whistling loud enough to get them back in the house. I had failed in my duty. Bev, Bev—why didn't you tell us he was coming?

Young Max was the most rebellious of all of us, and the bravest in how he rebelled. He didn't care if he got beaten (well, he acted like he didn't care). One day, when we were walking to school, he suddenly said, "When we get home I am going to break all the windows." There were plenty of glass windows in Jamaica. He had decided he was going to break all the glass. Something had pushed him to the limit.

We'd say, "You are crazy! If you do that you will be picking whips for weeks!" Being naughty outside the home so that others could see was the most rebellious thing to do, because that would totally break the example we were meant to be setting. Everything had to look perfect from the outside. Max would be determined to make the biggest scandal ever. Nothing would put him off, however much we warned him, even if he knew he would be whipped.

He said he was going to do it. And he did. He said, "I will run," and we said, "Where are you going to run to?" There was nowhere to run. You run and run and run, but sooner or later night falls and you come back to the house and you know what's going to be waiting for you. There was nowhere to run, and no one was going to hide you. It wasn't like Sicily and the Mafia: Who is hiding this child? Whoever is hiding this child will be put on a ship and sent to America! Sure enough, though, he would throw those stones, and he would

run, and he would get caught, and he would get it worse than ever.

There were very few days I didn't get some form of punishment. It was nastiness. It was humiliating. The God they spoke on behalf of was the jealous, unpleasant one straight out of the Old Testament. This God that was their idol, whom they looked up to, was a petty, unjust control freak, a capricious bully who bizarrely kept regular hours. He didn't seem a very godlike God.

It was all about the Bible and beatings. We were beaten for any little act of dissent, and hit harder and harder the worse the disobedience. It formed me as a person, my choices, men I have been attracted to—all that can be traced back to how I was brought up. It was a profoundly disciplined, militant upbringing, and so in my own way, I am very militant and disciplined. Even if that sometimes means being militantly naughty, and disciplined in the arts of subversion.

There were good things, too—times when the light broke in, when we could turn mounds of dirt into palaces in our mind; but these moments were brief and forbidden seeming, little stinging jolts of pleasure among all this fixed, malevolent sternness, pleasure that was warped in my mind because it would inevitably lead to pain.

The rain would intrigue me, how suddenly it appeared, wet and warm, another surface altogether, another dimension, something that might even cancel dread. It was a hint of another force, something beyond the limits of a world being made up around you by the church, and my grandmother and her petty, brutal husband.

My parents left us behind because they believed it was for the best. I don't remember feeling any resentment that they had left us to suffer this aggressive attention. In many ways, at the time, we didn't think about how horrific it was. It was all we knew, as if it was ordinary, how children everywhere are treated. We had little else to go on. Over time you realize how bad it was, and the problem with that is you feel anger years after the event, when there is nothing you can do about it. It can still control you.

When they went to America, my parents saw how kids there were allowed to grow up, and they felt that it wasn't disciplined enough for them. Maybe that was one of the reasons we didn't join them immediately. But then they didn't know how bad it was for us, because my mother didn't grow up with Mas P like I did—she didn't know that kind of abuse, that level of violence. The bishop was powerful, but he wasn't looked upon with as much explicit fear: He was actually very calm, almost frighteningly calm, as if he could quite easily swallow whole his entire family.

If you saw Mas P, there was something in his eyes that revealed how angry he could get. You can see the spite, the intensity. You can really feel that fire had descended to the earth. It's fascinating that those who put the fear of God in others are often those who live with the most fear—of others, of difference. Those who demand that you conform the most to how they live are the ones who are the most scared and intimidated by life.

I have learned over the years to be able to see in someone's eyes what they are like, if they are prone to violence. You can look in their eyes and tell if they are a serial killer! I haven't seen a serial killer, but I have badly misread a couple of guys. They seemed very peaceful, but they turned out to be pretty dark. Sometimes you don't see it immediately; it's something that comes out when certain buttons are pressed, when you say certain things.

If you looked into the eyes of Mas P in a photo he looks insane. You can see how he wanted power. Or how

he wanted to hurt people. Hurt children. My brother Noel thinks he looked as harsh and bitter as he did because he wasn't getting any sex, or if he was, only once or twice a year. At the time, I couldn't imagine his sex life, or anyone else's. He was cruel simply because he was cruel, for no reason.

We were mostly locked inside our closed, paranoid community and we didn't even go outside the church to go to school. The church had their own school. All Saints Apostolic Church, All Saints School, tightly bound together. Everything outside was very alien to us. Even the barber across the street seemed foreign—if you went there you would be grabbed by a ghoul and who knows what would be done to you. This was how it was made to seem, that you must never go into these other places that weren't approved by the church. We had no radio, no TV. It wasn't allowed. Information was completely restricted. It was school, church, school, church, back and forth.

Until you were old enough to go to the public school, you learned the Bible, and nothing else. I know the Bible. Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy . . . I've tried to forget. A lot to remember as a child, a lot to forget later. It becomes a part of you even if you don't want it to. You try a lot of things maybe you shouldn't to see if it will help get rid of some of that Bible detail you have stuck in your head. You're fighting the Bible you hate to read; you're battling with a God you don't believe in. It never leaves you, once it has been planted inside you with such force.

Once we started to go to the public school, about three miles away, we used to walk between our house and the school, out into Spanish Town, with its dreamlike Emancipation Square still pretending the town was important, the lanes and alleys planned centuries ago busily crisscrossing each other even as they now coexisted with ruins, even slums. The world stretched a little into a new shape, into something other than a biblical nightmare. The walking was freedom because there was no one watching and it was the island, without it being of the church. I remember the trees, the foliage, the larger-than-life plants and luxuriant grasses relishing the climate—you'd see the jerky imaginary faces of animals in the trees and in the shadows.

Real animals with chunks gouged out of them foraged for food on the streets. There were mad mottled dogs roaming about that you had to deal with. You had to work out your route to try and avoid these emaciated terrors. If you couldn't, you made sure you had two or three rocks ready to throw at them. You didn't have a bag then, you carried your books, but God forbid you ever dropped one and it got dirty or torn. They had to be in perfect shape, however hot it was, however sudden the rain, and even if you were chased by starving dogs. If you were chased by the dogs, you had to make sure your aim was good. Throwing a stone in their general direction isn't going to chase them away. You have to hit them. Stop them in their tracks.

Fighting the mad dogs builds character. I run into a lot of mad dogs to this day, so that helped me prepare. It's all connected. From the mad dogs on the way home from school to the mad dogs in the music business.

For us, that was the best time, walking on our own through the brambly lushness of Jamaica, the way plants and scraggly grasses grew in a feisty, random tangle, always something new to explore. It felt like freedom. It was outside the immediate reach of the church that at home wrapped you up in a jagged cocoon. And school was very strict. Very British Victorian. They would have the cane. Our headmaster was from Wales. Big belly, like a blubbery white whale. He would saunter off to get the stick and waddle back, prolonging the inevitable. School discipline seemed less of a burden than church discipline, because it didn't seem as though it was being handed down from God, ruling things from misty afar. It was more pragmatic somehow, not rooted in fanatical fundamentalism.

Once in a while we were allowed to go to the beach with the family, or to eat somewhere—say, Port Royal. I remember stories about how the port used to sink, and then reappear, because large parts of it had fallen into

the sea in the great earthquake of 1692. Some said it was because it had been singled out by God. It was known as the richest and wickedest city in the world, filled with brothels, inns, and drinking halls. The deepwater harbor near Spanish shipping lanes and their ports made it a haven for pirates, smugglers, and buccaneers. A hundred years after the earthquake, one of the biggest, busiest cities in the Americas had been reduced to a quiet village. We didn't know the details; we heard the rumors, that it was a ghost town run by pirates.

I remember being very afraid of seeing the mysterious Rastas swarming in packs through the town on their dented bicycles. They were like Hells Angels, except they were leathery, bearded Rastas wobbling a little on bikes with their knotty, dreadlocked hair, which took a lot of patience to grow, which was the point. Their souls were bent and bound into those knots as though their hair symbolized imprisonment and yet freedom.

The Rastas had only surfaced in the 1920s and '30s, but they seemed to have been around since the beginning of time, keeping themselves to themselves, an ancient sign of a mystical, pre-Columbian Jamaica that had been nearly erased by centuries of colonization and outside rule. They would lurk at the edge of vision, as tangible as phantoms, mostly silent, working something out, lamenting their own captivity in Jamaica, nonchalantly loping off into the forest and the hills, possibly dissolving into the rivers and streams. They were used to hiding out, and would abruptly yet listlessly materialize out of nowhere. Now you see them, now you don't.

I had no idea what they were up to. We were told to run when we saw them, and hide under our beds. They were demonized. The church considered them eyesores, drug addicts, a bunch of crackpots who lived in filthy caves. Haile Selassie, Emperor of Ethiopa, wouldn't get off the plane when he visited in 1966 because he was scared of all the Rastas around the plane. They worshipped him as a messianic figure destined to deliver them to a paradise of peace and goodness and greeted his arrival by banging drums and smoking their sacred herb, halfway between sun-cracked warriors and ancient herdsmen. They were visually amazing looking, and I became less and less scared of them, and more intrigued. They had these red eyes that later I understood were from the smoking. Red with weed, the healing hazy fog thickening easily around them suggesting all manner of fluid, life-enhancing rhythm.

They would take over all the land on Spanish Town Road—the road that turned and twisted from Spanish Town to Kingston, where the ghettos spread and they could hide—living in hunchbacked wooden huts, and they refused to pay tax, and they rejected attempts to control them, and they said, Man is free, leave us be. They became known more around the time of Bob Marley, but they were around for years before then.

I used to see Bishop Walters, my draconian grand-uncle, standing at his gate talking to one particular solemn-looking Rasta guy, which was very intriguing. He never let him inside; there is always this thing about the gate in Jamaica. You stand and talk at the gate for a long time, but you never let them in. There is a whole book to be written about the gate in Jamaica—an interesting barrier between one state and another, between one stage and another.

The Pentecostal movement in Jamaica and Rastafarianism emerged at about the same time, and they are obviously very different. The Rastas presented themselves as self-determined, spiritually empowered rebel heroes with an anticolonial political cause they represented visually. Pentecostalism recommended moral redemption through transformative Christian rituals, defeating local circumstances by spiritually rising above them. At heart, both are rooted in biblical Christian fundamentalism, both formed self-reliant communities, and both reflected the changes in Jamaica that led to independence. Bishop Walters and his Rasta at the gate clearly had something in common; even if they were in disagreement, they were both talking about methods and aims. They were somehow closer than it seemed at the time. One looked more like you imagined Jesus

to look than the other.

Our house was a modest detached bungalow set among other similar dwellings. There was a small, very neatly kept front garden, and a beautifully maintained lawn as perfect as they wanted me to be. The garden was a way of presenting moral tidiness to the surrounding neighbors. There was a working backyard sucked dry by the sun. A couple of lush fruit trees would produce mango and breadfruit. A lavish palm tree spilled out over the roof of the bungalow. Flowers splashed everything with color.

The kitchen was the heart of the house, always full of vegetable shavings and chicken bones. The stove where food was cooked had an air of magic. A corridor ran parallel to the main living room, where the bedrooms and a basic bathroom were. The smartly curtained living room had very pretty tiles on the floor. They're still there, even though my mother thinks they look old-fashioned and has always wanted to replace them with something modern, like patterned lino. When I go back to the house they are a vivid, very solid reminder of all the objects and textures that colored my childhood, many of them now vanished, some still remaining, making me feel charged with both a sweet sadness and a weird exhilaration. Perhaps it is relief that I made it out of what once seemed so forbidding and sheltered, a place of exploitation and oppression, one that now seems so small and harmless, even cozy. I'm never wistful or sentimental when I go back, things getting slower as I get closer, but I definitely feel as though the dreamy past is being held in place, erased of all the nastiness.

Mas P was a very good welder, and he produced lovely ornate ironwork as protection for the doors and windows. I don't know if that's what he did for a living, or how he made money, but the metalwork he did back then is still there today, and, disconcertingly, it is quite beautiful. He definitely had a clear eye for practical solutions, reflected in the way he ran the household with an iron will and meanwhile took care to decorate and protect the house.

At night, large moths the size of bats would settle on the walls. You would be afraid to chase them away, because you heard that they were how your ancestors took new form. It was a time and place where ghosts seemed to be always hovering at the edge of our reality, the dead ready to pop up out of nowhere and send shivers down our spines, or even scare the hell out of us.

There were plenty of bushes and thickets in and around the town, where the duppies hung out—duppy was the Jamaican patois word for "ghost," but a duppy was more than a ghost or a spook. It was a malevolent spirit scheming toward some terrible outcome, the very reverse of what it is to be human. I'm not sure I knew anyone who had seen one, but you knew for sure that their heads were turned backward on their shoulders and they carried a chain. And you must never call one a duppy to its face, because to do so gave it power.

To believe in duppies was a definite sin in the eyes of the church. You couldn't ask for any help with how to deal with the duppies. You were left to fend for yourself.

There were a lot of secrets that the adults kept to themselves. We had a separate dining table, so we didn't join in with the adult talk. I was asked to eat with the adults once, because I knew how to do it properly, how to sit and be quiet and next to invisible. All that sitting and keeping still accounts for my restlessness in later years. All that boredom meant that now, later in life, when I get bored I am dangerously bored. Instilled in me is a desperate desire to break free of whatever confinement I feel is holding me back. The boys were more rowdy; they wanted to eat quickly and go out to play. That never went down well.

It was all very hush-hush, a lot of whispering, and on no account were we ever allowed in my grandmother's

bedroom. Even now when I visit my mother's home, her mother's old room seems very foreign, like some sort of ominous sanctuary. It's filled to a heavy melancholy stillness with buried secrets and hidden energies. The house had a certain smell, from all the cooking, even because of all the dire whispering and judgment, which added to the atmosphere. Houses can be the most dangerous of spaces where even the way the furniture is arranged feels as though it is trapping you there.

I remember my school, and the schoolyard, near the looming Victorian prison and the sinister gallows, a sign of the town's old national importance. There were solid icons of the colonial past everywhere. The square we used to pass through is still there and is a big piece of history from when the Spanish came and then the British. There are a lot of Spanish buildings, very old, elaborate Spanish-type villas, and a Georgian splendor that is very out of place under a hot midday sun.

The narrow alleyways, old cream-colored buildings, and dusty roads, many leading nowhere or out into the country, all very tightly packed into each other, would remind me later of the sinister backdrops used in horror movies. A classic horror movie landscape always reminds me of growing up, probably because every day often felt like it might end up with something nightmarish straight out of a scary movie. There was a venomous, vindictive look in Mas P's eyes when he was about to beat us that was completely monstrous. He conned us into believing he knew everything—he was the all-seeing eye that nothing could escape. It was a look I was to use later in my life when I needed to create a very definite impact in a photograph, video, or film.

The only acting class I ever took was in New York with Warren Robertson, who had been taught by Lee Strasberg, the father of the American Method. He was seen as some kind of guru and had been named acting coach of the 1970s by the New York Post. The 1978 book he wrote about acting was called Free to Act: How to Star in Your Own Life. One of his exercises was called Sexual Tennis: "Stand a few feet apart and confront each other with your chosen intention. But as you do that, imagine you are trying to bounce a ball back and forth and you can only use your hips and pelvis to do this." One rumor circulating told a story of Warren helping a male student to conjure up feelings of fear by holding a loaded gun to his groin. Warren was pretty committed.

In the classes, I was very shy. Warren could read your mind. I called him a warlock. He was very perceptive. He could see by the fact I sat at the back of the class that I did not want to be in the group; I wanted to be alone. Some people love being in a group. I was never good in gangs after growing up in a gang of boys that I was always on the outside of. I trained myself to work well in isolation. Warren sensed that and told me it was best that I work with him on a one-on-one basis.

He was more than an acting coach. I learned a lot about myself. Working with someone like Warren is about much more than acting. It's about facing up to who you are and how that can be of use when you act. His technique was to liberate you so that you could use everything you had inside you. He would basically hypnotize me to get me to open up. He diagnosed that really I was acting out Mas P in all my performances: the fixed stare, the dominant stance, arms folded, the lashing out . . .

I was always the first in our family to try things, accidentally or intentionally—especially if there was a sense that what I was doing was forbidden. I was the first in my family to drink poison. I don't remember, but my mom tells me that I did it when I was really little, four or five. It was hidden under the bed and it looked like soda and it turned out to be kerosene. I almost died. Frothing at the mouth, blacking out, collapsing under images of Jesus, trembling fireflies, and a vaporous local Rastaman.

Certain rituals stick in my mind. There would be the sudden ringing of a bell and you'd hear the

cries—They're burning the mongooses tonight! There were a lot of mongooses and they would eat the fruit in the trees planted on our plots of land. Barbed wire would be wound around the tree trunks to stop them climbing, making the trees look mean and creepy.

The mongooses would eat your crop, so you set a trap, and when you caught them, you set them on fire and burn them. It was like a celebration—the bells would ring, and we'd all go out and watch the mongooses be burned to a crisp. Jamaica had a problem with snakes, so they brought the mongooses to kill the snakes. Which they did. So there are no snakes in Jamaica. Bendy-spined worms but no snakes. And then that became a problem because the mongooses ate the fruit, the mangoes and breadfruit that were such an important part of the diet. And then people burned the mongooses. They would shriek like cats being skinned alive.

We didn't have separate bedrooms, so I would sleep in the same room as my brothers. Max was a sleepwalker and I remember at night he would sit straight up. It used to scare the shit out of me. He would get out of bed and start walking. As a child, when it's dark, seeing your brother jerk upright in front of you and walk around the room is pretty freaky.

My imagination was quite vivid when it was dark, with all these thoughts swirling around, and there were no streetlamps. I would be asked to go and get a bag of sugar from the shop around the corner for my grandmother. It would be beginning to get dark. Scared of the old pirates and the smoking Rastas, the charred, screaming mongooses, and the evil eye in the sky, the trees that would hang over tall walls like hulking dinosaurs, the duppies lurking in the woods, the rustling creature faces in the mad patterns of the leaves, my zombie brother walking into walls, and most of all the wrath of Mas P, I would sprint barefooted like Usain Bolt—that was another reason for me to be beaten, because I was barefoot, and I was not allowed to not wear my shoes. I didn't like shoes. They were like chains. I needed to find freedom where I could.

My mind was filled with hallucinations, many of them passed through to me from the church. Pentacostalism is one of those religions where they believe everyone else in whatever religion is going to hell, and they scare the pants off you.

In Bishop Walters's version of the Pentecostal Church, when you are baptized you are baptized in the name of Jesus, not the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. I did feel as though I had a relationship with God, with Jesus, if only because I was young enough to feel the vicious heat of that hell being talked about. And this was a church that was all about talking—speaking in tongues was proof that you had been saved. It was evidence of salvation. Jesus himself had prophesied that it would be a part of the believer's experience. It said so in the Bible, so it had to be true. Jesus said, "These signs will accompany those who believe; in my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues" (Mark 16:15–18). The speaking in tongues process was something else that appealed to the Jamaicans' love of presentations that seem larger than life.

When I was baptized at seven, I spoke in tongues, but then again, a monkey can do it. I'm not saying that it is all mumbo jumbo, but as a child you are not mature enough to really understand the concept of speaking in tongues. You hear it in church, you hear it all around you, and there is power in numbers. Everybody's doing it, and as a kid, controlled by fear, egged on by your own sense of daring, you start speaking in tongues.

You're babbling incoherently, making random sounds, you know how to do that, but it feels like it's important and its making you important. Everyone around you reacts as though you are speaking the language of heaven, as though the words are flowing out of your spirit. It's like you get high on it, you get intoxicated. I got the spirit! I felt it! It can become musical, with voices falling and rising and the repetition

of various phrases—Yes, Jesus, we love you, Jesus, praise the Lord, hallelujah. The hidden things of God get revealed.

I didn't know what I meant, but I believed, because everyone around me believed. You do it every day, every day, every day, you hear it at home, at school, at church—the prayer, the laying-on of hands, the spirit—you're told it's a gift, directing you to heaven, and you speak in tongues. You really believe and you really go into a trance. That's what it is, a meditation; you are taken somewhere else, and words pour out of your mouth, your eyes are closed, someone is at your ear talking to you, whispering, God this, God that, the power of God, it's inside you, it's speaking through you, and you repeat it, and repeat it, and you get it, you've got it, you believe it, you really do, of course, there is nothing more pure than a child really believing. I believed! I believed it was supernatural. And I believed it was natural, and that it happened to everyone in the world, to the kid next door, to everyone everywhere. I didn't realize that this was not the norm. We weren't let out enough long enough to hear any difference.

I didn't start to doubt God, or faith, or the belief. I never had a distinct moment when I turned on the religion that had been tightly wound around me squeezing the freedom out of me. I didn't have a moment of revelation, that it was all nonsense, or dangerous, or superstitious. I started to want to find out things for myself. I wanted to have my own experiences. And it was in this environment, snagged by all the strictness, that I began to discover pleasure in rebellion—rebelling against authority was not necessarily a method of establishing independence, but it was one of the few pleasures I could find for myself. For me, expected from a very young age to follow the rule or else, being naughty became a great pleasure. I've never lost that feeling of taking delight in a certain amount of mischief.

I remember once somehow I was allowed to stay in Kingston with my dad's sister, Aunt Sybil, the sister of the aunt who never married. It could have been two days, but it seemed like two weeks. She straightened my hair, which almost broke the prime rule; we went to the cinema, where I was supposed to burn in hell sitting next to all these sinners. It was the first film I had ever seen. I have some strange memories of voluptuous visions as I sat in the cinema. The pictures on the screen were so big, eyes in the sky, but wonderful, and from somewhere else that seemed ruled by a better, more exciting kind of magic.

It might have been The King and I with Yul Brynner. I don't know for sure, or even whether it was in color. If it was in black and white, it seemed to be in color, new kinds of color, bursting with promise. But I remember it was huge, and watching it was like looking at a dream. I was overwhelmed. It made me wonder how you could end up in such a world. I was all dressed up, but not for church, and the ugly bristly kink was taken out of my hair. It was seen as a sin to straighten your hair, so every morning I went to school, I had to do my hair to make sure it kept its shape. It was very painful. Sybil said, "Oh, they'll kill me if I let you back home with straight hair," so we had to wash it and put it back to church normal.

There was a delightful naughtiness about Sybil—I'm going to get you away from these crazy people for a short while and show you a little bit of . . . life! I never forgot that. This burst of something else, this flash of possibility. I still remember those days so well. It was a big, big, big moment. She treated me as if I was an equal. In a way it made me not so afraid. Everything else was about fear, and that sort of thing can keep you from growing. Jamaica is a land of growth—things grow so fast; it's nature in spectacular, bewitching overdrive—so it was weird to be in a situation where spontaneous personal growth was frowned upon.

Even looking into the boisterous public bar that was on the corner next door to where my great-grandmother lived on the main street in town made me feel like my eyes would melt. The thought of having an alcoholic drink made me think I would burn in hell. The family kept telling us every day that because we had again done something wrong, we were going to be flung into the fires of hell. It was brainwashing. I ended up

thinking that if I misbehaved, I would be condemned to hell and lose the power to feel love, happiness, or anything other than cruelty and misery. There was so much fear. Sybil showed me another way—I didn't know how I was going to get there, but I knew it was available. She exerted a liberating effect on me, even awakened in me the idea that I was young, with my own mind, not a smaller, insignificant version of an adult.

Aunt Sybil had been a beauty queen when she was younger, Miss Whatever-it-was, where you ride down the street during the carnival wearing a crown. She did marry, but she was too tough for her husband, because she was very driven. She said she had to read everything she put into the library. An amazing woman—confident, knowledgeable, with such a strong will—and I love her. Sybil is an example of the very strong women who take leading roles in Jamaican life, and she was such an inspiration while my mother was away. I was lucky have such an inspiring female role model in the family.

I was young when I was given permission to occasionally visit her. Eleven, something like that, ten, perhaps. She's now in her eighties, still going strong. They all live long in my family. There's a whole lot of longevity. The women in our family live into their nineties. It's genetic. Sybil was very worldly. She had been to London in the 1950s to study, she liked to drink, she was normal. She went to church, and had some of the Joneses' high-minded toughness and moral fiber, but it didn't take over; it was never taken to the extreme.

Wearing nail polish was seen as an act of rebellion at home, but Sybil showed me it was nothing horrible. My apparent vanity was my worst sin to the church family. I'd want to put makeup on, pluck my eyebrows, paint my nails, as I saw other girls at school doing. If I ever did, I would try and take it off before Mas P came home. Seeing Sybil now and then was a revelation, simply in terms of how you could put on makeup without it causing a catastrophe—it seemed to represent freedom.

My early Jamaican years were an awful lot for a child of that age to process. I split my personalities because of it. To protect myself I would split into different characters. It was the only way to evade that kind of pressure: Hide parts of me that would later emerge as distinct personalities, sometimes with different names.

Eventually I realized it wasn't me who was wrong—it was them. The way it works is: They make you feel that you deserve to be punished. You are somehow encouraged to think that it is a necessary part of life, that you need the discipline. Therefore, you must be worthless, or why would this be happening to you? It is crippling to your self-esteem.

I hung on. I wouldn't let myself be harmed. I didn't want to think that I was weak. I would think of myself as the master. I made sure that I loved myself, because at times it seemed no one else was loving me. That's carried on—it's definitely one of my personalities. One boyfriend told me that I loved myself too much. I thought, Well, you can love a boyfriend too much, but you can't love yourself too much. Sometimes you have to love yourself to keep yourself whole.

Something vicious and implacable was being pushed deep inside me and I had to stop it from completely breaking me apart. It was a childhood that was not a childhood. And you end up being detained in childhood longer than you should be, perpetually the oppressed daughter. You take longer than most people to get used to being alive.

There were ways in Jamaica of escaping the brainwashing, but not for long. They would always catch you and punish you. That's what happened to me in Jamaica: I was brainwashed by all this hellfire and damnation, and if I did anything wrong, if I talked back to my elders, or talked to someone I shouldn't have,

they would pull out my bottom lip and stretch it and pull it until the skin connected it to my lower jaw would tear. Once I left Jamaica I had to wash all that away, brainwash myself in a way, and for a while it was as though I was washing away the religion, and that viciousness took Jamaica away with it.

We knew our parents were eventually going to send for us—we just didn't know when. There was never a definitive time period. Then, one day, it started to happen. The children began to move to America, pulled away from Mas P and the church.

Chris went first. Then I went. Or was it the other way around? Noel didn't want to go straightaway, because he had embedded himself with friends and in school, and he resisted when they wanted him to go. He didn't want to leave. He was finding his own ways to stand up to the control. My younger brother Max came with me, because he definitely wanted to get out of Jamaica. After ten years, one by one, we were brought to America. My sister Janet was such a baby and my grandmother didn't want her to go. My mom thought it would kill her mom to bring Janet, as they were so close. So Janet stayed behind for a while.

My dad had changed his religion, gotten into Bishop Walters's house, married my mom, and taken her to America. He didn't originally head there, like a lot of migrants did, to carry the message of the church, taking over a uniquely Jamaican modification of an American-style religion. He had traveled to America to work, at what he thought would be a job that suited his talents and enterprise.

He worked in agriculture, and after the war in America they needed people with his expertise cultivating land. He could grow anything, and they needed new food sources at the time. He was full of hope and excitement about a new life away from the complicated family relationships in Spanish Town, but he was disappointed when he got to America that he was not being hired as anything other than a laborer. He considered that he was not that far above a slave, not expected to work as an educated Jamaican would in management or as an entrepreneur, but simply as someone moving earth about and digging holes.

He was in crisis, thinking of his wife and children and how he had moved for a better life despite the opposition of his father. He was a proud man, worried what his father would think, and he became suicidal. He remembers wanting to kill himself, to jump off a platform in front of an oncoming train. He says he was definitely considering it, because he felt he had let everyone down. He was standing at the edge of the platform, a train heading into the station, prepared to jump and end it all, when something sudden and amazing happened. At that point he got what he calls the calling. He had a vision.

He saw Jesus, in some form, who was asking him using words that weren't words, to become a pastor, and open his own church in America dedicated to the healing of mind, body, and soul. He had converted in Spanish Town to marry my mom but had never really bought into the Pentecostal premise, and then, in North America, at the end of his tether, he had this awakening moments before ending his life. He didn't expect this—he had converted to get my mom, to win the bet and get the girl, not to find God. To his surprise, he emotionally and spiritually converted after his vision on the station platform, and took the calling seriously.

My father really did feel he had escaped. Once he made it to America, he found that the Pentecostal Church there was very different from the church of Bishop Walters; it wasn't so exploited for personal power. It was a lot more open than my family's version in Jamaica, and he felt he could correct what he saw as the oppressive elements that had alienated his father and put a barrier between him and his wife. He had his own mission now.

In 1956, after ministering in New York and Connecticut, he founded the Apostolic Church of Jesus Christ in Syracuse, upstate New York. After a few years spent establishing his church and working his way into the

local community, reaching out to the unchurched through neighborhood revivals, he felt settled and had a purpose. It was time for his children to come over to the nest he and my mother had built.

I don't know what Mas P thought when I left. I never thought about him. I wanted to forget about him immediately, wipe him out. When he died, more than twenty years later, I felt nothing. I didn't want to commit so much of myself that I had any kind of emotional response. Brother Noel wanted me to think about it from a different point of view, to be released—saved, in a way—but I never could. He didn't want me to think of him as a monster, but to accept that he was ill, or himself the victim. To forgive him. I couldn't. I don't know if that meant I had taken control or was still in his control. The more you try and escape, the more the thing you are escaping from continues to exist. I didn't want to think about it.

Noel's way of dealing with Mas P and Bishop Walters, and their corruption of religion, was that he wanted to go into the church and turn it the other way. Make it kinder, more inspiring, more caringly Christian. He seriously studied the Bible and wanted to transform the churches in Jamaica to which our family belonged. Noel dissected their power. He analyzed it. He wanted to know how it worked and transform it into a positive thing.

We have all reacted to this cult that surrounded us in our own ways. I wanted to be free. Free of myself, almost. Free enough to choose to be lonely. Noel wanted to repair the idea of God. He received a degree in theology, became a pastor in Texas at twenty-six, and later became a senior pastor, and a bishop, and a driven, charismatic preacher at the City of Refuge Church in Los Angeles, with twenty thousand followers. His church is so large it's known as a megachurch.

He found other words in the Bible that weren't about God the bully, a supporter of torture and recrimination. God was our protector, which was news to me. Noel needed to uncover a gentle God, to recover some sort of sanity. "Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified, do not be discouraged for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go" (Joshua 1:9). In a way he is anti-religion. He doesn't preach to you in the way we were preached to. His Lord is a very different Lord from the Lord that was forced on us. His interpretation is very extreme in terms of our faith. A lot of other bishops and preachers try to get him out—to them he's a blasphemer. He's the me of that world, the me in how I approach my career.

I'm still afraid of walking into the church in Jamaica. It still makes me feel very uncomfortable because of how they all look at you in a judging way. I say to my mom, "I am not going to church in Jamaica," and she says, "No, it has completely changed. It's not the same as it used to be. People can dress up and wear earrings, you can wear pants even!" But it doesn't make me feel any more comfortable, however much has changed on the outside. Even if I can wear pants, I don't trust it after the brainwashing all those years ago.

I went to church with them one time as an adult, but my grand-uncle had everyone all so brainwashed that it was hard to watch. The housekeeper who looked after my grandmother, Sister Dorothy, still works in the house in Jamaica where I grew up and, even now, comes to Syracuse to look after my mom. She has been persuaded that the television is a force for evil and still will not look at the TV in a room if it is on. She thinks that if she looks at it she is going to burn in hell. Dorothy will contort her body and hide behind her fingers if it is turned on to make sure she doesn't get a glimpse of the hell it is revealing.

They are still under the powers of the long-dead Bishop Walters. He convinced his followers that they are going to burn in hell if they see something on television—a prime example of people using religion to gain control over other people's lives. I find it deeply disturbing that this still goes on, that someone who is no longer living under the pressure of the bishop still obeys him. It's a power that still causes me to pause, to feel the old anxiety, whatever I have done in my life.

I was successful and famous as a singer when Mas P died. I wanted to send my grandmother money directly, but was never able to until he died. I would pass it through my mother to give to her. Whenever I went to Spanish Town, to visit my mother when she was staying in our old house, if I saw him he would try to back me in a corner. I didn't want to see him, but he would be there, as though he had done nothing wrong, or had raised me as the Bible recommended.

He would try and tell me how I could use my fame, how many people I could reach as a missionary. I never confronted him about what he had done to me and my brothers and sisters. What was the point? Basically, I tried to avoid him. I never trusted that he had shed his venom. Every time we met he tried to reconvert me. He considered me a backslider. A serious sinner.

When my father visited Jamaica he would never stay in Spanish Town, because of the extremism of Bishop Walters. He would stay with his brothers in Kingston. The church was horrified at what I had become, and my father didn't want to have to argue with them. There was enough Jones common sense for him to decide what I did with my life was up to me, as hard as it was for him to understand.

Bishop Walters called me the devil. Whenever I was involved in a scandal that made the papers, I symbolized pure evil. He wrote it in a letter to my mother: Your daughter is the devil. He expected my mom and dad to shun me. They never did, whatever I got up to. My dad was punished because of me. He could have been made a bishop long before he was ordained if he hadn't had me to deal with, if he hadn't had a devil for a daughter.

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