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Led by the Spirit:

exploring the migration of cultural identity through Oneness Pentecostalism, from the
Caribbean to London

Keith Jarrett

PhD

Birkbeck, University of London

I declare that this thesis was composed by myself, that the work contained herein is my own except where explicitly stated otherwise in the text, and that this work has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification except as specified. Parts of this work have been published in *Emerge: 2015 Lambda Literary Fellows Anthology* (Lambda, 2015)

Abstract of Thesis

Post-war migration from the Caribbean to the UK has not been lacking for academic, literary and media analysis, but the shifting boundaries of British and Caribbean identity in the twenty-first century have not been extensively investigated, nor the varying cultural and religious ideas within heterogeneous migrant communities. By examining the changing nature of Oneness Pentecostalism among Londoners of Caribbean heritage, I hypothesise that increased global connectivity combined with community dispersal, assimilation into 'Britishness', and the forging of new compound cultural identities all contest the 'single narrative', or essentialist ideas of belonging.

This is a practice-led, interdisciplinary thesis in two parts, underpinned by an emphasis on narrative, and the exploration of conflict within identity. The first section is my novel, *This Is Not Us*, following two protagonists from different generations, and spanning six decades, from the pivotal years of Caribbean mass migration to the UK, to the beginning of the new millennium, and their changing attitudes to sexuality, belief and family. The second section explores the evolution of Oneness Pentecostalism among Londoners of Caribbean heritage through interviews and discourse analysis, in order to construct a non-fictional narrative around identity formation.

Key findings show vast generational differences, both among current and former adherents to the Oneness doctrine, including attitudes towards dress, worship, and gender roles, as well as convergence around the 'hardship' stereotype and its persistence throughout Caribbean migrant narratives. In my conclusion, I argue that fiction allows for a greater breadth of analysis, and that exploring cultural subgroups has wider implications for how we discuss culture and belonging more generally.

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Finally, to my examiners, Professor Bernadine Evaristo and Dr. Sian Hawthorne, my thanks for such careful reading and support at the revisions stage.

As the Jamaican saying goes, '*one finger cyaan ketch louse*'.

Remember we were brought here from the clear waters of our dreams
that we might be named, numbered and forgotten

Jay Bernard, 'Arrival'

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This Is Not Us

Prologue.
(The Girl)

*'Some tings oonuh cyaan never understand with you head
But all tings you must understand with you heart...'*

Pleasance, Jamaica

April 1959

– but that it feel like she rising high / how all them bird must feel / it feel like she float
above like the first time she ever see / a stairway / and just like she on them stair / she
rise up over all them head / she floating because she soon gwine dead

You haffi let her pass on, Leenee.

Nawww-----

what a bawling and screaming! / a heavy hand pressing her body down / what a
sound! / *not my lickle baby, my precious, no no no...!* / and then big footstomp / until a
bang-a-lang from the door / and she feel alone and light / she don't know if it day or
night / she just float...

Brother Dean–

Make her cool her foot! Raise another song and nuh bodder the child–!

It soon be done... (It soon be done...)

maybe three or four of them now in the room / sometime feel like more / she feel
the whole of Pleasance out a door / waiting for news / she cyaan make her eye open /
but she see the top of every head / in the night / star stuck on the sky like a magnet
she keep rising / though she cyaan lift up her eyes or head / but they talking
about her / it serious / she wonder if she dead already and they keeping nine night fi
her

Rock of Ages...

Oh Lord!

Clef for me

Keep her safe, Jesus!

Let me hide

if only she can look at them / she will say she not going nowhere / but the lifting
of her wings make her tired / so she will try again / when she...

the morning cock crow

the bird sing

and she not up there with the bird no more / she in her auntie house / wrap up
in a thousand sheet / on the floor / and it must time for her to leave this world /

She waking again?

No, Miss

Go boil up some more tea

Nothing really make sense. All she know is
she cold like a fire. Like a fire have
nothing to wear. Like her bones is fire and
her body is a shiver.

She soaking in her own stinky stinky water / coming out of her skin and she
burning / and she realise she speaking back / to the voice

What kinda light it is?

A bright like morning li-

You wan walk to it or away from it?

so much talking make her tired/ her mouth dry/ her body wet/ sweat from out
of her/ her body singing/

Noooo! Lawd, no! Me sey fi guh mek the tea! You hard a hearing?

Me wan walk-

she wan walk away from the light / But the Book say that not right / only people
with evil fear the light / so she will keep silent and sleep / while the people weep round
her

She could see and see / even if she cyaan lift her eye open / she see a web
around her / and a Spider watching over her / he start speaking:

*Jamaica / that is her name / born in the middle of a hurricane / and she gwine
dead same way / thus saith the prophet /*

and it April now so it not her time to go / it the spider or her grandmamma /
who tell her she not gwine dead / she is nine or so she think / too young fi leave outta
this world

how many day she lay her in her stinking sheet?/ she remember falling one
morning/ then the leaf they gather / the tea she drink / the sweat / the shock / her
grandmamma praying praying praying the tongues / the anointing oil / the blood

spider tell her / she born in a hurricane / and her mudder never knew she
coming / her mother did think she must need to take a shit / why she go out inna di
middle of the storm / and her mother was young young / shame upon her

how she know all of this? / because he tell it to her.

It the fever coming out of her, let her talk

she no know what she say loud from what she thinking / maybe this what it like
to be dead

The spider said: everyone know seh you face favour the pastor. A you the pastor
daughter.

And she answer back: but mi muddah never marry the pastor so how he can be mi faadah? Him already have a wife!

And the spider say: a so it go inna this islan.

(And she never say: is what an *island* is?)

And the spider say: lickle pickney doan chat big people tings.

And the spider say: children must be seen and not heard

(And so she never answer to him back)

And the spider say: gyal you black, eenh!

And the spider say: you really waan live?

She answer back: wha you mean?

And the spider say: mek me anoint you with oil and pray over you.

She feel the hands over her / hear her granny voice rebuking the demons: / the demon of confusion / demon of darkness / demon of illness / demon of sweat / demon of disobedience / demon of sin and fornication through her mother /

she plead the blood over all them tings / say she will do whatsoever the Lord ask of her as her servant / and dedicate this special chile to him / and she realise she not rising no more/ hands holding her body down /

Slow like a darg she fe-you fe-you the water from the spoon.

And the spider say: you know how you great-grandmudder was a slave.

And she say: doan speak dem things. Dem things is *bad* bad.

(She never ask why is bad she just know is certain things you never...)

And the spider say: is not me speaking.

And she say:

(And she don't say: who you is, den? Is who me talk to?)

And the spider come up crawling up her skin. And tell her seh a long long time ago in another kingdom...

And she wake up and drink a little water from the spoon. *Fe-you fe-you*.

And the spider crawling up the top of her arm and not letting her be silent in her head.

Him say: lickle chile!

Him always say *lickle chile*! like this. Like he rebuking her.

And he tell her how sometime story get passed down sideway. How sometime things is in the blood. *Anger. Heartache*. And a sad so sad it too big fi one person so it

pass through from mother or father to son or daughter like duppy pass through the door unless you face him and say *gweh!*

(She almost say: wha yuh mean?) But she keep quiet so quiet her heart 'top and the spider must about to guh long bout him business but she draw a breath and him crawl crawl back.

Him say: lickle chile! Nuh fret bout it. Some tings you can never understan with you head but everyting you can understan with you heart.

She laugh like someting sweet her but it sound like cough and it hard to breathe again. And she start think about her mama and how people chat all kind of things about her. And she don't want to be like her mother.

The last time she member she see her mother was in a dream and before that? Now she don't see her mama, just the wet sheet which make her shiver and she start to cough.

Auntie Yvette must hear her and run to her from where she have the Jim Reeves playing. She start sing *How Great Thou Art* and squeeze her hand. Auntie Yvette with her face like a moon. Tears falling from her like river water. And the tears baptise the girl.

And she speak in tongues *ila baba mi ilababamiopolopobubewa*. She cough and speak in tongues because the Lord done raise this child up from the dead. Now she alive again, and the world come back to her. And she have a new life.

She will use this new life to understand with her heart, like the spider tell her. And she gwine remember this day of second chance, the day she get lift from the bed and begin to see with a new yeye.

ONE
(The Boy)

‘There is sin in the Robinson household...’

(East) London, 1994
Thursday before Easter

Samuel retrieved the shoebox, took out his 2Pac tapes.

Sin was the shape of screwed up cassette ribbons, living in the darkness under the bed. Sin hid from the light because its deeds were evil. So much sin wound around sin. When you played the tape backwards, you'd hear the demons laughing.

Samuel scratched out the titles he'd written onto them with a pair scissors. He ought to cut the ribbons too. Today, he would give up this room for Esther and Gloria. He needed to get it right quick. He would fish out all the stray underpants, hide his rap tapes, erase the memory of *dollar dollar bill y'all...* and replace the evil with things that were true, pure and of good report. The Winans' harmonies would replace the rawness of *I got the flow*.

The sisters were from New York, like his favourite rappers; they might even know the latest Brooklyn slang. But the Projects in New York and Chicago were a long way from this pebbledash maisonette, this dead place.

If Esther and Gloria were anything like Cypress Hill, like *insane in the membrane*, he could learn their accents and freestyle to it; but he knew better: they were prophets and they had come with a message from God for his church.

Like she often did, his mum had bounced into his room this morning without knocking. She'd teased him about his Man U poster, as always, but then she put on her stern face. *You best get your room in order for the prophets*, she'd said. He'd wiped her watery kiss off his cheek once she'd closed the door again, then got out his notepad.

Everything was so serious now. He needed to start making changes in his life, now he'd accepted his calling as Junior Pastor Robinson. *Junior Pastor!* Serious! Even if it was a fancy title they'd made up to teach the young people about responsibility. *Taking the mantle*, as Deacon Brown liked to say. But it wouldn't feel the same without his father at the service tomorrow.

Samuel paced up and down his room, muttering The Lord's Prayer with his eyes open so as not to stumble on all the mess: schoolbooks, piles of scrunched up pants and vests, his giant wooden globe, his old toy box – now full of school equipment – and, underneath it, the magazine he could not throw away. Yet. *Forgive us our trespasses*. The hairline cracks on the ceiling had joined up in a way that looked too much like the shape of his ungodly thoughts. He hoped no one else could see but the Lord. He could change.

After getting dressed, he ate through the plate of fried dumplings and overcooked baked beans, and his mother raised an eyebrow at his fit of hiccoughs.

'I told you not to eat so fast.'

'Sorry, mum.'

'Fix your tie.'

'Yes, mum.'

'Yes, *mum*, *no mum*. Come and give your mother a hug. You're a good boy, you know!'

Manny narrowed his eyes across the table from him and the warmth of her hug turned chill. Manny was a permanent shadow in the corner. With their dad gone, the shadow was growing, a scowling light-blocker. And, with his new face fluff, Manny was even more like Esau. Samuel broke away from his mother.

'I'm not a *boy*.'

The air stopped. Or maybe it was a gasp. But then it seemed to fix itself when he lifted his fork to squeeze another mouthful of dumpling inside him, the sauce from the baked beans dripping down his chin.

Manny played with his watch. His mother arranged her cutlery on the plate to finished o'clock.

'So, if you're not a boy, what are you?'

She wasn't going to let this slide. He chewed fast, swallowing before he spoke.

'I'm sorry, mum--'

'Sorry! I don't want to hear no sorry. What *are* you, if you're not a boy?'

'I didn't mean--'

'Don't give me no *I didn't mean*! You're becoming a man, but you still my pickney *boy*! And don't let your head get so big you can't fit back inside the door, you hear?'

'Yes, mum!'

He cleared the dishes without complaining, bringing them to the sink and watching the remains of red sauce slide off the plate and down the plughole. *I'm so slick my rhymes are gonna make you sick...*

'Samuel, young *man*, mind you waste the water.'

He bit his tongue.

This side of Leyton was row upon row of terrace houses the colour of morning tea with not enough milk in. Outside the kitchen window was just the same; a shared garden and then brown and grey and brown and grey and just a few minutes away it gave way to green, to marshland, to white, to the ice rink, to space, to fights between schools, between gangs. There, at Lea Valley, his school friends were meeting to skate

and chirps with each other. He was not jealous. (*Samuel, you're a good boy, you know?*) He was a junior pastor now and he was going to join the evangelisation team around Walthamstow Market, doing God's work. After he put away the dishes, he went into the living room to pray, then went to get ready to evangelise.

Walthamstow Market was the second-largest market in Europe. And it was just as well; he was less likely to be spotted by other kids from school, less likely to have to face his embarrassment, even though he knew he shouldn't be ashamed. *If you are ashamed of Me, I will be ashamed of you.*

'Get out the fucking way!'

'Sorry.'

He wasn't hiding by standing, awkward, between a hair shop and the back of a stall... He was just choosing the narrow path, in a full suit and tie in the middle of a market.

Don't be such a coward!

He stepped out and walked back to the square, back into the thick crowd where he could be seen by everyone. He hadn't even passed the library yet, but he better start giving out the wonkily-cut flyers Lacey designed. Better get them all handed out now.

The market stalls were a blur. Five pound batty riders the colour of Opal Fruits; bandanas with the colours of Jamaica: black, green and gold; rows and rows of tights – dernier, whatever that meant – darkening in shade the further along he walked; khaki Karl Kani short-suits; packets of rollers; bowls of sellotape; four women in saris all gathered round a box. *Three for a pahnd. Four for a pahnd. Five for a pahnd. Come and getchyour juicy Granny Smiths!* The old stationers with the crack in the windows taped over. A row of umbrellas.

He scanned the area for faces he recognised but most people walking his way were middle-aged, a few of them with primary school kids in tow. He passed a few old women with shopping trolleys, who didn't meet his eye. The old-school cockney market sellers who looked a bit like Ian Beale from Eastenders – he didn't meet their eyes, either. A few Sanjays and Gitas in the mix as well – why would they be interested? But he held out his flyers, anyway.

He was more-or-less safe here. All the other youts his age would be inside Selborne Walk, or by the bus station... or right behind him, walking towards the barbers. His tie was too tight, or maybe it was just his collar. His neck wasn't breathing right. The Potter's House lot – the cool church – wore baggy jeans and bandanas and rapped the gospel in the street. He'd feel better if he was in with them. They made the gospel

streetwise. It was a shame they didn't baptise properly, though. The true path to salvation was narrow, through baptism in Jesus' name and speaking in tongues. And living right.

As he walked, he kept thinking he heard his name. Each time he turned around, nothing.

What if he *was* spotted, though? What would his classmates think of him now? And his trousers were jack-ups: after his latest growth spurt, they barely reached his ankles, despite his mum letting out the hem. The bottom of his too-smart Clarks were sticky with bubble gum; as he walked he scraped his feet.

'Oi, fuck off!'

Someone spat and it landed on his shoe. It might have not been directed at him but... He ignored it. *Blessed are ye when they persecute you and say all manner of evi-*

'Dyamn Witnesses, aren't they?'

He couldn't work out who said it – he was too scared to turn around – but he walked faster. Anyway, he wasn't a Wickedness. He was a *proper* Christian.

He was stopped twice to say more about the service; this, the second woman, wanted to hear the Word.

I am not ashamed.

He rehearsed his spiel and let the Spirit work through him. She needed more.

'Can I pray with you?'

The woman who said her name was Lydia allowed him to cup her head between his hands and, once he was focused on the task in front of him, the sounds of the market died down.

She stood head and shoulders smaller than he was and, despite being at least three times his age, she was like a child in his grip. Her hair was greasy, her plaits knotty.

Samuel kept his hands still; now was not the time to think of what creatures must be feeding off her scalp. His hands itched but this was a distraction from Satan, just like his dreams, just like his love of hip-hop. This was the week when, two millennia ago, Jesus sacrificed his life for Samuel and even Lydia and even his brother Manny and all the other people that were lost. Manny who came back late from college, who'd been back late all week, knowing he could get away with it because his dad was away. Doing sinful things, even as they knew it was wrong. They all needed prayer.

He listed his blessings:

- 1) Thank you Jesus, it may be cold but you've spared us from the rain
- 2) Thank you Jesus, I have all my faculties

- 3) Thank you Jesus, because I have the chance to spread your Word and even though my friends are skating right now and I could be there, you've allowed me to be here to witness–

Lydia's once-white bomber jacket, grey from East London grime. Her skin, which needed creaming, was grey. He needed to repent for his pride. What would his mum say about his attitude? His mum, who reacted so strongly to him answering back. Maybe there were spirits of discord at work in the house.

'Dear Jesus, thank you for bringing Lydia here today, hallelujah. We praise you Lord, for this lost soul who comes humbly before your presence.'

He steadied his mind on his hands, on the sweat from her scalp entering his pores. He made sure to avoid the eczema patch on her forehead. The woman beneath him seemed to be forever moving. Her soul wasn't still.

'I am seeing, dear Lord, that this sinner Lydia is struggling and you know all about our struggles dear Lord whether it be the struggle of alcohol or drugs or fornication, dear Father God. But you say that though our sins be as scarlet you can make them as wool if we but hearken unto your Word dear Lord...'

He knew the smell of alcohol just as he knew the smell of sin. Hers had hardened into a thick block that stood between them. The alcoholics always sniffed him out. Maybe it was his calling to lead them to Christ.

After Lydia walked off and took his flyer, Sister Madeline bowed over, one wobbly hip movement at a time, opening her arms wide.

'I bless the Lord every day for you, son.'

Samuel found himself muttering in tongues and steadied his body against a post as the Holy Ghost moved through him. *Yes, Lord. Speak.*

Sister Madeline linked her arm with his as he took a large gulp of air and indicated he was ready to walk back to the group meeting point. The street came back to life, slowly, as they walked together.

'I was calling you earlier, but you never hear me.'

He smiled at her and looked behind her shoulder. Scanning. Scanning. What if he'd been clocked by someone at school?

No. He hadn't been seen. And if he was spotted right now, as far as anyone would guess, they were just a dressed-up grandmother and grandson, walking back from a wedding.

All that time while he was praying for the Lydia girl, he hadn't even been aware of bystanders watching him. How many pairs of eyes clocked him quickening in the

Spirit and speaking in tongues and laying hands on that woman? At least it was possible not to feel so paranoid *all the time*.

He'd better get used to it. And learn to preach to his friends. And, if he lost them, so? He still had a friend in Jesus. That was how he *should* feel, but it weren't that simple, was it? He might get jumped by some of the Year 11s. Manny had had a rep and some upstart might try it on with him, try and show they were a badman by picking on the younger brother. *Manny*. How long before he would leave church altogether, before his dad would throw him out of the house? Next week, next year?

The likelihood of bumping into anyone from school lowered as they walked further down the side of Selborne Walk, the familiar C&A sign now fading behind his back. Sister Madeline kept her grip tight on him, his arm trapped in hers.

She stopped to halve her pile of flyers and thrust one half in his hand. *Here!* He needed to keep smiling. They'd been told in training. *Free concert! Easter Gospel Special!* You couldn't deliver the Good News with a bad face.

Bless you, sister. From rival ghettoblasters, Salt-N-Pepa shooed over the saxophone riff of that Wham! song *doo-bee-doo-bee-di* and it all blended in among the sound of wheelbarrows, shopping trolleys and finally, at a clearing, Brother Fredrick proclaiming the good news of Christ:

'Ladies and gentleman, sinners, hear the word of the Lord.'

He and Sister Madeline had reached the spot where the other brethren were gathered, in between two empty stalls with busted metal legs. The older Mothers leaned dangerously against the stalls and faced each other, leaving a space in the middle, either side of Brother Fredrick, where walkers could pass through. Although here the crowds were not as thick – the stalls were spread further apart – noise filled the space between them, the space not taken up by Brother Fredrick. He stepped aside as a white-haired couple – the man with a Zimmer frame and the woman with a check shopping trolley – struggled to get through. A younger white couple was watching from the sidelines.

'Why don't you monkeys get out the fucking way with your God bothering?'

'I'll pray for you, sister.'

'Pray for your fucking selves and leave us alone.'

The heat from Samuel's cheeks reached behind his ears and right around the back of his head. A torn blue plastic carrier bag danced in the wind in front of Brother Fredrick. Samuel watched it rise in the air until it got caught on someone's foot. He lifted his head again. Sister Madeline put a hand on his shoulder.

'Oh, Lord, the language of people these days!'

Mother Gillian bent her head towards Sister Madeline, the bow from her hat almost stroking Sister Madeline's face.

'I'm sure them use to say worser tings way back when.'

Samuel glanced to his left until he found Brother Derrick, whom he could not look in the eye, recently. He quickly shifted his gaze to Angelica, next to him. She was fourteen like Samuel, but only just saved, a Cathall girl with fire in her mouth.

He continued to move his head around, deliberately. It would be almost as bad if they thought he was checking Angelica. It wasn't that she was butters or anything, but he had to be an example now he was a *J.P.* He had to show a pure spirit, a mind focused on God and not on girls. *It would be easier if his head was full of girls.*

Brother Fredrick lurched forward all of a sudden, his grey suit jacket stretched tightly around his middle. He often joked that this is what marriage had done to him; it had made him eternally pregnant-looking, full glow and all. *A good man not only findeth a good thing in a good wife, but a whole lot of belly too...*

'People are you listening? The time is at hand.'

The feedback from the microphone squeaked loudly, so he walked further forward, stretching the lead.

'Think you've tried everything? Try Jesus! He can wash away those sin stains. Forget the Daz doorstep challenge! Try the Jesus challenge! Let the Lord wash you clean before it's too late. Try Jesus. He's your friend. Can I get an amen?'

The brethren bellowed *amen* obediently, the voices carrying over the market calls. *Two pahnd a pair! Come and getcha two pahnd deal...!*

After the *amens*, the air seemed dead, and still. The sky seemed darker and more people – strangers – started to gather around, to show interest.

'Can I get a witness?'

'Yes, Lord!'

'Mother Gillian, why don't you tell us all what they Lord has done for you?'

Samuel couldn't help snickering as she grabbed the mic from Brother F. He could almost predict her testimony word for word. The outside sermons were supposed to be simple. In evangelism class they told you to keep the message clear. Samuel felt familiar words wash over him as the rainclouds got thicker in the air.

'Oh yes, he has made my life complete, my Jesus is so sweet. He sweeter than the honey and honeycomb. He is a balm in Gilead. What a friend I have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear...'

Good Friday

It felt like a joke to have April Fool's fall on the most serious day of the year. He was only supposed to do Godly things today as he was fasting. Looking at his pager didn't count, and now this! He reread the pager message from Yannis before deleting it:

143

'143' meant 'I love you'. What the hell was that about? He shouldn't have turned it on; it was a present, for emergencies. What was Yannis playing at? Sure, it was an April Fool but why? Did Yannis think he'd reply, or call him back? Did Yannis think he was...?

He was fasting precisely because of that thing that was on his mind, the thing that he would grow out of any time soon. He couldn't help picturing Brother Derrick, how he could trace the outline of him in his basketball shorts. And now Yannis's message was spinning around in his brain. *It was a phase.*

Was he just playing around? Had Yannis noticed something about him? Was it written on his head? ~~Fuck!~~ Blast!

Of course there was a rational explanation. It was a prank. But why on him and not one of the blatant batty bwoys like Ian or Jitesh? How was he meant to reply?

He needed to think about something else. If he could sleep and never wake up, he wouldn't have to deal with any of this. Maybe should reply with something stronger – a 187 – but he was fasting. Murder would have to wait.

Nothing in the house felt right today; it was like there were extra demons in it or something. His dad would pray whatever spirits it was away. But his dad was gone; Granny Robinson was at death's door and he was in Jamaica watching over her, waiting for her to go.

It could be worse. At least he wasn't dying like his grandmother. Then again, she was old. At least she didn't have to deal with pager messages. He tried to picture her, from the last time she visited when he was younger, but drew a blank.

Maybe he could get away to the funeral and just stay there, in Jamaica, where no boys would send him *I love you* messages as a joke. He could start again and become a real man.

He ought to miss Granny R, or feel sad for her, but she was just a still photograph in his mind. When they spoke on the phone, she said the kind of basic things he expected most black grannies said. *You reading you scriptures? You being a good boy fi yuh daddy?* It's not like he could compare her with his mum's mum; *she* never ever spoke about her parents, what they were like when they were alive, anything.

Maybe he could live in Granny's house, on his own, away from his wretched family. He knew he wasn't adopted because he looked too much like Manny, but it felt like they were a different species sometimes.

He'd been getting on okay with him, and all, but something had changed since yesterday. Maybe because they were sharing a room now. Or maybe it was how he'd asked him about The 11's tag he'd seen felt-tipped on his chest the night before. Manny had brushed him away. *What you looking at me for?* He'd switched off the light.

At the back of his mind, the possibility rang that Manny might have got a tattoo... but that was unthinkable, outrageous. It was felt-tip. He might be backsliding but he wasn't satanic. The bible said making marks on your body was an abomination. *Just like the other thing...* Also, the E11's were vicious, on another level altogether. Even doodling their tag on his chest was messed up.

Esther and Gloria had arrived early in the morning, so he'd spent the night sleeping in his brother's room. He'd read a few Psalms before bedtime with his pen-light so he didn't dream about Brother Derrick again. Maybe it was Manny's problem, why he was so evil to him, because he was jealous of Samuel's calling. Weren't Joseph's brothers envious of him, right up to the point they sold him to the Egyptians? Maybe Manny was planning to get rid of him, to sell him, too. *Would that be so bad?* He could end up working for a rich king, interpreting dreams, just as Joseph did; seven fat cows and seven thin cows. He wouldn't mind ordering around a few people to make preparations for the famine. And then... and then one day, Manny would come looking for food, would come begging to the king, and he would smite him.

His stomach tensed up with laughter. Soon he'd have a six-pack.

He looked down at his Casio watch and counted. It had been over five minutes since he'd thought about Yannis's message; but now he was thinking about it again... *143. 143. 143.* And his belly was doing that sinking thing.

By lunchtime, getting ready for the evening service, he'd almost forgotten again. The sisters had gone without him talking to them properly – and he kept confusing which was which; now they were out visiting some of the other brethren and would go directly to the Good Friday service. Still, he knocked on his door – their door – before going in to fetch more clothes and his Gameboy, before reminding himself that he was fasting. *God don't play games.* He closed his eyes and the Tetris shapes fell around him, rows of bricks rising up higher.

His room wasn't his room anymore. They'd taken up the floor space with suitcases, books, hair products. There were shiny tins and books and cassettes: *Living*

Godly, Staying Godly; The Family That Prays Together; Through the Fire: Living Out the Last Days; Women Walking in Prophetic Times; Deliver Us From Evil: mending brokenness within the home; Holy Matrimonial Relationships...

His Gameboy was missing from his shelf. And draped over his toy box, two dresses. But when he lifted up the blue dress, the bit of paper he'd wedged between the lid was no longer there. Someone had opened his box. Careful not to move the dresses too much, he extended his arm, dug around. He'd arranged everything so it looked messy, deliberate. But now it seemed like it had genuinely been ransacked. He went for the stack of his old schoolbooks, which meant he had to lift the lid further; one of the dresses fell down the back. He couldn't find the magazine.

A bang jolted him. It sounded like a cupboard door closing downstairs. He rearranged everything quickly and clicked the door shut behind him.

Back in Manny's room, he heard stomps going up the stairs. It had been a close call. No blood remained inside him. Someone had found his magazine. Or maybe they hadn't. Maybe, just maybe they hadn't. But someone had been inside the box.

The only way to stop himself shivering was to go back to bed. He hid himself under the quilt, wishing he'd never brought the wretched thing home in the first place.

The day before Easter

Saturday service was shorter than usual because of a double booking at the hall. A wedding party was happening at 7pm, so they only had the place until 5. Deacon Brown led the service, his voice thick and raspy.

‘This is why we need to pool together our efforts more and trust a building.’

All of the saints applauded and hallelujahed and it felt like a personal criticism of his father. Elder Robinson was the main pastor so it looked like he was responsible. But hadn’t all the Deacons and District Elders met several times and decided it was better to hire the hall for now? How were they going to pay for it?

He was thankful for his outrage, thankful it was distracting him.

How was the ministerial team supposed to survive on the small offerings shared out between them *as well*? He’d heard his father argue this so many times at the table; for the first time in the weekend, he missed him.

Manny caught Samuel’s eye a couple of times but his face was difficult to read. He slipped out in the middle of the sermon as he often did these days. The praying mothers were quick to stop most of the girls doing the same; even Samuel had to beg Mother Gillian because his bladder was bursting earlier. But because Manny was the pastor’s eldest son, he got away with so much; he got away with everything, and already people had been talking about him.

Jerome. 23. New York. Fireman. Hosing himself down, his fireman jacket open. Six-pack slick with oil. What would it be like to touch – to lick...?

Drat! His mind was wondering. It was wandering because he was hungry. This always happened when he was fasting, a way of the devil testing him. *Where was Manny?*

Manny. Seventeen. Thirteen stone and five foot ten. He was his brother. He shouldn’t look down on him. And the bible told Samuel to love unconditionally. That meant loving him even when he was mean, even when he was ungodly, even when he discovered the bag of weed last week... and saw him sitting on a wall outside the chip shop with Jason, chirpsing girls. Even when Manny was trying to be a *badman*, mixing up with all kind of people. His stomach growled. *Samuel* didn’t have half the friends his brother did. The popular brother.

If the pastor couldn’t control his own child, what did that say about the whole family? Didn’t the bible say *train up a child in the way he should grow and when he is old he will not depart*?

Jorge. 21. Los Angeles. Removals. Sitting on a stairwell. His pants have rips, flashes of flesh. Maybe Samuel was just curious, was just appreciating the muscles they had;

maybe he wouldn't feel so bad looking at them if they were all black like him. Although Jorge was kind of light-skinned, so he counted.

Manny returned just before the altar call; no one came to the front and Deacon Brown didn't seem too upset. It was already nearly five according to his watch – the clock at the front was broken – and the caretaker was mean enough to turn off all the electricity if they went over time.

The car trip back was worse than the way there; he had to squeeze in between Esther and Gloria, who'd insisted on sitting in the back so Manny could sit up front.

'He's the man of the house right now.'

Manny. Emmanuel Marcus Robinson. Man of the house. Samuel snickered and got a flick on the ear from Gloria.

'You better not get high and mighty over your brother you hear? What's that y'all say? You may be bigger but *the two a you nuh size!*'

His brother snorted.

'I'm sorry, Sister Est–'

'–Gloria...!'

Samuel drifted. He was back to his room, in the trunk. Why had they gone in it? Had they found the magazine? Could he give explain it?

Devon the Construction Worker. Chicago. 24. Working out in the gym, dumbbells raised in different angles. He was black. Tattoos. In one of them, he'd lifted up his basketball shirt. Like most of the pictures, there was oil and sweat involved. After all, that was the title of the magazine: *Sweat!*

Samuel had spent the most time tracing his finger along the photos, making out the outline of his cock, and the bulging globes when he wore those backless pants. He was straddling a bench–

'You quiet today, Samuel!'

The acknowledgment from his mother made his eyes hot. He wished she could hug him now, tell him everything would be ok. But he was alone.

'I'm ok.'

Gloria started humming again. She stopped and faced him.

'You know the Lord has a blessing but you have to seek him out, little one. I'll be praying for you tonight.'

Ruben, Latin Hunk from Miami. Oiled muscles (again). He was leaning back on the bonnet of a red Jeep. Wearing his baseball cap to the side, his short shorts rolled up. All these images he'd memorised, images he'd studied almost as closely as he should have

been studying the bible every night. Images that he couldn't push away all day, even while sitting next to two women of God. Two women who may or may not have been sent by God to warn him of his evil. Was he daring God to strike him down?

His mother said something about preparing fish fritters; she asked the prophets something about their bedding. All the time, the carousel of men spun around the car. Samuel decided to count and hold his breath as long as he could, to pretend he was underwater, hidden in its depths, baptised again, swimming someplace far away from this claustrophobic trap.

Easter Sunday. 6:45 a.m.

There is sin in the Robinson household.

The rocking of his mattress woke him and his first thoughts were of the magazine. Not one second went by without it overtaking everything else in his mind. Why had he brought it home in the first place? He willed himself back to sleep and kept his eyelids closed, even as hell flames flickered inside them. The rocking continued.

His mother leaned over his body, the smell of seasoning mixture and soap reaching out to grab him while her scrub-hard fingers jabbed at his ribs. Rock. Rock. Rock. Nowhere to hide. He opened his eyes.

His mother's beret was wonky and her hair puffed out either side. Her Arsenal shirt was inside out.

There is sin in the Robin-

'I said get up now!'

As the warm of his blanket was lifted away from him, he let his eyelids slide back down to where the magnets were. The slap across his belly bolted him upright.

'Nnh-nnh. No, you don't. A disobedient spirit He will not reward. Get up now and come downstairs.'

Confirmation. They'd found it. He would run away and never come back. Run away to Amsterdam. He'd already packed his bag in preparation. Clean pants and socks, a couple of t-shirts. His jeans. The half-empty bottle of CK One he'd jacked from Manny, and some Lynx. All that was missing was his toothbrush and the cash.

He would use his brother's passport; he looked more like Manny's photo than *he* did, anyway. He just needed to borrow some money. He'd tried his mother's purse and only found a tenner, but there was an emergency stash in the kitchen he could get to, inside the Ovaltine tin.

The bedroom door slammed as his mum left; the banister creaked seconds later. The light of the room began to separate before him as the sin dissolved, just like vampires melt at the touch of morning, or something like that. Maybe they hadn't found it, after all; maybe he hadn't been discovered.

He tried to make his heart slow, but it kept beating. *What if he died now? What if he was going to hell?* He took a deep breath. He took another. Still time to make things right.

There was the light through the blinds, the spots of it dancing on the wall, all the shades of it on his duvet, the one he'd outgrown with the Teenage Mutant Hero Turtles – *Leonardo, Donatello, Michaelangelo, Raphael* – the air from the wide-open window was

moving the light towards him and away, towards him and away like the water at Southend.

This wasn't his ro- of course, he was in Manny's room. It smelt of farts – and maybe, if he wasn't imaging it, he caught a whiff of weed. Or maybe it was just the smell of school, fixing itself to him.

Here he was laying on a borrowed mattress in this room because the prophets were here. It was Esther's deep voice he could hear now from the living room. The floor beneath him shook. He shouldn't be afraid. He'd repented. He was saved.

'Sin!'

'Speak, Lord!' (*His mother?*)

'There is sin.'

'Praise Gard!'

The *Gard* sounded American. High pitched. That must have been Gloria. American *gards* sounded wide open, not like poshy-poshy English *gods* or Jamaican *gawds*. Even as the sickness came to his stomach, he laughed.

He needed to fight that need to be sick. That feeling that was seizing his body up, from his stomach right up to his throat. He had no reason to be afraid.

'Robinson family! There is sin! And it must be cast out!' '*HallelujahpraiseGard!*'

'Yes, Lawd!' (Definitely his mother.)

He sat up. The cliff was returning outside of the dream. God was about to punish him, and Esther and Gloria were the messengers, but why was He taking so much time over it? Was He making a decision, weighing up if he was sincere in his repentance? *A sincere heart you will not despise.*

The floor shook again as another stomp from downstairs echoed. He slid the blanket up and over his head and counted to ten:

- 1) Because he is the youngest junior pastor their church has ever had. At fourteen, he is the youngest and God is using him. Like Samuel in the bible, this is his purpose in life
- 2) Because it is Easter morning and he has prepared a sermon for the youth service
- 3) Because he fasted all day yesterday and even threw away his 2Pac tapes
- 4) And he had that odd dream again about being on the mountain but that was just his mother waking him up
- 5) What's the difference between a mountain and a hill and a cliff?
- 6) And the room is silent so Manny must be downstairs too

7) And he didn't just dream about the mountain did he? He wouldn't feel like this if it was just about the mountain...

8) But God will forgive him for that, won't He? He cannot help his dreams

9) He knows *he* is the sin, even though he's tried to pray this thi-

Thwack!

In a quick series of movements, he felt a blow across his head, and in the time it took the sting of his left temple to dull, his blanket was removed again and his mother had grabbed him by the wrists.

"Children obey your parents..." That is the first commandment *with promise*. I said *with promise*. And you go disobeying your *own mother*. A beat you I would have beat you right now but we best get downstairs. And *now*.'

'Mum-!'

'Don't you *mum* me. Just come!'

Why was she so hard on him and never on Manny? Was it because-? No, he did *not* want to go downstairs. The prophets were downstairs and the thing he had been hiding, the thing under the mountain was waiting to crumble away.

One. Two...

He could no longer count; his heart rate had sped up again and out of his chest, trying to run out the door while his body held it back with his elastic skin. Jesus was downstairs in the living room, talking to the two prophets, telling them about all Samuel's evil thoughts – every last one of them, from the rap lyrics to the magazine and his thoughts about the boys at school – and on Easter Sunday, of all days, the day he was going to give his first sermon as Junior Pastor.

He felt his arm being lifted up.

Three. Four...

'Here!'

He took the wet flannel and rubbed his face. The cold hardened his cheeks.

'Now make yourself decent.'

His penis, still sticky from his earlier dream, was poking out of the fly of his pyjama shorts. He ignored the heat from his face then adjusted himself and walked out into the landing, while his mother stayed sat on his mattress. He looked back at her but she did not catch his eyes. The only person in this house who loved him and now even she had turned cold. It served him right.

The sound of the two sisters downstairs and the word *sin* echoed in his belly. He was guilty of the blood of Jesus. The boiler cupboard revved to life as he walked.

Sometimes, when you are in the depths of your fear, you can hear the sea. With his sea legs, Samuel passed over to the top of the stairs and held his breath. There on the landing, where the woodchip walls met the framed photographs of his unsmiling parents, and his own toothless seven year old smile – and Manny’s ten year old one next to him – and where the carpet seemed to float under his feet and the doors smudged before his eyes, Samuel felt his body crumble, noticing the waviness of his legs and arms as he hit his head on the potpourri table with the empty vase. He knew he was about to die, which was bad enough. But the thought he might go to hell was the worst of all.

When he came round, he checked off the items one by one: Olbas oil; smelling salts; wet flannel around his neck; soft pillow propping his head up; three sets of eyes watching; a drip of anointing oil tickling all the way down now nearly at his nose; a low muttering in tongues.

Also: the grip of his throat around words he could not voice.

Also: the sin of Achan in the Robinson household. Why had he not at least tried to bin it? And if he couldn’t get rid of it, he could have confessed...

Before the day was over, it needed to go. Because of Achan, the whole family was stoned to death and all their belongings were burned along with them. *Just one bit of leaven leaveneth the whole bread* and just one sin corrupteth a whole family.

‘Bless the Lord!’

Gloria was speaking into his ear. Loudly.

‘Praise the Lord he’s come round again. D’you see what I said, amen? The Lord will protect the righteous. Right about now we could have seen a dead boy at the bottom of the stairs but the Lord will deliver against the will of Satan. Amen?’

‘Amen, sister!’

‘Amen.’

‘This is the God of miracles.’

His mother was crying. The puffs of hair, black and grey, reaching out from under her beret were scattering in all directions, like the tribes of Israel. Like that guy on The Simpsons who kept getting hit by the rake. Samuel stifled a laugh.

‘He’s smiling, amen!’

‘Samuel, you ok?’

His mum’s cartoon head kept moving in and out of focus. They weren’t allowed to watch it anymore. *Satan controls the world through the TV and the media*, the American preacher said... on the radio.

He was in the hall, at the top of the landing. *He was alive.* The hall light was on but it was daylight; light flooded into the hallway from the windows in the bedrooms at either end. All the doors must be open.

Lord, why did you stop me from falling to my death?

The new digital clock on the wall said it was 6.15 am; it was still an hour behind.

If it weren't for the sisters praying downstairs, he would still be asleep. He wouldn't feel so tired, cold and empty. There'd been no food since Friday, Good Friday, when he'd started his fast. He closed his eyes again. *Give me a sign, Lord, and I promise to follow you this time. Wholeheartedly.*

'Baby, can you hear me?'

I'm not a baby.

'Yes, mum.'

'Praise the Lord! Come, open your eyes!'

He'd fainted before. He knew the drill by now: the pain in his head would become unbearable soon. Maybe he should ask for a paracetamol. And then what? Would he be able to skip service, Easter service of all days? *Nnh-nnh.*

He needed a sign it was all going to be ok. He tried to sit up, lean against the wall. His mother's hand cupped the back of his head and stroked him. Her fingers were going against the grain of his hair. It reminded him of rubbing the side of a balloon and making it stick.

The sisters had the look of the holy of holies upon them. They knew about it; how could they *not*? He should have burned it before, when he could. It wasn't too late – he could still run away.

'This is the day the Lord has made, Sister Robinson.'

'We will rejoice,' his mother joined in, squeezing his hand with her free one.

'Where's Manny?'

'Hmph. Don't worry yourself, Samuel. You able to stand, baby?'

'Yes, mum.'

'Oh, Lord. Thank you, God.'

She rubbed her face on the sleeve of her Arsenal shirt.

'Fear not for I the Lord am with thee, hallelujah. If you trust in the Lord, no harm shall befall you or your family. He shall bear you up in His hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone. The Lord is good unto those who serve Him, to those who obey –'

'Trust and obey, for there is no other way –'

Esther, the smaller of the two, had begun singing over Gloria. Samuel got onto his knees, the pink flannel falling onto the floor, the photo of his parents in a gold frame

looking back at him, with him as a baby in his mother's arms. A spider crawled towards his face and lingered there.

'Let us pray again.'

'Yes, Lord.'

'Dear Father God, most Holy, most Right –'

When Samuel closed his eyes, all the angels in orange stood before him, wings folded in love. He'd given in to the overwhelming feeling. And he'd fallen into their arms. And a spider had landed on his photograph, a sign, a small sign.

He knew he had been forgiven. That was if he kept his vow, if he finally gave in, gave his heart to the Lord; if – like he did with 2Pac and WuTang and the mix he'd recorded from Station FM – he filed everything that was not of the Lord away into the other life and he let the Old Man die daily so the New Man could live in Christ. He could become new again. Clean.

The hands about his neck now felt life giving, warm. He was being charged up like a ball of static; charged by the energy of Christ. Once he fulfilled his promise, he would be free. Just this one last barrier. He was healed now. The spider was there to remind him. He could bury all the guilt in his past, like the cassette. He was no longer a sinner.

The sin was not in him, no.

And, as clear as a fresh water glass, it came to him: if not him, the sin was in Manny. *Where was he now?*

The older brother should be wiser, stronger, more steadfast. But just like Cain, just like Esau, just like... he couldn't think of any other siblings in the bible. Manny was like those two, at least.

He'd been progressively angrier over the last couple of days, slamming things and snapping. And he'd written The 11's logo on his body, like a tattoo. The 11's were responsible for the shooting. Manny was glorifying them. His soul was in danger.

Just as he knew the smell of alcohol and drugs on the woman he prayed for in the market, he knew the smells disguised by deodorant sprays and mints, which he'd sensed for a while. It was his duty to save Manny. To save the family before they all died like Achan's family. He had been chosen. He had the spider come to him. He had to deal with the struggle, not his brother. He had been made Junior Pastor, in favour of his brother. Like Esau, Manny had forfeited his firstborn blessing. But he could still be saved.

'Yes, Lord, speak.'

It was only after a few minutes, when he felt his mouth dry, that he realised he'd been speaking in tongues again.

In the car, John P. Kee and Kirk Franklin and the Family delivered the Robinsons all the way to Lea Bridge roundabout and then Lower Clapton Road. Samuel made his body as small as possible between Manny and Esther and the boxes full of Lord Supper items and food for the evening break. It was uncomfortable between Manny's spread-wide legs and Esther's hand placed in between her and Samuel's leg, for modesty. Samuel had longer legs than Manny's, but his brother took up more space. Gloria sat at the front, never once turning round.

Samuel smiled to himself, at peace for the first time in weeks. It was the peace that passeth all understanding, filling his limbs, his breath, his heart. All Manny could offer was a black scowl back at him – his face even darker with his new attempt at a beard – but that was ok. Jesus could break the most toughest of sinners. Esther, on the other hand, returned his glance with a shoulder squeeze and continued humming, the melody light and free. The fish fritters filled all the remaining space in the car, the windows beginning to fog, the harmonies of the tape player singing twisting together at once *He's a balm in Gilead / the best friend I've ever had / He's a ba-a-alm..*

Samuel manoeuvred his body to move more freely, then he tore out a page from the exercise book in his lap and ripped it into strips. He would use them as ribbons to mark the different scriptures he'd picked for his sermon. His was the sermon of a heaven-bound saint, the inspired Word that could even change Manny's heart. In his head he prayed *Please Lord, if you can use a donkey to save souls, you can use me too.* Deep down, he knew he was no donkey; one day he might even be called to set up a church of his own. His dreams, and the thorn in his side – all of that could be put behind him now.

I'm a new creation, I'm a brand new man. All things are passed away, I'm bor–
'Samuel, shut up. You're being so annoying. *Cha!*'

'Don't talk to your brother like that!'

Samuel's chest throbbed from the shock of being drawn out of his world. *Shut up.* He hadn't realised he was singing. He also hadn't realised his brother's anger held such power over him. The power of Satan would not prevail.

'Don't talk to your brother like that, Manny. He's mummy's goodie goodi–'

'Chile! Don't you dare do your mother like that!'

'It's ok, I can deal with him!'

'If you train up a chil–'

'I know the scripture as well as you, Sister Gloria.'

Esther continued humming. Helen Baylor continued playing from the cassette deck. The traffic lights went from red to green and Samuel's mother stalled the car, restarted the engine to the sound of horns. The shouting that had briefly sparked stayed in the air.

'Their father usually drives us to church.'

His mum sounded so defensive, unrecognisable. Her words bobbed in the air alongside the smell of fish fritters and the air freshener tree bouncing left to right off the rearview mirror, where he caught his mother's eyes.

No one spoke for the rest of the journey. After what seemed like an hour, they reversed into a spot between a blue van and a Ford Cortina he recognised as Sister Miriam's.

Homerton hospital lay a few streets away from the hall they hired for church services. At times like these, when Samuel felt belittled by Manny and empowered by the Holy Spirit, he was tempted to run over through the wards and lay hands on the patients, to make the lame walk and set the captive free. It was the same Spirit that flowed through the apostles, that resurrected Lazarus, and that cured the lepers, grateful or otherwise. Why could he not do the same as Jesus and the apostles did? Why did it take so long to believe he had been healed from the sin that had given him the dreams and the magazine? When he finally had a church of his own to lead, in a building that he would buy, it would burst at the seams from all the thousands of people who had been healed, and those who had been delivered from the demon of alcohol and badness.

Manny grabbed him by the wrist.

'Samuel, get out the car.'

His mother slammed the door.

'What's going on with you, Manny? Leave your brother alone. Can't you see he's going over his sermon?'

In almost the same breath that she took to scold Manny, she addressed him.

'Samuel, get out the car.'

He needed to push away the sudden hatred. His own mother, who one minute was *babying* him and crying over him was the same one that dragged him out of bed by the wrists, shouted him out of the car, allowed his brother to bully him. What was going on inside her head, making her swap her heart over so often? His dad was more straightforward – but still difficult to understand.

After slamming the door behind him, he earned a brief *clap* which made his ears ring all the way to the church door. Maybe she hadn't meant it to be so hard, but her wedding ring grazed his face.

No, he needed to enter with a pure heart. He didn't hate. He wouldn't cry.

The hall they hired was an old Working Men's club, the stale smell of old English drunks still rising up from the carpets every time they entered. The ghost of pipes and leather armchairs and white bearded men holding pints filled the hall. Sister Miriam, who had previously been a nursery teacher made the banner, which they hung every week: Life Everlasting Apostolic Church, International.

The small red doors were wide open and he could hear Neil on the bass practicing a *thunk thunk twank*. They were early for a change. Most of the other brethren wouldn't arrive until after eleven, even though the service officially began at ten. As it was a special day, one of the Mothers was bound to start a chorus as soon as the clock struck the hour, and just a handful of people would sing, probably without any music.

Once inside, carrying the foot washing bowl and the thick white towels in one hand – and his bible and hymnal in the other – he scanned the hall from the foyer, then headed off to the side, towards the kitchen. He was keeping a special eye out for Angelica, who he'd judged in his heart. He needed to make it right with her before service began, so he could partake in the Lord's Supper.

She was nowhere to be seen and he was still unsettled. He needed to make something right, to feel worthy of taking Lord's Supper; he couldn't sit out of it on Easter, and definitely not before doing his sermon.

The idea crystallised right there in the hall. The Crimestoppers number, he knew it by heart. Maybe it wasn't Angelica he needed to make it right with; maybe it was his own conscience. Now he was clean and pure, now that God was continuing to bless him and had forgiven him – and maybe God had destroyed the magazine by a miracle (why hadn't he thought of that before?) – he needed to rescue his brother, his family.

'Dear Lord, I promise to obey you,' he whispered, retracing his steps outside, into the unwarm air. He walked beyond the car park, beyond the cluster of bereted brethren, beyond the side road, facing the hospital and then round the corner. The wind pushed him back but he walked on towards the street; he should have put his jacket back on, but it was too late for that now.

It was a phonecard box. He didn't have a card on him, he realised, but then he remembered it was a freephone number. The Crimestoppers hotline was listed – and

someone had scrawled INFORMERS FI BUN! over it – but he knew it anyway. He knew exactly what he was going to say, nothing more, nothing less.

He would tell them Manny knew who The 11's were – the E11 posse – and he knew about that girl getting shot in the crossfire outside McDonald's. It wasn't a lie – most people Manny's age knew people who knew someone in the 11's. You had to stab someone to get in, apparently.

If the police took Manny in for questioning, maybe that would teach him a lesson. Maybe that would bring him back to God. But he wouldn't gloat about it: *Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth...*

He was doing this for Manny's own good. Manny would thank him one day. He wasn't doing this out of anger or jealousy or because he was covering his own sin. No; it was his duty.

When he put the phone down again, he tried not to swear. It hadn't come out the way he expected. Maybe he'd said too much. But it was in God's hands now.

The beginning of the service was kind of dry, but nothing out of the ordinary; the main Easter activities would begin after the prayer service. Deacon Edwards eventually took control of the morning worship in Samuel's father's absence, but even he continued as Mother Gillian had done, with slow, dragging choruses that made Samuel's mouth yawn wide as he sang. But if he focused on the Lord and didn't let his mind wander, things would continue to improve.

It didn't help that he'd been woken up early to pray with Esther and Gloria. It didn't help that he'd passed out earlier; that had forced him to break his fast before he'd hoped to. But the taste of hard dough bread and scrambled eggs, after two days of juice and water, was a satisfying one. It dulled his head, which still throbbed.

'What can make me whole again? Nothing but the blood –'

As he sang, he continued to twist his neck to look back, waiting for Angelica. If she'd just been there on time, he wouldn't have dialled the stupid crime hotline. *What was he thinking!* It would be ok, they probably wouldn't take him seriously, anyway.

Don't worry, all the information you give us is confidential.

'Oh, precious is that flow! –'

She'd had a kind voice, the telephone copper. Kind of Scottish, maybe? From somewhere up North. What would *she* know about a bunch of jokers, messing with

people bigger than them, people who might have guns? And what did *Samuel* really know?

More people began to filter in late, well into the middle of the worship service. The musicians were soon allowed to take up their seats near the front stage and once Brother Duncan hit the drums, the prospect of an entire day at church became less discouraging. The keyboards, bass guitar and the tambourines filled what was once an ungodly revellers' room and made a *sweet sweet savour in this pla-ace-* .

There was still no sign of Angelica, just the Edwards family, plus the Robinsons of course, four generations of MacKenzies, nearly all the Praying Mothers and Deacons, White Eric, Susan, Jeremiah... and a few more entering in bundles of twos or more; just like Noah's Ark, two by two and seven by seven, they were filling the gospel ship.

In the foyer, a group of mothers were chatting. And it was there he spotted her, the woman he prayed for at the market. A miracle he'd helped bring about. Another miracle! His mother nudged him so he turned around quickly.

After the opening prayer, Deacon Edwards came back to the microphone. Samuel looked to the side of him, away from his face, remembering the mix of emotions he'd felt a couple of days before. But that was back then, before his change. He was no longer having flashbacks of *Sweat!*

'Praise the Lord, Brethren. I think it's high time everyone at the back took their seats and we come together, can I get an amen? Ok, in a few minutes, God permitting, I'll be calling to the front our visitors Prophetess Gloria and Sister Esther MacDonalds. They're visiting us from the States, from New York, is that right sister?'

'Amen! We from St Vincent via New York.'

'From St Vincent. Can I get a Praise the Lord?'

'Praise the Lord,' the church echoed.

'Any Vincentians in the house can I get an Amen?'

Elder Laws gave the loudest whoop.

'Hallelujah praise God! We serve a God that is no respecter of countries and of borders. The same God that can touch the hearts of Vincentians is the same God that can reach the souls of Jamaicans?'

'Praise God!'

'And Bajans?'

'Praise God!'

'And St Lucians?'

'Praise God!'

A few tambourines began to jangle.

'And all the islands of the Caribbean. And Africa. And India, even in India, amen?'

'Amen!'

'And right here in this United Kingdom, Praise God?'

'Praise God!'

'Because we're all a part of God's kingdom. Praise God?'

'Praise God!'

'And we're united in this Kingdom. What a mighty God we serve, amen?'

'Amen!'

'Amen. And right now, we're about to get a new pouring out of the Holy Spirit. I'm going to give us all a chance to gather, then I'm going to ask Mother G to give us another word of prayer and then I want to call up Prophetess Gloria so we can hear what the Lord has to say for us this morning. This is the morning He ro-ose *shabbamalahkashinda*. I said He rose, hallelujah, from the dead.'

Close to a hundred people had already filled the stuffy room. A handful of visitors, easy to point out even to the untrained eye, were scattered among the crowd. The visiting women wore make up and jewellery; the visiting men weren't wearing ties.

Lydia was her name, she was among them; he had brought her to the church. Samuel felt pride that his family had been chosen to host the two women, the two women who had a message from God and that he had been used as a vessel. Underneath that pride, he buried all of his concerns about the sin the prophets had warned about earlier that morning; he forgot about the magazine; he forgot about the phone call, and how the phone box smelt of tobacco and piss.

As the service progressed, Samuel knew his sermon was going to be prophetic. There would be an outpouring of the Spirit. Maybe people would get saved as a result.

'Grant me humbleness, Lord.'

At the same time, the realisation dropped: the thoughts he'd been having, and the dreams too, they were all a way of keeping him free from the sin of pride.

The phone call came back to him; it was fine. He'd mentioned his brother's name but nothing too incriminating. He just said they needed to speak to him about the 11s. He would have a humble chat with Manny later, and all would be forgotten.

He'd tuned out, and Gloria was already speaking, her New York Vincentian accent filling the hall like it was made for her voice:

'I've come with a word from the Lord,'

'Praise the Lord!'

'It's a living God we serve, amen?'

‘Amen!’

‘The Spirit’s telling me you ain’t ready to hear. Church are you ready?’

‘Amen’

‘I said Children of God, hvu-mashalamai! Are you ready?’

‘Speak, Lord!’

Samuel gulped. *Was* he ready? His head was full of Manny and the sermon he had to deliver. But his heart was full of the promise of God. He’d seen the spider; he’d brought Lydia. His sermon was going to be a fire-come-down word from the Lord.

‘The Word of the Lord ain’t a lie. His ways are not our ways; His thoughts are not our thoughts. Amen?’

‘Amen!’

Samuel shouted loudly with the congregation.

‘And sometimes as a man or as a woman, we been trying to get in the way of what the Spirit is telling us. Sister Esther?’

‘Yes, Sister!’

‘I was talking with Sister Esther just this morning. How with men’s eyes, we quickly git dazzled by what we see, by the things of the earth. But when we see with spiritual eyes, hallelujah wakanda!’

She was speaking faster, breathless even, her pitch high and stern. He waited for her to catch his eye as she scanned the room, but she never did.

‘Speak, Lord!’

‘When we see in the Spirit, it tells us another story. When we walk in the Spirit, the world moves in a different way. I’d like to read from the book of Jonah, chapter 2. Sister Esther come stand with me!’

The temperature was getting colder.

‘You see, even sometimes a prophet has to repent and do what the Lord says to do. Can I get a witness?’

‘Amen!’

‘Are there any prophets here in this room?’

A few people raised their hands.

‘Please come stand here at the front; this is sanctified ground and it is time for you to receive a fresh anointing. Sister, please bless the anointing oil.’

The anointing was strong. All the prophets in the room filled the air with their tongues. He could make out a few: Sister Ruth’s, low and hollering *mooballah modhaka ooomhallamah*; Brother Derrick’s *keekudda halidoma kalekamay*, matching the jerks of

his elbows. Many more chorused, a choir of voices speaking the heavenly tongue. The Spirit was so thick in the air you could taste it, feel it.

Sweat dropped from Samuel's head, down from his nose. He felt himself jump, knocking the chair in front. A praying mother grabbed his arm to stop him from falling. He fell anyway, into her arms, stomping his foot, the power charging through every piece of his body. Like a toy at a funfair being gripped by a claw, he was being moved by the claws of God.

'Praise the Lord, the Spirit is moving.'

The whole church was erupting. The musicians played chord after chord, Brother Duncan on the drums, his sticks flailing, the music behind him faster, louder, the tambourines building in Samuel's spirit.

And then, above the noise of everyone else's tongues, Deacon Brown's tongues became heavier, louder, and everyone else began to quiet; God was about to speak.

'Momo shangala waka shimala. Waka millimamomo.'

Sister Esther grabbed the microphone and began to interpret. Samuel's chest tightened, created a giddiness that made him want to vomit.

'I, the Lord, have heard you cries.'

'Speak, Lord!'

Exactly. Another direct message to him.

'I have heard and I have seen. There is no hiding from Me.'

'Hallelujah, praise God.'

Hiding. Samuel's heart stopped. *The magazine.* Deacon Brown marched around the room as he spoke, his eyes no longer his eyes, his eyes glazed over, overtaken by the power of God. His eyes seeing right through into everyone's soul.

'Mokasi momo dadabishalla mo moshabba shabba moka simoom.'

'Some of you are hiding. But I have been watching. I see into your hearts.'

Samuel sat down in his chair, unsteady. *And now he could read his thoughts.*

'Mama madda dimashalawaka hallelujah!'

'And as wheat separated from the chaff you will be judged.'

'Moko simoom booya'

'Hallelujah!'

'You will be judged.'

'Shamaka waka dimabimo'

'Speak, Lord!'

'Now is the time to choose. Choose ye this day who you will serve –'

'Dimabima shaballa –'

‘Yes, Lord’

‘Those who serve Me will not perish but will have everlasting life. And those who repent not will be cast out.’

‘Speak, Lord!’

‘Oooh mala mala Bala shabaya’

‘Yes, Lord!’

Samuel leaned against his seat, his shirt sticking to his back. His eyes boiled tears from hell. *Surely, this prophecy wasn’t meant for him, after all?* He’d already repented. But his heart had beaten out of his chest. It was on the floor.

‘*Shamomo dada*’

‘I have spoken –’

‘*Dada shamaka gomoballaballa*’

‘I have given you chances. Repent now!’

‘*Gomoballa balla*’

‘I say unto you repent!’

‘*Shoomollo mono*’

‘The time is at hand!’

‘Yes Lord!’

‘*Mokasi momo*’

‘I have spoken.’

‘*Balla balla mallabah mama....*’

It was over. The prophecy wasn’t about him. It couldn’t be about him.

Deacon Brown began to murmur, collapsing into a chair, fist landing on his head.

Prophetess Gloria grabbed the mic.

‘Church, it is time. We have held our tongue and stayed silent. Look how God destroyed Babylon, destroyed Jezebel. Stay far from the evil among you.’

Samuel thought of how Manny begged their dad to take them back to Alton Towers, to experience Nemesis. How the last time he’d been on a rollercoaster, he’d pretended to enjoy himself. He’d swallowed back his own vomit so he didn’t look like a wimp. The feeling he had now wasn’t far removed.

‘Robinsons! God is talking to you. There is sin in your household and it must be cleansed. It must be cleansed for this church to prosper.’

If it wasn’t clear before, it was now. He hadn’t been forgiven. He hadn’t done enough. The sign of the spider wasn’t an angel, it was an omen. Everything that mattered to him was broken. The whole church would now see how wretched he was, how he’d stained the whole church. And now it was time to face his reckoning. For the second

time that day, his body disobeyed him, crumpling onto the floor, exposing his weakness and his shame. This time, he would never get up again.

TWO
(The Girl)

'....the neatest way to explain how she came to see the other side of the sea'

Kingston Town, Jamaica

March, 1964

Sweeping done from back to front, and out the verandah too. The sun so hot her head boil off the minute she stepped out. Too hot. Her foot bottom hit the soil and sizzle like she frying oil in a pan. She step back in. It hot like sin today.

In that sweet... / By and by... / We shall meet / On that beautiful shore...

Cleaning done too. Soap and brush. She shined her granny shoe twice till her wrist nearly drop off. She empty out the water and watch the black pool roll down into the street. She scrub and scrub the sheet and make the scruppah-scruppah sound with her palm. She hung it out on the line and try not to wipe off her head with it. She black already so a lickle more sun not gwine dead her. Sweat ran her eyes so she never tarry.

We shall sing on that beautiful shore / The melodious songs of the blessed...

The girls in her school never walk out-uh-door in the sun, they were too stoosh, too frighten fi tun black black like she. But how could *she* forget what it like? Just a few years ago, she was all day in it, selling grater cake with her mother, down the hill with the basket. The membering of it, though, was bitty-bitty. Like a photograph, the valley, like a photograph, her mumma singing but no noise coming out her voicebox.

And our spirits shall sorrow no more...

Every day she was grateful the Lord protek her and bless her and save her from death, unlike Lou Ann and Zacharias and Fredrick and how many other children the fever truck down that year in Pleasance? Nobody tell her. It like the Lord did send a plague to lick off every last one of them but her.

The sighing came into her chest and she forget the song she was singing. She best did forget about that place where she born too. Soon as she came like Lazarus and get better, they give her away to Nanny to raise. This was her home.

Praise the Lord!

She must be grateful for the chance to become a respectful ooman here in Kingston. To get herself some learning, and come all speakey-spokey like she not just a fenke-fenke country gyal wid nutting in her head nor her belly.

She should be grateful for Nanny and she was yes she was.

YES I AM!

But why it was she want to scream till her throat tear up? Eenh? Eeenh??

She kissed her teeth then ripped off a piece of the petticoat she had to wipe off the clock. Nanny soon reach back in the house. It must sparkling clean today. The only

way to repay the debt she owed was to get her education and grow into a God-fearing ooman. But she still wondered. Even if it not good to wonder.

What if she never left Pleasance for Kingston? Somewhere, back over there, a girl like her but not quite so bad-lucky, with a mother that loved her and sang to her at night, and maybe she not member all the girls in Pleasance but one of them, surely, one of them would have...

Everyting done.

Nanny said devil make work... The only other thing she must do was sit and read the Word, but someting in her was restless. Pain in her titty as well, and in her belly and everywhere was paining her up.

You could do it, yuh nuh!

The voice come and go like that. It shock her. Maybe she say it out loud herself or maybe it was somebody else, outside of her, but the voice was true. She *could*, she could bun the whole place down with a matchstick, like the voice telling her. The whole house up in flames. *Badoof!*

But what kind of evil thinking, eenh? She needed to tup herself thinking. She never deserve the life she had.

That saved a wretch like me...

She open up the door and sat out in the hot hot sun. Hell would be hotter than this if she didn't change the bad thoughts in her soul.

It was quiet, too quiet. The house across the road, painted white like it was ready for a baptism. The shop on the corner with the China people. The blue house next door with the chickens out the back. Not one sound from there, neither. But in the distance, a motor car coming.

She recited the Lord's prayer ourfatherwhoartinheavenhallowedbethyname until the words blur and the sweat blur off her face and the sun was making her blacker. *Hell fire even hotter than this.*

She said it over and close and open her eyes. Miss Patterson passed on the other side. Two margah pickney with her. Nobody waved to her on this street. She was just a choopid gyal and giveusthisdayourdailly-

She saw Nanny green dress coming up the road, only Nanny walk like that, her big parasol in hand. Maybe it was the voice in her head or foolishness in her heart or maybe not just one reason but she made haste and hide. She slammed the door fast and climb up above the door and hang breathless just in time for it to open up again.

Spider?

She slowed her breath, right down till it was a tiny breeze of air between her lips.

Spider, where are you hiding this time?

More than anything, she never want to be found here, hanging, above the door, under the roof, and her leg-back ached trying to hold herself up. Like she a spider fi true she was dangling from the ceiling *one... two...*

Spi-der! Don't make me draw my tongue today– *two... three*

The hem of her old blue dress bunch up around her waist. She could see her granny almost right below her, and now she had to hold in the laugh like small bubbles in her belly. What she doing up here, eenh? *Three... four*

Come out from wherever you hide yourself girl, you are far too big to play these games. How are you going to marry?

Nanny sew the blue dress she was wearing together *with her own arthritis* she said and it not just one arthritis she had but she had *one for every single pickney she raise.*

You're old enough to bear a child and you still act like you– Hear my trial! This girl is going to get one big *lick* so help me Lord, if she don't come out.. *four... five... six*

And Spider could finish the rest of this sermon, she knew it by heart. She could hear the neighbours talking after her in the same way. *Girl with sticks for legs with heart of rockstone and ears of blessed Lawd why you cyaan listen, eenh? She not righted at all!*

Nanny said she must talk properly, said naigger gal like her need to show she not no *bubu*, but she herself talk bad bad sometimes. And some of the neighbours talked bad same way. And yet *Spider* have to deal with this do as I say not do as I do –

I said I am warning you, Spider!

Storm was coming. And with it, another hour on the floor in the front room, the deliverance room. And she doing this fi what? What kind of bad spirit mix up inside her? She wish all of them could just dead. Nanny and all her church friends.

And sometimes she wished she could dead too. She slipping.

Woy, woy, woy!

She jump down to the ground and Nanny must did jump even further out the way. Two figurines clapped each other smash. The record player lid drop. Every last one of the bible in the room flung open. The ground spun like a record. And Spider land in the front room on the same spot she sleep in when they have a visitor.

Nanny held onto her titty, look like she was going to buckle over. *You've deaded her, Spider.* This time, she really and truly held her breath. What if she make her have a

heart-a-claps? (Maybe she could go back, and maybe she would see her other fambly again...? No, she did best not think these things!)

Nanny straightened up and looked her in the eyes. (She was alive, was not going to die. *Why, was she hoping...?*)

Why you want to frighten me so?

I don't know, Miss.

What possessed you to climb up the walls – the clean, clean walls – with your dirty foot bottom, just so you could scare me, eenh?

A shrug was all she could shrug.

Answer me, you nasty girl! And take your hand off your kimbo!

Sorry, miss.

You mean you had your legs open with your foot up against the wall, and your dress hitch up so? What if a man would have come through the doors, eenh?

She didn't know. Or maybe she knew this would not happen–

Showing your stinking panties too. Take off your dress!

Miss?

I said tek off your dress!

And girl did best obey, naked as the day the midday sun, Spider was going to get a well-deserved...

She knew not to plead. Just to wait and hold her tongue and member how it felt to hang off the ceiling out of sight and free, back over in Pleasance where she fell from. So help her God, she would never forget where she fell from, where her navel tring was buried, even if she never returned there till the day she old.

Sometime things so tangled up she didn't even know the order of things. Like, when they called her Spider (before/after?); if she was hiding up on high to escape Nanny, or for play she was playing, or because she was running from the duppy; if this was before or after the big night of her deliverance. Sometimes she remembered things in reverse, the same way you have to walk into a house backwards at night so as not to invite them in.

She ran through the simple things. Like, how pickney was meant to be seen but not seen fi true. How she knew the dasheen and yam must prepare tomorrow; she knew how guinep would whet the lip of all who come to sit out on her granny verandah and dash the skin and spit the stone out on the half fix-up road. She knew how one side of the road was new and nice and the other was nothing more than a dirt path.

She knew it was best she stay simple, not to ack too smart in front of Nanny, even as she growing out of everything: the dresses Nanny sew for her; the shoes she

bought; this house she didn't leave much – except for school and church and market –; and even the school and church and market, even though these things were bigger than she, she could see the edges and she wanted to look around them. The edges saying *come, simple gyal*.

Sometimes she found herself humming after them.

And it so happened, in the middle of it all, when she really and truly learning to not be seen nor heard, she found herself in the middle of Nanny conversation with big people. And she hear how Nanny tell all and sundry how Spider girl was rescue from country, and how her red-eye auntie must have put an obeah on her and the others to make them all sick because she never have nuh pickney of her own.

She heard the rest of it time and time again. How the Lord saved her life. And how, now she was here, she need to learn and fix herself up.

Nanny church friends talking hard after her when they think she not hearing. When she humming like she far away and wiping and cleaning and mending clothes the way Nanny teach her. But she not far away at all; she right there.

Until one time they said her mommy was underwater. She must have stopped humming then because the voices come lower till she couldn't hear them again.

The night after her deliverance was a Thursday. She hadn't come out of the house for three days. For three days and three nights – just like in the bible days – she hadn't left out the house.

So she cook and cleaned. And she sang and whistled. *A whistling woman and a crowing hen...* and whistling wasn't usually allowed in Nanny house, but when she was preparing the dinner and bringing it out to the dining table, Nanny made her do it to make sure she never thief a scrap of food and nyam it off while she serving them. A lickle voice tell her *but that's what them say buckra make the slaves do back when*, but she'd stopped paying mind to the voices. She was fasting the demons away.

After everybody eat and some of them leave, Nanny out in the rocking chair with two of the woman from church. She didn't recognise them, they sounded like they from country, they sounded rum-loose, like her uncle used to sound, except more speakey-spokey. She crouch and listen to them from the window:

This one ah England, the other one ah Canada

Because just you watch and see how this country is giving itself over to the devil

All these roadblocks and machetes–

And wotlessness.

And so many gone America too

Eenh hee! Just like Panama before that

That's right, and Cuba before that.

Oh, you cousin Susie! You remember her?

But, of course! Just last month she send me a letter–

Anywhere far from this place, not a shilling I tell you, not a shilling...

Maybe it was the drink they drinking why they sounded like two piece of song over the top of each other. Nanny never touch a drop of wine since her husband go. *Wine and strong drink is a mocker of persons, and no chile of God should go the way of the demons inside the bottle.*

Precious, Lord!

Hashamala-shandala!

Speak, Lord!

Spider belly-bottom was like a broken cup with all the sharp bits sticking up and piercing her but it was for her good. De-li-ver-ants... Maybe she was like a bottle, and so she needed to be emptied. It was good, the fasting, it was good, the praying, it was good, the laying of hands.

To stop thinking about her belly, to stop thinking about the hardness of the floor, to stop thinking about her mother, to stop thinking about Mandeville and Pleasance and all the other places between, to stop thinking about the other children in the school, to stop thinking about the Americans who abducted the bad children at night and do experiments with them, so many things she had to stop, stop... she listened out for the sound of the choir, cheep-cheeping in the night.

If she tried to sleep right now, all the other things would disappear. But so many people were standing in front of her eyelids. Joshua and the Israelites walking round and round the city and all the hundreds of people living in the wall who would fall and dead when it came crashing down. How could that be right?

Last week, she had to share the floor with cousin from one part. The other day it was an auntie from another part and sometimes she didn't know if the cousin was real. If she was real. If Nanny was real or if everything was a dream. Maybe if she spoke everything out loud....

Who that you talking to, chile?

De-li-ve... Tomorrow she could eat again. If she stop feeding the demons inside she wouldn't have all these questions, all these questions she had ever since she come.

Tomorrow she would eat cornmeal porridge for breakfast. Then she would knock for her new friend Constance. They would walk to school hand in hand, just watch! Out of so many children in the Catholic school her grandmother must have beg to

let her into, only one girl ever talked to her. And the lessons were hard. And they were making her speak right, not like the countrywomen outside.

She bend her ears to the conversation.

And nobody know what kind of business yellow-man next door is up to?

You can't keep your voice down—?

Nobody a confide in nobody these days

And nobody confide in a loose tongue, m'dear.

What long-mouth friends Nanny have! They must from country fi true! That why *she* come to the big town, for Nanny to take the wildness out of her, one prayer at a time. But she still wild same way. Because she had the spirit of her mother in her blood. It was the only spirit she never wanted to lose entire.

That little girl of yours, Marguerite.

She must have been humming again. Must not hum the mento songs.

Spider!

Something inside her and outside of her too not settled.

Yes, Miss!

I know you can hear us. Come out from under the window.

Yes, Miss!

And go fetch Sister Green some water.

Yes, Miss.

This road had ears. Cup of water in hand. She must not look up. The road built from nice-up nice-up hair and people who did think Kingston was going turn around, people who not quite so hitey tightey as Constance family but mostly light or fair. How they must all look down on her. They must have known she the kind of person to go out climbing into other people back garden in June. Even though Nanny prayed over her good good. Even though she now in that school with nail inspections at the morning line and the measuring stick against the thigh, same measuring stick not too afraid to lick if skirt too short or child too late or tongue too sharp. Even though they did teach her to speak right. Even though the hoity toity girls made sure she comb out her picky head every night so she never get tease for that. And even though Constance was her only friend, somehow Spider was too wild.

Spider, you too wild.

She spill some of the water.

Sorry, Miss.

Child, I don't know what I'm going to do with you—

Sorry.

Spider made sure not to look up. One of the countrywoman raise up her voice.

But, wait! Sorry, what?

Me sorry, Miss.

Girl me nuh like the way you answer after you Nanny, suh. That girl too fresh, you hear? You spwoil up the girl. Spare the rod and spwoil the child.

I said sorry, miss.

From the way the woman speak it sound bad. Nanny never treat her too tough, even though she strict enough.

The countrywoman got bigger from out the top of her eye. And when she raise the slipper, she see Nanny sitting still on her chair, her green flower dress and her fair skin, her hair grown grey with streaks of white. She see fear for the first time.

This gwine hurt me more than yuh, countrywoman say.

She catch sight of Nanny frown into a no. But it too late. Cos the anger boiling boiling like kettle whistle fi tell you tek it off the fire.

And Spider feel the whistle rise up to a fist–

Riddle me this...

*Girl with a grip around big ooman wrist
in a house she was fortunate to live in
who ever hear a girl resist a beating like this?
What a brazen and ungrateful girl this!*

Easter Sunday, March 1964

and the air was thick with cooking oil fog and plantain smell, green but nearly ripe, and all-spice pepper and bun to go with cheese and water left overnight to soak the peas. She threw the water into the street to clean their doorway. The three-legged dog must have limped out of the way, but he was back again, right on the corner.

It was only a little while since the sun thought to pop its head over the galvanise wall cross the road to say dawg, and she was already up. A hymn kept repeating in her head, but the words only came in little bursts, like water from the tap. Her prayers had been answered again. The spirit of rebellion had been quenched. All that humming and talking to shadows and not speaking properly. It took three days and a whole heap of fasting and praying to shake out the bad thoughts in her head. But they were gone.

Next door, Mr Vik was playing piano music till it squeezed out all the air. Jazz keys went up and down the piano. *Music was a Trojan horse, it made your body war inside.* Somewhere, somebody said that to her. Maybe it was the pinder cake woman. Maybe it was somebody who had not yet found the Lord, or someone who never baptised properly. She kissed her teeth, then hoped Nanny hadn't heard.

She washed her face with the pot water. Next door, helpers' hands must already be stinging with lime squeeze, jooking the chicken into something dinner-shaped. She couldn't see through all them walls, but she knew the plates would be coming out from everywhere, the beg and steal ones. And those dug up from cupboards only used on days like these.

She imagined by breakfast time, green banana and callaloo and ackee and saltfish would find a space between lips – uncles and aunties first and then the children. There might be a hymn or two sung, some boy or girl preparing for the services to come. But her and Nanny following a different path. They going *real* church. Not Catholic, not Methodist, not Revival or Adventist, not New Testament or the pretty little Baptist church where proper girl go. No. Nanny say only Jesus Name would save her. Nanny husband left her because of it, years ago. Nanny was beholden to nobody but the Lord. Just like couldn't take telling from nobody but Nanny. She tried not to smile thinking of the shock that ooman have when she tried to raise her hand after her.

She was going to ask to join the choir this week, after she re-baptised. And once she finished learning her trade, even though she hated to sew, maybe then she could think about becoming a woman.

She entered back in the house, the air cold around her still-wet face.

Pearl, you know what day it is today?

Yes, Nanny! Is Easter Sunday.

It is Easter Sunday, yes. You know why this is the most beautiful day that exists?

Because death cannot resist the pureness of life.

They're teaching you so well at the school, eeh? Speaking poetical with me!

Behind her back she could feel Nanny smile. She would ask her, yes she would ask her if she could join. If she could get permission to rehearse. She would do it no–

Pearl, sit still and close your mouth before the flies come in. We don't have long.

Since she raise up her hand to the ooman, Nanny start calling her Pearl: *Pearl, come let me plait your hair. Pearl, come let me teach you how to act like a lady. Pearl, why you so hard-headed?*

Pearl never questioned the change to her name. For one, if she'd learned anything lately, she knew how not to answer back to your elders.

You know why I call you Pearl?

Nanny reading her mind. She couldn't resist a smart answer; they were both in a good spirit.

I thought it was because you so old you forget my name.

Oh my Lord, you're so *facety*, you know that?

Easter service would be good. Even though Nanny made sure she kept her eyes holy, she wouldn't mind if the boy Nehemiah came to ask after her. One day they could settle. And she could become a decent ooman, after all.

I may lose my hearing and my eyes but till I die I'm never going to lose my mind.

When Nanny laughed, lines crossed the back of her cheeks.

So why you start calling me Pearl?

Why *did* you start..? Why have you never asked me why they called you *Spider*?

Why do old people always answer question with a question and then I get lick for not giving a straight answer?

Pearl, you're too much. If you hold your tongue, I'll tell you a story.

Pearl mama. As a child, she have the gift of foresight. *And maybe you have it too, Pearl. Maybe you have it too.* Her mama was a young pickney having pickney but nobody saying a jam ting about it. And everybody in sight blaming *her* for what happen because that is the sin of Eve, to offer up the fruit and bear the pain. *And your pain is coming, Pearl.* But Jesus is a great redeemer. Jesus was the bridegroom and her mother was saved before she passed. And Pearl was a gift from the Lord. But is sometime the past have a way of foretelling the future. And sometime spirits does warn people about the past. And sometimes I look up into the hills from whence cometh my help–

My help cometh from the Lor–

I'm so glad you're remembering to learn your bible verse.

Spider could hear Nanny speaking and speaking, but all she could see was the clouds spread out like fingers cross the sky and she smiled and sung another song so loud she did hope it would reach Up There and how Mr Glenrose tell her off and kept her back while all the others passed the breeze block wall and poked their tongues and ran back home, a flash of beige and blue. Then, suddenly, the two of them alone.

Nanny didn't need to tell her she was growing too quick because she knew. It only recently did men begin to look at her like *that* and she never wanted to change even though she knew it was coming. Even though her teacher tried to–

And Pearl, where you gone?

I'm *here*, Nanny!

You not listening. You in your head so much you not listening when it time to listen. When it time to hear the truth, you don't listen.

Yes, Nanny.

Nanny laugh sound more like a cough. They held hands across the table.

Yes Nanny, I'm listening.

Nnh-nnh. You hear but you never listen. And Lord knows you're black as sin, even though I tell your mamma to aim high, because I knew her as a child, you know? I knew her as a child. She was a bright, bright girl. Just like you a bright girl. But you're turning woman on me and something needs to happen soon. I been praying for an answer and I have a feeling it coming so–

He'd spoken as she ran. *Why do you sing them songs he say If you don't know what it is they mean? You best repent and stop trying to pass for innocent!*

And she could also hear the night before, the band of drums from a distance, how its sound make her member how the Dead Yard setup stay.

All these Pocamanians spreading their Africa ways into black souls and women, prancing out of control into the path of the drums. That is not the way to be civilised.

That's what Nanny would say. Nanny would never find herself in temple or balmyard or meeting house or tambourine corner nor walking in the council of the ungodly nor sitting in the seat of the scornful– and yet she would deliver her, speaking in tongues and anointing her head with oil and dragging her to the church and–

Nanny stopped, released her hand and wiped her mouth.

You're head is far, far away. Go! Go and bathe! Go and dress! Go and wake Choopsie and Seh Seh! And check on baby Dundus, are you hearing me?

Her mama wasn't dead. Why would she lie about it? Why were the bad spirits coming back to her?

Make sure you scrub yourself good she say to Seh-Seh, as she stifled the last ouch into a wince. She tapped the comb on her skull.

She would not return to school again. But she did need to make a plan. How long could she hide from her teacher, or any other man that make her feel a way?

Pearl ran up ahead towards the church, umbrella held up to guard against the sun, while cousins May and Seh-Seh raced against each other from post to post.

Mind oonuh fall and get those dresses dirty!

Nanny sounded half-hearted, so Pearl ran some more, the freedom of outside. If she had a wings, she could run to the other end of the world and fly off into the stars.

And then the breeze blew the song Nanny singing to Spider ears and it the same song she had stuck in her throat all morning, humming slow:

Some bright morning/ When my work is over/ I'll fly away...

Baby Dundus was bouncing behind, so she stopped and scoop him up in the one free arm she have and look back at Nanny.

Spider almost couldn't match the vision of the old woman before her with Nanny, the one person who was like a mother to her. She pushed up her lip. And then Auntie Carol appeared from round the corner almost bumping into Seh-Seh as she raced toward the next street.

Auntie Carol!

Her two cheeks were busy with dots. She was margah, almost as much as Spi-
I need a word with granny. But *you* stay here.

Auntie Carol fix a stare that make her feel she looking inside her. Everything in the busy street all stop. The man who sell cooler box ice at the corner seem as if to cock his head their way. The preacher man in tailored suit waiting to cross the road, bible in hand, looked over. The old man with the stoop and cane who pause to take a breath as well.

Granny C- ?

Yes, I know what you're going to tell me, Sissy.

I-

And you're still my Sissy, even if you come big and *Carol-ing* to me now. And look how you've frightened the poor girl, running like that!

She fixed her eyes down at the stone in the ground, at the shine of her shoe, how it tight around her toes, how her toes fought. Words floated–

So your husband say it

Yes Marcus read it this morning but it had been inside the drawer a while now –

When did –?

Well there's enough money –

Her father? –

So he say –

We cannot leave it too la –

Auntie Carol started lisping again. And in the middle, yes in the middle of that blessed street, Auntie raise her stretchy-stretchy arms skywards so the sleeves retracted like wings.

Praise be to the Lord for hish provishions.

Spider felt her Auntie get tall when she spoke like this and her voice began to tower higher than preacher man till it get like Babel and she speaking in tongues.

Already she saw the sweat how it made marks upon her orange dress, right at the pits and trickling down to her breasts, and the grapefruit in the cart rolled over.

But before Auntie could go on more, Nanny hushed her.

Spider! Look up from the ground, eenh? Your father has sent for you. I told you it would happen!

Nanny shook her head shake her head shake–

Pearl, your father in England wrote a letter.

A change is gonna come

And it won't be long

And this girl will surely prosper

If she holds on to her song.

Because Spider father was over in London somewhere where *everyone* have a house with stairs and because he finally sent for her to come and live with them and because it him and his woman that he marry over there, so Spider must prepare and pack her best clothes to leave, for in a week she would be gone.

Spider took a long time before the sounds that reach her ear make any sense at all and Auntie Carol eyes were hidden behind that still-flapping hat, but Spider wanted to look and see if this could really all be true.

All she could do is push away the question with her eyelash: *Father? Him have a wife? England life? Leave soon?* Then the question fall down her cheek, one at a time.

She never even wanted to be with Nanny, always – and she never even have no friend except Constance and she never even have a bed of her own when other people staying in the house, which is most days. And she never even own more than two pretty dress and she never even have a mother no more – well, she never know – so why did never want to go?

All she had was the tales from those who returned from England, vexed and bitter. So she bawled until her grandma take no more and there was just one corner till they reached and Granny kiss her teeth and said under her breath that she would give her two big clap clap, like that countrywoman was going to, if she ruin her dress with all that caterwauling.

And so the both of them laugh *hard* hard and hug up and walk to church.

A girl they once called Spider, who then became a Pearl, said this was the neatest way to explain how she came to see the other side of the sea:

Just before they would have thrown me out of school and before I would most likely have had a child, like my mother in the village probably had the pastor's child, and just before the wild arguments, and they would have thrown me out of the church too. Or I might have been thrown into it and Dear Precious, Precious Pearl – cheops! – would have been left out to fend for herself and Constance my only only friend would have hidden under the table for fear of being seen when I pass the house because we would not be allowed to walk together anymore. Just before all of that, the fingers in the clouds plucked me out and took me across these shores to meet the man they say might be my real father.

THREE
(The Boy)

'You've become a real shit, lately!'

(East) London, 1997.

...and just bounced out the classroom, mid-lesson, abandoning his Maths books and big grey Lever Arch folder to the mercy of his classmates. His record bag was still slung over the back of the chair, dangling; God knows what else he'd left. But he was out of there, never to return again, amen. *Badass.*

Miss Cartwright had called him back, no, *demanding* he get back inside.

'You cannot run out of my class!'

You cannot run out – Well, he *could* and he had. Cheops! Her empty voice nothinged behind him. The door slammed. Energy sprinted through his hands; his whole body fizzed like a shaken Lucozade bottle. He'd not felt so much happening inside him all at once since... since...

Samuel had changed a lot in the last year. The teachers said it. His *grades* said it. They'd been all *understanding* and *reaching out* and reh reh reh. When your brother's in jail but they see you've been a good kid, you can get away with these outbursts. *Anger management* to rass! Nah, mate, he was done with this place. Patronising eedjats.

Once out, his fists needed release. Taking aim at the side of a locker, the resulting dent – and fist-metalling sound – was a glory. The desire had come out of nowhere, and he didn't even wince, he was invincible. Perhaps he should smash something, set fire to something. If he had a lighter, he'd burn the whole building down.

Knuckles stinging, he scanned the narrow, windowless corridor, all the way to the Head of Year's office at the corner, by the stairs. Here, he finally appreciated the pattern of all the connecting classroom doors, the lines of dark green lockers, meant to match the school logo, how these lockers had once been suggested by the school committee members, high on American High School series. *Saved By the Bell. Degrassi Junior High.* How the Head kept threatening to remove them if school behaviour didn't improve. Behaviour. *Behaviour.* This whole place was about getting everyone to *behave* and keeping them locked down, like a prison. School was a prison.

This was not the time to think about prison. To think about his brother, who was going to be released soo–

Some idiot chief had left a basketball on the floor, wedged in between a fire extinguisher and another row of lockers. He lobbed it as far as he could and it banged the door of a geography classroom, before boinging along the floor and losing steam.

An angry male teacher voice hollered from behind the door and then footsteps quickened towards it. Samuel ran, ducked, curled up into a ball where the wall tucked in at the side of the classroom. It was Mr Reynolds. His feet disappeared the other way.

This is what the bad boys got off on! The thrill was enormous. And what could they *do* to him, anyway? *Detention? A letter to his mum? Expulsion?* Two twos, he was seventeen; he could leave school any time and never come back and it was his right to do so. Stompy-stomp, Mr Reynolds making elephant echoes with his feet. How long before the fool fool man turned back around, went back into his class?

Actually, Samuel *would* leave. He would leave the school and never come back. This was *it*.

He quickly stood back up, composed himself, and sat down on the bench attached to the floor, right beside the classroom. When Mr Reynolds appeared again, it was time to play innocent.

‘*Samuel*, what’re you doing here?’

The teacher kept walking closer as he spoke, not even slowing his pace.

‘Nothing, Sir.’

Finally he stopped, until there was only a footstep between the two of them, Mr Reynolds towering over him in the way few teachers were able to since his growth spurt in the last year or so.

Samuel couldn’t help looking at the outline of his groin inside the navy of his trousers – after all, it was at eye level. Mr Reynolds was wearing briefs, probably Y-front ones. How could he be comfortable bunched up like that? What adult wore briefs anyway? *And why was he thinking about a teacher’s nuts – especially his? He’d given up being* that way...

Samuel looked up at his face; hopefully he hadn’t been noticed.

‘What... what do you mean nothing? Shouldn’t you be preparing for your mocks, if you’re not in class?’

He smelt of bad coffee. The stale and bitter air coming from the teacher’s mouth brought them close, too close. Why be such a cliché? Even some of the non-white teachers – all of them – they all had the same renkness about them! Samuel imagined kissing him and all that bitter breath invading him, Sir’s crusty dry tongue poking around in his mouth. *Why was he thinking about Sir like this?* The guy was gross, as spotty as a Year 9 and what, probably three times his age? Still, he felt blood start to throb down to his own lap. No, the book he was reading said this was just a normal reaction; it would pass.

‘I needed to clear my head, Sir.’

‘Well, clear your head over in the Common Room.’

Samuel stood and they were level again. He stared into Mr Reynold's eyes, beyond his cheap glasses. *Pity*, that's what he felt. Pity. Why would anyone teach in this dump?

The teacher backed away.

'Tell you what, you didn't happen to see who it was that kicked a ball into my classroom, did you?'

'No, Sir.'

His frown was hard to interpret.

'I thought you wouldn't have. You're one of the better-behaved ones, aren't you? Ok, go before I mark you down...'

Samuel got up and walked a few paces, Mr Reynolds' eyes on his back, most certainly. It was difficult not to laugh. Fancy wasting your life in some crappy shoes and decades-old NHS glasses, teaching Geography to a bunch of kids who didn't give a fuck!

Samuel's own less-than-passable shoes attacked the stairs, two at a time, definitely not in the direction of the Common Room. Once he was well out of eyeshot, he paused. He had nowhere he wanted to go except outside – and then what?

The corridor felt cold at this end, dark. Dog-eared posters on the walls. Year 8 concrete poems, from two years ago, in the shape of butterflies and caterpillars. No one had defaced them yet.

Which way should he turn?

'Samuel!'

A girl's voice. He turned around, looked up. Jamilah.

He took another step downwards, towards freedom. He didn't need her trying to drag him back to class. He was done.

'Why you darking me...? SAMUEL!'

'*What-tah!*'

'You... *ok?*'

Are you ok? Words he'd let pass through his lips before, at his mum, his dad, his friend Adrian when his mum died, or the woman he'd seen getting licked by her boyfriend outside Wilky's a week ago. Now he knew how stupid it felt to hear when the answer was an obvious *no*. Stupid and angrifying.

Even so, the fizziness in him started to go flat, his eyes warmed like a slow kettle. *You ok?* He'd just done one of the most *choopid* things ever, walking out because he didn't like what Miss Cartwright said to him, because he couldn't concentrate, because ...

Could he honestly tell her he *wasn't ok – and why?* And how, ever since those prophets came three years ago, he had been a curse on his own family? Where would he even begin...?

'Are you ok? My girl's tripping! Are you ok?'

Another step down.

'That don't even make sense...'

'Course I'm fucking ok! Back off!'

'If I didn't *know* you, swear down I'd go back in and leave you on your jacks.'

Go, then!

'Here's your bag!'

She kicked it down the steps left between them, and the flap lifted open, the mouth of it gasping, his pencil case and books poking out like bits of unchewed food.

'The fuck's going on, Samuel?'

Nothing and everything; a legion: stomach pain, headaches, tightness of the neck, hunger, thirst, righteousness, *he's put on a lot of weight recently*, tightness of the belt, tightness of breath, more thirst, *Diet Coke*, short-sightedness, not enough chewing gum, *ooer! bad breath!*, too much sweat, not enough light, not enough, *you're gonna fail with that attitude, Mr Robinson*, legs unable to move from the spot. *What's going on, Samuel?*

'Let's blurt!'

He kept his head still as he walked, like a plate balanced on waiter's palm in a cartoon. In silence, they ventured out past the gate. Sixth formers weren't supposed to leave the building before lunchtime, but seeing as the mock exams were approaching, some of the teachers were lenient – and they were too busy dealing with the out-of-control Year 11s. As long as they could walk past the staffroom with confidence, getting out would be easy. The cold air hit.

'You got your wheels?'

'Yeah, my sister's innit?'

A strawberry milkshake would numb him again, the thick icy sweetness sucked up through the straw and straight into his head. Jamilah was easy to convince; any excuse to leave and she was ready.

'Come let's hit Maccy D's!'

'You getting me petrol then, bredrin?'

'Whatever!'

He only had a fiver. *Fuck*. It had to last him a couple more days.

'Oh my God, you hear about Moses getting jacked?'

'No! When?'

'Oh my God, Samuel, you're *late*! You been churching too hard, innit?'

The familiarity of Jamilah's teasing settled him down.

'We doing the drive-thru, yeah?'

'Scene!'

'Who's been sitting here? A fucking midget?'

Samuel adjusted the seat back until his legs stretched out and into comfort.

'Shut up, you lanky eedyat!'

'Thut uuup!'

'Stop being such a chief!'

'Thtop being thuch a chief!'

'Fuck you. I ain't saying nothing. Watch!'

She moved her finger across her lip, miming a zip.

We'll see about that.

Samuel played with the radio tuner. Choice FM reception always went in and out, the weak signal from South London bringing static and interference and dozens of pirate frequencies locked in between. He fiddled with the settings, bass as high as it would go, treble down low. Notorious BIG made the door shake.

'The door's shaking!'

'It's slick, innit?'

'Turn it down a bit, star – I need to concentrate.'

'Joker! I forgot you just passed your test. Where's your P plates gone?'

It was good how they teased each other. She was solid, *real*, the only person he could trust. It helped, too, that her smile made her cheeks dimple and her eyes shine. So many times he'd thought – he'd hoped – she could be his girlfriend; it would make more sense. But even if he wasn't struggling, he couldn't have a girlfriend and stay in church. Maybe he'd leave, like Manny and his mother had left. Maybe he could be normal. And then what? He would probably have got into trouble like Manny did.

Samuel looked over at Jamilah, deep in concentration, her fringe halfway into her face. Rumours about them helped. A few weeks back, some of the year 11s – Malichai, and his posse – made it onto his lunch table, chatting about who was still a virgin, voices getting louder as they turned to him. Samuel made the perfect comeback: *yo, at least I know how to talk to girls innit? You can't even do that, so I doubt you've gone any further...* Jamilah laughed along with him too, even if few people laughed at Malachai and got away with it. Everyone knew his brother was a part of Lost Sidez. Then again, everyone knew Samuel's brother was in jail, too – and they knew it had to do with The 11's posse, which came way before Lost Sidez.

Jamilah's family would kill her if she was seen driving a boy around; there was no way she would hang out with him if things were going down that route. That's what she said once: *safe*. Why did she feel *safe* around him?

He'd tried to kiss her last year, and she pushed him away and laughed. Was he *that* butters, *that* hideous?

'You're kris and everything, yeah, don't get me wrong, but two-twos, you and me isn't a ting like that.'

She'd said he was *kris*. Did she really think so? Even still, rejected was *rejected*.

The rest of that conversation replayed in his head more than he would admit: ('Fuck you! And stop talking like you're black!')

'I'm more black than you, doe! Don't even go there, girlfriend!'

'And stop calling me *girlfriend*!')

Afterwards, they'd both said things they shouldn't; they'd both spent the next few days avoiding each other, then spending awkward silences sitting on the swings, the sun setting behind the row of houses at the edge of Cider-Can Park, a burning orange glow offering no warmth or joy.

Why couldn't he just let it go? And what made her think she was more black than *him*? Having a black stepdad and a Trini-Indian *real* dad didn't really change that, did it?

'Grr!'

He roared out of the window at no one. At everything. If he didn't stop thinking, his head would hurt. His finger hit the volume circle until it could go up no more. He sang along to the words, his arm waving out the side of the window, the strap of his record bag around his forehead, making him lean forward to squeeze his bag behind him. *I'm a maaaad eedyat, I'm bad!*

'Yo, Jam, you've taken the wrong turn, innit?'

'Is it?'

'Yeah, drive-thru thatah way'

'Yeah, your fucking *gala* music's distracting me. We're going inside'.

'Unnnh! Whatever. *Sala cutti*'

'It's *Sali kuti*'

'Whatever. *Teri ma*'

He retrieved his orange bandana from his bag, folded it over neatly, until a small triangle poked through the folds. He then tied it over his head, pointing the triangle over

his left eye, then pulled down the sun visor mirror to admire his handiwork. Not quite Tupac but still sort of cute. With just a touch of acne that still hadn't gone away.

The place was ram-packed with kids from Ellison College, mostly groups of girls huddling in corners, and then a bunch of wannabes taking up space in the centre, jeans bagging halfway down the knees. It was like stepping out of the darkness into the light. Not only was it brighter than school, and even the outside, but it was louder, fuller, buzzing, how he imagined Moe's Club might be, the spot all the non-Asian Sixth Formers seemed to head to on a Friday night. Except this was the opposite.

He nodded at people he recognised, Ugo and Simeon. Sharlene. Tanya. A fair few were defectors from his school who'd ended up at Ellison. Jamilah, who knew everyone, started fist-bumping a bunch of other girls. She ran shrieking to the side and leapt on some girl.

'Raaaah! I ain't seen you for time -!'

He could hear her voice above the noise, persistent chatter rising up with every step closer to the queue. He took his place among the mass, a cluster of dark-coloured puffer jackets to which he added his own body. Jamilah would join him in the huddle when she was ready, if she hadn't already tried to ease her way forward with her charm.

He looked to his left, to the centre of the room, where the buzz seemed louder. A lot of comments seemed to be directed there. He froze when he saw... when he saw the *Satan* among them. The Satan seemed to be looking right back at him, *through* him. Samuel looked away again.

'Is this fucking queue moving or what?' He was shocked by the power of his own voice.

One of the puffers in front of him turned around.

'I know, star! This is long!'

'Fucking mental! Need to hurry their arses before we.... Cha!'

It was difficult not to throw his eyes back in the direction of Satan, but he was sure more faces had turned towards him, were noticing the way Satan looked at him. If only a few more people could join the queue – real tall people, people who could block the now-clean line of sight between them.

Jamilah reappeared with a smile and an elbow nudge.

'What's up with you now?'

'That a boy or a girl?' he whispered, pointing his lips left in the vague area Satan was seated.

'Which one? There's like a million people here.'

'You know which! Sitting in that group in the middle...'

‘What are they wearing?’

Samuel turned back round, peering past Jamilah. He/she seemed to have come closer, sitting less than ten metres away. His/her face was unreadable, and was definitely facing his. And smiling.

‘Like, a black t-shirt. Got a bob. He’s wearing lipstick and shorts. Or if it’s a she, I dunno. Hoop earrings...’

‘Oh! That’s a boy, fool! That’s Dipesh’s cousin, like Sandeep or something...’

‘That’s a boy wearing lipstick?’

Why was he even being allowed to sit there? Why hadn’t the whole of McDonald’s turfed him out, beat the nastiness out of him? And why was he smiling, like he knew something? His legs were like a girl’s.

‘Mmm-hmm. You wanna say hi?’

‘Why would I wanna say hello?’ His voice came out screechier than he’d hoped.

‘Because you just *might*.’

Samuel and Jamilah looked at each other as the mass moved forward a little. Why would he wanna say hello to *that*? He frowned again and looked away, back towards Satan/Sandeep. *Why would she even suggest it?* He steeled himself. No. She couldn’t think he was *like that*. He’d been healed... not fully, but almost completely. He’d been reading the book and staying away from temptation.

Satan-Sandeep was sitting among three girls, dressed almost like a girl. And yet he clearly wasn’t a girl. And people were staring at him, but the girls he was with were all acting like it was nothing. But most of all, his eyes were satanic, luring him in. And they were staring back at him, through him.

He turned away.

‘Why would I wanna say hi, Jam? Go on! Tell me why’

How dare she show him up like this! He was trying to talk through his teeth, to not draw more attention to himself from the eyes watching Satan now keenly watching him and Jamilah. The whole of McDonald’s was watching them now, surely; it felt like it, even though the conversations were still buzzing around them and the queue was moving.

A ketchup missile whizzed past his ear, and from the reaction of one of the wannabes in front, it reached the right goal.

‘Come on then Cameron! You starting?’

The wannabe was laughing and hitching up his jeans; they were just fooling around. But then the boy in front of him – who he’d talked with only a moment ago – did a quick swivel, flinging the ketchup sachet back in the other direction, and almost

elbowing Samuel in the process. The energy in here was too explosive. A fight could easily break out and before long the police would be there. Why hadn't they just gone to the drive-thru?

'You tell me, Samuel!'

'What the fuck are you saying?'

'I'm saying I don't give a shit whether you're gay or... or whatever.'

How...? Fucking...? In front of everyone. His head exploded and bits of his eyes and brain and tongue were rolling on the floor. Blood everywhere. He was *not*... He was struggling, yes, but he wasn't...

'Shut the fuck u-'

'No, *you* shut up for once-'

'People can hear!' he seethed into her ear.

This wasn't the place to talk about how he was deprogramming himself, learning to become more of a man while his brain was still developing – while he still had a chance of changing easily – of how the book he'd been given by Elder Graham was steering him in the right direction.

'No one's listening, Samuel. And you don't even know half these guys here anyway. You know what-'

It was wrong to hit girls.

'Keep your voice down!'

But he wanted to.

'My man's telling me to keep my voice down and he's shouting louder than me!'

'Peops are staring!'

He kissed his teeth.

'Look, you can tell me anything!'

She was trying to humiliate him. After all this time, one of his best friends turned out to be a snake too...

'I'm your best friend. Even when you went all weird back in Year 10, Year 11, I stuck around -'

'What you mean -'

'Yo, Jameelah!'

A short, plump boy with an *All Eyez on Me* cap had come towards them, slapped her on the shoulder. He looked like he'd been trying to grow his beard for years.

'Faz!'

'Yes, yes, what's gwaanin?'

'I'm sweet, innit, you?'

Samuel pressed his teeth together, flexing his temples. Chin Fluff needed to move on now so they could finish what she'd started. His heart was beating at twice the speed. How long had she suspected?

'Yeah, yeah. Who's your boy?'

Faz motioned towards Samuel, who unflexed his temples, offered a weak smile and a fist bump.

'Yeah, respeck. Samuel'.

'Samuel?'

'Yeah'

'If I'd known you was checking mans, I would have asked you out long time -'

'Fuck off, Fazzah! He's my breddrin, innit?'

My breddrin.

'Yeah, we both go St Farts'

'Oh skeen.'

The queue moved a little and Samuel moved with it, leaving the two of them a couple of paces behind. He let their conversation continue and wished he could resist turning once more to check if those same eyes were on him.

'I see you clocking boys bare times,' she added in the car, between mouthfuls of burger, in recognition that the conversation had continued in their heads for the last ten minutes.

Samuel slurped on his milkshake. He suppressed a cough as it went down his throat. He would remember this feeling, the cold of it tightening his throat, the oversweet syrup, its pinkness, the scream it screamed. You're. A. Fucking. Bender. Worse than all the other sins combined. An abomination. *There's a difference between doing wrong and being wrong...* He took a breath.

'I don't.'

'You do. I don't care--'

'I fucking don't! Just drive the fucking car and get me home.'

If she'd noticed him looking, who else had? Was he that bait? After two years, thinking he'd almost rid himself of the demon plaguing him, it was clear he hadn't. He *was* wrong, every part of him.

'Like I said, you're my brer. I don't care if you *are*, just don't be a dickhead, cool?'

How much longer could he deny it? He'd stopped being that way since he made the promise. Since that Easter Sunday when he'd made that call and the prophets had come, he'd only slipped once or twice. Ok, a little more, but he'd been *trying*.

'What you mean?'

The window was open but he couldn't breathe.

'You've become a real shit lately, Samuel. You know it! And walking out of class, that ain't *you*! What happened to the Year 10 Samuel I knew?'

He was preaching outside Selborne Walk like a prick. He was behaving all self-righteous and grassing up his own brother.

'All this trying to be some kind of bad man, Samuel. That ain't you! Even the way you're talking!'

Yeah, it was like she'd punched him in the belly, cut out his insides. She'd been the only person he could trust and now she was betraying him, a proper Judas. Telling him that he was a bad person. And a batty bwoy, too.

'Ok, I get it -'

'You want me to shut up?'

'Nope. Keep going-'

'Samuel... For fuck sake!'

She turned into the street, two streets away from his house, a few more away from hers. The car idled on the corner.

'I get it now, Jamilah -'

He felt his eyes sting.

'You want me to be your little gay boy you can drive around. And when I start showing you I'm a man, innit, when I finally answer back to fucking Miss Cartwright, you start gunning for me -'

'What the fuck -?'

'Exactly. What...the..fuck? You want to start putting me in makeup too? Bet you'd love that!'

'Get a fucking grip-!'

'Have you ever thought I might be going through right now? Mmmh? That my own brother, my own brother is still in jail. And that I might have put him there?'

'What -?'

'Yeah exactly. You didn't know that shit, you just jumped to your own, innit? And no, for the record, I'm not... Or I don't want to... I don't want that lifestyle. It's gross and it's sick. And I don't want to speak to you again, ever. I thought you were ride or die but you're dead. You hear? You're dead to me.'

For the second time that afternoon, he slammed the door behind him and didn't look back, for fear of being turned to salt and regret.

He remembered the Crimestopper woman on the other end of the phone, the calm way she'd asked him to say what he knew. And he didn't know anything, did he? But the police had come the next day. They'd rummaged through everything, and found bags of weed. They'd seen the tattoo and linked Manny to the gang. They'd tried him at the Magistrates, then the Crown Court. They tried to send him down on a murder charge, and he'd ended up with five years for possession with intent. And it was Samuel's fault for not minding his own business, for thinking he was holier-than-thou. Because of him, his brother was in jail, his parents' marriage was pretty much over, and his mother had left the church. *Good fucking work, gay boy!*

He took towards the park, then walked back. He zigzaged through the streets. Eighth Avenue, Beresford Road, Green Crescent, Elm Road, Albert Road, Vale Road, road road crescent park roadcourtroadroad he walked through all the heavy brown brick houses and through the grey estates and then ran until each street blurred with thick eyeboil tears. When he got to the park, he slumped on the first bench he saw and stared into the distance.

When he finished counting to three hundred, he began to pray.

'Dear Father, I need you more than ever before...'

He kept his eyes open, watching out for dog walkers who might spot him muttering and think himcrazy.

'I know you heareth and you answereth. Those who have a pure and an upright heart you will not despise...'

An old married couple came closer towards him, arm in arm, one of them bent over a walking stick. He minimised his lip movements until it became a mumble.

'I know I've sinned against you in words and deed and I repent...'

The woman smiled while the man looked over suspiciously. He carried out the rest of the prayer in his head, with his eyes closed.

When he got up, clarity came again, like an inward breath after swimming under water; even the sun shone differently. He walked home, measuring his breaths all the way. When he turned the key in the door, he felt his chest expand.

Mum, I'm not going school anymore. He'd practiced the words over in his head. He was going to burn his books on Wanstead Flats this weekend.

He said the words aloud over and over.

I'm not going school anymore.

I'M NOT GOING SCHOOOOOOL ANYMORE!

He needed this all to be worth it.

No one was home, just a note about the rubbish not being put out in thick capital letters on the draining board. The paper scrunched up in his hand and he threw it in the bin; the feeling of power returned as the paper touched the edge and fell in. The Last Supper attendees seemed to give an approving nod from their position on the wall. He replaced the broken lid, peered in at the cracked eggs.

The whole place was cold, especially in the kitchen extension; why didn't anyone leave the heaters on? His parents must be sadists. As he ran the tap and washed his hands, while filling the sink for the washing up, the steam rose and settled on the window.

Samuel warmed up half a tin of beans in the microwave, put two slices of bread in the toaster. *Spell 'roast'*, the joke went. And then: *'What do you put in a toaster?'* He started to laugh. The right answer isn't the one that sounds obvious. This is how he might start his next sermon.

He turned on the box, and Children's television hadn't even started, he was that early. It was the calm before the storm, after the storm-out.

The food pinged back in the kitchen, and he returned to the cold, piling everything on a saucer, sealing the beans in a sandwich formation, watching them spill out on either side. He ran back into the living room, sat down on the floor in front of the sofa, closed his eyes to say grace.

His father shook him awake. It was still light. The beans and toast were on the plate, on the floor in front of him. He'd slumped against the settee and his legs were only a couple of centimetres away from the red...

On a second look, he'd stained his trousers with tomato sauce.

'Samuel, what's going on?'

His father looked concerned. His father of wrinkled forehead; when was the last time he'd been so close up?

'Hi, dad'

'Samuel?'

I'm not going school anymore.

'Are you ok? What's happened, son?'

He'd practiced the words but his mouth couldn't quite get into the right gear to say them. All the colours of the room had muted to grey; the swirling blue of the new carpet, the wooden brown of the frames, the *God bless this house* sign, the picture of his brother Manny, accusing him, accusing him, accusing him always. The clock's tongue ticking its judgment over them.

'I'm not going school anymore.'

'What? What do you mean? Did they do something-?'

'I can't... I don't want to go there anymore.'

'Come here, son.'

His father patted the settee then grabbed his arm to join him.

And they stared at each other, there on the settee, the Home Sweet Home cushions between them, a fence between their thoughts. And then his dad reached over and embraced him, his fingers cupping the back of Samuel's head, jammed into his chest. He was breathing his father's belly in the darkness, or what was left of it.

He'd lost so much weight recently, while Samuel had filled out, more than he wanted. Samuel flung a cushion out of his way, to settle into the embrace, then he allowed himself to be let go.

'I want you to talk to me.'

It was more difficult to speak than he expected. They'd never been that close. If he had a problem, he usually went to his mum. It was an unspoken agreement that seemed to work until everything kicked off with Manny: his dad loved and looked after the older brother; his mum cared more about him.

'Please. You can tell me anything.'

Anything? No, he couldn't.

'The teachers are bullies. I'm not learning anything. I don't want to be there...'

He began again. He developed his argument, like they'd taught him to do in essays; maybe he'd learned some useful things, after all. *In conclusion, dad, I walked out...*

As expected, his dad listened, nodded. He'd learned to do this as an Elder of the church. No more going back to that building, the high gates with spikes, and barbed wire, the anxious bus journeys, trying to avoid the eyes of Year 11s, the small circle of friends he'd kept – why was it most of his friends didn't even stay for Sixth Form? *Because the school was late! And the teachers were dead.*

He found himself speaking clearly, like an adult. And his dad wasn't interrupting or disagreeing. He could leave... and live his life... doing *what?*

'I'm going to the Prophetic Bible School.'

It had come as a revelation. His *real* calling. His last chance to try and be the Christian he'd vowed he would be. The sun came through the gap in the net curtains and a ray hit the spot right in front of him, surely a sign, a small sign that showed God was with him in that moment.

'Son, you sure about this? I don't want you to miss out on your other studies- '

'I'm surer than I've ever been about anything.'

Of course, his dad would doubt God's will in this. That was another test. He was conditioned to think finishing secular education was the way forward, like that was the most important thing in his life.

'Have you prayed about this?'

He was praying now, praying without ceasing, praying into the anointing that was washing over him now, washing over the new blue carpet with the sun dancing through the carpet. He'd spent the last four years praying about it, without knowing. It had taken him up to that point, leaving his school in anger (and didn't Christ also get angry with the moneychangers in the temple?) and taking a leap of faith.

Of course, joining the Bible School before his eighteenth birthday might be difficult; he would have to wait and see.

'Well, I don't know, son. I'm sure you could give it a year until you finish your A Levels- '

'But this is something I need to do *now*.'

'Well, tell your mother and see what she says. I'm just glad nobody's hurt you.'

Oh, *this* is what had scared his father – the idea that he might have been hurt! Didn't he realise Samuel was a man now? That he could handle himself? Even his own dad must think he was a sissy. He should have trashed the school, after all. He should have showed them all not to ramp with him.

The five o'clock news anthem rang out from the telly and shocked them both into silence; in silence, they settled in the sofa, side by side, watching the excited presenter discuss the announcement of a coming election.

The following weeks were predictable. Samuel's mother said no. (But God said yes).

'Why you wanna go and ruin your education for, eenh?'

She'd barely lifted up the forkful of fish fingers before he told her. His father had told him to wait.

'...Because you prideful you prideful you just up and walked out of the lesson and you too hard-headed to go back?'

She pointed the fork at him.

'You and your father same way. I already lost one son and God help me, me not gwine lose another one for no foolishness.'

They'd lost the bond they once had. She rarely hugged or kissed him. What did she know? She had left the way simply because her faith had been tested.

'Some of us need to make sacrifices for the kingdom.'

'Some of us need to make sacrifices, eh? So when the last time you even write to your brother? He could be rotting inside. He could be on fire and you wouldn't even give him your spit to cool him off. But there you are making sacrifices!'

She was the only one who took the trip up to Feltham, though his dad wrote letters each week with sermons attached. How could she know what it was like to pray for him every day, to have that responsibility? She was just a backslider, making excuses.

Samuel explained the importance of the gospel again. Maybe if he could have stopped his tongue before saying she wouldn't understand, she might have finished the fish finger and she wouldn't have lost her temper.

Two days later, Samuel called the number on the leaflet and spoke to a Bishop Winston. They invited Samuel and his parents – including his mother – to a meeting, at the end of which they would seek God's guidance about Samuel's enrolment.

In the last couple of days, her stance had hardened. When he stopped her, going up the stairs, he noticed the glint of her new earrings as she lay into him. He'd never thought of her as pretty before. But now she was following the world, becoming less of his mother and more of a *woman*. Was she trying to impress someone – a man? He stopped that thought.

'–and don't you dare, don't you dare quote no scriptures at me. I was quoting scriptures for longer than you've been alive. The reason I left that church of yours is because I know how easy you can twist up any piece of scripture to make a argument –'

'That's not true, mum–'

'And don't you dare call your own mother a liar! Blow me down!'

'I'm just sayin–'

'Let me remind you, I left that place because I didn't wanna pay lipservice no more... doing things for puppy show. Cheops! And I don't care if you stay in that church or if you see sense and leave –'

'Don't talk about church like that.'

He looked up past her and upwards to the upstairs landing. His father must be in his room. She'd never spoken like this before and it was like the devil had possessed her.

'Dad? Dad! Tell her – '

'And you can call after your father as much as you want, but you still my son and it's our rules – both of our rules – we living by.'

His father never appeared; he was sleeping.

The following evening, she came home with her hair bronzed at the tips. Her new trousers were bright blue and tight. She was becoming unrecognisable. She'd lost more weight and gained a strange laugh. She was mocking the both of them, father and son, moving in and out of their midsts like an evil wind.

Samuel and his father went to the meeting. They prayed. Two weeks later, and without any explanation, he had her blessing.

'You can do what you want.'

Six words that changed his life.

FOUR
(The Girl)

'She changed her walk / just as she changed her name'

(West) London, 1968

After something like four Summers pass, Theresa forget the too-blue sky she grew up under, and the deep green of the trees she used to climb, a green she could never find in the *grey and unpleasant* of England. Maybe her eyes were seeing this place wrong; maybe she needed them checked.

She forgot too – too quick – the small hall Nanny take her to, with tambourine and chorus going for hours, the laying of hands and deliverance. The wet smell of Kingston streets, the feel of genuine sweat from stepping in the sun.

But how could she ever let go of the mangoes that just shook off to the ground come June! In her dreams they lined up like the Miss Mango competition?

She remember the name of every one, but each year the sweetness and texture get fainter in her mind until it just another hazy (is that the word?) memory she lazily drop onto the floor like forgotten mango skin.

Four Summers on and she stop cry after the life she left and the hand-clapping games she make up with that Constance girl (a Constance she *really* name? Or Comfort or something like that...)

Those games would surely have changed as she aged into a young woman. Imagine her still climbing tree to pick fruit and hide! *Mm-nnh!* These days she liked to spend more time inside with hot-comb and tongs and rollers and iron and paisley (what a pattern eenh!) and flower-print dresses which she find and take to Miss Dawes who live over the way to hem in, tuck up, patch and stitch.

She now existed in a wireless world playing its music low in the room they give her to sleep – the attic she had to wriggle to enter. But she still couldn't keep from making new verses to the songs she heard on the radio.

You're my Rockefeller – you're my Cinderella/ Oooh... why you jook me with your umbrella?

She prance in the mirror of the room which her so-called father and wife now shared. She fix her lips in front of the mirror:

I love your cheek... that's very weak

I love your tongue... pull the other one

I love your tonguey-tongue tongue...

Sometime she danced alone when no one else was in the home they all lodge in right near the long Grove. But she knew her *father* would return and *that woman* and the Baker family that had the other room and the landlord who liked to pull her cheek and go on and on bout how she grown and learnt to speak so *well* for a *Colonial girl*.

Spring come again now and she get used to her name, the one that print on the passport. Not quite the same as the *Pearl* she would like to be or the *Spider* she became, but a *Theresa* she never knew she was till the man at the airport stamped the open book.

She thought about the sign the other man – her father – held up, and how she fix her mind to look him in the eye, but they drop down till she found she studying the shiny new shoe Nanny gave her, patent leather, wrapped around her impatient toes. They were too tight, too stoosh for the girl she was then, the girl who liked to roam streets and climb the trees in neighbours' yards and disappear behind the leaves. Look how far four year tek har!

Motor car here was king and the Queen's home not so far again - and closer still more royalty - living fewer steps away than the walk she used to walk every day to school back home. Did *they* know she was there? All them royal highnesses and lownesses. Did they know how she lived all squash up like ant? Did they know...?

Kensington way over at the end of the Gate, separating rich from poor. And it had its gardens where flowers stood as clipped and stiff as the upper lip they so proud to own. Beyond there, a Palace but without a throne. The whole place sounded like a riddle!

In her letters to Nanny (which she never send) she spoke about the swinging bell bottom men, the no-hip women strutting the streets, quick and clickety clack. Platform sandals back and forth, hopping onto tails of buses then down into the earth, where train after train rushed off.

Nanny would never understand how things reverse: people never take to the streets at night to cool down and chat but run in to warm up and drink tea. *Nanny, she write, you would never believe how brown and black unite against white anger, how front-page headlines warn of Rivers of Blood to come. But I'm not frightful, Nanny.*

Maybe she was, just a little bit. They just killed Martin Luther King in America. And everyone kept saying things could only go bad bad from there.

When she first arrived, she held everything in, inside a closed mouth while *cat got your tongue love?* women who stop to chat with whoever they give her to for the day marvelled at the speechless wonder.

Me do have a voice!

She wanted to shout it out loud; but in this topsy-turvy land, her tongue had no weight. So she waited for it to soak in the new language from across the water.

Today her voice was coming back stronger, different; her accent felt harder... Thinking about this brick-house city with chimney-lined streets – with houses she at first mistook

for factories – make her wonder if she could ever live anywhere else. It made her think she was at the centre of everything. And all the girls that teased her at school in Kingston were just simple-minded babies who never seen a building higher than two storeys. Who never travelled in a lift or a tube. They must still be reading about snow and Spring and crumpets, but never tasted any of it.

This city had seeped into her skin with its big red buses and underground subways and endless highways and High Streets whose windows she loved to contemplate on the way from night class where she'd been told she might not pass... but that thought was for another day. Right now her mind was on the pretty miniskirt waving through the panes. It was yellow like sunflower, like the ripest of ripe suns.

She didn't have two shillings to rub together but she'd saved and took loans from friends, plus she'd learned how to sew and to mend and if there was still a tomorrow she would reach into the windowsill and all she just need was to borrow a frilly blouse. Tomorrow, she would sneak from the house and join the dancing crowd.

But today, Theresa was not supposed to prowl these streets alone at night, or roam too far, not move beyond the knot of streets that mark where she belonged – the knot of streets that promised nothing except, one day, to close around her neck.

Her father:

You never hear about the broken glass? Only a couple years ago
(it was ten years ago)

Don't answer back to your father... Just a couple years ago the glass shattered all over the Crescent. Your Uncle Mervyn lucky to survive but they still put him in a cell.

Yes, father.

They promised London would be heaven... but this is Notting Hell.

Yes, father. *Notting Hell*.

Don't you dare backchat after me or you gwine feel the underside of my sandal.

Sorry, fathe–

Plus them just kill off Martin Luther King. It gonna hit us here as well
and, most likely, worse –

Yes, father. Worsen much worsen.

Her father (she could never get used to the word – and he was never *dad*) said it, and at nearly eighteen (nearly a big big woman!) she had to toe the line. It was best she stay inside for now and learn to cook and clean and iron shirts. She was a girl, too pretty to ruin so soon: there was not much for her outside the room.

This is what they say, her father and his wife

(She will not – cannot – call her *mother*).

But there were, of course, exceptions: she must study a course, for work was hard to find and they would not permit a fool fool gyal to live there and not fend for herself on two feet of her own.

And so, of course, deceptions: she'd taken to skipping one class in the evening – here and there – not enough to stir complaints, but enough to learn the things they never taught in college rooms:

- 1) like how cigarettes burn in a lipstick mouth between painted fingers and how the smell lingered there under the nose like little rock 'n' roll fumes.
- 2) like the calculation of how many cigarettes it took to complete Bayswater Road, the park at her side, before falling in under the glare of West End lights.
- 3) like all the night corners where the wonky-hipped men whistled out in words she knew but still could not decode.

She walked bravely through the folds of Mayfair streets where no one stared. So long as her face remained down and dead they did not seem to clock the eyes widening in her head.

She'd already learned to pick her pace to suit the neighbourhood; she learn to imitate the grace of women wrapped in fur and act as if her lace collar was just the same. She changed her walk just as she changed her name.

She followed down these avenues till blistered feet spoke back, walking through hippy Carnaby where the trendy, chatty, smoke-choked crowd hung off the doors leading down into subterranean jazz-cages.

Oi! Darling! Yeah, you...! What's eating you, princess?

Where you walking to, sweet thing?

A weh you go with that groovy dress?

Hey sistah, care to take a drag on this? Yeah, that will slow you down! Far out!

She made her way past shuttered shops that promised 7" of vinyl satisfaction and good vibes, past the smells of incense sticks and liquorice beverages and over towards the other streets where men stood round doors dark with secrets they couldn't keep. At the time she should be headed home to sleep, she snaked through the alleyways where windows flashed red and women flashed flesh: knobbly legs promising heaven to men who slow down enough to hear.

And of course she knew she was young, and carried her curves beyond her years – not quite eighteen, but close – and sometimes if she stopped, she felt the stares piercing her V Reg coat, buckled tightly round the waist. All eyes on that dark-skinned girl.

Psst! Never did a darkie before! Wanna take a walk over to that door? You game?

She never felt the threat of walking alone like this, not from them, not here. What was there to fear when the streets were full of eyes? When the men who called to her seemed to be carrying shadows bigger than their tongues? When all the good duppy walking next to her as she walked? When she marched like she had a purpose? The only thing to fear was cops. Policemen would not tolerate hanging around, or walking without reasonable destination: the same law that caused her so-called father to spend a night inside a cell is one she knows they'll do that man for as well.

Her heart tapped again, she better head back because how could she explain the same thing happening to her, here? Especially when she should be elsewhere, learning?

Feet hurt, calves burned, early Spring sky turned auburn then black. She should have been back by now. Would she never learn to keep her curiosity down?

I don't need college / to widen my knowledge

It was like so she chanted whilst winding down through piss-alley streets and sating her curiosity with the buskers near Piccadilly trumpeting all the way to Leicester Square.

She blew a raspberry, took out one hand from the itchy polyester pocket and tooted a scale. The wind began to pinch her chest so she picked up pace and cupped two hands around her face.

From Soho slack streets into Theatreland [how they called it...] and then off again in a zigzag following traffic to where lines of lorries tooted angry horns queuing to unload their fruit in Covent Garden Market.

She was lost... further than she'd walked until now, further than ever before... She was lost and terrified of the cost to her freedom (strokes of the cane or slaps from the slipper or clips from the curtain rod):

Is not because beat you I wan' beat you, but because discipline is an order from God.

A few more turns and finally, she saw again the familiar Shaftesbury Avenue: from here she could collect herself and find the bus that took her directly back home.

Sweet chariot / sweet [...] bus swing low / me wan' go home / me wan' guh now

If she closed her ears hard enough, she wouldn't hear the jeers behind. She was out of sight, just enough, yards away from the bus stop, to bend and unclip the pins that

hitched the hem of her check-patterned dress to above the knees. And now, released, it fell below her jacket.

And as she rose again to face Bloomsbury church, her eyes rested on the form of the man that made her stop a few weeks ago. This is why she'd been walking without knowing where she was going! This is why her route had taken her further and further each night since that first time. This is the man she was looking for. And just as she'd given up, he'd appeared, a miracle, a sign she'd been waiting for. A sign her life was about to change for good.

That first time she saw him, with trumpet in hand and pork pie hat outstretched and slick back hair.

What you doing here?

She did not dare to smile then, but there was something about the song he played and the music in his eye, which held her there for a while. Something that kept her up that night composing another song.

Brown-eye bwoy, weh u want from me? / Brown-eye bwoy, weh u need? / Tell me when you look on me / What do dem brown eyes see?

She memorised his number from the only time they spoke to each other. After several minutes had passed he'd blurted it

Are you on the phone?

No!

(imagine him calling her home and her father picking up! Or even worse, the landlord or one of her boys...)

I'm home between one and t'ree... call me!

Why? I don't have nothing to say... not to you anyway!

He'd shrugged and smiled but still given her the paper, still destroyed her with them wild drowning eyes and those dirty notes from the old trumpet he pressed against his lips in a rough, raw kiss.

She wanted to walk away from this man, but here he was, now on the steps, silent and trumpet-less, slumped over in a thick thick jacket that look it need a wash and a stitch or two. It was like she was his transport to somewhere, or he was her ticket, or they were a destination or... her head hurt turning around the right words to say or think.

Eh eh! You're the coolie bwoy who has a phone!

But her voice had come back stronger, different. A confidence she didn't know she had taken over like a spirit covering her naked soul. She could never speak like this

at home. She needed to sound like a proper woman, in the same way they'd tried to correct the properness into her back in school in Kingston.

Eh eh! So you not speaking to me?

His eyebrow rose up faster than he did, a semi-tone. He sat up, then plopped those eyes straight back down to the bottle held firmly in fist and fizzing with beer.

Coolie bwoy! Why you not paying me any min'?

But wait! B-but look 'ere! Me sure the girl me see in front of me eye dem who just love a-stare say she nuh have nuttin' fi say to me!

He slurped noisily, shrugged a breathless laugh and sputtered.

A-and w-w-weh she a go, dr-dress like pussy foot?

This was not the man she remembered from a few weeks, the eyes that haunted her, the mouth she imagined would be full of poetry like Shakespeare like Kipling like all the men that took up space in her English book. Cheeks hot, she didn't back off, just turned her neck to scan the road for a lucky 7 bus in case she needed it. In case...

The streetlights highlighted the emptiness: the only thing that moved for several yards were the branches overhanging the road.

It is now she had to speak, to reach out for the thin man with the thick tweed that she needed to hear play again (if he could only play again maybe she would be reminded why he was in her daydreams). She needed to see those cheeks puffed around the trumpet, to watch those hardened fingers press into the brass. Seeing him again was a sign she couldn't pass up, even if this wasn't how she'd imagined it in her head.

In a fast, harsh voice she didn't recognise as her own she heard herself.

Well I don't business with your drunkardness but I'm going to call you, you hear?

(Silent night all is quiet.)

Me gwine call you. Between one and three you say you home?

Eeh-hee! And you say you have a phone?

A spark of recognition. A nod. An odd smirk. Of course he thought she wouldn't remember.

Yuh nuh see me have a brain? I remember the number... Now weh yuh name say again? Sammy? I like *Sammy*. A good name is a good thing.

My name? Well, my name is... is..

Hand on hip, bite of the lip, tell a lie? Or tell him why you do not fit your name...?

Reezy...

Tell him why your name is nothing but the passport that has pinned you to it.

But you can call me Pearl.

And when he told you about the dance tomorrow you didn't tell him you were still seventeen, that you were just a girl. Because tomorrow marked the beginning of your world.

In you diary that night you prophesied:

Like a May pole ribbon woven and unwoven round the melody, I saw myself sing and sing, a new world unravelling.

A bridge start being built way West over here in this town. It was nineteen sixty eight year of our Lord, and links were being made.

Rising through the Occident, her father wife says.

What that mean?

Occident mean West (and children must be seen, not heard. Why you listening in...?)

It going all the way from White BBC City to Paddington's brown riverside base and houses were being chopped every which way she looked. She did see the drawings of tower block soon be rising up in their place.

She see construction sites peering over the soon-to-be flyover, while below people squat in boarded up shops. Along, right along, below the higher calling of those destined to pass through at speed, walls had graffiti scrawled all over:

Burn it all down / All you need is dynamite!

Her father wife not so button-lipped anymore. On wash day they bent over the bath and soak the shirts in soap.

Rents are rising, tall as tempers, she say.

And riot is only a matchstick away, Theresa add.

Her stepmother laugh, skin her teeth, then tuck herself back in, body and soul.

She write it in her letter to Nanny (which she still never send):

You wouldn't believe but there are flowers everywhere, except the ground: flowers in vases, sometimes real, flowers painted on brick walls, flowers on wallpaper, flowers on necklaces, flowers in hair, flowers in a chain around my finger (daisies), flowers pressed inside pages, pressed against lips.

She wanted to write how there were demonstrations everywhere too, and she didn't understand it all. But something was happening inside her and out too, bursting.

She didn't say how everyone, young and old, disrespecting police that come charging through squares, well, from what them say in the papers.

But, most of all, she didn't know how to write about the music that wrapped itself everything like wall flowers, like strong weeds, around buildings at all hours, lining avenues that wound down towards the bridge's root: Beatles, blues, rock, rocksteady, Ska, steel pan, jazz, and every combination spanning the neighbourhood. She didn't even know if all the styles had a name, so many sounds surrounding her existence.

The name Theresa? She looked it up in her Notting Hell dictionary four years ago. Theresa meant *prisoner*, prisoner in a tenement with a bruise for a father swelling the insides of her legs up through to her backside: all for her own good.

Whoa! Whoa! Woe betide the girl who disobeys, who parades brazenly through this city at all hours

(I'm sorry father)

Who sprays her neck with stolen perfume

(I never stole it, fathe-)

Hush you mout...! Woe betide the girl who leaves the room to go to class and does not find her *dutty rass* back home within exactly forty five minutes from the end – now to be checked by our friend Sister Baker who live in the room next door.

Yes, father.

Don't *father* me. Just because I working late don't mean you can go gallivanting all over the place, like only *skettles* do.

The word burned more than the slipper.

Just because *your mother*

(and by that he means his wife)

has to go look after so-and-so don't mean you can be out the house too.

And what are these Marxist flyers doing here? What kind of foolishness this? Don't you know black people mustn't get locked into white people mess? What kind of ideas are they feeding you on the street?

I'm not on the street, father... I was ju-just passing –

You better quit passing and *pass*. You better start training your feet to only go to class and back –

(and sometimes to the shops, and sometimes to collect the pardna money)

and you better not get no funny ideas that ruin the heads of smart-ass young girls otherwise your backside will be smarting even more.

If yuh cyaan hear yuh mus' feel / If yuh cyaan hear yuh mus' feel / etc. etc. etc. etc.

Blow after blow raining down until she couldn't feel anything but tears flying fast and an anger – no, hatred – stirring inside.

What he didn't know is that what-ifs flew freely through a mind opened by trumpet-player notes passed from ear to ear. What he didn't know is that fear could only go so far, its limits only reaching the end of the road. What he didn't know wouldn't hurt as she ran off to buy the miniskirt with the pardna money she collected from Sister Louise.

Tonight she would be free and do as she pleased. Tonight she would rock to the music coming from the basement squat where *Sammy* would take her. And *Sammy him no dead-oh Sammy him no dead-oh* Sammy face take up space in her head-oh. And nuh grudgeful man who claimed to be her father could shake him out again.

Just a step along the windowpane, half-rotting and unsteady, holding onto the drain pipe to balance till she was ready to step on to the next door windowsill. She trod barefoot, one hand gripping high heels, eyes fixed fast to the ground. If she could soundlessly bound across and down and pray-to-God no lights came on, she would be free.

A railing spike pointed up the moon; the moon shone down like a searchlight. Voices rose from in the house, and her heart gave way. The dinner rose to her throat. *What kind of eedyat gyal was this, creeping creeping?* What a risky business, what a hiding she would have in store if she got caught! The thought made her head light. Her hand reached to backtrack and her shoes clanged heavy, through the basement stairs. *Too loud!* They'll surely have heard and beat her hide worsen than before.

The thought pushed her to the ground floor. Cheers escaped through the downstairs glass and she knew that sound. She could almost see the Opportunity Knocks clap-o-meter rising, while she descended shoelessly, cursing her foolishness and lack of grip, knowing she couldn't afford to slip one more time.

There was now no turning back and a siren shook her to the final drop: to be spotted by cops would be worse than to be spotted by someone indoors. Round the corner, and running with joy and relief disbelief at having escaped, knowing she could not go back, she rearranged her purse, deciding to abandon the heels for another time. Nylon close-to-knee-length socks separated her slippery feet from the grimy slabs of stone that paved the night streets.

Litter lined each step: toffee wrappers; stubs from tube tickets; fag ends; spillings from bin bags, oozing like the papers running with ink stains; broken bottles. She would not dare to bare her feet further, even if she slipped running like this. Even if her new green socks browned further with dirt and ripped.

Panting, she stopped. She needed not to trip, needed to navigate her way around the blocks through to Colville Road avoiding the rowdy pub crowds with cans and

bottles handy to throw at passers-by they did not know or like. She'd been warned about the types of men who congregated these places. It was pack-up with faces she'd been taught to lower her eyes to and hurry along to the shop before dinner spwoiled.

Perhaps it was the way her feet wet through why she felt so cold, so foolish, so like a little child. Perhaps the nerves had frozen her mind, made her temperature feverish against her numbing hands, which she now placed on her head. Perhaps it was the dead weight of fear waiting for her to come back home, or the dread of appearing at the celebration party with no friends, no booze and, now, not even any shoes:

Even though it seemed they share the same stepmother, Theresa was no Cinderella – and besides, didn't even *she* arrive to the ball with proper footwear? She kissed her teeth and cursed aloud. It was a foolish thing she'd done, all because she let this boy beguile her with his proud trumpet lips and narrow eyes. Besides, what did she expect to find once she reached there, *eenh*? Once he tried to slide his hand up her new skirt? Once he pulled her to a corner? (She'd had warnings about the doings of men.)

And more worrisome besides that, what if he did *not* pull her to a corner? What if he did not even take her arm and spin her round on the dancefloor? What if he had a girl? Or two or more..? What made her so sure this was the right thing? That made her take this chance? ...And now what is it that made her even doubt if the air she was breathing was even real?

Theresa felt her skin escaping from her bones in waves of goosepimpling and shivers, her body moving without her say, jumping like a Poco woman. And then a car tooted and a man in a stripy jacket whistled loud. She should not have helped herself to the money, should not have slid out the window and now she needed help walking in her new check felt mini skirt, Mary Quant on the label.

Now she felt the eyes heaping up around her thighs as she rushed to the bus stop that would take her up through part of Westbourne Grove until she reached nearer the bridge. This is where Mister Sammy lived. This is where he said they should meet.

Hello my sweet, stubborn lady.

His smile shone brighter than the lamplight by the stop where he was waiting.

How you know I would have got the bus?

He shrugged and wiped grease from his red-brown forehead with a suede-jacket sleeve. From behind his back, with the other arm, he magicked a flower, yellow and open-mouthed. *Surprise!* It matched her skirt.

She felt herself smile, and pursed her lips instead. It tickled as it found its place behind her ear, while she was careful not to let it interfere with her rolled, blow-dried, hot-combed, oiled-through mane.

Eh-eh gyal! A pretty you pretty, you know? Of course you must well know...!

He stammered on, reaching out to touch her shoulder while she pushed out her lips again. Best not to show herself prideful.

So where the music happening then? Or you plan to spend up all the night commentating on my pretty-me-prettyiness?

Ah-oh! Tchh!

Samuel put his fingers towards her face. She didn't flinch as he raised one of her cheek then the other. His teeth glinted under the streetlight. She played cool.

G-gal, you 'ard!

Bwoy! You have a lot to learn -!

Gyal, you 'a-a-ave a a-a-answer for every lickle ting I say - ?

Bwoy, you have to earn the right to say certain tings!

Whoay! Why I - ask you over here a-a-again?!

Me nuh no! I was just aksing myself the selfsame question - !

He held his hands up and the sweat rolled down his face, close enough to kiss. So this was what those lovey-dovey books meant when it said *time stood still*?

Bwoy, you give up too easy! Come tek me to where we have to go!

Where this new attitude of hers sprung up from was a mystery, because all this strong talk couldn't ease the tightness she felt around this man with his Indian hair and porkpie hat and smiling teeth and stuttering tongue and *gal you pretty* talk and wide-stance walk as they crossed the road.

W-what happen to your shoe them - ?

She let the question pass just like the bus that revved above his voice.

So what this flower call?

J-Jasmine

Now that is a pretty name for sure

Why you no call me Jasmine tonight, all right?

Jasmine a you the m-m-most beautiful of them all!

A bubbling a bubbling a bubbling...

Man come with drum sound pelt down, pelt like heart beat, feel like it going break down rib cage and everything within it. How good and how pleasant and how sweet (must grab air - must move feet) and lungs would go break if she didn't sing, let song escape.

In the corner, a picky-picky head man with drum was chanting

Unity and community and jus this and...

And these words only made sensation now she'd dragged so much on the reefer and this was pleasing for the soul, or that's what Sammy told her.

She realised she had a flower on her head too, she had to make sure it didn't fall, even as she felt herself fall, her legs were elastic bands falling and expanding and coming back again. The low-ceiling room was stacked, front to back, black and brown bodies bumping close, arms hitting arms as they skanked and scraped, but this feel more heavy and slow than the music she know. This was not ska; this was London sound.

Trumpet-man Sammy was way over the other end of the drummer man. He winked real slow and dipped and put a finger out towards her, as if him saying *me soon come just mek me finish this yah song*. His sweat was powerful strong – she already knew it would be – like a miracle ointment blessing him with notes upon high notes. And even though his back was stooped now, going up and down scales, (what a slippery fish this music is, eenh?) he looked more solid than ever. His trumpet nuh dither nor stammer.

And she was now up front near the band with trumpet for limbs and trumpet for feet and the drummer man was doing something to her chest while another man with a mic – the toaster man she should call it – was rabbling over and over.

Abubblingabubblingabubblingabubbling....

She was letting things rise, not sure yet if it is throw up she wanna throw up, or sing she wanna sing, but this hot room with the man jooking his arm into her side and the fan she had in her hand... She didn't know from where was all moving and pressing in, but there it was. She found herself moving or being moved, didn't know which was which but one of them brought her toward the *bubbling* man, dressed in matching suit and hat, same deep brown as his skin.

Tonight... is only unity / go set our people free...

And there were maybe thirty or forty people and five loud musicians, but she knew a couple people could hear her near where she stood and there were hands now pushing her up, next to the toaster.

Mek her sing, nuh! Mek her sing! Hear the gyal!

And Mr. brown-suit toaster man was passing her the mic, and the mic was a slippery fish too, a fish she had to catch with her voice, and Samuel somehow was next to her, and there was stillness in that hot-up room, just the trumpet man and the drum man and the suity-suity man saying

Come nuh!

and

I see tree-ee-ees a-are green

She began it in an alto trembling up from her belly button, with a fullness she never get to express at home in the attic. This is what they play at home on the radio, but of course she know this was a different rhythm they were dealing with. She know what the drum was speaking into her chest. In one big breath that held the world – and all that was within it – it exhaled back out with one breath.

An a Jasmine too... This world is a flower fi me and fi you.

(And of course, she must have known, when she get back the next morning, she would see her suitcase on the street, opened and ransack already by the time she got near.

She must have known she would be expelled, that her father would think the shelter he provide was some kind of Eden she could be thrown out from for good, and that he would be some kind of God.

And that must mean that she was the Eve who bit the fruit. Who knew music could taste so sweet? Sweet enough to shack up with a man she barely knew from Adam! Sweet enough to move into the basement squat with five other people in a room... Who ever knew, chile? Whoever knew!)

FIVE
(The Boy)

'Blood on the door'

Mayfair, London,

2001

Samuel stepped into the waterless bath, joining the other two. *He would call home tomorrow.* He adjusted the itchy waistband of his jockstrap and tried to resist the urge to laugh, which he blamed on the weed smoke from before, and the dizzying Original Formula poppers. He was also grateful for this temporary relief from Ibrahim... Ibrahim *the Impaler.*

It was a tight fit with the other two guys in there. He snorted a couple of times, balancing himself on the thin tanga line between laughter and awkward silence. The bath enamel was cold against his feet. He placed a palm on his belly and stood for a moment, between the other two pairs of legs, reacquainting himself with vertical reality after what must have been half an hour with his back on a hard oak desk. The tinny house music from the room was almost inaudible.

'Three men in a bath and one of them laughed move over move over.'

The other two guys, crouching beside him, shifted and 'shushed' at the sound of his voice. He resisted the urge shout it out, sucking his cheeks in. Coke always made him boisterous; he annoyed himself sometimes. But you had to laugh when the laughter hit you.

Bottles and other bathroom necessities busied themselves at the bath's edges. A shower cap, a soap bar, three bottles of lotion (*Gold? Frankincense? Myrrh?*). A pyramid of towels, folded starkly. Ibrahim's hand reached up to pull him down.

The Job was standing slack-bottomed by the bathroom door, shouting over his shoulder: 'Who is this? Whaddaya want?'

No answer, this time. Whoever it was had been standing outside the door for at least five minutes now. They'd ignored the first knocks, but now The Job was worried enough to hide them all in the bathroom. Most likely someone had got the wrong room number, but the guy was paranoid. At least he wasn't breathing stale tortilla chips in Samuel's face right now.

The Job was important – a politician or something – in his country, wherever that was. Important enough that he didn't need to care about his personal appearance. An unnaturally firm globe of a belly, covered in dense hair, some of it greying; more hair creeping up over his shoulders, ending suddenly at his neck; a smooth, round face, which wasn't either hideous or appealing; bloodshot, coked-up eyes; olive skin that was impossible to determine – was he a white guy who tanned easily, or a brown guy who

kept out of the sun? –; two thick hands with no ring on either; surprisingly skinny legs; he wasn't evenly distributed.

Where was the guy from? The accent, slipping from a lilting English to a faux-American New Yorker – *New Yoiker* – twang, albeit one that hadn't quite managed to sound authentic. He was puzzling.

'Oi, Victor, get down.'

For a moment, Samuel stayed where he was, confused, before remembering. He was Victor tonight. He squatted down, easing his knees inside the bathtub cradle.

Globe Belly had asked where he was from, and Samuel had offered him a country at random, like he always did. He knew never to say British and never Nigerian, just go for whatever story came to his mind. Never Brazilian, either – the worst reputation to have; he'd heard the condom trick story at least four times from different jobs. *They pour lube down the end when you're not looking, then tell you they've just cum, after a few minutes.* He practiced his new name under his breath. *Víctor.*

Outside in the bedroom, knuckles rapped on the entrance door yet again. Three firm clashes of fist on wood. The Job turned away, listening.

'Ok, ok. Gimme one minute!'

He stepped fully inside the bathroom.

'I'm a go close this door toight, ok? Keep your noise down, ok? I'm a go get the door... Better be fucking room service!'

He slipped a dressing gown over his wide, werewolf back, his head nearly touching the doorframe as he slammed the door behind him. The house music, all the doof doof doof du-du doof doof doof faded. If the walls in his own home were even nearly as sound-proofed as this hotel suite, Samuel would accept more incalls.

The whole scenario was *off* somehow. Which kind of idiot tries to hide a bunch of escorts in an empty bath while the room service guy comes to deliver something he'd forgotten he'd ordered? Samuel-Victor was riding with it, for now, just as the other two were. Perhaps it was the extra boy he'd ordered, who hadn't yet turned up. Or the police? They had drugs. Four fat lines on a mirror on the bedside table; weed; pills; God knows what else. *If they came, his parents would have two sons who'd been to jail!*

No one else knew where he was. Samuel's mind ran over how he could get out of this situation quickly. What ID did he have in his wallet, what giveaway numbers might be in his phone, how easy would it be to run out of the hotel in just a jockstrap and hail a taxi home? Yeah right. Not likely. He looked at the other two. Safety in numbers. They didn't seem perturbed. He slowly depanicked. It'd be fine.

Two in a bath and one of them laughed, move over move over. Samuel stole a glance towards the toilet bowl as Baby Blue Underpants got up and pissed, noiselessly. He stepped deftly back into the white void of the bath, easing Samuel's knees aside with his toes. Then he crouched again, his arse right in Samuel's face – deliberate? – as he bent to pull the bath curtain closed. The curtain was bone white; they must have had to change them frequently. Usually smart places like this had sliding glass panels, but Samuel was grateful for that old-school white curtain. Now he breathed in BBU's taut thigh muscles, eyed the God-like V of his back, his gluteous Os and only half-flaccid cock, stretching the triangle of lycra that clothed him. He could feel Ibrahim's eyes following his, but he didn't care. No mistaking it – he'd seen this guy's photo before, pretty much the exact same view. On the same page as he was, too. When he got back home, he would check his copy of *Boyz* to be sure; but it had to be. This guy had had no need for Photoshop though. *Ever ever ever amen.* Baby Blue. Probably nineteen or twenty to Samuel's twenty-one.

Samuel allowed his left knee to fan out more and press against his.

'G'mme space, bruv, yeh?' Baby Blue hissed.

'Yeah, cool.'

'Shh!'

No space left anyway. Their knees had to touch. This bath was made for one; two at a push. Samuel sighed slowly, the thickness of his breath turning the air stale.

Imagine ending up getting nicked for drugs, just like his brother? He'd be another son of Elder Robinson's, lost for good. The church gossip would be off the scale!

It was bad enough he'd suddenly quit bible school after only two months. And then he couldn't face church anymore. He confessed to his father first how he'd been struggling, how he'd ended up kissing another boy. Just as well he didn't tell him the rest. The coldness of his dad's expression stayed with him. *You should be the one in jail*, his fingers seemed to say, when they poked him in the chest. Even though his exact words were *Seek God!* And then he refused to say anything else to him, flat out refused to say a word until the day Samuel left for good.

He hadn't been disowned, exactly; he just couldn't face going back. At the time, before getting into trouble again, Manny had been planning to move in for a while, to look for work. Trying to avoid two people in a small home was difficult; three would have been impossible.

Ibrahim's finger punctured the cycle of his thoughts. It jabbed its way at Samuel again, finding his sore sphincter, even in this awkward crouching position. *Great – a love triangle... of sorts.* No time out. Samuel groaned. They better not be here much longer.

Only moments ago, the relentless Ibrahim had been stabbing Samuel's intestines while Globe looked on and took deep inhalations from his jar and stroked himself through his pants. A lot of guys paid to have Ibrahim poke around in them with his extra-long cock, shoving up to fill their insides. *You feel so naice, baby. That good for you?* The whispered word 'easy' had no effect. Samuel had taken it with a barely-disguised grimace and groans that could have either been discomfort or pleasure, but who cared? Ibrahim could easily have pulled out and just pretended to fuck for a while; Samuel would have done that if it was anyone else on the receiving end.

Samuel brushed Ibrahim's hands away. His elbows were poking Ibrahim's chiselled stomach; all that bone and sinew and nowhere safe for his arms to land. It would make his life a lot easier if he found Ibrahim sexually attractive too. He was too full on, too wiry, too insect-like, and the bloodshot eyes and chapped lips didn't help.

But this was a good gig; no way did he want to piss Ibrahim off. Tonight, he'd leave here with five hundred at least; provided there wasn't too much more fucking, he could cope with that, despite being the only one who didn't get a break. Both Ibrahim and Bright Blue Undies had taken their turns with Samuel, one at a time. In some ways he was grateful the other guy, Damion Top, hadn't showed. As it was, he, Samuel, had done most of the work. He ought to get a bigger share of the cash. But life wasn't fair. He'd have to deal with it. *Life wasn't fair for his mother either, was it? How must she feel, with a preacher for a husband, a convict for an oldest son, and a gay prodigal for the youngest? What must be going on in her head?*

Samuel leaned back, feeling the tension in his thighs. The slate tiles were hard on his skull but at least they were more alive than Baby Blue. On the other side of the bathroom, near the sink, every five or six tiles shone a different shade of fancy. Here, inside the bath, his eyes argued with the shower curtain. *What are you doing here? You don't belong.* He liked the tiles though – it was the kind of blue-grey he'd rarely seen before.

He tried to remember what some of the other rooms were like, if they had cheap-looking shower curtains and smart looking tiles, and whether he would have noticed. How many times had he been in this hotel? Twice, maybe? A bar of soap, a smelly hand cream, a shower gel vial... A middle-aged businessman, a wedding ring shadow, a lonely testicle in a low-hanging bag, a moon-cratered arse that needs discipline discipline, tawse, cane, twenty sir, thank you sir, *I'm starting again. I don't like the tone in your voice...*

'Hey' Ibrahim pulled at his arm, grabbed his jaw to bring their faces close. They kissed, Ibrahim's harsh dreadlocks swiping between, curtaining their mouth-to-mouth

interaction. On Ibrahim's tongue, chewing gum, skunk and Samuel's own arse and poor-quality coke battled. Samuel gagged. Not great this. But preferable – just about – to being fucked. Curved and pokey, it was neither pleasurable nor easy getting used to Ibrahim.

Usually, when undergoing the repetitive friction of man inside man, he could think of the next thing on the agenda– going out to meet friends, or returning home to empty the communal washing machine – or a new thing, like an album he bought and needed to burn into his laptop. No such luck today; over and over Ibrahim had screwdriven into him, all the time asking if it was good. In real life – in the life that belonged to his other phone, where friends, family and daytime belonged – Samuel didn't take well to the feeling of another man's power inside him. Víctor, however, appreciated the money; if he buffed up a bit more, perhaps, if he could one day be like Blue Undies, he could readvertise as Top Only and make the same amount of cash.

Samuel pushed a dreadlock aside and let his tongue slide over Ibrahim's while his thoughts disappeared down Park Lane and flew across the city.

Everything is the colour of tea. The houses are breakfast tea with too little milk. The roads Earl Grey. The sky clear with a half-submerged slice of lemon. Stir it and see the citrus oil rising. If you sneak in, creep up the stairs and peep down into the living room through the banister, you can see his mother haul herself up from the couch for another pot of peppermint tea. The TV is on too loud and it's another police drama and all the action goes missing under his mother's mutterings. Why did she just do that? Go on, tell him! No! She hums or finally gets up to boil another cup. A dozen or so cushions suffocate the room. Towels drying on the radiator. The hotness of the television screen, the pressure-kettle room, the prayer without ceasing. His mother and father have been brought to their arthritic knees, in different ways, but you can see it in the slowing movements of his mother, how she struggles to lift herself from the sofa. The walls announce the absence of Manny. They have taken down his photo. The air is heavy with questions.

He needs to phone her–

and then Ibrahim's finger interrupted, again. The lubricant had long dried.

'I need a break.'

'Ok, baby. You gonna give me some of that again later, though, yeah?'

Goose pimples ran up Samuel's naked arms, all along where the tattooed web on his bicep sat. The spider, itching again. Cramped in a bath with two other mostly-naked guys, he couldn't reach over and scratch it easily.

Sunday broke on Samuel's Timex wrist with two beeps. His belly ached. He'd been here exactly two hours; just another hour or two and he was free. Once they were out of there, Ibrahim would split their money; he'd have to sacrifice another tenner for the weed. Then another tenner for the liquid Kamagra – not that he'd needed it, seeing as Globe Belly just wanted him to bottom. If he'd known in advance, he would have smoked more; he would have braced himself for Ibrahim; he would have tried using the douche.

He remembered how his father handed him a stack of notes, the week after he left the Bible College, when the pressure became too much:

'Since you say you're a big man now, here you go!'

It was more than he'd ever held in his life. His father's hands cupped his, with a serious wad of money in between.

'Now I'm taking out twenty for the week's grocery shopping; another twenty for the month's hot water and heating which I keep telling you to turn off; and this is for the electricity because you always leave the light on; this is for the new shoes you had to buy because you kept breaking down the other ones; this is for the times I've driven you around like a taxi driver, this week alone; oh... and the rest,' now only a few notes remained, 'is for the rent. And you owe me some. So you can either take all that money back and leave out of my house now, or you can fix up and seek the Lord...'

After collecting his money, he would probably fork out another twenty for a cab – he could afford to treat himself tonight – or, who knows, maybe The Globe would pay for one.

He is counting the grey hairs on his father's head. This one for me, this for Manny. He loves me. He loves me not. Jesus painting their children's sins on each hair follicle. His father loved him, yes; worried for him, of course. But it was born of absolutes: obey my rules or we don't speak. The silence of a new millennium; the silence, a hole, which used to be filled with discipline. Maybe he felt closer to Manny because he beat him more.

He sees a bible shrugging open, limp-wristed on the edge of a table. But even the very hairs on you head are all numbered; ye are of more value than many sparrows. He is counting the greys and cursing this self-righteous man, an exile in his own country. Failure of his own doctrine: Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not depart. He too, with teabag eyes. With a lemon smile.

The attic is singing from the Redemption Hymnal. Can you hear it? A mouse is gnawing the crumbs of his childhood.

This was how it went:

- 1) The Job did a *shh!* at everyone and shut the bathroom door. He, a semi-naked large guy, tied his bathrobe before exiting. Shower curtains were drawn.
- 2) Three black bodies from four separate corners of the city sitting in an empty bath. A boy called Samuel who that night went by Victor – like he'd previously gone by Marcus on other occasions – put the shower cap on his head and poked his tongue out at the guy who called himself Ibrahim – who could also have been Gary or Fola.
- 3) No one laughed, though Samuel tried.
- 4) The guy who called himself Ibrahim put a finger to Samuel's lips and kissed him into silence. In silence two of the three continued the charade of lust while one, whose name Samuel did not hear – neither an assumed nor a real one – prodded words into his phone.
- 5) This much Samuel knows.

Then he assumed the police must have come. A thud sounded through the walls. There were heavy steps and then there was a crash, something broke. It was big enough thud to be heard through the thick bathroom door. They were frightened when they heard him bang against the door.

After what felt like minutes, everything was still again. Maybe they had arrested him and dragged him out of the room. But there were no voices now, just stillness. How do you admit to being scared when your clothes and wallet are in the other room and you're naked?

Ibrahim – still half-hard – pulled back the curtains, jumped out the bath and fixed the other two a stare. Why hadn't the police burst through and grabbed them too? Something serious was up.

Samuel's adrenaline lifted him out of the bath. Perhaps a minute or two passed, but it felt like hours, as he held onto Ibrahim's wrist, tried to keep him from opening the door. Then he let go. But they did not get that far out of the bathroom because the Job was blocking the door.

Their path was blocked by the large man who hired them. It smelt awful, of shit. He was on the floor. Something was wrong, very wrong. He was dead. As the door moved, blood hit Samuel's leg.

It took both Ibrahim and Samuel to push the door open enough for them to squeeze through. As they passed, Samuel stepped on a hotel slipper and jumped. He

must have screamed. He held onto Ibrahim's shoulder then leaned against the wall, as far away from the man as possible, far from the man he'd just jumped over.

The dressing gown was blood splattered. Even with the lights dimmed for sex, he could see he'd stepped in blood. Blood on the carpet, and on the wall. Blood pouring from the man, from what should have been his neck. Blood and broken porcelain.

He had been stabbed more than once, surely. Victor looked away, above his head.

The walls were white. The abstract paintings were blue and red. The swirls were moving, spinning around, and forcing him to move his eyes back down to the body. The body was a mess. A handle embedded in his middle. Or what used to be his middle. How could a man contain so much blood?

How long had Samuel gripped Ibrahim's wrist? It surely cannot have been more than a minute. How could the Job have died, a couple of feet away from them?

Samuel didn't even know the man's name. One leg must have been touching the bathroom door before it opened, and it was now curled out for mercy. His six-foot-something bulk had grown to twice the size, every bit of him covering this side of the room. Why did he not scream for help? Or did he scream and they not hear? The painting on the wall was blue.

The man had become a large island in the middle of a suffocatingly-small room. The air in this room was horrid and hot and smelled of blood and faeces. The blood that must still be pouring out of the man. Samuel retched and tried to look away again, but he was drawn to him.

'Victor!'

Had the killer left? Did they know they were also in the room?

The room was silent. No, the room was loud.

Samuel – now definitely Samuel again and Victor no more – had been yelling over the doof doof doof music with one foot raised unsure which way to move next – towards the man or towards his clothes. They'd need to step over the man again to leave the room. He was stretched out between the bathroom and the door. He was dead. He was dead and they were all in a lot of trouble now.

Samuel would have to dress and pass the body again to get out of there– oh my God, he was a Job a minute ago and now he was a body – and instead focused on the hand prints on the door. Blood on the door. He dry heaved. But nothing came out. He needed to leave again, even as Ibrahim was saying something and the music had now stopped but Samuel couldn't hear. What was the track? Baby Blue had already leapt towards the bed.

That's it, just two hours ago, the Job was fiddling about with his iPod and asking them what music they like and chiding them all for their unsophisticated tastes.

'How old are you? Twenny-three, twenny-five?'

Samuel had been offended. 'I'm twenty-one.'

'No... really! Not the age you put in the magazine. I know you guys knock off a couple of years but it don't matter. I reckon you're twenny-five. Boys your age keep listening to that techno and shit. You need some of this real...'

When three people who only know each other through body thrusts and behind-the-john winks and barely audible sighs when things are taking too long and where you gym? and link me up for a duo yeah? finally come up against something real. *That*.

Ibrahim grabbed his shoulder.

'Come. We need to get out of here. They might come back.'

Shit.

'...'

'What?'

'...' Samuel dry heaved again.

'Here, take your cash and get dressed. Come on, man, let's go.'

Samuel looked around for a towel, so he didn't get more blood on him as he stepped back in the direction of the door. He took the wad of notes, noticing they were fifties. Easily more than a grand.

'Come!'

Fuck. They might come back. They might come back. He needed to pass the body or risk being next.

Shit. It's just a body. A lifeless, larger than life *I've got a body a very busy body and it goes everywhere...* The drawers were all open. When did Blue Undies go? Had he taken his cut and run, while Samuel was busy losing his shit? Had the other two checked for more cash? For the Job's wallet?

The room was surprisingly small. With the view of the city cut off by the thick velvet curtain, it felt claustrophobic. His jeans were in the corner he'd left it in, next to the bin, where tissues and used condoms sat. *Fuck. My DNA. Everywhere in this room.*

As he put his jeans, t-shirt and hoodie on, he stuffed the contents of the bin into his pockets and followed Ibrahim out of the door. As he closed it, he looked down at the scene. *Fuck.*

Samuel buckled his belt under the stark light of the mirrored lift. He avoided his and Ibrahim's reflections, just looked down at his cruddy Adidas. His Von Dutch shirt. His hoodie. All things that would have to be burned. There's DNA everywhere. All the molecules which he would leave behind in the lift, all the prints on the oak table, in the bathtub. On the bed. No, he hadn't really got to lay on the bed in all that time. Nothing must link him to this death. He would have to burn his clothes at the very least. Not look suspicious on the CCTV. *Shit. CCTV.*

'Marcus, it's gonna be all right, ok?'

The okay wasn't a question, but it was questionable. *Marcus.* His middle name; the other name he used. Samuel nodded all the same. Tonight he was Marcus to some and Victor to others. Tomorrow, those two dudes needed to disappear. And fast.

The lobby was empty. Calm. The numbers in the lift descended from twenty-six to fourteen. Two highly-perfumed women and one man entered. Both in suits. Samuel fixed his eyes on the red stilettos and marble floor. Don't scream. His hoodie was not warm enough. Ibrahim's hand on his shoulder would not still him. The lift was too slow. His heart was racing ahead of his body, was already looking for the quickest route home was picking up pace and knock-knocking three times against his skin, a fist full of what the fuck just happened here?

A man was on the floor upstairs. Dead. Stabbed. They could have called the police. The police would have come and they would have found drugs and a stab wound and three black men and... let's not jump to conclusions, boys?

And if there were stab wounds, there had to be a stabber. And maybe the stabber was following them, or knew who they were? *Shit*, the murderer was following them. The murderer was waiting for them in the lobby. If Samuel could hold the screams and the vomit inside his throat for one more minute, that would be ok. He'd just been witness to a murder. *Fuck.* For the first time that night, he wished Ibrahim had kept fucking him and the man hadn't answered the door.

SIX
(The Girl)

'If you can't be careful, you need to know how to get rid...'

(West) London, 1971

It was three weeks since Andrew. Three weeks since the two of them agreed not to tell Sammy about it; he didn't need to know. *Keeping mum*, was how Andrew put it, his mouth twisting to keep his No 6 in as he talked, his face behind a wall of smoke.

It was three weeks since she'd parked away all comparisons between the two of them; now even the memory of that afternoon made her nauseous. Trapped inside their room, the smell of the ganja made her heart gallop away from her body. Maybe she was thinking of Andrew again, how he fit differently inside, how it seemed to bend into her. How she'd craved it a second time.

The room started to take on weight around her, heavy and unbearable. The walls were drawing closer, suffocating. Where was the window? Even that had become squinty-squinty, the weak afternoon light barely making it through the half-drawn curtain. She needed to throw up.

The record on the player – a song she didn't recognise – battled through the confusion of their bedsitter. The bass guitar solo had been running for too long, the rhythm frantic. Where was the calm she needed? As she pushed her body towards the window, towards the tiny escape of air, she could feel him watching. *Mek him watch*.

Come here, baby.

She took a breath through the window, into the street, a neighbour's mustard yellow Cortina pulling into the kerb. She instantly felt some relief. The curtain was dirty again, a bunch of it wedging the gap of sky open. The sash needed fixing – it wouldn't stay up on its own. The nets were yellowing too. The paint was peeling from the wood. Back when she was a child, she would have been made to clean every inch of this room.

She kissed her teeth.

I'm not your baby, *baby*.

She turned towards him, anyway, to go back towards the bed; maybe after lying down again, the feeling would go. The room was too jumpy. The drumbeat kicked in again badoof-badoof bap-bap.

Sammy's stretchy-stretchy arms reached out to grab her elbow, pulling her onto his lap, onto the orange chair. She fell onto him and his hands hooked around her waist, trapping her like a seatbelt, his thick arms holding her in place, buckling her in for a journey she didn't want to go on. His chin scratched her neck.

Why you so uptight these days, eenh?

She felt him harden under her, through his velvet trousers. Even in her temper – no, perhaps because of her temper – he was getting hard.

Why you being such a drag?

All those months ago she'd thought of marrying him; now it was like they'd skipped the marrying part already and were headed for the hateful lock-horns of middle age. Adulteration, argumentation, confusion. This is not how she'd pictured her life. The picture of her life had her smiling in it, in a big gold frame. Also inside the frame: a stack of records with her name on; a house somewhere outside of the city, with her own room; a Capri perhaps, or at least a Mini. She was not sure if Sammy fit. He was making her miserable. The place was making her miserable. *If she had a wings like a dove...*

Sammy took another puff from the maryjane and held it to her mouth; bile rose up from her stomach. She shook her head no.

G'along then!

She stood up, put her slippers on and left the room they shared, before running down the stairs. The tears hit her cheeks as she stood in the landing.

Five minutes later, she flushed the toilet, washed her mouth of the vomit and finally accepted what she'd known for at least the last couple of days.

The other thing she knew was there was no way she would keep it.

The bathroom was cool, at least, even if she had to ignore the dutty. Four of the rooms shared this place and not even one of them took it upon themselves to tend the leaks. Not one of them seemed to mind the chacka-chacka towels on the floor. Cheops! The pride of a woman was missing from bedsitter land. One day...! Maybe if she tidied around a little, it would ease her heartbeat. If she thought about the–

After the second time, she flushed again, tiptoed around the wet towels, and back to the sink, rinsed her mouth. She was thankful for the quiet. At this time of the day, she could linger in peace for a while; the morning rush had passed, the hot water had already run out.

Theresa climbed into the bath, stood on top of the upturned wash tin and lifted up her woollen jumper. In the mirror, her belly looked as it always had. Turn to the left and she was Jasmine, in purple, hair like a flower under her bright scarf. She looked like a big woman with everything to say. Turn to the left and she was still Theresa, Pearl, Spider. *Spider*. How long since she had heard that name spoken to her? Long, so long, her old names were like an island floating away from her, were like her language, becoming more and more English as time went on.

If she had a child one day, she would have to make an effort to teach it to speak in curves like a true Jamaican, not the close-mouth, cold ways of the English. She would teach it to learn the different meanings of words: ignorant, fresh, fair, pear...

If she had a child... Not now, though. Now she was young, and in a bathroom that would make Nanny shame. And she'd only had her freedom for what... three years? The idea of something growing in her belly and coming out of her, only to chew at her breasts, slow her down, ruin her voice...? No! Out of the question.

Fool fool gyal / If you fool with bwoy / Your belly gwine full...

In the mirror, her belly looked like it always had; yet now it seemed to have a little stretch to it. Or was it a curve? A new growth sticking to her insides-?

Baby, tell me what happen? What the matter, precious?

He'd come as a knock at the door, softly, trying to enter with his too-smooth words. He was knocking into her thoughts, interrupting her mediation. He'd already knocked his way into her womb. Or... or... she swallowed the other possibility and flushed the water again.

Sammy! Give me a bly, nuh?

It was difficult to leave the bathroom; her legs were wobbly, and her heart raced, but she couldn't stay here forever.

Baby come out and let's talk, nuh?

Yuh nuh hear me say me coming out?

Out into the corridor, she did not meet his gaze as he brought her close to him. They stood with the banister behind their heads, her side against his side, him looking at her, studying her, always trying and trying to get inside her head. The wall in front of her was less than a stride away. There was mould on the ceiling, a cobweb on the corner. What once was white was now yellow. Sammy's eyes were on her face, she could feel it as she moved her pupils round; she wouldn't look back, though.

The wallpaper had peeled off a little; the same paisley pattern but lighter. Spots of yellow. The faint trace of a crayon. No children had been here for a while – well, as best she knew – but the crayon remained.

Gyal you look rough!

His words swirled a little. She mumbled them back to herself. *Girl... you... look... rough.* There were people who tasted wine like this. She'd seen it on the television. They rolled it around on their tongues and then spat it back out.

Thank you!

The key to the front of the house scratched at the door; it always took a few tries to unlock. Sammy's eyes moved over towards the sound.

Come, make we go upstairs and continue this.

We not going upstairs and we not *continuing* anything.

Girl, you hard-headed, eenh?

Blouse and...! One of the first thing you said to me when we met: *What a strong-head ooman you are, princess. And how pretty pretty!*

He always laughed when she mocked his voice, that voice of his that betrayed an English university, a rebellion against his own uptown parents; it was a voice that gave away his need to take back some of the lostness of the West Indies for himself. Without it, he could pass for Indian.

Ain't nobody changed but you, Zam-Zam!

She looked up at him and his worn out smile, mini white flags bared behind his lips. How much older he looked today. He would be thirty soon – well, sooner than her – and he would want to be a father, surely. The only kind of man that didn't want no children by thirty had to be a different sort of fish altogether.

The door finally opened, unjammed itself with a hard push. Graham came through the threshold. Of all people, him. Him with his suspect ways, *a different kind of fish* indeed. Her belly was swimming.

Another man followed behind him, a stranger; they both seemed startled at the welcoming couple. The stranger was clearly that way too; he seemed womanish.

Hello, Graham.

Fucking nastiness, she whispered under her breath as the two men returned his greeting. The other one, shameless, he even looked Sammy up and down like *that*. Sammy cleared his throat.

There's a couple letters for you... I – I put them on the side over there.

Thank you.

Sammy poked her in the ribs. Not hard, or anything – nothing she hadn't felt before – but now she wondered if the baby would feel the poke.

She was actually grateful for the interruption. Where was the conversation going to go? She didn't want to speak to Sammy, and he had that urgent pursing of the lips, like he was blocked and needed a wash out.

Graham looked embarrassed to see them both, as he should; the other man walked behind him with purpose and they disappeared up the stairs to their floor, a blur of bell bottoms jeans. She kissed her teeth, not simply out of disgust, but through something else – anger perhaps – that was easy to pass onto them. Graham was the landlord's nephew, too; only God knew the family story...

Mind your business.

It is my business, and it's against the law.

She raised her voice with the last part of her declaration. They had no shame.

No it isn't. Not anymore.

Yes it is. Them have to be *in private*.

A pause. The paisley of the wall smudged when viewed cross-eyed. How many people had studied it since the decorators first put the wallpaper up? How many other people up and down the country had this very same design, losing its colour through tobacco smoke and age?

Smoking the leaf is against the law too. And you don't seem to mind that, at least until today.

Why was this boy always so ready to challenge her? Wasn't he meant to be trying to get into her head already? And now he was trying to *change* her head, too?

Yes, but this is against God's law as well.

Since when you worried about God's law, Reesy? You turning Christian on me? They're behind closed doors and we have more to be worrying about right now than –

Do we?

Do we what? Wha' do we?

Do we have a lot to worry about?

Paisley was Scottish, wasn't it? It was probably a joke they played on the English, bringing them paisley and tartan, selling them masses of the design, just to get back at them. One day she would live somewhere without these dizzy-making shapes on the wall that looked like pictures of sperm under the microscope in her science book.

I don't know. You tell *me*.

Zam-Zam!

The hallway went quiet. A door slammed, two floors up; of course, them foolish boys had been listening to every last word of their conversation. Good. And probably all the other people who were in, too. There were nine rooms, the people inside changing hands most of the time.

I does like it when you call me that, you know.

She kissed her teeth again, allowed the hiss to draw out, to echo.

For peace sake, Jazzy, look at me.

She met his eyes and couldn't tell if they were red from the smoke or tears. She shouldn't pity a man. Man should be strong. She should be strong too; she needed the strength to get rid of the child inside her, before it was too late.

You hard-headed, you know. But that mean you strong. And you and me, we gonna go far.

She shouldn't feel sorry for him but she hugged him, anyway, her jumper feeling scratchier than before. It scratched her neck like his beard scratched her neck. Her whole body felt itchy, irritable.

She let him go after counting to ten. And then she counted her breaths over and over till he disappeared.

He returned with her coat in his arms. He draped it over her shoulders and they walked out into the fresh air against her face, into the midday sunshine. It was the kind of cool air she'd got used to; she finally saw the purpose of it. They slammed the door and she heard the whole house crumble behind her, in her mind's eye; nothing but rubble left of her old sanctuary. But she wasn't as foolish as Lot's wife. She didn't look back.

Here were the streets (she could feel every piece of it under her toes). Here was all of Westbourne Park (although the neighbourhoods bled into each other so fast so fast – some road mapper got excited with all the naming). Here was a criss-crossing of roads, and finally the Harrow Road, big and wide. Hand in hand, silent as cockroaches, they walked alongside all that traffic. Where was everyone going on a Sunday in such a rush?

Vrrroom-vroom, the three-wheeled cars with the four star petrol, the 18 bus, the mad woman with the rollers always wandering the street barefoot. *Clara*, was it?

They picked up pace. She fell in step with Sammy, his unpolished boots against her slippers. She hadn't even gone up for her shoes.

Soon they reached the end of the grey concrete rainbow, the edge of the flyover, the road of heavens that always filled her with wonder. If she had the child, by the time it grew up, all roads would be up in the heavens like this, while the city dwellers get in all kind of argument below, forever shielded from the sun and rain, forever separated by concrete girders. *Girders*, was that a word?

Is it what I think?

He was talking again.

Pardon?

You acting all kind of funny, and you sick up in the bathroom. And now you won't speak to me. Is this what I think it is, Jazzy?

What is it you think it is?

You know exactly what I mean.

He couldn't know, surely? He *can't* know. The blood fizzed to her head like a shaken Cola bottle.

Huh?

Are you...? You know...?

Precious Lord, no. By no means should he know about this baby, at least not until she knew how to rid herself of it.

Well, if you mean seh why me tek down today, ask your good friend Winston.

She waited for his reaction.

The oxtail he cook wasn't cook right, so then yes it is what you think it is.

Jasmine, child, I need you to be serious. I need you to tell me the truth.

He'd put his English voice on again, a true sign she was getting to him. *Good.* He had no idea what was in her head, how even talking made her feel like everything was going to come back out of her. He couldn't handle hearing about her fear, about the possibility of a baby growing in her. And how she was going to kill it, kill it dead. Even though everything said it was wrong. Even though Sammy thought she was cleverer than that, of course she believed in God's law. How could she tell him she had every idea of doing something she knew was wrong in order to do the right thing? Eenh? Even if he would try to convince her otherwise, would try to get her to keep it.

What if you can't handle the truth if it lick you in the face?

You not even making sense. I need to know.

What do you need to know? You can't even say it!

I need you to say it. And then we can take it from there. And then I can support you. We can support each other.

Yes, I did kiss Andrew. And I feel bad about it, so bad. That what I been keeping from you. You happy now?

He was weak. Coming with his pity-fi-sorry-fuh face and asking *are you...* like it was a missing word game. *Are you pregnant? Are you ill? Are you thinking about sleeping with my best friend? Are you...?* (And it was true, after all; she did more than kiss Andrew... but Lord knows she'd been trying to forget it).

Sammy walked back home like a weak man, tears in his eyes that were red from smoking. Meanwhile, she was left there alone, trying not to remember what actually happened with his friend, with *their* friend. And she realised she was hungry.

When she returned later, to their tiny room, before she could say anything, he got up from the bed. He must have been waiting.

His body was a blur springing towards her and before the door even closed she felt something connect with the side of her face. The palm of his hand? Everything slowed, like it was a movie. She felt herself fold over, her hand on instinct coming up to her face, her knees thudding on the carpet. Her jaw stung with the echo of the slap; her chest bubbled with laughter and pain.

Perhaps it was the surprise of his usually gentle spirit, now hardened against her. Whatever it was, her face was kicking back in response. She could feel her cheekbone vibrating in anger – her eye socket too. He'd broken her face.

The last man who beat her lived less than a mile away, and how far she'd come since! How far and how stupid, bringing her stupid body from one man to another, across the neighbourhood, only to wind up on the floor, burned by a striking hand. She might not be able to see out of her eye again. The thought of him – her father – made the tears just come out of her like in the movies. The heat on her face was what she'd wanted, wasn't it? Why else had she provoked him?

She stepped outside of herself, watched herself curl up into a bawl. Like lava she cried on the floor, like a mad woman. Even with her eyes closed, she could see him, she could see her father entering the room. She could see his narrow-eyes and baldhead laughing at her. She blinked him away through the tears and he was gone again. Her cheek was on fire. Her eye socket throbbed. She was staring at the carpet, as purple as her jumper. Never had she been like this in front of her father; now, with Sammy, she had made herself a girl, pathetic.

She tried to become a stone. She swallowed her tears, made herself still. No man would ever see her like this again. This is what her premonition had been; the foundations of the house burning down. She slowly opened her eyes, held her breath; it was just a slap, nothing broken, even if everything still stung. She flopped back down.

A hand stroked her back when she didn't get up from the floor, most likely the same hand that hit her. She allowed herself to respond to the stroking, and then the hand became two hands, and those hands began to reach lower, down to her buttocks, down between her thighs. His breath was warm on her neck as he joined her on the floor; his body began to wrap around hers. How could he do this, right there on the dirty floor? The shock of his touch kept her frozen.

With eyes closed again, she allowed Sammy's pressing against her, allowed the sound of the fly being unfastened, and all it signified. She let him enter her and he was tender, even in the quick rearranging of her panties, the fumbling around, the lifting of her skirt. He kissed her neck over and over. I'm so so sorry each kiss seemed to whisper.

His kisses left cool damp traces along her neck, woke all the nerves in her skin, even though she didn't want it to yet. She wanted to be a stone but he was trying to break down her barriers and she would let him this time. She brought her own hand down between her legs as his thrusts grew wilder. She got up onto her knees, allowed herself to be lifted onto the bed. She moaned into the pillow as her skin came off

entirely, as the fever inside her danced. After a few minutes, she began to rock the fever herself. She pushed against him, gyrated, felt her bottom smack against his pelvis and pulled away, pushed back again. All he could do was hold on and speak in tongues, his words becoming less and less meaningful as he began to let go. When he eventually pulled out of her, she was reborn.

The traffic outside was calm and steady. It was now night. Their ironed shirts watched over them from the rail above the bed. They watched her as the coolness of the flannel against her eye turned lukewarm, kept her awake. Tomorrow she would have to be up early to work at the Corner House; Sammy would be at the dole queue and rehearsing with the other musicians by midday.

You awake, Sammy?

Somewhere outside, a light turned green to red. A car engine stopped. The Spring air rattled the sash window. It was still May, still prone to cold.

Sammy?

The disquiet in her had revived. He'd held onto her until his grip slackened; now his arm barely touched her.

He twisted as she backed away from him, taking more of the blanket. She looked over her shoulder at his body. Like a chalk outline in a movie. Like a murder committed in the night. *How funny. That's exactly what he could be!*

Theresa leapt off the bed in one movement, trying not to wake him. The flannel hit her pillow. She shushed it, feeling giddy with the act she was about to commit. Giggles rose from her as she crept to the drawer to retrieve the knife from the drawer where they kept the few eating implements they possessed. One day, he'd promised, they could afford to live somewhere with more space, with a kitchen of their own, and maybe a balcony. Lucky there was no balcony now; she might throw him off.

With a flick of the light switch, the brightness filled the room instantly. There'd be no going back now. Knife in the other hand – the same knife she'd last cut onions with – she woke him up with a slap, a slap across the face. She waited for the surprise to hit him, for him to see the metal.

If you ever raise your hand to me again –

She didn't have to finish the sentence. He jumped back, raised his hands. His chest went in out quickly; his breaths became visible. After the shock, he tried to reason.

I sorry, my queen. I'm so sorry. I don't know why I – but I was angry

Leave it at the sorry and start again–

I am sorry, I so sorry.

And I will never – ?

And I will never, *ever*, lift a finger against you again, in my life. I love you too much, my Jazzy. I love you to bitsies.

He became sobs. The walls of the room began to expand and blur for her too, the pattern whizzed. She was still pointing the knife towards him, her grip tightened on the wooden handle, on the stupid of the situation.

She wanted to vomit again, and what had seemed like a good idea now felt childish. She'd been trying to be the kind of woman she'd heard about when she was a child, trying to be tough; the kind of woman her mother probably was. But here she was with the scallion knife, the onion cutter, the useless blade now made a symbol of her power. How could they go back to how things were after this?

Jazzy.

And he'd not even pressed her about Andrew.

Jazzy?

Perhaps he already knew what happened.

Baby, look at me.

She dropped the knife on the floor. After another while, someone banged on their ceiling; they must have been noisy.

Sammy got up, still naked.

And you can shut your raasclaat mouth, he shouted out the door, banging it shut.

His chest dripped sweat; her tongue could have licked it, but this wasn't the time. How could they go back to how things were before? How could they rewind, put the needle back to the start of the record? He took her hand. Knife still on the floor, they settled back into bed, or the bed settled around them. Sammy felt soft, clean. She would have to make an effort. She would do better. *My baby girl, my queen. I'm sorry.* The blanket wrapped around their bodies, their breathing fell in sync, she against his chest, lifting, sinking, lifting, sinking. The rhythm of his breaths slowed down.

A baby?

Sammy would want her to keep it and that is the last thing she intended to do. She wasn't even sure... It was just the once but that once would have been enough. And she sure as hell wasn't going to raise no half-white baby.

It started as an overheard conversation, a whisper at the Corner House. By the end of the week, she noticed them noticing her. She was one of the whispered about.

Theresa, dear, you ain't married, are ya?

No.

Philippa had cornered her in the bathroom; it wasn't even her break time. Jasmine should have sensed her – the way their heels clacked on the floor tiles so loud – and escaped back to the cubicle to avoid her. She didn't have time for this tittle-tattle; there were tables to attend to and the lunchtime swell was coming.

And you don't wanna keep the baby, do you?

Her heart came up through her mouth and out her ears. *How did she know?*

It's obvious! If you've ever been up the duff, I s'pose. Like you are. You ought to be careful, doll. And if you can't be careful, you need to know how to get rid. And how to hide your shame, for Pete's sake!

How...?

Don't leave your tongue hanging out, love. You ain't the first person and you won't be the last to get yourself in the family way.

Philippa smelt of Murray mints up close; her perfume was renk. How could teeth get so yellow so young? She wasn't that old, surely? Probably about thirty...

Lucky for you, it's legit now. You can sort it out with the doctors and be in and out of the clinic within a few hours.

How..?

For Pete's sake, Terry!

Don't call me Terry.

You even listening to me? I've had a word with the boss.

...at least thirty and old enough to know not to create gossip. The fright in her stomach started to turn into something else. Just like Sammy, now everyone else was ganging up on her, telling her what she was and what she should do! And now the manager? Her manager thought she was a decent woman not a sketel, a mattress, a corner ooman getting her belly big with no ring on her finger.

You've told Cindy? Oh my God, no, no!

Her heart burst with righteousness as she gripped the washbasin.

Yes, of course I've spoken to her, she's got a heart of gold, love. You can take the afternoon off tomorrow...

You've spoken to my *fucking* supervisor!

Calm down, love!

You've spoken to my fucking supervisor behind my back, wid you dry up pum pum mouth, all ah oonuh laughing after me and gossipin and backbiting and you tell me seh mi mus calm down! Why you nuh bathe your mother and drink the water!

Theresa ran out of the bathroom. She ran down the corridor down to the back staircase where the staff came in. She took to the steps two at a time three at a time,

four, flying down and not taking a breath until the handle of the big door twisted open. It was only once she stepped outside the building that she remembered she was still in her uniform; her dress and coat was in a carrier bag in the cloakroom. *Fuck.*

Tottenham Court Road and from Tottenham Court Road into Soho, via the Charing Cross Road. Stepping through the dirty streets, the puddles where all the day's rain had gathered. The overflowing drains. The buskers on the floor, none of them with the same rapture as Sammy when they first met. Sammy, the serious melodian. Past the jazz bar that had closed its doors or changed or become invisible. Why couldn't she remember the name or where it was exactly? Which of these mazed streets? Not Frith Street. Not Dean or Wardour or Berwick. Only in the daylight did she see how grotty the streets were. Were the binmen on strike again?

Her feet took her up Berwick Street and past all the places she'd walked with Sammy when they first met. How he'd told her he just dropped out of university, like he was happy with himself.

Oi oi, Nippy! Where's me cuppa? Hahaha!

A drunk voice called out. She was still in her uniform. She removed her cap.

The streets were heaving and she felt cold. She would have to apologise, ask for her job back, grovel. And her coat. She needed it. But she would almost rather freeze outside here and die. *Why was she so proud?*

One day she would sing a song of success. She would be on the television and on the record charts and people everywhere would be listening to her song.

Tell everybody on the radio / come hear me and my song...

Two 38 buses in a row.

It was written in the womb...

She faltered

You best not get my rhythm wrong...

The doctor had a too-easy smile. The nurse had a tilted head when she spoke. The number of people at the clinic was endless, so much labba-labba she felt her tongue was about to drop off. So much questioning.

I see, they said, and wrote things down. I see. She didn't see, but they saw and they wrote. They asked if she was married, in the same way she'd been asked earlier... no, she wouldn't think about work now.

The nurse asked if she needed any more information about contraception (she didn't, thank you). It's important for *you* lot, especially. Theresa didn't know she had a

lot; she'd never felt so alone as she did now, not since she landed at the airport with a new name and no friends or family, just some *father* she was supposed to love and obey.

Do you want to talk about the swelling on your eye?

The swelling on my eye isn't what you think. And then she realised, it was what you think but it not as simple as you ever think it.

She shook her head *no* before realising that's exactly what they must expect her to do. Next thing, she had an information sheet and more waiting to do.

Philippa was right, though. Even if it had taken long, it was over by the end of the afternoon because it was an emergency. She said she would be thrown out if her daddy ever know, thrown out with nowhere to go. And as she tell them the bareface lie, she remember the grip she come to England with, wet up on the street and almost empty, how her coat just dash way, how her foot began to shake like it was still dancing from the night before, to see her whole life – the things that hadn't already been taken – spread on the pavement outside.

Here love, take a tissue. It won't be a minute.

To relive all of this, to make herself weak again after making herself weak with Sammy already... too much weakness for one week.

These four weeks / since I been waking / next to you / Four weeks / Since I don't know what to do...

She stopped when she heard a throat clear next to her. She must have been humming aloud.

On the walls of the clinic, posters with health warnings: *Smuggling Pets Could Bring Rabies into Britain*. She smirked, thinking of gerbils and ferrets, stuffed down trouser legs on the ferry to Calais, dogs in the boot, next to the usual *booze and fags*.

On the table of the clinic, magazines. *Family Circle*. *Nova*. *National Geographic*. Some feminist thing or another. And a handful of newspapers, which had already been mishandled. Looking up again, there were girls, girls like her waiting. Women, even.

What you looking at, you wog?

She lowered her eyes again and clenched her fists.

Leave it, Suse.

She blocked out the rest. She blocked out so much, she didn't even realise until back home later that eve and Sammy ask what new song she was singing.

Just a little song I making up.

So you coming to the studio at the weekend, after all?

What you mean! But of course!

That's my baby! I'm glad we back on the train track.

The room was still suffocating and the walls were still tired but there was a new kind of breeze to it all. Louis Armstrong was on again, their song. The cassette was going to wear out before long, but his voice oh his voice was like the best stomach medicine.

Baby?

And she had blocked everything so well she didn't realise she was ironing her uniform out, as if she was going to wear it tomorrow.

Mm-hmm?

I have something for you.

And she hadn't blocked out the way he'd held her on the floor.

I'm on my girl time, ZamZam!

The trumpets continued.

You *are*? Oh... that's good news, I... It mean you not... I mean... it wasn't that kind of... We don't have to be all the time, *eenh*? I meant something serious!

She sprayed a little more starch on the collar. The collars should be stiff, and the cuffs. She would do his shirts next.

Why you don't put that thing down for a second?

She put the iron down for a second. And then two. And she looked at his face, at his beautiful hair and the dimples in his smile. She looked at his eyebrows and the way they almost met. And she smiled back at him, a genuine smile which came from inside her. Because while she had no job, she still had him. And they had no baby to interrupt them for now. She needed to come back the next day to take one more pill and then it would be just the two of them and the music they were making and Lord knows, in the next couple of years, they would make it to the big time. She could feel it in her...

Come here, Jazzy.

She sat on the bed, next to his chair, and it was only when she looked down at his hands that she saw the ring.

I want you to have this.

What are you...?

I want you to have this and it's not because it's marrying I want to marry you – you know I don't dig all that church people business – but, I don't know. I want you to know what you mean to me.

Don't cry. *Don't cry*. Too late. Tear after tear rolling onto her nightgown.

I know the last few days been rough. And I don't care what happened with Andrew, I really don't care. I'm older than you. I been around longer than you. I roll around with all sort of girl... and-and more–

Zam-zam?

Look here. I'm not good at this sorta thing. Me a big man, you know? And there nothing more I want than to have a baby with you. One day. One day when you ready. When the both of we ready.

His Rs sounded so full and elegant. *RReady*. She couldn't look at his face now. Instead, the swirling pattern of the quilt, the padded silk, the kind of sheets Nanny used back there. Where was Nanny now? How would she feel about her being out there in the world, with a ring on her finger, and no God to speak of? She'd buried God back in Jamaica, replaced Him with music and now this man.

You have anything to say, baby?

I... I – let me see the ring, nuh?

He took her hand and slid it on. A tiny gold band fitting perfectly over her finger, her initials engraved T 'J'.

For six weeks, she was glad for summer – for the warmer days that meant she didn't have to explain her missing coat. For six weeks, she ironed the same uniform and left the house on her workdays. But she hadn't gone to work: she snaked along the canal to Paddington; she visited the graves at Kensal Rise – and even walked among mourners till the tears came at the burial; she ate ice cream by the Serpentine; she sat alone with her thoughts, telling stories. Sometimes she was aware she'd been speaking aloud because a man or woman would come towards her on the path, and she would stop.

She would make herself laugh. And sometimes the laughter carry off into the past, into her childhood, and sometimes it land hard on the ground as she sat in Hyde Park. Once or twice she laughed aloud so much, she imagined the sound carry itself around the world even to China. The laugh she laugh so sweet, it did make her feel almost warm enough to stay still, on the grass, with the newspaper under her uniform (why she keep her uniform on?) and the dew still dampening her buttocks (at least it wasn't raining, because then she would have to spend more money sitting in a café or wandering around Whiteleys trying not to draw the attention of security guards).

The days were getting warmer and the breeze tickled her sleeves. But the newspaper underneath her said it was going to cold again, a deep cold like it wasn't summer on the way after all. The newspaper underneath her was always full of misery. The Angry Brigade might strike again; no one was employed, so many people on the dole; no money anywhere, and the coloured people problem getting worse.

When she didn't talk to herself she sang to herself.

Baby it's a cold world / but I have a warm heart / we gonna melt this world / we gonna melt this world together...

In the park, it was easy to find a place to sit beneath the trees. The trees were as old as old.

She breathed like the other band members had told her she should breathe, full and from out of her belly; she no longer sang through her nose. Something seemed to be shifting inside her insides.

She was also aware of her hunger. She'd taken a sixpence from out of the jar; before long, she was looking for the money Sammy had taken from the bank and hidden under the mattress. Surely, he wouldn't notice if she took a note or three from him?

It ended quicker than it begun.

Coming back from the park, she opened the door to their home. She was whistling (*a whistling woman and a crowing hen...*) and she turned the key and he was behind the door. He wasn't grinning or calling her Jazzy.

Where you been, Theresa?

Her heart skipped; if anything, she was early back from *work*. And he was meant to be at practice with the boys.

I've been at work... wha you mean?

She went to push past him, into the flat.

I said where you been.

I said I been at work.

He sighed. Her heart skipped again. Could he know? This pretence couldn't keep up forever, after all.

She went to put her handbag on the orange chair – his orange chair – and spotted the coat – her coat – on the bed.

Where've you been keeping your coat these last few weeks, Theresa?

She grabbed the coat, smelt it (cigarette smoke), felt inside the pockets, checked the broken belt loop she'd not managed to stitch (yes it was the same coat). Head in hands, his voice boomed over her.

I said why you been taking my money? What have you been doing these last few weeks? Who are you, even?

I'm the same person, I'm – I can't – how..?

How? What are you saying? You mean how did I know you been taking money from me? The only money I have?

Fuck. He'd noticed.

I – I – a work... Brenda... my friend Brenda at work she – she needed it badly, I gave her a fiver and I took some from you but I'll give it back when I get my wage –

What wage you gonna get, Theresa? Hmm...? What kind of wage will you be getting? I trusted you and you could have asked me for anything. For *anything*, Theresa. You sleep with my good good friend and I didn't say nothing. You come at me with a knife and I didn't do nothing. What kind of a man that, eenh?

She couldn't answer.

I tell you what kind of a man. The kind of a man that strong. That was willing to trust you even after you betrayed me over and over, even if you never earn that trust.

You can trust me, I –

Just hush your mouth because everything that come out of there is making me sick to my core, to my core right now. You too rotten.

Fuck. No.

That's right, sick to my core. Even when I have the coat in front of you, you still lying, lying about a *Brenda*... You must know I went to your workplace like a damn fool. Oh I went there all right and I did some asking around. And you know what they said? You didn't even come back to collect your things. You lied to me about being pregnant. You a liared and a t'ief. A liared and a tief and a halfway murderer.

No, no, no –

I'm not even going to touch you, Theresa. I'm going to walk out of this place right now and I'm going to come back in an hour and you better be gone by the end of that hour, otherwise you'll find out what murder is.

An hour later, she was knocking on the door at the house where her father lived. And her father was out. And her father's wife wrote out the names and addresses of all his siblings without looking at her. One of the aunties would take her in for sure. And as she was leaving for the phone box, her father's wife said walk good, daughter. She nodded.

SEVEN
(The Boy)

'Don't find yourself becoming the thing you want to escape from.'

Barcelona, 2005

The feeling he was being followed had persisted all day, even here, at the beach where Samuel usually felt calm. It made him nauseous – or perhaps it was the comedown from the weekend hitting him later than usual. He'd avoided a coffee so his heartbeat wouldn't add to the rising panic. Now, at three pm, he had a headache and was stifling yawns.

The phone vibrated in his pocket. His jean shorts were too tight for him to retrieve easily while seated, so he leant back to manoeuvre himself. The minute the screen revealed who the message was from, he regretted bothering. Vladimir.

K pasa?

He closed the lid then replaced the phone, before removing his shorts altogether, trying to avoid contact with the sand. He'd gone commando today. The two men in front of him had their eyes on his cock; he looked beyond them, taking in the vast horizon and the bobbing dots in the sea, the few cold, brave souls he would soon join. He deliberately avoided the couple's gaze, but still adjusted himself, squeezing his shaft just enough for the blood to thicken it a little. He tried to appear nonchalant, unsmiling. For a moment, he forgot his unease.

As he placed his shorts in his beach bag, with only a few grains pouring inside, his phone vibrated again.

?

He considered not replying, or switching it off, but both options seemed cowardly.

Nda. De'jame n paz! Te escribo ma's tarde, ok?

It was difficult to get the hang of typing accents on this new handset. And Vladimir's insistence was draining. Colombians. *Cheops!* He turned his phone off and scrambled for his iPod, only to realise he'd left his earphones back at the apartment.

'AGUA COCA COLA MOJITO CERVEZA BEER COLD WATER...'

The vendor's piercing cry made him regret not having his music even more. Some hip-hop, maybe, or even some reggaetón would be the perfect soundtrack for this moment. Or that *Gasolina* song that was everywhere, inescapable.

The vendor's feet passed erratically, leaving more grains of sand on his towel.

'Agua coca cola cerveza AGUAAA...!'

Apart from the occasional outburst, this end of the beach was quieter than the other end near the Olympic pool. The energy here was more local, full of familiar faces.

And it was a longer trek along the coast, far from the metro. He'd cycled here, borrowing Vladimir's bike, and the rust that came with it.

While settling on this particular clearing, away from a group of Spanish mariquitas drinking loudly together, he spotted at least five people he half-knew. He wasn't in the mood for chitchat though, and he wasn't in the mood to be ogled, too much.

Laying down fully, he turned to the side, snubbing the meerkat to his left, a fifty-ish man with burnt, orange skin and severely-dyed black hair and beard. He'd been stretching his neck past breaking point for any sign of interest, ever since Samuel sat down. It was worthy of a nature documentary, the mating habits of the older gay man.

Samuel lowered his sunglasses firmly on his nose, he hoped in the style of a *Do Not Disturb / No Molesta* sign. Why was it so hard to relax? He checked his heartbeat. *Cálmate cariño!* His muscles, his whole body was tense. A few minutes here would do him good.

'Aguacocacolaaguaa...'

The Olympic centre end of the beach had too many strays: curious tourists, daring straights, the odd picture-taker. Even if he was sometimes assumed to be a *top manta* beach vendor simply because he was black, he was rarely mistaken for a tourist here on this stretch, away from the big crowds. And he wasn't a tourist, not really, not anymore. He wasn't even a runaway. He had become a part of the city and its way of life and, por colmo, he was losing grasp of his English, tucking it away piece by piece along with his former identity. Here was a completely different language – and not just in the spoken sense: not a trace of Pentecostal fire anywhere, just a thread of Catholicism wrapped around the already-twisted buildings, a way of being that seemed more tactile, more wrapped in images.

If he wasn't teaching it for a living, he'd stop speaking it all together. He made a mental note – this was a good example of a conditional sentence. English was so full of irregularities, more exceptions than rules. His students found it hard to accept the contradictions of the language; they spent more time trying to catch him out, questioning his command of his own native tongue. Rarely, they were right. *If he weren't teaching...*

During his training, they'd wiped away most of his East London habits – the *should ofs*, the double negatives, the glottal stops, the ghost *Hs* – and it felt like a stripping of his identity, until there was nothing left but textbook sentences and a hatred of phrasal verbs. It was liberating, learning how much of his being was shaped by the accident of his birth, how so much of it could be reshaped simply by speaking in new ways, in new languages.

He'd had to learn to think like this in the last few years, and only because he'd seen the poster in the window of the travel agent, the morning after that wretched night. *Be enchanted by Gaudí's magical city for less than £50 return!* He had no idea who Gaudí was then, but he needed to go somewhere – fast – and never return. He'd needed magic – and luck – and somewhere cheap to fly.

His first instinct had been to go to Amsterdam, but Amsterdam was an obvious choice. He had no connections in Barcelona; all he knew was it was in Spain – and not the bit where all the English gangsters went. No one would think to seek him out there, and the travel brochure said it was by the beach, which sounded even better. In an alternate world, he'd be walking along the canal now – in clogs, perhaps – probably with more than a smidgen of Dutch, too.

Godverdomme! He sat up again and turned his phone back on. He'd forgotten the school was supposed to call him about his hours.

'Aguacocacolacervezabeercocacolaligh–'

This time of year, the drink peddlers were desperate, buzzing like drunken bees. In a few weeks, the beach would be quiet, just the hardcore locals. *No new messages.*

He'd bought the phone last week and had the SIM unblocked in the Raval, in one of the shops Vladimir recommended. The guy ended up rabbiting on about his family in Wembley. He'd never been there; he'd spent all of his growing up trapped inside two pages of the A-Z, on the northeastern corner of London. When Samuel recorded his new voicemail later, he played it back to himself. It sounded like one of those international students who'd studied American had taken over his voice. *Good.* That old British Samuel was dead, along with all the glottal stops: *little... brittle–*

The sun was behind a cloud that looked about twenty-minutes wide and the sea was too cold to bathe in without some serious drying-sunrays, so he was stuck laying down on his threadbare towel, needing the calm of the water, or at least its cleansing; he could still smell last night on his body.

He shouldn't have come here. He shouldn't have left Vladimir's in such a rush. (Another conditional: *If he had stayed at Vladimir's apartment, he could have showered and eaten a decent meal.* He still struggled with these constructions in Spanish).

No, he could have stayed back at the apartment – the flat –, but he needed to be alone, to commune with the sea, away from Vladimir's noise. He'd moved in before they were ready, and it was too claustrophobic being stuck there all the time.

The unsettling in his chest now was almost as strong as it had been the first year of living in the city. He'd arrived and spent several months moving from place to place, in the busiest areas of the Old Town, almost unable to breathe, feeling as if the air was

suffocating him. He used up nearly all of his money in the locutorios surfing the internet, scouring the British news for mention of his name, or of the hotel murder. And nothing. Like it had never happened, which was almost worse than the fact that it *had*.

He still dreamt of the night, but the details changed each time, except for the tangy smell of blood. He wouldn't recognise the faces in that room now, after four years of exile. *Exile*. He sighed. The waves lapped loudly. Even the sea was on edge today.

He had nothing to worry about. *If he hadn't snorted Vladimir's friend's shitty coke at the club on Saturday, he wouldn't feel so jumped up.* Maybe he should check his pulse too. He put two fingers to his neck.

'AGUACOLDWATERCERVEZABEERMOJITOCOCACOLACOCACOLALIGH -'

Someone whistled, maybe a couple of towels across from him.

'Oye! Dame dos cervezas, pero frías, vale?'

The feet passed his head again, too close, a few grains of sand blew onto his face.

The clouds hadn't moved much; it would be at least fifteen minutes before he could take a dip. Several people had already got up to leave. *Packed in their towels.* He was forgetting idioms too, only the quaint BBC ones coming to him at odd moments like this. Maybe he should get a beer. *Beer... Pig's Ear.*

This beach had a gentle rhythm, of people settling, then undressing, being alert to the movements of all the other bodies, and then easing into the environment, before further disruptions: coming, going, swimming or walking along the sea's edge, putting on trunks to walk further down, or to the chiringuito or the toilet.

Resigning himself to nature, Samuel breathed in and out in the way he'd been taught by Laura. She was meant to be some kind of yoga guru, but she was full on, not a trace of zen. He laughed to himself, then closed his eyes, noticing how his eyelids were flickering, restless. ~~Someone was definitely following him. They'd been following him since at least last night when he saw the guy with the camera.~~ No. The feeling would pass. It always did. *Thou shalt not be afraid of the terrors by night, nor the arrows that flyeth by day.*

The phone buzzed again in his bag, under his head, once, then twice more. He probably shouldn't be sleeping on it; his friend Oriol had warned him about keeping his phone near him all the time. Samuel had brushed his words off, but it bothered him, just like everything bothered him today. The conversation replayed in his head:

'You've had like five mojitos and you're telling me about cancer, gilipollas?'

'You're still not saying *gilipollas* properly!'

'Anyway, my Spanish is better than your English!'

'Don't come running to me in fifty years when you have brain cancer!'

‘Who said I’m planning to live fifty more years?’

‘Well... twenty then.’

In twenty years, he would be forty-five. And where would he be then? Would he still be here? Would he still be teaching English, and making ends meet from the odd client he met in the sauna? The idea of living past thirty was unthinkable. He would be old, properly old. Even twenty-five was a shock.

Oriol irritated him with his ridiculous advice. Vladimir was irritating him now too. And his housemate, Carlos. Angela, from the language school was irritating him. His colleagues – a bunch of English and Irish misfits – irritated the fuck out of him. His students, his old landlord... and now even the cloud-filled sky, refusing to make way for the sun and prepare the sea, the only two reliable things he had in the city right now.

He opened his bag, retrieved his ringing phone from his shorts, saw it was a withheld number and flipped the lid just as the vibrating stopped. He read through the other messages. Vladimir. Laura – who must be telepathic to have sensed he’d been thinking about her – and Joaquín, one of the guys he’d met two weekends ago, when the coke had been *less* shitty.

He replied to Joaquín first. He pressed his knees together to hide his cock; it had begun to get hard again. He could feel the two guys ahead of him craning their necks. At least, he imagined they were; he wouldn’t give them the satisfaction of looking.

The phone rang again in his hand as he was replying to Vladimir. *Unknown number*. He picked it up.

‘Dígame.’

‘Hello?’

‘Yes. Hello?’

‘Is this Samuel?’

A woman’s voice, familiar – strangely familiar – but he couldn’t place it. A chill graduated up to the top of his spine. He hung up.

Is this Samuel? He had a new number; apart from Joaquín and some of his main contacts, no one would know to call him on this one. He hadn’t got round to messaging everyone about his change of phone.

He thought back to the guy with the camera last night who followed him, even as he turned back on himself, crisscrossing through El Born. Samuel didn’t see his face – he was too busy trying to lose him – but he was sure the guy had taken snaps of him. Someone from London had finally caught up with him. It couldn’t be the police, or he would have been nabbed already. So surely, it must be the people who killed the

American guy, all that time ago? And if they wanted to kill Samuel they would have done it already... He'd gone through all this logic before, during calmer moments. He'd also gone through this in the early hours of the morning, when he couldn't sleep for panic. He had nothing to fear from those guys now; they knew he wasn't going to blab to anyone.

So what, then?

Samuel put on his shorts, then his vest, then slung his bag over his shoulder. A guy on a bike had definitely eyed him oddly when he left the apartment today, then called someone on his phone while still looking back at him. But all of this could be coincidence, could be open to interpretation.

'I don't know how is it you say the word *paranoid* in English.'

Vladimir was sitting at the edge of the bed, wiping the cum from his chest with his t-shirt. He was still at half-mast. A bead of cum dangled from the tip of his cock, threatening to dribble onto the side of the bed. Samuel reached over and caught it with his finger.

'Goloso!'

Samuel smiled despite himself. Since moving in, the sex had improved.

'Yeah, it's the same word in English and I'm not being fucking paranoid...'

He sat up. Paused. Tried to formulate a sentence in Spanish that communicated exactly what he felt, what he saw. But it was too difficult to be exact when he found it hard even to explain to himself.

'I can feel it... someone's following, looking for me. But in a bad way.'

It sounded pathetic, but he hadn't told anyone about the hotel, about *why* he was worried. Better leave out the detail.

Vladimir frowned in the way he did too often, elevenses bringing his face right in, like it was all being sucked into his nose. He chucked the t-shirt over to Samuel who sniffed it briefly and threw it on the floor. It smelt of gym sweat.

'I know you think I'm reacting too much, but I... I don't know. I'm not- '

'YES, YOU ARE BEING PARANOID! YA!'

The sudden change of volume pulled Samuel out of the post-climax buzz.

'Don't shout, for fuck's sake, *carajo*!'

Samuel switched back to English, to show he meant it.

How could a moment of tenderness switch so quickly? Was Vladimir taking steroids? Is that why he seemed to be getting bigger – why his temper flared so easily?

'Whatever. I can shout if I want to -!'

‘Don’t be such a shit! One moment you’re all romantic and sweet, next minute you’re shouting your head off. Who the fuck are –?’

‘FUCK OFF, THIS IS *MY PLACE* AND I CAN–’

How quickly things could change! The unspoken settled between them, its release sudden and unpleasant. *Mi apartamento. My flat.*

Samuel would commit this moment to memory. He would remember this and reuse it when it was necessary. *This is my place.* This is what he really thought: Samuel as parasite, Vladimir the host.

‘Ok, *ya veo!* This is *your place*, yeah? You asked me to move here! I say one little thing and *this is your house!* You want me to move out? I’ll move out tomorrow, *coñazo!* But I’m fucking staying here tonight–’

‘Ok, I won’t shout... You coming over to La Nena’s tonight?’

He switched back to Spanish.

‘And now changing the subject. What’s *wrong* with you –?’

‘Ok, ok! *Ya!* What do you want me to do? I said I’m sorry!’

‘No you didn’t say you’re sorry! You said you won’t shout and before that you said it was your–’

‘I’m sorry. I’m really sorry... I love you.’

The delivery sounded heartfelt, even if the words were formulaic, pathetic. *Querer* in Spanish, the same word for *love* as for *want*. *Amo* would have been worse, the same word for slave. If nothing else, arguments with Vladimir were good for improving his fluency. He fell back on the bed.

Samuel felt like a telenovela hero, for want of a glass to smash. If they hadn’t argued every day for the last week, he would have allowed himself to cry. He imagined a solitary teardrop falling from his eye, and how perfect this scene would be with kitsch wallpaper background and a seventies soundtrack.

The room was too stuffy, too hot. Half of his boxes were unopened in the corner, waiting for him to make a decision. There was probably a dent in the carpet already, and that’s all he’d be when he left, a dent in an otherwise unremarkable building, in a lively neighbourhood, in a fast-changing city. Someone else would take his place, in Vladimir’s bed, in this city; he was just another foreigner. More tourists seemed to be coming in, all the time–.

‘Say something!’

If he were another type of person, he would choose the dramatic route now, burn bridges, leave and find another place to rent on his own, which would probably mean taking on more clients and more private tuition.

The cardboard boxes, five of them, with clothes and books and things he'd collected. Where would he go at such short notice?

No. He would be practical right now. He could save his hurt for another time. He'd already made the decision to move in, knowing this is exactly where he didn't want to be, why he'd refused for so long.

Vladimir's lips were moving.

'I'm sorry', he repeated. 'Please, baby. Please say something.'

Samuel shrugged, and leaned towards Vladimir. He took Samuel's hand in his and it was warm. Samuel pushed him back onto the bed and cupped the back of his head, pulling him in for a kiss. His lips were soft, full. It was difficult not to be in awe of his body. *In love.*

He would let himself forget for now; so many other things were on his mind.

He broke away from the kiss.

'Yeah, probably...'

'What -?'

'I'll probably come to La Nena's if I'm in the mood. But I'm teaching an early class tomorrow so I need to hold back on the drink.'

He poked his tongue out.

'Yeah, that's what you always say.'

Stretching over to switch the bedside lamp on, his back muscles flexed, two fins on the back of a brown shark. He stood up and left Samuel on the bed. Samuel closed his eyes and breathed in the funk of the room, and the sound of running water in the background, his panic at bay.

Vladimir was still in the shower, whistling, when Samuel left to get some eggs, the heavy door clanging shut. Carlos's keys were on the ledge; he must have come in while they were fucking and arguing, and he would have heard them – him and most of the block, too. His face burned. He needed to forget the arguments as quickly as Vladimir did. It reminded him of something his father always used to say. *Only Jamaicans harbour so much bitterness, we bear bad mind for years and years. You remember your Uncle Kendall...?* He would choose to remember the sex instead. He should feel more embarrassment about being heard doing something he enjoyed.

He pressed for the lift as he couldn't be bothered to navigate all the five floors of small, narrow steps. Downstairs and across the street, he could buy anything, except ackee and ripe plantain, both of which he craved now, for some reason.

The barrio was full of dominicanos, so there were shops full of yam and green banana and tins of condensed milk. He picked up the carton of eggs and some *yuca* and paid the guy at the front who always insisted on speaking in English.

When he returned, Vladimir was already working peeling a green plantain, with the Barbie towel around his waist. They needed to go to the *bugaderia*. Neither of them had many clean clothes left.

‘I’m surprised you eat so much fried shit and stay in such good shape.’

‘It’s the Colombian genes!’

‘You always say that’

‘Well, you better believe it’

‘No, it’s definitely your Cuban side. Us Caribbeans are fuertes! We’ve had to be. Check your history books, morenito...’

He stuck his tongue out, imitating Vladimir.

‘You’re so full of shit sometimes–’

‘Give me that and do the eggs... Here!’

He slid the carton of eggs across the surface towards him. Samuel enjoyed preparing the chips. You had to dice the plantain, and throw the discs into the hot oil until they were almost golden and soft enough to crush. The pan spat chispas as they landed.

‘Your phone rang a couple of times while you were out’

The buzz returned to his head. *It was nothing.*

‘Did you see who it was?’

‘No. I don’t look at your phone, do I?’

‘All right, I’ll check in a minute. Don’t worry, I’ve stopped being paranoid.’

They kissed, traces of minty mouthwash and Samuel’s semen entering through Vladimir’s tongue.

Samuel turned the chips over, while Vladimir passed behind him to do the eggs. His hands briefly held to his waist and Samuel lowered his shorts, briefly, to feel the heat of him.

The sun was setting outside and the sounds of other people’s arguments bounced against the walls. The window was open to the street. A moped revved below, sped off into the distance.

Samuel used the bottom of the mortar to squash the discs, then returned them to the oil. A few minutes later, as Vladimir scrambled the eggs with chilli, Samuel inspected his twice-fried perfection, sprinkled salt over it all and, for a moment, was truly happy.

After eating, Vladimir packed the dishes away and Samuel returned to the bedroom. Carlos was speaking loudly on Skype, with the door open. He waved as he passed his door, then flopped onto the bed to read his phone.

Two voicemail messages. He dialled the number and typed his pin. How automatic the movement of his thumbs!

The first message was from the school. One of the other teachers, Alex, was sick. Could he cover for her in the afternoon? Nothing more was said about his hours for the next week, which was strange.

The second was from a withheld number:

'Samuel, please call me back urgently. My number is plus four four seven--'

The caller hadn't given her name.

He needed to stop being *paranoid*. Someone from the school had probably passed his number on. There was always an explanation.

'Message deleted. You have no new messages.'

Fuck. It was an accident. He deleted all his messages on instinct, but he'd meant to save this one. He'd pressed three instead of two or whatever it was to save it.

He could retrieve it by going through all his deleted messages but that would take several minutes and the whole idea was tiring. It had been an intense couple of hours. They'd had sex and argued with the bedroom door open and eaten. And he'd been on edge all day, which is why they'd argued in the first place. The very last thing he needed to do was call some person back who probably wanted to discuss some private classes – and was being insistent and not leaving their name. If he was going to the party tonight, he'd need a disco nap; he hadn't had a coffee all day, so no wonder he was so ratty. All the arguments piled up in his head as he drifted off, allowing his head to sink into the pillow, allowing himself to drool and dream.

La Nena was a stout drag queen with a bush for a moustache, and a taste for seriously high heels; he had a longer name when he was on stage, in his full regalia. He also spoke too fast and too quietly, so Samuel could only get half of what he said most of the time.

After four years in the country, Samuel had learned to divide Spanish-speakers into two groups: those he could understand and converse with fairly easily, and those who seemed to be speaking an entirely different language. La Nena was the latter and, by the time he asked Vladimir to repeat in proper Spanish, the moment had passed.

Later that night was predictable. He could understand even less than usual, and La Nena was holding court in the centre of the room, making it impossible for him to relax. The dozen or so men in the room hung off La Nena's every word, like he was some

guru. From what Samuel did manage to grasp, most of what was said in between topping up their drinks was made up of in jokes and sounded childish. There was a lot of gossiping about someone called Tina. And more gossip about another of Vladimir's exes who was now doing porn or something. And then gossip about someone else doing something else with someone or another sometime.

His mind wandered as he eyed the men in La Nena's open plan kitchen. He only really fancied two of them, the one with the trunk arms and the slim guy sitting on another friend's lap, who winked at him. From the corner of his eye, he could feel Vladimir scowling next to him, so he pretended to be distracted, looking around the grand room. His eyes settled on a rum bottle in the corner, so he got up to attend to it, to keep it company for a moment, while the rest of the clan sipped on their punch.

Vladimir's friends were cliquy and made him drink too much. Why were they playing Britney Spears? What a waste of high-tech speakers! The babble continued in the distance.

The last thing he remembered was downing a shot of vodka at the table and rolling his eyes when Trunk Arms remarked 'pero eres *negro negro!*' to Vladimir.

When he woke up, the alarm clock said it was ten past eight. The curtains were closed with a chink of light coming in from the courtyard, shared with all the other apartments in the block. He could hear a vacuum cleaner in the distance. And then the blood in his ears as he realised he was late for work. *Fuck!*

He jumped out of the bed and ran to the shower, picking up the Barbie towel from the floor. And that's when he noticed his mother, sitting in the armchair, also asleep. She looked regal, sitting up in the chair, snoring.

Because he was hungover and barely awake, he knew he was dreaming. Of course he was still dreaming; he even used to sleepwalk as a child. *If he hadn't drunk so much vodka last night, because Vladimir's friends were pesados, perhaps he wouldn't be hallucinating now.*

The other thought – that his mother might be an apparition, that she might be dead and visiting him one final time – was one he pushed down, and the real reason he didn't look back to check his grasp on reality.

He ran the shower, and sat on the toilet brushing his teeth while the water warmed. He remembered how Vladimir felt inside him the day before then scolded himself for daydreaming on top of his hallucination. He needed to get alert – and half an hour ago! He lathered and rinsed off straightaway. The towel was still damp from Vladimir.

When he returned, his mother was in the chair, and awake. Yes, it was real.

Samuel was awake. Check.

His mother was awake. Check.

His mother was awake and in the chair and in Vladimir's – *their* – apartment. She looked... different. Like she'd styled her hair. Like she'd aged backwards. Like... *what the fuck and how... and who...?*

'Who? Oh... Vlad, was it? Is him let me in.'

Samuel fell onto the bed. *His mother.* He placed his hand on his forehead. This was too much to deal with. Unexpected. The nausea he'd felt the previous day returned, rose, became physical.

He ran into the toilet, vomited, and felt deliciously giddy. He locked the door. She knocked.

'Son-son, you ok?'

This was bizarre. Flashbacks of all the times she'd shouted up the stairs, shouted into his bedroom door. *Are you ok?*

His laughter splashed against the tiles.

The cold water from the sink felt like a reset button pressed inside him. He flushed. He unlocked the door, moving past the worried-looking woman.

'Mum, I'm late for work.'

'I never meant to wake yo–'

'Am I alive? Are *you* alive?'

'Me look like duppy to you?! Your boyfriend tell me you funny, same way! I like him. I've... I miss you to bitsies, you know.'

He forced himself to look at the person in front of him, even as she reached for him. The way the word *boyfriend* fell from her mouth, just like the way her extensions fell down her face. Her blue jeans and low-cut t-shirt. What happened to the person who raised him? Yes, *what happened?*

'You look great, mum.'

You look great, mum. Why was he talking as if it were the most natural thing in the world for her to just drop by? As if it were the most natural thing for her to have traced him across Europe, and entered his boyfriend's place... and watched him sleep?

But it was. She was *here*. His mother. Smaller than he remembered, or maybe bigger. She was definitely bigger. It suited her.

'Thank you, son... My *baby*.'

He flashed a smile.

'My baby... my baby...'

And then she reached to him. And then something, a magnet, stopped him. He put a hand on her shoulder instead, and watched hers fall from mid-air against her sides.

‘Mum, I’m gonna get sacked if I don’t hurry up. Can we go for lunch?’

Her face shrunk and he looked away, looked towards the row of hangers to locate a shirt. That change of expression was familiar, echoed deep inside him.

‘Of... of course, son.’

‘Take this erm... this address. We can grab a coffee and a tortilla there. It’s a kind of omelette – you’ll love it.’

‘I’m sure I will...’

He grabbed his clothes. She watched him dress, her eyes a red mystery.

‘My baby, my baby, my baby...’

He became aware of the lube bottle on the floor, the Shangay magazines, the silver cockring – would she know what that was? – the collage with the shredded fragments of Gael García Bernal, Divine and the Virgin Mary.

‘My baby...’

She’d probably moved Vlad’s jockstrap out of the way to sit down. He continued to scan and then stopped when he caught himself in the mirror, his mother observing him observing the room as if for the first time.

It was too late to be embarrassed. He had to go. He put on one of Vladimir’s jackets because it was hanging from the rail near the door.

‘How long...? How long you been here...? I mean in Barcelona?’

This time, her hand grazed his shoulder. She pulled him in towards her, holding the back of his head, the friction grating and familiar and comforting and–

She smelled of moderately-priced perfume. Not the smell he remembered. He pulled away.

‘Mum, this is too... I gotta blurt. I’m late and I don’t wanna get fired. We’ll link when I finish work, yeah?’

‘Baby, don’t worry yourself! So much we have to talk about, but I’m just.. I’m just happy me see you. And you ok. And... and you’re loved.’

It was possible to function on autopilot. Everyday, people did this. People who had affairs, lived second lives, people diagnosed with terminal illnesses, people who had ~~lost~~ experienced the death of their parents, or children, or lovers, people who had secretly won the lottery or gone bankrupt. Millions of people still set their alarms and went to work and hugged their partners and brushed their teeth while something big loomed outside their everyday lives.

In the grand scheme of things, all he'd done was leave a country for a few years and leave behind everything. *Todo*. And now his mother had sought him out. His mother who hadn't disowned him like his father did. His mother who he'd never spoken to properly since she backslid, until he backslid too, leaving the church and his bible school and his leadership training, all because he could no longer bear living a lie.

His father's overreaction was long buried; it was predictable, like the assumptions from strangers that he must have been kicked out of home, that his parents must have been homophobes. Reality was far more complex, just like his mother was complex. He found himself speaking:

'Ok, we're going to do another exercise on phrasal verbs, so you really get the difference between the literal and the non-literal ones...'

He lost himself among the students' groans, among the heavy strip lighting and whiteboard, and all the badly stuck-on posters of the too-warm room.

His mother, whose own mother, and mother's mother, held the key to so much of his DNA. She'd turned up at his door and sat at his bedside and observed, and after four years, all he could think to do was go to work and discuss verbs, going over them with the group, going through the motions, thoughts of his mother going round in circles, while he was steadily going out of his mind, waiting for the class to finish. And the time was going... going... gone. He was out of the class before even the most unenthusiastic of his students.

At the tapas bar across the road, helpfully called *Lunch*, he met his mother, seated at a table right in the middle, her back to the wall. It wasn't busy at all, just six or seven people, half of them at the bar counter. His mother was typing something into her phone, while holding up a book with her left hand.

His mother read books!

He was more surprised by the reading than by the absence of her ring, and then surprised at his lack of surprise at the former and not the latter.

He slowed his pace. Clearly a lot had happened since he'd gone; so much that was probably inevitable. The bible passage came to mind: 'be not unequally yoked'. He couldn't imagine being his mother, so mismatched to her husband for so long. And then Vladimir crossed his mind, but by then he was at her side.

'What's that you reading, mum?'

She jolted back in her seat.

'Oh son! You know seh you shouldn't frighten your mother.'

'Duppy know who fi frighten! Anyway, you was engrossed!'

She manoeuvred to sit upright, gripping the book like it was too precious for the table.

‘Don’t you dare call you mother gross!’

‘You know what, mum? After all this time, you still ain’t learned to be funny?’

‘And in all this time, you *still* answering back after you mother? Bwoy, if I was the kind of person *my* mother raised you to be, I would have licked your backside till kingdom come. *A-woah!*’

She slapped the book down and bared her teeth, one gold, the rest yellow. It sounded like a laugh but he wasn’t sure. He wasn’t sure about anything anymore.

She patted the space next to her; he took the chair opposite.

‘It’s the *Da Vinci Code*. You heard of it? Everyone at work was talking about it and it the kind of thing your daddy wouldn’t want me to read... so I’m reading it.’

Her voice sounded conspiratorial, mischievous. There was a drop of red wine in her glass. She’d never talked about his father this way, even though they’d practically been apart while living together. Where was her new attitude coming from? And her new interest in literature?

‘How *is* dad?’

‘Make we order some food first! I don’t know about you but I haven’t eaten all day. And this wine... this wine is a little trong.’

‘Since when you turn drinkard, mum? I’m worried!’

‘Me too! Me not used to it. And you... you look so different, so... so *well*.’

He didn’t *feel* well. Nausea rose through his chest again, light-headedness bubbling up to his throat. The silence fell uncomfortably between them.

‘Make me hold your hand at least, since you too prideful fi hug me.’

She reached for his hand, and her palms were warm and soft. She cupped it across the table. With the other hand, Samuel motioned for service.

‘Oiga, camarera!’

He turned back to his mother. ‘Shall I order for you?’

She pushed out her lips in assent – how long since he’d last seen that expression! – and the waitress took their order and the menus. He breathed in deep.

‘You know your grandfather used to speak Spanish... on your father’s side?’

‘Really? So much I don–’

She waved her arm and he checked for the ring again. Nothing. And she hadn’t any tattoos along her arm – she hadn’t gone *that far*, even if she was reading Mr Da Vinci whatsits.

‘Or Portuguese – or something. He was good at these things. He loved to travel. He even went to Africa, you know.’

Outside the window, in the distance, he spotted a cluster of his students passing, the ones whose names he couldn’t remember; they were so unremarkable. And there was something magical in that. He’d never been able to be like everyone else, had he?

He looked back at his mother who hadn’t taken her gaze off him. And then he was naked as the morning, when he’d woken up with her in his room, his sex life on display.

‘There’s so much about the family you and dad never told me.’

‘We never wanted to burden our children with all that history. You were meant to be the future, free from all of that.’

‘Free from all of wh–?’

The waitress slapped the cortados down on the table. His mother screwed up her face and for a moment – again – he saw Vladimir.

‘What am I supposed to do with such an itsy bitsy little thing? You mean seh them nuh have a full size coffee here?’

‘It’s nice, mum. Just try it. It’s strong. Put hairs on yuh chest!’

‘Where’s the sugar? I don’t really take sugar anymore, but I might as well make it stretch a bit further.’

He spat out his coffee with the force of his laughter. It splattered all over the table.

‘Ok, you *have* become funny since I last saw you.’

‘Oh? Well, I’m glad you think it’s funny I’m being funny.’

When the waitress asked if everything was ok, he ordered another, and a bigger café con leche for his mother. The *pan con tomate* appeared and Samuel added an extra drizzle of olive oil, enjoying how the thick, golden liquid poured out of the jar.

‘Look at you, eh?’

She smiled.

‘What?’

‘I dunno. I just haven’t seen you in so long and you’ve *grown*.’

‘Mum, I stopped growing when I was, what? Sixteen, seventeen? Unless you’re saying I’ve grown outwards.’

He made a gesture towards his belly but she’d looked away. ‘I’m just happy to see you’re making a life for yourself.’

The tortillas appeared. And at the moment – finally, then – she said the words he didn't realise he was dreading:

'Your brother's been looking for you.'

If only it were possible to look at the past with the wisdom of the present, to go back in time and unravel all the wrong decisions and assumptions.

Samuel skimmed the letter his mother had produced from her bag, which she'd clearly opened and read. The writing looped; it was large, frequently breaking the boundaries of the lines... and it was dated 2001. The paper was almost transparent, it was so thin.

Bro,

*I was hoping we could start again, but I guess you still don't want to speak to me. I need to get things off my chest and I need you to hear me out. Either way, we're gonna have to speak soon. S**t's got real, as they say...*

You were always my clever younger brother, I see you! You had to be more cleverer than me, holier than me. Even taller than me! (And you kept going on about it.) Like, for instance, you remember that girl Katrin you saw me with? Yeah, after we spotted you, even she was going on like yeah, he's the cuter brother. That kind of cut me still, for real! ☺ But that's how I kind of saw you, growing up, how you were making yourself out to be the better, younger brother. You have no idea what it's like. Like – I remember mum and dad arguing after you were born and me thinking they were gonna give me away and keep you. Stupid, I know. But you won't remember them arguments, still.

Anyway, cool cool, I wanted you to do well and escape what I was going through. I was facing demons, innit? I'm not sure when you must have known, but these things catch up with you.

Ok, I've just reread this last couple sentences and I sound well mysterious. But I don't know if you're gonna read this letter and HI MUM I know it's probably gonna pass through some hands before/if it gets to you. MUM STOP READING THIS NOW OR I'LL GO IN. TRUST!

Samuel sipped water and skipped ahead, turning the page. Manny was on about the weather in Birmingham, where he was now, and how he'd just gone to see some theatre show. Then, boom, he mentioned schoolmates Manny had threatened, so he wouldn't be bullied, pushed into the wrong crowd... it seemed to be breaking out into a list.

He couldn't work out if it was angry or confessional or what. Did he think Samuel owed him? Did *Samuel* think he owed him? He read more:

I remember that day I was trying to stash my tings in your trunk, and I found your gay mag, it kind of fell together. You needed to do all that self-righteous stuff because you needed to protect yourself. You put on the whole armour of God! I'm not saying you were a prick, but YOU WERE! I don't mean it in a nasty way.

Anyway, that day in particular, I remember fuming. All this time, I was the bad son and you was the good one and you were hiding this shit? And that whole day, I was watching you, thinking when's the fakeness gonna drop? Whatever I am, no matter how bad people think I am, I'm REAL, you get me?

Could you at least call me? We've got things to work out. I've got a ting to ask. Just a favour, don't worry, not some long ting. I'm not beggin you for money or nuttin. I know you met Simeon. He said you he was with you in the hotel when the accident happened and we need to talk! I can't say anymore now.

Samuel's blood ran cold. Feeling dizzy, he read on:

Anyway... I saw that mag you was hiding in the trunk and I thought, 'my man needs some time to figure things out', and I also kind of knew that was a shit hiding place. So, I dunno, I took it to the bins. And I felt sad we weren't even allowed to talk about girls or anything. And I was like, even if you wanted to talk about boys with me, I'm you're big bro. I won't get it, but I'm your bro. And I should have looked after you.

That's what I vowed to do, from the time I left school. I looked after you. Cos tings weren't easy, was it? I MEAN IT, CALL ME! I had people looking out for you, making sure you weren't bullied. I told dad not to be so hard on you. You know he'd come and see me when I was locked up the first time? And he'd say don't tell your mother I come here. And I'd spend most of the time asking about you, making sure he wasn't hard on you.

I ask myself now though was it worth it? I've done...

Samuel couldn't read to the end. He needed air.

As he rose, his mother grabbed his arm.

'He's gone missing, Samuel. And I don't want to lose another child. Not again.'

'Is that why you came for me?'

'No.'

'What's going on?'

'You need to come back home.'

'I-'

'I know you have a home here. And I'm proud of you, I really am.'

‘When I was your age, I was a singer, did you know? I was on Top of the Pops, a backing artist, and I thought that was going to be my one chance to be a star. And it wasn’t.’

The bar was filling up with customers. He couldn’t think. He pictured his mother, in her green blouse and new hair, she looked like the kind of woman who might have once been a star. It was calming, made his eyes well up.

‘Oh! I don’t want to talk about my past like that. What I want to say is I ran away from it all because I thought I was choosing the easy road. And then I met your father and it all made sense because I needed it to make sense... am I making sense?’

She wasn’t making sense. Letters and ringless fingers and Dan Brown novels and what was going on with his father – and his brother – and after a whole morning of teaching English, he couldn’t make sense of it...

‘Sometimes it’s good to run away. I was glad at first when you disappeared because I thought finally you’ve escaped all the baggage we tied you down with which we didn’t mean to tie you down with but we tied it all the same...’

‘Mum, I –’

‘You can talk when I’m done! I’ve been going over this in my head for it must be what? Three, no, four years? I remember one day I called you my baby and you said, *I’m not your baby anymore!* I never felt so wretched in my life. I’d been living for you *all that time*, and all that time you needed to live for yourself, grow into yourself. And you know what, me glad suh till you finally step out of our shadow. Sometime you need to run way and create your own way. But you mus know *what* you’re leaving behind so you don’t find yourself becoming the thing you want to escape from. Not sure it sense me making sense right now–’

‘I think so–’

‘Look! I never thought my own children would want to escape from me. From *me!* That’s the last jam thing I want. But I see now. I see it was the only option for the both of yous. But you can’t escape from the things inside you. You have to face them or they’ll come looking for you, Samuel. You know why I called you Samuel?’

Of course!

‘No, not Samuel from the bible. A long, long time ago, I was young and foolish. I was in love with a man called Sammy, many, many years before you came along. And the more I tried to forget him, the more I created –. Never mind! Me never come to tell you all this... What I’m saying, Samuel, is you need to go and find your brother before he find you first. You’ve done your running away, but if you’re going to stay here you need to know what you’re staying for and what you’re running from.’

It was too much. All this revelation. The tears running down his face. The smell of home wafting from his mother. Her perfume, which hugged him back as he reached across the table. Samuel excused himself to go to the bathroom and kept walking past the door.

EIGHT
(The Girl)

‘someone her grandchildren could be proud of...’

White City, West London, 1974

Thursday

What was it like that first time you go on Top of the Pops, Granny?

Round her bedside, the two youngest girls would be plaiting her grey braids. Ten of them in total – no, sixteen – her grandchildren, all around her bedside as she lay there, hours before her last breath. She would sip a little water before diving into great detail how she had one piece of nerves that day, nerves that made everything in her body fizz like she was on a merry go round. No, like she was on a plane taking off. At this point she would sit up. Yes, one of those chacka-chacka planes with the propellerations. *Hmph!* She'd chuckle at how her licky licky Aunt Ceecee took the bowl of soup away from her and said *if you too ungrateful to nyam the sustenance I tek my time to prepare for you, I will have it!* She couldn't even think about holding down any food with those nerves inside her, filling her up.

She would detail her path from the tube with her sunglass on, even though there wasn't any sun. And how she had her purple sequin blouse and her brown suede skirt in a suitbag, slung over her shoulder. And how she'd stupidly placed her flats in her handbag and braved Wood Lane in her platform heels, just so she could walk tall all the way to the studio.

Would she admit to her grandchildren that the Television Centre was nothing like she imagined? Perhaps. In her daydreams, the building was more cluttered: leads serpented the floor and men and women with clipboards skipped over them; bulky men with cameras blocked her pathway, and microphones with afros on, *dead cats* as they called them, were all pointing towards her.

Reality was different: she'd checked in with the secretary at reception and stared at the mosaic on the wall before somebody called her name, like it was a doctor she was going to see. She was ushered towards Studio Four, down a complicated set of hallways with hardly any obstacles at all. And it was all so grand, just as it should be; a television palace now welcoming its new queen.

Here she was, at the threshold, outside their Green Room.

Her feet had been burning as the dreamlike cream doors parted before them, a matching corridor – *cream and beige and brown, colours that rule this side of town* – laying ahead. Déjà vu had made her arms tingle, or maybe it was the tightness in her feet, the restriction of shoes, and the added discomfort of platform heels. Either way, the buzz going through her made the walk feel familiar, though she'd never been before.

The usher didn't stop talking about the building, the history, the best cafés along the Goldhawk Road she must consider should she ever come back. *Should she ever...* Her grandchildren would laugh, of course. The walls of her room would be full of photos from her decades-long singing career and, of course, gold discs. And the trophies on the shelf, the long oak shelf bowing with gold – and some silver – awards (this was real life after all; you can't win everything outright, she would tell them).

She wouldn't give them much about the usher; he was just a vehicle for her to pass through. But the usher kept taking up space in her head as she walked, all the space she was using to drink in as much of the details for her grandchildren... *it's just a little further down, past a Polish restaurant of all things. They have great beer and a tasteful vino for the ladies, too.* She wasn't a *tasteful vino* woman; still, she'd smiled a full rack of teeth and let him exercise his jaws.

The usher spoke nothing of why she was here, what was in store for her that night. He'd asked no questions, just labba-labba with his stories *and last week we had Sir Thinkington-Thingumy and he was incredibly small, much smaller than you'd picture him, mind your step, Madam...* And she was becoming increasingly itchy, tingly, tight around the lips. But she held her peace. This was just the beginning.

Auntie Ceecee had been firm; she was not to come home late, even though Theresa explained how important tonight was. *My Lord is no respecter of persons, my dear. You could be going to see the Queen and I would still tell you the same thing. Home by ten. because King Jesus is more important than all the things of this world, and you and me need to pray tonight, you hear?*

The show would finish well before then; it was only a matter of finding her way back East in good time, not being tempted to tarry. She best toe the line until she could find somewhere else to live. With the right break, an increase in her savings, a record deal, even – surely, that was right around the corner now? – she would be out again, in her own place, free to...

This way, Madam.

The usher held the small of her back as he announced the Green Room, but Theresa shrugged him away. She wanted to open the doors herself. *I need to compose myself for one second* was how she put it. That line always worked, a line she'd learnt from a film seen during those lost days, after the break up, before going to live with her auntie. Those days still blurred together in her head, but tiny pieces sharpened at moments like this. It was like hooking a wire hanger into the back of the TV: total perfect clarity for one minute and then the white static returned. So long – month after month –

she'd lived in this white snow; now, things were about to change, a new angle, a *finesse*.
Yes.

She watched the usher's back disappear down the warren of milky corridors, where photographs of men she mostly didn't know – except to know they were important – lined the walls and didn't meet her eye. She threw her gaze to the nearest one, more beard than face filling the frame. *You can't frighten me, mister. No, suh.*

She could smell cigars and authority; the whole building was soaked in it. She breathed it in and let it enter her body too. *My beard is bigger than yours, anyway.* Her laugh sounded like it had a hole in it but she liked its echo. She practised her smile again, then flicked her tongue over her teeth to check for lipstick traces. Perhaps it was better to look angry, fierce tonight; it was better to frown than to smile.

A woman holding a stack of papers ran towards her, in a modest felt skirt and green heels, clack clack-clacker, and then past her, into the chaos of wherever she was headed. Two men walked briskly after her, crisp white shirts and paisley ties. Again, they clacked in their Sunday-shiny shoes.

In the far distance, the sound of typing, the sound of doors opening and closing, of heels and trolley wheels and lifts. This place was anything but still, but it still felt emptier than she'd imagined. Maybe it was because she'd still seen no cameras, no equipment, no sign that this was the television studio at the centre of the world.

She'd never been inside anywhere that smelt like this, and it made her dizzy, giddy, giggly, ashamed. *We were ashamed because we were naked.*

Excuse me! Are you ok?

Even after all these years living in England, that clipped English tone she found hard to decipher, containing worlds of meanings behind small words. One day she would master it, too. *Are you ok*, sometimes a question and other times a way of questioning, an accusation.

Approaching from one end of the corridor, Theresa tracked the voice: a smartly dressed woman, in a brown trouser suit and an out-of-date beehive. She must be forty or fifty. Purple around her eyes, getting heavier as they approached. Even as the woman walked towards her, she was sliding her glasses down to the end of her nose, preparing to admonish.

Yes, I'm ok, thank you.

The cloakroom for the cleaners is on the first floor.

Theresa winced. She felt something rise from her belly into her chest, a hot spirit inside her revving up but finding nowhere to go.

Thank you for letting me know, Miss–?

That's a Green Room in there.

Today of all days, she could laugh.

Yes?

Theresa held out the pass she'd been given, a gift.

I see. Well, no need to be so chippy. You looked like you were lost.

I said I'm ok, thank you.

I was helping you because you looked lost.

I'm not lost. Are *you* lost? You look more than los-

Your mother must be proud of *your* manners.

Theresa breathed in and out, closed her eyes, inhaled... exhaled. *Click clack.*

Cheeops!

When she opened them again, the woman was gone, a vision faded. Theresa's arms had stopped tingling. What should have been a laugh came out as a hollow cough, bouncing off the hard cream walls.

Theresa hadn't thought about her mother in months, maybe even a year. *Was* she dead? The grandchildren at her bedside began to dissolve in front of her eyes, one by one. Was she dead or had she just run away, away from the judgement of that wretched place where she'd given birth?

One day, once Theresa was famous, she would come looking, would explain why she never come back for her.

She folded the past and the future into herself, packed away her remaining grandchildren and her mislaid mother for another time. With one hand on the door and another on her coat, just to check she was wearing clothes after all, she pushed everything open to join her co-stars in the Green Room.

Suddenly, it was – yes *that* was the word – *glamour*. Greeting her: a flood of light and mirrors; multi-coloured fabric on the floor; a table with champagne and glasses; half a dozen chattering people in one corner –including a woman with a typewriter on her lap... she did a double take. And then there were two men in another corner, perched on a desk; a photographer – presumably, from the large camera he was behind, taking pictures of the scene –; music that appeared to come out of the ceiling – violin music, of all things. Finally, her eyes rested on Lenny puffing on two cigarettes simultaneously, talking to Willie the drummer, near the back wall. The wall that wasn't covered in mirrors was covered in discs, signed album covers, magazine clippings.

Even as she walked in, the flood of noise and brightness was pushing her backwards towards the door. She'd stepped from the dark to the light and it was too

dazzling. But she resisted the need to retreat and stepped further towards Lenny while the chatter continued, oblivious to her entrance.

Who will be the first to notice me?

Jasmine, sweetheart! *There* you are.

Lenny, of course. She laughed. She would have to play with him, make him a sacrifice for the panic she felt.

There I *am*.

She pushed a breath out, stepped towards him, stepped into herself, realising how bent her back had become in the journey from the secretary to the Green Room via directions towards the cleaners' cloakroom.

I *still* don't know who this man is, you know.

Her voice had come out loud and deep. The room around her hushed. Even the violinist seemed to pause in shock before resuming the arpeggios.

And even if I *did*, I don't know why he call me sweetheart. I don't do nothing to sweet him yet.

The laughter came, after a delay. The two men in the far corner seemed to guffaw the loudest and she turned towards them, giving them her smile, the one without the teeth. Lenny scooped her up in a hug, then let go as the hanger from her suit bag scraped his back. Willie assured her the sound check went fine; she'd be fine; they'd rehearsed a hundred times or more before now. And this was a scaled-back performance: Lenny on the piano, him on drums, and just her and *the other girl* backing.

They told me you weren't one to be messed with.

A hand on her shoulder, messing with her.

Hi there, I'm Claudia.

Good evening, Claudia. *Jasmine.*

I'll be doing your makeup now, Jasmine, if you want to follow me?

My makeup is just fine, thank you. She felt her back start to bend again.

Let me just speak with Lenny one little bit and I'll come over to you, darling.

I'm so sorry but we need to step on the pad. You're on in an hour.

That's ok, sweetiepie, let me just speak with Lenny one little bit.

She pulled on his elbow, hissed, tried to whisper.

Is that a *white* woman? Is that a white woman tell me seh she going *make me up*?

Jasmine, darling. Don't be a drag. She does makeup for TV all the time.

I can't let no white woman touch my hair and my face and ting, no suh.

She knew before she turned around that the hand interjecting, on her shoulder, was a Claudia hand. It was bony and insistent.

Look, Jasmine, no need to be nervous about going in front of the cameras.

I look nervous to you? No, darlink, I'm a professional.

Let's not get off to a bad start, Jasmine.

She was laugh-talking, shaking her head. The fringe was going one way and Claudia's head was going another.

I've done plenty of coloureds before so you've got nothing to worry about. We'll have you ready for TV in no time, you'll be smoking.

Coloureds.

I'm just fine without makeup, don't you think?

Yes, you look just groovy. I see already you have lovely skin to work with. A little glitter and shadow and a touch-up here and there and you'll see! We can even try on the wig Lenny left for you. You'll thank me once you see your face on screen, promise.

Theresa turned to Lenny to plead her case, but he'd already gone back to the window, along with his two cigarettes. *Where was Michelle, the other Oval?*

You done the other singer yet?

Yes, the other makeup artist saw to her.

Ok. But let me show you the foundation I have.

Groovy!

Claudia with the bony hands who she didn't know from Adam now had her fingers interlocked with hers. And she was leading her away to destroy her face and hair, just before the one of most important moments in her life.

Live. Theresa was on the television, *live*, her face – buried in way too much powder – (live-) beamed into the homes of millions of (real live) people. She could do anything and it would be seen across the whole country, taking in the fifteen second or so time delay. If she murdered someone (Lenny), the screens would go black just in time to spare the people on the other side of the screen. But if she were to sing one wrong note, the microphone would pick it up and transmit it all the way through the cables.

The studio audience was mostly younger than her, than Lenny. The room was clogged with teenage sweat and sweet perfume. Girls mostly filled this tinier-than-expected space; the other band, Moonlight 74, had left the stage and she could see everything around her for one minute, as the lighting went up again, bright yellow light that signalled their turn to get on stage. Girls thinner than her, even. So many girls in miniskirts and woolly jumpers; Theresa wondered about the mismatch of temperatures. With those cold legs, no wonder why they couldn't dance properly, just bobbing and twisting, even as the music had ended.

She couldn't unfix her eyes from the audience and almost tripped getting up onto the stage, in those damn platforms. If it wasn't for Lenny, she would be barefoot right now; that was how *Jasmine* was meant to sing. But *Theresa*? Her real self was more practical; she knew better than to complain, *wanti wanti cyaan getti getti*. Her singing alter ego could make do with a compromise; it was that or living solely off the dole. As long as her voice was heard – and on live television – she could be barefoot, or in platforms, or rollerskates or stilts, and she would still do it. This was the *big time*.

The lights kept going up and up, a bright yellow glare in her face that swallowed her whole, until she could see nothing in front of her apart from the microphone. They were giving off too much heat. She steadied her hand on the stand, then measured the space from her lips to the microphone tip; the gap between her voice and machine intervention. Too close and the sound would distort. Too far and the sound wouldn't reach so good. She sensed Michelle on the other side of Lenny, from the corner of her eyes, and it was like they were two well-decorated trees either side of a bench. He was sitting upright and proud on his piano stool, poised for the first chord. This was for *real*.

The pain in her foot was real. The corn in her toe was real. The smallness, the airless buzz in the studio, the endless screens and the screaming teenagers being told when to scream and where to stand. James Sullivan, the presenter, screaming to the producer *bring those two to the front*. Blonde hair girls, she supposed, too small to wear so much lipstick. She had time to breathe and adjust to the light, while they went through the music chart countdown again.

The microphone wasn't on yet – but what if it was, and she belched? Or laughed?

The light on her began to change, to soften a little, while the audience remained in semi-darkness. She could now see the red light switch to the main camera – camera two. It was fixed on him, with her body just in shot, to his side. That was their cue to get ready. The sound was switched on.

So many small silhouettes were pressed against the front of the stage. She could feel their godless freedom. None of them had to be home early like she did – and she was so much older than most of them, too. But they were dancing to *her* tune now – well, to Lenny's tune, but to *her* voice behind his.

An arm reached out to touch Lenny and it was tempting to reach down and grab it. Here she was – number one! – in her big time style, *a big time people*, being reached out to. But now was the time to look straight ahead, without looking down into the lens of the camera, which seemed to be wheeling closer towards them. Only Lenny could look. From the side of her eye, she could see the cameraman's headphones. She wished

she could see what the camera guys were all seeing now, and how they were putting it together.

They'd told her when to look this way and *that* way and she took to it like it was hidden under her skin. And in one kind of sense, it was, right there under her ribs and even down to her hips, because she'd spent so much of the last six years doing this in a smaller way, from that basement room all the way up to the Four Aces and that one time Oppor- no she wouldn't let that thought fini-

Whatever you do, don't panic, and stay in time to the backing track.

She'd not been in the rehearsal but she knew the red light meant they were recording. She'd introduced herself to Jason, the camera director, in the Green Room. She'd also met some of the others, too: Ashleigh, Gary, and a couple of names she had either not caught or had forgotten. She'd shown Jason she wasn't a novice. *Ah, you're using a dolly.* Made it sound natural. He winked.

You've done this before, I can tell.

Lenny, who *had* done this before, with his last record, just huffed. As they prepared to take to the stage, he'd hissed at her the way only jealous men do.

Next time I have a number one hit, if I'm letting you sing backing vocals for me, you better ration all that muck you've sprayed on. It's like you spent the whole day stuck in a potpourri bowl.

Lenny, sweetiepie, don't let the nervous get to you.

She grinned towards the audience, the brightness of the stage lights following her sway, the crowd in the half-light, white faces focused, fading from her vision all the way to the back of the studio. Suddenly, she was bathed in red and green, a whirring disco ball effect from above, coming and going in waves. It was dizzying but she was prepared. All she had to do was sing and breathe. And she could see more now, when the light was off her; the same girls she'd spotted while waiting backstage, all dancing, dancing to her (and Lenny). All moving in their own way to the music.

She spotted a black face in the front of the crowd being pushed forward, and so she winked again at him. Just for him. His afro was picky, she could spot that even from her position up on the stage, even with the bright lights in her face. She wondered what he must be thinking of her as she swung her arm out – her purple-nylon-covered sweaty arm – and looked again into the eye of the camera. The lights were like stoves on her head, and she was their fry pan and all that heavy lard they put on her was trickling off tickling her neck and down into her cleavage and the rest of her face was making a pool of sweat on the stage but she didn't care, *nnh-nnh. Big things.* Millions would be watching at home; she would get recognised on the street. She kept her smile going.

Would he recognise her?

A misstep, subtle but jolting.

She let the chill of his memory subside as she concentrated on the rhythm.

The memory had made her lungs contract, made her cheeks burn oddly, more than the rest of her was already burning.

Take a breath

– *uh, uh, yeah*

No one would even notice how she breathed that note out wrong. She mustn't catch herself wandering, wondering about him.

This is what everyone would be saying in their homes:

But wait – ! See how this little girl come on the TV again? Again!

Again, yes... But this was not Opportunity Knocks, no, not like last time; and she was not little anymore, no; nor was she a lead singer, no; nor was she now with the band she'd once loved. This is what it's like to be part of *someone else's* big time, she corrected, washing away some of the pride in her, the same pride she needed to watch herself about, because *pride will stop you at the door* to heaven, and it's only lately she'd begun to *really* think about heaven and...

– *ooh ooh ooh*

then the camera light moved on to the woman next to her, Michelle, young and *lickle bit* – a tiny something of a girl, you could turn her sideways and forget she was there – and more suited to the studio makeup than she was. But *puss and dog nuh have the same luck*; Michelle already had two babies and everything. It wasn't jealous she was jealous, more like another loosening of the pride. When that camera lens moved on, she was alone again, dancing and singing and nobody would even notice if she stopped.

Something bitter was beginning to settle onto her vocal chords, like dust on a stylus, just a little dirt, which was probably for the best anyway.

Here she was live on the television with half of this big island they call England glued to the screen, and inside the screen, mostly off to the left of the *real* singer, there she stood, swaying and oohing. And no one would hold an arrow pointing to her. No one that mattered, anyhow. Who remembers the backing singer, *eenh*?

Theresa's spot was in the *background*, just like Michelle on the other side, with her two pickney waiting at home, and just like the pre-recorded caterwauling strings and Willie's doogah doogah drums taking up space behind Lenny, falling hard and exact on every beat. *Lenny* was the star here. Theresa's job was to smile and *ooh ooh ooh!* while she clicked in time, to *his* time. If she was lucky, the camera would pan out enough, once in a while, and get her face in the frame.

The mountain is mine –

– *ooh ooh ooh!*

Theresa noticed something new again in her voice. The faltering of age or of that small bitterness attaching itself more firmly to her throat? How long would the lightness in her alto hold?

Oh yes, the mountain is mine

– *uh uh yeah!*

I'll cover you in kishes, bay-bee

– *ooh ooh ooh!*

Gonna let us shine

– *uh uh....* What? Somebody needed to find himself
a better

– Ooh ooh ooooooo–

songwriter, that same somebody who called himself *Lenny*, and what a choopid idyat-fool name he chose! The boy was really called Kenneth. *Kenneth!* And he had an uneven temper and unruly hair besides. *How he could come onto the stage in front of millions of people with no shame, eenh?*

Theresa felt giddy with the thought, and stifled the urge to laugh: while a studio full of people danced to “Lenny”, and while millions were turning him up now in their living rooms, while so many queued at Tower Records the day this... this *song* was released, while so many sung along with him now, clicking their fingers in a frenzied attempt at capturing the rhythm, here she stood, right by his side, backbiting him – the song and the singer – everything from his hair to his breath to his name and his lack of original. And if she was not careful, the cameras would see the pride and yes the jealousy that was within her. The red-eye monster...

Theresa remembered to sway and smile and hum till the chorus and not pay too much mind to the back of this head delivering such a fool, fool song that, despite herself, she knew so well it was part of her body. An *ooh* sway and an *uuh* smile and a click and a slide and a best watch out for the Camera Two close-up.

I'll cover you in kishes, bay-bee

– *ooh ooh ooh!*

Gonna let us shine

– *uh uh yeah!*

After the final *oohoooo hooo*,

And this time she'd better breathe right.

Yes, there it was...

applause.

The whole studio was riotous, well not quite riotous because they weren't stampeding the stage or even showering them in underwear or roses, but for a big time television audience this was *good*. Great, even; yes, this was great.

The whooping and hollering was for him, yes, but it was for her too, her in Ovalness and bellbottoms and platforms so high she felt like a stage upon a stage.

Lenny took a bow and with a *thank you so much* another shadow passed.

It passed and everything froze.

And...

And somewhere...

in the back of Lenny's *thank you so much* head, perhaps, or in that final bow, even as the excitement of being beamed into so many homes throughout the country was still pumping around her blood, she read the writing on the wall. She was twenty-four now, starting to get old already, starting to hear it in her voice already. If she wasn't smart, would this be all she had to look forward to? A childless spinster picking up crumbs from the master table? Gold crumbs, television crumbs, nearly-famous crumbs, but not the full bread-and-butter life of a mother, wife, a woman with her own house and a steady income.

The zing in her ankles and calves agreed. She would be a body of pain tomorrow and the next day, with muscle ache and back burn and no one to share it with, just a handful of cut-eye girls at the secretarial course on Saturday. And definitely not with her auntie's church people on Sunday. And...

And everything sped up again and the crowd continued to cheer and the lights continued to flash and Lenny grabbed her around the waist, brushing against her right breast and *that was so rad! Wasn't that rad?* And she shivered and laughed and felt her eyes water, even though she felt hot and happy and ecstatic afterwards and *yes, that was rad!* And *do you wanna have a little Barry White with me to celebrate?* And she found herself nodding even as she said the word no and had to forcefully remove the hands pulling her elbow towards the corridor.

The cream and beige felt harsher, colder this time.

If you're not gonna partake in some of this, at least come to the Club bar.

I've got to go home.

I can drive you home in my can.

I've got to go *now*.

Your cameraman friend's going to be there. You dig him, right? If you're going to be frigid around me, maybe he can warm you up, if you catch my drift?

I don't catch your drift.

Don't be a drag, Jasmine.

Unlike you, I need to be home, *Ken-neth*. You already know this. She'd broken the number one rule. He *hated* being called Kenneth.

Fuck you, Jasmine. You're a neurotic bitch, did you know that? Neurotic. Erotic. Why did his insults have to be so speakey-spokey?

Tell me something I don't know already.

Your vagina's going to dry up one of these days.

He'd never gone this far before. She paused.

And your nose is going to drop off one of these days. And you won't have anywhere left to hide your bogey. And you'll be singing *The mountain is miiiiiine...* in that with your slimy hands all moving up and down the mic stand and all the bogey gonna be running down your face onto the mic out of that hole where your nose used to be. And that day I'll be laughing so hard so hard so *hard!*

Ronald's laugh sounded like a sneeze. Maybe it was a sneeze.

Jasmine, you know women aren't funny.

I'm not even being funny, Kenny. Your nose is gonna run away just to spite your miserable face.

Again, a sneeze-laugh, and his shoulders lifted up and down. Everything was going to be ok. *Just.*

Nobody else can get away with talking to me like that you know, Jasmine.

Eenh-hee? Well, maybe more should!

I've organised a cab for you. Get out of here. Fuck off.

Go bathe your mother and drink the water!

Jesus, Jasmine!

You *need* Jesus, Kenny!

Oh, I get it, you're trying to get the last word in...

I'm not trying anything. You're trying *me!*

Both of their laughter filled the corridor as she walked away to collect her bag.

He paid for a black cab. It must have cost so much, she would have never spent so much money like that. But he also owed her so much, so...

and, in turn, she owed her auntie, so...

and her auntie owed the landlord, so...

and the landlord

...well, he owed Tower Hamlets council

and the council owed the GLC or something like that, so...

so...

so...

Everything was money these days; it was worse than before. The three-day week was over now, the economy was meant to be getting better, so they said. And still almost nobody round where she lived had a proper job, and every Peter was being robbed to pay every Paul. And everything begat everything, like a twist up genealogy of debt and usury. *Cheops!*

When it came to real life children, she had begotten nobody. Nobody and nothing but debt to her Auntie Ceecee and one beautified night on the television screen. And now it was over and she had to go back to her auntie and explain why she was coming in past the curfew, even though Theresa already told her it was an important singing night.

The car sped all the way up the Westway, over the new flyover, over the place she first settled in, over the boy she first settled with – and neither of them was a settling at all, just one ugly lesson after another – and she carefully removed all the powder from her face with the flannel she'd brought with her. She would remove the bandages from her feet back at home. *Home.*

The streetlights whirled over and over in the car. Down below there was Ladbroke Grove and then Westbourne Park and then she would come to land in Paddington, finally safe from all those streets she knew so well before. Golborne, Colville, All Saints, Bayswa–

The driver woke her up; opened the door. His arm was hairy, his hands were warm on her, even through her blouse. She felt the hot of him rise up through her arm, tickling her neck at the moment their eyes met. His were green, lit by the passenger door light.

You have a good night, Miss.

The hint of a lisp, the trace of a smile and still his hand on her arm.

Thank you, Sir. Please let me tip you.

She imagined him inside her, those hands on her nipples, on her neck, those eyes holding hers as she gave into her body... if her skirt were easier to pull down, if they were further away from her auntie's door, if she had the pill because no way could she go through that again.

Don't even think of it. Your boss already sorted that one out.

Your boss rang heavy in her ears. She let herself loose from his grip in one quick movement and closed the cab door. She bade him good night and he returned to his seat. With a rev of the engine, he was gone.

The porch light was still on; her auntie was still up. She barely turned the key in the door and pushed it a little, not too much, but enough to move whatever was behind and to hear a crash, several crashes, the sound of cymbals, a final thud. The narrow hallway came to life with the echo of clanging. On instinct, Theresa looked ahead at the stairs, which throbbed darkly. No her auntie was not there; she was off to the right, in the front room waiting. She had created an obstacle course, a frying pan and a tambourine on top of the books, all been positioned deliberately. With the porch light, Theresa inspected the items which had fallen at her feet, counting, four – five – six. She bent to stop the jingles of the tambourine.

Missie?

Theresa cleared her throat. *Missie?* This was going to be a long night. She closed the door behind her and stepped into the front room, her auntie's face glowing under the dim lamp by the bay window, bible open in her lap but upturned.

Yes, Auntie Cee?

She dare not come any closer for now. Her feet were tired so she leaned against the threshold. *Please don't let this be a long one.*

Don't come and *Auntie Cee* me now! How many times I tell you, eenh?

Sorry, aun–

I tell you once, twice, three, I can't even count them all with my hands–

Please–

Auntie Ceecee lifted her hand, stop.

As long as you are under *my* roof, in *my* house, I tell you I don't... want... you... ga-gallivanting all hours of the night with goodness-knows-who, coming in dressed up like...

She threw up her arms again.

...like some watless woman, into *my* house, into a house of *God*, a blessed house. Me... don't... want... no demonic spirit coming into this hou–

But, auntie–

Don't *but* auntie me. You old enough to know not to act like a child and still *–still!* – help me Lord, every single last day you come into my house you like a leggo beast. Out of the kindness of my heart and the love of Jesus I take you in. And what I get in return?

You, back-talking me – *but, auntie this, but auntie that! Lord hear my trials!* As from today things are going to change.

Theresa went to sit down on the nearest chair, the wicker back seat with its many cushions.

No, missie! You are *not* sitting down into my chair inna *my* house, with you legions of demons you bring in with you. *Satan I rebuke you!* I do not invite you to my table. I can even smell the smoke you bring in, straight from hell fire.

Auntie!! No! What you mea–

I can see in the spirit. I see the shadow around you, the hands that want to drag you into the pit and I tell you this day, *my niece*, that as long as you are in my house, *as for me and my house*, we gonna serve the Lord.

Her auntie's words spun the room around, made her head dizzy. This *twenty four year old woman* who just came out of the television studio in White City, and just came out of a black taxi all the way across town, and now back in the living room, her auntie – her landlord – was rebuking Satan out of her.

You ever ask why the people around you smoking fire cigarettes and burning their throats with strong drink all night long, eenh? It's because they getting ready for hell fire. That's why.

Auntie Cee, please mek me speak

You will *not* speak, Missie. You know *why* me won't let you speak? Because it not you speaking but the devil speaking through you right now. As I was praying while I was tarrying for you, the Lord reveal to me in a vision that you would beg and plead and plead and beg. But I was to tell Satan to get thee behind me. I was to gird my loins in wisdom. Take off you shoes now because this is holy ground. And when you done we gonna kneel and pray.

Sunday

The big April sun cut its eye at her. She tied up her jacket in backchat. It was warmer than she'd imagined. Auntie Ceecee's strides were long and determined; they were late. True Covenant Fellowship Church was twenty minutes away, a hired hall near the canal.

When they arrived, the service had begun. The droning Praying Mothers were singing *Leave Babylon and Come*. The voices scratched at her ears; Lenny would fit in here.

...Leave Babylon, leave Babylon and–

The mountain is mine (uh, uh, yeah)–

Don't mind your friends, they will laugh you to scorn–

I'll cover you in kishes, baby –

After kisses and handshakes and hugs with some of the other older Mothers, Auntie Cee took her place at the front. Theresa relaxed her shoulders and found herself a chair near the back. Too far back was a danger zone, where the ushers and shy backsliders sat; three rows in was perfect.

Theresa adjusted her skirt after sitting down, enjoying the feel of the freshly-ironed pleats as she did so. It was well below the knee but the sideways looks from the older members of the congregation made her question her modesty.

The bruise on her thigh still throbbed as she adjusted herself to the chair. Theresa was a twenty four year old woman, not a child! And, as an adult, she had refused to cry, which only made the beating worse.

An hour or more must have passed as she let this thought turn over and over in her head. She would never lay hands on her children, whatever the bible had to say about sparing the rod. It was leftover slavery business, all this caning, whipping and slipping.

The light through the windows of the hall changed, the sun casting its fickle gaze over her again, this time blessing her forehead, her cheeks, her eyelashes.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, can I get an amen?

Amen!

I said, can I get an a-men?

AMEN!

Her lips were so dry. No lipstick anointed her; just the barest of foundation, a little perfume spray.

We serve a living God, brethren.

Ame–

Some of you sounding like He's *dead* this morning. But he rose up from the grave, hallelujah shimoyay. He rose from the grave and this Palm Sunday, the beginning of the week in which we remember how He died for our *sins*, I think you all need a reminder of why we're here today.

She believed in God but she wasn't so sure about *the way* they did God here. Was He meant to be like that man who called himself her father, eternally angry and willing to throw her out of His house? Or couldn't He be more like Nann– it was too painful to even conjure up this woman, the way her hands moved through her just-greased hair, how she tapped the comb on her skull when she winced. Wasn't God, surely, in the tenderness of a comb?

Where is my *fearful* congregation this morning?

Mother Brown to her left had elbows like stones. It was like she was purposely hitting Theresa's side as she lifted her fan, up and down, up and down. Every inch she moved away was matched by a wider swing towards her.

Auntie Cee Cee was now sat in the choir seats on the platform. They briefly held each other's gaze but Theresa looked away, towards the window again. She could walk out there and be free.

I said where is my fearful congregation? Because we know not the day nor the hour when He shall appear, like a thief in the night to take his children home, amen? And He shall separate the wheat from the chaff. Those who are part of the world, getting up to worldly things, *singing worldly music*, dancing – not like David danced, no *shalamackandala, oh!* – no, but dancing to the beat of the Prince of darkness, the prince of this world, they will not rise up to meet him, no!

The pastor paused enough to let the uh-oh sink in to her gut.

They who heard the word but hearkened not, they hell is going to be *hot*. Amen-amen?

Amen!

The whole congregation had begun to take on the energy of the pastor, and ball of energy that was beginning to turn around and focus on her. The heat entered her body and sped up her heartbeat. It wrapped itself around her throat.

The wrath of God is coming, brethren. And those who are not ready, those found to be with blemish will face the wrath of God, *kandalama-sha!*

And this time the elbow moved in an un mistakeable way towards her side. Mother Brown turned to her, held her eyes and pushed her bottom lip out left towards the preacher. *You don't know this message is for you?*

Let us turn our bibles now to Revelations chapter 6.

Theresa felt the eyes on her, burning at her neck. Many ideas came to her at once, presenting themselves before her in a rush of blood and urgency. The first of them was how embarrassed she was, despite holding her head up while everyone else's eyes darted back and forth from their bibles to Pastor Harrington and back to her. She'd enjoyed having millions of people watch her in their homes as she sang; she was less happy with the dozen or so now making little pretence that they were *not* observing her.

Her pride had got her nowhere until now. Just a couple of moments on television, a lost baby, a series of people who had abandoned her: men, like Sammy; men, like her father; women, like her mother and Nanny – and soon, her auntie, unless she gave into Auntie Cee's idea of God.

And there went out another horse that was red: and power was given unto him that sat thereon to take peace from the earth–

And the second thought, which came from the back of her mind and settled in front of her, was that she would never get to sing on television again. It was something she knew from the moment she stepped off the stage, which cemented during her brush with Lenny. *No man can serve two masters.*

And they cried with a loud voice saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge–

And this second thought led to another, and another, and underneath it, the realisation that she would give in to the Lord, eventually. As long as she could get through today's service, she would make a new plan. She would still become someone her grandchildren could be proud of.

June, 1974.

The thing she could never say out loud was an acid corroding her stomach, was rockstones aggravating her soles, was wind choking dust in her throat, was sky defiantly refusing to crack open with even a tiny piece of sun, was this piece of man and his arm weighing on her shoulder as they sat on the trunk of an uprooted tree. Here, she sat with the Pastor's son on a day that should have been warm but was not; with a man that should have been beautiful but was not. Something was missing from the equation.

She knew from the casual sideways glances at the topless man earlier, and even how he tested her reaction:

I heard men meet in this wood sometimes late at night, to... You catch my drift?

In that pause where the unbreathed air sat between them, she knew. She knew and she let that knowledge sink into her stomach because she'd already made her decision on the tube journey here. Her other options were few.

She didn't ask *Why you bring me here then?* Furthermore, she ignored the temptation to ask *So when you think about these men doing their nasty business, how that make you feel inside?* She knew the answers with her body and then, just as quickly, she unknow it with her mind.

Instead, she let a brief and wary *oh* slip through her lips. The hand connected to the arm pressing down on her sore shoulder squeezed a little. A finger rubbed her collarbone.

But this is truly a pretty place, you don't think?

She didn't think. Just as her mind was unsticking from one idea, he'd presented another. Always a preacher, even when sin was on his mind. Finally, she broke the silence, like cracking an egg over a ready pan.

Is a nice *nice* place you bring me to, Deacon!

She felt herself smile and shrugged his hand off to face him.

Deacon! And I should have been an *Elder* by now. You know I turn twenty-four next week?

Same as me. We big people now!

He had his earnest face on again. He was at his most handsome this way, his fixed gaze, his pursed lips and his short afro framing his oversized head, always racing ahead with a new thought. Maybe he was beautiful. This is how he looked in front of a pulpit before a sermon.

The breeze was picking up again. Her lower arms felt cold and she almost regretted her orange and brown dress, which she'd chosen for their outing, knowing none of her cardigans matched it. *Pride feel no pain*. It was meant to be summer.

He was looking at her again, with that earnest face. Yes, he was... almost beautiful enough to kiss, were it not for the fact he should not be here; were it not for the horrible feeling gurgling inside her stomach.

So why do you still talk so bad?

But wait! So this is what you drag me all the way across town fi tell me-?

He put his hands up then clasped them together.

Sometimes I don't know what to say to you. You're a headstrong woman, and I am but a weak soul...

Too right, a weak and a deceptiv...

She detected a flinch as she muttered. She dropped her eyes as he placed a hand on her knee. Those over-expressive hands, large and heavy and misplaced. She clasped hers over his and shifted them both to the trunk, in the space between them.

I did tell you we should have come with a chaperone. I'm sure Sister Vita would have more than love to hear you cuss me.

Reesy, I know. I know, I know. And that's why I brought you all the way over here. Here, where I could be sure nobody would recognise either of us. So we could talk.

She looked around, over both shoulders, then whispered.

What? So you tun communist now?

Stop with your joking, Reesy!

Ok then so talk! I'm all ears, Matthew.

See we both big people now, Theresa. Yes we are. I should have been an elder by now but I'm still unwed. I've been waiting all this time for a sign from God because he that findeth a good wife findeth a good thing. And not just a good thing but a great thing because 'a virtuous woman is a crown to her husband'. That's Proverbs 12:4.

Her eyes began to burn. Her toes pinched uncomfortably in her shoes; they throbbed more with the thought of walking all the way back up to Hampstead station alone. The thought of leaving him here with his fancy talk, leaving him to the topless man and the barking dogs and the picnic hampers near the pond, to the lives so far from their own interrupted her shivers.

I think of you as a virtuous woman. And I know you have it in you to be a virtuous, *godly* woman. Once you've put all that sinning and singing behind you, for good, I know that you will be.

One solid tear, hot and heavy, followed another. At least she had no make-up to worry about ruining. She'd known he'd do this, but not here. Not now.

Are you asking me to – ?

Yes, Theresa. The Holy Spirit is telling me to ask you to be my wife.

The only other thing she could never say out loud, even if she whispered it in her soul, even as her lips betrayed her heart? The ghost of a *no* came and went.

By the autumn, they were married.

Epilogue
(The Boy)

'...the price of the ticket'

October 2005

London is just as he left it, although perhaps a little cleaner and drier. Thirty minutes of the plane cutting through cloud as he descends, more cloud once the plane rolls into the terminal, an oppression of grey cloaking the sky like a sheet. No wonder why nobody's smiling. The cloud enters the cabin as people release their seatbelts before the sign's turned off. They elbow each other and mumble under their breaths because of it. The cloud enclouds him too, fills him with a restless energy. His calves flex as if preparing to sprint. *Welcome to Stansted Airport.*

And from Stansted, he catches the train to Liverpool Street, trying not to be shocked by the price of the ticket, nor his own awkwardness getting through the gates. And from Liverpool Street, he realises he needn't have gone all that way; he will have to go back on himself. And from all that way, he takes the eastbound tube and then changes his mind. He wants to check out up West first, remembering Bond Street and Soho and Carnaby St and wasn't it Oxford Circus where those perfume sellers used to flog knock-offs, and where that 'don't be a sinner, be a winner' man used to stand and preach? He is becoming nostalgic. And he knows he's becoming nostalgic but, surely, after nearly five years, he's allowed!

When he gets to Oxford Circus, Samuel is disappointed by how small everything is and how messy and chaotic; he is also disappointed in himself for lugging his luggage all that way. Because he's just delaying the inevitable, isn't he? His back is achey and the wheels on the suitcase are even more knackered than he is. He kisses his teeth at the wind.

He still peeks into Hennes but thinks better of going further up Oxford St. What's he doing here, anyway, not buying anything, zigzagging through crowds, loitering by windows? Self-consciousness grips him, almost as tight as his fingers on the wonky handle; they've had bombs recently, and he might look suspicious, wandering around with a big suitcase and a beard.

It's not the same place he left; it never will be. This city is no longer his, if it ever was. If he owned any of it, it was the small portion of E numbers on the map, where *ting* and *thing* and *fing* and *fink* were equally distributed among mouths. At least, that's how he chooses to recall it – the side-by-side fluidity of language, the confusing mess they used to call *multiculturalism*, the mess that he felt was inside him, as much as he was inside *it*. But tings change in a fast-paced metropolis. And if his family is a mess – and the family who lived in the basement flat below them, who never complained during their all-night prayer meetings – then they will all be swept away one day. Tidied up.

On the tube back East, he puts his sunglasses on and thinks through what he might say, what he might do, whether there really are people out there trying to kill him, and how he might try to make sense of his life. Somewhere between Chancery Lane and St Pauls, he thinks about where he might go next. Next could mean scrimping a little piece of money and throwing a big-arse fiesta; next might mean tracking down old friends like Jamilah, after linking with family, of course.

Next could also mean storming into church one Sunday and challenging the Elders. *What was that prophecy about? Why did you let all that negativity happen? Why you let all that power get to your head – is it because you don't have any other power in you, why you need to fuck up the congregation and fill it with all kinds of madness? Cheops!*

On the Central Line, which is too busy, but where he gets a seat, he thinks he will cry, but doesn't. He thinks he might pray, but doesn't. He attempts to read the free newspaper, but...

Time is not reversible, and he is not on a redemption trip, he tells himself. When they go into the tunnel, he frowns at his reflection in the glass, practicing the sermon he would preach if he ever got to stand in front of a pulpit again. The woman opposite him thinks he's looking at her.

He looks down at his belongings, all reduced into a carryable bunch of clothes, books and CDs. Plus sand from the Ganges in a bottle – a gift. A pile of photos in a plastic wallet. His laptop. *If you go looking for redemption, you'll commute to disappointment on a daily basis.* He knows he cannot be *redeemed* – even if he wants to be – as he is neither sinner nor saint. The world is big enough to hold multiples.

The human body is strong enough for contradictions, he repeats to himself, as he thinks of his mother who named him Samuel because of some man she met in the past, before he was even a thought in her mind. His mother, who encouraged him never to babeify his name, to Sammify his existence.

He decides he will go to see her first, find the address in his phone, as if he hadn't already committed it to memory. The train passes Leyton, then Leytonstone. He waits at the platform, taking the next tube with the new destination. There is not long to go. Three minutes.

He alights. The streets are busy but the noise of his suitcase wheels feel loud, louder than the traffic, the road drills, the roundabout with its horn-blaring appeal, the dead flowers. At the corner shop, he buys some cheap-looking champagne, which costs a lot of money. The bottle is warm to the touch and he is sweating as he punches in his PIN.

When Samuel finally approaches his mother's door, he is a walking contradiction and it is beautiful. The pavement slabs give way to a gravel drive and the small jagged stones reshuffle under his feet.

Led By the Spirit

**Led By the Spirit: exploring the migration of cultural identity through Oneness
Pentecostalism, from the Caribbean to London**

1. Introduction

A note on definitions:

This enigma of ‘belonging’ to an identity, and the different levels of exclusion/inclusion which surround Black Caribbean Oneness Pentecostal traditions are among the principal concerns within this study. While the boundaries between ‘Evangelical’ and ‘Pentecostal’ remain contested, with multiple overlaps, ‘Pentecostal’ is mostly used here to denote Christians who emphasise speaking in tongues and the ‘gifts of the Spirit’.

‘Trinitarian’ refers to the most widely held concept of the Godhead within Christian theology – that of the ‘persons’ of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. By contrast, the definition of ‘Oneness’ or ‘Jesus Name’ and what constitutes a ‘Oneness church’ – often characterised by a monadist emphasis on ‘Jesus’ rather than the ‘Trinity’ – is a primary question within this study¹. ‘Jesus Only’ appears as a pejorative appellation by Trinitarian believers. Many Oneness Pentecostals of Caribbean heritage identify their faith as ‘Apostolic’ to distinguish themselves from Pentecostals of Trinitarian doctrine. For purposes of clarity, this study generally employs the terms ‘Oneness’ and ‘Jesus Name’.

All of these definitions are boundaried by history, by geographic contexts, and by competing identities, just as ‘Caribbean’ or ‘West Indian’ – which will be given more in-depth analysis in this study – is also a contested and complex set of identities. Being of ‘Caribbean heritage’ in Britain is often taken as an elision of ‘Afro-’ or ‘Black’ Caribbean, and assumes a direct link to Anglophone ex-colonies in the Caribbean basin, punctuated by Windrush migration². While this is reductive, the traditions that form the basis of this

¹ Acts 2:38 – where Peter instructs a crowd to repent and be baptised, ‘*in the name of Jesus Christ*’, on the day of Pentecost – is commonly expressed as the departure point for Jesus Name traditions, compared to Trinitarians, who baptise in the name of ‘the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost’. Baptism is the primary corporeal manifestation of the doctrinal divergence, which is bound up in theories of the Godhead – and which, arguably, most laypersons cannot easily articulate – and a century of Oneness church cultures, the history of which French (2014) examines. This thesis is more concerned with the *culture* surrounding the doctrine, rather than vice versa.

² *Windrush* is used metonymically to refer to post-War migration from the Caribbean to the UK between 1948-1971, after which restrictions severely limited such movement. It should also be noted that, during the completion of this thesis, ‘Windrush scandal’ has been adopted as shorthand for the still-unresolved crisis due to hundreds of Commonwealth citizens resident in the UK being detained, deported and denied access

study fit this definition. 'Caribbean', rather than 'West Indian' will be favoured as a term – unless citing other works or participants in the study – being both more accurate, more expansive and less weighted by coloniality than the latter phrase. '*Caribbean+*' is used occasionally to posit the idea of a trans-geographic Caribbean identity.

This thesis is governed by overlapping impulses, but the presiding one is the principle of narrative-building, of storytelling. While it may be desirable to impose neat definitions in order to compartmentalise belief systems and racial and geographic categories, it is the *people* who inhabit these identities who are of primary concern, and the stories they tell. It is also in the elasticity, in the 'queering'³ of these terms that my research is grounded. As Brim notes (2014), the notion of liberatory 'queerness' operates under a 'twin critical impulse to queer norms and renormalize queerness', even while our 'queer sky and the normative sea share a broad and blurred horizon' (pp.3-5). 'Queering' provides a tangled mess of intersectional frameworks from which to borrow from, using ideas of 'reading against the grain' (Romain 2017) and interrupting linearity and simple dichotomies, and will be returned to later in the conclusion.

Finally, the concepts of 'narrative' and 'narrative-building' are referred to throughout, both as a method and as an objective. It should be understood that to 'narrate' – i.e. to construct story with characters, a plot, a 'quest' (or testimony), even – locates this study at the convergence of academic discourse with traditional literary traditions, ergo the 'blurred horizon' that challenges normativity.

Beginning the study with a series of definitions, and then arguing that each term displays a certain mutability, instead of undermining the whole endeavour, sets in place our interrogative window. Where does Oneness begin, and wider Pentecostalism end? What of Caribbeanness? And Britishness? And how useful is this demarcation of belief and culture, within a rapidly-changing global picture?

1.1 Prologue: Crossing Over, 2000

'Take the shackles off my feet so I can dance/ I just want to praise Him/ I just want to praise Him...'

to legal rights and healthcare, due to irregularities in their citizenship status. Many had migrated as children of British subjects during the aforementioned period (Elgot 2018). ³Queer academic thought has influenced this study; but while notions of 'queering' discourse has some rhetorical merit, the use of this phrasing here is limited to the introduction and conclusion, so not to gratuitously co-opt concepts of Queer radicalism and the established literature on sexual liberation and gender, when referring simply to 'a disruption of normativity'. Notwithstanding, the novel has been significantly informed by these traditions, including critical approaches to work on Baldwin's, such as Brim's (2014), and on Anzaldúa's writing on queer resistance and marginal cultures (1987) .

Six months into the twenty-first century, my siblings and I harmonise to 'Shackles' as we drive to church through the eastern fringes of London, with the windows down and the radio up. In this unprecedented moment, popular music stations – such as Capital and Kiss FM –, 'urban' gospel programmes on Choice and Station FM, and Premier Christian Radio⁴ are all aligned. This crossover gospel/R&B hit has peaked at number 5 in the UK pop charts and, for the first time, something that is acceptable in the mainstream is also acceptable within our religious practice.

Christian music has hit the charts previously – and since –, particularly at Christmas⁵. It can also be said that Gospel singers have created music chart hits before⁶. What makes this occurrence unique is that Pentecostal *Gospel singers* have now made the charts by singing *Gospel music*, music with a worship-focused message and an R&B/Hip-Hop sound. The word 'God' may only feature once in the three minutes and thirty seconds of the song, but references to 'Him', words like 'shackle' and 'praise', and church clichés like 'holding on through these trials' are peppered throughout, recognisable to anyone who has sat through a church testimony service, even though they might slip unnoticed past the song's secular audience.

While individual members of our Oneness congregation may have listened to non-Christian music in private, we were discouraged from consuming songs that did not glorify God, or that overtly promoted Trinitarian doctrine. The singers, sisters Erica and Tina Atkins-Campbell, were members of the Church of God in Christ (COGIC) in the USA – one of the more widespread Trinitarian Pentecostal church denominations – but their controversy-free and catchy lyrics enabled those of other Christian denominations and even other faiths, or none, to sing along.

In just a year from this point in time, Joel Edwards, minister of an East London New Testament Church of God (NT) congregation, and recently appointed General Director of the Evangelical Alliance, will become one of the first honorary Canons of St Paul's Cathedral. This could be seen, arguably, as a step towards 'black-majority' churches becoming more assimilated within the mainstream framework of 'white-

⁴Premier Radio was the first Christian radio station and began broadcasting five years earlier (<https://www.premierchristianradio.com/About/20th-Birthday/Premier-s-20-year-timeline>) [Accessed January 2020].

⁵ For instance, Cliff Richard's millennium rendition of 'The Lord's Prayer' reached number one at the end of 1999 (Richard, 1999).

⁶ Including Bebe Winans, who joined up with the British pop group Eternal for 'I Wanna Be the Only One' back in 1997 (Eternal, 1997)

majority' Anglican and evangelical organisations⁷. And yet, 'Jesus name' congregations, while seeming to have much more in common – at least in worship style – with Trinitarian Pentecostals than, say, a New Testament COG congregation would have with St Pauls, remain further separated from this position of influence or acknowledgment on the issue of 'Oneness'.

1.2 Overview: Troubling the Water

The previous section, titled 'Prologue', follows a stylistic protocol of setting up the author's personal story as an 'opening', a gateway to more forensic analysis. This jumping off point situates the writer, perhaps offers some clues as to his intentions and allegiances, before returning to impersonal pronouns and more 'neutral' language for the rest of the text. A 'prologue' two-thirds of the way through a thesis, after an introductory 'note' on definitions, destabilises this protocol, if we are to see the two components – of fiction and research – as a whole. How are we to read what has gone before in light of what is to come? And how might the creative and the academic sit in conversation with each other, beside each other?

It is hoped that, in light of the decision to present a novel as legitimate research *in itself*, ideas of narrativity, of character, of moulding an *individual* story from a plethora of questions and possible avenues, will shift the dial towards ambivalence, towards a 'troubling of the waters'⁸, something that will be explored further.

The remainder of this chapter will be concerned with deepening conversations around the Jesus Name tradition in the UK and the gaps in existing literature and popular awareness. The question underpinning this process is: 'How do we navigate the disputed territories of belonging?', a question that binds together both the creative and research components of this study, begetting more questions, even at the 'definitions' stage, where the base concepts have already proved 'elastic'.

⁷Sturge has much to say on this matter, listing some of the other important achievements in the UK and beyond that have bought black-majority churches more recognition (Sturge, 2005a, pp. 17–20)

⁸The choice of language – here and throughout, incidentally – is deliberately resonant with autobiographical context. 'The Water is Troubled, My Friend' is a traditional Pentecostal chorus, especially sung in Caribbean congregations, referring to an incident in John 5:4 where an angel would 'trouble the water' at 'a certain season' (KJV). The 'troubling', in spite of the associated connotations (i.e. discomfort, disruption) actually causes healing, for the first person to immerse themselves. It would be conceited – at best – to suggest that by the disrupting of norms in this study, any miraculous healing will occur; it is, however, expedient to consider that by acknowledging the possibilities of 'disruption', we reframe and expand our existing modes of perception.

In order to navigate this idea of belonging more concisely, we must consider the ‘unsettledness’ present in the novel, e.g.: the several unresolved mysteries; the interlocking narratives; the constant dislocation; and, at the heart of it, the reframing of perspective and time, which often puts ‘the action’ at a remove⁹, in order to better interrogate the sentiment underneath. Similarly, the research has adopted a similar ‘troubling’ or ‘unsettled’ approach: after reviewing the existing literature in the field, and while situating research methods within Study of Religion, the thesis will present a selection of themes that have been otherwise under-explored, rather than simply adding to the mass of theory around religion and cultural studies, themes that lend to creative exploration rather than a theological one. Baptism, then, is submerged under more present conversations around transatlantic migration; sexuality and racism, areas which could in themselves be explored at great length as standalone studies, are embedded within the novel and present in the research but not given chapters of their own, as explicit, distinct themes. While choosing to operate as a creative writer may not relinquish one’s responsibility in terms of accuracy and rigour, it privileges: story, polyvocality, contradiction, metaphor, parable, qualitative analysis, the repackaging of ‘truths’ into characters with yearning, with a quest...

Following this overview, discourses on the ‘double-bind’ are introduced; then, some of the geographical contexts of Oneness Pentecostalism and the connections between the US, parts of the Caribbean and London are summarised. At the end of the section, crucial summary on the changing demographics within the ‘Black British’ subset is explored, which is where we

In **1.3.**, the Literature Review begins by querying ‘difference’, then proceeds to explore gaps of knowledge regarding Oneness Pentecostalism in Britain, before providing an overview of its history. We outline the origins of the Oneness movement in the US, then chart its migration into the Caribbean, and the racial and doctrinal splits that occurred, with repercussions on both sides of the Atlantic. The possible emergence of a ‘London Jamaican¹⁰’ culture, and the more recent blurring of Pentecostal identities in this century are then examined to conclude the review.

⁹e.g. Manny’s arrest and imprisonment, Samuel’s confrontation with his father, Theresa’s long-awaited separation from the church and her husband. Placing these examples here, at a remove from the main text, is a similarly deliberate choice.

¹⁰ Whether a truly pan-Caribbean ‘Jamaican’ or ‘London Jamaican’ identity, formed by the absorption of proximal cultures, can be said to exist is yet another question, and is explored in part through the interviews and analysis.

The closing section, **1.4.**, stresses the need for creative exploration and cross-disciplinary approaches, launching us into the methodology and research.

Chapter 2 lays the grounding for the discourse analysis: here we detail the process of information-gathering, before reflecting on some of the pitfalls and challenges – including my own positionality as a researcher operating from the edge of the culture – and the desire to promote a ‘speaking back’ to the research¹¹; later, the chapter attempts to summarise the current landscape and some of the prevailing concerns within British Caribbean Oneness communities; at the chapter’s close, we move onto the case studies of contrasting churches, ARC – founded in East London – and South London’s COOLJC.

Chapter 3 marks the beginning of the in-depth interview analysis, and is concerned with inclusion and exclusion: what narratives are deemed worthy of telling, by researcher and participants alike? How are they informed by existing terms of reference (namely ‘Windrush’ migration, the ‘hardship’ story, ‘Oneness’ as part of a larger Caribbean identity)?

Chapter 4 pieces together some of the material ‘adornments’ of belief. While there may be little visible difference between Jesus Name and Trinitarian culture, this chapter explores the idea that the former adherents tend to enforce a more rigid ‘embodiment’ of power¹², including forms of dress, protocol and fasting. Here we see some acknowledgment of sexuality and gender. The chapter ends with a recounting of the alienating experience of late-twentieth century church upbringing.

Chapter 5 continues with this reckoning of the past, exploring how nostalgia permeates narratives to create a shared ‘inherited memory’, both in terms of extreme economic and social hardships, and an enhanced reliance on faith and community after migration. We then journey to present-day accounts, and how this inherited nostalgia is reflected in younger people’s identities, before analysing senior perceptions of modern worship. The chapter concludes with a reflection on these conflicting memories and their effect on the future.

Chapter 6, the conclusion, summarises findings of the research and expands on the relationship between the creative component and the discourse analysis. It speaks to some of the echoes within the novel and the completion of ideas between the two

¹¹Paulo Freire’s ideas on dialogic learning and non-hierarchical communication have been particularly illuminating in my teaching practice, but have also influenced research methods (Freire 1968)

¹²Foucault’s work discussing penal systems (1991), let alone his later work on biopower, make for compelling reading in this regard.

formats, avoiding overlap and maximising the space.¹³ The final pages of this study highlight some of the areas which require additional investigation, further areas for exploration, and some of the implications of the findings for the wider disciplines of Study of Religion and Creative Writing / English Literature. It also details how the study, including the novel, may be part of a broader conversation on identity-formation and the porousness of belonging.

1.2.1 Crossing the 'double bind': finding the 'Jesus' name' in the Pentecostal

Subscribing to 'Jesus name' Pentecostalism in the UK is acknowledging a 'double bind' of difference (Spivak in Loomba, 2015). The 'double bind' term suggests subalternity and is more than a little provocative, given that Spivak's original essay dealt with widow-sacrifice. Yet subaltern studies have evolved in recent years to look at the ways in which multiple layers of marginalisation contribute to rendering invisible the experiences of certain subgroups. Pentecostalism and black Caribbean culture both remain minority concerns in London and the UK; Oneness practices within this are thus side lined further. The story of Caribbean Oneness Pentecostalism in Britain isn't *only* one of oppression or isolation but, given the paucity of literature that focuses on this aspect, it *is* one that is marginalised on many levels.

Whilst the numbers of Pentecostals in London is sizeable – and increasing – it does not often hold the popular gaze. The rise in believers, predominantly down to migration from Africa and the Caribbean, has sparked a number of studies and a flurry of articles on the enduring rise of Pentecostalism ("Ecstasy and exodus," 2016). Its global presence – especially in Latin America and Africa, where it holds great political sway – has also been the focus of research. Although Allen Anderson (Anderson, 2004) clearly problematises the loose grouping of charismatic, neo-Pentecostal and traditional churches that make up the term 'Pentecostal', however it is defined, the wider Pentecostal movement that Oneness churches find themselves in holds numerical and political global significance.

Membership of Pentecostal congregations in London is mostly linked to migration and race – what Hill sees as a 'religious apartheid' in the UK (Hill, 1963) and what Hollenweger and Anderson, writing on America, trace back to early formations of Pentecostalism following the Los Angeles Revival (Anderson and Hollenweger, 1999).

¹³ For instance, as discussed previously, the study hints at 'queering' approaches while not being overly concerned with sexuality and queer theory, while the novel takes the reverse approach, employing a standard novelistic form, while focusing more on LGBT+ themes.

The legitimisation of Pentecostal practice often depends on assimilation and integration on racial terms.

Research that includes a fairly comprehensive tabling of West Indians in London's districts in the 1960s suggests that social alienation could have led to *some* West Indians leaving the traditional Anglican and Catholic congregations they were affiliated to in their birth countries, finding greater community in black-majority Pentecostal churches in London. Whether or not this was a correct assumption, it is clear that now, decades on, the picture is more complex: race, ethnicity, gender, class and socio-economic status all come into play.

'Jesus name' doctrine further complicates this dynamic, hence the 'double bind': whilst speaking in tongues, or engaging in specific African and Caribbean cultural customs – such as using reggae rhythms during worship or switching between Jamaican patois, 'Queen's English' and 'Authorised Worship Language' (Toulis, 1997, p. 184) – render many Trinitarian Pentecostal churches visibly, or audibly, different to more established Anglican and British evangelical institutions, the shared understanding of the Trinity, along with key aspects of biblical doctrine, gives these churches common ground. 'Jesus name' churches, on the other hand, face further fundamental differences.

Reed, writing on Oneness Pentecostalism and the theology that grounds it, asserts that 'heterodox movements are notoriously hard to grasp' (Reed, 2008, p. 227). And, indeed, while studies exist on 'black churches' or 'black majority' churches in London, on African and West Indian migration and on Oneness Pentecostalism elsewhere in the world, the very specific nature and history of 'Jesus name' Pentecostalism in London – particularly among those of Caribbean heritage – and the tensions within 'Jesus name' congregations as it navigates the boundaries of Pentecostalism, cultural identity and its own evolution, are sometimes elided.

1.2.2 Crossing the Atlantic

"Move to the left in the name of Jesus (repeat)
I said move to the right in the name of the Lord (repeat)
And could I see you just shake that booty that Jesus give you (repeat)
Shake that booty in the name of the Lord (repeat)..."
Beenie Man, Gospel Time (Beenie Man, 1999)

A barely-visible seam separates two strands of Caribbean Pentecostalism in London, dating back to a century-old split between 'Trinitarian' and 'Oneness' Pentecostal

churches in the USA (Hollenweger and Wilson, 1972; Reed, 2008). Church denominations from both branches of the split found themselves sending missionaries to the Caribbean and Latin America from the 1910s onwards (Anderson, 2004).

British colonial history and its profound cultural impact on Jamaica, especially, combined with its proximity to the US and, indeed, its African heritage and ongoing syncretic practices (Austin-Broos et al., 1997, pp. 43–71), have created a unique blend of Christianity on the island, out of which Pentecostalism dominates. The hard-to-substantiate claim that Jamaica has the ‘greatest number of churches per square mile’ in the world is often repeated online (Olsen, 1999), even though public perception of Jamaican culture in the UK does not match up to that¹⁴.

Perhaps Beenie Man’s ‘Gospel Time’ call-and-response medley (Beenie Man, 1999), released in the same year ‘Shackles’ became a UK hit record, would have been an equally appropriate starting point, although this may have risked entertaining the idea that Jamaican spirituality is more relaxed than its European or (white) American counterparts, given that this dancehall artist – and a Rastafarian to boot – topped the Jamaican charts with this mishmash of old gospel hymns, children’s rhymes and a provocative, sexually suggestive chorus. If anything were to epitomise the contradictions of Jamaican Christianity, perhaps this comes close to doing so¹⁵.

The singer Grace Jones, child of two generations of Oneness Pentecostal preachers – whose brother, Noel, is of one of the biggest Oneness leaders in the U.S. – speaks of this duality throughout her memoirs, and how this has shaped her behaviour (Jones, 2015), something that also comes through in the film *Bloodlight and Bami*¹⁶.

As the Oneness movement is the focus of this study, it is here we must begin to untangle it from the myriad of other movements that have influenced Jamaican Christianity and that, in turn have migrated and evolved in a British context.

Two of the biggest Oneness movements in the United States, Pentecostal Assemblies of the World (PAW) and United Pentecostal Church, (UPC), are to be found in Jamaica. Meanwhile, as Jamaicans and other Caribbean people migrated to the UK in significant numbers – punctuated by Windrush, 1948; the devastating 1951 hurricane;

¹⁴ Other, corroborated, studies pick out further record-breaking facts about the island, among them that Jamaica has more recording artists per capita than any other country (Channer, 2006) so starting this study with a song, as the introduction does is, arguably, well-justified.

¹⁵ One should consider that Beenie Man, while speaking of sexual excess in much of his lyrics, is part of a dancehall culture reacting both within and against the restrictions of a rigid moral code in a country formed by British Protestantism and, later, American evangelism.

¹⁶ Fiennes (2017)

Jamaican and Trinidad and Tobagoan Independence in 1962; mid-sixties political upheaval; and then the eventual slowing down of migration after the Commonwealth Immigrants Act of 1968 – congregations linked with these American churches also took root in London. Hence, Faith Chapel, linked to PAW, and Calvary Temple, linked to UPC, can be found in adjacent South London neighbourhoods, tucked away in unassuming residential streets.

Whilst exploring the history of these congregations from Jamaica and the English-speaking Caribbean to London, we are also examining purely ‘home grown’ London churches, such as the ARC, attended by a large Caribbean-heritage base.

1.2.3. Demographics: the shifting meanings of ‘Black British’

Robert Beckford (Beckford, 2000), Mark Sturge (Sturge, 2005b) and others – writing in the last decade – have argued for unity among Black Majority Churches (BMCs), and recognising that congregations continue to be segregated among colour lines – although not necessarily by ethnic backgrounds, perhaps because of what Sutcliffe describes as unifying ‘speech events in black worship’¹⁷. Larger denominations such as New Testament Church of God (NT) still dominate discourse on Caribbean Pentecostalism, as even recent documentaries demonstrate (see Stephan, 2016). The increasing dominance of African majority churches has led to some Caribbean members joining larger African congregations – among them, Kingsway International Christian Centre (KICC) – and this flow has gone both ways. Some congregations which previously had a Black British or Caribbean majority congregation are now more multicultural, with a larger African presence. Among them is ARC, which features in the case study of the Methodology (2.4). As the Caribbean population numbers are stagnating, a new picture of Black British identity is emerging.

Nothing about the current Caribbean Apostolic landscape in London can be said without giving attention to the wider UK context. Between the 2001 and the 2011 census, the numbers of ‘Black African’ and ‘Black British African’ people resident in the UK overtook their Caribbean counterparts (Office for National Statistics, 2016b). Two other patterns of note emerged in the 2011 census: more British-born respondents identified as ‘Black/Black British - Caribbean’ (358,000) than ‘Black/ Black British -

¹⁷ Namely: call-and-response, an eschewing of rigorously planned sermons (i.e. being ‘led by the Holy Spirit’), proverbial expressions, ‘tonal semantics’ in preaching styles (including word stresses and repeated sounds), body language and non-verbal expression (including foot-stomping), audience rapport (especially in prayer) and – importantly for this study – the testimony. (Sutcliffe, 1986. 19-25)

African' (323,000) but the foreign-born Black African population outnumbered the foreign-born Black Caribbean population nearly three-fold, at 666,000 and 237,000 respectively. Of course, this does not take into account 'Other' Black, nor does it the increasingly represented 'Mixed/Multiple Ethnic group' category, of which over 400,000 people claimed a mixed White and Black Caribbean ethnic identity.

Much more could be discussed on new Black British identities and cultures; BMCs are not exempt from the effects of cultural shifts. That more people claim a mixed White and Black Caribbean ethnicity than do a Black British Caribbean one suggests – far from the picture of 1960s and 70s accounts – that a degree of social integration has occurred. Surely, this must affect the picture of attendance at Caribbean-majority churches?

The UK has seen dramatically less immigration from the Caribbean in recent decades, and in the census of foreign-born UK residents, Jamaica is the highest Caribbean nation listed but only ranks tenth in terms of numbers, behind other Commonwealth countries, the USA and Poland¹⁸. Fallout from the Commonwealth Act, tougher visa restrictions – including financial pre-requisites for entry – and a greater cultural shift in the Caribbean towards the US has contributed to this gradual decline. The 'Windrush scandal' has also entered national discussion since the interview research, uncovering large numbers of people born in the Caribbean – and their British-born descendants – who have had their UK citizenship removed due to discriminatory policies, under the 'hostile environment' (Elgot, 2018).

Additionally, neighbourhoods associated with a significant Caribbean presence have changed in nature; house prices and living costs have moved Black British Caribbean people further into the suburbs. In the case study, this push outwards is discussed by two of the pastors interviewed, in one of the centres of these shifts: East London. Both grew up in the East End and later moved into Essex; some of their congregations have followed. In one case, the church has seen a decline in numbers and stagnation in new memberships; in the case of the second – the ARC – a huge demographic change has occurred. Finally, some members – as their communities have *de-Caribbeanised* – have moved to larger churches, or from Apostolic churches to other denominations.

This picture opens the door to some of the literature around BMCs and Oneness congregations in Britain, which will now be explored in depth in the Literature Review.

¹⁸ Midway through researching this thesis, Britain voted to leave the European Union, curtailing freedom of movement for EU citizens; migration patterns to the UK will inevitably continue to shift considerably in the coming years.

Further elaboration on the landscape of Oneness churches in London is to come in the following chapter on Methodology, as the Case Study and the responses of interviewees shed a different light on this reading.

1.3 Literature Review

1.3.1 Analysing Language, migration and Difference

The *meta* endeavour, of looking at Caribbean 'Jesus name' Pentecostalism in London, as opposed to the American origins of Oneness doctrine¹⁹, or its presence in the Caribbean itself, or the more widely-studied existence of (Trinitarian) Pentecostalism within British-Caribbean culture, presents a unique set of problems and opportunities, many of them to do with language and provenance, as discussed earlier. Gerloff states:

'Although at face value the teachings of Oneness and Trinitarian black pentecostals [sic] in the Caribbean and Britain appear to be different, in my observation there is more affinity than generally admitted. The controversy is of North American provenance. In black pentecostal worship of all kinds, it is Jesus or Jesus' name which is exalted, and this Jesus is present as liberator indwelling the believers and inspiring them to do the same or even greater works (In 14.12).' (Gerloff 1982, 81)

The 'appearance of difference' versus the 'reality' of commonality/affinity which Gerloff speaks of – be that *difference* artificial or otherwise, imported or otherwise – is of utmost importance, especially considering the elusive nature of 'Caribbean' identities.

Stuart Hall, in his chapter 'Negotiating Caribbean identities' Hall, (Meeks and Lindahl, 2002, pp. 22–29) asserts that 'if the search for identity always involves a search for origins, it is impossible to locate in the Caribbean an origin for its peoples.' He continues: 'There are always exercises in selective memory, and they almost always involve the silencing of something in order to allow something else to speak' (pp.26).

Whilst he was talking about the disputed Jamaican coat of arms, this has some ramifications here. In order to talk of Caribbean 'Oneness' doctrine in Britain, one must

¹⁹ French (2014) is cited extensively here, particularly later in this section (1.3.3.) as an authority on Oneness Pentecostalism in the U.S. before its impact on the Caribbean. This American history is worth noting, even while my focus is on British-Caribbean dialogue.

isolate and possibly silence the areas where there is not a clear definition. In turn, one reason why there have been few comprehensive studies on Oneness Pentecostalism in Britain is, arguably, that it is easier to lump it together with general analysis of Caribbean migration and belief.

1.3.2 Oneness Pentecostals in Britain: exploring an omission

Perhaps it would be easier to explore the 'Caribbeanness' of Oneness Pentecostalism in a multicultural British city against the backdrop of writing on British Pentecostalism that, largely, excludes this group.

Kay's study (Kay, 2000) would be the logical entry point into British Oneness Pentecostalism, yet the book is centred around 'Classic Pentecostalism' and avoids exploring the Oneness movement in any depth. He focuses on four large denominations, including the (New Testament) Church of God, the only black majority church of the four, and details some of the issues the West Indian founders of the church faced while trying to incorporate themselves into the already established British denominations, including racial discrimination.

Oneness doctrine appears here as an 'issue' that had not really surfaced within Assemblies of God in Britain (pp.128-9), which once again centres AG and places any deviation from Trinitarian Pentecostalism as a variant, or a split. Kay then claims that New Testament Church of God is so-named because the title 'Church of God' was already registered by a "Jesus Only' group' (p.34). This, of course, does little to explain the presence of New Testament Church of God in Jamaica and the Cayman Islands but does show how complex permutations of Caribbean churches can be (mis)interpreted here in the UK.

The silencing of Oneness belief contains many layers. Firstly, in Talmadge French's study, focusing on the early Interracial Oneness movement in the USA, he suggests that academics worldwide tend to centre the Assemblies of God (AG) as the broad basis for defining Pentecostalism (French, 2014, p. 4). This elides many charismatic churches and, of course, Oneness doctrine.

The second elision may be due to racial divides. Oneness Pentecostalism has relished being 'without the camp' (p.3) since its rejection from AG in 1916, causing the majority of its black membership to leave. Since then, as French elaborates, Pentecostalism has been marked by race segregation, although Oneness Pentecostalism remained racially integrated in the USA until 1924. Global Pentecostalism is still seen

through the lens of being “under the rubric of American hegemony”²⁰, despite the fact that many churches rose up independently of the much-discussed Azusa Street Revival. Nevertheless, the AG’s shunning of ‘New Issue’ Pentecostalism as heresy allows it to be dismissed more easily.

Another elision comes from the fact that few Oneness academic histories have been written, with some exceptions such as Howard Goss’s *A Pentecostal Life*. Recent years suggest a massive change in trends towards including the movement as a legitimate one, or at least as heterodoxy rather than heresy (French, 2014. pp17-19).

Yet another important factor is the rise in Global Pentecostalism(s), which Hollenweger (1976) and Allen Anderson (1999) address in great detail. In Brazil alone, the increasing political influence of organisations such as Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (UCKG) is a much greater preoccupation for academics and lay commentators alike than the comparatively less significant story of migrant Caribbean Pentecostalism.

The Welsh Revival and early-established groups such as Elim are explored in the history of the church in Britain (Kay, 2000 and Anderson, 1999); its present and future are explored in studies that deal more extensively with African churches (Kalu, 2010 et al.) Somewhere in between, Toulis, Sturge and even Beckford (Beckford, 2000; Sturge, 2005a; Toulis, 1997) write from the lens of New Testament Church of God Pentecostalism and the larger organisations within the black church, many of which are now recognised by British organisations such as the Evangelical Alliance.

Finally, compounding all of this is the complicated nature of British West Indian migration and its Pentecostal links. Gerloff (Gerloff, 1992) is one of few writers who ventures into the topic of Caribbean Oneness Pentecostalism, whether in the Caribbean or Britain. She gives four reasons why it has attracted little attention in public writing and academic studies, namely (pp.156-8):

- 1) official information services failed to take much notice of Pentecostalism
- 2) anthropologists have seen it as an American import and prefer to look at Revivalism and “cultism”
- 3) historic churches and (mutual) doctrinal hostility, on the one hand, and more outspokenly political movements such as Rastafarianism, on the other hand, rendered it invisible

²⁰ David Martin in French, 2014. P.5

4) Evangelical and Trinitarian Pentecostals of West Indian heritage are seeking favour with 'middle-of-the-road' Protestantism.

While talking more about the latter point, she gives as an example an interview with a New Testament principal, from Jamaica, who said:

'[W]e had English [...] and American missionaries coming here, [...] all White people, and so we followed that pattern, worship like them; and when you come to America and see the Black worship, it's all together different [...] The West Indian out there – you cannot blame him – he is groomed by the Englishman, he is strengthened by the American White, so we have nothing to do with the American Negro' (1992, p.158).

Gerloff uses this interview, not in order to highlight a point about race – as it might be interpreted in another reading – but as a point of exploring denominational conflict and the deference of some more mainstream movements to British and (white) American Protestantism. It would seem that adherence to more *demonstrative* Christianity is not seen in a favourable light for the aspirational class.

Gerloff seems to be the only academic concerned with giving a (very) comprehensive treatment of 'Apostolic' or 'Jesus name' traditions in Britain. Her stance is that they are the most radical:

Whereas pentecostal [sic] denominations like the Assemblies of God or the Churches of God borrowed their theological language, without further reflection, from the Trinitarian tradition of historic Christianity, black Apostolic pneumatology is rooted, quite true to the New Testament, in a Spirit-Christology which perhaps in a post-Hellenistic era, offers better categories for the Christian mission than the traditional Logos-Christology. (Gerloff 1992, p.81)

She also notes the necessary nature of the oral tradition for spreading Oneness Pentecostalism, which had 'little or no access to writing and publishing outside the USA'. It is only through West Indian migration into Britain that enabled its spread. Gerloff then indicates a change in direction for the integration of Caribbean Oneness. She claims that the first-time migrants 'made an effort to meet with the historical (Trinitarian Pentecostal) churches' was an Evening of Praise and Worship in

Birmingham in 1975 (Gerloff 255), pointing to the ongoing divide between traditions but also to the promise of reconciliation.

1.3.3 Early Oneness Pentecostalism

Birmingham University plays a significant role in analysing the origins of the Oneness tradition. Reed, French and Gerloff have been based there; Iain MacRobert published research on US Oneness in 1988 from Birmingham ; Ken Gill (Gill, 1994) and Manuel Gaxiola (Gaxiola-Gaxiola, 1977), both with a connection to the university, published research on Mexican Oneness Pentecostalism (as cited by French, 2014. p20). Often feted as the ‘first Black British theologian’, Robert Beckford was supervised by Gerloff. Although not known for discussing Oneness Pentecostalism, his insight into Jamaican culture and iconography, from *Jesus is Dread* onwards (Beckford, 1998) merits special attention.

French (French, 2014) gives the most comprehensive background to early Oneness doctrine, and its origins in the US, discussing some of the issues that gave rise to current schisms within the movement, particularly the splintering of the PAW among racial lines (p. 134). Reed (2008) is also systematic in his treatment of the movement but withdraws from any opportunity to explore much beyond 1931 in the US. What he does state – a recurring theme within this study – is that Oneness groups are ‘isolated from the wider Pentecostal movements’, even as it ‘shares the bounty of the global Pentecostal movement’ (pp.222-3). Despite this, he concludes on a positive note, exploring theology but not venturing much into global territory.

In both studies, we are reminded that the movement is grounded in American identity and politics. Hollenweger (1972), on the other hand, while offering a wide historiographical overview of Pentecostalism worldwide that the other studies shy away from, pitches Oneness movements as a quiet skirmish within the Assemblies of God (AG) that was quelled (p.32), gaining another brief mention via the UPC and the Indonesian Pentecostal church (p.71) before largely disappearing again.

The most notable aspect of French’s study are the disparities between received presumptions and the actualities. Oneness Pentecostalism, according to French, is visible in the US from as early as 1901, and the term ‘Apostolic’ in a Pentecostal context precedes the ‘Jesus Name’ doctrine (2014). He gives other insights into the key figures involved in the movement, musing that G.T. Haywood, despite being seen as a figure who ‘transcended race’, after managing to delay the inevitable racial splits that

occurred, is undoubtedly responsible for the large numbers of black followers – this represents 40% black members worldwide and 60% in the United States alone.

1.3.4 (British-) Caribbean Pentecostalism in focus

To speak of Pentecostalism – let alone its ‘Apostolic’ manifestation – through the lens of London and the Caribbean is almost to speak of light dispersion: its origin is arguably in the United States and its integration into the West Indies deserves much more investigation; London would seem to be at one remove from the source.

The rise of Pentecostalism and the pattern of its uptake amongst Jamaicans in particular is a preoccupation of many. Austin-Broos, discusses the compatibility of Pentecostalism with syncretic African-derived practices of rural communities, explaining the relative ease with which Pentecostalism expanded in response to a new anti-colonial consciousness and the gendered nature in which it took hold (Austin-Broos, 1987). Teresa L. Reed makes a similar point in her analysis of Afro-Caribbean sacred music, where she compares her (US) Midwestern Pentecostal church with Trinidadian Spiritual Baptists, the Haitian Heavenly Army and Jamaican Revival Zionist [sic] churches (Reed, 2012, p. 6).

While drumming and spirit possession are a common trait among African-derived practices, caution must be taken when adopting a comparative approach that fails to delve deeper into the social relations of each country. Austin-Broos, for one (1987), remarks on the influence of Baptist liturgy on Zion Revivalism; the ‘striking similarities’ Reed notes in some of these forms of worship are in part due to mutual influence, not necessarily due to a universal African source hidden in the call-and-response songs²¹.

Toulis (1997), like Austin-Broos, also remarks on Pentecostal gender structures, this time from a British stance. She warns that it is ‘misleading to read women’s religious participation in terms of externally defined dichotomies which make use of narrow definitions of power, oppression and advantage’ (215). Despite higher numbers of female membership and a seemingly overwhelmingly male power structure, as she notes via Elaine Foster’s study (pp.214-15), women wield much authority in Pentecostal

²¹ Here we are on shaky territory for, while the impact of African belief systems on Caribbean Pentecostalism is undeniable, and may *appear* similar in style to Afro-Caribbean syncretic religions (such as Zion Revivalism, Vodou, Palo Monte and Yoruba beliefs), much rigour must be taken when analysing the cross-pollination of these traditions.

organisations. Women must validate male leadership and it is up to the men in power to prove themselves worthy.

Austin-Broos compares the female-centred Pentecostal religion with male-centred Rastafari; despite her detailed analysis, it is too easy to interpret the argument as 'Pentecostalism is for women and Rastafari is for men'. Her more expansive study (1997) includes a chapter that delves deeper into the – at times verging on erotic – concepts of 'brides of Christ', along with the opportunities for female empowerment outside of family structure and childbearing pressures, the demand for chastity and 'washing of sins', the symbolism of blood in menstruation and more (pp.195-231).

Caribbean religious identity in the context of migration is, in itself, unremarkable (see Gerloff, Hill, McLean, Root or Toulis, among others). To speak of Caribbean *Oneness* Pentecostalism is another matter, especially in London, where the movement would not seem to be particularly strong, compared to Birmingham or New York, or other cities attracting a large Afro-Caribbean diaspora. Gerloff (1992, vol. 1. p252) appears to be the most exhaustive authority by far; her study uncovers 1386 Apostolic congregations in Britain, of which many are in the Capital.

Early analysis of West Indian Pentecostal congregations (Hill 1963, Calley 1965, Root 1979 et al.) seems antiquated in many ways, especially when considering Calley and his attempts to address research problems and techniques by presenting himself as an insider (Calley 1973, pp. 146-9). For him, the key to understanding is through infiltration. Calley elaborates:

'[Religious] sects provide no possible role for the outsider. One who attends their services is, almost by definition, either a member or one interested in becoming a member (...) To gain material of any but a very superficial kind it was necessary that my informants believed me to be a Pentecostal (...) [M]y participation was limited to singing, praying, ritual ejaculations and sometimes preaching. I did not talk with tongues as this would have involved me too deeply with the congregation in which I did so. (pp.146-7)

His methods are distasteful to the contemporary reader, and perhaps this is why other works on British Pentecostalism discuss him in such great detail – sometimes disdainfully.

Hollenweger analyses both Hill (1963) and Calley (1965) on the question of West Indian Pentecostals in Britain (Hollenweger 1972, pp.187-90), looking favourably on the latter's work.

Calley (1963) is referenced repeatedly in many works exploring Black Majority Churches. In Philip Mason's introduction to *God's People* – Calley is described as an anthropologist, contacting the Institute of Race Relations in 1959 to propose undertaking the work, based on his theory on 'emotional and puritan religious groups' thriving under 'rejection from the national majority', a hypothesis he developed from studying Australian aborigines (v-vii). Roots' work (1965) was directly influenced by Calley.

Whilst Calley defines Pentecostalism as a sectarian belief, it is dismissed as the preserve of marginalised, lower-class migrants; this is seemingly part of a trend: in analyses conducted by his contemporaries, well-to-do, middle-class West Indians attend Anglican churches as a marker of privilege (Patterson, 228) and the poor, the racially-sensitive, the working class flock to Pentecostal churches for comfort and solace. Thus to talk of British West Indian Pentecostalism in the 1960s necessitates a discussion on class; later studies seek to uncover gender roles.

1.3.5 The Problematising of Race

Hollengweger (1976), Anderson (2013) and French (2014) all deal extensively with the early Azusa Street Revival and the eventual splits in the movement that took place, most significantly along racial and doctrinal lines. Yet, when the racially-differentiated movements spread to the Caribbean, a blurring took place between organisations that are dominated by white leaders and a majority-white membership in the States, and their missionary outposts in countries with majority-Black populations. In the process of importing the religion, original racial distinctions would seem to have been dissolved, even though there were very complex, pre-existing racialised relationships in the target country (Hall and Du Gay, 1996).

Ira Brooks notes the re-emergence of the American-based racial tensions in Britain when white 'mother churches' in the US, faced with a near-exclusively black Caribbean membership in Britain, sought to redress this balance by creating a new 'Metro Evangelism' church – targeted at white British people – without consulting its Black partner churches (Brooks, 1986, p. 94)(Brooks 1986, p.94).

Toulis, in her study based primarily on New Testament Church of God congregations in Birmingham spends much of her introduction focusing on race and the early reception of Afro-Caribbean migrants to Britain. She comments on Hill's study:

'The view that Caribbean culture was a permutation of a more sophisticated British culture and the idiom of paternal colonialism affected the way in which Afro-Caribbean religious practice was interpreted during the period 1948 to 1965. During this period it was believed that English churches were the first place where integration and assimilation would occur' (Toulis 1997, 25).

The difference between the *expected* integration of a population that was largely influenced by Anglicanism and the rites of the 'mother country' versus the realities of a complex dynamic between American evangelism, pan-African thought – including Rastafarianism –, more 'rural' syncretic practices and the racism of the host country created a new arena for the expansion of Caribbean Pentecostalism.

While Hylton (Hylton, 2002) is particularly dismissive of Pentecostalism in the Caribbean, he does point to some of its early hindrances there, further explaining its exponential rise since the latter half of the last century. The Night Noises Prevention Law and the Obeah Law²² –enacted from times of slavery up until the early twentieth century – were both used to try and curtail Pentecostal activities (p.118) and their gradual abatement coincides with Jamaican independence from colonial status and mass migration into Britain. Elsewhere, these facts are not covered in great detail, if at all.

1.3.6 Towards a London-Jamaican culture?

Questions have already been raised about defining 'Caribbeanness in Britain, and in what is commonly – though not without reticence – referred to as the Black Majority church²³ (Sturge, 2005). While delving into what constitutes a *Caribbean Oneness* church as opposed to a *West Indian* or a *Black-majority Oneness* church, it is worth

²² Here again we see a continuation of 'charismatic' behaviour – drumming, speaking in tongues, loud worship, clapping, call-and-response etc. – and healing practices being associated with a distinct African spirituality, which in turn, was linked with witchcraft, and thus curtailed. 'Obeah' was not historically used to describe one's own practices, and thus becomes an ill-defined synonym for the occult or any rituals by Black Caribbeans proscribed by the English ruling class, be they actual African-derived practices or not.

²³ Henceforth, 'BMC'.

noting how others have variously analysed the demographic in question, in terms of nationhood, ethnicity and/or race.

Early studies on West Indian migration (Patterson, 1963), and those more specifically-centred on Christian belief (Calley, 1965; Hill, 1963; Root, 1979 et al.), focused on recent, West Indian-born, arrivals to London and queried the ‘chip-on-the-shoulder’ attitude of those not drawn to traditional English congregations (Patterson, 1963, pp. 226–233) and the resulting ‘religious apartheid’ (Calley, 1965). Later writers, including Toulis (1997), have criticised their approaches.

More than half a century since independence from British rule and since the Commonwealth Act, aimed at stemming migration from former British colonies and, not only has the Black African population risen dramatically in contrast to the Black Caribbean population – according to 2011 census statistics (Office for National Statistics, 2016a) – but many of the original migrants have settled, and second-, third- and fourth- generations are to be found in the churches in this study, many of whom may not be comfortable with the label ‘Caribbean’.

Mark Sebba (Sebba, 1993) argued that a distinct London West Indian identity emerged since the Seventies – of which language constitutes an important part – which sees *Jamaican* expression dominate. Sebba analyses Jamaican ‘Creole’ (JC) against other Caribbean Creoles, giving the example of vowel sounds in ‘face’ and ‘goat’ (pp.44-5) and the tendency towards Londoners influenced by Caribbean culture towards JC, regardless of their own ethnic heritage.²⁴

Sebba discusses differences between what is commonly called ‘(Multicultural) London English’ and ‘London *Jamaican*’, debating whether it is more appropriate to use the term ‘Black London English’, and how race figures within this linguistic community. JC enters into London speech via Creole speakers and is then modified, first through black speakers of London English and then to the wider public. Later commentators refer to this as ‘Jafakean’/’Jafaican’²⁵.

²⁴ Individual words are ‘the most “mobile” parts of a language’ and thus easier to appropriate, Sebba continues, explaining the popularity of JC *duppy*, *star*, *picky-picky* and of *tief*, both as noun and verb (pp.60-1).

²⁵ Unfortunate developments in the blanket adoption of London English and ‘Jafaican’ include sporadic newspaper comment pieces decrying the ‘dumbing down’ of *youth speak*, bans from schoolchildren using Patois-derived language such as ‘bare’ to mean ‘plenty’, and even a historian commenting that through this process of language adoption ‘the whites have become black’, and have thus become violent, following the 2011 riots (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/uk-14513517/england-riots-the-whites-have-become-black-says-david-starkey>) [Accessed January 2020]

Carolyn Cooper (Cooper, 2004), addressing the global popularity of dancehall music, also discusses how those not of Caribbean descent appropriate Jamaican language and culture. Speaking of the Birmingham-based *raggastani*, Apachi Indian, who is of Asian heritage, she writes: 'In transnational perspective, "the Caribbean" can no longer be contained within the conventional boundaries of the geo/logical nation-state. Apache Indian's Birmingham is, in many ways a Caribbean city, a Jamaican city – subject to the media-colonizing power of Jamaican popular culture' (p.257). Thus 'Jamaican' transcends the nation state and becomes an idea, a marker of culture influenced by Jamaican and Caribbean trends.

'Jamaicanness' even within Jamaica is a contested idea, especially when racialised. Cultural theorist Stuart Hall migrated to London from Jamaica in the 1950s, leaving a 'society that did not and could not have acknowledged itself to be largely black.' (Hall and Du Gay, 1996, p. 35). It was not until returning nearly two decades later that he heard Patois on the radio, which he attributed to the cultural revolution arising from black consciousness and Rastafarian movements.

Caribbean migrants who arrived as Trinidadians, Guyanese, St. Lucians etc. before the 1960s are now simplified into 'black', 'Caribbean' etc, alongside later arrivals and their descendants (ONS, 2011), and despite the complicated racial histories of each country that overlooks, for instance, Indo-Caribbean experience (Vertovec, 1993).

Lorde framed the liminality of 'hyphenated people' in optimistic terms (Schultz, 2012). In this spirit, the 'London Jamaican' label was initially applied to the participants in this study, later amended to 'Caribbean', with *Caribbean+* used to emphasise those whose Caribbean identity may not necessarily originate from a geographic birthplace.

Winston James states: 'It is now generally acknowledged that ethnicity and ethnic identity, however defined, are not static and eternal in their constitution but are profoundly dynamic, always in the process of being made, unmade and re-made' (James, 1993, p. 232). This study includes London-Jamaicans, British-born Jamaicans, West Indians who are not of Jamaican heritage but are involved in Caribbean-majority congregations. These are hyphenated peoples of heterogeneous culture and expression.

1.3.7 Navigating Denominational/Generational Divisions in the 21st Century

Sturge (2005), among other writers on the subject – many of whom allied to the New Testament Church Of God church (see Toulis, for example)– also argues for greater unity and development of the 'Black Majority Church' in the UK. This involves defining BMCs,

outlining histories, and in one chapter (pp.113-141) listing its commonalities and divisions, before proposing 'a way forward'.

The subheading '*Trinitarians and Unitarians*' in his chapter 'Theologies and doctrines of Black Majority Churches' is initially confusing (134-6), bearing in mind that the Unitarian religious movement is distinct from the more generic unitarian or non-Trinitarian stance taken by Oneness Pentecostals. Nevertheless, he makes interesting assertions about the current state of Oneness Pentecostalism, giving several examples of closer alliances forging with Trinitarian denominations as the older generation of 'Jesus name' adherents concede to the mainstream or peter out.

Most interestingly, he remarks on the renaming of Bibleway Church in Lewisham to 'The Tabernacle' when leadership transferred from the retired Bishop Leon White to his son. This would seem not to be merely an exercise in nominal rebranding; The Tabernacle's website, when accessed in 2016, had a statement of twelve beliefs containing no reference to baptism at all – let alone in Jesus' name – and the phrasing of the statement 'We believe in One God who has revealed himself as Father, Son and the Holy Spirit' has the suggestion of a Trinitarian stance²⁶.

Gerloff's 1386 Apostolic congregations in the 1990s (1992, 252) would seem to be much lower in number by the time Sturge (2005) or McLean (2013) writes. Yet Gerloff's assertion that some fluidity may exist between Oneness and Trinitarian doctrine in the Caribbean community is an interesting one, and falls in line with Sturge.

McLean does not specify which particular doctrine participants in her study adhered to (2013, pp.115-31), but it is noteworthy for its focus on second-generation West Indian youth in New York and London. Remarking on the mass exodus of the latter group, she warns that US-based churches would do well to take note – making services more relevant by ditching the old Redemption Hymnal and strict dress codes. Beckford (2009, pp.135-151) playfully uses the topic of dress code to talk about his experience as documentary maker and the forming of religious culture among Caribbean migrants, of course referring to Calley's assertion that 'dressing up' was a form of compensation for the lack of validation received at work. In both, they stress the need to modernise and adapt.

The cinematography in Fiennes' work (2002) and sparseness of dialogue allow the viewer to relish moments of dress. A mother dresses her daughter for a convention; a former drug addict spends time applying her makeup in the mirror; an usher prepares a new convert for baptism, adjusting her swimming cap and baptismal gown while

²⁶ www.thetab.org.uk/about-the-tab/our-beliefs [accessed June, 2016]

reading Acts 2:38. Men in suits, with bibles under their arms, cross the road to the church. The choir is repeatedly represented, robed and joyful. All of this lays in contrast to the children in the street playing skip rope outside, while sexualised R&B plays in the background, and with the murder scene where a mother wails hopelessly, until she is prayed for. Pastor Noel Jones' church retains an order in the chaos of a disturbed city. Oneness, even in its 21st Century form – where women wear trousers and uncover their heads in church – conforms to a strict code of presentation. This unselfconsciously material element is most compelling, and will be focused on later in the study, in the context of a modern London.

1.4 Conclusion: crossing disciplines

“Wat a joyful news, miss Mattie,
I feel like me heart gwine burs
Jamaica people colonizin
Englan in Reverse”

Louise “Miss Lou” Bennett, ‘Colonization in Reverse’, 1966

Choosing to research the history of Caribbean Oneness Pentecostalism in London necessarily means broaching various elements that prop up the subject: the story of British colonisation and American influence on Caribbean churches; the story of Caribbean culture and language; the Oneness movement and its history; studies on post-war migration to London, and the social/political landscape of the city; Oneness church structure and wider influence; finally its overlap with other Christianities and generations. Most crucially, it involves chronicling the movements of specific churches and linking them to their origins, out of which issues from these other areas will arise.

On the note of other beliefs, do we include Seventh Day Apostolics in this grouping? And, on the note of generations, at what point does a London congregation cease to be Caribbean? Telling a story about migration risks drawing an incomplete picture: migration involves the “arrivant” (Brathwaite, 1995) settling and assimilating, or being unsettled and perhaps returning; there is an ever-changing “here” of the present and a fixed “there” of the past. Can the Jamaican migrant’s children, then, be considered Jamaican too? And as the religious practises of these children and (great-)grandchildren evolve and merge with other church groupings or into the mainstream, or into other religions (or none), what then can we say of *Jamaican* Oneness Pentecostalism in London if we find that a pastor from a non-Jamaican background has taken over what was historically a Jamaican-majority church? Unlike, say, Ethiopian

Orthodoxy, or even Jamaican Zion Revivalism, the Caribbean practice has no fixed liturgy to separate it from other Oneness – and even sometimes scarcely from other Trinitarian – Pentecostals. Oneness in the Caribbean is itself an export, a migrant, from the United States, and as wider Caribbean culture mutates, assimilates and dissipates in London, so too, perhaps, will the Caribbean+ incarnation of Oneness.

Undertaking such a challenging task involves creative risks. Creative risks are the domain of poets and novelists, perhaps. And as a poet, simultaneously involved in writing a novel, I wish to capitalise on my field of knowledge by taking the creative leap into the (at least) partially-unknown, compiling stories that problematise the boundaries between the history of religion and literary endeavour. In doing so, I wish to make clear the ethical and methodical considerations that have been undertaken.

2. Methodology

As detailed in the Overview within the Introduction (1.2), this chapter steps beyond the Literature Review – and the gaps of knowledge highlighted therein – into the research process. The following section (2.1) explains the decision to employ discourse analysis²⁷ and offers personal reflections, including misgivings over my ‘objectivity’, despite desiring to promote ‘non-directive’ questioning and loosely structured inquiry. In the subsequent section (2.2), this is explored further through discussions on ‘narrative disruptions’, i.e. interviewees who challenge the research process and/or trigger reflections that ultimately alter its character. The remaining sections explore the landscape of this study’s primary scope – changing Black British-Caribbean identity and Jesus Name congregations in London – during the time of the research, and it includes a case study of two contrasting churches.

2.1 Setting up the study: the *what* and the *who*

At the outset of this thesis, it was quickly decided that creative principles behind story could also be applied to those that drive oral research; I was interested in the

²⁷Gee’s introduction to discourse analysis (2014) surveys this approach. After putting forward several methods of fieldwork and ethnography, it was decided this would be the optimal approach for this particular study. For clarification, the process essentially involved: i) interviewing participants ii) transcribing the interviews iii) selecting recurring themes iv) piecing together narratives from the selections v) analysing speech and other verbal signals to process these narratives. This would provide the best complement to the fiction component.

relationship between creative fiction and oral testimonies, whilst considering how a narrative arc could be explored, using templates such as those proposed by Dara Marks (Marks, 2009), a screenwriting consultant. Etienne (2016), discovered after I already completed this process, shows other possibilities for the creative presentation of research. Her group interviews of 103 older African-Caribbean women are dramatized with a *narrator* and a *cast of characters* for each *act* broaching different themes.

It would be erroneous to assign the interviews a creative non-fiction label; having already developed a fictional narrative in conversation with the interviews, there is little room for poetic license in these chapters, and academic discourse allows little ambiguity. Nevertheless, within the remit of discourse analysis, more room can be allowed for narrative: a literary landscape emerges from paying attention to the way stories are (re)told, how sentences are structured and connected to each other, how events are layered on top of each other, from vague recollections of tarrying services and paraffin heaters to more detailed descriptions of the service where the 'storyteller' converts to the Apostolic faith.

Most importantly, as an author, my own biography is relevant: where I set the lens, whose stories I prioritise²⁸. From the Prologue, my cultural heritage, and the geographical and historical context of my upbringing are flagged; it is possible to map some of the fictional Samuel's experience onto my own, in the spirit of his journey, rather than the chronology thereof²⁹. Following my own pedagogical imperatives, informed in part by Freire (1987), embarking on research involved non-hierarchical approaches and self-exploration. The first interview I conducted was on myself; I also consulted widely on some of the issues presented by the characters in the novel (being aware, for instance, that Theresa is subjected to gender-based violence), seeking to redress the balance of my own subjectivity through critical engagement³⁰.

As the new millennium represented a coming of age for me, both in a personal sense and in wider cultural terms, I wanted to explore ideas around *maturing* identities. How race and religion are discussed in both academic and non-academic texts has

²⁸ The non-directional interviews, discussed further in this chapter, was partly an attempt to counteract my own biases, or, to at least open up blind spots by letting participants speak for themselves as much as possible.

²⁹ The drama was deliberately heightened, in part to make this very point clear: Samuel's later journey includes being witness to a murder whilst a sex worker in London then spending four years 'self-exiled' in Barcelona, an experience I do not share.

³⁰ Whilst this was a useful exercise, the self-interview has been excluded from this study in order not to promote unacademic narcissism, and to make space for other interviews.

changed significantly over the last few decades and even in the last three years³¹; it will, undoubtedly, change again. My ambition at the outset was to narrate changes in identity formation to posit some questions about *how* we explore identities that are difficult to categorise in exclusive terms; at all stages of the study, both 'Caribbean' and 'Oneness' Pentecostalism have proven to be contested terms; where these overlap and evolve across London neighbourhoods is where the narrative heat emerges.

My novel is split between the 1960s-70s and the early 1990s-2000s. Tensions occur around repressed memories, and the clash between the 'settler' migrant generation and 'settled' second-generation British culture. While this holds a personal fascination as well as a literary one, translating these ideas into academic narratives has highlighted certain gaps within studies of British Caribbean Pentecostalism, which I wanted to explore.

By 2000, decades after the first surge in Caribbean migration to the UK, British Caribbean culture was well established in London, through language, music and other artistic forms. At the same time, in some areas – not least of all, in Pentecostal worship – it remained the isolated 'other', misunderstood in popular culture and in the academy, where studies on worship were often focused solely on the more deeply embedded New Testament Church of God. This led me to seek out an array of voices influenced by Oneness doctrine to tell their stories.

The next challenge was to consider what stories to seek out and from whom, and which of these would provide a transition from the well-trodden narratives of migration and rejection to new territories that deal with multiple *belongings*. I sought to appropriate the commonest genre of storytelling within the Pentecostal church, the *testimony*, expressed by Sutcliffe and Tomlin as 'verbal art', and part of a uniquely Black church tradition (Sutcliffe, 2015, pp.22-23). While their essay expands on the lyricism of the Caribbean testimony tradition, 'testimony' in the interview context also needed to be an expansive tool, a recording of history. I ventured to document the *struggle* and *overcoming* of participants, the mutual rejections of Apostolics and more mainstream denominations, and the gradual integration and increased fluidity between Oneness and Trinitarian, between Caribbean and Black British.

It was decided I would interview twenty to thirty people, enough to sample a diverse community for a qualitative analysis, and to pick out common themes from the

³¹The Literature Review necessarily focuses on critical analysis within academia; however, instead of a 'trickle down' of knowledge into the mainstream, popular culture seems to be reshaping conversations around race and religion. Music has, again been an integral part of this conversation, e.g. Bernard (2020).

interviews; a greater number would have made any in-depth analysis more difficult. Given the limitations of the study, with a maximum of three themed chapters, it was necessary to maintain a tight focus, to be 'led by the Spirit', i.e. not solely governed by the academic drive to pursue *all* avenues of interest. Interviewees were selected to encompass different ages, genders and roles in the church, in order to explore a breadth of manifestations of Apostolic discourse. Most importantly, all participants had to have had a significant involvement in Jesus Name churches with a Caribbean majority, based in London. The majority of participants needed to be currently active within the church, but I also decided to involve former members of Apostolic churches, who may have significant input, bearing in mind the recent apparent decline in membership.

My project conceptualisation sprang from a desire to seek out the 'Caribbean Oneness Pentecostal journey' to London and its subsequent embedding; this meant exploring migration, the founding and evolution of churches and the development of communities. The over-fifty demographic have experienced a wider exposure to social changes in London, are more likely to have been born in the Caribbean and to have seen changes within their church structures. Targeting older members of churches and especially the leadership, was decidedly the best way of exploring these key issues. As the interviews progressed, it was again decided to speak with a few younger people for contrast: what of the 'settled' British-born generation of Oneness Pentecostals and their journey narratives?

Given the breadth of stories to be explored, I wanted participants from different areas of London (inner-city and suburban, at different compass points) and different church communities, from those that are part of a larger group, with American headquarters – such as UPC and affiliates – to smaller, independent congregations. My own familiarity with East London made it easy for me to target particular churches in those areas, but I wanted also to spread out to the much less-discussed West (including Shepherds Bush and Harlesden), North (Tottenham and Edmonton) and, of course, parts of South London where black populations have been discussed extensively in many cultural studies – in particular, the areas around Brixton, Peckham and Lewisham, the latter having among the highest densities of Black Caribbean people in the UK (Race Disparity Unit, 2019).

After contacting more than thirty potential people over two months, a total of nineteen interviews took place in multiple settings: in the homes, workplaces and churches of participants; at the university and home of the interviewer; and, in one case, at a fast food establishment. In most cases, a 'neutral' setting was put forward, with minimal background noise. All interviews were recorded and were expected to last

around ninety minutes; the shortest interview lasted just under an hour and the longest was two hours and twenty minutes.

The interviews that took place within the limited time frame I had, reflected my access to participants. I had a few more respondents from South and East London churches than I did from boroughs I was keen to explore but less familiar with, such as Haringey in the North, Brent in the North West and Kensington & Chelsea in West London. The ethnic balance in those areas have gained recent national attention: Brent was only the second area in the UK where 'White British' became a minority ethnic group; the 2011 riots which began in Tottenham (Haringey), and spread nationally, once again brought to attention the tensions between police and black communities in London; Notting Hill (Kensington & Chelsea) often the departure point for any discussions on race relations – from 1958 race 'riots' to the precarious persistence of its Carnival – has seen a significant change in ethnic make-up and social background, and is now more known for its Conservative Party cabinet members than for its West Indian community. More recently – and tragically – since the interviews, the area has become known for the Grenfell Tower fire, which killed at least 58 people, and has become a focal point for discussions about gentrification and the silencing of the working class.

I was keen to interview more people from within the above-mentioned areas, who might have something to say about their religious community in light of their local communities. Here, though, my drive towards this micro-sociological question – something perhaps better measured through quantitative analysis – conflicted a little with my desire to seek out personal story, soteriology and a pragmatic approach: of the nineteen people I eventually interviewed, where the subject came up, few attended a church within the borough they resided in. This was not necessarily going to be a story about geographical communities but about a wider London picture.

As I targeted church leaders first, I was conscious of the gender representation among interviewees. Congregations usually have a greater female presence, while leadership is predominantly male; in some church groups, such as Bibleway, female pastors are not permitted. Eight of the interviewees were women. I sought to navigate the divide between quantitative representation and diversity of the project. Of the women, I was able to achieve great diversity: a pastor, senior members of congregations, two former members – one who has moved to another denomination and one who had stopped going to church altogether -, of different age groups and locations across London. This, I feel, was at the expense of the male representation. Nearly all the men interviewed were church leaders (elders, pastors and bishops). The joint interview with two younger church members is the only exception. While this comes close to

quantitative representation, I feel I could have attempted to seek out and approach more male lay members over the age of thirty.

In all initial contact with interview participants, via phone and email correspondence, it was explained interviews would begin by asking for their *testimonies*, which were to be as extensive as possible and would form the main bulk of our conversation. For later interviews, I also laid out some of my initial interests: Caribbean migration to the UK; interactions between Oneness and Trinitarian denominations; the relationship between faith and the body (i.e. ideas around modesty, commitment to fasting etc.); the place of technology among faith communities (Wagner, 2011). As these interests developed – mostly from analysing the early interviews – I then incorporated questions that dealt with these themes for later interviews.

Before the recordings, initial questions were basic fact-gathering ones: name; place of birth; name of church they currently attend (if they currently attend a church); education level; occupation. At the point of recording, participants were asked: ‘Could you tell me your testimony?’ Follow-up questions were then for clarification or elaboration on certain topics raised.

Initially, I had created a list of ‘interests’ – clothing, fasting, baptism, conversion, migration. I also had at my disposal printed maps of London and other prompts adapted from *The Oral History Reader* (Thomson, 2006), which I later abandoned in favour of a more detailed preliminary conversation and follow-up questions, so as to further develop the areas of interest and provide back up for interviewees who needed more direction:

- 1) What is their relationship to fasting?
- 2) What is their relationship to other churches (both Apostolic and otherwise)
- 3) How do they see presentation/clothing as part of their faith?
- 4) How were they baptised and how does the church they currently worship at undergo baptisms?
- 5) How does praise and worship take place at their church? What is the role of music in their (spiritual) life?
- 6) What does an optimal work-life balance look like?
- 7) What role does technology play in their spiritual life?
- 8) How does Lord’s Supper/Communion feature in their church?
- 9) What generational changes or differences can they see in the church community?
- 10) How does reading (biblical and non-biblical texts) feature in their lives?

The purpose of the open-ended call to an initial *testimony* was ostensibly to emphasise the freedom for participants to set the terms of discussion; however, this does not eliminate the interviewer's slant towards his own narrative approach. I set out to be clear about my personal interests where possible beforehand; in return, the interviewees controlled the initial structure of their testimonies, including where they began and ended, whether they exclusively covered their conversion to Christianity and/or Apostolic beliefs or veered more deeply into their personal histories. Given the length of the interviews, while the participants controlled the real time narrative, the interviewer/researcher – as curator of dialogues – ultimately tells the story. As a result, while the research-gathering process may well seem open-ended in style, the final analyses and reconfiguring harbour the researcher's own interests and desires, as the majority of what is said is discarded.

2.2 Power relations: interviewees disrupting narratives

Ira Brooks' account of his conversion and involvement in the church shows the potential of first-hand narrative and the simple power of recounting personal history, using it to shed light on the development of the church. Unlike Ira Brooks' extended *testimony*, this project was to be a mediated *collage* of narratives; presenting the results of this research, effectively as a 'guardian of stories' – in a non-literary context – raised questions of power relations. Using the Foucauldian notion that 'power is everywhere' (Foucault, 1991), an interview method was sought that would admit some awareness of the power dynamic between interviewer and participant and challenge the idea that the scholar simply constructs a narrative and pins it onto a subject or, conversely, that the scholar simply records the experience of the subject. It is the academy that 'invented' religion (Smith, 1988), it is the academic, medical and penal system that create sexual categories (Foucault 1991) and racial ones. In a project that seeks to subvert the boundaries of identity, participants themselves must be afforded space to navigate and define – to a certain extent – their own identities and experiences in a way that redresses some of the power balances.

Setting up *testimonies* was an attempt at instigating a narrative built on a quest and a *struggle*, which does not neatly apply to all the research participants, and is something that Ricardo – the youngest interviewee – immediately picks up on:

636³² **Ricardo:** when I think about what testimony means, getting up and testify
in the Apostolic church, that already shows the direction of where I'm going
640 there was always the connotation of the struggle and a victory in a
testimony[...]

Ricardo finds it difficult to begin talking as he feels his 'testimony' is inadequate; unlike the 'older generation', he has not migrated, or suffered economic hardship or any overt racism and thus, initially, rejects the idea that he has a *testimony*. My interests were precisely in pursuing respondents who *did* have a testimony in the struggle/victory sense, unwittingly or otherwise. The idea of having a *testimony* had varying degrees of usefulness and was one area in which my approach was challenged. Rachel, like Ricardo, struggles with the word *testimony* but uses it to step into a narrative of immigration and parental identity very quickly. In many ways, her opening gambit is playful; church is positioned as an 'occupation' like any other – bingo, dominoes, even smoking, perhaps:

4 **Rachel:** That's really interesting and I don't think I've ever been asked what my testimony is. I was thinking about it as you mentioned it Saturday in our brief conversation. I started thinking what is my testimony.
14 it's a strange one as my parents came to church from the sixties, they came from Jamaica. That's what they did. Some people went to bingo or played dominoes, mine went to church.

Despite the playful comparison between church and domino-playing, a serious point is made: the idea of testimony engaged Rachel in her pre-interview preparations; she had never been asked this before – a new idea was being presented. Also, after she has ruminated on her own *testimony* and begins to present it, while she remains the protagonist, the opening character is not the protagonist herself but her parents.

Experiencing this pre-narrative created new reflections on how the interviews opened, and how the main characters and stories are set out initially. This led to the creation of an analytical chapter focusing not only on belonging and community, but also on how narratives around belonging were presented in the initial stages of the 'testimony'.

³²Here, and in all future interview extracts, time is written in minutes and seconds (i.e. the quote above is at 6 minutes and 36 seconds).

Whilst a crucial area of inquiry lay in looking at *how* participants in this situation profiled their own identity, it was also important to respond to how they chose to frame their 'testimony', and whether this raised any unforeseen questions.

The *testimony* was used to 'speak back' to the research in terms of identity too. Marcus starts his interview by correcting the information which had been emailed to him beforehand; this caused me to once again alter the description of my research to ensure that 'Caribbean' and 'Jamaican' were not used interchangeably as identity descriptors, even in the Sebba (1993) sense of 'London Jamaican', or the Cooper (Cooper, 2004) sense of trans/global 'Jamaicanhood':

0 **Marcus:** I'm not Jamaican, I'm actually Grenadian

7 a very proud Grenadian and I would never abdicate that, it's my identity my culture and so on.

16 And I relate to being Grenadian very strongly although obviously I love the whole of the Caribbean. I love everybody; but my identity is my identity.

The statement could not be clearer, but it presented some challenges to what was already uncertain territory: where does *Jamaican* end, *Caribbean* extend and *British* begin? Marcus was one of few people to have been raised in a Caribbean country post-independence. In this sense, he is *truly* Grenadian – and proudly so – while most other participants were either born in London or spent their formative years in a British colony. His statement of Grenadian-ness facilitated a reconsidering of the project's scope; surely, if one purpose of this study was to denounce the limitations of single-identity narratives, the single 'Jamaican' narrative must not be imposed on someone for whom this label does not fit. 'Caribbean' is now the main label applied, and 'Caribbean+' to emphasise the varied manifestations of Caribbean culture among people with multiple other identities.

All participants were informed that I had contacted a range of people who were currently or had previously been involved in Oneness churches with a significant Caribbean influence. Here, again, blurring of boundaries occur. The community/ies detailed in this project are relatively small. Several members of my family have been involved in Oneness Pentecostal churches across London; it would have been impossible to conduct an in-depth study without encountering people who knew me or a close family member personally. My last name, my physical appearance (I have a strong resemblance to family members) and even my awareness of key churches within these communities all betray a personal and familial link to the subject matter.

Whilst I was clear about my positioning as academic researcher, it became increasingly difficult to sustain professional detachment. Calley's problematic assertion that '[religious] sects provide no possible role for the outsider' (Calley, 1965, p. 146) hung in the air. If my purpose was not a spiritual one, why was I conducting this research; and why in this way? As a former 'insider', someone who no longer attends an Apostolic/Oneness church, not only was I aware of my own beliefs – and the challenges that would ensue –, but I had to navigate those of interviewees responding to me based on *their* perception of my beliefs.

Victor directly confronts me at the end of our interview in a fast food restaurant –a meeting place proposed by the interviewee, and not the most conducive place for such purposes. His final remark mirrors the challenge set before the recording:

B3913 **Victor:** and I don't think it's an information gap you have but something's hurt you and it's made you decide you want to walk away from it. And I wish you'd walk right back.

Again, this disrupts the *meta* narrative of the academic as semi-visible narrator. Whilst the researcher-interviewer role is detached from the narrative, the interviewees are conscious of *my* presence within *their* story. Thus Victor's testimony and my subsequent questions become a springboard for his evangelistic calling.

Despite personal discomfort due to the setting – Victor loudly expressed views I deemed controversial, and spoke in tongues, loudly, during the interview – in this case, his 'speaking back' to my research was not an unhelpful one; by this time, questions about what was being searched for were well-formed and he felt it was his duty to challenge me, in much the same way I experienced the compulsion to interrogate modern Apostolic identities.

An early interview with Naomi, pastor of a large church in South London, created anxieties for both interviewer and participant as the premises of the research were not then so clearly delineated. We met at her church, just after their morning service. As a result of this particular interaction, no other subsequent interviews took place on Sunday, nor after a church service. More effort was placed in making sure that the interview location was more appropriate for an interview. This also helped eliminate concerns around formality of dress.

Before Naomi's interview, we had undertaken two brief phone conversations; this was followed up on the day, in the minutes preceding the recording, by a more detailed explanation of the research, yet the boundaries of the interview were not fully

clear to the participant. What *exactly* did I want her to say that would satisfy me? She had been previously under the impression that I was a member of an Apostolic church and, as I clarified that I wasn't, a clash of desires ensued: hers, to enquire of my exact doctrinal stance and biblical background – going as far as to suggest I wasn't raised correctly – and mine, to conduct an interview with limited directions.

After the recording was finally allowed to start, it was clear again that there were still key misunderstandings about what was expected.

5 **Naomi:** I was born in Jamaica. That what you want to know? Is that anything like that?

12 //Whatever you.. you feel – //

15 N: Ok, well I was born in Jamaica. I went to school there. I got married. All that?

22 // Sure –//

23 N: I got marri-. Oh, my name is [Naomi]

27 //Again, while I'm,, this is all going to be made anonymous. This recording and my notes [...]/

55 N: Oh right. Good, good, good. I was born in Jamaica and I got married in 1958 [..]

The beginning of the recording is stilted for several reasons. One of those is the lack of an established protocol. As an interview embarking on one of my first interviews, the *exact* nature of what was being explored was hazy; I stumbled upon being asked what exactly I wanted to hear just before the interview. It was also startling to be challenged not only on my own beliefs, but by the direct pre-interview request: 'So what you want me to say to you?' Naomi was unaccustomed to the informal interview setting and spoke back to the power narrative: she was aware I wanted something that would 'satisfy' me; what exactly would achieve that purpose?

As pastor, Naomi held authority in the church; as an outsider, the nature of my *outsiderness* needed to be determined further, in order to establish hierarchy and conventions. In the insider/outsider binary, I was an ambiguous figure. I was visibly identifiable as being a part of the predominant demographic inside the church – overwhelmingly Jamaican, in a neighbourhood I know intimately – yet out of context as a researcher, with an ear piercing, something frowned upon in that particular church. I was dressed in smart casual attire, without a tie; most of the congregation was dressed formally, including Naomi.

The insider/outsider dynamic played out in our greetings: should I refer to her as 'Pastor Edwards' – more formal and perhaps more appropriate for an academic interview – or should I opt for the more deferential 'Mother' Edwards – which suggests belonging to a community as well as recognising her seniority? Ultimately, I opted for the latter. We hesitated in our opening welcome too; I hesitated in offering a handshake.

The ambiguity of my intrusion into her space continued throughout the interview. Naomi asked 'is this what you want?' on several occasions as she elaborated on her testimony and asked for prompts. If this was an academic study of a historical nature, she deferred to other church leaders who she deemed as having greater knowledge, and was generous with that information:

2919 **Naomi:** Mother Yates and Bishop Edwards and them? They know the root more than I. I know Bishop Nelson who was my bishop. He ordained me again as well. So I got it three times.

2935 So Bishop Nelson, he died. Those people would know. I just know about myself and Bishop Young and his history. They treated him very bad when they were preaching this gospel.

3005 If you see Elder Yardsley in Manchester, I can give you his number and he can tell you a lot about them.

3018 He did a history on Bishop Edwards and Bishop Neale.. because he asked me some questions as well.

3030 Call him.. he has the roots.. he even sent me a tape. I didn't play the tape, but Bishop Edwards is on the tape as well.

3048 It would be good for you to talk to him and I'll listen to the tape. If there's something that can help you, give me your number and I'll get back to you with that.

3100 Let me get it now.. He's a very nice man. He'll know more[...]

So much occurs within this brief moment, half an hour into the interview. First, Naomi defers to those she believes know more than her. Then she reasserts her own standing; she was ordained *three times*. Thirdly, while again deferring to those she considers a higher authority, she inserts her own historical judgement: 'they treated him very bad...' She does not expand on this. Fourthly, she repeats the deferral and offers access to a further contact. Then, she admits to having been interviewed previously (via email). Finally, not only does she reveal she has a tape with some of the history of the churches, but that she has not listened to it; she does not explain why, before deferring again to

the 'nice man' who will know more... If nothing else, this highlights some of the reservations an interviewee may have regarding: confidence about being an authority; willingness to explore judgements ('nice' and 'bad' etc.); previous attempts to document their activities.

Her reticence at my approach and her judgement of me will have contributed to this deference to others, but it is also worth considering her precarious position as a female pastor. As many denominations do not allow female leaders and, as she had already handed over many of her responsibilities to junior – male – elders of the church, choosing instead an overseer role within her congregation, perhaps this speaks to a further 'handing over' of authority to men. The academic 'neutrality' I hoped to project was thus ineffective in a non-academic, non-neutral space where hierarchies and pre-assigned roles are paramount, even where they may not be clear to the outsider.

Victor, in the highly contrasting setting of a fast food restaurant, is impervious to conventions which would limit speaking in tongues and the voicing aloud of certain views – among them his anti-Islam sentiment, in an area with a sizeable Muslim population – and my own discomfort at this; he uses the domain of the restaurant in a similar way Naomi does the church, asserting his power over the space by deciding which protocols I should adhere to.

Marcus, where he rejects a Jamaican identity in favour of a Grenadian one – choosing not to do so in our initial correspondence or in our pre-recording conversation, but right at the start of the recording – does not assert spatial authority but a more complicated disruption to the narrative. Both Rachel's and Marcus's opening comments suggest their careful consideration of, and their challenge to, how the research is framed, although Rachel does not contest it directly.

2.3 Current landscape

Following on from 1.2.3, covering some of the shifting trends in Black British identity and culture, this section now focuses on Oneness Pentecostal identity, drawing on some of the conversations with interview participants, and building on existing literature. This will enable us to transition to the case studies (2.4) before drawing directly from the interviews to address additional themes.

2.3.1 Demographics: age, 'hurt' and gender fault lines

The Oneness church community faces a challenge in retaining members, particularly male lay members and young people. One of the ways some churches have responded is through marketing that de-emphasises the Oneness baptism and doctrine, focusing instead on community outreach, cultural solidarity and a push to reach beyond the Caribbean community.

Youth retention in particular is an issue. Oneness churches have often held a strict dress code and separation from 'the world' for its members – limiting socialisation with non-adherents and any engagements with sport, music or entertainment – and their eschatological concern has sometimes precluded its members from getting involved in 'long term' issues: 'trusting' (buying) a house with a mortgage, investing in schooling, taking an interest in politics. Nearly all interviewees expressed regret at the mass exodus of young members due to the 'harshness' of church policies.

Valerie, in her testimony jumps from discussing the 'problem' with some Apostolic worship – namely, how she feels values have been compromised – to her children's *hurt*:

1411 **Valerie:** some of my children are still in church, some only visit. To be honest, why they only visit is because they're carrying hurt

1426 I can't mend that. I just leave it to God and pray about it

That *hurt* extends, later in the conversation, to young people in general who have left the faith because they have been harmed by the strict discipline of the past. It also echoes Victor who, after his previously-cited closing remark, 'something's hurt you', goes on to suggest that many young people have left the Apostolic faith because of the older generation's failures and harshness. Valerie's resignation, 'I can't mend that', contrasts with Marcus, whose congregation is younger; while he also speaks of hurt from an over-strict past, he speaks positively of his resolve to engage with young people through, for instance, song choice in praise and worship services, and his practicalities around sexual advice and counselling. Nearly all interviewees had something to say about the youth exodus and attributed it to the past.

The other significant demographic concerned is that of the male-female divide. Church leadership tends to be male; only a handful of female pastors of Oneness churches could be found, including Naomi, who herself can only list two other female church leaders.

Austin-Broos (Austin-Broos et al., 1997) explores the gender dynamic of Jamaican churches in great detail; she also argues that the church offers a symbolic role

for unmarried women and single mothers, through 'bride of Christ' narratives in the bible and worship songs, for example. The same cannot be said of men. Outside of the leadership structure, congregations are predominately female. Nevertheless, a complex picture has formed. Congregations that maintain a high majority of West Indians and that continue to emphasise the 'Apostolic' nature of the church – often noticeable through the conservative dress of its members – conform to this structure; others have seen a greater retention of young people, including men.

2.3.2 A complicated landscape

A mixed picture of Oneness Caribbean churches has emerged in London in recent years, in part due to the various denominational divides that make it hard to track anything in terms of location, numbers, history, structures etc.

The majority of congregations originated from Pentecostal Assemblies of the World (PAW) or United Pentecostal Church (UPC) in the United States and the Caribbean, or from their offshoots. Some of those offshoots abroad have created new possibilities within the UK; church organisations in the UK have sometimes maintained ties with their 'parent' churches, while others have become separated, due to doctrinal or personal issues.

One of the most notable examples of the evolution of church groupings includes Bibleway. The headquarters of the organisation is in the United States. It was founded by Smallwood E Williams, who separated away from R C Lawson's Church of Our Lord Jesus Christ of the Apostolic Faith (COOLJC); R C Lawson, in turn, founded COOLJC after being ordained by and splitting from PAW. Bibleway's split in the US, after Williams's death in 1991, created a similar split in London, spawning offshoots such as Built on the Rock (BOTR). ARC also arose indirectly from Bibleway; the leader, Pastor Peter Nembhard attended and was part of the Bibleway leadership, and gained theological training at their college.

Richard, pastor of a South London congregation – and former Apostolic leader, now veering more towards a Trinitarian stance – describes a turn-of-the-century scene that was littered with 'living room pastors', i.e. with congregations that only number a handful of people, and a new jostle for the non-denominational market. He states:

130 the reason why Bibleway left COOLJC is because they considered the leadership of RC Lawson oppressive. It was his way or no way.

200 He would not recognise leadership of his cadre of some very skilled gifted leaders who had congregations of thousands. So you had Smallwood E Williams and a range of I think twelve other bishops in 1957 leaving COOLJC to start Bibleway

220 what interests me is that COOLJC came out of Pentecostal Assemblies of the World for similar reasons

230 what you find in these kind of churches is because of leadership issues you become what you worship

His tone condemns the dictatorial nature of church leadership and the repetition of history; this condemnation is echoed by other interviewees.

2.3.3 Stepping into the twenty-first century: online contradictions

Perhaps, when it is not always possible to locate churches through physical buildings (building ownership for newer or smaller churches is prohibitively expensive, so halls are often hired for a Sunday service) or through its intra-denominational network, or even through the signifier 'Apostolic' – which is also used by some Catholics and African congregations in different ways³³ – the most obvious way to attempt to build a picture of the Oneness landscape would be through browsing the Internet. The online footprint of some Apostolic churches gives a few clues as to which ones are sincerely attempting to engage with the public. Any conclusions we can draw from this must be tentative, though: it takes just one computer-literate member or friend of the congregation to create an online post; this cannot be used as to conclude much about the churches themselves, in terms of membership numbers or their impact on the local landscape.

A brief browse through social media gives plenty of insight into the activities of individual Apostolic congregations and their leaders. Facebook announces that the Beulah Church in Shepherds Bush live-streamed parts of their last service via the church's profile. A search for Refuge Temple in Streatham reveals a filmmaker's YouTube account, which hosts a video from the church's convention, while also featuring another video of a secular Dancehall party on the filmmaker's profile. ARC

³³ Oneness churches in the U.S. with 'Apostolic' signifiers are often different to those in the U.K., with more proscriptive attitudes to female modesty (sometimes forbidding cutting of hair), alcohol consumption etc. As discussed in the introduction, this study tends towards 'Oneness' to denote the non-Trinitarian doctrine, but sometimes uses 'Apostolic' interchangeably, within the context of so-named Caribbean-majority churches.

church's Vimeo account displays videos of a variety of sermons, by its different pastors, in date order; the bible verses quoted are captioned. The Bishop of Greater Faith Ministries in Sydenham has songs on YouTube from an album 'Messiah on My Mind'; his wife – the 'First Lady' – features on the website of an online theological college and community outreach programmes. Hackney Pentecostal Apostolic is listed as 'providing religious services and community activities' on the local council website, and is reviewed extensively in a blog on East End churches³⁴.

Some of this information is useful for gathering a picture of the status of individual churches and how established they are in the community: as an example, the listing of Hackney Pentecostal Apostolic Church on Hackney's website suggests a 'formalising' process has taken place; it has a permanent home – and owns the building – and is accepted officially. The church has been at the same site for decades and has benefitted from some permanency.

Likewise, ARC's Vimeo account sheds light on some of its pastor's comments when he discussed his marketing efforts in our interview; the effect of a marketing team on Google Search can be experienced simply by browsing to check the ARC's web presence. This suggests other things about the church: it does not demand tithes³⁵ from its members, so clearly it must have a large enough membership to financially support its marketing team and other paid roles within the church. In numerical and financial terms, it seems to be bucking the trends and experiencing real growth.

Despite all these examples, a closer look at YouTube videos and Facebook pages of most churches show only a handful of 'likes' and 'follows' – the online presence for many churches exists, but is not necessarily being engaged with. Likewise, a few churches searched for simply do not have any online trace. Finally, some churches, like those listed by Gerloff, are difficult to trace through time due to mergers, breakaways and name changes.

2.3.4 Only half the picture: an elusive Apostolic church

The web presence, while not a good indicator of the physical spaces these churches operate in, tells us to expect contradictions: while some interviewees and academics alike announce the decline of the Oneness movement and the fragmentation of

³⁴ Searches conducted in January 2016

³⁵ Many churches require members to pay a tenth of their wages to the congregation, drawing on Old Testament tradition.

denominations, the very presence of these fragments in far flung communities creates a complex picture.

Some bigger denominations still operate inside a network; other smaller ones have reduced their membership to just a handful of families. Some churches have become more ethnically mixed – including an increase in African and migrant European congregation members – while others have seen an intake of more recent Caribbean migrants. Conversing with nineteen interviewees from different church experiences in different areas of London has not made this picture any clearer; each corner of London and each denomination is facing its separate challenges. It is very difficult to make conclusive arguments about the bigger picture. As will be discussed in the next section, the ethnic makeup of certain areas of London is also another factor to consider. The Home Counties now house a greater number of Black and Black British Caribbean residents than in decades previous; while this project deliberately was limited to London boroughs, there is a case for including the surrounding regions, particularly in Essex and Surrey.

While concluding that the picture is blurry if we move the lens back to focus solely on the capital, it is possible to agree on one point about this overall picture: Pentecostalism as a whole remains, numerically, the fastest growing faith in London, but membership of Caribbean Oneness congregations, overwhelmingly, does not share this growth.

2.4 Case studies: contrasting churches

In this section, we explore in greater detail two seemingly different churches that simultaneously fit within, and challenge the limits of, the labels of ‘Oneness’ and ‘Caribbean’. The first, ARC, would struggle to be officially labelled as either, while the second fits more conventionally into this description. Through this case study, we explore how identities work on a continuum.

2.4.1 ARC, East London

The ARC was founded in Stratford, East London in 1997 with a handful of members by Pastor Peter Nembhard, his family, and another couple. At the time of our interview he was Senior Pastor with four Pastors underneath him – including one woman – and several ministers/ministries. The leadership has since expanded, as have their branches.

Nembhard's background was in Bibleway; he joined their Bethnal Green congregation after converting to Christianity in jail and subsequently witnessing the murder of his friend. The church is independent from Bibleway, though it was founded as an 'Apostolic' church (the acronym ARC – pronounced 'arc' – initially stood for Apostolic Revival Centre). Later, it became 'A Radical Church', losing 'Apostolic' from its name.

Here, Pastor Nembhard explains some of the ideas surrounding the name:

540 ARC is an acronym for A Radical Church. I was asked last night what does that mean? What makes you radical?

547 But in my head I think why we're called a radical church, this is what I always say to people.

555 I don't feel like we want to be put into box, confined and predicted..

600 prescribed as a church..

607 basically not to just copy every other church and do what everyone else is doing and behave like everyone else is behaving etc.

612 so that led us through a lot of transitions in terms of what I was taught
620 as a new believer and as an upcoming minister and what we'd practiced.

629 Most of what I was taught in terms of doctrine, I still hold to

633 I may not hold to it with the same emphasis that it was presented to me in
641 so we baptise people in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ because I can see that's what the scripture teaches

Here, a number of ideas come to the fore. Firstly, the name change has de-emphasised the 'Apostolic' nature of the church, something that become less important. Secondly, the idea of 'the radical' as part of a non-conformist narrative raises more questions about traditions and culture. In our interview, we discussed how 'praise and worship' services structured. Nembhard no longer draws from the traditional American hymnbooks and choruses favoured by his Caribbean predecessors, in a deliberate appeal to reach beyond that ethnic and age demographic. In fact, in a one-sentence descriptor of what the church is on its Vimeo page, the first thing it describes is the ethnic diversity: 'ARC is a multiracial church in Forest Gate, at the heart of East London...'

The church remains in East London, and now has additional branches in Walthamstow and Dagenham (East London) Sydenham (South London), Thurrock (Essex, just on the M25 boundary), and now Birmingham. The main Forest Gate branch

was colloquially known as ‘the young people church’, after a large influx of teenagers following the stabbing of a local girl in the early 2000s, during a particularly violent summer. More recently, many of those new converts – now in their late twenties – have moved out to Essex; some have joined the Thurrock branch. As East London has gentrified, a new English middle-class professional group has joined.

Members have no dress code to adhere to, although Nembhard and most of the leadership team preach in relatively formal dress (suit and shirt, usually no tie). Crucially, the demographic has changed: while it is ethnically diverse, there is still a large black majority and, of this majority, African members outnumber those of Caribbean heritage by a small margin.

The church employs a marketing team and an online team. Both teams ensure the web presence is regularly updated, sermons are available for streaming, algorithms are checked to ensure the church is listed high on search engines. The marketing team also pays flyer distributors; visibility is important to the church as a growing business.

2.4.2 Refuge Temple, Church of Our Lord Jesus Christ of the Apostolic Faith (COOLJC)

By contrast, Refuge Temple is a much older church in Streatham, South London, and maintains affiliations with other churches in the Church of Our Lord Jesus Christ of the Apostolic Faith Group (COOLJC); it is in fact the UK headquarters of the organisation, which has an American leadership and a huge presence in the Caribbean and other territories. Bishop Joseph Dawes is the head of the church.

Like ARC, then, it is part of a chain of churches; unlike ARC, these chains have been long established and have strict hierarchies, from ‘elders’, through to ‘bishops’, via ‘pastors’ and ‘district elders’.

Numbers of attendees have declined slightly but the demographic has remained fairly consistent: a tendency towards more women, and towards the above forty age bracket – but not exclusively – and predominantly Jamaican-born with many second-generation British Jamaicans. This is partly due to recent arrivals from the Caribbean and also some movement between churches.

Refuge has a problem retaining young people in the congregation. The strict dress code has been maintained: women must cover hair in church and are not permitted to wear trousers; jewellery is frowned upon, besides wedding bands.

Like ARC, however, Streatham – and neighbouring Brixton – has seen a lot of local regeneration and gentrification. As the church owns the building, the church itself

has largely been unaffected but the catchment area has widened: some members live much further afield. Though this was not explicitly discussed with informants, this will affect how often members make it to services and events outside of the Sunday services. Hymns are usually from the Pentecostal Hymnal – last revised in 1953, with many hymns written by G. T. Haywood – and ‘choruses’ are raised in church services, some of which arose from American ‘spirituals’, others of unknown origin but popular throughout the Caribbean.

Refuge operates within the COOLJC federation, having regular conventions with sister churches around the country. Although ‘Refuge’ is the most common name for the church, this is not as a way to remove emphasis from the ‘Apostolic’ marker. The organisation COOLJC self-defines as an Apostolic church.

Women are not allowed to be ordained as pastors; instead, respected older (female) brethren can gain the office of ‘missionary’. Missionaries wear white to Sunday services. Bishops wear robes.

2.4.3 Comparing and Contrasting

This brief summary of two very different models for Apostolic practice and belief show opposite ends of the scale: ultimately, both churches baptise in Jesus’ name and both were founded by leaders of Caribbean heritage who underwent theological training at Oneness colleges run largely by American and Caribbean-born leaders, but there are other lenses through which they can be seen. ARC pushes at the boundaries of both ‘Caribbean’ and ‘Apostolic’, while Refuge Temple does not, on either counts. Other churches sit at the boundaries of one or the other categorisation.

Let us first deal with the boundaries of ‘Caribbean’ identity. As suggested through the conversation with Marcus, the idea of a distinct London Caribbean categorisation is a highly contestable one: anyone born in the Caribbean who migrated in the 1950s and 60s would most likely have been born in ‘Britain’; their identity is different to more recent immigrants, born in a post-independence era. Likewise, second- and third- generation Britons have a cultural distinct experience to their parents. If we were to place ‘Caribbean’ churches on a scale of *Caribbeanness*, Refuge Temple ranks at the higher end, with a greater influx of Caribbean-born members and a membership comprising almost exclusively of Black Caribbean people and Black British people of Caribbean heritage. On the other end of the scale, with a British-born pastor of Caribbean parentage and a very mixed demographic – Caribbean/British Caribbean members do not make up the majority – ARC ranks low on the scale. ARC would be hard

pressed calling itself a 'Caribbean' church, anymore than it can an 'African' or an 'English' church – where its headquarters and Essex branches are concerned.

Dress seems to be a big part of church identity, where more rigid limitations on clothing are associated with 'Apostolic' churches. As ARC's Pastor Nembhard moved away from Bibleway, with its more prescribed attitude towards clothing and jewellery – which most Bibleway congregations still hold to – his church became more relaxed in its attitude to outward presentation. Refuge Temple, by contrast, has not followed this model. The visibility of the word 'Apostolic' in the church's names and/or printed doctrine seems to go hand in hand with the also visible dress code for its members, bearing in mind ARC does not label itself an 'Apostolic' church, despite following Oneness baptism and doctrine just as Refuge does.

A sample of each congregation would put ARC and Refuge at opposite ends of a scale, in terms of attire: the *traditional* and the *casual*. But even here, it is not clear-cut. Leaders of both congregations are usually formally dressed; church members are not so much at the ARC but they are at Refuge Temple. Women are not made to cover their heads at ARC, nor are they forbidden from wearing trousers or makeup and neither gender is prohibited from wearing jewellery; the reverse is true for Refuge Temple. And yet, many other church denominations which appear to follow a similar style to one or the other fall in between these. Victor, for example, insists there is no prohibition on jewellery at his church, although members tend to 'fall in line' over time and stop wearing it. Other small *traditional* congregations may now make similar claims, rather than insisting explicitly on outward conformity. Those congregations believe sanctification creates an automatic, gradual outward change. Furthermore, even in truly 'casual' Apostolic congregations, most women of older generations still wear hats to a service and do not wear trousers, in contrast to younger, British born, members.

How church members dress seems to be the clearest way of coding the direction of the church, whether that be cultural preservation, or assimilation to the contemporary British status quo. And it is here that ideas of *Caribbeanness* and *Apostolicness* merge: some Trinitarian Pentecostal churches also follow a similar 'traditional' dress code as Refuge Temple does; it cannot necessarily be used to indicate Apostolic 'holiness'. While, then, attire can still be used to demarcate separateness from the 'world', it equally delineates a cultural space. Dress code could, arguably, be used as a marker to assess a church's *Caribbeanness* even more than explicitly conducting a survey of cultural heritage. Missionaries dressing in white is not so much a signifier of holiness as it is a cultural symbol.

Age and gender also feed into dress code and Caribbean+/Oneness identification. A *traditional* Caribbean church with a predominantly older female congregation in hats and skirts – such as Refuge – will look and thus *feel* different to one with a younger, mostly British-born, more gender-balanced congregation. This feeling has implications in how people choose to identify themselves, despite what the actual doctrine is. It might be useful to propose considering the age and gender makeup of the congregation as an indicator of what the dress code will be (and vice versa); the same cannot be said of examining the church's doctrine to determine the dress code.

It is difficult to disentangle the Caribbean and the Apostolic elements of each church from the wider emerging cultures that surround them – whether Black British, or African/ African Caribbean. Just as the thrust of this study has veered towards exploring issues that shape the cultures of Oneness and the different ways in which an Apostolic identity have been forged through different church lenses, it is also important to pay more attention to where the ethnic cultural blurs lay. The Essex-bound British-born Caribbean members of ARC will, arguably, see their faith and culture through a different lens to the long-time residents and new arrivals to Streatham's Refuge Temple. This in turn affects attire, formality – including 'church' language – and how the members and leaders see themselves, and whether they consciously attach to an 'Apostolic' identity or not.

For this reason, dress as a marker of culture and holiness will be explored in a more in-depth manner. Before then, it is important to examine further some ideas of a shared 'belonging', in a cultural sense. What does it mean to *belong* to a group and what commonalities are expressed in that? Where do the borders of belonging and exclusion lay? Age is one sense that people *belong* to a culture; it could be argued that, as globalisation has become more embedded in popular culture, younger people of different ethnic backgrounds have more in common with each other than with previous generations within the culture or ethnic groupings they identify as theirs. It is, therefore, important to explore what implications this has when participants explore the Apostolic church of the past. How are the boundaries of identity-formation expressed in terms of nostalgia or even regret for the past? Finally, how does this relationship between past and present realities negotiate with the continued demands of group identification? The next three chapters will deal with belonging, on a cultural level, the meaning of attire on a spiritual *and* cultural level, and then the interplay between the past and present narratives.

3. AS YOU INCLUDE SO I MUST EXCLUDE: establishing the (emotional) boundaries for personal narratives.

The following three chapters respond to the overriding question present in both the novel and the research: 'How is it possible to document a heterogeneous movement as part of a creative narrative, and where do the boundaries lay?' Here we shall begin with the latter concept, of *boundaries*, the thresholds of 'truth' and storytelling.

As detailed both in the literature review and the methodology chapter, trying to isolate and identify a fluid group or set of identities and place them within a detailed framework involves *exclusion* as well as inclusion.

Where Caribbean culture is fluid and has evolved via 'London Jamaican' dialects (Sebba, 1993) and inherited culture – both through migration and dislocation – at some point, an American-led church with an increasingly non-Caribbean-born membership ceases to be a Caribbean/*Caribbean+* church by any definition. Where Oneness traditions have evolved – and in congregations that have shied away from advertising as a 'Jesus' Name' tradition church – the Oneness/Apostolic marker also begins to lose its significance. These identities will always be contested and the whole purpose of gathering several diverse narratives is to push at some of the margins of these groups.

Both the above examples focus on organisations but not on individuals; however, here, in this chapter, through looking at how identities are established in the first minutes of an interview, and how new topics are introduced, we will explore how participants themselves include and exclude elements of their identities in order to construct a narrative that fits their idea of 'testimony' and how the spiritual and the cultural interact. The focus here is primarily on migration and how stories of dislocation are used to highlight 'belonging' on an individual and communal level.

3.1 Where to Begin: on specifics and chronology

Naomi's interview was discussed in some detail in the methodology chapter. Despite initial tensions and her requirement for further guidance on how to begin the *testimony*, as she continues, she is particularly precise in how she constructs her narrative:

55 **Naomi:** Oh right. Good, good, good. I was born in Jamaica and I got married in 1958

105 I got saved in 1956 under Bishop Young

113 in Saint Barbara.. I was baptised by him.

124 I got married in 1958 by that same Bishop
133 and I emigrated to England in 1959, 6 October
142 because my husband was already here, I joined him.
148 We were worshipping with Bishop Hamilton in Ackland Road, London
154 and then we left and started the church in Tower Gate and then we came to
this church here [...]

In just one minute of the interview, she covers: her birthplace – the country but not the region; her marriage, in the same sentence as her birthplace, but not her birthdate; her conversion date, including the Bishop who baptised and then later led her marriage ceremony; the region of her baptism; the exact date of her migration to the UK³⁶; the fact her husband had already migrated, but not how long they were apart (presumably less than a year); the location and leader of her church when she migrated; the origins of the church she now leads, and the move to its current location. The amount covered in this small amount of time is remarkable: several decades, migration, changes of the location and her status in the church she attends. It moves from the general ‘born in Jamaica’ to the specific date of migration and the details that fall in between those two on a scale of specificity.

Tell me your testimony is a particular command that invites interpretation and construction of an ordered narrative with a start, middle and end. Naomi chooses to start with her birth but says nothing of her childhood and early adulthood until she is married; she also says nothing of the death of her husband until later. Jamaica is a small part of this early narrative; she quickly moves to her ‘London story’. While much of this is important to *her*, as discussed previously, the interviewer becomes a part of the interviewee’s story: she is narrating to an audience ideas she believes will be of relevance or usefulness while avoiding details that she deems unnecessary, or that she is unwilling to share. Knowing this study was largely concerned with London, many of the omissions – birth date, her experience of Jamaica as a child, her baptism etc. – are unsurprising; what is surprising is the retrieval of the exact date of her migration to London and how this is used to frame the beginning of her testimony.

Marcus, similarly opens up his *testimony* quickly, moving quickly from his birth to the details of his migration:

³⁶ Precise details have been changed to protect Naomi’s anonymity – as have most identifying details of interviewees.

40 **Marcus:** I was actually born in Grenada and came here in 1971. January
 1971 I remember it very well.

53 I came to meet my mum who was already here from, I think, 1964 with the
 usual plan that most West Indians leaving the Caribbean at the time.. they were
 enticed to come because of the promise of work.

115 And everybody thought they would be able to make money and return home
 in 5 years.

126 My mum came up from Grenada to do nursing and she was here, sent for me
 in '71. At that time I was ten, going on eleven.

152 And I remember arriving as a little boy dressed up in a fine suit, because
 that's how we travelled in those days, when you were travelling it was a big, big
 thing.

208 So I had my suit, my bowler hat, my grip, as they called it.. suitcase.. and
 with all my worldly belongings in that suitcase and I remember arriving with (2)
 I don't know how I felt.

230 It was an exciting but very anxious time because I'd never grown up with
 my mum for long.

Like Naomi, Marcus uses his place of birth and date of his migration to London
 as a way of structuring his testimony. Like Naomi, he is specific with dates and ages.
 Naomi also omits to mention how she arrived to London – boat, plane etc – or what/who
 met her when she arrived; Marcus initially omits this but then creates specific
 atmospheric details, the Caribbean meaning of 'grip', the bowler hat, his mixed
 emotional landscape as a 'sent for' child. With his statement, 'the usual plan', Marcus
 positions himself as part of a wider story, a wider pattern of migration to the UK.
 A couple of minutes later, he speaks more on the difficulties of being dislocated from his
 previous life in Grenada:

405 So I left that familiar territory coming up to this country and when the plane
 landed at Gatwick I remember the freezing cold that hit me for the first time. Oh
 my God!

420 That's something I've never got used to. I'm still not used to the cold

430 But as well as the cold it was a complete culture shock for me.

436 I think my system was in lots of emotional disarray, because mum I didn't
 know, she didn't know me as a person [3]

522 So I think I was filled with all sorts of anxieties, real deep-seated anxieties.

533 That was the beginning of what I think was a difficult induction to life in
 England [2]
 552 [2] The expectation from my mum was that I was this little child that she'd
 never known, she didn't know my ways
 614 but I think she expected that straight away we'd have this mother-child
 bond we'd just be able to pick up and it didn't happen that way at all
 628 quite the opposite, so... I don't know how much you want or need any
 elaboration on that?

The audio recording – as well as the content of the words themselves – reveals some of the emotional depth to his response. The lengthy pauses between utterance punctuate the distress he recalls from reencountering his estranged mother in the 'freezing cold' England. Here Marcus demonstrates reflexivity that extends beyond the immediate experience of the interview. Yet at the moment he became the most demonstrably emotional, he again questioned the relevance of his output against what the interviewer *wants* or *needs*.

3.2 The filtered lens: one generation removed

We return to an interview extract that has already been explored, approaching from a different angle. Rachel, a former member and youth leader of an Apostolic church, elaborates on her reflexivity surrounding the word 'testimony'. In doing so, she opens up with her own migration story:

1 **Interviewer:** So, could you tell me your testimony?
 5 **Rachel:** That's really interesting and I don't think I've ever been asked what
 your testimony is. I was thinking about it as you mentioned it on Saturday in our
 brief conversation. I started thinking what is my testimony?
 14 It's a strange one because my parents came to church from the sixties, they
 came from Jamaica. (2) That's what they did, I suppose. Some people went to
 bingo or played dominoes, my parents decided to go to church.. and I was pretty
 much dragged from there.
 36 In actual fact, I'm a bit of a church baby I would say
 39 But my testimony? I think it's literally surviving the whole.. the whole
 experience of being brought up in a church, which was very restrictive, and still
 having faith. That really is my testimony.

Like Naomi, Rachel begins her account with her ethnic background (i.e. Jamaican heritage) and elides much of her childhood. She does not discuss her baptism, nor give any specific details – of time, place, memorable incidents etc. – until prompted later. Like both Marcus and Naomi, however, the migration from the Caribbean to London frames the testimony, albeit her parents' migration, not hers. Once she does start talking about herself, she becomes 'a bit of a church baby'. This declaration resonates with her testimony later on; it is through this lens that all of her experiences can be filtered. Rachel's approach is more summative than we have encountered so far, and she continues in a similar vein:

58 R: but I know loads of people who I went to church with and because it was so restrictive, you couldn't speak to people

110 I actually would describe it as a bit of a cult, and I found it quite damaging.

118 So to come out on the other end and still have faith and believe in God and still even meet some of the people I went to church with.. the elders and senior members of the church and think actually, I still love you

134 and you thought you were doing good.. you did your best, this is what I ended up with.

144 I'm very happy that I've still got faith and that really is my testimony. The bits in between will take forever to go through but, to have survived it, while some of my peers, you don't even mention God to them, they're atheist really,

Here is a narrative of *people*: the 'loads of people' Rachel grew up and attended church with; the outsider people whom 'you couldn't speak to'; the senior church members. By creating a *people* narrative, she is able to pass judgment on the institution – 'damaging' and 'a bit of a cult' – and 'overcome' it, separate from those who operate within the institution, including those who, presumably, set the rules, whom she is still able to meet and love. This sectioning off also allows absolution of one group, while moving into another group, and distances her from peers who have crossed over another boundary into atheism.

200 I have a healthy view of God and of faith. I think it's a day-to-day struggle

216 I'm kind of happy in that I feel I'm an evolving person and finding new parts of faith.

226 The testimony is I haven't given up on faith, despite some of the damaging experiences I've had.

240 But I'm still journeying and still interested in having faith in God

250 I guess that's my testimony. Whether that's succinct or not, it's difficult. Do you want to ask other questions around that?

The idea of a testimony is one that evokes overcoming and maintaining faith. Although in some ways, Rachel's is an anti-testimony – she uses the template to discuss how her inherited faith caused damage to her wellbeing and how she subsequently overcame it – it does follow a narrative arc of triumph over adversity. While it conjures up a personal survival narrative, it also speaks to collective hurt ('some of my peers, you don't even mention God to them'). Like Marcus, Rachel places herself within a tradition of people whose journey follows a set pattern; what she highlights as remarkable is the fact she maintains her faith, unlike them, and she returns to this as her 'testimony' – a word which appears eight times in three minutes. This frequency punctuates her points about her upbringing and also returns us to a tightly-wound theme; Rachel is careful to construct a narrative that fits inside the limits she has created for herself.

3.3 Hardships excluded: narrating a happy childhood

In contrast to all the narratives so far, Ian – who also leads his *testimony* with an overview of his upbringing and uprooting from the Caribbean – allows himself to build an atmospheric picture of his birth town and religious upbringing and says little of cultural displacement or the difficulties of migration. He himself sets the boundaries of 'testimony' before going into his narrative. Once in London, however, the nature of the details changes:

5 Well, I'll tell you my testimony in connection to church because whenever I hear the word testimony, church springs to mind.

13 I guess we'd probably need to start from Jamaica and, for as long as I can remember, in terms of the community, I've always been around some church community or another.

31 My earliest recollection is around visiting the Baptist church.. my parents used to go there.. about a mile walk from where we used to live in Jamaica.

45 Nothing in particular happened there; I just remember some of the old hymns and watching some of the swallows flying around the big church and trying not to fall asleep in the hot sun.. That's basically it @@

101 Without knowing the details at the time, I recall going to a different church, which is more vibrant. My parents started going to the Pentecostal church.. a place my mum always talks about.. Faith Hall. Some of the grandchildren think she's talking about a person, but it's a place.

130 It was a small place. I remember the singing was much more vibrant and the exciting times people had there. I have fond memories from that.. night service, when we couldn't go, because we were too young.

151 I remember being able to stay on the verandah and hear them singing, even though it was three quarters of a mile or so away and we'd hear the choruses and one of my favourite ones was Won't It Be a Time When We Get Over Yonder?

212 We almost used to be able to join them from the verandah because you could hear the singing and the tambourines playing. That's one of my earliest recollections, going as a little kid with my parents and just watching.

228 but I think in that we were brought up around church, church people, that was our community, outside home and school.

In the final line of this excerpt, Ian defines what is 'community' to him. Beyond his home and school, his identity and his sense of belonging revolved around church and 'church people'. He has always 'been around some church community or another'. Like 'church baby' Rachel, this is an identity that has been with him from a young age; unlike her, he moves from worshipping at a Baptist church first.

After defining the terms of his testimony, he launches into the narrative. More mundane details of distance feature ('about a mile', 'three quarters of a mile'), as does his negative reaction to the Baptist church but, even in this, he ventures into a visual description of 'swallows flying around the big church'. When recounting his experiences of both Faith Hall and the unnamed church, he is generous with adjectives: 'old', 'big', 'hot', 'vibrant', 'exciting'. His description of the verandah includes the memory of a song. In contrast, as he launches into his experience of church life in London – and unlike Marcus, details of his migration to England do not feature in this narrative – the language is more factual.

237 When I came to this country, again it was our church... the church we used to go to Sunday School was in New Cross Gate. We lived in Lewisham and the church van used to pick us up to take us to Elder Nicholson's church

300 Our parents didn't go there initially. They used to go to somewhere in Brixton but, because there were eight of us as children, getting to that place was tricky at the time.

318 Because Elder Nicholson used to pick us up in the van, that was that.

325 As a child, I was going to Sunday School not really thinking about what it's all about, going through the motions and enjoying the singing and learning the verses.

337 Eventually, at about twelve, one year we went to convention in Streatham, I think, Bishop Seaton's church

354 and my brothers Noah and Leroy decided they were going to get baptised and that's the first time I thought ah, so maybe I need to start thinking about this.

410 I guess I was probably pragmatic at the time. I didn't like all the attention, and it was almost inevitable, I never imagined a life outside the church and knew it was going to happen at some stage.

428 I thought, if they're getting baptised now and I don't then I'll be on my own and all the attention will be on me so I might as well get baptised with them.

438 Somehow, the message had gone through to me that as a Christian you need to be saved and, in order to be saved, you have to be baptised.

448 I don't remember anyone sitting down and telling me this but I guess if you're going it's going to happen. And that was that. I got baptised around eleven. And I thought, that's it, on my way to heaven, without realising the depth of it all and what needed to happen.

In this account of the churches in London, Ian mentions the churches he and his parents attended, including those he visited for convention. Ian conveys positive feelings about the experience, 'enjoying the singing and learning the verses', while avoiding any descriptive language about the churches themselves, whether this involves adjectives of size (big/small), worship (vibrant etc.) or even details about the leaders, apart from their names. He also gives little detail about his baptism, despite an extensive description of the thought processes around it.

A likely explanation lays in the relationship between the interviewee and their expectations of the interviewer. Ian's Jamaican experience in the late 1950s is a world he knows the interviewer is unaware of; by contrast, as he lists the churches – notably,

at this stage of the interview, he recalls them by their leaders as opposed to their names – and areas in which they are to be found, Ian assumes the interviewer is able to conjure their details. Like Naomi, who invokes the researcher’s mother as co-experiencer, Ian – perhaps unconsciously – minimises the atmospheric detail of his London church and baptism, in a show of assumed familiarity. Thus, while not directly acknowledging the interviewer as co-narrator, Ian demonstrates his awareness of mediating information through the lens of the listener.

Let us return to the last sentence of this extract and the implications within it: ‘And I thought, that’s it, on my way to heaven, without realising the depth of it all and what needed to happen’. While Ian pitches his younger self as a naïve character who baptises out of ‘pragmatism’ rather than a deep awareness of his spirituality, what he is actually narrating is what he outlines at the outset: a strong connection to a communal identity. He rejects the isolation that would occur if he were to remain unbaptised; his relationship to his brothers creates his sense of belonging and community. This community remains unbroken; he has continued to be a member, and now Pastor, of an Apostolic church.

Perhaps the dislocation that others have expressed upon migrating to London is absent in this narrative because Ian’s compass point is located in the community of church and family. Outside of this territory, he is not silent because he did not face any difficulties – stories of disliking the cold and encountering racism abound in almost any account of mid-twentieth century migration from the West Indies – but because its importance is minimised in the face of his relationship to this ‘community’. Thus, it could be argued he excludes any ‘hardship’ narratives at this moment to focus on his deepening relationship to his faith. Or, conversely, it could be argued that the very repression of his language – as highlighted through the absence of adjectives upon arrival to London – represents a shutting down of experience, a shift from a multi-sensory childhood to a monotone arrival in London where, in order not to feel excluded, he is baptised.

3.4 ‘I just want to give you the highlights’: selecting key moments for a narrative

Recounting a life history necessitates selecting some information while minimising other details. Extracts of two further interviews will show different ways in which respondents have undergone this sifting process.

Fredrick, a pastor from a West London church, while beginning with his birthplace and migration story – as some other interviewees have done – frames his

testimony very deliberately. Like Marcus and Naomi, the date of his migration to London appears almost at the outset:

10 First of all, my name is Bishop Fredrick Davidson. I'm from the island of Grenada, in the West Indies

18 I arrived here in England on 18 October 1960 at a young age; I was a very aspiring young man.

33 I had a vision in life and when I came to England I saw the vision begin to unfold before me.

44 That vision was based on high heights, knowing who and what is God.

55 I was employed by The Co-op for thirty seven and a half years and I've had numerous interesting jobs.

In Fredrick's *testimony*, 'first of all' becomes the launch pad for any new series of ideas: Fredrick's birthplace and migration to England; his introduction to Christianity and then to the Apostolic faith; his educational and vocational achievements. He continues in this vein for the first three minutes:

110 First of all, I went to the technical college to do carpentry where I met a Welsh brother who was a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. He invited me down to his home in Surrey and that's where I first heard the gospel preached.

134 I was introduced to the Lord Jesus Christ and gave my life.

141 that was in 1962.

146 from thereon, I met my wife (2).

155 She came to live on the same premises where I lived with a friend.

204 She introduced me and my sister to church.

210 The first time I went to that church and heard the gospel preached and why I must get baptised in Jesus Name.

222 It's a long story but I just want to give you the highlights of my salvation, my belief and faith

234 In the early sixties I got baptised and was filled with the Holy Spirit

241 I've done a number of academic ministries

249 First of all, I attended the Apostolic Faith Institute where I did theology

259 I also did I.T.

306 I taught in the Selah Technology Institute on theology for 3 years

315 I also did Sound Engineering and making music. I also did assembling of computers. I also took keyboard and piano lessons
340 I now play keyboard and guitar
348 The most important thing about all this is accepting the Lord Jesus Christ as my personal indwelling saviour [...]

The specifying of his date of arrival in the UK and the thirty seven and a half years of his job contrasts neatly with his framing statement: 'I just want to give you the highlights...' In many ways, it is structured like a professional resumé. What he highlights and what he excludes not only shows us the structure of his narrative, but how he chooses to play out his identity/ies and where he sees himself as 'inside' and 'outside' a communal one.

The specified date of migration contrasts with the unspecified vision, 'based on' high heights. His time working at the Co-op – to the nearest 0.5 years, contrasts with the 'numerous interesting jobs'. Finally, there is more detail in the Welsh brother who invites him to his home in Surrey after meeting at a carpentry course; the next utterances are all in the passive tense: 'I first heard the gospel preached'; 'I was introduced to the Lord Jesus Christ'. After recounting meeting his wife and being introduced church 'and why I must get baptised in Jesus' name', he reaches the climax of his narrative which then spreads out into his 'highlights', from spiritual landmarks to academic ones and then back to the spiritual.

Fredrick is the only interviewee so far who frames his identity explicitly in terms of being a Jesus' name believer; by launching and surrounding this narrative with other 'highlights' he also pitches himself as the 'rounded' protagonist in his story.

3.5 'The year that everything changed'

Robert narrates his testimony more conventionally, delivering an arc that starts with his pre-religious experience, his conversion and then the journey into pastorship. He leaves out his childhood entirely and begins with the story of his conversion to Christianity:

5 My name's Robert Patterson.
13 I got saved in 1986. My conversion started in prison. I was serving a three and a half year sentence because I was a bad boy, between ages of thirteen and seventeen. I got saved at nineteen. When I was thirteen, I was in detention centre and when I was sixteen, I got sent to prison

40 and while I was there the chaplain, Edward Jones, began to challenge me with the Gospel and the love of God. From that, I began to read the bible and pray and recognise the importance of God in my life

59 and when I came out I said God if I get parole I promise you I'll go church.

110 and I came out of prison and tried to find a church but just couldn't.

Like Rachel's, Robert's is the narrative of the *Caribbean+* second generation. In the early stages of his account, however – unlike all the testimonies up until now – this could also be the experience of any British narrator, with no reference to his parentage or the culture around him nor on his level of churching. As he frames his testimony in terms of his personal identity, he is simply a *bad boy*. Also, his exposure to the Gospel in this account is via an institutional chaplain, rather than other inmates, an outside group, or through any connection to Caribbean Pentecostalism that he has specified.

Robert does not elaborate here on his early exposure to Christianity before his period in jail; when he does later, following questions on this, we realise that he was indeed raised within one of many Caribbean Christian traditions. He also does not dwell on the situations that led him to jail; he does, however, recount the tragic incident that finally solidifies his conversion:

114 I couldn't settle in any church so I started to slip back into my old ways until one day went into a party and these guys from Tottenham that we used to have rivalry with (2) bounced me. I turned around to fight and someone said Robert, leave it!

130 Because of the influence of God in my life I was a bit calmer by then and I walked away.

139 Ten minutes later they did the same thing to my best friend Nathanael. He responded and they stabbed him five times in his heart.

145 And he died in my arms and that was my turning point, my final straw, and I knew I just had to go somewhere and give my life to God and that's what I was saying when Nathanael died.. give my life to God.

200 The fortunate thing is I didn't need to go anywhere. A little old lady invited me to a church in Stoke Newington, I was living in Hackney. I went along and it was a Pentecostal Church pastored by Pastor Nelson and I was a nineteen year old and when I arrived that was it, I was like I've found it.

226 I got baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, I got filled with the Holy Ghost. That was in 1986.

238 That year everything changed for me. I got my first ever job in my life,
passed my driving test that year, went to bible school, met my wife. I mean that
was the year that everything changed.

255 But the important thing that happened is God put me in a solid church with
a solid pastor, who nurtured me, fathered me, mentored me. That was my
beginning.

Robert's *testimony* is a 'turnaround narrative', with its own drive that transcends the 'cultural' elements already discussed; he also avoids discussion of the doctrinal drive: why did he choose the Apostolic church over the church denomination of the prison chaplain, other than for the 'little old lady'? Here, in this narrative of inclusion/exclusion, the chaplain and the old lady both act as plot devices in the path to his ultimate goal: baptism and filling with the Holy Ghost.

The final point of particular note in this episode is his bookending of 'the year that everything changed': the milestones within it this range from meeting his wife to passing his driving test; like Fredrick's CV listing, among the four things mentioned are personal achievements as well as 'academic' ones. At the end of the more physical changes comes the conclusion to his narrative: a 'solid' church and a 'solid' pastor. Here, he does not identify specifically what this solidity means, whether on a doctrinal, pastoral or other level.

By ending this portion of his testimony – at just three minutes – with 'that was my beginning', he neatly sums up the first chapter of his spiritual journey.

3.6 The Oneness narrative within the cultural one

We shall end this chapter with a more guided testimony. Noelle was one of the last interviewees to be approached about the research project and asked for in-depth detail. Perhaps this is why her testimony was much more centred on the meaning of Jesus' name baptism:

12 I've been a Christian for most of my life

21 but I was baptised in Father, Son and Holy Spirit when I was a child, because
my mother was baptised in Jesus' name but what she believed in was that we
should all come to the knowledge of Christ for ourselves

46 but what she wanted us to do was be churchd..

51 so some of us, anyway.. I come from a very large family.. and I was ill when I
 was a child and because of that she spoiled me
 115 and there was this evangelical church, a great big church with lots of young
 people and youth which was good
 120 and they'd come round and ask if my mum had any children that wanted to
 come
 124 and she told us to go.. well, I took up the challenge to, and one of my sisters
 went with me.
 135 And I really enjoyed going, it was lovely. And they asked if you wanted to get
 baptised and give our hearts to the Lord and I did
 142 and they went to my mum, and said they should sit and have a bible study
 about me and the Christian path
 152 and I told them yes I want to be baptised and she told me that wasn't the
 right way to be baptised but I'm going to walk in the truth someday
 202 so if that will make me stay and go to church, yes I can get baptised and so I
 did.
 213 I thought she wasn't going to come to the baptism 'cause she's a Pentecostal
 who believes in baptism in Jesus' Name, but she did and I was really pleased.
 225 So coming from a Christian home we always had to read the bible, pray and
 all that, so I'm coming from a Christian background
 239 but then my parents, my dad came to England and my mother a few years
 later
 252 and I joined my parents some years later, I don't think I need to say the
 years..

In the *testimonies* detailed, we have seen some of the challenges that arose from
 my loosely-structured questioning, but we have also seen ways in which the participants
 have subverted the idea of testimonies and how this has allowed them to speak more of
 personal identity and belonging to different groups.

Noelle's testimony is of interest here in that she explicitly begins with her
 baptism and the difference between her and her parents' doctrine; her testimony
 involves realigning with their doctrinal stance as she discovers it for herself once in
 London. Like Ian, her family 'community' was a Christian one, not necessarily identified
 with Oneness at the outset; unlike Ian, her sense of belonging to a church is not
 dependent on her siblings. In this account, she has full agency of her beliefs, going
 against her parents' stance to get baptised in a Trinitarian tradition. The final sentence

shows an awareness of audience: 'I don't think I need to say the years', a reminder of her boundaries with the interviewer.

It is interesting to contrast Noelle's experience with Naomi's: later in Naomi's testimony, she recalls being disowned and thrown out by her parents as a teenager for abandoning their Baptist doctrine in order to be baptised in Jesus' name. Yet, at the start, Naomi frames her identity not in that strong adherence to Oneness beliefs but in her experience migrating to London from Jamaica. Conversely, Noelle glosses over her Jamaican upbringing, bringing the lens into close focus and talking about her relationship to church on a doctrinal level (first got baptised in the Trinitarian tradition).

Noelle describes the evangelical church and that it was 'lovely', although she does not explain why, save that it is 'big' and had 'lots of young people' which was 'good'. Her sense of belonging, then, settles on the youth focus of this church. Her parents' ethos and the size of her family is also featured in this account, but she does not, at this point in the beginning of her story, go into details about where and how she grew up. We only find out later she is talking about Jamaica. Like Ian, her story of migration is also devoid of any emotive language; she joined her parents, who migrated at intervals to London but little is said of her choice or feelings about this matter.

Much more could be unpicked about how 'belonging' is explored in this account – and how it is avoided. The family is split up – presumably over a number of years – and she goes against her mother's wishes, choosing to belong to an evangelical church, which she leaves when she migrates to London.

Upheaval was an anticipated theme in all these interviews, but each participants' treatment of this has shed light on interviewer-interviewee relations. While in the case of Rachel, for example, her sense of upheaval is located more generally in the repressive nature of her upbringing and the particular church she was a member of, other sources have included the dislocation of place and family – as in the case of Marcus, Ian and Noelle – and the more specific, incident-focused tragedy of witnessing a friend's murder, as in the case of Robert. Ian and Noelle's accounts are more enigmatic in that as much can be gathered from what is said as what is unsaid. In all of these accounts, awareness of the interview situation and of me, as interviewer, has had bearing in how these are presented and what can be gathered about belonging in light of this.

Finally, all of these introductions – the opening frames of these interview narratives – speak to the construction of story and identity and how they inter-relate. Some interviewees strongly expressed a cultural identity (e.g. 'proud Grenadian' Marcus, who still cannot tolerate England's cold), others an identity based on 'church culture'

(e.g. Rachel, the 'church baby'), and all demonstrated a careful consideration of belonging, which involves inclusion within and without a community.

4. Run faster and they'll have less time to see it: Dress as an indicator of holiness, culture and respectability

The most visible manifestations of separateness from 'the world' – i.e. spiritual distinction from outsiders – are constructed through customs and rituals surrounding dress, diet, speech and work/social spaces. Additionally, clothes convey cultural ideas, which shift in meaning according to context. Studies from Gerloff (1993) through to French (2014) assert that Oneness Pentecostals tend towards stricter codes of conduct, but here we see another blurring of boundaries between the spiritual and the cultural arena.

While the previous chapter deconstructed narratives around cultural belonging and community, this chapter builds on this identity-forming process, going beyond community allegiances into embodied traditions. Many of the participants are certainly embedded within London and Caribbean cultures – as already seen – but the narratives presented below suggest how religious practice may take physical shape. Again, the distinction between spiritual impulse and cultural rules are blurred.

Using themes of gender, modesty and respectability, it is possible to re-interpret the significance of attire and its relationship to holiness. Clothing represents a material embodiment of 'belonging' to God: when Foucault talks of social control being 'inscribed on the body' (Foucault, 1991) he does this through biblical allusion (see Jeremiah 33:31); the idea of writing the law upon the body has a solid historical and cultural background which some of the participants demonstrate an implicit awareness of.

4.1 'A contrast to the hardness at home'

Marcus is the leader of a fairly large congregation with an overwhelming Caribbean/*Caribbean+* majority in a densely Black Caribbean-populated suburb. The youth membership is growing, although there is a gap in the late twenties/early thirties demographic; there are a large number of families with children and older members of the congregation who migrated in the 1960s/70s.

Marcus describes the restrictions of his church growing up; his willingness to conform, instead of being described simply in terms of limitations, turns the prohibitions into freedoms. Because he follows the rules, he finds favour within the church; because of this favour, he is able to find freedom from the repressive atmosphere in his home environment or its 'hardness' (his family did not attend the church):

4514 also from your parents' day... churches those days were strict. I mean it was all about what you could and couldn't wear

4524 You couldn't wear jewellery. As a woman, you couldn't wear makeup and so on, things that these days.. I definitely don't agree with.. those type of rules.. but in those days it was strict, strict, strictness.

4545 As a young man, you couldn't have girlfriends,

4554 You weren't allowed to go to the cinema. No parties. Church life was strict..

4606 Sanctification was the name of the game. In those days, if you went to church and your heart wasn't right you were scared..

4615 because somebody would get a revelation and they would come and tell you exactly what.. you did and so on... And this was people who don't.. know, you understand?.. That's how the Lord operated in the church..

In a minute's speech – which would seem to be a mere list of don'ts to the casual reader – we gain insight into the 'dressed for holiness' narrative. Clothing is the most emphasised part, and the gateway to other restrictions: girlfriends; cinemas; parties. He then juxtaposes this form of sanctification (external, visible) with an internal holiness where one's 'heart' is or isn't *right*. And having a heart that wasn't right during church services instigated 'revelations' from the Lord to church members who would then reveal the sin.

His statement, 'that's how the Lord operated in the church' is striking: on the one hand it suggests a distancing, a resignation, a deferral to the process of days past; on the other, this distancing of himself and deferral to the Lord 'operating' in that way absolves the actors – i.e. those who *receive* the revelations – and the church leaders and members of the congregation who are complicit in those actions, from any negative consequences.

Yet, Marcus reframes this as a positive circumstance for *him*:

4630 So as young people we had that fear of God and fear of being found out

4635 So I went out of my way not to do anything that would cause any disgrace

4649 So.. I guess as a young person, I became one of the favourites in church and that was nice. It was different. It was a contrast to.. the..

4703 the hardness at home.

By towing the line where other young people resisted, Marcus thrived. Yet, he laments the strictness of the past and emphasise his current stance on clothing restrictions at church:

B300 and the attitude of our church.. the attitude of our church is different. I have tried to go completely away from.. some of these old rules rules rules rules. Dresscodes have to be..

319 instead of telling women they can't do this and they can't do that, let's tell them what they can do let's take away all these..

330 Let people enjoy church and let them not come feeling they're going to be judged for every single thing. Let's create an atmosphere of growth.

347 So.. yeah, we believe in holiness, we believe in righteous living, but we don't want these.. we don't want to shackle people to just being an object that's bossed around.

His use of 'women' acknowledges focus on policing women more than men. The gendered emphasis on clothing also speaks to Austin-Broos (Austin-Broos, 1987; Austin-Broos et al., 1997) when she explores the particular draw of women to the Pentecostal church. While authority is overwhelmingly male, its subjects – and those most policed – are predominantly female. In part, this is a power narrative; in another way, it also speaks to a reclaiming of some of that power by the 'atmosphere of growth'. A twenty-first century congregation will not grow if the restrictions of the past continue.

Later Marcus returns to the subject of clothing:

B645 That can be a very big criticism of Pentecostal churches. We tended to be inward-focused. It was always.. so we're trying to reverse some of that.

7 We've got a global action team that looks out, if there's a disaster or so on, we raises funds to contribute towards those sorts of things.

717 We don't have these old dress codes rule; no makeup or jewellery; no ..

728 I'm so cheesed off by all these past things that.. I'm definitely trying for it not to shackle.. our people now.

By contrasting the global action team – and earlier he described the local and national work he encourages church members to get involved in – with 'dress codes', he sets up the opposition of the 'outward' versus the 'inward'.

4.2 Sexuality, gender conformity and a trousered existence

Unlike Marcus' experience, in this sequence, we see how clothing can engender individual identity rather than a communal one. Pat begins an early part of her³⁷ *testimony* by discussing the relationship between gender, her (homo)sexuality and the church traditions; here, 'belonging' to her church community requires falling in line with a gendered dress code. But when she questions the biblical basis and is dissatisfied with the answer, it gradually causes her to fall away:

246 **Pat:** so I started questioning my sexuality and.. had a few weird
conversations with my dad, not with regards to me but just general rules in the
church and.. why certain things were in place and..
259 I remember one of his responses to me and the women in trousers thing is if
you read your bible more you would know, which I didn't find very helpful
{laughs}
310 So I started to question how much he actually knew and understood with
regards to what the bible said about certain things..
320 So yeah I stopped going to church quite as regularly because it was no
longer of massive importance. It was still important because it was all I'd known
for my whole life
335 but... the need to make money suddenly became more important, like if
there was a shift coming up on a Sunday or whatever, I'd take it why so I could
make money so yeah.. @yeah@
350 I stopped going at about nineteen, twenty and started experimenting with
trousers {laughs}
400 I started experimenting with trousers and had some friends who kind of..
took me under their wings, so to speak, and tried to make me more feminine, so
there was like a period of tight jeans and off-the-shoulder tops and up hairdos
@and whatever@

Several things could be unpacked in what is little over a minute of speech. Firstly, Pat introduces 'questioning her sexuality' (she later self-identifies as a lesbian) as a factor in what made her question 'general rules' in the church. Then she cites the tradition in her

³⁷ Pat identifies as non-binary and uses the gender-neutral pronoun *they*, rather than *she*. At the time of study, they identified as female, albeit masculine-presenting. I have decided to use the original *she*, faithful to how they identified during the study.

church of women not being able to wear trousers as the first and only example of these 'general rules'. The 'trouser issue' becomes a marker for all of the prohibitions and limitations placed on her as a (female) church member. Over the course of the interview, she explains in greater detail her back-and-forth relationship to her church but, here, in this narrative it is reduced to this symbolic single item of clothing.

According to this 'trouser narrative', not feeling sufficiently satisfied with her father's views on this issue shifted her priorities towards money making, which gradually halted her church attendance.

Finally, she foregrounds a more detailed discussion on her difficulties with gender conformity when she discusses being 'taking under the wing' of her friends – outside of church – who 'tried to make her more feminine' by wearing tight jeans. Here, she elides what is detailed later: the church had forbidden make up and jewellery for women, and trousers were seen as 'male apparel'; outside her church environment, wearing make up and jewellery and (tight) trousers were what constituted femininity. In this way, we see how for both groups – her religious and secular circles – 'belonging' involves adhering to clothing norms.

She attempts to explain the doctrinal background later in the interview:

1640 There's a scripture in the bible and I can't remember where it is but it speaks about women wearing men's apparel

1649 and.. my church, several churches, interpreted it as women shouldn't wear trousers because it's seen as manly apparel

1658 My research, accurate or otherwise, has taken me to a point where..

1705 my understanding is that term man's apparel came from women dressing in certain cloths and colours as a way of getting into the men's portion of the synagogue..

1720 but.. you know.. worship isn't divided like that anymore, so.. @makes@ no bloody difference

Pat lists some of the clothing restrictions imposed on her congregation before suggesting a gendered bias:

1725 That's my take on it, but they're against trousers and jewellery, you're only allowed to wear your wedding band..

1735 they're against piercings, against tattoos.. skirts above the knees,

1744 clothes that cling to the body.. not covering your hair..

1751 Yeah man, there's loads of rules for women, very few for men @@@ Loads of rules for women.

Towards the end of the interview, Pat justifies this from a cultural stance:

4848 ..[I]n Jamaica they're less Westernised, so to speak? So the whole cultura- women not wearing trousers, no makeup, no jewellery. They're coming from a church like that in Jamaica over to the UK, they're looking for a church like my dad's when they come to the UK, so his is like a niche market

Pat proposes theories for strict codes of dress: lack of 'Westernisation', blindly-handed down tradition, poor education etc.; in some ways, her hypotheses mirror those of anthropologist of the 1960s first encountering these churches, suggesting an alienation between an older Jamaican past and a 'born here' youth:

4945 I think.. those of us that were born here.. probably don't get.. no we don't, we don't get why they're so strict on all these things that we think is just foolishness...

5000 And I think again that stems from.. maybe educational hindrances in-in places like Jamaica and the West Indies or whatever, where people were told things because they weren't able to read so much.

5018 Over the generations, it's been passed down, that's what we do that's what we do,

5024 and over time we've found justification for that in scripture rather than reading it.. and figuring out what it means for ourselves.

Rather than a symbol of holiness, clothing becomes a symbol of cultural traditions. But those conditions become steeped in not being 'able to read so much'; the scriptural justifications become a convenient way to embed these traditions.

Pat's past offers much in the way of compelling visual detail and story, and here we return to the theme of gender as an individual – rather than a communal – identity emerges:

1815 when I was younger I wanted to wear trousers because it made sense. I played with boys. We were running up and down the road, we were play fighting, we were wrestling..

1824 jumping over walls, playing football. Wearing a skirt wasn't always
@sensible@

1833 I felt like I was constantly exposing myself, you know what I mean? I
always wanted to wear trousers.

1839 I remember one year saying to my mum, can I wear tracksuit bottoms for
sports day. She was like why?

1849 I said because when I'm running the wind blows my skirt and I don't want
@people to see my@ <whispering>knickers<whispering>. She said well just
run faster and they'll have less time to see it. I mean, what! @@@

1905 Yeah, that's how it was. That's literally how it was. You could not wear
trousers. It doesn't happen.

Again, this incident hides several features within the frame of a mother-daughter interaction. The story is foregrounded with an exploration of her character: playing with boys at different activities; not feeling her clothing was 'sensible' at the time. The climax to this lays in the sports day encounter. Her laughter and whispered 'knickers' suggests a continued embarrassment at this episode. The lesson she learns at the time also resonates to her experiences after leaving church when she is again guided by friends on her dress. In both episodes, other women suggest that their ideas of femininity take precedence over Pat's ideas of modesty.

Pat continues, describing her early trousered experiments under the guidance of a friend from outside of church:

1936 She let me wear her jeans couple of times. They were like fitted jeans, so I wore them because I didn't know any better.

1948 I went down that whole trying to be girly route, realised I didn't actually like the male attention, I was like oh please, piss off!

She continues for a while on the theme of gender, describing the pleasure of shopping for her brother as a child and returning to this pleasure as an adult:

20222 So it feels like I'm being honest, because that's what I was doing before society told me that I should be wearing stuff that cupped my bosom and accentuated my re=ar @@

What started off as a discussion of group identity and conformity, ordered through biblical teaching evolves into an exploration of individual identity and gender exploration. What connects Pat to Marcus is their unravelling of the idea that holiness requires strict dress codes and their renegotiation of clothing with regard to identities – both on an individual and a group level.

4.3 He's Royal: Richard, Robert and Victor on *smart* worship

So far, *presentational* narratives have touched on sanctification and cultural uniformity but, in this section, we will discuss *respectability* where, instead of spiritual or biblical grounding, justification of attire converges around one earthly figurehead: the Queen.

Three male church leaders with different, somewhat conflicting, ideas and attitudes to clothing all converge on this one analogy. Here, awareness of postcolonial discourse and of – the already mentioned – gendered weighting come more into the fore, yet the focus of the conversations provides multiple narratives.

Victor's 'Queen speech' holds several ideas, and the monarch becomes a springboard for all of them with regard to dress code within his church context. It must be noted that during the interview, he is dressed in a loose t-shirt and tracksuit bottoms:

2940 **Victor:** As you see, I'm very casual.

2945 I'm not really a clothes person; however, I recognise that it rocks a lot of people's worlds, therefore

2954 depending on what I'm doing, I'll dress appropriately

2956 If I was going to go and see the queen, I wouldn't go dressed like this because it wouldn't be appropriate.

30 Therefore if I can't go see the Queen dressed like this, how much more King Jesus?

3011 If I can give her honour and she's just an earthly monarch, so I'll give the Lord much more honour.

The Queen becomes the object of honour, as does 'King Jesus'. The implication, then, is that the church building – at least on days when services take place – holds symbolic value as the 'house' of King Jesus.

Up until this point, talk of clothing restrictions focused exclusively on women. Victor offers an alternative narrative, after he expands on how he dresses: first, to suit the occasion but also to suit the expectations of other people for him to be well

groomed. Once he starts discussing male presentation, he frames it in a 'soft' pressure way:

3044 I'm considerate that not everybody has a shirt or tie to put on, and not everyone likes to. But I'd like to teach the men that you have to dress appropriately

31 if you go to work there's a dress code, and when you come to the House of God, there's a dress code

3114 if you have the clothes, do it. If you don't, take your time

3116 when you're ready and when you're there, you'll change

3120 I don't enforce on everybody that you have to dress a certain way but, at the same time, I'm not lax about it

The 'take your time' narrative, of gentle coaxing towards a *respectable* outcome, suggests social pressure. Whilst 'shirt and tie' expectations for men feature within his dress code, he frames female attire under softer terms still:

3315 let's start with jewellery. It's important to me. We need to understand that jewellery is nothing. It's simply a reflection of where people are at the time.

3330 I can go without it. I don't really have or wear jewellery. That's because, as you get more detached from the world, you don't see the necessity for those things any more.

3345 some people are living very close to the world and they want to adorn themselves

3350 I've seen some beautiful women and their shine comes from the inside.

34 These old Pentecostal sisters, that they look so young and sprightly, and the reason is because of their prayer life and their heart; the shine comes from externally.

At last, the conversation has moved on from invoking respectability for 'King Jesus' into an inclusion/exclusion narrative that focuses on holiness. The holy woman shines from the inside as the 'glow' of spirituality emanates from them; this removes any desire or necessity for makeup. The 'holy' convert ceases to find room for 'adornment' and thus naturally removes them; in fact, they get smaller as the holiness progresses:

3449 **Victor** In terms of jewellery, I say you can have it, no problem. When you get to the stage where you don't need them anymore, take it off, but in the meanwhile...

3458 sometimes when a woman comes into church, she'll have big big earrings, and over time, they'll shrink.

3505 and then finally they stay small or they go. That means, I'm holding on to a bit of me... and others say I don't need it any more

3515 can you wear it? You have the liberty. Should you? Not really.

3525 the scripture says you should get rid of it but if you don't want to nobody's going to fight you for it

3528 hold onto it until you're ready. It's not a big issue

Robert also invites the queen into the conversation. He explains that he chooses not to wear a tie unless blessing a baby, but hasn't gone as far as wearing trainers and jeans. Like Victor, he mentions the expectations of his congregation. Unlike any of the other interviewees so far, he mentions being black and dealing with a 'young crowd':

1.0035 want to wear a nice suit, a nice trendy shirt. I think presentation is important for black people. I think they do judge me on my presentation. At the same time they want you to look a little trendy as well. Especially if you're dealing with a young crowd.

Here, as with Pat, Robert is conscious on cultural pressures that would necessitate a different standard than he might otherwise employ: 'black people... judge me on my presentation'. By implication, his involvement in a black community as a church leader means he must continue to be smart.

After then stating that *Christians* should dress smartly – with no reference to race or ethnicity – he speaks about his congregation:

2.20 Everyone dresses differently.

230 I think occasionally some of them are a bit immodest but that's not the standard. The standard is fairly modest.. I'm talking girls and guys.

2.40 And most people are smart

250 Pastor Henry is always suited and neat. We all try. It's not a forced thing though. We don't say to people you must dress like this, wear this, put on a tie.

320 I have a friend who's in a church where he can't not wear a tie. His pastor would pull him up and say weh you tie?

340 I don't think it makes much difference. I would still preach, actually, you are in the presence of a King; would you go and see the Queen dressed scruffily? No they wouldn't. So I think, do your best for God. I would still preach that but I wouldn't make a deal of it if I saw people dressed with their shorts on.

While Victor uses the Queen to begin his narrative, Robert uses her to punctuate his; the two also hold fairly different standards on 'appropriate' attire. Robert considers a tie too formal, and allows for makeup and jewellery, while Victor believes it unbiblical although he does not prohibit it. At the same time, they both advocate a natural policing of clothes. Here, while everyone dresses 'differently', the 'standard' is modest and most people are 'smart'. The onus of judging clothes moves from the preacher to the lay member, whose natural conformity to the majority, or natural state of holiness, will inform their appropriateness.

Francis is easily the most 'traditional' of the three men and the Queen features in the middle of his dress narrative as reported speech, as he quotes himself advising members of the congregation. First, though, he talks about his own approach to his clothing:

1.214 I like leading by example.

1.216 Being a child of God I always like to know I'm clean. I dress immacly-
immaculately,

1.225 make a good representation in my community.

1.230 Peopl- my neighbours sees me; they respect me.

1.235 When I stand before my brethren, I make sure that I've got a suit on. I don't put my hands in my pockets when I'm teaching and preaching like most (youths) do.

1.248 I set that example as.. a marker.. so that the young people will learn from me the way I present myself.

1.301 Even I'm not going church, you'll see me with a tie, you'll see me with a suit. That's how I learned to sort of present myself because in presenting myself it's like I'm presenting.. the gospel.

1.321 My way of presenting the gospel that people even (uninterested) bystanders can read because we are like an epistle read and seen of all me=n.

Our life, our decorum, how we approach people, how we present ourselves, even how we speak...

He continues to talk of the community and impressions before leading on to his advice to other members of the church, or rather his 'discipline':

1.409 and this is what pleases me quite a lot.. you see? When I- if I have to discipline anyone.. who dress like anyhow, I take them by themselves and I say look..

1.425 if you have to go before her majesty the Queen, you will have to dress in a way.. that the queen would like you to appear before her.

1.437 Well it's not the Queen but the courtiers of her palace will send you a letter well in advance to tell you what you must dress how you must dress and watch out for how you stand to present yourself before her majesty

1.455 I said if the woman, a natural mortal woman, can get such reverence from her subjects, how much more God? Almighty God who is greater than all.

Francis was one of the early interviewees; the question posed to him was framed in terms of presentation, i.e. 'how important is presentation to you?' While the conversation does move on from his own smartness to talking about members of the congregation, his is the only narrative that does not explicitly refer to women's clothes; there is no mention of make up or jewellery. But within his discussion, he states that God requires his 'children' to be neat, tidy and with a smile on their face.

In his last say on the matter, he gives an anecdote about his home life.

1.559 Sometime my wife.. she say, even though you at home @@ you're having your-your shirt with your tie on.

1.605 I say well something must in me. It does happen all the time.. in here. It does happen all the time.

1.614 But I'm so used to it. I'm so used to it, you see?

Like the women in Victor's analogy, whose holiness creates a gradual diminishing of earring sizes, Francis's readiness for 'King Jesus' has spilled over into his domestic life.

All three interviews use the same monarchic analogy, which could be interpreted in hierarchical or colonial terms as much as in holiness and spiritual terms.

The Queen is invoked as the ultimate model of earthly 'appropriateness' – a 'render to Caesar' argument (Mark 12:17) – by way of expressing their desires for respectability as individuals, as representatives of God, as church leaders and as black people.

4.4 Richard on abstinence and de facto alienation

In this sequence we return to the idea of holiness and branch the exploration of dress out into other areas, while looking at unintended consequences of embodied 'holiness'. In an account of his adolescence, Richard sets out some areas of concern aside from dress: namely, he touches on physical (fasting) and sexual abstinence, a denial of social norms (Christmas celebrations) and separation from non-Apostolics, due to the demands of church attendance and fellowship within the community:

Recording C458 **Richard:** This is how messed up it was. We had.. the pastor of the church.. was a deeply troubled man on reflection, and would not.. allow members to have Christmas day with their family and instead insisted on Christmas Day on having a fasting service.

520 And this would be an absolute fast...so no food and no water from six o'clock in the morning till six in the evening, absolute abstention from food.

540 He also taught that.. if you were gonna fast, you could not fast within three clear days of having sex I don't know where this came from.

550 So could you imagine if there was a fast on a Wednesday then another fast on a Sunday, that meant there was no sexual relations for that household.

The 'messed up' statement imposes an unflinching judgment on the behaviours of church leaders in the past, his emphasis on 'troubled' giving weight to his narrative on the authoritarianism of the church and the impositions of individual personality on a group. Richard immediately goes from a narrative of prohibition to one of church fellowship demands:

6.20 So you'd be in church, Monday you would have the night off but Tuesday would be bible class Wednesday would be a prayer meeting Thursday would be a fellowship meeting Friday would be a Youth meeting Saturday would be evangelism, Sunday would be Sunday school first thing main divine worship second thing, and then evening evangelistic service, your li=fe revo=lved around church.

It is interesting to note his rhythm as he runs through the week with almost no pause between each item, until he punctuates the sentence with an elongated 'life' and 'revolved'. This rhythm suggests monotony and relentlessness but also the familiarity of a well-rehearsed past. The narrative of the interview is not about his relationship with the present but with the challenging regime of his youth. This 'hardship narrative' is something we shall return to in the next chapter.

He continues with observations about the implications of the demands of church:

6.50 Anything that was not church was therefore not significant. Relationships that were not about church were not significant.

7 if somebody was attending your church you'd have a deep.. what felt like a deep intimate relationship. You be in their house. They'd be in your house. You'd be in a situation where you'd have fridge rights.

7.20 However if that person for whatever reason left the church that relationship ended you didn't speak to them you didn't see them and so forth.

7.30 And it was not as if you did it vindictively; because you did not see them they did not exist, because church was your world.

Here we are offered a narrative of side effects, or unintended consequences: rather than suggesting separation from those not involved in his church arose from a deliberate marginalisation – either by members of the church themselves, or by those outside his faith community – it occurred from the fellowship requirements of his church. This, while creating 'what felt like' an intimate relationship with church members, alienated them from non-members. He discusses this immediately after mentioning the enforced fasting and sexual abstinence, implying a relationship between the social separation from 'outsiders' and the fasting/sexual abstinence imposed by the church.

At the end of his testimony, while describing his current stance on liberation theology and his changing attitudes to sexuality, Richard briefly alludes to clothing requirements. In the moments leading up to this point, he talks of former friends and family who have since stopped associating with him, and a conversation with a reporter from the Voice newspaper who laughed at him during an interview, due to his new position on affirming homosexuality. He uses that to launch into his idea of holiness:

F950 Her understanding of holiness means that you live up to.. this thing over here

953 where actually holiness is to do with your relationship with God and your commitment to be the best person you can be in the reflection of the image of God

10 So sin is being short of that and we know when we've been less than who we are

His narrative of holiness and sin goes on to cover fidelity within relationships, honesty in business dealings, keeping commitments etc. and then, finally:

10.55 That's holiness for me, it's not you know.. Is my dress the right length? Do I believe the right things?

11 Because we're not saved by our doctrines or doctrinal adherence we're saved by that relationship that we hold with Christ (4) who loves us unconditionally regardless as to where we're from or how we are..

11.20 So that's my story.

Richard chooses to end the interview here, creating a binary comparison between the holiness positions espoused by others – presumably traditionalists, such as the reporter – in terms of dress length, and his more libertarian approach to homosexuality.

This small section opens up possibilities for further discussion on embodied rites and principles within churches, not limited strictly to the most visible area of dress. It is possible to see how ideas of holiness and approaches to fasting, dress, sexual expression and fellowship commitments may all relate to each other. The area of exploration up to now has been predominantly based on clothing in order to keep the focus narrow. Furthermore, as these narratives evolve, we see how clothing – ostensibly a marker of holiness or separation from the world – becomes an idea that follows on from 'exclusion' narratives; presentation is used not simply to determine spirituality but a church identity that is cultural.

More could be said about the complex gender narratives dress plays, or the way they relate to other areas of life. Also, there is a wealth of narratives to be explored on the role of fasting, tarrying meetings, and other rituals that endow physicality on this group. Notably, nothing has been said of Lord's Supper or the use of anointing oil.

What has been (un)covered in this chapter once again opens up channels of possibilities: complex fasts; insider/outsider ideas about femininity and modesty; more ideas about the 'then' and now. What is clear from all these narratives is that things have changed somewhat, either for the participants or for their churches, or both, as regards clothing norms.

5 Nostalgia narratives: finding belonging in the past

5.1 (Re)framing the past

Whilst we have built up narratives around community belonging, migration and 'separateness' from the world both in terms of attire/'adornment' and beliefs, it is expedient to return to the arrival of Caribbean Oneness Pentecostalism in London and the hardships that surrounded early worshippers. This hardship, and the mythology surrounding it form what may be termed 'nostalgia discourse'. In different sections, we shall explore how participants use the past – and the difficulties faced in it – to construct a narrative of 'hardship', 'discipline', 'overcoming' and belonging.

Racial, cultural and religious divides are narrated in the context of generational divides and also speak to previous ideas about Caribbean faith, from the 1960s onwards. The pre-1970s view 'that Caribbean culture was a permutation of a more sophisticated British culture...' (Toulis, 1997, p. 25) is tackled through exploring the cultural and religious identities; how might the experience of young, third-generation Jamaican living in the outskirts of East London contrast that of an older migrant from Grenada, in South London?

5.2. Naomi: a shared hardship (is that what you want?)

The following extract with Naomi sets up the key theme within this chapter, namely that of an ambiguous past, and a conscious effort to conjure a shared identity from its hardship, i.e. what could be termed 'the hardship narrative' within nostalgia discourse:

805 **Interviewer:** What was life like for you at that time, in the 60s?

811 **Naomi:** At that time.. I did mis-s Jamaica, if it that you mean-?

819 **I:** That's one of the thing–

820 **N:** I did miss Jamaica when I came here; I missed Jamaica very much..

The 'hardship narrative' consists of multiple elements. First, it is the idea of longing coupled with the *awareness* of that longing in the context of a contemporary audience. Naomi reiterates that she missed Jamaica when she migrated; she also prompts the interviewer into confirming this is what is expected of her while not waiting for the confirmation to be expressed; it is clear to her that a conversation of the

past must necessarily involve a declaration of hardship and longing for 'home'. The hardship is explored further:

823 And when I came here I cried. I didn't like the- the food.. I didn't like the house [3] I didn't like the house.

835 It was too cold. I had a hard time.. And we had to rent from landlords. And we had to wash in cold water and it was winter.

852 And a one room.. and we had to put a heater in there.

858 And I was cooking, and the heater in my room.. A heater cooker; your mum would know. Straight up.

902 So I had to put the pot on top of that, cooking in the room.

Here, the hardship Naomi faces becomes collectivised. It is no longer the hardship of the individual but shared between women of her generation. Even though she does not know the interviewer's mother well, Naomi invokes her as a witness to the difficulties faced in the domestic sphere. By making this statement, it is clear several ideas have been inferred about the circumstances of the researcher's family, which follows on from insider/outsider issues raised in the methodology chapter; beyond that, we can see communal experience and belonging brought into play under the umbrella of hardship. The lack of ownership – the word 'rent' is slightly emphasised by Naomi – and the detailed atmospheric picture of cold and tears that soon delves into domestic struggles reveals her powerlessness at the time. But that power is subverted in the face of the interviewer:

938 I couldn't shut the door too hard, I have to take my time.. and I had to be home by 9 o'clock and I was paying rent.

942 Is that you want? All that.

947 So we had a hard time until we start get our own house..

The rhetorical question, 'Is that that what you want?' has its own function, both as a chorus – anchoring the different verses of her testimony – and as an assertion of her authority. As a question, it shows hesitation – the initial awkwardness of Naomi's interview is discussed earlier in chapter 2 – but, here, as a statement she does not await a response for, it shows some degree of relish. *Here* is what the interviewer wants, a litany of the struggles a new immigrant faced. *All of that! Take it!* Listing these struggles before discussing how she and her husband acquired a house, and then the church

building, positions her as someone who has overcome, someone with a genuine 'testimony', someone who has 'made it'. This will contrast greatly with those who have not experienced her – and, by extension, my mother's – dislocation.

5.3 Bailey and Ricardo: *Maybe in Peckham...* Affluence, 'discipline' and generational divides

We will spend a considerable time in this section analysing a conversational interview between Bailey and Ricardo, two interviewees in their early twenties, from East London. In contrast to Naomi's experience, they also seem to suggest familiarity with the tradition of the 'hardship narrative', but feel – due to their age and their status as financially secure non-migrants – unable to access it.

5.3.1 The 'nothing to prove' generation

The long extract below unravels several ideas around the 'hardship narrative' and a resulting idealisation of the past; while it is posited as a challenging and dark place, it also conjures romantic notions: bravery, dedication and discipline. Faced with the material elements of the recent past and present day – including handheld gaming devices – it achieves a glorious, near-mythical status:

4818 **Ricardo:** When I talk about the older generations, I see the way they struggled. Even if I'm talking about my dad.. how he talks about how he made it to where he was today
4840 and how in school, he was the type of person to ask for more homework. I'm thinking what a @loser@ because that's my perception of that situation
4852 if anyone had asked for more homework at my school, I would have beaten them up
4854 because all of us would get it and I for one hated doing homework. But that's the different idea of discipline they had back then that we don't have simply because of the First World issues.
4916 I wanted to consume my time with Pokemon cards, and then PS1, then it was the Gameboy, and then PS2.
4921 It carried on, until it was girls
4929 but before that, I can honestly say I don't know what it is.. I don't know where they got the discipline from, maybe because they had to prove something.

This idealised 'hardship narrative' is presented in ambiguous terms: Ricardo's 'First World issues' are presented almost as a parody via different games and consoles; his father, as a teenager, is a 'loser' to him; yet here, and further on, an implied respect and admiration for his father's past circumstances surface, albeit with complications:

4945 My dad tells me often his teachers would say they wouldn't amount to much; they'd be overt about it; they'd say you're black so you're not going to make much of yourself; a bus driver is the best you can do.

50 My dad as stubborn as he is said no and he made more of himself.

5009 First of all, for me, I didn't have those overt comments... There were definitely covert things but none that I perceived [...] Well, I did perceive them, but then my parents didn't care @@ None that I would openly perceive you know.. and none that I could really take a grievance with, that would be enough to kind of spur me on to work harder and so..

5035 Yeah. I feel like he benefitted from having something to prove; that's why his testimony is what it is,

5048 And with my grandma and granddad, they had a necessity. Their testimony is out of necessity. They wanted a better life for themselves so they came to the UK to work and get a better life for themselves.

51 They had to work to get that life. That's it really.. There's nothing more to it with them..

5111 That's where our testimonies differ. One was out of necessity, one was out of stubbornness. But I don't need to work hard anymore because you know..

Labour.. @@ I can slightly get away with life just coasting and I don't have anything to prove because.. I mean the whole of society tells you you don't have anything to prove, unless obviously you take it upon yourself, you have something to prove to yourself.

5153 Or unless you really concentrate on the subliminal stigmas associated with young black men, but if you don't take those on board then what is there to lose?

This seemingly mundane account of a childhood of consumerism and relative affluence harbours several sub-narratives. Firstly, there is congruence with his surroundings that contrasts with some of the other, older interviewees. By articulating that he would have 'beaten up' any fellow pupils with his dad's work-eager character traits at his school, by asserting he has 'nothing to prove' – not because of an internal, a

familial, or a religious community drive but because ‘the whole of society’ says so – and by using the trends of his contemporaries to narrate his childhood concerns, from the pursuit of games to the pursuit of girls, Ricardo demonstrates his rootedness in the mainstream culture and his confidence of having agency within it.

At the same time, another sub-narrative emerges, conflicting with this freeness. First, he acknowledges his grandparents struggle leading to their migration, contrasting it with the hardships experienced by his dad, encountering racism at school in London. Yet, ‘[t]here’s nothing more to it with them’ implies his reality is more complex than that of the two generations preceding. But Ricardo then downplays his own experiences of ‘covert’ discrimination and having ‘something to prove’. As he does this, he sets up a familial conflict; his parents ‘not caring’ when he experiences the ‘covert’ comments and the idea that his father benefitted from the racism around him – a motivating factor – in a way that Ricardo could not. Finally, the ‘subliminal stigmas’, are quickly dismissed.

5.3.2 The *discipline* of Oneness

The word ‘discipline’ appears both as an academic motivator and a religious one. Firstly, ‘discipline’ is presented as something Ricardo’s generation lacks because of ‘First World issues’; then the discipline of the older generation becomes an enigma: ‘I can honestly say I don’t know what it is..’. And then Bailey responds to Ricardo’s comments, arguing that ‘discipline’ arising from hardship is responsible for their religious adherence:

5519 but I think.. you can’t.. downplay the testimonies that a younger person would have and I think it goes back to what you were saying about discipline..
5530 I don’t need to have discipline. I really don’t need to like you sai- I could quite easily go to the Jobcentre tomorrow and say yeah I’m looking for a job and not really look for a job. There’s people that have eight kids and are living off benefits.. and that.. are fine.. and so I suppose I could do the same thing..
5555 but it comes down to your work ethic and I think that also plays into the.. Christian aspect of it so.. the discipline you have determines how.. strictly you’re going to follow the.. rules and regulations of Christianity, determines how.. how much you’re going to live by.. what it says in the bible.

Thus, experience of hardship coupled with religious belief begets a special kind of ‘discipline’ or work ethic; without the work ethic, Bailey would now be able to coast with a comfortable life, where his parents’ generation may not have had the same

luxury. The rules and regulations – those solid ideological lines borne out of the ‘hardships generation’ – are now called into question when dealing with Oneness doctrinal issues.

Three events occur in Bailey and Ricardo’s responses to being questioned specifically about their Apostolic beliefs:

i) The first is a narrative of rejection:

4309 the guy I was talking about in the last question you asked who was telling me about *Audacious* events..

4318 he was the only.. Trinitarian that I’ve come into close.. contact with

4326 I make them sound like aliens, but.. the only Trinitarian I knew

4339 although we could speak about some things relating.. to God (2) some things just didn’t quite joi-.. some things didn’t - we kind of head banged on a couple of them.

4356 I remember one time, I think during our first time at university,

4404 I can’t remember how we got into the conversation but we were talking and he was asking how are you finding uni with God and..

4416 I remember he ended the conversation by trying to convince me that.. Trinitarianism was the correct way to do things

4426 and every time I would invite him to come to my church he wouldn’t come, and vice versa.

4432 A part of it was me was probably doing it because he.. he didn’t come to mine, because really and truly I had no reason not to, I was just making stupid excuses..

4447 But I felt a bit slighted that he didn’t come.. and I don’t really.. I don’t really know why..

4455 So yeah I think the Oneness.. there is a distinction. I think people are aware of the distinction.. but.. I don’t really know why and I’m not really sure what.. else..

On a basic level, Bailey expresses his disappointment at his friend not visiting his church, believing their conflict of doctrine may be a factor. He feels rejected, and in turn rejects. At the same time, he expresses a lack of confidence in defending the Oneness doctrine wholeheartedly: ‘I think *people* are aware of the distinction’ [my emphasis].

ii) This leads neatly into Ricardo's narrative, that of maintaining ambiguous tensions:

P4516 I try not to get caught up too much in it, ever. And I try not to let it affect me however, there are certain songs like How Great is Our God and.. there's another song.. This I Believe.. is in *the Creed*.

4537 How Great is Our God has the one part in it, the Godhead three in one; Father, Spirit, Son. And the Creed has [sings] Our God is three in one.

4550 Both of those, the second I sing i- in fact I don't even sing it, I avoid singing it. Simpl- it feels like blasphemy to me. That's how.. bad it is for me to associate with it, personally. Bu=t in terms of my actual experience with it outside of me doing it, so someone else who might be Trinitarian at the end of the day, you're a Christian, I don't care about Trinitari-

4620 let the older- like my dad, them lot worry about that kind of stuff

The tensions presented are two-fold. The first is his desired attitude versus his instincts, an internal/external struggle: 'I *try* not to get caught up too much in it' and 'I *try* not to let it affect me' signifies a conscious decision to subdue his ingrained beliefs. But then, his feelings prevent him from singing parts of the songs that assert Trinitarian beliefs: 'I don't sing it'; 'I avoid singing it'; 'it feels like blasphemy'. In order to distance his feelings from his actions, the emphatic 'ever' conveys total avoidance of the conflict, while the stress on 'me' and 'personally' conveys an attempt at disengaging from the conflict on any political level; it is a strictly personal *preference*. Within this, an unstated physical reality is at play: in giving these examples, he implies regular engagement with Trinitarian worship and spaces where his reluctance to sing involves consciously remaining silent in contrast to the rest of the congregation. His role as a musician may have a part to play in his regular exposure to non-Apostolic services.

The second tension, the generational divide, is one that has already been explored in this chapter: 'let [...] them lot worry about that kind of stuff'. While his personal feeling (discomfort at singing out Trinitarian lyrics) aligns with that of the 'older' generation – or his perception of it – he consciously avoids making a distinction between the two doctrines, distancing him from that generation, along with its hardships and 'discipline'.

iii) Finally, we have the narrative of the church itself, as an institution:

4628 someone put it very simply.. in a preacher who came to my church one time and he basically said.. He was someone who was part of a gang, he was very active in it to the point where he did the shootings and stabbings, that was him, and

4650 he's now a preacher but he said he.. that it wasn't the book that saved him.. that's what he said, that it wasn't the book that saved him.. you can re- quote you can throw bible verses at someone's face all day

4705 but at the end of the day, with him, it wasn't the book that saved him, but it was the man, Jesus, that's it.

4720 He's not saying the book isn't important, that's what he said, but what he is saying is that it had nothing to do with the reason he's now a Christian and..

4725 when it gets into those kind of discussions, you know about what way is right, Jesus, or Father Son Holy Spirit.. Why? @Why@ are you even getting caught up in that? I've taken that on board, that is my stance

4740 we get caught up way too much.. in those kind of specifics.

Up until this point of the conversation, both Bailey and Ricardo's Apostolic identity had been limited to personal accounts: in Bailey's case, knowing there *is* a difference between him and the 'alien' culture of his friend, and maintaining his allegiance without specifically explaining why; in Ricardo's case, acknowledging then dismissing the difference, while also feeling personally invested in maintaining a separation from the Trinitarian creed. Now, finally, a suggestion arises as to how Ricardo's more liberal stance may have been reinforced by the church he attends. The tension then remains between upholding an Apostolic belief on the personal level, not assigning importance to it on a pragmatic level and allowing this pragmatism to be reinforced on an institutional level – through a church that encourages this stance, and through his employment as a musician, which exposes him to Trinitarian doctrine. Bailey, on the other hand, implies that he remains attached to Oneness doctrine on the personal level and on an institutional level – his friend, he suspects, did not attend his church because of its doctrine – yet on the pragmatic level, like Ricardo, he is more ambiguous: despite 'banging heads' with his friend, and knowing there is a difference between Oneness and Trinitarian, he isn't intimately concerned with what the difference is and is less exposed to it ('the only Trinitarian I've come into close contact with..').

5.3.3 The stigma of poverty/underachievement

The shadow of mid-twentieth century views that focused on (Caribbean) religiosity as escapism from poverty, poor education and societal rejection (Calley, 1965; Hill, 1963), still hangs over some discourse on belief.

In Bailey and Ricardo's joint interview, they tackle the idea of religious adherence being the preserve of the poor and uneducated, but they then frame it in terms of generational differences:

5625 **Bailey:** also.. a point that just came to me.. some people argue that it's an intelligence thing as well

5635 I remember when I was in Denmark there was a Swedish girl.. she was telling me how Christianity is for poor people and for stupid people. I looked at her and said I'm not poor and I'm not stupid so what are you talking about?
[...]

5654 and I thought I can't wait to go back to my church and laugh at how stupid you are

5657 but I got back and Uncle Nathan.. he'll say he never said this but he did.. he said yeah it is for poor and stupid people

5711 and I was like what do you mean? I don't understand. He said because that way it makes it more accessible for the wider society. If it were just for intelligent people, stupid people would feel left out.

5734 If it were just for rich people, poor people would feel left out and there are more poor people than rich people.. so I think that's what his argument was–

5743 **Ricardo:** Rubbish

5744 **Bailey:** Yes. So I think maybe in some way I don't want to be a bigot or.. whatever, but maybe it is for, if you want to take it all the way back, for people who didn't have anything better

Bailey has done several things up to this point. Firstly, he asserts his belief – in stronger terms than he does the Apostolic doctrine – and he strongly dismisses the theory that his belief has arisen from poverty or a lack of education. Yet, when challenged by his uncle – and Ricardo vocally interrupts to disagree – he began the process of analysing this thought: perhaps, indeed, the previous generations' religiosity *has* arisen from poverty, and has brought about their strict 'discipline'.

At this point of the conversation, Bailey switches from responding exclusively to the encounter with the Swedish girl and his subsequent interaction with his uncle to approaching the older/younger divide, and its relationship to the past ('if you want to

take it all the way back'). The whole point of this anecdote is not simply to highlight the impact of poverty on belief but the perspective of a poverty-stricken older generation and how it differs to a more affluent contemporary one:

5804 like I'm praying for one day that I have the hope of a better life. People who already have the better life don't need to pray for that

5818 so there may be an aspect of that. And so turning it back to me now, I ..pretty much.. have what I want

5830 I remember one time I wanted a PSP? That was what it's called? One of those handheld little.. yeah?

5840 Ricardo: [non-verbal assent]

5840 Bailey: I didn't pray to God. I asked mum and said can you buy me a PSP? I asked her doggedly.

5850 Grandma might have asked God doggedly for food in her belly.

By acknowledging he asked his mother – rather than prayed – for the games console, highlights both the triviality of his needs and his lack of *reliance* on prayer. He does not *need* God's intervention in his day-to-day activities; even for his additional desires – expressed in terms of games consoles – his mother enacts the 'God function'. His grandmother's 'dogged' prayers for food now stand in direct contrast to someone, like him, without the hardship driving force.

5.3.4. Class division: a twenty-first century testimony

To draw this section to a close, we return to the idea of 'testimony'. Bailey struggled to define what his 'testimony' was right at the beginning of the conversation but, by the end, he manages to state: 'the more this goes on, the more I realise I have loads of testimonies' (5228). But it is his idea of the future testimony that stands out here:

5237 **Bailey:** I think it comes down to your.. station in life, or your lot in life, so..

5243 you say it's times, but there's probably a guy living in Peckham right now who's going to have a wicked testimony when he's like twenty five but.. you

living in Romford, it's not going to compare, so although you've both grown up in the same time, you're going to have a different testimony

5304 but that's just more to do with the experiences you've had. And you never know, his experiences may be the same as your dad's. He may have a white teacher who says look mate I'm seeing what you're doing in class;

5314 you're not going to amount to much because you're in a gang, you're selling drugs blah blah, but he might think I'm going to turn my situation around, let me.. let me make it different

5330 so I think the testimony definitely boils down to.. yeah, your station in life and how you.. I suppose the different experiences you face when you're younger, or when you're a child, and then that's going to determine how you deal with the problem and.. the outcome of that situation.

At the heart of this extract is a new concern – previously unexplored, but at the surface of other recurring themes –: what role does social class ('station') play in the outcomes of black *Caribbean+* youth? And how does this interact with perceived generational gaps? By contrasting Ricardo's Romford upbringing ('you in Romford') with an imagined Peckham boy's – using the politically-charged term 'station' – Bailey places Ricardo's comfort in an altered context. Class divides are further implied in Bailey's later comment about the possibilities of 'living off benefits' with eight children.

Ricardo cited his grandparents' struggle and subsequent migration, and then his father's experiences of racism, as the counterpoint to his 'lack of anything to prove'; Bailey resets this narrative, countering it against a place in the city – Peckham – that is distant, with a set of social problems – drugs and gangs – that are implied to be unfamiliar to Ricardo and Bailey both. Peckham becomes the heartland of this *new* testimony in a way that Ricardo's Romford cannot. By implication, the fictional Peckham youth's concerns go beyond games consoles and require divine intervention and/or 'discipline'. Bailey also emphasises the 'you', implying that Romford itself is no more the epicentre of affluence than Peckham is of hardship. Peckham thus becomes a placeholder symbol for the unknown, a place where Ricardo's generation stands with his father's.

In this new narrative, Ricardo – and the outer East London he inhabits – represents the settled, relatively affluent British-born Oneness Pentecostal; this new generation is not removed from previous generations solely because of an age difference but because of circumstance, including class – or, rather, 'station'. This new generation must navigate pressures from outside insisting they are poor/undereducated for their beliefs on the one hand, while trying to connect with the 'discipline' of the previous generations; their embeddedness in the dominant culture also presents new

opportunities to negotiate an Apostolic, Christian identity while pushing at the boundaries of that identity.

5.4 Marcus and Victor: 'Blood' and 'the Cross' for the Powerpoint generation

In this section, a comparison will be drawn between how worship songs are discussed in interviews with two different London pastors from different areas of London. Here, we see parallels between worship songs and the conflict of modernity/nostalgia that plays out across generations. The purpose of this exploration is not to introduce a new concept but to highlight how existing ones – past hardship, nostalgia and the discussion of the present as less 'demanding' – infiltrate different areas of discourse on Apostolic belief.

5.4.1 'The cross'

In Marcus' interview, 'the cross' recurs as a theme that draws him into worship, starting with his conversion story at the age of thirteen:

A1748 **Marcus:** I remember going to the convention and just sitting there in absolute amazement at the atmosphere.

1802 The songs, the singing, the.. the happiness of the people, the worship, and especially hearing.. songs about the cross.

1822 I remember.. those songs about the cross were really melting my heart and that really made me reach out.. fo=r a relationship with this.. this loving God who would love me so much that he'd want to give his life for me.

The framing of this encounter is one that builds up different elements: surprise at the people – and their happiness –, then the worship, then what he gathers from the songs. He then recounts his response to the altar call and how this 'Jesus of the cross' initiates the process of conversion:

1950 In spite of sitting with some of my friends, who at that time were telling me oh you're silly

1956 no my mind was made up and my heart was really gripped by this..by this Jesus of the cross that I'd known from a child.. but here he was, almost there.

Whilst Marcus is initially drawn to the happiness of the congregation – in stark contrast to his home circumstances (like Naomi, his migration account includes feeling dislocated and shocked by the cold and a prohibitive home life) - it is the meaning he derives from the songs, and the suffering of Jesus that converts him. Later in the conversation – on a separate recording – when asked about the meanings of songs in his worship, ‘the cross’ comes up again:

B2840 **Marcus:** If you can give me a song that has a combination of good lyrics and a nice melody, I’m there, it does move me.

2854 In the church in those times, I’d.. sit down and listen to songs and the words..

2904 The words talking about the suffering of Jesus on the cross

2910 and songs like Resting At the Cross and songs like Let Me Be Worthy of the price you paid for me, Let me be worthy of the blood you shed for me;

2927 songs like that and being able to relate.

2930 Maybe part of it was that in those days I often felt.. I often in those young early days, I often felt alone and unloved; I have to put it that way. Quite often I felt as if nobody understood who I was.

2954 So hearing a nice melody, and words that told me I was valued to the point where.. this.. Jesus would come and die in such a horrible way and it was for me?

[..]

This ‘nostalgia/hardship narrative’, unlike those up until now, does not rely heavily on Marcus’s own hardships, nor that of his generation, but on the religious experience itself, and his meditation on the suffering ‘at the cross’. In other ways, it fits with the narrative as posed by Ricardo – in the past, God fulfilled a need that parents could not – but, instead of a need brought about by poverty, Marcus largely talks of emotional needs unmet by his family. The ‘new family’ he finds in the church, despite its strictness, is one in which he feels fulfilled; the concept of the cross is one which he finds compelling as it speaks to love in the face of suffering. The ‘nostalgia’ element – i.e. the idea, now explored, that hardships of the past makes the older generation more authentic, or at least more dedicated, than the younger generations – is one that now takes on a spiritual element:

B3450 **Marcus:** So I’m not one of the ones that.. condemns the new.. songs, cause I think it’s relevant for today and today’s people

3459 however, and I say however, because there's something about some of
 these old songs that they never lose their.. meaning
 3510 they never lose their sacredness.
 3519 And I think when people become really passionate, it's often because of
 those same old songs that keeps us going on.
 3530 Songs about the cross still get to me.
 3535 There are some good modern ones that have been written about the cross
 (4)
 3610 There are some good writers now but, generally, a lot of praise and
 worship songs these days are more about.. telling God He's worthy, that He's
 lovely and so on
 3636 that's important too... but there comes a point where you derive depth
 from some of my old favourites

Marcus invokes the idea of the 'sacred' as he expresses being drawn to the songs of 'old'. By extension, 'new', or contemporary songs, while still adequate in a church context, do not hold the same 'sacredness'. He is careful not to dismiss the creativity and the worship created by and for younger generations, so it is not an observation shrouded in negativity; nevertheless, it continues the theme of the past being a more spiritually potent place. In the following sentences, he discusses Hillsong-era songs and the replacement of the Pentecostal Hymnal by flipchart songs, and concludes: 'We have to be cross-cultural, including the young and old being able to live together in harmony' (3807).

The use of the word 'cross-cultural' implies that the youth do not share the same culture as their parents. The settled new generation do not feel this same dislocation, nor the disruption to the family structure frequently associated with Commonwealth migration of the 1960s. Marcus' pragmatism – mixing song styles in his services and not 'imposing' the old on the new – still implies an adversarial binary, where 'young and old' live together 'in harmony', as two separate entities. Perhaps, the new culture, without the same hardships of before, lacks the depth of the old. Perhaps their experiences mark them as 'foreign'.

5.4.2 'The blood'

In an interview with Victor, the narrative takes a similar turn; both Marcus and Victor are asked questions about the role of music in their lives and in their worship and,

predictably, for the latter, being of similar ages, their experiences as church leaders hold some similarities:

1:815//Could you tell me more about the effect of music in your life?//

1:827 **Victor:** You're touching on one of my soft spots now. I love worship. I love to lead worship. Before I became a Christian, I used to sing and write. I still sing and still write. I don't give it as much focus now because anything you give focus to takes over your life.

After a minute, Victor advances to talking about *listening* to music...

1:1050 **Victor:** I prefer.. traditional gospel music, more so than a lot of the modern stuff,

1:11 Most of the modern stuff doesn't necessarily sing about or glorify Jesus; I call it message music.

1:1108 You know lik- let's go, Andre Crouch [sings] it was the blood that gives me strength from day to day..

1:1117 You can't compare that with something like [sings] I know who I am. I know what I'm.. Can't compare them. It's a message song, it's a song about who I am in God and I need to know who I am

1:1134 well yes I know who I am; good message, great. But the gospel and the blood and those kind of songs, very rarely do you hear a lot of young groups sing about that or even rap about that

1:1150 so there's something missing from contemporary gospel music today. It feels like it's more feel good and about fun. So 'Shackles' or whatever...

In the same way Marcus conveys his greater connection to traditional hymns through referring to 'the cross', Victor uses the 'blood' as a signifier for the older songs with 'depth'.

//tell me about worship and music and the role it has in your church. What songs do you use in church. Do you use a hymnal, that kind of thing?//

1:1220 the presentation changes in each generation and a lot of the hymnal music is no longer as relevant to the younger generation

1:1234 because you're dealing with a microwave generation. Everything is quick and everything has to be short. Their minds don't hold onto anything for very long, so if you want them to get it you'd better keep it succinct

1:1250 hence I think Powerpoint worship is much more relevant to this generation than hymnal music

1:1258 and as well the archaic language used in the hymnals, ain't gonna get through. What's a 'tis? And a yea? And a ye?

1:1307 You can learn that but if you want to impact them, you have to come with something they can relate to

1:1321 So I think that the Powerpoint worship is much more relevant to this generation and the role of music is to create an atmosphere where God can come and the people can experience God firsthand.

The discussion is framed in more explicitly combative terms here; the 'microwave generation' is unwilling to negotiate the long concepts and archaic language – that were ultimately, superior – once acceptable in the past. The songs about 'the blood' glorify God in ways that modern worship music does not; youth culture could be deemed as poorer for it. This, in many ways, contributes to a kind of 'nostalgia narrative' that places greater spiritual worth on not just the attitudes and circumstances of the past, but also on its trappings, including the worship songs and the language.

5.5 An alternative: demystifying the past

In an interview with Richard – over several recordings –, some of the themes explored are reimagined; instead of a 'hardship' narrative that looks with nostalgia at the spiritual prowess or superiority of the past – or one that simply paints his generation as martyrs – Richard talks of his estrangement from the practices he grew up with as he enters the ministry.

B750 **Richard:** that was my life until I went to.. Spurgeon's College. When I went to Spurgeon's College I really started to question things.. I really started to question why we believed.. what we believed; why we had this particular expression of church.

803 The first thing that I.. really had difficulty wa- with was our worship service. So.. it had no order. It had no.. There was no liturgy. So.. you woul-

820 A quick example would be Amazing Grace how sweet the sound would open up, so you'd sing a song like Amazing Grace; then you have a chorus like no sin, no sin at all; no sin cannot enter there; because heaven is bright and fair.

840 Then you'd have another song, Down in the Valley way down in the valley.. then you'd have another one; John saw an angel coming from heaven; having the keys to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his han- this was a worship song now; and he laid hold on the old old dragon and bound him for a thousand years.

900 Another worship song would be, you know, God is gonna burn up the wicked people and this was a worship song; God's gonna burn up the wicked people, God's gonna burn up the wicked people, God's gonna bu=rn up the wicked people one of these days.

919 So you'd think about these ways of understanding and thinking and I went to Spurgeon's where you would have a clear thought-out theme.. for the worship. The songs would be relevant; they would make sense; they would fit in with the sermon;

938 they would fit in wi- and so I started to change

In some ways, Richard replicates the 1960s anthropological observations of 'disorderly' West Indian services, contrasting with the more consciously-orchestrated Spurgeon's, whose doctrine is aligned to the Evangelical Alliance. Unlike the researchers of the past, however, he describes the inner workings of church leadership and politics of the time from his intimate, lived reality. His experience of late twentieth-century worship, and his encounter with another way of doing things led him to re-evaluate his own practice and eventually to his being 'sat down' (disciplined). Unlike the past conjured up by Marcus and Victor, where songs about the 'cross' or the 'blood' – traditional worship songs that go 'deeper' than modern ones – abound, Richard presents an alternative past where the 'worship' songs do not glorify God, sometimes do not make sense ('bind up the dragon') and clash with each other.

In this comment we see more clearly the emergence of multiple narratives: all can be 'true' while none of it is the 'truth' entirely; while some songs held more emotional and spiritual 'weight' – for some members of the congregation, some of the time – than now, the reverse is also true. In Richard's case, growing up in, and then away from, the Apostolic tradition towards the end of the twentieth century, ideas of suffering, inclusion/exclusion and judgment abound in his account of the past. For him, the leadership was overly-authoritarian and under-qualified; the worship was inadequate and the result was a mass exodus of the young.

Marcus and Victor, among those of his generation who joined at that point and *continue* to be a part of the Caribbean Apostolic tradition, have seen a change in worship; in some ways, this has opened up a nostalgia narrative, even though they accept that life inside and outside of the church was more fraught with challenges in the past.

We can also see, in Naomi, an older generation that migrated to London as adults, founders of early churches. The 'hardship narrative' is one that has been passed down to the younger, British-born generations, who have been raised in the Caribbean Apostolic traditions of their parents. Interestingly, both generations seem committed to the perpetuating of this shared 'hardship' story; poverty, dislocation from the Caribbean and friction with British society all form part of the landscape narrated. The younger, British, *Caribbean+* generation, faced with this narrative, approach their experience through a new lens: their commitment to their beliefs is not based out of necessity and physical/emotional want as it was for their parents and grandparents. And yet, within their acceptance of the difficulties faced by older generations, is a more complex disconnect that sees them pitched sometimes as 'losers', who don't fully accept the less explicit challenges of 'covert racism' and want.

If the different generations of Apostolic churches are to accept and understand each other on any plane – spiritual or otherwise –, they must become cross-cultural. The worship of the past must adapt; the doctrine of the past must become more flexible; the 'nostalgia narrative' must become more nuanced, allowing room for it to be contested.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.1 Introduction: Anansi in transatlantic conversation

‘If I was to tell you my story crossways, I could tell it like this: Once upon a time Anansi was a travelling man...’ (Miller, 2011: p.222)

The two contrasting elements of this study – discourse analysis and fiction – bring to light the multifaceted experience of those existing within and without the peripheries of Oneness Pentecostalism and Caribbean identity in London, and those who simultaneously fit and elude this categorisation. And, while cultural belonging through the lens of religious community has been the focus, larger ideas around the complexities – and contradictions – of race, gender, sexuality, generational and geographic positioning have been explored.

Fictional voyages through Caribbean religiosity and culture are not without precedent, from Andrew Salkey (Salkey, 1958) to Marlon James (James, 2005), if we speak of Jamaica alone; however, nothing that refers explicitly to the legacy of Oneness Pentecostalism in the UK exists, although Kei Miller’s *The Last Warner Woman* (Miller, 2011) approaches some of the tensions arising when what is ‘acceptable’ in Jamaica – prophecy, ‘warnings’, loud interruptions in the streets, street evangelism etc. – is transferred into England and, ultimately, finds itself detained in mental health wards and prisons.

In Miller’s rendering of the ‘warner woman’, to be West Indian is to be ill (p.177). The narrator ventures that perhaps it is the ‘mad as a shad’ Caribbean people who decide to migrate to Britain; thus, more specifically, to be a West Indian *migrant to Britain* is to be ill. Transatlantic migration is, therefore, ‘madness’ – because who in their right mind would return to the aging motherland, whose empire has crumbled, rather than to the geographically-closer, modern powerhouse of the USA? This reading also decentres the old colonial power, which never bothered trying to comprehend its Caribbean subjects in the first place.

As Miller’s novel draws to a close, a narrator weaves together multiple elements of Caribbean storytelling in a series of vignettes. In one, Anansi, the trickster god, is a world-wise spider, already famous in ‘Curacao and Panama and Merica and Canada’ and has ‘almost got no space left in his passport for other stamps’. He decides he should finally travel to England, as he’s never been, but when he steps off the plane and passes through immigration,

the gentleman behind the counter did barely have time to ask “Business or pleasure, sir” when a English woman start to holler out “A spider! Ooooh a spider!” and vooops! Anansi barely dodge the broom that was coming down hard on him. (p.156)

The sequence ends by announcing itself as an origin story: this is how Anansi ended up hiding in the ceiling. If we read this as a parable – the previous sequence in Miller’s novel refers to Jesus’s parables and the importance of telling a story ‘crossways’ so it doesn’t go straight beyond the ears of the intended audience – we can infer that the British experience has forced Caribbean culture to the ‘ceiling’, for fear of being violently erased.

While the implication is that Caribbean-British migration is the originator of ‘othering’, particularly where religious practice is concerned, it is dishonest to insist this othering exists only inside Britain: any online search of ‘crazy Jamaican lady in CVS’ will return videos and comments on a Jamaican woman ‘pleading the blood [of Jesus]’ in an American store, while the security guard threatens to call the police. The fascination and misunderstanding of the woman’s language and worldview, and the Caribbean peculiarities of her gestures and religious terminology is evident. Hundreds of online commentators label her a ‘voodoo woman’, a ‘cunning thief’, or simply mad or satanic. Many suggest she is not speaking English/Patois. It would seem the situation escalated through mutual miscomprehension and, just as in the Anansi parable, the woman’s actions are interpreted as threatening, as needing to be curtailed.

The mislabelling and the diminishing of Caribbean religious experience – and of Oneness Pentecostalism more specifically – sits within a larger, more complex story of transatlantic relationships, power differentials and still-evolving history. In a small way, this study, including the novel, has sought to provide an outlet to contest the reductionist – or simply erroneous – presentations of narratives around London Caribbean identities, and of which Apostolic doctrine finds itself a part.

6.2 Summary of findings and writing as research

6.2.1 Muddying the waters

One prevailing question throughout this study has been to examine where the exact boundaries of identity lay, where *American* becomes *Caribbean* becomes *British*, or where *Oneness* crosses over into *Trinitarianism*. This question cannot be answered through any quantitative measurements; furthermore, in analysing the interviews, and

exploring histories, the idea of a fixed identity has been shown to be a limiting one, becoming a question of *and* rather than *or*, of multiplicities rather than essentialist notions of what constitutes belonging to a group.

The underlying question – less explicitly stated – rests in futurities and documentation. If identities are unfixed and evolving, if Caribbeanness exists on a spectrum that bleeds into Black Britishness – and Britishness also finds itself elasticised, containing, among other things, a multicultural London identity with a shifting language, demographic and sense of community – and, if the increasingly-globalised idioms of Oneness Pentecostalism, informed by and informing the wider culture(s) of the city, are also fluctuating, how is it possible to simultaneously document this ‘double-binded’ history, while acknowledging the challenges that may arise from *fixing* an identity that is elusive, loose and which, perhaps, may be fading as a distinct group?

Gerloff’s assertion that there is no *real* distinction between traditions in Britain may have merit, when we look at the ‘radical’ approach of ARC, or of the Tab, whose pastor, at the time of writing, is delivering a sermon on TBN (Trinity Broadcast Network), a cable channel which happens to be available in the hotel room where I am staying, having delivered a poetic presentation at the Tate in Liverpool, another city of buried black history (Olusoga, 2016).

This serendipitous encounter is striking, for it neatly focuses some of my challenges: here we see an American-based, Trinitarian – and, more specifically, of Assemblies of God origin –, politically-influential TV station, giving voice to the leader of a little-examined church of British Caribbean origin which, through twists of history, is linked to it directly through the development of the Jesus’ name denomination, and bitter divides along racial and doctrinal lines. If I had not been restlessly scrolling through the channels, I would have missed it. Any other casual viewer would not be privy to the historical connections of the pastor’s church, nor is this wealth of history easily searchable online. Increased global connectivity can be seen as simultaneously enabling communication, and bridging historic wounds, whilst also subsuming individuals into the dominant structures of the day. The more dominant Assemblies of God, while not directly controlling TBN’s programmes, has been instrumental in providing the forum for the Tab, once ideologically opposed to it, a church whose history involves its predecessors being expelled from AG’s midst.

While the Oneness doctrine itself merits much further investigation, in the wake of an increasingly globalised church, I have been keen to explore the narrative potential within themes that have arisen from the research, as a *creative writer*, rather than as an historian. Subsequent sections will examine the creative process in more depth.

6.2.2 'Troubling' narratives in research and fictional representations

The introduction to this thesis outlines a number of omissions, principally concerning the study and representation of British-based Pentecostalism and the complexities of Caribbean heritage. The literature review, in particular, highlights dismissive portrayals of Caribbean culture(s) from the so-called 'Windrush', post-war era, where liturgies are misunderstood or deemed non-existent (Calley, 1965), and where leaders were described as impulsive, uneducated.

The title, 'Led By the Spirit', was employed in response to the dichotomy of interpretations of this non-normative structure: to the 'outsider', the churches investigated – and Black churches, more generally – operate within a patriarchal, unstructured belief system with no oversight; to the 'insider', they navigate a complex arrangement of negotiations with history and culture, with an emphasis on spiritual governance, and a broad network of transcontinental connections. All the interviews and case studies included – and more beside – highlight the complexities involved within the churches and surrounding communities.

The study emulated this disruption of structure, with the non-directional, open-ended instruction at the outset of all interviews: 'Tell me your testimony'. Only two interviewees required further questioning within a few minutes, while others were able then to navigate between:

- i) autobiographical details
- ii) conversion experience and/or belief history (including baptism)
- iii) their cultural positioning, either as migrants from the Caribbean, or children of migrants.

While an explicit instruction to list these three ideas may have provided more clarity, this open-ended style allowed interviewees to arrive at these points in the way they chose, and helped inform the latter part of the study.

This thesis has concentrated on physical forms of restriction and boundaries: of fasting, the policing of dress – and the gendered forms this takes – as well as the new displacements: of London's geography, of city-wide gentrification and of generational differences creating greater nuances. In this sense, we can speak of multiplicities, of a polyphonic narrative, and of explicit contrasts: young and old (Ricardo, Francis), the 'traditional' and those who have abandoned religious tradition altogether, or partially

(Naomi, Rachel, Pat). These voices have been reflected within the fictional narrative, and show the spectrum of ideas and experiences that challenge current notions of Oneness Pentecostalism and of Caribbean identity.

From the outset, I made a conscious decision for the novel to operate in conversation with the research, to complement, rather than be dictated to by it; for both ethical and creative reasons, it would be unfavourable to lift experiences from the interviews into the fictional landscape.

The novel explores the life of a woman involved in a Oneness church from an early age, and the story itself had to developed thematically around it, touching on: gender, cultural belonging, sexuality, and many of the other themes which arose during the research.

Certain editorial decisions were made with the above in mind, particularly in Samuel's story: he becomes a sex worker, and is witness to a murder; he leaves London and spends the latter part of the story in Barcelona; his story focuses on the tension between his homosexuality and his religious belief but then develops into consolidating his conflicting beliefs and his desire to 'escape' with the reality that his history is an essential part of him. All of these scenarios push ideas around religious and cultural identity to the limit. How, for instance, would a preacher from within the Oneness tradition react to learning his son is gay? And how does Samuel himself respond to this cultural conflict as a teenager? How do the ideas of a 'London Jamaican' language and culture stretch when a British man of Caribbean parentage lives abroad for four years and teaches 'standard' British English as a foreign language? What happens to this language when he is suddenly confronted with his mother, years later?

The symbolism of the spider – a nod to Anansi – is repeated throughout both narratives, echoing African traditions in contemporary Caribbean and British-Caribbean experience, an echo that speaks of resilience in the face of colonial exploitation. In Anansi, we also find ambiguous morality, for he is a trickster, who sometimes succeeds in his endeavours; we find fluid modes of being, for he is at once a deity, a spider and a human. Like other themes in the novel, the spider's significance is left for the reader to piece together. Invoking Anansi in this small way was a political choice, speaking to the survival of culture, against the odds. It also enabled me to widen the frame, to acknowledge a broadening of the conversation beyond one of religious identity.

During the latter stages of my thesis, I had the opportunity to undertake 'creative interventions' relating to my research, to challenge the status quo regarding the representation of Black British experiences, religious community and sexuality, and

more besides. This thesis stands alongside continuing work aimed at pushing the boundaries of current narratives.

For those who do not adhere to it, the Jesus' Name tradition, in a London Caribbean context, arguably, has little urgent or immediate need for attention, academic or otherwise. As a creative practitioner engaged in this academic pursuit, I have used the novel in conjunction with discourse analysis as a framework for critical engagement with marginalised identities and the politics of identity formation. This I consider to be a vital intervention, going beyond the restricted domain of one branch of Pentecostalism, or one ethnic grouping.

6.3 Conclusion

6.3.1 The Story of Omissions

As a practice-led creative research project, rather than a purely research-driven venture, my emphasis has been on driving narrative and opening possibilities. The novel has enabled an intersection of multiple disciplines; indeed, it would be possible to produce related research through a variety of lenses: women's or gender theory, or linguistics, for example.

This thesis has highlighted several areas that require fresh analysis by other academic and creative practitioners, including:

- i) The interactions of smaller, local congregations with larger 'mega churches'
- ii) To follow-up from Gerloff's early work, examination of the religious history and contemporary situation of Pentecostals of Caribbean heritage in the UK, and the new challenges that globalisation has accelerated.
- iii) More on the intersections of gender, sexuality and Caribbean religiosity in the UK and, specifically, ongoing analysis of shifting attitudes within black church communities – and within the Caribbean diaspora, as a whole.
- iv) The continuing evolution of Anglo-Caribbean language and dialects in London and the UK, in communication with the Caribbean region, and with online communities.
- v) How the language of church communities is evolving.
- vi) Finally, more could be said about the continuing rise of African cultural influence in the UK, and how both African Caribbean and African communities, globally, generate dialogue.

6.3.2 Inviting further voices to the conversation

By signposting other possible entry points and avenues to extend research, I am situating myself within a dialogue that stretches from Kei Miller's awareness of postcolonial tension through to Jay Bernard's practice of blending activism with archival research and creative output (Bernard, 2016).

I believe this encounter between research and fiction illuminates the following:

- i) how crucial it is to break out of the 'single story', allowing for more complex renderings of Black British people of Caribbean heritage living in London
- ii) how individual narratives cannot be made to represent the whole
- iii) how underneath the data surrounding migration, ethnicity, belief – or whichever measure applied to document the lived experience – a whole host of impulses, drives, desires and contradictions resides.

While Samuel's journey echoes that of his mother in many ways – and, ultimately, they come together, briefly, at the end of the novel – the trajectory of their lives differs wildly. Likewise, all the interviewees have brought together a composite portrait of the influence of the Oneness doctrine. This thesis represents part of a continuing discourse, in which many more voices must be added to disrupt the essentialist narratives that have dominated until now.

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