

LOVE STORY NO. 8 - JANE AND PHILLIP

By Heidi N. Holder (Trinidad and Tobago)

To seduce his neighbour's wife, Mrs. Alice Brown, Mr. Cromwell hired a landscaper to create an English Garden around his Port-of-Spain mansion. His own wife, Mrs. Cromwell, had succumbed to Wide Sargasso Sea madness and returned to London just after their daughter Jane was born. So Cromwell, with his curly hair and tanned looks, was marooned in Trinidad with a teenage daughter.

The garden was to be a sprawling thing of red and yellow roses, hibiscuses, crotons, tropical palms and a fake ruined bridge. So the Landscaper (occasional rag-picker and prostitute when money got tight) was there everyday in shorts and bare chest working the cutlass and shovel with veined hands covered in dirt.

One afternoon, the Landscaper sighed, brushed sweat from his brow and looked up to see Jane undressing at her bedroom window. He stopped his work and a caged, zealous thing leapt from his eyes to Jane's, reddening her cheek. She touched her hot face and closed the curtains.

For two weeks, Jane held the Landscaper's gaze and undressed to her petticoat before the open window. One day, a strap of the petticoat slipped from her shoulders and the Landscaper dropped his tools and strode through the servant's entrance to Jane's bedroom, where such ripe fruit was easily splayed and eaten, the communion marked by dirt and crushed leaves on the white cotton sheets with eyelet trim.

In the meantime, Cromwell read poetry to Alice Brown on her narrow settee, while she commented on his growing garden. Theirs, a proper seduction by the book!

They did it twice more in Jane's bedroom.

Five times in the tool shed behind the mansion.

The roses flowered at about the same time Jane did. And the Landscaper took her to a place where girls went to have their insides caressed with a hatpin to terminate their mistakes. When it was over, he kissed her cold cheek and took her home.

The next morning, the maid found Jane, pale and feverish in a blood-soaked bed. Soon, black and brown island doctors filled the frilly bedroom and, after they took Cromwell's money, declared that the innocent girl was raped and left for dead.

To find the rapist, Cromwell plotted with his neighbour Mr. Brown and spent his money in Port of Spain's low places until a name surfaced: Phillip B. Douglas, Landscaper (occasional rag-picker and prostitute when money got tight).

It was Brown who picked Phillip from among the streetwalkers on Charlotte Street, took him home, kissed him and drugged him. With regret, Brown then took Phillip to the tool shed where Cromwell beat the young man with the side of a cutlass, slit his throat then planted his ruined corpse under a row of palm trees.

For one year, Jane waited at her bedroom window for Phillip's return. When he did not show, she shuttered her heart and went to London where the cold drizzle and fog suited her. After saying goodbye to Jane at the Port-of-Spain wharf, Cromwell went straight to Mr. Brown's house and sat with Alice on her narrow settee. Touching her thigh, he asked her to choose any flower that he might grow it in his garden. Alice blushed. You must grow more trees, she whispered, handsome palms with branches like arms and legs flapping wildly about. Cromwell was a bit startled, but collected himself and kissed Alice mightily until she forgot the matter.