

A BIOGRAPHICAL NOVEL



GODDIE

ROBERT PICART

GODDIE

WHAT PEOPLE ARE SAYING ABOUT *GODDIE*

“Biographical novels are at times a Machiavellian tool used to ‘humble-brag’ about the main subject. *Goddie* is the antithesis of this. Robert Picart is masterful at painting a picture and capturing the moment. He describes events with such accuracy the reader will believe the lyrical illusion and feel exactly what he wants to convey. In *Goddie*, Picart wove a West Indian journey that forces those of us born to immigrant parents to take stock, stand proud, and commit to finishing the vision for which our forebears sacrificed.”

— DONALD F. MCLEOD

CHILDHOOD FRIEND &

JUSTICE IN THE ONTARIO COURT OF JUSTICE

“I saw my mother’s life and heard my grandmother’s voice in the poetic and melodious writing of *Goddie*. This profound, emotional, and beautiful story is my people’s narrative. Each page stirred a visceral reaction that kept me with her every step of the way.”

— KIKE OJO-THOMPSON,
PRINCIPAL CONSULTANT, KOJO INSTITUTE

“The students I see every day are worthy descendants of the powerful legacies that *Goddie*’s story represents. This novel is a moment for teenagers to see the voyage of many Black families in contemporary literature.”

— ADOLPH WILLIAMS, MANAGER, SOCIAL WORK AND
ATTENDANCE TORONTO DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

“The first few lines I read from *Goddie* took my breath away. Picart’s lyrical writing and lush imagery transports readers immediately into *Goddie*’s life and takes you on a journey that will leave you amazed and breathless at the end. By the time you are done, you too will believe that anything is possible.”

— CHARISSE M. WILLIAMS, LEADERSHIP COACH
AND AUTHOR OF *THE JOY OF THRIVING WHILE BLACK*

“Picart’s profound and expressive writing left me bursting with curiosity about my capacity to be resilient. The endless unboxing of characters, friends or foes, drew me into *Goddie*’s inspiring world full of sights, sounds, nostalgic warm breezes and unbridled hope.”

— MIRTHHELL MITCHELL,
CO-FOUNDER OF ONYX STAR MEDIA

“This book provides an intimate window into the life of Goddie and her life’s journey through an exploration of the personal interruptions of life, loss, trauma, birth, perseverance, and hope. Her story brilliantly captures the lesser-known history of the movement of Black women during the mid-20th century from places in the English-speaking Caribbean like Jamaica to England and to Canada in pursuit of a better life for themselves and their families. *Goddie* is a welcomed contribution to Black Canadian literature.”

— NATASHA HENRY, PRESIDENT,
ONTARIO BLACK HISTORY SOCIETY

“An intriguing read, *Goddie* was like a mirror that reminded me that extraordinary circumstances produce extraordinary people.”

— SHARON RILEY, JUNO AND HARRY JEROME
AWARD-WINNING VOCALIST
AND MUSIC EDUCATOR.

“*Goddie* brought to life the trials, tribulations, and triumphs of every Black mother. A constant mix of blues and jubilation, her vivid life illustrates how brutal circumstances can transform and elevate us to a place where eventually the journey all makes sense. The pearl-like words of Goddie’s story will bring tears to your eyes and warmth to your heart.”

— DAHABO AHMED-OMER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
OF THE BLACKNORTH INITIATIVE

“The story of *Goddie* is a searing tribute to the people of Jamaica and the wider Caribbean diaspora. Picart beautifully wove a solemn tale of loss and abandonment against the backdrop of my home country. This story brought to life all the conversations my mother and father shared with me growing up. *Goddie* is a celebration and a worthy catalyst for discussion with my students. Picart has done us all a service.”

— MARLA HUNTER, PROFESSOR OF MATHEMATICS
AND SCIENCE, JOHN HOPKINS UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION

“*Goddie* masterfully captures a familiar journey of many Jamaican immigrants with grace and reverence. Robert Picart colourfully salutes a riveting woman’s testimony of overcoming significant odds in the pursuit of a better life. A magnificent contribution to understanding the untold chronicles of Caribbean people who paved the road for people like me to travel.”

— LENWORTH (LEN) CARBY,
UNITED WAY GREATER TORONTO TRUSTEE

“*Goddie* is an inspiring story of a young woman’s search for her place in the world. With a moving narrative of love, surviving loss, friendship, strength, and hope, she invites the reader into her deepest contemplations and draws you to the refreshing sights and sounds of “home”. Robert Picart craftily depicts the tumultuous journey across the sea, and connects us all to the true historical footprint of so

many Jamaican people. It renews the strength and perseverance of a culture who have made some of the greatest contributions to Canadian life. *Goddie* will make wonderful addition to any curriculum.”

— MICHELLE FRANCIS,
EDUCATOR AND CURRICULUM CONSULTANT

“Picart paints a colourful and complex picture of the life of Caribbean people that goes well beyond the typical, two-dimensional storytelling of our experience that so often populates popular media and entertainment. *Goddie* is necessary reading for those interested in truly understanding the grit, strength, and character of Jamaican people—on and off the island, and for those interested in knowing the stories that were never fully revealed to us by those who forged the path for us.”

— KIMBERLY BENNETT,
DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS,
CANADIAN RACE RELATIONS FOUNDATION

“Robert Picart’s vivid language instantly transported me into Goddie’s world and took me on a ride I didn’t want to end! Her sheer courage to push through and persevere is inspiring. As a child of island soil, I know the often painful truth of the past can cause stories to never be told. Goddie’s truth created a deep longing to know my family’s history better!”

— STACY CAMPBELL MARSHALL,
“DAY IN THE LIFE OF AN ISLAND WIFE”
LIFESTYLE VLOGGER, NASSAU, BAHAMAS

GODDIE

ROBERT PICART



NEW DEGREE PRESS

GODDIE

COPYRIGHT © 2022 ROBERT PICART

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form by any electronic or mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems, without permission in writing from the publisher, except by a reviewer who may quote brief passages in a review.

This is a work of creative non-fiction. Some parts have been fictionalized in varying degrees, for various purposes.

Permission requests: www.robertpicart.com

Unless otherwise indicated, Bible verses are taken from the following translation: King James Version (KJV), Public Domain.

Cover art by SirIsrael Azariah King. @siakorignals

Cover design by Bojana Gigovska

Published by New Degree Press

First Edition: 2022

Library of Congress Control Number: 2021917813

ISBN

978-1-63730-431-0 *Paperback*

978-1-63730-519-5 *Kindle Ebook*

978-1-63730-520-1 *Digital Ebook*

TO MY MOTHER, VETA

You gave us everything. You did it alone.

You never complained. You never gave up.

I just wanted you to see yourself.

I hope you like it.

CONTENTS

FOREWORD	17	
PART I	MORNING BREEZE	23
CHAPTER 1.	MORNING BREEZE	25
CHAPTER 2.	GODDIE	29
CHAPTER 3.	DAADIE	35
CHAPTER 4.	WALKING HOME WITH JAMES	41
PART II	POTS AND PAINS	49
CHAPTER 5.	MUMMA	51
CHAPTER 6.	POTS AND PAINS	59
CHAPTER 7.	BUN UP PLANTAIN	67
CHAPTER 8.	CHICKENS, BULLET HOLES, AND MACHETES	71
CHAPTER 9.	GREEN BANANA PORRIDGE	79
PART III	NINE NIGHT	85
CHAPTER 10.	COLONGOLOOK RIVER	87
CHAPTER 11.	COUSIN CHRIS	95
CHAPTER 12.	NINE NIGHT	105
CHAPTER 13.	BLACK MANGO TREE	113
CHAPTER 14.	FRACTURED	119
CHAPTER 15.	DEATH AND THE GREEN DRESS	127

PART IV	PSALM 55	139
CHAPTER 16.	PSALM 55	141
CHAPTER 17.	LAST MORNING	149
CHAPTER 18.	GOODBYE SPRING HILL	155
CHAPTER 19.	NOT FRIENDS	161
CHAPTER 20.	LONG WALK	169
CHAPTER 21.	LAURETTA	177
PART V	WINDRUSH BABY	187
CHAPTER 22.	THREE CHICKENS	189
CHAPTER 23.	SHOPKEEPER'S SALVATION	197
CHAPTER 24.	ANN'S LETTER	207
CHAPTER 25.	A DAUGHTER'S GOODBYE	211
CHAPTER 26.	WINDRUSH BABY	221
PART VI	THE ARSONIST	229
CHAPTER 27.	THE NURSE AND THE STRANGE FELLOW	231
CHAPTER 28.	IT ALL GETS REVEALED	237
CHAPTER 29.	ARSONIST	241
CHAPTER 30.	DAADIE'S SMILE	247
ORMSBY FAMILY PHOTOS		254
ORMSBY FAMILY TREE		255
A TWIN'S EPILOGUE		257
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS		261
JAMAICAN GLOSSARY WORDS AND PHRASES		265

*Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not
dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen
thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold
thee with the right hand of my righteousness.*

—ISAIAH 41:10

—KING JAMES VERSION

FOREWORD

We don't really know anyone, now do we? We think we do. We search the world looking for heroes to rescue us, generals to lead us, and bishops to teach us. We do all this not knowing the greatest mystery could be sitting right in front of us, stirring her English tea.

Sure, Robert and I knew the caregiver and provider. But we didn't really know her at all. Good Jamaican manners would say we call her "Mum," but her family nicknamed her Goddie. For Robert and me, this person stirring her tea was a stranger.

The revelations started with the simple inquiry: "Tell us about your childhood." Robert's original plan was to record a few stories for a podcast or maybe just keep for our kids. In exchange, we both received a gift.

Going on this writing journey with Robert has been amazing. As his twin brother, I can't express how proud I am. Watching him write about the life of Goddie has taught me that a reverent separation happens when you capture your parent's experience. You listen like a child, but you gather facts as an investigator. It's not enough to just sling sentences together. You have to get it right.

Robert wanted to ensure it was all meaningfully articulated. His inexperience as an author would hold no water to the magnitude of this moment. Watching him empty his emotions and rise intellectually was inspiring.

As we sat and listened, she would look to the left and take herself back to a time when no shoes, four to a bed, and outdoor kitchens were the norm. Her voice rambled as she detailed the trauma of parental death, loneliness, and heartbreak. While it is the job of our elders to share their lessons, it isn't their job to relive their traumas for our consumption. Even in writing this, I'm humbled deeply at the privilege to watch Robert interpret this for her.

The protective side of my mother said that watching her father die, burying her mother six months later, and becoming indentured all at sixteen was nobody's business. It was her cross to bear.

West Indians are renowned for their secrets and ferocious about privacy. As Robert concentrated on the stories of escape, heartbreak, migration, and depression, we both realized that this was not just a conversation. It was a masterclass in how to navigate your life when it keeps getting interrupted.

When you realize the backdrop to this story takes place in the country hills of Jamaica, the dichotomy really comes to life. Who knew the land of jerk chicken, white rum, and reggae music was capable of inflicting so much trauma? Jamaica had everything. For Goddie, everything wasn't anything.

As the conversations with mum got deeper and the hours got longer, Robert and I realized what she was sharing wasn't just for us to hoard. The lessons were much deeper and much richer.

Robert wrote this novel based on Goddie's story for any person who's ever had to start life over. For some, it is not just in the starting; it's in the starting over from the middle of wherever you are. Only a few get to start over from the beginning. The rest of us pick up the fragments and start from the middle.

The journey of this novel meets the reader who lives at the crossroads of aspiration and anguish. Goddie's story is about her journey through trauma and misdeed—a life that winds its way through the coffee hills of Blue Mountain and the district of Spring Hill. A life that digs deep into the sinew of Jamaica and examines a time not so far removed from slavery.

It was a time when classes ruled the masses, and simplicity and gratefulness were the tools of war. Goddie's story examines the potency of Jamaican culture through the lens of loss and discovery. Witness the granular transition of a poor girl learning how to recover again, again, and again.

This novel is more than a story. This novel is us.

It now serves as a lighthouse, warning us against the missteps of the past while giving us the insight to see ourselves and where we come from. Although this story is emotional, it serves to remind us all that victory lives in each foot we put in front of the other.

Robert started down the path of a motivational memoir, but the journey took on a bigger meaning. It became clear her life lessons could be applied to anyone's journey. Writing a novel based on her life allowed him to underscore the fundamental themes of resiliency and triumph in the midst of upheaval.

Robert and I send encouragement to all those who read this and hope this inspires you to keep going. Please

understand that it is possible to redefine who you are. If a young girl alone in the world can start over with nothing but a bag and a boat ticket, then you can start over too. You'll be okay. You can start your interrupted life over from the middle.

It's not over. Keep pressing.

Richard Picart

PART I

MORNING
BREEZE

CHAPTER 1

MORNING BREEZE

The morning breeze was a false friend.

The breeze from the southwest wound its way through the parish, embracing everyone willing to meet it. It cut across the farms and hit the faces of Spring Hill with the promise of renewal. Spring Hill was a small district town in the mountains of Jamaica. The morning breeze jumped from hut to house and from churchyard to farmyard.

It teased all to venture out and seek the promise of the day. The morning breeze woke the lush eastern parish. The trees rose for duty, the rivers announced their presence, and the sun assumed the overseer position once held by others.

Warm and thick with promise, the morning breeze carried with it the fragrance of fried dumplings and fresh ackee. Salt air washed the terror of the past, the grief of yesterday, and for some, the promise of tomorrow.

In 1945, the island of Jamaica was divided into fourteen parishes that spanned three hundred square miles. In the far east, the Portland parish was home to Blue Mountain. The mountain held the Spring Hill district in its bosom, giving it the best of everything and nothing. Some described it as more beautiful than any woman.

If Portland was beautiful, then Spring Hill was its daughter—perfect and imperfect at the same time. This world in the hills offered a poor man's Eden, a rebuke of the changing nearby Port Antonio. The bush forgave everyone and no one as it offered both medicine and restriction in its duties.

Once governed by the Arawak people, Jamaica gave up her seed to adopt new seed from Africa. Nigerian sinew now carved her glory. She soon scattered her African seed only to allow new seed from China and India to take hold. The strength required to survive the depression caused Jamaica to war against herself, trading slave owners for political parties. Jamaicans had grown accustomed to the turmoil.

Portland was the place of runaway slaves. Freedom fighters and rebellion forces made their home there. Like stubborn iron, Jamaicans forged their beauty from the battles waged one hundred years prior.

In the 1800s, it was said Jamaica held the worst of the enslaved. The island watched as prophets became pickers, kings traded crowns for scars, and noblemen bowed to the sugar cane. Palaces turned into plantations, and the bellies of ships traded lots for the blue of the ocean. Those who refused to bow would bend or be buried.

The new Jamaicans were now unwilling citizens without a passport. The old religion of tribe and deity traded lots for the quiet belief in freedom. This freedom morphed from reality to principles and goals. Simple freedom was no longer an only child. It now had the siblings of political, intellectual, and spiritual freedom. If freedom was the goal, then initiative and ambition were the keys and long-suffering was the price.

The sun seared Jamaica's soul into its people. Dark skin baked to perfection encased muscular bodies capable of doing anything. Yam and dasheen roots fed the will to move

gracefully from era to era, making the impossible seem easy while defying the circumstances surrounding them.

Slavery couldn't shave away their high cheek bones, long limbs, and sturdy stature. Magnificence came from their pores and glistened on their scalp like a crown. Brilliance illuminated their eyes, and artistry was their currency. Jamaicans could do anything, cook anything, grow anything, and suffer anything.

Post-slavery Jamaicans didn't seek pity; they sought to be released to claim their potential, unguarded and unsupervised. Jamaica's greatest crop was its people—people who would gladly trade the suffrage of the sun for the winter of new beginnings. For some, the winter was found in the hills of Portland, Jamaica.

For one young girl, it all began in the hills of Portland in 1945.

Surviving in 1945 was hard. Surviving in Jamaica was relentless. Surviving in Jamaica meant enslavement by circumstance. The work was uncompromising. There was never a break. The flux of life was determined by powers incapable of measure.

For the Ormsby family, the flux of life was determined by two things. What they could grow, and what they could sell. This was Jamaica. This was Portland. This was Spring Hill.

Yes, the morning breeze was a false friend. For one little girl named Goddie, the August breeze of 1945 would never feel the same again.

CHAPTER 2

GODDIE

The morning was the best time for Goddie because it was the only time her imagination held center court uninterrupted.

While lying in bed looking out the window, she could see the palm overseers. They swayed back and forth, mocking her for sleeping in. The distraction was enough to forget the two other people lying beside her and the little one at her feet.

As she lay on her back, the dichotomy of her life was as simple as shifting her eyes from the tin roof to the open blue skies. She was a poor girl living on a paradise island. The sun pierced through the rusted metal edges of the roof. Even though the sun's presence meant work, it also meant new mercies.

Goddie was happy. In 1945, most Jamaicans were happy, but poor. Dirt poor. It was almost a birthright. Her family paid their land rent and ate much of what they farmed. They sold what they could and remained faithful over the rest. They knew it could be much worse. Much, much, worse.

She was the middle child of nine. It was a brood of sorts, spanning ages over twenty years. The clan started with the eldest son Lambert and made its way down to Edith, the baby.

Goddie had her charge of the younger ones while the oldest four worked the farm, the house, and inevitably, the war.

Her dreams demanded high detail and more room. A three-room house with eleven people was not enough room for all her glory. Goddie's ideas spread wide and spared none. They bore more weight than her bed frame could handle. Her dreams could not be secured by a simple wooden slat and roaming dog. There had to be more than fighting four people in a one-man bed. There just had to be more than putting in a day's work before eight o'clock.

She looked forward to the mornings. That's when she reviewed her game plan. Her training began long before the school bell, and the fight stretched far beyond the island. For her, the early morning was the chance to prepare for the day's challenges. She checked her body, her mind, and her spirit. Hard life had already taken enough, and she was not giving up anymore.

"Goddie! I'm not cleaning up for you again! Yuh can deal with Daadie this time. It's time yuh backside get warm up now," shouted Laurretta, Goddie's oldest sister, who never shied away from letting the world know.

"I'm coming. I'm coming," acquiesced Goddie as she snapped back to reality and Spring Hill's gravity. Dreaming would have to wait until later.

"Lassie Ormsby, get up now. You too, Minnette. Go wash yuh face before Mumma come. Come on!" barked Goddie.

Sharing a bed with three siblings was a hardship, especially in the mornings. Goddie became a sergeant, as she wanted no part of dealing with the general. Daadie was kind, but he did not play around with the morning routine.

"Ok, I'm sending Daadie for you. You all will move faster then," Laurretta said as she turned to leave. "A good switch

will make things all clear. Keep going. Yuh doing fine.” She stormed off again and swung the door open to find her father.

“Get up, nuh?” Goddie complained, shoving Minnette from the bed in retaliation. “Yuh should know by now. It’s school time. Stop pretend. LET’S GO.”

As she climbed out of her bed and looked for her uniform, she realized her dreams, for now, would have to be exchanged for reality. Duty called, and it was only calling once. Get these kids ready or deal with Daadie.

The Ormsby family lived in a simple district. There was the school, the church, the graveyard, and the post office. That was Spring Hill in Portland, Jamaica. Everything else was subject to the imagination.

Goddie knew imagination itself would have to be deferred for washing faces, washing floors, and wiping furniture all before school. Crisp uniforms. Bodies fed. Books in hand. No exceptions. She pushed the last sibling out of the room and slid into view of the broken mirror on the wall.

Goddie believed she was beautiful. She was the reflection of both the trial and triumph of Portland, Jamaica. She was forever long. Her arms were limbs and her legs flowed. For sixteen, she was towering. All nine children of Christopher and Caroline Ormsby stretched toward the sky as if growing their way out of poverty was an option.

Everything about her was long. Her arms wrapped around her as if she was her only friend. Her fingers encased everything she touched. Her lashes took their time to recover when she gazed. Her hands were like unworn English gloves. They were delicate enough to finish a braid and strong enough to fill the water drum before school.

Goddie was more personified than even she knew. Her high cheek bones and pronounced lips certified her blackness,

but her stride certified her queendom. Everything leads to the eyes. They were indifferent. They dissected the reality of Portland with ease and showed no partiality. Always shifting slowly, they recorded everything on film to be assessed and decided later.

The eyes were the lieutenants, and they always reported the truth. There would be no verdict in the moment—only the collection of truths and hard lessons that would bear fruit later. She knew she was a queen, but royalty was rarely recognized in its own land.

“Yes, keep staring in the mirror. Mumma soon come,” Delvina whispered. Goddie turned to throw daggers but quickly looked back at the mirror. Delvina was her birth name, but everyone called her Dearis. Dearis came after Goddie in age but spoke as the elder in the bedroom. “The pretty looks dun, and yuh nuh get none.” She laughed and bounded out the room for breakfast and inspection.

Dearis didn’t seem to have dreams. Not like Goddie’s anyway. Her dreams were limited to getting the last dumpling, kissing Mumma goodbye, and running out to the road to meet schoolmates before they left her.

Goddie rubbed coconut oil all over her long arms and legs. It made her cocobolo hair color shine and her skin beautiful. She oiled herself not only to protect herself from the sun, but also to protect herself from life. She had to preserve herself as much as possible. Sheen was the protection. It was a foolish protection perhaps, but Goddie was clear. She did not want what was around her to get in.

She was saving room for more, saving room for what the swaying coconut trees and morning breeze had promised. If a little bit of coconut oil ensured she would see more, she would have dumped the whole can over her head.

Goddie took on many roles as the middle child. Her impatience grew as she felt stuck resolving fights among older ones and having to explain it all to the younger ones. She got away with a lot but was smart enough to know tall people can't hide forever.

She quickly threw her uniform over her head, brushed off the front, and headed out of the room.

CHAPTER 3

DAADIE

The days drifted into weeks as the school term made its way through the early summer.

Goddie always had so much to do before heading off to school. The only part she enjoyed was sweeping up. The thrush of the brush broom was meditative. There was something about moving the broom from side to side. Like a metronome, it relaxed the tensions of life and cleared her mind to focus on other things.

With all the siblings outside, she was free to sweep quickly. Goddie fixed the plaits in her hair and started sweeping from the back of the house, working the rooms one by one.

Her housedress swayed in the rhythm as the open windows flushed the dust out with the morning breeze. With the front door open, she could see clear into the field. There she saw a familiar figure coming toward her. She didn't want Daadie to see her, so she looked through the wood slats of the house and watched him. Watching Daadie walk in from the fields became a morning ritual.

The sun preceding his silhouette was careful not to let him fall. It was strange because he never stumbled. He never fell. Even the oxen buckled from time to time, but not him.

Although the ridges of the plowed field were high, and the rocks and tree roots commanded respect, he always walked straight. He knew every inch of that land. He stepped on rocks and roots like a skipping rock on a quiet lake. Like an inspector, he scanned every leaf, every root, and every sucker, looking for any sign of disobedience to the cause.

For some reason, the sun never affected Daadie the way it affected everyone else. He could stay in the field longer, sweat slower, see farther, and smile bigger. He was forever happy in his heart. He knew he was blessed.

The creases of life gave way to the smile on his face. Hard life had carved its mark and shaped his eyes. His grey hair gave notice to time, but the rest of his body held on to the secret. His smile wasn't perfect, but it was perfect to her. He was always glad to see his middle daughter. Goddie reminded him of his own mother.

Goddie continued to watch her father walk toward the house. As he came closer, his strides become stronger and longer. She swept her way out to the veranda to see him better.

Goddie remembered the Genesis story where God told Adam he would toil all the days of his life. Daadie was Adam. Nothing was given to him. Even the land he toiled would mock him forever. As he walked up, excitement replaced exhaustion. Before walking up to the house, he always looked back at the field. It was like he was warning the fields to behave in his absence.

Daadie looks tired already, and it's not even midday, Goddie thought to herself. She kept her concerns quiet and quickly got back to sweeping.

As the grinding rocks gave notice of his approach, Goddie filled with pride. There were only a few moments between breakfast and the school bell, and she wasn't about to waste

any of them. She situated herself on the step, like she did most mornings, just waiting for her chance to have him to herself.

His words were better than food. They had more nutrients than yams, were sweeter than bananas, and had more fiber than any fruit she could have. Spending time with Daadie was spending time in school before school. The fundamentals of arithmetic and spelling had their place, but the words of her father had their mark.

“Yuh nyam breakfast already?” he asked quietly before straightening a water jug. Daadie was about order. Everything around him had to be done properly and in order. Even the water jug was subject to correction.

“Yuh get Reynold ready? ‘im always di late one,” he said as he sat down. Reynold was the youngest boy. His nickname was Foot, but Goddie preferred Reynold instead.

“Yes, Daadie,” Goddie replied. “im eating now wid Dearis an’ Minnette. Mumma serve di porridge gi ‘im.”

“Yuh uniform look gud, Goddie. It’s always important fe look presentable. Yuh can’t become sumting if yuh nuh luk like sumting. Yuh memba yuh Bible verse from yesterday?” he asked.

“Di fear of di Lord ah di beginning of wisdom an di knowledge of di holy understanding,” she looked across and said. Goddie was so tall there was no looking up, only looking across. He didn’t mind. He knew he was training a giant, and giants never look up.

She reached over and brushed sugar cane fragments from his pant leg. She could feel his knees were swollen as she brushed the cane away. He never complained about the pain in his knees. Still, Goddie knew his body was breaking down. Her thoughts were broken when he cleared his throat.

“What’s the rest of the verse?” he said.

“Proverbs nine, verse ten,” she replied. Goddie knew her verses. She would not be tested. He half-smiled at his student and stood up.

Daadie instructed the older ones to take care of the younger ones, and the younger ones to heed the older ones. He created rules and structure, and they followed. Other children suffered the absence of their father to war, so the Ormsby children knew the treasure they had.

He was impatient with laziness and never suffered fools long. Goddie was lucky enough not to see the switch very often. She knew that doing her part was helping the family do their part, and helping the family do their part was helping Daadie do his part longer.

He sat back down and looked out. “Goddie, I will nuh always be ‘ere. Commit God’s word tuh yuh heart an yuh wi neva fail,” he instructed.

“Yes, sir,” she replied. Goddie tossed around some small rocks with her feet as she listened. He only said a few words that morning. She could tell his knees were hurting, but he would never confess that.

Survival was the war, and pain was the price. Goddie knew the curve in his back was symbolic of the bridge they all walked on toward better things. Like many of the trellis bridges in Spring Hill, they looked weak, but they carried many from nowhere to somewhere. Even if the somewhere was nowhere.

“It’s time fi me to go, Daadie,” Goddie said, brushing off her backside where she sat and gathering her things.

Daadie was detailed in how the crops were plowed, how the fields were maintained, and how the harvest was organized. He organized both the loading of the produce in the morning and the accounting of the fields at night. Stopping

was dying, so he worked. He was the elder of the district and held court to resolve any issues that arose in the community. Goddie never saw him riding. He was always walking and singing a hymn quietly to himself. He would walk down Spring Hill Road to the post office and check for any news from the Farm Bureau.

Daadie's life was his crops. He could grow anything in anything. He cultivated the biggest and most hearty yams. He made the sweetest bananas. He farmed the best fruit. Everyone in the Farm Bureau knew his coffee crop. Coffee paid the bills. Coffee paid the school fee, and coffee paid for the uniforms. He taught Goddie the coloration of the beans and when to pick them. He was a perfectionist. He demanded excellence from his children and excellence from his crops. He always got both.

He was the policeman, the politician, the pastor, and the parent.

Goddie grew up watching Mumma love Daadie. She was forever staring at him. Forever listening to him. Forever hanging off his every word. Mumma knew that if Daadie said it, then it was so. Daadie was wise enough to listen as well, and they worked together to rear nine children in a three-room house. He fixed up the house and made it feel like a mansion.

As he was losing his sons to war, he had to teach his daughters. He taught Goddie how to always look out for her younger siblings and how to pay attention to the details, never missing the nuances. Goddie always stared at his hands, which always looked ten years older than the rest of his body. The cracks were mean, and they rejected healing. He was still a masterpiece.

“Whatever the Lord geh yuh to do, do it well. Yuh ‘ear me?” he said.

“Yes, Daadie,” she affirmed.

She could count on him to be honest with her, never going back and telling her secrets, forever listening and nodding. They looked out at the field. They never looked at each other. Goddie looked just like him. She was dark like him—sugar molasses like him. She smiled like him, and she was tall like him.

Goddie knew he liked her because he allowed her to size up to him. He saw himself in her and told her she would be the one who would rise. So, he took his time with her. He was never impatient. He was never rushed. He was always listening. Christopher Azariah Ormsby was his name, but Daadie was all Goddie needed.

“Mi bettah finish up di broomin and head to school,” Goddie said.

“Yuh need anything, Daadie?”

“No, my dear. Gwaan ah school.”

She pushed the dust off the veranda and leaned the brush broom to the side. After a moment inside, Goddie bounded down the porch and onto the path.

“Bye, Daadie,” she yelled.

He gave a slight wave as she disappeared around the bend.

A LIFE STARTED OVER... FROM THE MIDDLE

“The first few lines I read from *Goddie* took my breath away. Picart's lyrical writing takes you on a journey that will leave you amazed and breathless at the end.”

– **CHARISSE M. WILLIAMS**, Leadership Coach and Author of *The Joy of Thriving While Black*

“*Goddie* is a welcomed contribution to Black Canadian literature.”

– **NATASHA HENRY**, President - Ontario Black History Society

“*Goddie* is a searing tribute to the people of Jamaica and the wider Caribbean diaspora. Picart beautifully wove a solemn tale of loss and abandonment against the backdrop of my home country.”

– **MARLA HUNTER**, Professor of Mathematics and Science, John Hopkins University of Education

“Picart's profound and expressive writing left me bursting with curiosity about my capacity to be resilient.”

– **MIRTHELL MITCHELL**, Co-Founder of *Onyx Star Media*

“A magnificent contribution to understanding the untold chronicles of Caribbean people who paved the road for people like me to travel.”

– **LENWORTH CARBY**, United Way Greater Toronto Trustee



In Robert Picart's debut novel *Goddie*, we read the story of a young girl born in the mid-1900s in the picturesque Blue Mountains of Jamaica. To tourists, it's a paradise of crystal blue waters, coffee and rum. For residents, poverty, second-class citizenship and violence are reminders of daily hardship.

It's here that we meet sixteen year old Goddie. With the sudden loss of both parents, Goddie finds herself indentured to strangers in order to pay for school. Heartbroken, weary and alone, our heroine forms a plan to escape to Great Britain as the Windrush movement escalates.

Once in the U.K., will Goddie be able to escape the depths of betrayal for good and start over again? Will Goddie succumb to despair? Author Robert Picart's *Goddie* tells a gripping story of betrayal, the strength to overcome, and the glory of starting life over from the middle.



www.goddiebook.com

NEW DEGREE PRESS

ISBN 978-1-63730-431-0



9 781637 304310