

Young Heroes



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**Fictional accounts of the National Heroes of
Jamaica as children and young people written by
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Illustrations by Taj Francis

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George William Gordon True Respect for All



Mr East tapped gently on the mahogany door of his boss' office before opening it and going in. Mr Gordon was describing a new plan that would advance the sale of land, and the two professional gentlemen seated across the table from him were leaning forward, almost drooling with dreams of returns on investment. Ambitious men always visited the offices of George William Gordon because he knew how to make money.

"Mr Gordon, your father's messenger is here," East whispered in his ear.

Without hesitation, George excused himself and saw the messenger in an ante room next to his office. It was his nature to put his family first.

The messenger handed George a note, which he read quickly. His father was asking to see him at the Myrtle Bank Hotel after his luncheon, not, as George expected, a polite request for money. George scribbled a reply and told East to put a sum of money in the envelope before dispatching the messenger.

As the Custos - the first citizen of the parish, Joseph Gordon was extended particular courtesies by the hotel, and a sheltered nook in the lobby was reserved for his use. On George's approach, he stood up from the comfortable rattan arm chair and they shook hands.

The hotel had been their meeting place ever since George opened his own office in the capital: his father's home was out of bounds and he no longer wished to wait in his father's offices - a place that represented privilege that he could never obtain and which he quietly resented. After asking about his son's health and general well being, George's father explained his request for a meeting.

"George, you have been very kind to my wife and I in ways that we will perhaps never be able to repay, but I nevertheless find myself in the situation where I have to sell Cherry Gardens and move into a smaller house. I have found a suitable property in Barbican Pen. I wanted you to hear it from me first."

An involuntary jolt of sadness took George back more than ten years in the space of a single, slow pulse of his heart. Cherry Gardens was his lost paradise, and the idea that it was moving beyond one step beyond even the tenuous bond of being his father's home suspended his senses. He instead, through memory, heard his mother calling him and his sisters and brother to breakfast. She had prepared cornmeal porridge on an open fire under the shade of a guango tree not too far from the great house. The children sat on the ground at a safe distance from the pot and each waited for their bowl of hot, sweet, morning goodness. Around them, other residents of the plantation were sullen and silent as they and their children made their way to work in the fields.

Gordon had only happy memories of the Cherry Gardens plantation, his family were favoured above all the slaves because their mother had borne all of the master's natural children. They were a part of the house staff and so he knew every room in the great house while other children knew the shortcuts to the boiler house.

For some reason, he never knew why, when he was still small his father invited him into his study and gave him books and told him to teach himself to read. When he was ten years old George stopped working at the plantation altogether because he was sent to his godfather for schooling.

The schooling never stopped even after his father decided to get married and his mother's family was forced to leave the plantation.

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"It is not shame, it is just how things must be," his mother told them. She held her head high when the other workers mocked her and her children as their belongings were carted away. George never entered his father's house again.

Moving out of Cherry Gardens, however, brought George closer to the city and he quickly shed "country boy" ways and slipped into a new urban skin. He easily fit into the company of free natives and developed the skills and instincts of a man of business which allowed him to move between the worlds of the coloureds and the planters. The fact that his father, the Custos of the parish and member of the Assembly, openly acknowledged him certainly did not hurt.

"...so this is your opportunity to take the seat," senior Gordon said. George had completely missed the last few minutes of his father's monologue.

"I beg your pardon Custos," said George.

"Surprised that I would back you?" his father said slightly amused. 'Sir, you have shown yourself to be as excellent man as any in the Kingdom, and therefore the world."

Using his fingers, Joseph Gordon counted-off his son's virtues.

"You have established yourself as a sound man of business; oh yes, I have heard about this Mutual Assurance Society that will bring more land into the hands of hard working people. You are a man of God, though I cannot understand why you moved away from our Church. You have elevated your mother and sisters and set their feet on the path to secure futures. My financial fortunes, as you know, are greatly diminished, but I do have some influence and, with your permission, seek to put your name forward as the representative of the people of St Thomas, where I know you already have significant land assets."

"But I am just 22," The words came out of Gordon's mouth even as he saw the great potential for rapid personal advancement....

“How is your mother?”

“It was a question that the elder Gordon asked whenever they met, and George had always said, as he did now, “**She is doing well thanks for asking.**”

“I tried to do the best by her George. I hope that you see that; but true respect for all the people of Jamaica will never happen until more native people, like you, become the leadership of this country. Will you offer yourself for nomination?” Gordon senior's Scottish pragmatism was no more evident than when he was brokering a deal, a trait his son inherited.

“You honour me, Sir,” said George. “I will consult my associates in the parish and here in the capital and let you know in short order.”

The two spoke briefly about an anticipated game of cricket and shortly afterwards, parted company.

George did not immediately return to his office. He stopped at his solicitors and gave instructions that they make an immediate offer to purchase Cherry Gardens so that his father and stepmother would not have to leave their home. By the end of the day, George decided that he would accept his father's support for the Assembly seat and represent the parish of St Thomas.