

Young Heroes



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**Fictional accounts of the National Heroes of
Jamaica as children and young people written by
Gwyneth Harold.**

Illustrations by Taj Francis

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**Nanny of the Maroons
Eternal Father Bless our Land**



High in the green mountains in the East of the island of Jamaica lived a young woman who loved her family very much, but she was always getting in trouble as she enjoyed going on long hikes in the forest and hunting in the mountains instead of tending to the chickens and weeding the vegetable gardens.

"Where is my Nanny now?" Her mother would often sigh and anxiously look out for her daughter who would arrive home in the late evening after a day of hunting and carrying mountain doves that she caught and which she knew her family enjoyed to eat.

Nanny's people lived in a beautiful place, but they always had to be on the watch for they were free Africans who were in danger of being trapped and returned to a life of bondage on the plantations.

Late one night, Nanny, her brother Quao and friends Kofi and Yaw decided to go all the way down to a lagoon to catch fish. It was the night of a full moon and big cooking fish were sure to be there.

They knew the route in the dark, but in bright moonlight they easily reached the lagoon, cast their lines below the glinting water and into the dark deep. In no time, Yaw, who was best at fishing, pulled in two good sized eating fish. Nanny hoped for some parrot fish to slowly barbecue over a pimento wood fire.

They had been there only a short time when the soft sound of horse hooves approaching on the dusty road caused Nanny and her friends to lay low and look over to the coast road. A small group of armed uniformed men were riding from the East. That could only mean one thing - the militia, also taking advantage of the moonlight, were looking for runaways. Fear pricked Nanny's skin as she remembered when only a few years ago her family had run away from a plantation and were taken into a community to become a part of the Windward Maroons. She kept her head low as the soldiers always had expert mountain trackers with them.

The mounted party stopped and dismounted. One man stayed to look after the horses and the rest of the group disappeared into the fern and trees that fringed the coast road, very near to the path that Nanny and her friends used. There was no knowing when the men would return and it was not wise to stay until daylight, so the group pulled in their lines and crept away from the watchman and the horses and made their way back across the road and up the mountain by another route.

As they passed down a dense path near where there was an old Taino cave, Nanny smelled a cooking fire, "Ji nah," she whispered, which means "stand" in their father's language, Akan. The group stood and listened. They could hear water in the distance hitting against the rock cliff of the lagoon; they heard croaking lizards and nothing else, but the smell of smoke was faintly there. After a minute or two, after hearing nothing more they made off even more carefully than before. Then, they heard a woman's moan.

Nanny held the hand of her brother and pulled Yaw and Kofi to her.
"The runaways found the cave," said Nanny. We must help them before the militia gets there."

"But Nanny, they have guns...." Yaw said.

"Yes, but He Who Knows and Sees Everything is on the side of right, which is our side. Yao, it will be your job to stay here and listen. If we meet trouble run and get help from our elders. We will pray for your *nan ti yeah*, safe journey.

Like shadows, Nanny, Kofi and Quao stepped lightly through the dense bushes and leaves until they got to the cave. By this time the smell of the cooking was strong and there was definitely shuffling and muffled moans coming from within the ancient cave.

"Agoo", called Nanny quietly, so that the persons inside were keeping watch would know it was an Akan person outside and not an enemy. All went quiet inside of the cave.

"Agoo", called Nanny again.

"Akwaaba", said an anxious voice.

Nanny slowly went inside of the cave and in the flickering firelight saw a group of women and children holding each other in a corner.

She went to the oldest woman in the group, the elder, and knelt before her.

"Mother, men with guns are near. You must leave now and come with us."

"We are happy to leave but my granddaughter is hurt. If she moves she may die."

She pointed to a young woman at the back who was crying and holding a pregnant belly.

"I can take her," said Nanny. "Mother, please go with my brother and my friend. They will take you to safety. We have little time."

"The Great One has sent you, so we must do as you say," said the woman and she gathered the rest of the group and were led off by Quao and watched from the rear by Kofi and Yaw.

Nanny felt the young woman and saw that she had a fever. She left the cave and went in search of herbs. Near to a stream she smelled and found ginger, pulled up a root and filled the gourd she carried on her belt with water. On a drier part of the hillside she pulled a handful of leaves from a clump of fevergrass.

Returning to the cave, Nanny boiled the herbs and urged the young woman to have a good draught of the weak tea. After the young woman seemed in a little better shape,

Nanny got the young woman to her feet and urged her to lean and start walking to their hidden village.

When daylight eased its way into the sky, Nanny and the young woman were still far from home and in the distance, Nanny could hear the men tracking their path - sensing which way they were, closing in. Nanny knew the danger of giving away the location of her village, so decided to go down a gorge and cross the narrow point of a river to the other side. That route led to even more rugged mountainside with tracks that were harder to find, but which Nanny knew most of them very well. It was their best chance to elude the trackers, but it did expose them at one point to extreme danger.

The young woman with her was trying to be brave, but she was clearly in great pain again.

Nanny lifted her on her back and made her way down the side of the gorge, holding on to bushes and plants to maintain balance on the way down. She got to the bottom and finding the exposed stones she knew would be there, crossed to the other side and started the climb again, this time fully exposed to the men with guns who were now on the opposite bank.

She heard the leader give the order to load their weapons: there was a good chance of being shot.

Nanny laid the young woman in a sheltered nook behind a boulder and faced the men.

Since escaping from the plantation, the mountain had been her home and she worshipped her God freely there. She paused to do this now. Bending on her knees, her back to the hunters, she raised both arms up to the still grey sky, heavy with moisture-laden clouds.

She called out, "Eternal Father, bless our land. Guard us with thy mighty hand."

The first cracks from the guns broke the peace of the valley. A wild boar nearby darted further into the bush, a flock of parakeets left a tree as if on one pair of wings, their calls adding anxiety to the air.

A volley of gunshot travelled across the valley in the direction of Nanny, and with her upraised hands she caught them and with a downward arc of her arms, she sent them back to the men.

Later when the young woman gave birth to her baby, she whispered this story to her mother who told her to hush, then prayed against bad thoughts.

Back on the plantation, being treated for shot wounds, the men also told this story. They were believed as they had the scars to prove it.