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We touch down at 1:46 p.m. local time.

Warm air floods the plane as the doors open, and the sweet aroma of fruit wafts in the air. Passengers race to grab their bags as the thick accent comes over the PA once again:

“Ladies and gentle-mon, welcome to Kingston, Jamaica. It iz a beautiful day here on the island, and we wish you nothing but irie on your travels. It has been our pleasure to have you on board. As always, thank you for flying Air Jamaica.”

I gently shake Mia awake as Patois begins to pour out all around us. I grab our backpacks from the cabin, and we throw them over our shoulders before trudging off the plane.

As we make our way through the busy airport, we are surrounded by a sea of rich, dark skin. I feel courageous as we navigate through the brown and black bodies, and I can’t help but wonder if the feeling of belonging is why Dad loves it so much here.

Once we clear at customs, we continue our trek through the massive airport. All around us, people smile and laugh, and there is a mellowness to their pace. Most of the women wear bright colors and intricate braids in their hair, Afros, or long locks down their backs. An array of sandals and flip-flops

highlight all the bright painted toenails as Mia and I weave through the crowd.

“Stay close!” I yell, grabbing on to her hand. When we find the exit, I grow nervous knowing what awaits us on the other side. I look to Mia. “You have everything?”

She nods.

“Okay,” I whisper to myself. “Let’s do this.”

With our suitcases lugging behind us, we spill out of the doors and into the hot sun. The heat immediately consumes me, and it is amplified by the chaos and noise that surrounds us. The streets are *packed*. Loud horns blare, and people yell back and forth in thick, heavy Patois accents. Men argue on the side of the road, their dialect harsh as they negotiate the rates for local shuttle buses. Along the roads, merchants sell colorful beaded jewelry and fruit so ripe that I can taste it in the air. Women wear beautiful head wraps and sell plantains and provisions, bartering back and forth with eager travelers. People spew out of overcrowded taxis, desperate to catch their flights as others hop in, desperate to get home. The sun pierces my skin as the humidity and gas fumes fill my lungs. The action is overwhelming, and I feel like a fish out of water. As we wait by the curb, there is no sight of our father.

“What if he forgot?” Mia asks.

“He wouldn’t,” I reply. “Mom just talked to him.”

“What if he got the time mixed up?”

“He’ll be here.”

But the truth is, when it comes to our father, I can never be sure.

I fight with this idea as five minutes turn into ten, and ten into twenty.

The heat blazes, and sweat drips down my stomach.

I check my watch: forty-two minutes.

I pull my pink hoodie over my head to reveal a white tank

top, tying the hoodie around my waist to better manage the heat. Without my phone, I have no way of contacting him to see where he is.

But he said he'd be here.

He gave us his word.

Fifty-six minutes later, our father is nowhere to be found. My eyes frantically search the crowd as I ponder how much his word is truly worth. Time and time again, he has proven that the answer is not much. I turn to Mia, ready to tell her to head back inside. Worry graces her face for the first time since we left. Her carefree attitude fades as the concern of a nine-year-old takes over. I can't stand to see her like this, and I'll do whatever it takes to escape the feeling that is bubbling inside of me.

We'll take the first plane out.

"Mi, Dad's not coming. Let's go back insid—"

"Yow! Tilla!" A deep voice interrupts me mid-sentence. I whip my head around to find my father standing a few feet away with two freshly sliced pineapple drinks in hand.

"Daddy!" Mia screams. She drops her things on the curb and sprints toward him. My heart does somersaults.

One glimpse of my father and I am a child again.