

Episode 1

The Airport

8 :32 am , March 21 2019 Montego Bay Airport Jamaica

It's sizzling hot. The air is heavy. People everywhere are searching for other people everywhere. The security police are holding machine guns. They are silent and serious in their watch. Where the hell is Canute?

There's a bar where a few women in revealing slit dresses drink strong rum drinks, cruising to see who might be looking for what or who might be looking for them. Reggae music buzzes in the background.

The sweet smells of marijuana and hash mix with the strong scent of fried plantains. I'm hungry. Where the hell is Canute?

Crap, I don't even have a photo of him, I don't know how old he is, if he is portly or slim, dresses in tee shirts or button downs, is black or white skinned, is balding or has dreadlocks or if he'll be arriving alone or with others. We didn't even plan a clear place to meet. What was I thinking? Why was I not thinking?

My three bags feel heavier than they did last night. I'm tired. My back hurts from the two long flights. I'm definitely not a kid anymore. My cell phone has no signal. I remind myself to stay calm. I sit down and check for my passport and credit cards. Yes, right where they should be in my money belt. Just because I don't know anyone in Jamaica, have never been here before, and have read the recent State Department reports about tourists who've been raped, robbed and murdered.. none of that means that I am in danger. Not yet.

Taxi drivers in freshly pressed uniforms sit in a cluster, and I sit down next to them hoping to find safety with their numbers. They are waiting to be summoned by people whose flights have just landed. They check their cell phones every few seconds. Others stand, yawning, holding up hand written signs, waving them them limply with no apparent interest. But there is no sign with my name. No one is here to fetch me.

I remember what it was like to be five years old waiting alone at school for my mother, long after all the other kids were picked up and whisked away for lunch. I remember how I cried because I was the only child left, and was scared that my Mom would never come for me. To make matters even worse my idiot kindergarten teacher would find her most belittling voice to taunt me, “You’re just a cry baby. Cry Amy, cry, cry.”

I push the memory away. That was then, over sixty years ago, and this is now. In spite of the heat I am beginning to feel a wave of chills down my back. When I get sick this is normally how it starts. I realize I’m exhausted; I haven’t eaten in about twelve hours. Come on , Amy. You can’t just sit here, come up with a plan.

I ask the taxi drivers about my destination, Mountambrin. I say it slowly , carefully enunciating each syllable and then I write it down on part of a napkin saved from Starbucks at Seatac where this trip began. They shake their heads, one by one . No, no one has heard of Mountambrin. How can that be? How can a place be so remote, so far off the grid? Jesus, what if there is no Mountambrin? Funny. My Mom used to say, “ Not funny ha ha,.. funny strange”. I’m beginning to worry not just about this minute in time but about all the future minutes that are silently ticking ahead.

After shuffling through my papers I find a contact number for Mountambrin. I ask one of the cabbies to call it and and he reaches someone and speaks in what I learn is Pattoi. When he hangs up he translates, “They are in traffic; they are on their way”.

Over an hour later , a car pulls up and a slim man with glowing black skin dressed in a loose flowing pastel colored top jumps out. He trots towards me and extends his hand as an introduction. He has long graceful fingers with nicely manicured nails. He’s in good condition so it’s hard to figure out how old he might be; my guess is that like me he’s a well preserved 60 something year old, and that most likely, if my gaydar is working, also like me, he’s gay.

“Finally we are meeting”. He giggles. It’s strange but sweet to see that old a man giggling. *All those emails and now you’re finally here.* He seems genuinely happy to see me and I am relieved that the tension of waiting for a stranger is lifting. So far so good other than his lateness. He looks intelligent, trustworthy and just plain nice. This will all be OK... We carry my

bags to a rusty Cadillac from the 1970s with the words, Dr. Gruhlke, ophthalmologist, painted on its doors. There is also a “for sale sign” stuck on one of its cracked, aging windows.

The air conditioning system blows barely a trickle of hot air in our direction. The driver nods but doesn't say a word. We're on our way.

Episode 2

The drive to the mountain

We stop a mile away from the airport to grab a fast lunch and shop for my special needs: wine and bottled water.

Once we are back on the road, restaurants, shops and all signs of civilization quickly vanish.

We drive through winding roads where collisions are inches from happening. We pass people cooking animal parts on their make shift grills. Most of the dwellings are tiny shacks missing foundations, roofs and sometimes even front doors. Skinny dogs sniff garbage and men and women move in slow motion, looking weary and vacant from too much sun and heat.

They stare at us as we pass by. Canute tells me “ these are the squatters”- it probably wouldn't be a good idea for you to wander too far-“

Ninety minutes later, what hasn't really felt like a road becomes a driveway which doesn't really feel like a driveway. I realize we are in a jungle, a jungle which is on the top of a mountain. There are no more stores to buy toilet paper, no more gas stations to fill an empty tank, and no more restaurants to order salad with blue cheese dressing on the side or even a cup of chicken soup. We are completely off the grid and I am starting to wonder if this is what I thought I had signed up for. A hand painted sign with fading letters, “Mountambrin” directs us to make a final hair pin turn and slowly we ascend a very steep hill. No wonder no one knows about this place. The car plunges ahead for another two miles and finally comes to a stop as if exhausted. We have arrived.

Episode 3

Arrival

Welcome. Let me show you around, we'll deal with your bags later.

Right away I hear the dogs. Near the main house, there are nine of them in a large cage. They look just like animals in a zoo, stretched out with their feeding bowls, mostly sleeping on rough grassy terrain. At the sound of

our footsteps they jump into high alert. The brown mid sized one with a missing tail growls a warning in our direction and when we walk past him, shows his teeth. Canute explains that during the day they are locked in their cages but every night at 11:30 he sets them free and they prowl the grounds for our “protection.” By 7 am he locks them up again.” No real need to worry,” he says. “Well, maybe if they are out, keep your eye on Trace, the small black one. He’s not as big as the others but he’ll take your hand off given half a chance.”

Canute gives me a tour of the estate. The grounds have a wild roughness to them, thickly overgrown with vegetation and filled with huge strange looking pieces of sculpture. He knows the name of every flower, every tree and bush but it is hard to listen to his commentary. I keep wondering why the killer dogs are here and whom are they protecting from what? He stops to show me a tree’s root system which is about 400 feet long. “Isn’t this amazing? “ Actually it’s overwhelming. The teeming forms of life here seem to come in only one size, extra, extra large and they all seem to be competing for survival. Exotic trees and flowers in shades of blue, pink, red and yellow shoot out of every inch of ground. A green valley spreads out below us where coffee and plantain are growing. “We grow marijuana on top of the mountain; I’ll take you there tomorrow if you want to have a look”. He seems to love this place. ‘If you stand right here you can spot the ocean. *Isn’t this beautiful ?* he asks. I nod but say nothing. The dense foliage and bizarre sculptures sizzling in the heat are unnerving.. The vines look like they could strangle me. For the first time today I admit to myself that as much as I hate to even think the thought.. I don’t like it here.. Maybe I’ve changed. Maybe I ‘m no longer the person my friends refer to as the intrepid adventurer, living her life on the edge. What wouldn’t I give for a tourist resort with comfy lounge chairs, fluffy towels, cable TV mint chocolates , and a swimming pool in the shape of a swan? Who thought it was a good idea to accept the invitation I received nine months ago?

Dear Ms. Rubin,

I happened up on your YouTube Channel a few weeks ago and was mesmerized by your Music.

We are owners of an Artist Retreat with a Theater and Gallery In the Mountains of Westmoreland, Jamaica, West Indies. We have hosted many international pianists. If at all possible and your schedule allow, We would like to extend and Invitation to here in Jamaica. We are on the Western end of Jamaica far away from Kingston. So we are working very diligently to bring Classical Music to this end of the Country. It might interest you to know that this space was owned by Alex Haley and is the location where he wrote Roots, so there is a lot of history here.

Please let me know what the possibility of you accepting our Invitation to visit us here Mountambrin Theater\Gallery. I will await your kind reply.

Sincerely
Canute Gruhlke
Manager\Owner
Mountambrin Theater\Gallery

Just a month earlier I had talked to my good friend Kathy Madden about my composer's block. She is a psychoanalyst who has written a book on creativity so I thought she might have some advice. She told me that what I needed was someone to believe in me and my music.. "You'll see; it will make all the difference."

The universe moves in strange ways.

Ep 4: flashbacks and cancer

My mother bought me a Baldwin Acrosonic when I was eight. This replaced the white toy piano she had purchased for me at B Altmans in NYC when I was three. According to my mother I was playing along to recordings of the Mozart Horn Concertos on the toy piano before I was speaking in sentences.

Mom took me to a well known concert pianist who confirmed her hopes.. I had clear talent and it was important to start me on my musical journey right away. I don't remember if I was asked or told.

My parents slept in the living room of our small apartment in Midtown Manhattan and a considerable amount of what had been bedroom space was now appropriated by the piano, the bench, the piano light and what would be many scores of Bach , Beethoven and other famous dead white men. I remember the workers carrying in the Baldwin, piece by piece and my mother's yelling harshly at me, furious that I was watching television rather than cheering them on. She slapped me. What was wrong with me? Didn't I know how important this day was? Why wasn't I excited? But I loved my toy piano, were they going to throw it out? I hadn't asked for the big piano, but there it was.

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As I grew older, I sometimes ignored the Baldwin for days on end. My mother would place a hand written "for sale" sign on it, just to make me feel guilty. When I left home for summer camp there would be similar signs on the piano when I returned, "Amy , I missed you". Who knew that a piano could have feelings?

My teacher Doris did not always treat the Baldwin with respect. By the time I was nine she had burned a hole with her lit cigarette in one of the keys. My mother never forgave her.

My father was not an equal partner in the purchase of the Baldwin. He told my mother, " If I have to chose between buying the piano, paying for lessons, and having a bottle of scotch every week I'll pick the scotch". She picked the piano.

Nine years ago I was diagnosed with a rare blood cancer and was told that in order to stay alive I would need to take a chemo drug for the rest of my life. There would be no guarantees but following this protocol would be my best shot at survival. There was some debate about the safety of the medication. Taking it might cause the cancer to advance rather than slow down the course of the disease. In fact, taking the medication might kill me. Finally with both fear and resentment, I started swallowing the pills daily. I would be stalked by cancer no matter where I was and what I was doing

so my choice was to do all in my power to create a life of adventure and discovery.

Ep 5 Dogs at night.

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It's 11:00 pm, my first night at Mountambrin. Jesus. What a day. The heat has not lifted and the noisy fan in my room is guaranteed to keep me awake. I think a coolish shower will relax me but soon discover that there is hardly any water at all, hot or cold. More like a tepid drip which I can't shut off which then continues like a metronome throughout the night.

I lie on the musty mattress and stare up the grotesque paintings which cover every inch of my bedroom wall. Each painting features two or more nude black men with menacing faces, in warrior stances. Enormous penises protrude out of every body part imaginable including their heads. One painting would be far too many but the totality of fifteen of these in a room is an onslaught to my senses. Even the headboard and posts are imbedded with torsos and gigantic private parts. The craftwork is amazing but still, the figures disgust me. They are the works of my host, the father of Canute, Dr. Gruhelke. What kind of a person would want to bring these paintings and carvings to life?

I'm really starting to wonder about my decision to come here. But what else can I do now other than stay? There is no Hilton at the bottom of the hill. My phone has no reception. And I did make an agreement to perform a concert. Maybe I'm over tired and over reacting. Now it's after midnight. I really need to get to sleep. Well maybe instead of counting sheep I'll count penises.

Just as I am fading off into a dream I wake abruptly to the sound of dogs wailing. They sound like they are very close by. Canute had said that Trace was the alpha dog and that the others would follow wherever he led. As I turn on the night light I see Trace leap up on to my balcony with only a spindly door and window to separate us. He stares at me through the glass, and then grunts and glares. Trace has something large in his mouth and it is oozing blood. I lie in bed and try to stay as still as possible. I don't want any of my movements to challenge him. Three other dogs jump up to join him on the nearby ledge. They approach tentatively moving forward on their stomachs. Trace pants deeply, snarls a sharp warning, and then gets on his hind legs and lunges forward; He sinks his

teeth deep into the throat of the nearest dog who yelps in pain. I hear the sounds of a scuffle , the whine of defeat, and then the three dogs retreat off the balcony. I remain still. I am perspiring heavily but don't move to even wipe the sweat away. Trace noisily devours the different body parts of his hunt with occasional pauses to stare at me and see if I am watching. When I awake the next morning there is blood all over the balcony.

Good morning, Amy! Canute hands me a hot cup of coffee. Sleep well?

(Prelude to dinner) Ep 6

Canute cuts different fruits into beautiful slices which he places onto an appealing breakfast platter .. the star fruit is the most exotic. I have never had it before.

“How old were you when you were adopted?”

“Fifteen, My mom cleaned house for Dr. Russ. She told me that if he adopted me he'd get me out of Jamaica and that I could keep going to school. If I had stayed here I would have had to go to work in the fields. They let me choose although it did seem that they had already decided what was best. I came to Seattle to study international banking, and then in 2015 I gave it all up to help my father develop Mountambrin.”

Now he is cutting the papaya, the one that's the sweetest.

“Have you been married or lived with anyone?”

He shakes his head no. “I met an older man and we really hit it off. But eventually we both moved so there was no way to keep things going. There's been no one after him so I guess I've given up on love.”

“ So does your father know you're gay?” Yes I think so but we don't talk about it. I don't care what he thinks, I 'm too old for that, but here's something strange. He pauses and leans in as if he is going to tell me a secret, “ There's this violinist, Steven who has performed here a few times. He's gay and he told me that once when he and my Dad were having a few drinks Russell told him about having affairs with men. It was more than once. That's his business. I don't really want to know the details.” So Russell is in the closet, Why am I not surprised?

The banana is much more delicious than what we call bananas at home. Canute arranges the slices artfully.

Are you more like you Mom or your Dad? I laugh. God help me if I'm anything remotely like him. Bad enough that I have his looks plus I like to stay in bed as late as possible. I don't think I've inherited his meanness. I have some big flaws but I don't think I'm mean, at least not deliberately. "I thought my father was Ok with me and my relationships with women. But after he died my Mom told me the truth. He wouldn't even talk about my romantic choices, and that was really hard on her. She was all on her own, trying to figure me out.

The pineapple fruit is my favorite. Breakfast is almost ready. I'm enjoying our chat. It makes me less lonely here.

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"You know , my dad, Aaron seemed to get pleasure out of saying exactly the wrong thing at the wrong time."

Canute nods like he knows what I'm talking about. "Sounds just like my Dad. You'll be meeting him tonight at dinner."

Ep 7 flashbacks

When I was eight I realized that not everything had to be said out loud . Feelings like love and hate might be better stored up and stowed somewhere safe. I discovered the power of music to be my best friend. I could take music and wrap it around my feelings and then send it off to the world kind of like a piece of paper placed in a glass jar thrown into the sea. In my case there would be no words, and no jar and no sea. Just the sound of music, and if I got lucky, maybe someone, somewhere would hear my music and know what I meant and who I was.

At the age of 13 in summer camp I developed a strong crush on a young woman with long blonde hair and freckles. She played the guitar and wrote a powerful song, Come back Africa come back lost land. I didn't ever stop

to think about what the words meant and where Africa was, or why it was lost. But the melody and the pulsating rhythm and the way she looked when she played her song they captivated me. My shyness kept me from telling her and instead I spelled her name in sound. I wrote her a musical portrait: D, E, B, B,... no there's no Y in the language of music but if you substitute an F sharp you find that you've made a sweet melody, a melody as pretty as my Debby. Bach used this concept in some of his pieces, so why shouldn't I? And so I made an entire piece using the DEBBY method and at the end of the summer, my heart pounding, I played it for her on the piano and gave her the sheet music. Her reaction was more than I could have hoped for- tears tears and thanks. And then a long grateful hug. With "Debby" I had become a teenage composer who knew that she liked girls.

Ep 8

Dinner at Mountambrin Revised 2

It's Monday and we're having a group dinner at Mountambrin. This will be my first introduction to my host, Dr. Russell Gruhelke who discovered my music on youtube nine months ago and invited me down. I'm anxious. I want this meeting to go well; I want him to like me. I put on a brand new cheerful looking tropical outfit and a bright red lipstick just for good luck.

Dinner is served in the theatre gallery, an immense cavernous interior that also serves as an art gallery and performance space where I'll be performing just ten days from now. I have already spent seven hours here today, sitting at the piano, practicing and taking frequent breaks to explore the nooks and crannies, and even the storage rooms. There are literally hundreds of paintings and sculptures. They are very similar to the ones in my bedroom and all the other rooms I've viewed so far— images of black men with huge penises sprouting out of every body part. Some of their faces are fierce and menacing and others are lewd with salacious grins. It is impossible not to look at them. All the paintings have been created by Dr. Russ and as much as I try not to judge the works I have to wonder why anyone would choose this subject matter to paint over and over and over again. When I feel repulsion setting in I joke with myself and make up names for the gallery such as Penis Palladium, Whangers Gone Wild, and

Disney's Dildos. I chuckle but I have almost no appetite. The dinner bell signals that it's time to be seated.

it never occurred to me that Canute's adopted father was a white man. His skin is the color of wonder bread. He enters the theatre gallery very slowly and unsteadily, hunched over a cane. His suit and tie are from the 1940s, his large black shoes look like they have just been shined and his pants are belted high at the waist to cover the sagging middle of a man in his late eighties. We're indoors and it's nighttime so I wonder why is he wearing sunglasses. He takes his seat at the head of the table.

Two handsome, muscular black men in their twenties join us. Dr Russ introduces them as his assistants, numbers 1 and 2. It's awful that he doesn't use their real names. The cook, a wiry man who seems jittery is named Mickey but the Doctor calls him number 3. And then there is Canute who is covered in sweat as carries in platters of steaming fish, rice, vegetables and freshly squeezed juice to add to the rum in the center of the table. A man in his forties with dreadlocks peeks his head in. This is Mr. Lee, the resident sculptor. Apparently Mr. Lee is not part of our dinner as his two daughters aged five and fifteen live with him and they dine together.

When I meet the girls just a few days later the five year old explains to me that they don't join the group because "Dr. Russell hates vaginas". It shocks me to hear a child so young put these particular words into a sentence.

Not much conversation takes place. The Dr. releases his words in a barely audible whisper, not directed towards a particular person. Each phrase is like a small bit of spit dribbled out of the mouth, descending down the chin, free to land wherever gravity directs it. I think to myself, I'll bet he could speak in a regular voice if he chose to. I'm getting annoyed by having to ask him to repeat things, and I soon tire of saying, "Sorry, I didn't quite catch what you said." No one else seems to be even listening.

Still, I try to be a good guest. I try to engage him, "What brought you to Jamaica?" He sneers, "I'm not going to answer that". "People ask me questions. They want to know about all this.. waving his hand at the paintings and sculptures that overwhelm the room. "I came to Jamaica to paint. He laughs as if that were a joke. "You know, the paintings are all mine but

the sculptures are only part mine; they are a product of my ideas and Mr. Lee's hands. After twenty years of living here Mr. Lee has become a real artist. Do you know why? Because I am a great teacher. "

Aha I don't need years of therapy to figure out that Dr. Ross is a narcissist. Then he rolls his eyes, He says something that is barely audible and I ask him to repeat it. "People think that Mr. Lee and I are are a couple.. We're not. We're not homosexuals. I've got nothing against homosexuals. Well, I don't think they should be allowed to marry but I don't hate them. And I'll tell you something else. If I was attracted to men well then I'd be horny all the time. But I'm not. And I'm not a homosexual". My mother always quoted Shakespeare. I think to myself, " Dr. Russ doth protest too much." I ask Mickey to pass the rum.

The Doctor and the cook drink large quantities of rum throughout the dinner hour which make the cook even more jittery and the Doctor louder. Numbers one and two say nothing. They sit like mice hoping to be unnoticed. They sneak sips of rum when they think no one is watching. After countless glasses the Doctor is no longer whispering. He wags his finger threateningly at his son Canute, "Have you sent out concert invitations, called the people on the list or do I have to supervise everything? Canute tries to calm him, "Don't worry. Everything's being taken care of ". But Russ is not satisfied. " You know you always disappoint me." He looks disgusted. Nothing I've built with Mr Lee will ever go to you because ..you don't deserve it . You can't get it right. You've never gotten anything right. By now he is shouting."And I should never have adopted you".

"Stop it! You've got to stop hurting him. Leave him alone! " I want to shout at Dr Russ and tell him that he is a monster. But I don't dare. I sit silently but say nothing. My Mom always said "never tell people what to do in their own home."

My mind jumps to the sharp knives in the kitchen just a hundred feet away. There's also the machete that Mike carries to cut fruit and Russell's walking big walking stick. What was Mom's other warning? Something like "Stay away from people with sharp objects". Russell is as mad as a hatter and this room feels like a mine field filled with explosives. One false step and you'll be missing parts of yourself. No, It's too dangerous to intervene.

The tirade continues but Canute shows no visible reaction. Finally he asks meekly “Amy, have you had enough to eat? “ I follow his lead and we bring the plates into the kitchen.

“Canute, hey, can I give you a hug?”

“Sure”.

“Are you OK?”

He tries to smile. “Well sort of”.

I think he might be crying. “ I can’t stand hearing him talk to you like that.”

“That’s just the way he is. People have visited here and been so upset that they ‘ve run out, cursing him and screaming, like they have caught on fire. It’s not you. It’s not me. It’s happened before. That’s just the way he is.”

Ep 9 Silent Watcher

When I was eleven I used to watch my parents fight. At dinner time they threw dishes that shattered and I sat at the kitchen table quietly, watching. They were screaming and I was silent. When I would retreat into my bedroom and lock the door I’d watch the clock which hung over my bed. I’d watch the minute hand move forward through its prescribed circle making little jumps forward just like a grasshopper. Time was slow. How many grasshopper jumps would it take for them to stop? Maybe twenty? Thirty? Then there would be a knock at the door and my father coaxing, “how about coming back to dinner? Your mom has heated it up..” And she’d be standing at the stove smiling as if nothing I had witnessed had ever even happened.

Ep 10 Flash backs

I was twelve when I entered Junior High School. We moved to a bigger two bedroom apartment in Stuyvesant Town. Most of the kids had lived there since birth so I felt like the awkward odd girl out when trying to break into the cliques that had already formed. I was smart and knew that befriending the class president who received more corsages on her Birthday than anyone else was a good place to start if I hoped to fit in. My class was one dedicated to students who were “gifted” in music. Most of the students and teachers had heard me play the piano as I was already the Music Director of the Theatre group. They soon found out that I had per-

fect pitch and could hear most pieces and write them out. Jane, our class president played flute and loved the Theme of Man from Uncle. Who didn't? Could I notate it so she could play it? Absolutely. In return she introduced me to her circle of friends.

When I was 15 we moved again to even a larger nicer place in a development called Peter Cooper village. The rooms were spacious and there was even air-conditioning. The Baldwin took up its traditional place on the living room wall and my father decided that his territory was the chair a few feet away from the piano. He was in his mid 50s and could not hold a job. I did not know the cause but saw the result- he was home all the time, angry and depressed, and drinking more than before.

He devoted most of the daytime to reading the NY TIMES cover to cover. He would turn the pages and fold them noisily for hours at a time. He seemed to be oblivious to the idea that this constant sound just inches from me and the piano was more than annoying. When I asked him to move his reading chair to the kitchen, dining area or bedroom he was angry. He seemed to think he had a right to sit as close as he wanted to all the sounds that my fingers produced, and that somehow these pieces of Mozart and Bach and even my own originals belonged to him, not to me. When I was thirty and my parents had divorced, my father remarried a woman named Ethel, a piano teacher who could barely find middle C on the piano. They lived in her home in Providence, Rhode Island. Twice a year I'd meet my father in NYC and suffer through an afternoon of father / daughter time.

I picked him up at Penn station, hailed a cab, gave the address of a restaurant in Chelsea, The cabbie stopped suddenly and pulled over- can't you read? No smoking in my cab. No one's smoking back here—I answer back. "The hell they're not." He actually got out and opened the passenger door to check. He shook his head still confused at finding nothing that was lit, and then we were off again speeding south on seventh Ave. . Once you've smoked three plus packs a day for over fifty years you smell like one million lit cigarettes. Sounds like the message inside a fortune cookie. Lunch was nothing short of vile. He'd push/squeeze his food into the chamber of his mouth- amazing that he could get all that in,— then extend his jaw down and the roof of his mouth up in a kind of oral calisthenic- , and bite down hard to break apart whatever was in his mouth. It made me think that I was fathered by an alligator. He kept his mouth opened wide the entire time so chewed substances fell out onto his lips and face and sometimes slid down his lap or even landed on the table. All the while he seemed to be grinning as if to say " Am I not the absolutely most dis-

gusting thing you've ever seen? And what are you going to do about it? There was no way to escape seeing this other than to close my eyes for an entire meal. I used to call our meals together *the quick weight loss diet of EATING WITH FATHER*.

Ep 11 What is Russell looking for?

When I walk into the gallery for our second group dinner I hear a cd of my music playing on the sound system. Russell actually smiles, "Pretty good, huh?" Well, this is feeling better than the night before. There are no eruptions at the table. He seems to have doused his anger in rum.

I thank him for my residency, "I feel like I'm maybe exiting my writer's block; you've given me a wonderful place to work." Then I tell him about my program ideas for the concert. "What if we invite people in the audience to recite their favorite poem about Jamaica and I improvise at the piano? He winces. "You can do that if you want to find a way to have everyone leave the concert hall in under a minute." It's frustrating to be stopped by his road blocks but it's not worth a confrontation. It would be a messy business to ruffle any of his old feathers.

Now he is drinking wine on top of the rum. He slurs his words and seems to be talking more to himself than to numbers 1 and 2, Canute, Mike or me.

After another swallow, I'd like to hear you play the Baldwin. No one's played it for a long time."
"Sure".

I start with something original that is soft and meditative. I'm on high alert as his reactions are unpredictable especially when he is intoxicated. "Yes, that's right- listen to the vibrations -beautiful, perfect" but when I play some Gershwin he writhes in place and snaps "not right here- not for my paintings".

Wow-This is crazy. I see that I am in very big trouble. Trouble I couldn't have predicted. Russell doesn't think of my concert as I do — as a performance where there will be something to suit everyone's taste. Instead he's hoping that whatever I play will be a reflection of him, a musical version of what he's been doing with his paintbrush. . This is more than I had bargained for.

Then he backs off. “I’m not telling you what to play- play what you like- what do I know, I’m not a musician.”

The next morning there is a new painting sitting on the piano. It is a portrait of me which he has worked on throughout the night. Canute says it’s his father’s gift to me. I’m pleased but confused. On the back, he has written, “For Amy, a musical giant. I can’t do any better”. Sounds like the riddle of the sphinx. I wonder if I’ll ever know what it means.

Ep 12 Getting ready

My last five days at Mountambrin are all about getting ready for the concert.

Getting ready for a solo performance is like preparing for a race. You want to make sure you have stamina. You want to check out the terrain and you want to know where you might slow down, or even slip. You want to have a strategy about how to recover and keep moving onward. You want to know where to rest and , and you want to know where to go for broke and give it everything you’ve got —just like a warrior.

Sunday looms ahead. It doesn’t matter that I am Alice going crazy, falling through the looking glass in Jamaica. I try to ignore the insanity that engulfs me. I close my eyes and focus on the job at hand. I know how to prepare. I’ve done this for over fifty years. I drill the hard parts slowly, under tempo. I use my metronome to gradually increase the speed making sure that every time I hit a wrong note, or play a passage sloppily I stop and bring in the Spanish Inquisition. Why am I making the same mistake over and over? Until that question is answered there is no progress. Practicing is mainly problem solving. Shit happens but why? It’s my job to keep the shit from happening. I’m determined to play my best, no matter what.

The writer’s flow has a clock of its own. It refuses to follow my time or yours.

In the past days Dr. Russ has shared recordings of many composers he appreciates -I believe he does this with the hopes of inspiring me - inspiring me to write music that will somehow capture the essence of his paintings. I listen to his CDs carefully. And then I come back to myself and in

my own voice sketch musical passages depicting savagery, fear, the macabre, the grotesque and the tragic because that is what I see and feel here in this space.

In the afternoons when it rains I try to capture the sounds of a storm in the jungle. And when the sun breaks out I compose my version of that too.

The doctor tells me a story of a gay man in Jamaica who was beheaded by a violent gang just for his gayness and with my notes I try to tell that tragedy.

The creative process is filled with mystery and if finished products come they are the result of sweat, skill, talent, perseverance and luck. I feel disappointed that none of my sketches will be finished in time to include in the concert. But I am relieved as well. The Dr. can be ruthlessly destructive and my unborn children need protection from him. (The Dr. can be ruthlessly destructive and I need to protect my unborn children from him.)

Ep 13 Dress Rehearsal Pt 1

The 7 foot Baldwin sits on the stage of the Theatre Gallery. I have tried to become friendly with it since I arrived. I hated it then and haven't changed my mind.

It has a muffled sound for such a large instrument. Since no one has touched it for over a year the action has stayed stiff. No amount of talent or technique can help me tame this beast or make it look like I enjoy playing it, but I have to try.

Today is Friday and I'm doing a dress rehearsal as a warm up for my Sunday concert. I've been waiting for this day since I received the invitation so many months ago. I've worked hard to create a program that will appeal to the uneducated listener. I have played it in numerous concert halls in the last few years and am confident that it will speak to people because it is chock full of stories and dances and life. I might have performed a program devoted solely to my own compositions but I also wanted to introduce Jamaicans to some of my favorite pieces from the Americas. I've invited the staff to listen. It's later in the evening that I had planned. Dinner has yet to be served so I suggest that they eat while I play, before too much rum has been swallowed. I set the table for the Dr, his son, and the cook, Mickey and numbers 1 and 2.

They eat dinner wordlessly as I play the first half of my program.

First *10 fingers*, a meditative piece I wrote many years ago. Then 3 lively dances from Brazil by Nazareth guaranteed to make you want to dance, followed by the set of own originals that the Dr. Had fallen in love with, including "*Cry of the Mothers*", my most performed piece. Then some charming character pieces by the Cuban Cervantes, a few swinging classics by Gershwin and finally I end the first half with the dramatic story of a slave on the run, chased by hounds, "Troubled Waters" by the African American composer Maragret Bonds. This piece is a tour de force. In the past I feel like I haven't quite nailed it, but tonight and I am pleased that I have not failed myself. I've worked hard and can now deliver the gift of music to whoever wants to receive it.

My last note dies away. In its place is silence. Empty, resounding, continuous silence with no applause. I walk off the stage. I stand in front of these five men who now seem like a silent jury. I began to feel a chill entering me. My circulation is leaving my fingers and I wonder if they'll move alright when I play the second half of the program. I try to stay calm. Things are not going as I had planned. My gut is beginning to burn.

The Doctor shakes his head and make some sounds; I can't tell if they are words or sloshy gibberish. "No space, no space". I remember to breathe and I try to smile the smile politicians use when they are modeling diplomacy. He mumbles again, "There's no space"...

"What do you mean- do you mean that I am playing too fast for the acoustics of the room"? No answer. "Do you mean that I need to take more time between pieces?" Still no answer? Do you mean there is too much fast music on the program? " He raises his voice now to only slightly above a whisper, "I don't know anything about music- can't tell you what I mean". The other men look down at their plates, wordlessly. No one has my back.

"Listen Russ, I just want to understand what you are saying to me." I want to walk over and slap him.

Then suddenly he sits up and he actually looks straight at me. His voice is louder and stronger. "You know that piece you composed about the Mothers of the disappeared... that's a story I could paint a thousand times. It is

about something terrible and people feeling deep grief.”It’s an important story. It’s important that it’s told.”

I take a sigh of relief. Everyone loves Cry of the Mothers, some have even cried when they’ve heard it. He continues, “ And when you played it,’ he pauses for emphasis,I felt.. and I stand tall and proud, ready to accept a compliment,.”NOTHING. ABSOLUTELY NOTHING .” This is the loudest phrase I have ever heard from his lips. Mikey the cook, chimes in, NOTH-ING, NOTHING. I feel nothing from your music. They sing song this phrase together many times like a Greek chorus.

Mikey continues, as if he were the village wiseman, “In Jamaica we feel grief and in your music we feel NOTHING.”

I realize that Mickey probably cannot read, has never travelled more than 5 miles from home, is a skilled climber of trees to pick fruits but knows absolutely nothing about most things, especially music. Absolutely nothing.

Ep 14 final flashback and dress rehearsal pt 2

When I was forty I was awarded a Senior Fulbright Professorship to Ghana. It was a big deal, a big career move and a chance to have a second lifetime on the earth. Ghanains functioned in compounds not in isolated homes, there was the belief in the Ju ju, no hot water, one television station and occasionally electricity in our remote village. I went to study the rhythmic ambiguity of polyrhythms and left with what I was looking for and plenty more. When I was there I directed the first conference of Ghanaian music, created a fusion ensemble which performed on TV and filled a sketch book with ideas for new compositions.

A year after my Fulbright my partner Laura and I took my father out for his birthday lunch in Providence Rhode Island. Neither she nor I were permitted inside his home with his new wife. Was it because we were gay,? We never knew. Our car pulled up and my father emerged from the house shouting, “move away from the house” as if we were dangerous trespassers ,not his daughter and daughter in law coming to treat him to a party.

At the restaurant along with his first martini he began his attacks which were relentless. First he started with Laura, asking her why she had the

idea that she was successful since was only working part time. Food sloshed about in his mouth for all to see, nothing had changed. Then he turned to me. "Fulbright professor?" You can't even get a job in the god damn United States." Composer? You're not even in the Schwann Catalogue. Look at you. You are no damned good. "

He would not stop his tirade. It was an ugly eruption of venom aimed to kill. I had no more barricades with which to block him. I had been a good daughter. I had sent him sweaters, shirts, books, recordings, chocolates on holidays, and thanked him for the concerts he took me to as a child. I bought him sneakers for his aging feet, and even tried to teach him to play the guitar. I tried to help him with his depression, and sometimes even picked up the check because he had little money. I tried to love him no matter what. But he hated me. He had me- his first and only born -he made me, but still he hated me without reason and that made me hate him.

I was not alright. I might vomit. I might scream. I might burst. As quickly as possible Laura paid the check and said Aaron, we getting you into the car now and taking you back to your home. Silence on the drive back. Laura opened the door and let him out. That was the last time in my life that I saw my father.

I cried hysterically on the way to our hotel. Something, some part of me had become loose or actually severed. The part that stops your tears, the part that protects and soothes you, the part that says, you will be ok- that part had broken off and instead there was just this massive pain, and agony,. I heard terrible wild sobbing sounds coming out of me. They did not stop.

We drove to Cape Cod, a three hour drive but still I erupted uncontainable grief. I tried the usual methods to feel better. A long run, listening to a string quartet rehearse, having a lobster sitting on the water. Nothing worked. Nothing could cover up or replace the ruins of all that had been destroyed. Laura took control . I wanted her to. There was a pay phone booth and she called my mom. Laura spoke to her for two hours. She finally ran out of quarters. "Aaron has hurt your daughter terribly. She won't stop crying. I can't let this happen again." We've decided that she will not see him again, ever. You have to understand. It's non negotiable."

By the age of 41 a number of my cds were released. I sent him a letter: Dad, Guess what! I'm in the Schwann Catalogue! Check out page 347. He would see my name listed a number of times. I was running a new Music Program at Fairleigh Dickinson University in New Jersey. My career was going well.

He never responded to my letter. I don't know if he ever even read it. I severed all ties with him deciding that survival would be my primary goal.

I play the second half of the program. Once again I am met with silence.

I can sense that the beginning of a tremor is starting somewhere in my body and can feel myself constrict to try to stop it. This evening is turning into a nightmare. These assholes are not going to take me down with their insults and bullying. And what about Canute who is speechless? I thought he would protect me. I am not going to tear up, raise my voice, or tell them to fuck themselves. No. Not me. I am going to retain my composure and go back to my room, drink more wine and hope that I will be able to sleep through the wailing of the dogs.

Ep 15 Before the Concert

Sunday is finally here. Mountambrin is in total chaos. Mickey is no where to be found. He's been underpaid and overworked for way too long so he's picked today to go on strike. I wonder who will be preparing the post concert dinner for all the guests. Canute is running around frantically trying to figure out a solution.

At ten AM a trio of Jamaican musicians arrives. We eye each other suspiciously. I didn't know that they would be performing a hefty Brahms trio on today's program, and they didn't know that I would be playing full program of music of the Americas. The violinist named Steven is an arrogant man who acts like he owns the place. Canute tells him that their performance will follow mine. "If that is really what you want.." he snarls and stomps off. What a circus. What next?

The temperature is rising. My head hurts. I've got to keep it together. I sit down to meditate and try to focus. The last two weeks have really taken their toll. It's been hard to be so cut off from the outside world. I've been afraid and because of my fear I haven't been able to say what's on my

mind for way too long. I can't wait to leave this place tomorrow. (Get me out of here.)

It's noon. Audience members arrive are welcomed and escorted to their seats by Canute. He's quite elegant in a black suit, and no longer looks anxious so I guess that Mickey has returned. The theater fills up with conversation, laughter and the clinking of glasses filled with wine. Canute signals that it's time to begin. I'm guessing that most of these people have not been to a concert before. It's going to be challenging to hold their attention.

I get ready to take the stage. This afternoon is mine to own. The piano is my voice. I'm ready to speak to those who want to listen.

Dr. Russ is no where to be seen. (Dr. Russ is nowhere in sight). (There is no sign of the Doctor.)

Ep 16 The Concert Pt 1

The piano feels too big to play. It's resisting my fingers. It's a little better if I play lightly and so I don't try to play to the full depth of the keys.

I'm in performance mode. I can smell sweat already beginning in my arm pits.

Listen to the melody stretch and now rest here; now move on again to begin the next phrase.

Pretend my left hand is a guitar playing a lilting groove.

The piano weakens in the alto and soprano range so I 'm working hard to bring out melodies .

Don't push the tempo here or I'll crash. Hold back.

Land . Release the energy and start up again. Take your time.

Enjoy this.

Hold in the reigns.

Who's talking?

Don't they know your not supposed to talk at a concert?

Where is the cougher?

Give her a cough drop or ask her to leave..

Everyone misses a note here and there, but that's a strange one to drop.

"Cmon- after all that practice..??"

Curve your fingers,

Drop your shoulders.

Keep it light, Stop pushing. Lighten up.
Pinch the octaves .
Pretend this is easy
Tell the story.
Yes,
Love that inner line! Bring it out so they can hear it.

Trust that it's inside you. Trust what's inside you.
Just one more piece in this set. Save some energy for later.
You're almost done. Hang in there. .
I strike the final chord.
Applause— even a few cheers.

Ep 17 The concert Pt 2

My part of the concert is over and I grab a glass of wine. I'm feeling drained and reluctant to engage in conversation. People smile and some thank me.

Finally I see Dr. Russ. He is intent on avoiding me and instead, speaks to each guest. "I'm so sorry you had to hear that. My apologies. Amy certainly isn't much of a pianist, I made a mistake to bring her down here. But, your money is not wasted. In just a few minutes you'll hear a trio with a brilliant pianist who can do everything that she will never be able to do. Please do stay, and please do join us for a festive dinner." I learn later from Canute that Russ never heard a note of my concert.

The trio plays poorly. The pianist struggles with the piano, with the piece and with his colleagues. They are terribly out of tune, they barely look at each other and they each have a different sense of how fast the music should be played. At one point they have to stop completely as the pianist's music has stuck together and he can't turn the page. The audience notices none of this as they continue to drink and converse.

Dr. Russ sits apart from the audience, on the side of the stage, visible to all. He leans forward in his chair, transfixed by the three musicians. He bursts into uproarious applause between each of the movements and looks like a king at court nodding to His People who surround him. As the final notes die away he beams as if he himself had created and performed the music, stands up and bellows " Bravo! Bravo!"The audience takes up

the cheer” Bravo! Bravo!” They clink glasses and toast Dr. Russ and what he has created at Mountambrin.

I am hiding in the back of the hall. I am a little girl, small, unseen, and unwanted. I don't have any more space in my body for feelings. I am numb. I want my mother. I want to go home.

Pt 18 The End

The power is out again. Canute brings me a lantern lit by kerosene . I'm careful to place it far away from the curtains in my bedroom. It is eleven thirty. The dogs are starting to prowl. The light of the lantern is bright and strong. I wonder how long it would take for a house this old and corroded to burn.

I'm exhausted from the concert, from the dress rehearsal and by all that has happened in the last two weeks. I can't wait to get the hell out of here tomorrow.

I fall into a deep sleep and dream that the entire estate has caught on fire. Was the lit lantern sitting too close to the curtains? Was it my fault?

In my dream the monstrous men with their thousands of penises shriek hysterically as the flames swallow them bit by bit. Their torsos twist and convulse and their savage faces expand into ugly leers until they disappear into ashes.

And now in my dream I become the black killer dog. It is me who is howling. I am being kicked , I am being starved, I am being teased. I am the black killer dog, bated, muzzled, frightened, and tortured. There is a man hitting me with his stick. It is the white man, the Dr. Now is the time to tell him my story. I have been waiting for this moment for a very long time. I open my mouth and in one large bite, I have severed the connection between his head and the rest of him.

When I awake the dogs are back in their cages and the flames of the kerosene lamp have died away.

It's 7am and the sun is already heating the jungle on top of the mountain. . My bags are packed. I'll be leaving soon., thank God. Something smells good. I wonder what Canute has prepared for breakfast.