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TWO HEARTS THAT BEAT AS ONE

MEETING AND FALLING IN LOVE

It was not long after they began courting when Eric startled Jessica by telling her that she was the person he would marry one day. The more they courted, the more he was convinced he had found his bride. Eric had to propose on more than one occasion before Jessica agreed. She was a little hesitant as she needed her mother's consent. Little did she know there were much bigger challenges ahead.

Eric took Jessica to meet his parents but they did not approve of his choice of future bride. Jessica lived in the ward of Charlestown, which did not have a good reputation and was known for its poor living conditions; as far as Eric's parents were concerned anyone from this district would not be good enough for their son. His family was not wealthy but they benefited from the security of his father's permanent government job and ownership of their home, which set them apart from Jessica's family.

Going against his parents' wishes, Eric determined to marry the woman of his own choosing. It was the tradition for a man to ask for the parents' permission in writing, so he wrote to Hectorine, Jessica's mother, requesting Jessica's hand in marriage.

As Eric's political awareness increased, he became involved with both national and international movements. He attended Peace Movement and trade union meetings. He developed links with the World Federation of Labour and the World Federation of Trade Unions, which were connected to most trade unions in the Third World. He was learning about and liaising with Eastern bloc countries such as Russia, East Germany and Romania. In these early post-World War II years, relations between "democratic" and communist countries were friendly. Eric was a member of the World Peace Council (WPC), formed between 1949 and 1950 to promote peace and nuclear disarmament. The WPC organised large international conferences, rallies and meetings with thousands of delegates representing the different member countries. At a rally in Budapest, Hungary, where about 50 countries were represented.

World War II was an interesting one for BG. Many soldiers from the colonies had fought for democracy for Europe, yet had no democracy at home. Some of these soldiers were Eric's friends, who returned frustrated to a colonial government that

afforded them no political representation. Such frustration was not unique to BG; many colonial subjects in the Caribbean and Africa had fought and died in defence of the British Empire in both world wars, going home to thwarted expectations of political rights such as the vote and a better standard of living.

Therefore in the years after World War II there was an urgent desire for change when soldiers returned to Africa and the Caribbean after fighting in Europe and assisting with the war effort in the UK. This need was expressed by the unrest and rioting that took place across the British Caribbean region. BG was lagging behind her island neighbours such as Jamaica, Trinidad and Barbados, who had been given universal adult suffrage between 1944 and 1951. At the end of World War II, popular political parties were beginning to come into existence in the region.

In 1950 the People's Progressive Party (PPP) was formed. Eric joined as a founder member, going on to earn a place on the party's general council. Three years later, as campaign manager for the PPP's candidate, Eric would successfully lead Bally Lachmansingh to win the West Berbice seat in the 1953 general election, when Lachmansingh became a member of the House of Assembly.

The year after Eric joined the PPP, he and Jessica became parents for the first time.

About five other PPP members in Georgetown were also arrested for various minor misdemeanours and jailed, making them political prisoners. Eric received the longest sentence, spending one year in prison. But the worst of it for him was having to serve his sentence in the very prison where his father was a warder. In recent times in the UK, the writer and peer Lord Jeffrey Archer served his sentence in an open prison, but this was 1953 in a British colonial territory and Eric served his sentence wearing prison clothes alongside inmates who had committed serious crimes, while his five or six PPP comrades who were also political prisoners were held at another prison located in a remote area of Guiana, Mazaruni.

Eric's father, given his occupation, did not differentiate between political prisoners and felons, whereas Jessica's mother view was that "prison no make for dawg [dog]". As far as Frank Huntley was concerned, "you only go to prison if you're a criminal", so to see his son every day as an inmate in prison uniform must have been difficult. On reflection, Eric considers what it must have been like for him:

...it's still his son, the disgrace he felt, but my insensibility at that age, I wasn't sensitive to his feelings, it's only in retrospect that you're able to realise what it must have meant to him, really.

Eric spent each day in prison reading some of the most interesting books that he has ever read. He read a translation of Voltaire's *Candide* and many classics of English literature. The irony of Eric's position was that, having being imprisoned by the British, it was the British Council who brought to the prison those "interesting books". In prison, he learned to play table tennis for the first time. He said he also:

...made things with my hands, it's amazing what you could do in prison, when you have a file, I made little things out of plastic, plastic figures, and the day goes by...

Before his imprisonment, Eric had been deeply troubled about the country being occupied by colonial troops. There was no rebellion or unrest on the part of the Guianese people when the constitution was suspended, yet the troops appeared brutish and forceful and made their presence felt.

Interestingly, while he was in prison, the British government was at pains to show a measure of generosity by conducting a Commission of Enquiry into Eric's case to decide whether he should be dismissed as a postman. Eric believed that because it was the first time the British had removed a legally elected government from office, or engaged in such activity in that part of the world, they were very sensitive about being seen to do the right thing. They were also being observed by a number of overseas organisations, to whom the PPP wrote letters notifying them of what was taking place in the country. Eric wrote to the Post Office Union in the UK and to the World Federation of Trade Unions. He informed them that he was in prison and asked for their help. The colonial office and the local administration wanted to demonstrate that their actions were fair and reasonable in order to avoid criticisms from international groups sympathetic to the PPP.

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