

'They are Jamaicans, son, and we're leaving them,' she said. 'But we not just waving to them; we waving to de country. We saying goodbye to Jamaica.'

## Chapter Seven

When we were on our way, I asked Mum how long it would take to get to England. I knew this was going to be a long journey but when my mum told me it would take two weeks I jumped off my bed.

'Two weeks?' I said loudly.

'Look like you never hear me. Me tell you before, it will take a long, long time. You're lucky,' said Mum.

'Your dad took four weeks.'

'Why did he take so long?' I asked.

'Where's your postcard?' she asked. I took it out of my jacket pocket.

'Look carefully,' she said. 'The *Empire Windrush* is very big. Much bigger than this ship. So it was slower.'

I stared at the picture of Dad's ship, then I looked around the cabin. *Perhaps two weeks at sea could be fun*, I thought. There might be other kids to play with. We might see dolphins and sharks in the sea. We could even see a Great Whale. But then I thought of all the

things that could go wrong. The other kids might not like me. I could get seasick, or homesick. I think the stress was showing on my face because Mum reached over to me, pinched my cheek, and smiled as she said, 'You saw what it's like. That's a very big sea out there. It goes a long way. I'm sure your dad is looking forward to seeing you. Are you excited to see him?'

'I don't know,' I said. 'I want to see him, but I'm going to miss Grandma.'

She pulled me towards her and whispered in my ear. 'Hey. Don't worry now. You're going to have such a wonderful life. You should know how lucky you are. Now go to the bathroom and change your clothes. It's time to relax!'

After we had both changed into more comfortable clothes, we out on to the deck where a band was playing some old-fashioned music. People were dancing and smiling and there was a sense of happiness in the air. The men were dressed in smart suits with big collars and baggy trousers. They wore white shirts with ties, and every one of them had a trilby hat. The women were wearing flowing, bright flowered frocks, with brightly coloured shoes, many with handbags to match, and ribbons or flowers in their hair. The deck was packed and we could hardly move. I noticed that the wind started getting stronger, and the waves in the sea

were getting big. The ship was bouncing up and down and I started to feel dizzy. Then my mum kept on bopping up and down to the music, which just made it worse.

I was bored and the music and dancing didn't excite me. I could have more fun playing in our yard; I would be happier talking to Grandma. I was already beginning to miss her. I sat down in a chair at the edge of the dance floor. An old woman sat in the chair beside me, a cigarette clutched in her hand.

'What's the matter with you?' the old woman asked, leaning over. As she spoke smoke from the cigarette came out of her mouth. I could see my mum walking towards us.

'He's just tired,' my mum said having overheard the question. 'Him never realize how long the journey would be. He thinks he can't take two weeks of this, but I'm sure he can.'

'Ah, but now you have your whole life ahead of you. Yes, boy!' the old woman said. 'I could have only dreamt of going to England at your age. You're very lucky. You can get an education; you can work; you can do anything over there because you are going to the land of hope and glory.'

With a final wink, she danced off to join a group of people smoking and dancing in the middle of the

deck. I didn't care about the land of hope and glory; all I wanted was my grandma.

It didn't take long for me to get used to the ship. Sometimes we ate in the big dining room, sometimes we had food in our room, but wherever we ate it, the food tasted disgusting. There was no Jamaican food, only dry chicken and plain boiled potatoes. Even my mum was finding it difficult to stomach the dryness. She winced and pouted her lips but kept telling me it was yummy as she ate, as if I was going to suddenly have a change of heart. It was horrible, and she knew it. I missed my sweet potatoes and yam. I missed my green bananas. I was really missing Grandma's cooking.

After a few days on board I met a boy around the same age as me. I first saw him when I was running around the ship deck not far from where he was sitting. He looked like a smaller version of the men on board. He wore a brown suit, shirt and tie, and he had a cap instead of a trilby. He wore black leather shoes that were so shiny that the sun reflected off them. He smiled at me and I smiled back. I was going to talk to him, but then woman who was sitting near to him saw me and she shouted at me, 'Leave him alone. He's studying.'

I ran away quickly. The next day I saw him again; he was in the same place, but this time he was on his own.

'What's your name?' I asked.

'Winston,' he replied.

'Why did your mum shout at me?'

'That's not my mum,' he said. 'That's my nanny.'

'Your grandma?' I asked. She had looked a bit young to be his grandma.

'No.'

'Your auntie?'

'No,' Winston replied, starting to laugh.

'Well, what kind of nanny is she?' I asked. I couldn't think of another relative you could call 'nanny'.

'She looks after me! I was born in England but sent back to Jamaica for a while to be raised by my uncle,' Winston explained. 'My uncle lives in a big house and is very busy, so Nanny's job is to look after all my clothes and make sure I eat at the right time. She teaches me, too. But now Nanny is taking me to England, where my mum and dad live.'

Suddenly he sat up straight and said, 'She's coming. You'd better go.'

I looked over my shoulder and saw Winston's nanny weaving through the crowds on the deck. I ran, but I didn't run far. I hid behind a big pillar and watched, as Winston opened a book she gave him, and he started to read aloud. His reading was good, but sometimes he would stop to ask her about a word, and then he would

carry on. I sat and watched him for a while and once he looked up and saw me watching. He cracked a very quick smile, and from that moment I knew we were going to be friends.

Winston came from a rich family. His nanny could be quite strict, but he was allowed play times. There wasn't much for kids to do on the ship, and there weren't many kids, so all we did was walk around the ship and try to get lost. A couple of times we spoke to members of the ship's crew and they would give us sweets and tell us what it was like to be a sailor.

Sometimes there were church services on deck. My mum took me to one and there we prayed to God to take care of us on our journey. We made a few visits there, and one hot but windy day during a service, we were praying and a woman vomited all over her daughter. Most of the people just carried on praying but a man and a woman who were sitting next to them helped the lady and the girl.

'It's the food!' she shouted as she gasped for air. 'They're trying to kill us!'

'No,' said the man. 'This happens all the time. Is de way de ship roll.'

The girl began to sob.

'Don't worry,' said the lady. 'It's only de food.'

'You see, Mum,' I muttered. 'The food is not good.'

'God help us,' shouted the woman as the two helpers walked her and her daughter away to be cleaned up.

'It's not the food,' said Mum. 'She's just seasick, an' God help us all when we get to England.'

## Chapter Eight

On Monday 28 April 1958, I woke up to the sound of people singing, as Mum shook me in my bed.

'Wake up, Leonard,' she said. 'Wake up! Come look.'

I was still in my pyjamas and she was wearing her night clothes, but she wasn't bothered. She took my hand and we rushed out on to the deck where a group of other passengers, some still in their night clothes too, were looking out into the distance. They were all chatting excitedly, pointing at a thin strip of land I could just about make out.

'That is England!'

'England, here we come!'

'De mother country,'

People started acting more frantically than ever, pushing past one another with excitement. The captain's voice came over the speaker system and could be heard all over the ship.

'This is your captain speaking. I am delighted to announce that in just under one hour we will be docking in the port of Southampton. I hope that you have enjoyed your journey. I, and the whole crew, would like to wish you all the best for your time in the United Kingdom. Please ensure that you have your papers ready for inspection when you leave the vessel.'

My mum took my hand and led me back to our cabin. We got washed and dressed, then bundled our belongings into the suitcase. Mum grabbed her passport and held it tightly.

'You should only speak to the English people when they speak to you, and you should do whatever they tell you to do,' she said.

I put the suit on that I wore when I boarded the ship – it was the only one that I had. Mum really got dressed up. She only ever dressed like this on special occasions. She wore high-heeled shoes, a pretty bright-red dress with a small red hat that sat to one side of her head. I couldn't understand why she was trying so hard to look good now. We were only getting off a ship.

We waited for a while with the suitcase packed and placed next to the door, until we began to feel the ship slowing down. Then, for the first time in two weeks, we stopped moving. We rushed to the deck and waited in line to leave the ship. It felt like we were there for



hours, moving slowly, step by step until we got to the stairs. At the top were two men wearing the uniforms that meant they worked for the Queen. Mum handed her passport to one of the men; he looked at it, stamped a page, and then gave it back. He looked at me.

'I don't have a passport,' I said.

'That's all right, young man,' he said. 'Don't worry. You're one of us now. You'll have your own passport when you grow up.'

As we went down the steps I had to hold on to the handrail because Mum had to take the suitcase by herself, and it looked difficult. I just wished I was big enough to help her. Below, I could see a crowd had gathered. There were newspaper reporters, their pens and papers at the ready, and even people with television cameras. As we got off the ship and walked on to the dock, the cold hit me. It was freezing, and my suit was not warm enough for the English weather! I felt the chill run all the way down my spine. I took my first sharp intake of English air. It tasted different. Mum quickly whipped out a blanket from our case and wrapped it around my shoulders, just as we were approached by a television reporter. He was a small, stocky white man, wearing a big warm coat.

'Excuse me, can I ask you why you've come to England?' he asked loudly, the camera in our faces.

My mum halted and turned to him, respectfully. 'I have come to see my husband and to make a better life for my child, sir.'

'Could you not have made a good life for your child back home then, miss?' the man responded.

'I have come to help my husband, rebuild the mum country, and to give my child the opportunity to grow and prosper.'

My mum's voice had changed. She was trying her best to sound English. I couldn't understand why she was speaking the way she did, and why we were being asked so many questions.

'Do you think that you'll fit into life in England then, miss?' the man continued, bringing the camera even closer to our faces. 'Your child might find it difficult looking like that.' The man gestured towards my blanket.

'He's not used to the English weather and our clothes are all neatly packed in preparation to start rebuilding the mother country, sir. England is part of Britain, and Jamaica is part of Britain, so we are excited to meet more British people and to rebuild the motherland.'

The reporter nodded and swiftly and moved on to interrogate someone else.

In Jamaica we didn't have television yet, but I knew

it was full of famous white people. So I wondered if having just arrived in England, I was now a famous black boy. I looked back and saw that he was talking to everyone he could and I realized that we can't all be famous, but it was nice to know that I could be on television. Even if I was just looking cold.

## Chapter Nine

We walked away from the ship, and I got colder and colder. The cold felt as if it was going deep into me. The port was much bigger than the one in Kingston, and not far from our ship there was another with people getting on. Some people were hugging and kissing their loved ones goodbye, and others were moving around pushing boxes on trollies or carrying suitcases. It was busy. We walked around, then suddenly Mum stopped. She looked at me, shrugged her shoulders, and asked, 'Leonard. You can see any coach?'

'What's a coach?'

'Is like a bus. Same ting. You see any bus?'

'No,' I replied looking around as much as I could.

I kept looking around and Mum sat on the suitcase. She looked out into the distance as if lost. Then I looked up to the sky and saw the sun shining.

'Look,' I said. 'The sun is shining.'

'Of course it is,' replied Mum.