

## The Price of Sacrifice

Franz Dumas was a successful Haitian businessman who owned sugar and coffee plantations before Francois "Papa Doc" Duvalier seized control over Haiti in September 1957. Kingston's father was Kreyòl of several generations passed; and his mother, Maria was middle-class mulatto born in Santo Domingo. Franz named his son, Kingston after the Jamaican capital that Franz was quite fond of visiting several times a year. Maria preferred that if her only son wasn't to be named after Franz, then he should be named in tribute to her late father, Juan Carlo. But, Franz wasn't to be argued with -- a trait that remains strong in Kingston's personality.

Franz was a staunch political critic of Duvalier during the 1957 Haitian presidential election. Shortly after the takeover, a gang of Duvalier's secret police, the Tonton Macoutes, invaded Franz's plantation home which sat on one of his estates near the Capital. Franz's parents, who also resided there were immediately butchered with machetes. Franz was apprehended in a large room of the house, stripped of his clothing, and held down by two of the brutes while a third heated up a clothing iron. When it was at its hottest, the government agent viciously pressed the iron to Franz's most intimate privacies before savagely pulling away clinging, sizzling flesh. During an extreme attempt to be strong, Franz avoided begging for mercy and only pleaded in behalf of his family. Yet, he couldn't hold back his cries of anguish and horrific pain.

The agents' demands for Franz's jewelry, cash, property deeds and holdings were relentless. Yet, Franz feebly attempted to negotiate his family's safety. Apathetically impatient, the gang leader raised his bloodstained machete and forcefully swung down, beheading yet another undeserving soul. All this time, Kingston had been separated from his mother during the chaos, and seeing his father through an adjacent doorway, the child witnessed this shocking scene. His scream rang simultaneously with the two, morbid thumps on wooden floor where his father knelt. Kingston didn't hesitate to scurry away as the men turned to see him. Reaching the yard, Kingston was quickly snatched up and carried away by a faithful and brave servant. The four-year-old was swiftly carted through the yard and past the nearby tree line where Maria was waiting with the servant's visibly-shaken wife. Maria covered her son's mouth to muffle his whines as they all fled into the dense jungle, beginning their grueling journey to safety.

Maria had no immediate family on the Hispaniola Island. However, she had friends living in the Miami area who traveled to Haiti periodically as missionaries. They were immediately expelled from Haiti by Duvalier's inhospitable government after the so-called election. Maria felt that if she and Kingston could reach Miami, her friends, the Brennen's would help her.

Through his urban contacts, the servant arranged to smuggle Maria and Kingston out of Haiti by boat. When escaping the estate and the Tonton Macoutes, Maria could only grab a few pieces of her very expensive jewelry - some of which was used to pay fare for the illegal trip to Miami. She intended to sell the rest of the jewelry later. Unfortunately, smugglers are not among the most trusted of people. The alluring Maria and her young son would travel alone, and were easy prey for the psychopathic criminals who made a living by smuggling contraband and people across water and borders. Additionally, the plundering of the occasional yacht or two during their travels yielded a bonus of booty. There weren't any differences between the typical smuggler and the high seas pirate.

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The ship's captain was aware of Maria's jewelry that was sewn into the lining of her dress for safekeeping, and he suspected that she possessed more than she had; and he heartlessly coveted it all. By means of the captain's boat, the trip from Port-au-Prince to Miami using the "cat and mouse" route averaged about a week to 10 days and no one would be expecting the woman and child until then. He would have more than enough time to rob Maria, and throw the two overboard. In fact, the captain could eliminate the woman and child before reaching neighboring Cuba where the jewelry could be sold for more money than anywhere else in the Western Atlantic and Caribbean.

There was no need to sail the entire way to the United States when there were plenty of wealthy, American and European buyers at the hotels and casinos in Santiago de Cuba -- Batista's second most vibrant city. The captain anticipated that he would return to Port-au-Prince within a few days, just in case word got to the Tonton Macoutes that he smuggled a wanted enemy of Papa Doc. He can believably deny such an accusation just by being in Port-au-Prince at a time when he was supposed to be in route to the United States.

As the captain's boat entered Cuba's Eastern strait with Haiti, he sent one of his mates to fetch Maria and Kingston. They were nowhere to be found. It turned out that Maria overheard the captain conspiring with the first mate as to when their "special cargo" would be robbed and eliminated. Getting one step ahead of the pirates and during the night, Maria fashioned a small raft consisting of two wood crates bound by rope; pushed it overboard and dived into the ocean with Kingston in arms. The raft was only big enough to keep Kingston out of the water, but buoyant enough to keep a clinging Maria afloat.

By daylight, the current carried the raft far enough away from the boat to keep Maria and Kingston at a safe distance from the captain and his henchmen. The boat's course was set for North by Northwest and the ocean's current was taking her due West and towards the South of Cuba. After a brief search and not knowing his victims' fate, the captain turned the boat around and headed back to Port-au-Prince. Although not a seafarer, Maria traveled enough with her husband to know that she would eventually float into a busy shipping lane. She prayed for God's protection from the elements and predators of the sea -- both below and above the surface.

With some forethought, Maria tied little Kingston to the raft so that he would not accidentally slip into the ocean if anything happened to her. She spent the time at sea telling Kingston stories about his heritage. She also taught him to memorize his parents' names as well as the missionaries' names in Miami -- being able to repeat them in Creole, Spanish, French and English. With the possible threats of her situation very clear to her, Maria had the foresight to rip the remaining jewels from her dress and carefully place them into Kingston's pockets. Surely, within hours, Maria was fatally attacked by sharks leaving Kingston to fend for his life. In his solitude, the boy was emotionally traumatized but somehow remained afloat. Instilled with his mother's tenacity and courage along with his father's resistance to adversity, Kingston held steadfast to the notion of survival -- a characteristic not expected of a four-year-old child.

With his light complexion, Kingston's skin was burned red by the sun and his lips were parched and swollen. Miraculously, within a day or so of losing his mother, a deckhand of a

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passing yacht caught sight of young Kingston and he was rescued. One of the yacht's mates spoke Creole, and Kingston struggled to describe what happened to him and his family. Although the captain of the yacht felt it was his duty to report his rescue to Haitian authorities, the wife of the wealthy yachtsman intervened in Kingston's behalf nursing Kingston onboard the yacht while docked in Santiago de Cuba. From there she located and alerted the Brennen couple in Miami.

Because of her political ties with the Eisenhower Administration, the wealthy couple escorted Kingston into the United States as a political refugee – a status not offered to many escaping the political and economic horrors of Haiti. Because the US recently turned over the control of the Haitian government to its people, and after being informed of Kingston's ordeal, the US Ambassador to Haiti summoned and pointedly questioned Haitian officials about the Dumas family. A Duvalier spokesperson contemptuously retorted that Franz and his family had been tried and executed as traitors to the Haitian people in part because they were French spies still using slave labor to maintain their financial empire. The Ambassador knew better, but it was useless to create an International incident over the growing pains of a young government. Meanwhile, the Dumas property was confiscated by the Duvalier regime and secretly diverted into the dictator's private coffers.

Throughout subsequent years, such memories have been the source of Kingston's nightmares, and despite the Brennen's Christian teachings, his tenacity and ruthless cunning took an older Kingston to a life that offered some revenge for his family's sacrifices. Yet, Kingston is steadfast in his belief that he paid the price many times over. The honor and divinity of his parents' and grandparents' ultimate losses were not to be the guiding lights toward Kingston's future.