



CARIBBEAN CONTEMPORARY CLASSICS

**SNEAK
PEEK
SAMPLE
CHAPTER**

Old Story Time

Trevor Rhone



ACT ONE

1.1

Scene One

[The stage and auditorium go to black. In the darkness we hear the actors singing a quiet, lyrical folk song. Very soon we see the glow of PA BEN's lantern.]

PA BEN: *[Over the song, sings]* Old Story Time. Old Story Time.

[As he enters the auditorium, the lights come up fully on him.]

[Speaks] Evening, one and all. Everybody hearty? What happen, you people mouth join church or what? You don't have voice to answer me? Everybody hearty? *[The actors respond 'Yes, Pa Ben'.]* That's better. *[To the audience]* Make yourselves comfortable on them nice chairs. You people lucky, years ago when A was a boy and A use to go to listen to story, it was never in no fancy place like this, with all them pretty fandangles, pretty lights and whatnot. No, sir.

[The actors in the play start appearing from various directions and start moving to the Storyteller's area, where they will become PA BEN's immediate audience.]

On an evening in the district, we would gather at the village square, everybody gather round the shop piazza, some sit 'pon old drum, others 'pon the old crocus bags filled with salt, everybody chatting, some meddling in people's business, others giving remembrance to who dead the week before, who saw the ghost and what not, and my father was the chief Storyteller when him feel in the mood. *[PA BEN*

leaves the auditorium and goes up to his storytelling area.] But A tell you, give him a bottle of whites, an' two twos him was slap bang in the mood. He hem.

VILLAGE/ACTORS: Him clear him throat.

PA BEN: And that was the signal to launch into a story. Who present would run go call the rest.

ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY LOIS: *[Running to call off]* Pa Ben ready! Run come! Story time!

PA BEN: An' mi father would wax warm, him mind 'pon the story an' one eye 'pon the young gal them. Ah boy, those were the days. Yes, A can still hear the bamboo clarinet, and the fife a whistle, and the drum a lick, an' A can still see miself dress up in all mi finery stepping into the dance yard. *[He re-enacts the memory.]* And in those days they had a new fancy dance called the 'corkscrew', and A was the champion corkscrewer. *[He dances, much to the delight of his audience who tease him.]* Watch your back, Pa Ben, careful, Pa Ben, 'etc.] If any of you young gals here don't believe me, then meet me when the story done! Yes, those were the days. Good times and bad times, no opportunity for us black people, no water, no road, no 'lectric light. Sweet-mouth politician promise to bring down the moon, cut it up and hang it 'pon stick so we could read Bible when night come. Ah boy, sixty years later, they don't even cut the stick yet. Ah well, that is another story.

ACTOR WHO WILL PLAY GEORGE: So how you use to read?

PA BEN: With mi bottle lamp. And in war days when oil short, A catch two firefly, put them in a bottle, light up the place same way. Ah boy, war days, no flour, no saltfish, no soap, the shops empty, but that too is another story.

ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY PEARL: Howdy, Pa Ben. *[As she comes on]*

PA BEN: All well. All well. Come sit down. A ready for you. Open this for me. *[Giving her his bottle of white rum]* The tongue nuh fully oil yet, but A going to begin. *[PEARL returns the opened bottle to PA BEN. He takes a big swig, to more comments from his audience, 'Mind you rotten out yuh liver', 'Him don't have no liver', etc. The over one hundred per cent proof rum makes him temporarily lose his voice but he quickly recovers. He signals to the actress who will play MAMA. They whisper momentarily and she goes off.]* A did live in a certain big yard, next door to some a the people who the story concern, so you see A have first-hand knowledge. What A don't know as a fact, A will make up as A go along, and if A can't do it by miself, mi friend here will help me. *[Indicating his rum bottle]* Now how the tune go again?

ACTRESS WHO WILL PLAY PEARL: Me know, me know. *[She jumps up and immediately starts to sing a very uptempo blues version of the folk song, with much body gyration.]*

Once upon a time
There was a merry ol' time
The monkey chew tobacco
And he spit white lime.

[The actors/villagers listen to the version of the song, bemused.]

PA BEN: That is not the tune.

ACTOR WHO WILL PLAY GEORGE: No, but it sound nice. *[They all join in.]* The bull frog jump from bank to bank ... *[They start going off.]*

PA BEN: An' he never touch water. *[He chants]* Ol' Story Time. Ol' Story Time *[as he goes into his house.]*

[The lights come up on the rest of the stage as MAMA, endearingly called Miss Aggy by PA BEN and Miss G by the others, enters, dressed in her market wear. A basket sits on top of her head; she carries another in her hand. She looks tired as if at the end of a long journey. She comes on, sets her baskets down on the bench, then calls ...]

MAMA: Len! *[Pause]* Don't tell me him not here. Lennie!
[Pause] Watch me an' him today. Lennard! After I tell him to stay in the house an' study him book, *[She starts looking around the yard for him.]* him make me come back an' don't find him in the yard. *[She calls out once more.]* Lennard!
[Pause] Lennard! Pa Ben, Pa Ben! *[She calls across the yard.]*

PA BEN: Oi.

MAMA: You see Lennard?

PA BEN: A think him went to market wid you.

MAMA: No. A left him here to study him book.

PA BEN: Him about. So how was the market?

MAMA: Couldn't be worse this week. A had to give away half of the things, jus' so A never had to carry them back. An' like a bad luck, the damn jackass foot go lame up on me, an' me had to trot the ten mile come home.

PA BEN: Lawd.

MAMA: What to do? Anyway, A bring something for you.

PA BEN: Is what?

MAMA: Wait, nuh. *[She digs into her basket. He cleans his hands on his clothes in anticipation. She hands him a big hymn book.]*

PA BEN: For me? Thank you. *[He opens the book.]* Nice print.
[A hymn catches his eye and he sings.] 'Rock of ages cleft for me ...'

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MAMA: So you going to service tomorrow?

PA BEN: A not to make up mi mind yet. *[He goes into his little house.]*

MAMA: Is fourth Sunday, so Reverend Greaves should come up.

PA BEN: Then I have to try an' go.

MAMA: *[As she watches him go off]* Try. Old devil! A going down the road to look see if A see the one Lennard. *[She takes the market basket offstage.]*

PA BEN: *[He opens his window and looks out at her.]* Buy penny oil, hapenny salt, an' quattie bread for me. See the money here. *[Taking out a handkerchief. The money is securely knotted in it.]*

MAMA: All right. Where A leave the switch? *[As she hunts around for it]*

PA BEN: Nuh worry beat him.

MAMA: If him can't hear him mus' feel. *[As she is going off]*
Is you help spoil him.

PA BEN: Lawd! Harass the poor boy so!

MAMA: *[As she is leaving she sees a switch on the lower level.]*
Ah, see it here. Wait till A catch up with him, A going to scour his behind for him this evening.

PA BEN: *[Speaking directly to the audience]* If A had mi wits about me, A would save the boy a licking that evening. A should tell him mother that is me send him out. A have to find him before she catch up with him. Lennie! *[As he goes off calling. MAMA can also be heard calling offstage, 'Lennard!']*

[LEN chases PEARL on from Up Left. He catches up with her and touches her on her bosom.]

LEN: Touch. *[Both laughing like mad]* Okay, your time.

PEARL: All right.

LEN: Come on then. *[He presents his pelvic area for her to touch.]*

PEARL: *[Feigns at touching, then suddenly lunges at him]* Touch!

LEN: You never touch.

PEARL: Touch.

LEN: I finish play.

PEARL: You have to go home?

LEN: No.

PEARL: Yuh mother must be soon come from market.

LEN: So?

PEARL: I know what will happen if she come home and don't find you.

LEN: She can't do me nutten.

PEARL: Except tie you to the bed-head and murder you.

LEN: Tie who?

PEARL: You same one. Go on like you is a big man.

LEN: Big man, yes.

PEARL: In-yuh pants.

LEN: You want to see it? *[He chases her threateningly.]*

PEARL: You too rude. Play bad when yuh mother not around. Is only because she gone to market why you manage to t'ief out.

LEN: I don't have to t'ief out.

PEARL: So you say, but everybody notice how since you get to go to the high school, how she strict with you more than

ever, like she don't want you to mash ants. You mus' just primps. Is like you turning into a real high posh. Hoititoity. All drudge shoes!

LEN: You see me have on shoes?

PEARL: You hide them up the road man; when is time to go home, you put them on. Go home.

LEN: I go home when I ready.

PEARL: All right. Come we go down by the river. *[As she walks and stands directly in front of him. Their bodies are very close. They are both laughing.]*

LEN: So come we go.

PEARL: A don't want yuh mother to beat you, you know. *[As she pushes herself even closer to him]*

LEN: Last one reach is a dead dog! *[They race off, then freeze on the spot. When they break the freeze they are in the river, playing away, commenting on how cold the water is, accusing each other of wetting each other's hair, etc. MAMA appears behind them.]*

MAMA: Jesus Saviour, pilot me. *[The playing ceases immediately. PEARL scampers off. Len attempts to run away.]* Don't bother to run. If you run A murder you tonight. Come here. *[He comes slowly and tentatively towards her. She grabs him.]* Don't A tell you not to leave the house? Don't A tell you to stay in the house an' study yuh books?

LEN: A was studying all morning, Mama. A just came out for a little breeze.

MAMA: Well then, feel the breeze! *[As she beats him]* Don't A tell you ... Don't mix up ... Don't carouse. Who is di gal?

LEN: Is Miss Esmeralda daughter, Pearl, Mama.

MAMA: Pearl? An' what you is to she?

LEN: She is mi friend, Mama.

MAMA: Miss Esmeralda frowsy-tail, jiggerfoot, jeysey-ears, board head gal is your friend? Where is yuh ambition? You don't have any ambition? After A struggle out mi soul case to send you to big shot high school, you come home come mix up with that little dry-head gal? How much time A must tell you, don't mix up with the little dutty black gal dem in the district? How much time A must tell you, anything black nuh good? She is no advancement. It look like A will have to beat it into you. *[She drags him up.]* A will hang you, you know. Them little dry-head gal will drag you down! *[As she pushes him to the ground again]* You think A want to treat you like this? A only want what is best for you. Trust Mama. Mama knows best. Leave out the dutty black gal them, concentrate on yuh books, for life is hard when you black, but with a little education you still have a chance. When time come for you to have girlfriend, A have a nice girl pick out for you. Miss Margaret, Reverend Greaves' daughter, a nice brown girl with tall hair down to her back. She is advancement, you hear me. *[She picks him up.]*

LEN: Yes, Mama.

[MAMA shoves him off home. As they are going she continues]

MAMA: Miss Margaret. You hear what A tell you? Miss Margaret. Miss Margaret.

LEN: Yes, Mama. *[As she hits him a series of blows going off]*

PA BEN: *[Coming on to his area]* Miss Margaret. Miss Margaret. That's all could ring in the boy's ears, year after year. Miss Margaret. Like a drum. *[He comes directly down to the audience.]* You have to understand Miss Aggy. She wouldn't

even have a black chicken in her yard. One chop, off with the head. Miss Margaret was like an obsession with her. The years went by, and the boy study him books, day and night, an' him pass all him exams with flying colours, yet still him couldn't get a job in the bank. But later for that. One day A happen to be in a next district about three miles from here, and A happen to see the boy with a pretty black girl. We two eyes make four, an' him beg me not to say anything to him mother, and A kept him secret. In fact, A became him confederate, carry message, arrange meeting, dat sort a thing, till one day the boy announce say him get scholarship to go to foreign to further him studies. Three or four weeks after him leave the pretty black girl send to call me, Miss Lois was her name, an' she give me a letter from Missa Lenny, telling me thanks for everything. One thing him beg me. Don't tell him mother say A hear from him. It was a hard secret to keep, but A couldn't bruck it. As the months went by Miss Aggy still got no proper word from the boy. She worry till she all take in sick. *[MAMA enters through the door Up Right looking sick and forlorn: She sits on the low bench with her back to the audience.]* But still A had to hold mi tongue. Why was he carrying feelings for her? All A could do was to try and comfort her.

[He leaves the lower area and goes towards his house, calling out to her.]

Miss Aggy!

MAMA: How you do, Pa Ben?

PA BEN: All well. All well. *[He continues into his house to get a basket of peas and returns almost immediately.]* How is the feeling an' you?



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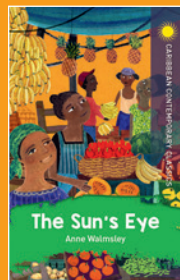
Old Story Time is a Caribbean classic, providing brilliantly entertaining theatre about race, identity, malice, and the redeeming power of love.

In this enthralling drama, we progress with Len from poor scholarship boy to successful accountant. We see a similar but opposite shift in George, from wealthy, well-connected schoolboy to double-dealing crook. Len's mother Miss Aggy, the girls he first loves, and the woman he eventually marries, many destinies are entwined with Len's. Misunderstandings can be dangerous, and trust and love need some help to win through. With the help of Pa Ben, our far-seeing narrator, can things end well?

Author

Trevor Rhone was a leading dramatist in Jamaica. His sparkling and original talent has won acclaim from critics and audiences worldwide.

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