



CARIBBEAN CONTEMPORARY CLASSICS

**SNEAK
PEEK
SAMPLE
CHAPTER**

The Young Warriors

V.S. Reid



CHAPTER 1

The questions

HIS FATHER'S VOICE rolled down on him like thunder.

'Tommy! It is time to get up!'

Tommy had been dozing but now he was wide awake. He looked at the sun shining through the trees and the leaves sparkling with dew. He sprang to his feet, making sure that his knife was secure in its pouch. Tommy never slept without his knife, for he was a Maroon.

'Are you up, boy?' his father called.

'Coming, father,' Tommy answered quickly.

He hurried, for that day was to be a great day in his life. That day he would begin the trials that would make him into a young warrior. It was his birthday. He was fourteen years old.

Swiftly he stooped and made his bed which was in one room of the wattle-and-daub hut his father had built. The hut had three rooms and a thatched roof.

Tommy had an unusual bed. Four logs were laid on the floor in the shape of a square. Inside the square was a layer of pimento bush, over which soft fine grass was spread. Tommy's father said this made the best bed, for it was both soft and sweet-smelling.

Tommy ran from the hut to the spring behind the great rock. He took off his clothes and dived into the

pool which was at the foot of the rock. The water was so cold that it made little bumps, called goose-pimples, rise on his arms and legs. He jumped out of the pool and scrubbed himself dry and warm. Quickly he put on the pantaloons all Maroon boys wore. Then, over his chest, he slung a belt and pouch made from goatskin and fixed his knife properly in its pouch.

Although Tommy was a little ashamed to have slept so late that morning, he was proud to have finished his morning duties before his father called again. He ran from the pool into the village.

The name of the village was Mountain Top. It had two lines of huts facing each other, with a street between them. At one end of the street was the Council-house which was very large, because it was built to hold all the Maroons who lived in Mountain Top.

As he ran, Tommy looked around for his friends. Here and there he could see them running towards the centre of the village. He was glad that he was not the only one who had slept late. No doubt, on the night before, they had tossed and turned in their beds as he had done, for a long time before sleeping. No doubt, they had all been thinking about the next day when they would be made into young warriors.

At the centre of the village was the parade-ground. It was a wide place on which the Maroon warriors held their drills, their shooting-matches and their dances.

The boys ran to the parade-ground. There were four others beside Tommy, and they were all about the same age as he. Older by about six months, was Charlie. Then there were David and Uriah and Tommy's best friend, Johnny. At any other time they would have been wrestling or mock-fighting, but now their faces were very serious for this was an important day.

They formed a line as they had been taught to do. Charlie stood at one end and Tommy at the other. Next to Tommy stood Johnny.

The sun was climbing above the trees. The people of the village were now crowding about the edge of the parade-ground, leaving an open path to the closed door of the Council-house.

'Tommy,' whispered Johnny, 'are you afraid?'

Tommy thought for a while.

'Yes,' he replied. 'Are you?'

'I do not shoot well with the bow and arrow. My father will be angry,' Johnny said.

'There are other things you do well,' Tommy said.

'You're the best runner among us all.'

'But I wish I could shoot as well as you,' Johnny said.

'And I wish I could run as well as you,' said Tommy.

There had been a good deal of talking and laughter going on among the grown-up Maroon people, but now they had become quieter. Suddenly, the *abeng* sounded.

The *abeng* was the bugle of the Maroons, and it was made from the horn of a cow. Its sound was low at first.

Then it slowly grew louder and louder and higher. At last, it seemed as if it was racing around the treetops. The Maroons used the abeng to call up their people. It could be heard for miles around and was blown in such a way as to tell the warriors whether they were being called for a battle, or for a talk in the Council-house.

The warrior who now blew the abeng gave one last blast. They could hear the echoes going away deep into the mountains that surrounded the village. The door of the Council-house opened and the Chief of the Maroons appeared.

He was a tall, very black, handsome man. He wore a sleeveless shirt and close-fitting trousers that reached down to his ankles. His arms were muscular, and around his wrist was a narrow band of gold. He carried a musket in his right hand and a powder-horn slung over his shoulder. Before stepping from the Council-house, he stood in the doorway and let his keen eyes rove over the parade-ground. Behind him came the Council consisting of the older men of the village.

The Chief and his Council walked along the open path from the meeting-house to the parade-ground where his eyes were fixed on the five boys standing in a line. Tommy was aware that Johnny was trembling beside him.

‘Be brave, Johnny,’ he whispered, ‘You’ll do very well.’ But, to tell the truth, Tommy himself felt like trembling.

Although the Chief was growing old, he still carried himself like the great warrior he had been. He had fought the English Redcoat soldiers for many, many years. The tales of his deeds were often told around the camp fires when the men went out hunting, or when the story-tellers gathered on moonlit nights in the village.

Soon the Chief reached the parade-ground. Now, no more than ten feet separated him from the boys. He halted. He looked at each in turn, beginning with Charlie. As the Chief's eyes rested upon him, Tommy felt like Brother Cockroach, in the Anancy story, when Cockroach found himself in Fowl's yard.

The Chief held up his hand and silence settled on the parade-ground. Tommy held his breath as he tried to recall everything his father had taught him. Each year, as far back as he could remember, he had seen boys made into young warriors and had dreamed of the morning when he, too, would be made into one. But he had never dreamed that he would be so afraid.

Tommy was not afraid of being hurt. What made him fearful was that he might forget the words he was supposed to say, the replies he should make to the Chief when his turn came along. But Tommy hoped he would remember. He had studied very hard.

The Chief broke the silence.

'Brothers and sisters of the Maroon people, greetings!' he said.

‘Greetings, O Chief!’ answered all the people.

‘Today, once again, we are here to find out whether some of our boys are ready to be made into young warriors,’ the Chief continued. ‘But before we put them to the test to see how strong and active they are, we must find out how much they know of our history.’

‘True, true,’ cried the people.

Tommy could see his father in the crowd smiling at him, and suddenly he was no longer afraid. He was now sure he would remember what to say when the time came.

The Chief was facing the boys again. His face was stern.

‘The first question will go to you,’ he said, and his finger came up fast as lightning and pointed at Uriah.

‘Uriah, who are the Maroons?’ he asked loudly.

‘The Maroons are the brave people who hate slavery and fight for their freedom!’

The people in the crowd clapped their hands. Uriah’s father was smiling. Tommy was very happy on Uriah’s account. He hoped that when his time came he would answer as sharply as Uriah.

Chief Phillip looked down the line of faces again.

‘Charlie,’ he said.

Charlie jumped when his name was called and looked wildly around. Although the morning was still cool he was sweating. Tommy knew that Charlie was afraid.

‘Charlie, where do the Maroons live?’

Charlie's mouth opened but no sounds came. A groan came up from the crowd and Charlie's father looked angrily at him.

'Come on, boy,' Chief Phillip said. 'Speak up.'

'In—in—in the mountains,' Charlie stammered.

'Yes, we know. But where in the mountains?'

'In—in—Accompong.'

'And where else? Speak up, boy,' the Chief said.

'And—and—in Trelawny Town,' Charlie replied, his eyes bulging.

'Yes. Go on, boy,' Chief Phillip insisted.

'In—in—Nanny Town,' said Charlie, licking his lips and trembling.

'And nowhere else?' Chief Phillip asked.

Charlie shook his head. People in the crowd began to laugh.

'And where do *you* live? Are you not a Maroon?' the Chief shouted.

Tommy felt sorry for Charlie. Although Charlie was a bully and sometimes made the smaller boys cry, Tommy thought it terrible that he was so frightened that he had forgotten where he lived.

'Yes, sir,' said Charlie.

'Yes, sir, what?' asked Chief Phillip.

'I am a Maroon, sir.'

'And what is the name of your village? Where do you live?'

'Mountain Top, sir.'

‘So, what is Mountain Top?’

Charlie was crying now. All the boys felt sorry for him. Tommy was sure that after this, Charlie would not be as rough as he used to be with the smaller boys.

Tommy suddenly realised that Chief Phillip was looking at him.

‘You, Tommy,’ the Chief said.

‘Yes, sir.’ Tommy spoke so loudly that the people laughed again.

Chief Phillip looked keenly at him.

‘Why do the Maroons live in the mountains?’ the Chief asked.

‘Because, in times of war, we’re like the trees of the forests,’ Tommy said quickly.

‘What do you mean by that?’

‘In times of war, our warriors clothe themselves with the branches of the trees,’ Tommy answered. He knew that fear had left him.

‘And why do they clothe themselves in the trees of the forests?’

‘So that the English Redcoat soldiers cannot see them. Our warriors become like the bush. Since we are small in numbers, we win our battles by being smart,’ Tommy said, holding his head high.

The people laughed and cheered and Tommy could hear his father laughing far more loudly than the others.

But now Chief Phillip held up his hand and there was silence once more. He looked at Johnny and turned his wrist, so that the gold band glittered in the sun.

‘What is this on my wrist, Johnny?’

‘It is a golden band that was given to our people by the King of Spain,’ the boy said brightly.

Tommy smiled to himself. He was happy that his best friend was not afraid.

‘And why did the King of Spain give us this golden band?’

‘Because we showed that we were true Jamaicans. We fought for our country.’

‘In what year did we begin the fighting?’

‘In the year sixteen-hundred-and-fifty-five.’

‘How long ago was that?’ asked the Chief.

‘If a warrior was born in that year, he would already have known more than eighty summers,’ answered Johnny.

Everybody applauded again as Chief Phillip nodded his head. The Chief turned away and looked at David.

‘You, David,’ Chief Phillip said. ‘Tell us what happened in the year sixteen-hundred-and-fifty-five.’

David was a great teller of Anancy stories, but, today, he was so nervous that he found it a strain to stand still. But a Maroon boy was supposed to stand as still as a stone while he was being questioned by the Chief.

‘In—in that year, the English conquered the island from the Spanish. When the Spanish fled, the English

became the new rulers of Jamaica. But the Maroons were never defeated and they never left the island. So we are the true Jamaicans,' David said.

'Wonderful! Wonderful!' cried the Maroons, laughing and beating the earth with their feet.

Chief Phillip held up his hand for silence and turned to Charlie once more. Somebody in the crowd tittered. Chief Phillip turned quickly. His face was stern and his fierce eyes swept over the crowd. Everybody was silent.

'Charlie,' the Chief said in a soft voice, 'What are the duties of a Maroon who lives in Mountain Top?'

Charlie swallowed. Clenching his hands tightly at his sides, he answered, 'To—to always obey the Chief and his Council—and—and never to stray beyond our scouts.'

'Why should the Chief and his Council be obeyed?'

'Because they make the law. No people or nation can become great unless they obey the law.'

There was a low murmur among the Maroons. You could see them nodding their heads at the splendid way Charlie had answered the question. He was no longer a boy to be laughed at.

'And why should you never stray beyond our scouts?'

'Because although our village is in a secret place among the mountains, the Redcoats are always searching for us. And so, night and day, our scouts are always in position. They are always ready to warn us if the Redcoats should appear.'

There was a burst of cheering as Charlie ended. Everybody was happy that he was no longer afraid. It was a dreadful thing for a Maroon boy to fail the questioning, for he would have to wait a whole year before he could again try to become a young warrior. Then, if he failed again, he would never become one. In times of war, he would never be trusted with important tasks.

For the first time since the questioning had begun, Chief Phillip was smiling.

‘Brothers and sisters of the Maroon people, the questioning is over. And now we can all rejoice that none of the boys has failed,’ he cried to the Maroons. ‘Bring on the music while the field is being prepared for the other tests.’

While their parents and the other Maroons were shouting their names and waving and laughing, the five boys remained still and solemn on the parade-ground. During their year of training, they had been warned that sharp eyes among the Council-men would be on them all through the tests. A good warrior was one who could stand unmoving for hours. In war, or in hunting, a warrior sometimes had to be as still as a tree.

A fly alighted on Tommy’s nose. It sat down on the tip and rubbed its forelegs. Looking down his nose, Tommy could see it. He blinked hard, hoping it would fly away, but it only tickled him more. His nose itched. He blew a breath upward out of his mouth, but the fly

seemed to like the warm air. He knew if he slapped it away with his hand, a Council-man would see him. So he stood there, while the fly jiggled and danced on his nose. Presently, it flew away but Tommy had blinked so much that tears were in his eyes. After his sight had cleared, he saw one of the Council-men grinning at him. Tommy was glad he had not moved, for he surely would have been caught.

The musicians had meanwhile entered the parade-ground. There were three drums of different sizes. The largest was taller than Tommy, and when it was struck the air trembled. There were also flutes made from bamboo. Their music was very sweet and often sad, although it could sometimes be gay. There were guitars too, and these were made from calabash gourds, neatly fixed to hardwood arms.

The band struck up a lively tune while some of the Maroons placed targets at one end of the parade-ground. The targets were four very large pieces of timber. Holes of various sizes had been made in them, the largest being wide enough for a fist to go through. The smallest hole was so narrow that only a marksman could shoot an arrow through it.



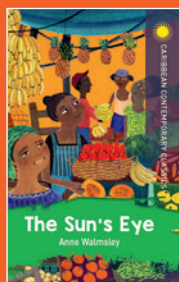
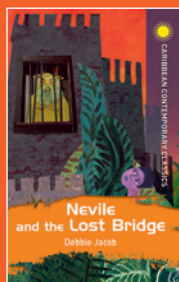
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The Young Warriors

In 1735, five Maroon boys are ready to be initiated as warriors. They have prepared long and hard for this day, and must now pass a sequence of tests. How the boys approach this, the most important day of their lives, says much about how they will respond to the challenges ahead. When they encounter a Redcoat troop in the forest near their village, the defence of the village and surrounding Maroon communities will depend on these boys, their training, courage and intelligence.

On this occasion, their community depends on them for its survival, but their initiation as warriors also teaches them lifelong lessons about loyalty, responsibility, trustworthiness and friendship.

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