

Elizabeth Kingsley is fifteen and has spent what seems to her like her entire life in the two-room school house set on top School Hill overlooking New Bristol Bay. A splash of freckles across her nose and cheeks, and the long reddish-blond hair that frames her face betrays her English-Scottish ancestry.

*I can't wait to graduate and attend art school in Nassau. This island is so boring. Nothing ever happens here, she thinks as she taps her pencil on her note pad waiting for the bell to ring. And now I have to do a paper on our ancestors for next Monday that's going to ruin my weekend. I'm just going to get it done before the weekend.*

When the bell rings her best friend Sarah Curry is waiting near the steps. They have walked home together since fourth grade. Sarah is tall and lanky and the color of chocolate.

"Hello Elizabeth", said Sarah but Elizabeth does not answer.

"Earth calling Elizabeth. Earth calling Elizabeth. Why aren't you talking?"

"Oh, I'm sorry. I was just thinking about our history homework."

"But it's not due for another week."

"I know but I want to get it done. What are you going to write about?"

“ I am going to write about my ancestors. My father said they were slaves stolen from the Congo and taken to Andros then to Abaco.”

“ I am going to write about my Loyalist ancestors. Mrs. Key said we can do our research at the historical museum. I’m just going to go there now.”

“ Now? But you have a week to do it.”

“ I know but I want to get it done.”

They turn on to a narrow alley, their shortcut between school and home. Elizabeth says goodbye to Sarah and turns opposite her usual route home walking two blocks to the Conch Cay Historical Museum. The museum is in the island’s oldest house built in 1838. She pulls the string on the antique door bell.

“I’m coming,” said a man with a Bahamian English accent. He opens the door smiling at his visitor. The museum director, Nathan Lowe , is long retired from his position of accountant in Nassau and happy to be home where he had grown up to pursue his true passion- history. He was thrilled to volunteer for the position of museum director when the vacancy was announced five years earlier.

“And what do I owe for this delightful and unexpected visit by Lady Elizabeth?”

“I have to write a report about the first Loyalist settlers of the Bahamas for my class.”

“You have come to the right place.”

Nathan leads Elizabeth into the museum to a tall book case and pulls a book off the shelf blowing the dust from its leaves.

“A History of Loyalists of Conch Cay, by Sir Isaac Edgewater” he reads aloud. “This book is long out of print and is the most comprehensive account of the island’s first inhabitants.” He places it on the table and opens it carefully.

“Books are to be treated like fragile friends. Is there a particular family you wish to study?”

“No, not really, just the first ones here.”

“Then go to the index and look up Keating – they were the first family to arrive here from St. Augustine, Florida in 1785.”

“My brother says the first people here were not Loyalists but Lucayan Indians.”

“Now that is true, but if you are talking about the ones who counted, the ones who brought civilization and industry to this island, then you must turn to

the Loyalists. They planted cotton, built homes, and ships – many of them were master carpenters.”

“My friend Sarah Curry said that the Loyalists brought slaves and that the slaves built the houses and picked the cotton.”

“That is also true, but the Loyalists were the architects of prosperity – the slaves were the workers.”

“My friend Sarah Curry wants to be an architect.”

“And she may well succeed. The burden of the past is ours to carry, but knowing it can also enlighten us and free us from the shackles of the stupid.”

Elizabeth’s attention is drawn to a lavish mahogany chair with red upholstery, ornately carved with a griffin and lion ascending its front legs, their stretched paws forming the cushioned arm rests and the Seal of England carved into the back of the chair.

“A spectacular piece of craftsmanship. The chair once belonged to the Duke of Sussex,” said Nathan softly stroking the armrest.

Elizabeth makes a beeline to a black telephone on the end table next to the chair.

“This is a rotary dial telephone – the first phone on Conch Cay. It belonged to Mariah Haversham. She donated it to us when she got a push button phone just before her death.”

Nathan slips his finger into the dial and turns it making a series of loud clicks when he lets the dial go. “It’s nothing like today’s cell phone. The number of clicks matches the number on the dial, and the total number of clicks per dial are translated into an electric signal that allows the call to be made by matching the actual phone number you are calling. Ms. Haversham’s number was 001. Go ahead and try it.”

Elizabeth spins the dial and holds the receiver to her ear. To her surprise a voice responds.

“Is that you, Elizabeth Kingsley?”

“Yes,” said Elizabeth visibly startled.

“ Are you a related to James Kingsley?” said the small shrill voice.

“He was my great grandfather.”

“Well, he was in my class at school,” said the voice.

Nathan looks on amused chuckling, “Oh my, that’s quite a monologue you have going. You have quite the imagination.”

Elizabeth looks at him with a surprised look. “But I am talking to someone – a woman.”

“And just who is that woman?”

Elizabeth returns the phone mouth piece to her face, “May I ask your name?”

“I am Matilda Haversham.”

“She said Matilda Haversham.”

“Nonsense,” retorts Nathan grabbing the phone and placing it to his ear. After a long silence he hangs the phone up.

“Don’t make a fool of me young lady. I suppose your flair for acting may be a gift but please- no pranks in the museum. I will have you know that Ms. Haversham was a direct descendant of Captain Horace Haversham who built the fort on top of North Hill to protect the island from pirates. You can learn about him in this book. Just look in the index under Haversham. You can take your

notes on your pad, but use only pencil. We can't take a chance with ink pens.

Now, I have some work to do in the office."

Elizabeth looks up Keating and after taking notes her curiosity takes her to Haversham. She quickly finds Matilda Haversham in the index- *born August 5,1898, died December 12, 1967. Teacher and founder of the Conch Cay Free Library.* Elizabeth is confused. She walks back to the end table and picks up the phone receiver. There is only silence. She dials 001.

"Is that you Elizabeth?"

"Yes...yes, that's me."

"I was hoping you would call. I know a great deal about your great grandfather. He was notorious joker. Do you know he glued my history book shut the morning of our final exam?"

"I didn't know that. I only know he ran the hardware store."

"He was a good-looking boy until he lost all his hair from mustard gas in World War I."

"I didn't know that. I just thought he was bald."

“You need to come to my house for tea. I can tell you so much about your family.”

“Well. Thank you. I’d love too.”

Nathan hears Elizabeth talking through his office door and opens the door visibly irritated.

“Confound it girl, are you still playing on that phone!”

“No, sir – not playing.”

“Well. I suppose I should appreciate your imagination and your penchant for acting. I can tell you that Ms. Haversham was quite a character. Her house is still vacant- empty all these years since her death. No heirs I’m told. She never had children. But you know the house- the one with the gingerbread. It’s right on your way to school. A bit ruinous after all these years, but it was once a beautiful home with island roses growing outside the porch.”

“I’ve never seen any roses there,” said Elizabeth.

“Oh yes, they are long gone – some died but many were replanted across town.”

“ I’ll be going home now.”



“Well, the museum is always open for you, Ms. Elizabeth, and you need not wait for a school assignment to return.”

The next morning Elizabeth and her brother Bertram are off to school. As they pass the Haversham house, Elizabeth moves to the other side of her brother, furthest from the house.

“Why are you so nervous?” said Bertram.

“I’m not nervous...it’s just that old house is creepy. I learned from Mr. Lowe at the museum that the house belonged to a woman named Matilda Haversham and she’s dead.”

“It’s just an old house – just wood and broken windows,” said Bertram with a teasing laugh. “The only thing haunting it is a bunch of old cats.”

“Ms. Haversham talked to me on the museum phone.”

“The talking dead! Wait until I tell Dad”, said Bertram raising his hands in a zombie type pose.

“Please don’t-it will only upset him and get me in trouble.”

Bertram continues laughing as Elizabeth cast a backwards glance at the house. Suddenly the porch door opens slightly and a hand appears holding a dish. The cats run to the door with eager anticipation.

“Did you see that!” said Elizabeth.

“See what?”

“Someone’s inside! I just saw someone feeding the cats!”

Bertram turns around. “There’s no one there. Maybe it was Matilda’s ghost,” he said recreating his walking dead pose.

“Don’t make fun of me. I didn’t make fun of you when you saw that silly UFO.”

“But that was real. Everyone knows there aren’t any ghosts.”

That day after school Elizabeth walks home with Sarah. Sarah is a more sympathetic listener than Elizabeth’s brother. When they reach the alley Elizabeth announces, “I’m going to her house.”

“Are you kidding! Why would want to go into that creepy house. Even the boys don’t go in there.”

Elizabeth says nothing and turns the porch door handle. It opens. Once inside the porch she turns the house door knob. The door opens.

Sarah yells, "Don't go in there! I am telling your parents!"

Elizabeth steps into the house. Sarah takes off running.

"Come in Elizabeth, I've been expecting you -four o'clock sharp. You're right on time ," said a familiar voice.

"But I never said I was coming."

"Oh, I knew you would come. Please have a seat at the dining room table. I have hot tea and orange ginger cookies just for you."

"Thank you."

Elizabeth follows her to a mahogany table beautifully set with two plates and two cups, a large porcelain tea pot, and a generous mound of cookies.

" Please sit down."

Elizabeth sits and takes a slow sip of tea, her eyes riveted on Ms. Haversham. She studies her small frame and finely chiseled cheeks, long hawkish nose, and snow-white hair that falls below her neck. She wears a long white dress with a blue apron.

“May I ask you a question Ms. Haversham?”

“Of course, dear”

“Are you dead?”

“My goodness! You should know that you never ask a woman her age or whether she’s dead.”

“Yea, ma’am.”

“It’s quite impolite.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“And frankly, all this fuss about death is a bit over the top.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“May I ask what do you do with your time, besides feeding the cats?”

“I suppose I am just waiting for time to end.”

“I didn’t think time ever ended. I thought there is only eternity.”

“You’re quite right. Well then- I am waiting in eternity rather than for eternity since eternity is already here. After all, if you think about it correctly, time is something that we create. We measure it with watches and clocks. We

mark our calendars and circle birthdates. I suppose it gives us a certain security to measure time. I want to show you something. Walk over to the window over there," she said pointing at the window in the living room fronting the narrow walkway opposite the adjoining cottage.

"Go ahead and push open the wooden shutter."

Elizabeth walks to the window and pushes open the shutter. She is looking at the alley that she walks every day to school. Suddenly, a little boy- no older than eight- comes walking by carrying his school books.

"Why he looks like my brother but it's not him."

The boy sees her at the window and waves and continues walking.

"That's not your brother. It's your father, Johnathan."

"My father?" Why he's just a boy."

"Well, your father was once a boy, you know."

"But how can he be a boy now?"

"I will answer by telling you a story. When I was a girl I looked forward to Saturday evenings when George Sanders would set up a sheet on a clothes line outside his house where he would show movies. He had a 35mm projector and

he would bring all sorts of movies and cartoons from Nassau for us children to watch. I would watch him place that large reel of film on the projector. I thought there is the whole movie from beginning to end all in that one reel – all two hours of time that it takes me to see those movies frame by frame, but yet it also exist in its entirety in a single moment. So you see it was only us children watching the movie that took two hours because we watching the film frame by frame. We created time passing- the film did not. Its beginning and end already existed.”

“I don’t understand.”

“ Go the window next to the oven and open the shutter.”

Elizabeth walks to the window and push opens the shutter. Her eyes widen with surprise. Instead of the houses she is expecting to see there, a vast forest stretches as far as she can see. There is a clearing about one-hundred feet away where she sees several people. They look so foreign- so different – they have the color of mahogany and are near naked.

“Those are the Lucayans – the first people of the Bahamas.”

“Why are they outside your window?” said Elizabeth her eyes riveted to this strange scene.

“You are seeing through that window the island’s distant past.”

“Can they see me?” said Elizabeth.

“Of course they can see you, so don’t be too conspicuous.”

“I think it’s too late. There’s a man running towards me!”

“Quick, close the shutter!”

Just as Elizabeth reaches for the shutter handle, the Lucayan launches a spear. She jumps out of the way just as the spear enters through the window and lands on the floor.

“Well. Now you’ve done it,” said Ms. Haversham.

Laying on the floor is a large spearhead made from the tip of a conch shell.

“Go ahead, pick it up and put it in that bowl on the shelf.”

Elizabeth examines it closely. “I don’t understand. When he threw it was on a wooden spear – where’s the wooden part?”

“Wood does not preserve well over time – only the shell survives.”

Elizabeth takes the spear point and places it in the bowl. She sees that it is filled with spear points.

“That window seems to have a very dangerous view,” said Elizabeth, “I don’t understand how is any of this possible?”

“My grandfather Christopher Haversham built this house. He was a ship’s carpenter. He logged the pine trees on Abaco and brought them to Conch Cay to mill them into planks to build the house. But he was most fond of the lignum vitae wood that grew on our island. Those trees were very old- some were over 1500 years old. You wouldn’t know it by looking at them being they were so small and narley. He used those trees to make the window frames. As a girl I discovered their secret and I watched the island’s history through those windows-a bit like watching the movies on Mr. Saunder’s sheet.”

“But how can you see the past? That time is already used up.”

“Its been used but it’s not gone. The universe is both sequential and simultaneous- a bit like throwing a ball and catching it at the same moment.”

“ Well this has been a lovely afternoon but I need to go home and finish my paper.”

“ Nonsense, you must stay a bit longer. You have plenty of time to finish your paper. It’s imperative that you look through one more window. Go to the living room window near the couch.”



Elizabeth walks obediently to the window.

“Oh, I forgot to tell you. Please take that umbrella with you.”

“Umbrella? Why it hasn’t rained in weeks.”

“You can never be sure about rain. It has a mind of its own.”

Elizabeth picks up the umbrella and walks to the window and opens the shutter. Suddenly a wave of water smashes into her knocking her off her feet. She is soaked. A fish is flopping helplessly on the floor next to her.

“Quick-close that window! You’ll ruin my rug with all that water!

“My goodness, “said Elizabeth. “That was unexpected.”

“Well, now you know what to expect in the future. “

“You mean Conch Cay will be underwater? Where will we live?”

“On boats I suppose-but the fishing should be excellent.”

At that moment they are interrupted by a loud banging on the front door.

The door flies open.

“Elizabeth! Elizabeth!” her mother screams. Elizabeth’s entire family, Sarah, and other neighbors rush into the living room.

“What’s wrong?” exclaims Elizabeth.

“What’s wrong! Look at you. You’re soaked. Where have you been?”

“Why I’ve been right here having tea with Mrs. Haversham,” she said pointing across the table at the empty chair.

“There’s no one else here,” said her mother.

Elizabeth sees only a table covered with mold. Broken tea cups are scattered on the table and crockery litters the floor. The plate once filled with cookies is empty and cracked. The entire room with its sagging ceiling and broken furniture fill her with a tightening fear.

“We’ve been looking for you everywhere. We’ve been to this house a dozen times because of what Sarah said, but no one has been here.”

“But I’ve only been here for an hour.”

“An hour? You’ve been gone for eleven days!”

Elizabeth is shocked, her face ashen.

Her father picks her up and carries her out of the house. Her family and friends hug her. Sarah is crying from joy.

When they walk pass the museum Duncan is standing on the porch.

“Bravo...Lady Elizabeth. Bravo. They found you, thank God.”

As the Kingsley family marches triumphant down Royal Street Duncan walks back to the museum office. The phone rings. He instinctively picks up the receiver from the office phone. There is no answer. He is startled when the ringing continues even though he is holding the receiver. Confused he opens the office door. The rotary dial phone is ringing. His mouth parts slightly, his eyes widen as he places the receiver against his ear.

“Hello,” said a small weak voice, “is that you Nathan?”

Nathan swallows. He is silent – mesmerized.

“I am inviting you for a spot of tea. Please be here at 4 PM sharp. I don’t like to be kept waiting. Time is of the essence.”