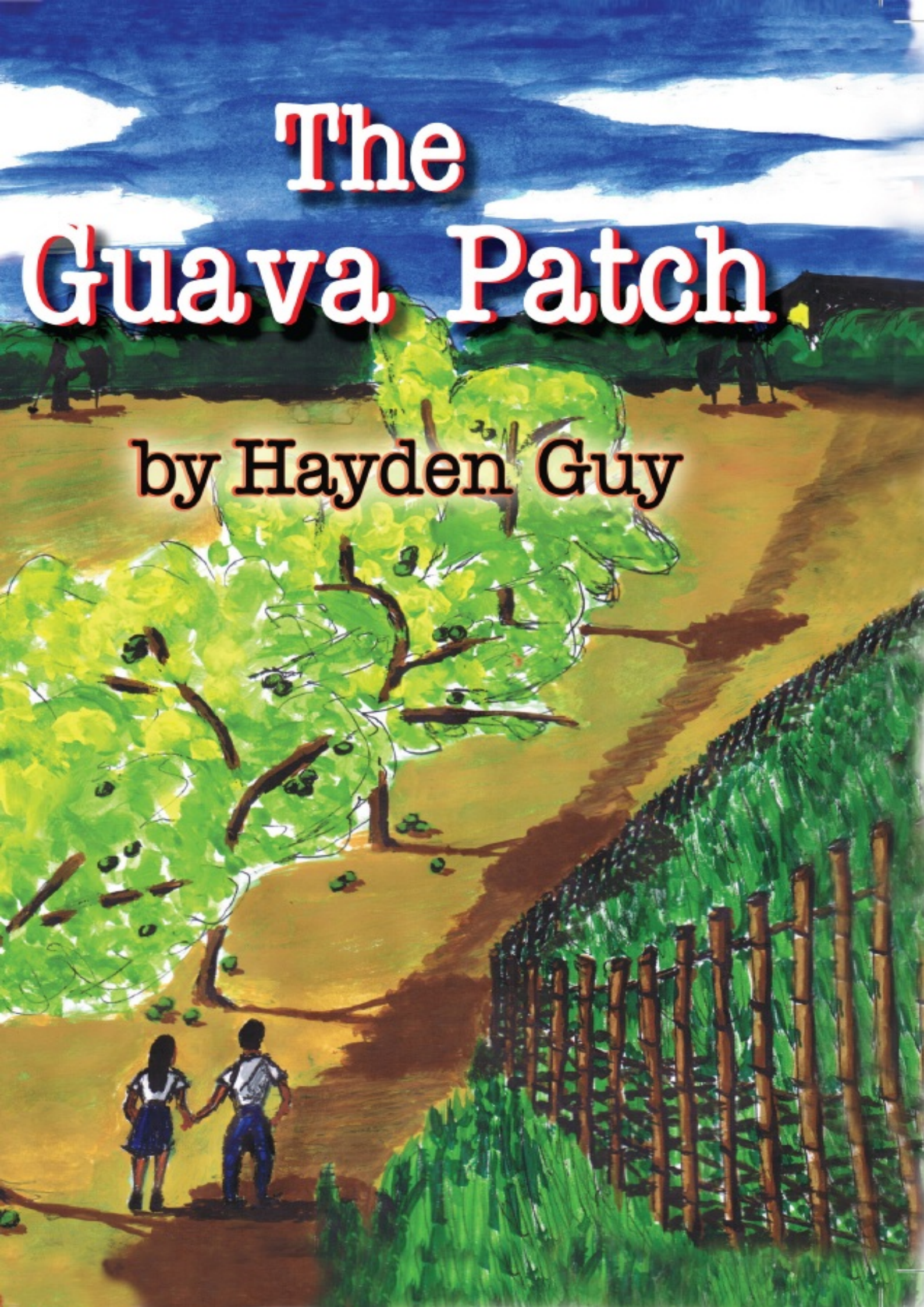


The Guava Patch

by Hayden Guy



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THE WONDER YEARS

‘T was a strange and somber night. The midnight sky was a prussian-blue, lit with stars like fireflies. The air was heavy and almost motionless, quite peculiar for this Caribbean Island, normally the air was ceaselessly active. Far away in the distance, lightning danced quietly across the backdrop. Against this scenario my Aunt Katy laid dead in her room, draped in red and her head covered. Her face livid and drawn in, not the usual cheerful brown I had been acquainted with the past few months. She was in her sixties, I was eight. Our father had recently arranged for me and my two younger brothers to live here with an Aunt, her two daughters, and her son. Twenty-five Quinam Road, in the quiet southern town of Siparia. My Aunt’s house lay inward, away from the bustling commercial center of Siparia, known as High Street. You had to walk inward, as there were no buses or other modes of transportation to go down Quinam Road. They all stopped at or traversed across High Street. Besides the buses there were mini buses, we called maxi taxis and people often used their own personal cars as taxi-cabs to make a living. Like most southern towns in Trinidad, Siparia had thick, lush vegetation, winding roads and was very hilly. For the most part my brothers and I enjoyed living here. It was a vast improvement from the orphanage we had just escaped from. My fondest memories of my pre-teen to late teen years were made here.

It was here that I attended primary or junior high school and met brothers Marcus and Machel Montano. The older Marcus and I shared class together. His younger brother turned out to be a world famous calypso-singer. Even back then we hardly saw Machel in school, he was always singing on television. I remember most of us balking at the fact that he had passed his exams for a prestigious high school. When did he have time to study? He was always in competitions and his attendance was meager. Anyway, it was here that I met the best friends of my early life. Drake Freewell, Carter Newman, Simeon Baxter, Curtis James and Brian Reeves. I met these five in high school. Drake was a strapping guy with a copper complexion, like the Messiah and short cropped woolly hair. He was a fast runner, very fast. I remember seeing him in the local high school track - sprints. It was like watching a gazelle in action. We both lived in Siparia in different areas, he lived on Coora Road. Simeon and Curtis were tall, lanky, dark skinned youths, who liked playing basketball. Simeon lived in Point Fortin and Curtis actually lived right next door to me in Quinam Road, one house between us. We visited each other quite often. He soon moved away with his mother to Fyzabad, where our high school was located. Carter was also dark skinned with curly hair. He was a sharp dresser and he liked to dance a lot, I mean a lot and he carried a comb in his back pocket. He lived on the long stretch of road called Siparia Old Road between Siparia and Fyzabad. His house was like midway between the two towns. He lived with his grandma, a sweet elderly woman. She had a light complexion, she was hilarious and a mean cook. He loved her very much and when she died years later, he was deeply hurt and devastated. His mother lived in the States, he

talked about her a lot and she always sent him the latest shoes, sneakers and clothing. It was to Carter's house I would visit every Saturday morning to get my hair cut. One of the best barbers lived in his neck of the woods, two brothers actually, these brothers were haircut prodigies. They had no electric clippers, just scissors, fine tooth combs and razor blades. It would be years later that Carter would tell me that they had opened up their own barber shop when he and I had migrated to the States.

After high school there wasn't much economic opportunity and so we both ended up in Brooklyn, New York. Brian ended up there too. Brian was tall and light skinned with semi-woolen hair, he was of mixed parentage. There was a lot of miscegenation on the island. As is widely known blacks had been forcibly shipped here by the shiploads four hundred years ago, then the Chinese and East Indians were later introduced as indentured laborers. There was also the native dwindled population of the Arawaks and Caribs. Then, of course, who could forget the "esteemed" Europeans, who orchestrated this whole debacle. As a result the mongrelization of these races ensued and it exists throughout the diaspora and the America's down to this day.

After completing my chores Saturday morning at my Aunt's house, I would go to Carter's house. We would watch Donnie Simpson's (the black guy with green eyes) video music show and soul train with Don Cornelius. Carter would be doing his latest dance moves, picking up new ones from the show and his grandma would be cooking us a scrumptious meal in the background. When she didn't cook, we would hop into a taxi to Fyzabad and buy chicken rotis for us and his grandma. Roti is a national staple of Trinidad. Ground yellow split peas is put inside the tortilla shaped dough, which is then lightly fried on a black-heavy baking stone. Curried chicken, goat or beef is cooked with potatoes and channa then placed in the center of the roti, then folded up and eaten. Fyzabad had the best rotis, better than the Siparia roti shops. One of the most prominent features in Fyzabad is the statue of Uriah Buzz Butler, a black laborer activist from the 1930's who fought for worker's rights. It was at this junction we would all meet after school to catch a ride back to Siparia. And it was at this junction the roti shop was located. Brian also lived here in Fyzabad, with his mother. I rarely heard him speak of his father and when he did he berated him vicariously for being absent from their lives.

Another common sight in Fyzabad was the jumping jack oil rigs. They were everywhere. Fyzabad was an oil-rich town. Trinidad was an island rich in oil, natural gas and asphalt. The island boasted of the world-famous pitch-lake and scenic waterfalls. Also, one can't forget that gem of an island called Tobago. It lies off the northeast corner of Trinidad. I personally have only been there once. My late father took me and my two siblings there when we were living in Siparia sometime. I recall getting motion sickness from the huge ship we went on. It was my first time on a ship or boat of any kind. It was very overwhelming, seeing the three-dimensional geographical coastline of Trinidad from the ship. I only remember profusely praying to set foot on solid ground again. Tobago was panoramic, it was much smaller than Trinidad, yet it was much more beautiful. The island was laden with palm trees, humming birds and all species of fish. And the seas, the beaches, the water looks like blue glass, you can see clearly through it. This is the island Daniel Defoe wrote about in his famed novel Robinson Crusoe. To me it seemed Tobago was like a signet ring on El Shaddai Yisrael's hand, something he created to display his sheer and awesome power. So it was to my dismay when I was first introduced to

evolution in high school. I thought to myself, how could people buy into Charles Darwin's farce? How could an eco-system like this exist without a master architect? Common sense dictates that a house needs a builder, it doesn't just explode and appear or change from one thing to the next as though by magic. So I dismissed Cro-Magnon, Neanderthal man and Big Bang theory from my mind and summed it all up to the white man's overactive imagination. We spent two weeks in Tobago, my father had wanted us to get acquainted with our relatives there. We had to drive through thick green vegetation. They lived inwards and the air was heavily spiked and perfumed with cocoa and coffee. There were cocoa and coffee plants everywhere. In the morning our relatives gave us rich-chocolate tea with fresh hot homemade bread and butter. It tasted simply like a slice of heaven.

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