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STIRRING THE POT
OF HAITIAN HISTORY

COLLECTION LAKANSIÈL

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*with the courage of yesterday's teachers
and the considerateness of young people today
for the glory of tomorrow's children*

hand in hand

with you

my dear

my wife

my left flank

steadfastly

m-r: t.

I give a bundle of thanks to all the family and friends-comrades who helped me in every possible way to get this book on its feet. After expressing thanks to Kettly, I extend special thanks to Lyonel, Evelyne, and Jean-Robert for the strength they gave me.

m-r. t.

“The habits of past generations are like iron weights on the minds of people today.”

**1. *I'm holding
a
gathering***

*I'm holding
a gathering
to understand what's happened
to my brothers and sisters
oh yes!*

Night was spreading across the mountains. A woeful breeze was blowing, but the children didn't stop playing. Sédènié was running after Aséfi, his small belly bloated from bad fat, his wee-wee dangling in the darkness. Up in the sky, the moon was peeking under the petticoat of the stars, and close by, near the fence, three lightning bugs were playing hide-and-seek with hardship.

Lamèsi stoked the fire, threw on a piece of wood, then said:

— Children, stop!

All the adults raised their heads. Lamèsi looked at them. There were so many people, she couldn't count them all. Tipous was there, Roro was there, Fifi was there ... Voklin had even come with his drum. Timari brought coffee. Néréstan had a few stalks of sugar cane that he cut into tiny pieces so everyone could have a bit.

Lamèsi said:

— Brothers and sisters, we're gathered here because Grinn Prominnin has returned. From the time of President Tibab, we sent Grinn Prominnin to sound the depths of our suffering. We sent him to find out what bad spirit killed the Emperor, what bad spirit killed Tipiè, Séfanm, and Marilis ... what bad spirit has been preying on the family up to this very day, as I speak. We gave him drink, and we gave him food. We gave him good clothes so he could make the trip easily. Days went by, water flowed under the bridge, my late father was long departed. Some people started saying that Grinn Prominnin must be dead. Other folks thought he'd given up. And then this morning, I had a big surprise; I was bathing upstream, and who did I see? Grinn Prominnin! His age was starting to show, his face looked tired, and ... it was like ... (I didn't like it one bit) he looked like a city person. But a weight came off my heart when he kissed me on both cheeks and said to me: "Sister Lamèsi, don't fear, you can summon the people. You're going to find out what's happened to your brothers and sisters."

— So, where is he? Make him talk then!

Lamèsi glanced backward; she looked at the candelabra cactus thicket.

The candelabra thicket parted. A man came forward, his head down.

— My family, I say: Honor.

— Respect, Grinn Prominnin.

The woeful breeze stopped blowing. The man rolled up his pant legs and sat down on a tree stump between Tisè and Fanfan.

— Brothers and sisters, I bring news. Since President Tibab's time, I've done nothing but travel. I've seen mountains, I've seen rivers. I've seen savannahs, I've seen the sea. I cast my eyes on other lands; I learned to speak ritual words ... But when I finally reached the realm of the past, I realized that if we truly want to shed light on our condition, we must turn and look behind us ... We must confront all the crises the family's been through, we must study the traces they left in our blood.

— But, you don't understand what happened. Even Grandma Andrémiz, who was born years ago under President Sylvain Salnave¹, doesn't know what the Emperor said.

— Well, that's what I've come to do here. That's the only thing I've come to do here. I've come from the realm of the past to tell you what went down. I've come from the land of the depths to speak the ritual words for you. I ... that's all I can do ... I've come from too far away ...

The woeful breeze returned, and it stirred up the flames of the fire. The flames rose up, lighting up all the members of the family. Grinn Prominnin turned and looked at Sédènié:

— That one was born while I was away, right?'

— Yes, he's one of those who were born while you were away. He's the youngest. The one born after him died. But Loulouz is pregnant again'.

The woeful breeze carried the words away. Sédènié put his head on Aséfi's shoulders. Grinn Prominnin cleared his throat. Up in the sky, the stars were challenging the moon, but close by, near the fence, seven lightning bugs were denouncing the hardship.

Grinn Prominnin said...

In January 1820, General Jean-Pierre Boyer, President of Haiti, entered Jérémie. He sent a communiqué to proclaim far and wide that even though the army hadn't been able to capture Goman, Malfèt, and Malfou (the three main rebel leaders), they had managed to crush the last band of maroons who'd been sowing 'disorder' in the country.

In January 1820, Boyer entered Jérémie. In October 1820, Boyer entered Cape Haitian. In February 1822, he entered Santo-Domingo... In April 1825, France recognized Haiti's independence.

A huge crisis was over. After thirty years of fighting, another kind of society—the society we inherited—appeared on Haitian soil. With another kind of leader. Another kind of slave. Another kind of maroon.

To understand that society, our own society, we must understand what kind of life disappeared into the wilderness with the three maroon of La Grand'Anse. For us to finally understand the malady we suffer from, we must understand the malady we've inherited.

Today, we're in charge, but we can't do everything we want to. We alone are responsible for tomorrow, but yesterday's chasing our tails. We alone have the power to choose, but the rules of the game were already written, and we didn't write them.

Between 1789 and 1820, Haiti was gripped by a **crisis that cut to the marrow**. And it was during that crisis, over the course of just thirty years, that the framework was built for the society we inherited. **The burdens of past generations are like iron weights on the minds of people today.**

Between 1789 and 1820, the Haitian people carried out the one and only slave revolution in human memory. But during those same thirty years, a native-born class pulled a fast one on the people, and it took over the revolution. And if we want to fully understand the malady that we suffer from today, we must retrace the path of that crisis. On the left hand, a revolution; on the right hand, a coup.

So, when all the ashes were cool, when Boyer took Jérémie ... I myself ... they themselves ... he himself ... you yourself!

Sister Lamèsi, please, give me a little cotton tea. All these ideas call for refreshment ...

1 Sylvain Salnave was President of Haiti from 1867 until 1869, when he was executed [...]
(translators note).

