**Island Princess in Brooklyn: Diane Browne**

**18. Another Bad Thing**

The ringing of the phone broke through my sleep, or was I dreaming? Granny always said ‘a ringing phone in the middle of the night when all decent people should be in their beds can only bring bad news.’ That’s when I realized that perhaps it wasn’t a dream. I rolled out of bed and landed on the floor, my legs all tangled up with the comforter. The phone wasn’t ringing any more. So maybe it was a dream after all.

And then I heard Mom say, “Oh, Jesus, God, Lord have mercy!” I ran through the door. She had the cordless phone in her hand and was holding her side with the other hand as if she was in pain.

For a moment I was confused. Was she in pain? Then she said, “ Which hospital? What happen? You don’t know? How you can don’t know? How bad she is? Of course, I will come. Just find out the details. Lord, have mercy!”

And then I knew. I didn’t even have to look at my mother’s stricken face. It was Granny!

“Is Granny? What happen to Granny?” My heart was beating in my chest as if it would jump out. “Granny is in hospital?”

“I not sure what happen. Somebody calling from Jamaica for Esther. Esther is at the hospital with Granny. The person say that Granny fall down and hit her head. They not sure how well she doing. Oh, my Lord! I must call Lillian.”

Granny fall down and hit her head! They not sure how she is doing. I thought that maybe I would stop breathing, or faint.

Mom was on the phone to Aunt Lillian, calling on the Lord all the time, and saying of course she would go. She would just tell the hospital she had a family emergency. I started to pray.

Mom hung up the phone. “Well, that is that! I going to see what is the soonest flight I can get”

“You going to Jamaica! I coming too.”

“Coming too? Princess, is mad you mad? You can’t leave school.”

“If something happen to Granny, I have to go to her. I am coming too,” I screamed.”

“Coming too! With what money? You can’t go chile. I going to lose days’ pay as it is, leaving work with no notice. Come, help me pack, quick, quick time in case I can get a first flight in the morning. Bring the big, black suitcase come. Oh Lord!”

Help her to pack! Mom didn’t know how serious I was. If I had been with Granny, instead of up here with Mom, whatever had happened to her wouldn’t have happened to her. Mom didn’t have any money for another ticket! And suddenly I lost it, totally. I couldn’t even see. It was like all dark with different coloured sparks swirling round my head. Tears were running down my face

“ I don’t know where the money coming from, but I have to go to Granny. Suppose she die! Can’t you see, I have to go! I am the one to go!” And as if to explain fully, I added, “And anyway she is more my mother than you any day. Granny is my real mother, not you!”

I had not really said that, had I? Had I really said that?

Yes, I had. I expected Mom to ‘land me a box’ because I had gone too far. That was always the threat from an adult if you opened your mouth once more, and said one more facety, out of order thing. It had never happened but this time it would for sure.

But it didn’t .

What was Mom supposed to say? She was supposed to say that on top of having a crisis with Granny, she also had an ungrateful daughter, me.

She didn’t say anything. Her mouth opened and closed again, but no sound came out. She looked startled like somebody had boxed her instead. Then her face turned red, red right through her dark skin, and sort of crumpled in on itself, but she didn’t cry.

It was then I noticed Mr. Ramjohn standing in the doorway of the bedroom. He looked like an old gray ghost. He looked at me with such a sad expression, and just a slight shake of his head, as if he was witnessing a catastrophe. He put his arm around Mom’s shoulders and led her into their room.

It was a catastrophe! I had gone too far. Granny always said, ‘One thing you cannot do is take back the spoken word’. I crawled back into the bed. I was sobbing now and there was nobody to comfort me. I was frightened for Granny, and frightened at what I had just done to Mom, because I knew I had hurt her. But like a wild thing trapped in a cage, I couldn’t imagine what wild thing, I knew I had to get out. I had to go and see Granny.

I didn’t sleep for the rest of the night. I was waiting to see if Mom got a flight for the morning. I had declared that I was going to Jamaica also but I didn’t know how I was going to do that. I also didn’t know how I was going to face my mother after what I had said to her.

There were no sounds in the house, I wondered if my mother had packed quietly. I kept peeping out of my room to see if there was any activity. I had visions of her making a sudden rush out the door to a waiting taxi, before I could catch her. And what was my plan anyway? After all I wasn’t packed and I was still in my pajamas. I didn’t know what to do.

The phone rang again and I rushed to the door of my room. A second ringing of a phone in the night. Did that mean worse news?

Mom picked up the phone. “What you say? I can barely hear you. Oh, is you Esther…”

Silence for a little. Mom was listening. I expected her to fall to the floor, bawling at any moment. Tears were coming to my eyes. I could feel them.

Then she said, “Oh, thank you, Father God! Esther, you sure? Then they do a cat scan, an x-ray? Then is how people can get things so mixed up? … True, true. People do their best. Then you sure you don’t need me to come, even in a few days time? Or even Lillian, though I don’t think she can get off so easy. Okay Esther, thank you. I will call again tomorrow.”

Then to my surprise, I heard my mother break down and amongst her sobs, say, “Ramjohn, is okay. Somebody get the message wrong. Fool-fool people! But I thought I lost my mother. Oh, Lord, thank you, Jesus.” He had his arms around her. “I must wake Princess and tell her. She must be fretting in her sleep.”

And then she turned and saw me. We looked at each other across the half dark area, and then she opened her arms and I ran to her, as she said. “You Granny is okay, Princess. Thank God for his mercies.”

First Mom phoned Aunt Lillian and then we all sat down in the living room to talk about it. Mr. Ramjohn was having his early morning coffee. Mom her tea, and I was having hot chocolate. It seemed that Granny had slipped and fallen down on the wet grass. (I could just imagine her running to pick up the clothes). Granny said she was fine but her ankle was twisted. When Esther came home there was Granny with her painful swollen ankle; she couldn’t walk on it; she couldn’t even hop because it sent the pain shooting up her leg. Esther did not know if it was broken so she rushed Granny to the hospital. Moreover she was worried in case Granny had hit anywhere else, and didn’t know or remember. This is how the ‘fall down and hit her head’ story began. Esther told the person she asked to call that she just wanted to make sure Granny had not hit her head.

So anyway the ankle was not broken, and Granny did not have any sign of having hit her head. No sign of concussion, or anything like that. So Esther would stay home to help Granny till her ankle went down and be doubly sure about everything. After that, Miss Annie from next door would come over to help Granny do things that might be difficult with the ankle.

Mom sighed as she said, “Two old people, Miss Annie and Mama. The blind leading the blind,” and she chuckled with relief.

So all was well. But of course it wasn’t really. I still had to tell Mom I was sorry for what I had said, which was such a bad thing really that just saying sorry would not do. I would have to say a lot more, and there were no words that I could think of that would help.

I did mumble, “Sorry, Mom,” as I got up to get ready for school.

And she replied without looking at me, “What’s done is done, Princess. We were all very worried. People say things when they are worried.”

I noticed that she didn’t say, ‘people say things they don’t mean,’. No, she didn’t say that. I had to make amends (as Granny would say) but I didn’t know how.