**The Battle of Jericho**

Sheriff Hollis Mitchell hitched up his pants on the front steps of the Lake County Courthouse, hauling them up by his leather belt and resettling them on the meaty ham hocks of his thighs.  Above him rose eight recessed Ionic columns, their slender forms reminiscent of the female body and each topped by two scrolls that echoed a nautilus shell or perhaps the coiled, intricate folds of a woman’s sex.  Sheriff Mitchell’s shirt stretched across his chest from the effort of readjustment, the buttons straining by their threads.  He reached up and tilted the white Stetson back, just enough to get some cool air at the band line.  The shifting and adjusting around his crotch set off a hum, a vibration or perhaps a scent, a feral scent of adrenal glands.  Something so basic, so true that the signal never rose to the level of human consciousness but was only spoken of within the body’s cells.  In response, the townsfolk of Lake County in that spring of 1949 dropped dough on their wooden counters, the flour trailing their fingertips like white pixie dust. They stopped reading nursery rhymes to their school-drained children, and left them heavy lidded on their pillows.  They stopped toying with the inside of their cars, dropped wrenches and worked rags to wipe away the grease from the backs of their hands.  They moved as though enraptured through the Floridian evening, following a clarion call that only they could hear when Mitchell’s balls shifted in their sweaty cotton confines.  All of them no longer baker, no longer parent, no longer car mechanic but a member of a larger rhythm of shuffling feet and swinging arms, uniform in their desire and commitment to attain a singular, unnamable goal that was begging to be satisfied like a cloying thirst tickling at the backs of their throats.  Each millimeter, each centimeter they inched forward made them proud, made them joyous, made them happy until in the intimacy of the crowd’s crush, it was difficult to distinguish between a stranger’s arms and one’s own.  Normally, the unexpected brush of foreign flesh, even the whispery hint of downy fur, would have made them flinch as though pierced or penetrated by a sharp needle.  But tonight, when the white corral sand beneath their feet felt as smooth as silk and the moon warbled in its watery orbit, the brush of contact, a whisper’s touch again and again, brought them to the brink of ecstasy, and they knew a deep and abiding love for one another, stronger than any biblical river. The kind of joy and sensuous pleasure experienced only beneath a revivalist’s white tent and later the sweet piercing ecstasy of the moment they stepped from beneath its tarp into the fresh air, sweaty and hot and throbbing and vulnerable to the night’s cooling elements.

“We got one,” Sheriff Mitchell announced from the stone steps. “Y’all may know, Ricky Greenleaf, but we’re still searching for the other one, his friend, Earnest-something.”

“We’ll find him,” a voice called out. The Sheriff nodded and turned to re-enter the courthouse, granting his blessing on the looting and pillaging that now commenced at his back.

For three days, drunk on the sordidness of Sheriff Mitchell’s allegations, the townspeople burned everything that had either been black owned or black touched in Tavares. The victim, Carrie Mae Sims was one of them, a Southern flower that had been plucked, according to her husband, by Ricky Greenleaf and his out-of-town friend. Her bruised face, now hidden behind her father’s locked doors, was proof enough that the assault had taken place. On the fourth day of the unrest, despite the still smoldering streets, the Executive Board of the Call to Greatness Womens’ Committee prepared to assemble. Each member firmly believed that the upcoming Tavares Watermelon Festival was more likely to restore the town’s good name and dignity than the federal troops that had been called in and even then, stood with their bristling bayoneted rifles at every major intersection.

Secretary Vera Roberts curled her light ash blonde bangs that early afternoon in May and rolled her hair into a fashionable updo that was held in place by a cheeky silk scarf. She painted her mouth a deep maroon color, her favorite, and made her way past the admiring young soldiers over to Bess Hunter’s place on Sunshine Lane. Vice President Ruth Driscoll set aside double stitching the hem of her youngest daughter’s costume for the Spring Revival at Crystal Lake Elementary, and clad in a respectable grey skirt suit from Driscoll’s, her husband’s retail store, the only one in Tavares, also made her way through the near empty streets to Bess’ sunroom. Meanwhile, Deputy in charge of Publicity, Florence Ashford, escorted Marilyn Reese, the *Tavares Daily’s* summer intern to the gathering. Florence had pitched a feature about the committee’s work, a bit of much needed publicity that would make the governor’s office look favorably upon them after their troubles. The editor-in-chief demonstrated just what he thought of the story by promptly assigning it to their cub reporter. On their walk over to Bess Hunter’s house, Marilyn, the newly minted journalist, practiced the pronunciation of her vowels, injecting them with the peach-ripe fullness of the South. A sound that she had abandoned at her northern boarding school where the cold crisp consonants rang off the tongue like the clink of coins in a jacket pocket. The air over Tavares, Florence sniffed, still smelled of a noxious brew: recently extinguished fires, camellia bushes in bloom and the sickly-sweet scent of slowly rotting citrus. As they pulled up to Bess Hunter’s home, Marilyn noticed with disappointment, that Bess’ daughter, Daisy Hunter was standing in the front door, greeting the Committee members as they arrived. She had forgotten that running into her old classmate was a very real possibility. She had only been grateful after the seventy-two hours of confinement in her home to finally be set free.

“Hi Daisy,” she said from the bottom step.

“Well, hi there, Marilyn,” Daisy replied. She shifted her weight onto her right foot and cocked her left hip forward against the doorframe. Crossing her arms against her chest, Daisy made no move to let Marilyn pass. Marilyn had detected in the other girl’s tone a now familiar hint of resentment as though the decision to leave Lake County had been Marilyn’s alone. Her mother, Mrs. Reese, of course, had protested. She was after all the daughter of Syd Hester, the great citrus baron. But Marilyn’s father, Mr. Reese, a penniless second son, hailed from the north, and all the girls in the Reese family had attended the same boarding school. His daughter, Mr. Reese insisted during their many dinner-table-battles, would not be the first to break with tradition.

“Are you going to let us pass, Daisy Hunter?” Florence asked in a teasing tone, ignoring the tension between the teenage girls.

“Who is it, Daisy?” a voice shouted from the darkened hallway behind her.

“Mrs. Ashford and Marilyn,” Daisy yelled back over her shoulder.

“Well, don’t just leave them standing in the door, Daisy Hunter. Good Lord, let them in,” the voice cried back. Daisy complied with a swiftness that showed no hint of being able to defy or even delay her mother’s wishes. She stood now with her hands clasped before her, the very picture of docility, her left thumb worrying at the back of her knuckles. This was the Daisy that Marilyn had always known and even though she hadn’t enjoyed the heat of the girl’s earlier regard, she couldn’t help but pity her now cowed former classmate.

Florence led her past the small kitchen, through the living room and into the sunroom, an addition that had been constructed by Bess’ husband Carl before he shipped out and later died fighting the Japs in the Pacific. It was smaller, Marilyn noted, than her own dorm room at Miss Porter’s and smelled in the afternoon light vaguely of nail polish and the dust that had been dislodged by the Committee members’ earlier arrivals. Marilyn’s mother, she knew, didn’t spend much time with these women. The members of the Executive Board cleaned their own homes and cooked their own food. They were perfectly respectable people but they weren’t quite Lakeshore Drive people. The furniture in the sunroom had been arranged in a semi-circle, the couch pulled away from the wall and tilted at an angle with two other matching upholstered armchairs beside it. One was already occupied by Ruth in her grey suit, even then fretting about the completion of her daughter’s costume, and the other by the maroon lipstick wearing Vera in her silk scarf. Placed in front of them was a high-backed dining room chair and behind that a kind of altar. On the sideboard, a vase held a single plastic rose and beside that a miniature American flag wilted in the heat. Between both was a framed portrait of Carl in his Marine dress blues. It served as a reminder to the Executive Board members that Bess Hunter, their President, had made the ultimate sacrifice. She was an American.

“Now, y’all know Marilyn Reese,” Florence announced. She gestured for Marilyn to take a seat on the couch and soon followed her.

“Hello, Marilyn,” Ruth said. She had been stitching the costume for her youngest of seven, but Laura, Ruth’s middle child had gone to school with Marilyn all the way up to Homestead High. Laura had always considered her classmate peculiar. Someone had even gone so far as to call Marilyn “sly.”

“Hello, Mrs. Driscoll,” Marilyn said, hunching her shoulders forward beneath the older woman’s assessing stare. “Thank you so much for having me,” she added, remembering her manners a beat too late.

“We are so delighted to have you back home,” Florence hastened to add, patting the young girl’s knee. Her husband, Earl, owned the local hardware store, and Florence could easily have been mistaken for one of the rail thin implements he sold there. Her grey hair was pulled back and contained in a bun, Vera noticed with disdain, at the back of her neck. Really, she thought, I’m the only woman on this committee who looks after herself.

Bess Hunter entered the sunroom with Daisy, her daughter, trailing her. In the young girls’ twitchy hands wobbled a plate of cheese and crackers. At school, Marilyn recalled Daisy jumping at the smallest sound – the smack of a fallen math textbook against the linoleum floor or a metal locker door being slammed shut. She sat down now in an aluminum folding chair that had been set up beside her mother’s throne. “Regal,” Marilyn noted generously in her reporter’s notebook. Bess was a stout woman who had squeezed herself into a floral-patterned dress from Driscoll’s new spring collection. A single bead of sweat slid from the nape of her neck, cutting a wet trail through her talcum powdered bosom. She cleared her throat and ran a single painted fingernail down the typed agenda, copies of which she’d mimeographed in Homestead High’s main office where she manned the front between Principal Brooks and the town’s adolescents. Bess had her own desk and a gold nameplate on it and had perhaps mistaken her authority over those quivering souls as evidence of her own innate powers.

“As you know,” she began clearly for Marilyn’s sake, “we are here to talk about the –” Daisy jumped up as though she had only just then recalled her hostess duties and carrying the quivering plate of cheese and crackers, offered it to Ruth along with a cocktail napkin.

“Refreshments?” Bess asked, trying to conceal her annoyance with a perky tone. She and Carl had both understood that Daisy needed a lot of work. Spare the rod, they agreed, spoil the child. But now this ungainly creature was Bess’ burden alone to bear. All those present assumed she would remain unmarried after her high school graduation and spend the rest of her life taking care of her mother’s needs. Clearly pleased by her efforts, Daisy placed the near empty plate on the sideboard and took the seat again near her mother. Marilyn wrote in her notebook, “the proceedings began on a note of warm Southern hospitality.”

Ruth eyed Marilyn, bent over her notebook, trying to take up as little space as possible. Poor girl, she thought. With a southern mother and a northern father, it was clear that Marilyn no longer knew where she belonged. Neither fish nor fowl, and now with her attendance at boarding school up in Connecticut, neither here nor there. Ruth pitied her – to be so properly out of place with no roots was her own worst nightmare. In fact, that sense of broader belonging was what held the Women’s Call to Greatness Committee together. Shared values and shared beliefs that ensured the continued health of their community and a way of life that even then encircled by the National Guard, she worried, was under threat. After the uncertainty of the war, she knew she was not alone in longing for a return to normalcy. But Marilyn siting there seemed in that afternoon light, a harbinger of something unexpected and unknown.

“We are here,” Bess began again, “to discuss this year’s Watermelon Festival.” Ruth shifted in her chair to ease up on her arthritic hip and exposed the wide breadth of her left thigh and backside to Marilyn and Florence. It appeared as though Bess was going to stick to the agenda, and Ruth was grateful that for once they might be spared the usual theatrics. After all of those children, Ruth no longer indulged in fantasies about men and their unbridled lust. She had keenly felt at each birth the loss of essential minerals and nutrients and had, after seven children, grown dull and grey from the depletion of her body’s resources.

The women settled under the melodious drone of Bess’ voice. Marilyn had seen her mother plan parties before but nothing on this scale – a festival meant to include and inspire the entire town. They had to requisition three hay wagons from the local farmers, then organize and schedule teams that would work in shifts to decorate them. Contingency plans had to be put into place in case a shift worker got ill or for personal reasons had to take a day off. And they needed an on-site supervisor to keep everyone on task and make sure their daily goals were met. They needed chicken wire, lumber, the fabric for the fringe and skirting, props, tissue paper pompoms, streamers, ribbons and balloons for decoration and they had to order the lettering from Orlando, which was thirty miles north of them, and twist ties for the paper flowers that were, Bess nodded in Ruth’s direction, her area of expertise. Sewing for seven girls had made Ruth adept at handling the accordion-like floral creations with their scalloped and fringed edges. Marilyn tried to keep up, scribbling as fast as she could and starring any areas of confusion so that she could circle back around with Florence if need be. Marilyn knew the editor-in-chief of *The Tavares Daily*, pressured by her father to hire her, was skeptical of her abilities.

“Well,” Bess said. The light was fading. The shadows had lengthened and sharpened on the green carpet before them. Marilyn wished they would open a window. The air outside, she knew was still sooty, but the scent of acetone was overpowering in the stifling room and Marilyn suspected Bess Hunter’s brightly colored coral nails as the source of her discomfort.

“Really,” Florence was murmuring to Ruth, “there’s nothing like a homemade costume.” Marilyn slid her notebook into her satchel and slung it over her shoulder.

Vera Roberts watched her and closed the maroon notebook in her lap. The minutes were contained within in her neat handwriting. Still eyeing Marilyn, she said, “I heard they took her in the young nigger Greenleaf’s car.”

Marilyn had mostly overlooked the quiet Vera but now in a panic she met the older woman’s gaze. That very morning over breakfast, Mr. Reese had mentioned a meeting with Sheriff Mitchell, and he’d cursed his deceased father-in-law’s unholy alliance with a man who used trumped up interracial rape cases as a re-election strategy.

“I saw him driving around town in it!” Daisy squealed. In her excitement she had begun to rock back and forth on the aluminum chair threatening, Marilyn worried, to topple it. A look from her mother stilled her.

“It’s a Packard ’47,” Vera said, nodding at Daisy. “And my Clyde says that no nigger has any business driving around in a car like that.”

“That’s right,” Bess agreed. “Makes them think they’re better than they are.” Vera’s husband worked as the foreman for one of the Hester Citrus Companies largest groves, three hundred acres in all. He knew the blacks’ proclivities better than anyone. His hard work had helped build the brick mansion Marilyn Reese called home, Vera thought, squinting her eyes at the younger girl.

“Probably made it off that bolita,” she added, wiping a non-existent smudge from her maroon lipstick. It was rumored that her Clyde made a little extra cash on the gambling himself, heading down to The Spot every Sunday after church for his take.

“Well, Duke Greenleaf, the elder, says they made that money honestly. They own the small store on Main and that plot of land over by the Sim’s place,” Ruth said. “The Sims never could make a dime from their farm. Said it was too marshy.” Everyone there knew Old Man Sims was a drunk, and it was no wonder his daughter Carrie Mae had found herself in all this trouble with the younger Greenleaf boy. The idea that a bunch of Negroes could do better than white folks though stung Bess.

“You’ve seen the car,” she insisted. “Well, that night it glowed like the devil’s chariot.”

“How do you know that?” Vera asked, peeved by the speed with which the conversation had moved on from her comment about the bolita to the Sims. As though there was a reason to ignore any mention of it. As though saying the very word, “bolita,” damned you in the eyes of others.

“I mean, how do you know about the way the car glowed? You weren’t there,” Vera insisted.

“Vera,” Bess said, “you know very well that Carrie Mae’s Aunt Delilah is in the church choir with my cousin, Eleanor, and Eleanor told me everything.” What Vera knew was that Bess had a way of embellishing the facts.

“The important thing,” Florence interrupted with a forced smile, “is that it’s all over now.” Vera thought Florence’s grey bun and Ruth’s grey clad thigh and backside were indicative of the women’s limited imaginations. Florence in particular was just as weak as mosquito pee. Florence’s husband, Earl, Vera knew, had suggested they search for the two black boys at Duke Greenleaf’s General Store on Main Street. While they were there, a fire was “accidentally” set and under cover of night, in one fell swoop, Earl had wiped out his black competition. Vera snorted. Florence stiffened in her chair. Her patience with Vera and her showy ways was starting to wear thin. Eyeing the maroon lipstick, Florence thought that the younger woman could benefit from just a little bit more modesty. Bess cleared her throat. She had, after all, won First Place in the Homestead High Oratory Contest.

“There were two of them,” she began again.

“That’s right,” Vera said, nodding away. “Sheriff Mitchell deputized my cousin, Nathan, and they’re out hunting him right now. They caught the young Greenleaf or whatever was left of him and put him in jail.” Bess frowned. This was not the time for interruption. Now was the time to let the story unfurl itself like a long red tongue down the length of the dry, dusty room.

“Greenleaf was the tallest,” Bess continued.

“And the most handsome,” Vera added from beneath her blonde bangs. But this time Bess didn’t mind the interruption. This was an important detail.

“From what I’ve heard,” Bess added, “he wanted it the most.” Marilyn looked around her in confusion. She didn’t see what any of this had to do with the Watermelon Festival and like most on the verge of understanding something awful and something new, she was frightened.

“Randy’s car had broken down,” Bess explained, “driving Carrie Mae back home from the Spring Jubilee at the American Legion. You know they separated last May, but Randy was trying to get back into her good graces. It was a full moon that night so Carrie Mae could see just about everything. She was hot and sweaty from all that dancing, and she got out of the car on County Road 24 to rest and cool down. She leaned against the hood.”

Ruth worried about the double-stitch at the end of Ginny’s robes. Would it hold? The children were forever stepping on each other’s costumes, and Ruth didn’t want it to tear. She wished Bess would get on with it.

“She heard the car’s engine before she saw it and the sound of WDBO, 92.3 FM out of Orlando. They were playing Sara Vaughn’s ‘Black Coffee.’ Have you heard it?” Bess asked. The women shook their heads in unison, “no.”

“It’s the devil’s music for sure,” Bess said. “When the car pulled up, Greenleaf was hanging out of the open window. ‘Ma’am,’ he asked, ‘You alright? You need some help?’”

‘My husband will be back any minute,’ Carrie Mae said, trying to hide the fear from her voice. ‘He just went down the road to get some gas.’ But they were already climbing out of the car. They’d been drinking moonshine and dancing at The Spot. They were all liquored up. She could smell it on them. Even then they didn’t turn the radio down, and Carrie Mae could hear the lyrics to the song, ‘I’m mighty lonesome….’”

That’s a nice touch, Ruth thought.

“’You thirsty?’ Earnest asked and offered Carrie Mae a sip from his flask. She was so nervous, she didn’t think about saying ‘no,’ and it was only when she tasted the whiskey against her lips that she realized she was drinking from the same cup as a black boy. She spat the liquor out, and they laughed at her. She handed the flask back to Earnest, but he was already eyeing her up and down.

‘The nearest gas station,’ Greenleaf said, ‘is five miles down the road. It’s going to take some time for him to get back to you.’ Earnest took another swig of his whisky and licked his lips.

‘Man,’ the Negress sang on the radio, ‘was made for lovin.’

‘How ‘bout a little kiss?’ Greenleaf asked. ‘And then we’ll be on our way.’ Carrie Mae backed away from them, but they grabbed her and pushed her into the backseat of their car. Greenleaf went first. His hands were hard with callouses from picking in the groves. He pawed roughly at her breasts. Despite herself, Carrie Mae shivered. His mouth sought hers and Carrie Mae smacked him hard across the face, drawing blood.’ He touched his split lip. There was blood on his fingertips, and he licked it clean.”

Marilyn was confused. It was so hot in that stuffy room. The needle point stench of acetone stung her eyes, irritated her passageways. She felt a migraine coming on. She was outraged, repulsed, embarrassed and hot. Florence glanced at her and was relieved to see that the cub reporter’s pen and pad had been put away. This was personal, not public. Bess had been alone for so long that it was a mercy really to permit her this one, small pleasure. Vera re-crossed herlegs.

“’You, white bitch,’ Greenleaf growled, wrapping his right hand around her delicate throat. He groped for the hem of her dress with his other hand, pushing it up to her waist. His fingers latched onto her cotton briefs and ripped them clean off. The sound of tearing cloth filled the hot cabin. She was frantic now, beneath him in the backseat, bucking against his hardness again and again. He went wild with lust. He groped at his belt buckle and undid it with one hand, forcing her thighs apart with his knees.

‘No, goddamn you, nigger, no’ she choked out from around his imprisoning hand. Her comment infuriated him, and he entered her again and again. When he was spent, he rolled off her and the other one took his turn.’”

There, Ruth thought, it’s done.

While the Call to Greatness Women’s Committee Meeting concluded, Earnest Baxter was almost two hundred miles away from his alleged crime. Contrary to what the women thought, he had never met Carrie Mae Sims. Sure, they’d stopped by the side of the road on their way back from The Spot. The white couple had clearly needed help and even in the dark both he and Ricky Greenleaf, his old war buddy, could make out the red imprint of a hand across the white woman’s cheek. But they’d driven off as soon as her husband insisted that they were fine. Even then they’d known better – not to interfere in white folks’ business. No good could ever come of that. Still, when they heard the knock at the front door, they’d known. Both of them. They hadn’t needed to be told.

Earnest, like Ricky, had headed for the marshlands with his life, the very fullness of it in his throat.  It blossomed there like a cherry tree he’d once seen on shore leave in Okinawa.  He ran for the green, the dank verdant covering that would, he prayed, hide him from the hounds.  He ran toward the tree line, tripping into the darkness and the coolness, unsure of his path. Separated from Ricky, he didn’t know the names of the weeds, creepers and nettles that reached for his skin.  He was a city boy after all, hailing from Orlando.  He didn’t know that some of those creepers were so light and feathery that they drew their very sustenance from the air.  Thanks to Ricky, Earnest had made some money picking in the groves around Tavares. He used his arms, thick from reaching and plucking the ripe fruit, to push aside the undergrowth, to work his way forward when the boggy soil turned to swamp water.  It rose to his chest, and he closed his eyes against the idea of snakes and the fat, slug like creatures that resided in the muck below.  The algae thickened around him, coating his arms as he moved through the stagnant waters.  Mosquitoes whined in his ears.  Clouds of gnats suspended in mid-air blinded him with their damp bodies, dive- bombing on suicidal missions into his eyes.

He never heard the dogs, but what pressed at his back was a communal terror, passed down from one person to the next until it had infiltrated childhood dreams. A force so unreasonable, so all- encompassing that there was no true escape from it.  When he woke with his back to a tree, he sensed that he wasn’t alone and hadn’t been for some time.  It was difficult to tell whether the presence was a projection of his dreams or something more real, something wearing the dark mantle of night, made of muscle and bone.  He ran again.  Further north, he sensed, as the land beneath his feet dried with each passing step.  By noon on the third day of running, the thin skin under his eyes stung with sunburn. Mosquito welts covered his neck.  It was flat now all the way to the horizon, pockmarked by one-hundred-foot pines that stood fifty yards apart.  The flatwoods lacked the swamp’s green covering, and he felt exposed under the northern Florida sun.  He protested his innocence, but he also knew, as he did so, that he would die.  The warbler told him so, and the cypress pond too. He would die, the wind whispered, no matter where he went, and the South’s dark core would swallow him whole, and he would finally know the names of everything that surrounded him.

On the fourth night, his last night, he stopped in a clearing beside the Suwanee River. It was flat, barren ground. He lay down and rested his cheek against the compact dirt. Everything ached. Even his teeth were tired. He closed his eyes and thought about his son, who was six years old to the day. Joshua was a war-time baby. Earnest hadn’t even known of his existence until he’d returned to Orlando from fighting overseas and run into Alicia, a one-time flame, carrying a toddler, his spitting image. On that first meeting, the child’s springy cheeks had dimpled with glee. He’d grinned at his father with a joy that Earnest had not felt nor seen in nearly a decade. The return had not been what any of them had expected. There was no hero’s welcome, no ticker tape parades. If anything, their uniforms provoked more fury in the white folks around them. Earnest should, he understood then in the darkness, never have left them in Orlando.

That night, his last night, on the barren, wasted ground, Earnest dreamt a dream. He hovered above the clearing and could see everything from his wide vantage point. Two women in sackcloth dresses worn smooth from many washings emerged from the tree line along the river bank. It was difficult at first to make out in the dark what they were carrying until they dropped their loads beneath him in the clearing. On closer inspection the bundles were made of old bed linens, a coarse wool blanket tangled in soiled rags, a patchwork quilt with a tear in the middle twisted up in blood-spotted bed sheets from one, Earnest assumed, of the women’s monthly flows. The workers rested for a moment, stretching their backs and sides, then took the cloths one by one and dunked them in the river water – not to clean them, Earnest understood in pure dream logic – but merely to soak them. Sodden and dripping, they lashed the larger pieces of cloth with bits of rope and old twine to a nearby oak tree’s branches and a sapling that rose up across from its elder until the two women were in an enclosed space. A hush harbour, he knew again, from which no sound could enter or escape. The women squatted on their haunches and waited.

One by one the others emerged from the woods. They entered through a gap in the heavy linens and joined the women inside. A teenage boy carried a tin horn, battered and bruised by its hasty creation in the blacksmith’s hut. The oldest of them all used his cane as a staff. Four others, including the first two, formed the dancing troupe in the middle of the harbour. The old man beat the earth with his staff. The teenage boy wasn’t very bright, but he could keep the time and his voice was young and strong.

Joshua, he sang, fit the battle of Jericho, Jericho, Jericho

Joshua fit the battle of Jericho

And the walls came tumbling down.

“My son’s name is Joshua,” Earnest cried from his place in the heavens, watching from above even as at that very moment, the hounds tore his body to pieces. He was a dancer now moving counter-clockwise in tiny, intricate steps, each performing a variation of the same movement as they saw fit. His shoulders shimmied. His hips wagged. They turned in tight circles but always moving in the same direction, counter-clockwise. It was a march that held them in place, staked them to the earth even as the dancers raised their hands, and their upturned palms praised the heavens. They extended the hush harbour upwards into the sacred plane and then pointing outwards, their hands shaking like leaves in a furious wind, they moved the hush harbour backwards through time and welcomed the ancestors into the present. Emmanuel brought the shofar to his lips and blew. Now brother! One shouted. Come believer! A dancer hollered. Shout sister! Earnest cried.

You may talk about your King of Gideon,

You may talk about your man of Saul,

There’s none like good old Joshua,

At the battle of Jericho.

The music made the dance, the dance made the music. Six times the marchers circled the city walls. They were the Israelites and their God walked amongst them as a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night, heralding the end of Canaan. They stomped. They rocked. They rolled. They hopped. They jumped. They sang. They beat the earth. They beat the ground and the walls, the walls came tumbling down.