

The Absentee Husband

by
Austin Mitchell

Part One

Alrick Dunn was born in 1920 in the little district of Friendship in Trelawny. He came to Kingston when he was seventeen. He got apprenticed to his uncle Gladdy Wilson as a welder. He lived in Franklyn Town and met several women. Alrick had three children before he was twenty-five with three different women. It was a shock when he met and married Maisie Dillon in 1947. The union produced six children and by that time he was a driver of heavy duty vehicles as the government stepped up its road building program.

"I'm going to work in a place called Keswick, Maisie," he told her one day in 1959.

"Since you've been going all over the island on these jobs it has come to my attention that you have many women, Alrick," she accused him.

"I have six children with you, three boys and three girls, now why would I be going out there looking other women?"

"Alrick, don't tell me that I'm lying. Look how many nights you're gone and it's me alone looking after the children. I've never once thought that I'd cheat on you. I don't even know what you're doing with those women you had children with before I met you."

"You've been tempted many times, though. And I give those women their allowances. They're all married or living with a man."

"Of course, I have been tempted, many times too. Which woman wouldn't, after her husband only comes home, maybe once or twice a month?"

"I'm a truck driver. That's how I make my living. The government is doing a lot of road building all over the island. So they employ me. Whenever I come home, I bring money for the house. You don't have to work."

"You'd want me to go out and work and look after six children?"

Alrick was thirty nine while Maisie was thirty seven and their children's ages ranged from four years to eleven years.

She was sitting in a chair on their veranda while he stood near the veranda railings. They were living in a self contained four bedroom house on Dexter Street in Allman Town.

"Have I ever told you to go out and find work?"

"Don't you worry, Alrick. I can always find work. Don't forget that I was a postal clerk once."

Alrick didn't reply and Maisie continued.

“What I can’t seem to understand is that sometimes I look after enough clothes to last you a week, but often you stay for more than the week and your clothes always look crisp and clean.”

“There are women who do washing and ironing all over the island. You know many of them in Kingston.”

“How do you live when you go to the country to stay? You’ve never said a word to me. Suppose something happens to you, who should I contact? Suppose something happens to one of the children how will I get in touch with you?”

“Okay, I’ll write down the name of the place where I’m staying and where I can be contacted.”

So that Monday morning, Alrick left with his truck for Keswick. He had lodgings at Vernal Powell’s house. He had rented him the small side of his house. The Powell’s children had gotten big and migrated overseas. Alrick loved Keswick, there were a few local bars where he where he drank with his friends. There were some very beautiful girls in Keswick.

One Thursday afternoon he was going for a load of gravel when a young lady waved him down.

“Can I beg you a lift to school? I’m already late.”

She had some difficulty climbing up into the truck. She wasn’t a really tall girl. He had to stretch over to the passenger seat, grab hold of her hands and draw her up into the truck.

“What’s your name?” he asked as he drove off the truck.

“I shouldn’t be telling you my name. But it’s Gwen Dwyer.”

“What’s the name of your school?”

“Keswick All-Age. I’m going to evening classes.”

He let her off at the school gate and she went inside.

He was along with a woman, Sylvia Wright. She was washing and cooking for him and some nights she would come and sleep with him. Her boyfriend, Benny, was on the farmwork program. She told him that she had to return to him when he returned in two months time.

He continued giving Gwen rides to school in his truck till he definitely knew she was making it a habit.

“I don’t feel like going to school today. Can’t I just ride around in your truck until it’s time to go home?”

“What would people say if they saw you riding in my truck all day?”

“Why don’t they mind their own business?”

“They would tell your parents on you.”

He had a hard time persuading her to get out of the truck and go to school.

He was still sleeping with Sylvia but she was getting fearful as her man would soon be home and he had written her a letter asking some very awkward questions.

He went home every two weeks, but the relationship between him and Maisie was breaking down. That young lady, Gwen was filling up his head. She was a big woman with full breasts and a wonderful body. He longed to possess her, but didn't want any trouble with her parents.

He had heard that her mother, Miss Della, was a very difficult woman to deal with. She had taken several persons to court for just telling her a bad word. Her husband, Butty, was a quiet man. Alrick understood that he never spoke a great deal. He had heard that they had two older children, a boy and a girl. Both were living in the States.

Gwen seemed stuck on him. All the other workers had found women in Keswick. Some even had women pregnant for them.

A tractor driver called Morris, confronted him one day.

"Alrick, you're probably the only big man who doesn't have a baby mother up here."

Alrick laughed.

"I can't do like you guys, besides having a very miserable wife, I have nine youths already."

Morris opened his mouth, but the shock he was in couldn't make the words come out.

Alrick merely grinned and went back to his truck. He couldn't take Gwen to the Powell's house as he didn't want them to know that he was seeing her.

Syd Hamilton had a one room house with a kitchen and bathroom. Syd sometimes spent months in Clarendon, working on various projects. He would leave his keys with him. So that was how Alrick and Gwen became lovers. By this time Sylvia's husband had returned to the island and she had gone back to him. Alrick wondered about the letter he had written her. But two weeks later, he and Gwen were down at Syd's house when he heard a hard knocking on the door.

He went out to see who was there.

"Benny turned me out. He heard about us. Can you put me up for tonight? Get rid of that little hussy, you have in there. Come out, Gwen, you're pushing yourself on Alrick. I'm going to report you to your mother and let her give you a backside."

She had a bankra with her, with all her clothes inside, he thought.

Gwen pushed away Alrick's hand and rushed outside to confront Sylvia.

"What do you know about me and Alrick, woman?"

"He was sleeping with both of us at the same time. Look at me, a big woman having to be competing with this little girl. Have you asked her how old she is?"

"I'm over eighteen years of age, for your information, Sylvia."

“What a feisty girl. I’m Miss Sylvia to you, Gwen. You’re over eighteen, of course you are. I bet that Alrick wasn’t your first man.”

Alrick intervened.

“Sylvia, I told you that I can’t put you up.”

Sylvia flew into a rage.

“I know why you want to get rid of me and it’s because of this little girl. But she isn’t as innocent as she seems. Ask any of those young boys around and even some of your fellow workers.”

Gwen let out a huge bellow.

“Benny kicked you out, because he couldn’t stand it any longer. Every time, he went away, you had a new man.”

“I’m going down to your mother to complain about you. She’ll know what to do with you. You should be in school rather than be at a man’s house.”

“Sylvia if you ever go and tell any lies on me, you aren’t going to like it.”

“So you’re threatening me too.”

Sylvia grabbed up her bag and set off in the direction of Gwen’s house.

Gwen went inside, took up her bag and set off after Sylvia.

Alrick heard the next morning that Gwen’s mother had marched her up to his house to warn him off. He was probably asleep and didn’t hear them calling him.

“My mother is just miserable. She thinks you’re too old for me.”

“I told you that she’d say that.”

“She wants me to talk to one of those little guys around. But I don’t like them.”

They were sitting in his truck talking.

“She found out that you’re married.”

“I’m married to a very miserable woman.”

Two months later, they were talking up at Syd’s house. They had just made love and were basking in its afterglow.

“I missed my period last month. I think I might be pregnant.”

Alrick looked at her. He remembered what Sylvia had said about her. He could tell her that if she was pregnant, he wasn’t to blame.

He wasn’t her first man, but she refused to tell him anything about any of her previous lovers.

“I’ll give you some money to go to the doctor.”

Gwen went and did the test, she had to wait another two weeks for the results.

She told him that although she hadn’t gotten back the results, she was sure she was pregnant. She had to be hiding from her mother as most mornings she was throwing up.

Alrick didn’t know how to treat the news, two weeks later that she was pregnant.

“What will your parents say?”

“My mother called me all sorts of names. My father wants to talk to you.”

“About what?”

“I’m having a baby for you. My father wants to know how you’ll support me with this baby?”

“You know that I have other children. One of my daughters is working but all the other children are in school.”

“Are you saying that you made a mistake in getting me pregnant?”

“Of course, not.”

“Listen, Alrick. I never tricked you. You’re more experienced than me. You should have known what to do in not getting me pregnant.”

She took up her bag and stormed out of the house.

That same night he was down at Willie Ivey’s bar in Keswick drinking with some of his colleagues when Son Son Whyte, a local barber, told him that Gwen was outside with her mother. He decided to ignore them. Fifteen minutes later, a local woman, Jasmine, came to call him. He decided to go out there and talk to them.

Gwen was there with her mother. She had a huge bankra. It was drizzling slightly and they both had parasols covering their hair.

“Alrick, what have you decided to do about my daughter? You put her in the way. You never denied it.”

A small crowd was beginning to gather in spite of the drizzle. Alrick marched off to his truck and drove away.

In bed later on that night, he thought he heard them calling him, but he decided to ignore them. That morning just as he got into his truck Gwen appeared with her bankra.

“What are you doing here?”

“Funny, you should be asking me that after last night. My parents have put me out. And since you’re responsible for what has happened to me, I’ve come to stay with you.”

“I told you that I have a wife. She’s coming to look for me this weekend.”

“What has that got to do with me? Okay, let her stay with you. I’ll stay down at Syd’s house.”

“People will tell her about you. It won’t look good. Come, I’ll drop you home and have a talk with your parents.”

“It seems as if all of a sudden, you’ve gone deaf. What’s the matter with you, Alrick? I told you that my mother has put me out of her house.”

They finally agreed on a compromise where she would stay at Syd’s house. She was nearly six weeks pregnant.

Part Two

“Where is she, Alrick? The little hussey, who says she’s pregnant for you. So you’re hiding her from me. That’s why you don’t want to come home. That’s why you’re shortening my money.”

Maisie hadn’t entered the house before she started shouting.

“Shut up, what’s the matter with you? Every time you come up here, you have to make a ruckus. Can’t you understand that it’s only decent people live up here.”

“Don’t tell me to shut up. So I’m not decent? I’m going to show that little girl how decent I am. I just want to find out where she lives.”

Alrick jumped into the truck and drove away. He heard Maisie shouting after him, but he couldn’t make out what she was saying. He stopped at Syd’s house to warn Gwen that his wife was around. She hissed her teeth and said that she wasn’t afraid of her. He had to give her money to buy food. She offered to cook and bring food for him. He refused, saying that he always ate with the other workers.

That same evening he heard about a ruckus in Keswick. It was between Gwen and Maisie. How the hell had Maisie found out where Gwen was?

“So I found out about your girlfriend. She’s carrying a big stomach for you, Alrick. That’s what you’re up here doing. I should have listened to your mother. She told me that you came from a wild breed.”

He nearly fell into a trap by saying that her stomach wasn’t all that big. But he caught himself at the last moment. He wondered if she had been setting a trap for him.

“Did she tell you that she was pregnant for me?”

Maisie burst out laughing.

“She boasted before me and several other women and even some men. She claimed that she has you now and I’m not going to get you back.”

“That’s why you came up here?”

“Alrick, you’re my husband. What’s wrong if I come up here to look after your welfare?”

“Nothing’s wrong, except that you’re listening to a lot of rumors.”

“Swear to me Alrick, that girl, Gwen, isn’t pregnant for you.”

But he walked away. She followed him.

“I heard that it’s another man’s baby she’s carrying. She was sleeping with every boy in the village and even some grown men too. When none of them would own up she put it on you.”

“How do you know so much and it’s the second time you’re coming up here?”

Thank You for previewing this eBook

You can read the full version of this eBook in different formats:

- HTML (Free /Available to everyone)
- PDF / TXT (Available to V.I.P. members. Free Standard members can access up to 5 PDF/TXT eBooks per month each month)
- Epub & Mobipocket (Exclusive to V.I.P. members)

To download this full book, simply select the format you desire below

