# **A Duppy Riddin' Ya**

By Lazaro Jackson

Have you ever heard of the term sleep paralysis? How about listening in on a tale where someone recounts their experience of being ridden by a duppy. A harrowing occurrence that sees a person struggle to free themselves from a malevolent overpowering force holding them down; horrors unfolding in the conscious world around them, yet no one comes to their aid or seems to hear their cries for help. A feeling of such powerlessness that should ordinarily force a person to give up and simply count their losses. To just let the darkness engulf them since the monsters are already closing in quickly anyway. That’s exactly what it feels like to be a young person in the Caribbean facing the climate change crisis.

My thoughts reel as I walk along the white sand shores. Thoughts that shouldn’t have to occupy the mind of a young man in his early twenties. The sun hangs low over the ocean surface as I do so, ready to sink behind the waves and make way for another equally warm night ahead. The wind was still, almost ominously so. Yet, locals and tourists alike continue to play in the clear water, or entertain themselves on the sand. It’s as if they were completely oblivious to the cataclysmic fate that awaited us on this tiny rock in the vastness of the rising oceans. Or maybe they are in fact aware, and merely choose to ignore the looming threat on the horizon, to live life in the moment while they still can. It isn’t like many of them have much of a say in how future events of the world unfold anyway. The globe is always going through changes, some more extreme than others, and maybe this is just another one of them.

Except that it isn’t, not exactly. It can’t be, when records show that it is the actions of human beings that are greatly influencing the rise in global temperatures. How can this just be another natural earthly cycle, when such a drastic uptick in the global warming phenomenon only began occurring post industrial revolution? With our heavy use of fossil fuels, livestock farming and dependency on deforestation having significantly altered the makeup of the naturally occurring greenhouse gases in the Earth’s atmosphere.

I look across the water at the sun shining down and let out a heavy sigh. These same rays that now paint the evening sky such breath-taking hues of red and orange, become trapped by certain gases in the atmosphere, like methane, nitrous oxide and, the largest contributor of all, carbon dioxide. Unable to escape back into space, this heat accumulates, warming the Earth, and effectively leads to the long-term change in weather patterns we are experiencing more and more frequently nowadays. This long-term change is what is known as climate change.

As a young person, terms like global warming and climate change have been known to me seemingly all my life. This is the world that was handed to us, we have never known a world not in crisis. The continued destructive practices of the generations before us have crippled the world we live in today, and yet we are the ones left to try and find ways to clean up the mess. We are forced to be proactive in developing solutions to ensure that we, and those following us, have an Earth to call home in the future. Frankly, it isn’t fair. To be born into a world and be tasked to take its insanely heavy burden on our backs.

For years before us, it had been known that things were not going in the direction they should’ve been, and yet, for most of my life, people still regarded global warming and climate change to be hoaxes. Something impossible, or at least something that wouldn’t affect the Earth until long after the perpetrators of the act have long gone, or reaped the rewards they sought. Now that climate change has proven to be a very real and dangerous side effect of human error, however, it seems that alarm bells have begun sounding off with urgency almost every passing day. With people in charge now looking towards the youth to make suggestions for a healthier world built on sustainable bases. I scoff at the audacity.

The people on the beach are becoming fewer as the sun dips lower. I sink down to the sand and sit. Digging my toes deep in the warm grains, I hug my knees close and look across to the horizon. I can’t help but come to the realisation that if nothing is done to relieve the building pressure, this won’t be here in the future. Not like it is now anyway. At some point the ocean would have reclaimed most of my island, if not all of it, and whatever remains will be ravaged by hurricanes and other abnormally strong storms. That is the reality of small island states in the event that a feasible solution to the climate change crisis cannot soon be found.

Even before then, climate change will cause damage to our economies. Already built primarily on the instability of the tourism market, weather anomalies may see fewer travellers wanting to risk the journey, which in turn creates even fewer jobs for locals; the rising sea levels will force us to rethink how we market, build and live on the coasts; and higher ocean temperatures may see damage to our coral reefs and fishing industries. The fishermen having a laugh a few meters up the beach are already feeling a pinch in their pockets, but many don’t recognise the reason why. This is why it is so very important to educate our people on the impending devastation that awaits us at the hands of climate change.

I sigh again dejectedly and fall back on the sand. Rain clouds are rolling in now. I close my eyes and let my mind continue to ponder. What is the point of educating our people when we are but a very small part of the larger problem? Being a young person born at the high point of this climate crisis means being numb to hearing headlines like “this is the hottest summer in recorded history” every summer; with heat waves becoming increasingly more prevalent, especially in the tropics. These increases in heat also create the ideal setting for vector-borne diseases, like dengue, to resurface stronger than before. Meanwhile, a decrease in regular rainfall brings forth droughts that impact our agriculture sectors. We know that now, as an international community, we must work towards a goal of capping global warming at 1.5 degrees Celsius or face irreparable catastrophe. However, despite having this knowledge, and guiding our people accordingly to combat these changes, where exactly do small island states, who will experience the brunt of the climate change crisis, stand in the grand scheme of things?

When one really sits and gives thought to such questions, it becomes clear why as a young person in the Caribbean, climate change should invoke strong emotion. Whether it be sadness, fear, or anger. For me, as I lie here on a coastline that threatens to one day become a part of the Atlantic Ocean floor, I would say that climate change means to be a revolving mixture of all three. It means to be filled with a constant internal rage that just keeps being fuelled every time there is a new oil discovery or article about corporations taking it upon themselves to take trees from the Amazon. It means being sad that having grown up hearing that the world was in danger, the only things you could do were advocate for greener eating habits, sign online petitions and buy a reusable straw set. It means being scared that at the same time we are told the healthier future we seek is in our hands, the hands of the people meant to inherit it, that the fate of our countries is still being dictated by countries and companies so much bigger than us, with voices so much louder and overpowering. So why even try if there’s nothing much we can do anyway?

The first drops of rain streak across my cheeks like cold tears. They rouse me from my deep contemplation. Failure to maintain the cap point of no return, sees subsequent generations suffering a bleak future filled with many uncertainties. The selfishness of generations before will shroud the world in dark shades of grey, and just as we, the current generation is expected to find solutions for their problems, so will they. However, I remember being taught that if you don’t like something being done to you, you shouldn’t do it to someone else. So, whilst a hope for a brighter sustainable future still exists, we reserve the right to fight for it.

I open my eyes to a dark cloudy canopy. The sun had long set and the beachgoers seemed to have all left. Yet, my peripheries still show shadows. My body feels strangely weighed down and I cannot move. A surge of fear accompanies thoughts of being trapped and vulnerable out here in the open; at the mercy of the pouring rain. My heart beats fiercely in my cold, soaked chest. All of my efforts to move and yell appear fruitless, and still, I keep on fighting. Until I heard it, soft at first, then louder and louder until it is the only sound filling my ears. Like a sudden crack of rolling thunder, over the deafening sound of the crashing waves and the pouring rain. It was my voice. My voice could be heard.