

## Angell

By Dr. Oge Young

The porch was crowded with women and children. The sun beat down, but a frail roof provided shade. A morning breeze drowned some of the clamor. Excited voices and laughter filled the waiting area. They were patient, appreciative that we had come to provide them with basic medical care. I stepped out of the door in my scrubs to ask for the next woman on my list.

Unable to pronounce her last name, I called out 'Angel.'

A young woman stood timidly and made her way to where I was standing. She followed me in. As the door closed there was a pleasant hush. "I am Dr. Young," I said. She replied, "I am Angell, with two L's" as she offered her coarse, strong hand. She smiled, lips quivering slightly. White teeth shown against her dark face and tight-curved black hair.

At thirty-five, she lived with her four children- a son 18 and three daughters 17, 15 and 11, all delivered at home. Each had a different father, long gone, 'more trouble than they were worth.' Also, Angell shared her home with her mother who had suffered a stroke. She sold chickens for a living. I pictured her yard with a tin-roofed dwelling and a gutter collecting rainwater. Like her neighbors inhabiting the lush, porous hills surrounding the village of Chantilly in central Jamaica, she spent her days thankful for a garden with good soil and an occasional rainstorm. "No problems," she said. "Just want an exam. A friend told me you were nice."

Undressing behind the shower curtain hung in the corner of the room, she fit loosely into a large, cotton blue gown. She sat down at the end of the exam table covering her lap with a white drape. I stood in front of her, feeling her eyes fixed on me as I looked down at her thick, worn palms and dirt-filled nails. No thyroid nor lymph nodes were palpable beneath the thin, taut skin covering her neck. Well-nursed breasts hung limp and soft, with no cystic changes, so common in our country. She laughed when I told her that her heart was still beating. A firm abdomen bore abundant stretch marks, purple hearts from her pregnancies.

Bending her knees to bring her heels to the end of the table, a pelvic exam revealed no scarring nor prolapse, remarkable after four births. She had some mild tenderness on deep palpation.

Angell denied having been abused. I wondered if she really understood. Her lower legs were indented with scars. Calloused feet hardly needed shoes. She appeared surprised when I helped her sit up. "You are perfect my friend. You deserve a man who loves you more than himself." She laughed again, shaking her head... maybe embarrassed, but flattered.

She returned to the makeshift dressing room. I jotted a few notes. Dressed, we sat. I had gifts of pads and medication for her menstrual periods. Condoms provided a reminder that she could still bear another child and unprotected sex

had other risks. I gave her extra toothbrushes, floss and tubes of toothpaste which I suspected she would sell.

Then we stood. She looked down, quietly thanking me. For what? For affirming her health, her strength, her beauty...her humanness? Did she feel my eyes fixed? "Will you be back next year?" she asked. "God willing," I replied. She thanked me once more, as she disappeared into the sounds of others on the porch. Calling my next patient, I wondered who felt more grateful.