

**THE RANKS
OF THE
INSANE**

**NINTH NOVEL in the
MOCKINGBIRD HILL Series**

**BY
Dorothy K Morris**

This is a work of fiction. All persons, places, institutions and events are either the result of the author's imagination or are used in a fictitious manner.

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“The object in life is not to be on the side of the majority, but to escape finding oneself in the ranks of the insane.”

Marcus Aurelius

“We men are wretched things.”

Homer’s Achilles

FOR
My People
With Gratitude

Berenice is pronounced in the Italian way:
Ber-i-ni-chi

MOCKINGBIRD HILL
PLANTATION

SOUTH CAROLINA
COLONY

Late Summer 1739

ONE

THE PAIR OF NORTH COUNTRY harrier pups struck scent in the dense, tangled wood at the rear of the property at Mockingbird Hill. The well-known sound of their baying led the two boys as they followed as fast as they could through the brambles, brush and thickets. Soon they found themselves totally enclosed by forest. This was an area where they had never gone before, it being too deep and dangerous for their play. Thickets of berry bushes, low brush and scrub oak prevented their following the pups any further. They could hear them baying, still hot on the trail of rabbit or fox, but could no longer see them.

"We shouldn't be in here," said Freddy.

"I know. Momma told me never to come back here," replied Kofi.

"Wonder why?"

"It's scary. Snakes. Painters. Hornets' nests. Quicksand. Tall trees make it dark when it's still daylight. We can't follow Beagle and Bump any further. Let's get out of here. They'll come home."

"But they're on something. Maybe that fat rabbit. If they catch it, we could take it to

Fulani," pleaded Freddy. "She'd fry it up for us."

"I like fried rabbit," replied Kofi. "Alright. We'll go a little further, but if I get scared, I'm running back."

The two boys slowly and carefully made their way through brambles and berry bush stickers, trying to see the hounds. By now, Beagle and Bump were far out of sight and could hardly be heard.

"They'll come home," said Freddy. "I suppose we better go back."

"Look yonder. What is that?" asked Kofi as he pointed to a rectangle enclosed by a low wrought iron fence covered with thick honeysuckle vines.

They both walked toward the enclosure, their curiosity peaked.

"It's a grave," whispered Kofi in a hushed voice. "Why is there a grave out here? Whose is it? Why isn't it in the churchyard?"

"Do you see any name? Is there a piece of stone or wood?"

Kofi walked carefully to the top of the enclosure and gingerly stepped over the barrier. He used his bare hand to brush away a pile of leaves at the head of the grave and uncovered a wooden plaque. He stepped back and together they read aloud:

JG

1729

"Who is that?" asked Freddy.

"Don't know. Can we ask somebody?"

"Kofi, you know we can't. They will know we came back here and we are not supposed to."

"Maybe this is why," suggested Kofi. "Maybe we aren't supposed to see this. They never told us not to go anywhere else."

"Maybe."

"Then I am going to ask my momma," said Kofi.

"She will beat your butt," offered Freddy.

"She might. But I want to know. Something isn't right. Even if he is a worker he should be in the grave yard at the quarters and this one has a little fence and a sign. This isn't a worker. He was somebody special."

"I guess so. But who?"

"I'll ask and if Momma tells me, I'll tell you." promised Kofi. "Why don't you ask your momma?"

"Maybe I will," said Freddy, feeling suddenly brave.

"I don't hear Beagle or Bump any more. Let's go home. That rabbit will taste as good another day. I'm hungry now and it's getting dark."

The two boys made their way back through the thickets and berry brambles until they came out of the wood at the rear of the house. The stables were on one side and the workers' quarters began on the other.

"We could ask Granny," suggested Freddy. "I bet she would tell us and she won't whack our butts."

"Let's go find her now," replied Kofi, and they both ran to the kitchen door at the back of the big house.

When Kofi knocked at the door, Roundale, the cook, opened it. "What you boys up to now?" she asked in a softly scolding manner. Then seeing the berry stickers caught in their breeches, she scolded stronger, "You go into the woods where you ain't supposed to go?"

"We were following Beagle and Bump. They had a rabbit. Or almost did. I think it hid in the briars," explained Kofi. "But we found something back in the woods."

"What did you find?" asked Roundale, her flour-covered hands on her hips. "Come on in the kitchen and sit. You can tell me what great thing you discovered while I get the biscuits in the oven."

A pregnant silence ensued as the boys each motioned to the other to tell.

"Well, one of you tell me!"

"We found a grave," blurted Kofi.

"It looks like a grave," added Freddy.

The boys were startled by the cook's frightened reaction.

"You boys ain't found a thing in them woods. Not a thing, you hear? Ain't no grave there. Not a one."

“But we saw it, Roundale,” said Freddy softly.

“Must be where your granny buried a favorite horse years ago,” suggested the cook, obviously disturbed by their discovery. “Now you go on to your homes and behave yourselves and don’t you say nothing to your mommas about no grave. You hear me? Scram. Get home and let me do my biscuits. You hear? Not a word.”

Both the boys left the kitchen by the back door in a hurry.

“I will find out,” said Freddy. “Momma will tell me.”

“I’ll ask my momma, but don’t know if she will say. She might not know.”

“If Roundale knows, everybody knows. See you tomorrow. I have to go and see if the hounds came home yet. I’ll have to wash their feet before they come in.”

“Night, Freddy.”

“Night, Kofi.”

TWO

"IT DE DEBIL. HE IN DE GROUN' DERE," said Yosie, when Kofi asked her who was buried behind the house deep in the woods. "You don't need to go messin' wid de Debil. You stay 'way f'om dat place. Don't go dere no mo'. You don' need know mo'." She took Kofi, her son, into her arms and hugged him tightly. "You git to bed, now, Son. Don't axe me no mo' 'bout dat. You heah?"

"Yes, Momma, I hear," he replied obediently, all the while more determined than ever to find out who was buried behind the house in the woods in a slightly marked grave.

Home for a brief holiday from his second home in town, where he had lived for three years with the Maestro, who taught violin to four boys, Kofi lay in his cozy bed in the largest of the workers' cabins. His mother, Yosie, and her husband, Medo, who was not his real father, shared the cabin. Kofi fell asleep with the grave in his thoughts.

The sky was pitch dark when Freddy left Kofi and took his pony from the paddock, but the pony knew his way back home. Needing no

saddle, he jumped on the pony and cantered all the way back to Tally's Nook, where he lived with his mother, Lady Corinna, and his mother's second husband, Fredrick, Lord Talleigh. Lord Talleigh was his guardian. There were also two half-sisters and a small half-brother, who was the heir to the Talleigh title as Freddy was to the Grenville title.

Freddy had grown up, at least to this ripe age of ten years, in a happy, cheerful household where there was much laughter, playfulness and love. Disciplined, yes, but never harshly. Schooled, yes, but never to the point of dread. He was a happy boy, but with one exception. He knew that he was Fredrick, Lord Talleigh's ward, and not his real son. He knew his last name was Grenville and not Talleigh. He had never known his father and no adult in either place on the river would ever speak of him. He had early learned that it was a forbidden subject. He, himself, was John Fredrick, Lord Grenville. He had once asked his mother why he was called Freddy instead of Johnny. She would not reply to him. She would look at him with that expression which he had come to know so well. It meant 'do not go there'. So he did not.

He jumped off the lathered pony at the stable and came face to face with the stable master.

"You brought your pony in all lathered. You must walk him now until he is dry," said the man.

"Might the groom do it, Mister Jeffers? I have found something in the wood and I want to ask Momma."

"No, Master Freddy. You lathered the pony—you walk the pony. Besides, the groom is having his supper. Now on with you. At least twenty minutes. Mind you give him a good rubdown and a portion of hay."

"Yes, Mister Jeffers," said Freddy as he began to hand walk the pony around and around the stable yard. "Oh, Mister Jeffers, did you see if Beagle and Bump came home? They were on rabbit scent and we lost them in the wood."

"They came in, all right. Covered they were with briars and wet sand on their feet. You'll have to tend to them as well, young Master."

"I will."

"Master Freddy, you take them pups in the woods again you take care they don't get in quicksand!"

"Yes, Sir, Mister Jeffers."

A half hour later Freddy had cooled the pony, had given him a rub-down, checked his feet for sharp oyster shells that might cut his soles or the tender part of his foot, and had put out his portion of hay and water. He called the harriers to him, washed their feet in a bucket of water and took the briars out of their coats.

Then together the three tired youngsters went into the house.

"You have missed supper, Freddy," said his mother. "Sally will fix you something. Did Kofi get home?"

"Yes, Momma. I saw him to his door and then I rode King Arthur home by myself. I had to walk him and then do a rubdown. That is why I am late."

"Did you and the pups strike it rich?" asked Fredrick Talleigh from the parlor.

"No, Sir. They got away from us in the briars behind the big house at The Hill. But we did find something."

"What did you find, Son?" asked Fredrick.

"Well, we don't quite know, but we both thought it looked like a grave. I don't know what it is doing out back there and not in a churchyard."

His declaration met with silence. He saw his mother's face go white and Fredrick came out of the parlor to stand with her. Freddy looked from one to the other and realized that he had said something that he should not have said.

"Did I do something bad, Momma?" he asked. "We just found it there in the brambles."

"No, Son. You did nothing bad," answered Fredrick. "It's just that we did not know of a grave back there. How could we? We will have to check it out soon. Now you go and have your supper. It will be time for bed soon."

When Freddy had left them to go to the kitchen for Sally to give him his supper, Fredrick and Corinna looked at each other. Fredrick took her in his arms and found that she was shivering.

"I didn't know it was there," she murmured. "I never knew where Aunt Agnes—you know—I never wanted to know so I never asked."

"Neither did I," he replied. "Only Aunt Agnes knew. And Harvey. They told no one."

"I thought it would be far away, like the vicar said," said Corinna. "I did wonder why those acres of land just behind the house were never cleared. It seemed the logical place for more paddocks," she said. "What do we do now? Shall we have to tell him? I am afraid to. We are never to speak of that—that—horrid affair. The vicar said."

"We really don't know if it is, Corinna. He only said it looked like a grave."

"Do you know anyone else who might be there?"

"Can't say that I do."

"Do you think Kofi said anything to Yosie?" asked Corinna.

"If he was as excited as was Freddy, I am certain he must have."

"And Yosie would have told him never to speak of it."

"Yes, she would have said that."

"We know Freddy. He won't let this go. His curiosity is boundless. If we don't tell him, he will tell Aunt Agnes what he found."

"Corinna, would you wish me to tell him? I think I do know enough of the truth that would satisfy him. What do you wish him to know?"

"I wish him to know nothing, but perhaps that is impossible. What could you tell him?"

"I believe he should know the truth. As much as he can handle at his age. Otherwise, there will be questions remaining—nagging him. Don't you see?"

"Yes, but..."

"I know. Let's wait and see if he brings it up again. Then we will know."

"He will. He is probably asking Sally about it now," said Corinna. "Wait until he asks again and then tell him, if that is what you think best."



Freddy ate his supper while sitting at the long kitchen table. Sally sat with him sipping a cup of tea while he ate.

"Sally, I found a grave today. Or what I think is a grave."

"What makes you think it is a grave?"

"Shape. It was long and narrow and had a tiny fence around it. And there was a piece of wood and it was carved with JG. What could that mean?"

"It must be yours," she quickly teased. "Aren't you John Grenville?"

As soon as the words were out of her mouth she blanched. She had said something awful and could not put the words back in her mouth.

"Didn't mean that, Master Freddy. I was a'teasin' you."

Her apology came too late. His quick mind had already put it all together. John Grenville was his father. The grave was where his father was buried. He had not been buried at sea as Kofi had told him. Now he knew why he was never taken to see his father's grave when they went to church on Sundays. But he still did not know why his father was buried there or why the lie.

"Don't tell yo' Momma, Master Freddy. She'll be terrible mad at me."

"Don't worry, Sally. I know you were teasing. I won't say a word about it."

He kept his word. He did not tell his mother what Sally had said. He liked Sally and had no desire to get her in trouble. However, he was certain now that he knew who was buried in the hidden grave. There was only one person he could ask and feel certain he would get an answer, Granny Agnes. He would not bother his mother again. But first he had to tell Kofi. Together they would go to their grandmother and tell her what they had found.

THREE

FREDDY AND KOFI KNEW that they had shared the same father and that their father had died just after they were born. They had both been reared by their mothers' new husbands. In Freddy's case his mother, Corinna, had married her cousin, Lord Fredrick Talleigh, who had taken Freddy as his ward. Yosie, Kofi's mother, had eventually married Medo, the overseer of all the farming operations at Mockingbird Hill. Medo and Yosie were black and had been slaves until Sir Reginald Upton had freed all the slaves at The Hill and paid wages to those who chose to remain and work. These two boys, half-brothers, one a gangly redhead with the build and coloring of his Talleigh family, and the other half black with coffee colored skin, shared one thing in common. They both had brilliant blue eyes, a gift from their father.

When Freddy finished his breakfast the next morning, he went to the stable with Beagle and Bump on his heels. He made sure King Arthur had finished his morning hay and then he took him from the paddock. He bridled the pony, mounted bareback and trotted off to find Kofi, the hounds running ahead, sniffing the ground. He found Kofi sitting on the front step of the

cabin, waiting for Freddy. The hound pups found him first and bowled him over with an effusive greeting, accompanied by licks of their long wet tongues, before they left him to follow a scent.

“Come on up,” said Freddy, motioning to the space behind him on the pony’s back.

Kofi jumped up and straddled King Arthur.

“Ready?” asked Freddy.

“Where we going?”

“Down to Hunter’s dock. I have something to tell you.”

“What? Tell me now.”

“No. Wait until we get there. It has to be secret for now.”

“Hunter might be there.”

“We’ll say we’re crabbing.”

“Then we have to get buckets and some line and some fatback. There’s some in the cabin,” said Kofi.

“Then go get it. I have line in my pocket and there’s already buckets at the dock.”

Kofi vaulted off the pony, ran into the cabin and shortly came out with several pieces of fatback wrapped in a cloth. He got back on the pony and they headed toward the dock where Hunter kept the fishing boats moored. Hunter was in and out of the little cove most of every day, fishing, catching crabs, gathering oysters or netting shrimp, which made up quite a bit of the diet of the people at both plantations.

Today, his oyster boat was out and the boys were alone on the dock.

The boys tied bait onto the long heavy string, brought an empty bucket close and settled their lines into the water. They could see blue crabs swimming in and out of the timbers at the base of the dock and waited for a bite.

"So what is the big secret?" asked Kofi.

"I think I know who JG is," whispered Freddy.

"You don't have to whisper. Nobody is here," advised Kofi.

"Wait until you hear. I think it is our father, John Grenville."

"Can't be," replied Kofi. "He was lost at sea."

"I don't think so. Your momma might think that but mine never said that. She just won't talk about him. Neither will Cousin Fredrick."

"Momma told me that a long time ago. First time I asked."

"Did you tell her about the grave we found?"

"Yeah, I did. She said it was the Devil and I can't talk about it. She got strong with me and told me not to ever talk about it and to leave it alone. Did you tell your momma?"

"Yes. Same thing. Her face got white and she was quiet. Sent me to Sally to get my supper."

"Why didn't you ask Sally?"

"I did and she said something and got scared after she said it."

“What?”

“She was teasing and said it was my grave— JG—John Grenville. Kofi, I don’t think our father died at sea,” replied Freddy, shaking his head. “I think that is our father’s grave back in the woods.”

“Why would he be there and not the churchyard?”

“We have to find out why.”

“Who we gonna ask?”

“I think Grandma Agnes will tell us. She knows everything and she never gets mad. At least we will know if something is strange about the grave, if it is a grave.”

“We do have a right to know, don’t we?” asked Kofi.

“If he is our father, we do.”

“I got a crab,” said Kofi, pulling the line up with a fat blue crab hanging on to the chuck of fatback.

“Put him back in. Let’s go to Grandma right now.”

“OK, Mister Crab. You win now one but I’ll get you another day,” advised Kofi, carefully taking the crab off the bait and throwing it back into the water.

The boys mounted the pony and rode up to the stable. They dismounted and put King Arthur into a paddock with Big Jo. The pony tried to join the big, old mare to share her hay, but she snaked her head at him and he scooted to the other side. Freddy gave him a forkful of

hay and checked the water buckets. Then together the boys walked to the back door. They went into the kitchen, knowing that they would be confronted by Roundale, but determined to get by her and to find Grandma Agnes Upton.

"What you boys want?" asked Roundale. "Hungry? Didn't you have breakfast?"

"Not hungry, Mistress Roundale. We came to see Granny. Is she awake?"

"Course she is. She is up early every morning. What you want with her? You better not pester her with nonsense about that grave? I done told you!"

"We just want to see her and talk a bit," replied Freddy as he and Kofi went through the kitchen, down the covered walkway to the main part of the house.

They entered the hallway and checked rooms on the first floor, finding her in the study at the desk. They peeked into the room and waited quietly until she raised her head and spotted them.

"Good morning, young men," she said pleasantly. "To what do I owe this early visit? Why are you not out with Beagle and Bump? I saw rabbits a'plenty yesterday in the barnyard stealing grain from the chickens."

"We were out yesterday, Granny. That's what we came for. We need to ask you something," said Kofi.

"Ask me something? What would you ask?"

Kofi looked at Freddy and Freddy stared back. Neither could find the courage to tell her what they had found.

"Well? Somebody speak. You came to me and now the cat has your tongue? It must be important. You want something and are afraid to ask for it? Your mommas said no and you think I will say yes?"

"Something like that, Granny," replied Freddy.

"We found something in the woods way behind the house yesterday," Kofi blurted. "Beagle and Bump chased the rabbit."

Silence. The boys watched as their grandmother's face turned as to stone. This time they were frightened. It was not like their grandmother to lose her cheerfulness when they were with her. After the longest time—seemingly enough time for them both to grow another inch—she spoke.

"Freddy, close the door," she said quietly.

He closed the door and returned to stand by the desk. They waited through another silence.

"How old are you both now?" she asked. "About ten if I remember correctly."

"Yes, Ma'am," replied Kofi.

"Then I suppose you are old enough to know. Boys, I think I know what you found in the woods. If it is what I think, I will tell you this once and never again will either of you mention it. Not to me, your parents, not to

friend or stranger. It is a forbidden subject, but you have a right to this one time."

Both the boys were as silent as mice hiding from the cat.

"Do I have your promise that this will be all of it forever?"

"Yes, Ma'am," replied Kofi and Freddy as one voice, although, in their hearts, they withheld at least one percentage of that promise with the intent to return to the issue at some time in the future.

"Then come here and stand beside me."

The boys did as she asked and waited again.

"You found a grave," she whispered.

The boys nodded.

"It is the grave of my son and your father. I cannot say his name. It is a sacrilege to say it and you must never. And you must never go there again. Do you hear?"

"Yes, Ma'am," again said the boys together.

"Why is he there and why can't we talk about it?" asked Kofi, almost frightened by now.

"Your father killed himself," she whispered.

"He shot himself. He was a suicide."

"Is that bad?" asked Freddy.

"It is the worst," replied Agnes. "I disobeyed the vicar and did not have him buried in the swamp or at the crossroad. That is where suicides are supposed to be buried, with all sorts of horrible things done to their bodies. It is said they belong to the Devil. However, he was

my son and I could not. The responsibility is on my head."

"Oh, that's what Momma meant when she said it was the Devil."

"You told Yosie?"

"Yes, Ma'am."

"She said you were never to speak of it or go there?"

"Yes, Ma'am."

Agnes looked at Freddy and he saw the same question in her expression.

"Yes, Ma'am. Me, too. Can you tell us why he did it?"

"No, I cannot. At least not until you are older. You would not understand now. Just know and leave it alone. It will have to be enough for now. Remember, I have your promises."

"Yes, Ma'am," they both said.

"Now go on out and go fishing or something. Better yet, go home and study. Freddy, your tutor said that you are doing badly in the classics. You need to study your Greek and Latin. Kofi, your holiday is almost up and you will have to return to town with your maestro. Are you keeping up with your practice?"

"Yes, Granny. I practice with Uncle Joseph and Corinna every day."

"Good. You are making us very proud. Now go on with you. I have work to do."

The boys left their grandmother and resumed their day. Holiday would soon be finished and Kofi would return to town. Tutor would return and Freddy would be at his studies most of each day. Lady Agnes and Maestro both considered Kofi a young prodigy with his violin, and even on holiday he must practice hours each day with his Uncle Joseph. As Agnes had said, Freddy, the new Lord Grenville, was not as bright or talented as Kofi and had fallen behind with his Latin and Greek. With much on their minds, too much to give them incentive to play, Freddy went to work on his classics, and Kofi went to his Uncle Joseph's home to practice violin. Neither of their minds was settled. They were embroiled in curiosity which had not been assuaged by their grandmother's brief explanation. Both boys were of an age now when their desire to know needed resolution. They would not let it go until they knew the full story of their father. Somehow, from someone, they would know the full truth.