

## A Reason for Living

**Julian Jingles**

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*In the historical novel A Reason for Living, a broken man who's participating in a revolution looks back on the women who loved him.*

In Julian Jingles's historical novel *A Reason for Living*, an aimless man finds unexpected purpose at a time of revolution.

In the 1960s, in Jamaica, Howard, who lost his mother when he was a child, eschews wealth and fame, despite his family's prestigious real estate empire. He flits between women, focusing on carnal pleasures, and throws himself into his paintings. His life is empty of meaning. But then Bernaldo, Howard's cousin, introduces Howard to the fight for civil rights. Jamaica's people are ruled over by a corrupt government, and news of the US's civil rights movement sparks the islanders' own movement for equality. Howard is moved to play a pivotal role, looking toward the future for his country, and his escapades hold interest.

Still, Howard is a difficult lead. Moored in a loss from which he never recovered, he engages in affairs that become violent and unsettling; there are instances of rape and incest included. What the women are drawn to about him is not clear, as his flaws are his defining characteristics. In his conversations with women, Howard's language goes from lyrical to violent and back in quick order as he works to woo them. Further, the women themselves aren't fleshed out beyond their inexplicable attractions to Howard—a man who seems increasingly broken.

Focus is lost as the book shifts from Howard's coming-of-age tale toward his role in Jamaica's revolution. The revolution itself—which was meant to bring equality to those who are oppressed—is not greatly detailed, nor is its aftermath, though. The book's messages come to be overshadowed by Howard's intense instances of violence. Additionally, there are errors throughout the book that hamper its readability: a lack of clear spacing leads to words appearing smashed together, and random words and phrases are italicized without need. The book's paragraph breaks sometimes come in the middle of sentences and contiguous scenes.

While the prose contains some poetic turns of phrase, as well as some intriguing evocations of the sights and sounds of Jamaica, there are also abrupt transitions between scenes with clashing tonalities that compromise the story's sense of cohesion—as does the fact that the final chapters move away from Howard to cover his father's travels. In the tragic climax, Howard's past indiscretions come to a head, forcing him to confront his decisions.

In the historical novel *A Reason for Living*, a broken man reconsiders the women who loved him in a time when his country is crumbling under the weight of corruption.

JOHN M. MURRAY (September 11, 2021)

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