

# POUi



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# **POUI**

**CAVE HILL JOURNAL  
OF CREATIVE WRITING**

**NUMBER XIII, 2012**

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*Poui*

*She don't put out for just anyone.  
She waits for HIM  
and in his high august heat  
he takes her  
and their celestial mating  
is so intense  
that for weeks her rose-gold dress  
lies tangled around her feet  
and she don't even notice.*

*Lorna Goodison*

## INTRODUCTION

Welcome to *Poui* X111. In the last issue, we celebrated the florescence of Bahamian writing and speculated that older writers were mentoring younger ones. In this issue, where Bahamian writers once again outnumber all others, the appearance of a new Bahamian writer still at school appears to bear this out. **D'Anthra Adderley's** poem 'Blue Stars' joins several others in addressing the perennial theme of love in all its guises. Perhaps one of the reasons love recurs is because of the intimacy of observation it enables in the onlooker. In **Nicolette Bethel's** 'Eunice', the description, 'your doe-cat eyes, your racehorse limbs, your liger-tigon teeth' is so precise and specific in its marrying of opposites it could only come from close and personal knowledge of the individual concerned even as it mythologises her. Both these poems address their subject directly as 'you', literally 'speaking from the heart', Bethel as elegy and Adderley as protest -'spaceman I'm not use to life on mars' she tells her lover. Though written in the third person, **Stewart Brown's** 'Deep Heat' recalls rubbing his father with Deep Heat as 'a small intimacy, a closeness/more physical than anything since we were past/the rough and tousel of backyard games.'

These are poems which celebrate the strangeness of the ordinary, the way a single detail can trigger profound feeling. Other pieces dramatise the violence of intimate relationships, and the means of escape from violence. In 'The Root of Things', **Emille Hunt** tells a story of family conflict – father/son, but also wife/husband – ultimately resolved when the father comes to see his son's choice of Rastafari as a man 'trying to get to the root of things'. For the female persona of **Danielle Boodoo-Fortune's** 'Lilly's Garden', the only refuge from her husband's 'sudden rages, his bouts of violence' is in 'forcing things to bloom in the corners of her mind'. The persona in **Nick Whittle's** 'Farewell' seeks a refuge from rejection in a 'walk along Consett shore alone'. This turning to the environment is not, however, necessarily a comfort in a context of fast-changing technological advance, as **Maria Rodriguez** in 'Crossing the Island Now' and **Nicolette Bethel** in 'Moving the Container Port to the Western Esplanade' both show. **Victoria Sarne's** story, 'Just Another Day in Paradise', and **Lelawatte Manoo-Rahming's** poem, 'The Paralytic Slum', deal with the social violence which undermines the clichés of a paradisaical Caribbean, clichés invoked and undermined in **Thomas Armstrong's** story, 'Happy Hour', set in an island of 'sun, sea and smiling people'.

In several of the pieces the emphasis is on the essential ambiguity of all relationships, the way they depend to an extent on appearances or the acceptance of difference. In Hazra Medica's 'The Greeting' and Sarah Venable's 'POV', gender and sexual orientation can by no means be taken for granted; while in 'The Colours of Life', Mark McWatt celebrates in photograph and poem a fleshy/flashy fungal form seen in the forest, 'like a man so flamboyantly/so unrepentantly gay that, despite the urge/to flinch and turn away, we are drawn/like the forest flora, to admire...' In 'Tan Tarde', **Ad'ziko Simba** cuts through the cliché of Caribbean community with the lines, 'we are not close knit/more like/loosely crocheted'; and in 'Being herself,' **Keisha Lynne Ellis** shows how for the persona the painful process of defining herself entails rejecting both her working class mother and a man who can't fulfill her desire for upward mobility.

Haiti has for some time been visible in *Poui* as a subject close to the hearts of Caribbean writers. In the absence of any contribution from a Haitian writer, we have included here two pieces by Bahamian writers. **Emille Hunt's** story, 'Desir de Fanmi', bravely ventures onto the same terrain as Edwidge Danticat's 'Children of the Sea' (see the collection, *Krik ! Krak !*) in imagining the experience of a migrant fleeing Haiti in a leaky boat. If it does not match Danticat in imaginative or linguistic power, it does nonetheless demonstrate the place of Haiti in the Caribbean imaginary. As **Philip Armbrister** laments in his poem, 'Rise up Haiti', 'For too long you have waited and/Waited and waited, for too long/You have dressed and redressed,/For too long you have rehearsed/And prepared...'

All this and more make *Poui XIII* vital reading for readers interested in new and old directions being taken by Caribbean creative writers.

The Editors: Jane Bryce, Mark McWatt and Hazel Simmons-McDonald.

# POUI XIII

## CONTENTS

**Introduction** ..... 4

**Gregory Gilbert Gumbs**  
Here ..... 9

**Edison T. Williams**  
The Train Hopper ..... 9

**Sarah Venable**  
P.O.V. ..... 13

**Philip Armbrister**  
Seaweeds and Seagulls ..... 14  
Colours of the Sea ..... 15

**Nicolette Bethel**  
Elegies - Agatha ..... 15  
Nellie ..... 15  
Eunice ..... 16  
Moving the Container Port to the Western Esplanade ..... 17

**Hazra C. Medica**  
The Greeting ..... 17

**Lelawattee Manoo-Rahming**  
Quiet Gardens ..... 18  
The Paralytic Slum ..... 19  
Wild Northside Gardens ..... 19

**Eric Rose**  
A Modern Tragedy in Three Verses ..... 20

**Emille Hunt**  
The Root of Things ..... 20

**D’Anthra Adderley**  
Blue Stars ..... 29

<b>Emille Hunt</b>	
Desir de Fanmi .....	30
<b>A-dZiko Simba</b>	
With Everything .....	32
Tan Tarde .....	34
<b>Thomas Armstrong</b>	
Happy Hour .....	35
<b>Paula Obé Thomas</b>	
Come .....	39
<b>Jacqueline Bishop</b>	
Hagiography .....	39
Captain's Logbook 1 .....	40
Captain's Logbook 2 .....	40
Zemi's .....	41
<b>Keisha Lynn Ellis</b>	
Being Herself .....	44
<b>Philip Armbrister</b>	
Rise Haiti, Rise Up .....	50
Black Dog in the Night .....	51
<b>Maria Soledad Rodriguez</b>	
Crossing the Island Now .....	52
<b>Frances Farmer</b>	
Aftermath .....	53
<b>Victoria Sarne</b>	
Just Another Day in Paradise .....	53
<b>Jerome Teelucksingh</b>	
The Hairdresser .....	54
<b>Nick Whittle</b>	
Farewell .....	57
<b>Mark McWatt</b>	
Under My Skin .....	58
The Colours of Life .....	59
<b>Obediah Smith</b>	
Wendy's One Evening .....	60



Born in 1954: 54 Today .....	61
Quick Draw .....	62
<b>Danielle Boodoo</b>	
Lilly's Garden .....	62
<b>Stewart Brown</b>	
Deep Heat .....	64
<b>Shilpa Venkatachalam</b>	
Moon .....	65
Traces .....	65
<b>Correction</b> .....	66
<b>Contributors</b> .....	68

*Gregory Gilbert Gumbs*

## **Here**

And here in the cold North the days  
    Weigh down on you like  
    Straitjackets  
And the nights are like prison cells

Here we become mere shadows  
Hauntingly reflecting the past everywhere we go  
Desperately pretending existence  
But, merely going through the motions

And the news from Afar  
    Aaaah, yes, the news  
The eagerly expected news from our warm southern Caribbean  
Island homes  
Here  
We hear it with a mixture of curiosity  
    The news, the neeeeews, all of the neeeeeeeeeews  
We hear it  
Here with  
    An ever increasing sense of fragmentation,  
    Confusion, and dizzying isolation.

*Edison T Williams*

## **The Train Hopper**

(Dedicated to the memory of The Mighty Phoenix.)

From the collection *Facing North - Tales from Bathsheba*

My littlest great-grands like me to tell them stories about days gone by in Barbados. When they are with me or when I go up to Rowan's in St. George to my granddaughter, these children don't want no bedtime story from a book. They want to hear something from my boy days. Sometimes they don't believe me when I tell them certain things, cause this is a different world altogether from when I was a boy. They laugh when I tell them about walking from Bathsheba to Bridgetown and back; about bringing a bucket of water on your head; cooking in the backyard in a pot over three rock-stones with a wood fire and all of them kind of things. But today they bringing two friends and they want me tell them about the first time I went hopping the train.

I sit down on the veranda waiting for them and taking the breeze. When that car drive up, they jump out and run up to me and hug me up; make a old man so happy.

Their mother, Grace, tell them, “Don’t hug Grandad so tight, you might hurt him.”

I lean over and whisper to them, “Don’t mind your mother. I like hugs,” and Grace give me a big hug, too.

The girl, Shoshanna, she younger than she brother, Thomas, but she boldface, introduce me to their two friends. “Grandad, this is Rashida and this is Addissa. They go to school with us and they want to hear about the day you hopped the train from Bathsheba all the way to Bridgetown.”

She turn and whisper to her two friends. “You mustn’t interrupt granddad because you will make him forget.” But I hear every word. My ears still good, you know.

Grace gone in the house to look for her aunt. I hear the fridge door open and then the TV turn on. The children sit down at my feet, in a semi-circle on the floor of the veranda, and I start my story.

They laugh out when I tell them that I was a very mischievous child and used to get nuff licks. They only laughing because they don’t get none. I tell them that those were hard times and parents didn’t use to make no sport with children.

My father hardly ever beat me. He was a mason and when he work far from home, he used to sleep out weeknights and come home weekends. My mother would beat me with anything she could put her hands on at the time. If she was hanging out clothes, she would sting me with a wet shirt; if she was in the little piece of ground behind the house, she would break a switch off a pea tree or some bush and fling it in me. They laugh again. “You only laughing because you don’t get no licks. My mother couldn’t read nor write; when I was a boy, this was common. Things in Barbados was not like them is now, you understand?” The children look a little sad when I tell them so and their eyes look as if they trying to see into the past.

One of the worst beatings I get, though, was a day I didn’t go to school; I spent the day playing cricket and then cray-fishing with some bigger boys in Joe’s River. When I get home Ma pick up the coucou stick and lick the pan with the crayfish flying out of my hand. She put a beating pun me that I never forget until the day I went hopping the train.

Some boys in Bathsheba used to hop on the train and ride to Belleplaine or Bath and walk back, but there was a fellow name Thelbert who everybody used to call Baldwin. He used to hop a morning train all the way to Bridgetown and hop an evening one back to Bathsheba. And he would tell us all the stories about the places and things he see. I first see Bridgetown through the eyes of Baldwin. Baldwin was a legend in Bathsheba.

One day during the school vacation, I ain’t had nothing to do. I done tie out the two goats, done bring water from the stand-pipe and done clean out the pig pen.

Why you all giggling and looking at one another so?

As I was telling you, I ain’t had nothing to do, so I left home to go down to the sea to see if any of my friends was down there. When I reach by the train station there was people waiting for the train, not just passengers. There was always people waiting for the train, old people, young people, people waiting for people, people waiting for things off the train, people just waiting to see people and people waiting to see the train. There was ladies in their long skirts right down to their ankles, all the men was wearing hats and most people was barefoot. I telling you these things because you young people don’t know bout life back eighty, ninety years ago.

I stand up near to some men by the train track. Some other men was sitting on the rails. Then I see Baldwin walk up and I know the train coming soon because Baldwin like he could feel the train coming.

“You going town today, Baldwin?” a old man ask.

“That is a question, man?” replied Baldwin, and he turn to me and say, “Why you don’t come with me today, young fellow?”

Now I didn’t expect Baldwin to ask me so, so I was surprised and excited at the same time. But my mother and a tamarind rod appear in front of my face as if they was real. So I know I couldn’t go to town.

You laugh. I was so excited, I just blurt out, “I will go as far as Bath and walk back, Baldwin.” And as soon as I say so, I hear the train whistle. Toot-toot. Toot-toot.

It come round the corner, smoke flying from the funnel of the big Baldwin engine. You see, that is how Thelbert got the nickname Baldwin. People got off and away from the tracks. When Baldwin see the train he start to skip around and shout out, “Yes, yes, yes,” lashing his fingers together over and over again, like an excited child.

Baldwin tell me, “Now listen to me, young boy. Watch me and do what I do. First thing, check out what in the freight car. If they got barrels of molasses, we ain’t going in there because you could get squeeze if they start moving bout. If we got to hang on outside and the train stop going up the hill in St. John, get off to the side. We going help them push it. If the train start to roll back, get out the way fast. Remember the two boys that get kill up there when the train roll back pun them? That would never happen to me. I like to play it safe. And if that foolish idiot, Banfield, working on this train today, you can’t come with me because I got to go on top.” I remind Baldwin that I only going as far as Bath.

Baldwin went and talk to the conductor and I see he pointing at me. I don’t know what he tell the conductor but he come and tell me, “We going town today, young boy.” Well, we hop on pun this train, and when I reach Bath I was having so much fun that I decide to go all the way to town. At every station, Baldwin helping passengers take off and put on luggage and he tell me to help, too. We pass plantation after plantation and sugar factories. I was surprised at how flat the rest of Barbados was. It ain’t like Bathsheba at all.

When we get to Bridgetown, we left the train station and cross the bridge. Baldwin show me Lord Nelson statue. I never see a statue before. But I remember my mother telling me that there was only one Lord and he was invisible. Then we went down the wharf, see men in boats pulling oars and some tall ships in the Careenage. We went all through town; I never see so much people before. There was people everywhere. And I didn’t know we had so much white people in Barbados, they all working in town, in banks and stores. I see so many donkey carts and horses with carriages and trams and some motor cars. Everything was for sale, in shops and by hawkers by the side of the road. If you had money, you could buy anything. Town was like another country.

Some people did dress up real purty. Baldwin did know some of the hawkers. A St. Lucian lady give us two mangoes and that is all we eat the whole day. We went back to the station in time for the last train back to Bathsheba.

All my fun was one way that day because on the way back, I just thinking about my mother. I know what in store for me when I get home. When we get back to Bathsheba and I hop off the train I see my friend Bucky Best and he say, “Boy, you going get your tail cut tonight. You mother did looking for you all over Bathsheba, but we ain’t tell she nothing.”

When I get home I peep through the flaps in the front door and I see a bowl on the table with food in it and a spoon and a tamarind rod next to it. When I see that tamarind rod, I flinch like I taking a lash already. My mother was sitting in a chair next to the partition, fast asleep. I tell myself, “Think, Beresford, think.” I thought about running away or climbing through the bedroom window and sneaking into my bed, but I was

hungry and the food was in front of me. I was thinking food or licks, food for licks, food and licks; then a idea hit me. We had a lot of rain that year and a lot of people came down with fever from mosquito bites.

I pull open the door and shout out, “Ma, Ma, you hear what happen?”

Ma head jerk off she chest and she shout out, “What happen, boy, wha’ happen?”

“You ain’t hear that they kill the mosquito that giving all the people fever? The manager at Joe’s River Plantation shoot it. It weigh thirty pounds.”

The boldface little one shout out, “But Grandad, when you told us this story before, the mosquito only weighed twenty pounds.”

And her mother shout out from in the house, “And when he first told me that story the mosquito weighed ten pounds.”

I ain’t pay them no mind. I continue with my story.

Ma look up at the roof, put her hands over her head and she say, “Thank you, Lord, thank you, Jesus.” I used to think that the Lord lived on top of our house in those days. “Come and eat your food, boy. Oh, Lord, give me grace.” By the way, that is how your mother get her name. My mother was always begging the Lord for grace and your grandmother make her very happy when she name your mother Grace.

Ma went into the bedroom and I sit down and start to eat. I take a pause from eating and pick up that tamarind rod; I break it in two and then break them in two and pelt the pieces out the window.

Ma came out the bedroom and say, “I going down by my sister and come back.”

Now, when she say “my sister” and not “your aunt,” that shoulda tell me something, because she normally used to say “your aunt” when she talking bout her sister. But I was too hungry to think.

When I finish eating, I was tired so I went and pour some water in a wash pan and went in the yard and wash up. Then I went and curl up in my bed. I fall asleep as soon as my body hit the khus khus and I start to dream. I dream I see a red-hair, freckly face man with a shotgun in his hand and he was outside our house, then this big able mosquito fly in the place. The shotgun follow the mosquito and the mosquito land right on my backside. Before I could move my hand to knock it off, the shotgun went off BRAX and I feel something tear into my backside. I holler out, “Ai, ai, ai, oh Lord, oh Lord.” The pain straighten me up, and before I could turn, the window stick tear into my backside again...and again.

My great-grands two little friends’ mouths and eyes open wide, wide. My great- grands cackle out but their friends didn’t sure if to laugh or not.

I had to tell them that I ain’t finish yet. Because, just then, my aunt rush into the bedroom. She shout at my mother and hold on to her tight, tight and pull her off me. I don’t know what would’ve happened to me that night if my aunt hadn’t followed her mind and her sister.

The children were quiet for a moment then Shoshanna say, “Tell us another one about the good old days, Grandad.”

And I reply, “Next time, dear, next time. You know you only get one story at a time. You must come soon again.”

And then the questions start.

*Sarah Venable*

**P.O.V.**

**The Woman:**

Dear Diary,

For the past few weeks Tony has insisted on dressing up and taking me to dinner at the Taste of Tamil. I hate that smarmy waiter, but Tony likes to sit in his area because the lighting there is dim and flattering. Sometimes I wonder whose benefit that is for.

Last night Tony complained about what an unsupportive wife I am. He starts out reasonably, but he always ends up putting a guilt trip on me. I told him I couldn't take it any more, was thinking about leaving, and he started to cry at the table. I try to have strength enough to be understanding, but he is so embarrassing sometimes that it feels like cruelty. He got really weepy, then flipped his wig when the waiter threw us out. Oh Lord, please guide me. What is the right thing to do?

**The Waiter:**

Dear Miss Manners,

I am an immigrant to your country, where I am waiting tables while I complete my degree in physics. In case I am ever faced with this situation again, I would like to know what to say.

I work at the Taste of Tamil restaurant. I am accustomed to people being surprised to find Indian décor, Indian waiters and Indian food. I am sorry to say that people in your fine country do not learn to read or spell properly. They see "Tamil" and think they are going to find tamales here.

I tell them, "What you are looking for is good food. I will help you with the menu. Try the roti. That is like Indian tamale." I am not being too proud to say that some people become regular customers at my tables.

Tonight there came two women who have eaten dinner here a few times. They are a little odd, but very polite. They were eating when one of them started to cry. This is not so unusual, because some of the food is very spicy. When people order it, I bring extra napkins, because it makes their noses run and they are uncomfortable having this fluid dripping down their chins. Some people's eyes water too, so I was not surprised to see this person crying a bit.

The other woman was trying to comfort her friend. I took some water and more napkins to their table, but this seemed to embarrass the comforting lady. As I poured the water, her friend began to sob. It was very crowded and people were starting to look at them.

I felt very sorry for her, so I lifted the sobbing lady's chin and started to wipe the running mascara from her face. Imagine my surprise when I felt that her chin was scratchy! It was a man wearing a dress and he was becoming hysterical.

I thought it was best to get them out of there. I said, "I am very sorry for your distress, but I am going to bring you the bill, because you are losing control of yourself. You are upsetting my other customers." This is standard procedure.

The real woman was very embarrassed now and went to the door. As the crying man wearing a dress was putting down the money, I said, "I am very sorry, Sir." In a very loud voice he announced that I was heartless. Then he threw his wig at me and ran out.

Should I have said, "I'm sorry Madam?"

*Philip Armbrister*

### **Seaweed and Seagulls**

Seagulls on the beach  
Jet skis on the water  
The sun diving conch  
Gulls scamper for a last meal  
Others stretch their wings  
One final time in the low  
Coolness above the surf

What does she want with seaweed?  
Seaweed whose mystery  
Bewilders the sea birds  
Seaweed whose taste  
The ocean rejects  
Seaweed whose bountifulness  
Civil Servants refuse to clean

She fills bag after black bag  
Stoops with a posture and  
Side arm swoop which  
Lends credence to the weeds  
The weeds the salt keeps  
In time, in the leaves' fibre,  
She may unleash something  
Which pleases her  
In time, in the company of seagulls  
She may return again

## **Colours of the Sea**

the colour of the sea  
much like the colour  
of the people shades  
itself with various hues

therein lies its beauty  
therein lies their beauty

*Nicolette Bethel*

## **Elegies**

### **Agatha**

So this is love: rising from your bed to bake  
two dozen cakes before the sun hits noontide.

Standing in the kitchen heat on legs as strong  
as tree trunks, but more treacherous, baking

for money, cooking to pay for the garden,  
to fatten the nest-egg so your men mightn't starve.

And this is love: making their breakfast, packing  
their lunches, cooking their dinners: dishes

of fish and of chicken, of rice slow-simmered  
and sauced and sweet-steamed to feed them.

And this is love: standing on knees knife-shot  
with pain, and fretting in bed when they weakened,

seeking the operation to strengthen them to support  
your weight, standing till death for your menfolk.

### **Nellie**

They tell me you were always stubborn,  
always impatient, efficient as a hammer  
and as hard. It wasn't you your father  
cut down with lead words like ballast  
*yellow fool, yellow fool*. It wasn't you  
men took for granted. They didn't dare.



Still. They tell me the hardness was a shell,  
was a shell; said you hit hard, aimed to kill  
before you could be touched. Say the animals

knew: the pigeons flew to you, roosted  
crooning on your shoulders, and the rabbits  
hopped to you, dogs rolled at your feet,  
and cats purred in your presence. Say  
if you'd been white and a man, your thread  
would sew wounds, not whitemen's trousers.

But this is how I knew you: sewing clothes  
for a living, your round brown body  
quick as silver for hugs, for slaps;  
a harsh tongue, a warm lap, heart as soft  
and as vulnerable as a lamb, temper  
fast as fire, and as hot, till the stroke  
robbed you of speech and of memory,  
laid you in a cradle, tied your hands, etched  
that frown forever on your brow, sent you  
wandering through twilight searching for your sisters,  
seeking to answer when they called.

### **Eunice**

Legs long as children, and beautiful  
as Egypt. As horses. As casuarinas,  
but smooth-skinned, and as brown. Men  
adored you in their adoring-man way:  
that is to say they wanted to collect you,  
place you in their killing jars, pin you  
to their spreading-boards. It was your eyes  
that drew them: round as does' and soft.  
They never saw the cat-light deep within  
until they'd closed their net and found  
the tigon underneath. They never thought  
that thought went with those limbs. When you,  
you sleepy liger, yawned at them, they never  
saw the teeth. We watched them, and you,  
and noticed that they came and left and never  
stayed for long. We never saw a man  
emerging from your room. You gave them  
smiles and drinks and finger-food but never  
fed them meals. And they yearned all the more.

You never lost it all; but illness and the coma  
took a lot. The scrambled synapses in your brain  
reversed your words, criss-crossed commands,

made your eyes see double. Your long legs stumbled.  
Your great heart strained for sleep, and stilled  
that night the last man tried breaking in your room.  
And so you stilled, all mane and arms and legs of you,  
your doe-cat eyes, your racehorse limbs, your liger-tigon teeth.

### **Moving the Container Port to the Western Esplanade**

The harbour is a great blue tale  
of sloops and schooners, tall ships, sails  
and spongers, cruise ships, clean-limbed  
penny-divers, glass-bottomed boats. A tourist dream.

A pastel lie. And someone wants to tell the truth  
and tell it wrong. Look there, where God's hand burned  
the water blue, we plan to land  
one rusty tanker, two piles of fill, three cranes.

Dredged ocean, scarred land, linked chain:  
and containers. We're moving the port, and lying too.

*Hazra Medica*

### **The Greeting,**

Nathaniel cracked his knuckles and flexed his fingers in protest against the cold. He had been at it for seven hours. Cracking his knuckles and flexing his fingers in protest against the cold. Checking up on the courses he would have to take next semester. Making tea...using the teacup that was the first thing he bought after arriving. Watching in fascination as the tea bag made a valiant effort to stay afloat but sank at the last moment. The lady at the natural foods store had praised the box of tea bags. *Organic!* He was clearly expected to be impressed. He had made the effort for her: slowly nodding his head up and down, first in appreciation, then to forget that ten months ago fresh lemon grass blades and mint leaves were being plucked straight from a backyard garden and made into a tea for him.

Most of the students had gone home for the summer. He had arrived later than most and so was staying behind during the vacation to catch up. He was on a scholarship and couldn't afford to fall behind. His professors were pleased with him. *A hard worker*, they said when they introduced him to others. *All the way from the Caribbean*, they nodded in approval. *Married to the library, this one*, they laughed. *Your family must be so proud of you*, they speculated. He had told *her* all of this. *She* was proud. He didn't call *her* often and when he did, it wasn't for long. Too much work to do. *She* understood.

*She* was all he knew. *She* was always there. When he was younger, it was she who would come, on Report Day, through the gates with face made up, wig on head, blouse neatly tucked in, skirt a-flying and

purse over shoulder. As if by magic, the sea of whispering-gossiping mothers would part. And, *she*, looking neither left nor right, would ascend the stairs to hear from his teachers. He didn't mind it much until he got to secondary school. Then, his heart sank at the end of every term when *she* came blazing through the gates and up the stairs. Then, after watching *her* ascent, his classmates gathered around him to ask repeatedly: "Boy, how your mother pretty so?" They would continue until *she* came downstairs or some teacher, trying not to smirk, ran them off.

His mother *was* pretty. He had seen pictures of her in one of the large albums kept in a trunk. Pictures of her laughing... with friends... with relatives in another island... with her best friend. She had died while giving birth to him. It had been a hard year; no one wanted a newborn added to their year. So, his mother's 'crazy-crazy' best friend had adopted him. It was this best friend who showed up every Report Card Day and who cheered loudest at every graduation. It was *he* who winced as he cleaned bruises Nathaniel received during fights with the boys at school who mocked him. It was *he* alone who had given Nathaniel a gift before he left for university: a teacup with **#1** printed in bold on it.

Nathaniel cracked his knuckles, flexed his fingers in protest against the cold, and looked down at the letter he had written seven hours ago. There was his new *address*, the *body*, the *complimentary close* and his *signature*. (It was *he* who had explained, better than the primary school teachers ever did, the various parts of a letter to Nathaniel.) The envelope stood nearby with the delivery address already neatly written on it. Nathaniel reached for his pen. He hastily scribbled in "*Dear Mother*". He folded the letter, sealed the envelope, removed himself hurriedly from his desk and forced the circular buds of his mp3 player headphones into his ears. He didn't need to think on his way to the mailbox....

*Lelawatte Manoo-Rahming*

### **Quiet Gardens**

Such quiet gardens  
like cemeteries.  
Wet leaves cover  
the swarms of blind ones  
listening in the fungus gardens  
for the murmuring  
of the returning ones:  
the ones who bring food,  
the ones who make warmth,  
the ones who clean out the waste,  
making new gardens

In cemeteries  
where no one hears the murmuring  
of once-human lights swarming  
through bright holes made by stars above  
swarming into the cosmic garden  
sprouting into trees fluorescent  
with leaves murmuring in silence.

## **The Paralytic Slum**

The paralytic slum lies  
Wide awake in sunlight  
The view from which is to die for  
A sparkling city below  
Ringed by sapphire and diamonded sea

Except the cracking of guns  
At midnight at noontime at sunrise  
At sunset or any old time always herald  
That someone has died for something else:

Crack cocaine or a wrong bed  
A dollar that is worth 15 US cents  
A jacket from the Big Apple  
Sent by a sister or an aunt

A mother maybe who escaped  
The child never knew  
Except when the crack of the gun

In his hand made and unmade  
Images, memories of his mother  
Kissing him gently, at midnight  
Promising to send for him soon

But 'soon' was cracked open  
Like a wall  
In a hail of bullets.

## **Wild Northside Gardens**

In the white-bank land sixty feet above  
The crashing waves, the indigo sea

The heirloom sweet-potato slip  
Vines down into the valley

Breakers cascading over the reefs  
Painting the blue in bold strokes of white

The black land that pools in wet hurricanes  
Drowning the slips and roots of all pure things

In high tide billowing sprays on the shore

Shower the thirsty beach heliotrope

The old ones made a dash for the hills  
To the damp, honey-hued sandy land

Salt-laden sea milk washes  
Green the wild northside gardens

Where only pure things root and roost  
Sweet potato, sea oats and ospreys.

*Eric Rose*

### **A Modern Tragedy in Three Verses**

Lust brought him there  
And love made him stay ...  
Isn't that the way  
Sometimes?

Loneliness led  
And desires fed  
While he always feared  
"The Line."

Now there are two  
Don't know what to do ...  
Isn't that the way  
Sometimes ...

*Emille Hunt*

### **The Root of Things**

For Fr. S. Sebastian Campbell and Alex Morely - they have a true warrior spirit.

*Man a Shaka Zulu, pickney, Nkrumah, pickney, Kunta Kinte, pickney  
Just like Malcolm and Martin and Garvey I'm fiery  
Shaka Zulu Pickney, Tarrus Riley.*

Ian walked off the boat with a rage in his eyes. He was dressed in plain clothes, but militancy dripped off him. His starched blue shirt was tucked neatly and evenly into his blue trousers and his Land belt buckle beamed bright, as if he had spent the night before polishing it with Brasso. His moustache was trimmed thinner than I had ever seen him wear it and his lips were pressed tightly together. A small overnight bag hung at his side as he made his way to the car.

Although it was a bitter return for him, I was happy to see him. He had left Nassau for Inagua the year before for the post of Officer in Charge of the island. I repeatedly suggested that he allow me to spend a weekend with him, but Ian was methodical, and explained how he wanted to establish his image within the first few months as a no-nonsense man, a man without a heart; therefore, a wife coming to see him would expose weakness of sorts. So I resorted to phone calls.

I quickly checked my lipstick and hair in the mirror before jumping out of the car. Earlier, I had spent the whole day cleaning the house and placing the furniture the way it was before he had left; the television was moved back into its corner, his old commendations and pictures with the commissioner and the Archbishop were back in their dark rusty frames, and the standing lamp was back near the door. Everything was the way he had left it, except his son.

“Ian,” I said walking up to him, placing my arms around him. I could feel one arm lightly on my shoulder as his overnight bag banged my knee.

He said, “Let’s go,” throwing his bag in the back seat and jumping into the driver’s seat.

Before we pulled off, in between grunts and snorts and “hmmms” he adjusted the seat, tilted the mirror upward, turned the radio dial and turned off the air conditioner.

“How was the boat ride?”

“Long,” Ian said, maneuvering his way through the crowded dock.

“Oh, ok. I noticed you only brought one bag. I guess you didn’t get my message about bringing a box of fish and conch?”

“Guess not.”

“The thought still would have been nice though. You know these fellas out here charging people an arm and a leg for grouper and mutton fish.”

“This is not a casual trip you know, Beverly. How can you talk so calmly when all hell break loose?”

“I’m sorry. I just thought...”

“You thought wrong, Beverly. All you had to do was tell me. All of this could have been avoided. I could have come home from long time and deal with this matter from months ago. Months ago.”

“Okay, good. Let’s talk about it then.”

“Oh no, the time for talking already done. You had your turn and you ain’t say a Christ thing to me. It’s my turn now. I have to get to the root of things.”

I had heard this saying about a million times during our marriage. It was his favourite. He used it for everything, whether he was commenting on some political issue or the state of crime, his solution to everything was that people had to get to the root of things.

As we pulled out of the dock, Ian went straight onto Market Street instead of heading on Shirley to Cable Beach police station.

“Jay is in Cable Beach Station,” I reminded him.

“You don’t have to tell me where he is. I know where he is.”

“Well, aren’t you going to get him, or at least see him?”

“In the morning,” he said waving his hand outside for another driver to go ahead. “I going home to sleep and catch myself.”

“Ian Rule, your son is in jail. Do something.”

“Mind your tone in this car, woman. Now you want come running to me to do something. I must save the day now? The boy round here playing like he is some kind of revolutionary and starting problems, well let him sweat a little in there. He ain’t no revolutionary, he is Jay Rule. Revolutionists is end up dead. I said I will do it in the morning. If you can’t wait then you go down there.”

The rest of the ride passed in silence until we passed Bamboo Shack, when he asked, “You cook?”

Ian had just washed and made his way downstairs in time to see me rest his favourite dish, curry chicken and rice, on the table.

“Smells good,” he said taking a seat and pulling the plate closer to him. “You know they have some really good mutton on the island, nice and tender, good for currying.”

“There is something you need to know about Jay, Ian,” I tried to slip in between his chewing and scraping of the fork.

“I am eating now, Beverly. I already tell you I going deal with all this come morning.”

I tried countless times to tell Ian about what really was going on, but he busied himself with phone calls to friends, reading and relaxing.

The first time Jay came home with his hair in little buds and explained to me that he was now “trodding the path”, I fretted over the inevitable clash between him and his father. Despite that, I was actually impressed with Jay’s courage, to take that position knowing that some day he would have to face his father, police Inspector Ian Rule.

He was known as a no-nonsense officer and once even told his superiors about his squad mate and partner, Tony, who was taking money from illegal Haitians in return for a blind eye. Ian had a crocus bag of fear which he carried with him and would throw on anybody without saying a word. I remember Sunday mornings in particular. Watching from the choir, I would see Ian usher people up the aisle, stop suddenly at a pew with a group of children, and stick out his open palm. Just like that, as if he and the children traded thoughts, they would remove the chewing gum from their mouths and place it in Ian’s hand.

Even though I tried my hardest to guess what the meeting of the two would be like, I could not completely figure it out. Jay and Ian never argued much, except for the normal father and son things, such as chores and borrowing the car. But the thought of the disastrous showdown between two would be buried deeply under my interest in my son. I was captivated by Jay’s transformation and the amount of time I was spending and learning from him and his friends.

There was a cloud of manliness and confidence that hovered over Jay now. It seemed like it was just yesterday he was learning to drive, on the phone all hours of the night talking to girls, and sporting the latest fashion, but now, he was settled. He had bought himself a bicycle, took to wearing African print shirts and slippers and told me a thousand times how he was looking for an empress. This was more than a phase; this was a lifestyle for him. I saw the conviction in his eyes when he and his friends talked about Zion and oppression. I remember a conversation I shared with him and his friend Dan.

“Would you like some more peanut punch?” I asked them.

“No thanks, mother. I and I good,” Dan said to me, placing his hand on his breast.

“Bless,” Jay responded pushing his wooden mug toward me.

“So what do you boys have plan for today?”

“Well we going to work in the garden for a bit and then a little reasoning later on,” Jay said, taking a sip of the punch. As soon as Jay decided that he would become a Rasta he built a little shack out of old dry wood he had hustled and started a garden in the backyard. He grew all sorts of vegetables, herbs and provisions.

“A little reasoning huh?” I asked. They smiled to each other. Jay’s teeth were turning dullish beige and his lips were darker. They didn’t have to explain what reasoning meant but I knew that it involved smoking. Many nights, Jay would come home with his eyes shaded red. When questioned, he would say, ‘we was just doing a little reasoning’ and then would fall into a deep sleep. Even Ms. Stubbs’s barking potcakes or the ringing phone could not wake him. Jay never admitted he smoked, but many days I would watch him work tirelessly in the garden with something dangling from his mouth. I never approved, but I felt calmer knowing he was doing it here and not on the street. “Please be careful out there,” I advised my son and his friend. “You have to realize where we live and the consequences of your choices.”

“King, the I mother is chant some real positive vibes upon the I them,” Dan said nodding his head.

“Listen, mum,” Jay directed. “Is only so long this system could downpress the people of this land, you know. Look at me,” he said. “I look just like you, just like them but because I wear my hair contrary to how the foreigner say I should look, they persecute Rastafari. They could keep us out of the schools, keep us out of the big time bank job and the police could profile all they want, but Rastaman them born out a persecution. No matter what they do to Rastafari, they can’t stop us. If they ain’t want let us in they schools, we going to build our own. If they bury us, we’ll rise up again. Oppress people always rise up and come to they true self.”

“Overstand, bless, respect,” Dan said as he shook his locks. “Mother, you see what type child a Zion you raise. You pour real upfulness into your seed.”

Although I was lost in Dan’s language, I was proud of Jay. I felt like those mothers in church who were proud when their children returned home from college as doctors and lawyers. Jay’s drive reminded me of how Ian felt about order when he first joined the police force.

Ian finished his dinner and made some calls to a few friends to let them know he was in town for a while. Afterwards, he came to bed.

“I am coming with you in the morning to the station,” I said to him shuffling myself between the sheets.

“No need to, it under control,” he said turning his back to me.

“I know you have it under control, but I would like to be there.”

“Fine, Beverly. I leave at eleven.”

The next morning, I followed Ian as he walked briskly into the Cable Beach police station.

“Hey Inspec,” an officer said rising and saluting from behind the desk. “Come ‘round back. How things on the island, man?” I followed behind.

“They good, man. Little bit of problems here and there but I getting things done, piece by piece. Listen; is the Officer in Charge here? I have a little problem.”

“No, he ain’t here right now, just step out. But let me know what you need, boss. As it looks right now, well you is the highest ranking man here.” The officer joked and pulled a chair for me to sit in.



“Well really,” Ian said lowering his voice. “You see my son happen to find himself mix up with some bad company and may have been arrested taking part in an unsanctioned demonstration.”

“Small thing, Inspec. We could just give him a little talk and let him go under your supervision. You see these children always fall by the wayside here and there but when they come from good families like yours,” he said pointing to me and Ian, “they easy to pull right back on track. We all were young and made mistakes once. What your boy name is?” The officer said pulling a black log book out from a drawer.

“Jay Rule. You don’t know how much I appreciate this. I will definitely let the OC know how professional and helpful you were. It’s just so hard when you pour all you learnt into these kids and they act so contrary without remorse.”

“Oh,” the officer said focusing on the book and tapping on a spot with his finger. “You say is Jay Rule?”

“Yeah man, Jay Rule, born the ninth of March nineteen eighty four.”

“Yeah Inspec, I have all of that. It seems like Jay was involved in a major riot and assault on officers during a funeral service. However, his police bail has already been signed and he has been released.”

“I’m sorry, there must be some mistake. See, that boy ain’t have nobody else to sign his bail. I don’t understand.”

“Yes, sir. It was signed by Priest Daniel of the Ethiopia African Black International Congress. He signed it yesterday morning.”

“Priest who? The Ethiopia what?” Ian leaned in to read for himself.

“The Rastas,” the officer said. “The Rastas pay he bail. Your son is some kind of Rastaman, hey?”

Ian looked at me.

“I tried to tell you,” I said to him softly. Ian ignored me, thanked the officer and we made our way home.

As we pulled into the driveway, Ian jumped out, opened the front door, and raced upstairs towards Jay’s bedroom. I followed behind him closely, but he was going too fast and slammed into Jay’s locked door.

“Why is there a locked door in my house?” he asked, attempting to shake the lock loose. “I shouldn’t have to ask permission to go anywhere in this house.”

Before I could dig up an answer, Ian had already sprinted downstairs and now, out of breath, was slowly coming back up with a table knife in his hand.

“Have me picking damn lock like I don’t even live here,” he said as he jiggled the blade in between the frame and the door. “Got it,” he said as Jay’s bedroom door swung open.

Ian walked in, his eyes searching for some familiarity. All of the acolyte and academic awards were gone from the walls. His closet, which once held his cassock and cotter and dress suits, was laden with African print clothing. The walls were painted with maps of Ethiopia and photos of lions, Haile Selassie and Bob Marley, who also was playing on low from his speakers. “What is all this? What is this garbage playing on the radio? This is the mess you allow in my house?”

Ian began tearing the posters off the wall and slammed the speakers off the shelf.

“What are you doing, Ian?” I asked digging through the heap of posters and flyers.

“I am doing what you should have done from long time ago. I am getting to the root of things.”

“Even if that means not respecting your son?”

“I don’t have to respect anybody,” he said sharply. “This is my house, my rules. I pay the bills in here. Where is Jay now? Where is your son?”

“I don’t know,” I stammered. “He said he would...”

“Time and place. Where is Jay?”

“I don’t know, Ian.”

Ian gathered several of the posters he had torn down and marched downstairs. I followed him into the kitchen. He opened the door and shoved them into the garbage bin outside.

“What the hell is that?” he asked, looking at Ian’s shack. For the first time, I saw how awkward Jay’s shack looked in our perfectly designed backyard. Ian had directed which plants he wanted growing in his yard, and which section he would place his grill and hammock. He had spent days over the gravel stones and the garden ornaments. Now, at the end of the yard stood a wooden shack, striped green, gold and red, overlooking his precious garden. “What is that?” Ian repeated without taking his eyes off the structure. He was out of breath again.

“It’s Jay’s shack, Ian,” I said attempting to guide him back inside by his hand. He shrugged me away and strode to the shack. I walked closely behind him, all the while pleading with him.

Ian opened the shack door. Immediately the lingering smell of smoke rushed toward us. The room had a little cot, several goatskin drums, a rake and some other tools Jay used in the garden. Ian was speechless. He slammed the door shut and returned to the house.

“Why can’t the three of us sit and talk about this?” I asked placing a glass of water in the front of him.

“There is nothing to talk about,” he said, in between the gulps of water. “You messed up, and I’ll fix it, simple as that.”

“Messed up?” I asked. “Your son is alive and is aware of himself as man. How did I mess up?”

“You let him do what he want. And why you ain’t tell me? All those times we talked on the phone, why didn’t you report this to me? Nothing, not one word. I would have flown here immediately. You abetting his foolishness. He could have only done this with you. Not if I was here, never.”

“You are overreacting Ian.”

“Don’t tell me I’m overreacting, god damn it,” he said slamming his hand on the table. “I been on the force for thirty-five years, I know where this going to lead. Who you think doing all the foolishness out there? This how it start. Them fellas only want excuse to smoke dope. All them Rasta is, is a bunch a criminals.”

It was useless. Ian toted his experience from the force around like an overzealous Christian does his Bible, referring to it whenever he got a chance and on any topic. I turned away and busied myself with cleaning up spilt water.

“I will investigate and get to the...”

“The root, yes, I know. He is not a case, or a mission. He is your son for Christ’s sake. For once be a father and not an enforcer. He is a Rasta, yes but he is still your son. He has locks, but he is still your son. At the end of the day no matter what happens, he will be your son.” Anger wrapped around me, like a vine climbing for sunlight. I was shouting. Ian shouted back.

“He is not my son. I do not have any Rasta children. No son of mine will sleep under this roof giving allegiance to some cult. I have no son.”

“Are you serious, Ian?”

“You know what? I shouldn’t be blaming you. This is my fault. I should have known better than to leave you in charge. Leave you with this type of responsibility. You were not trained for such a task.”

“What task is that, Ian?”

“Making a man; I shouldn’t have expected you to make a man out of Jay. A real man, men like Pindling and Fawkes, great men who build this country. Men like Martin Luther King, Bishop Tutu, real godly men who stood for something and had morals and standards. No, you let Jay get mix up with some foolishness and...”

“Ian, Jay is not involved in foolishness. He is...”

“Don’t interrupt me, Beverly. Don’t interrupt when I talking; never interrupt a man when he voicing himself, when he getting to the root of things. Like I was saying, You let him get mix up in all kind of foolishness, and now I have to clean up this big mess you make.”

“It is good to know that after twenty-five years of marriage, that is what you think of me,” I said, as I walked into the study. Walking away was the easiest answer whenever Ian acted like this. I was not surprised that I had not seen my husband in almost a year and within two days, I was tired of him.

We did not talk to each other for the next few hours. Silence roamed about the house; the way it was before Jay was born and after Ian had become so occupied with his job. When we were younger, Ian was a much nicer man. He would surprise me with lilies and we would fall asleep at night holding each other watching a movie on TV.

It was approaching two o’clock and I went into the study to ask Ian if he wanted a sandwich. He waved me out. He was up to something. He had several of the pamphlets and posters from Jay’s room laid out before him. There was the look in his eyes. There was only one time that I would see that look in his eyes, see him that determined and focused. He was planning something. Usually it was some tactical plan or mission. I knew it already; Ian was going after Jay. I lingered by the door when I heard him talking.

“Hey Braithwaite, what’s good man?” Braithwaite was the Commissioner of Police and a former squad mate of Ian, and Jay’s godfather. “Listen remember that thing with Jay I told you I was coming to Nassau to deal with...Yeah well it didn’t really go as planned...Apparently he is mix up with some Rastas...Yeah I know I feel the same way. ...I have a little plan. I see they planning some march for Discovery Day...I figure you didn’t sign off on any request to parade...No, no Braithwaite, it ain’t no little parade. These Rasta them going to be in the street spreading all kind of propaganda. We can’t allow that type stuff in the country. I want go down to Government Grounds where they rallying at the end and break that foolishness up and get Jay just to show him that this ain’t nothing but trouble they causing round the place...Media? Don’t worry we could just say we believe couple of the perpetrators from the graveyard riot out there, plus you know couple of them going to have weed on them...I know, I know. We going to make it look good and clean...I was thinking I will need about a thirty officers or so in full riot gear, you know, to show them we serious. I need this favour, Braithwaite. You know I don’t ask you for much...You going to make me beg you?...Thanks buddy, I know I could count on you.”

I ran into the room before Ian had even hung up the phone.

“Ian you cannot do this, there is something you must understand.”

“You listening to my conversations know. You don’t have no respect for me all around.”

“Ian, listen to me, please. I beg you, listen to me. Jay and those aren’t playing dress up or going through a phase like you think. This is a lifestyle, a belief. Please, this will not end well.”

“We are the police. You mean it won’t end well for them troublemakers.” Ian walked out the room and made his way upstairs.

I just sat there in the study feeling worthless. How could I make Ian understand the passion that was not only in Jay but all of those young men? How could I explain to him the fire that burned inside them, how they viewed the police as not only as the enforcers but as their enemy?

Ian spent the next few hours making various calls to different officers. I wandered about the house thinking about what to do, about how I was going to stop the chaos that was about to take place. That night I called Jay’s phone repeatedly but there wasn’t any answer. I stayed awake, waiting for him to come home, but he never did.

The next morning I awoke on the couch to Ian polishing his boots. He was humming as he moved about the house. His helmet and baton lay on the table by the door. A bottle of Brasso and an old rag, were near the sink where he had polished his buckle and emblems. It was useless now, he was in attack mode.

“I gone,” he said as he made his way to the door, grabbing his helmet and stuffing the baton into its holder. “I’ll be back with Jay in a bit.” I ran to the window to beg one more time, but he was already caught up in the excitement on the riot bus that had pulled up for him.

I raced upstairs and quickly washed my face, got dressed and sped down to Government Grounds. It was too late to catch Jay at the starting point.

Ian spotted me as soon as I walked onto the field. They were a ways off from the stage that they had set up. There were flags and booths with books and pamphlets. I made my way toward Ian.

“Why you come here, Beverly. You don’t need to see this.”

I knew better than to argue with Ian in the front of his junior officers, but he saw the pleading from my eyes.

“Anyway, you had your chance to stop this. It’s my turn now,” he said turning away from me and toward his squad. “Listen men, we will go on my command. You know the routine. Go for the leaders and then the others will disperse. This is not a negotiating mission, we have been authorized to disperse this crowd and bring an end to this illegal demonstration. We move as a unit. First a warning we know they won’t heed. Then tear gas, then rubber bullets. I doubt it will proceed further, a little stern hand is all they need, but if it does, we release the dogs and then haul them violators off. Is that clear?”

Before they could answer, a sea of black came marching past Government House and over Blue Hill onto Government Grounds. Ian’s eyes widened at the sight of the crowd. Surely, he must have been expecting a few dreadlocked disciples, but among them were a few teachers I had worked with over the years, some college students, a few pastors, and even some of the men from the various unions.

“We have a big task here, fellas,” Ian said looking at the crowd. “Stay focused, men.”

Jay was in the middle of the crowd, shouting through a bullhorn. A ring of black had formed around him.

“Touch One,” Jay shouted.

“Touch All,” the crowd responded.

“Touch One.”

“Touch All.”

“One Africa.”

“One People,” they answered.

“One Africa.”

“One People.”

Jay walked onto the stage with slaps on the back and cheers trailing behind him. He scanned the crowd that stood below him, breathing in their energy. He nodded his head.

“We made it today, brothers and sisters. We made a stand today. We are unique in what we do here today. You see brothers and sisters, some people scratch at the surface of things. Others dabble around, getting themselves dirty, but to no avail, they get no- where. And others, others like us, we get to the root of things. And it is in the search that we find so much greater than we initially set out for. We find something much more precious than what we could ever hope to change. We realize something so valuable, that it changes our views, it changes our spirit, it changes our existence. Today, like a great man once said, we have gotten to the root of things.”

The crowd threw chants of “yes” and “amen brother” at Jay. I looked around at Ian. It seemed like Jay’s words had shot off the stage and were holding him at bay.

“And it is in getting to the root we come to our pure selves. True searching forces you to change. Yes, our true self. You see this ain’t no Rasta thing here today, or no Christian thing. The roots don’t care if you rich or poor or employed. This,” he said spreading his arms to the crowd, “this is a people thing. And in our true self we are telling the government that we want no more Discovery Day Holiday, rather a National Hero’s day. No more celebration of men who came and took away not only the people, but the voice and spirit of these limestone beds. The roots call out for us to celebrate our own. Today we celebrate men like Dr. Robert Love, Randol Fawkes, Lynden Pindling, Arthur Hanna and Cleveland Eneas. Great women like Anatol Rodgers and Doris Johnson. Today, we add them to the scrolls so long missing our handwriting.”

The crowd cheered and shouted as Jay talked. I looked over at Ian and it seemed as if his breathing had slowed. His eyes searched the figure that was on stage delivering. I looked back at Jay and shared Ian’s view. Some men who were playing softball made their way over, and some workers from the bakery on lunch break stood in the roads. Jay stood above the crowd, breathing in its energy. He was preaching and teaching. He had come out of them, yet he was firmly planted and a part of them.

Ian was mesmerized; he could not hear his squad calling on him.

“Move now, chief? We ready, boss. Let’s stop this.”

“What?” Ian asked, turning his attention to his men.

“Ready to move? Let’s stop him or cut the power before he work this crowd up.”

“No,” Ian shook his head.

Confusion ran across the faces of the officers.

“Just wait,” Ian said, turning to face Jay. “Never stop a man when he voicing himself; when he trying to get to the root of things.”

*D'Anthra Adderley*

**Blue Stars**

I look to the sky  
in hope of catching a shooting star  
but you go by too fast  
you are no longer by my side  
you sleep well at night  
while I toss and turn between the universes  
you've launched me into  
'spaceman I'm not use to life on mars'  
I'm afraid I'll fall to my death  
I'm dizzy, all I can see is stars  
in love with you I recite from this crater  
like the one you left on my heart  
I thought we could leave footprints on the sand of time  
of forever and the moment I wish to spend with you  
but I find I'm here alone again  
emotions run hot  
like wild fireworks  
my passion burns my body up  
I wait for you to wake me  
at the bed of this rainbow of pain  
prick me  
let me feel  
let me bleed  
out                    every color of you

## Desir de Fanmi

When Jacques ran into the house drenched in sweat, slamming the wooden door almost off its hinges, I knew something was wrong.

“*Vini*, Come. We must leave Haiti,” Jacques shouted as he sprinted to the window, drawing the bed-sheet curtains.

“Jacques.” I tried to pull him from the window, his panic too big for our one-bedroom home. He was shaking and breathing heavily. Sweat poured from his receding hairline, his skin was patched with bush and grass, and prickles were caught all over his pants. Inside the house it was quiet as usual. A lone candle brightened the joint living room and kitchen. Every now and then, when the wooden windows were propped open, a passing mountain breeze slightly blew the curtain that separated the bedroom from the rest of the house. “*Di mwen*, tell me what you are talking about. What is going on with you. Leave Haiti, why?”

“They are coming,” Jacques said, holding me at bay by my shoulders. The look in his eyes, his shaking hands, the sweat that soaked his thin shirt told me - the Tonton Macoutes were coming.

I knew that it would happen someday: that someday someone would hear one of Jacques’s speeches, that someone would go back with word that a student was in the country speaking against the government.

When I first married Jacques, when he talked about freedom and rising up against the President I saw the passion in his eyes. Now all I saw was fear.

“*Konbe tan?*” I asked.

“We have about half an hour, at most an hour before they arrive,” he said between tortured breaths. “Get Michelle and I will pack some things.”

Jacques moved like a madman through the shack, the wood creaking at his every step. He emptied out the draw bag where he kept his pamphlets and stuffed it with the little money we had hidden, some bread and a Bible. I left him peeping out the window and went to where Michelle was sleeping on the other side of the curtain. I tried to wake her without her father’s madness alarming her.

“Are we going dancing today, *manman?*” she asked. Michelle loved to dance. After her day’s lessons, I would take her to see the old women perform the traditional singing and dancing of Haiti. Michelle would clap and join in.

At night, when Jacques rubbed oil on my skin, he would tell me his dreams of Michelle carrying the traditional dances of Haiti all over the world, how she would dance for presidents and prime ministers and whole countries would know her name: “*A bo madanm Michelle Desir, Desir de Fanmi*, the beautiful Michelle Desir, of the Desir Family.”

“*Non*. There will be no dancing today, child,” I said, hugging her.

“*Ale*, we must go,” Jacques said, pulling the curtain. He took Michelle and made his way to the door. He told me to follow closely as we moved through the bushes. “We cannot go on the roads, they will be looking for us there.”

We began running, tearing our way through the bushes. At times when the bushes were too thick or tall, Jacques would pass Michelle to me before taking out a machete and slicing a path for us.

“*Ki kote ou ale?*” I asked.

“You’ll see when we get there,” Jacques answered.

After about thirty minutes of running and falling down, Jacques decided that we should rest under some plantain trees.

“*Dlo*,” Jacques said reaching for his draw bag. I reached inside the bag and handed him some water. It barely touched his tongue before he gave the container back to me.

“Drink more,” I said pushing it back to him.

“*Non*, you and Michelle will need it for later.”

“*Ki sa*, What?” He did not answer. “Tell me what happened, Jacques. Tell me where are we going?”

“They found me,” Jacques said staring at a trail of ants that made their way up the plantain tree. “The Macoutes found me. I was in Mibale spreading the word about an anti-government rally. I gave some flyers to some men. I didn’t know they were friends of the Macoutes. About an hour later, the Macoutes came in their dark shades with machetes and clubs. They questioned me and found the flyers in my bag. They beat me and threw me in the back of a jeep. They said they were taking me to Fort-Dimanche.”

As Jacques talked on, my mind stayed with Fort-Dimanche. As children, we had been told horror stories of the prison, how the weeds outside the main wall were so thick because they grew on the graves of hundreds of men. We saw men released back into society to serve as a warning to those who dared to rise up against the President. They men told of men blinded, chopped to pieces, set on fire or electrocuted. The grout of the stone floors was forever stained with blood. The Macoutes had no mercy. They would bring a loved one’s clothes or hand from Fort-Dimanche to remind their families of their fate if they didn’t swear allegiance to the President.

“They were drunk and driving wildly,” Jacques said. “The roads were wet and muddy and we slid. The jeep turned over and I ran into the bushes. They came after me, but I found my way to the coast and found a man to bring me back here to Latoti. But the Macoutes already know my name, and my family and where to find me. They are on their way.”

“Where are going, then? Where can we go?” I asked again.

“We must leave Haiti. That same man who brought me back to Latoti says he knows of a boat leaving for Bahamas. He has agreed to take you and Michelle.”

“What about you? Are you not coming, Jacques. Where will you go?” Before Jacques could answer, he jumped up from a sting from one of the ants. As he rubbed his arm, he gazed back the way we had just come. I turned around to see thick, black smoke covering the morning sky.

“We must go,” Jacques urged. “They are right behind us.”

We continued running. In about an hour Michelle and I were by the coast waiting in the bushes as Jacques went in search of the boat he had been told about. Jacques came and ushered us to the far end of the shore, where an overcrowded boat rocked on the morning tide, bursting with men, women and children. All the men looked as if they had suffered at the hands of the Macoutes. Some had patches over their eyes, bandages around their heads and necks, and missing arms or feet. One woman crammed in a corner shivering in her blood soaked gown.

“It is not safe, Jacques,” I complained.

“You are not safe here in Haiti. The biggest pain would be to see my family suffer at the hands of the Macoutes. Do you wish to see them pour gasoline down my throat and set me on fire? Or suppose they force me to sleep with Michelle? Go, please. I will meet you in the Bahamas.”

Jacques hugged and kissed Michelle one last time before he handed her to me.

“We are going to dance, Papa. Are you not coming to dance with us?” Michelle asked.

“*Non, Michele. Mwen danse pita avek ou*, I will dance with you later,” he said before helping some other men on the shore guide the boat out.

I should have hugged him again. I should have told him I loved him. I should have sent Michelle with another family and stayed with him.

The first day on the seas was very calm considering the circumstances. People barely moved except to relieve themselves. Michelle and I drank some of the water and ate a few slices of the bread that Jacques had packed. I offered a slice of bread to the young girl who only held herself shaking in her blood stained gown. She refused. Besides that, it was quiet. All day the sun beat down and at night the wind roughly brushed the skin.

The second day, Michelle and I ate some more bread and drank more water. I again offered some bread to the girl. She took a piece and went back to comforting herself. People had stopped going so far to the edge to relieve themselves and did whatever they had to right where they slept. Michelle’s skin was scorched from the salt and the sun. I did my best to cover her. At night I put her under my shirt, close to my skin to keep her warm.



The third day, the waters seemed more alive.

“No unnecessary moving,” shouted a man who appeared to be the captain.

Michelle had lost her appetite and was listless. I gave her the last of the water before turning her over on her stomach, pulling down her pants and sliding the crustless bread inside her.

The girl, Mari, ate the last of the bread. She told me that she was mourning for the death that had taken place inside her. The Macoutes had raped her in front of her husband, a Baptist preacher, before killing him. They beat her and left her die next to her headless husband. She miscarried the next day and gave the child’s blood to the sea.

During the day the sea got rougher, rocking the boat so that people were in danger of falling out. The captain shouted again for people to stay still. It seemed our chances of survival had narrowed when we saw the Bahamas Army boat coming. The waves barely bothered their vessel. They pulled next to us. We thought we were saved.

I could see one officer in his life-vest doing a count and writing on a pad. He went and talked to another officer in white. They argued, and after a while several officers with guns and rope came onto our sloop. It was leaking slowly and starting to fall apart.

They tied the rope to a wooden post and returned to their vessel where they secured it. They began towing us. Why were they towing us? Every time our boat shot up and slammed back down in the water, the wood would creak and the rope would wring itself tighter. We began to see shark fins in the distance.

All of a sudden the boat went up into the air and as it landed water erupted. Instead of the rope wringing it snapped, throwing the overcrowded boat into a frenzy. It leant over closer and closer to the water and in seconds, people were overboard, splashing and shouting and drowning, water filling their lungs. Those left on board screamed for their family as they went down and were torn apart by sharks. There was shouting from the officers on the vessel and shouts from the guns firing at the sharks. Why hadn’t they put us on their vessel?

*I am on land now, but why am I in a hole? Who are these people around me? Yes, they are the people off the boat. There is Mari, she isn’t shaking any more. Nobody is moving. I am on land in a deep crowded hole with people who are not moving. Wait. Where is Michelle? Where is my child? Above us are officers with masks and shovels. I understand now.*

*At least face us east. Don’t just throw us in here anyhow, you have to do it properly. You, officer, looking down at me, take off your mask so that I can see your face. Let me ask you something. Why didn’t you put us on your boat? You saw our boat was falling apart. You knew the waters; you knew there were sharks. You had more than enough space. Was it the smell of three-day-old sweat and shit, was it the poverty that dripped off us, were we too black from the scorching sun?*

*No answer? At least take the names of the living so people can know what happened. Oh, you are sending them right back to Haiti; no report, no commission of inquiry. People have to know why we died, officer. You’re closing up the hole. At least mark the grave. Which island is this?*

*You’re pulling away on your vessel leaving us here, not facing east and no record, but you know you can’t get rid of us. You may have buried us here, in this sand, on this island, but we are part of you now.*

*Jacques. Jacques, is that you? I see you found Michelle. Let us go, Desir de Fanmi.*

*A-dZiko Simba*

### **With Everything**

Blues goes with everything  
a parting kiss  
a hunger in the last tongue touch

a nothing taste like goodbye.

Blues  
it goes with everything  
every faltered foot  
echoing  
what was  
a moment in time  
slipping too fast  
too past  
the sea erasing  
prints

Blues goes

it does

with sitting alone  
circles of silence  
devouring bone  
no pill to pop to stop this  
Blues  
no other song will play away  
this grey

Blue

when it comes  
settles  
like brown  
Sepia love turned  
Blue

a wasted wave  
a futile snatch  
an empty hand  
cold and

Blue  
such a constant beat  
such a soft sighing swing

Blues comes and goes with everything

## **Tan Tarde**

(Livicated to Tilford McLintac Urqhart, 8 Oct.1920-7 Apr.2011)

My father who is not my father  
has decided lately  
to start a family

from remnants.

we are not close knit  
more like  
loosely crocheted  
more holes than fabric  
more fabrication than truth.

More good stories than flaws  
in his mind  
he did all  
a man could.  
Kept flies from their eyes.

They lived his nightmare  
unravelling under his fury.

Knotted by his blows  
they lost each other.  
They lost themselves.

Since his diagnosis  
he is hell-bent  
on patchwork.

Muy tarde, demasiado tarde, tanto tiempo  
says my sister who is not my sister.

She will not return from Spain.  
My mother laughs.  
My other sister who is not asks  
if a dog his age  
can really learn new tricks.  
Only cats stitch in time  
to save nine.

But my father who is not my father,  
he won't give up.  
He does not know,  
poor soul;  
he sews dreams  
and reaps delusions.

*Thomas Armstrong*

## **Happy Hour**

It's said that a bar is only as good as its bartender, and that a hotel is only as good as its bar. Henry Drakes was that bartender and Palm Bay was that hotel. Barbados is an island that sits apart from the rest of the Leewards, and except for the dwindling sugar cane harvest, there is little to recommend the old British colony but sun, sea and a smiling people.

"Henry my boy, it's happy hour!"

"Yes Mista Flint, dat is true ... wat yuh would like?"

"Pina colada for the wife and rum punch for the old boy."

Flint's wife smiled. Her husband always ordered for her, and she never once objected. Everyone was happy.

"Henry, seeing you when we walked in this afternoon made my day. You've been here every year we've come down ... must be eighteen years now, I think."

At first Henry tried to pretend he knew them, but at some point the name Flint popped into his head, at about the same time Flint's wife began to speak and her husband cut her off.

"How long have you worked here?"

"Mista Flint, long as dis place bin standin."

"Oh my ... and the hotel's so old," said Flint's wife, managing to get a few words in. Another couple sat at the bar and shortly after two men joined them. Flint addressed the group as if he worked at the hotel.

"This is Henry, the best bartender in Barbados ... perhaps in the world. He's got the best job in the world, that's for sure."

Henry smiled, as he always did, and the other patrons soon addressed him as Henry, just as Flint did. As he mixed the drinks, one of the men spoke.

"Henry, how do you get a job like this anyway? I'd like to apply."

Everyone laughed. Henry smiled too, and as he smiled he thought of the small amount of money he was paid to lubricate pink sun-burnt strangers, of the little chattel home he shared with his wife of thirty years, the small piece of land she worked, of the meager proceeds from that work which she sold in the market, and finally he thought of the old Vauxhall that daily threatened to quit on the back roads of St. Thomas.

"Mista, yuh sure yuh would want dis job? Yuh got tuh stay sober."

"The man's right Jimmy. You'd drink all the profit!"

The patrons broke into laughter once more, as Henry distributed the cocktails and beer. He hadn't seen these guests before but they were soon introduced to him. They acted as if they'd known him for years, and that's the way it always was. Every week, or two weeks, a new set of people arrived and to all of them he was Henry the bartender, the mixer of their drinks, the one person always ready to listen, and one Barbadian they felt they knew. Henry was the island, and the island was Henry. None of them knew him as Henry Drakes, and none of them ever bothered to ask.

The evening shift arrived. Between taking orders and mixing drinks, he'd spent the last thirty minutes trying to tidy up. The job was becoming more tiring with every passing day.

"Drakes boy, yuh lookin tired."

“Blakie, I feelin it, dat true.”

Blakie was Billy Blake, the evening bartender.

“Yuh get some sleep, yuh hear ... an say hello tuh Mabel.”

No sooner had Blake stepped behind the bar than the orders started coming and the blender began to whirl. Henry walked across the one-way street outside the hotel and fumbled with his car keys before opening the driver side door of the old beast. As he turned the key in the ignition, and gently pumped the accelerator, the engine turned over, but refused to start. After about five minutes of rising frustration the damn thing caught, spewing a black cloud of exhaust out the back.

The traffic was bad on the main road, so he followed the coast road, and contemplated the hot meal his wife Mabel would be fixing. The myriad greens and blues of the ocean, and the churning surf, passed by unnoticed. The sea had always been there and always would, just like the unforgiving rock of his tiny island.

It was dark when he pulled into the narrow lane beside his home. The place was small, little more than two rooms, but they had raised a family there and it was *their* home. As he stepped inside the door and quietly removed his shoes, the rattling of pots and pans came from the kitchen. He snuck up behind his wife and held her by her waist. She spun around.

“Henry man, stop dat! I almos drop dis.”

The anger on her face hurt him, and he backed away. Her frown softened into a tiny smile. She put the pot on the counter and held out her arms.

“Come, yuh silly man.”

She held him.

“Yuh tink yuh some young yam ... dat what yuh tink? But darlin yuh lookin real tired ... here,” she took him to the tiny circular table and pulled out a chair, “... sit yuhself down.”

As she returned to the kitchen, “Your favourite tonite ... steamed flyin fish wit rice an peas.”

She was right. That was his favourite meal, especially the way Mabel prepared it. She brought him a glass of fresh-made lemonade and it tasted better than any drink he’d mixed during the whole day at Palm Bay.

“Clinton droppin by, or so he say.”

“Woman, yuh jus spoil ma dinner.”

“Henry, he’s your son yuh know.”

“... an he yours too.”

“Look darlin, de boy sound happy ... he jus want tuh drop by is all.”

“Ok, but when I havin dinner, I havin dinner ... an ain’t nobody gettin in de way a dat.”

As he spoke strains of rap and dub filled the air outside. A car door slammed shut. Before Henry could turn around, a loud knocking shook the louvers of the front door. Mabel rushed by, and soon filling the open doorframe was the tall figure of their only son, Clinton. Behind the young man, on the road outside under a streetlight, Henry could see the gleaming hood of a silver Mercedes Benz.

“Mommy!”

The boy hugged his mother, as he set down a large shopping bag. Henry remained sitting.

“Daddy, evenin ... how yuh goin?”

“Hungry, if yuh want tuh know ... Mabel, how de dinner comin?”

“Yes dear I\_\_\_”

Clinton interrupted. “Yah ... sorry for dat ... business yuh know.”

Henry shook his head. If his son wanted to refer to what he did to acquire money as business, that was up to him but Henry was having no part of it. Clinton followed his mother into the kitchen. Henry sat at the table sipping his drink, getting the odd bit of their conversation.

“... Mommy, look at dis ...”.

“Wait ... why dat lovely ... but de money ...”

“... it fuh yuh ... ain't no money ... yuh like it?”

“... but it get dirty ...”

“... hold it ... here.”

A few moments passed. Henry couldn't take it anymore. He roughly pushed the chair back and stood in the kitchen doorway. His wife was holding a new dress close to her chest.

“Where de dinner?”

“Dear ... soon ... look at what Clinton bring?”

“I ain't want tuh look at nuhtin he bring.”

Mabel tilted her head, frowning, as if pleading with her husband. The boy's eyes became small and his face hardened.

“Henry please, the boy tryin\_\_”

“Woman, he ain't tryin hard enough.”

“Mommy, nuh matter what I do, it ain't never enough for dis man ... never enough!”

“Yes, dat true ... cause dis man, “ Henry patted his chest hard, “ ... cause dis man ain't never do nuhtin he shamed of ... nuhtin, yuh hear.”

“Wat yuh tryin tuh say ... say it, go on, say it.”

Henry and his son where standing close now, too close for Mabel. She tried to get between them.

“Woman, get back ... get back!”

They stepped out into the main room, near the table.

“Yuh want me tuh say it do yuh ... tuh say dat yuh a man. Yuh tink cause yuh can get babies from all sort a woman, dat yuh can sell yuh smoke tuh tourists dat yuh a man ... yuh ain't no man at all.”

Henry loudly sucked air disdainfully between his teeth. He took the shopping bag from his wife's hand and tossed it at his son. His son laughed.

“All right ... all right ... I goin ... I goin. Mommy des for yuh ... nuh matter what he say.”

He set the bag down, and grinned at his father.

“So yuh a man is yuh? Yuh ain't no man ... yuh a coward ... yes yuh are ... a coward. All des years yuh smilin at de white man ... ‘yas sir’ dis and ‘yas sir dat’ an yuh smile sooo sweet ... yuh call dat a man. Yuh de great bartender at Palm Bay, smilin an servin drinks ... kissin tourist white ass ... yas dat a man ... a real man.”

As he walked through the door, he looked back.

“Yas, yuh right, I sellin a little weed tuh tourists, and when I do I smile too, jus like yuh. So yuh see, Daddy, you an I ain't so different, it just dat yuh get pay so little ... so little for a life.”

The silver Benz threw a cloud of dust into the night air. A silence descended over the house. Without uttering a word, Mabel returned to the kitchen. She kept her eyes on the floor, unable to look at her husband. As muted sounds came from the kitchen, Henry walked outside and sat on the back porch. A single firefly flickered intermittently, describing a dotted path through the tamarind trees, as a cool December breeze chilled the back of his neck. From the house he heard,

“Henry, come dear ... dinner out ... come.”

He didn't move but remained staring at the grey fields of flowing cane. He heard soft footsteps from behind.

"Henry, yuh ain't want yuh dinner?"

He shook his head. She sat beside him, and for a few moments they didn't speak. Mabel glanced at him, but he looked away. She placed her hands on his shoulders. He fought back tears. She rocked him back and forth. Emotions surged over his body, and she held him until the waves of sadness passed.

"Clinton was very wrong tuh say wat he say."

"No Mabel, de boy right ... he right. I ain't no man ... he right."

She turned him to face her. Though her eyes glistened, she held him so tight that that it hurt.

"No ... yuh wrong! He ain't right! Now yuh listen tuh me! Yuh more a man dan any a dem, yuh hear ma ... more dan any an dem. Clinton so wrong ... so wrong. In dis little house yuh raise a family ... in dis little house!" she slammed her fist against the wooden siding.

"Everyday yuh go intuh dat hotel, and yuh ain't once complain ... not once, an yuh bin true tuh me."

He smiled up at her.

"Yas, I know yuh bin ... any yuh did all dat fuh yuh family ... all dat. I ain't want nuh udder man ... none a dem. Yuh a real man tuh me."

She kissed his forehead, and he hugged her tight. They laughed through their tears as they almost fell off the porch.

"Man come ... I need sometin from ma man ... come."

She took him by the hand and led him into the bedroom.

By the time they'd finished they were both glowing with sweat, and Mabel's hair was matted against her forehead, and her curls fell over her shoulders in wet strands, just as they did when they were young. She looked down on him as Henry lay back on the bed. Every muscle in his body had relaxed into a state of happiness.

"Again?"

He looked at her with a mixture of shock and fear. Mabel jabbed him and laughed.

"I only kiddin ... I'll warm up de dinner."

As she dressed she winked at him.

"Yuh ain't lost nuhtin boy."

The day was like most days in Barbados, hot and sunny. A clear blue sky stretched from one horizon to the other, and sounds of birds chirping could be heard over the gentle surf as the first wave of tourists began to hit the beach. Henry was at his station once again. He cut thin slices of limes and arranged the grated nutmeg and bottles of bitters in the same order he'd always done. Old man Flint approached.

"Henry, my man, good to see you looking so happy."

"Yas, Mista Flint, got tuh be happy."

"I'll start the day with a rum punch please."

Henry set to work on his best drink, and set aside two glasses. He spread the nutmeg on top and slipped in the maraschino cherries before placing both drinks on the bar. The old man protested.

"But Henry, happy hour isn't until four."

"Yas, I know Mista Flint, but yuh an I know dat it always happy hour down here."

*Paula Obe Thomas*

### **Come**

My tongue traces your back  
as morning shadows trace the northern range  
from the depths of your valley  
sliding down the bank of your thighs  
i cup the sweet  
early morning dew off your breasts  
gently i lick until they peak  
would you object if i nibble  
scratch teeth on sensitivity  
light stomach hairs  
erecting passion  
moving down  
blowing softly upon your navel  
palms running across mounds of beauty  
and would you be my canvas  
may I dip into your well  
and taste your ink  
before i paint sunrise inside you  
head buried inside volcanic rushes  
fingers reaching  
searching for your truth  
shhhhhhhh  
come for me.

*Jacqueline Bishop*

### **Hagiography**

*Somebody was always going somewhere,*

My mother told me, that's the story of our family.  
Her mother left her a six-week old to work  
as a domestic in Kingston, to work for a family  
where the boys would always try to touch her,

*You have such pretty legs Emma ---*

As for her father he made the journey beyond  
the shores of the island. When he was leaving



he took with him a woman, who used to be friends  
with her mother, all of them living in the same yard.

*Remember I tell you this as your grandmother:  
Man cubbitch like star apple leaf.*

Your great grandfather, he came all the way from  
the other side of the island, from Hanover,  
came following two sisters who were pretty enough,  
and brown enough, to get work with foreigners.

*He spent some time in the sugarcane fields in Cuba.*

In Portland, of course, he met your great-grandmother.  
I tell you all of this so that you know:

*No, it wasn't that hard for me to leave you children  
behind and come by myself to America.*

### **CAPTAIN'S LOGBOOK (1)**

So far, so good --- twelve days  
down the Amacura river. South America.  
The water as clear as any non-reflecting mirror.  
But all we have come across so far  
are two groups of Indians: all men.  
No good for selling in the Barbadoes.

### **CAPTAIN'S LOGBOOK (2)**

I have instructed my men --  
stay away from the male Indians, especially,  
the warlike bellicose Caribs.  
The laws are now such that I do not want any trouble.  
In any case Indian women, all women,  
are that much easier to handle.  
All you need to do is show them something  
in the cupped palm of your hand that glitters.  
Plus with women, you get a better return  
on your money. If they are young enough,  
and strong enough, you can easily  
put them to breed with somebody.

## ZEMI

The three boys were there the night a fire brightened the sky. When no-one was looking they signaled to each other, picking up what looked like a smooth wooden sculpture that had fallen close to one of them and disappearing with it into the thick dark night. Since the old man whose house was on fire was going on so about how he had to get his things out, they knew that what they had was valuable. At the very least they knew that it was valuable to the old man.

When they got to the mouth of the cave that they used as their hideout and looked at what they had taken by flashlight, you could not hide the disappointment on each of the boys' faces. What they had was a dark polished wooden object that looked as though it was a dodo bird with a long thin piece of wood down its back that ended in a flat base on which the bird could stand. Altogether, the bird was the length of one of their hands.

"But what kind of old foolishness is this that we waste we time so tek way?" Derek wanted to know. "This thing look exactly like something that people carve up quick and sell to the tourist ships down at Bay."

"The tourist things down at Bay better than this," another boy, Carlton, spoke up. "Because at least with the things down at Bay, you know what the hell they carving. This thing look like it part-bird part-man part-something else." He shuddered. "I just hope we don't take up crosses upon ourselves when we take up this thing eh tonight!"

For the longest time Hugh, the other boy in the group, who attended Titchfield High School, did not speak. He just kept running his hands over the smooth dark wood, which he was sure was mahogany. Someone had taken the time to really work on the piece of wood. From far down inside himself he dredged up a memory of a teacher in first form telling him something about how the first inhabitants of Jamaica - Tainos, though most Jamaicans called them Arawaks - carved things that looked like this. It was the first time he had heard the names. He had forgotten exactly what the difference was between the two, Tainos and Arawaks, but he remembered the teacher being quite adamant about the point. The teacher had told them that, whether they knew it or not, the Tainos were right there with them on the island, in the foods that they ate and in some of the words that they spoke, though most people could not see this. If they had not been so far from Kingston, if it had not been something like a four-hour drive there and back, he said he would have taken them to see the Taino pieces that were in the collection of the National Gallery of Jamaica. The boy kept looking down at the statue. As it was, the best that he could do, the teacher had said, was show them a couple of drawings. This carving looked like one of them.

The boy kept his mouth shut. His friends already thought he was strange enough, what with his love of girly subjects like art and literature. When he passed his common entrance examination to attend Titchfield High, both his friends, who had not passed their examination, had almost stopped speaking to him. Only idiot boys took and passed their common entrance exams. They had looked at him with scorn, calling him a sissy and not wanting him near them because people might think they were sissified too. He would not say anything to upset them now. He had decided to come on the raid with the other two because it was such an easy target, an old man's house on fire. Though his grandmother did not know it, he had started skipping classes, picking pockets and doing other mischief with his friends, both of whom had now dropped out of secondary school. Lately they had been going on more and more raids, taking their loot back to the hideout.

"Just plain foolishness, this is!" the tall light skinned Derek yawned and said. "I can't believe I come out of my bed for this foolishness!"

Derek was what most of the girls in the district considered 'nice', since he had the eyes of a cat and the pretty yellow skin of a ripe banana. His father, people said, had been a sailor, though like most of the boys in the district he did not know who his father was. He was being raised by his grandmother, while his mother worked as a housekeeper in Kingston.

Again Carlton spoke up. "When I hear the old man's house was on fire, I figure that they must have something in that house worth taking, for the old man always going on about his 'valuables'." He took the carving from Hugh. "It's a good thing we luckier this afternoon than we was tonight, with the bangles and chains and earrings we get today, for we won't get a thing for this."

The other boys nodded.

"Well, all in a day's work" Carlton said, saying something he heard his uncle say after cutting and selling his bananas in the Bay. "Yes, all in a day's work."

"So what we going do with it?" Hugh wanted to know.

"This piece of old foolishness?" Carlton was now turning the carving over and over again in his hand. "Might as well we leave it some place far in the cave, which is where it seems to belong."

With that he tossed the carving in a corner where it landed with a loud crack.

The carving would stay in the cave for the next couple of years, kicked out of the way as the boys brought more things to their hideout. By then they had graduated from pickpocketing and were staging more elaborate and daring robberies. Wearing masks and carrying high-powered weapons they entered a jewellery store in Buff Bay and made off with every last piece of jewellery in the store. Then they robbed the Courts Furniture Store in Annatto Bay, right before Christmas when most people were finalizing their purchases of new furniture. Next it was the McDonald's on Fletcher's Lane and the harberdashery in St. Margaret's Bay. By then Hugh had long dropped out of school, and told his grandmother that he had a job out at Boundbrook, though he could not tell her what exactly he was doing or who he was working for. Boundbrook was miles and miles away from Nonsuch.

The other two boys gave their grandmothers similar stories.

Of course the people of Portland felt that it was people outside of their parish who were going on with all of these robberies, people from Kingston, surely, who had the expertise to do the kinds of things that were happening, though a few people kept saying that no, it must be someone local, because the robbers knew exactly when to strike and how to strike before they melted back in the bushes as though they were duppies.

Others pointed to the fact that these things had only started happening when the new highway was built, linking far away Portland to the cities of Kingston and Montego Bay. One pastor noted that since the highway, since all the 'new developments', things had gone downhill in the parish. People could drive in and out as they had a mind to. At least when the roads been bad, the pastor said, it wasn't so easy to move about.

The boys loved to hear people talking about them. Sometimes they even joined in the conversation. No, it was not someone from the parish, one of them would say. Yes, it was someone from the parish, another of them would say. Then the three of them would start arguing with each other. When alone, they would have a roaring laugh about how stupid people were. "Imagine, they thinking is some big-time criminals from Kingston doing these things! When is only we! Is only we!" The boys could not stop laughing.

Hugh rose to become the acknowledged brains of the operation. He was the one that talked strategy. The other two boys were the hands behind the trigger. Because of their success they now believed in their own invincibility. Hugh was careful however to warn against ostentation. They did not in any way want to call attention to themselves. When they made a really big haul, he encouraged them to go and reap something in their land or try to get ‘additional work to account for the extra things that they would be buying.

One day, when they were all relaxing in the hideout from a particularly successful run at a nightclub the night before, Hugh’s eyes fell on the sculpture. Over the years, as it was tossed here and there, more and more pieces had broken off. Carlton and Derek were for throwing it out; the thing always gave them the creeps, but something about it appealed to Hugh and he was for it staying in a far dark corner of the cave. The old man from whom they had stolen the carving had died a few years before, and every time Hugh looked at it he winced. For years the man would talk about the carving, how in his carelessness he had let it burn up in the fire, how he had found it in a cave with all sorts of strange markings and symbols painted in red pigment. From the minute he found it, the old man said, he knew it had a strange power. It had belonged to the first people who lived on the island. No, Hugh yawned and said to himself yet again, the carving could not be a zemi (by then he had remembered the word the teacher had used when he showed them the pictures at school), because zemis were rare and precious things and the carving they had did not in any way look rare or precious. He turned away from it; they had work to do.

Hugh had decided that they should rob the big hotel at Treasure Man’s Cove. He would say later that he always had a sense of foreboding about the whole thing, but the hotel was right there and the days they cased the place, there was no security. This robbery would be as easy as all the others. But this time the Port Antonio Bay Police, whom they had been laughing at for years, were waiting and when they arrived in their masks, they opened fire. Dexter died on the spot. Carlton died on the way to the hideout. Hugh was shot in the arm and the police with dogs would follow him all the way up to the hideout where his grandmother would beg for his life and plead with the police.

“Do, mister policeman do, don’t finish him off right here, before his old grandmother. Don’t do it. Don’t do it before his grandmother. Do, mister policeman do, I know a grandmother grow you up too.”

When an inventory of the cave was done, the old wooden carving would be found there, almost in pieces, among the jewelry and appliances still in the cave. It would have been thrown away except that it exerted a pull on a young police officer, who asked for the strange looking object. The young policeman would take the carving, wrapped up tight, in a week-old newspaper to the National Gallery, where people’s eyes would pop open when they saw what the policeman had walked in with. The sculpture was a zemi. When missing pieces were tediously recovered from the floor of the cave and restored it turned out to be one of the most intact zemis ever found on the island.

From his jail cell, Hugh laughed a sardonic little laugh as he read in the newspaper that the carving was worth untold amounts of American dollars. He had always known that there was something special about it but the other two had refused to listen. When he argued for taking it to his old school teacher - who would know for sure what it was and what to do with it – they waved him away.

“Leave it over there,” they would say, “keep it in the dark. You take it out and someone recognize it as belonging to the old man and we bring eyes on us. Something ‘bout that thing we just don’t like.”

Hugh continued laughing, even though the warden was coming towards him with a hard wooden baton, telling him to shut up, he was causing a disturbance in the prison. A precious piece of Jamaica’s heritage, worth more than all the things he and his two dead friends had stolen and sold! A real authentic zemi. The policeman who had taken it in would be paid so much that he and his family would be set for the

rest of their lives. Hugh's laughter rang out long and loud in the jail cell, and, despite the baton coming down time and time again on his head, trying to silence him, Hugh could not stop laughing.

*Keisha Lynne Ellis*

### **Being Herself**

It was the overall lack of class and taste that Charlene found impossible to bear: dingy walls; worn, stained carpet; chipped dishes; tacky figurines of Jesus; framed Bible quotes; furniture covered in yellowed, cracked plastic; her overweight mother in a maid's uniform. Charlene felt trapped, a hostage to mediocrity, suffocated by the lack of ambition this house represented.

"Mummy," she whined, "why can't you just take me?"

"Charlene," her mother responded slowly, tiredly, "I just get home from work. I need to sit down for little while." Marjorie Cooper spooned sugar into the mug of herbal tea she was steeping. She closed her eyes and brought the mug close to her face. The steam floated up to greet her, caress her. She took a sip and exhaled audibly. When she opened her eyes Charlene was still there, looking at her expectantly.

"Mummy, before you get comfortable you might as well take me."

Marjorie closed her eyes again and took a deep breath. When she opened them she reached for her car keys. "You ready?" she asked her daughter.

Charlene smiled and gave her mother a hug. "Thank you, Mummy! I just have to put on my shoes." She disappeared from the kitchen into the back bedroom.

It took Charlene twenty minutes to find her shoes and when she finally emerged from her room she wore a completely different outfit.

"Okay, let's go," she said. Marjorie still had half a mug of tea left but she set it down and pulled herself out of the chair.

They stepped out into the warm night and Charlene looked around, curling her lip. During the day the neighbourhood was an active one and people tended to gather outside. The houses were small and close to each other so conversations often grew over stone walls or though chain-link fences, in cracked driveways and in front of rusted iron gates. Men gathered under the shady silk cotton tree to drink, smoke, talk and laugh loudly. They constructed a table out of concrete blocks and a salvaged piece of plywood. They'd sit on plastic crates and play Dominoes until their rum ran out and they were forced to go back home to their wives. Old women shuffled with plastic food store bags in their hands; young women sashayed with babies on their hips. Gangs of dogs roamed the streets, tipping over garbage bins and barking menacingly at people walking by.

Charlene was plotting her escape from this neighbourhood. As it stood she spent as little time as possible in her mother's house but she couldn't wait until she was out completely. She envisioned a house out East, or a condominium on Paradise Island, sometimes, when she was feeling especially ambitious, she'd envision herself in a mansion in Lyford Cay.

They got into the little green car and Marjorie turned the key. The car grumbled and complained but she was able to eventually coax it to a start. Other cars zipped through the short streets and the hum of their acceleration and squeal of their stops created a rhythm. Aggressive, bass heavy music thumped so violently from many of them that the roofs of the little houses seemed to rattle. The neighbourhood dogs barked incessantly, as if they were discussing some crucial matter – politics or Junkanoo. The weary car creaked its way through the narrow streets and added its own rusty voice to the chorus of sounds that cluttered the air.

To walk to Arawak Cay from her mother's house would have taken about fifteen minutes, but Charlene was wearing high heels. It was the neighbourhood that she had grown up in but it wasn't safe for her to walk through it at night. Many of the children she had played with as a child still lived in the same houses, but they had grown apart over the years. Charlene had chosen a different path in life and had in

turn become a different person. Her clothes, her interests, the way she spoke separated her from those who had never striven for anything better. She sensed her neighbours' envy, and she was afraid to walk past them at night.

It wasn't a long enough drive to have a real conversation. Marjorie asked Charlene how school was and Charlene felt obliged to ask how work was. She braced herself for the response. Charlene hated hearing about her mother's work. She didn't want to think about her cleaning dirty bathrooms, pulling strands of tourist hair out of clogged drains and touching their dirty bed sheets. She told herself, though, that it was good for her to hear about it. Having a constant reminder of what was waiting for her if she failed, Charlene stayed focused on achieving her goals.

They pulled into the bustling Cay and the car squealed to a stop outside of the busiest restaurant on the strip. Charlene did little to hide her eagerness to get out, away from her mother and her car. She said a quick thank you and pulled the door handle. The door didn't open. She yanked at it a few more times, doing all she could to hold back the expletive that banged against her clenched teeth.

"You forget that handle don't work, aye? And that window don't go down. I gon' have to let you out." Marjorie stepped out of the car, still wearing her janitress' uniform and waddled around the car to open the door.

Charlene was mortified; luckily the darkness of her skin shielded the redness that crept into her cheeks. She got out quickly and scanned the various groups of people dotted along the strip for anyone she knew. Not immediately recognizing anyone, she let out a short sigh of relief and thanked God for small favours. Needing to put as much distance as possible between her mother and herself, she darted onto the sidewalk, moving as quickly as she could in her pointy-toed, high-heeled shoes and tight purple dress. She heard the car groan down the street and not until the sound faded completely did she feel she could relax and be herself.

She hated having to ask Marjorie for rides. Kelly, her best friend since she was thirteen, had a car but Charlene didn't like asking her to pick her up from home, especially at night. Kelly was really pretty. Her mother was black and her father white and she had come out a perfect blend, with long curly hair that fell to the middle of her back, big green eyes, and smooth caramel skin. Her car was pretty too – a white BMW, with leather seats and shiny everything. The guys that hung on the corners and sat on the walls would be sure to harass her, and maybe worse, whenever she came through the neighbourhood.

Charlene checked her watch. Eight-thirty. She was late. She went into the restaurant and looked around for her friends. When she opened the door the cool air-conditioned air rushed out to embrace her. She welcomed it. Neither her mother's house nor car had a working air-conditioner and the early days of summer in Nassau could be brutal. The restaurant's décor was a mish-mash of colourfully ornate Junkanoo costumes, drawings of coconut trees, pictures of the Bahamian Olympic gold medalists and posters of Bob Marley. Calypso music floated in the air along with the smell of deep-fried conch fritters. Though the street out front was alive with activity, inside the restaurant wasn't very busy and Charlene quickly determined that her friends were not there yet. She stepped back outside into the thick humidity, already dialing Kelly's number on her phone.

"Hey, are you here yet?" she asked when Kelly answered.

"No, sorry! Don't hate me. We'll be there in five minutes. I couldn't find anything to wear. I thought I had an outfit picked but when I put it on I realized how fat it made me look so I had to find something else. Then when I went for Ashli she wasn't ready either. But we're almost there. Ten minutes."

Charlene flipped the phone closed and put it back in the sleek purse she kept tucked under her arm. She looked around for anyone she might know. She saw a few familiar faces, but no one she could strike up a legitimate conversation with. She would have to wait alone until Kelly and Ashli came.

She decided to wait inside so that she wouldn't have to worry about sweat stains creeping onto her dress. She took a seat at the bar. Her short skirt rode up even further and she saw the eyes of the men around her dart to her thighs. She quickly turned and tucked her legs under the bar. It didn't take long to get the bartender's attention, and she said sweetly, "May I have a Miami Vice, please? With rum." The bartender brought her the candy-cane coloured drink and she sipped it happily, feeling the rum and sugar tickle her

mouth.

She was looking over her shoulder for her friends every few moments so she saw when the Rasta walked in. He swaggered into the restaurant, confident and colourful, wearing a bright red shirt, and a cloth of red, gold and green tied around his head. The turban towered so high that he had to bow to get through the door. He saw her seeing him, though she quickly looked away and focused on her drink. She could feel him walking toward her and cringed visibly when he sat at the bar next to her. There had been other stools available when she walked in and now Charlene wished that she had chosen one that was better sheltered by tourists. She took her phone out of her purse, flipped it open and fiddled with the buttons. Undaunted by her pretence of occupation he swiveled his stool so that he was facing her and said, "Goodnight, empress." She ignored him, praying desperately for her phone to ring.

"All I say is 'goodnight'. It ain't like I ask you to marry me."

Charlene rolled her eyes and sighed. He was one of those. One of those guys who felt that it was a girl's duty to respond to his advances. One of those who thought that any woman who didn't succumb to his charm was a bitch. Charlene had experienced a lot of men like him. Those who would shout insults at her as she passed because she wouldn't stop to talk to them. She cursed her dark skin. Because they were the same colour these men thought that they were the same, that they were equals. This kind of man didn't bother her friends. Even if they tried to talk to Ashli or Kelly, they never expected anything. Charlene, though, was black like them, and that made her worthy of their disrespect.

Charlene turned and looked at the man next to her. He was ugly. His face was narrow and his features sharp. A sparse, coarse beard traced his jaw, covered his chin, and framed his mouth. Random patches of hair were spattered on his cheeks. His skin was dark and obviously battered by the sun. Darker still, were his eyes.

"Good night," she said, careful not to be rude. The last thing she wanted was for him to make a scene. He smiled, shamelessly displaying a double row of misshapen yellow teeth.

"That purple cloth look good on your skin," he said to her. She rolled her eyes again. Here we go, she thought. Her dress was short and tight and demanded the attention of men, but she preferred if all but a select few kept their comments to themselves.

"That colour match you aura." For lack of a better response and because she had no idea how to begin trying to understand what that meant, Charlene rolled her eyes once again. She turned to face the television on the other side of the bar.

"You still in school?" He had a slow drawl in his voice.

"Yes I am," said Charlene, "I go to Trinity Academy." She said the name of the school to intimidate him. Trinity Academy was the most expensive school on the island, in the country. She wanted him to realize that she was...well, she wouldn't say *better* than him, but she was definitely beyond his reach. He wouldn't know that she went there for free, that she had gotten a scholarship when she was twelve and that her mother's paycheck wouldn't cover the cost of one term's books.

He continued, "So you is take science then. You know bout energy." Charlene didn't understand what he meant and had no idea how she should respond.

Yes, she knew the word and understood what it meant in a variety of contexts, but she had never been asked if she knew *it*, generically. She decided that it was a silly question and refused to answer.

He continued anyway. "Energy can't get create or destroy, right? So it always there, always been there. The same energy that was around from the beginning of time is still floating round us right now. And ain't no new energy in the world. It's the same vibes that create the universe that create you and me. And them vibes is come from your body, and make it glow. Yours glowing purple." He took a gulp of his Guinness.

All of this confused Charlene very much. He sounded like he belonged on television or in a book. She had never heard anyone speak like this in real life. She couldn't tell what to make of this man who had forced himself into her personal space and now expected her to engage in a discourse about energy, the universe and auras. She searched his dark eyes for a clue about his motives. Was he serious? Was he high? Did he believe what he was saying? Did he see her feather earrings and beaded necklace and assume she was some sort of new age hippie? Did he think that she would be impressed? Was he being facetious? Was

she supposed to laugh? Was he insane?

Charlene blinked, realizing she had fixed her gaze too intently on him.

She rolled her eyes. "Whatever," she said. Her confusion gave way to annoyance. *Whatever?* Was that the best she could come up with? She was one of the top students at the most expensive school in the country and she had let a Rasta reduce her to the point of uttering senseless, empty words. She turned to check the door. Where were her friends?

The Rasta smiled. Charlene scowled. They sat in silence for a while, sipping their drinks. The bartender came up to them. "Y'all ordering something to eat?"

"No," said Charlene, "we're not together. He's only sitting next to me."

"Aw, my bad," said the bartender and walked away.

"Why you have to say it like that?"

Charlene looked at the Rasta. Knowing full well what he meant, she said, "What do you mean?"

"No. We're not together. He's only sitting next to me," he mimicked in a high-pitched voice, exaggerating Charlene's diction.

She swiveled the stool to face him. "Firstly, I don't talk like that. Secondly, we're not together. I was sitting here, minding my own business and you just came and sat next to me."

"Yeah, and you want make sure no one think you with me."

Now Charlene smiled. She made her voice soft and condescending. "Oh my, poor baby. Big bad man like you let me hurt his feelings?"

"I never say I was a bad man. And I don't know why women think men don't have no feelings."

Charlene once again found herself with no response and in the uncomfortable position of having to figure out the motives behind what he said. Where were Kelly and Ashli? She had used the last of her cell phone credit during the last conversation and couldn't call to see if they were any closer. She checked her phone for missed calls or messages. None. A frustrated sigh passed through her lips.

When she looked back up she caught the Rasta's eyes. Or, more accurately, his eyes caught hers and held them for a moment. She blinked and took a sip of her daiquiri.

"What's your name?"

"Charlene," she said before she could stop herself. Why didn't she say Tiffany? Tiffany was her stage name, her alias for when she found herself trapped in situations like this.

"Hi, Charlene. My name is Roger."

What made him think that she cared?

"Charlene, can I get your number?" She looked at him but didn't respond. "And you can't even lie and say you don't have no phone cause you ain't stop looking at it since I sit down." Despite herself, Charlene smiled. The stagnant remains of a Backwood cigar on his breath were stirred by the tide of Guinness he poured into his mouth. Strangely, instead of pushing her away, the scent tugged at her, tempted her to inch closer.

Roger took his phone out of his pocket and typed her name into the address book. "C-H-A-R-L-E-N-E right?" She nodded. What was she doing? This Rasta was not what she needed, wasn't even what she thought she wanted. What would her friends think? People like him occupied a different plane than the one she found herself on since attending Trinity Academy. She lived in a different world, but hadn't yet fully secured her place. Yes, she went to the school and attended the parties, but she was always reminded, mostly by herself, that she had been invited into this realm. She had no real ties and if she were to ever become unworthy she could easily be evicted, thrown from the circle and left to resume her life in the lower class.

No one seemed to hold her mother's lack of sophistication and money against her. She always imagined that they respected her for rising above the circumstances of her birth. But if she were to choose to associate with a man like this, this man who probably rode a bicycle and sold peanuts and tangerines by stop lights, she would prove that she wasn't as smart, as classy, as good as Kelly or Ashli. But still, for some reason, against her will and better judgment, her lips began to form the digits of her phone number. She stopped when she felt a soft hand on her shoulder. She turned and saw Kelly and Ashli.

"We're so sorry!" they said in unison.



“That’s okay,” replied Charlene, quickly standing up. Her heart thumped in her chest like she had just been caught with her hand in a stranger’s purse. “Let’s get a table. I’m starving.”

She turned briefly to look at Roger and mumbled, “Goodnight,” so softly that she barely heard herself.

Roger did nothing to give her away. He simply placed his left hand over his heart, bowed his head slightly and said, “Bless night, empress.”

They hadn’t taken five steps away from the bar when the girls burst into a fit of giggles. “Omigod, Cha, we’re so sorry,” said Ashli.

“How long was that guy talking to you?” asked Kelly.

“Omigod,” said Charlene, “Forever. He was so weird. And his breath stank. Don’t ever leave me alone again.” They giggled some more.

At their table, Charlene chose a seat facing the exit. She and her friends chattered excitedly about the same things they always talked about, but Charlene was on edge. While her lips took part in the conversation her heart fluttered in her stomach. Eventually, she saw Roger and all his colours walk out of the door, and it wasn’t until she was sure that he was gone that she was able to relax.

“What are you guys gonna have?” she asked her friends.

“I think I want the crack conch,” said Ashli, tucking her long light brown hair behind her ear. It was so soft and wispy that it promptly fell back over her eyes. “They have the best crack conch here. Oprah really liked it. She even mentioned it on her show once.”

“Really?” asked Kelly.

Ashli continued, “Yeah. Remember when she was here filming at Atlantis? My cousin works at VIP relations there so she was responsible for taking care of her. You know, like making sure she got everything she needed. Anyway, she said that Oprah’s really nice and was really interested in experiencing authentic Bahamian culture, so one day my cousin brought her here for lunch. She had the crack conch and fell in love. So the next day she talked about it on her show.”

“Cool,” said Kelly, “Well I’ll have the crack conch too then.”

Charlene wanted the steamed snapper but didn’t dare order it. It would be impossible to look cute while eating a whole fish.

“Well, I’m getting the conch too,” she said, “Maybe we should get one order and share it. We don’t want to look bloated at the party.” Her friends agreed and commended her on her foresight.

When the food came they picked at it gingerly.

“It is good,” said Kelly, “Oprah knows what she’s talking about.” Ashli nodded in agreement. Charlene thought that it tasted like fried shoe soles with salt and ketchup. Her mother’s crack conch was better by a long shot. She didn’t mention this though; instead she just ate the fries.

When they had eaten all that they would allow themselves they gathered their things to leave.

“Wait a second,” said Kelly. “We should get drinks for the road. We don’t want to walk into the party sober. It’ll take too long to start having fun.” Her friends agreed. They went to the bar and sat down. Charlene sat in the middle of Kelly and Ashli and motioned at the bartender. When he came she said “We want three shots of tequila, and three coconut rums and orange juice.” Charlene was happy that he saw her with her friends so that he could see that she really wasn’t there with Roger.

The bartender placed the drinks in front of them, along with a salt shaker and three pieces of lime. Together they licked the back of their hands and sprinkled on salt. On the count of three they licked the salt, poured the tequila down their throat and sucked on the lime. They all shuddered a little and took sips of their chaser. Charlene remembered when she found it difficult to do a tequila shot; how she would have to fight to hold back the vomit it induced. Now, she was used to it.

The girls went to the bathroom, made sure their make-up was flawless and that their hair was behaving and then got in Kelly’s car. She drove quickly to the hotel where the party was being held. They left the care to be valet parked sauntered, drinks in hand, into the ballroom.

The rest of Charlene’s night was a collage of strong drinks, loud music, close dancing, and groping hands. Hours later, lying in Kelly’s big bed wrapped up in her soft sheets, she quietly thanked God for

getting her home safely. It was a long drive from the hotel to Kelly's house and Kelly had been drinking. She lay next to her snoring, and Charlene waited patiently for the room to stop spinning.

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"Wake up. Wake up. Wake up." Charlene opened her eyes and saw Kelly standing over her, as fresh and bright as an hibiscus, wearing a bikini. "The sun is shining, the weather is sweet," she sang. "I wanna go in the pool." Charlene pulled herself out of the bed. The pool sounded like a good idea. She went over to Kelly's drawers and helped herself to a swim suit – a plain black bikini; there was no need to dress up.

Wearing only their swim suits, the girls trotted down the stairs and stopped in the kitchen. Kelly's mother, Deborah Carwin, sat at the counter with coffee and a cigarette, reading a magazine.

"Morning, Mummy."

"Morning, Aunt Deb."

"Morning, party animals," she smiled. "You think y'all could have made any more noise coming in last night – or should I say this morning?"

The girls smiled sheepishly as they remembered how they had stumbled up the stairs, bumping into walls and each other, and laughing hysterically.

"Sorry," they said in unison.

Deborah smiled and exhaled a puff of smoke. "You know I'm only teasing. I'm glad you girls had a good time."

Deborah and Michael Carwin were both exceptionally kind to Charlene. They made her feel so welcome and worthy that she considered their house to be her home. She slept over often and was always treated like a member of the family. They invited her out to dinner with them, and on family outings, and had even taken her on a few trips to Miami.

Charlene opened the fridge and got the orange juice. She filled two glasses and gave one to Kelly.

"Aunt Deb, you wanna go in the pool with us?"

"Not today darlings. I'm on my way to get my nails done. Michael and I have another cocktail party to go to tonight." She rolled her eyes. Charlene was fascinated by this woman.

Deborah Carwin, formerly Deborah Rolle, had grown up not far from where her mother lived. In fact the two women had known each other when they were children and even gone to the same school. But Deborah had chosen a different path in life. Right out of high school she got a secretarial job at a law office where she met Michael, a British expatriate who had just joined the firm. According to Deb, it was love at first sight and a year later they were married.

Marjorie had gotten a job as a cook in a small restaurant and had fallen in love with a man who was married to someone else. Shortly after Charlene was born the restaurant had closed and her father's wife had had her second child. He told Marjorie that he couldn't afford to take care of three children so Marjorie took the first job she could find. Now, while Marjorie cleaned toilets, Deborah got manicures and went to so many cocktail parties that they became mundane. She was Charlene's role model. In fact, she told Charlene often that she reminded her of herself at that age and nothing made Charlene prouder.

Outside the temperature was already well into the eighties and the girls jumped quickly into the pool. Kelly dipped her head under the water and when she surfaced her hair was slick and shiny. It looked like the sleek silk dresses that Deborah wore. Charlene bobbed in the shallow end, careful not to even get the nape of her neck wet. While they waded they talked about how much fun the night before had been and agreed to take it easy that night. Maybe they'd just go for sushi or something.

When Charlene thought that she had gotten as much sun as her dark tone could tolerate she got out of the pool and stretched out on a chair in the shade. She picked up the magazine that someone, probably Deb, had left on the table. She flipped through it, taking note of the fashion and sex tips that filled the pages. She felt someone walk up behind her and turned casually to see who it was.

When she saw him a small gasp flew from her lips and her heart pounded in her chest. Roger. The man leaned his bicycle against the wall and picked up the rake that had been left out for him. Oh thank God, she thought. Thank God. It was only the gardener. After her heart slowed to its regular pace and her

breathing was back to normal Charlene began to worry. Why was she still thinking about Roger and how could she be interested in anyone that could be mistaken for a yard man? She couldn't believe that she had almost given him her number. What was she thinking? There was something about his eyes. There must have been. What else could have drawn Charlene so close, so quickly? Everything else about him was unattractive, repulsive even, but there was a twinkle in his eye, a spark in his dark pupils. Charlene had always said that she liked 'pretty eyes'. Shades of blue were her favourite but the eyes of this stranger were far from blue. Unless it was the navy blue of a moonless midnight - dark and deep. The kind of darkness and depth that made her want to lie on her back and gaze into her past and future. The kind that made her feel tiny and huge, like she was a part of everything and like she was completely alone. Her heart danced in her stomach and Charlene had to take a deep breath.

"Cha!" The sound of Kelly calling her name brought her back into this world. "Jesus, I called your name like 10 times."

"Sorry," she said, "What's up?"

"David just texted me. Him and Spencer want to come over and hang out with us. What do you think?" From what Charlene remembered she and Spencer had spent a lot of last night together. He was gorgeous – dirty blonde hair and blue-green eyes. She smiled.

"Your parents are going to be gone all day right?"

Kelly nodded, "Mummy's at the spa and Daddy's at the office. We won't be seeing them until this evening."

"Well then, tell them come over." Charlene smiled as Kelly texted a reply. An afternoon by the pool with a guy like Spencer was exactly what she needed to be brought back to her senses.

"They'll be here in 20," said Kelly. The girls giggled and scrambled for their towels. They raced each other to the door. Charlene buried the thoughts of Roger in the part of her mind where she kept memories of her childhood as she and Kelly ran upstairs to shave their legs.

*Philip Armbrister*

### **Rise Up Haiti, Rise Up**

"Somehow, only when it is dark enough can you see the stars." Martin Luther King Jr.

When the earth shook in January  
Haiti bump n'grind like a  
Vulgar go go dancer knocking over  
Club tables and spilling red wine  
In the laps of shocked patrons.  
Their bulging eyes stared at the  
Thick, warm liquid as it oozed  
And drained and seeped into the  
Concrete fissures as if summoned  
By the earth's core to satiate a  
Chronic thirst. Perhaps Haiti your  
Time had come! For too long you  
Have looked out and over there,  
For too long you have waited and  
Waited and waited, for too long  
You have dressed and redressed,  
For too long you have rehearsed

And prepared... But to what end?  
Well, earth has rescued you and  
Redeemed you. You have given her  
Surfeit, she has set you on a hopeful  
Beginning: like a mare watching  
Her foal buckle and stumble as it  
Tries to stand but confident in its  
Gallop through the passage of time;  
Earth beseeches you to rise, rise Haiti,  
Rise up and take your stance again!

### **Black Dog in the Night**

An image of a tired black dog lies on the side of the road,  
its body pressing against the concrete wall.  
The narrow space between the road and wall,  
where it rested, became a sanctuary.  
A metre or so from the main street,  
the metal post of the *Stop* sign  
provided a third rail to the east.

It's dark, cars are passing.  
It's cloudy, the wind is blowing.  
It's Sunday, church is going on.  
Rain lurks above debating whether to intercede or not.  
Should it interrupt the peacefulness of the moment  
knowing not what has trespassed nor what will transpire?

The day must have been long:  
at once rummaging for food  
at twice protecting the turf  
at thrice wandering aimlessly to no end.  
What now?  
The dust settled, time passed and  
this spot is as good as any.  
Tomorrow will be no different  
if it makes it through and it will.

We put the children into the vehicle and  
placed their packed bags in the back with their shoes.  
I started the engine and turned on the headlights.  
Then in the distance, my wife pointed in the direction of an animal.  
It did not move; not even a stitch did it twitch.  
We all said goodbye then I honked the horn  
as if to say the jeep won't be out-done.  
We drove off.  
Toward the end of the side road near the main street  
I pressed on the left turn indicator and slowed to a stop.

Simultaneously, we peered out the window and  
saw a crumpled black plastic garbage bag,  
paused...  
looked at each other and smiled.

*Maria Soledad Rodriguez*

### **Crossing the Island Now**

When they built the expressway  
across the island, they made  
north to south so straightaway  
I lost my chance to meander  
along the Route 1 curves affording me  
more thrills than any carousel spin.

At times you'd think your car  
would turn up in someone's living room.  
*Hello! Weren't you expecting us?*  
Or the ravine would run to cover you  
with its mottled mantle of skin.  
*Tamarind coming out of your eyes?*

Around those curves smells ran amok—  
blood pudding, pork ribs, rice and beans  
with cilantro waving its hand, beckoning me  
to a sitdown at a roadside stand.

*Any bets about how many of us  
will dare to crash this party?*

No wonder the tables were made  
of cement and bad amplifiers let  
the noise beg for our attention—  
the vein-cutting boleros, the hip  
merengues cut on beer, and always  
always the preacher in his wagon  
wiping away his perspiration.

*The final reckoning is just around the corner.*

The expressway put an end to smells  
and fears and turns.  
Now there's just a straight road ahead,  
paved with good intentions.

*Frances Farmer*

### **Aftermath**

Skinned knees like a child  
Fallen to my knees with no memory of how I got there  
Another seizure.

A metallic monster came from nowhere  
Then I sat in a twisted tomb of metal  
With no memory of how I got there.

My head shattered a window  
Tears in my brain and my memory was gone  
And I was like a child.

Scarred knees remind me  
Of the scars I cannot see  
Inside my brain.

*Victoria Sarne*

### **Just Another Day in Paradise**

It is stifflingly hot - one of those blanket-heavy, humid days in Nassau that make you feel as if you are suffocating. I am stuck in the inevitable Friday afternoon traffic-jam, grateful for air conditioning, listening to Frank Sinatra. I am cocooned in relative comfort, mostly oblivious to the external surroundings, with nothing more pressing on my mind than how much longer I am going to be stuck here. Mentally I run through a shopping list of what is in my fridge for dinner and whether I need to detour to the grocery store.

A momentary flash of movement in my side-view mirror catches my eye and I turn my head to the sidewalk and see a woman, a vagrant, whom I have seen wandering in this area on many occasions. She is naked from the waist up and is, shockingly, stripping down to her skin right there. She is stick-thin and dirty, her skin like leather so it is impossible to determine her age. Her face is expressionless, as if she is inhabiting an entirely different location in her head. There is a lifetime of wear and tear inscribed on her face, even though it seems devoid of awareness. She is oblivious to everyone who glances her way and who then quickly turn their heads in embarrassment as she steps out of her panties as if it is the most natural thing in the world and she is about to step into the shower. The rest of her clothes are already discarded in a heap on the ground. This action has taken only seconds and yet it seems as if a slow motion movie is playing in front of me.

I am startled, my breath catches in my throat and I cannot look away from this bizarre sight. My immediate response is an acute ache knifing down from my throat to my stomach and I feel a rush of humiliation both for her and for myself. I spontaneously identify with her as a woman and feel ashamed for her, for myself and for anyone else witnessing this private but public act. I feel guilty. Aren't we all, knowingly or not, aware or not, responsible for this unknown woman's abandonment? Somehow, with no sound reasoning, in my mind it seems a hundred times worse that it is a woman. It feels personal. If it had been a man I think my reaction would have been different: disgust, even outrage, mingled with compassion for this human being's failure to conform to acceptable behaviour.

In spite of a real sense of and belief in equality for the sexes and a very real personal imperative that we are all responsible for our own acts, the fact that this is a woman seems more poignant, more shameful, more pathetic. She clearly has no understanding of where she is or what she is doing in full public view, Her vulnerability finds its echo in me and I feel as if I too am stripped naked. I feel an inexplicable shame suddenly washing over me, as if she has somehow torn away my humanity and my dignity as well as her own.

I want to grab her and cover her up and my thoughts are racing through my head as I try to think if I have anything in the trunk that might serve this purpose. I don't. Although her action in stripping down took only seconds I feel as if I have been frozen in this limbo moment for much longer, but suddenly the traffic is moving again and I have no choice but to continue forward.

I am still shocked, this crazy vignette stuck in my retina and I wonder how she came to be in that state on this downward path in her life. Was there ever a point, a fork in the road where she could have taken an alternative route? Was there ever a conscious moment that choosing to live on the street was better than whatever current circumstance she found herself in or was there an indescribable bolt out of the blue that capsized her world that she had no resources to deal with? Was there no-one there to help her make a different choice, help plant her feet in a different set of shoes, point her in a different direction or simply take her hand, offer her some hope and lead her for a little while?

I know that often when we have been blessed with a reasonably comfortable and stable life we tend to think that security is permanent and are unaware of the fragility of life and the fine line between success or disaster, happiness or tragedy. Sometimes even in the most certain of circumstances, all it takes is one little twitch of the tightrope and we all fall down.

We arrive at a particular low point in our lives for a myriad different reasons; severe disappointment in love, job or money matters, sometimes all three; sometimes drugs or alcohol; sometimes clinical depression, sometimes a tragedy and yet, if we picked a handful of those assorted souls, each one would probably find a different way to deal with their troubled world.

Unlikely as it may seem now there was a low point in my own life when tragedy struck, when I might have been that woman or someone like her or I might even have been dead - a possibility I had considered then.

As I continue driving home, the refrain repeats endlessly in my head, 'there but for the grace of God, go I.' I am disturbed and reflect, as I do frequently, how quickly any of us can be catapulted into unforeseen and awful predicaments. Above all, I question over and over - who or what decided it should be this woman and not me or you? A random act of fate, a benign or malevolent god? Economics or lack of education? Bad luck, bad karma, bad choices? Whatever my beliefs and experience, I still have no easy answers and logic dictates that I never will.

*Jerome Teelucksingh*

### **The Hairdresser**

I grew up in a ghetto known as Never Dirty in St. George's, Grenada. It was infamous due to innocent persons being killed by criminal gangs. The country's Prime Minister and the Minister of National Security were always on the radio or television informing the public that crime was on the decline. Their failed efforts at curbing crime included 'Operation Anaconda' and 'Operation Clean-Up'. The police

commissioner was on the television claiming that stabbings were not serious incidents. Residents of nearby slums, Never Dirty, Canada and Hollywood, were disappointed that politicians were only interested in visiting and helping us during election time.

During the evenings I would ride my red Raleigh Chopper bicycle to witness the antics of the residents. There were memorable characters in Never Dirty. These included Tantie Phillips who would spend her evenings under the shady mango tree. She was an expert in plaiting, cutting, straightening, colouring and combing the unmanageable hair of neighbours and friends. Her shop comprised a long mirror, a shaky bench and three crudely built stools for customers. An old bookshelf was converted into a cupboard. On the sides were two thin, meandering sandy trails. These were the tell-tale signs of termites.

On top of the cupboard was a large bottle filled with a yellow fluid. It had combs of different sizes. Two crudely built shelves had piles of old *Newsweek* and *TIME* magazines and *Archie* comics. Some did not have covers and others were missing pages. Nailed to the tree's trunk was a hand-painted sign in slanting capital letters: 'NO GOSSIPING.'

Pauline was an assistant who tried to be as talkative as Tantie Phillips. She lived at Calivigny and was seventeen years old. She had passed Principles of Business and Caribbean History but failed Mathematics, Accounting, English Language, Geography and Spanish when she sat the Caribbean Examination Council (CXC) exams in 2006. Her alcoholic father decided that she should learn the art of hairdressing from Tantie Phillips. He claimed to have been unable to pay for private lessons for his daughter to succeed in the subjects that she failed. Pauline wanted to repeat her exams and then proceed to CAPE classes at Holy Faith Convent where she would pursue Accounting, Geography and History.

I remember Christmas Eve in 2007 when Henry Jessie, of Moliniere Point, went to have his hair plaited in cane rows for morning mass at church. Henry was sixteen years old but his moustache and beard made him appear older. His father was in jail for armed robbery and his two brothers had been murdered during the past three years. Their aliases were 'Godfather', 'Ruffneck' and 'Big Boy'. The police felt the murders were gang-related killings and thus did not bother to find the culprits. The newspapers described Henry's brothers as 'career-criminals' and his father as a 'community-leader.'

Phillips stopped combing Henry's hair and started to wave her hand. 'Eh, eh is you Mr. Peters! Buh how you looking so sad? Come na, leh we ole talk for awhile.'

'Good evening. Long time no see.' Peters seemed surprised that she was talking to him because six months ago she loudly cursed him for not remembering her pet dog's birthday. He had recently returned from fishing with friends at Grand Anse Bay.

'How de elections treat you? Ah hold meh head and bawl down de place when ah see 18-18 tie.'

He momentarily paused and wondered which political party she supported. 'Yes, gyul...me too.'

'Yes, Mr. Peters. Only de good Lawd know de troubles we gone thru.' Tantie Phillips had the ability to speak clearly with hairpins, curlers or a comb dangling from the corner of her mouth. 'Chile, stay one place and stop twisting yuh head, leh meh comb your hair properly.'

After a few minutes she stopped combing and began gingerly to poke at Henry's scalp. 'Wait na, what is dis in yuh hair looking like Quaker oats?'

'Wash yuh hair regularly. Yuh still have dandruff.'

'WAIT! Oh Lawd, Henry yuh have louses in yuh head.' Phillips took a few steps backwards and reached for the can of Baygon. She began to spray Henry's head. Henry did not move and felt it was some hairspray or air freshner that was used for persons with unclean scalps. He began sneezing and coughing.

Pauline covered her nostrils and moved away from Henry.

'Miss Phillips de correct word is lice not louses.' Henry felt embarrassed and wanted to change the topic.

Phillips clouted him. 'Henry shut yuh damn mouth. Yuh have animals and insects running loose in yuh natty head and yuh want to correct me! Boy ketch yuhself!'

'So Miss Phillips how ah could geh rid of these little tings in meh head?'

'Ah usually recommend aloes but your case different. For a few weeks yuh have to use Breeze or Skip soap powder. If dat not working den sprinkle some rat poison on your hair in de morning. De louses go eat it and dead.'



Phillips handed Pauline the comb, 'Here wash this good by de standpipe and put it in de jar to geh clean. Bring me annuder one. Bring de gloves. Remind me tomorrow we need to buy some more gloves.'

Pauline used her index finger and thumb to carefully accept the comb. She acted as if Henry had a contagious disease. She had never seen a louse but imagined it would be the size of an ant. She placed the comb in a container and gave a pair of gloves to Phillips.

Henry looked at the ground. He noticed a millipede walking across his yellow rubber slippers. He flicked it away.

'Good, yuh hair neat, go and lime with de fellars. And doh ever go out looking as if you doh have a mudder or if you never see a comb.' Phillips was glad she had completed Henry's hair before 5.30 pm. She wanted to reach home to watch *Oprah* and *The Bold and the Beautiful*.

Henry glanced in the broken mirror that was nailed to the tree trunk. 'Okay it looking good. Later tantie. Doh worry ah go deal with de insects and dem in meh hair.' He left without waiting for a reply.

Pauline mumbled, 'If he continue dat lifestyle with de boys on de block, before long he go end up in some funeral home with bullet holes.'

The next customer was Susan who was eighteen years old. Her face was pock-marked and she wore a red jersey. She was from Grenville and would often visit St. George's on weekends. On the back of her over-sized jersey were the words, 'Vote Maurice Bishop'.

'Eh, eh, Susan long time no see. How things? Yuh pregnant again or yuh didn't make de chile yet?'

Susan was embarrassed and pulled the jersey downwards. 'Ah had the chile two years now, buh ah put on some extra weight for de Chrissmas.'

Phillips smiled, 'Yuh size good gyul. So yuh come to straighten de afro?'

'Yes, Miss Phillips, put some of relaxer in meh hair and some of dis colouring.'

Pauline opened a drawer and brought two bottles for Phillips. Both bottles had smudged labels. One was *Pluko Hair Dressing* to soften hair and the other was *Herolin* which was supposed to strengthen hair. She opened the small, glass bottles of relaxer and hair dye. After peeping into both bottles she replaced the covers and began to shake them.

Peters felt excluded from the conversation. He picked up the *TIME* magazine. It was dated 18 January 1974 and had an interview with Eric Gairy.

Peters stopped reading and watched a stray dog begin to urinate on the trunk of the mango tree. Pauline loudly steupsed and shouted at the dog. It quickly ran away.

Susan's head rocked to and fro as the relaxer was being applied. Her eyes were closed. She passed her hand near her face to chase away some mosquitoes. 'Where all dese mosquitoes come from dis hour of de day?'

Pauline grabbed a can of Baygon and began spraying. There were nine empty Baygon cans on the ground near the cupboard. 'Ah forgot to tell yuh buh yuh hair looking good Susan. I know is long time you eh visit a real hairdresser....'

Phillips felt offended. She placed both hands on her waist. 'Pauline wha' de hell yuh mean a 'real' hairdresser? I does fix she damn hair and ah is a real hairdresser.'

Pauline replied in an apologetic tone, 'Miss Phillips is not you ah talking about. Some ah dem who wukking in saloon does cut people hair like is grass dey cutting.'

Peters intervened to quell the situation, 'Lissen Miss Phillips, Pauline eh mean to insult yuh. Look she herself come here to fix her hair. Dat shows she have respect for yuh.'

Phillips was still furious, 'Susan move yuh fat backside from meh chair and doh come back here again.' She closed the bottle of relaxer.

Susan was shocked and shouted, 'Finish put de rest of the de blasted relaxer in meh damn hair! Yuh feel yuh wrong and strong.'

Phillips spun around and glared at Susan, 'Na, na, na. Yuh couldn't be talking to me.' Phillips shook her head and looked up in the sky.

Pauline sensed trouble, 'Look Susan, is better yuh leave and finish de job home.' However, the advice had no effect on the women.

Susan remained in the chair. 'Ah not movin' until she finish meh hair.'

Phillips pushed Susan off the chair. Susan hurled herself at Phillips and began pulling at the hair of Phillips and scratching her face.

Phillips bawled, 'Oh, lawd somebody save me from this whore! HELP! She MURDERING meh!'

At the nearby apartments, a curtain moved and a face peered at the commotion. Peters intervened and held Phillips whilst Pauline restrained Susan. Phillips began to curse loudly and Susan was spitting at Phillips.

Susan shouted, 'Leh meh go. Ah going home and never want to see dat hard face Phillips again. She is a two by four hairdresser who cyah even properly comb de weave dat she tief.'

A frightened Pauline released her. Susan had some of Phillips's hair in her hands and threw it in the face of Phillips, 'Here look yuh ugly weave. It feeling like yuh use hair from under yuh arm to make it.'

Phillips's face was red, her chest heaved and the veins in her neck pulsated. 'Peters LEH MEH GO. Ah calm down now!'

He refused to do so and waited until Susan had turned the corner and then released Phillips.

Phillips picked up the weave and dusted it with her hands. She then placed it on her head. 'Of course everybody know I does wear ah weave. So what if it a little rough? Dat was meh Chrissmas gift from meh husband larse year. It have lots of sentimental values. We neighbour dog was shedding some hair so meh husband say instead of letting good ting waste, he decide to make some attachments and braids. He smart too bad. Always making tings.'

In a comforting tone Pauline interjected, 'Dat ok, nothing wrong with dat. It looking good on yuh Miss Phillips.'

*Nick Whittle*

### **Farewell**

my navel string no longer buried here  
atlantic ship-wrecked at consett  
disowned and banished  
ripped and uprooted  
bloody and empty  
farewell  
farewell my land  
my friendship denounced  
no more dreams of fellowship  
i walk along consett shore alone  
one last time searching for magic passed.

*Mark McWatt*

**Under my Skin**



***Part of an old log just after the bark has been removed***

**UNDER MY SKIN**

Not expecting anything in particular, I tore last summer the dry and loosening bark off a short log lying on the forest floor and was dazzled by the rich world I saw of colour and texture and life—the raw beauty of death painted by time on the white wood: a new universe for the dazzling life of little things that crawl and wriggle along the roots and branches of the sunset-red and night-dark fungi growing where the sacred sap of life had once been flowing...

Surely, I thought, such painted beauty redeems and amply compensates for death's dark loss and I wondered if, after I have lain dead in the forest for a cold season or two, someone like you (lovingly) were to peel off my loosened skin, would such a world of sunset colours grin from the rotting flesh of me? And would your heart that moment forgive cold death for tearing us apart?



*Fungus on the forest floor near Bella Lake, Muskoka: August, 2011*

### **THE COLOURS OF LIFE**

This brightly coloured fungus on the forest floor  
breaks all the known rules of belonging,  
so unlike all the things that grow around it  
—an alien life-form in an old, familiar space—  
its colours so obscene and so assertive  
that the rest of nature, we feel, should turn away  
embarrassed and confused...and yet  
the lurid thing thrives and is triumphant  
in its natural setting, where it catches the eyes  
of you and me, like a man so flamboyantly,  
so unrepentantly gay that, despite the urge  
to flinch and turn away, we are drawn,  
like the forest flora, to admire, and are grateful  
to have been captured in the orbit of his beauty  
as he celebrates with infectious and overstated joy  
the colourful—and only—life that came his way.

*Obediah Smith*

### **Wendy's One Evening**

I must write to remember  
I've a right to remember

am I able to draw her  
able to draw her back  
black beauty

fifteen or is she fourteen still  
about a minute ago  
became a woman  
dew upon her still

with her mom and dad  
and little sister

if dad and mom  
were never romantic  
dad and daughter certainly are

how could he help but love her  
how well she's made

unable to avoid it showing  
out to eat this evening  
mother, quiet figure  
in the background

it is she with her dad  
a couple of lovers

happily linked  
who able to get between them

eyes discover her  
I discover her, but too late

dad knows,  
though she's his daughter  
she's bread and water

beauty of the week  
her beauty makes him  
as weak as it makes me

had to take my pen out  
push back my bulging eyes

still my swiftly-beating  
heart of horses

white short-shorts she wore  
her top, lavender, tight-fitting  
something some designer fashioned  
little yet but how exquisite

how she looked  
and how she moved

fell into her dad's arms once  
and for one second

but I'm aware of their affair  
I've been there.

### **Born in 1954: 54 Today**

as if she had something I wanted  
or something to offer

what do you want for your birthday  
she asked

as if to stir up something  
she is in no way able to satisfy

stir up what I've waited ages  
for someone to satisfy

not several persons but one someone  
I want that someone  
to walk into my life

or someone I knew once  
to return, still twenty-two

though she must be fifty-two now  
that is if she is still alive

I was in love once, a long time ago  
careful ever since about such risks

hoofs of my heart over rocks

## **Quick Draw**

*for T.L.A.*

never fails to get her peace out

sign she forms usually  
with two fingers of her left hand

quick to draw, to pull and flash  
before the camera flashes

peace she pulls  
with one hand or the other  
like someone with two guns

like days of old  
in the USA, when it was a matter of  
who was the fastest gun in the West  
who got to survive, to remain alive

pulls her peace as if  
it were a life and death matter

even if it is overlooked, it's out,  
her peace, out, held up

antithetical actually  
to the pulling of knife or gun  
to the pulling of weapon

it is for peace that she draws  
some of them sometimes  
hidden or partially hidden

in the long sleeve of sweater  
or jacket or some outfit

usually out though  
when the camera clicks,  
snaps, flashes

*Danielle Boodoo-Fortune*

## **Lilly's Garden**

Seven years is a long time to be without someone. Enough time to learn to make do without them, if you must. So by the time Caleb returned, Lilly had already turned his shed into a store room for her jellies and preserves. She'd already repainted the house, layering bright yellows and oranges over that watery blue he'd always favoured. Life went on, after all, and time would not wait on her husband to tire of the gray eyed woman. Her children were gone, and she was alone in the old house. She had grown her hair out, let it

turn brown-silver at the roots, tucked mint leaves and bougainvillea blossoms into her braid on sunny days. For the first few years she'd worked feverishly on the garden, but the soil was hard, unyielding. Foolish and fanciful, the children had called it. A garden wasn't important at all. What she needed was a way to make money. So she bottled bright preserves, spiced and flavoured exquisitely, labeling them in her neat script, *Lilly's Garden*, on plain white paper. The little house bloomed beneath her hands.

And then, one high August morning, his shape appeared, familiar and strange, at the gate. She squinted in disbelief, and something that was both excitement and horror at the same time. Caleb, of the full laughter and velvety mouth. Caleb, of the hard hands and quick temper. Caleb, of the children that grew inside her, and the scar beneath her chin. She stood in the doorway and waited, her heart swollen and tender in her throat. His hands turned her face this way and that, tested the resilience of her long, faded braid. He kissed her firmly, said to her that she'd changed. But this she knew. She'd learned to live as a woman without a husband. She'd willed herself to change, scrubbed the grieving from her ageing face, rebirthed the old house and started all over again. But this Caleb would never understand. He was sure she'd be waiting for him, everything just as he had left it. He was hungry, he said. He kicked off his muddy, patched boots and pushed past her, into the yellow kitchen that shuddered at his intrusion. Lilly watched as he uncovered each pot, frowning at the bright-coloured preserves simmering inside. She watched herself move through the startled house, slicing, boiling and rinsing, setting a meal down before his expectant eyes. "Now," he said, rubbing his belly in satisfaction. "Now you must explain to me what you've done with my house." She watched herself shrink as he seized her throat and squeezed down with carefully measured anger.

All her life, Lilly had wanted a garden. After her mother left, her father had taken a shovel to the little herb garden in the back of the house, leaving only a gaping wound in its place. His vengeance upon the children, far more prolonged and cruel, would come afterwards. Through the narrowed passageways of her twice-broken nose, she learned to recognize the sharp, similar smells of violence and fear as they wafted through the rooms. She could smell it on her sister's clothes, in her father's sweat, in the upturned earth where the garden stood. In the cool dark of her head, she imagined her own garden, and what it might look like. In her mind she planted tall trees and bright blossoms. "Lilly. Like a pretty flower," Caleb had said. He was standing in front of the mechanic's garage at the corner, dark hair shorn close, mouth eager, anticipating. The next time she passed by the garage on her father's errands, he was waiting at the roadside. He tucked a flower behind her ear, let his fingertips brush against her jaw. She smelled the strength of his possession, thick, musky and overwhelming. When her father struck her with his boot that evening, calling her whore, saying she was just like her mother, the smell of the bruised flower filled her nostrils, lingered in her hair for days.

Jasmine, she'd breathed, lifting her daughter's slick, tiny body from the ache of hers. The baby's face against hers was a whispered fragrance, a prayer. The midwife draped a blanket across her raw belly and thighs. The room was a soft, warm cocoon. There was no pain in the wide world that this faint perfume would not soothe. Her name is Jasmine, she said to Caleb as he entered the room. "Margaret, like my mother," he said, examining the baby's small face. Possession, the thick, dulling rush of it came then, and an onslaught of pain.

"Margaret," she repeated.

The walls were repainted in watery blue, and the preserves were packed into boxes and given away without a thought. Lilly did not bother to protest. It would have mattered little anyway. While she worked in the house, wild orchids sprang up in her mind. She was sitting deep among the purple and white blossoms, singing to herself. In the corner of the garden grew wild mint and thyme, in memory of her mother. In her mind, Margaret was not married to the smooth-faced young man who kept her confined to the house and perpetually with child. Margaret was there, waist high in sunflowers, her brown curls untied. She stood at the stove in the quiet blue kitchen, imagining a daughter named Jasmine, a daughter who might have been unfrightened and free. "Who is he?" Caleb asked one night, pinning her shoulders to the bed. "You're too



quiet. You are hiding something.” She closed her eyes tight as rage and fear mingled with the salt of his sweat filled her nostrils. She imagined her blood to smell like crushed roses, the ones so red that they appear almost black.

Her mother had only returned once to the house. Lilly remembered her face most, lined and soft, scrubbed clean of the heavy powder and brick-brown lipstick she so often wore. Her eyes were wide and fearful. She’d said to him that she wanted the children, that she’d come back for them. Lilly and Rachel-Anne needed their mother, she’d said. Lilly remembered their mother’s sharp, birdlike cry as he threw the vase at her, the shattering sound, the bright drops of blood that would not leave the shaggy rug afterwards, no matter how hard Rachel scrubbed. When her own children were young, Lilly often wondered at how they made sense of Caleb’s sudden rages, his bouts of violence. But he’d never hurt his children, she’d tell herself over and over, forcing things to bloom in the corners of her mind. As long as it was only her, it would all be fine. She’d be fine.

Seven years is a long time to be without someone. One evening, Caleb returned home to find Lilly still asleep, her long braid undone and her hair fanned out about her like faded wings. He shoved her, at first gently, annoyed at her laziness. There were unwashed dishes in the sink, and no food to be found. In Lilly’s mind, she planted a cherry tree, then brought bluebirds to its slender branches. There was a bench beneath the tree, and she sat, weaving blossoms into her long braid. Caleb shoved her again, alarmed this time. There was a house in the distance now, sunflower yellow, trimmed with orange, green curtains fluttering brightly in the windows. How lovely, she thought, enchanted. As Caleb slapped her cheeks and splashed her face in desperate attempts to wake her, Lilly decided to stay. She tucked a flower behind her ear, and buried her face deep in the fragrant blossoms. Something wafted toward her on a forgotten air, something dense and musky. Possession, she thought, frowning. Not here. She rose to her feet and surveyed the vast expanse of her very own garden. I know, she thought, smiling to herself. I’ll plant some jasmine.

*Stewart Brown*

## **Deep Heat**

A muscle pulls on a country walk (another gift  
my father gave me) and the village store  
can offer only *Deep Heat*. As surely  
as the ointment warms, its pungent

wintergreen revives sprained memory:  
my teenage self, reluctantly rubbing  
my father’s back with embrocation,  
a regular chore through those sullen years,

his days spent hunched over a tradesman’s bench.  
Though something in me chaffed at the routine of it,  
still, it was a small intimacy, a closeness  
more physical than anything since we were past

the rough and tousel of backyard games,  
the very occasional “flat of my hand”  
and the day that he said “no” as I reached out,  
I was “too big now” to hold his hand

as we walked through the park to the cricket ground -  
our Saturday ritual all those pre-teen years.  
He was a star once he crossed that line, my Dad,  
handsome, Brylcreamed, fast bowler man,

bending his back to gain that extra yard of pace.  
And I would watch and yearn and change the tins  
or – later - keep the score all afternoon for half-a-crown.  
He was a man of his times, afraid of nothing

(he had flown Lancasters after all) so much  
as any taint of *queer* and I guess  
he was embarrassed to be seen out by his mates  
strolling, hand in hand, with this “big boy”.

So after that we hardly touched – no hugs  
or ostentatious showing of emotion, no tears –  
until that final day, alone together in his hospital room,  
his breathing laboured and far beyond speech,

I clasped his hand and wittered on,  
desperate banalities (we always talked about the Saints –  
a football team he hadn’t seen for fifty years,  
nor me for thirty five), made jokes and promises

and gave some last chance thanks,  
until, somehow, he squeezed my hand, our game,  
like when I was his nipper and we were walking  
through the parks: and then he died.

*Shilpa Venkatachalam*

### **Moon**

She points to the sparkling night sky stretched tight across space  
And with her little fingers screams, “Moon”.  
“Moon”, “Moon”, she says  
And turns her face toward me in amazement.

How do I tell her that the moon shies short  
Of a wonder that stands at two feet in height, right beside me?  
That light years are grasped in a second when she wraps her tiny hand around my finger.

### **Traces**

I do not desire that which I have  
That which I don’t, I fear to desire  
I am caught like a traveller on an eternal bridge with no entry and no exit  
And like a pendulum I swing from side to side.

In an ecstatic moment I throw up my arms  
And embrace the unknown and the intangible  
The moonlight rubs its back on my skin and soaks into it  
Like it has soaked into the empty night streets.

I ask no questions; I seek no answers  
I surrender to surrendering.

All this in an instant...

Then suddenly, the moment explodes  
With a fierceness that erupts the lava simmering in my being

My arms fall back down  
The pendulum comes to a slow halt.

And my scattered being is again contained.

### **Correction**

Due to a technical error in the printing process, some of the line endings in the second stanza of the following poem (published in POUI XII, p. 50) were rearranged. We reprint it here (correctly), with apologies to Mark McWatt.

*Mark McWatt*

### **LOOKING AT A MILLIPEDE**

The millipede feasts on fallen fruit and flowers  
imbibing its shiny beauty from their putrefaction,  
like men who take nourishment from all the hours  
of ingesting the dead ideas of whichever faction  
of the world's ideological divide they think empowers  
and justifies their chosen course of action...

And each individual in his fervour shines  
with the feeding millipede's beauty and perfection,  
as he treads the exciting tight-rope of his times,  
expressing ideas he's sure will give direction  
to a faltering human race... While the heady wines  
fermenting in his veins mature towards selection  
by creatures not unlike the millipede—the sublime

and wriggling embodiment of his resurrection...



*Millipede feeding on the floor of Welchman Hall gully*

## CONTRIBUTORS

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**Thomas Armstrong:** is a Canadian/Barbadian writer. He has published short stories and one novel, *Of Water and Rock* (DC Books, Montreal 2010). The book, in manuscript form, won 2<sup>nd</sup> prize in the 2008 Frank Collymore Literary Endowment Award, and as a published book won the NIFCA Gold Medal for best book, and The George Lamming Award. He is currently working on a novel with a supernatural theme, set in Barbados, entitled *The Out Man*.

**Nicolette Bethel** is a Bahamian playwright, poet, and anthropologist whose work has been published in journals including *Calabash, The Caribbean Writer, and The Caribbean Review of Books*. She is the author of *Mama Lily and the Dead* (Poinciana Paper Press, 2010), founder of Shakespeare in Paradise, an international theatre festival, and editor-in-chief of the online Caribbean literary journal *tongues of the ocean*.

**Jacqueline Bishop:** author of two collections of poems: *Fauna* (2006) and *Snapshots from Istanbul* (2008); *My Mother Who Is Me: Life Stories from Jamaican Women in New York* (2006); *Writers Who Paint, Painters Who Write: Three Jamaican Artists* (2007); and a novel, *The River's Song* (2007). She is also an accomplished visual artist and founding editor of *Calabash: A Journal of Caribbean Arts and Letters*, and the recipient of a 2008-2009 Fulbright award to Morocco.

**Danielle Boodoo-Fortuné** is a poet and artist from Trinidad and Tobago. Her work has been featured in *Bim: Arts for the 21st Century, The Caribbean Writer, Anthurium: a Caribbean Studies Journal, St. Somewhere Journal, Small Axe Literary Salon, and Tongues of the Ocean*. She is currently the Poetry Editor at *Anansesem: The Caribbean Children's Ezine*. Danielle is currently pursuing a M.A in Literatures in English at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine. She blogs at [danielleboodoofortune.blogspot.com](http://danielleboodoofortune.blogspot.com).

**Stewart Brown:** has taught in schools and universities in Jamaica, Nigeria, Wales and Barbados. Since 1988 he has lectured at the Centre of West African Studies, University of Birmingham, where he is Reader in Caribbean Literature. In 2007, he was Visiting Professor in Literatures in English at UWI, Cave Hill. He has edited several major anthologies of African and Caribbean writing, as well as critical studies of Derek Walcott, Kamau Brathwaite and Martin Carter. He has published a volume of essays: *Tourist, Traveller, Troublemaker* as well as four collections of poems.

**Keisha Lynne Ellis:** was born, raised and lives in Nassau, Bahamas. She writes fiction, essays and poetry and is a regular at poetry cafes in Nassau. Her work has been featured in two multimedia art exhibitions, *A Sudden and Violent Change* and *Bahama Mama*, while more can be found in the online literary journal, *Tongues of the Ocean*, and in the upcoming issue of *The WomanSpeak Journal*.

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**Emille Hunt:** is a young writer from the Bahamas currently completing an MFA at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine. His work has appeared in *Small Axe* and *Tongues of the Ocean* literary journals and *Transition Magazine*. His fiction was shortlisted in the Small Axe Literary Competitions of 2009 and 2010.

**Mark McWatt:** is Professor Emeritus of West Indian Literature at Cave Hill, where he taught for more than thirty years and still teaches Creative Writing: Poetry. He is a founding editor of *Poui*. He has published three collections of poetry: *Interiors* (1989), *The Language of Eldorado* (1994) and *The Journey to Le Repentir* (2009). His collection of short fiction, *Suspended Sentences*, won the Casa de Las Americas Award and the Commonwealth Prize for Best First Book in 2006.

**Lelawattee Manoo-Rahming:** is a Trinidadian who works as a mechanical engineer in Nassau, Bahamas. A poet, fiction and creative non-fiction writer and essayist, her poetry, stories and artwork have appeared in numerous publications in the Caribbean, the USA and Europe. She has won poetry, essay and art awards in The Bahamas, the *David Hough Literary Prize* from *The Caribbean Writer* (2001) and the Commonwealth Broadcasting Association 2001 Short Story Competition. Her first book of poetry, *Curry Flavour*, was published by Peepal Tree in 2000.

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**Victoria Sarne:** An Englishwoman far from home and far from youth, sometimes feeling like a little girl in too big shoes, I have discovered that my voice enables me to survive the good, the bad and the sad times.

**A-dZiko Simba:** a writer, performer and storyteller who uses her talents to uplift Afrikan peoples in the Diaspora. She has most recently written for a year-long serial drama, *Outa Road*, for Jamaica's RJR radio station. Her CD *Crazy Lady Days* features poems accompanied by African percussion and flutes.

**Obediah Smith:** was born on New Providence, in the Bahamas in 1954 and has published 13 books of poetry in English. He participated in writers' workshops at the University of Miami and University of the West Indies, Cave Hill, and in 2009, was the Poetry Workshop facilitator for the Bahamas Writers Summer Institute. His poems are included in literary journals and anthologies throughout the Caribbean, in the USA

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**Maria Soledad Rodriguez:** of the Rio Piedras campus of the University of Puerto Rico, has primarily taught and published on pan-Caribbean folk figures like Bobo Johnny and douens as well as women's literature. She is currently working on poetry manuscripts in English and Spanish.

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**Sarah Venable:** formerly known as an artist, she began contributing feature articles to magazines in the mid-90s. Her poems have been published in *Poui* and the anthology *The Truth About Oranges*, and have won Bronze and Gold awards at NIFCA. She teaches creative writing to graphic arts students at BCC, and to children through the National Cultural Foundation's WISE programme.

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**Nick Whittle:** Nick Whittle was born in Birmingham, England and has lived in Barbados since 1979. A regionally and internationally known visual artist, his inclusion of words in his visual practice naturally developed into the writing and publication of poetry. His work has been published in several issues of *Poui* and the NCF's *Winning Words* and can be viewed at [www.nick-whittle.com](http://www.nick-whittle.com)

***Please note the following correction:***

The poem by Pamela Mordecai in POUI XI (pg. 149) entitled 'Remembering Nothing' should have been entitled: 'Poem'. (Please accept our apologies for the error).





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