Volume 6

Bim

Arts for the 21st Century

BIM LITERARY FESTIVAL AND BOOK FAIR 2014


Bim

Cover Image

RED COCONUT 2012 by **Alison Chapman-Andrews**
36" x 48" acrylic
Private collection

"Looking again at a drawing of Martin's Bay a natural rectangle was clear,
so it became a painting. I enjoyed doing it and it became the
start of the series and exhibition of 'Landscape Revisited'.
The 3 primary colours in one piece is an idea I've been exploring since 2006.
In this one red predominates in this work: **'Red Coconut"**.
My favourite idea in **Red Coconut** is the green sun/coconut
(green being the opposite colour of red). This has been photographed
a number of times, but the colour is never quite right."

BIM: Arts for the 21st Century

VOLUME 6 May 2013 – May 2014

Printed by COT Holdings Limited
Design by M. Yearwood

***BIM*: Arts for the 21st Century**
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***BIM*: Arts for the 21st Century** is edited collaboratively by persons drawn from the literary community, who represent the creative, academic and developmental interests critical for the sustainability of the best Caribbean literature.

***BIM*: Arts for the 21st Century** is jointly published by the Errol Barrow Centre for Creative Imagination, The University of the West Indies, Cave Hill and the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, Government of Barbados.

Opinions expressed in ***BIM*: Arts for the 21st Century** are the responsibility of the individual authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the editors, Errol Barrow Centre for Creative Imagination, The University of the West Indies or the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, Government of Barbados.

***BIM*: Arts for the 21st Century** is produced twice each year and publishes creative works, essays and critical expositions that meet the needs of the literary and artistic community. It accepts submissions that focus on literary, artistic and cultural phenomena within the Caribbean and its Diaspora. *BIM* accepts and publishes academic articles that are of high quality, but which are not too heavy with jargon to the exclusion of the wider reading public. *BIM* accepts non-academic contributions of high quality, including book and other reviews, poetry, short fiction, photographs and cartoons. In future issues, it will also accept digital art, electronic sound and digital video files, and critical comments on these. In all cases submissions will be subject to scrutiny by the editorial committee.

Manuscripts should be forwarded in double-spaced format, preferably with an accompanying electronic text file in Microsoft Word format. Endnotes are preferred. Photos should, at a minimum, be 300 dpi in quality. Submissions should contain the name of the author and title of the contribution on a separate page, but the author's name should not appear on subsequent pages of the actual manuscript. Correspondence should be sent to:
The Editor, ***BIM*: Arts for the 21st Century**, Errol Barrow Centre for Creative Imagination,
The University of the West Indies, Cave Hill, P. O. Box 64, Bridgetown BB11000, Barbados.
Submissions to the publication should be sent to eephillips57@hotmail.com

Acknowledgements

Prime Minister of Barbados, the Honourable Freundel Stuart Q.C. M.P.
The Honourable Mr. Stephen Lashley, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth
Professor Sir Hilary Beckles, Pro-Vice Chancellor and Principal, UWI, Cave Hill Campus
The Director and Staff – The Errol Barrow Centre for Creative Imagination, UWI,
Cave Hill Campus
Mrs. Gale Hall, Executive Assistant to the Principal, UWI, Cave Hill Campus
The BIM Editorial Board

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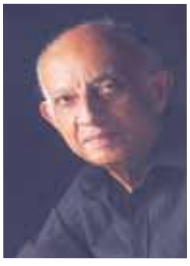
Fiction

POETRY

John Balaban

John Balaban is the author of twelve books of poetry and prose, which have won The Academy of American Poets' Lamont Prize and a National Poetry Series Selection. His poetry has received two nominations for the National Book Award as well as the 1998 William Carlos Williams Award from the Poetry Society of America for his 'Locusts at the Edge of Summer: New and Selected Poems'. He has been a John Simon Guggenheim Fellow and, in 2008, he was awarded a medal from the Vietnamese Ministry of Culture for his literary translations and for his leadership in digitizing and preserving the ancient text collection at the National Library of Vietnam. John Balaban is professor of English and Poet-in-Residence at NC State.



Edward Baugh

Edward Baugh, a Jamaican, is Professor Emeritus of English, UWI, Mona. His scholarly publications include: 'Derek Walcott: Memory as Vision' (Longman, 1978), 'Derek Walcott' (Cambridge University Press, 2006) and 'Frank Collymore: a Biography' (Ian Randle, 2009). His three collections of poetry are: 'A Tale From the Rainforest' (Sandberry, 1988), 'It Was the Singing' (Sandberry, 2000) and 'Black Sand: New and Collected Poems' (Peepal Tree Press, 2013).

Miguel Ángel Barnet

Miguel Barnet, poet and ethnographer, is the most widely published and translated of Cuban writers. He is the recipient of numerous awards that include the Felix Verela award, the highest honour for cultural achievement. Miguel Barnet is the current president of the National Union of Cuban Writers and Artists. In 1966, he published 'The Autobiography of A Runaway Slave' that became an international best seller.

Carlyon Blackman

Carlyon Blackman is a Barbadian poet whose previous and forthcoming publications include 'The Caribbean Writer', 'St Somewhere Journal', 'tongues of the ocean', 'Poui' (University of the West Indies, Cave Hill), 'Bamboo Talk Press' and 'As Us journal'. She was awarded 2nd prize in the Frank Collymore Literary Endowment Awards 2012 (Barbados) for a body of work entitled Ars Poetica.

Danielle Boodoo-Fortuné

Danielle Boodoo-Fortuné is a Trinidadian writer and visual artist. Her poetry has been featured in publications such as 'Bim: Arts for the 21st Century', 'The Caribbean Writer', 'Anthurium: A Caribbean Studies Journal', 'Poui', 'Tongues of the Ocean', 'Small Axe Literary Salon', 'Room Magazine', 'New Linear Perspectives' and 'Dirtcakes Poetry Journal'. Danielle was awarded first place for poetry in the 2012 Small Axe Literary Competition. She was also nominated for Best New Poets 2013.

Loretta Collins Klobah

Loretta Collins Klobah is a Full Professor of Caribbean Literature and Creative Writing in the Department of English, College of Humanities, at the University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras Campus in San Juan. Her poetry collection 'The Twelve-Foot Neon Woman' (Leeds, England: Peepal Tree Press, 2011) received the 2012 OCM Bocas Prize in Caribbean Literature in the category of poetry and was shortlisted for the 2012 Felix Dennis Prize for Best First Collection of poetry, offered by Felix Dennis and the Forward Arts Foundation (UK).

Linda Deane

Linda M. Deane is co-founder of ArtsEtc Inc., an independent publishing company in Barbados. She is a recipient of the Frank Collymore Literary Endowment and Prime Minister's Award for the poetry collection 'Cutting Road Blues: A Narrative' (in press). Her writing appears in several journals and she is co-editor of 'Shouts from the Outfield: The ArtsEtc Cricket Anthology' (AE Books 2007).

Photo: Rachel Eliza Griffith

Kwame Dawes

Born in Ghana and raised in Jamaica, Kwame Dawes is the author of thirteen books of poetry and many books of fiction, non-fiction and drama. His collection, 'Hope's Hospice' will appear with Peepal Tree Press in the spring of 2009. He is Distinguished Poet in Residence at the University of South Carolina where he directs the SC Poetry Initiative and the University of South Carolina Arts Institute. Kwame Dawes is the programming director of the Calabash International Literary Festival that takes place each May in Jamaica.

Keith Ellis

Keith Ellis (Jamaica, 1935) is Professor Emeritus of the University of Toronto and Doctor Honoris Causa of the University of Havana. He is the author or editor of some twenty books and more than a hundred articles dealing principally with Spanish American literature and culture. He has been honoured with the Distinction for National Culture (of Cuba) and is a Corresponding Member of the Cuban Academy of Language and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada. His poetry has appeared in anthologies and journals in various countries and in several languages.

Ramabai Espinet

Ramabai Espinet is a writer, critic and academic. Her published works include a novel, 'The Swinging Bridge' (2003), 'Nuclear Seasons', poetry (1991) and the children's books 'The Princess of Spadina' (1992) and 'Ninja's Carnival' (1993). She is the editor of 'Creation Fire' (1990). A documentary on her work, 'Coming Home', was released in 2005. Forthcoming is a collection of short fiction, 'Shooting Trouble'.

Pablo Armando Fernández

Pablo Armando Fernández (b. Delicias, Las Tunas, 1930). Has an enormous reputation and a distinguished career as poet, narrator, playwrite, editor and diplomat. He has won numerous prizes, including the Casa de las Américas Best Novel Award in 1968 for 'Los niños se despiden'. In 1996, in recognition of his lifetime literary achievement, he was awarded the Premio Nacional de Literatura for his oeuvre.

Juleus Ghunta

Juleus Ghunta is a 25-year-old Transformational Speaker and Poet. He was born in Hanover, Jamaica and was educated at the University of the West Indies, Mona, graduating in 2010 with a degree in Media and Communications and History. He is the creator of the D.R.E.A.M.R.I.G.H.T acrostic. In 2013, Juleus received the Prime Minister's National Youth Award for Excellence for his work as a youth advocate. His first collection, 'The Blue Chair', is slated for publication in 2014. Juleus's poems have appeared in 'Bookends', the literary supplement of Jamaica's Sunday Observer.

Margaret D. Kawamuinyo Gill

Awards: India, Shankar's International Childrens' Poetry competition 1968; Barbados, Frank Collymore Literary Endowment Award 1998, 2nd prize 2006; Hong Kong and China, International Visiting Writer 2007 among others. Published as a performance poet since 1972. Anthologised in 'Aftermath: the Best of Third World Poets' among others. Books: 'Lyric You.' 2000, 'Machinations of a Feminist'.

Ann-Margaret Lim

Ann-Margaret Lim, a fellow of the Calabash Workshop, will forever be indebted to Wayne Brown (1946-2009) and Mervyn Morris whose workshops she attended. She's been published in both major Jamaican newspapers, The Caribbean Writer, The Caribbean Quarterly, the Journal of Caribbean Literature, the online magazines, the Pittsburg Quarterly and Calabash: a Journal of Caribbean Literature, with work in the upcoming Calabash festival poetry anthology. In 2007, her poetry manuscript received a Highly Recommended award from the National Book Development Council of Jamaica. In 2013 she was short-listed for the Bocas Poetry prize.

John Robert Lee

John Robert Lee is a Saint Lucian writer and broadcaster. His latest publication is 'Elemental: New and Selected Poems 1975-2007' (Peepal Tree, 2008). Lee's poetry was most recently published in 'Missing Slate'. His recent collection: 'Sightings and other poems of faith', 2013, was published by Xilibris and Manahaim Publishers. He has also recently compiled a 'Bibliography of St. Lucian Creative Writing: Prose, Poetry and Drama 1948-2013'.

Vladimir Lucien

Vladimir Lucien is a 23 year old writer from St. Lucia, currently completing his degree in Theatre Arts and Literature at the University of the West Indies St. Augustine. He has been writing now for about four years.

Kathleen McDonald

Kathleen was born in Palo Alto California and grew up on the island of Barbados in the West Indies since she was three years old. She received her two BFA degrees in photography and pictorial art from San Jose State University and she is currently pursuing an MFA degree in studio art practice at San Jose State.

Mark McWatt

is from Guyana and has been publishing poetry for more than three decades. His first book of fiction, a collection of stories entitled 'Suspended Sentences', was published by Peepal Tree in 2005 and has won four literary prizes, including the overall Commonwealth Writer's Prize for best first book, 2006.

Philip Nanton

Philip Nanton is of Vincentian origin and lives in Barbados. His essays and poems have been published in Britain and the Caribbean. He compiled and edited Remembering the Sea: An Introduction to Frank A. Collymore. He produced and wrote the CD Island Voices from St. Christopher & the Barracudas which is to be published by Papillote Press in 2014. In 2012 he represented St. Vincent & the Grenadines at the Poetry Parnassus in London.

Esther Phillips

Esther Phillips gained an MFA degree in Creative Writing from the University of Miami where she won the Alfred Boas Poetry Prize of the Academy of American Poets for her thesis. She won the Frank Collymore Award in 2001. Her publications are: 'La Montee' (UWI, 1983), 'When Ground Doves Fly', (Ian Randle, Kingston, 2003), 'The Stone Gatherer' (Peepal Tree Press, 2009.) She represented Barbados at the Poetry Parnassus Festival in London, 2012, and her work which appears in several journals, has recently been recorded for the U.K. Poetry Archive. She is editor of Bim: Arts for the 21st Century and founder of Writers Ink. She is also founder of the Bim Literary Festival.

Olive Senior

Olive Senior is the prizewinning author of 13 books of fiction, poetry and non-fiction. She won the Commonwealth Writers Prize (for 'Summer Lightning') and was shortlisted for the Governor General's Award for Poetry ('Over the Roofs of the World'). Her other poetry books are 'Talking of Trees', 'Gardening in the Tropics' and 'Shell'. Her novel 'Dancing Lessons' was shortlisted for the Commonwealth Book Prize, the Amazon.ca First Novel Award, was a Globe Best Book and was long listed for the IMPAC Dublin International Prize. Her children's picture books are 'Birthday Suit' and 'Anna Carries Water'. Olive Senior conducts writing workshops internationally and is on the faculty of the Humber School for Writers, Toronto.

Évelyne Trouillot

Born in Port-au-Prince, Haïti, Évelyne Trouillot lives and works there as a French professor at the State Universtiy. She also facilitates writing workshops for children and youth. Évelyne Trouillot has published five novels, two books of poetry, three books of short stories, children's books and one essay on children's and human rights in Haiti. Her work is translated into Spanish, Italian, English and German.

C. M. Harclyde Walcott

C. M. Harclyde Walcott was born in Bridgetown, Barbados. He was educated at Erdiston Model, then Modern High in Bridgetown, and York University in Toronto, Canada. Mr. Walcott has among other occupations, worked as a Theatre Director, Film-Maker and Photo-Journalist.His creative writing has appeared in 'The New Voices', 'Arts Review', 'Poui', 'Calabash' and 'Bim'.

Thanks to our translators:

Bernadette Farqhuar, *retired Senior Lecturer at the University of the West Indies, Cave Hill. She attended Hampton University and Cornell University in the United States.*

Jeannette Allsopp *PhD (Lond Met) is a linguist, lexicographer and foreign language specialist. She has done many translations from Spanish and French into English and vice versa. She currently directs the Centre for Caribbean Lexicography at the UWI Cave Hill Campus and is the author of the first and only Caribbean Multilingual Dictionary of Flora, Fauna and Foods in English, French, French Creole and Spanish and is at present involved in compiling a second volume of the Multilingual Dictionary of music, dance, folklore, festivals and religion.*

FICTION

Christine Barrow

Since retirement as Professor Emerita from the University of the West Indies (UWI), Christine Barrow has been writing short stories, three of which have been published (under a pseudonym) in Poui: The Cave Hill Journal of Creative Writing. She has completed courses in Creative Writing at the Barbados Community College and at UWI, and was a participant in the residential Cropper Foundation Writer's Workshop in Trinidad and Tobago in July 2010.

Photo: Jonathan Demme

Edwidge Danticat

Edwidge Danticat is the author of several books, including Breath, Eyes, Memory, *an Oprah Book Club selection,* Krik? Krak!, *a National Book Award finalist, and* The Farming of Bones, *an American Book Award winner, and the novel-in-stories,* The Dew Breaker. *She is also the editor of* The Butterfly's Way: Voices from the Haitian Dyaspora in the United States *and* The Beacon Best of 2000: Great Writing by Men and Women of All Colors and Cultures, Haiti Noir, Haiti Noir 2, *and* Best American Essays 2011. *She has written four books for young adults and children* – Anacaona, Behind the Mountains, Eight Days, The Last Mapou – *as well as a travel narrative,* After the Dance, A Walk Through Carnival in Jacmel *and a collection of essays,* Create Dangerously. *Her memoir ,* Brother, I'm Dying, *was a 2007 finalist for the National Book Award and a 2008 winner of the National Book Critics Circle Award for autobiography. Her most recent book is* Claire of the Sea Light.

Karen Lord

Karen Lord is a writer and research consultant. Her debut novel Redemption in Indigo *won the 2008 Frank Collymore Literary Award, the 2010 Carl Brandon Parallax Award, the 2011 William L. Crawford Award, the 2011 Mythopoeic Fantasy Award for Adult Literature and the 2012 Kitschies Golden Tentacle (Best Debut), and was also longlisted for the 2011 Bocas Prize for Caribbean Literature and nominated for the 2011 World Fantasy Award for Best Novel. Her second novel T*he Best of All Possible Worlds *won the 2009 Frank Collymore Literary Award.*

Robert Edison Sandiford

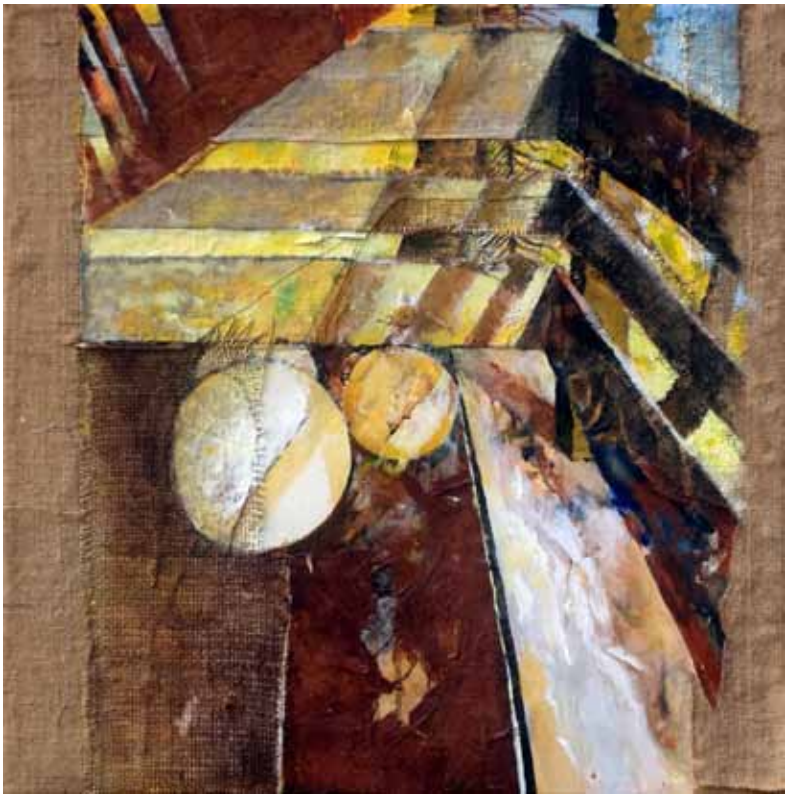
Robert Edison Sandiford is the author of eight books, including the novel And Sometimes They Fly *and the graphic novel* Great Moves. *He is the editor with Linda M. Deane of* Shouts from the Outfield: The ArtsEtc Cricket Anthology *(www.artsetcbarbados.com). A recipient of Barbados' Governor General's Award for fiction and the Harold Hoyte Award for newspaper editing, he has worked as a journalist, publisher, video producer (with Warm Water Productions), and teacher.*

Hazel Simmons-McDonald

Hazel Simmons-McDonald is a Professor of Applied Linguistics and the Pro-Vice Chancellor and Principal of the University of the West Indies Open Campus. She has edited anthologies of poetry and prose, and serves on the board of 'Poui', a journal of creative writing published by the Department of Language, Linguistics and Literature. Hazel has published poetry and short fiction and was among eleven writers of short fiction listed for consideration for the first Hollick Arvon prize for short fiction in 2013.

Ronald A. Williams

Ronald A. Williams was born in Barbados and lives in the United States. He attended Coleridge and Parry high school where he was a track athlete. Now retired, Williams writes full time. He is the author of three novels, 'Four Saints and an Angel', 'A Death in Panama', and 'A Voice from the Tomb'. A new novel, 'The Memoir', will be published in 2014.



BAY HOUSE 2 2011 by **Alison Chapman-Andrews**
24" x 24" acrylic and collage
Landscape Revisited

A verandah corner at Martins Bay.
Somebody had found the two bleached floats, washed away from fishing nets. To this still life, I added the dead coconut branch from the beach. Through the slats of the enclosing rail, made from rough wood, is seen a coconut tree with two hanging dead leaves. The canvas is textured by papers, burlap, and bark cloth. These natural textures are painted over in acrylic.
Light streams through the rail producing a strong pattern. The sea is seen at the top right. These houses on the bracing East Coast of Barbados were where families took their summer holidays, away from heat of Bridgetown. They were called Bay Houses. My favourite piece in the collage, is the button left on the cloth which echoes the round floats.

Foreword

It is evident that ***BIM*: Arts for the 21st Century** continues to reaffirm its regional character in this issue that features the work of Anglophone writers as well as that of the Francophone and Spanish-speaking countries.

The reader will observe as well that this issue focuses heavily on poetry since this genre is seldom given the prominence it deserves. *BIM* provides that essential space that allows for the voices of established and emerging poets to reconnect us with ourselves through their creative and often innovative insights.

In her poem, "Hommage," Evelyne Trouillot, pays tribute to the woman whose strength persists, though "*la pénombre a épousé sa silhouette/ et la vie a violé son sexe."* The poems of Pablo Armando Fernandez are mostly reflective. In" El Antes en el Tiempo," he concludes, *"Hecho el trayecto que en la palabra/ nos identifica, todo memoria,/ el Antes, resucita* (Having made the journey that identifies us in the word/ every memory, the Past, lives once more.)

Ann Limm, a finalist in the 2013 Bocas Poetry competition, writes with the well-known forthrightness of the Jamaican woman. In her poem "Immerse' she tells of "*the rub a dub I hanker after/in a smouldering room with boom boxes/and a man/pinned to this grey and black dress/that when accessorized with pink snake/-skin belt, skirts middle thigh*.

Linda M. Deane is no less striking in her poem "Close to Home." This poet focuses our attention on the disturbing fact of vagrancy in our societies: *"that piss smell that carries up and downwind, the rags,/ the matted mud hair…the wild, doan-carish air/ the rant turning the air blue…"* Deane's "River Road Stand 1" is also a dramatic evocation of the Barbadian ZR van experience.

In what I call "the artlessness of art," Edward Baugh sums up in "For Attention" the complacency with which we treat communication from dear friends only to regret later: *The date of her letter: 22/04/01. / I wish I could remember when she died.* One senses the poet's apology but also the acknowledgement of his tendency towards forgetfulness as a result of his own aging. We celebrate the publishing of Baugh's latest collection of poems: Black Sand: New and Selected Poems (Peepal Tree Press).

One is struck by Danielle Boodoo-Fortuné's unique imagination, somewhat similar to that of the late British poet, Sylvia Plath. Danielle is already gaining several significant awards for her poetry: *"Today she lets you in, / mines the cracks/ in her bones with the/ point of her tongue/ and listens…After all, a heart too soft/ will fail, collapse in the lung/ send you fumbling for a body / to breathe for you."*

John Robert Lee dedicates his "Poems of Copiapó" to Kamau Brathwaite. One can almost hear the voice of our elder griot in Lee's words: *"my soul waits/ for the sound of the wheel/ for the grate of the weary winch/ for my portion of miracle."* Kwame Dawes also pays tribute to one of my favourite poets, the late Seamus Heaney: " *to see that break in time/is to kill something in us, again, each time,"* while Mark McWatt has recently added photography to complement a major poetic talent.

Olive Senior, Edwidge Danticat and Ramabai Espinet prove that is spite of their different metropolitan locations, their roots remain strong in their writings that are highly evocative of their Caribbean experience.

National Book Award nominee, John Balaban, Professor in English and poet-in-residence at the State University of North Carolina takes us outside the Caribbean landscape as far as the Black Sea to remind us that in the end, "Only poetry lasts."

The fiction in this November issue is no less striking. Christine Barrow's "Yellow" is a compact, well-crafted piece combining elements of Nature, innocence and tragedy. Hazel Simmons-McDonald's "Mirror" shortlisted for the Hollick Arvon prize, explores the complexities and deceptions of love relationships. Double Frank Collymore Award winner, Karen Lord, does not fail to sustain our interest in her unusual piece entitled, "Haunts."

In "The Big O," Robert Sandiford provides insight as to what is still not possible for a talented black musician in today's Western diaspora. In his extract, "Tightrope," Ronald Williams shows the obvious talent we have seen in his previously published works.

We also feel honoured to have the work of local artist, Alison Chapman-Andrews, on the cover and pages of this issue.

We take this opportunity to announce the *2014 Bim Literary Festival and Book Fair*, May 15-18. Independence Square will be the home of the festival and with its connecting bridges and waterway, the theme: Crossings: Breaking Boundaries, is most fitting. The environs, including the Main Public Library, Days Bookstore, and the Waterfront will be sites for the festival, all locations easily accessible to the public.

The organising committee feels privileged indeed that the Prime Minister, the Hon. Freundel Stuart, Q.C. M.P. , has agreed to be Patron of the festival as he was for the inaugural event in 2012. During the breakfast hosted by the Prime Minister in 2012, noted writers such as Derek Walcott, Earl Lovelace, Lorna Goodison and Kei Miller, among others, presented signed copies of their work to the Prime Minister. We hope to repeat this significant event with our visiting writers in May next year.

We hope you enjoy this November issue and that you continue to support the Bim magazine, our essential literary legacy.

Esther Phillips

Editor

COSMIC GROVE 1994 by **Alison Chapman-Andrews**
48" x 60" acrylic
Private Collection

Below Layne Bridge was a magnificent gully with Royal palms on the left, and a stream with coconut trees. In the painting the sun and moon appear simultaneously. Under a straight horizon orange land symbolizes the heat compared to the coolness in the gully with its blues and greens. Each tree trunk is patterned differently. On the gully floor the plantation that owns it tried growing red and pink ginger lilies, seen in centre.

POETRY

A Hammer to Love With

Danielle Boodoo-Fortuné

On her sixteenth birthday
you gave her a hammer,
told her
here, love with this.

Love has been hard
since then, and brittle.

You've gone ten years
without sleep, five years
without silence.

Today she lets you in,
mines the cracks
in her bones with the
point of her tongue
and listens.

You straighten the sheets, crush
fennel seeds in her tea
to keep the gods at bay.
How any man can survive her
is beyond your wisdom, but
in some way you are proud
of the thing she's become.

When did it happen,

she asks, as she always will,
her tongue bruised
from the night's work.

When did it start?

You remember, oh yes.
She must've been seventeen,
dragged him home bleeding from the mouth
and singing in godstongue.
Between her bone-sharp teeth,
the hammer, dark and glistening.

Or at least that's how you remember it.

You say nothing,
wipe the spilt marrow
from her breasts.
feed her, spoon idle talk
into her bitten mouth.

You do what you can.

Oh, this one is difficult,
you can tell by her eyes.
She is afraid he might undo her,
take her by the hips
too gently

undress
the wound

too slowly.

But you smell the bones
buried shallow in the bed.
Oh, she will manage him,
like she always does.
There is no tenderness
here, not since
then.

Tonight you will comfort yourself
with smoke and prayer.
When she licks her way
into him, you will wish
you hadn't heard the cry,

wish you hadn't said the words

But it is finished, you tell yourself.
And it is not your doing.
After all, a heart too soft
will fail, collapse in the lung,
send you fumbling for a body
to breathe for you.

You know this better than most.

After all,
anything, swung hard enough
will kill a man,
hammer and heart alike.

Five Songs for Petra

Danielle Boodoo-Fortuné

I
They say my great-grandmother was mad,
but I like to think she flew into herself,
got trapped in the wool of her feline heart
and decided to stay there.

II
He was already married when he met her.
Her name juts from the borders of his own,
half-Carib woman with a forest in her bones,
mother of his mad children, she who would dare,
with her sharp white teeth, to try and eat him alive.

III
They say my great-grandmother lived alone in the leaning house.
I slept there once, long after her death,
my body rocked between the walls by
a slow August earthquake.
I smelled her in the damp floorboards.
The syllables of her name
rolled through the broken windows like
swollen fruit and grating metal.

That was how I found her.

IV
He was already married when he met her,
but there was something about her
that caught him, pierced his skin.

Her love was an unsheathed claw.

He waited, tunneled around in the flute
of her hip to find the sound
of himself.

But soon, the beasts around the bed
would not let him in. The house bulged
with books and bared teeth.

When she began to sing to the trees,
he decided it would be best
to remain whole.

V
There is a door that leads
down a broken hill. Trees grow there,
but are dark, burdened with moss
and too much hunger.
If she walked here, with her dogs
barefoot and half-blind, then
I might still find her.

If I go mad, like she did,
I wonder if he will stay.

Immerse

Ann Lim

My hands duck the grey
and black dress
three times into the water
before I hold it
and scrub it with the brush.

In this moment I am John
baptising my dress, then religion
administering the ritual *scritch*
scritch, scritch to free it of any signs
of the rub a dub I hanker after

in a smouldering room with boom boxes
and a man
pinned to this grey and black dress
that when accessorized with pink snake
-skin belt, skirts middle thigh.

Domestic

Ann Lim

Light blue sky; white clouds;
a Westmoreland Sunday ruled by sun;
five steps down from the road, children
grown-ups arranged at the seas' skirt
in the carpet of sand;
houses on both sides of the road;
a patch of land – grass overgrown:
a woman and a man.

She goes down, gets up
and goes down again. His hands
feet deliver blows. A house looks up
intermittently from the paper.

Caribbean Aubade

Ann Lim

De win' doan turn so slow;
de sea doan groan up and down de shore
in de mawning.

No, when mawning come
de win' rush, fling open de window;
de sea sprint, tear up de course, like Bolt.

So come, fin' mi wais'
res' yu head in de curl o' me neck
till true mawning come.

For Dorothea

C.M Harclyde Walcott

i remember
thinking, to myself
when i entered
the room
that you looked the part

and then i saw your bright red heart
the one that you had pasted
over,

the apple
on your laptop.

and then I saw your shining silver crescent
the one that cradled the star
that dangled from the waist
of your wrapper
folding in
nicely
and curved behind,
the way good fabric behaves
on a body
that is worthy

full
of statement

and then I saw the ring
finger, silent
that spoke gently
from that many ringed left hand

and so much like
nina
of whom you remind me
and whom i love

Here It Lingers

Ramabai Espinet

Here it lingers, death does
Hesitant before my clinging to familiar ways
A cough at morning, that special cadence
The timbre of a voice, at the end
Somehow approximating itself, saving
Its most companionable moments of grace
For its own comfort

All days seep into a limbo just
At the point of apprehending change
Yet change refuses its own disturbance
Keeps goals intact, stays its hand
Shines like copper gleaming in sunlight
Like old tapestries, settled, marked by light
Keeps the threads of its own safety

The plant in the corner remembers
The black leaves of last year's grief
How its tears drawn in chlorophyll
Shrivelled into black on the greying rug
Registering an improbable grief
How to tabulate such knowing; how
Read in a different tongue, a plant's language

I remember, do you? The day
You were born, how the window
Filled with light, how the leaves
On the soursop tree showed their brown undersides
How tall the celamen tree was, swooping over
The wooden house; the pigs at the back
Horses -a stable- all this you knew

I remember how you knew one house
Only (until you lost it) its gray roof
Sheltered by a chenette tree, shaking
With earthquake, hurricane, riot
Remember the bicycle you borrowed
From Teacher Kelly to ride home
The day of the Water Riots, your heart thumping

No time for forgetting all your struggle
The days that rose up in dust and canefield
Turning you round and round till you
Could only see concentric circles; you grew giddy
You spun and fell; only sugar revived you
You spoke more slowly; you turned your back
Your heart thudded on, breath continued

Careless, often, seeing too much but also
Not seeing, not hearing, heedless, caring
Too much; if all they say is true
Omitting the simple truth of how hard it was
How hard, how hard all of it really was
And how love made up for some of it
How impossible to tell it-the temptations, the grief

You remember the times when it all came
Together in a blaze of sunset, a touch
A boat inching towards Faralon, the open sea
A rock at Balandra Bay, its roughness, its flatness
The sweetness of a winning horse's flank
A good hand played, white water breaking at Mayaro,
Morning walks, a woman's ardent smile

If all these once known and held
Forget the way your feet marked earth
And how you held in your cupped hands
Still dreams, silent, not marked for waking
One plant's blackened leaves remember grief
And my hours of waking, my dreams
Too remember the timbre of a voice much loved

Poems of Copiapó

John Robert Lee

for Kamau Brathwaite

Wheel

Wheel, wooden support, winching cable

tradesman's materials of this miracle

in the desert of Copiapó,

like bread, like fish, like rain water turning to wine—

O wheel that lifts with inexorable, monotonous love

they that had gone, had sunk from sight, had disappeared

from hands that now hungered in regret,

eyes desperate for one more looking

like the lovers of Port au Prince, the mothers of Medellin—

you are not the UFO some saw in 1864 over Copiapó

spectacular, a mythical Samsara

an Ezekiel fantasy of cycling whirlwinds,

but here, clamped above the blue cavern that entombs the 33

yoked to the capsule that falls relentlessly through the needle of a shaft

you return them each to terrible glory,

to impossible hope, from abysses of faith

like Lazarus to the salt bread and green tea of his incredulous friends.

Last man out

"…and if the earth jolted now

or the weary cable shredded

or they forgot to count

the last fool embedded

in his damned courage

or the capsule door

opened up to wedge

that treacherous corridor

and has the weather changed
above the Atacama
and if the earth rearranged
now this blue tabernacle

and is she faithful
Cortella, Cortella —
O rod and staff me as You will
in the depths of this desert valley

as my soul waits
for the sound of the wheel
for the grate of the weary winch
for my portion of miracle

last one to be raised
estamos bien en el refugio
my soul waits
and in Your wheel I hope."

Supper at Copiapó

O blessed yard of chickens and cavorting pups
after that catacomb's dread and aborted hopes
and holy be the avocado blossoms of this precious plot
that will never lie in that grim grotto

and happy be the sacred rags of these grandchildren
whose prayers, I swear, will never wash the belly of that cavern

and how complete the worn hands of my old lover
that caressed my dreams at the end of the shaft of San José—

so, hallowed be this coffee cup, this corn, this wine
these companions of the gloom from day one to sixty-nine
that Your ineffable grace lifted from Copiapó mine.

Dé Bonda

Vladimir Lucien

The boys still slammin' their dominoes
outside of Broda's place. Cock-chat
who use to be a sweet-boy in his day,
use to be a carpenter, he say, with the best
wood in the whole island, starring in
the Country & Western dances, now sits
limp and old, slamming dominoes hard
on the table with three of his partners,
wearing his old crumpled Fedora loosely
on his head. Cock-chat has had enough
women in his day. In his small world, he has lived
all the life he has ever cared to live. He has built a long
line of dominoes now, and holds the final one
in his hand, suspended over the board, knowing
that on either end of that long white road, dotted
with little black oblivions like a map of all the funerals
he has ever attended, it is his turn to play; that no matter what
any of his partners do, they cannot stop him.
No matter how much his children-mother quarrel
tonight, a man don't go home until he ready. He slams
his domino, the whole table is shaken.
Somebody else reshuffles.

Black Light

Vladimir Lucien

In Memory of Walter Rodney

It inevitable that all o' we bound
to step on our shadow foot
and not say sorry, that our mother
can only teach us what manners
was when she was small and worry
about if we will be good people or no
if we will say thank you and please, that we would ask
and receive, that the hard times go ease
up, that no-body can buckle our knees and tell us
we hungry, and there will always be light in our eyes
and always bread in our heart. But is because you go
and start givin' the system back-chat, tellin' too much
to the Bredren and the Sistren, bringing down
the bar-graph of Babylon buildings, measuring underdevelopment,
grounding downpressers to dust, demanding bigger manners like Freedom,
Equal Rights & Justice, asking permission to be your skin
and yourself please! because you did not hold your peace
in your pants pocket, did not take your UWI cheque quiet
with it signature hissing fast like a snitch, the light switch on you
with a rage ready to blow out the candle that you was,
your afro blazing from your scalp down there in Burnham
gold-tooth El Dorado. And to think that in Georgetown, and in
Kingston, and down in Bridgetown, the youths with good heads
on their shoulders, Vaseline shining on their forehead like futures,
white powder on their chest keeping their hearts cool, will go to school
and learn all kind of nothing about them-self, that they will mash
their shadow foot as it go behind them, that one day one of them,
one of your own, playin' smart , go deny you, go spit their new light
on the darkness of your heart.

Our Own Rebellion

Juleus Ghunta

We will not devolve our duties to
the dissidents in Tahrir Square:
to arraign those who oppress us here.

Our afflicted souls - though widely strewn -
unyielding resolve transcends the moon.

We note the broken ribs, the tears, gas,
the blood curdling in the cracks
beneath the dark roof of their ashen cities;
the hymns that keep the limbs of their dead moving.

We must honour Egypt with our own rebellion.

Our insolent screams must excoriate the hands of greed
until their skeletons release our sacred dreams,
and *"if they don't allow us to dream,*
we will not allow them to sleep".

The Blue Chair

Juleus Ghunta

The truth is, there's no monopoly on anything,
neither freedom, nor the making of heroes, nor dreams.

SASO sung songs of liberation
deep into '76 nights,
causing Apartheid's wings to flutter in Soweto streets,
crippled by young dissidents.

I know, therefore,
that the blue chair in the final passage
at the western end of the library,
where adjacent shelves glow
with the Mandelas, Bikos and Sisulus
shall be your seat of salvation
if you so desire.

Here and There

Kathleen McDonald

bright thick petals
of frangipani,
breadfruit trees laden
sea spray finding its way
up the hill
many coloured hibiscus
sweeter than taste
with each breeze
the pink oleander
demands attention

breadfruit gone
No sea spray to moisten
skin now dry from western air
Here, far north are hibiscus and
pink oleander blooming
still heady
from childhood memories
growing among unfamiliar shrubs
many miles from home
that calls me stranger.

Flotsam and Jetsam

Philip Nanton

It's just nature, we say
this tsunami of empire that washed us up here.

Final offer gentlemen. Five pounds three shillings
for the seasoned buck.

When that last wave rolled back it exposed a humble butter fish
twitching, flipping and flapping, worn down town

Five dollar for that heap?
Ground provisions no longer cheap.

its mouth opening and closing

you'd be amazed what deals can be struck with care
in our little colony's market square

sucking its death of sea air wondering why its fins
fail to glide through water while its scales
slap the keel of some hard-hulled fishing boat.

Only thirty dollar Mother Lynch. Ah beg yuh
.
Mammy sending money for the wear and tear

When did we become indifferent to the hucksters
with their tight grip on the sidewalks

DRIVER! Why you can't look where you coming?

their five shoe boxes, twenty-three combs and
white trestle tables that groan with out-size brassieres?

Rasta! Why YOU can't go where you looking?

We're cool with the pool of smart boys skulking in Middle Street
each with his three card stool waiting to fool the next passer-by

You and you family…….. think they big-shot.

while Sam solicits donations for his phantom football teams.

It have a funeral at four o'clock sharp.

Who turns a hair when Bazodie marches through Market Square
wearing buttoned down wrists, short pants, head swathed in a balaclava.

I wonder why people always have to die 'pon a week-day.

With his termite ridden piece of treated pine he executes a perfect off drive

and follows it through okras and eddoes in the firm belief that he is Brian Lara.

He? He say he going to come back.

And we look away when the rain fills the drains

Who want to go to Hell can go to Hell.

and cockroaches thick as locusts swim out of the open gutters
like recently hatched leather-backs lost on their way to sea.

You are the shepherd, they are the flock

But all's not lost. The wharf sign welcomes everyone
to a capital city proclaiming itself a hive of industry.

Boy, don't wear jeans and tee shirt again
when you come to see me.

They keep you too hot.

Passing

Kwame Dawes

> *The day he died, the day he didn't need*
> *To catch the horse since the horse had come to him*
> *Where he sat beside a path*
>
> Seamus Heaney

Something dies in us each time we see
someone die—by that I mean the moment
between their being alive and the instant
the long breathless moment after they grow still.
There are holy deaths or deaths that
comfort like the wide space we feel
after a terrible pain, the strain of trying.
But death, sudden and violent, and by this
I mean the halting of animation, the suspense
that becomes the dying person's last
expression; to see that break in time
is to kill something in us, again, each time.

Heroes

Kwame Dawes

For Seamus Heaney and all the true Veterans

In my world, the heroes have died perfectly
or matured into responsible creatures, wildness
gone, families to care for—heroic feats, all memories.
They return to old streets not triumphant
but to the sordid fact of their hearts thumping
with fear of their violent cities. In the old days the shadows
were ghosts, the named spirits of the dead, familiar
as the nooks and crannies of the streets, the taste
of fruit according to trees, the physics of balls
in the air. Those ghosts returned every night,
so familiar were they with the topography of shadow
and light, or the braggadocio of our champions—
then, we thought it not foolhardy to gambol around
gravestones, daring them to come to meet us. They are
buried now, their bones awaiting the resurrection.

Close to Home

Linda M. Deane

The gait of *paros* treasure hunting in trash cans,
shapeless litter on the steps of the Treasury Building
or blocking access on the boardwalk.
The one like broken machinery you have to sidestep
by the bank. I'm checking the lines on the hand
out-stretched for a dime, fixating on features:
the shape of a mouth coaxing dollars from hapless tourists,
how far the eyes have sunk or are red or vacant.
I meet the stare head-on in case the obstruction,
that piss smell that carries up *and* downwind, the rags,
the matted mud hair, that angry look, the wild, doan-carish air
the rant turning the air blue or the resigned despair
is the distant cousin, second or third (I forget which)—
in any case, the one that shows up from time to time,
the strayed black sheep the family considers not
far enough removed.

But then I find myself thinking
What the hell can you do?
…

River Road Stand 1

Linda M. Deane

In the van stand, pigeons stage
epic fail over hardened crust.
Muddy gutter, cocked wings flail,

discarded snack box spills its fries.

Blackbird enters. Swoops, snatches
and is gone in bright, beaded blink
of eye. Like only he one knows

how to flash feather and mek it fly.

Expertly, “The 19” loads itself. Driver
springs behind the wheel, gives wide berth
to all o’ wunnah blocking and we leave

behind us, the squabble of half-filled rides.

Lara

Keith Ellis

for Lynherst Peña

He came to shadowy light
when the Gleaner's cricket writer,
a branch of the tree of colonial whips,
chastised the Jamaica youth team
for losing to its counterpart from Trinidad.
So absorbed was our keen scribe
in the downward strokes of his whip
it escaped his punitive mind
that at every back swing, loading up for more,
indelible evidence accumulated amounting to this:
the Jamaican boys suffered defeat not for being
lazy ignorant scoundrels, brutes
in need of old-time discipline,
but for a quality the Gleaner's pens
seem trained not to report:
the gleaming unmatched display of talent
of a young West Indian master,
the fielding, captaincy and above all
the batting of one named Brian Lara,
who at every turn was nemesis to Jamaica,
but to whom the antithesis
of the lashing verbiage would not be applied.

Then with sure-footed ascent, the master dancer,
forward or angling to the pitch,
backward for the cut, pull or hook,
with elastic stretch for the drive,
or compact recoil to explode from the back foot,
bat always kissed at that spot of sweetness,
the meeting place of power and grace,
sounding always the same sumptuous music.
With pure elegance did this genuine pearl

and son of Pearl accumulate as no one before,
lifting us to ecstasy unknown in sport,
leaving in streaming tatters
the concept of the good-length ball.
The sun watched with Caribbean glee
the radiant commanding spectacle.

A sickly tint of green
encroached on his conquered fields.
Sombre England was where it first appeared.
Permission granted for brief return from there
for native honours soon was Iagoed
into murmurs about perceived haughtiness.
Then they brewed the perfect poison:
HE THINKS HE'S BIGGER THAN CRICKET.
Antidotes for such imputations do not exist;
and so they poured it out in funneled tabloids,
transmitted it in waves, long ones for the locals;
the BBC targeted short distilled ones
at the West Indies, still to be post colonial.

From the rumshops to the University:
"Im tink im bigga dan cricket"
"Im no bigga dan cricket!"
"De bwoy seh im bigga dan cricket"
Mi noh like him at all yu know sah"
"Why?" "Mi no know why. Mi jus doan like im."
"The problem is Brian Lara thinks he's bigger than cricket."
And they found new sins.
"I saw Lara last night. He was with a woman!"

And we, in Jamaica especially,
where I had stood behind his netted stumps
hour after hour until late on a Saturday
watching him sweetly address everything
offered by an ingenious bowling machine,
his lightning mind managing every smooth motion,
while gunshots rang out from surrounding districts,
after sportswriters and teammates had long gone,

as he prepared to show Sri Lanka his sole mastery,
shielding the others from the peak form
of the greatest spinner who has ever lived
--and not just the very good one
from whom he took in cultivated style the record
number of runs in a test over—,
we in Jamaica especially, readers of the Gleaner
and of its one-note critic, remained in dreary cant:
“de boy noh have no discipline,
im tink im bigga dan cricket.”

Equanimous historian of our cricket,
Sandiford the Barbadian, had watched him in exceptional awe
when still in tender years “he tore apart
on a bad wicket” two sanctified demons of speed,
the bouncing Garner and the wily Marshall.

Without him, our loyal administrators
kindly agreed to an English tour
fixed by the hosts to cuddle with lingering winter,
with no merciful acclimatization
and each match placed further north.
Our frigid inept fingers were thoroughly crushed
in the plotted inaugural white-washing.

He who had left from the island of three verdant peaks
to scale three times the rugged and slippery Himalayas
like no one else, on two occasions
with infinite endurance remaining,
375, with 501 and 400 not out,
was now unheralded in his islands;
Caupolicán bereft of Ercilla or Darío.[1]

Prompted in the extreme by a smooth-tongued
and persistent travelling Iago,
Lara’s Antiguan colleague, then broadcaster,
branded this third and unending monument
“the worst thing to have happened to West Indies cricket.”

The commentators do not remember
the unmatched nobility of his sporting manners,
his way of not staying if he knew
he had breached the nicest edge of a rule,
or his restraint in not exposing his victimization
by the numerous misjudgements of the men in white.
Barring those record wrongs, the long injury,
what would his totals have been?

Of them he did not speak,
but deep resentment he provoked
from paid users of the word
for ascending to the pinnacle
in articulateness, cogency and wit
among those in sport who comment on sport.
It burned most in the one obligatorily praised,
the presumed authority we were told to respect,
master of the cliché in word and colonial thought.
He whispered with a visiting Iago
our hero from our glorious sport to keep.

We went along and threw a pearl away
richer than any we have ever had.

1 When the Spaniards invaded Chile in 1535, its main inhabitants, the Mapuche people, chose as the commander-in-chief of their resistance the man who demonstrated the greatest endurance by bearing for a longer time than his competitors a tree trunk on his shoulders as he walked without rest about an arena. Several competed, but Caupolicán outdid them all by bearing the weight for close to two days and showing at the end of the contest that he still had much in reserve, that he was "not out." The people declared him to be "El Toqui" (The Leader), and he was splendid in their defence. The exceptionally civilized Spanish poet-soldier, Alonso de Ercilla y Zúñiga (1534-1594) celebrated Caupolicán's feats in his epic poem La Araucana, which appeared in three parts, in 1569, 1578 and 1589, a poem that marks the beginning of Spanish-American poetry. In 1890 the great Nicaraguan poet Rubén Darío (1867-1916) returned to the theme, as others including Pablo Neruda (1904-1973) later did, praising Caupolicán in one of the best known sonnets in the Spanish language.

TREES ON BLACK (detail) 1998 by **Alison Chapman-Andrews**
14" x 14" acrylic on machine knitting
Private Collection

Vertigo

Carlyon Blackman

A gaggle of school girls made their way
through a shortcut of the hospital grounds
and came upon a man, a good looking man,
the sort they wrapped in brown shop paper
and hid under the covers, love swept and flushed.

So romantic he was, standing there
on the flat slate roof several stories high
above all rippling muscled heart,
wild of eye, and earnest
as the wind tearing words
from his sculpted lips:
something about Sibyl and forever,
can't live... constant pain... us apart...

A girl, who was next in line ahead of me
beholding the scene of glorious living colour,
pushed past the crowd of drab men and wives
suspended in their drill polyester lives
in time to hear one nurse remark out loud:
go on, jump you fool, stop wasting precious time
and let me get on with the balance of my work.

How could she ever hope to know what alchemy
harlequins and silhouettes possess
that makes us hesitate at the deckle edge
between a chapter's end and the freefall binding
us to the here and now.

Reflections On A Statuette Of A Cuban Drummer

Mark McWatt

(for Samuel Fure Davis)

When I look at this photograph
the sounds my mind hears
are the best palliative for pain:
those quick, anaesthetizing rhythms
sweep over me, like the oblivion of safe arrival
after a long, stormy flight.

The facelessness beneath the obligatory hat
is another convenient erasure
of accusatory discomfort—leaving only
the formal guilt of the tourist, trying too hard
for the right balance between concern
and the delirious self-abandon of the night-club,
where no familiar face challenges
his dream of belonging...

And so, harnessed to the drum
—and the native's knowing eye—
he writhes awkwardly to the midnight music
that he can never inhabit...

Of Fish And Photographs

Mark McWatt

A dead fish on Sixty-Three beach:
a common sight, perhaps,
suggesting no moral imperatives,
no need for careful thought nor action.
It is pointless to wonder why
some of the sea's dead are swept ashore
while others are consumed in the water,
nourishing and sustaining the ocean of life...

So the mind's judgment need not be engaged
by this sight...

And yet, as one who stood
on that spot and looks now at this image,
I find myself questioning the power of a photograph:
for despite its faithful reproduction of grey sand
and grey, rotting flesh, I'm struck by the way
it falsifies the reality of the experience

—by excluding the sense of smell...

Black Orchid, Black Orchid

Margaret D. Gill

See. Black orchids edge the hedges
of this playing field. For me,
I'd never call a flower's name
such to suggest malfeasance
or some perfidy. I'm only saying.

An orchid here escapes the view
of Madam Bannochie. Just saying.
Black orchid growing on the edges
of some playing fields. For me, I'd call it
a black orchid. Nothing more.

Just sing it out:

> "Black orchid, near the edges of some playing field!
> Black orchid…"

Hommage

Évelyne Trouillot

Dans mon poème
la nuit est pleine de flottes mystérieuses
aux voiles voraces
et cupides
leurs barres dessinent des courbes
mensongères
qui font pleurer la terre
et mes orteils saignent déjà
ont saigné et saignent encore
sous la trouée de l'ancre

Je ne suis pas de celles qui baissent la tête
et s'habillent de porcelaine
quand les perles charrient
des histoires maudites dans leur sillage
que la mer asphyxie les téméraires
qui ont
embrassé l'abysse

Je me méfie de celles qui
poupées moelleuses
altèrent
la berceuse guerrière de la mère
à l'enfant qui ne naitra pas
car la pénombre a épousé sa silhouette
et la nuit a violé son sexe

Je ne suis pas de celles qui se prosternent
languides
devant des amours figées
en points de croix ou macramé
sur coupole d'argent
ou anneau doré

Dans mon poème
une femme traverse à gué
et le jour a troqué ses comptines patinées
pour la cadence chaloupée
des rives éprises
de mouvements insensés

Je n'oublie pas celle qui
a promis mille orgasmes lumineux
à son corps
s'il atteint la victoire

Je lui dis merci
d'avoir gardé au creux de son sein sauvage
le grand souffle du large

A Tribute

Évelyne Trouillot

In my poem
night is full of strange ships rigged with voracious, grasping sails
whose helms describe illusory contours that flow weeping on to land
My toes have bled and bleed and bleed again, caught in a ship's anchor.

I'm not one of those women who bow their heads and become like fragile
china dolls
when unsavoury words tarnish their reputation
and when the sea swallows up the impetuous ones who dared venture into deep waters

Let me be free of those who, like cuddly little dolls,
change a mother's war-like lullaby to her child who will not be born
because darkness covered her silhouette
and night ravished her
I'm not one of those women who prostrate themselves languidly
before faded love
with their embroidery or macramé etched on a silver dome and a golden ring

In my poem, woman fords the stream
and by day she trades her time-worn nursery rhymes
for the rolling cadence of river banks where delirious movements delight

I can't forget the woman who has promised a thousand ecstatic orgasms
to her body if it is victorious.

I thank her for cradling the huge breath of the open sea
in the fold of her wild breast

Translation by Bernadette Farqhuar

Le Cri Qui Trébuche

Évelyne Trouillot

Inutile de chercher à rattraper
la bille
Néophyte nébuleuse
la pensée se désagrège
en multiples parcelles solitaires
frigides orphelines

Ma part d'alphabet meurtri me reste entre les doigts
blessures à nu
sans voyelle ni métaphore pour muter la douleur
et sa rage décuplée
assiège mes paumes

Je ne le retrouve plus
ce poème que je pensais écrire
Dans la démence bleue
un nuage volage a perdu sa place
Qui se soucie
d'un cri rouge qui trébuche
entre ciel et terre ?

Sans le vouloir
j'ai froissé son aile
ombré l'envol étourdi du papillon
dans l'indifférence virtuelle
battement inaudible
majestueux

Pourtant j'aurais aimé poser mon front
là où la montagne s'agrippe au ciel
dans ce hiatus
chimérique
où mes peurs colossales et laides
devenues

singulières et parfaites
éclateraient sans mouiller la terre
entre l'épaule et la joue

Je ne le retrouve plus

Les idées ont perdu leur collier de paroles
et je ne sais comment les rafistoler l'une à l'autre
Mes doigts tripotent la matière innommable
qui s'évapore au toucher
et ma cervelle rebelle
refuse de chercher
elle ne veut que pleurer
la fugitive flamme
coincée entre ma voix et son lot
mourant d'étincelles

Insomniaque
se méfiant de ses songes
délateurs aux yeux clairs
je maudis
ce poème
qui me laisse
chavirée
le doigt pressé contre la gâchette

Comment savoir qui la balle aurait pu frôler ?

The Scream That Stumbles

Évelyne Trouillot

Why do I try yet again to grasp my pen?
Like nebulous neophytes, my thoughts break up into myriad scattered strands, lonely
cold and abandoned
What I know of the alphabet remains bruised between my fingers
like raw wounds,
without vowel or metaphor to
soothe the pain
and its increasing fury afflicts my palms

I have lost all trace
of the poem that I hoped to write
In the blue madness a fleeting cloud has gone astray.
Who cares about a red scream that stumbles between earth and sky?

Unconsciously, I crushed its wing
I tarnished the dizzy flight of the butterfly
a majestic silent beating of wings
obscured in near indifference

Yet, how I longed to rest my forehead
where the mountain grips the sky
in that illusory hiatus
where my giant, ugly fears
now rare and perfect
could break forth without the inundation of that space between shoulder and cheek

I have lost all trace of my poem
My ideas are like the scattered beads of strands of words
How do I string them back together?
My fingers toy with this evanescent matter
which disappears to the touch
and my rebellious brain will not go in search of it
Instead, it laments the fleeting flame trapped between my voice
and its dying portion of creative sparks

I'm an insomniac
suspicious of her clear-eyed betrayer dreams
I curse this poem
It leaves me devastated
with my finger pressed against the trigger

Who knows who its target could have been?

Translation by Bernadette Farqhuar

En el Principio el Agua Señoreaba

Pablo Armando Fernández

La Luz miró a su derredor, todo era expansión.
¿Dónde ejercer su obra?
En esa inmensidad todo era circular.
¿Cómo comunicar puntos opuestos
entre los cuales ascensos y descensos
fluyeran sin contradicción?
La expansión era aire ¿sin opuesto?
Creó el agua. Le encantó verla
imitar el color aplomado de la expansión.
mas, la hizo transparente, reflejo
de cuanto pudiera aparecer
semejante a todos los fulgores
que ella, Luz, emanaba.
El agua era vida en sí para sí misma.
La veía correr. evaporarse
y regresar feliz a la corriente
que en torrentes la expande.
¿Cómo hacerla dominio
compartido en distancias?
Sopló al aire y al agua y de su aliento
surgió la tierra, barro modelable
que podría cumplir con sus ensueños:
esparcir vida que se reproduce
en flor, fruto y semilla, polvo redimible.
Y de esa encarnación nacieron hombre y mujer,
pareja que al agua y a la tierra representan.

En este plano terrenal se hacen imprescindible
para la subsistencia. Cuando una falta a la otra
sus predios se enajenan y empobrecen.
El ser a quien la Luz diera su antorcha
esperanzada en que la propagara
entre sus semejantes y disfrutaran de la virtud
de hermanar agua y tierra como a iguales,
no debe faltar a ese designio redentor.
Su misión es cuidar de tierra y agua
para que no carezcan de ellas la simiente
que la Luz encarnó como su sustituto.
A todos por igual nos nutre y limpia,
sin ellas no hay simiente procreadora.
¿Qué falte a algunos? Es falla condenable
que la Luz no perdona.
De no atenernos a sus exigencias
el polvo regirá y volveremos a ser aire
circular en el vacío infinito.

La Habana, 21 de agosto de 2003

In The Beginning Water Reigned

Pablo Armando Fernández

Light looked around, everything was space.
Where could it do its work?
In this immensity everything was circular.
How could one communicate opposite points
Between which ascents and descents flowed smoothly?
The space was air, without opposite?
He created water. It delighted Him to see it
reflect the leaden colour of the space.
But, He made it transparent, a reflection
Of all that could appear similar to all the flashes
that she, Light, emanated.
Water was life in itself for itself
He saw it run, evaporate
And return happy to the stream
Which expanded into torrents.
How could he make it the domain
Shared across distances?
He breathed on the air and the water and from His breath
Arose the earth, malleable clay
Which could fulfill its dreams;
Scatter life which is reproduced
In flowers, fruit and seed, redeemable dust.
And from this incarnation were born man and woman,
A couple that represent both water and earth.

On this terrestrial plain they became essential
For survival. When one or other is lacking
Their qualities become reduced and impoverished.
The being to whom Light gave its torch
was hopeful that it would propagate
Among its fellow beings and that the virtue of
Joining water and earth as equals
Should not fall short of this redeeming design.
Its mission is to care for both earth and water
so that they do not lack the seed
that Light incarnated as its substitute
It nourishes and cleanses us equally
Without them there is no procreating seed.
That it may be missing in some? It is an unpardonable sin
That Light does not forgive.
If we do not attend to its demands
Dust will reign and we will once more become
Circular air in infinite space.

Havana, 21st August, 2003

Translation by Jeanette Allsopp

El Antes En Eltiempo

Pablo Armando Fernández

A Enrique Wolf

Antes, es en el Tiempo
el espacio que siempre nos acerca.
No importa dónde estemos.
El camino recupera las huellas
de nuestro andar hacia esos reencuentros,
en los que reiniciamos la ventura
que asiste a quienes andan de regreso a la Luz..
¿dónde, cuándo, cómo? En el andar.
Aquí estamos ahora tras peregrinaciones
que en el ave y la flor
ofrendaron destino a nuestro ser.
Rayo de luz, siempre como la flor
se multiplica y crece
y como el ave surca los espacios
para que el Antes en el Tiempo esparza la Luz.
Hecho el trayecto que en la palabra
nos identifica, todo memoria,
el Antes, resucita.

Londres, noviembre de 2002

The Past In Time

Pablo Armando Fernández

To Enrique Wolf

The past, in Time is
the space which always surrounds us.
It does not matter where we are.
The path retains our footprints
As we walk toward those re-encounters,
in which we relive the happiness
that is present in those who return to the Light..
Where, when, how? In walking.
Now here we are after our travels
that in the bird and the flower
Gave destiny to our being.
Ray of light, always like the flower
it multiplies and grows
and like the bird ploughs the spaces
so that the Past in Time will disseminate the Light.
Having made the journey that identifies us in the word,
every memory, the Past, lives once more.

London, November 2002

Translation by Jeanette Allsopp

Pensando en los Griegos

Miguel Barnet

Todo no es más que una huella
Queda la imaginación
como hilacha de la memoria
Pero es demasiado oscuro
y a diario se desvanece
la visión de conjunto
Si queremos dialogar con nosotros mismos
habrá que encontrar el modo
¿Acaso no fue lo que hizo
el socrático Platón?
Respiremos a fondo
con máscaras del tiempo que nos ha tocado vivir
El que inventa solo descubre una tradición
Descubrir es volver a hallar lo desconocido
Este poema solo se explica
en la certidumbre de su temporalidad
Como dije al principio
Todo no es más que una huella

Thinking about the Greeks

Miguel Barnet

Everything is nothing but a trace
Imagination remains
like a thread of memory
But it is too obscure
and daily the collective vision fades
If we wish to dialogue with ourselves
the way to do so will have to be found
Wasn't this perhaps
what Socratic Plato did?
Let us breathe deeply
With masks of time that it has been our lot to live
The one who invents only discovers a tradition
To discover is to find the unknown once more
This poem is only explained
In the certainty of its temporal nature
As I said at the beginning
Everything is nothing but a trace

Translation by Jeanette Allsopp

Licantropía

Miguel Barnet

En el borde del aire
fui el gorrión que vuela sin rumbo
En el lienzo de la borrosa pared
fui el lagarto esquivo
que repta donde nadie lo ve
En la tierra húmeda y mutable
fui la babosa
que se hunde en el hueco de agua
donde navega el homo sapiens
que soy.

Lycanthropy

Miguel Barnet

I was the sparrow who flew aimlessly
On the edge of the air
I was the fleeting lizard
which slithers where no one sees it
on the canvas of the blurred wall
I was the slug
That sinks into the pool of water
where the homo sapiens that I am sails.

Translation by Jeanette Allsopp

The Hospital Paintings

Loretta Collins-Klobah

For Mirerza and Robinson

I. Headland

On the summit of a mountain higher than our el Cerro de Punta,
ascending above La Grande Soufrière and even el Pico Duarte,
I sit in the grass, a rag doll, legs braced against downward slope.

From here, the land runs down to a wide, skirt-like promontory—
patched with sun-lit green, marl, red soil and thin-bedded sand.
Land ends in a rock-ridge, dropping-off to a sheer limestone cliff.

At cliff-foot, far below, crescent of beach, tiers of rainbow umbrellas,
canvas color-wheels that, from here, look like a cluster of ribbed beach balls.
If families are there with skin-oils, chips, boom songs, dominoes and babies,
I don't see them, only the gesso of white sea-foam lacing the cove's apron of blue sea.

The promontory is rustically fenced in roughly-hewn, white-washed posts,
dug-in wide apart, waist-high, strung with allamanda vines and yellow flowers.
I have never seen this quality of light, bright in the blue sky and over all else.
And though I am on a land mass of higher altitude than any to be found in my islands,
I recognize the world below as home, Puerto Rico.

I am looking at a woman,
who stands with her backside to me, by the fence at the cliff's edge.
She is beautiful, brown, solid and sturdy in an ox-leg stance
as she looks out to sea and over the world.
She is the center of gravity in her laced-up boots.
Her Afro, trimmed close at neckline, tufts high on top.

She wears a loose dress of excess yardage, sewn of lightest fabric,
curlicues of shimmering gold chintz swirling on clear nylon.
The sleeves and skirt billow and ripple in the wind.
La dorada, ribbons sheeny in that alchemy of light.

Queen Latifah? Here in Puerto Rico? I ask myself. I actually do.
But, it is not the Diva, shoulders-squared and gazing down,
with no jumper's impulse, no loveless stupor in her body's pose—
just a centered steadiness. It is not *that* diva. I see it's my daughter.

Not my *quinceañera*— she has grown fully into her womanishness.
I am surprised. I see she has had all the experiences that this entails.
She is forty. She is beautiful and beyond beauty standing there.

From where she stands, the land slopes down to the right.
Another woman is there, quite some distance away.
She also has her back to me, keeping her own meditations
at the flowery railing, her head swiveled to the sea.

She is dressed in simple blue-denim skirt and sandals, a sun hat.
Her white hair is pulled into a pony-tail, so that it won't gallop.
I am supposed to know who she is, but I don't.
The way they stand there, it is like those paintings of women.
I fall off the mountain. From that height, I fall backwards, plunge.
I feel the full G-force of the long, hard, fall, then I hit.

My eyes open halfway. It is dark. The hospital bed is beneath me.
It is too dark to see the one ornament on the wall facing me,
the wishbone that someone hung there— Christ on his cross.
My eyes and the two water balloons of my lungs have survived the fall.
Nothing else. I am flattened into the bed, yet not even my head is here.
The air that gusts on the liquid of my eyes is very, very cold.
It is dark.
I am alone.
My daughter is not here with me.
I have her afterimage —floating.

II. Legba

With sketch book, headphones and blanket, my girl has come to camp out,
nesting in her pajama pants in my visitor's chair all this Sunday afternoon.
She bubbles-over, recounting escapades with family friends caring for her,
the thrill and drama of having lots of brothers and sisters, pool outings
at their second condo in Cabo Rojo, where she saw red monkeys in the trees.

And the father has a whole room where he keeps his drums, the congas,
los barriles de los tambores de Bomba, los buleadores, los primos o subidores, el cuá,
maracara gourds rattling perona seeds, los güiros, las panderetas—seguidores y
requintas.
De Plena a Plena and Plena Tiva were playing, it was June, so the family *had* to go.

Pués, Saturday was the best—ever. ¿Qué pasó?
They took me to the fiestas patronales de Dorado,
El Plenazo de San Antonio de Padúa, el santo patrón
de los doradeños, also the patrón of lovers, who stand his figurine
upside down on his head until he delivers their desires.
You won't believe what happened to me there, she says.

The procession had ended, and la Parroquia San Antonio,
la iglesia católica en frente de la Alcaldía, en la plaza pública,
had flung its gates wide, ringing two bells after solemn mass.
Blessèd by el Cristo Yaciente, San Antonio de Padúa y Nuestra Señora de Rosario,
los padres were handing out bread to the celebrantes in the plaza.

The town square was crisscrossed with high-strung strings of pennant flags,
many strands of light bulbs looping out from the grid of the stage lights
to lamp posts and treetops. There were rides, kioskos for food and artesanos.
Manolo Rodríguez y su Orquesta started to play, and they were good.
That's when I saw that man there, leaning on an antique lamp post.

I knew that I knew him, and then I knew from where— from the painting,
exactamente el mismo hombre, you know— *El Velorio* by Francisco Oller.
La cara de arrugas, el africano viejito— las caras eran *idénticas*.
I mean, it was the same guy from the painting,
that lame African man leaning over the gray bebé with the frown—
the only one caring about the angelito, while everyone else,
los jíbaros, go crazy with the baquiné— drinking, spilling and sprawling.

Era bastante oscurito de piel y con una pierna coja.
Él tenía pelo rizo de color gris y negro, but I didn't see it well
because tenía puesto un sombrero negro.
Él llevaba puesta una chaqueta de otra década, como el traje
en el cuadro, y pantalones iguales. Él fue caminando con un bastón.
Nada, pués, cuando estaba puesta la música, él bailaba o contaba.
I thought, I have to tell Mom— he just showed up at the fiestas patronales—
dancing right next to me, right out of the painting.
I knew you would like that, Mom.

I look at my quinceañera, my daughter, excited with wonder.
I smile, resting the side of my face on the pillow, pushing blanket away
from IV bruises, and motioning for her to sit by my side. All of her life,
she will feel it and know that hard history and sweet grace of the islands,
where the portals between us and the ancestors, the orishas and loas open wide.
She has skillfully and respectfully sketched the man in her notebook—
hunched on the lamp pole and dancing to grooves of Manolo Rodríguez.
Manolo's maracas held Legba at bay, in the crossroads of the public plaza of Dorado,
while I fell and fell in my Saturday dream and did not land on the other side.

III. Jerusalem the Golden

So, to end, I'll paint us at the twilight hour of the Ángelus del Verbo Divino,
both of us bathed and in fresh night-dresses, surrounded by gardenias,
on the third-floor balcony, at home on the evening of my release.
It is not the church bells that ring in dusk, but the first pop-pop-pop
of an automatic gun. We are in the high treetops, the flamboyán
in red bloom, the breadfruit cupping its small green balls in its hands.

We hear the múcaros, the small owls, purring in the trees out back,
and the frogs and insects— pond frogs, two-note frogs,
and our own coquíes that sing out their names, *co-quí, co-quí-quí,*
intoning with all their might, *the full tutti.* Night music sounds classical,
composed and orchestrated by prodigies of el Conservatorio de Sapos.

The deambulantes and chickens that live in the park by our home
settle in for the night, two corner bars pumping up the bachata
on tinny loudspeakers, and the evangelists praying and singing
at their storefront church. The elderly woman who loves the microphone
and always bawls out so passionately out-of-rhythm-and-tune
is singing a hymn I think I recognize, though if it is, it would be in Spanish:
"Jerusalem the Golden," and though I am not religious,
in the conventional sense, I hear the hymn in my mother's fervent voice:

They stand those halls of Zion, all jubilant with song,
And bright with many an angel, and all the martyr throng;
The Prince is ever in them, the daylight is serene,
the pastures of the blessèd are decked in glorious sheen.

A kitten is mewling loudly, one of the many cats over-fed
by the 97-year-old widow in the wheelchair downstairs.
My daughter tells me it was so nice to live with a large family.
The mother was good to her. The father liked to make barbecue.
She snuggles against my side on the bench.
I vow silently to be good to her. And to make barbecue.
With these songs of mercy and few new paintings,
we re-enter the stream of our lives.

Poetry Reading by the Black Sea

John Balaban

> Often, gates shut, safe inside the walls,
> we gathered arrows fallen in the streets.
> --Ovid, *Tristia* V, X:21-22

A breeze riffles in from the beach
stirring poplar catkins, wooly stuff
drifting the town in flurries, searching

the air like syllables of poetry while
we perch on the stones of this Roman bath
listening to poetry, the delicate thing which lasts.

Here at empire's edge, boys, silly with love,
chatted idly by the pools. Merchants,
trading amphoras of oil and Lydian dye,

cursed thin profits, cruel seas, lost ships.
Now seagulls flap and squawk on broken walls
scurfed with weeds and the royal poppy.

Greek and Roman, Getae, Thracian, Bulgar,
Slavs, Avars, Goths, Celts, Tatars, Huns,
Arabs, Turks, Russians, and, now, the U.S navy.

Not far from here, one frigid winter in Tomis,
an aging Ovid, exiled by Augustus,
donned a helmet to defend the ramparts

as Thracian horsemen circled the frozen marsh,
their long hair tinkling with chinks of ice,
shooting poisoned arrows into the walled city

killing the boy who attended the old poet,
the boy he paid to massage his skin, there
in "the last place," among barbarians

two thousand years ago. And, now, acacias
fragrance our evening as poplar fluff floats by
over imperial rubble. Only poetry lasts.

Finitude

Esther Phillips

He is the kite-flyer, whose upward gaze
forgets the finite ball of twine that spirals
out until the hand is empty.

The man who from a distance celebrates Nothing,
only to find the closer he gets, that nothing can exist
outside of something: desire, pleasure, pain.
It was always not possible to choose only nothing.

He daily flogs the mind that must not yield
to Time's nudges, its kick in the ribs;
the years' shuffling one truth after another.

How faithfully he tends the body's needs
yet longs for its annihilation.

His conversations are with the dead.
His voice is the echo of bones.
The pages crumble in his careful hands.

Nursing Home

Esther Phillips

There'll be no greater light.
It's dim, as it should be.
All is grim here.

See how they've draped death
across that chair, limbs hanging loosely,
skin fresh as a newborn
except for the stillness;
the gaze, it seems,
sucked into the white wall.

Silence quells the unexpected word,
the odd chuckle. Only the night
finds credence here: the painful cries,
an anguish of unspoken loneliness.

Philosopher, your chair now sits
on wheels, guided by a kind nurse.
How can you bear to witness the fall
of reason
when the mind gives way,
what is real trumps the imagination,
and language knows no skill
to counter the void?

You speak of giving your books away
as if to shed some weight.

It is the season for light travelling
when all, *all* is left at the Gate.

Christmas Pudding

Olive Senior

I didn't have a child's heart, I swear. Each year
as Christmas drew near I drew further into myself
wanting to creep into the huge old ceramic jar
on the shelf and drown in the aroma of pimento
and clove and dried fruit marinating in rum.
Wishing Christmas would never come.

But Christmas came alright and the one part I liked
was the making of Christmas pudding.
It started on the day they took that jar from the shelf,
bustled around to fire up the Calidona Dover
wood-burning stove, grease the cake tins
rub up the sugar and butter in the mixing bowls
throw the sifted flour and the beaten eggs
and the orange peel and the candied citron
and the rose water and vanilla essence and
the whole jar of drunken fruit in.

The puddings couldn't wait for the date, the 25th,
O no, the cooks wouldn't hear of it. Christmas
Puddings have to be baked or steamed at least two
weeks before the event. Then, quietly sitting
in their tins, soaked again in good over-proof rum.
THAT'S THE LAW. At least of pudding-shaped
cooks who would never go around arresting drunken
men for imbibing too much of their Christmas pudding.
O no. Not content with that alcoholic haze, on the day
they add brandy to the pudding and set light to it. I swear!

And I know swearing is a bad habit. But it's not
my fault. It came from lifting the lid of that old
crock and inhaling even before the cooks got hold of
that rum-soaked fruit each year and drowned it.

For Attention

Edward Baugh

The “For Attention” file that had lain
unattended for so long, now mostly junk:
a few newspaper clippings maybe still
worth keeping, otherwise e-mails and formal
correspondence ready to shred, hotel receipt
from a city on the other side of the world I’ll
never visit again – sentimental stuff;
then, catchingly different, in black ink
and an unsteady hand, a letter that fills
the inside of a thank-you card. The name
at first doesn’t ring a bell, so I begin to read:
“It’s two-and-a-half weeks now since the transplant.
Your letter arrived just as I was heading out
to have it done. I mustn’t put off any longer
my reply, waiting for my hand to steady down.
It has been bearable; meanwhile I must
keep praying that the best comes out of it.
I’m not the most positive person, but I must try.”

The date of her letter: 22/04/01.
I wish I could remember when she died.

VIEW AT FLOWER FOREST 2011 by **Alison Chapman-Andrews**
24" x 24" acrylic and burlap on canvas
Private collection

"On returning to the Flower Forest the tree that was the source of 'Big Canoe' from 1999 had grown out of recognition. What were noticeable were the low, blue horizon and the light from the upper sky, which shone through the trees. Below the vegetation seemed impenetrable. Here the lower half was covered in rough and distorted burlap, before being painted on In this lower darkness rough ly shaped and distorted burlap, has been painted over with acrylic."

FICTION

Yellow

Christine Barrow

The man strides towards the sea. His body is angled like a burnt stick, his hair and beard are white like white clouds. He favours his left leg and avoids the soft sand that would suck in his bare feet and slow him down. He wears brown pants cut-off at the knee and a once yellow, now off-white T-shirt with Save the Turtles printed across the back. He carries a homemade fishing rod and a blue bucket. His eyes are fixed on the water, not to savour the sun's reflection, a soft yellow shimmer from horizon to shore, but to his left, beyond the line of breaking waves, scanning for signs, a dark moving shape under the water like hundreds of fluttering leaves, a circle of ripples on the surface. A few swift steps and he is there, sweeping his line in an expert arc, yet almost careless, into the water. A moment later, he whips it back out with a small, silver fish attached.

He turns to his right with a wide-open smile to the two children sitting well back on the beach, next to a washed-up pile of driftwood, well away from the manchineel tree and its skin-blistering apples. With one hand he holds up the rod with the fish thrashing and spinning, its scales catching the sun. His other hand, palm forward, fingers splayed, warns the children to stay where they are. The sea has no back door.

The little girl claps her hands and wriggles her toes in the sand. She is wearing a yellow skirt and top. The boy, taller but just as skinny, waves, but the man is busy reloading bait.

Out goes the line and back it comes with another fish, and another; each seems larger than the one before. With a flick of his wrist, the man twists fish off the hook and tosses them into the bucket.

The boy covers the girl's feet with handfuls of sand and pats them down, as if he's building a pair of heavy boots. He gives her broken shells to decorate them. He breaks off a piece of driftwood and draws a circle around her. Then he creeps towards the bucket; it must be half full already. His shadow traces a long, thin line to the girl. She kicks off her sand-boots and crosses the circle.

The man looks up over his left shoulder at the sky behind the manchineel tree. A dark cloud spreads towards the sea. Back in goes his line. He waits, then jerks it, again and again. He adds more bait and flings it, the small lead weight taking the hook deeper out, and waits again.

The man lifts a hand to shade his eyes. There is a flash of brighter yellow caught in the sun's beam, then in the foam of a high wave, like an umbrella with black, broken spokes, thrashing and kicking. He turns sharply to where he'd left the children. He drops his rod, scrambles to reach, his feet sinking into the deep, wet sand. His right leg buckles, his hands hit the sand. He's up again, crashing through the dense surf, grabbing one spoke, then another.

It is almost dark now. The man slumps onto the sand. He folds her arms and her legs, draws her limp yellowness into his rib cage. His panicked fist pounding her back has slowed to a mindless thump, thump, as he rocks her body; as if he doesn't feel the rain lashing his back or know that the sea has claimed his fishing rod too. He doesn't see the boy drenched and squatting over the blue bucket of dead fish between his knees, his arms still shaking around it.

Tightrope

Ronald A. Williams

Diane pulled on to the grounds of Trents sports club. Cars were parked all along the driveway, and she was forced to park on the nearby school grounds. Most of the people who had come in those cars were at the social center for the art exhibit not at the cricket match, but knowing that Alistair's father would be there, she walked to the stands. Mr. McDonald waved as she climbed the steps, smiling. Alistair had obviously not arrived yet.

"How are they doing?" she asked.

"Terrible. A hundred and twenty-eight for six, after Empire made two hundred and ninety-one."

"Huh," she replied, feigning interest.

"As they used to say, "Every year these people improving worse," Mr. McDonald replied, sucking his teeth.

She chuckled, glancing with moderate interest at the activities on the field. There was a question she had for Mr. McDonald, but it would be useless to ask until the game was over. The old man's conversation was reserved for others in the stands who shared his passion. Diane smiled at the back and forth commentary about what was happening on the field, and leaning back, soaked up the atmosphere without engaging in the event. "Good Lord, give me strength," Mr. McDonald exclaimed.
The team had lost another wicket. She commiserated with the old man for a little while but was soon ignored as attention shifted back to the field of competition. Beside her, the conversation, sounding more and more like an argument, shifted to whether it was becoming too dark for the batsmen to see. Mr. McDonald was stating, with surprising passion, that the match should be called because of light, by which he meant its absence. Diane smiled, listening to the arguments and thinking how powerful an acquired taste could be.

The conversation shifted around like fog pushed by currents of air, finally settling on a lament about the weakness of the current West Indies team, the professional, international competitors in the sport. Diane thought of the anomalous nature of the team. It was the only team in international competition composed of different nations,

and she wondered how many thought of the fact that this was the most obvious reminder of their colonial past. Diane marveled at this, wondering why it had not disappeared along with so much else that had been rejected.

Maybe it was the first thing they discovered they were good at, she thought.

"Well, that's it then," Mr. McDonald said, rising slowly.

On the field, the umpires were picking the bails, thus ending the game for the day. Around them, the few spectators were leaving, and Diane observed that they were primarily old men. Women had never frequented the cricket matches, and now, the young people found other distractions. Suddenly, Diane felt lost in time, caught between Mr. McDonald and some future that was not quite clear. The world seemed darker than it should be, its edges blurred, indistinct, yet somehow vaguely menacing.

"Well, Diane. What brings you this way?" Mr. McDonald asked.

"I came to an art exhibit. It's in the social center."

"So that's why there are so many cars here this evening. Who's the artist?"

"Evan Walcott," Diane answered.

"Do you mean Marjorie's son? He's from the village. At least he was born there. Moved to town somewhere when he was young, though. Why is he showing his work here?"

"Some government group is sponsoring 'this bring art to the people' movement. Actually, I thought Alistair was going to be with you. Have you seen him?"

"No. He was supposed to join me for the match, but you know how he and Richard are. Separate, they are okay, but together, a real problem. They've been that way from school."

"Maybe he's with Natasha at your home," Diane said, and the old man nodded.

With Alistair's father beside her, Diane was nervous, wondering how she would act when Evan saw them. More importantly, she wondered how Evan would act.

Inside the building, maybe two dozen viewers were milling around, plastic cups in hand, as they scrutinized the paintings. These had been placed on easels at the perimeter of the room, and Diane and Mr. McDonald joined the haphazard line. Evan's work had a certain power, and it was quickly evident that the artist was better with landscapes than with the human form. Diane stopped before a painting titled "Janet", and was struck by the immediacy of the work. It was a painting of a small house caught in a hurricane. Three figures were inside, and on the right, walking in to what looked like the front-house, was a woman with grey-streaked hair, her face calm and her fingers pointing to the roof as if she was giving instructions. Standing on a short ladder to her

right, an older man was holding the roof down, attempting to tie, with an extraordinarily white rope, the wooden beams in the ceiling to something more secure in the house. The artist had painted a grey gap between the roof, which the wind was on the verge of ripping off, and the wall of the house, and he had invested that space with a malevolence that seemed to jump out from the canvas. Around the isolated house, trees were flying through the air, and the sugarcanes had already been flattened.

Diane could see that Mr. McDonald was impressed. However, it was not this that held her eyes. A child had been placed in the middle of the painting, its cherubic face looking out on the storm with an equanimity that should not have been present in one so young. There was no fear, no curiosity even, just a smiling acceptance of what was there in that moment. Then, Diane noticed that the eyes did not quite look directly at the viewer, and this realization pulled her eyes away from the child's face toward something that was painted in the bottom left hand corner of the canvas. It was small and indistinct, and Diane bent forward to see it clearly. She suppressed a gasp. *There was a tiny painting of a woman with her abdomen open and a child inside*.

The old woman's story? Diane wondered, perplexed.
In the distance, approaching rapidly, was a spinning sheet of what appeared to be galvanized iron, its edges sharp and serrated. It was immediately evident where it was headed with its guillotine-like precision. That woman would be beheaded. Diane stood back, again looking at the child's face. The child knew its fate.
"Interesting," Mr. McDonald said, staring at the painting.

"Yes. Very interesting. Do you notice the look of glee that seems to be lurking just behind the child's eyes? He seems almost happy about the impending decapitation."

"Madame Defarge," Mr. McDonald laughed. "That's not what I meant, however. The scene is oddly familiar."
"Familiar?" Diane asked, looking away from the old man.
Her head was spinning, and the dying woman's voice describing the woman with the open womb was rushing in her ears.

"Yes. It looks very much like something Alistair's mother describes. The "Janet" title, is, of course, hurricane Janet that devastated the island in nineteen fifty-five."

"Mrs. McDonald describes this scene?" Diane asked, her voice controlled.

"Well, not this scene exactly. For one thing, she talks about a hurricane that occurred in the nineteen-thirties, but that scene in the middle there with the old man holding down the roof and the woman giving directions, is part of what she describes. Even the child looking out the window is part of her description. You should ask her about it."
Diane nodded, a feeling of disturbance suddenly engulfing her. They moved on, and her tension increased as it became evident that the artist had a model for his paintings.

She was everywhere in his work, usually not very large but present in the girlish figure who populated his highly idealized scenes of St. Euribius. Compared to the "Janet" painting, most of the other work was uninspired, and Diane had been moving somewhat impatiently along when she suddenly stopped, staring at a painting titled "Unfinished." Again, Evan's eye for nature was evident, and she felt a combination of pride and anger as she stared at the scene. It was of the north coast of the island, and in the background, the sea churned, a row of white-capped waves rising. The sky had a lurid, purple shade, and Diane glanced over to the earlier painting "Janet", noticing the same purplish sky. This sky, however, roiled, the clouds, darkened by approaching night, seeming to mass, as if waiting for something. The space between the clouds and the waves showed the last glimmer of light. The rocks, greyish black in the dying day, seemed to be pulling themselves from what little earth covered this broken landscape, and at the right edge of the painting, a small copse of casuarinas stood, silent and unmoving in the near darkness. In the trees were a young girl and a tall man who, to her mind, looked liked Evan.

Evan had centered a figure in the canvas. A woman sat in a flowered skirt that flared out around her, covering her legs and feet as she leaned toward the massing sea. Her blouse was open, and its heavy rise suggested much though it showed little. Diane looked at the other paintings, suddenly aware of the exposure of many of the figures – boys running around with flies open, girls whose eyes told the story of their desire, even a painting of a shark that cruised close to shore, its eyes, above water, seeming to suggest a certain lasciviousness. Nothing else possessed the subtlety of this half-opened blouse, however, and Diane stared for a long time until Mr. McDonald chuckled, saying,

"An unusual interest, dear."

Diane laughed uneasily, her eyes finally taking in the face or at least, the oval space where the face should have been. By some trick of the dying light, the face had been obscured, as if an object had moved between it and the now disappeared sun. She understood the title "Unfinished." Yet, the painting did not feel unfinished, but complete, as if the artist had captured the enigma of the woman's soul. The body was fully realized, particularly in the expansive suggestiveness of the almost exposed breasts, but the unfinished face hinted at something else. Diane wondered what.

"Good, huh?" Mr. McDonald said, and Diane nodded, that odd disturbance of her soul heightened by the painting.

She was about to turn away when Mr. McDonald said,

"There's Evan now. He has certainly grown up."

Diane felt her heart leap as she looked at the tall, slim young man who was

approaching, an open smile on his face. Diane noticed his teeth—big, square and strong. The young man flicked his dreadlocks over his shoulder, then stuck out his hand.

"Good evening, Mr. McDonald. Long time no see."

"Good evening, Evan. How are you?" Alistair's father replied.

"Quite well, sir. Enjoying the work?"

"The paintings, you mean? Yes. Yes. They're very good. I had heard that you had become quite successful with your art, but I had no idea you were this good."

The young man smiled shyly and then turned to Diane, the devil in his eyes as he said,

"You probably don't remember me, but I used to spend time across the gap near where the Beckles family lives."

Diane nodded, smiling, not trusting herself to speak. Then, feeling like a hypocrite, said,

"Yes. I remember you."
Diane, not wanting to look at him, turned back to the painting, saying,

"You have quite an eye."

"Thanks. This one took me quite some time to compose. Every time I think I've got it right, something changes, and I'm off again, trying to capture what I see. I must have ten versions of this painting."

"Is that unusual? To paint so many versions, I mean," Mr. McDonald asked.

"For me, it is. I usually see an image in my head, and I paint from that image. It almost never changes."

"Does that mean this is a real person then?" Mr. McDonald persisted.

Evan looked at him, a smile deep in his eyes.

"Why do you ask?"

"Well, you said you 'usually' see an image. I got the impression this was not an image but a real person. If she is, then she would constantly change. Particularly if you were attuned to every nuance of her. The more you look, the more you would see, so reality would not be fixed but shifting."

The young man looked at him, his eyes direct, seeming to encourage Mr. McDonald to go on. There was a vague challenge in the stare. When Evan spoke, however, his voice was mild.

"You know, you're right. I never thought about it that way before, but you're right."

His eyes turned inward, looking contemplative as if he were really hearing this interpretation for the first time. Diane, her hand folded into a fist at her side, wished this conversation would end, and as if Evan sensed this, he said,

"I had better circulate."

"Are you selling any of your paintings tonight?" Alistair's father asked.

"No. This is just an exhibition that the Ministry of Culture arranged. It's designed to bring art to the masses or some such thing. Not too many masses here tonight," the young man ended with an ironic snort.

He was right. Almost everyone present was from the middle-class. The cut of the clothes and the whispered conversations which, to Diane, always suggested that these people were vaguely afraid their opinions may be wrong, spoke of the recently liveried class. Diane, uncomfortable, felt sure everyone knew she was the model for the faceless woman.

"Why, Mr. Mcdonald? Did you want to buy something?" the young artist asked, his voice sweet and innocent.

"My daughter-in-law seems quite taken by this painting. I was thinking I could buy it for her," the old man replied with a chuckle.

The young man looked at Diane, a light in his eyes, and said,

"I don't think she needs to buy it. She already has it."

Diane started, but Mr. McDonald asked,

"What do you mean, Evan?"

The artist smiled broadly, then said,

"I saw her looking at it. In her mind, she has already made it hers. To buy it would be redundant, don't you think, Mrs. McDonald?"

Diane, aware of Evan's secret laughter and feeling vaguely irritable, said,

"It is never possible to possess art. That transforms it into a commodity."

"Yes. I'm sure you are right," the young man replied easily, with that square-toothed smile. "I don't ever think I own a painting once it's completed. In my head, it belongs to me, but once I'm done with it, it seems to lose its magic, to become less real."

"Platonic idealism," Diane responded, adding, when they both looked at her, "The real exists only in the mind; all else is shadow. Our senses perceive, and therefore create, only imperfectly what the mind had constructed in its ideal form."

"Yes," Evan responded, "sort of the closer you get to something, the more flaws you see."

He snickered suddenly, a surprisingly harsh sound, and said, grandiosely,

"I have to go. Over there, beauty and money beckon. Mrs. Waldron-Clark is a good client, so I must play the clown."

He said goodbye and hurried across the room. Diane watched him go, noticing how he again made that gesture of tossing the dreadlocks over his shoulder, and thinking that there was something feline about him.

(Excerpt from the novel *Evening over Luxor)*

Mirror

Hazel Simmons-McDonald

Madeline sat facing the mirror. Strains of music from the gramophone were muffled from the buzzing in her ears.

It was my fault, wasn't it? Mine and George's. He betrayed you. He lied.

She stirred. The music had stopped and the needle was knocking against the capstan. It was early afternoon; rain clouds were gathering. The metallic film, the tain, in the mirror was fading. The darkened space at the centre seemed to her like a tunnel leading to a place of peace. A flash of lightning brightened the room. It occurred to her that she should find a cloth to cover the mirror, but her legs were leaden. She sat in a trance-like stupor, staring at it.

Why did you let him sweet talk you? What did he say to convince you Papa wasn't coming back? Eugenie and I knew George was a creep. He only wanted to have you. You let him hurt the man he called friend. George betrayed you and I've let Evon fool me. I listened to his sweet talk. He got what he wanted and he's gone. Everyone will laugh as they laughed when Papa left.

She shook her head. The buzzing persisted. It started to rain. She sat still, staring at the mirror. Eugenie entered.

"Doudou, you wake up? How you feelin? How de head?" She stood behind the chair massaging Madeline's temples. "Pa kite kow'u fol pou séléwa sa-la. Don go mad for that good fuh nuffin. Sleep shéwi; sleep, dear."

She closed her eyes, swallowed to still the buzzing in her ears. Eugenie stood behind the chair brushing her hair, singing the song her mother used to sing to her.

Look in the mirror what do you see

One little girl pretty as can be

Who's pretty?

Maddieeeeee

Back then Madeline would chime in at the last line, squealing her name in a high pitched voice, collapsing with laughter. Eugenie's voice was soothing. She drifted off to sleep. Eugenie went to the gramophone. She put the stylus at the start of the record. Madeline had played it two nights before when she wanted to show Evon how her mother and father used to dance. Through the mist of sleep Madeline heard the rhythm. She recalled the clack clack of her mother's heels striking the floor to the tempo as her father danced with her.

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Her mother lived for the times when her father returned from a trip. He always brought gifts for her and her mother. He had brought the gramophone and records of popular merengue and love songs. One year he brought her mother dancing shoes. They were like ghillies, with decorative laces, high tops and solid heels. Her mother would wear a full, flared skirt that fell to her ankles and a broad belt with a gold buckle that accentuated her hips. They moved as one to the music, her left arm hugging his shoulders, her right circling his waist, her head thrown back, her eyes closed; a smile playing about her lips. His arms would be wrapped around her, holding her closely, his cheek against the side of her head, his eyes closed too, their hips moving in a quick up and down motion as they stepped to the beat, heels hitting the floor in unison, clack ti clack. She and Eugenie watched them. Sometimes she fell asleep and Eugenie would put her to bed while her parents danced through the night.

One year her father stayed away an unusually long time. Her mother worried and seemed to wilt. Every day she dressed carefully in case he arrived unexpectedly. She would run to the window when she heard a car approaching. She would hurry to the mirror, check her looks, walk back to the window, look out, return to the mirror; sit in the chair, waiting... One day a car drove up to the house and George, her father's friend, walked in. Madeline couldn't hear what he said, but her mother had cried for days. George would stop by once in a while then he would come every evening to sit with her. He would stay longer, leaving after Madeline had gone to bed.

One night Madeline heard the gramophone playing and the clack of heels on the floor. She rushed to the front room thinking her father was home, but there was George, hair pomaded, two-tone shoes shining, his arms wrapped around her mother as her father's used to be. Her mother danced, but her arms hung limply by her side and her eyes were open. The sight of her mother dancing with George disturbed Madeline. She started to cry. Eugenie calmed her.

"Don cry shéwi. He goin jes now. I go mek him go." She took a broom, stuck it upside down in a shoe and put it behind the door. After a short while the music stopped;

the front door closed; George left.

Several nights later she woke to the sound of voices in the front room. One was her father's. She got out of bed to go to him but Eugenie met her at the door and led her back to bed, muttering. "Bon dyé senyè, lavièj, édé nou – Good God, virgin, help us." She knew something bad must be happening to make Eugenie pray like that. She heard George's voice, a tussle; her mother's muffled scream. She had thought: It's t*hat George, he's a bad man*. She jumped out of bed, found a broom, stuck it upside down in a shoe behind the door as Eugenie had done to make George leave. She closed her eyes and wished him gone.

After a while she heard the front door close. She rushed out to greet her father, but there was George buttoning his shirt, glancing uneasily at her mother who was slumped in the armchair staring at her dishevelled reflection in the mirror. Eugenie fussed over her, rubbing mustard on her forehead and temples to prevent a kwiz – Eugenie's Creole word for hysterics. Her mother didn't recover. Every day she would sit in the chair staring at the mirror. One day Madeline came home to find the chair empty and Eugenie crying because they had taken her mother away. Madeline was bereft. She felt an enormous guilt because she had put the broom in the shoe and made the wrong man go away.

She knew from the letters and money her father sent that he was in Latin America. His address was always different. When the letters stopped, she knew her father had died. She grieved because her mother had left without saying goodbye and her father had never returned to see her.

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You didn't even say goodbye and Papa never came back to see me. Everyone will laugh as they laughed when Papa left.

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Madeline reached out and touched his arm. "Don't go." He looked at her. He didn't answer.

"Evon, is this what you want?" He pursed his lips, looked away and bent down to tie his shoelaces.

He said. "Stop dreaming Madeline.

"What happened since last night?"

"Last night helped me to see how wrong I am to keep up this charade."

Madeline raised one eyebrow quizzically. She looked at him as he stood up. He fixed his gaze on the wall behind her. There was nothing there except the mirror that

hung there. She had meant to take it down when water had seeped through the roof and down the wall behind it. The rainy season had come and she hadn't had the roof repaired.

She had placed the mirror on the wall directly opposite the large one that sectioned the bureau into two parts. Her father had bought the bureau for her mother. It was made of mahogany. Two separate vines sprouted from the wood surface on each side, encircling the mirror and meeting at the top in a wonderfully carved bunch of grapes tucked in a cluster of leaves. The rest of the bureau consisted of two sets of drawers on either side of the mirror.

Her father had said the bureau was an antique that cost him a sum he couldn't reveal to Madeline's mother. That bit of information, carelessly given, added to its mystique. Her mother had treated it as her most prized possession. Every day she made Eugenie polish the surface with cedar oil she bought from Devaux's store.

This was the main bedroom in the house. It had been her mother's. Eugenie told Madeline her mother had given birth to her in that room. She claimed to remember the event since she had been the midwife, and had delivered Madeline on her own, even though her father had asked a doctor to be present. As far as she was concerned, he need not have been there because he had done nothing to earn his fee.

"He didn have to stay," she said. "He didn do noffing, just stan up lookin toutoulbé – like he confuse. When he see you wid dat nice black mark roun you eye he shout 'Oh Gawd!' You mama get a kwize onetime. He tell your papa is somefing I do. Me! Is me dat tek care of you mama; mek she get well. I don know why he shout, mek you mama sick; an you so pretty wif your beautiful mark."

Madeline had moved into the room when her mother had died soon after she had been taken to the asylum. One day she discovered a mirror that was almost identical to the one on the bureau. It was framed in mahogany and there were carvings of leaves in the wood but no grapes. She was amazed at the similarity and had bought it. Despite Eugenie's protestations about bad luck, she hung it on the wall opposite the bureau. This made the room seem larger.

She looked at Evon in the mirror. She could see the front and back of him replicated in a series of fractured images, as though he were transfixed in several dimensions. They were looking directly at each other but in different mirrors. She broke the silence with a hollow laugh.

"It's the money, isn't it?" She tilted her head, willing him to focus on her. He blinked and looked away. "You've withdrawn since I told you I couldn't give you more money. Is that it? Evon, this gambling is destroying you. I'm not helping by giving you money whenever you ask for it – I'd hoped you'd realise that. Stay. Let's work this through."

"Don't patronise me, Madeline. I can do without the money. I'm suffocating, can't you see? I said I'd pay you back. I will. But I must leave."

"What about everything you said?" If it isn't the money what is it? It's my eye, isn't it? She was pleading, hated it, but wanted to get under the armour he had crafted to exclude her. It wasn't the thought that he had become indifferent that irritated her; it was the possibility that he had been interested in her money and not her. He was silent for a moment. Then he said

"I lied. Madeline, face reality. Look at us. Look in the mirror. This won't work."

She jumped out of bed, went to the bureau, peering into the mirror at the black patch that covered her left eye, like a harlequin's mask. It started beneath her eyebrow, fully covering her eyelid, tapering to the corner of her eye at the bridge of her nose, circling the hollow beneath her eye, narrowing into a thin line at her temple. She had grown used to people staring at her, wanting to discover whether she had a patch over her eye, then looking away quickly when they realised it was her skin.

"It's my eye, isn't it?" He didn't answer. She recalled he hadn't looked away when he first saw her. He had stepped purposefully out of the Manager's booth in the supermarket on the corner. He had walked up to her with an audacity that threw her off balance and said "You're beautiful." He reached up and touched her eye. She felt it had caught fire beneath his touch. She had left abruptly and gone home, gravitating to the mirror when she got there to look at her eye.

She had always thought this nevus her attraction. Her mother and Eugenie had stressed that, despite taunts she occasionally got from youths on the corner. "*Ga led-la*" – "*Look the ugly one*" someone might call and the others would whistle or shout "Black eye!"

"They jealous" Eugenie would tell her. She believed this. She would toss her head, stride down the sidewalk, the wind blowing her skirt against her legs. Madeline seemed indifferent to what people thought about her looks. She was tall, and wore her hair in a closely cropped afro that accentuated the lines of her face and the nevus on her eye.

Evon's bold encounter was the start of something that became more intense with each visit to the supermarket. He made a point of bagging her groceries and when he had finished he would put his fingertip against her eye and say "My B-Be".

"I'm not your baby. Stop it."

"You're my Beautiful Black eye; my B-Be" he would retort, laughing. He did this with such charm she knew pretence at being offended would have made her seem churlish. She looked forward to her visits to the supermarket. On one of those visits, he offered to carry her groceries and she had let him. He would stop by after work sometimes and

they would sit on the veranda talking, sipping rum punch Eugenie had made. Sometimes he would stay to supper. With each visit his hour of leaving was later until he didn't leave. Sometimes he would go off to play cards, he said, and Madeline would lend him money when he ran out.

She recalled this as she stared into the mirror, seeing his reflection repeated infinitely, wondering why he decided to leave. She couldn't bear the thought of it. She touched his arm.

"Don't go." He pulled away and moved towards the door. The buzzing in her ears which started whenever she was agitated grew louder. Her heart thumped. She was furious with herself for having allowed him to break through defences she had built to avoid such a situation. Three years with him had been blissful. She had tolerated the censure of friends who said she was degrading herself by becoming the mistress of a drifter from "No-one-knew-where." She liked his boldness, his caressing her eye and calling her his B-Be. She had surrendered to him with an intensity of feeling.

He was leaving; she didn't know why. Who in this small town, she wondered, would look at her, a woman with a black eye who had lived with an outsider. She was agitated, distracted by the pulsing nevus. She leaned against the bureau, felt the handle of her hand mirror and grasped it, wishing its solidity would restore her equilibrium. At the door he turned to her and said "Get a life, Madeline." She hurled the hand-mirror across the room. It missed him and shattered against the door. He was shaken. He stared at her and said "You're crazy!" Through the buzzing in her ears the slamming of the door was muffled.

She went to the door. She thought she heard Eugenie calling her. She was on the other side, waiting for a word before she came in. She heard her mother saying she had just bought herself seven years of bad luck for shattering the mirror.

"As if I care" she muttered as she stooped to pick up some of the splinters. She opened the door; Eugenie was standing there. Madeline hardly heard what she said..

"Didn I tell you he no good? Doudou, don mek yourself sick over dat séléwa! He no good, you hear? He jus like George, dat séléwa dat turn your mother head. Sit down, doudou." She led Madeline into the front room.

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Madeline sat in the armchair facing the large mirror, another of her mother's prized possessions. It hung where she had placed it, facing the door so she could see her reflection whenever she entered the room. The tain was worn in patches around the edges and in the middle. She stared down the dark tunnel at the centre.

"Sit down, shéwi," Eugenie cooed. She pried Madeline's hand open and removed the splinters which had cut her flesh. "Bon Dyé! Look what you do! You goin kill yourself for dat engwa? He ungrateful! " She mopped the blood from Madeline's palm.

Seven years of misery? This blight over my eye is more misery. You lied telling me I was pretty. Why did you preen in front of that mirror, caressing your belly, giving me this birth mark? Why didn't you make papa stay? Why did you leave me with this longing to be like you, this longing to be loved? Why was I born with this? I'm so sorry I made the mistake with the broom that made Papa leave. Evon's B-Be talk was a joke. Now he's gone, like you, like Papa...

A peal of thunder rolled through the fog in her head. The gramophone scraped to a halt. The music stopped. She tasted the salt of her tears. Another flash of lightning; a splintering sound; the mirror cracked. She blinked. In its fractured surface she saw the door opening, and her mother sweeping through it, her reflection walking towards Madeline through the tunnel. She was smiling, holding out her arms. Madeline stood up, reaching out to her mother's reflection. As she leaned forward there was another flash of lightning and another crack intersected the first across the dark patch in the centre across the tunnel.

She saw George and Evon coming towards her from a point in the distance. Anger bubbled inside her. She wanted to destroy George for what he had done to her mother and wanted to eradicate the humiliation she had suffered at Evon's hands.

Another blinding flash of lightning and her mother's image faded as George and Evon came in. They were laughing.

Anger seethed inside her.

"Liars!" she shouted. A flash of lightning lit up the empty room. The thunder exploded as she grasped the mirror and dashed it against the wall, laughing as their faces disintegrated in shards at her feet.

The Big O

Robert Edison Sandiford

Wil called to tell me The Big O was dead.

"Ed, it finally caught up with him."

"Where are you?" I said. He sounded far away, on the road somewhere, with cars and trucks passing. Somewhere not near his home.

"Last night." He ignored or didn't hear my question. "His mother called me last night."

"Where are you?" I tried again. "Can I—"

The connection went fuzzy.

"Ed, I gotta go," he said. I could hear him about to end the call. "I gotta go."

He was gone.

I didn't hear from Wil for two days. I had tried to reach him at home, but the phone kept ringing and he wasn't answering his cellphone. By now I knew it wasn't me he was ignoring, so I wasn't bothered about that. But I wished he would talk to someone. He wasn't even talking to Mum.

"I'm worried about your brother," she said.

Me, too," I said.

She waited for me to say something more, with a look I often saw her give Dads when they were discussing money, work or us kids around the kitchen table.

"How much is it to Victoria?" I said.

"Can you afford to go? At this time, I mean."

I did seem to have more papers to mark this semester, but Wil was the one Mum worried about the most, especially after he went to BC to work and live. Of all her children, Wil had the biggest dreams and strongest sense of self, which to her made him more vulnerable than the rest of us. No Cumberbatch had ever settled west of Toronto; our family were easterners…well, Quebec Montrealers by way of Barbados, what you might call true, true island people. We had done what Barbadians had always done in

their migrations, whether to the Carolinas, Manhattan or England: stayed close to water, salt or fresh. There were just some things you knew about yourself. Socially, culturally, geographically, and economically, it had always made sense for us not to venture too far beyond the Ontario-Manitoba border. But Wil went anyway, in his Lancer; down the 401. He said if Obama could become president of the United States, a black man, anywhere, could now do anything. Dads was sceptical about the move west—of course, no one from his generation had attempted it— but wished Wil luck and wired him money until he got settled. I could tell: he was proud of his eldest boy's daring. Wil qualified in Vancouver as a financial consultant, found work in Victoria in the middle of the worst economic crisis in eighty years, and made friends slowly out there. He had no wife or kids as yet. At least he was on an island, and not in the interior.

None of us had visited Wil in a long time and so we had to rely on the last address I had for him in an old email. His townhouse, on a neat street called Fairfield in a fence-lined neighbourhood, seemed different to me. The size or the landscaping was off. Although modest by most standards, even Montreal's, the house was too big for the lot and lacked shrubbery. Concrete had been poured wherever grass might grow, and there were screens or burglar bars in all the windows. In this neighbourhood? I thought. The noble firs that lined the back of the property like a guard wall itched my nose.

No one was home. I tried dialling his cellphone and gave up after leaving a third message. My cellphone buzzed when I slipped it in my pocket to peer unsuspiciously through his kitchen window.

"You've been trying to reach me."

"Yeah, for a while. Mum's been worried. So have Bert and Lyn and Dads," I added, less honestly. "Did you get my other messages? I'm now standing outside your door. Where are you?"

There was loud music in the background. I realized from the distance in his voice, a delayed reaction, that he was in a car. Driving. I hadn't noticed before: his Lancer wasn't in the driveway.

Wil paused. I guessed to read a sign.

"I'm on the Trans-Canada. Just passed Medicine Hat." He paused again, or I missed something because of the reception. "...should be sometime soon, in a few days."

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"Your brother's as crazy as ever."

Mum said this to me on our way home from the airport. She was relieved we heard from Wil but annoyed that it cost me an unnecessary plane trip.

"How did the house look? Did he say why he decided not to fly back?" Dads asked.

He was behind the wheel. Since I left, there were already new exits to Pierre Elliott Trudeau International because of the ongoing expansion, so I let him drive.

"We didn't talk much," I said. "He was on the road."

"He won't make it in time for the funeral," Mum said, turning her head. "Will he?"

Dads indicated right for LaSalle. I shrugged, and Mum turned around and began to focus on the cars whizzing by.

I was still studying what she said about Wil. What to make of it. Mum and Dads had paid for my flight on their Mastercard. I was out only a couple days work. When she said, "Your brother's as crazy as ever," she reminded me how parents knew things about you you didn't understand or like to think about yourself. Secret things. Unhappy things.

Like things that would make you a stranger to yourself, if you knew them, too. From the time I was a boy playing peewee hockey, Mum would say to me, "You're such a little man." She said it to me most recently when I turned forty last summer over a cake with four candles. Kissing me on each cheek: "Look at my little man." Dads, the discreet dominoes player, kept his take on us even closer to his chest. So that you never knew what he was thinking about you or understood about you until he showed his hand.

*

The Big O wasn't baptized The Big O. The Big O's real name was Orville Sobers. He and Wil had been best friends since high school. They played in a band together. They got off on guitars and guys like Hendrix, Clapton, Santana, and Jeff Healy. Between them over the years they'd owned a double neck, a star bass, a Fender Stratocaster, a Gibson Les Paul, and a dozen crappy acoustic guitars.

"They're not bad," Dads once said after hearing them play a school dance he chaperoned. "Your brother's just having fun. With Orville, it's different. He's good, but even for a black man, he's going to have to play more than bass in Montreal if he wants to make it." Dads also said something about Oscar Peterson. He had heard the jazz great at Place des Arts a few times. Dads said the man's art wasn't really his music.

"Oscar and his piano...the man has that talent for reinvention that opens up the world to him."

Now, all my brother had was an acoustic guitar he sometimes played; he picked out something he remembered from back in the day when I visited him that first time in Victoria. When The Big O couldn't find a regular gig last year, Wil flew in, took him to the unemployment office to sign up for seasonal assistance, then took him for a beer.

They used to drink together after practice. Shots of Mount Gay from our basement bar, but I never saw either of them drunk. That ended when the band broke up. Then they started dating the same women, as if replacing one shared passion with another.

"The same *kind* of woman," my brother Bert corrected me when I asked him about it.

Bert was older than I was by six years and younger than will by two. I didn't contradict him. His emphasis felt like a warning to keep my mouth shut. I knew I overheard Wil and Orville in our basement talking about whose turn it was to go out with LesLee. At the time, I was just noticing which of the girls in my classes had breasts and round asses, and a shy way of talking to you when they wanted something. I wondered why Orville and my brother wanted to share the attention. Why anybody would.

Anyway, The Big O's name referred to these women and his success with them in bed. But Orville may have been more man than myth. He died alone, in an upper duplex, on his way to the bathroom, most likely for his heart pills out of the medicine cabinet. It was his ex-wife, Yvette, who found him, his arms outstretched toward the bathroom door, like a man reaching for an oasis in the desert, she said.

*

"What's this about Wil driving from BC?" my sister said when she stopped by the house.

Lyn lived on the same street as our parents a few numbers down. I was helping Mum put away some groceries. "You know he won't make the funeral."

I stopped putting the boxes of bran flakes and Quaker Oats in the pantry. I avoided looking at my sister too directly. I *didn't* know, and Lyn liked certainties. I had none to offer her.

"Why didn't he just fly? He left *three* days ago. It will take him *at least* seven to get here. The funeral's the day after tomorrow. He must have *known* he was cutting it close...."

My sister went on in this way, first with me, then with Mum. Wil called the day before. He was near Winnipeg: still several days away from Montreal, at a push. And he *was* pushing it. "Could I get a slice of cherry-apple pie with that root beer?" I heard him say to a waitress. He was at a diner. His order sounded hyper-alert and slightly aggressive. He was at the counter, not at a table or in a booth.

Mum didn't tell Lyn any of this, though, and I picked up an IGA bag of Peek Freans' assorted cookies to put in the basement bar for when Lyn's two boys visited with Mum and Dads weekends, so she could get a break from them or catch up on work at the office.

Downstairs, I tried to reach Wil on my cellphone. No answer. I got his voice mail. I didn't leave a message. I kept calling and calling, getting voice mail each time, wishing he'd just answer.

*

Mum was talking on the kitchen's cordless to Mrs Sobers about Orville this afternoon. I sat in the recliner in the living room pretending to read an old Fiction Issue of *Esquire*, picking up the parts of the conversation I could.

Not enough honest loving. Too much fried foods. Obvious talent that failed to make room for him. Piecemeal work. These were the things, according to these old West Indian women, that exploded the hearts and prostates of *good* black men.

Married. Divorced. No kids. No money.

"Lawd have mercy, girl," I heard Mum say. "What more yuh could do?"

Those boys were *so* close. Always talking bout *Star Trek* and President Obama.

Where no one had gone before. Sad laughter.

She hung up and came to sit on the sofa opposite me.

"The funeral *will* be this Thursday at her church as planned," Mum said. "They're Pentecostal," she reminded me. "Mrs Sobers said Orville wasn't a goer, but he was definitely a believer."

Mum looked at her lap, meditative. There was light in the living room, yellow and orange, mild spring tones splashed everywhere by a strengthening sun.

"He could make it," Mum said.

"He *might* make it," I sort of agreed, closing my magazine.

*

I could never understand The Big O's sex appeal. I didn't think that I wasn't a woman had anything to do with it, either. A bruised-looking black man and bushy bearded, he had a tendency toward disarray and a paunch. Almost every time Mum saw him she asked when he was going to lose weight, pull up his pants, get a shave. "You're such a handsome fellow, Orville. No woman is going to want a slob, man." He flashed my mother a flirtatious grin up from his bass and said, "Working on it, Mrs C," then went back to plucking the strings.

He *did* have a booming laugh to go along with that grin, delicious and devious when a story really got him. His voice was as deep and soulful, as smooth and sinful, as his instrument. When he was on, playing only to you.

One of his one-night stands stayed for three whole days before moving in with him.

Little by little: a toothbrush, a bra, a hair comb, a blouse, a pair of shoes. Wil and Orville must have no longer been sharing, or maybe this one The Big O kept to himself. Yvette was a waitress at The Whacks, a club he played downtown on The Main, and she sang back-up when one of the regular lineup couldn't make it. She had a real voice.

They were married for nine years. Had a kid who died in her crib. They divorced when Orville caught Yvette with their band's drummer. The Big O no longer made her happy, she said. She was in love with ponytailed Richie, the drummer.

Orville often sang, "Who's zoomin who?" when talking about the breakup. No demonic grin, no wicked laugh. "I really didn't see it coming," he said, wagging his head and slapping his bass. He told me about it one evening at the club: the parts he thought I needed to know and the parts I wouldn't have thought to ask. It was the first time we had ever spoken like that, as two grown men. The last time, too.

*

Dads came up from the basement. He had the cordless in his hand. He was shaking his head and started to talk as soon as he saw me at the kitchen table.

"We have to give your brother some time. He's on his way, but…." Dads put back the receiver. He kept his head down and seemed uncertain what to say next. As with so many of his pronouncements, I didn't at first understand, and I felt annoyed at his inaction.

I wanted to know how long they had spoken, if he called Wil or Wil called him.

Where was he now, somewhere close, in a motel? I didn't ask. There was something in the way Dads stood by the phone's wall cradle, his head down, arms crossed, as if he didn't know where to go from there.

The longest conversation I had had with Wil was while he was on the road. He was somewhere "east of Thunder Bay," he said. We spoke for almost three and a half minutes.

"You remember that time you almost went flying?"

"Yes," I said. He was referring to the time Bert and his friends tried to throw me over our neighbour's cedar hedge. The story, according to Bert's retelling at family get-togethers, was that I wanted to see if I could fly and asked them to help me with the launch. More likely, I was being a pest, as I could be to both my older brothers, and one of their friends suggested they toss my ass over. I was six or seven at the time but knew it wouldn't be anything like rocketing the roller coaster at La Ronde.

"Orville was never part of it," Wil said.

"I know," I said, honestly. I had no memory of The Big O being there, among the young sadists, or of much else about that afternoon. There was a blank where the images should be, and it took Wil's words to draw me out of the widening void.

"The Big O was never there," he said.

"I know," I said, now a little unsure because of Wil's insistence.

"He liked you, you know."

I didn't know how true that was, so I didn't answer.

"But he'd never be part of anything like that."

Wil had come out of the house. He saw Bert and the others with their hands on me.

They were pulling me toward the hedge. He was shouting at Bert, asking him and his friends what the hell they were doing. Mum and Dads had gone to IGA with Lyn. That's what I remembered, but was that what happened? Wil came outside, looking left and right, when he heard me screaming?

"They could've broken your neck," Wil said to me. "Orville wasn't that kind of character."

*

"I don't understand," Lyn said to Mum as Mum straightened her hat in the dresser's mirror. "Wil should be here."

"I've tried to tell him, but it doesn't seem to make a difference," she said, turning her head from side to side.

Lyn stepped behind her and began to readjust the cream felt brim. We were all dressed in variations of black and white. Dads handed me the car keys while we waited.

"Then tell him he has to give the eulogy. Tell him Orville's mother is expecting him.

Tell him we all are, including his best friend the duppy."

Mum smiled, checking the tilt of her hat. She approved, nodding. Lyn's joke was one she herself might have made and may yet repeat at the wake.

But it wasn't as if Wil could stop driving now, or beam himself here.

*

"Is it over?"

I picked up my cellphone off the kitchen table knowing it was him, and too late, but it was like I needed some confirmation finally, across all the kilometres and wireless space.

"Wil? Is that you?"

"Did I *miss* it?"

"...Yes."

There was a sniffle. "I tried. Please tell Mum and Dads...and Mrs Sobers...."

"I know. I will. Where are you?"

Pause. Silence.

"Ed, you can't ask that question...not without knowing you'll have to do something about the answer...."

"No. I guess not."

Pause. Silence. Something cracking.

"I'm coming home," he said, breaking down.

Good. Good, I thought. "OK," I said. "But call me again. When you reach."

Haunts

Karen Lord

Vivian was scarcely three days dead, victim of a bad bout of dengue, but he came to visit nevertheless. His manner was casual, his expression calm and neutral. He came to the park at the usual time on the appointed Saturday afternoon, sat in his usual spot, and waited for the rest to shuffle and deal the dominoes. No-one flinched. His passing had been so sudden and so early that it made more sense to see him than not to see him. Tracey nodded to him in cautious greeting. Euclid smiled a skewed smile around his habitual cigar and gave him sly glances, all the while cheerfully swirling the dominoes over the table. Kofi was the only one who looked slightly worried, checking his friends' faces to confirm that he was not alone in viewing the visitation, but afraid to ask a direct question

'But why?' Euclid asked him at last, not at all in a negative way.

Vivian shrugged. 'I had some free time.'

No-one asked further. Perhaps they did not want to know. It was enough to have the familiar rhythm of the domino-slam and the occasional cheer or curse as the luck changed allegiance around the table.

Dominoes in the park was a years-old habit. No-one could say who began it, and it probably had not been started by any of the four, but by some past stranger, name now forgotten, who had been temporarily part of the ebb and flow at the margins of their core group of die-hard players. Tracey first came with her husband Manuel, but he soon drifted away to other pursuits, leaving her to continue alone.

'He can't stick to any one thing,' she stated in a heavy, flat voice, a voice that now sounded always slightly on the verge of anger.

She had been an almost-famous singer in the jazz clubs of New York until Manuel lured her back to her ancestral region. She still carried her mother's Trinidadian accent and a certain something her Jamaican father called feistiness. It was a combination that could charm any audience, but the once-mellifluous tone had hardened and stagnated with a little age and a lot of weariness.

She appreciated her park posse, but sometimes she wished they could have known her when she had been happy.

Vivian was ... or rather had been ... the perfect example of a quiet, mid-career civil servant who should have been a politician except for his incurable naïveté. Playing dominoes in the park was his sincere and unselfconscious way of staying grassroots instead of keeping up with the Joneses. Kofi was relatively junior and should have been playing on the football field with the other young men, but as he hooked his leg around the wooden leg of his chair, he displayed a broad, hungry scar coiling around his bare calf, carved brutally into the flesh and muscle. More of that story, Tracey did not know, nor ever cared or dared enough to ask. She suspected his motorbike had been the cause, but he rode it fearlessly, with no shadow of regret.

And then there was Euclid, the grandmaster of the dominoes clique, knowing everyone and known by all, wise and fearless and invulnerable in his own way.

Four months later, when Tracey took her place at the domino table, Vivian was the once who flinched. He recovered quickly, embarrassed at the faux pas, and gave her a sympathetic and welcoming nod. 'You here?'

Much as he had, months earlier, she merely shrugged. 'I had nothing else to do.'

Kofi had got over his initial worry weeks and weeks ago, but the presence of another ghost at the table proved a slight set-back. He blinked frequently, his mind clicking through the ramifications of this second haunting along with the persistence of the first. He channelled his nerves into an incessant shuffling of the dominoes, creating a warm susurration and killing time. Euclid was late and they were a man short.

Eventually, Euclid showed up, looking grieved and stressed, and immediately addressed Tracey with deep reproach. 'Manny taking it hard.'

Tracey was unconcerned. 'Let him take it how he want to take it. He is a free man now. Cheryl can comfort him.'

Euclid sat heavily, shock twisting his face. 'You knew about that?'

She pulled seven dominoes out of the now-stationary mass in the centre of the table and coolly examined her hand. 'Manny always sin like a man who want to be caught. I got tired of catching him decades ago. I went quick and quiet in my sleep. He should hope for such a good death.'

'Dying must make you cold,' Kofi said. He meant to make a joke, but his voice cracked as his throat went dry. Kofi had gone from fearing for his sanity to fearing for his life.

The two ghosts looked at him in sympathy.

'Should we leave?' Vivian offered kindly.

Euclid was angry at the suggestion. 'You see anybody here could take wunna place? Play your hand, man. Reality don't frighten me.'

Kofi felt shamed. Euclid had given up smoking for six years, then, when his caution proved too late, took up cigars once more in defiance. He had come to terms with life and death. But Kofi, Kofi was young, healthy, and had no reason to think he might die now or next year. They played. Vivian was apologetic, Tracey was insouciant, but they played.

It took several months, but as Euclid remarkably continued above ground, Kofi relaxed and let himself enjoy the weekly game. They eventually shortened their usual hours-long session to one quick round of six games. 'People might talk,' was all Euclid said, but the message was clear – the living should only have brief contact with the dead. Anything more than a ritual nod was asking for trouble and upsetting the balance between the two worlds. Still, the shorter time made for a more intense period of almost concentrated fondness, that unselfish communion between friends enjoying a shared activity in excellent company. It was already heaven, and thus a fitting place to meet.

Their last session took place, by necessity, in Euclid's back yard rather than at the park. He was strong enough to recline under the shade of an almond tree, but he could not manage upright posture on a bench. His usual cigar had been retired many months previously when nausea and weakness overmatched his defiance. He made an effort for their sakes, but by the second game he was visibly drained.

'Look, you should really pack up the dominoes and go home,' Euclid said, his voice placid but firm. 'Play a game or two and remember us, but don't hang around waiting for me to die. It isn't worth it.'

There was a baffled pause, as if they were trying to work out whether he was speaking to the living or the dead, as if it mattered. Kofi bowed his head to hide the sudden moisture in his eyes, and obediently stacked the dominoes in their wooden box. Vivian and Tracey departed in silence, swiftness and mystery, as shades do. Kofi left with a quiet, mumbled word, and the ensuing silence was soon shredded by the sound of a motorcycle engine revving up then fading into the distance.

'That's the end of a grand tradition,' Euclid muttered to himself, too tired for tears and too peaceful for bitterness.

He tried to rest, but found himself distracted by the sound of sirens. Was that an ambulance, the police, or both? He squinted a peek into the waking world and saw Kofi standing in front of him, holding the box of dominoes.

'Back already? But I didn't hear the motorbike?'

'Something gotta carry you,' Kofi said.

The tune of the sirens became suddenly clear, suddenly comprehensible.

'Really? Just so?' Euclid lamented. Kofi had been young and healthy, after all, but Kofi showed no resentment.

'So. I have the dominoes. We going to play or not?'

I don't give a damn, I done dead already. The old calypso played sweetly in Euclid's spirit as the old back yard faded away and the park surrounded him, vivid and real and strange in a way that thrilled his new senses. Vivian and Tracey were already there, waiting with patient smiles. Euclid sat and let Kofi take over the shuffling of the dominoes while he stared around him at the park's new splendour. He saw forms and faces known to him, familiar in truth rather than from mere acquaintance, timeless in style and expression yet carrying a hint of their former era in their posture and accent.

Did he now haunt the old park, the one in the mundane world of the living? Or did the old park haunt him, with its memories too dear to be discarded by death? He preferred the latter. He knew little yet of heaven, but for the moment, for an ever out of time, for him it would be a Saturday afternoon and dominoes in the park with friends.

The Gift

Edwidge Danticat

She had promised him a gift, just so he would come and have dinner with her. They had not seen each other in nearly three months, not since before the earthquake.

The outdoor restaurant overlooking the bay was her idea. They'd been there many times before and, in much happier days, they had both found the hip hang out's colorful light panels, velvet couches, and silk pillows intriguing. The ottoman-style tables that you had to lean over to eat on had always been a bit of a challenge, but between the palm trees, covered in Christmas lights all year round, and the downtown Miami skyline, there would be plenty to look at.

Anne had bought a special dress for the occasion, an off the shoulder black sheath that grazed her knees. Leaving her condo, she'd thought that if not for her one bare shoulder, she might look as though she were heading to a funeral.

Daniel was late of course. She was taking turns fiddling with her cell phone and eyeing the sequined Mona Lisa print above the intimate corner she'd chosen for them, when he came limping over, looking nothing like the dapper man she'd once thought she'd loved so much, the one who'd tried to seduce her from the moment they'd first met, when she'd appeared at his real estate office, a penthouse suite overlooking downtown Miami, and asked if she could decorate the walls for him with her paintings and her friends' paintings, on the condition that he make his high end client list available to her and let her use his space for an opening now and then.

"I don't know about all that," he'd said, smirking, even as his blonde female assistant was sitting next to her, across the desk from him, taking notes. "Besides, it seems like a lot of work. You'd have to be here all the time, looking after those paintings. And after me."

He was still new to Miami then. One of those New Yorkers who seemed to think that giving up Manhattan was the same as losing a limb. A double dyaspora, she'd called him, in temporary exile from both New York and Haiti.

Back then, he was spending a lot of time in the gym. But now he was looking less strapping and much thinner and a few inches shorter as he tried to keep both his legs moving in the same direction and at the same pace.

Before he slid down into the blue couch next to her, he leaned over and wrapped his arms around her neck, just as he always had. He smelled like one of the many expensive colognes he liked to take turns wearing, in spite of her recommendation that he stick to a single scent so that whenever she smelled it, wherever she happened to be, she would think of him.

"You're suggesting that I have a scent created just for me," he'd said, "and I'm just not that rich yet."

She learned a few days after they met that he had a wife and a baby. After he sold a two million dollar mansion to an up and coming starlet, there was a profile of him in the business section of the Miami Times. The wife was from a well to do Haitian clan. Her family was in the construction and he wanted to enter the market there. It was a perfect fit.

The black and white picture of the three of them in the paper – him, his wife, his son – hit her like an assault. There they were. Holy trinity. Perfect family. The wife's particular mix of Lebanese and Haitian ancestry showed in her cascade of thick shoulder length hair. The boy, nearly a year old, was doughy, edible-looking, his pudgy arms wrapped around the wife's neck.

Daniel sat down now and slid his body close to hers until there was no where else for him to go, then resting his head on her bare shoulder, he looked down at the cell phone in her hand, and said, "I was once at the Caribbean Market in Port-au-Prince, and all of the maids were on their cell phones with their mistresses. I should put that differently, with their female bosses. And later I was at the outdoor market and the market women were on their cell phones with *their* maids, telling them what to cook their kids for lunch."

"T'exagères," she said.

You think I'm exaggerating?" he said. "After the earthquake, didn't you hear about all the people who were stuck under houses and schools, texting for hours? "

He raised his head from her shoulder and Anne felt the much lighter weight of him slip away from her body. Maybe he had not changed so much after all. He was still acting as he always had, carrying on as though life were one endless flirtation, one eternal conversation. Maybe it was his way of pretending that time had stood still for him, for both of them.

"You look good," she said, though his gaunt face was full of fading scars that a woman would have found some way to cover up with the right type of foundation and blush.

The busboy came by with water, then the waiter with silverware and a menu, but they might as well as been shadows, ghosts. There was a speech about specials and

the menu that she missed.

"We need a minute," he said when asked what he was drinking.

"We might as well eat on the floor," he said the way he always did, while tapping the low ottoman table with his palms.

She suddenly found herself falling into familiar gestures too, running her fingers up and down his now much skinnier arms.

"Did you have trouble finding the place?" she teased.

"I'm only a half hour late," he said. "And I'm not moving as fast as I used to."

When the waiter came back, he ordered a Pinot Noir that the waiter seemed to be pushing, then some prawns and crab cakes.

"Have you been working?" he asked, once the waiter was gone.

She wanted to tell him that she was still living in the condo where he'd visited her nearly half a year ago and that the bedroom was still small and the terrace still overlooked the bay, even though the bay and its speed and sail boats were sometimes hard to see with her mess of easels blocking the view. She wanted to tell him that she had gone back to basics and was now painting in a series, a sequence of birds magnified a thousand times, on giant canvases: bright green Antillean mango birds or wanga nègès, the only birds known to fly backwards. She was also painting orange and black, striped-bellied piculets, the kind whose feathers had been found buried in twenty five million year old amber, somewhere in the Dominican Republic.

The waiter came back with the wine and Daniel made a show of sniffing and tasting it, even though she knew he'd never send it back. Clicking his full glass against hers, he said, "A lot has changed, you know. Otherwise you would have invited me to your place."

"You're lucky I invited you here at all," she said.

The food came and they both looked down at it, momentarily uninterested.

"Usually, we'd be in bed by now," she said.

"Usually, I'd have both my legs," he said.

"Can I see it?" she asked impulsively. She wanted so badly to see his leg, to experience with him the absent part of it, just as she had when it was still there, walking toward and away from her, wrapped tight then loose around her body.

For a second it looked as though he was about to bend down, pull up his pant leg and show her his prosthesis, but instead he grabbed one of the four crab cakes and stuffed it in his mouth. He took his time chewing while she watched his face, his now messier and older looking face.

"I thought you were all about anticipation," he said, when he was done chewing. "Delayed anticipation."

Perhaps without meaning to, he sounded harsh, and he seemed to be stuffing his words down his throat when he grabbed another crab cake and this time washed it down with the entire glass of wine.

"You imbecile," she said, hoping that she too would sound angry, unforgiving. " I was always trying to make everything last."

They'd never had enough time. There was not just the wife and the kid, but also their businesses, and all types of social functions he asked her not to attend because his wife would be there.

"Where was my head back then?" he said, while pouring himself another glass of wine. She could make some kind of joke, she realized. She could say, "In your pants. Your head was in your pants." But instead she asked herself where *her head* had been.

"Have you been back to Haiti since – " she interrupted herself, "well, you know."

He kept chewing until the plate in front of them was clean.

"Non," he said when his mouth was finally empty.

The afternoon of the earthquake, she had been at the college near his office, where she was teaching an introductory Art History class. She had grown close to some of her students and they had invited her to a dinner that, coincidentally, the Haitian Students' Association was hosting that night. They had also invited a local Haitian singer to perform. What was his name again? She could not remember. Erol. His name was Erol and he was the older brother of someone in her class.

After she left the class, she thought of not attending the dinner after all. Then her phone started ringing. And with everyone close to her being far away, with Daniel being on vacation with his wife and son in Haiti, with her parents being safe in Montreal, and with other relatives in Paris, Guadeloupe, Santo Domingo, and New York, all worried but all right, she decided to go to the dinner after all. What better time to be with other people, she'd thought? There were still not that many details coming through. He was not answering his cell phone.

The college hall was packed. People came from all over campus and other nearby campuses. When she walked in, she saw hundreds of people, sitting in concurrent circles on what was supposed to be the dance floor. Nearly everyone was crying.

She sat down on the outer ring of one of the circles. The singer, Erol, the closest thing to a spiritual leader in sight, was sitting in the middle. He too seemed lost, dazed,

his eyes bright red. The Student Association president, a reedy young girl, stood up and walked over to Erol. Sobbing, she asked him if there was some type of ritual they could perform.

If only rituals could emerge as spontaneously as that, she'd thought, to be performed the moment they were most needed.

When his office finally re-opened a few days later, his assistant told her about his leg, his wife, his son.

She had not lost anyone close to her, which was miraculous with two hundred thousand or more dead. Maybe she just didn't realize that she had lost someone. Soon the assistant was claiming that he was back in the States, but she was not allowed to say exactly where. His cell phone was disconnected. He did not return to the office, until the day before, when he finally called back.

When the waiter came around again, he ordered more things that he kept eating, empanadas, buffalo wings. She was too nervous to eat, but he didn't seem to notice. He reached for some popcorn shrimp, then pulled his hand away.

"I wish we had some akra," he said, recalling the fried yucca fritters she liked to cook for him.

"I could make that," she expected herself to say, but she didn't. Just as she didn't want to give in to her hankering to invite him over to her place. She did not want their reunion to be in a bed. And who said that this is what he would want anyway? It had taken him weeks to speak to her again.

She had started painting million year old birds because she could not imagine painting what she really wanted to, earthquakes. And how do you paint an earthquake anyway? Do you paint soil monsters devouring the earth? Shattered houses. Bloody, lifeless bodies. Random items scattered above rubble? Do you paint cemeteries and grave markers and distraught mourners weeping over them? Do you paint crosses, wilted dust-covered flowers or vibrant bright red ones, for hope? Do you even write messages of hope on your canvases, in case someone misses the point, that you are very happy to be alive. Or do you paint your lover, his dead wife, and son? A derivative work from a newspaper clipping, something so faithful to the original photograph that it could easily be mistaken for it, except for your painting their clothes the color of bird feathers: the bright green plumage of the wanga nègès for the wife's evening gown, the striped orange and black dinner suit for him, and the amber-colored bow tied jumper for the boy.

"Where were you all this time?" she finally asked him.

He closed his eyes, then caged them both inside his fingers. Rocking his head back and forth, he chuckled nervously then said, “Aside from physical rehab, where I still go, also in a nut house. I’ve also spent time in a nut house.” He then lowered his hand from his face, as though everything he’d just said could be proven by simply looking into his eyes.

When his assistant had told her that he was in rehab somewhere and didn’t want to talk to anyone, she’d thought only about the prosthesis, the amputated leg, so she’d kept working non stop at painting him and his family and those birds.

“I have friends who were found with their bodies crushed together with their mistresses in hotel rooms,” he said now. “Could you imagine how it would have looked? My wife and child pulled out in pieces from under her parents’ house and somehow they pull me out alive, and soon after that, I continue this thing? With you.”

Did he think that people still had these old world concerns about appearances, she thought, about how things *looked*? Hadn’t the apocalypse happened? They were both now part of a less moral universe. Otherwise, how could she justify her momentary delight, when she’d first learned how things had turned out?

“Forgive me. Forgive me,” she had said to everything from the clouds outside her terrace to the passing carefree boaters below. Was it really joy she had actually felt? Or was it yet another one of those fantasies she’d nurtured for the half year they’d been seeing each other, of his wife and child disappearing, and her taking their place?

“I was never going to leave them for you,” he said. He turned his eyes away from her towards the mini skyscrapers and glass towers, whose reflections created, as the night sky darkened, a parallel city on the water.

“I don’t remember ever asking you to do that,” she said.

“And you were not the only one,” he said, his voice growing firmer, colder as he went along. “There were other women too.”

Her own voice cracked in spite of her best effort at steadying it. She kept her eyes on the large leather buttons pushed deep inside the corners of the ottoman table. Aside from the ache of needing to let him go, what she was feeling most was shame, shame for having felt what she had felt, for seeing an open door where so many had been forever shut.

That night at the college hall, someone from the crowd had come up with an extemporaneous ritual. An old Haitian man, slowed by both old age and heartache, had risen from the crowd and asked if there was something longish that they could make knots in. A rope would be best, he said, but since there was none, a few of the women

offered their scarves, some cotton, some silk, some flowered or striped and some in solid colors. The old man asked for help in tying the scarves together until they had formed a table size ring in the middle of the room.

"This is now the epicenter of the earthquake," the old man said. "And we are going to fill it with the gift of our love."

This was not what she had wanted, needed. And nearly everyone seemed as disappointed as she was that no one had yet provided them with the actual gift of magical words to recite, or soothing songs to sing, or candles to light. This felt trite to her, empty, untrue. But it was their ritual of their moment, until some better ones could come along. They were making do on the spot, with what they had. Another type of priest, cantor, vicar, or ordinary person, might have done something different, but the basic idea would have been the same: to try, with will and desire alone, to influence something you could not.

The restaurant was filling up now and the waiter's visits became less and less frequent. The bottle of wine was empty and he didn't seem that eager to order another.

The way she'd heard it, his in laws' neighbors had a stocked liquor cabinet that had somehow survived the earthquake. They'd brought everything they had to the field hospital where his leg was amputated. He had gulped half a bottle of thirty year old scotch before a surgeon friend had cut off the crushed part of his left leg, at the fibula.

"When you called yesterday, you said you had a gift for me." He was looking at her again and his eyes began to seem familiar, full of false arrogance and desire. Raising his eyebrows, he said, "I know this gift is not of a carnal nature because we are meeting here."

He held his hands out towards her, as if to ask for her forgiveness, or maybe he was waiting for her to produce the gift she had promised him on the phone. She let the hands, shaking now – though still looking much more whole than the rest of him – dangle in the air until he pulled them away and stuck them in his pocket.

The gift was in her car. It was too large to carry into the restaurant. She had imagined some scenario where she would hand it to him in the parking lot before they said their final goodbye. She would reach up and touch his face, the old smirking one and not this new scarred and haggard face. She would wrap her arms around his waist and squeeze him while inhaling the mysterious cologne. Then she would pull away from him and would let him watch her walk to her car, where she would get him the rolled up package. She would tell him not to open it until he got home, because she didn't want to be there when he first saw it, her massive color reproduction of the picture from the newspaper, the one of him and his wife and his son. She did not want to know how he would react

to seeing it, whether he would be angry or sad or glad? Maybe he would call her later to thank her for it, but she wouldn't answer his call. She did not want to know whether he would keep it or throw it away. But having now been disappointed over and over by many types of rituals, she changed her mind. She would keep the painting for herself, to remind herself of her decision to never see him again.

"The gift thing was bait to get you here, so I could see you one last time," she said. And she felt as though this was the truest thing she had said that entire evening.

"Is that so?" He smiled his first real smile that night, as though he was okay with this, as though he had long been. Then they sat there silently, watching the reflection of the city skyline disappear in the wake of the last of the evening's speed boats racing by.

Bim

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Subscriptions, BIM: Arts for the 21st Century, Errol Barrow Centre for Creative Imagination, The University of the West Indies. Cave Hill Campus, PO Box 64, Bridgetown, BB11000, Barbados.

Published by
Errol Barrow Centre for Creative Imagination
The University of the West Indies, Cave Hill Campus
in collaboration with
Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth
Government Headquarters
Bay Street, St. Michael
Barbados