

The Cuckold

"Mornin', Mr. Harvey. What I could do fuh yuh today?" Richards was seated on a block of wood, half-hidden behind his piles of yams and potatoes. His son leaned against the chicken wire fence that separated the area where fruit and vegetables were sold from the butchers and fishmongers. He held a cigarette loosely between his lips.

"Jus' two pounds of potatoes, thanks." Mr. Harvey smiled pleasantly.

"How yuh like de heat, suh?" Richards asked, placing a heap of potatoes on the rusty scale.

"Not much, to tell you de truth, but I don' like complainin'."

Richards handed Mr. Harvey the paper bag and pushed his panama back from his forehead.

"Sometimes, suh, I think we would go crazy if we didn' complain, yes."

Harvey shrugged, smiled his thanks and walked briskly away.

"I don' like complainin', Mrs. Harvey," young Richards said, trying to effect Harvey's calm, even tone, "but I have reason to believe yuh hornin' mih." His father shook his head slowly, reaching for the sheet of cardboard he used as a fan.

There were very few people on the beach, probably because it was a Wednesday afternoon and school was not out until 3:30. It was low tide so the couple could lie comfortably on the sand without the threat of being wet by the waves washing into the shore. Mackie threw a stone at what was left of a turreted sandcastle, clicking his tongue when it hit its mark. Helen opened her eyes and looked around.

"Dis sun ain't playin' it hot, nuh." She frowned, shading her eyes. "Wait, that's Marilyn an' Kahn?"

"Who? Mackie looked in the direction she was openly indicating. Walking towards them were a woman in a two piece bathing suit and a wiry man in black swim trunks who was holding her hand.

"You don' know 'bout Marilyn Harvey an' 'sweet-man Kahn'?" Mackie shook his head and knew he was going to find out. "You mus' be de only man in Mayaro who ain't know Rex Harvey business."

"Yuh mean Harvey wid de bookstore?"

"Yeah. What happen is, he didn' always have dat bookstore. He inherited one in Tobago. Some uncle leave it fuh him. So cupid Harvey decide to run de bookstore in Tobago an' come home every weekend. He had only been married two years, so is to know what happen."

"What?" Mackie grinned.

"She pick up with Kahn. Kahn is a jockey so when he ain't in trainin' an' dey have no track meetin' he's leave San Fernando an' come to Mayaro. His family have a beach house down there." She pointed past the river. "One day he see Marilyn an' he like her an' Marilyn like him back. De women find Khan sweet too bad. Mus' be de bandy legs he have from ridin' horse."

"Wait, dey passin'," Mackie muttered.

Khan was thin and angular with narrow shoulders and a determined jawline. The woman was no longer young but she was attractive. Her legs were long and slender. She had an expression of gentle amusement on her face as they walked past Mackie and Helen. Kahn held the woman's hand tightly in his.

"Poor Rex Harvey," Mackie whispered, his eyes following the couple.

"Well," Helen answered, "that's what everybody say when he was away an' they thought he didn' know. But after nearly two years of this Tobago thing he come back here an' set up another shop an' Marilyn so bol'face she ain't stop hornin' him yet. Everybody was waitin' fuh de explosion, expectin' to see Marilyn walkin' through de village wid her bags an' baggage but, no, Rex ain't say 'boo'. She still comin' an' goin' as she please. Nobody sorry fuh him again."

"So yuh mean she wid Kahn half de time an' her husban', half de time?"

"Precisely." Helen tapped her knee. "De arrangement couldn' be sweeter . . . for dem." She pointed at the couple who had stopped to kiss.

When he got home from the bookstore that evening, Rex Harvey changed into his house clothes, washed his hands at the kitchen sink and began peeling and dicing vegetables. He had got up that morning with an incredible craving for thick home-made soup so he had gone out to the market before work and bought the potatoes. He had everything else. Pumpkin, lentils, salt meat and the flour for the dumplings. He only put sweet potatoes in when Marilyn was home. He didn't like them much. He enjoyed cooking. He'd roll up his sleeves and whistled while he peeled and sliced and stirred. He didn't mind eating by himself as long as there was something good on television. Tonight if he timed it right, he could watch 'Rhoda' while he ate.

The house was relatively tidy. He cleaned it on Saturdays. Most of the other stores in the village stayed open on Saturdays but he made it a rule that he kept weekends for leisure. On Sundays, he usually drove his Cortina to the beach and he'd sit under a coconut tree and read one of the books from the second hand shelf at his shop. When he got home he would normally watch T.V. until he was sleepy.

The potatoes were peeled and quartered and were sitting in the brown liquid along with the other ingredients. He peered into the pot and stirred it. Looking at his watch, he smiled. It would be finished in time.

It was full moon. Marilyn couldn't sleep. Kahn lay stretched out beside her, one arm hanging off the bed. His mouth was slightly open. She sat up and watched him for a while but the moonlight shining in at the window that faced the bed lured her to look out. She rose and walked over to it. It was high tide. The water rolled black onto the shore. She took a few deep breaths, savouring the salt. Then she noticed him. There was a man walking up the beach towards the house. He approached slowly, gazing at the water.

"Tabanka." She smiled to herself.

As he drew closer, she noticed he was whistling. There was something odd about the way he walked. He was wearing a black fedora. He was her husband.

He bent for an instant, picked something up, cast it into the water. Then all of a sudden, he began to waltz. He waltzed in ever-widening circles under the white moon with the water washing the sand. Then, as abruptly as he had begun, he stopped. He shoved his hands into his pockets, turned sharply and walked back the way he had come. At the window, Marilyn stood perfectly still, her fingers clutching the curtain.

Micheline Adams

Sonnet

John is turning green
will he puke
that's the big question around here
there's not too much else going on

Yesterday I mailed you a letter
but now I realize
I forgot to address the envelope
if you get it
we know there's a god

John's writhing now
he's on his belly
do you think it was something he ate
Stop that wiggling, John,
you're creasing my concentration

Stuart Ross

Walked the Beach

Walked the beach
collected words like seashells,
hung them from my neck,
placed them on coffee tables as ashtrays,
conversation pieces.

Collected words
until they
wrote obscenities on my blouse,
insulted my living room guests.

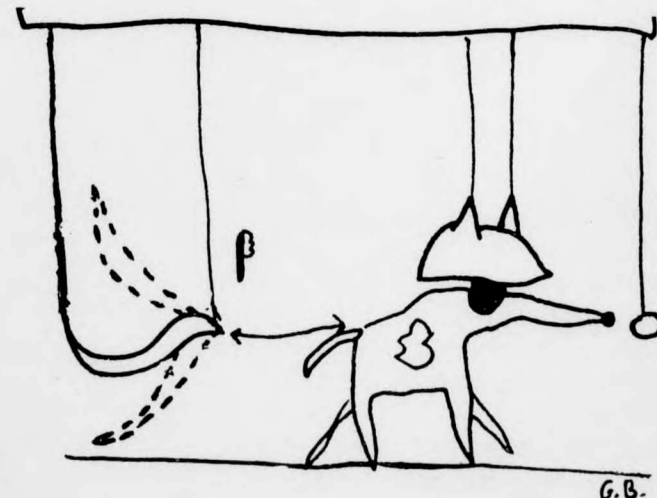
Collected words
until they roared,
crawled out of shells
like dying creatures.
Spelled fishy in the sun.

April Bulmer

Freedom

A microcosm
two command
Deign to be,
A Deity
The mirrored ceiling
Reflects the view
We sweat
Only
To die
sewed in verse
Of love and incomprehension
It means nothing
Unless
A dog knows the leash.

SW



gary barwin