

Veronica Carnegie

FLY SAW CLEARLY



"With my little eye, I saw him die." I recited my Cock Robin poem but kept repeating one line, ad nauseam to some people. I wanted to tell how they murdered my principal but I would only blurt the one line in the faces of passersby and inevitably frighten them.

"Move, Fly. Shut up yu mouth. Yu really hurting mi nerves now." The old woman who shared her pastry with me a few minutes before, as we sheltered under the bus shed from the drizzle, turned on me. She claimed to have been a professional with a Ph.D. but I don't remember her field of employment. She told me she was sick and tired of me, the damn Cock Robin poem and my madness.

"Yu telling everybody about the principal they kill. The woman is not yuh relative. Yu just up and down like a yo-yo. Get a hold of yuhself, man. Gunmen shot and killed my husband and son and nobody investigated. I stop cry. I have to live on nothing. Only God knows how I manage. Relatives tell me to be strong. I have to be strong with nothing. I live on next to nothing and you carrying on about somebody yuh hardly knew."

They'd shot and killed the one decent person I knew, the principal who'd given me a sense of worth and importance. I remember running from the graveside, terrified, when the officiating minister said "ashes to ashes."

"I saw him die. I saw him die," I'd repeat like a stuck radiogram needle. I recited, I walked, I ran and very often not knowing where I was, I sang in my lostness. I did not

remember where I lived, became like a small child again, sang nursery songs and wondered why I couldn't find Nurse and Mrs. Banton nor they me. I revisited the Boulevard. I passed by the school and bawled out the dead principal's name and the new security guard drew his gun on me.

In the streets I approached a little girl and her mother and the little girl said "hello."

Before I could answer the child's mother jerked her away.

"Don't ah tell yuh not to talk to him."

"Yes, Mummy, but why not?"

"He's a mad man. Used to be a teacher."

"Is my teacher mad, Mummy?"

The mother looked directly at me and muttered, "In this country, show me one person who isn't."

The mother threatened to call the district constable and I hurried away.

All day long I walked, kicking the loose stones and the dirt with them. I climbed over a shrub-covered hill and then the land unexpectedly leveled and opened wide with about an acre of the greenest guinea grass I'd ever seen. I raised my feet high and moved through tall, thick grass, bowing and lifting and bending and stretching and switching as if the wind with an air borne baton, conducted their expansive blades in four-fourths time. Bow down, up, up. Left, right, shimmer, shimmer. I beat out my rhythm to a different place from the near green grass and clumps of shrubs to the distant mountains, white-capped by thick fog. During my walk I noticed that every shade of green was evident and I couldn't count them. The green of the grass was different from the bottle-green of some thick-stemmed plants out-skirting it, different from the green of the sugar cane and its lighter center-stripped fronds, different from the green of the broad-leaved bananas, different from the green of the ever-running pumpkin and its dark capture-land vine, different from the blue-green of the not so far-away hills.

In the hot sun and the swirling Caribbean heat I noticed that even the trees grew in disorder. Everything grew everywhere and any old how. A coconut tree grew tall beside a pear, next to a breadfruit, near a mango, behind a guinep, under the ackee pushing a pimento tree. I kept on going and after a while I stumbled on a heap of stones and noticed there were eleven such heaps near a shady grove. The grove was semi-dark and wet and I dropped my wanderer's sack, stretched myself and inhaled the overpowering smell of coffee rose and over-ripe jackfruit fallen from the tree. At the bottom end of the grove, where the light was, white water oozed, at

stand-pipe force, from a rock. I wet myself washing my face and then with hands behind my back, I bent under, opened my mouth and allowed the brackish water to fill my being. I swallowed and stopped when my stomach neared bursting point. It was mineral water. If the water is as powerful as they say, then healing will take place in me.

When I heard the sounds of living things, I peered through a thicket of gungo peas and saw an enclosure with animals and birds that shared the same pen. All the animals were mixed up. Pigs walked with goats, with a couple of cows, the one donkey, a sheep, the chickens. The dogs and cats eyed me from the same vantage point, under a nearby elongated, barrack-like house with bedroom windows all opening to the back view.

The sight or the smell of me caused a commotion and two people came out. They'd been watching me. They were old. He was tall, dark-skinned, good-looking and slightly stooped. She was short, fair, fat and shaky.

"We've been watching you, son. Who are you and why are you here?"

"My name is Fly, ma'am. I was a teacher, ma'am and I spied them with my little eye as they killed the only person who made me who I was."

"So why yuh not in school? What really happen to yuh?"

"It's a long story, ma'am. I have to go now. Good evening."

"It's getting late and rain is coming. Yuh can spend the night here."

I accepted the invitation with untold relief. I was exhausted.

"Bertie! Bertie! Set up the bath," the old lady called out to someone inside the house.

"It ready an' hot, Miss Prudence."

"Okay, Bertie, an' pick out some o' Missa Fred's clothes. Dem will fit 'im."

Miss Prudence pointed me to the bathroom where a brown brew, poured from a black kerosene tin, sent off its steam in my nostrils and frosted the mirror over the basin.

"Yu ready, sir?" asked a huge woman, Bertie, I suppose. Before I could answer, she grabbed my slender frame, ripped my clothes off me and flung them in a bucket by the door filled with disinfectant. Firm hands and a resolute bosom forced me to plunge into a hot bath in the blue tile-framed bath tub. As the woman Bertie scrubbed me all over my body with strong soap, she began to pray, on top of her lungs, that the evil spirit and iniquity that possessed me would pass out of me before midnight. I groaned and tried to pray with her.

"Oh Lord, I spy," I started to pray, "I spy with my little eye a dead body, slumped over a

desk with a hole in the head, dripping blood on a map of my country. Lord lettest now thy servant depart in peace."

Later, that night at dinner, I told them, Miss Prudence and her husband, that I saw everything going on around me but I was overpowered by another vision that urged me to walk and run and recite the one poem that had leeches on to my brain.

"You know what your problem is?" Miss Prudence replied, "You suffering from self-pity, man."

After a while I focused on the meal and tried, without disrespect to tune them out but my hosts cross-questioned me and blamed me for my present situation.

"You're in that position because yuh think nothing of yourself. What yuh want is two damn good licks to straighten yuh out."

She continued, "We raise eleven children and not one mad. Two coming in from America tomorrow and ah want you to meet them, especially the doctor." Miss Prudence beamed and boasted about her children's achievements. "It was tough, sometimes, and I can tell you, the last one gave us hell but we had a big cook-out when she graduated and added her heap of stones like the rest. We jokingly call them our monuments. Yu see the eleven heaps of stones?"

I nodded and she continued, especially about the doctor.

"He is a specialist and he can cure yuh. Yu have to get a visa, yuh know. Yuh have to go to the Good Samaritan Clinic where he work in New York."

"They all have degrees," she continued, "You have a degree, Fly?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"What? And yuh up an' down the street like a half-wit an' 'ave people call yu Fly?"

After listening to Miss Prudence, I suddenly dropped my head forward, my chin touching my upper chest and pretended to sleep.

"Poor fellow, let him go to bed." I heard.

The morning broke. I jolted with excitement for this new scene because I, Fly, never spied the same dawn twice. Day with its soft light and bird music was slowly breaking. The sight was baby blue, cotton white, sunshine yellow and fragile light creeping into being. I took a deep breath and closed my eyes as I inhaled a fresh morning and bent over the window sill to stretch.

Down in the yard beneath the window I, Fly, spied a dark grey open-back van and two

police officers loading bags of green ganja plants onto the vehicle. I guess in a country where madness ruled, the entire scene made perfect sense. The scene jolted me back to the school where my Principal was shot. Students were poor and rough and routinely joined gangs with names such as the FADALESS CREW, SHOTANKILL CREW, NAH LIVE FI NUTTEN CREW, DONE DEAD A'READY CREW, SLAUGHTER HOUSE CREW, BULLET CREW. One of the older teachers had explained that members of the Fadaless Crew either were raised without fathers or their fathers had been murdered. No girls could join, and they were angry, and some people said they had guns. The Shotankill Crew had male and female members whose parents had been shot and killed in cold blood. When they filled out application forms and were asked for information on parents they wrote: Shot and killed. The word deceased was far too tame and told no story. They too were angry and wanted justice. Nah Live Fi Nutten was negative. They were unemployed, unemployable and felt that the most extraordinary thing to do was make "duppies" by killing people. Done Dead A'ready members were fatalistic. They had nothing to live for so the rest of the world had to keep out of the way. Some crew members carried guns and dealt in vengeance.

I rubbed my eyes and looked again as the two cops finished loading the bags. I, Fly, realized that this was another kind of crew that would need its own name.

I moved away from the window just in time to answer a knock on the bedroom door. As I opened the door, Miss Prudence greeted me with a mug of aromatic, high-mountain, country coffee.

"Thank you, Miss Prudence, this smells good."

She turned to go but then she spun around, gave me a quizzical look and asked me point blank, if I'd seen a van outside the window.

"Listen, Miss Prudence, I have lived on this island long enough to know how to see and not see at the same time. I, Fly, may spy, but I also know how to stay out of people's business." After she departed, I put down the coffee mug, picked up my bag and went out on the main road to see if I could spy Nurse, Mrs. Banton, or even my principal.

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