

Flash Fiction | Cyril Dabydeen

KISKADEE & BLUE-SACKIE

Here amidst ruins with the birds flying over in veritable space, as she asked, "Who are you?" "Who am I?" he replied. Connective lines, tissue, in another long-distance call. "So much to remember," Noonie said. "And to believe?"

"It's what we left behind."

"No-no." He meant, Yes-yes.

Emblems of mango, starapple, and familiar birds with bramble bush and vine all around. *Can you imagine?*

She shot back, "It's only you!"

"Me?"

"Yes, you!"

A vinyl record playing of plantation-days, like a merry-go-round with more connective tissue, see. But now Seattle's on the horizon, and somewhere else, too. Burning cane-fields, pegasse and molasses smells in the air: as they watched the conflagration: he and Noonie, together. Ash floating down; and as children how they had kept jumping up and down catching the strands, like filaments of fire.

But we're here now.

"We shouldn't be talking like this," she said.

"Why not?"

"It's an omen."

"Not that again, Noonie."

Real birds fluttering: the kiskadee with its bright yellow crest and solid bill; and the blue-sackie. *Twa corbies, d'you say?* Yes, they'd been in love, in another place or time. Boundaries crossed, and being in a less romantic time because of what separated them.

"It's no use," Noonie said, emotion welling up.

"No use?"

Fifteen, twenty years passing by...in an instant.

Noonie, again: "I've always wanted to be with you."

"But we're now far apart, is that it?"

The ground somersaulting, as he kept imagining more.

"We were just leaving for another place, you know."

"Paradise?" he asked.

"What we always longed for."

"Maybe."

"Just to be some place else, yeah."

What he really feared. Branches, vines and limbs of trees like the guava and joomoon as they skirted the ground, being everywhere at once.

But closer, ah.

"You should never have left, Anand."

"Never?"

"It's who we really are."

"You mean...being far away?"

America coming closer. Canada, too, with cold and ice; not islands in a coastal place by the Orinoco and Demerara rivers. But being here now, on the veritable American Coast: Noonie, in her Seattle base; and he, in Canada's east coast. Her eyes glowed, and her pointy nose like the kiskadee's bill. *Laughter*. Her waist, and legs invitingly lanky...as more he imagined. He wasn't sure about the guava tree any longer. The Atlantic trade winds blowing, and he kept going back there.

Telephone lines connected everywhere.

She knew as much as he knew.

Didn't they always?

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Noonie hummed to herself; as he also hummed. Why did they leave there to go on their separate worlds? Words they repeated to themselves, if in dreams only. Then, "Christ, we should never have left."

"Oh?"

"We're really far apart, Anand."

Drop by silent drop, like dew falling. Another bird landing silently on the familiar guava tree. Now who aimed at it...with a slingshot? Now how really far away were they, in this North?

Not...far south?

Trade winds kept blowing. And night after night they listened to birds' wings fluttering; and the village houses on stilts, with the tenement and backyard. In bottom-houses really, cowdung-plastered: authentic village life masked by time, see.

Another landmark, like their favourite spot with Africa, Asia, in the mix. *Where else?* Raspy voices asking, with a Creole inflection, ah.

Click-click: tell me more.

Tweet-tweet.

The Atlantic's waves rising higher; and the seagull, the kingfisher, and the harpy eagle appearing and making them believe, as never before.

The sun coruscating. As Noonie sighed. He also sighed, like his last sigh. The lines jangled. A dead-end. *Click-click.*

What's foretold...with fleeting spaces between them, because of what seemed evanescent. Just as Noonie might have warned herself about, and warned Anand about too. More of a vinyl cord winding and unwinding... bringing them back to reality.

She really stirred, Noonie did.

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What else was there to tell, in the silence between them? Nothing, but longer days and nights, with the telephone lines appearing wireless, come to think of it. Anand's heart raced, with blood and bone being together. As Noonie scoffed and breathed harder.

Now their embracing with eyes closed and lips sealed.

Consequence of a new day...or night. Their pretence at lovemaking. Imagine it; and Anand wanting more, not only a slow dance...in snow and ice. What the birds really knew?

What Noonie said she heard, though she didn't.

He too listened. Oh, how he listened.

Imagine, eh.

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Face-to-face with each other, after many years; and their not recognizing each other anymore, as their eyes dimmed. But they forced themselves to remember...like looking in a tall mirror. The sun coruscating. And how far away were they really from each other: what only the birds knew. Noonie laughed again. Oh, the birds kept being at it.

Over a longer distance, more spaces reached, he intimated.

Noonie closed her eyes. Somewhere a dead-end. A memory-lapse.

What else he didn't know? Voices, echo-chambers.

Silence, once again, in their listening, and not listening.

Two birds being all, images only: let this be believed. About their coming together, and really embracing. Wings fluttering everywhere, in a strange new excitement. Their body language only, imaginary yet real.

Source: Lakeview International Journal of Literature and Arts, Vol. 4, No. 2, August 2016, pp. 184-186.