1991

Swimming in the Ba'ma Grass

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Recommended Citation
Available at:https://ro.uow.edu.au/kunapipi/vol13/iss3/19

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Swimming in the Bá’ma Grass

Abstract

... swimming? In the Bá’ma grass? Who ever heard of such a thing and a big man at that. Dress in him work clothes same way, him khaki shirt and him old stain up jeans pants and him brand new Ironman water boots that I did tell him was too big for him, this old man playing the fool in the middle of the pasture, lying there pretending he swimming with his two hands out there like he doing the crawl and his feet kicking. Look how he playing the fool till one of his boots fall off and is what that red thing like blood stain up the back of him brand new khaki shirt is only one time it wash and look how him gone stain it up now. And is why that police boy there, the one Shannon, why he standing there with his gun in him hand and that other one there from the station, Browning, standing beside him and the two of them watching my husband there making a fool of himself pretending he swimming? Why all the people running and shouting and Shannon waving his gun at them telling them to back-back, Shannon waving his gun at me while I run to Arnold who not swimming at all I know he jokify but this is going too far.
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You don’t think the one Shannon could mad enough shoot Arnold? That is what Dorcas big boy was calling out to me when I was hanging out the clothes? Him did really say ‘Shannon shoot Marse Arnold’? Me not even sure now me did hear what him did say good. He was making so much noise I get confuse. He was calling my name, calling my name: ‘Miss Vie, Miss Vie. Come quick’ and something about my husband and Shannon but if he really did say Shannon shoot Arnold why me poor woman standing here thinking seh Arnold playing the fool?

See here now. Is only because I know Arnold is a man come from the sea and like to play the fool sometime; he love the sea more than anything in the whole world and when he wanted was to go to Treasure Beach and I wouldn’t let him, him would lie on the floor and pretend he swimming and laugh, doing it just to annoy me, but not in a malicious way, Arnold don’t have a mean bone in him body which is why everybody so vex with the way that that police boy Shannon been treating him since that time he went up to the station to complain. Trying every which way to get Arnold into trouble but he never succeed yet because everybody in this town know Arnold is a decent law-abiding man. Telling everybody, the boasy boy, say he going to get Arnold. And not a soul, not even Sarge that say him is Arnold friend do one thing about it, because that Shannon is
bull-buck-and-duppy-conqueror and everybody fraid of him. Forever boasting that he going to get Arnold. For what? Everybody know Arnold not a complaining man. He not a quarrelling man. Look how long we live here in peace with all our neighbours. Ask any one of them. Of all the people living here, Arnold must be the only one never quarrel with nobody yet. Me really can’t say the same for myself because everybody know my temper well hot. But this time it wasn’t me quarrelling with anybody why Dorcas boy was making so much noise. Mark you, him was always a noisy little fellow. But what he was calling out again ee? Lawd Jesus! A can’t keep a thing in mi brain.

Oh. I remember now. I was talking how my temper hot and that is why when that Shannon impertinence off to me at the station I did fire him a box hot-hot. Me big married woman him a go put question to! A tek him big dutty nayga hand a touch me. Just because he see me there a clean up the place he must be think I one of him dutty Kingston gal. I fire him a box you see, and him so shock, him just reel back so, and then I see some evil come into him eye, you see, and a swear to Massa God he going to kill me. But one of the other man come into the room same time and Shannon turn him tail and leave. The other guy ask me what happen and I tell him – this was one of the decent fellows there – one of the Wright boys from out Christiana way. And me did expect him to laugh but he look serious bout the whole thing and he say, ‘Miss Vie, you have every right to box him. Facety wretch. But Shannon not a man to cross you know. Them say a six man him kill aready in town. Is ‘Enforcer’ them call him there you know. And them only send him here because town get a little too hot for him right now. Then him look round good before him whisper to me, ‘Is Big Man behind him, you know’.

Cho! What Wright a play? Everybody know bout Enforcer and which politician him kill for. But that is Kingston business. Me did hear say him was getting too big for him boots so the Big Man glad to get rid of him, send him down here to cool him off for a while. And like how no politics a go on down here, Enforcer don’t have nothing to enforce.

But see here, that Shannon is a rat though, you know, a stinking dirty rat. After that, I couldn’t do nothing right at the station. Shannon cross me up every time. Is like him set in wait for me. The minute I clean the floor, him would walk outside in the mud and come tramping right across it, innocent like, and I couldn’t say a word. I would wash the sheet and towel them and hang them on the line, and when I come back to pick them up, somebody rub green bush and dutty into them. Me say, those things were so childish. If him was big and bad like they say, why him was going on like pickney so? I take the Sarge him coffee in the morning, and Sarge take one sip and swear blue light at me for somebody put salt in the sugar. Just things like that him do, like pickney. But still and all he was a snake. Used to make my skin crawl. Any time I at the station and he come in, my skin just crawl. Him never trouble me again though, and
I make sure to keep out of his way. But I get the feeling the whole time he looking at me and laughing inside, laughing and biding him time.

Then is what that Shannon doing standing there in the middle of the pasture in this sun hot, wearing him good Kingston shoes? Why he not at the station eh? I never even bother to tell Arnold about him putting question to me, for you know how man stay. Even though they there quiet, them like a raging bull when they think another man even look at their woman. And then again, sometimes man you would never ever consider, put question to you, and your own man vex because they say is you encouragement them. So me don’t say nothing. But all the little petty things Shannon doing getting on my nerves. So I start complain about the job and I tell Arnold I want to leave.

Arnold don’t want me to leave for he say is the best job I ever have, cleaning up at the station and doing a little washing on the side. Arnold say is good government work and I get my pay regular, I don’t have to put up with some facety woman in her kitchen and if anything should happen to him, if I stay there long enough, I will come in for a little pension.

But I fuss and fuss every day till Arnold can’t stand it no longer and he ask me exactly what is happening and I still don’t tell him bout Shannon. I tell him bout all the trickify things somebody doing to me and how it making my work twice as hard. I don’t tell him how it burn me up day after day to go to work and see that snakey smile on Shannon face.

Well, unbeknownst to me, Arnold nuh decide to go and see the Sarge, who he know well – the two of them drinking all the time together down at One Love. But Arnold is a serious man when him ready so he don’t tackle Sarge at the bar – him put on him good clothes one day and after I leave work, he go to the station to complain to Sarge that one of the policeman have it in for me. So Sarge say he will look into it. Now I don’t know if Sarge did know what was happening – maybe Wright did tell him. Anyway, next day I go to work and he call me in and ask me how come something happening at the station and I don’t tell him, look how long I work there and is my husband have to come in and lodge complaint. So then I explain to him what happen with Shannon and me and why I don’t want to discuss it with Arnold. So he say ‘A-oh’. And that is the last I hear of it.

Is Wright same one did tell me how Sarge call in the Shannon there and chastise him for his treatment of me. But you see how life stay? Shannon get it into him head that is my husband that did lodge complaint to Sarge about him. And that is how the bad blood between my husband and Shannon start.

And is me cause it O God is me responsible for everything that happen in my husband life from he meet me. Is me cause him to be living here, working on the land, something he never want to do for he really wanted was to live by the sea. Is there him come from, down Treasure Beach way,
is a hard set of people living down there, you know. If them not fighting with the sea them fighting the land, for it hardly ever rain and it hardly have any proper tree or no little green grass. Is Mandeville I come from, up in the hill where it green and cool all the time and me not lying at all, me just never like the part of the world that Arnold come from. It never look natural to me, the way place suppose to look, and the people them don’t look natural neither. And I never never could stand the sea. Is how me did get on to meeting Arnold? Me can’t even remember, I tell you, me brain gone.

Arnold used to deal with my Daddy, that time when I was a young girl and my Daddy did have a dray. He used to go down to Treasure Beach way and buy fish, and melon and tomatis and skellion, all those things what them Saint Bess people did grow, what nobody else was growing those time. And Arnold is one of the people he used to deal with. When Arnold start put question, me never interested, because Arnold was a big hard-back man and me was just a little bit of a girl, used to ride with my Daddy sometimes for I was the youngest and he love me dearly. And I used to like travelling perch up on my Daddy dray, that time I boasie can’t done, but I never like that part of the world he used to go to and me never like those St Elizabeth red people. But after a while me just get used to Arnold, he know how to make me laugh, and my Daddy think highly of him, say he was a man of intelligence and ambition. So my Daddy was happy when I marry Arnold.

When we married first, I did go to live at Arnold house, but me not lying, me could never get used to those people, no matter them was fambly now. Never could like them at all. And them never like me, that’s a fact, for they just don’t like black people. So I pull Arnold and I pull him and I never stop till he agree to leave that place and come with me to my Daddy land in the hills. So he come and I will say he make the best of it. He never say anything, but every chance him get he would go down to Treasure Beach and he would come back with fish and smelling of the sea. He never once blame me for nothing though, wasn’t that kind of man, not even when I never have no children. I used to tell him I don’t need more pickney than him the way he go on foolish sometimes. I tell you, that man can make me bus’ some big laugh. When I bother him, he say, ‘A gone leave you, a swimming to Treasure Beach’ and then he carry on as if he swimming. Moving his hands and feet any which way. He mek me laugh till water come a mi eye. What a foolish man though, ee.

Arnold go on too bad sometime. Now you can tell me why he lying there in the sunhot in the middle of the Ba’ma grass?

You see him waterboots? One of them fall off already and the other soon come off. Is stubborn he stubborn why they fall off, you know. Because he always buying things larger than him size. Though him is such a little man, I think in him head he see himself as big as a king. If I didn’t buy
him clothes for him, nothing would ever fit him right. He swear even his foot bigger than it is and when he did go to buy a new pair of boots Saturday, I warn him to get the right size for I know how he stay. And lo and behold, he come back with a pair of waterboots there that you could see was too big. He so stubborn, he argue with me say no, waterboots suppose to big. Put them on this morning to leave for his ground and see here now, it look like these big boots mek him stumble and fall, why else he lying there on the ground? Him hat and all fall off. Lying there making me think is joke he joking.

Is what Miss Dorcas big son did call out to me just now when I was hanging out the clothes and he frighten me, he there bawling so loud? Why I can’t remember? Lawd, my memory was always bad, from I was a young girl I forgetful. Is something Arnold tease me about all the time.

The boy say something about Arnold and I remember now I drop the clothes and run. My Father! I drop the good white clothes straight into the dutty ground. Is what happening to me poor soul, eh? And now I have more washing to do for Arnold new shirt soaking in blood and he lying here not saying a word and Shannon standing there like a snake and the people back off and standing over there fraud of Shannon and it can’t be true what the boy run come tell me. It can’t be true seh Shannon shoot Arnold dead?

Arnold always seh he want to die by the sea and is I take him away from where he wanted was to be. Jesus only know I have to take him back there. He can’t just die here so.

Arnold, come mi love. Let me help you sit up. Look. Look over there and see a great wave rising. It coming from the sea. It bringing the whole of Treasure Beach rising up to meet you. See the boat them there. And you fisherman friend them. Festus and Marse George and Tata Barclay and Lloydie. See you mother Miss Adina and see Grandy Maud, your sister Merteen, little Shelly your niece and baby Jonathan. Just sit up and look nuh, and stop play dead. You too jokin’ man, and everybody watching. Open you eye and look Arnold, if you think a lie. See the great wave there. Coming over the mountain. Coming to carry us to our home.