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## Poems

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## Poems

### **Abstract**

UNCLE CYRIL, GRANDPA DOLPHUS, REDISCOVERING WHARTON STREET, TRINIDAD

# John Lyons

## UNCLE CYRIL

'Que hay?'

A sharp call from across the road:  
Uncle Cyril, our family sailor,  
adventurer down the Spanish Main,  
bent like a question mark  
to disguise his height  
land-shambled towards me.

'Que hay?'

Hands weathered like good leather  
reached out to me. El Dorado glinted  
in his broad smile, hat at eccentric angle,  
carelessness hanging about him  
without malice.

His pockets were a cornucopia of coins:  
'Buy "sweeties" but don't be lickerish now,  
save some fuh yuh brother and sisters.  
How's yuh Granma?'

Uncle Cyril had made and lost a fortune,  
trafficking live stock to Port-of-Spain market,  
fishing in his half-owned pirogue  
for anchovies and jacks.

Years after his sea faring  
my father found him consumed by bush lore  
in a forest near Charlotteville in Tobago,  
guarded by a vicious sow, a butting goat,  
and a parrot screeching, 'Que hay?'

## GRANDPA DOLPHUS

When Grandpa Dolphus  
pushed car-tyre sandals off,  
comforted shocked toes reluctant to separate,  
you knew he had come in to stay  
until next day when rum shop opened.

When he reached for the historic tin of twist,  
trawled pockets for his 'sweet pipe',  
you knew rigmaroles were coming  
without the 'crick-crack-monkey-break-he-back-  
on-a-piece-a-pomme-arac' endings.  
He swore every single word was gospel.

He told of places under sand box and silk cotton trees  
where unspeakable happenings bristled  
his hairs like Grandma's scrubbing brush.  
How he signed the cross, ran away  
not looking back, not petrifying into salt.  
Giant forms holding up the moon blocked the road.  
They threw no shadows; they sucked his breath,  
till he turned about to save his life.

Those tales were familiar as the nose of our faces.  
Only the dog gave its dumb attention:  
It rolled its eyes in the direction  
its listening head should be.

When Grandpa Dolphus  
pushed off his lap  
Columbus, our don't-care-a-damn cat,  
you knew his pipe had burnt itself out  
like his tall tales;  
but only for that night.

## REDISCOVERING WHARTON STREET, TRINIDAD

No more that yellow earth road,  
haunt of midnight presences;  
by day, a school boy's practical lesson  
in geography: ox-bow lakes,  
gorge formations and alluvial deposits.

Now it is a pitted asphalt thoroughfare,  
signposted Wharton Street, shrunken,  
a betrayal of so many fond memories  
of my kite-flying, marble-pitching days.

No 18, my old house, looks smaller  
than when I saw it last back in 1959.  
It stands curiously vulnerable  
on tall pillar-trees out-datedly elegant.

Under its rusted, corrugated iron roof  
poverty shows a brave face.  
They are the tough ones, like perennial crops  
from the seeds of forbears, selected  
for survival by the Middle Passage.

Their priorities are instinctive  
as coupling: food for the body,  
calypso to lift the spirits, making  
time to celebrate inconsequences.