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Abstract
Pearly don't know how she going to get through the evening. She want to tell him. But she caan tell him. He only going think she forward or worse yet fool fool. For don't that's what her sister did say, 'Pearly you fool fool eh chile!' But if she don't tell him, how she going know ...? Pearly mixing up the ice cream worse than when she first start the job ... people want guava, she scooping up paw paw or mango, tamarind, ginger, why they don't just want chocolate, it easy to find ... as for vanilla, rum and nut, sweetsop and coconut all of them the same colour ... coconut that is how it all start...
DIANE BROWNE

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She remember the Sunday evening, the trees blowing in the breeze, children running up and down, people walking round and round, some sitting down, on the benches, on the rocks, on the grass, and the band playing songs she never even hear before – some old people moving their head to the music, for they know the songs. She remember all this in looking back, not as it happen, because is like nothing is anything before him, and everything only take place after, even if is before.

The people crowding round the stand and all the girls serving so busy. She just scooping up ice cream, hand it over, smile (for Miss Williams say, ‘All you girls, you are to be polite’) so she never even notice one from the other, till she hear a voice say, ‘Can you serve me a coconut cream, please.’

She stop, coconut cream? and look up to say, you mean ice cream, and she look into a smiling face, the whitest teeth in the coolest black skin, the deepest brown eyes with the longest lashes. She never know a man eye lashes could long so. She feel like her heart jump up in her mouth, she feel like her head turning, the spoon fly out of her hand and drop into the bucket of coconut ice cream. Lucky thing it right under her hand or how else she would find it again.

And he laugh and say, ‘I don’t mean to frighten you.’ And he look into her eyes, and Oh, god, she know he know is not frighten she frighten at all, but she don’t know how she know, she just know. Oh god, how he know?

Then she notice the red white and black soldier uniform and she say, ‘The band stop play?’ though it don’t sound like her voice, but she have to say something to sound compose.
And he say, 'We just teking a little break. We soon play again. So I caan take the ice cream with me now. You can put it up till we leaving?' and he hand her the ticket.

She nod her head, and he say, 'I going to play a tune for you,' – like he run the whole band. 'What tune you like?' And she don't know for she never hear this music before – she just looking at him – don't even hear the people around saying, 'But what a way people have time to chat, eh, and don't serve nobody...

'Is what happening man? No my turn now...'

Then he say, 'We going to play "Jane and Louisa will soon come home into this beautiful garden". I dedicate it to you.' And he laugh again – a nice laugh like he sharing it with her. Oh, god, how he know? Her face feel hot, she never feel like this before. She don't know how she tell one flavour from the next after that.

When the band finish they all hurrying up to pack up and he come running. 'I caan stop the bus will leave me. Thank you for keeping the cream.' And his hand touch hers as she hand it to him. Oh, mi God. And now he say, 'My name is Alfonse,' and she don't even know when she tell him hers, but he say, 'See you next Sunday, Pearly.'

Well all week she think bout it. She realize that she mek a fool of herself and she plan to behave with greater composure next time, for is not once her mother tell her, 'Man just mek to fool up woman, you hear me.'

Sunday come and she mek her pink stripe uniform starch stiff (for Mamma still using starch) till it rustle when she move and her pink stripe head-tie wrap just right (she did have to do it more than once and go do it another time but did frighten to crush it up) and powder her face so it don’t shine, and moisten her lips with vaseline (Mamma don’t allow lipstick – only Jezebel woman wear lipstick). And she decide to pay him no mind if he come over.

The band come into the garden and she watching through the corner of her eye, but she caan mek out one from the other in the uniform. The band take a break, and she ready, face set till Miss Williams say, 'Pearly what happen to you? Why you look so? Remember, be polite.' The band start again. He don’t come. Well she know he wouldn’t come after all. So man stay. And her heart lie down in her foot bottom so she could barely move from one bucket to the next.

She don’t even hear the band stop.

'You save a coconut cream for me, Pearly?' and she look up, same smiling face and eyes and lashes and since all her resolve did wear away with every scoop she mek he catch her with her face open for he say, 'I couldn’t come in the break. The bandmaster have me picking out the music. You think I wouldn’t come, but I tell you I would come, Pearly.' And she know he know again.

His hand touch hers when she hand him the ice cream and the feeling she feel in her is as if she caan barely breathe, and she feel her eyes just
open wide and looking at him. Then somebody call out, ‘Hurry up Alfonse, the bus a go leave you, man.’

And he don’t smile. He look into her eyes very serious and say, ‘I see you next Sunday, Pearly.’

Pearly walk on air all week.

And so it go on. They have no time to talk. She working when he come, she working when he leave, he have to go in the bus with the others, Miss Williams watching her, the bandmaster watching him. In fact it occur to her that the only thing she know bout him is he like coconut cream.

One time he really did ask her where she live so he could visit her, but she tell him Mamma wouldn’t like it – for in truth Mamma is a Christian and would not see her keeping company except in the church but all them boys in their suit and talking bout the bible and nothing else though who know what is in their heart never interest Pearly, and now after Alfonse...

Then as bad luck would have it Isoline come home, only for a visit, and say she get a lawyer to help her and she getting out papers for Pearly and she have a job for Pearly in the very same hospital where she work and she teking back Pearly with her on a visitor’s visa, but it will all work out for her to stay, the lawyer assure her of that.

That night Isoline tell them is a night Pearly can never forget. When Isoline tell them all the blood drain out of Pearly face and she so frighten she choke on the dumpling she eating.

Mamma say, ‘Oh Isoline, the Lord’s name be praised! How I been praying for this. I will miss her but she get a opportunity at last. Pearly, hear how you sister good to you!’

Isoline say, ‘Well, Pearly, what you say to that?’

And Pearly so frighten she answer, ‘But Mamma I don’t want to go I caan go.’

Mamma say, ‘Eh? What you say?’

Isoline say, ‘Don’t worry, Pearly. I will look after you. You will like New York.’

Pearly get so agitated because she know she caan give any reason to anybody that she jump up from the table, turn over the sour-sop drink and shout, ‘I caan go. I don’t want to go.’

Well Mamma don’t even notice the drink how it run cross the good cloth she have on the table because Isoline is there. She cry out. ‘But anybody ever see mi dying trial eh! What you say Pearly? Nothing for you here, you get a chance to better youself. Look how I slave and worry over you, school you. You don’t have any ambition, girl. What crosses you bring on me now. Is get in trouble you get in trouble?’

Pearly saying, ‘No, Mamma,’ and start to cry.

Mamma start to cry, and calling on the Lord.

Isoline say, ‘Pearly is a good girl, Mamma, she don’t get in trouble,’ meanwhile she looking at Pearly hard to mek sure is true. ‘Is just the
shock. I shoulda write her and tell her first. She will feel different tomorrow.'

Mamma go to bed and tie her head and rub up with camphorated oil she feel so sick. Pearly caan sleep. How she can leave? By now she know she is in love with Alfonse.

Isoline corner her the next day. ‘O.K. Miss Pearly, I see you face. Tell me is what happen’

Pearly tell her and she say,
‘God, is fool you fool so. A man play some music and laugh with you over ice cream and you tun fool. You don’t know a thing bout him. For one thing him sure to have a baby-mother if not more. Who say him even interest in you. Him don’t mek no effort to see you. Well, at least we lucky you not having baby. But not even that him ask you. Well one thing sure I not leaving here without you.’

Meanwhile Mamma walking round with her head tie all the time say her pressure giving her bad feelings, and looking like somebody dead for her. Pearly know she is a fool. Everything Isoline say is right. She caan even talk it over with Alfonse for he would think she is forward – after all he never ask her anything, he never promise her anything. Isoline and Mamma will mek her go. Pearly know her heart is breaking, for she can never love anybody else.

Then Denzil her brother come by.
‘Isoline tell me you don’t want go with her, why?’

Pearly tell him and she expect him to curse her and call her all kind of fool, but he just sit down on his Yamaha bike outside the gate and say, ‘So you in love, little sister. You know even if him don’t have a baby-mother him still not going married to you, which is what I see you have on you mind.’
‘Why?’ Pearly say.
‘Because man in uniform don’t just married so they has to get permission and they don’t pay them much anyway. The best you can get is to be a baby-mother. You throwing away a opportunity.’

Tears full up Pearly eyes and run down her cheek.

He see them and say, ‘Well I tell you is big and old enough to know you own mind. What you feeling is nothing new, new for you, but nothing new. And poor Isoline, she don’t feel it. She caan find no man there. All them man over there in drugs and crime. See, she is a good girl like you, so every night she go bed alone in the cold. So maybe you right. Maybe you better off than Isoline ... And after all, everybody don’t have to go to America.’

Pearly tum her head away so Denzil don’t see her face, but she smile. She love this brother almost as much as she love Alfonse.

So Pearly mek up her mind to tell him. But now she don’t know how to tell him, and so she mixing up all the flavours. What he going think when she talk to him. She caan tell him...
When the band stop playing she say to Miss Williams, 'Please I have to be excuse Ma'am,' and Miss Williams look at her but she don't say no.

Pearly slip out of the stand and meet Alfonse on the grass under the lignum vitae tree before he can reach the stand.

'Pearly,' he say, 'What happen, how you look so?' and he look embarrass as some of the other men looking sideways at them and laughing.

Pearly say, 'I just saying goodbye. Mi sister come from New York, and say she teking me back with her,' and she hold her breath while she twist up the apron in her hands.

And now she catch him unaware and she can read his face.

He say, 'But Pearly, I don't even get to know you yet.' Then he stop and can go on. But Pearly already see when he look into her eyes even though he drop his eyelids quick and she catch her breath when she see the long eyelashes, and same time the lie slip out of her mouth before she could even think.

'Well, I don't know if she really serious. I think she only talking, but I tell you just in case she serious.'

He say, 'Pearly, my day off is on Wednesday I will meet you here before you start work.' And that is how they start meeting – every Wednesday.

Isoline in her back everyday, and Mamma walking up and down with her bad feelings, but Pearly don't care.

So Pearly don't go for the visa. Isoline say she wash her hands of her and rain down curses on her head. Anyway she kiss her before she leave, and after Mamma ask the Lord umpteen times what she do to get such a ungrateful chile, she stop tie her head get over her bad feelings and life go on.

Pearly never know happiness like that as she see Alfonse every Sunday, and every Wednesday they walk in the garden.

Then one Wednesday he come late and she just thinking he forget her when he come in and rush her to a bench, and she could see the happiness and excitement in his eyes so much so she herself excited too and wonder what it is.

'Pearly,' he say, 'I get a scholarship.'

'A what!' she say.

'I going away to American, a music scholarship. The bandmaster put me up for it and I get it.'

Pearly bend over and put her head on her hands so he don't see her face, and she wonder if she have a heart or anything, for she feel cold, and caan feel her feet or hands or anything. He don't notice, he going on about it. He going for six months, and when he come back he will get a promotion and more money and then ... he don't say but he promising her all sorts of things with his eyes which she know better than to believe. Mamma right. Isoline right. He say he is leaving next week, he didn't tell her before in case he never get it.
Pearly think this must be how it feel to be dead. She smile though and say how she happy for him.

She don’t even try to manage with the flavours. She tell Miss Williams she sick and she go home. Not a lie neither for she throw up so till she think if she not dead before she now dead.

Alfonse come last time on Sunday and he miss the bus on purpose and wait for her till she come off work and they walk in the garden. They don’t say anything much. He laugh and say when he come back he will pick her a rose and waltz with her in the garden just like in the song he dedicate to her. But Pearly don’t even understand what he is talking bout. She barely hear him. All she know is her heart is breaking.

Denzil come by. ‘Mamma, say you sick. What happen?’

‘I not sick, don’t you see me going to work.’ Then she tell him full of shame how she so fool in truth.

‘But he coming back. Is government scholarship. He have to come back.’
Pearly spirits lift a little bit.

‘But he will forget me. There is plenty pretty woman up there.’

‘Who say he will forget you, and he don’t have time on scholarship to look at woman.’
Pearly spirits soar like a dove.

‘But Pearly you better go back to school.’

‘Go to school! What you saying? I finish school. I working. You mad!’

‘You no hear what I say. Alfonse don’t have baby-mother, Alfonse gawn on scholarship. Him looking to him future, is a serious man that. When him come back him getting promotion. When him come back, Pearly, him won’t want a girl that sell in ice cream stall. You better go to extra classes and learn to be a typist.’
Pearly don’t believe what Denzil saying. ‘But you know how I hate school Denzil.’

‘Don’t say I never warn you, Pearly. Think you say you love him. Easy to be a baby-mother, not so easy to be wife. If is wife you want you better better yourself.’

Pearly still scooping ice cream, the children still running up and down, people walking round and round the garden, the band still playing – without Alfonse. But Pearly have a plan. Already she is the best girl in the stall. She have every flavour at her fingertips, even can suggest to people that don’t know what they want. Miss Williams come to depend on her. Soon she will be the supervisor and don’t wear uniform but dress up in clothes like Miss Williams.

Pearly find the song bout picking the rose and waltzing in the beautiful garden in a old school book that she never throw away and understand it. She understand, and what’s more she know rose have prickles and waltzing have to go hand in hand with just walking, and she believe Alfonse is coming back to her, and supervisor is just as good as typist, if not better.