The Lizardy Man and His Lady

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Abstract
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This journal article is available in Kunapipi: https://ro.uow.edu.au/kunapipi/vol16/iss2/14
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Jesus Mary and Joseph! What wrong with you children ee? Shelly-Ann, what kind of noise that you making in the people house? Roger, why you have to go on like big man so? You know what, the two of you better sit down quiet and watch TV. Eh, Miss Ersie? We don't want to hear another peep out of you. If I have any more bother from you Miss Shelly-Ann, home you go. And I not bringing you back to play with Roger again if is so you going to behave. When I come here to visit Miss Ersie, we don't want no noise and confusion in we head.

... as I was saying Miss Ersie and this is the Lord own truth, if it wasn't for the little one there, me would leave long time, you know. Go right back to mi owna yard. For certain things people like me and you shouldn't have no call to put up with at our age. Seh what? Yes mi'dear. Getting worse every day. You lucky you have a nice family like this to work for. That's what I was used to one time too. But sometimes you can't predict how things will turn out, ee? Like when you see what can happen to some people good-good pickney. When you see how them can turn down. A walla-walla with so-so bad company. Me seh, her mother would have belly-come-down pain if she could see the class of people fe har pickney a mix with these last days.

Seh what? You hear him was in prison in Miami one time? Fe ganja? A same so me did hear. A whole plane load. And now them say him in the other business there big big. What them call it? Eh-hm. The coke and the crack and all them sinting. Imagine eh mam? Is that me big-woman have to live with. But you see me here, although me have to live in the same house, you have to say is fe him money paying me, still and all Miss Ersie, me walk far from him, you know. Me do me job and me say 'yes sir', 'no
sir' to everything and me swallow mi tongue. Not that him really exchange more than two word with anybody. Him not a talking man. And them seh you can eat with the devil if you carry a long spoon. So my spoon well long.

Seh what? Her family? Lawd mi dear, them don't business with her again. At all t'all. Then you never know seh the family cut her off? Me never tell you? Well what I should say is, she refuse to have one single thing to do with them from the time she leave the husband and go move in with the first fellow there. Didn’t like what her mother have to say one bit. So she just cut herself off. Well that one didn’t last very long, I can tell you. And is a good thing her family don’t even know the half of it. Suppose them did know the kind of life she was a lead?

Well, me stick with her through thick and thin, move up and down town with her, for who else she have to look after little Shelly-Ann? And me not lying, some time there she don’t even have money to pay mi wages. I don’t even know what we eat. From she leave the husband, she suck salt. I tell you. Suck salt. From one man to the next till she meet up with this one and them move into the house here. Well, him seem to have plenty money to throw around. Give her more gold chain and ring and all them sinting. Satellite dish pon the roof. Plenty food pon table. She jump inna plane gawn a Miami every two minute. But for all that, there is other kind of crosses, as me and you know, mi dear.

Well yes, she did get a job when she leave the husband. Job here, job there, but she never stay long in any of them. For Miss Ella nuh too use to work, and me nuh think they was paying her too much money for all that. And the kind of place we had was to move to! Imagine a woman of that pedigree living in one little flat in the back of people yard. It wasn’t what she was used to, I can tell you. But is she make her bed, so she had was to lie on it. Plenty time, when she feeling down down down, when she just a cry the living eye water, them time me say: 'Miss Ella, go and make your peace with your parents. Go to your mother and father and beg their forgiveness. They will take you back in for they love you regardless. They will look after you and Shelly-Ann. You can’t continue to live so.'

Miss Ersie, I tell you those time my heart really go out to her. She sucking salt. But she say no, was too proud to humble herself.

Me tell you. You see her there now a mix up herself with every kind of riff-raff? You wouldn't believe what a pretty pickney she used to be. The class of family that girl come from. Born into mi hand, you have to say. Is me raise and grow her. And when she get married, is me her mother beg go with her to go set up her owna house.

Her mother say to me, 'Gatha. I don't know how I myself going to manage without you. But Ella need you more than me now. Is no use sending one of these foolish little young girls that don't know one thing to work for her. Is you going have to show her everything about keeping
house.' Well. I never want to leave my old mistress, for is twenty-five years I work with her, leave my mother yard as a young little pickney to go there. And me and her have our ups and down, for she have her ways there like all of them. But I not lying to you, she still better than most, for she treat me fair and square. Couldn't say she never fair. So since she ask me, I go with Miss Ella. For is big man she marry, you know. Expecting her to entertain all twenty people to dinner party one night and them sort of thing.

Well she did know how to look pretty and dress up herself, but that is all she know. I really have to say I don't know what she woulda do without me. And that is not boasify. Is the Lord own truth. For me not lying. Miss Ella get married but she couldn't do one single thing, spoil like all them other rich people pickney. Have somebody walk and pick up after them from morning till night. Left to me, she wouldn't grow so. She woulda learn to do something for herself. But as far as her mother and father concern, like how them don't have no other children, the sun rise and set on her. 'Gatha, don't worry. Ella will learn in time', is what fe har mother used to say every time I quarrel about how Miss Ella keep her room, how she just throw down everything on the floor for me to pick up. I never like it at all and I did raise my voice to her sometime, for I didn't feel it was right to bring up a girl-pickney so. Eh, Miss Ersie? Don't you feel seh girl pickney must learn to look after themself, rich or no rich? Nuh so! But is them spoil her. The parents spoil her from she born. That is the Lord own truth.

'Let's play house.'
'Okay. This is my briefcase. Where are my car keys?'
'What you want briefcase for?'
'Because I'm the daddy and the daddy always have a briefcase.'
'My daddy don't.'
'Not true. I see him with briefcase.'
'Who?'
'Your daddy. I see him at your house already get into his car with a briefcase.'
'You mean Mr Lizardy Man. That man is not my daddy!'
'Why you call him so?'
'Promise you won't tell?'
'Promise.'
'Because he look just like a lizard ha-ha.'
'Shelly-Ann, you too foolish. Lizard green. He not green.'
'He wear lizard-skin shoes.'
'They don't have lizard-skin shoes. How much lizard you think they would have to kill to make one pair of shoes?'
'Well, I don't business with that. That's what he wear. And he just lie there all day long watching TV with his lizard-skin shoes sticking out over
the edge of the couch. The living room dark like anything for he pull the
curtain. And he just lie there all day long. Without moving. Don’t move
at all. Look just like an ugly croaking lizard.’
‘So what your mother would be doing with a lizard-man then?’
‘She not my mother.’
‘Shelly-Ann! You story. Is your mother. I hear my mother say so, and she
don’t lie. Gatha say she is your mother. I even hear you call her Mummy
plenty time. So how come all of a sudden she not your mother?’
‘She not my mother.’
‘So who is she then?’
‘She is the Lizardy Man’s lady ha-ha.’
‘Cho. You too foolish. We playing this game or what? Or you just going
to stand there the whole day telling lie?’
‘Don’t say that. I don’t tell lie.’
‘You do too. You just told some fantastic ones.’
‘Didn’t.’
‘Did.’
‘Didn’t.’
‘Did.’
‘Didn’t.’

Jesus Mary and Joseph! Children! Shelly-Ann, you shouting again. You
know what, Miss, one more peep out of you and I lick you till you fene
today. You hear me? Miss Ersie, I really can’t take these naughty children,
you know. Next time I come back for a chat, I am coming by my own self.
And that will serve you right, Shelly-Ann.

... anyway, Miss Ersie, me feel seh, plenty something a go on. Me can’t say
me see anything you know, but nobody can convince me that she not
taking some of them something herself. Me never see her tek nothing, me
can’t lie and say me see it, though me know them smoke the weed there
hard hard. But that is nothing; she been doing that long time now; long
before she meet this man here. But me know seh, these last few months,
she really change. Sometimes you see her there, she just out of this world.
Just like the other one there. The man. Is two weeks now him no leave the
house you know. The two of them. Lock up inside the house there day
and night. Me not lying to you. Me feel something gwine happen. Is like
the two of them just waiting for something to happen. And she not paying
the little pickney one mind. Almost have to say the child don’t have
mother again. It break my heart to see how she treating little Shelly-Ann.
That’s why she get rude and giving so much trouble. The little child can’t
even go near the mother now, she push her away, tell her to go and play.
Have no time for her at all. Sometime is as if she don’t even see her.
Me not lying, me would really like to get out. For from my mother born and grow me, I never mix up in nothing yet. And me would gone long time, Miss Ella or no Miss Ella. But me can’t bring myself to leave the little one here. For if it wasn’t for me, she wouldn’t have a soul to mind her.

Them say cockroach nuh business inna fowl roos. And I am a woman that know how to keep my own counsel. But I decide I going to take it upon my head to write to her grandmother. Going to send her a letter. Eh, what you think Miss Ersie? Don’t you think I have every right to put the case before her? Write her and beg her no matter what, she is please to come for the child?

Well, there you have it. You right, the child have a father even though she don’t see him from one year to the next. But is still her father. Maybe he is the right one to come. I am going to write Miss Ella mother and put the case and she will know what to do. For you have to say now Shelly-Ann don’t have no mother. Mother don’t business with her at all t’all. Mother head gone, you have to say, the way she a behave. And me can’t carry on no more. Me nuh care if Miss Ella vex when she find out. Me can’t deal with her and her jingbang life no longer. For she not the same person me did agree to go to work for. Is like a different somebody. This situation just can’t go on.

‘Shelly-Ann, you know what?’
‘What?’
‘Your father there. Alright then. The Lizardy Man. You know he is a dealer?’
‘A what?’
‘A dealer. I don’t know is what exactly. But is a bad thing. I hear my mother and father talking about it. They don’t like how he living on the same street with us. Say plenty bad things going to happen.’
‘I know one bad thing already.’
‘What?’
‘Is a secret.’
‘But I just tell you a secret.’
‘Okay then. The Lizardy Man have some guns.’
‘Guns? You mean he have more than one?’
‘Eh-hm.’
‘What kind of guns?’
‘I don’t know.’
‘How they stay?’
‘Well one is little, like what the detectives use on TV. The bad guys too. When they say “Hands up” or something like that. The one they put to your head and go click click. The Lizardy Man have one of those. He have it with him all the time.’
'Cho. That is nothing. My daddy has one of those. He sleeps with it in the bedroom. In case he has to shoot a thief.'

'No thief coming to our house. You know is four bad dogs we have. Doberman at that.'

'Well we have bad dogs too. Ridgeback worse than Doberman any day. Badder than bad. But thief can still come. That's why my daddy has his gun.'

'Well we have security fencing. And electric gate. You don't have that. Anybody can just drive into your yard. Our gate only open when the Lizardy Man drive up and press something in the car and it make the gate open. Or else you have to press a buzzer and the Lizardy Man will talk to you from the house. Then he decide if he is going to let you in or not. Nobody can just drive in as they like.'

'How the other gun stay?'

'He have another one hide in the clothes closet in the bedroom. Is like what the police carry.'

'What? A M-16?'

'I don't know is what. Same like you see the police driving around in their jeep with.'

'M-16, to rhatid!'
you can say such a thing chile and you have yu good-good mother at yu yard. Oh my poor little innocent lamb, you must never say such a thing, dear. I know she not paying you too much mind these days but Shelly-Ann you is a big girl now so you must understand. Your mother not well, so you must try and see with her. She will soon get better and treat you nice and loving the way she always treat you. Say what wrong with her? She just not well Shelly-Ann. She have big people complaint. Say what that is? Listen nuh pickney, what is wrong with you? Why you have to ask question so? Just don't bother to try my spirit, you hear.

Laud have mercy! Shelly-Ann, stop! Stop. Stop. Stop. Right there. Don't go one step further. Shelly-Ann, you hear me? Come back. Aright. Don't move from here, chile. Stand right here so. I don't like what I see. Shelly-Ann, how the gate throw wide open so? You ever see the gentleman leave the gate open yet? And him car right there in the garage. And where the dog them, Shelly-Ann? Is who open the gate? You think the dog them run weh? Jesus save us, is what this on me today? Girl, something just tell me we not to go in there. We not to go in there at all. Come. We going right back down to Miss Ersie. We can phone your mother from there. Something just tell me we not to go in. Don't like what a seeing at all t'all. Shelly-Ann, what you think happen to the dog them, and the gate wide open? Jesus, what a autoclaps if them loose on the street and we buck them up! Come, pickney. Mek we tek foot and run, you hear.

'What happen, Shelly-Ann, why you come back?'
'I don't know. Gatha say I must come and play with you. Roger, you know what, something happening at our yard.'
'What?'
'I don't know. We never go in. Gatha gone to phone my mother.'
'How you mean?'
'She say we not to go in. For the gate was wide open. And the Lizardy Man car was there.'
'So what if the gate open?'
'I tell you already, that gate never open. Only if the Lizardy Man press a button and open it himself. Even for us. Mummy and me and Gatha, when we want to come and go. He or Troja always there to open the gate. But they never ever leave it open. As soon as you gone through, they close it again.'
'So what you think happen?'
'I don't know.'
'My daddy said something bad was going to happen.'
'Gatha said so too.'
'Maybe they gone out and forget to lock back the gate.'
'No. Roger?'
'What?'
'I know something that happen. Something bad.'
'Bad like what?'
'Well. I don't know if Gatha did see. But I see, Roger. I see two dead dog lying on the lawn.'