

Christian Campbell

A DREAM OF FIRE



I.

It start like a dark calypso:
Man think Woman scheming on Man.
Man spit gasoline on Woman
and fling a match.
Woman run and everything done.

To light match in a straw market,
most things catch: straw dolls, *Hey Mon*
T-shirts, African statues made in Japan,
daishikis, tchotchkes, straw hats, Androsia
dresses, knock-off Gucci bags, floral sarongs,
shell and fish scale jewellery, the cries
of *Prettygirl* and Walcott poems.

The braiders would spider
hair and recite “The Schooner *Flight*”
for \$20, one bead per line.
But now the people are laughing
or crying and all we see is one red man
running out of the blaze. Out of the fire
bust open like dawn. It is Derek Walcott,
the red man running.

These heavy women with huge hands,
hats, and long skirts, these straw vendors,
would plait straw tighter than sonnets and hustle
Walcott poems on the side. In the dream

they shake their gray-heads at the howl
of fire. A bird, a sea-swift, might think
it Soufriere. But it's just a burning market.
Yes, the arsonist was inspired by "A City's Death by Fire":
After that hot gossamer had levelled all but the church'd sky. . .

II.

Walcott is safe, thank God, no longer
limps. Poems gone, poems gone.
But he knows them all by heart,
like the braiders. Poems gone,
he sucks his teeth and grumbles:
History. First time in Nassau,
last stop on the schooner *Flight*,
he paints the market skanking down
in flames, cigarette painting smoke, too,
from his mouth.

He paints one of the braiders
knitting my hair, diamond style,
chanting me a poem:
*Open the map. More islands there, man,
than peas on a tin plate, all different size,
one thousand in the Bahamas alone. . .*
A big-belly man is making conch
fritters to sell, so I don't smell
poems burning. Only oil, batter,
bubbling conch.

Smoke barrels up like music.
The sing'd straw dolls lip-synch
Arrow: *Olé Olé, Olé Olé. . .*
and ya room-boom-boom-boom
(and for once the old man dance).

Bay Street burns like the sixties, like 1942.
Funky Nassau. There is no place like this.
Armagideon or obeah, only us.
Everyone knows what we like:
we like pretty. So what matters in the dream,
the scrap gangs running to catch ashes
of Walcott poems for new costumes
and how beautiful Bay Street will look
with a whole other mouth.

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