**To Dah-Duh in Memoriam -**Literature Notes

**SUMMARY**  
This short story is about a young girl's visit, from New York, to the island of Barbados. The protagonist, along with her sister and mother, visit Dah-Duh. The visit is an interesting one in which Dah-Duh and the protagonist develop a caring, yet competitive, relationship. Dah-Duh introduces her to the riches of Barbados (nature), while the protagonist introduces her grandmother to the steel and concrete world of New York (industrialism). There is a competitive edge to their conversations because they each try to outdo each other on the merits of their separate homes. Dah-Duh, however, is dealt a blow when she learns of the existence of the Empire State building, which was many stories taller than the highest thing she had ever laid her eyes on – Bissex Hill. She lost a little bit of her spark that day and was not given a chance to rebound because the protagonist left for New York shortly after. The story progresses with the death of Dah-Duh during the famous ’37 strike. She had refused to leave her home and was later found dead, on a Berbice chair, by her window. The protagonist spent a brief period in penance, living as an artist and painting landscapes that were reminiscent of Barbados.  
  
**SETTING**

* The story is set in Barbados, in the 1930's.

**CHARACTERS**  
*Dah-Duh:*

* A small and purposeful old woman.
* Had a painfully erect figure.
* Over eighty (80) years old.
* She moved quickly at all times.
* She had a very unattractive face, which was ‘stark and fleshless as a death mask’ (Marshall, p.178).
* Her eyes were alive with life.
* Competitive spirit.
* Had a special relationship with the protagonist.

*Protagonist:*

* A thin little girl.
* Nine (9) years old.
* A strong personality.
* Competitive in nature.
* Had a special relationship with Dah-Duh.

**THEMES**  
*Race:*  
This theme is apparent when Dah-Duh and the protagonist discuss the fact that she ‘beat up a white girl’ in her class. Dah-Duh is quiet shocked at this and exclaims that the world has changed so much that she cannot recognize it. This highlights their contrasting experiences of race. Dah-Duh’s experience of race relations is viewing the white ‘massa’ as superior, as well as viewing all things white as best. This is corroborated at the beginning of the story when it was revealed that Dah-Duh liked her grandchildren to be white, and in fact had grandchildren from the illegitimate children of white estate managers. Therefore, a white person was some-one to be respected, while for the protagonist, white people were an integral part of her world, and she viewed herself as their equal.  
  
*Love and family relationship:*  
This story highlights the strong familial ties that exists among people of the Caribbean, both in the islands and abroad (diaspora). The fact that the persona and her family left New York to visit the matriarch of the family, in Barbados, highlights this tie. The respect accorded to Dah-Duh by the mother also shows her place, or status, in the family. The protagonist states that in the presence of Dah-Duh, her formidable mother became a child again.    
  
*Gender Issues:*  
This is a minor theme in this short story. It is highlighted when it is mentioned that Dah-Duh liked her grandchildren to be boys. This is ironic because the qualities that are stereotypically found in boys - assertive, strong willed, competitive - are found in her grand daughter. An example of this is the manner in which the protagonist / narrator was able to win the staring match when she first met Dah-Duh, this proved her dominance and strength.   
  
**SYMBOL**  
*Empire State Building*  
This building represents power and progress. It is in the midst of the cold glass and steel of New York city and, therefore, deforms Dah-Duh’s symbol of power; Bissex Hill. It is not by accident that the knowledge of this building shakes Dah-Duh’s confidence. Steel and iron, the symbol of progress, is what shakes the nature loving Dah-Duh. It can, therefore, be said that her response to the knowledge of the existence of the Empire State Building – defeat – is a foreshadowing of her death. This is the case because it is metal, in the form of the planes, that ‘rattled her trees and flatten[ed] the young canes in her field.’ (Marshall. p.186). This is a physical echo of her emotional response to the knowledge of the existence of the Empire State building. The fact that she is found dead after this incident is not a surprise to the reader.  
  
  
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