

# The Caribbean Writer

Where the Caribbean Imagination Embraces the World

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*Highlighting  
Time, Place and Memories*



.. 60	<b>Miss Annie Cooks Fish,</b> <i>Charmaine Rousseau</i> . . . . .	126
.. 62	<b>Swelling Shut,</b> <i>Christina Cooke</i> . . . . .	132
.. 63	<b>In Madame Tussauds' Garden,</b> <i>Robert Sandiford</i> . . . . .	137
.. 65	<b>Soldier,</b> <i>Jacqueline Bishop</i> . . . . .	140

## PROSE/PERSONAL NARRATIVES

.. 69	<b>Carnival in Santiago De Cuba,</b> <i>Flora González</i> . . . . .	145
.. 71	<b>Becoming a Man,</b> <i>Daniel Suarez</i> . . . . .	152
	<b>A Story of Immigrants,</b> <i>Althea Romeo-Mark</i> . . . . .	160
.. 75	<b>Memories and Monuments: Reflections on the Christena Tragedy,</b> <i>Whitman T. Browne</i> . . . . .	166
.. 79	<b>Oracabessa Days: A Testimonial of Roots, Identity &amp; Redemption,</b> <i>Marva McClean</i> . . . . .	174
.. 90	<b>High Pressure,</b> <i>Margaret A. Leighton</i> . . . . .	180
.. 94	<b>Roster and Genealogy of Emigrants From the British Antilles Settled in Chiloe (1800-1900),</b> <i>Pablo A. Pérez</i> . . . . .	187
.. 97	<b>Love The Living,</b> <i>Fabian Thomas</i> . . . . .	193
.. 105	<b>Fireflies,</b> <i>Devin Murphy</i> . . . . .	196
.. 109	<b>Nightwalking,</b> <i>Ayanna Gillian Lloyd</i> . . . . .	197

## NIGHTWALKING

*Ayanna Gillian Lloyd*

The night breathes, full and thick, keeping its own thoughts. Taste it on the back of your throat and roll it on your tongue. Sit up in bed. The sheets are tumbled with dreams and the pillows still bear the imprint of faces not yet forgotten. Place your feet on the concrete floor in your room. It is chipped and scarred with grainy remnants of the carpets that were pulled up after the flood that you both drowned in a lifetime ago.

Listen to the noises the house makes when it thinks no one is around to hear it. All houses talk when they think they are alone, full of the traces of our past lives. They murmur their own thoughts also; independent of things we have left behind. The floorboards creak to each other. The louvres clack. Fans left on in empty rooms sigh and curtains murmur as the breeze tickles them. A television, now turned off, emits a low hum that you must put your ear closer to the blank screen to hear. Do it because that's what you do when no one is around to see you do weird things like listen to a turned off television on the off chance that it said something.

The frogs and the crickets are silent now but the dogs howl and moan and glare at other imaginary dogs that prowl around their territory. If you stand long enough at the window – no don't pull the curtain - wait, just stand at the window with the lights off, staring hard at their rangy silhouettes through the closed curtains. Give it a minute. The dogs, one by one look up at the widow, stare, smelling your lack of sleep, your restlessness, wondering who encroaches on the only time that they are dogs and not pets.

Pad softly down the corridor. No, don't put your slippers on. Yes, do it in your silk nightdress or in panties and an old lover's t-shirt. Unlock the door. Step out into the night barefoot. Feel the grass under your feet. The dogs won't bark. They feel you in the night and know it is your time for walking. The gate creaks. Don't latch it. Leave the murmuring house behind and walk down the street. Feel the asphalt hard and unforgiving under your toes. Feel that the heat of the day is gone and only the cold is left. Feel the splinters of broken bottles, old cigarette butts and tiny, hard stones. Embrace them. Know that your feet are made for traveling and rough terrain despite what

your brain tells you. The neighbours' dogs watch you balefully from behind the cages of their yards. They know you, yet are wary of the woman who smells like sleeplessness. Stare at them in turn and know that your eyes are the same.

Feel the night embrace you, tease you, send an errant breeze to flirt with the hemline of your t-shirt and play with your secret places. Sit on the curb. Listen. Smoke. Watch the white whispers curl around your fingers. Feel the acrid taste slip past the back of your throat. Be with yourself. Do not think of him tonight. Ignore the imaginary smell of his skin on the t-shirt. It's been washed so many times that the familiar smell is really only in your head anyway. Do not remember that time you made love in the street, against a wall, your thighs encircling him under the stars. Do not remember his hands. Walk as long as you need to. The splinters that cut your feet remind you that you are still here, that you have cheated death so many times that you wonder if you can die at all.

Feel the dawn coming like a heavy thing. It is still dark but you can sense it pressing in on the back of your eyelids, like only those who do not sleep can feel. Retrace your steps, pass through and latch the creaking gate, walk through the dog pack in your yard, that sniffs you, tasting the night on your legs like a tangible thing. Re-enter the softly purring house. It lives less now, as the world will wake soon -- remember even houses keep their secrets. Do not wash your feet or remove the splinters for these too are gifts. Do not think - just feel. Do not waste that last hour of the fading night. You are now unburdened enough to write.



Jamaica, B.W.