JAN CLAUSEN

CARRIACOU MAN

HE IS A MAN of stories, and of music.

He would scoff to hear me say he has an artistic bent; his verdict on himself is that he lacks imagination. In other matters, too, he has the habit of self-effacement. And yet he's bold, on the verge of overbearing, when marshaling evidence. He says he doesn't get poetry—but I, having watched how avidly he attends to Blind Willie Johnson's 1928 recording of "If I Had My Way," caught up in its perfect balance of feeling and technique, can't possibly agree.

He is a seasoned attorney, expert at poking holes in an argument. He steers me through the thickets of personal finance, models the tenacity required to battle bureaucracy. He's a licensed notary public, a crack tax preparer. Like me, only more so, he "isn't visual," and will happily confess to not having noticed dramatic alterations to his daily surroundings. He likes to tell the story of his naturalization interview, how he laughed at the softball questions they led off with (number of justices on the Supreme Court?) only to falter when asked to specify the colors of his new flag. I thought that this was an instance of willful ignorance, born of his loathing of American empire, but reconsidered when I observed that he failed to recognize the flag of Grenada, his country of origin.

It's true that he left the island before it acquired this flag in its year of independence, 1974. It's equally true that his deepest identification is not with Grenada proper, though he spent formative years in its capital, St. George's, while attending Grenada Boys' Secondary School. Rather, he is a child of Carriacou, a tiny yet mighty island in the Grenadines chain. One reads that Carriacou is a "dependency" of Grenada, ridiculous term for a place so full of sturdy self-regard, so assured in its unique identity.

Above everything, Carriacou is devoted to its calling as a matrix of relations. Whenever and wherever far-flung Carriacouans meet, they slip into an eager exchange of genealogical gossip as into a warm bath, sure of being related at some remove or other. Relatives or not, they'll have memories to trade—perhaps of the time in their distant childhoods when Hurricane Janet hit, and they felt a little fear but more excitement, greeting roofless houses as a singular novelty and relishing the

coconuts and other gifts washed onto the sand in the wake of the storm. It's splendid to be present on such occasions, a witness to their energetic faith that the "we" of their tiny homeland is a force to reckon with. "Don't you know me?" is a game they love to play with kin re-encountered after decades apart. An invisible tether binds them to Carriacou, never mind the centrifugal heave that has scattered the generations from Brixton to Canarsie, and from Alberta to Florida—for they have to go where the work is. During the Second World War, many took jobs in the regional oil refineries that fed the war effort, and so the man of stories tells the tale of first meeting his father: "I was six when he came from Aruba on vacation—I remember, he lifted me up."

As this history suggests, Carriacou is worldly, steeped in traditions of travel. In former times its people plied the Grenadines in locally built boats that supported a keen smuggling trade. Many ventured farther afield, and the man of stories recalls that his farmer grandfather spent a season in New York City long before his own birth. But worldliness isn't a matter of distance covered, and it strikes me that the island itself is expansive, comprising a complete and burnished universe within the confines of its approximately thirteen square miles. Of course I may be wrong, but that's my conclusion after so many years in the Carriacou orbit.

The man of stories grew up in his grandparents' house in the village of Mt. Pleasant, with young aunts and uncles who were almost like siblings. They worked their land on the fringes of the village, and he spent long hours tending cows and sheep when he wasn't in the classroom. The warmth and friction of that entangled island life, its tight radius repeatedly traversed on foot or donkey back, imprinted the little boy with memories of remarkable staying power. The urge to share them lies dormant most of the time, reviving unpredictably in moments of relaxation. Then he talks freely and with palpable enjoyment, confident in the simple power of events and the salience of the details that comprise them. Thanks to these sessions, I've become attuned to the world-shaking import of dry and rainy seasons, of water from roof runoff filling up the cistern's belly. I can empathize with a boy's healthy greed for mango and sugar apple, his panic at being caught on the road as evening falls on Tibeau, where the tide laps the graveyard. I've learned by heart the quirks of Uncle Toby and Brother Lincoln, the substance of affinities and feuds that stamped the life of Mt. Pleasant.

Dispelling my northern-born ignorance, the stories have prepared me to become the boon companion of a Carriacou man—or at least

this one eccentric who describes himself as such, even as he limits his exposure to the pressures and expectations his identity entails. In his generation, people married close to home; a spouse from another part of the Caribbean might suit the adventurous. But he was never going to be like all the others! And thus my deficiencies in Carriacou terms—setting aside that I'm white and American, I'm too much off to myself, too stingy with my time, too little a devotee of the commonweal—may actually count as strengths in his eyes. His choice of a spouse declares his basic posture: here's a Carriacou man who won't be bound by Carriacou rules! And yet he's attached, umbilically so, to his original island. He makes me think of the son in the parable, the one who defied his father for a time, yet afterward went to the vineyard and labored as instructed.

He is a man of music, as I've said. "Candy man, he's been and gone." "Every step you take, every vow you make, I'll be watching you." "What-chou going to do when they send your man to war . . ." Otis Rush's "So Many Roads." These and other snippets from classic blues to kitschy pop, and sometimes fragments of jazz melodies, issue from his lips while he performs household chores, as if he were still a child on the family land in Kendeace, beguiling the hours spent taking care of animals on the rough dry slope above the beautiful sea in the company of his young uncle Randolph. "Time to get a new song!" I exclaim when the dinning repetition of a phrase—quite unconscious on his part—becomes grating to my ears.

He knows a great deal about American jazz and blues and has tried to educate me, but I flunk his pop quizzes, unable to name the saxophone soloist on "Nobody Knows the Way I Feel This Morning." (Who could fail to recognize Sidney Bechet!) His own self-education in this field began when he was studying in England. He discovered that spending time in record shops was a handy way to avoid his writing desk, where he ought to have been completing his dissertation on Black Americans and European immigration in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Despite the procrastination, he finished his degree and taught for a time in Grenada before coming to the States for a job in New York's public university system.

His large record collection now occupies part of a custom-built bookshelf running the length of a wall in our living room. The trove of CDs has its own revolving cabinet. The machines to play these twentieth century items are still in working order, so we have little need for

audio streaming services—at least the commercial kind. The man of stories furnishes his own streaming service, tuneful as he moves about the house, singing and whistling the livelong day, preparing his breakfast of steel cut oats, riding the exercise bike in the basement when bad weather forbids his daily walk. It comforts me to hear him in the reaches of our dwelling.

I regret that he missed out on early musical instruction. Mt. Pleasant lacked a surplus to invest in nurturing talents beyond the practical, and he encountered no teachers of whatever instrument at the Government School or among the village households. Scholastic aptitude was a different matter; perhaps it could lead to advancement in those years when the rigid colonial system was beginning to bend, enough to admit a few clever children from unassuming backgrounds into a system of secondary schooling built along British lines, with Latin study, prefects, and the infamous tradition of instructional flogging known as "six of the best."

In time, there would be scholarship catapults, hurtling him into a foreign dimension. Before all that, however, he grew up close to the land, his family dependent on kerosene lamps in darkness, eating repetitive meals of "coucou, coucou, coucou" (a ground corn porridge) in seasons of scarcity. There was never enough moisture, and in the dry season, finding a functioning well to water the animals could become a major challenge. Tending the field crops—pigeon peas, cotton—was an endless, tough slog for those with the constitution for it; he still recalls which of his grandparents' children—eight of them, boys and girls alike—was a good sturdy worker, who was too slow, and who was "delicate" and spared the heaviest tasks. But then there was the excitement of kite battles, the homemade toys fitted out with razor blades the better to slash the strings of the competition. He lights up describing the treat of a pig's fried blood, prepared at butchering time, and the savor of corn ears roasted in the field, and the elaborate, multistep process that involved several households in preparing a year's supply of cassava farine. And the Br'er Anansi stories, of which he retains no shape or plot but only the magical feeling of being in the circle when the telling began.

In most matters scornful of identity policing, he fiercely defends the Blackness of his music, making sarcastic comments—half in jest and half in earnest—when he catches me relishing Frank Hutchison's slide guitar on "Cannonball Blues." He questions my enjoyment of the plaintive, twangy sound, musing about the white musician's sources.

"But everyone borrowed from everyone else—*you've* told me that," I plead in my own defense. No dice. In his eyes, Hutchison can't lay claim to the high artistry that removes the stain of theft, any more than Elvis did in recording "Hound Dog" or the Stones when they lifted hits from Marvin Gaye and Muddy Waters.

His untrained voice is a pleasing instrument, and I've often wished that it could resonate for a large audience. In years gone by, he joined a community chorus founded by a lefty neighbor of ours. He greatly enjoyed tunes like "The Molly Maguires," a hymn to the defiance of oppressed immigrant miners, but after a while the rehearsals got on his nerves. At last his irritation at having to interact with a bunch of cheerful, well-meaning people caused him to quit the group. I wished he'd stay and yet I understood, for I, too, quite frequently feel oppressed by the labor of socializing. (We are so alike in this that in our early childhoods we each enjoyed compelling fantasies of living by ourselves; the vision of an entirely self-sufficient existence struck us as liberating, not scary or lonely.) Encouraged by me, he began guitar lessons but quickly grew disheartened by the gap between his novice efforts and the output of his favorite blues guitarists, kora players, flamenco wizards. He knew too well the achievements of Son House, Reverend Gary Davis, and Manitas de Plata! I thought once again of opportunity lost: if only he'd learned the basics early on, in a spirit of play, it might have opened doors for him (I mean doors of art—who cares if he ever made a career of it) that years of flute lessons never did for me, who was taught proficiency but missed the passion.

Or so I think, embroidering on the facts. But do I romanticize?

HE IS A MAN of stories, and of omens. "As a Carriacou man, I have to believe it is no coincidence when . . ." When a household appliance breaks, a glitch or mishap occurs. Some odd juxtaposition of trivial events hints at arcane design. He's joking—or is he? "This means that nothing will go right for me!" "For god's sake," I erupt, "don't start that now"—because I have my own forebodings. I'm instinctively in tune with his "goat mouth" rule: don't speak of perceived good fortune, keep your poker face intact—or you may wreck your chances, even inches from the goal. "You put your goat mouth on it!" is the teasing reproach when I ask for a status report on minor problems. "How's your shoulder injury healing? Are the exercises helping?" "The goat! The goat! I *was* feeling better. Why did you have to go and bring it up?"

Like him, I am devoted to storytelling, but our approaches differ profoundly. His is an art of the moment, shimmering and fleeting; he seems entirely free of the writer's mania for fixing in a supposedly timeless medium the ephemera of sentiment and perception. Nor does he grip the past by photographic means. He hasn't a single picture from the Mt. Pleasant years. Of course these would have been few in any case, given the lack of gadgets in the old Carriacou, but I can't believe that he never faced off with a camera lens at some point or other. I hanker for a glimpse of the child he used to be. A school photo from his late teens—a group shot in which he's swallowed up, a microscopic figure among his classmates—is the earliest I've seen. The next is a passport photo from his twenties or thirties. He boasts of having destroyed photographs. I'm stumped by his satisfaction at having flown beneath the radar.

WHY NOT say it? His name is Winston, a wildly popular name with West Indian parents during the Second World War, when the British PM was broadly revered and few knew of his exploits as a racist imperialist. Although the war baby cohort is fast dwindling, there are still many Churchill namesakes, and once when we were waiting for a flight in Grenada, a rather loud "Winston!" from a female passenger who sought the attention of her traveling companion caused a comical stir, with half the grizzled male heads in the small departure lounge reflexively swiveling.

WE MET and fell in love in 1987, in the course of our involvement with the Brooklyn-Nicaragua Sister City Project, one of many local solidarity groups that supported the Sandinista government during Reagan's vicious contra war. From our first days together, Winston's stories delighted me, and I naturally thought (and perhaps naively said) that he ought to write them down. It took me years to realize that simply because he told so beautifully didn't mean he'd choose to lock his memories up in any rigid medium. Given his reticence, I sometimes ask myself why I'm so intent on pinning life to the page. Do I put too much faith in a kind of embalming, a merely mausoleum preservation? It remains an open question.

Close beside my sorrow for the many ancient things—glaciers, languages, species—that are coming to an end (an engineered demise I refuse to equate with the natural deaths of humans and other creatures) sits my sadness at the knowledge that the subjects of Winston's stories

have vanished, are vanishing. Where will they go when my teller is gone, along with the other Winstons? Even today, how many remember the years when Carnival featured Shakespearean monologues, performed by young men who had gotten by heart such crowd-pleasing fare as Mark Antony's oration on the death of Caesar? When each Carriacou village had its go-to carpenter ready to build a coffin for the fast burials needed before the advent of modern refrigeration? Who has known the rank taste and barely chewable texture of whale meat from a local fisherman? Or the novelty, amid placid days, when the Shango man came over from Trinidad to exorcise a Dracula (a supernatural being, something like a poltergeist) blamed for causing chaos in a neighboring household? Who was there when the wicked teacher Mr. Duncan ran wild, beating the students of Mt. Pleasant School multiple times a day for any or no reason? (This story is told with rueful amusement, a note I hear from other West Indians of a certain age when recalling ancient beatings. Mr. Duncan, however, was outlandishly brutal and doesn't receive the indulgence accorded to more moderate tyrants.)

I ask myself: What right do I have to feel such tenderness for someone else's lost island world? And answer: I have no right, there can't be rights in this regard. There was too much deprivation in that tough peasant life; no wonder people left as it became possible. No wonder "nobody works the land anymore," as my Carriacou man periodically bemoans, never mind that he leaves completely up to me what little gardening gets done in our tiny backyard. During the tense days we spent in Nicaragua's northern war zone, he showed off his skill with a cutlass for brush clearing, but that was the only time I've seen him behave like a son of the soil. He seems to take after the man he calls Brother Fred, the father who moved to Brooklyn and held down a desk job. By contrast, Fred's own father, known to Winston as Daddy in keeping with the usage in the Mt. Pleasant household, seems to have possessed a true farmer's soul. He doted on his cows almost like relatives and spared neither himself nor his offspring when they labored in the field.

In "nobody works the land anymore," I detect a lament for the staples known as "ground provisions," which are still around but play a lesser role in an era of processed foods. The name comes from the old "provision grounds," scraps of land on which enslaved people grew sturdy root crops for their own consumption: cassava, sweet potato, dasheen, and such. It must have taken matchless ingenuity and patience to forge an enduring bond with terrain so unforgiving, the soil far poorer and drier

than Grenada's. But survival was at stake—and they meant to survive. According to the Centre for the Study of the Legacies of British Slavery at University College London, the number of enslaved on Kendeace Estate—the legendary "Kendeace" of so many of Winston's stories, where he spent endless hours supervising Daddy's cows—was forty-nine in 1826. In 1790 on Mount Pleasant Estate, 227 captives harvested 77,000 pounds of cotton; by the year of Britain's Slavery Abolition Act, 1834, the census of human chattel had increased to 256.

Soaked in the brine of bondage and British paternalism, the Carriacou of Winston's childhood needed to change for the sake of the Carriacouans. But what sort of change? I think of Palestinian poet Mourid Barghouti's comment on returning to his childhood home: "Let us be frank: when we lived in the village, did we not long for the city? Did we not long to leave small, limited, simple Deir Ghassanah for Ramallah, Jerusalem, and Nablus? . . . The Occupation forced us to remain with the old. That is its crime. It did not deprive us of the clay ovens of yesterday, but of the mystery of what we would invent tomorrow."[1]

To say that Winston's childhood world is gone is not to say that Carriacou has prospered. Of those who stayed, many scrape by, casting about for casual employment, lucky if they can turn to relatives abroad for assistance on occasion. Much of the housing stock is in dismal shape, but flashier dwellings rise where returnees have invested their savings from long years abroad. ("You can't just sit there and say our weather is beautiful; the weather was beautiful when we went to England, and we still had to go," Uncle Patrick remarked, sitting on his verandah in the lulling peace of a Carriacou afternoon.) A fortunate few will collect decent pensions, and Social Security checks stretch further down here. Often a prospective retiree initiates a building project from afar, thereby compounding the usual problems of dealing with contractors and ensuring quality work. Getting the needed supplies is another big hurdle, since everything has to be brought in by boat. In the face of disappointments, Carriacouans persist. The roads are in lamentable shape, but SUVs negotiate the washouts. In its way, Carriacou, like everyplace else, has acquired intimate knowledge of "the keen dismissal in speed."[2]

WE HAD *to go*, and so Winston went. His stories encompass winters in Cambridge: the dreadful chill of English accommodations, huddled evenings feeding coins to a gas meter, the perplexing national prejudice against frequent bathing. He lovingly recalls convivial lunches fixed by

his student comrades, some from the Caribbean and others from Africa, who took turns shopping and prepared their specialties. Recalls how he and his buddy hooted in rageful mirth when a woman who'd advertised a flat to let indignantly slammed her door against the menace of their color: "We thought it was funny," he insists, but on some other occasion recounts the incident as typical of the bad old days, when racists freely acted on their feelings.

I see him, young, uncertain of direction, a winged seed confided to the wind, gambling on the largesse of the metropole, the empire that had ravaged the world and now, in its senescence, dangled dubious prizes. When he sailed for England on the *Queen Mary*, leaving from New York after visiting Brother Fred, he still didn't know how he ought to pronounce the name of the Cambridge college where he would matriculate. Today a website tells all the world that the "Caius" in "Gonville and Caius" sounds like "Keys," but in 1963 he learned the hard way, getting it wrong and having to be corrected by a fellow passenger.

There was courage in that voyage, but conformity as well. As winner of the coveted All-Island Scholarship, he could have had his pick of any school in the British system. He thought first of heading for Jamaica to attend the University of the West Indies. His elders countermanded that idea. What was the sense in forgoing the prestige of an Oxbridge diploma? "Maybe I would have been better off at UWI," he has said more than once. Less adrift, more in tune with teachers and classmates. Instead, he took advice and endured the "mother country"—where he was a fish out of water yet not entirely so, for of course his landsmen had preceded him. On his arrival in Southampton, an uncle met the boat and put him up in London until classes began. Later, he'd spend many weekends in the city, hanging out with a fellow Grenadian who was getting his law degree: Maurice Bishop, future leader of Grenada's socialist revolution and martyr to its harrowing collapse, which furnished the excuse for the US invasion. "The people still love 'Bish,'" Winston observed, a quarter century after the 1983 tragedy, "but the Left remains severely discredited."

WINSTON ISN'T my only Carriacou story source. How often I've been a fortunate fly on the wall as relatives or friends reminisce, evoking the mischievous presence of cousin Walter, recalling the admonition they always heard when they were working in the field and broke for the midday meal: *cut and swallow*, hurry up and get back to work. And

then there was what Daddy had to say about eating the pig that had died mysteriously, allegedly from heat stroke: *Wha en kill go fatten*—the Carriacou version of the bravado-laden precept that danger survived only makes the target stronger. More than anyone other than Winston himself, it is Veda, one of his several Brooklyn aunts, who let me in on the Carriacou ways and stories. I think of her when I water my big thyme plant, descendant of a cutting she gave me—it languishes in the freezing winter months but always revives in summer heat.

Veda was the first of Winston's Brooklyn family to whom he dared introduce me. Back when we were new and dipping a toe in the social waters, he apparently foresaw some major catastrophe if our love intersected with the Carriacou scene. (Whether he worried that they or I would fail, I still couldn't say.) Veda, an aging but energetic presence, quickly made it clear that we had her endorsement. Before long, we were riding two buses to enjoy her yearly Thanksgiving feasts of crab and callaloo, peas and rice, fried plantains, and baked fish. If only I could pick up the phone and hear once again her laughing salutation—*Why you didn't call me? You don't want to know me?*—no serious reproach but standard Carriacou raillery, the staple of affectionate interaction. I wish I could see her descending our broad front step, moving gingerly, sideways, to spare arthritic joints—she, who had been Daddy's trusted lieutenant, stalwart of all the roughest farming tasks. I wish we were catching the bus to East 54th Street, laden with homemade pies and bottles of wine, headed for her apartment up a flight of brick steps, where the TV's on with nobody watching and the heat's cranked too high, and after the meal she'll transfer heaps of food into aluminum takeout containers, tying them up in plastic shopping bags to send home with us.

We timed one of our trips to Carriacou to coincide with Veda's own stay in the Mt. Pleasant house, and one day we and she and her younger sister Myra took a boat ride over to Petite Martinique, Carriacou's island neighbor. The four of us hiked along broken roads as Veda complained that she "wasn't a walking person." According to her, the trudging she'd done to get around to the government schools where she taught arts and crafts before she left for New York had been enough to last a lifetime. On that same trip, a broom in her hand, she stood in the yard in Mt. Pleasant, recalling how she'd sewed the white cotton shirts that Winston and Randolph had to take with them when they went away to high school in Grenada. While they were there, she'd wash their dirty

laundry, which was sent up by boat. (Winston disputes this, claiming he took the items to a woman in St. George's.)

She talked of how her father cherished his oldest grandson—"Winston, you know, was always Daddy's boy"—and how Mammy criticized the feminine-looking outfit the toddler had on when he came to live with them. It was 2006 when she told me these stories, shortly before her terrible stroke. How good it would be to go back in time, before Sundays in the nursing home, the TV tuned to some evangelizing channel and my sister-in-law murmuring the Twenty-Third Psalm into the patient's ear as she lay unresponsive. How I wish I'd had any comfort to offer on a par with religion and the accents of home.

VEDA REASSURED ME I was meant to be included. Once she even told me quite directly that family was a sacred but capacious category. I wish I could remember the language of her tact, the actual words she used to welcome me.

Winston is, by contrast, a demonstrative cynic. He sometimes declaims with an exasperated flourish, "I want no part of this family!" but in soberer moments takes a softer attitude. "I know they would help me if I ever needed it," he told me early on, defending a commitment I never thought to question. He's making no plans to revisit his birthplace now that so many people he grew up with have died. At one time, nearing retirement, he thought of splitting his time between Brooklyn and the island. In the end, he couldn't picture spending his days in decorous exchanges with visiting relatives, seeking the masculine refuge of a rum shop for a little variety. "I don't get attached to places," he remarked, the last time we "went down." "Carriacou is just where I'm *from*." I don't believe it, but I mustn't argue. I think of my neighbor Louise, who grew up in Antigua. "Immigration is always so painful," she said. "Painful to think about." There's that—and then there's the ache of origins. The Winston I've observed in the Eastern Caribbean has seemed to me at ease as nowhere else—his skin is at peace, his senses are relaxed. And yet "home" will always be fraught for him. His first and deepest place is a site booby trapped with hurtful memories of feeling like a stranger in the village.

TRUTH TO TELL, I'm bedeviled, in the Carriacou orbit, by a nagging sense that I've gotten away with something and am liable to be exposed. There are so many sources for this feeling. It's because Winston

and I, Black and white, are not supposed to be together. Because I'm of the North and he the South, in global terms. Because my country once attacked his country, using overwhelming military force to trounce Maurice Bishop's impertinent claim that Grenada wasn't anyone's backyard—and now the few among my compatriots who speak of that episode are apt to say "Grahnahda" and not "Grenayda." Because I come of the enslavers and he of the enslaved. Because the devil ship *Omnicide*, flying the pirate flag of Western Civilization, currently has my homeland at the helm.

My scruples may seem excessive, but I'm sure they are warranted, even as I know that caution is also dangerous, a spontaneity killer. Though we often discuss racial politics writ large, Winston and I mostly ignore the ponderous sorting system that modern racecraft would like to apply to our "mixed" partnership. It's good to improvise, and wiser not to talk about it. I've hoped that the trick of freedom might reside in the shadows between what's known as private life and the rigor of paranoid analysis. (History has occurred, but we are also human beings!) Don't be like the centipede who forgot how to walk when she paused to wonder how her legs coordinated. Don't subject delicate matters to an ordeal by microscope. Don't put your goat mouth on it.

And so I have avoided writing about my marriage. But now it strikes me as sad—better say insupportable—that the person I love completely, the being whose being has imprinted mine as deeply as any other, goes missing from my writing on account of these fears.

My love is my other life, and this demands its own recounting. "No such luck as marrying *into* anything," I once wrote, a poetic line of astringent realism. "But their stories became a part of you," a friend pointed out, referring to Carriacou. And hasn't that been my lifelong problem? *Thou shalt not covet other people's stories*; but how do you seal the border? Where will you find a story that's yours and yours alone? If you ever did find it, what would be the point? My settler roots, my Pacific littoral birth, my forested mountain longings, serendipitous amazements of Brooklyn street encounters: these pour over me, wash in and out of me like tides of an ocean that has never been pristine. I don't know how to subtract Winston's stories from the great mass of stories I carry around with me.

MIGHT IT BE the case that the storytelling habit begs comparison with the life-sustaining practice of growing ground provisions? For,

much as food security means a degree of independence for subsistence farmers, sharing homegrown stories helps expand the space for collective imagination and the action it inspires. It's an antidote to the mass-produced plots with which our advanced devices wearyingly bombard us. No matter the surface content of the yarns they pump out, isn't "faster, faster!" their underlying theme?

By virtue of being transmitted from voice to ear, the Carriacou stories, like other oral stories, create a physical, sensory link between human beings that is part of their power. They take their sweet time, immune to efficiency, an antidote for those journalistic products that now come with a label advertising the number of minutes needed to consume them. They require no encryption or state-of-the-art software to render them opaque to surveillance regimes. They never bother to apologize for taking up bandwidth.

How, in light of these stories, could anyone suppose that time is a progression—let alone a speed machine? "[A]s long as you remember what you have seen, then nothing is gone. As long as you remember, it is part of this story we have together," Leslie Marmon Silko writes, in work that pays homage to indigenous storytellers.[3] According to her, Pueblo stories are "something like a spider's web—with many little threads radiating from the center, crisscrossing one another."[4] They connect the generations, intimately bound to places within ancestral territory. They affirm for the living—souls still transfixed by the mad perplexities of being human persons in time—the ongoing, vivid presence of their beloved dead. I often think of Silko's "nothing is lost" when I listen to Winston's stories.

So what would it mean to demand, enhance, promote "story security" for the planet at large?

THE CARRIACOU STORIES help me *take heart*, along with the kindness of Carriacou people who keep making room for the foreigner I am—doing this, I know, for their relative's sake, but also because they are deeply generous. The personal perspective their tellings impart isn't some frozen vision of time past but memory charged with potent imagination, evoking a boundless world within a cramped geography. That imperfect world cradled the beginnings of the Carriacou man in rough and ready fashion, with slaps and caresses at times overwhelming for a sensitive child. And yet the abrasive intimacy of the contact founded an unshakable and passionate attachment.

Stories are a path of return and creative transformation. "North is the continuation of warmth by other means," I wrote years ago, seeing how Winston's scattered yet closely bound family carries on "the Carriacou way" in the teeth of diaspora. Stories repair and strengthen original bonds; they reconstitute island being under challenging conditions, softening the impact of cold winter winds and unfriendly social weather in the gray, sprawling cities that receive the emigrants. If stories help to heal space, they can mend time as well. In *Remembering Peasants*, historian Patrick Joyce draws connections between the widespread disappearance of peasant cultures since the mid-twentieth century and our contemporary affliction of rampant *presentism*: "the social condition whereby present time is at once everything and nothing, an eternal now that manifests and disappears in the instant." In this situation, "the dead are forgotten, and we no longer dwell with them, do not know how to dwell with them."[5] Revisiting my journal from one of our Carriacou trips, I found this note about a conversation involving Winston's late father: "Nobody quite dies here. The men who said 'Brother Fred born in Bogles' spoke as if part of him was still alive."

Lest the concept of story security appear to suggest a fantasy of fortunate arrival, I want to ask instead how stories might temper the massive *insecurity* that besets us. Consumed as we are by a frenzied acceleration inimical to human collectives and the biosphere itself, the bare beginnings of story security would require us to reorient ourselves along the axis of life committed to life—a matrix of relations, in the Carriacou sense. (As Winston said, rejecting the mere idea that anyone could claim ownership over stories: "My stories are about *other people*.") We are tasked with reinventing modes of being with others conducive to the telling of homegrown stories about our lives, free from the constant threat of manufactured devastations: physical uprootings, wars and genocides, curable yet endemic poverty, and ecological catastrophes like Hurricane Beryl, the early-season tropical cyclone (eventually a Category 5) that battered Carriacou on the first of July, 2024. Beryl destroyed or heavily damaged up to 98 percent of the island's housing stock. Trees were stripped of foliage and agriculture halted, along with most other economic activity. Stories remake a world on the brink of collapse, but they shouldn't have to work so terribly hard to put the pieces back together. Time is inexorable, but that doesn't mean that a vanishing machine needs to run in high gear.

What would it take to value not just stories themselves but the range

of conditions friendly to their emergence? Conditions that invite them to be unfolded. Conditions that encourage noticing, care, imaginative play, and taking one's time. That render more real the collectives that are their seedbeds. In an essay in the journal *Small Axe*, David Omowalé Franklyn details how Grenadian rebels of the late eighteenth century planted sturdy, prolific crops such as plantain for sustenance during an attempted revolution under the leadership of Julien Fedon. (The People's Revolutionary Government of 1979–83 would similarly stress agricultural self-reliance, popularizing the slogan EAT WHAT WE GROW, GROW WHAT WE EAT.)[6] When Fedon's project failed, some of the survivors retreated to the hills and founded new communities, growing ground provisions and creating their own accounts of who they were and where they were heading beyond the reach of plantation-based tyrants. They called this endeavor "makin' freedom." I can think of no better phrase to express why homegrown stories matter, how it is that they sustain us. Against terrific pressure to rush toward repair, stories instruct: when you're out of time, slow down. This is a practice of making freedom.

NOTES

1 Barghouti, Mourid. *I Saw Ramallah* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2005)

2 Brand, Dionne. *Nomenclature: New and Collected Poems* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2022)

3 Silko, Leslie Marmon. *Ceremony* (New York: Penguin Books, 1977)

4 Silko, Leslie Marmon. "Language and Literature from a Pueblo Indian Perspective," in *Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996)

5 Joyce, Patrick. *Remembering Peasants: A Personal History of a Vanished World* (New York: Scribner, 2024)

6 My understanding of agricultural self-sufficiency in the Grenadian revolutions of 1795–96 and 1979–83 relies on David Omowalé Franklyn's evocative treatment in "Grenada, Naipaul, and Ground Provision," *Small Axe* Vol. 11 No. 1 (February 2007)