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Merle Collins

The headlines for our stories down here in the Caribbean always come in graphic type, written by the wind, and sung by the sea, with that murmuring in the water over *Kick-Em-Ginny* reminding us that *Not all skin teeth is good grin*.

I often think that a popular history of Grenada, or of Trinidad and Tobago, might have a title like *Flight of the Sparrow: From Jean and Dinah to Capitalism Gone Mad*. Now, since Hurricane Ivan swoop down and *dékatché* (destroy) Grenada in September 2004, I'm thinking that Grenada's history for the half century from 1955 to 2005 might be titled, *From Janet to Ivan: Tout Moun ka Pléwé*, and this, of course, could also be the title of a calypso, the sung history of the land. This is not a history, not the history I'm thinking about, but some notes toward it.

When Hurricane Janet hit Grenada in 1955, I was four years old. In fact, it was seven days before my fifth birthday. I remember looking outside our house in Hermitage on the morning after Janet. I *believe* this is *my* memory, but I couldn't write this piece as autobiography because memory sometimes tends to be fiction, even when we think otherwise, so let's call this a true piece of fiction.

That morning, after Janet, I remember seeing a tall coconut tree in the yard near where my grandaunt's house used to be, the same place where my cousin's house, built after his return from England, now stands. It was the same coconut tree that, before Janet, used to be behind the house, on the hill separating us from another cousin on the piece of family-land up there. Today, when I tell my mother that the coconut tree had moved on the morning after Janet, and ask her if she remembers that, she laughs a little half don't-quite-believe-but-can't-be-sure laugh and says, *Well, it couldn't move*, and then she adds, *Perhaps*, and then she shrugs and

says, *Meself, I don't know*. And then she comments, *But plenty things happen with that Janet there, wi*, leaving me to conclude that so much happened that the coconut tree moving from the back of the house and settling itself, fully planted, in the front yard, was not as impossible after Janet as it would have been before.

I remember the coconut tree, but I don't remember anything about the kitchen, and my mother says that the night before Janet she was in the kitchen turning, in the way that woman always have to turn in kitchen, and her aunt (deceased now), the same grandaunt with the house next door, called out to ask her, *What you doing there? Why you don't go inside? You don't hear they say storm coming? So you don't fraid storm then?* And although my mother wasn't really one for obeying—and this is my mother saying, not me—and although she was thinking, *Ki storm sa?* (What storm is that?) *Every time they only bawling storm, storm, and no storm coming*, for some reason she decided to obey. So she went inside. And because she had a little piece of kitchen inside the wall house that Aruba money build, she continued what she was doing—and it must have been something she absolutely had to do, as most things are, when women have to do them in kitchen, and in those days she must have been cooking fig or potato or salt fish or something for supper, because it was about six o'clock or something like that, she said, and for supper it would have to be heavy food, not the little piece of *wénté* (light) bread she eating these days. Anyway, she went inside the wall house and next morning, when she looked outside, there wasn't one piece of board where the kitchen had been standing the evening before. All the board that used to be the kitchen was down under the cocoa, together with the clothes now hanging on the trees as if somebody put them out there to blow, and the galvanize covering the nutmeg trees, and everything that was normal the morning after Janet.

Kitchen gone but house stand up, so at last my mother and father started to feel little bit better about the fact that after all the Aruba money done, the contractor—a cousin from up the hill—still asked them for the last few cents they'd been trying to hold on to, so that he could buy four bolts to put in the corners of the roof. He bought the bolts, and he put them in, and he did a whole set of other little things up there on the roof and around that house they thought quite unnecessary, until Janet came and nearly the whole of Hermitage end up staying in their little room and hall with the two bedrooms and the porch. And *then* my father start to boast about how is *he* that know how to build house, not big and wasteful and weak, but small and firm and strong enough to withstand any storm. He never drive a nail, mind you, and according to my mother, before Janet the contractor was *her* family; after Janet the man was *his* compere.

So because of this contractor who learn his trade from other people before him, right on the ground in Hermitage there, right in Grenada without going to the place called *Away*,

because of this master contractor who learn from those that come before him, nothing happen to the house; only the gash on the roof from the galvanize next door, and water coming in under the door, and nearly the whole of Hermitage end up inside it, and for a few days, what was ours was everybody own, and people were walking all over the place in my father's clothes. Nothing strange; everybody was wearing everybody else's clothes in those days.

I remember a lot about that night of Janet. I remember how they hold up the lantern when people coming inside; I remember the sound of the wind howling outside and my parents standing behind the door to push against it; I remember them bracing themselves for the push when we could hear the wind pulling in its breath for another puff; I remember them pushing the Aruba trunk against the door. So I don't really understand the part my mother tells me about, that she had my brother and I covered up in the other bedroom, that she piled covers on us to keep us warm and to prevent us from being too disturbed by the storm. *That* will have to be *her* memory. I know what I remember.

Janet made a lot of things possible. The galvanize roof lifted itself off the house of the family across the road and grazed our galvanize roof as it flew over our house to settle itself in the cocoa down below, in the piece of land that my grandmother, who was then still alive, had inherited and passed on to her three children. In fact, it went right over my grandmother's piece, down below that to the piece my grandaunt had left to *her* three children. Next morning, I'm told, and I can't vouch for this, because even a flawed memory fails me here, but next morning, I'm told, the family across the road found their galvanize covering some nutmeg trees in my grandaunt's little piece of land down near the ravine at the bottom of the slope. Covering nutmeg, not cocoa trees, because although everybody say *under the cocoa*, meaning down through the bush or up through the bush, sometimes "the bush" is not cocoa at all, but mango, or nutmeg, or some other something. So even nutmeg who, with her red mace petticoat, come to claim such a place in the heart of the land, have to humble sometimes and bow to the history of cocoa. Cocoa must have really made an impression in the country for it to be carrying the blame—or the praise—for every story that happen *under the cocoa*.

With one reach, Janet pull all of Hermitage together and it was like things used to be in days everybody forget, when this little piece of land and that other little piece and the piece across there, did belong to one family that leave it to the son of heir to share, and this girl get a piece and that girl get another piece and the son of heir get what he want to get, and big piece of land for one family become several little pieces of land for the several families that would go dividing down the generations. And you have to wonder if things getting better as the years pass, as more family land get divided, as Grenada getting more and more piece up, or if, as we imagine, the passing of time mean the coming of progress. But we have to admit that Janet make all Hermitage come together as one; galvanize scatter equally in all land and

in all yard; what one had was what everybody had—for a while, anyway, until galvanize clear, and everybody taking care of their own little patch, and forgetting set it again.

But all of Hermitage would still remember—those who weren't there yet must also remember—about Miss Wattie who lived in the cocoa down on Belmont Estate. Miss Wattie didn't have anything. She didn't even have land to put house. In fact, she didn't even have *house* to *put*, and it was just that Belmont Estate acted like it didn't know anything, leave her to settle there on the land in her cardboard house. People know Miss Wattie head wasn't right; she was always carrying a load of some kind, garbage that she had picked up through the years, or through the months, or through the days. So there was Miss Wattie living on her lonesome in the house under Belmont cocoa. All who had house that was big and not so big, Janet hold them and shake them, pull off their house top, and leave them naked. But Miss Wattie cardboard house under Belmont cocoa, a two by four that look as if it would go out like a candle if you blow it too hard, next morning Miss Wattie house standing up like a champion, as if Janet was joke, and people say—and you could take this with a grain of salt or a chunk of salt, depending on how much salt you want before you swallow—but they say next morning Miss Wattie inside of her two by four as cool as cucumber, and when people go and look to see how she pass in the hurricane, Miss Wattie come through the wet cardboard wiping the *yampie* (rolled up dirt) out of the corner of her eye and asking, *What do? Something do?* I tell you; tongue and teeth don't laugh at good thing. Is something to remember. What a good ting (thing) for Miss Wattie that Belmont Estate let her put down her cardboard and never say a word. Well, these days the times were changing, so perhaps Belmont Estate bosses realize it.

The 1950s was a special time. People just get the vote in 1951. E. M. Gairy, new labour leader who probably couldn't even vote before because of the British property and income qualification, just about to become king of Grenada. New labour leader holding the reins, so you couldn't take too much chance with poor people. Labour union would be after you. Was a special, special time, the 1950s. Black people become “the Honourable” in Grenada Parliament. Was a thing spreading right through the Caribbean. So, not to take away anything from the good heartedness of the managers on Belmont Estate, but perhaps all of that—Gairy and the union and the fact that at last poor people could talk little bit—all of that musbe help Miss Wattie survive in she little cardboard house.

When you really think about it, so much was happening in Grenada in the 1950s that it not surprising Janet decide to come and punctuate the story. Everything around was like hurricane touching it. People voting for the first time in their life, poor black man in the legislative council, union organizing and standing up to the Queen and the Governor who was in charge of the country at the time. The whole land upset, all the high-up people

wondering and lamenting. While *nigger yard* having party, in the Great House was weeping and gnashing of teeth.

And you just have to look round Grenada and see the rivers and the waterfalls and the sunflower and the crater lake in Grand Etang that people say is bottomless so that if you drown in Grenada you come out in St. Vincent, and *Kick-Em-Ginny* the underwater volcano near Carriacou that we always sailing over—you just have to watch all of that—to know that Nature is a prize-winning writer, so is no surprise that Janet appear right in time to punctuate and put in figure of speech to the story that developing in Grenada.

And while Janet doing she do, people getting used to the idea of other hurricane hurrying come over the Atlantic. And hurricane forming right inside Grenada self, hurricane coming back from other Caribbean country too, from Aruba, from Trinidad, from America, from England, from all the places Grenadian people go to get a little *pankwai* (a little something—colloquial) when things get rough. Is not now Grenadians, and, in fact, all Caribbean people, going out and coming back. In 1951, Gairy appear from Aruba and take charge. Then right after the 1954 elections, John Watts come back from the US and form party. And Grenada moving on—progressing. Early in 1955, the Grenada legislature vote for the start of a system with ministers and everything, and now people talking about party in power, party in opposition. So thing changing, and naturally nature is part of the changing. How people going change and land stay the same? The people who get dragged across the Atlantic and crushed into the ground for so long, now rising up and looking around and walking toward the future and thing stirring like crazy. Is not from across the Atlantic they say most hurricane nowadays coming? That Atlantic always have something to say in we story. Who could forget how much stirring up that Atlantic Ocean get with people jumping overboard, and song floating across it, and people walking back to their homeland across all of that raging, and things of the sort?

So now Janet was part of the story. After Janet, I can't say I remember jumping over galvanize in the road to go anywhere, but my mother could remember it, so I suppose that is why sometimes I remember how galvanize graze my foot and how next morning galvanize pack up in the road like the carpenters put them there so they could start work. I can't say that I personally remember how a house fall down from a hill in Lawipoo, up above Hermitage, and how they find a child dead in the cocoa down there, lying down near to the house, but my mother remembers it, so I know that it happened, and in fact it would be right to say that I remember it, too. I can't say I saw any house go floating down Belmont River or any other river with the family holding on for dear life and eventually finding that life was really too expensive to hold on to, but some body remember it, because I hear it happened, so sometimes I see that family with my own two eyes and I could even hear how they screaming. And is true that

Belmont River lifted the government surgery, and the nurse went sailing down in it, holding on to the roof, they say, until thank God eventually somebody saved her. I can't explain about the holding on to the roof part, but I know the story is true, because I could even tell you that the river took a cock that my cousin mother gave the nurse after the successful delivery of my cousin, who was born that same September, twelve days before Janet reach. So you see, I have proof; Janet take plenty fowl and nuff other sacrifice in that 1955, that time after the days of *Sky Red*, when Labour Union hot and fires lighting up the skyline, those days after poor black people fighting for pay, those days when the whole landscape promising to change.

And later on, plenty Grenada storm, natural hurricane and human hurricane, take sacrifice too, so the story changing, but the story staying the same.

After Janet, was *raymabuddy* (total confusion—colloquial) in Hermitage. Hermitage is a nutmeg place, and nutmeg is not like cocoa. When hurricane hit cocoa, it lie down flat. The wind twist it an twist it, and it would look like it good and dead, like it gone for true, but it only making *yangoo* (pretending—colloquial) and after a while it will lift its head and look around, shake up its shoulders and then spring back up quick. But nutmeg take things to heart. Nutmeg would break it neck over the kind of punishment that Janet give. Oh nutmeg! Is not by accident you come and make you home on the flag after a time. Nutmeg need time to get over the disappointment and the hurt and the embarrassment and then begin to come back. Like we always say, it will come back, eventually, because the seeds in the ground and the root there, but it have to take time. Ah, nutmeg, we know you so well. Wherever you come from to make you life here, you become we major crop. All over the world we boasting how, small as we is, we supplying one-third of all nutmeg the world need—the WORLD, you know! Ah, nutmeg. We know. You don't like hurricane and Grenada never without hurricane, whether people know it or not, whether the wind blowing so we could hear it or not, so nutmeg, we know you life can't be easy. This Janet time, there, Hermitage is nutmeg place, so Hermitage bawl *amway*, (oh my—colloquial) and Grenada conclude, *Ay! Crapaud smoke we pipe!*

But old people say God never give you more than you can handle. Bit by bit, things pick up. In five years, nutmeg was well on the way again, and, too, besides, some fat pumpkins appeared all over the ground after the hurricane, just as if Janet pull seeds out of her pocket and drop them off before she leave, as if she say, it have other things besides cocoa and nutmeg, learn that. So yes, people learn for a while, but cocoa and nutmeg in their blood, so as soon as cocoa lift it head, and as soon as nutmeg take heart and start to grow again, people forget. Not only Hermitage, but all of Grenada, forget plenty things that Janet teach. People go back, same way, picking up the *one one* nutmeg and selling in the nutmeg pool so they could put it in bags and ship it away for processing in far country. People waiting to get the little tuppence

from nutmeg bonus to go and buy flour and rice and send the money *Away*. People put on their *OPL*—and my mother explain how that was short for *Other People's Labour*, which was what they called the clothes that overseas donate after Janet—well, that's how it is, sometimes you have to grin to give the heart a ease—so yes, people put on their *OPL* and if the colonial government think you deserving and you get a little Janet House, you put up your new board and you live inside that, and you take the little relief quick before it dry up, and yes, some people find old board under the cocoa and old galvanize down the road, pound the two by four back together, and prepare to move on as before.

And so the years passed. People add little room to Janet House when more children come. Janet House get a little paint and end up looking like other kind of house. Life move people from Hermitage and from other places to plenty places inside and outside. It move me, for a while, from Hermitage, to Morne Delice cocoa. Now *under cocoa* is *under cocoa* in truth, but nutmeg still there, in between the cocoa. Nutmeg Lady dressed in her red petticoat, sitting down in her boat, always ready in case life call her to some other station. Time passing. People who lived through Janet talking about it as if it was their private little experience that they proud of. And this time, no hurricane but plenty hurricane activity.

1957, EMG convicted because he break up an opponent's political meeting. So, he out of office. By election. T. A. Marryshow, champion of federation, pass away. Caribbean Federation coming, but federation soon to pass away, too. H. A. Blaize and the Grenada National Party on the stage even if not really on the rise. Ministerial system coming in, Gairy going out—for a while. Carriacou's H.A. Blaize become first Chief Minister. Constitution change and exchange, every minute now a New Constitution. By this time, there was GULP, GNP, PPM and six people running on their own as Independents. Country same size as before, you know, same size from Sauteurs up there to St. George's down in the south, and over to Carriacou and Petite Martinique. Nothing change size-wise, but party multiplying like peas, and Independent on the rise. Half of the people who were fighting to vote in the 1950s didn't even bother to turn out in 1961. But EMG win. Hurricane still around. 1961, Duffus Commission say corruption in the land. Poor people say, corruption there from time; we don't care; we put him dey, and he have to stay. Britain, doing in Grenada like they do in Guyana, say they suspending the Grenada Constitution. So said, so done. EMG out of office, and some people rejoicing because they thinking of EMG and not of England. And then record book say that in 1961 Grenada had a storm called Anna. I doubt it have five people in Grenada who ever hear about Anna. With all other storm going on, tropical storm was small thing. People who fighting political storm all the time have no time to think about name for some little tropical storm. I only know about Anna because I find her birth paper. So Anna must have been like the 1961 elections. Important, and present, but the kind of normal storm people get used

to. By this time, the excitement from 1951 gone, and although party multiplying like peas, people not really taking them on. And people get used to “the Honourable.” Get used to seeing “Honourable” pass by in car while they walking. Some didn’t mind, because at least was a BLACK Honourable and the fact that he reach somewhere probably mean everybody reach somewhere. Though, to be truthful, not everybody see it that way. So after the Duffus Commission, and suspended constitution, election just gone, but election coming again. 1962 election, the issue either to Trinidad with GNP or to the Little Eight with Gairy. Even Gairy couldn’t beat the odds because Grenadians like the idea of going with Trinidad. GNP flying high, but they can’t deliver because Trinidad not looking Grenada way. And people talking about other things, too, about Jamaica, for example, about how it get up and leave the federation one lick so in September 1961. And soon the talk go around that Trinidad Williams say, one from ten leaves nought. So like Trinidad want to stay on its own.

So that was that. Time moving on, and now nature taking notice. In 1963, a hurricane come that really make people lift their head and remember Janet. That one was Flora. Flora was born first of October, nine days after Janet but in a different year, 1963. So she was younger than Janet, but both of them same planet—that dangerous Libra that you can’t take your eyes off. Those scales! You have to be afraid of them. You never know which way they would settle. I was in high school in town when Flora happened. I had a friend living right near Parade Gap. I can’t remember how I ended up at her house. Perhaps bus wasn’t running when the school sent us home, or something. Anyway, I was up there at her house and rain was falling bat out of hell. That time, we didn’t have telephone to say we could call and say what was happening. I don’t even remember how my uncle (deceased now, he died in Trinidad) I don’t remember how he knew where I was, but some *bushgram* or something must have worked, because I remember him coming to pick me up in a car. And I remember swimming with him in this car up to St. Paul’s and down Morne Delice hill, through Morne Delice cocoa into that desolate place that I couldn’t stand to be living in when I was little. The car was walking and swimming at that time, because trees were halfway across the road, pieces of galvanize all over the place, and when we got to the bottom of the hill, Backwater River was high and red with water coming down from the red mud mountain. But we make it. I remember hearing that soon after we passed the bridge, river come down and take over the road. So that was Flora and 1963. The radio did warn us, I believe, but nobody was taking it too seriously.

The record books say Flora was a hurricane in the same category as Janet, with winds higher than Janet, but perhaps it didn’t hit us right on, because although Flora leave an impression, she didn’t take over from Janet. Janet was still the worst thing that had happened to Grenada. That is what memory say. The thing is, Janet was the first ever hurricane that had a name in Grenada. The first one since the Caribs left and England and France took over,

anyway, and the few little markings we know that the Caribs left on rocks don't tell us anything about hurricane, even though people say they give the world the name *huracan*. Or at least, so far we're not bright enough to figure out if they left signs to tell us anything about hurricane. We could only read what England and France have to say; we can't really read the writing of the Caribs, even though we've been living so long in the land that used to be theirs. Is not the Caribs that teach us what we know from book, you see. Is England. But still, we treasure the Carib Stone in Mount Rich, and I remember some people used to come from that mysterious place called *Away*, to take us from school to dig up Carib pottery on Calivigny Island. It still haunts me now that I dug and found—I don't know what—and handed over—pottery to—I don't know whom. Who has it now? Is there more? What did it tell them? Who digs on Calivigny Island now? What do they read on the rocks and under the ground? Well, we have plenty evidence around nowadays to tell us that is not all the time you could trust writing. Still, we have so much of the modern writing that means not a lot to us, that it would be good to be able to read something from those who knew the land long before we inherited it. They knew what the mountain said before we came along, or were dragged along, and they listened to the wind and talked with the volcano bubbling under the sea. They know *Kick-Em-Ginny*. They had another name for Arthur's Seat up above Hermitage before the Scottish adventurers came and called it that. What was that name? What messages did their ancestors leave? What messages did they leave before they ran away from the French and leaped down that hill in Sauteurs, preferring the rocks and the blue water to Frenchmen with guns?

Do books and records have all the stories? The records say nothing about a hurricane in 1921, but my grandmother used to swear there was one—a 1921 hurricane that throw down her house in Carriere, and was responsible for her moving back to live in Hermitage with my mother, who was a little girl just born at the time. And since her house went down the hill in that one, I have to believe she knows what she is saying. Still, according to the books, before Janet the only hurricane that had weight, even though it was weaker than Janet and happened before hurricane had name, was one that happened in 1918. Who know who is right? I know about Janet because I was there and see. Perhaps the record tells the truth that it knows. Perhaps, although the 1921 hurricane threw down my grandmother's house on the hill in Carriere, it wasn't really a hurricane at all, but just some high wind, and some rain. Perhaps it wasn't a hurricane to the people who had a structure that was more firm on the ground. What was the struggle of poor people in 1921, not a hundred years yet, that time, since the end of enslavement?

Anyway! Sometimes the present jump out of the future and drive you back to the past for explanation of life. Coming back, to the nearer past. By the time Flora happened in 1963, federation mash up for good because Trinidad—and Tobago—moved out and became

Independent, and people were whispering about how the choice for Grenada was to go Trinidad or Little Eight, and wondering if they wanted to be struggling with the eight, at least seven other little islands like us, with little brother and sister hanging on, or whether we should hold on to the hand of BIG Trinidad with oil money. And although Trinidad was holding out its hand, plenty people wandering if Trinidad was only making *yangoo* and waiting to see what Grenada would do. So with all of that going on, perhaps Flora just pass around as punctuation again, and as metaphor, to wash things over a bit and to see if she could make the writing on the rock look a little bit clearer for us.

By 1967, GNP didn't deliver Trinidad and Tobago, constitution come back, EMG win elections again and now Britain say, okay, go ahead, handle your internal affairs, all of them. We will still look after your foreign business till you grow up little more and could handle it yourself, but move. We letting you go. Writing on the wall—independence next.

Natural hurricanes simmer down while all these stormy years going on. Just storm coming now and then, rainy and sisterly, to keep company with storm. In 1978, *a wente* (weak) little storm called Cora turn up. Although Cora had birth paper, was only a little rain and some wind. Too much was happening in the country for anybody to take on a little bad weather. Cora was born 11 August 1978, the birth paper say, but who remember that? That time in Grenada, politics hot like fire and getting hotter every day.

The 1960s gone with Duffus Commission on corruption and constitution suspended by the British who give constitution, and 1970s come in with young people and Black Power and organization forming like crazy. Nobody had time to *shoo-shoo* about one organization that forming, and really find out what it was, before another one follow it. You had FORUM, you had MACE, you had MAP and then you had the one that make people come and bawl *raymabuddy*, the selfsame JEWEL! Ay-a-yay! You come and have GULP and GNP/UPP and the 1976 elections, and the famous ALLIANCE! So with all of that going on, Cora would have had to come strong for anybody to notice. Grenada too accustom to high wind and plenty rain for some howling little wind to make much of an impression. And with Belmar, Gairy's man who was named Innocent but who people say was not so innocent, getting shot in 1978, Cora, like the 1976 ALLIANCE, come and pass and was forgotten before anyone ever thought of remembering. Belmar and how he get shot was bigger news than some little *jookootoo* (inconsequential—colloquial) tropical storm somebody called Cora. But don't blame Cora. Wasn't her fault nobody really know her. It wasn't easy to compete with things in Grenada in the 1970s.

The 1960s was rumbling but the 1970s was like another 1950s come around. This time wasn't union leader, was party organizer. Wasn't union leader put on the Executive Council of a colonial government in the hope that he would acquire “a sense of responsibility” and forget

about organizing; it was a group saying at first they not even a party, but a Movement, that they promoting People's Assemblies, that they want to nationalize financial institutions, not a group with union leader shouting for poor people, but an assembly with lawyers, shouting again, and fighting in the courts for poor people. People start to *shoo-shoo* bout NJM, bout Maurice, bout Kendrick, bout Unison. It was the Black Power time and people say the new generation believe in Black Power. Young people looking on and saying *time reach*. The older heads from 1951 saying, what you talking Black Power? Come and meet the original Black Power. Was us. It happen before. So now is a question of who really serious, of who blacker than who. The new ones even oppose Independence in 1973, saying is not Independence they really opposing, but Flag-and-Anthem Independence under Gairy, so thing getting technical. Demonstrations all over the place. People say Maurice and Kendrick and Unison get serious beating by something called the Mongoose Gang. People up in arms and *shoo-shoo* and shouting like rabies in the place. Eventually, in the midst of murder and mayhem, Independence come and settle itself, as a grant from England, in 1974. Independence flag flying. Nutmeg flying high over UN and places like that. Life going on. Enough hurricane among people so nature taking it easy.

So time come and pass. Janet was still king—well, queen—the memory of Grenadians. Although Hurricane Flora pass in between, Janet still had the throne. The old people who were the young people in 1955 were talking about Janet like she was a warrior woman that reign for a time in the land. You could hear them saying, *Girl, I live through Janet, yes; you don't know! And boy, Janet, that was storm!* And although everybody who wasn't even there shivering when they remember Janet, the older heads saying, *All you young people, you wouldn't understand; you have to live it.* And in spite of everything, perhaps was true. Perhaps sometimes you have to feel it to know it. Or perhaps you have to really sit down on the ground and listen good not only to hear but to *feel* what been there and what coming.

Other hurricane happening. 13 March 1979, I was out of the country. Just gone out. Somebody call me in America and say to me, *Put on the television.* And is so I live it, on the radio and on television. But still I remember it. You walk with you country in you pocket. 5 A.M. Radio Grenada taken over; 6:15 A.M. Army barracks attacked; Between 6:30 and 10:30 A.M., senior police officer broadcast statement of surrender. The Gairy government *overthrown*—strange word in that area of the region people call the *English-speaking* Caribbean—and the New Jewel Movement taking office. By this time, was Maurice, was Bernard, was Kendrick, was Unison, was Vincent, was Jackie, was others. EMG, meantime, at the UN, talking about UFOs. And a calm will have to come right here, before we talk about serious storm. My heart can't take it—even now, all these years later, after revolution rise up and, under pressure, revolution fall down. In 1804, Haiti get cut off. What make Grenada feel it could

do a thing like this and not make sure it grab the neighbours right around and hug them and kiss them and let them know they are loved? The nearest friend Grenada had in those days was Cuba, who wasn't friend with America and not friend with plenty people, so the yard right around exposed. With 20/20 hindsight you have to know that was not safe! Anyway, revolution come, last four years, and revolution go. Not simple like that, but it happen. I was out and I come in. Like other people. Things change, and things changing. Haiti rehearse it for us and still we never know it. Is like with all we word *international*, we think is a country that exist of itself. Is One Caribbean, take it or leave it. When Trinidad blow it nose, Grenada wiping the snot. When Jamaica put on tune, Grenada start to dance. We live it, but still we don't know it. Get cut off, get suspicious, start to lock up people, chaining up we self to survive. Revolution was in trouble before trouble take revolution.

Is a story with too long a tail to fit into this hurricane drama. Brother and brother start to fight. And you have to wonder how come the first name that hurricane get is the name of woman. The big political fight in the world with gun and bomb and plane and things of the sort, is always man against man, and yet when they start to name hurricane that mashing up country, is woman first get the name. Something tell me that this *they* doing the naming wasn't a feminine *they*.

Anyway, brother and brother come and fight in Grenada; political friend become political enemy. Every thing that look like one thing wasn't one thing at all, and next thing you know, one leader and his supporters up against a wall watching down the barrel of a gun, never had a chance to look anywhere else after that. Maurice Bishop dead, Unison Whiteman dead, Jacqueline Creft dead, Vincent Noel dead, Norris Bain dead. And then we could say, other people died, but they didn't have public office, and who knows if their people want their names out there like that? And do we know all who died, still? Revolution run aground; NJM in trouble and more than that, Grenada in trouble. What could never happen had happened. The whole country under curfew and Grenadians in shock. Was 1983, was October. This time, I was there. So I remember just like I remember when I not even there. News say that on the 23rd, two hundred and thirty US marines get killed in Beirut. On the 25th, the US invaded Grenada. But for Grenadians, the 19th was the peak, the day of the sacrifice. After that, it was like people see the impossible already, and sad to say it now, but it was like they welcome this other atrocity. It was like things couldn't go any further down in the gutter, and people wash their face laughing in this other humiliation. Who know who dead then, in that invasion? No picture hanging up at the airport, no plaque on show with names of Grenadians who try something, even if they didn't succeed, and even if history say they were wrong. Even if! No list of all those who sacrifice themselves, or who get sacrificed, even if you think they wrong. You have to believe in something to give up your life. And even if you didn't believe and you

life gone, is not easy sacrifice, it mean you were serious about something. Maurice Bishop dead, Bernard Coard in prison, newspaper people that the revolution did imprison outside, all thing that turn ole mass after a time now released and starting, uncertain, to try to find a way again. Still, and then later, and more.

Some come, some go. Politicians join hands, interim government flourish, brother quarreling with sister, with mother, friend quarreling with friend, with father, country divided like we might think it was never divided before. Nobody say the word, not out loud in public, but was Civil War that creep up and establish itself. And that is why it so hard to heal. Everybody know everybody side, or think they know it. Civil War was never declared, but Civil War fight. And life going on, and people finding out things they never know before from reading book. Who in prison discover few friend was ever as real as family, whether family agree with them when politics was politics or not. Family holding on with them through the rough. And long after Columbus, Grenada after the Caribs and the Arawaks discovering itself. People looking around and reading the land, reading each other. Everybody silent and concentrating, reading the land. Some of the best exam results in the country coming out of the prison. Time passing; Grenadians still silent; shock last for ten years, for fifteen, for twenty, and more. People come, people go. Life on its way again, little tropical storm passing, nobody noticing. Storm is we life. Hurricane will have to be real raging to shake us.

And is so Ivan come and find us. Waiting for a hurricane to move us. And although I telling you the story leading up to Ivan as if I was there, I was really outside again, outside like half of Grenada. Outside, but inside. People traveling to and from Brooklyn, and Washington, and Toronto. Coming for steam, traveling to remember the spirit, coming to touch the red mud, coming in from outside to discover how the island look surrounded by the sea that the tourists talk about, coming for fish, for a boat ride into Carriacou over *Kick-Em-Ginny*, for mango, for *papaye* that taste the way only Grenadian *papaye* could taste, for mammie apple, and star apple, and fat pork, and soursop, and guava, and music by Inspector, and Scholar and Ajamo, and Lady Cynthie and Wizard. The calypsonians, too, traveling—to Brooklyn and back every year. People traveling to England, too, and back, but not every year. Those in England waiting to come back and build house to settle down. Is too far to come all the time. The country expanding, and contracting.

Is so Ivan come and find us. Just how Janet did come, raging and puffing to put exclamation mark on the story, so Ivan come, raging enough to wake the sleeping and the dead and energize the forgetful. Ivan come with more force than Janet, and is not an easy thing to imagine.

And after Ivan, I stand up in front of the house in Morne Delice and look up at Mount Gozo, the mountain I know and respect. I look up at Mount Gozo and I bow me head in shame to see how naked it was. Ivan take off all the clothes the mountain was wearing. It strip

mortelle and bois canot and nutmeg and cocoa and French cashew and lime and mango and gospo and golden apple and grapefruit. It don't only strip them; it make some of them kneel down and pray; some it knock flat on their face. Cocoa bend up and twist up when Ivan knock it around. It break nutmeg back, it swizzle the head round, it twist the neck, everything. I looking up at Mount Gozo and I watching all the belly turn inside out. I turn round and I seeing down into Westerhall like it right next door. I watching car turn corner a mile away. I watching St. Paul's and over by Mills on the hill. I looking around and realizing I have plenty neighbours, and people not far away from each other at all, down here in what used to be Morne Delice Cocoa. People telling me how is only two galvanize in the back that come off and they put them back for me; wasn't nothing much. The old *boucan* lose its galvanize roof but the house stand up steady. It have other houses down here under the mountain that remain safe, don't even lose roof or anything, which make you realize that is not every slip of land you have to put house on, that tree and windbreak and things like that have a purpose all their own, that you need shelter from the rock and the tree even if is not cave people living in still, that you can't forget that nature have a purpose all its own.

All the windbreak my father (deceased, now, before Ivan) plant through the land behind the house when he was working for the white people, I believe that save, not only our house, but others in the area. Perhaps the bois canot and the mortelle and other big tree he plant through the land to shade cocoa help to break the wind before it could settle on the house. By the time wind reach the house, the land tame it already. Ivan come and break the hold the old people had on story about hurricane. Think about it. For years, storm and hurricane punctuating we story. Storm most times, hurricane three times. 1955 Janet come and that time we stamina small, Janet leave us stunned and stunted; Flora come later, and if is true that Flora had same strength as Janet, well, by that time, we pass through so much human hurricane that we stamina tall; we shaken but not really stirred. So Ivan know he had to make an impression. All thing happen and Grenadians so cool. Human disaster, political trauma, all little lip of land selling to make house, land getting hotter and hotter, so Nature say, Ivan will have to be in a rage to get any kind of reaction. And is so it happen. Ivan drag us kicking and screaming into the twenty-first century, drop us down with nothing and say, wake up! This is where you is! Start to build!

They tell me the house was plastered with leaves as if Ivan strip the trees and plaster the leaves from bois canot and mango and mortelle across the door and the windows and the walls of the house to tell us something. So is that I remember. Ivan leave the leaves from Mount Gozo plastered right around the house. Over the doors and the windows and the walls. Ivan say, you don't have to wait till they cut the tree, make paper, put in book, write things for you to read. Read the leaves.

Ivan leave message for a lot of people. Somebody in Mardigras tell me that since Ivan, he is like everybody else; he barking, *Roof! Roof! Roof!* One lady say, that night she see the wind like it was a living person, spinning round and going forward and raving like a mad person, *Wooo! Wooo!* bawling with its mouth stretch out in front of it like it on the prowl for a victim. She keep saying, *I see wind, I tell you. I see wind like it was a living person!* My cousin up on the hill in Kumar, is like Ivan settle its eye on the house she and her husband and the five children have up on the hill; it lift up every board in that house and rip it apart; it fling fridge and chair and everything down the hill. And still, when people pass by them later, they turning around on the hill up there and looking down at Hope City, how it developing like a nice, upper income zone for those coming back from that wonderful place called *Away*, and they marveling, *And you all have such a nice spot up here, right over the sea.* And the man keep saying, *We keeping it. When the children get big, they will be able to build a house that Ivan can't mash up. I don't know how and when we will build back something, but we keeping the spot. We going make it.* And somebody else say that on the night of Ivan, she and her husband could hear when the wind was coming to push and they pack up everything behind the door, sit down on the chair trying to push back against Ivan, so he wouldn't be able to break down the door and come in. In the end, Ivan manage to break the hinges, but he didn't get in. They were lucky, because all around them, Ivan manage to get in by holding on to people rooftop and ripping it off. I guess they had a master contractor who bolt down their roof like how the family contractor that become *compere* bolt down the one in Hermitage for Janet.

And when you see how Ivan so bold face and destructive, how he even pull boat off the sand and fling across the road, you have to think that at last, hurricane getting named after man. All that killing and destruction that hurricanes do, hunting down and killing like politicians at war, that is not woman work.

Under Ivan, nutmeg break its neck and lie down flat, cocoa bend round and twist up and bow its head down low. Coconut tree didn't bother to move go and stand up in the yard; it just fall flat on its face. But just as people stand up after Janet; they will stand up after Ivan. Even though now hurricanes seem to know where Grenada hiding, we have to hope and to plan and talk bout the land and what it need for politicians who think they in control to see sense, so that more and more hurricane won't keep aiming to come more often than before. We have to watch and learn from Mount Gozo as it put back on its clothes and survive. We have to plan so that all those leaves up there won't become concrete. Ivan was born 8 September 2004, Janet was 22 September, and Flora was 1 October, so is that Virgo—Libra time we have to watch, but especially Libra.

But, star sign aside, perhaps at last people have their eyes on who really causing the damage. Ivan is the man people thinking about now, and watching. And perhaps people

asking, how come hurricane didn't know where we was before, and hurricane know so good now? And perhaps people wondering, so this one come across the Atlantic, over the sea? What about the hurricane they call volcano, brewing up under the sea? How to watch that one and know what it planning? What about other hurricanes around us, working and not always showing their intention?

So we here under the mountains, watching Mount Gozo and all other mountains, reading the stories that they leave us. During Ivan, my cousin's "England house" didn't fall, the one with the four bolts from Janet time didn't fall, and the one the mountain protected, didn't fall. There are others that stayed standing, and I'm watching all of them and I'm wondering, was it luck, or was something else working? If it was something else, what was that something else? Is not a secret anybody should keep if they know; is a lesson for survival everybody should share. Me, when people ask if I was there for Ivan, what was happening in Grenada when Ivan reach, and what happening now, I say, well, some of the story have to wait for the telling. But I remember Morne Delice yard after the storm, and I thinking, *Hmmm; Ivan leave message on leaf for everybody to read.*