

GOLD TEETH DON' SUIT HOG MOUTH

Every year in Barbados at the end of Crop Over, as soon as the carnival wind has abated, gossip comes tripping in seeking out the ears of villagers.

That late July evening, in Martown's tiny rum shop, Fabian's eyes were wide and dark and shiny as kola-nuts as he held forth to Gregory and Brad, his two-man captive audience.

Gregory who was normally the most patient of men, sat across the table from Fabian, trying his hardest not to be drawn in, but finally he could contain himself no longer.

"Quit you pompasettin', Fabian." He said "Ain't no-one from dis village of Martown bin doin' dixie wid no Calypso Queen."

Each year during Carnival the battle for the title of Calypso Monarch is fought and won.

The latest winner was a nineteen year old beauty from Bridgetown, by the name of Alicia "Lucy Luck" Belle.

The thought that she might be 'carrying on' with someone from their village of Martown---from *Martown* for Chrissake – was frankly absurd.

"But Greg, man, I hear it from de mout' of Mrs Montano sheself." Fabian said, and then reached across the table to dip another phulowrie ball into the bowl of chutney by Gregory's elbow.

He knew full well that the mere mention of Mrs Montano was likely to send poor Gregory into a frenzy

Mrs Montano was the village gossip, inveterate church-goer, and best friend of Gregory's wife. She could be found at most times of the day imparting the latest bit of sensitive information to anyone who cared to listen. Except, that is, during office hours Wednesday to Friday, when she was behind the Parcel collection counter at Martown's General Post Office.

It was here at the parcel counter that Mrs Montano had turned over a small brown packet and read that the sender of the parcel was "Miss Alicia Bell"...Miss Alicia Belle!.....

Miss Alicia *Lucy Luck* Belle!—whose songs were being played on every radio station and danced to in every trendy bar across the island. The Calypso Queen herself.

Once Mrs Montano spread the word that the lovely Alicia Lucy Luck Belle had personal connections with someone in Martown, rumour spread until at least a dozen husbands in the village were suspected and accused of being the recipient of the parcel and succumbing to her charms.

"I ain' payin' no attention to your mischief makin' dis time, Fabian. Dat jus' plain ridiculous" said Gregory, who was forever being accused by his wife, Angelina, of carrying on some illicit affair or other....and never once with any justification.

He looked over to Brad, the buck-toothed, be-pimpled bar tender cum proprietor, for support, but finding none stared into his drink and shook his head.

Fabian gave him a friendly pat on the shoulder. "If yuh want my advice..."

"Damn you advice, man. Las' night I take you advice. I go home, like you say, wid de long stem roses for de missus on account of all dese rumours. An' see what good dat done me."

P.2

Now it was Fabian's turn to look, in mock astonishment, over to Brad at the bar.

Brad just grinned and shrugged his shoulders. He knew as everyone knew, except Gregory, that a woman who receives a bunch of long stem roses, unless they were for courting, birthdays or anniversaries, is going to want to know the reason why.

Gregory's wife, Angelina, had jumped to the wrong conclusions about the roses, and poor Gregory had had a miserable evening.

In the brief lull in the conversation, a gust of wind forced the door back on its hinges, making the leaves on the palm tree outside shudder.

Gregory pulled his jacket tight round his chilly shoulders.

He didn't see through the window at the back of the bar, a young girl appear like a vision, walking out of the rainstorm up towards the rum shop.

She couldn't have been much over sixteen. Her dress a rich topaz blue, was shiny with rain.

A bracelet of lemon citrines and mint-coloured tourmalines sparkled round her wrist.

As she drew level with the shop door Fabian called out to her to come and shelter till the shower blew over.

The girl kept walking, head down, and made to go on, as if she hadn't heard him.

But Fabian was in a bullish mood. He stepped out in the rain in front of her, eyeing her wrist.

"Whachoo got dere, beauty" he said "You bin thievin' from dem pink tourists, up for de Crop Over,heh?"

Gregory shushed him up, and smiled apologetically at the girl. "Him don' mean it, yuh know. Come inside. Come outa de rain, won't you?"

After a moment hesitation she answered. "Well, I could do wid a cup of hot chocolate, s'pose," and in she walked.

Gregory pulled up a chair for their guest. The vision-from-the-rainstorm sat down at the little wood table next to Gregory who discovered—as he pushed in her chair, as he draped his dry sports jacket round her bare shoulders, as Fabian took a ringside seat opposite and a hot chocolate was bought—that her name was Talia. She'd been down at the seafront buying some flying fish for tea.

"And de bangle?" Fabian wanted to know. "An admirer gave dat to you?"

"No" said Talia, looking embarrassed. "Dem is glass stones. I got it from..." But she stopped mid-sentence, seeing the look on Gregory's face, and turned her head to where he was looking, just beyond the open door.

"Sweet mudder of God! It's my wife! If she see me here wid you..." Gregory considered briefly crouching behind the bar to hide.

"So it *true!*" Angelina shouted as she came into the shop "I might have known it. You cheatin', good-fuh-nuttin..." she paused here to draw a dramatic breath, placing her hands on her generous hips.

P.3

“And as for you” she added, looking straight at Talia.

Gregory opened his mouth to speak: “But—

“QUIET Gregory! I talkin’ to de young lady” Her eyes were still fixed on Talia.

“As for *you*” she went on “, what grown man in his right mind would want to jump on dem skinny bones? Mind you, it no wonder you all worn out and tin like dat: I understand you got sometin’ of a reputation, Miss Alicia Lucy Luck Belle. Ain’ dat right, Gregory?”

But it wasn’t Gregory who tried to reply this time: it was Talia---Talia who spat the word “*Liar*”! in the older woman’s face and added “Alicia way too good for any a you. Gold teet’ don’ suit hog mou’.”

And it was Talia who scraped back her chair, pulling Greg’s jacket from her shoulders; Talia who, with tears in her eyes, made for the open door, dropping her parcel and a letter in her haste.

Fabian walked through the silence to the door and picked up the parcel and the letter. The letter was dated over a month ago. Fabian read it aloud:

Dear Talia

Finding a real friend like you just before Carnival—was the best thing that ever happened to me. Every time I’m up on stage I’m singing for you, Talia. I hope you like the bracelet. Wear it and think of me.

Love from Alicia Lucy Luck Belle

“Well I’ll be...” Angelina proclaimed “You two best go after her. A letter like dat ain’ sometin’ you’d want to misplace.”

Gregory hesitated for a moment, then stooped to pick his jacket off the floor. Fabian dumbstruck stared at the letter hanging damply in his hand.

“Well whachoo waitin’ for!” urged Angelina “Poor girl gonna catch her death! Get gone!”

As the two men left the shop, Angelina gazed fondly after her husband.

“I got myself a good’un dere” she said.

“Ain’ dat de trut, Angelina” said Brad, nodding his pimply head “Ain’ dat de trut.”