

Anthurium: A Caribbean Studies Journal

Volume 8
Issue 1 *Bahamian Literature*

Article 20

April 2011

Absent Father

Gordon Mills
anthuriumcaribjournal@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarlyrepository.miami.edu/anthurium>

Recommended Citation

Mills, Gordon (2011) "Absent Father," *Anthurium: A Caribbean Studies Journal*: Vol. 8 : Iss. 1 , Article 20.
Available at: <http://scholarlyrepository.miami.edu/anthurium/vol8/iss1/20>

This Fiction is brought to you for free and open access by Scholarly Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Anthurium: A Caribbean Studies Journal* by an authorized editor of Scholarly Repository. For more information, please contact repository.library@miami.edu.

Absent Father

Early on Saturday morning, before her sister, Gaylynn, who she shared the bedroom with and the rest of the household had emerged from their slumbers, Nadia reached into the closet. She took down a pair of jeans and a pink cotton skirt, freshly ironed, and then stretched to take up a lime green top and a white blouse. She held them to her in the way she had seen shop assistants do when she had been out with her mother. She tilted her head in both directions and extended her leg, foot pointed, to allow the skirt to fall naturally. Jeans or skirt she asked herself. Jeans or skirt?

She spun around, placed the clothes on the bed without disturbing Gaylynn and went back to the closet. The floor was covered in shoes, most of them belonging to Gaylynn but Nadia picked around carefully and quietly and eventually, found her tennis shoes. Little pink lights flashed on and off as she walked in them. She had meant to wash the laces but last night she had to do the dishes after dinner and then press her clothes and when she had finished, she felt too tired to do them. I'm sure he won't notice dirty laces, she thought to herself.

Clean socks and her newest underwear came next, all laid out on her side of the bed in preparation. She sat beside the clothes and paired them up: jeans and blouse, skirt and top; jeans and top, skirt and blouse. Decisions, decisions.

And it was important, she told herself. Make no mistake. A couple of evenings ago her father had called to say he would collect her on Saturday afternoon to take her out.

"Where we goin' daddy?" she asked him, excited and anxious.

"I don' know," he replied, "but I think ice cream and the St Thomas bazaar might be on the list."

"Yes, please," she trilled. "They're having horse rides and cotton candy. Please take me."

"Just be ready," said her father gently, "and I'll be there on Saturday."

She wanted to look her best.

The doorbell rings.

Her mother's voice echoes through the small but tidy house. "It's your father, Nadia. Are you ready?"

"Yes, mommy," she answers, "I've been ready for ages."

"Well, get to the door. Don't keep your father waiting."

Nadia grabs her SpongeBob backpack and runs to the door. “Hi, daddy,” she laughs delightedly as he scoops her up in his strong arms and holds her aloft before pressing his head into her tummy and making her giggle uncontrollably.

“Are you ready?” he asks.

“Yes, daddy. Look, I’m wearing my new jeans and best tennis.”

“Come on then,” he says, putting her down and taking her hand. “Let’s go to the bazaar.”

And so they go to St Thomas Church Bazaar and he puts her on the biggest horse there and walks with her around the field and he buys her cotton candy and makes sure she goes into the Bouncy Castle and then wins a teddy bear on the Hoop-La for her and finishes with a double scoop ice cream – strawberry and chocolate – before he carries her back to her mother in their small, tidy house and she sits up retelling the events of this special day to her mother, sister and brother and then bathes and falls asleep to dream of the next day out when her daddy comes.

“What are you doing, sprawling all over your pressed clothes?” Her mother’s voice had a sarcastic ring.

Nadia gazed at her mother a little blurrily and sat up, smoothing out her blouse and skirt. “I can’t decide what to wear when daddy comes.”

“Don’t leave them on the bed,” said her mother roughly. “Gaylynn will be awake soon and she don’t want your clothes all over the bed.”

“What do you think, mommy?” Nadia asked. “The skirt or the jeans?”

“I think you’d best not build up your hopes. You know what your father’s like. Look what happened the last time.”

“Don’t mommy,” pleaded Nadia. She hated when her mother reminded her of her father’s unreliability and broken promises.

“And the time before that. You sat there and sat there all day. Not a phone call. Not an apology.”

“Mommy, please.”

Gaylynn, disturbed by her mother’s rising voice, stirred on her side of the bed and opened her eyes. “What happen?” she mumbled.

“Nadia,” said her mother, “put your clothes away till later. Even if he comes, he won’t be here before three.”

“You put your clothes out already,” smirked an incredulous Gaylynn, “you’ll never learn.” Five years older than her sister, Gaylynn had been through all this with her own father. She had learnt over the years to expect nothing from him. It was the only way to avoid the hurt and the disappointments.

Nadia couldn’t argue with them. She didn’t know how. This was her father they were talking about, the man whose voice always reassured her, whose promises excited her and whose plans thrilled her. On the telephone the other evening he had sounded so positive. So certain. This time would be different. She knew it would be.

It wasn’t long before her mother left for work and her brother followed her. On Saturdays he worked at the local food store packing groceries and sometimes gave her a dollar or two when he came home. Gaylynn stayed in the house all morning but she too left soon after twelve. She helped their grandmother clean and wash on Saturdays and often slept there too. Nadia would usually accompany her and help with the washing but today her father was coming so, until he came, she would have to wait in the house on her own.

Nadia once again looked in the closet at the jeans and the skirt, unable to decide. Which would daddy like better, she wondered to herself. Suddenly enlightenment dawned. There was really no choice. If she was going to ride a horse, she needed to wear jeans. It was that easy.

She took out the jeans and the little top, found the rest of her clothes and placed them all once again on the bed. Then she walked to the bathroom, ran the shower and bathed. When she emerged from the steamy tub, the clock in the hall registered 1:20; less than two hours to wait.

Dried and powdered, Nadia dressed herself and checked her appearance in the mirror, its crack seeming to separate her head from her body. She twirled and posed, hands on hips. I look OK, she thought.

The remote control for the television was on the sofa and Nadia turned to the cartoon channel and watched, flicking to other channels from time to time, not really engaged or interested in what was on the screen. Her thoughts returned constantly to her father. What would he be doing at this moment? Was he getting ready? Did he have to work this morning? Was he still living in that house near the hospital? Had he called her from there the other evening? Had his voice really sounded different on the phone? Was she right to think he was actually coming today?

She checked the clock: two-thirty. Half an hour and he would be there.

Nadia brushed her teeth and put her backpack on the sofa beside her. She sat back to wait while the Disney Channel showed a little girl being carried across a deep, fast-flowing river by a muscular man, up to his chest in murky rapids. The man reassured the girl that everything would be all right; they would soon reach the other side. Nadia was enthralled. The water raged and the man stumbled but he was determined to keep the small girl safe. Please let them make it, thought Nadia. Don't let them go under. The man had almost made it. The water was becoming less deep; he could almost touch the bank. Spellbound, Nadia watched. The man and the girl had almost made it when the doorbell rang loud and shrill.

Nadia was wrung from the screen. The bell – who could that be? Her eyes flicked to the clock and registered the time – 3:10.

“Daddy,” she squealed, a slight question in her tone. She ran to the door. “Daddy?” She opened the door, ready to leap into his arms and be carried across the rapids.

But it was not her father.

“Hi, Nadia,” said the small figure on the doorstep. It was Wayne from across the street. “Is Cory there?”

Nadia's heart was in her boots. She didn't answer immediately. “Cory...No, he's at the food store...”

“OK. Bye,” And Wayne was gone.

Nadia stood on the doorstep staring into the street. She walked out a few paces and looked both ways. There was no sign of her father. She turned and walked back inside, her little shoulders slouched and her head down.

The movie was over. She would never know if the girl and the man had reached the other side of the river. She wasn't even sure if she hoped they had. In her frustration, she cut off the television, fought back the angry tears and punched the cushion at the end of the sofa. “Don't cry,” she told herself. “It's early. Daddy's never on time. There's still time to get to the bazaar.” She buried her head in the cushion she had just assaulted and repeated to herself, “Early...still time...Daddy's never on time.”

The next time she looked at the clock it was twenty past four and the next time, a quarter to five. At five-fifteen she was looking through the window but her view was blurred by the lens of tears filling both her eyes. Doubts about her father's coming filled her head. “Why does he always do this?” she asked herself as the tears flowed forlornly leaving shiny streaks on her

cheeks. “He doesn’t even think to call.” She pressed her head against the window pane and closed her eyes

The doorbell rings.

Her mother’s voice echoes through the small but tidy house. “It’s your father, Nadia. Are you ready?”

“Yes, mommy,” she answers, “I’ve been ready for ages.”

“Well, get to the door. Don’t keep your father waiting.”

Nadia grabs her SpongeBob backpack and runs to the door. “Hi, daddy,” she laughs delightedly as he scoops her up in his strong arms and holds her aloft before pressing his head into her tummy and making her giggle uncontrollably.

“Are you ready?” he asks.

“Yes, daddy. Look, I’m wearing my new jeans and best tennis.”

“Come on then,” he says, putting her down and taking her hand. “Let’s go to the bazaar.”