

moss side stories



Moss Side Stories

Edited by Martin De Mello

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Crocus
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Introduction

Black history in the UK is rarely told by the people who were there, or given artistic and cultural expression by black artists. This despite the fact that the music and the ideas from Africa and the Caribbean helped shape a new, radical and progressive idea of Britain. Moss Side and Hulme in Manchester were at the forefront of this, from the early flop houses set up by African seamen so that they could have a bed for the night, to the social and cultural renaissance of the clubs and shebeens. Everyone went to them, black and white, indigenous and foreign, unknown and famous. You would meet people from all over: from Nigeria, Jamaica, Liberia, India, Trinidad, Poland, Ireland... People with a common love of the music and with a common experience. People with the courage and compassion to look across the divide.

The result, a working class that overcame many of its' prejudices and conflicts to come up with a new idea of Britain. A black and white Britain that owed little to the social and cultural map of the middle class and its concepts of integration and multiculturalism. For a time – for nearly forty years, in fact – the Moss Side and Hulme areas of Manchester were at the forefront of this new Britain. In the clubs that were its symbol everyone was equal. Until that equality was split apart and uprooted by an urban renewal programme which saw the old communities scattered across Manchester.

There are, however, still those that remember. This book is in small part their testament. It represents the determination of the community not to forget. Without memories and reimagining history is little more than an artefact. A narrative without a story. Here, we have those stories.

THE STORIES

The Accidental Seaman

Jennifer Makumbi

Abbey turned from Moss Lane East into Princess Road without realising. His mind was elsewhere. The more he thought about his situation the more lightheaded he got. The irony was sickening. He now had his passage back to Africa, he even had savings to start a business in textiles, but he could not go home. Moses, his one month old son, could not make that kind of journey. It was 1954 and Abbey knew that if he left Britain without his boy, he would lose him. And losing him would render Moses one of those anonymous children of the empire who grew up asking, 'Who? Where? Why?'. It was especially painful because Abbey never intended to become a seaman, let alone be stranded in Britain.

As he crossed Princess Road, he caught sight of *The Merchant Navy Club*. From his side of the road it looked like a lazy woman waking up late. A slick of resentment crept on him. It was as if the club had conspired to entrap him. *The Merchant* was at the centre of his life in Britain. Africans who ran it had lived in Manchester for a long time and looked out for each other, especially the newcomers. They tipped each other off on available jobs and housing; they were there in sickness and (God forbid) in death. When a ship arrived from Africa, *The Merchant Club* got wind of it first. When seamen Abbey knew arrived from Mombasa it felt like home had come to visit. To hear stories from familiar places and to feel Swahili words roll off his tongue made him feel alive again. He always gave the seamen his photographs to take home to reassure his family that he was still alive. The December before a ship had brought records from South Africa, including The Manhattan Brothers, with a woman, Miriam Makeba, who everyone said would be the new

sensation. Sometimes they brought Lingala records from the Congo as well. And when Nelson played African records, the cadence in lyrics swept Britain away and at once Abbey was back home without care. Now, as he walked past the club, the first time he brought Heather Newton, Moses' mother, to *The Merchant* flashed in his mind. Heather Newton. He wondered where she was.

Princess Road was alive. Outside *Nelson's Electrical Repairs*, a group of men formed a circle talking in Patois. Abbey quickly walked around them: standing in groups was the quickest way for a stint at Greenhey's Police Station but West Indian men were defiant. He walked past the BP petrol station and crossed Great Western Street.

Now, Kwei's drunken warning when Abbey and Ruwa first arrived in Britain came back to taunt him. On hearing that *The Montola*, the ship Abbey and Ruwa worked on was to be scrapped, Kwei had warned, 'Don't settle in Moss Side if you want to return to Africa; go somewhere like Stockport.'

At first, Abbey thought it was Kwei's clumsy attempt to get rid of them, but then Kwei explained:

'Moss Side is a bad mistress, pa! She treats you so right this wretched place feels like home.'

Abbey had laughed. The idea of staying in cold Britain with soil as black as soot was absurd. Ruwa, who saw himself as a son of the sea, shook his head.

'Me, I can't stay. The ground still feels wobbly.'

'You see,' Kwei had carried on drunkenly, 'in Moss Side people smile so wide you see all their teeth. In summer, black folks are like ants crawled out of earth. And people talk so loud, pa!'

True to his word, Ruwa had moved to Liverpool, claiming that the smell of the sea was stronger there. Abbey gave himself two years to save for his passage and return home. That was four years ago.

He crossed Claremont Road. The clock tower on the Princess Road Bus Depot said it was 8.30 pm but it was still bright and warm. In Britain the sun had moods. It barely slept in summer yet in winter it hardly woke up. Abbey had thirty minutes before his shift at the depot started. He was contemplating going to Mama Rose's place to eat when he heard, 'Abbey my friend.'

Berry came towards him, his hand stretched out. 'Is your name still Abbey, as in Westminster Abbey?' Berry teased.

Abbey smiled nervously, looking for something witty to say. He was about to say that it was all the history he had learnt in school when Berry added, 'Did your mother really call you Abbey Baker?' Abbey turned slightly, his mouth twitching. 'I'll not hold you my friend: but be true.' Berry shook his hand again.

That is the problem with Berry, Abbey thought as he walked away. He had a way of making him feel horrible about his name. But what would he say, that it was better to be West Indian than African? People like Berry did not realise that being black, African and Muslim was too much. He was lucky that his adopted name, Abu Bakri, had easily turned into Abbey Baker (Baker as in Sir Samuel Baker from his history class). There was no reason to mention his real name.

He stopped outside *Henry-George's Garments*. Another glance at the tower clock said that he had fifteen minutes left. Going to Denmark Road to Mama Rose's was now out of the question, but he still had ten minutes to burn. He peered into *Henry-George's Garments* and caught his 'almost-white' wife's eyes. He quickly looked away. Berry had once sneered,

'That name Henry-George is the closest them haughty couple will ever get to the royal family.'

That was before King George VI died. On the Queen's coronation, Henry-George's wife had carried on all euphoric and fluffy, decorating and flag-waving like she was a proper white. In the window of their shop, a large portrait of the former

Princess Elizabeth in a brown dress with her children Charles, in a white shirt and red pants, and Anne, in a pink dress, was still displayed. Now Abbey stared at it. The children were laughing with their mother. Abbey remembered that Princess Anne was born five months after he arrived in Britain. Now, looking at how grown she was, he shook his head; 'If you don't watch out, that boy Charles will become king before you go home.'

Just then Henry the husband stepped out of the shop. He saw Abbey and smiled,

'Too early for your shift?'

Abbey nodded.

'Good man. No good going late to work, it's thieving and it gives them reason to say we're lazy.'

Henry wheeled a railing of children's clothes that had been on display into the shop. Henry is not bad, Abbey thought, it is that the wife of his that turns him. Henry-George's wife did not associate with blacks, she showed off by shopping at *Lewis's*, pushing her children in a pram and taking them to *Belle Vue Circus*.

Abbey looked at the clock: he had five minutes left.

He ran across Bowes Street and peered through the main entrance of the depot. Neville, the supervisor, was talking to some drivers. Rather than walk past them, Abbey decided to use the side door. The moment he stepped on the cobbled stones of the alleyway his heart jumped. His eyes avoided the leaning willow near the third block of terraced houses. Something was wrong with that tree – the way its branches hung mournfully like a widow! He should have known it was a bad omen. He tried the door: it was locked. Rather than walk past the tree, he turned back to the Princess Road entrance. Luckily, the men were gone.

The vastness of the depot never ceased to overwhelm him. Rows and rows of buses stretched as far as he could see. Yet others were still arriving to park in rows 17 and 18 at the back.

Abbey turned to the right and walked down Row 2 parked with No 42 busses. He took the ramp to the sluice to pick up his tools. He knew Neville would assign him Row 8 with No 53 busses. They were the dirtiest because they went to Belle Vue. But Abbey liked it – the dirtier the bus the more chances of coming across lost property. Often times, he found half-penny coins here and sixpence there. He once found a purse with sequins and pearls all over it and slid it into his pants. Throughout the shift, it had weighed heavily against his crotch. He only took it out when he got home. There was forty-two shillings. Abbey had patted the purse on his forehead feverishly thanking family spirits. He had never realised that Ganda gods worked in Britain.

Abbey arrived in Britain aboard *The Mantola*, a Dutch merchant ship. On the 17th of March 1950, *The Montola* limped into Manchester canal on one engine and docked in Salford. It was on its way to Amsterdam when it ran into engine problems. They hoped to stay a week or two for repairs and set off again.

He was hiding in the engine room when Ruwa, a Chagga friend from Tanganyika, came down from the deck excited. ‘Come up, Abu, England is here.’ Since getting into cold climes at sea, Abu had kept in the engine room, which was hot. The unnatural heat had puffed his fingers and feet. At the time, his name was Abu Bakri because it was easier to get jobs in Mombasa with a Muslim name. But his father had named him Ssuna Junju. He was neither Moslem nor Christian because his father could not make up his mind.

Wrapped in a blanket-coat Ruwa lent him, Abu stepped out to see the heart of the empire. An icy blade sliced right through his lips and nose, and his puffed body deflated. Though it was early in the morning, England seemed to be at dusk. Abu had never seen so many buildings stacked so close together, some on top of the other. There seemed no space left.

‘They are rich,’ his voice choked with awe.

‘You’ve seen nothing yet.’

‘Nothing yet?’ Abbey was alarmed.

Manchester Canal was lined on either side by brick buildings with a lot of windows. Smoke came out of every rooftop and disappeared into a grey heaven. Won’t the buildings catch fire? Streaks of soot ran down the walls. A few trees, here and there, were skeletal.

They docked.

The sun had refused to rise. The sky was a dark mist as if the gods were angry. A few more trees looked dead. British soil was black. All he could see were buildings, people, ships, trams, cars.

Abu wanted to stay on the ship but Ruwa who had been to Manchester before, held his hand and led him into Salford. As they walked past glass windows, Abu caught their reflection. Suddenly, against the multitude of white people, he saw how horribly black he and Ruwa looked. He hung onto Ruwa’s hand despite Ruwa’s attempts to shake him off. They were looking for a seamen’s club, *The Merchant’s Navy Club* in a place called Moss Side. There they would find out where Ruwa’s friend Kwei, a Fante from Gold Coast, lived. They walked all the way to Manchester city centre because Abu would not get on a tram. He had whispered,

‘I know how to behave around whites. I’ve been to South Africa.’

‘The British are different from Boers.’

‘Their mother is the same,’ he hissed.

Abu was so frightened that for the first time he regretted running away from home. To remember now that it was about a stupid war poster - OUR ALLIES THE COLONIES - was painful. To his childish eyes, the African man in the picture was regal in a fez with tassles falling down the side of his face. His uniform was bright red with a Chinese collar of royal blue gilded with gold. There was a palm-tree trinket on the fez

with the letters T.K.A.R. He wanted it all. He had wanted it so desperately that he could not wait four years to make eighteen and enlist. That was in 1943 and the war could be over by the time he made eighteen. He had heard his father talk about the white man's war with breathless awe. Apparently, all the wars the world had known were child's play. At fourteen, Ssuna was taller than most people. White men were notoriously blind. Sometimes they could not tell girls from boys. There was no chance they could tell his age.

Unfortunately when he turned up to enlist, a friend of his father saw him and pulled him out of the queue. When his father found out, he warmed his backside, saying that the only army he would ever join was the kabaka's. That was when Ssuna swore that he would show his father. He would enlist in Kenya. After the war he would come home elegant in the red uniform and fez. Then they would choke on their words.

With a few friends, Ssuna had jumped on a train wagon and hid among sacks of cotton. What he remembered about that journey was the itching of sisal bags; he had scratched all night. No one warned them that Nairobi was chilly in the morning. But even there, the white man had turned him away. He told him to come back in two years, thinking that he was sixteen.

Abbey smiled; the white man was blind by two years.

But Ssuna could not return home to Uganda. His father wanted him to stay in school yet he found school slow. As far as he was concerned, sitting in class all day reading and scribbling was for dreamy girls. He wanted to fight in a proper war, come home a warrior and marry the most beautiful girl. While he waited Ssuna found work in Mombasa as a deckhand on ships sailing at first to Eastern and Southern Africa, then later to West Africa.

But by the end of the two years, Ssuna had lost interest in the European war. He had seen Indian coolies, Kenyans and Tanganyikans return on ships from Burma maimed. It was not

the stories of horror they told that broke his resolve but the fact that many of them never actually fought. They were porters. To him, coming home maimed for carrying someone's luggage was obscene. A warrior needed to hold a gun and feel its shudder as it exploded.

Now his wish had come true in a twisted way: he was in Manchester, terrified. The city's infrastructure of brick and stone was overwhelming. The skyline was dotted by sharp church steeples and tall round chimneys. No doubt this was Christendom. There was a church at every turn. There were arches on doors, windows and on walls. To Abu, while Muslim heaven was made of domes, Christian heaven had arches everywhere.

Manchester town centre was beautiful and scary at the same time. There was more stone but less soot. They were surrounded by such high buildings Abu felt dizzy looking up. He saw the buildings collapsing on top of him. The gods would not make him go up there. Huge posters hung up above. What if people fell as they hung them up? On the ground, beautiful shops sold beautiful things he had never seen. On the walls, grey devils and lions sculpted in stone snarled at him. Statues frowned like guards on the lookout for heathens. White women dressed in smart blanket-coats and wide hats walked with their hands linked with their men. They looked like pictures in magazines. They stared at him and Ruwa with curiosity, wonder and aversion. He tried not to aggravate them by walking away from pavements but Ruwa pulled his hand impatiently. Once they came to Princess Road, away from the overpowering spectacle, Abu whispered the questions that had been itching him.

'Why do the men hold the women's hands?'

'Because it's cold: that's how they keep warm.'

Abbey was silent for a while, then he asked, 'If this is Manchester, what is London like?'

'Kdt,' Ruwa clicked his tongue. 'Compared to London,

Manchester is rags. London is where King George lives. London blinks like a woman.'

Abu pondered this for a while.

'Why are their houses similar? You could get lost.'

'Stop asking questions, can't you see the numbers on the doors?'

Later, after Abbey had settled into Manchester, he would go to Albert's Square on a Sunday and sit on a bench. He loved staring at the arched patterns in the cobbled stone in the square. Looking at the intricate designs on the walls of the Town Hall, Abbey tried to imagine Albert's life. He wondered what his mother would make of Britain if she saw it, what she would say about the food. Once in a while, a man or a woman caught his eye and smiled discreetly. That little gesture, the acknowledgement of his humanity, gave him strength. In fact, one day he was so emboldened he walked into the Town Hall. Inside, the building was art. With intricate designs of arched stone hanging low above his head and with mosaic beneath his feet too good to walk on, Abbey realised that he stood at the centre of the empire. He closed his eyes to feel the power. The room went quiet. He opened his eyes. The air was nervous. A sense of being out of place overwhelmed him and he fled through the side door.

When Abbey arrived home after the shift at the depot, his landlord's light was still on. This meant that he was unhappy. When Abbey opened the door the smell of cow-foot hit him. Keith stood on the landing. Keith was Irish and did not mind having Africans for tenants but he said he had his limits.

'What's that horrible smell?'

'I don't know, Mr Keith, I've just returned.'

'Well, don't you smell it?'

Abbey sniffed the air and shook his head.

'How can you not! The house stinks.'

‘I don’t hear it, Mr Keith,’

‘Tell your friend, Quway, (white people could not say Kwei) that I’ll not have you cook tripe or any of the horrible stuff you people eat.’

‘I’ll tell him, sir.’ Abbey ran up the stairs to the bedroom he shared with Kwei. He heard Keith muttering, ‘They lie like children.’

Kwei sat on their bed pulling his shoes on. Abbey was surprised. Normally, by the time he came home, Kwei was gone for his night shift.

‘Keith is complaining again,’ Abbey whispered as he hung his coat.

Kwei sucked his teeth loudly. ‘He knocked on the door and I ignored him.’

‘Thanks for cooking.’

‘How is Moses?’

Abbey’s smile fell. He opened his hands in helplessness and shrugged his shoulders.

‘You didn’t see him!’

‘He was asleep again.’

‘What? Twice now you go all the way to Macclesfield for nothing?’

‘What could I say, wake him up?’

‘Yes. Wake him up to see his father.’

‘Heather told them she wanted him adopted. What can I do?’

‘You’re his father, you decide. You’re too soft.’

Abbey sat down on the bed and sighed. ‘I don’t know, Kwei. She said she did not want her child going to Africa because of snakes and lions.’

‘Stupid woman! Didn’t we grow up there? Next time you go, we go together. You’re too soft. Now I am late for talking to you! Oh,’ Kwei seemed to remember something, ‘do you still have any Blue Hearts?’

Abbey gave Kwei two of his awake pills. He had no use for

them anymore. He used to take them when he and Heather went out all night. Kwei tossed them into his mouth without water and ran down the stairs. Abbey fell back on the bed.

Abbey met Heather Newton at the Whit Knitwear Place on Wilmslow Road. She was a temporary machinist while she waited for her nursing course to start in Scotland. At first, Abbey did not notice her. She was one of the girls and there were over fifty girls and women in the main hall. The only girls he looked out for were the nasty ones. Besides, Abbey was so weighed down by being African that he would never assume with white girls. Heather was walking past one day when she said hello. Abbey looked up from the mop and smiled. He thought it was kind and brave of her to smile at him. She seemed like a good girl: not loud, did not swear and he had never seen her smoking.

Months later, Heather stopped to talk to him. She asked what he did after work. Abbey explained that he had a second job at the Princess Road Bus Depot and that he was trying to raise money to return home.

‘Where is home?’

‘Uganda.’

‘Is that in the West Indies?’

‘No, East Africa.’

‘Really, I didn’t think you were African, you’re a bit pale.’ Then, as an afterthought, she asked breathlessly, ‘Did you kill a lion to become a man?’

‘No, we don’t do that.’

For a moment, as Heather walked away, Abbey wondered whether he should have lied, but he had never seen a lion. Two weeks later, he bumped into her. The other girls had walked on ahead and Abbey expected her to run and catch up with them but she stopped and smiled.

‘So where does Abbey from Uganda go on a night out?’

Not to sound backward Abbey said, ‘At *The Merchant*, it is...’

‘*The Merchant*? I hear you blacks get up to all sorts there,’ she punched his arm playfully.

Rather than protest that nothing untoward happened at *The Merchant’s*, Abbey smiled. He held, in either hand, a bin full of material cutting, thread and other rubbish. He had been on his way to the outside tip.

‘I would like to see *The Merchant*, Abbey. Would you show me?’

‘Of course,’ Abbey smiled self-consciously.

Though they agreed to meet that Friday night, Heather ignored him for the rest of the week. Abbey begun to doubt she had meant it. He was therefore surprised to find Heather waiting outside the depot when he arrived for his shift that Friday. When she saw him, she had motioned him to follow her and they went into a side corridor next to the depot called Passage No 1. There, standing under the willow, she told him that they would meet at *The Merchant’s* entrance at 11 pm and she disappeared.

Abbey arrived ten minutes early and fretted. Heather would walk into the club, wrinkle her nose and walk out. Now *The Merchant* seemed grubby, the people coarse: the smell of toilets at the entrance was garrotting.

Heather was already excited when she arrived. When they went in and the music was so loud and it was crowded and smoke was everywhere she shouted, ‘You people know how to have fun,’ and Abbey relaxed. They danced until Nelson turned off the music at 2 pm. Outside, Abbey was wondering what to do when Heather suggested that they go to Wilbraham Road; someone she knew was having a party there. When they arrived Abbey was surprised to find other white women with black men, mostly black Americans. There was a lot of American alcohol as well. ‘It’s from the American air base,’ Heather had whispered. She even introduced him to her friends. One of them remarked,

‘So this is Heather’s African.’

‘Are you a prince?’ another woman asked. Before Abbey answered the woman turned to Heather and said, ‘Most of these fellows claim to be princes.’

Abbey shook his head even though his grandfather was Kabaka Mwangi whom the British had exiled in Seychelles. Once, he heard a shine girl make fun of her own father who claimed to be a prince. Abbey had stopped himself from spitting in her face; how would she know that on the one hand princes in Africa tended to end up as fugitives fleeing assassination, and on the other they had the privilege to travel to Europe?

There were no black women or shine girls at the party but Abbey did not ask why. A door to an exclusive world of acceptance had opened to him. At *The Merchant*, when people saw him with Heather they had looked at him with concerned surprise. Here, no one cared. They danced until six in the morning when Heather caught the early bus back home.

The following weekend she suggested they go to *The Mayfair*. Abbey asked,

‘How do you know about black people’s clubs?’

‘Girls say the most exciting things about black people’s clubs. You must take me to *The Cotton Club* and *Frascati*. I insist.’

Kwei was worried about him. He told him that for a seaman saving to return home women were expensive, but for soft Abbey a white woman would devour him like mashed potatoes.

‘It is a story to tell though, when I return home.’

‘If you return.’

Abbey and Heather went out another three weekends touring, even the West Indian clubs on Oxford Road. Heather was nice to him. When he was out with her people noticed him. When white men glared at him Abbey felt alive. But black women, even shine girls, kissed their teeth and looked away. When Heather said, ‘You’re painfully tall,’ he walked at his full height.

One Friday, after 2 am, rather than go partying, Heather said she was tired and wanted to lie down. As she could not go home, she asked him to take her to his flat. Abbey could have died of anxiety. Firstly, people said Africans smell; didn't Heather know? Secondly, what if their room smelt of offal?

It was too late to worry because they were walking past Greenheys Police Station, down Great Western Street where he lived. Mercifully, the room was clean and tidy. He had been ready to spend his savings on a hotel room if he saw Heather wrinkling her nose. She seemed too tired to notice any smells. He offered her their bed while he slept on the floor. After a while, Heather asked him to get in bed with her and hold her. When he told Kwei about it the following day, Kwei said, 'You're not going home.' Abbey started looking forward to Fridays. At work, it started to hurt when Heather ignored him.

They had been seeing each other for five months when Heather stopped coming to work. Abbey could not ask why; people would get suspicious. Two months later, when he had decided that Heather had started her course in Scotland but had not bothered to say goodbye, she turned up at his house. It was a different Heather. She was fearful and angry. She needed somewhere to hide.

Abbey was confused. Heather needed a room but she would pay her own rent. She did not want him to look after her but she needed him to go to the shops for her. Yes, he was responsible for her condition but she was giving up the child for adoption. She shouted at him when he turned up at her flat. 'What will the neighbours say, first being pregnant and then with a black child?' Abbey insisted that as long as she carried his child he would come to see her.

It was by chance that Abbey found out when Heather went to have the baby. Her landlady told him that she had been taken to St Mary's Hospital the day before. Luckily, when he got there, Heather had not been discharged but the baby had been taken.

Abbey made a scene. That is how he found out which home the baby had been placed in and got his name on the child's birth certificate.

For a month now, Abbey had been visiting the home twice a week to see the baby he had named Moses. It was only a month since he last saw Heather but, in the absence of her picture or an article to remember her by, the most vivid memory Abbey had of their relationship was that freaky willow whose limp branches, rather than look up the sky like normal trees, drooped to the ground. Heather always waited under the willow.

When Abbey and Kwei arrived at the children's home in Macclesfield two days later, the matron pretended not to see them. This made Abbey more nervous but Kwei went up to her and said,

'We want to see our son.'

'Who is *your* son?'

'Moses Baker.'

'You're not his father.'

'In our culture my brother's son is my son.'

'Moses is up for adoption. A nice couple have finalised the adoption process.'

'Ah?' Abbey, who had left Kwei to do all the talking gasped. 'But you say he's sleeping every time I come. Why lie?'

'His mother wanted him adopted.'

'Which mother, the woman who would not put him on her breast?'

'We're doing what is best for Moses.'

'Ooh, you see them, Kwei? They're taking my child.'

'I am only following instructions.'

'Taking him from his real blood to make him anonymous?'

'Bring his records. We need to see his records first.' Kwei banged the desk.

'You need to calm down, both of you! I can't listen to both

of y...’

‘Calm down, calm down, when we are losing our blood, would you calm down?’

‘I’ll bring the records.’ The woman found a way out. ‘But you need to calm down.’

When she left the room Kwei turned to Abbey and whispered, ‘They don’t know how to deal with us angry. We frighten them. If you stand there all orderly and soft then they’ve got you.’

The woman returned with a blue folder. ADOPTED was stamped across the cover. Abbey and Kwei stared in disbelief.

‘He has been taken, Abbey.’

‘Why didn’t you tell me? Hmm? Why didn’t you tell me every time I came?’

‘He was only taken this morn...’

‘Thieves, why don’t they make their own?’

‘I want my child back.’

‘There is nothing I can do, Mr Baker.’

Now Abbey broke down and wept. ‘How can I go home Kwei, How can I leave my blood here?’

Even the woman softened. ‘Look, I am really sorry, but in this country...’

‘Don’t tell me about this country, you’re not good people.’

‘Abbey,’ Kwei started quietly. ‘Write, write everything. Our blood is strong, Moses will come looking.’ He turned to the woman, ‘You have made Moses an anonymous child. You must take that to your grave.’

Abbey picked up a pen and opened the file. First, he changed the child’s name from Moses Baker to Junju Juuko. Under father, he changed his name from Abbey Baker to Ssuna Junju. In brackets he wrote ‘(son of Mutikka Juuko of Kawempe, Kampala Uganda)’. He paused for a second and then added ‘Junju’s father wanted to keep him’ and he signed it. He put the pen down and walked out. He heard Kwei say, ‘I’ll write down Uncle Kwei’s contacts as well,’ but Abbey did not stop.

The Making Of A Revolutionary

Olatunde Madsen

Chapter

From the roof, my flat roof, I can see the city centre. And the big hotel clock. I never need to look at my watch. Sometimes I don't even wear it. My watch. My roof is the 602 roof. The asphalt is good. No leaks. It might not be asphalt. From here the PSV looks scrawny, puny. Baron Turbo Charge's throne is a puny box. Chuh! Why they name Robert Adam Crescent after a fireplace man when the whole block is freezing? When it's cold I turn slow.

The people in this computing class are extremely slow. Operating system code is simple. Where is the complexity in $N = \text{size}(u)$
 $\text{do } j = 1, n$
 $\text{Sweeps do } i = 1, N-2$
 $u(i) = 0.5 * (u(i-1) + u(i+1) - f(i))$
end do end do end subroutine relax? If he tells it us one more time I might start to whistle.

I have studied Felix's dogs 83 days now. Like others I thought at first his dogs was attacking the trees: trees in the middle of the Crescent grass patch never get high cos of Felix's dogs. They jump, hang there by their jaws, like fruit. Quivering.

But now I realise it is as likely the trees is putting out some scent to attract them. If you observe the dogs, you see them try to go past, trembling. Their feet stiffen, necks twitch. Then the tree scent, the tree magnetism catches them and they can't resist, pulled like washers to a big magnet and -ding! they stuck on the tree. Probably the tree is benefitting from their saliva. Enzymes. A tree-dog symbiosis.

She nice. She wear this perfume as she code. But under that scent is this sweet, liquorish, mixed herbs scent. She been messing up my code with that scent. Making it go wrong, type

of squiggly. That scent isn't one I've smelt before.

Why does a woman answer her door in mash up Dalmation slippers and a pink no belt dressing gown an nuttin else? Yes it's Sunday morning, but at last check it was 62 minutes to midday. She knows both Fortran Expressions and Jackson Method. This is not COBOL I am working on, woman. She gives me the book, staring at it, muttering. First I miss what she says but then I realise she say 'damn'. I stand by her step a while undizzying from her smell. I can't think of the name of the bird I can hear squawking. It's not a blackbird or something. Sounds like it's in a big room.

You know I have a problem to dance. Swaying to the Saxon Sound system. The PSV too big, a big room. I prefer Blues where I can jus rock with the crowd. The base vibration is in excess of engineering limits. Its frequency is the same as the resonant frequency of the walls. I look at the vibrations climb the walls to the ceiling. As the walls move they induce torque. The PSV ceiling has steel beams - not welded, they nut and bolted. They have a maximum load. At 400 psi they gonna start working loose. I dance best I can, both eyes on the ceiling bolts.

The White Horse is packed, with the football team victorious so in good spirits. Fog Horn is singing. His name Fog Horn cos they play at Hough End Fields where the fog sometime roll across so you can't see the ball, but Fog Horn blows 'Mine!' and everyone know even if they don't see him that he gonna come chargin through. His voice is a cornet more than a horn, but is no such thing as a Fog Cornet so you understand they settle for this slight inaccuracy.

It wasn't so much I try to kiss her so much as I try to taste her scent. She place a finger on my lips and say no kiss on first date. Second date you cook for me and I call on you. Fine, I tell her. Date, time and menu. It's 5pm Saturday and I choose the menu. Which is good. I can choose something I want to eat.

People always reinventing the wheel. You got million pound

companies cooking for you and putting it in a can and on a shelf so all you got to do is pull up the lid, but I saw vegetables in her kitchen so I expect she wants this freshness thing.

Fog Horn roll the pastry out for me, chop the cheese and throw it in with onion then another pastry on top. In the oven 40 minutes and it's done he say. He show me how to switch on the oven. I shoo him out. He lingering like he's the one got the date. When he gets on the other side of the door he tells me to keep proper watch of the time. A weather eye he calls it. Maybe he's spent too much time outside.

It's 5pm and she don't show. I test the pie with a knife and is ready. I slice it and eat it. At 5:23 she call round. I fry her pancake and gravy. She not hungry. We chat and then I'm wearing no clothes. I always wondered what this animal wrestling was about, the mating thing. It's complicated at first. This goes here. That is for that. The angle is so, this applied here, no precise timings or accurate routines, nothing you could flowchart.

Then something happens that's like when a whale leaps out the water and splashes down. Like Baron Sound System vibrated every cell and my skin bathed in chilli and I'm hanging on like Felix dog to the tree, quivering at the smell, herbs everywhere.

She left at 11.37pm. My pulse the first time was 124, then it was 93. Temperature indoors 76F Outdoors 72F.

Verse

I think he is amazingly heroic, Viraj Mendis. Tamil Tiger, revolutionary leader, exile, wanted for fomenting the revolution that will bring down the ruling classes, asyllumed in the Hulme Ascension Church. The Government threatening to send in the police, the army, the air force to seize and deport him to his death.

I wanted to be one of his Praetorian Guards. I wanted to kiss

his hand. But he was surrounded by legions of wary defenders. The closest I got was a beardy nod as he passed me one morning, heading to the Church toilets. His eyes were revolutionary rocks.

Then at computers class I noticed this man who bears some resemblance. Tall, long limbed, unkempt, without the glasses. Sparse and yet muscular. The zeal in his eyes. We swap code. I cue him for some compliments but he offers none, only more code. Then this note while we are both on a vigil outside the church: *My revolutionary sista we shall continue the fight mano a mano, leg to leg, till the new dawn of freedom.* I like the mano-a-mano, leg to leg stuff, at least it places us on the physical. Fighting the power.

He accepts my invitation to the PSV. We dance there. He arrives wearing his usual scruffs. They let him in anyway, they know him, and what's more he is with me.

He dances like he has no knees and his hips have become stiff. People smile kindly at him, not that he sees them, his head is tilted up to the roof all the time. I don't think he's looking for God. But his arms aren't rigid, they're loose, flopping around his waist and out from his sides, banging into the people around him. No-one seems to care. Once I get used to him I shake everything. The Jazz Defektors turn up and dance with me. It pumps the place when Salts and his gang strut their stuff. They bring charisma, star quality, he's talking about being in a film soon, with David Bowie. Then Alfonso takes to the floor and dances with me making all the other girls jealous. It's like dancing with Bob Marley himself. The place starts to heave and I slip my hand in his. I leave with my very own Viraj Mendis holding my hand.

At my door he leans in for a kiss. At last! I can feel his manhood slapping my thigh. Who could resist, my finery, the heady cocktail of music, the sweet grassy smell of the summer night. I make him wait though. Keep them keen.

I arrive late for the date, like a girl has got to do. Except he

has eaten everything! He feels no shame about this, seems more confused that I have arrived at all. He looks at me and it takes him a few moments to open the door. He stands in the kitchen looking around and after a couple of false starts rustles up some pancakes like his mother used to make. I have brought him new clothes. If I am dating this guy he has to step up to my standards, sartorially. And some deodorant since he appears to have an aversion to water.

He strips off without shame, right down to his underpants. He is everything I imagined Viraj Mendis to be: lithe, shiny, a few curls of chest hair, the slim buttocks and sinewy legs of an ardent freedom fighter.

I slip his underpants off for him and place his hand on my hips. Everything on him rises. His hair. The pimples on his skin. The expected parts. I realise from his own surprise at this rising that he is about to have his first revolutionary tryst. He is clumsy and excited and quick the first and second times. Then he gets better.

Afterwards he holds me in one long arm, which is bony to lie on. The PSV is livening up, its sounds drifting across us. Later, in a few hours, I will go there. I murmur 'a luta continua' to him. He whispers back 'victoria acerta'.

Unconditional Love

Desiree Reynolds

He didn't think the pain touched him. The slaps that turned into fists, cups, empty cups, full cups, coat hangers, wire flexes, broom handles and finally plates of food. And his little sister watched on, protective, mindful. She still protected him today even though she was eight years younger and still in the house where food and fists flew.

On his first night he sat on the bed and stared out of his eyes. The bulb blinked and swayed above his head, as they did wherever he went. He watched the shadows change. Darkness wasn't a happy place for him. Even in the darkest corners, where the girl holding him, swaying against him, might suddenly let go, a lighter will flair and she would see in his face what she didn't want to see. Shame. His back ached even when nothing was touching it.

Small holes of loneliness opened up within him. Even his shadow had had enough. The room stared at him and decided to chuck him out.

The streets walked him. He was on Broadfield Road, looking for a draw. The same street where they once raced rabbits and a woman was sent to court because she had too many nappies on the line.

The weed made him forget the licks and filled in the holes.

'Do you wanna dance?'

'What?'

He didn't know how he managed to be in The Western, in a corner, his mouth on a woman.

His soul rattled inside him, looked through the holes in his eyes, for someone to talk to. He wished he could cry.

He drew the weed in, held his breath to allow the smoke to fill his lungs, find the empty spaces and put in them the joy and laughter he was missing.

‘Boy, where’s the money?’

‘I...’

His dad’s face changed shape as he punched his son and took the money to the betting shop.

The music pumped out, shook his organs, moved the smoke around him quicker. White rum and coke made his teeth sing. Women watched him, he watched them. He got up to go to the toilet and bumped into someone.

‘Mine out, bredrin!’

‘Sorry. Easy yeah.’

‘Hey, is dat you? Mark? Mark Brown?’

‘What?’

‘Mark? Miss Glesson’s class?’

He vaguely remembered an old white woman, looking meaningful, at his cuts and bruises over the top of her gold-rimmed glasses and tutting about animals.

‘It’s you, isn’t it?’

‘Yeh.’

‘It’s me.’

‘Look...’

‘It’s John, John Morgan.’

‘Yeah?’

‘Check me star, look good. It’s John!’

‘Oh yeah,’ he didn’t remember and he didn’t care. All he could think about was the piss waiting to burst from him.

‘Yeah man. You goin’?’

‘Nah man, bartroom.’

He pushed through, went to the toilets. His head touched the cold tiled wall in front of him. He didn’t know why his head was so far forward. He heard piss splash on to the piss-soaked floor.

'I need to go home.'

'Whappen, star, you cork up?'

'Huh?'

'You no hear me?'

He turned, fixing himself.

'Do I know you?'

'Jus' chatted to you outside bruv, yuh mad?'

'I haven't got a brother.'

'You know what me mean. It's John.'

'Oh yeah, John.'

His tongue was thick and lazy. What did this fool want with him anyway?

'So...'

'So?'

'You look gone clear.'

'So?'

'Easy man, I jus' wanna ask you something.'

Now the man had his full attention. He saw him for the first time. Big, red, with a twitch that came from the machete chop his grandfather took over a woman that wasn't his grandmother.

'What is it, man?'

Something happens in men's toilets. A vulnerability that is amplified. He looked for a quick exit; the window had mesh on it and the door was behind the man he didn't want to know.

'I jus' wanna...'

He reached up a hand, grabbed the man by his afro and forced it down hard onto the urinal. He heard the porcelain crack, he heard the groan, he felt the body go limp as he pushed him to the floor, amongst the waste and matter of the dancers. He stood for a while over him, kicked him in the stomach, to make sure he wasn't going to get up and left.

In his room with the twitching bulb, he wondered when he would be found, would he talk? He tried not to care.

‘Mum?’

‘Mark?’

‘Yes.’ Silence trembled on the phone. A wide open space was between them. Neither of them knew how to get to each other.

‘Mum?’

He held the phone just away from his ear, goodness knows who had used it before. The hallway was long, dusty, he could hear the life happening in the other rooms. Music climbed up the stairs from the landlady’s gram, ‘Knock three times on the ceiling if you want me.’ He smiled to himself, no one was knocking.

‘Mum?’

He wanted to hear some cornmeal porridge warmth.

‘Is what you want Mark?’

‘I...’

He felt the man’s hair in his hands, he felt the jolting shock of his head, connecting to the porcelain. It felt good.

‘I...’ He didn’t know what to say. He couldn’t find the words. He couldn’t even count them. He hung up and went back to his room.

He woke up thinking about himself and he went to sleep thinking about himself. He needed to get out. When his feet touched the concrete, it steadied him. He walked about Princess Road, with nowhere to go. He could smell his room on him. The sun shone weakly, behind a cloud that looked like the hair of the last woman he’d slept with. He looked into the shop windows at things he didn’t want or need. People didn’t recognise him and he didn’t want them to. He walked to the brewery, like a futuristic, stinking city. All columns and chimneys. The smell of yeast mixed in with the smell of his room made him feel sick. He continued to walk, not used to himself in daylight. He didn’t know what he wanted. He only knew he wanted. And in his wanting, bruises bubbled, love stood waiting. His wants

suffocated him and made him feel as though he was walking through wet tissue.

‘Excuse me’

‘Huh?’

‘Sorry, is this...’

He looked around him, maybe she was talking to someone else.

‘I... er...’

Her glasses reflected the whiteness of the paper she was holding. She turned it around.

‘Just got here and I’m lost,’ she giggled, self-conscious and young. She was shouting and took a headphone off one ear. He hadn’t seen many of those. She was thin and white with short spiky blonde hair and small blue eyes. About twenty. She looked at him and expected an answer; instead all she got was his silence. These streets seemed to be full of white people these days, students or runaways, from Stockport or wherever, replacing the families that he didn’t grow up with, didn’t play with, didn’t eat with, the ones that ignored the screams coming from his house. As he looked at her, there was no remembrance of skin on his fingertips. It had been such a long time. Lack of use had taken away his tongue.

‘What’s up, cat got your tongue?’

Then he hated her, felt her hair in his hands, the crack of her skull against the porcelain. His face couldn’t stop thinking about it.

The aching loneliness tore strips off him, peeled back his skin and left him naked. The flame from the match flared up and out and the light caught him on a nerve. He felt the world had placed him in a bubble that he pushed against, pressed out his hands and feet and tried to find a hole, the exit, instead he was locked in by the skin of life, that ignored him and he was left silently screaming. He cried for all the jokes he wasn’t going to tell. And the hearts flapped around the memories of what he

couldn't say, like fireflies, hypnotised by their own light.

Bits of him went missing through lack of use. He pounded the streets, up Rosebery Street, down Cowsbery and Hartington, until he got his legs back. His lips felt cold, useless, like the dentist had used too much cocaine. His sculptor chipped away at him, he was being made by someone other than himself.

He thought about the blows and the grunts of satisfaction his father would make as his punches connected. He thought about his mum, holding him down and the sweat dripping off his father's face as he kneeled on his chest.

'Don't lie to me boy, where is it?'

But he hadn't spoken, his lip was too swollen.

'Don't mek me ask again!'

But he hadn't spoken.

He looked around him nearly blacking out, at his room and the house and knew that no amount of pain would bring that money back. It had gone from the house and from his father's hands into the bra of the loose women his father relied upon to feel whole.

His father shook him, his feet dangling off the floor.

'Where is it?' His father lifted him and threw him across the room, his mother's face was eager for this, she wanted someone to feel the pain she was in, even if it was her ten-year-old son. She held him up, so his father could punch him again. He could hear his little sister outside the door, her little girl's voice, shrieking, crying for him and threatening to call the police. Sometimes he woke up with the heaviness of his father's knees on his chest and couldn't breathe.

He tried again, because someone had to hear him.

'Mum.'

'Is dat u, Mark?'

'Did you get the money?'

‘Dat was you?’

‘Yes.’

‘Me goin’ to dash it in the bin.’

‘Mum! Don’t you need it?’

‘From you? Why would I want anything from you?’

‘I...’

‘It’s all you fault. He left ‘cos of you!’

‘Don’t! He was no good, Mum. He used to... you...’

‘And what have you done, eh? What you mek of yourself?’

‘I just wanted to give Donna something.’

‘She don’t need nutin’ from you’

‘Please... Can I talk to her?’

‘No.’

‘You thought the money was from him, didn’t you?’

‘What?’

‘You’d be happy to spend it if it came from him, wouldn’t you?’

‘What do you mean?’

‘You heard. When las’ you hear from him?’

‘Get off di phone, Mark.’

‘Put the phone down then, go on, go on’

‘Mark, you goin’ to pay for all the wrong you doin’.’

‘And what about your wrong you’ve done, Mum?’

‘What you talking ‘bout?’

‘What about the...’

The phone clicked and it sounded to him like a thunder clap. He took a strong grip on the phone and smashed it on the wall. It crumbled in his hands.

The men that were too old to work, or avoiding it or doing what they thought was work, dotted the empty pub, the Little Alex, on the corner of Alexander Road and Moss Lane East. A few of the regulars crowded around a radio that was on at the other end of the bar, impatiently listening to the news.

‘What a ting.’

‘No one would do anything to dat likkle white gyal roun’ here.’

‘Except mek she happy, haha!’

‘Heh! In my day, white man and police would be all over here by now, wait! Dem still might come. You mark my words.’

‘Oh, Clarky, dem no want to come here, dem fraid fi we...’

‘Fraid ah what? Us? You mad. Is hingland we deh!’

‘Well, mek dem come.’

‘Me tink she fine ah man an’ is hole up wid him. Too ‘fraid to tell her parents dat she have black and cyan go back!’

‘What di hell is wrong wid you, Ginga, you no see no one want your ol’ mash down tings anymore? Why is heveryting sex to you?’

‘You mean dere’s somting else?’

‘Ah serious business we ah talk.’

‘Alright, Mr Bemson, no watch him.’

‘But him get pan my nerves wid his sex talk, tings goin’ get bad.’

‘How you mean?’

‘A white gyal garn! Missin roun’ ya! You tink white people ain’t gonna come up in here and look fi are?’

‘Well...’

‘Di police, newspaper, gangs, dem skinhead dat want we out, all ah dem are gonna reach right yasso and anybody inna hanyting, betta mine!’

He pointed his huge crooked thumb up. The top had been bitten by the neighbour’s dog who he was teasing with a sharp piece of orange tree twig, when he was four. His father killed it and they never talked to their neighbours again. The look of a dog always made him nervous. He felt guilty. He jabbed the half a thumb at the air. No one knew if he was pointing to the shebeen, down the road, the club next door or the house that stood empty opposite that men took girls into, away from

the eyes of the streets. The quiet bar became quieter as people checked themselves, adjusted themselves, shifted about in seats and smoothed out collars.

He looked at the barman, words collected in his mouth and he couldn't stop them flowing.

'No one wants to eat dinner with me, no one wants to touch me, no one wants to dance with me, no one wants to hear me laugh.'

'Yes son, what can I get you?'

'No one wants to hear me.'

'I said, what can I get you?'

'No one..'

'You said that already.'

'But...'

'Look, I don't know what's wrong with you. I don't know if you've watched too much telly and I'm actually not interested, so, what can I get you or fuck off!'

Everyone stared, just for a second and then carried on talking.

He went and sat in his usual corner, just outside the toilets.

THE PLAY

THE ONE HIT WONDER

Olatunde Madsen

Characters

Moses

Herbert

Carmen

Junior

Leroy

Ian

Victor

Penelope

Vastiana

Katherine

ACT ONE

The Reno club, in the early seventies. Time: Friday, 2am.

Sounds of a heavy front door being opened with a key, then a glass internal door swings back. Two sets of footsteps, one set more steady than the other. Flick of a light switch. Sigh of cushions on a banquette as someone sits. Moses and Herbert are two veterans of the Reno. They are in their early to mid forties. Moses is Trinidadian. He's half drunk and intends to get completely so. With the help of the contents of the 'closed for renovations' Reno club bar. Herbert is Jamaican. His voice is deeper than Moses'. Herbert's tone is important in counterbalancing the deliberate saccharine Motown style elements in the songs and storyline.

MOSES: This is great. You really making this happen. Nice, comfy chairs, nice bar. Almost ready to fling open the doors again

HERBERT: Drink?

MOSES: Just a small white rum.

HERBERT: Place is haunted though.

MOSES: What?!

HERBERT: Ghost of Junior. Like a poltergeist, comes in, sits anywhere, starts throwing things around.

MOSES: (*unbelieving*). I remember Junior like it was yesterday. Those days at the club.

HERBERT: He's still here. Won't leave without Carmen, he says. Junior and Carmen. Was like Anthony and Cleopatra. No, Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor.

MOSES: Uh-huh, I remember. They was fiery.

HERBERT: Remember how Carmen used to sing like a nightingale?

MOSES: Tell me again.

HERBERT: I don't know. Talking about it summons their spirits.

MOSES: (*gentle goading*). C'mon, can't start painting this place. Not at this hour.

HERBERT: We really played then. You on snare drums, me on double bass. Mikey on horns. Carmen singing. We were the best.

MOSES: Number one.

They do drum rolls and walking bass with vocals, jamming.

HERBERT: Then Junior would step up to the mic.

MOSES: He was a sensation.

HERBERT: The One Hit Wonder, they called him.

MOSES: Mmm... Fill me glass with that wicked rum, Herbert, and tell it me one more time. You say his ghost is here now? That's new.

HERBERT: It's gin. You know all about what happened with Junior-

MOSES: I know, I know. But you tell it good: "the pearly lights, the madness, his voice soaring, the broken heart" and that.

HERBERT: Uh-huh. Clear as crystal I remember... Respect. That's what everybody had for Junior, even in the early days. I was just a session musician then. Junior was a guy with ambition and a pawn shop guitar. I'd see him come and go with his band, the Declaimers. What happened to that band?

MOSES: Junior. Junior. What did he say to you, when you met him for a drink at Leech's Funeral House? On Princess Rd? Leech's?

HERBERT: I met him at Leech's- it was the only place you

could practice without waking nobody. I mean, the dead was there but they didn't awake... till now. Drink?

MOSES: Don't mind if I do.

Moses pours himself some gin.

HERBERT: Junior. He was just turned 18 and I poured him a birthday drink. He said I played good and we talked – music theory mostly. He'd studied it you, see, at college – and he'd picked up a lot from Mama Tunes then, of course. Mama Tunes, she wasn't his mother but she was like...

MOSES: Leech's place: you pour Junior a drink. What did he say – about his dreams?

HERBERT: Yeah. He was always a nice guy. Shy, but still very certain of himself – is that a contradiction?

MOSES: No. He dreamed big?

HERBERT: Like every other young broke musician in Moss Side he had dreams: America, the Big Time, his name in lights – limos, a big house back home in the sun... He was quiet, but he had confidence, a self-possession about him that made you believe he could make it, if anybody could. He could sing.

Song, to be sung in the voice of Junior. It's a naive, early (approx 1960) Motown style number

I'm yearning
I'm burning
I'll be a star soon
Write a million dollar tune
Make all the girls swoon
I'm yearning
I'm burning.

HERBERT: You hear that?

MOSES: We just imagined it. It's the gin.

HERBERT: ...I remember clear as Royal Scot crystal. He left Leech's heading back to the studio, said he had an appointment with his girl-

MOSES: Carmen?

HERBERT: Uh-huh. He was courting her – nice girl and pretty. Went out with her for almost six month.

MOSES: Those times when love was something more than a full bottle of gin.

HERBERT: Uh-huh. She was backing his band, the Declaimers. They were doing alright. Nothing big, but developing. Had a few backroom producers sniffing around. Thing was, he was head over heels with Carmen.

MOSES: And it all ended.

HERBERT: It was bound to happen. She'd been a singer in her own right before she'd joined the Declaimers.

MOSES: He loved her. She didn't love him.

HERBERT: Uh-huh. I remember clear as crystal. He met her one night at the PSV – heard her singing solo – met up and enjoyed each other's company – she was a couple of years older than him, Carmen. She said later she fell for his sharp suit and fresh smile. They went together a couple of nights, and he invited her to join the band. She came in as a backing singer – allowed herself to be told what to do by Junior: when, how to sing, phrasing, how to move. Had to. That's how Junior operated.

MOSES: And that was the problem?

HERBERT: Yebm. She wasn't used to that. She'd been singing professional for over a year... He should have let her sing lead more. She could sing.

Song, to be sung in the voice of Carmen. It's a naive Motown style number. Bright, burnished, upbeat.

Baby I got to be with you
Cos there's nothing we can't do
We can run hell for leather
When we are oh together
It's like a dreamtime
And in the meantime...

I got your picture in my purse
You make me giggle and worse
It was love from the first
You know me chapter and verse
It's like a dreamtime
And in the meantime...

MOSES: She could sing, but he didn't let her so she got mad with him?

HERBERT: She thought he was in love with himself too much – never gave her a chance to stand in the spotlight.

MOSES: Was it true?

HERBERT: Pretty much. She got frustrated, angry, made up her mind to move on personally and artistically. She was gonna chase her own rainbow again.

MOSES: So she told him it was over between them?

HERBERT: Yebm-

MOSES: Why didn't she stay in the band even so?

HERBERT: If she left one she had to leave the other. How Junior was.

MOSES: So she told him it was over.

HERBERT: Right in the middle of rehearsals at the... No, it was in that place the blind drummer had, with the egg

boxes stuck to the walls, for soundproofing, in the engineers booth there. The mics were live there and everybody heard – the band... I remember that day clear as Royal Scot crystal. She really hit him for six that day.

Flashback music.

CARMEN: It's over, Junior, I've had enough.

JUNIOR: What are you talking about?

CARMEN: Me and you- we're through.

JUNIOR: Hush with this foolishness.

CARMEN: I'm leaving to do my own thing.

JUNIOR: You're joking.

CARMEN: And I want that mic out there, I paid for it.

JUNIOR: Who is he?

CARMEN: There's nobody else.

JUNIOR: C'mon, Carmen. We're a team.

CARMEN: We'll see each other around. We can still be friends.

JUNIOR: Don't do this. Please. You mean everything to me.

CARMEN: I'm sorry-

JUNIOR: Sleep on it.

CARMEN: It's no big deal. If I meet you on the street, we can stop and chat and be friends.... It's just ...

JUNIOR: Who is it!

CARMEN: Michael, there's no-one, honestly!

JUNIOR: Liar!

CARMEN: For God's sake! People split up every day all over the world.

JUNIOR: What are you talking about?

CARMEN: I'll always love you as someone very special. It's just we two, we're not, I mean-

JUNIOR: We're not what? What do you mean?

CARMEN: I mean...*(Blurts)* I'm not going to end up as some faded thirty year old backing singer to a no-hope group.

JUNIOR: OK, that's what it is. You can sing lead on the next song.

CARMEN: You've been saying that too long. It never happens.

JUNIOR: This time I promise, I'll...

CARMEN: You never do. You just can't resist – you can't stop yourself. It's just take, take, take.

JUNIOR: You never given me the chance yet.

CARMEN: I've got to do something with my life, Michael. I've got to find wings and take off.

JUNIOR: You've had offers elsewhere?

CARMEN: No, but I'll find them.

JUNIOR: You're throwing us all up for a... a dream?

CARMEN: It's an honest assessment. You can call it what you like but my mind's made up. And don't try to talk me out of it. I've been thinking about this for days.

JUNIOR: You can't do this, your ruining my – you can't walk out on me and leave... wrecked like this-

CARMEN: Don't be so dramatic, there's not that much to ruin. Look around: a pile of rusting electronics, a bunch of off key musicians, your way off – yes, way off – voice, and none of you with a clue how to mix. I'm sorry Michael, but it's a cut-throat business. Every John and Jill is out there

putting down tracks. You've got to have something different. And the band and you don't... (*Silence*). I'm sorry, I didn't mean it like that.

JUNIOR: It's OK, you said it and you meant it. Not like that, but you meant it all the same... You can go now.

CARMEN: I will. I'll just collect my things... It's for the best... Things will sort themselves out, you'll see. Oh, Michael, look at me please... Don't cry.

JUNIOR: Leave. You've hurt me enough already.

CARMEN: Alright. I'm going.

Song by Junior: Topsy Turvy.

My whole world's gone topsy-turvy
I can't hold nothing down
If there was a Prince of Tears
I'd be wearing his crown (his crown!)

My whole world's gone topsy-turvy
The sun's gone sad and blue
There's only rain at the end of the rainbow
Now I'm without you (without you!)

Chorus and backing vocals.

“Ooooh- the world spins round and round
And I can't keep from falling down
Ooh the birds fly happy and free
But not me – no – not me – ee!
My whole world's gone topsy-turvy

I feel whipped like a spinning top
I toss and turn on my pillow
And it just don't stop (it just don't stop!)

Fade.

Scene: The Reno club, 3am. A card game is in full swing.

LEROY: Are you a mouse or a man? If you're gonna bet, bet something! ...You could be bluffing. Or double bluffing.

JUNIOR: I could be the Pope or Malcolm X. It's speculation. My money's on the table...Any test.

LEROY: Sing.

JUNIOR: Except singing.

LEROY: You said, 'Any test'. So sing!

Junior sings.

I'm waiting for a knock on my door
Not daring to hope that she's there
Picking myself up off the floor
Stitching up all the tears
(Tears in my heart, tears in my heart, tears in my heart, girl)

Dancing with girls that aren't you
They're sweet but this isn't new -
I'd rather be any - where
So long as I'm with you
(So long as I'm with you, I'm with you, with you, girl)

LEROY: The song of a desperate man! He's bluffing.

IAN: Raise him then.

LEROY: Since when I take advice off you? You're nothing but a fool.

IAN: (*indulgent sarcasm*). Why?

LEROY: You're a qualified land surveyor. Expert in building roads, bridges, pushin back hills and that. And you working as a hat check boy.

IAN: It's temporary.

LEROY: One year temporary! Like you losing this kitty

money here gonna be temporary!

VICTOR: Lay off of him, Leroy.

LEROY: And you. A pilot. 'Flew Spitfires' you tell me. Now you drive a bus. All of you, nothing but fools. Better off back home. At least I came as a peasant. At least I improved myself.

IAN: You used to dig under the glorious sun, smell of flowers and goats and your mama's cooking in your nose. Now you down a pit, you step in a cage and descend into a mile of darkness, damp, drilling rock every day. Coming up for air, your lungs as black as your face. That's improved?

LEROY: Shut up and play.

VICTOR: We waiting on you.

LEROY: Victor, you been married a year and you wife not pregnant yet? Why so slow?

VICTOR: The whole thing is quite difficult.

LEROY: I thought it was simple, just a matter of... (*Makes a train chugging noise*).

VICTOR: Katherine is a sensitive woman. Everything has to be just right.

IAN: My Therese is like that too. The right lighting, the right music, turn the heater up full wick, can't be people in the other rooms either side – the walls are paper thin in the house. Got to oil the bed springs in advance so they don't squeak. Even then sometimes she just wrap up, cross up and turn away.

LEROY: You have to have the right lines.

VICTOR: You going to lend us some?

LEROY: 'Give me some sugar, baby'. 'Fireman's knocking with his hose'. 'You are the moon and the sun, I'm pulled

by your tides, your beauty it makes my mouth smile wide'.
And don't be stealing my lyrics neither, Junior!

VICTOR: With Katherine, I think she, you know, she get up early, two buses then start cleaning at the hospital, mopping the floors, three hundred and sixteen steps, one thousand and forty yards of corridor, with the mop, left, right, left right, don't miss no corners. Then after lunch she start on the dishes, domestic ancillary, scrubbing the swill buckets, loading the plates. Then two buses home and clean the house. By the time she finish its late late an she tired man, dog tired.

IAN: She get a rest the weekend?

VICTOR: Weekend she just want to sleep all through. Only time she wake is when I cook rice an peas.

LEROY: She nice though. You check her hat if she asked, Ian, nuh?

VICTOR: Don't push me, Leroy. I know you drinkin, but...

JUNIOR: C'mon, let's play Poker!

LEROY: What about you, Junior. I heard you an Carmen fallen out?

JUNIOR: This is a knitting circle or Poker? Let me shuffle, give them here.

LEROY: A rumour reach my ears she call you an the band, what was it? Yes, ' a bunch of talentless Afros'. Hehehe.

JUNIOR: I'll raise you five.

LEROY: Hoping to raise some money for more singing lessons? I'd donate, it's a needy cause, but the children's Christmas coming up.

VICTOR: True. They doing a fundraising dance here for the children this Christmas. They going to get them all presents.

Kathy is organising it.

IAN: When is the dance?

VICTOR: Two weeks, Thursday.

IAN: How much?

VICTOR: (*holds up coins*). Two of these. Ticket only. Be a big night. Hewan Clarke, Persian, Juggla all on the decks. Vinyl be hot, man.

LEROY: I'll buy four tickets once this game is over.

VICTOR: That's generous.

LEROY: Amount of money I'm gonna take off you fools, I'll buy your wife a dress too. She need cheerin up, livin with a sourpuss like you. (*To Ian.*) I buy you a box of fireworks, stick where the sun don't shine, an mebbe make you get a move on quitting that 'temporary' hat check job.

IAN: In a generous mood, much appreciated. (*To Victor, Junior.*) We got to listen to this stuff forever?

VICTOR: Don't pay him no mind, he's full cut. The dance it's a good thing. Some folks struggle you know, kids got holes in their shoes, wearing hand me downs that's been handed down an handed down. Some never seen a new toy in their little lives.

LEROY: God yes, that's sad. You breakin my heart. Let's all stop and weep shall we? Now play!

JUNIOR: Since when you get such a hard heart, Leroy?

LEROY: Since last week I lose one week's wages at this table listening to Victor's sob stories an lunacies. The man's clever like a magician. Using distraction while he mess with the cards. This time round nobody leaves till I win my money back.

IAN: I'm hungry. It's way past 3am. My spirit's willing to play

on, but my belly's empty.

LEROY: I got it covered. Fried chicken, dumplin, gravy, next room. Stay right there. Don't move. Junior watch them rogues – both a dem – last time they had five Aces between them, you understand. Deck only has four. They had five.

VICTOR: You just drinkin too much Bell's, man. Bell's got you seeing double.

LEROY: Five's a hodd number. There's no double make five. Watch them, Junior. Watch the cards. Right... Chicken, dumplins an, ummh. Nobody leave!

Leroy exits to adjacent room.

VICTOR: We better let him win. Else he vex, vex, vex.

IAN: If we don't take his money, some slick at the nex table he sit down at will. Better to lose to friends. That's what friends are for.

VICTOR: Still... He's not right in the head. Ever since his mother die and he couldn't make it back for the funeral in time. They sent him photos in the post. Feels God is kicking him. Let's just slip him some good cards, he won't notice. Anybody got an ace?

JUNIOR: I got an ace.

IAN: I got two.

VICTOR: Give him them. Take away three of his cards and give them him. Swap, swap, swap. Fast. I hear him.

JUNIOR: But I'm here to win. I need the money.

VICTOR: We all need the money but this man needs a break. Sometimes you got to give a brother a break. How much you put in?

JUNIOR: Ten

VICTOR: There. Take that.

JUNIOR: That's not winning. That's breaking even.

VICTOR: Here. Makes eleven. Finished. Finito. Now fermay la bouche. (*Mimes 'shut your mouth'.*) Chocks away. He's back.

Clatter of plates as lero y returns, unsteady on feet.

LEROY: Four dumplings and one chicken wing – no, two dumplings and one chicken wing each.

IAN: Don't mind if I do. Very nice. Almost fresh. Always makes me dry in the throat, dumpling. Maybe I need to go home, get a drink.

LEROY: Here, water, water, drink. Drink like a camel and I still got more where that came from.

IAN: Don't mind if I do. Nice glass.

LEROY: Want a larger one? That one good enough?
Toothpick?

IAN: Later mebbe.

LEROY: Let's play then. You watched them?

JUNIOR: I never blinked once.

LEROY: On your mother's life you watched them?

JUNIOR: These are two ugly guys, but I watched them, I watched them, man.

LEROY: And they never cheated? Didn't mess with the cards?

JUNIOR: On the grave of my ancestors, they not cheated with the cards.

LEROY: On your mother's life they didn't mess with the cards?

JUNIOR: I already said.

LEROY: On your mother's life they not mess with the

cards? There's a difference. 'Not cheated with' is not the same as 'not messed with'. Swear on your mother's life they not messed with the cards.

JUNIOR: What is this? Suddenly you're Perry Mason or something? Splitting hairs. We come to count how many angels can dance on the top of a pin needle or we come to play Poker? Play! Raise or fold! This is the Reno, Moss Side, not the Old Bailey Crown Court!

VICTOR: Nice chicken. Cook it yourself?

LEROY: In pure palm oil. Now what I want to know is, how can I leave the room with a Royal Flush hand and I come back and it's turned into three aces and jack. Uh? You people think Leroy is stupid?

IAN: Three aces? Then I fold.

VICTOR: Three aces? I fold too.

JUNIOR: I'm out already.

VICTOR: You win, Leroy. You played good tonight, like you was on fire. Pot's all yours. Three of a kind beats my rubbish. And Ian's rubbish too.

LEROY: Me left the room with-

VICTOR: You ever hear the saying 'quit while you're ahead'?

LEROY: --With-

IAN: Spit in the sky an it land on your head.

LEROY: --With a Royal Flush.

IAN: It wasn't a Royal Flush, it was a Straight Flush.

LEROY: Got you!

IAN: Huh?

LEROY: 'It wasn't a Royal Flush it was a Straight Flush'. So. You knew my cards!

VICTOR: Give him another tot of Bells.

LEROY: (*Leroy swigs glass of bells*). You knew! Get on your feet, let's finish this. Damn cheats. Swindlers. Ring the bell, seconds out, I'm going to punch your lights out. (*Leroy slumps.*)

VICTOR: Only bell he heard all night is the Bells bell.

IAN: Only man can snatch defeat from the jaws of victory.

JUNIOR: We not leaving him this money?

IAN: He's in no fit state. Drop it all outside. Give it all away. Wake up an waste it in a Blues, or the place next door to that.

VICTOR: No. We leave it him, minus certain deductions. Like the two tickets for the fundraising Christmas dance. He said he was going to buy two of dem, right?

IAN: Four. And minus he said he buy a new dress for my wife.

VICTOR: Said that too. Then there was the firecrackers. He wanted me to have some to shove up my... Well, I got a big batty. Gonna cost him a lot of firecrackers.

IAN: OK, we deduct for all a that and... well, not much left now. Leave him what's left. Done.

VICTOR: Leroy, I salute you. Nice playing poker with you, Sir.

IAN: Nice game.

JUNIOR: Next game I'm playing with serious people, not you lightweights.

VICTOR: That's the drink talking. Adiós. We'll see you next week.

IAN: Alligator.

JUNIOR: Bye.

Wind whistles as external door opens then slams shut

THE INTERVIEWS

The following are excerpts from interviews undertaken as part of Commonword's Ghosts: Disappearing Histories project. The interviews are with clubgoers and DJs.

HEWAN CLARKE

I have a memory as a child – where we lived in Jamaica there was a large field next to us and there used to be a lot of events that took place in the fields – and I have a distinct memory – I can't remember how old I was, I must have been really, really young – I remember going up to a speaker box and actually thinking that the musicians were inside there playing the instruments. I have never told anybody that (laughter), but I do remember that. I thought yes, they have the musicians in there playing. I had no idea that it was all electronic and stuff like that. And then coming over here in the sixties we always had music in the house. Sundays the tradition was my dad would put the radiogram on and we would all listen to music. Mainly at that time it was ska, blue beat, reggae and stuff like that. So I grew up, you know, I was always surrounded by music – always. Constantly.

Moving forward a little bit then, what led you into becoming a DJ?

What led me into becoming a DJ? That is a difficult question. It was just one thing from another really. It wasn't a conscious decision of right, I am going to be a DJ, let's get on with this. I have been surrounded by music and when my dad stopped buying music I wanted to continue to be surrounded by music, so I actually went out and started buying music myself. Mainly reggae. And then after a while I remember meeting up with a new group of friends who were into jazz at the time and listening to some jazz stuff, Herbie Hancock and stuff like that, thinking wow this is good, I am ready for this type of music. And so I kind of stopped buying as much reggae and started buying a lot more jazz. And then you got to an age where you started going out into clubs, into the town centre, and you

were listening to what the DJs in the clubs were playing. They were playing mainly jazz funk – this is sort of like late seventies, nineteen seventy five, nineteen seventy six. Something like that. And I realised that a lot of the records they were playing, I had them. So my friends started asking me to do parties for them and I started to do parties for them and then some of the parties were held in nightclubs and club managers would come over and say “Oh, we like your selection of music, would you like to...” It was one of those things. It wasn’t a conscious decision that I was going to become a DJ. It was just one thing leading onto another really, and you just took advantage of them as they came along.

So you were about eighteen, nineteen at the time?

Yes. I mean, I remember in fact I actually started playing in Moss Side youth club, which is now The Powerhouse – which eventually became The Powerhouse in Moss Side. I played there, I played at Burley youth club and then from there I always used to go out to the late night blues and shebeens that used to proliferate around Moss Side and those areas, and I ended up playing in a few of those. And then from there I ended up just kind of like warming up for a sound system in the Nile. I never went to the Reno back in the early days because I wasn’t into soul at all. I remember going down into the Reno once and it was packed and I thought “God,” and I went back upstairs to the Nile. That is basically how it is, just one thing leading to another. It was never a conscious decision. Never.

Was there a difference between the DJs then and the people who DJ now do you think?

Major. You needed more skill back then. You needed to have the ability to read your audience, because back in those days we

were playing, we were working on one deck which was usually a Garrad deck, you were playing seven inch. You would play one seven inch then it finishes and then you would take it off and put another one on and so forth. There was a technique that you could do where you could change the music really, really quickly. I mean, some DJs, they were really phenomenal with it. It was a technique: you have a seven inch – I was right handed so you operated the stylus with your right hand, you would take it off with your right hand and then you would have a seven inch in your left hand and then you would put it on top of the one that was playing and then slowly flip the one that was playing off and then drop the other one on top and then put the needle on, that sort of thing. It takes practice but you could do it really, really quick with practice.

That was a skill that you had to learn to do. If the gap was too long in between the changing of the record, what would happen is that people would drift off the dance floor, so in order to keep that momentum you had to learn how to switch it very quickly and get the next track going before they get a chance to walk off. And you have to, you have to know your audience, there has to be some sort of a happy medium between yourself and your audience. You have to know what they wanted in order to keep them on the floor, keep them dancing all night through. And if you put a bad record on there would be kind of like a down turn on the night and everybody would walk off the floor and that sort of thing.

So it was a more intimate relationship between the DJ and audience?

Yes there were.

And you get the blame if it goes wrong?

Oh yes, yes definitely. I mean the blame situation wasn't

anything negative, you know. People would just hiss you and come up and joke with you and stuff. You would apologise and put another record on or something like that – but yes, there was more intimacy back in those days, and of course the clubs were smaller, you know. They only held, like, a couple of hundred people whereas nowadays you have nightclubs with one thousand, two thousand capacity. It is totally different. It makes it impossible to develop that kind of intimate relationship with that many people in one night. So yes, there is a major difference, a major difference.

So what do you think the role of the DJs was then, in terms of the community and the importance they had?

The DJ was very important in that community. You were like – there is a record that came out in the seventies by Prince Philip Mitchell called *Star in the Ghetto*, where he talked about he is never gonna be a star on Broadway but he is going to be a star in the ghetto, and it is very much like, you know, you were respected. You would be walking down the street and people would be letting on to you and giving you high fives and whatever. You were highly respected. It was just totally different back in those days. You are kind of like – I don't know how to describe it really. It is just that level of respect that people showed towards you. And, you know, if there was ever any trouble in the communities, because everybody knew you, you could be like some kind of community policeman. If you saw a couple of youths fighting or somebody arguing or something like that, you could go over and because you knew both people you could calm the situation down and, you know, diffuse any sort of negativity that was there. Community DJs are – I don't think there are that many of them now, that whole concept of the community DJ. It's communities have sort of like broken up or become more diverse, you know, and a lot of the black

people started moving out of Moss Side and sort of like moving to Stretford or Wythenshawe or places like that and you saw the breakup of the community, I think. You started losing contact with one another. And so the DJs, they would sort of like pull everybody back together by putting parties on and stuff like that, and then old friends would get together and meet up. It is a kind of, it is like a community diplomat, you know. It is just an all round person.

What do you think the social importance of the clubs was then generally?

They were very, very important. They were very important. They were places where people could meet, you know. Single people could meet and they could meet their future partners in nightclubs and stuff like that. I mean, for me, I have noticed that the whole segmentation of the community was sort of, in the case of Moss Side anyway – my experience of that is there were two clubs that I could say in the late eighties, sort of middle to late eighties, that were definitely what we call ‘Black Nightclubs’, where a majority of West Indians, African people would frequent these nightclubs because the music that was played in these clubs was music by black people for black people. There was the Reno, I mean the Reno is known universally for its music policy, and there was another club called the Gallery, which was on Peter Street. And these were two clubs where if you were black you were guaranteed getting in with no problem whatsoever. Any of the other clubs in Manchester you could turn up at and you could probably get stopped by the doormen or something like that – you weren’t always sure that you were going to get in. But the Gallery and the Reno, you knew that you would get in them, so they would have a large concentration of black people in there.

I definitely know that when the Gallery and Reno closed down. The whole situation within the black community

changed. Because people just got bored with nowhere to go anymore, you know what I mean? And it was after that period that all the gangs started forming and all the negativity started coming in on the scene really. But before that we never had that sort of problem because there were places for people to go to let their hair down, you know, to have a laugh, and of course in those days you could smoke indoors. A lot of people were smoking marijuana, you know, and if you go out on a Saturday night and you see a couple of guys having a fight in a corner or in the middle of the street or something, you can guarantee they have been drinking alcohol, they haven't been smoking marijuana. Marijuana doesn't induce you to beat the hell out of somebody else. It is not that sort of thing, it is peaceful thing smoking marijuana. There was never any trouble. And then it became illegal and that is when all the trouble started basically. I don't know, me myself, I think it was a deliberate act closing the Reno and Gallery because for me, definitely, that is when most of the trouble started really.

Did you ever play at any of the shebeens?

Yeah, I played at quite a few of them. I loved them. They are very liberating places for DJs to be because the emphasis is not on making people dance, it is just on being yourself and playing what you want to play, and people came to hear what the DJ was playing. Back in those days, with imports that were coming over from America, the DJ played the part of the middle man, basically. You got new music that was coming over from America and Jamaica and you went to the record shop and you were given a selection to listen to and you choose a selection out of that, and then you took it to your blues or your club and then played it. The people that came in, because a lot of the music that was played, there weren't any radio stations catering for that type of music anyway, so the only place they could hear

this music was in the places that you were playing. And if you had a reputation for keeping up with all the new music that was coming out and playing them, then people would frequent your blues and clubs and stuff like that, and they would want to hear the new stuff as soon as they come out.

The turnover of music was quite phenomenal, you know. You would hear stuff one week and then next week you don't hear it again because there is something new that comes in to supersede it. Nowadays it is different. People, I find especially a lot of people that I grew up playing to, they have kind of like compiled a soundtrack of their lives, basically, and now they are not so keen on hearing the new import stuff, they are quite happy reliving the memories of all the stuff that they grew up with, and that is quite frustrating for me as a DJ because I am very – I class myself as being very forward. I am still going into record shops and I am still downloading new stuff, and I want to play it.

How knowledgeable was the audience in the seventies and eighties?

They were very knowledgeable, because there were a lot of blues, there were a lot of DJs and so they were very knowledgeable. And if you weren't playing a certain track that somebody else was playing, you knew that you were going to lose your audience through that. So you had to keep up with it, you know. And, of course, people would always come over to you and say have you got such and such? And you would think "Oh no, I haven't actually," and then you would go out and you searched out this track that people were asking for.

Not everybody was knowledgeable. You had certain people who knew what was going on, who sort of frequented all the different places, and it was like "Oh, you haven't got the new Marvin Gaye single," or "You haven't got the new Lee Perry single," or stuff like that. And you had to go out and get it, you

know. I think DJs need – we feed off people like that all the time, and as the scene got bigger and bigger and more music started coming out, if you didn't have the capacity to buy everything you depend basically on what people were asking you for, then you would go out and get it, you know.

In terms of an income, were you earning enough to get by as a DJ from the start or were you doing other jobs as well?

Oh no, you had a day job. You didn't really earn that much as a DJ. You earn enough to, just to get you to the record shop on a Saturday and buy another batch of records basically. But I mean all the money that I earned, that I ever earned in any of the clubs, that was put aside, that was just to buy music. The money that I earned from my nine to five, that went to pay the bills and, you know, buy clothes and all that stuff. But all the club money definitely went into music.

And what was it that you did for your day job?

I was an engineer. I was a capstan setter operator working in a small engineering company, making all sorts from nuts and bolts, screws – I had a variety of jobs. I used to change my job every five years. I mean, looking back now, over my CV, I didn't realise at the time that I did that. But I realise that every five years or so I changed my job and moved to a new place, and I have been working since I left school and I have done everything from working in engineering, doing telesales, working in factories, all sorts.

Have you ever earned enough from your DJing to just be able to rely on that?

No. I like to keep myself busy and DJing work mainly took

place at night and I would get up during the day and I would want something to do during the day. I needed a job during the day, I couldn't have just worked in the nightclubs at the night all the time. I would die of boredom during the day, I really would. I am just a workaholic really. I just need to keep myself physically busy and mentally busy and stuff like that.

On a slightly different note, were there any changes in technology that changed being a DJ or changed the way of being a DJ?

There was no need for any technological change in DJing because it is... DJing is just really simple. I mean, all you are doing is exposing people to music. I remember the change when they started bringing twin decks in. The old Garrard twin decks. Belt driven twin decks. So you didn't need to keep, you know – they bought in these twin decks which means that you didn't need that skill of being able to swap the record over really quickly, so that was the end of that because then you would just move from one deck and then on to the other and then back onto the other and so forth.

Headphones came in with that, with the twin decks, because when you were working with the seven inch on one deck you didn't need headphones. It was just a case of putting the record on. And you knew exactly where the music was going to start because you had an empathy with the vinyl. You knew exactly where it was going to come. It was a case of putting a needle a second away from the beginning and then the music comes in. With the arrival of the twin decks, then it was a case of one record is playing and you get another one and put it on, you cue it up with your headphone and you wait for one to finish and then you start that one. It got lazier basically, I think. That is what technology did to the whole prospect of being a DJ, it just made you lazy, because when you were playing with one deck and a seven inch you were constantly busy, you know. Seven

inch would last maybe two or three minutes and so you had two or three minutes to choose your next track, you know. You had to look at your audience and think “Where am I going to take them on the next track?” And you had two minutes to choose your next track – as that finished another one goes on. It just made it lazier, I think.

Did that change the relationship with the audience then?

How did it change the relationship with the audience? I think the audience enjoyed it more because it meant no more gaps. I mean, you could play a seamless blend of music now, you know, as soon as one record was fading – with the swapping over of the seven inch, of course, there had to be a gap. As you take the needle up off that record there was no music and then you would put it on the next one and then music, so there was a gap.

We weren't really mixing back in those days, in terms of beat mixing, as DJs do now. We weren't even aware that the possibility existed for that back in those days. It was just a stop-start, stop-start thing really. I think that concept was a lot better, because you could get through a more diverse range of songs and tempo, whereas nowadays with the beat mixing thing it is kind of like a gradual build up or gradual slow down, you know. So it was more interesting musically, back in the days, I reckon.

So it was kinda like move with the flow of emotions?

Yes, you could. It was easier back then to create that sort of, like, emotional build up with people. Thinking about it now it was like – you had a lot of power as a DJ, you know, to take people to places musically, you know what I mean? And you could build them up and then bring them down again. You had a lot of power really. It was quite liberating.

And how did you feel then when the Reno closed down and the shebeens started to disappear?

It was quite sad really – it was really sad. Everybody was kinda like miserable. You lost contact with friends. People from out of town that used to – at that period Manchester was the place to be, we were like – you had London down there and they were doing their own thing and Manchester had a massive musical reputation, people would travel for miles to come to Manchester. The Reno, you would meet people from all over the country, all over the world, basically. And then when that closed, that was it, you had made friends with those people and you lost them, there was nowhere really for them to go.

The Reno was interesting only in the fact that it was open until six o'clock in the morning. There were very few clubs at that time that had a six o'clock licence. Of course, it was totally illegal, but there was some sort of arrangement between the manager of the club and the local police station around the corner. Every now and again the police would come in and do a raid and kick everybody out and shut it at three o'clock, but mainly it could go on till whatever time you wanted. So when town closed at two o'clock a whole hoard of people would just make their way straight to the Reno, and working in there I would get there at eleven o'clock and there was just myself and the manager. And I remember the undercover police officer coming in to get his stub. It would get passed across in an envelope. I suppose they were taking payola for that, basically. People started coming in twelve o'clock and then at sort of one thirty/two o'clock there was a massive rush of people because it only holds so many people and once it was full that was it, the door was shut, you couldn't get in for love or money. There was always a throng of people outside after two o'clock begging to get in and stuff like that. It became a one out and one in sort of situation. It was quite interesting. Really interesting.

And when did it close?

I think it was nineteen eighty eight it finally closed. By then it had become really dingy. There was a room in the back with an open fireplace and in winter it was always boiling hot in there and of course it was always packed with people who were there dancing so you didn't really need any heat in that place because the bodies generated enough heat for it. But I remember going in there in nineteen eighty eight after they had gutted it. I went in and it was just really sad, just looking at it all. I wish I had a camera back then to have taken a photograph of it, but I never did. And I remember on the floor there was an old membership card, it was green and somebody had scribbled their name across it, but i couldn't read who it was, and I picked that up and I kept that and that is sort of like my keepsake, my memory.

DOROTHY SKINNER

A lot of people was working in those days, and they came home from work and there was a big pub, an Edwardian pub, called the Denmark, which was beautiful – and they had the cheek to knock it down about nineteen seventy. That was on a street called Lloyd Street, I think – the top of Denmark Road and turn left. And they used to have people playing in the band in the afternoon in this Edwardian pub because it was that sedate. I think it was called the band room and from what I have heard they did tea, afternoon tea. That was Moss Side afternoon tea and that lasted until the late fifties I think. The clubs started to sprout up I would say about in the fifties, half way through the fifties.

Were there any other places you remember?

We started going in a café – because this lady came over from Jamaica, she was called Mama Rose and she opened a café and there was lace curtains up. Previous to that it had been some sort of a local shop, like fruit and veg, and she opened it up, put the curtains up, played the music, opened the front door and people was curious. In those days there was no such things as cafés, only Kardomah in town, and you had to be quite wealthy to go and have coffee in the Kardomah. And Lyons Teashops was available in those days.

So she opened this café and we went in one day for curiosity and had a cup of tea. And we did that a few times, and there was a chef at the back called Sammy that was making curry and rice and he would give us a little bit of rice and people was very nice to us. And then the police started patrolling up and down Denmark Road and we was a bit frightened when we was in the café because we was only fifteen and it was only a cup of

tea. The police pulled us up at one stage and said “You shouldn’t be in this café, where do you live?” And then the next time I went in the café Mother Rose said “Would you like a bottle of pale ale?” So we plumped for a bottle of pale ale that day, one and three it was, instead of a cup of tea. She drew the curtain and we was in this little private room, we wasn’t threatened at all by anybody, we sat there had the pale ale – thought it was wonderful at fifteen. The curtains was drawn and I think the next time we went to do that the police detective, one of the detectives came in the front of the café, we got the nod and had to run out through the back door, down the entry. And I had to run very, very fast with no shoes on because I wore high heels in them days – and he never caught us, but he chased us down the entry and he had a trilby on and a big overcoat. We ran like mad and my mother would have killed me if she had found out that happened. But she never ever found out, so that was one very, very frightening incident.

One of the other things, all the immigrant boys used to stand on the Denmark Road having a chat in the sunshine, and the Black Marias used to come along, throw them all in, take them to Platt Lane Police Station, keep them in there for about four or five hours and fine them two pounds – I think it was court the day after.

Why were they arresting people on Denmark Road, just because they didn’t like them?

I think it might be they would have classed it as loitering with intent. I don’t know what the charge was really, but it was an unusual thing to do because I don’t think when you were in Hulme in those years you congregated in gangs all over the place. You didn’t do that, you went to youth clubs and you had your little gangs in different places, but you wasn’t loitering on the streets as far as I can remember in Hulme. Don’t forget,

I came from Hulme and went to Moss Side and everybody congregated on Denmark Road, doing no harm but chatting away. I suppose they were chatting away about the old country and the police put them in the van. God knows what them immigrants ever thought about that, they had just come over from their country, over to wonderful England, and they are getting thrown in the Black Maria.

So how long were they doing that for?

Well, it was just a part of life, part of life. I don't really know, we just accepted it, we didn't really do anything about it. We just said "Watch the police don't get you," or something like that.

Let me tell you this as well. I had a friend called Sheila. Sheila's family came from North Manchester and she went out with a lad called George who was Maltese, and she fell in love with George and I don't think she ever fell out of love with George, but George was married to a woman that was a moaning woman – did a lot of moaning. He went out with Sheila quite blatantly, would walk down the road with her and she was always linking him, in all sorts of weather, going to the pictures, going here, going everywhere. And the police – there was an offence called 'in need of care and protection'. A girl of fifteen/sixteen, if you were doing anything wrong, going in the café where they sold a bottle of beer, you were 'in need of care and protection'.

The police arrested us at one stage and I got put in a remand home in Whalley Range for three weeks, and my mother was ashamed to death of any of the neighbours ever finding out and that is because the police – the police knew that I went in this café, they knew that I went up and down or I was doing nothing hardly wrong, but because you was in that environment you was in need of care and protection. And this girl, who is still a friend of mine, she told the police something, I can't

remember, but when I was interviewed I admitted it. It was nothing serious, I can't remember what it was. And the police put me – they had me in Platt Lane Police Station. My mother never went anywhere with me, I had to go on myself and I must have said yes when I shouldn't have said yes because I wasn't that clever, so I admitted to doing something, going to this place with Irene. My friend Irene's mother told the police to get lost. My mother wouldn't do that and I landed up three weeks in a remand home in Whalley Range with all other girls. Some of the girls was having a baby, and some girls got into trouble, so I will never forget that as long as I live. And when I came out I was so frightened of doing anything because I didn't want to go anywhere and be locked up for twelve month, but my friend Sheila was in this remand home if I remember right, or she had been threatened by the police, and then they caught her again with George and she got two years in an approve school.

Now when you are young and you're working and you have got your own life it is just stuck at the back of your mind that she is in the approve school, and one of your friends might say "Oh, Sheila is still in the approve school, she is in such a place." I didn't take a lot of notice of that but I think it was in the eighties Sheila had a big party in her house and it was something to do with the Moss Side Carnival. She didn't go to the carnival, she used to say "Come over and see me and you can have a drink at my house." She had food on and drink on and I went over once and there were loads of people in her living room and I was stood at the back, quiet, having a drink and talking to somebody and everybody was laughing because she was a comedian, Sheila, she made everybody laugh. And she must have said to this group of people "You lot don't know you're born, I got two years in approve school for going out with a married man." Now these thought that she was a comedian and telling lies and everybody burst out laughing and she said "I don't know what you're laughing at, I bet you don't

believe me, but ask her behind you whether that is true or not.” So then I realised that I was brought into the conversation ’cos I was busy talking to somebody and she said “Will you tell these girls and boys, did I get two years in approve school for going out with a married man?” And I said “Yeah, you did.” She said “Will you tell them the name?” And I told them the name and then they all went quiet because they knew and I thought “Yeah, you did Sheila, you did get two years for that.”

★★★

I remember going down the Palm Beach the first night it opened – the music was fantastic. It was in the middle of summer, everybody was dressed up with nice print frocks on, and I don’t remember any marijuana and things like that going on, but you paid a shilling to go down and the music was good and you had a drink and the place was – the door was open, there was plenty of fresh air in and it was nice to go in there.

What music were they playing?

Music like Tab Hunter. The main record in them years was a song called *Red Sails in the Sunset*, and that used to be blasting all over. Shirley Bassey was just coming to focus – she started to get well known, Shirley, with her very first new numbers what she had. I can’t remember what it was called but Shirley was singing. You got Louis Armstrong records – it wasn’t bluebeat at that time, I don’t think. Don’t forget it was the fifties and you were limited in the music world. I think Tamla Motown came in in the sixties. I am not really well up in music, only if I hear records on I can identify them.

So it was a bit of a mixture?

A bit of a mixture in the music department, but I know they played good music down there. I know there was a good atmosphere. And I always remember that night when it first opened in the Palm Beach, and then there was next door which was the Nile Club.

Every time I walked up the stairs in the Nile Club I was met by all my friends. They was near the door, they was waiting for you to come in and it was lively. Nothing like that going on nowadays. Sometimes I would finish work, and I worked in town, I would go straight down to the Nile Club, up the stairs. I always looked at my watch and I made a sharp exit at two o'clock. I had to be up for work the day after. But you would meet all the people that were important in your life in them places.

What other clubs did you go to that you remember?

On Ragnor Street, there was a café that used to play music but it wasn't a club, it was called Bobo's. Bobo was an African, he had been there a while in Moss Side and he opened this café up. Now he opened the café up for all these kids, all these teenagers had somewhere to go. I went in there a couple of times, I was always aware of it. That was on Ragnor Street. And then as the years went on there was a club called – it was in an old house, I think, from what I can gather – called Banjo's. He was called Mr Honour Banjo and he had a wife from Liverpool called Kathleen, and he married Kathleen because she told me that, she showed me the wedding ring, she said "I am married to him, to Banjo." She had children. He died young and she died young and she was a smashing girl from Liverpool, and she lived on this estate where I live, and those children were left without a mum or dad. I often wonder what happened to those children. The eldest boy was called Anthony and one of the girls was called Iris – I can't remember the others. Oh, Sarah. And

my kids went to school with those children and I often wonder how they went on as years went by, you know, but he had a club called Banjo's and I think that was bordering with Chortlon & Medlock and Hulme. I think I might have gone in it once, it wasn't a habit of mine to go in there.

So what made a particular club a favourite?

Well, the Nile club was well established and there was never any fights in there. And it was run properly and everybody was having a dance and everybody met up and had a chat. Everybody loved going to the Nile Club, they came from Cheetham Hill to the Nile Club. What spoilt things, you see, there were gangs in Cheetham Hill and gangs in Hulme and Moss Side and that spoilt it really, when that started.

And can you remember what people were wearing at the time? What the fashions were?

My own fashions, I was always getting a new dress. I was always dressed up. I don't know what I looked like looking back. I mean, I used to think I looked marvellous but I wouldn't like to see any photographs of me now. I used to wear like a straight dress, I think that was the fifties look – no, it wasn't, it was the sixties look that. I would say it was funny and old fashioned really looking back.

In the fifties you wore a dirndl skirt. I had no fashion sense and my mother never helped me. I remember buying myself a coat one Christmas and it was black and it must have made me look like a bloody old woman of fifty, and because I had put weight on and because my mother never had us on proper diets, giving us rice pudding and great big potato dinners – great big dinners we had, you know. It wasn't until I got married that I started to be diet conscious and in those days nobody would

admit you were on a diet. But I think my mother fed us up like that because when the war was on there was no food, and after the war she was then able to get this food and feed us up properly. So I was fat and putting weight on and I thought that by buying a long black coat it hides the fat, that was my mentality at the time.

So, the fashion. Dirndl skirts, something that never suited me. These long, low line, pale blue blouses. I bought something once and it was lavender and I bought it one Easter and it cost me four pounds, ten shilling and it was what you called at the time a car coat. I don't know why because hardly anybody had cars. And it was three quarter length and it had big square pockets at the front, and it was mohair and it was lavender, so imagine that. I bought one and it must have been nice because my friend went and bought one. So if people copied you, then you knew it was nice, didn't you? So that was the fashion in them days. I haven't got a lot of photographs of me being dressed up and going out. I always had a scarf around my neck, that was modern, and I still have a scarf around my neck half the time.

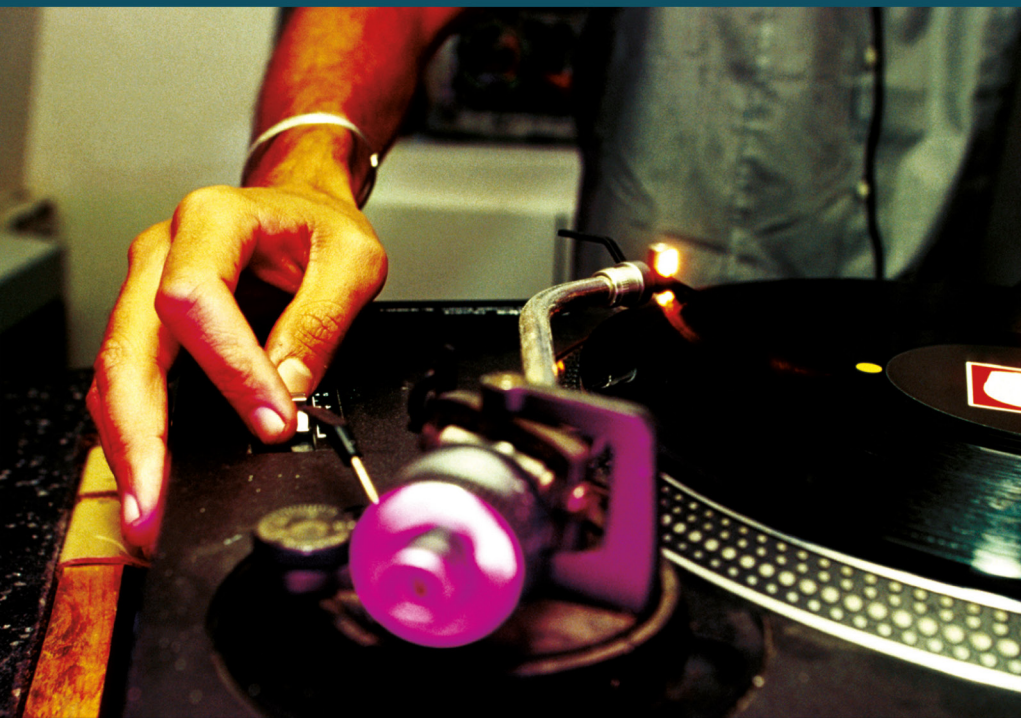
Can you remember what people were wearing in the seventies then?

Well I remember something coming out in the seventies called the 'New Look'. It was a long coat that touched the floor and I bought one like an idiot, looked absolutely ridiculous in that, and it was a plum colour. That was in the seventies. I have always had a bit of fashion sense, me, but sometimes I think "How did I wear that?" But that was fashionable, that is why I bought it. Plum doesn't suit me and I bought it and wasted money on that.

I had a uniform where I worked and it was bottle green and white, and we always looked smart. A decent skirt and a little waistcoat, I had that for work. I always dressed trendy from the seventies, that is not sophisticated or frilly – trendy I would call it. So I had casual gear on – you could get army pants from

French Connection in the seventies. Those was a new invention.
And a khaki jacket. Which I still wear that kind of stuff.

moss side stories



About the Authors

PETER KALU is a novelist, poet, playwright and script writer. He started writing as a member of the Moss Side Write black writers workshop and has had six novels, two film scripts and three theatre plays produced to date. In 2002 he won the Kodak/Liverpool Film Festival Award for his script, *No Trace*. In March 2003 he won the BBC/Contact Theatre's Dangerous Comedy Script Award for his play, *Pants*.

Before turning to writing he worked as a translator (of French and Spanish into English), a glass collector in a Leeds pub called the Shoulder of Mutton, and as a street busker around the North West. He has a degree in Law, four children, and more than three decades practice in kung fu.

OLATUNDE MADSEN grew up in Manchester and was around to witness the disappearance of the clubs and shebeens and the subsequent loss of the cultural and social centre they provided. He has had a varied career as a gardener, cultural activist and writer, publishing under a variety of pen names. *The Making of a Revolutionary* is the first time he has written fiction about the Manchester he grew up in.

JENNIFER NANSUBUGA MAKUMBI is from Uganda. She is currently completing a PhD in Creative Writing at Lancaster University and is working on a novel *Kintu's Children*. A chapter of this She has been published in African Writing Magazine and her research interests are Postcolonial literature with specific interest in African oral traditional forms, feminisms and masculinities.

DESIREE REYNOLDS, after spending a lot of time doing lots of things, is finally where she's supposed to be, doing what she's

supposed to do. She has been published in, *A Generation Defining Itself*, and her debut novel, *Seduce*, will be out with Peepal Tree Press early next year.