

Delores Gauntlett

KENDAL KRASH – 1957*



Imagine that September night when the news flashed
to the tenement yard on Sunlight Street
that the excursion train had crashed:
when the man broke down and wept
for his sister torn from her seat
as the song died in her mouth. Imagine

How the tree trunk yielded to the wild burst,
and the door clanged
as the train ploughed into the yam field
near the sleeping town of Kendal; imagine
the priest and pickpocket lending a hand
to someone as the carriage caved in
and the hour sucked the oil from the lamp,

The instant when the train plunged
like a blunt machete through the damp clay
of a moonlit field and the cows broke
into a dismayed gallop,
while rich and poor alike were thrust into the texts
of one another's lives,
jam-packed, trying to hang on
between this world and the next.

Now, year after year, as if to fill
some vacant outpost left by the chill,
the stories clamber back, of the Kendal Ghost
emerging from the stricken stream
to hitchhike into town (or so they say)
then disappear, as in a dream
of morning mist when time came to pay.

*The 1957Kendal train crash was the worst rail disaster in Jamaica's history and the second wors in the world at that time