

*Christian Campbell*

## A DREAM OF FIRE



I.

It start like a dark calypso:  
Man think Woman scheming on Man.  
Man spit gasoline on Woman  
and fling a match.  
Woman run and everything done.

To light match in a straw market,  
most things catch: straw dolls, *Hey Mon*  
T-shirts, African statues made in Japan,  
daishikis, tchotchkes, straw hats, Androsia  
dresses, knock-off Gucci bags, floral sarongs,  
shell and fish scale jewellery, the cries  
of *Prettygirl* and Walcott poems.

The braiders would spider  
hair and recite “The Schooner *Flight*”  
for \$20, one bead per line.  
But now the people are laughing  
or crying and all we see is one red man  
running out of the blaze. Out of the fire  
bust open like dawn. It is Derek Walcott,  
the red man running.

These heavy women with huge hands,  
hats, and long skirts, these straw vendors,  
would plait straw tighter than sonnets and hustle  
Walcott poems on the side. In the dream

they shake their gray-heads at the howl  
of fire. A bird, a sea-swift, might think  
it Soufriere. But it's just a burning market.  
Yes, the arsonist was inspired by "A City's Death by Fire":  
*After that hot gopeller had levelled all but the churched sky. . .*

## II.

Walcott is safe, thank God, no longer  
limps. Poems gone, poems gone.  
But he knows them all by heart,  
like the braiders. Poems gone,  
he sucks his teeth and grumbles:  
*History.* First time in Nassau,  
last stop on the schooner *Flight*,  
he paints the market skanking down  
in flames, cigarette painting smoke, too,  
from his mouth.

He paints one of the braiders  
knitting my hair, diamond style,  
chanting me a poem:  
*Open the map. More islands there, man,  
than peas on a tin plate, all different size,  
one thousand in the Bahamas alone. . .*  
A big-belly man is making conch  
fritters to sell, so I don't smell  
poems burning. Only oil, batter,  
bubbling conch.

Smoke barrels up like music.  
The singed straw dolls lip-synch  
Arrow: *Olé Olé, Olé Olé. . .*  
*and ya room-boom-boom-boom*  
(and for once the old man dance).

Bay Street burns like the sixties, like 1942.  
Funky Nassau. There is no place like this.  
Armagiddeon or obeah, only us.  
Everyone knows what we like:  
we like pretty. So what matters in the dream,  
the scrap gangs running to catch ashes  
of Walcott poems for new costumes  
and how beautiful Bay Street will look  
with a whole other mouth.