

Gus Edwards

A CARNIVAL INCIDENT

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The court case is over now, the verdict is in and ain't nothing left for anybody to say. And I'm glad. Everybody talk up all kinds of things, the lawyers even more. But in all of that business, didn't nobody even once touch on the truth. How I know is because I was in on this thing. But didn't nobody know that, and I for one didn't say a word. I ain't no fool. What I now is what I know. What other people what to guess and gossip about, got nothing to do with me.

I knowed Brooks. We was friends. We worked together in Finance and see each other nearly every day. At least twice a week after work we would sit down in a bar, have some drinks, talk and look at women.

Brooks was a married man. Had a wife name Marva, who had her own business as a hair dresser. The business was making money so she wasn't any kind of money burden on Brooks. Plus she wasn't a bad looking woman at all.

They was married for six years and Brooks used to run around behind her back. Nothing serious. Just a little bit of quick meal hear and there. Once or twice Marva would glimpse him with some young sweet thing and I would have to cover for him in some way. Mostly by pretending that the girl ain't with him but with me. I used to tell him, "Man, you got to be more careful and discreet. I can't be covering you all the time. Plus, one day Marva gon discover that I is the one that's lying and then I gon be in trouble with her, too. I know the woman since childhood. I don't want to do nothing to disrupt that friendship."

But Brooks wasn't listening. He would just wave his hand and tell me to have

another drink. "I'm paying."

Brooks like to play table tennis and I was good at it, too. Sometimes we would team up for tournament and even do inter-island meets. It was after one of these games when Brooks and I was settling down to enjoying a beer that he say to me, "I'm tired of Marva. Tired of everything bout the woman and I don't want to fuck her no more. We been together six years and I think six years is enough. I done paid my dues."

"You married to the woman and fucking is part of the deal in marriage"

"Not for me it ain't. Not any more."

"Why?"

"Because I hate she, that's why. I hate everything about her. The way she walk, talk, breath, everything."

"Does Marva know this?"

"No. I'm telling you. That's all I'm doing telling you. Nobody else."

"So what you planning to do, divorce her?"

"No. I can't"

"Why not?"

"Money. I owe the woman money."

"Owe money, to your wife?"

"Yeah. Remember all them business deals I get into?"

I told him "Yes," because I did remember them all. None of them ever pan out. Not a one.

"Well the reason I ain't in the poorhouse or jail is that Marva give me the money, out of her business, to bail me out.

"So what's the big deal? Wives in always helping their husbands in ways like that."

"The money wasn't just give to me. The money was loan. I had to sign all kinds of papers saying that I would pay it back sometimes. See, the money wasn't personal, it come outta the business. So her lawyers made her give it to me that way."

"And you didn't say nothing?"

"To tell the truth, I was so happy to get the money, I didn't care what I sign. So now she got me by my balls. Because if I start talking bout divorce, she gon demand that

money. I know she will, and try to put me in jail or worse if I can't pay. Marva can be damn vengeful and evil when she put her mind to it."

"So what you planning to do?"

"I don't know. But I got to do something. I know that for sure. I can't go on like this. Something got to change." He look so down in the mud that I felt sorry for him, but there was nothing I could do and I told him so.

"I didn't expect you to do nothing," he said. "I just needed somebody to talk it out to. Somebody who could understand and maybe even sympathize."

That was the only conversation we had on that subject. Then for three or four months after that it look like things was getting back good with him and his wife. You would see them a lot of places together, laughing and acting lovey dovey. I was glad to see it. Because I don't like divorce and I don't like to see people I know in pain. I didn't ask any questions, of course, because none of it was any of my business. But inside I was glad they was working it out.

It was one week before Carnival. Marva had a young woman come to visit with her Brooks. The woman was some kind of friend or distant family. I don't remember. But I remember the first time I see her all I wanted to do was jump on her. The young woman's name was Joycelyn and she had a mouth so big that when she laughed it looked like she could swallow up the moon. And everything about her was soft and creamy and sweet, sweet, sweet. I had my own girlfriend but I still was interested in giving her a try. After all, it was Carnival. And Carnival is the time to try any kind of recklessness you might have in mind. So I talked to Brooks about it. "Try her if you like," he told me. "But I think she engaged to be married to some fellow back where she come from." I ask other questions bout the woman, but he say he didn't know much. "Joycelyn was Marva's friend and house guest. They talk to one another a lot. I just try to be pleasant and polite."

Then, after being in Joycelyn's presence two or three times with and Brooks, I run into her by herself on the street. I engage her in conversation, then ask her if she would like to have dinner or maybe go to a dance or something with me. She told she would love it and was pleased that I asked. But she was going back to where she come from that very next day. I was surprised at that Carnival was only two days away.

“I thought that you was here for Carnival.”

“I was but I think the excitement get to be too much for me. So I’m going back home.

“Well, that’s a shame,” I told her. “I told her. “It woulda been nice to take you around for a little bit, but have a good trip.” She thank me and she left. And I watch her walk away thinking,” Why do I always have to have such bad luck? But there was nothing to do so I just shrug and forget it.

Carnival come and as usual it was big, crazy and colorful. Every year it get bigger and bigger with more people coming in, more floats, more events, more everything. Every year it wilder too, and this year was no exception. Things just rush by in a blur and when was over, the whole island was a mess. Clean up from all of this sometimes takes a month. But they say it’s good for business. Tourist business. It pouring the island on the map.

I think I remember seeing Brooks one time in all of that noise. He was drinking and smiling and we said “Hello” to one another.

The next thing I’m hearing is that Brooks is dead and the police got Marva in jail for shooting him. They say she tried to shoot Joycelyn, too, but the young woman got away and nobody know where she is. Not even the police.

I went to the funeral and it was Brooks alright. He was lying there in the coffin, hands over his chest, dead as a rock.

A week later, Marva was out the street on bail. People said they shouldn’t let her out unsupervised like that because the woman might run away to escape punishment. But Marva said, “I ain’t going a damn place. I stayinig right her and telling my story for everybody to hear.”

For weeks after she got out I did everything I could to avoid running into her on the street. I didn’t want to see the woman, hear the woman, know the woman. She had killed somebody I called friend and no matter what her explanation was, I couldn’t like her for it.

I was successful in avoiding her, too. More successful than anybody has a right to be on an island this small. Then one day as I was walking into the Post Office, I bump smack into she walking out.

“Hello Milton!” she say. “You the only person I ain’t seen since I been going through this ordeal.” I mumble something bout being busy and tried to get away but the woman wouldn’t let me go. “What you trying to do, avoid me?”

I told her, “No. Not exactly.”

“Then sit down and talk to me. Here, let’s go over to Radley’s. I’ll buy you some coffee.”

We went into Radley’s. The place was nearly empty. We both had coffee and I had some pastry as well. As soon as we sit down she went right into it. Didn’t wait for me to ask a question or wake a commentary. She just jump right into it like she was the actress preparing a scene for a play.

“I know Brooks was your friend but I is your friend, too. I was your friend before him. You and me go back a long ways, so I believe you should at least listen to my side of the story as well as his.”

I didn’t want to tell her that Brooks was dead so he wasn’t in any position to tell his side of the story. I was thinking it but I didn’t say it. All I did was sit there sipping on my coffee and eating that sweet bread.

“What people didn’t know is that BBrooks was a two-face lying, sonofabitch, no good dog. Out in public he was smiling and charming, but inside the house when nobody was around and it was only him and me, the man was an evil, dirty skunk. That man used to beat me, choke me and kick me. Then when he was done would cry and tell me he was sorry just so that I wouldn’t go to the police about it. He knowed that I loved him so he used to prey on my weakness by crying and begging and telling me that he was going to change. I was a fool because I believed him. Believed him every time. But as I was saying, I was in love. That was the reason I married the man in the frist place. I was in love and I wanted the marriage to work out. And I did everything in my power to help the man, too. I give him money, sign papers, talk to people and even had my father use his influence to get him that job at Finance. Wasn’t anything that that man ask me that I said no to. But it seem to me the more I give the more he want, and the more he get the more he dislike me for it. It was like he envy me the fact that I am a good business woman. I can’t help that. That is a gift from God. He, as everybody know, was the worst business man in the world. And every time he get into a drowning situation, I was

the one who had to bail him out. My lawyers used to tell me not to do it. But I used to ask them, “How could I refuse? The man is my husband.”

“In the last four or five months, I have to admit things was going better with us. For a long time Brooks didn’t want to do any sex business with me, then all of a sudden he wanted to do it every night. At first I thought that maybe he was up to some trick. Brooks wasn’t above using anything to get his way. But after a while, I got to believing he was really sincere. You used to see us, so you know I ain’t lying. For a time there we was like a honeymoon couple. And we was even talking about taking a vacation together. Something we haven’t done in years. It was like I was dealing with a new man and I open up my whole self to him. I cancelled all the loan debts that he had with me, because he said he felt like I was holding a loaded pistol to his head. I didn’t want him feeling that way, so I cancelled them. I also made all our accounts at the bank “joint accounts.” They used to be separate and he said that was bad because it looked like I didn’t trust him. Again my lawyers said I was being stupid but this was about my marriage. And for the preservation of my marriage I was willing to pay any price. Then one day I found something that shoulda made me suspicious, but I didn’t pay it any mind. I found a gun in the bottom of one of his briefcases. Brooks had three. I was looking for some tax papers he was supposed to have brought home for me to sign. I thought they mighta been in there was so I went through his briefcase and found the gun. When I ask him about it, he told me it was for him to go out and do target practice with the boys. I believe him and didn’t think anymore about it.

“Carnival time come and Joycelyn wrote to ask if she could come over and stay at our house. I told her, ‘Yes.’ I was glad to have her. I been knowing Joycelyn since she was a child. Her mother, Jane, and I used to go to school together. Brooks was against it saying it was going to interfere with our privacy. But I insist and finally he gave in.

From the minute they met at the airport, I shoulda seen there was something going on. Brooks and Joycelyn didn’t know each other before, but the minute they shake hands a kind of chemistry begin to happen between them. I shoulda knowed it. I shoulda sensed it and I think I did, but I paid it no mind. I mean, here’s a girl twenty and a man forty four. Even if he tried, you wouldn’t think a girl like that would be interested in a man his age. Plus she was the daughter of a friend. Brooks was my husband and she had

a fellow back home she was planning to marry. See what I'm saying? So even when my instincts told me things, I ignored them. Like one night after dinner, we was all having fun, the three of us. Suddenly Brooks said he was tired and he want to go home. It was only a little after nine and Brooks is a man who usually like to stay up till two and three in the morning. He say we could stay, but we said no. We would turn in, too.

“When we got back to the house, Brooks went right to sleep. Wasn't interested in sex or nothing. I went to sleep, too. Round one o'clock I woke up and Brooks was gone. I looked around and he wasn't in the kitchen or living room either. I was about to go back in when I saw the lights of a car through the window. It was Brooks. He pulled in and I heard two doors slam. When he walk in Joycelyn was with him.

“Where were you?” I ask.

“Down by Mango Bay. I was up and in here reading. She come out and say she was going out for a walk.

“I wasn't sleepy,” Joycelyn say. “I just though I would walk and look at the moon.”

“I told her it was prettier down by Mango Bay, so I drive her over to see it. I hope we didn't wake you up.”

“No, no,” I told them. “I just woke up to get a glass of water.”

Joycelyn said goodnight and went back to her room. Brooks pour himself a drink and ask if I wanted one. I told him no. He took out the book he said he was reading and I went back inside to sleep.

It come as a real surprise when Joycelyn said she was leaving two days before Carnival. I asked her why. I though maybe it was something we had done. But she told me no. She was tired and homesick, and she missed her boyfriend. I could understand that, so we took her down to the airport, Brooks and me. But we couldn't see her off because Brooks was in a hurry to get some place and we was only using one car. Mine was in the shop for repairs. I even said I would stay and take a taxi back home. But Joycelyn said that wouldn't be necessary. She would be fine. So Brooks and I went back. He drop me home and rushed off to his appointment.

“What I realized afterwards is that this was all a trick. That girl wasn't going anywhere. This was all a pretense. Brooks and I would bring her down, he would rush

me back home and then he would double back and pick her up. Which is what he did. He pick her up and took her to some motel room where the two of them spend hours an hours together. When he come home that night it was late. When I ask where he had been, he said he was out in the country with some friends, including you.

“For three days of Carnival, I hardly see the man. When I ask him where he was, he would get mad and tell me to stop being so possessive. It was like he was going back to being the old Brooks all over again. I didn’t want that so I stopped saying anything.

They mighta got away with it if one of my customers didn’t tell me she seen Joycelyn in some restaurant that morning having breakfast. I told her it couldn’t be. That Joycelyn had gone back home. But the woman who only met Joycelyn once was sure she had seen her. When I mention it to Brooks, he said it Brooks, he said it was impossible. Said that Dora didn’t know who she was seeing.

“Later that day the Devil in my mind told me, ‘Watch Brooks close—he up to something. Don’t let him see that you watching. But watch the sonofabitch close.’ And that’s what I did. I let him leave the house and then I followed the skunk dog bastard. I stayed a good distance out of the way but I kept him in sight and I followed the bastard everywhere he went. That’s how I found out where he was keeping that little whore. At the Bindley Motel out in the country. I watch them walk round the country road holding hands and kissing. I watch them go into the room and remain there for hours. And I watch them get in his car, the car I pay for and drive to all kinds of places.

“When I couldn’t watch it no more, I went back home. I couldn’t believe that man and what he was doing. I couldn’t believe that bitch, either. She had been a guest in my house and that’s what she was doing with my husband.

“Then it come to me. That gun Brooks had, he was planning to shoot me with it. This was before Joycelyn come into the picture. He had some kind of plan and it involved the gun. That’s why he was being so nice and got me to sign all those papers and everything. Then he was going to put a bullet in my brain and that would be it. I don’t know how I know it but I will swear on a pile of Bibles that that’s what the man had in his mind. And he was probably planning to do it during Carnival. He could say that he though I was a burglar or that he was drunk or something. People know that all kinds of craziness go on during Carnival. This coulda been one of them. But I think this

business with Joycelyn delay him. He got himself caught up in something he didn't expect. He had this young girl opening up her legs for him and he couldn't get enough of it.

“So, now it was my turn to act. And I gon tell you, Milton, tell you plain, this was when I decided I was going to kill his ass. I sat there and thought about it and I said to myself, ‘If that pistol is still in his briefcase, I’m going to take it out and shoot him with it. I’m going to put a bullet in his behind and that will end this thing once and for all.’ I went and I look and there it was. The gun that was meant for me was the one that I would use.

“I drove back out to the motel but his car was gone. So I parked in the bushes and waited. It wasn't till late when they got back. But I was there and I was waiting. I got out my car and I walk up behind them. They didn't hear me. I coulda shot him right then but I wanted to see his face and I wanted him to see me, too. So I called out, ‘Brooks.’ He turned and before he could say a word, I fired the first one. Then I fired two more because he was still standing there. The girl looked like she was going to shit her pants. I turned and I aimed at her butt she beg me, ‘Please, please, please, please.’ And she was shaking all over. I told her to ‘scatter her ass’ before I put a bullet in her. She took off running somewhere in the bushes and that's the last anybody seen of her right to this day.

“The police came and they arrested me. Now I got to answer charges in court. But what I did was justified and I'll tell the world that. I hope you believe me.”

Then she got up and left. Didn't say goodbye or nothing. Just got up and left.

The court was called and they argued for a week. Temporary insanity with mitigating circumstances. After eighteen hours of deliberation, the jury came back with a verdict of “Not guilty.” ... People in the court cheered and Marva went out of that place a free woman.

Six months later she was married again. This time not to an island fellow but to an American. People say if he misbehave, Marva will put a bullet in him, too. But the man, George, is quiet and look like he don't know how to misbehave so everything is fine.

About a year later, I found out that one of the things Marva told me that morning

in Radley's was a lie. We was doing some business having to do with bringing in some merchandise for a store I had a small financial interest in. During our conversation, it came out hta he was the one who had sold Marva the pistol. The one she had used to kill Brooks. This man didn't know anything about the case because he was away. But he was wondering if I could use a weapon similar to the one he had sold to Marva two years before. Just a little something to keep around the house for my own protection. I told him no, but I asked him again about the one he sold to Marva. I wonderd if he had to right woman. 'Oh yes,' he told me. 'Woman own the Star Beauty Hair Dressing place. Mavis something is her name.' I told him Marva. 'Oh yes, that's right. Marva. Marrried to a sonofabitch from what I could make out.' I told him that husband was dead. 'Then she better off,' he said. I told him yes she was.

Later that evening, I looked at an old calendar. According to the captain, she had bought that pistol eight months before Brooks was shot. It put a whole new complexion on things. And it gave me a whole new view of Marva. I used to think she was just a good business woman. Now I can see she is more than that. A whole lot more.