

Brackley and the Bed

SAMUEL SELVON

One evening Brackley was cruising round by the Embankment looking for a soft bench to rest his weary bones, and to cogitate on the ways of life. The reason for that, and the reason why the boys begin to call him Rockabye, you will find out as the ballad goes on.

Brackley hail from Tobago, which part they have it to say Robinson Crusoe used to hang out with Man Friday. Things was brown in that island and he make for England and manage to get a work and was just settling down when bam! he get a letter from his aunt saying that Teena want to come England too.

Teena was Brackley distant cousin and they was good friends in Tobago. In fact, the other reason why Brackley hustle from the island is because it did look like he and Teena was heading for a little married thing, and Brackley run.

Well, right away he write aunty and say no, no, because he have a feeling this girl would make botheration if she come England. The aunt write back to say she didn't mean to say that Teena want to come England, but that Teena left Tobago for England already.

Brackley hold his head and bawl. And the evening the boat train come in at Waterloo, he went there and start 'busing she right away not waiting to ask how the folks at home was or anything.

'What you doing in London?' Brackley ask as soon as Teena step off the train. 'What you come here for, eh? Even though I write home to say things real hard?'

BRACKLEY AND THE BED

'What happen, you buy the country already?' Teena sheself giving tit for tat right away. 'You ruling England now? The Queen abdicate?'

'You know where you going?' Brackley say. 'You know where you is? You know what you going to do?'

'I am going straight to the Colonial Office,' Teena say.

'What you think the Colonial Office is, eh? You think they will do anything for you? You have a god-father working there?'

Well, they argue until in the end Brackley find himself holding on to Teena suitcase and they on the way to the little batchy he have in Golders Green at the time.

When they get there Teena take one look at the room and sniff. 'But look at the state you have this room in! You ain't ashamed of yourself?'

'Listen,' Brackley say, 'you better don't let me and you have contention. I know this would of happen when you come.'

Teena start squaring up the room brisk-brisk.

'It making cold,' she say, putting chair this way and table that way and turning everything upside down for poor Brackley. 'How you does keep warm? Where the gas fire I hear so much about?'

Brackley grudgingly put a shilling in the meter and light the gas.

'What you have to eat?' But even as she asking she gone in the cupboard and begin pulling out rations that Brackley had stow away to see him through the winter. Brackley as if he mesmerize, stand up there watching her as she start up a peas and rice on the gas ring.

'You better go easy with them rations,' he say. 'I not working now and money don't grow on tree here as in Tobago.'

When they was eating Teena say: 'Well, you have to get a job right away. You was always a lazy fellar.'

'Keep quiet,' Brackley say, enjoying the meal that Teena

cook in real West Indian fashion – the first good meal he ever had in London. 'You don't know nothing.'

'First thing tomorrow morning,' Teena say. 'What time you get up?'

'About nine – ten,' Brackley say vaguely.

'Well is six o'clock tomorrow morning, bright and early as the cock crow.'

'You don't hear cock crowing in London,' Brackley say. Then he drop the spoon he was eating with. 'Six o'clock! You must be mad! Six o'clock like midnight in the winter, and people still sound asleep.'

'Six o'clock,' Teena say.

Brackley finish eating and begin to smoke, whistling a calypso softly, as if he in another world and not aware of Teena at all.

'Ah well,' he say, stretching by the fire, 'that wasn't a bad meal. Look, I will give you some old blankets and you could wrap up that coat and use as a pillow – you could sleep on the ground in that corner . . .'

'Me? On the floor? You not ashamed?'

'Well, is only one bed here as you see . . .'

'I using the bed.'

'Girl, is winter, and if you think I going to sleep in the corner with two old blanket and wake up stiff . . .'

But, in the end, was Brackley who crouch up in the corner, and Teena sound asleep in the bed.

It look to Brackley like he hardly shut his eyes before Teena was shaking him.

'Get up,' Teena say, 'six o'clock.'

Brackley start to curse.

'None of that,' Teena say. 'No bad language when I around.'

Teena move around fast and give Brackley breakfast and make him dress and get out on the cold streets mumbling, 'Get a job, get a job,' before he knew what was happening.

It was only about ten o'clock, when he was washing

dishes in a café where he get a work, that Brackley realize what was happening to him.

When he get home in the evening, Teena have screen put up around the bed and everything spick and span, and Brackley don't know where to look even for chair to sit down.

'I see you make yourself at home,' he say maliciously.

'And what you think?' Teena flares.

'The boys come here sometimes for a little rummy.'

'None of that now.'

'And sometimes a girl-friend visit me.'

'None of that now.'

'So you taking over completely.'

'Aunty say to look after you.'

'Why the hell you come England, eh?'

Well, a pattern begin to form as the weeks go by, but the main thing that have Brackley worried is the bed. Every night he curl up in the corner shivering, and by the time he doze off: 'Six o'clock, get up, you have to go to work.'

Brackley ain't sleep on bed for weeks. The thing like an obsession with him. He window-shopping on the way home and looking at them bed and soft mattress on show and closing his eyes and sighing. Single divan, double divan, put-you-up, put-you-down – all makes and sizes he looking at.

One night when frost was forming on the window pane Brackley wake up and find he couldn't move.

'Teena.'

'What?'

'You sleeping?'

'Yes.'

'Teena, you want to get married?'

'Married? To who?'

'To me.'

'What for?'

'So-I-could-sleep-in-the-bed – I mean, well, we uses to

know one another good in Tobago, and now that you are here in London, what do you think?

'Well, all right, but you have to change your ways.'

'Yes, Teena.'

'And no foolishness when we married. You come home straight from work. And I don't want you looking at no white girls.'

'Yes, Teena.'

No sooner said than done. Brackley hustle Teena off to the registry office as soon as things was fixed, thinking only how nice the bed would be after the hard floor and the cold, with Teena to help keep him warm.

'What about honeymoon?' Teena say after the ceremony.

'In the summer,' Brackley say. 'Let we go home. I am tired and I feel I could sleep for weeks.'

'Bracks,' Teena say as they was coming away. 'I have a nice surprise for you. Guess who coming to London this evening?'

'Father Christmas,' Brackley says yawning.

'No. Aunty. I write telling her to come up, as the room not so small and we could manage until we get another place. And then she and me could get a work too, and that will help.'

'You putting hell 'pon jackass back,' Brackley moan. But it was only when they reach home that a great fear come to Brackley. He had was to sit down in a chair before he could talk.

'But Teena,' he say quietly, 'we ain't have no place for Aunty to sleep?'

'Don't worry,' Teena say. 'She can sleep with me until we find another place.'

Ballad
OLIVE SENIOR

1

Teacher ask me to write composition about The Most Unforgettable Character I Ever Meet and I write three page about Miss Rilla and Teacher tear it up and say that Miss Rilla not fit person to write composition about and right away I feel bad the same way I feel the day Miss Rilla go and die on me.

When Miss Rilla die I wish I could make up a Ballad for her like they do for famous people in the old days. Dont ask me why only when we sing ballad song in school I get sad and think of Miss Rilla. But I cant sing or play guitar and nobody make music round here since that Blue Boy gone away and beside this whole thing too deep and wide for a little thing like a Ballad. So I will just tell you the story of Miss Rilla and Poppa D, Blue Boy and me though it is really about Miss Rilla. And when we come to the sad part we can have something like a chorus because they have that in all the ballad song they sing but I dont think bout the chorus yet.

Miss Rilla die on truck that was carrying her to market and they bring her body back down but I never see it before they make it one with the Springville ground for all day I down by the river crying and not crying, laughing and not laughing.

O my Lord. Miss Rilla dont laugh round here anymore and it seem like all the laughing in the world come to a stop and everybody talking nice bout her. Eh-eh everybody talking like they never once say any nastiness and like Blue