

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Poem: Under The Breadfruit Tree

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Pot of water boiling, smile plastered on her face, Bursting into a cackle now and then, At the joyous thoughts, the fond remembrances, the warm feelings, Of those unforgettable breadfruit filled days, She peeled the breadfruit,

What should she make today? Would it be a breadfruit salad, stuffed breadfruit, breadfruit in rice, breadfruit cheesy, breadfruit fish cakes? Maybe breadfruit chips, breadfruit fritters, fried breadfruit, breadfruit drink, curried breadfruit, Or should she boil it down in a pig snout, pigtail or fowl foot soup, Then again it could be a meal of dumpling, breadfruit with stewed saltfish, mackerel or oxtail, Aha, she should roast it with some sweet potatoes, But then again...Breadfruit salad today it is she declared,

As she danced her way around the kitchen, The memories came flooding, Memories of preparing those scrumptious and sumptuous breadfruit dishes, Memories, memories, memories, memories, Flooding, flooding, flooding, flashing, flashing, Memories of a life tied to that big old breadfruit tree, A tree that weathered so many storms, A tree that not only provided shade and daily sustenance, But a tree that taught many life lessons, The most important lessons were in family, friendship, community and generosity,

It was under that tree where she sat listening to the village women chat as they helped her grandmother pound stones or grate coconut, cassava, or sweet potatoes to make konkie or cassava bread, She saw the daily exchanges of two breadfruits for some fish, or ground provisions, With that breadfruit tree nobody in the village would ever go hungry, It was under that tree where the cattle and pigs were butchered and sold, It was under that tree at Christmas time where the Masquerades, Mummies, Bull and Cowboys and Indians came to make merry and play,

It was under that tree where she sat and played school and dolly house with her cousins, neighbours and the village children, It was under that tree where real creativity was born, As she used the 'Pinkey', that yellow offshoot from the breadfruit tree to make her dolls, Sticking match sticks or other shrubs to make the doll's hands and feet, It was under that tree where they roasted doves and baked bread in ovens made from the Klim and Nido pans, and fried eel and tackee, It was under that tree where they pitched marbles, spun top, played cricket, rounders, jumped rope, played 'stick and ladder' and 'morals' It was under that tree where she got lost in so many novels, Penned poetry and stories, worked on her art and dreamt of faraway lands,

It was that tree, that tree, that tree that provided so many days of merriment, as its sturdy branch provided a very good swing, Oh how she liked to go up in that swing, she didn't see rivers, but trees and many a things, As the poet Robert Louis Stevenson noted, it was the pleasantest thing ever a child could do, It was under that tree where she sat and chat it up with friends throughout the ages, That tree, that tree, that big old sturdy breadfruit tree, That tree which helped shape or carve that little girl's identity,

As she came to, her thoughts drifted to the childhood of so many who are being raised in the here and now, Who or what will shape their identity, In an era where we are technologically bombarded, in an era which stifles real, real, and I mean authentic creativity, In an era where we are governed by social media and the all-important selfie, Oh breadfruit tree, dear breadfruit tree, sturdy breadfruit tree, Nourishing breadfruit tree, my friend breadfruit tree, Comeback with alacrity, no, no, not for me, I am asking you to come back for the present and future generations you see, Breadfruit tree, breadfruit tree, breadfruit tree, breadfruit tree...