

LOST PEOPLE

by Cyril Dabydeen

"So where do you come from?" he asks, with sanguine ease.

"Where?"

Some nerve he has, this man with bonhomie accosting me here at the busy shopping mall on St Laurent Avenue in the city's east end. He's gimmicky, sure—with his immigrant's instinct, you bet. Origins, in our quest; and from Ethiopia or Somali he is, maybe. Where does he mark out a place for me? Canadian, eh?

I humour him. Yes, with our inner rhythms intact.

Where are you really from?

We keep being at it, in a manner of speaking. Parlaying, as if from a time past. Why not? Swarthy-hued, and thin-boned: he is, being in his forties. He genuinely wants to know if I am a stranger—not a player?

"You do know where I come from?" I ask with scepticism, in my immigrant play-along. Rigmarole, maybe. He demurs with his south-Saharan pride, I sense. But our being here in the North, as he keeps trying to guess where I come from—but figuring he already knows with his intuitive sense.

Where really?

Oceans crossed...Indian or Pacific, if not the Atlantic. Or somewhere along the Cape of Good Hope with Vasco da Gama, or Christopher Columbus. Whose discovery of the New World are we talking about? Explorers being "discoverers"? Where are you really from?

An island-archipelago with St Lucia, Jamaica, Trinidad, coastal Guyana in my ken. Or French-speaking Haiti, Guadeloupe, Martinique. Then Spanish-speaking Puerto Rico, Cuba. An image of bearded Fidel Castro with umbrella in hand in the stark sunshine, a strange or befuddled expression on his face because of political change. American change, d'you know?

This African man with his own heft with places like Djibouti, Nigeria, Kenya, also in his mind. West Africa too, where the slave-trade commenced more than two centuries ago. What the West Indies sugar plantations were linked to. But his being here now in a posh shopping mall with Dollar Stores, grocery stores, myriad shoe and fashion clothing

outlets. People maundering along, their bags filled with "trophies."

Who wants a new identity, nothing less wholesome? Oh, somewhere else in my ken is Ghana's Elmina Castle—a slave-dungeon, yes! History, yes.

"You're not from India, are you?" he asks.

"Oh?"

"You're not who you think you are, maybe," he replies, sensing conceit. He pulls at his jacket lapels and tries to look suave, and muses on about me. My not being definitively, or, selectively Asian? Who's really exotic these days? I call him Mohammed—like a made-up name, or moniker. He mumbles to me with his own bearing and pride. Yes, faith mixed with self-knowledge tied to a special longing and desire. People removed from origins, yet with their ancestry intact, I conceive.

Now this man brings more of sub-Saharan Africa to me, and Mother-woman Lucy from genealogy, anthropology, prehistory in my ken.

"Fooled you, eh?" He laughs suddenly.

I also laugh.

We look at each other eye to eye, then turn to others here at the shopping mall. And our being in this capital city with our own burgeoning "idea of the North" tied to our immigrant selves. Like a declaration, he lets out,

"See, you're the lost people."

I blink an eye.

"Lost...from where?"

"From your original homeland."

Mohammed with a past civilization of the Pharaohs, and pyramids built by the Nubians in North Africa. His muscles stretched tight on his face.

I deny being lost. I never was. Others passing by looking at us with puzzlement or quandary: people of different hue and ethnicity. Nothing I will lay claim to, no race-markers, no other identity. I try to regain my composure, thinking of what's lost and never found again. Other journeys remembered...and oceans, rivers, and mountains crossed.

I aim to move along. Voices I carry in me, momentous or perplexing.

Not falsifying? Mohammed, with guile or gumption, still seeing me as the "lost people"—as shoppers, passersby clutching bags, I look at in a multicultural walk-about. Everyone indeed being lost, or found again. What I say to this man with my own conceit. Yes, he leaves me alone without the sense of a demarcated place or country. Moving along!

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FISH MEAL Study

We would like to investigate the long term effects of eating mackerel fish on glucose control and heart health among South Asian population with diabetes.

We are looking for

- South Asian men and women aged 25-65
- Diabetic controlled by diet and lifestyle
- Non-diabetic
- Overweight to obese (classification for Asian population - BMI ≥ 23 kg/m²)
- No other chronic health problems

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