

AH SWEETER LYME

by Karina Billini

SETTING:
Crown Heights, Brooklyn.

TIME:
Summer 2016.

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She opens the door. It is ZALE, a 20 year old black male, in a black wife beater, black cargo shorts, and neon purple high-stop sneakers. The Trinidadian flag hangs on his back pocket.. He is part of the purple Jab-Jabs. He has a razor tongue. KEAMI has known him his whole life. As much as KEAMI tried to keep him out of the street life, he found himself in it.

KEAMI

Hey, Zale!

ZALE

What-up what-up what-up!

They hug like long-lost brother and sister. After the hug, they do a secret handshake. Keami is a little rusty at first, but she picks the handshake's steps.

Zale takes notice of Patrick. He circles Patrick almost playfully. Keami is about to slip in between them and act as a border, but:

ZALE

Yo, I remember you. My little brother was in your STD workshop with the talking condom. He put a video of your condom rap on the 'gram. Shit was funny—

PATRICK

*(Touched.) Thank you, I appreciate that, man.
(He gives his hand to ZALE; Zale takes it.) Patrick—*

ZALE

Zale. Yo, Patrick. You mind stepping out for a bit? I wanna talk to Keami about something private—

KEAMI

(Disciplinary.) ZALE. (She turns to Patrick.) Sorry—

PATRICK

(He laughs.) No worries. I gotta head out, anyways. Sarah's waiting for me to go unpack.

KEAMI

Alright, Patrick. Thanks. I'll make sure to login these hours. Enjoy your day.

PATRICK waves goodbye. He picks up his Jansport and exits. ZALE grins widely at her.

ZALE

Nice little white boy you got there. *(He recalls something.)* Hey! Didn't a white man pop up in your tarot reading with Mama Nancy like a hundred times—

KEAMI

That was probably a bill collector. Patrick is like my white *you*. So what's up, little bro?

ZALE

No more bed-bugs by us!

ZALE walks over to the mannequin and begins to finger the sequins on the canary bodice.

KEAMI

(Happy to hear.) Yeah?

ZALE

You shook that Super enough, throwing that *(with exaggerated flavor.)* LAW around—he sent an exterminator last week—

KEAMI

(Light-heartedly.) Shook him good, huh?

ZALE

Better than I could—

KEAMI

(Disciplinary.) I did it so you wouldn't—

ZALE begins to throw air punches towards the mannequin.

ZALE

Ahhhhh but if I did, you got that LAW hook-up—

Zale throws a punch at the mannequin. Keami throws a blanket over the mannequin.

KEAMI

Zale—

ZALE

I'm playin, I'm playin'. I wasn't gonna shake him. But, *yo*, for'real, thank you. Shit was getting unbearable—

KEAMI

You're welcome, little bro—

ZALE

My grandma said she invited you down; made you codfish as a thank you. Shit went cold—

KEAMI

Tell Mama Nancy no payment needed—

ZALE

Still—her good catfish! COLD. (Pause.) You been ghost all summer. Missed every barbecue and block party by us.

Keami becomes nervous. She begins to organize her papers.

KEAMI

You've been here, Zale. You saw me with these end-of-the year reports. Cases piled up, tall as God knows. And ya know, you always welcome to come chill here—

ZALE

I know, but I missed you *down there*.

(He starts to dance soca loose-and-goosy, with a feminine energy. He's imitating Keami's dancing. Keami looks on, smirking, deep in nostalgia. Maybe she gives a little movement to her hips.)

Watching your hair get big and shit cuz of the heat and the soca. Catching the holy ghost, Jesus in your hair. But *you know!* *(He throws his hands in dismissal.)* *I get it.* You got *all this*. You *Hollywood now*. You *Dr. Phil now* with yo new PHD—

KEAMI

I am *proudly still Brooklyn*. But I sure as hell am Dr. LaCroix. My student loans confirm that.

ZALE

(*Proudly.*) Dr. LaCroix. *Proud of you, sis—*

KEAMI

(*She points to her PHD Diploma on the wall.*) You one day—

ZALE

(*Dismissing it, but enjoying it.*) Nah-maybe-nah... So. What you got for me! I miss Dragon Ball Z for some Keami gifts!

KEAMI excitedly hands Zale the worksheets she's been reading from. He scans the worksheet and gradually his face goes sour.

ZALE

History of J'ouvert?

KEAMI

I'm holding a workshop. I want all of you to come. It's gonna be dope—

ZALE

Your "How to Pay Yo Bonds" workshop was dope—me and the boys still got the monopoly money from it. *But this— History?* (*He reads from the worksheet.*) "Whining is a tool of preservation." *Huh?* You gonna have girls dancing on us? That's the hook up?

KEAMI

No. I'm not some brothel. Knowledge is the hook-UP—

ZALE

Yeah and we already know this stuff—

KEAMI

UH-HUH—

ZALE

(*Uncertain; bullshitting.*) *J'ouvert opened in....1994—*

KEAMI

(*Like it's everything.*) *Think liberation of the slaves. Think your great-great-great grandparents had blue JAB-JAB face paint stuck in their chin whiskers.*

ZALE

And I bet they were just living in it, not trying to study it—

KEAMI

Well, y'all live in it way too much, Zale.

A pause. ZALE is seeing through KEAMI. It's an unspoken betrayal.

ZALE

This is trouble, Keami—

KEAMI

How? *It's a conversation—*

ZALE

Dr. LaCroix, we gonna pass on this.

(He hands the worksheets back, but Keami won't take them.)

Thank you but no thank you—

KEAMI

(She's shocked.) What?—

ZALE

Give me your cool shit, Keami! Your "I'm the Black Robin Hood" shit—

KEAMI

This is cool! Come on. Sell the shit out of this to the boys. You owe me, you do—

ZALE

I'm returning you the favor right now.

The favor: He tries to hand her the handouts. KEAMI denies them.

KEAMI

It's just a conversation. And a measly handout—

ZALE

You know what J'ouvert is for my boys. It's celebration...and it's transaction. It's business—

KEAMI

And I get that! Listen.

(Pause. She suavely throws her arm around Zale's shoulder. He purses his lips at her like "Woman, I know you're hustling me.")

I-I'm starting a committee. For upgrading J'ouvert. (ZALE lets out sounds of disapproval. He knew it.) Listen! HOW. DOPE. WOULD. IT. BE. If y'all can be like the official creative advisors for J'ouvert? Switch it up! Give it flavor. Make it a sweeter lyme. You guys can come by and brainstorm things—

ZALE

Word? Like choose the music and shit? We need more of them steel bands over that soca—

KEAMI

Yeah! That too! Come on. Please. I need the numbers. We are a second away from being shutdown, Zale. Just one workshop—

SAVITA (O.S)

Keami! I don't think my suitcases are going to fit into the closet!

SAVITA rushes into the room with her suitcases. SAVITA, 21, tall, Trinidadian American, KEAMI'S estranged sister, decked out in a beautiful sun dress. She glows immaculately, sun-kissed by her time in the islands. ZALE takes notice of her. His eyes light up, almost comically; He likes what he sees. He puffs out his chest and KEAMI takes notice of this.

ZALE

I mean, *is she* part of the history lesson—

KEAMI

No. And stop puffin your chest out at my sister, little boy—

ZALE

Sister?—

SAVITA

Savita (*She offers her hand*)—

ZALE

Well, hello sister. *First time I've heard of you.*

(*To Keami.*) Shit, I thought it was just my baby afro you were combin' out baby formula from—

SAVITA is wounded by ZALE'S surprise.

KEAMI sees this.

KEAMI

(*Trying to cover.*) She grew up out in Jersey with my mom while I was down here for college—

ZALE

New Jersey? I thought all your people was out in Trinidad? *Damn. Keeping secrets. (Melodrama, playing around, sort of:)* WHO ARE YOU—

KEAMI

They are! My mom and I lived out in Trinidad for most of my youth. But Savita; she's a second chapter. She just came back from a summer in Trinidad. Her first time—

ZALE

(*To Savita; suave. With a Trini accent.*) You glowin, g'yul. Lookin' like a pineapple plucked from the Caribbean sun—

SAVITA

(*Blushing.*) Thank you. When was the last time you were out there—

KEAMI

He's never been. Boy is a straight Yankee like his Momma—

ZALE

Ma never could afford to send us. But every time my Grandma Nancy speak that Trini, it's like I'm already there--

SAVITA

Awwwww--

There is a spark between Savita and Zale.

Keami notices this. KEAMI wraps her arms

around ZALE. She hands him the manilla envelope with the handouts.

KEAMI

Alright, Zale. I'll see you at the workshop?—

ZALE

Can't promise everybody, sis. But somebody will be there, Keami. No worries. *(To SAVITA.)* You coming to Keami's thing?

KEAMI

She might. (Keami hugs Zale and walks him to the door.) Love you, bro.

ZALE

Love you, sis. *(He turns to exit but turns back to SAVITA. Seductively, in Trini:)* Fammmmmillayyyyyyeee!

SAVITA

(Recognizing the phrase and excited to connect; in a poor Trini accent.) Familayyyyyee!

ZALE smiles knowingly at Savita. Keami raises a playful, hitting hand. Zale playfully shields his face and exits. KEAMI closes the door.

KEAMI

(In Trini.) G'yul, don't go around yellin' and respondin' to "Familayyyyyee"—

SAVITA

Why not? All the cute little old men in Trinidad did it. I felt like they were my street grandpas—

KEAMI

(Trini.) G'yul, you don't need no street grandpas. *(Normal voice.)* It's a pick-up, sis. Don't respond to that—

SAVITA

Oh—

KEAMI

I got a closet here for your suitcases, sis.

KEAMI kneels down and picks up SAVITA's suitcase.

KEAMI

You can still smell the island.

SAVITA kneels down by her luggage. She sniffs. She stays kneeling, her arms wrapped around the luggage.

SAVITA

(Solemn and nostalgic.) Yeah.

Savita's whole energy shifts. A sadness. KEAMI takes note of it. Keami grins widely at the sight; she knows it well.

KEAMI

(Laughs at the sight of SAVITA.) First time going and coming from Trinidad, huh? As soon as you reach JFK, you feel the fish hook on your tailbone pullin' on the line, tugging you to come back.

SAVITA

Yeah....like the island has been waiting on me.

KEAMI

It was, g'yul. You a Trini. And that island been waiting for you for your whole life. *(A joke; celebratory.) And so have I!*

Keami pulls a bottle of wine and two glasses from her desk. She hands Savita a glass and pours her wine. She toasts.

You officially Trini, g'yul.

Keami drinks her wine. SAVITA is touched by this. Keami wraps her arm around her sister.

SAVITA

(Like a child.) Yeah?

KEAMI

(Teasing.) I meannnn.....you a little vanilla! TOOK you a little while to get there—Lord knows I've been waiting my whole life for you to get Trini. But you're here now. Back from the motherland. Ma lost her shit when you went out there , huh—

SAVITA

Yeah—

KEAMI throws her arm around Savita. She holds her sister.

KEAMI

So tell me everything, *g'yul!* How was it? What was it like? I haven't been there since—*OOF—2009?* Save me the airfare. Does the mango still dissolve on your tongue? Are the river limes still popping? It's a damn shame you weren't down there for J'ouvert.

Keami gets up and goes to the closet. Savita follows like a guilty dog. Business with Keami cleaning out her closet to make space for Savita's suitcases throughout the convo.

SAVITA

(A rant.) Everybody feels like family out there, ya know? Everyone's stove or backyard become yours. It's hella nice—

KEAMI

Yeah, it—

SAVITA

And the food—God, Keami! I already know—nothing in Hackensack will taste as good as it did in Trinidad. Like Aunt Sally's cooking is probably the best cooking I—

Keami's face goes sour.

KEAMI

Me and Ma's tastebuds never had the pleasure. *(Pause.)* Dad's people, huh?

A tense pause. SAVITA becomes nervous.