

Pulling Seine and Catching Souls

By Lisa-Anne Julien (Trinidad and Tobago)

Is it possible for the eyes to run out of tears? The mother asked the butcher, as he weighed her steaks.

He smiled at her comfortingly.

Tears don't mean anything, he said.

She sighed. Her heart returned to a normal beat, which was a dull thump that forced blood around in a lazy, obligatory meander. She'd been worried. Crying didn't produce tears anymore, just a pain where she was told her heart was. Would her son, looking down from heaven and seeing no tears, think she'd gotten over him? For children, things were just that simple. She hoped the butcher was right.

Handing her the steaks, the butcher's eyes twinkled as he cocked his head towards half a dozen kingfish sitting upon melting ice. He knew her son loved kingfish, especially when it was baked and stuffed with ochroes, cassava and green banana. She sighed and declined demurely. The dish just wouldn't be the same without her son's giggling and fighting with his father over who should get the fish eyes.

Yes, the boy loved fish. The only thing he loved more was the ocean. Loved it too much and feared it too little.

Just walked right in, the homeless beach bum had whispered that day, an incredulous look on his beaten face. Just walked right in.

She returned home to a husband too drunk to notice she'd even left.

New moon tonight, he said blankly. She didn't respond.

After her dinner she sat in her veranda, the ocean breeze and hungry mosquitoes caressing her exposed skin. She looked up at the new moon crescent, thinking about its command of the ocean. The high tides being created by the moon would be causing the waves to swell to gigantic proportions; dark green formations with amoebic properties that would

inevitably lure more fish than usual across the ocean. The fishermen would be excited; the villagers would be on standby to help.

Maybe, she thought. Just maybe.

The next morning, as the orange glow of the sun marched out of the horizon, she placed her feet gingerly onto the sand, remembering a time when she'd walked the beach front for days looking for her son's body.

The captain had already taken his boat out into the deep and thrown the seine net into the ocean. Back at the shore people were beginning to find their spot on the long rope, ready to pull the net in.

The villagers embraced her, arguing amongst themselves who she should stand next to.

Pull! The captain's voice bellowed the formation to order.

The villagers pulled. Children grinned and pulled, believing their contributions to be a significant part of the effort. Old men licked their lips and pulled, thinking about the rum that was going to warm their bellies afterwards. Women pulled as they wondered if they had sufficient limes at home to clean the fish.

Everyone pulled.

She pulled with all her might, welcoming the pain in her arms as it slid away from that place where she was told her heart was.

Then she saw her husband. He ran to the middle of the rope and pulled.

The catch was enormous: Cavalli, moonshine, shark, herring, carite and kingfish. She got down on bended knees, watching one kingfish flip and dance, before surrendering to the foreign medium. The captain, exhilarated by his catch, knelt down beside her and handed her five medium kingfish wrapped in newspaper. She took it, wiped her tears and walked to meet her husband. Hand in hand, they made their way back home.