Chapter III

Search for Material Prosperity:

Storm of Fortune
The novel *Storm of Fortune*, the second in the trilogy of Clarke, is a sequel to the first novel *The Meeting Point*, with exactly the same characters. Once again Bernice Leach is found at the centre. The novel follows the lives of Bernice and Estelle as the consequences of the latter’s pregnancy unfold. The novel also revolves round Dots and her husband Boysie Cumberbatch, and his friend Henry White, whose rich Jewish girlfriend, Agatha who appears to be the source of much of the ill-luck that befalls him. For Henry comits suicide soon after marrying her. The relation depicts another dimension of Jewish - Black relationship, in which both are victimised for no fault of theirs.

The novel is an insight into the lives of the above mentioned characters. In the words of Keith S.Henry:

*Storm of Fortune* is an absorbing sequel where the lives of the immigrants evolve and develop with less reference to the claims of power structure. (1)

Bernice’s rich Jewish employer Mr.Burrmann makes her sister Estelle pregnant and sends her to a botched black street abortion. The novel *Storm of Fortune* opens with Estelle lying in the hospital ward recuperating from the attempted abortion. In the hospital she comes into contact with a fellow -
convalescee, a White North Ontario woman, Gloria Macmillan. Though it is just a brief stay together they develop a great concern for each other. They begin to understand each other and talk about all sorts of things at length. In the course of their chat, Estelle expresses her desire to quit the place and lead a self-made life away from her sister. Her acts have cowed her down and she feels embarrassed to return to her sister’s apartment. At this juncture Gloria Macmillan consoles Estelle and extends her support by inviting Estelle to come down to Timmins and redress her life. Macmillan is so friendly and so brilliantly persuasive that Estelle could not but accept her offer. Macmillan very generously spares some money from her slender purse to enable Estelle meet her travel expenses to Timmins. Estelle accepts the offer and sets off to Timmins.

Estelle undergoes immense mental agony out of shame brought down upon her by her own deeds. She expresses this to her sister Bernice in her delirious state - about her embarrassment over her own actions and admits that she has learnt her lessons from this experience - the experience of becoming pregnant. She says:

Hold my hand Bernice; I am so ashamed, and I have disappointed you so much. I don’t know what to do. I come all this way up here from Barbados to Toronto, and spoil things for you, and me, in nearly no time at all, in merely six months... but I had to put this one down to experience. And mammy always used to say that experience never killed anybody, that you have to experience a bad experience one more time to correct it, that only the weak in spirit and intelligence... but I have gathered my experience from this experience. (SoF,p.11)

Estelle’s sense of personal guilt drives her to leave the hospital a few hours before Bernice’s arrival. Though she is ignorant of the route, and of the
train that she has to board, she risks going to Timmins, as she has no other place to go. She hires a cab to station. A man informs her that there isn’t any train to Timmins for the next eleven hours. So she dumps her luggage in the cloak room and boards a train heading north in the subway.

Estelle’s journey to Timmins is a fine depiction of as to how a black woman is harassed in a variety of ways and shows how difficult it is for a black woman to guard herself. Initially the train is empty but gradually fills up. The passengers are silent and do not appear lively. Though the seat beside her is empty no one cares to occupy it. A woman comes straight to her berth after looking at her with curiosity decides to stand rather than sit by her side. This is only first of many incidents during the journey to Timmins. She is greatly troubled by a man and she feels there is some conspiracy. A feeling of some fear of loneliness, of isolation, of being dirty seizes her.

After all the desolation and the beauty of the fleeting country of the northern Ontario, which she had seen through the window of the train, Estele is stunned by the liveliness and the big-city spirit of North Bay. Hiring a taxi she lands before a cheap but good hotel where she thinks of spending the rest of the night. The man at the counter was just telling her where to sign when a woman comes rollicking through the door behind the desk. She stands gazing at Estelle for a few seconds. Then with outstretched arms comes straight to Estelle and embraces her. She is none other than Mrs.Macmillan. Estelle is both surprised and shocked to discover that Mrs.Macmillan resided in North Bay, a very small town far away from Timmins. She feels cheated yet says nothing and harbours no hard feelings against Macmillan. The significance of the Macmillan’s episode is not developed further and one finds it rather obsolete and begins to wonder why Clarke bothers to introduce the character at all. Mr.Keith S.Henry rightly comments saying
The Macmillan episode is so bizarre so much without further consequence in the novel, Gloria Macmillan so strangely unembarrassed during their accidental encounter at being revealed as a liar, Estelle so unembittered—she is still pregnant and now very out-of-pocket—that we wonder what Clarke’s motive could in developing it. (2)

When Dots comes to Bernice and reports the brutal beating given to Henry by the white policemen, Bernice who herself had been an eye-witness to the incident conceals the fact. Dots was not aware of the fact that her husband was the actual target of the white policemen but had escaped from them by lending Henry his car. The policemen took it for granted it was Boysie and beat Henry. Dots pours out her venom against the white policeman taking it seriously. She even walks out of the domestic service of Mrs. Hunter. She demands that Bernice did the same thing. At this stage Bernice says that she cannot do so as she has to support her sister Estelle, who has been made pregnant by her employer Mr. Burrmann, who in turn has also sent her to a botched-black street abortion. She blames Bernice for concealing the facts. They had been friends—real good friends—helping each other at all time and encouraging one another right from the day they met each other. Now it has past thirty-four months that is to say three long years and still Bernice has no confidence in Dots. Dots tried to breathe sense into Bernice saying:

Everytime you (Bernice) feel bad, everytime you feel depressed. Everytime you get a head-ache, everytime you want to go to church and you don’t want to be the only black person to be riding by yourself on that street car. Everytime your period comes and you can’t Mistress Burrmann’s kitchen work I have come and help you. I have been answering your call Right? And now, good Jesus Christ,
Bernice! You mean to say you can’t be honest with me, for one minute? You call that friendship? (SoF p.7)

These words strike Bernice hard. There is silence for few minutes. Then Dots makes herself comfortable in a chair and talks to Bernice in a soothing way. She briefs her about Boysie, her husband and the woman in his life. She shares all her personal feelings with Bernice. But also stresses the fact that a married woman, as she is, is more experienced than Bernice herself and that marriage is what makes the difference in understanding life in the right perspective. Bernice’s reluctance and inability to have faith in black sisterhood has to do with her failure to accept her negritude.

At another level is depicted the development of Boysie from a frustrated unemployed young man to a cultured, civilized young man strong and sound in both finance and social status. Luck favours him at a very crucial time. A Jamaican, a janitor in a church - Old Man Jonesy, as he is called, wishes to leave for Jamaica for rest. He puts the Baptist church pastor, Reverend Markham, at St. George street informed about his proposed visit to Jamaica, who later calls Dots and insists that Boysie took up the job in Jonsey’s absence. All Boysie had to do was - Sweep out fifteen rooms every night, carry a little waste paper and other slight garbage outside, by the side of the building, post a few letters after the people finished working, and get paid sixty dollars a week.

On the first day Jonsey tells Boysie that the Janitorial job at the Church house is a very responsible and important one: “An important job that had to do both the important gentleman and ladies downstairs in the Church house. (SoF p.198). He further explains all the eccentric things about the job. He also stresses that the office room, that of Dr. Glimmerman, the boss-man, be cleaned not just with the broom but also with the vacuum cleaner. Old Man Jonsey had begun, like Henry on rail-road; and had moved up, in prestige but not in salary, to the janitorial job in the more exclusive Church house; and wishes that Boysie
would grow out to be a trusted industrious man. The first week Boysie cleans the fifteen rooms at the Baptist Church. It is hard work and Boysie thinks he has taken the wrong job.

One weekend Boysie holds a promised party with his friends Henry, sans Agatha, Henry’s girlfriend, Freeness and all men he knew and particularly without Dots. The party begins on Friday after the departure of Dr.Glimmerman and when the last of the guest leaves it is seven O’clock Monday. The office is to function from eight O’clock. Boysie, then in a stuper of drunkeness and sexual satiety remembers this and instead of sweeping the rooms with a broom plans to do with the vaccum cleaner. He empties the vaccum cleaner into the toilet which served the entire floor, flushed the toilet and dashes downstairs. As he opens the door of the board room, he hears voices - panic-stricken voices of questioning, of wonder and doubt. The toilet had overflowed and water was dripping into the room. Dr.Glimmerman takes Boysie to task and that puts an end to Boysie’s career as a janitor. He is kicked out.

With the money that Dots has cleverly saved from her salary and her husband’s, Boysie purchases a new station-wagon and begins to work on his own. He gets the letters, Boysie Cumberbatch Limited Cleaners, written on it. Later he takes up the job as contract cleaner and janitor in the offices of Macintosh and Company, Stock Brokers. He is now a new man. He buys an apartment, a new one with -

Shinning furniture which you could see colour for colour, design for design, price tag for price tag, and time- payment schedule for time payment schedule, in many similar apartments all over Toronto; urban, sub-urban, labour-urban and snobburban. (SoF.p.288).
Boysie accepts Mr. Macintosh, a business magnate and the President of Macintosh and Company, Stock Brokers, as his model. He imitates him in each and every aspect. He also begins to think that education is something that makes a difference and that an educated wife is an asset. When Henry expresses his disgust for books, Boysie says: "Education, boy! That's what I mean when I say you're lucky as hell. Agatha is a highly educated woman. And she is your wife now. I wish my wife was a more learned woman." (SoF.p.273). A drastic change in the life of Boysie is noticeable. From an unemployed, stupid man he grows out to be a hard working and industrious personality with a purpose. The change is rather too sudden:

Of thematic importance is Boysie's great prosperity in his new janitorial business and his new ambition: it is decidedly unexpected in view of what we have seen of Boysie's personality, but they are, above all, implausibly sudden.(3).

Mrs. Gasstein, a minor character in the novel and the friend and neighbour of Mrs. Burrmann, briefs Mrs. Burrmann soon after her return from her Mexican tour about the events that took place in the absence of Estelle and Mr. Burrmann and the arrival of an ambulance - she had never seen one enter the colony for the past twenty five years - the parties and all that takes place in Forest Hill. She insists on Mrs. Burrmann taking a stern decision to see off Bernice. She says -

Get rid of that nig ... get that negro out. But do it nicely. I know I can trust you to do it nicely. Even give her some money you do it. She doesn't have to know what's happening; she doesn't have to know the truth. In her place get your self a nice middle class European Jewish woman. There's scores of them, refugees and people like that... coming to this country everyday. (SoF.p.220).
And this leads to Bernice's dismissal. She heads straight to her friend Dots' apartment who at first is surprised to see Bernice. They welcome her with renewed spirits. Bernice's arrival to Boysie, is "The Prodigal girl come home! (SoF.p.234)- because it has been months since they have met. But when they come to know the truth about her loosing the job as a domestic, their love and affection for her is even more clearly seen. They extend their invitation to her to stay with them till she finds another job. The blackman's love for his fellow beings is seen here. Dots' words comfort and console Bernice and help her recover from the embarrassment she has been exposed to. It is here that she is joined by her beloved sister, Estelle, who writes a letter to her and both Dots and Bernice bring her home and they all live together without any differences. The incident serves as an instance for black brotherhood and one of the very few events that provide certain relief in the novel.

Henry - the unemployed friend of Boysie - and his affair with his rich German educated girlfriend is another aspect that helps the progression of the novel. Towards the end of the earlier novel *The Meeting Point* Henry is given a good thrashing by the white policeman, for involving himself in affairs with white women. But even in *Storm of Fortune* he is not a changed man. He is the same young fellow flirting with white women, spending money which he gets from his girlfriend; drinking at the pubs with Boysie and ending himself up in drunken brawls. He even goes to the extent of slapping Freeness, a friend of both Boysie and himself. He tells Boysie that he is vexed with his life for not finding a job. He wants to be manly but luck is what makes the difference:

I is a man with hard luck, meaning that every- body in this blasted place is against me, in a certain way, in regards to getting employment, or getting a job. And you also know, you can bear me out in this, that I is one man who try hard as shit to find employment in this city. I isn't a lazy man. A
West Indian isn't a laze immigrant, like some o'the pricks sitting down right here in this room drinking this cheap blasted draught beer, from twelve when the traven opens to one O'clock in the morning when it close. (SoF.p.170).

He wants to marry Agatha but before he does he needs to get his hands on a job. Henry is financially supported by Agatha. He depends on her for every thing because he has no other go. Even this he tells Boysie:

I want you to let me and Agatha live in that apartment till I could get a place of our own, but remember! I am not trying to force myself on you, in no kind o'manner, and I am not trying to impose on you, or nothing so. It ain't nothing like that, it is only that I feel bad as hell that a woman got to support me in the essentials of life, like even buying the tooth paste that I uses every morning, buying the cigarettes I smokes during the day, the goddammit, she even pays for the french leathers I uses when I am flirting with her. ... and that pains me to have to ask. I was not born asking, man... (SoF.p.179).

This may be the beginning of the pain his conscience experiences which finally proves to be fatal for Henry. Henry's desire to make money is better seen when gambles with Freeness at a dice house. His frustration leads him to stake sixty dollars given to him by Agatha to buy himself a good looking suit for their marriage: "Henry was playing with money that belong to Agatha. Nervousness was working itself all through his body; and it was going to his mind. He felt he would lose Agatha's sixty dollars." (SoF p.213). When Freeness advises him against his bet of Ten dollars over a four - which is supposed to have very few chances in the game of dice - he picks up a quarrel and slaps Freeness hard to the ground:
Ten dollars is a lot of money, you idiot! Ten dollars? On a four? Man, you have rocks in your rass-hole head, or what? Ten dollars is a lot of bread, you arse! If you had ten dollars this afternoon and you was in Barbados, you don’t know you could be the rass hole governor of that place? You could own Barbados with ten dollars! ... Henry flew up, grabbed Freeness by his shirt front, and shook Freeness vigorously five or six times, and then threw him flat on the floor before anybody knew what was happening. Henry was screaming, "Don’t make me tear-up your arse, nigger!" (SoF.p.215-216).

Despite the repeated serious repercussions from whites and blacks alike Henry marries Agatha. The wedding ceremony in fact dramatizes the tension that exists between the two races. None of Agatha’s white friends turn up though she invites. There are about fifty invited guests and many others whom Boysie ushers in to avoid embarrassment. There is a lot of pomp and show-drinking, dancing, speaking, and dreaming. Boysie and Dots describe it to be a very joyous day in their lives. Agatha herself accepts it and remarks that it as the happiest day in her life. But the joy has an ominous air about it. One of the domestics at a hair salon sums up what the ominous air is about:

This rich-able Jewish girl who is marrying a Bajan black man, Christ, he really have his blasted head full with rocks! Wait, he couldn’t find nobody better than she? Why they always have to go and look for white woman? (SoF.p.251).

The irony in the question is that the whites are asking the same thing. Joy comes to an end when a police man - in response to a complaint lodged by some White people in the area - comes and orders them to pack off. It hurts every one and more so Agatha. This racial discrimination is too much for Henry. He confesses this to Boysie at a bar:
I been meaning to tell you all this a long long time, man, but I was catching by arse royally as the Trinidadians say. It was pressure in arse, man. And I couldn't breathe, man. First thing was the police coming and breaking up the reception. Well Agatha ain't forget that yet. I could not believe it myself - no cop would be so stupid as to break up a wedding party. But after the quarrel came the hunting for an apartment. I was thinking of my wife, my goddamn rich white woman, and she can't find a decent place to live, merely because she happened to be walking beside a man with the wrong brand of colour, according to the landladies and landlords in this arse-hole Toronto. (SoF p.280-81).

Henry turns to writing poetry to cushion the effects of his isolation, his loneliness and boredom. When, Boysie makes fun of his poetry, Henry says he is being serious, that he has written it - "In a poetical form, like poetry..." And dedicated the thing to his beloved wife Agatha. Boysie unfolds the paper and reads:

But was it really time that killed the rose of our love? Was it time? And was it time to die? Is it time? This rose? It was not, could not, be time. Time has no power over roses, or over love, or over me, or over you. Time has no gun over love and beauty. (SoF p.285).

But Henry's devotion to poetry is implausibly sudden. Commenting on Boysie's new ambition and Henry's sudden devotion to poetry Clarke himself clarifies:

That Boysie's new ambition and Henry's new poetic vocation are not as implausible as this reader is inclined to think. He
argues that Boysie's sorry behaviour previously was abnormal for him. It was induced by his new experiences in Canada of a de-moralizingly total financial dependents on a woman. His moral growth was also propelled by his important role in the wedding reception of Agatha and Henry. As for Henry, he was now surrounded by his wife's books. For this reader the novel does not effect the linkages and transitions as convincingly as Clarke intendend. (4).

On one ocassion Henry says to Boysie:

Now the position is this, Boysie. I want to get married real bad to Agatha. Real bad. I know I am making the biggest ... mistake in my life, but to err is man. You can't kill me for being a man. And you can't kill me or hang me because I err. I don't like the idea of marrying a white woman with money, no more than any other man like the idea, if he is as poor as me. It ain't wise marrying any woman who have beans, particularly if the man don't have a goddamm bean to his name, to back up her beans. You follow? (SoF.p.178).

Henry becomes disenchanted by the pressures of survival with his Jewish White wife. Towards the end of the novel, unable to cope with the alienation between Agatha and himself - created by his sense of guilt of being black and the fact of his total and demoralizing dependence on Agatha drives him to despair and he commits suicide. He admits that his unemployed status and his total dependence on Agatha makes him feel like a 'slave' to her. He loses all sense of authority, respect, and control when he deals with her, and he says, "she is trying to give me an inferiority complex, Boysie! And she is calling it beauty."(SoF.p.277)
These ambiguous black-white relationships can be rationalized only on the basis of the fact that these "expatriate characters are dislocated from their peasant society and seem to go through the science of a second conquest" (5). The depression, fear, and shame they suffer from, their lack of pride in their ancestry emerge from their colonical biases. They are not ready to accept affinity with Africa and hence repudiate their blackness. The pain they experience as immigrants is the basis of their ill-fated lives.
REFERENCES


2. ibid, pp.95.

3. ibid, pp.95-96.
