

## 'PARLOUR'

It was on a summer's day earlier this year after I visit the Dockyards Brompton, three miles from here. It was on this said day that I first heard a voice from a man I will come to rejoice.

Many have stated that this man who was steeped in British history, was gifted, gracious and intelligent as can be. And I must convey that... truth it is and bless the free.

Fore our first encounter did not fright a lady, even though we meet in the darkest of night. He was sitting in the corner of the parlour, lit by candlelight.

Stitching away, as though one had the most urgent of meetings the next day. I mistook him for homeless, and afraid, when questioned, he said a workhouse was his last stay.

I lit the fire and draw a chair near and asked him his name and why he chose here.

He shuffled a bit, cleared his throat and a voice of gentle yet firm conviction spoke.

"I was born here in these towns of Medway, father a Naval cook from St Kitts, he told me, He remembered whispers, stating his father was not free and that he broke ship, from the island he flee, to Britannia with quick speed".

"Chatham his father's name that is, I learnt, as I offered Tea, often spoke words depicting beauty of the Caribbean Isle, 17 years abroad across the seas, was once home. Evidently a place he felt his father longed to re see. He unconsciously smiles as he records as a boy, he would listen contently in the joy of adventures in the west of the island full of banana trees.

As he drank his tea, with expression declared on his semi lit face, he announced I knew my privilege, as I. One in England is concealed to the real hardship of slavery, especially, when one learns that most slaves could not and did not last beyond 12 years in the fields. In Honor, on the seventh day we kneel, tradition Mother said father instilled".

For 14 sunsets, I spoke to a man who I know not his name, never in fear and never in vain. we talked about his life as a tailor, and I ridiculed him in jest about not being a sailor.

From the age of 12, Seven years he was skilled to high standards, Tailoring and Education, the norm for that generation. 1819 seeking London, I presumed to take refuge from grief after his father was laid to rest. But he declared hand on his chest, that the permanency of London was to seek financial progress.

His mother I later discovered on the 6th sunset was an English Maid from Gillingham, but there was no word of her travelling with her eldest son, it seems she remained a Kent civilian. Fore, he said I believe that five his mother borne and one left early, rested in peace so then there was four, three of which she could not ignore.

He spoke briefly about the passing of his wives both named Ann, the shock upon me must have been as clear as the sun rise, my tears began when he informed me that their deaths were less than a trio of Christmases apart. He tried to hide his eyes, restless hands, and a fixed bowed head. At times, the silence loud. Beneficial it was not to ask for more conversation, the pain of remembrance stretched across the parlour air. when he spoke of Ann Juliana, his infant daughter who did not see 12 weeks of 1826. I knew that evening much was left unsaid as I blew out the parlour wicks.

When he returned the night after next, with no sound made, we both knew that the last conversation would never be re addressed. I made the Tea and asked him about Trade.

He flowed (partly relieved) with energetic dialogue outlining tailoring in London, the aspirations. The smell of fabrics, the feeling of fitting esquires with garments, the joy knowing his hands made such fine creations. All hard work, as one has to be organised and professional to demonstrated innovation and gain considerations.

The energetic tone changed with cause, as he explained the treatment of Tailors, less wages and more labour, the gentry felt like dictators. Not even the 1832 Great Reform Act, brought much favour.

Still as prior, most had, no real power unless you owned property, no access for those who own tools, wealth gave you cause, with Land, strides you can made within Parliament halls. Joining a new tailor's trade union could be dangerous, yes, as he looked straight at me, he said I was no fool. 1834 Strike I did, no regrets as demands were fairly set. The strike failed, conditions further derailed, and my job in detail, lost and blacklisted which does not make for great retail.

The Metropolitan Tailor's and The National Charter Associations seem to be a natural evolution as I had to agree that unfair treatment did not reside solely within the tailoring industry, nor did it only hinder me. The working class seek Democracy, representation for the likes of you and me. Those who live in luxury have lost integrity, the thousands that signed the people's charter and attended our mass rallies are evidence of social discontent for all to see.

I am aware of the power that the title of National executive of the chartist movement bestowed upon me, in equal measure the power of racism as I bear my father's skin and mockery about my deformity, many a times lead me to plea to thee to retain sanity.

I felt, I knew the injustice as I too bear his father's skin. A simultaneous sign from us both highlighted by the sun rising through the trees. Laughing, I asked him where did get his accent from, with an expression that was slightly solemn, he said this evening I will tell you all about the 1848 Chartist Rally on Kennington Common. I replied will you also tell me your name?

William, William Cuffay he beamed as he left.

He never returned; the only reason I know he was actually here in the parlour during that summer season, was the sewing kit that was left in a small beautifully decorated Victorian chest. Like so many I found out about the latter part of William's life reading a book tucked up in Bed.

Whilst history is finally acknowledging William as a game changer . I'll put on a wager, that this man was never crown traitor, he believed and stood up for the working class to live better, proud to be a striker, Raising awareness as a prisoner, even when they made him a transporter, continuing his advocacy down under in Tasmania, This fellow whose ancestry went back all the way to Africa, really was a political battler, living for others right to the end, when he died a pauper.

**Michi Masumi (Oct 2K23)**

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