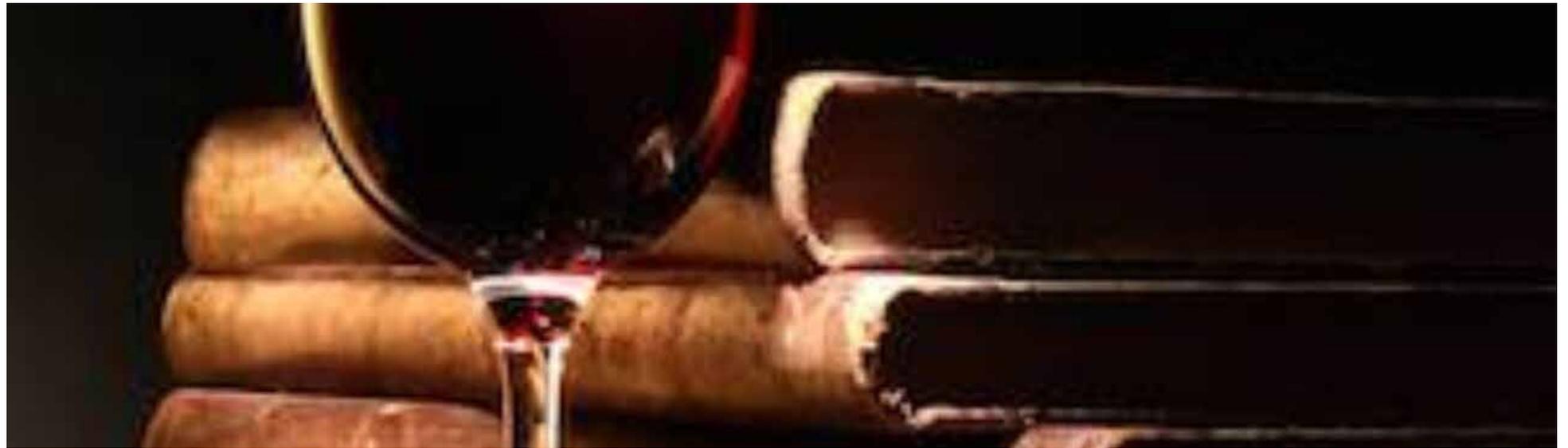


Bookends



CONTESTS, COMPETITIONS, etc

US, UK, Barbadian authors up for Women's Prize for fiction

LONDON (AP) — Novels that explore forgotten and neglected communities in Britain, the US and the Caribbean were named finalists recently for the £30,000 Women's Prize for fiction.

The six-book shortlist includes American author Brit Bennett's

tale of twins who take different paths, *The Vanishing Half*, US writer Patricia Lockwood's social media satire *No One is Talking About This* and *Transcendent Kingdom*, a story of African immigrants in Alabama by Ghanaian-American writer Yaa Gyasi.

Also in the running are Barbadian writer Cherie Jones' story of gritty life on a beautiful island, *How the One-Armed Sister Sweeps Her House*, and two books by British writers: Susanna Clarke's literary fantasy *Piranesi* and Claire Fuller's rural family saga *Unsettled Ground*.

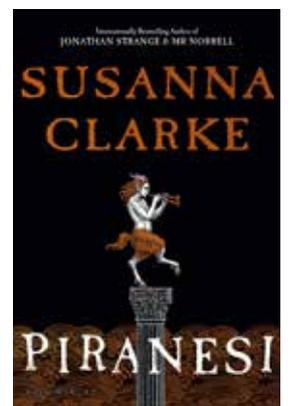
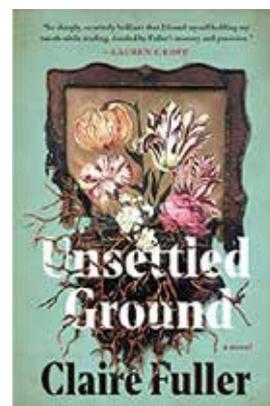
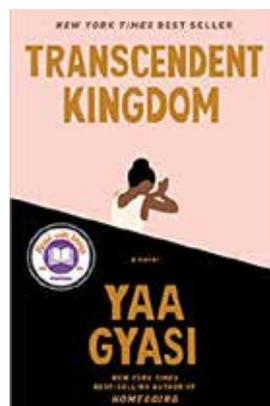
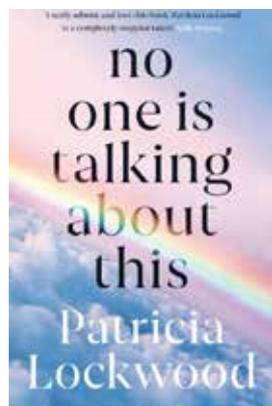
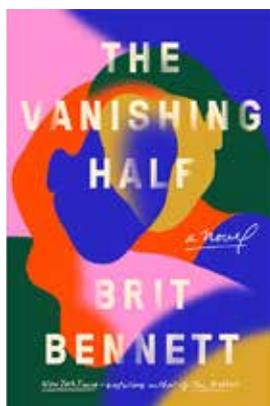
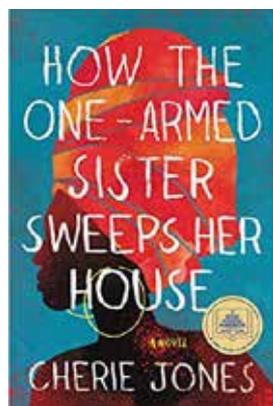
Booker Prize-winning novelist Bernardine Evaristo, who is chairing the judging panel, said several of the novels depicted "communities that aren't really written about in fiction" and tough subjects such as domestic violence, addiction and depression.

"But they're not miserable books," she said. "They're all really beautifully crafted stories.

... They're not lightweight, but they are a thrilling read."

Founded in 1996, the prize is open to female English-language writers from around the world. Previous winners include Zadie Smith, Tayari Jones and Maggie O'Farrell.

The winner of the 2021 Women's Prize will be announced July 7 at a ceremony in London.



REVIEW

'Blood Grove' a bewildering maze of double-crosses

Blood Grove, by Walter Mosley (Mulholland Books)

WALTER Mosley's Los Angeles detective, Easy Rawlins, has always invited comparisons to the original hard-boiled Southern California gumshoe, Raymond Chandler's Philip Marlowe — but never more so than in *Blood Grove*, Mosley's 15th and latest instalment in his series.

The surface similarities are obvious. Both detectives work

what Chandler called LA County's "mean streets" Both are seldom in the good graces of the authorities. And both sometimes meander through rambling plots that are difficult to follow.

In *Blood Grove*, as with Chandler's *The Long Goodbye*, the plot is so byzantine that it borders on incoherent. And that's OK.

Both Chandler and Mosley amply reward readers with the beauty of their prose and with the world views of their iconic heroes, men of honour struggling

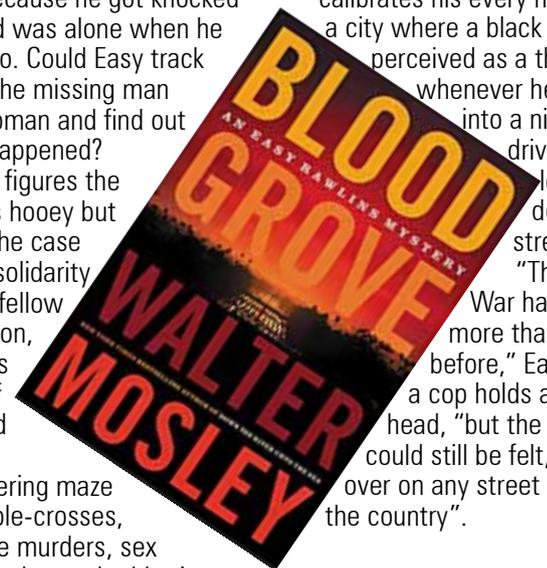
to do right in an unjust world. For Marlowe, that meant trying to earn an honest living and stay alive in the corrupt, cultural wasteland of late 1930s to 1950s Los Angeles. For Easy Rawlins, it has meant trying to do the same with the added complication of being a black man in race-torn, post-World War II Los Angeles.

Blood Grove opens in 1969 when Easy, an aging World War II veteran, is approached by a Vietnam vet with a wild story. The young vet thinks he may have killed a black man in a fight

over a white woman, but he's not sure because he got knocked out and was alone when he came to. Could Easy track down the missing man and woman and find out what happened?

Easy figures the story is hoey but takes the case out of solidarity with a fellow vet. Soon, he finds himself trapped in a bewildering maze of double-crosses, multiple murders, sex clubs and armed robberies.

As always, Easy carefully calibrates his every move in a city where a black man is perceived as a threat whenever he steps into a nice hotel or drives a good looking car down the street. "The Civil War had ended more than a century before," Easy thinks as a cop holds a gun to his head, "but the remnants could still be felt, still killed over on any street corner in the country".





Philip Nanton on Shake Keane

RIFF: The Shake Keane story, a biography of the Vincentian musician and poet, was launched during a virtual event on January 28th 2021. The biography is published by Papillote Press (London; Trafalgar, Dominica).

Here, Saint Lucian writer John Robert Lee interviews the author Philip Nanton.

What inspired you to write this biography of Shake Keane? Is it a first biography of Keane?

The short answer is that Shake's life contained many elements of a good story.

To expand: I had written an article (*Small Axe*, 14, September 2003) about Shake's poetry, as well as two short reviews, one in *Caribbean Beat*, (Issue 66, March/April 2004) and a short essay about his life for *Caribbean Trailblazers: St Vincent & the Grenadines*, Vol. 2 2011 edited by Baldwin and Cheryl Phillips King. While writing these pieces I realised what an intriguing story was reflected in Shake's life. Up from humble beginnings in St Vincent, a relatively unknown Caribbean island; international acclaim in the jazz world, especially in England and Europe of the 1960s; a triumphal return home that went sour because of political machinations followed quickly by a struggle to survive his last years in New York. It also helped that I had met him back in 1979 and got to know him to a limited extent.

Shake was an important influence on my writing, especially my *Island Voices from St Christopher & the Barracudas*. This collection of monologues and dialogues, first published as a CD in 2008 and in book form in 2014, is indebted to his brand of satirical humour.

Other elements of his story also appealed to me. He was a rare artist with highly developed skills in both music and poetry. His life story reflected also common Caribbean experiences including, migration and the return home with

a

sense of national duty to fulfil. Yet further, St Vincent, Shake's homeland, is an unlikely island from which such a highly achieving artist set out. The island exhibits more of a claim to agriculture (arrowroot, bananas, marijuana growing) than to high culture. Close readers of Derek Walcott's poetry will remember that, in his long poem, 'The Schooner Flight', it is the ignorant Vincentian crewman who teases Shabine about his poetry and who tosses around to the other crewmen the exercise book that contains Shabine's poems. So another question to be addressed was how to explain Shake's achievement, coming, as he did, from such an unlikely place? Finally, there was the contradiction that people in St Vincent demonstrated over time — a mixture of pride in Shake's achievements when abroad alongside a disdain for his contribution when he returned to offer it to the island. In many ways, then, there was a rich story waiting to be told, and no

one else had come forward to tell it. Obviously, it's not for me to say how effectively I addressed these questions, but they certainly formed the inspiration for the book.

You mention three major influences on Shake's life and work, which also played a part in the lives and work of his artistic contemporaries: The rise of nationalism in the Caribbean from the thirties; the experience of migration eg *Windrush*, and the views of, and practice of "masculinity". How were the issues of masculinity manifest in the music, poetry and life of Shake Keane?

To answer I'd like to disentangle 'masculinity' from 'music' and 'poetry'. But I should point out first that masculinity, along with migration and nationalism were the social frames for analysis through which I viewed Shake's life. They are more fundamental frameworks than your more gentle term 'influences' suggests. As such, I would separate the masculine frame through which he lived from his poetry and music.

Essentially, I understand masculinity as a form of learned behaviour.

Music and poetry I understand to be

concerned primarily with emotions that a good artist can create and anyone can experience. As such it is hard to assign a gender to music and poetry which deal with universal human emotions. All three involve performances, but performances of very different types. I appreciate that some writers and critics believe that without looking at a book's cover they can tell from its opening lines if it was written by a man or a woman. I am not so sure. But I incline more to Virginia Woolf's observation that effective writing requires an ability to gender hop. As she put it — to be 'woman manly and man womanly'.

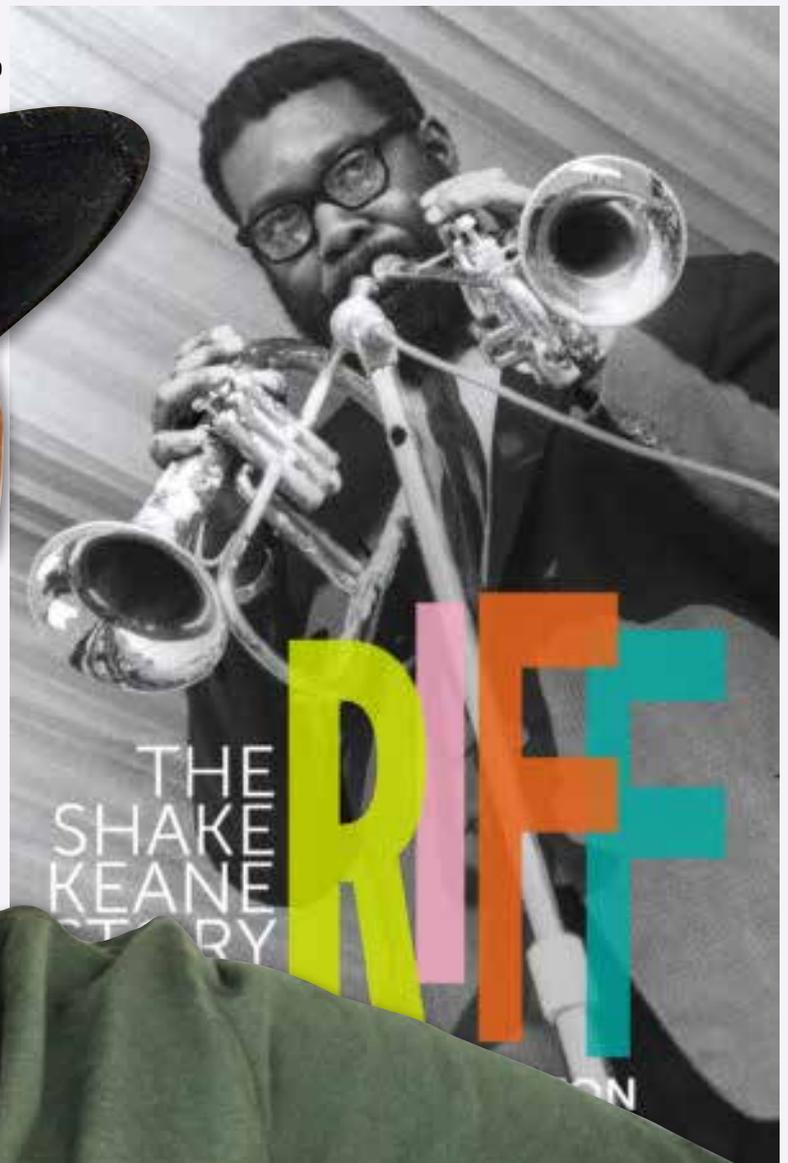
Shake's performance of masculinity reflected many features of conventional West Indian male behaviour. He showed himself to be 'one of the boys' in many ways. The music environment that he inhabited — the bands that he played in — for most of his life was predominantly a male one. His original instrument, the trumpet, was traditionally seen as a male instrument. Similarly the touring with all male bands as well as being a regular at alcohol-fuelled late-night music dives in London's

Soho with their jam sessions all reflect conventional masculine behaviour. Late in life his nostalgic longing for friendship was reflected by his regular phone calls at any hour to male friends dotted around different corners of the world. There were also less appealing features of this masculinity. He drank regularly and heavily when under pressure. He was an absent father to his three children, he exhibited a serial dependence on his three wives and, occasionally, he lashed out violently against those nearest to him, to the extent that I have come to understand that his second wife left him for that reason. So it's important to state plainly, also, that Shake was no saint.

I locate his music and poetry more within a framework of jazz as I set out below.

How did the musicianship, and in particular, his development with the Joe Harriot quintet of free-form jazz, shape the poetry? You suggest that "he often applies what could be called a jazz rule-breaking style to the composition of poetry." How is that seen when we read his poetry today? Are there parallels with Kamau Brathwaite and his own "nation language" formulations, his typographical and sound

Philip Nanton



experiments? And is he a precursor to the later “dub-poetry?”

I discuss this question in a couple of chapters in the book, so I'll answer briefly. First, it's true that Shake did claim that he saw his poetry and jazz as unrelated to one another. I argue that cross-over elements from jazz to poetry can be detected in two ways, first by the different ways that he improvised on the page. And, second, through the ways that he exploited the notions of 'play' and 'playing'.

His improvisations involve — call and response poems, the formation of visual poems and the location of individual words, displayed almost like single notes.

The idea of 'play' or 'playing' takes a variety of forms. There is play as a form of *dis*-order; play as a form of teasing, for example exploring the idea of a name change, popular at one time, or the use of nick-names; and there is the play with the folk idiom of St Vincent. Examples of all these forms of play can be found in

You also asked about parallels with Kamau Brathwaite and 'nation language'. I would say Shake was more interested in ways of bending or breaking language rules to create certain effects that he wanted to achieve. He was less interested in the piety required to establish a new language, albeit a language that comes out of conventional rule breaking. I'd say that Shake was working more within a jazz aesthetic, an apparently more relaxed and casual style but one that has its own depth. It's true that Kamau is known also for exploring a jazz aesthetic and both were clearly jazz aficionados. While Kamau was an astute listener Shake played two jazz instruments and innovated with jazz music. I

see here not better or worse or leader or follower, but qualitative differences.

Would you consider Shake a pioneer of Caribbean literature among his contemporaries? How would you also place the work of his Vincentian friends Danny Williams and Owen Campbell alongside that of Shake in the wider context of the burgeoning Caribbean poetry of the time?

If by pioneer you mean someone who strides out on his own to make a mark in some field then I'd say 'yes'. I know of no-one else, from the English-speaking Caribbean, who has combined poetry and jazz to reach the level that Shake achieved. Certainly, there are other Caribbean artists who also mastered a number of genres. I'm thinking of Derek Walcott with poetry, drama and his water-colour painting; there is also the late Jacques Coursil the French/Martinique trumpeter — a jazz/classical musician and professor of linguistics whose work I discovered recently. Interestingly, though they differed in many ways, Coursil and Shake had certain pioneering characteristics in common. Both surpassed chord-based improvisation, both threw their musical nets wide and both participated in a search for new sounds in music.

The main characteristics that Shake valued as central to Caribbean poetry were 'joy' and 'exuberance'. These are probably not pioneer features of his poetry but both overflow in his work. I would argue that we need them always but, especially in these COVID times, we need them more than ever.

Regarding Danny Williams and Owen Campbell: during the 1940s and 50s they were called 'the Vincentian trio' by Henry Swanzy of *BBC Caribbean*

Voices fame. They were known at this time for voicing and celebrating island specificities in their writing. But more than that they were certainly close friends who supported each other as poets and writers working in the relatively indifferent context of St Vincent. In my view Campbell and Williams remained good, if more conventional poets. Shake's work changed to respond to the wider influences of music, travel and ultimately to reflect a kind of love/hate relationship with St Vincent.

To extend that last question, you say that Shake Keane could be fairly described as a minor poet. Where in his poetry do you think he offers still-undiscovered glimpses of making major contributions to the development of West Indian poetry?

In essence much of his work disrupts the clear lines of demarcation between styles and genres that critics often require. Located at the cross-roads between jazz and poetry, Shake's most significant achievement was ultimately a blurring of the boundaries between these two art forms. The collection *One A Week With Water: Rhymes and Notes* is the most compact example of this process.

I used the term 'minor' to describe Shake's poetry because of his limited output, impact and his style as an artist. For example, his *Collected Poems*, published posthumously in 2005, contains 72 poems and 182 pages. His prize-winning 1979 Casa collection *One A Week With Water* runs to only 74 pages and only 500 copies were ever published; for ten of his mature years he published no poems. Then there is the issue of reception of his work. He deploys overt as well as underlying humour in much of his work. I

suspect that this combination has resulted in critics not taking his work seriously. If critics by-pass the work then it simply falls out of the frame.

Shake was not the sort of person to beat a drum to announce himself as an artist though he was a powerful and gregarious presence when around people. In his approach to jazz and poetry he showed a style that was easy-going yet humble. For example in 1990 he was asked: "What are you contributing to, not only creatively, but to the universe of the Caribbean?" His reply could not be further from the now commonplace style of artistic self-aggrandisement. He answered: "I'm not sure... One has to learn certain technical things and as you get older you have to convince yourself that you have made a contribution." (*Caribbean Perspective*, 1990)

Did Shake write enough religious poetry to make him a significant voice in the fairly rare literature of the Caribbean that treats of the theme of Caribbean spirituality and religion?

Probably not. But the two articles about early religious poetry of the Caribbean that he wrote for *Bim* in 1952 indicate a sense of spirituality and a certain openness to spirituality that I would argue he never lost, despite a life that at times contained considerable turmoil. His early long poem 'L'Oubli' explores a young man's testing of faith. His later Volcano Suite are five contemplations on what he calls a 'Natural Presence' coordinated with our presence on the planet. There appears to be in some of his writing then an exploration of Nature as a way to God. But these scattered poems

are not a sufficient body of work to rank alongside committed and profound religious poetry like that of Mervyn Morris, John Figueroa and yourself. But at the same time Shake was committed to an underlying essence of what he called 'delight' and 'joy' which he found in Caribbean religious poetry from his early explorations and which he identified as central to his (and Caribbean) poetry. This commitment may have been informed by his early Methodism.

Finally, overall, how would you assess the contributions of Shake Keane to Caribbean arts and literature? Does he need to be rediscovered, both his music and poetry? How do you think this new biography can help?

I hope from what I've said above and in the biography that I have made a case for Shake's work to be rediscovered. At present his work in both genres is perhaps more like an open secret of Caribbean arts. The originality of his jazz/poetry association, the music itself and his essentially celebratory, exuberant poetry remains a delight to be discovered for those who will come across it for the first time. If my biography helps to steer more people in Shake's direction I will be pleased.

John Robert Lee is a Saint Lucian writer. Among his latest publications are Pierrot (Peepal Tree, 2020) and Saint Lucian Writers and Writing: an Author Index (Papillote Press, 2019). He will kick off #CaribbeanStrong, the annual Bookends series of interviews by Jacqueline Bishop with writers and artists from the Caribbean, beginning next week. The stellar line-up will include Althea Romeo-Mark, Dorothea Smartt, Richard Georges, and Lionel Cruet.

BOOKSHELF

On our radar: 'Locke and Key' actress publishes book

Hurricane Summer, by Asha Bromfield. Wednesday Books, 400 pages

Asha Bromfield, who stars as Zadie Wells in the *Netflix* series *Locke and Key*, and is of Jamaican heritage, has published a first novel, *Hurricane Summer*.

It has been described as a "sweeping debut [that] takes readers to the heart of Jamaica, and into the soul of a girl coming to terms with her family, and herself, set against the backdrop of a hurricane".

Hurricane Summer tells the story of Tilla, who has spent her entire life trying to make her father love her. But every six months, he leaves their family and returns to his true home: the island of Jamaica.

When Tilla's mother tells her she'll be spending the summer on the island, Tilla dreads the idea of seeing him again, but longs to discover what life in Jamaica has always held for him.

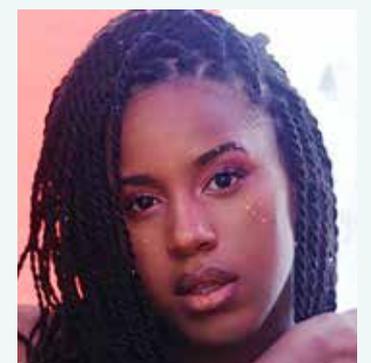
In an unexpected turn of events, Tilla is forced to face the

storm that unravels in her own life as she learns about the dark secrets that lie beyond the veil of paradise — all in the midst of an



impending hurricane.

Hurricane Summer is a coming-of-age story that deals with colourism, classism, young love, the father-daughter dynamic — and what it means to discover your own voice in the centre of complete destruction.



Asha Bromfield