

THE MEDICAL DUPPY

By Larry Zaroff*

Whether from West or East, first world or third, secular or religious, though we attempt to live rational lives pursuing our daily activities, we all have our superstitions, our unproven beliefs, our hopes for good fortune. My friend, Dan Tormey, a former hospital priest, a clear thinker who knows how to examine data, told me about his encounter with a duppy in 1971.

A duppy is a ghost, a spirit back from the dead, who imposes on the living. Duppies are indigenous to Jamaica, growing there like bananas, restlessly spooking the living. They are unhappy shadows whose existence, if believed, can be an impediment to progress. Bob Marley may have been troubled by a personal duppy when he wrote “Duppy Conqueror.” Subsequently, duppies have migrated out of the Caribbean, North, appearing as evil creatures in the video game, “Shadow Man.”

While Dan was the chaplain on the Hope, a hospital ship, docked in Kingston harbor, bringing Western medical care to the third world, he received a unique request from the health minister in Jamaica: a duppy had been haunting a cottage adjacent to the local medical clinic—formally well attended-- in Ramble, a small village in the interior. The population was afraid to utilize the clinic. Medical care was needed. A perfect project for the Hope. An exorcism.

Now Dan is multi-talented, accustomed to responding to unusual requests from doctors and patients. He has had to deal with all sorts in

his work in hospitals and prisons, even surgeons. He has also been known to baptize eggs that have been fertilized in vitro. But when the health minister told him about the problem at the medical clinic in Ramble he hesitated, having had no experience with exorcism. But Dan has accepted challenges all his life.

Gathering a Hope team, three nurses, a physiotherapist, and a pharmacist, who could know what was needed to rid the clinic of a medical ghost-, he set out to solve the duppy problem. The duppy-body of origin was an elderly nurse who lived in the small cottage adjacent to the hospital. She disappeared. When her body was finally found in a corner of the cottage, where she had died, apparently many days before discovery, the organic deterioration was disturbing. Those who found her attempted to remove the remains at night through a back window to escape detection. Of course someone saw the maneuver and the word spread. Soon after the cottage was considered haunted by the nurse's duppy. Not unreasonable. After all, the nurse was upset. Who would want to go to their maker out of a window with an unacceptable body? She was sufficiently angry to keep her duppy in residence in the cottage. Because the cottage was close to the hospital, guilty by association, the duppy was suspected of periodically making rounds there. Thus, the disuse of the clinic.

So Dan and his fellow exorcists set out in a borrowed jeep, a vehicle that had a good repair history and excellent tires. Inexplicably one of the nurses could not find her watch, which was on her wrist when they set out. Then a good tire blew. The spare was bald, no jack came with the jeep. After finally getting under way again, darkness capturing the febrile party, traveling narrow, sinister roads, unusual shadows appeared at every

bend. Was the duppy hindering their passage? Had the duppy joined them for the ride?

When the exorcists arrived, accompanied by a lusty, very dark tropical night, at the Ramble police station, the chief would not take them to the cottage. Too frightening at night. Eventually a group of local officials, staying safely behind, was persuaded to point them to the haunted hut. The locals stood at a distance while they entered the hut. The mosquitoes were awake and so was Dan's party. They were worried, had a sleepless night, particularly when a scratching noise persisted at the front door. No human could be glimpsed. Early morning, heavy-eyed, the party discovered a real dog that had been after their pizza box. "All is well," they proclaimed to the village people. The villagers were not satisfied. A second night, attended by actual sleep was necessary. The following morning the clinic reopened to its accumulated business, the villagers eager to accept Western medicine. The exorcism was evident. If Americans could sleep in the house, they would be safe. Dan would not take credit, correctly so, since the exorcism was virtual. However he might have agreed with Marley who wrote about duppies:

Yes, I've been accused
Wrongly abused now
Through the powers of the most high
They've got to turn me loose

Two nurses stayed behind to organize the clinic while Dan and the rest of his fabled exorcists, with new tires, returned un-eventfully to the *Hope*.

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