

# INDIGO DONUT

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*To Patrick Edward Singh*  
*I wish we'd had a chance to know each other better*



*You were  
water to me  
deep and bold and fathoming*

*You were  
moon's eye to me  
pull and grained and mantling*

*You were  
sunrise to me  
rise and warm and streaming*

*You were  
the fishes red gill to me  
the flame tree's spread to me  
the crab's leg/the fried plantain smell  
replenishing replenishing*

*Go to your wide futures, you said*

'Praise Song For My Mother' by Grace Nichols



# 1

It was coming back again, like a film on slow stream, except someone had hit the mute button. The silence made it worse – it meant everything else was turned up to full. There was the smell: old tea mugs and burnt toast and smeared plastic takeaway boxes. The taste in her mouth: sugar so harsh it made her head hurt, like she'd breathed it in and it had stuck in clumps behind her eyeballs. She remembered how the last few jelly beans had rolled out on to the floor in front of her, stabs of colour between the ashtrays and crumpled cigarette papers. Or had they been M&Ms? A silver mobile phone was balanced on the magazines on the sofa next to a tangled pile of clothes. They were for her, her mum had said. She could try them on later.

*Where are you, Nanna?*

She was fully in the memory now. She looked down at her feet. Her bare toes in her sandals were still crusty from the sand pit at the park. She hunched over, hooking her hands around her knees, bracing her back against the door. It stayed shut. And everything behind it stayed silent.

Maybe she should knock. But Daddy had said she could

only come in if there was an emergency, something like a fire. He'd checked the cooker was turned off and smiled at her mum.

'See, Mahalia. It's okay. We won't be long.'

He'd pulled her out of her mum's arms and planted her on the floor. Her mum had bent over and kissed her on the nose.

'That's a magic kiss, sweetheart. You'll be all right.'

Then her mum had followed her dad into the bedroom and closed the door.

But she wasn't all right. She'd been all right where she was before. In Mummy's arms. She closed her eyes and screwed up her face, turning so her ear pressed against the door. Suddenly, her head was full of sounds. Different sounds, from before she was brought here. Her fingers squeaking across the wet sand pit as she gouged out a long, windy river. The wooden elephant, the giraffe, the lion, the zebra – all lined up. She was going to bury the crocodile deep in the sand, ready to nip the elephant's trunk when it bent over to drink in the river. Or was it the giraffe's neck . . . ?

She could hear the slosh and thud of water filling the buckets and the shrieking as the other kids soaked each other. And Nanna's voice cutting through it all, telling her they had to go soon, after one more ride on the twirly slide.

Then the thump as the boy dropped from the swing,



screaming for his mummy, and Nanna fading away as she ran over to help him.

And the man, over by the bench, calling her name. She hadn't known who he was. He'd promised to take her on an adventure, but he'd left her in this room.

*Nanna?*

She opened her eyes. The sound stayed turned up. Two bird puppets were arguing on CBeebies. An ambulance – or was it a fire engine? – howled in the distance, getting louder, like it was charging towards her. And the banging, hammering on the front door, so hard it made her cry out for Mummy.

And her name. Someone was shouting through the letterbox.

But she didn't want to open that door. She wanted to open the one that would lead to her mum.

Something shifted behind her. She twisted round as the bedroom door opened. Grey trainers. Jeans. A pillow lying in the middle of the dark floor, like it was floating. Feet on the bed, toes shiny with nail polish. A hand dangling down, like it was waiting to be held.

She touched her nose. The kiss had sunk away. The magic was gone. She wasn't all right. She wasn't all right at all.