



BROWSE



## Don't Shoot, Don't Shoot!

Austin Clarke

Callaloo

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**In lieu of** an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

## Don't Shoot, Don't Shoot!

*Austin Clarke (bio)*

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FRIDAY

THE SALT SEA WATER IS UP TO HER WAIST, AND THE SUN IS HOT, AND THE

SKY is blue, and she can see far out into the green waves. All round her, are shouts of laughter, in the voices she knows, and has known from childhood. And two hands are on her hips, holding her in a tight, playful grip, and the hands raise her almost completely out of the water. And over she goes! Splashed into the intoxicating warm waves, fresh and salty as a tonic: "skinning cuffings."

"Yonge Subway!" the man sitting on her right side, reminds her. "You asked me to tell you when you come to Yonge? One more stop." He says it in comforting words and manner, similar to the assurance given by a father, or a lover, or a husband, to remind his daughter, or girlfriend, or wife, of her beauty and of her responsibilities. She recalls the pain and the violence she went through, only last Friday, when she threw her son out of the house, for disrespecting her rules of curfew, during the week.

She gathers her three yellow plastic bags. On them is marked NO FRILLS. She holds them in her right hand. In her left hand is her imitation black leather handbag. In it is her weekly wages. She looks around at the men in the coach with her, inspecting their faces to see if she can read "thief" on their countenance, and automatically holds her black handbag to her chest. She can feel the weight of it against her breasts. She has been on her feet for more than nine hours today.

"Friday! Thank God!"

"Eh?" the stranger beside her, asks, thinking she is speaking with him.

She gets up. The dream of seawater and sun has now vanished. She is back in this city, in Toronto; and it is December and winter. She balances herself against the metal pole. The subway train slows down suddenly. It jerks to a stop. She is thrown forward, almost touching the man sitting across the aisle. She is slammed against the pole, hard. She has been on her feet all day; thinking of her husband in America, trying to find permanent employment; and of her son, B.J. now re-baptized into the Muslim faith, with a changed name, Rashan Rashanan, wearing his Blue Jays baseball cap with the peak turned backwards, and his trousers

drooping below his waist, barely covering his ass; "Lord, what kind o' son I raising, in this city?" She said it loud enough that the man on the seat in front of her, raises his eyebrows, wondering.

She is now close to three young men, no older than her son, who begin to talk. She tries to listen. She does not understand the way they are talking; does not really understand their language, although they are speaking English. She pretends she is not listening. Things have changed so much, nowadays in this city, that if she is caught listening to their **[End Page 254]** conversation, or looks at them the wrong way, she could be shot. Dead. She pretends she is back in the dream about sun and seawater and sandy beaches. But she is in Toronto, on a crowded subway train; and her ears are pricked; and there is something frightening about to take place, something daring, something romantic about these three young boys, between fifteen and nineteen years old, standing so close to her. She can see the chains round their necks, the colour of silver; and thick; and with their initials as pendants. She can see the rings they are wearing: one on the index finger; one on the thumb, round the first joint, just below the fingernail. All are of silver.

One looks like a child. Fifteen.

The subway train is stopped. It has not reached the station. She wonders if someone has been killed, if someone has jumped, on the tracks, committing suicide . . .

"THE MAFUCKER COME UP IN MY FACE, MAN! YOU SEE WHAT I'M SAYING?"

"Yeah!"

"Mafucker diss me, man!"

"Yeah!"

She is listening. And she is frightened. They glance...

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## DON'T SHOOT, DON'T SHOOT!

*by Austin Clarke*

### FRIDAY

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