

Caribbean Bacchanal

By

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Chapter One

The obeah woman sat around the table in the smoke filled room, rocking back and forth, her eyes wide open and not blinking. She was seeing things ordinary folk couldn't but wanted to know.

"The saviour is coming" the old obeah woman said still rocking.

"When?" the tall black man intensely asked.

"When the time is right," she answered.

"Who?" he questioned in a quiet tone.

"Born of our enemies and masters all those long years ago. Born of humble, born of love to loose and hate and love again.

"Born to lead but give it away for good over evil.

"Born to heal."

The large black woman continued so slowly that the tall black man had to lean to hear.

"Born to heal de hate between us all."

"But a warning," she said still rocking.

"The saviour will not be one of us. There will be distrust and hate.

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“Your action will have to help guide, but you cannot force it.

“You will know. The Great Spirit will show the Saviour to you.

“You must be ready. You must plan and wait.

“Great hurt and hate will come before the end.”

The obeah closed her eyes and she stopped rocking.

The tall black man knew the session was over. The information he desperately sought came over in bursts.

The afternoon breeze had come up and the cane fields swayed and played in the sun.

Behind a small ridge running away from the house came the sound of kids, laughing and playing with those wicked sounds that come from mischief.

"Look look", yelled the eldest. "There's one. Oh GaardGet it. Get it" she commanded.

The others all jumped in and around the small creek, snatching and grabbing the tiny wabeen, a topical native fish.

The trickle of water that was a creek in the wet season played host to a range of animals...kids, fish, frogs and tadpoles and of course disease.

The daily skirmish involved everyone. It was all or nothing. Everyone,

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according to the eldest, had to be involved or nobody. Although hardly having to force the others into the game, it was the unsigned pact of kids that this was the done thing after school, regardless of the usual consequences.

"Give it to me" she demanded. The fish was golden and red in the afternoon sun, it shone like a treasury and she was in charge, others had toiled and obeyed commands to get the prize. She was in total control, just like always. But she didn't consciously think this....it had always been.

The boys continued to splash around in the stream, kicking water on everyone, their uniforms showing the signs of a battle day at school against all odds, against all normal catholic regimented practices.

They continued playing in the cane field and stream, not caring for grime or snake, knowing that their mother was hell and heaven. and that as usual there would be hell before the heaven of bath, food and bed.

Scrambling down from the ridge through the cane fields towards the compound and house, The White Girl turned to the others and said "I'll bust ya mouth if ya tell mudder what's we been doing".

Sheepishly the others filed in behind and arranged themselves as best they could before passing through the gates and into the house compound.

"What dee hell yoou been up to gurl", piped their mother. "I'd been waiting long time for ya'll". She stared at all of them, and yet each at the same time, taking in the group response, but waiting for the give-away smirk of an individual.

"Nothing. We been coming home from school, like always', The White Girl said without blinking an eye.

"Don't give me nonsense, gurl, get to bath" their mother spat as she biffed each of the seven children as they pushed past in an attempt not to

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get involved.

"You in big trouble gurl, just wait until your father gets home"

Funny thing was that their father was never involved with the children. Only later in life and occasionally.

The breeze swung through the house and the sun fell below the cane fields stretched out across the horizon.

It was at that time of the season that the long green leaves of the cane were about four feet high planted in regimented rows and clumps.

Again water was short in the dry season. The White Girl organized the six others in through the same bath water, making sure the four boys were scrubbed thoroughly. By the time that she got in, the water was decidedly filthy, yet with her usual strength knew it was the right thing to do, and not waste water and bathe as best as possible.

The big trick was to use lots of baby powder, but even then one had to be careful about the amount used because of restrictions on imports.

The White Girl was about 16, long and skinny, mouse brown hair, not particularly good looking, but not ugly. She was tough, with long roots going way back in the islands, with a tough mother, casual but caring father and a tribe of relatives and friends.

At this age her puberty had not fully developed her body, and yet she was mature, or even old. She had not the chance, nor probably the inclination to be young and stupid.

That evening the children were trooped in for a standard meal of rice and peas, mixed with a little fish, and lots of spice. Evening meals were not

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the main meal of the day. Breakfast was always left overs from the night before, or cereal. Lunch was always the biggest meal of the day and yet the evening meal was the best.

The chatter of the kids was incredible. Nothing talk. Every thing talk, yet nothing. Their mother listened without competing. The talk swayed between the boy's and girl's activities that day. School, teachers, other boys, other girls, school bullies, school work, those for and those against.

The White Girl was in charge, she didn't take nonsense from any of them. She loved and respected her mother, and didn't get involved in the work of the woman of the household. It was her mother's household and her mother was in charge of everything. Her mother did all of the cooking, the house organization and it was her space and purpose in life.

The breeze was stronger and the countryside quickly became very dark. The night watchman peddled his ancient bike down the dirt road towards the house. How could his wife handle another night without him and a newborn on her breast. The baby was the tenth. They were to have 13 all together. The night watch man sounded the bell on the old up-turned racing handles as he approached the house to warn 'Madam' that he was approaching.

The three boys were in one room and the four girls in another. Of course the boys always fought and mucked up. The girls fought over whether there should be fresh air blowing in the room.

The house was huge, even by European standards, let alone by island standards, of which there were probably none, other than a tin shed for shelter.

The White Girl's family's home was built on concrete pillars, 12 feet high before the floor of the first level started. The Mahogany main front steps swept up to a large double door, with large highly polished brass handles, that were almost impossible to keep shiny in the rainy season.

The black polished Mahogany floors shone in the dyeing afternoon sun. There was no glass in the windows. Mosquito proof mesh covered the wide windows from which large hand-carved poles held back the wooden shutters used for hurricanes.

The whole house was covered by a huge roof, with eaves that dropped down well past the top level of the windows. This allowed the rain to be kept at

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bay, while allowing the breezes to come in.

The walls between all rooms did not reach to the ceiling allowing breezes to waft in, cooling the children as they lay spread out uncovered on their beds wearing only underpants.

The sweeping drive-way was guarded by 80 foot coconut palms, from which the mature nuts dropped onto the lawns which rolled around for acres.

Closer to the house, gardens were tendered by the gardener under the direction of Madam, who was the gardener, despite not actually getting her hands dirty.

The wind always blew harder in the afternoon when the girl was cycling home from school. She struggled against the wind, pushing down on the peddle and pushing down her anger following the day's events on each down stroke. The dust stuck to her sweat making the end of the school day even worse.

The day was like most days at Saint Anns Catholic Girls School, - hard, tough and demanding.

She and her three sisters were the only white girls in the school of 1,150 black and tan girls. Everyday they were behind their backs with innuendoes, sniggering and open abuse.

Jamara was the leader of the pack in their final year of high school, as she was in all of their years. She too had come from a small village of tin huts and sheds on poles.

Her huge mother had a pretty face which had made her one of the most attractive women in the surrounding villages when she was younger. Unlike European women, Negro woman with very large backsides which stick out at right angles to their backs, are very attractive. The black men loved these big asses. Most people referred to them as 'nigger bums'. As a result of her good looks and sexy ass she had eight children by five different fathers.

The extended family included sisters and mother-in-laws of all the children in some way. Jamara's mother couldn't

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bring all the children up by herself and initially the whole village helped in some small way. Another reason her mother had so many children is that they didn't know too much about stopping having them. The men always used the excuse that condoms gave you cancer and therefore couldn't be used.

Jamara called out, "White bitch, you always gunna run?" as the White Girl walked away towards the yard where the bikes were stacked. "What ya scared of? Some little old black girl gunna flatten ya face and push ya down a peg?"

The White Girl kept walking, herding her three sisters before her, ensuring that if things turned out the way the world normally would she would have a fight on her hands, the others could run and keep out of harm's way. The girl was not sure if all the other black girls in the school felt the same way as Jamara, if fact most didn't, but the pressure of pushing white people was growing all the time.

The White Girl knew that the girls from east Indian descent did not hate or blame the white people, if fact most of the Indian girls in her year liked her, although they weren't friend friends. Just people she knew at school.

As she peddled harder against the wind, she thought about all the things that her grand-parents had told her about the history and issues surrounding the islands. The white people from Europe had settled and taken over the islands about 400 hundred years ago. But it hadn't been one country that had been involved. Spain, Portugal, France, England and the Dutch had been the main countries fighting over the new lands, most changing ownership many times.

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Of course most of the islands had slaves from Africa, but her island had been different; emancipated slaves from other islands had been sent there, and with the indentured labour from East Indian, the result was about 50-50 blacks to Indians with about 1 per cent 'white' from all countries. It was funny because the definition of white included Chinese, Syrians, Europeans and English. No one thought about the girl's background as being Portuguese, she was white and that was that.

The whites had exploited the blacks as labourers, the Indians were the store keepers and used everyone to make the money; the black man sweated in

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the hot sun for nothing, the black woman sweated in the houses of the rich people for nothing, and they survived in tin sheds, with one water pipe for 10 families.

Encouraged by her friends, Jarama ran after them and shoved one of the White Girl's sisters in the back, forcing her to her knees. Instantly the White Girl turned and pushed Jarama in the chest hard enough to force her to take a step back, much to the cheering of the crowd of girls which had ran up to the two.

Jarama was taken back a little, in all the months she had been provoking the White Girl this had been the strongest reaction. What she didn't realize that the girl could take shit from anyone and although it hurt inside she would never ever let it show, but the second one of her family was attacked physically or mentality she was like a lioness, back against the wall, defending territory and family. This was what she was going to be like the whole of her life.

Jarama now wasn't quite sure what to do next. The group around them cat called and jeered at them both, calling on Jarama to "Take the white bitch down".

The 'white bitch' just stood there, standing her ground with a flicker of fear her eyes, glaring, daring the attacker to get on with it or retreat. Inwardly she was shaking, her heart pounding, the sweat on her forehead beginning to form drops and shine in the hot topical sun.

Without warning Jarama lunged and the girl, grabbing at her and pulling her down into the dirt. Being heavier and stronger, Jarama had the advantage, and although they were not hitting each other with closed fists as boys might, they rolled around in the dirt trying to hurt each other as much as possible by kicking, biting and slapping.

Almost as quickly as it started a nun appeared and pulled them apart. That second all the girls yelled out that the White Girl had started it and began to chant.

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Sister Mary yelled at the girls to stop, and then vigorously shook both of them, ordering them to appear the next day in front of the head-mistress.

The White Girl glared at Jarama, the nun and the surrounding crowd, half pushed and pulled her sisters through the group and then ran over to the push bike area.

She was now ahead of the others, pushing hard against the wind. As her thoughts caught up with and the daily struggle, she began to cry; half in anger, half in fear of another day at school and another half at knowing that she would get little open sympathy from her mother, maybe even a slap for coming home with dirty clothes. Why did she always have to carry the flag for the family. Why was the eldest always expected to protect and be responsible for everyone?

She only let the crying last for a brief few minutes, before the others could see. She couldn't let them see, it was important that the day's events didn't let her down in the minds of her sisters, they depended on her, to protect them against the harsh school reality and against the weight of her mother's demands.

By the time the girl reached home, the sweat and the pressure of the day were telling; she cycled past the guard house to the entrance of the compound where the house lay amongst the others, calling out to the guards that things were good.

As always the other sisters were lagging behind, and she had to wait for them to catch up, usually taking one or more school bags in the front basket, even further weighing her down against the afternoon wind and heat.

Most days she walked the last half mile with her youngest sister to ensure she arrive home safely and to make sure she did not get into trouble with her mother.

Two afternoons a week the girl had to peddle home and then peddle to her auntie's house to look after her three children while she undertook extra work in the factory where she slaved for ever.

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After dropping her three sisters home and having something to eat and drink, the girl set off and started to cycle towards her auntie's home. The track wound down and around the rows of sugar cane which at this time of the year were quite high and it was difficult to see what was around the corner.

As usual her auntie's children were bad; she had to work hard in getting them fed, bathed and into bed. Always the three children got wacks for not doing as they were told and by the time her auntie had arrived, the girl had finished the dishes, done her homework and was ready to ride the two miles home by way of the light on her bike which was created by a dynamo which rested against the rim of the wheel and generated light and extra effort to keep going.

At night the sugar cane looked like enormous stakes swaying in the moon light, even though it was relatively early in the evening, the topical night came on quickly and it was always dark before she reached the single lane timber bridge across a small creek.

She hated that creek; only weeks before they had seen a small crocodile lying on the banks, although it had probably been caught and eaten by the locals. Nothing like curried croc and rice to break up the staple diet of fish and rice.

Past the bridge, she peddle even harder up the little rise, before the flatter down hill section to home and bed. Her mind was miles away on the thoughts of another life and land when out of the cane field jumped a black thing which knocked her off the bike, sending her crashing sideways into the left hand ditch and head long into a clump of sugar cane.

Without warning a long black hand and arm grabbed her by the throat and forced her back onto the ground. She couldn't breathe, she didn't even have time to suck in breath, her mind completely unable to comprehend what was happening in the first few seconds.

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All as she could see was a black face with wild white eyes pressing against her face squeezing her throat with such force that her own eyes were bulging.

The thing attached to the arm said nothing, but began ripping at her string bag which was hung over her shoulder. Sitting upright on top and astride the girl, the black man pulled out her belongings, searching for money and anything of value.

Cursing that there was only a hand full of dollar bills, the sole result of two weeks worth of baby sitting from her auntie, the man slapped her hard over the mouth, yelling that he wanted more or she was gunna get it.

Her heart was racing, she held her hands over her face now, the blood tasted salty in her mouth and with the sheer terror she had her eyes tightly closed.

The man jumped up, pulling the girl with him; "Listen you white bitch, ya gotta have more money than that."

"Jesus Christ" thought the girl, it's the third time today some black bastard has called her a white bitch.

The man grabbed her by the breast, "Come on girl there is something ya got that I want".

The shock completely immobilized the girl. She was rigid with fear. She couldn't breath. She couldn't move she couldn't call out; her mind was blank with fear.

In one movement the man ripped the cotton dress down to her waist exposing her white breasts and immediately shoved her down on the hard dirt trying to pull the dress completely off. His head went down on her breasts with his warm mouth sucking at one of her nipples.

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Her complete inaction and state of fear and shock, made him believe that she was enjoying the process, much like the whores he had been with; a total lack of movement and recognition of what was going on. He thought every time was like this.

Thinking that this was the best and easiest time he was going to have he stood up to un-zip his pants and pull them down around his knees. He always knew these white bitches wanted black men and she was no different from the others that he had heard about.

Something snapped. It may have been two million years of woman-hood and self preservation, it could have been the black verses white thing, it might have been the fact that she came from strong Portuguese stock, it may have been that she had a shit of a day and that she was no longer going to be the white bitch. But whatever the reason her brain cracked open instantaneously opening her eyes and bursting her athletic body with energy.

The man had his head down concentrating on his pants and zipper.

Feeling as though the world was at her hand and being completely aware of her being and the universe as a whole and her position in that universe with a all seeing, 3 dimension look at her predicament, as though she was looking down at her self, she grabbed a small stick about two inches long and repeatedly smashed it into his face.

The scream in the still night air traveled for hundreds of yards, although there was no-one to hear. With all her strength, with the universe behind her, she shoved the man backwards against his chest and sprang to her feet in a single movement, the lioness coming back for the second time that day.

In a instant she was running along the narrow gap between a two lines of sugar cane, her heart hurting as it pounded in her chest and head. Her mind was racing to adjust to the situation, subconsciously looking for escape and yet keeping her rushing head-long through the gap in the line of sugarcane.

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The ground was rough where the tractors had ploughed during the dry season and she stumbled and flopped from side to side as she ran between the rows. First down one way, then a right angles down another, zig zaging along.

Suddenly she stopped and squatted down. She felt her heart was surely giving her away. Then she heard the man swearing and running around in the dark. He had no idea where she was. The last she heard was the man running away from her.

It was then she realized that the night was her friend. If she was still, she could hear everything, the dark protecting her and allowing her to see and hear all around.

She moved slowly at first, in a crouched position and then straighten up carefully looking right, left and right around. Walking slowly down a row one way, the girl pulled her dress around together in the middle and tried to decide if she would think of a lie to her mother or just tell her the truth.

Her father had taught her that if she was lost in a cane field to walk in a straight line down a single row and then change direction down another.

The fields were always planted in squares with neat rows. The blocks formed large squares which could be set on fire separated from other parts during the cutting season.

At the end of each square was always a track, which lead to a road which lead to a village. Sometimes you might have headed in the wrong direction but eventually you would come across a village.

Reaching the edge of the square, the girl could see lights in the not too distance and keeping inside the first row of the cane field, so as not to be seen if the man where about, she walked off to the village.

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As usual the dogs heard her long before the humans and began to bark furiously. The lights in one of the village huts came on and a skinny Indian man walked out and greeted the girl in a courteous manner.

"Good evening Miss, can I help," Rashad, the head villager said.

The girl stood her ground, tightly holding her dress around her shoulders and chest.

"Do not be afraid, I can help. Aren't you a daughter we know? Come come, oh God let me help," the villager said.

She walked over and the head man lead her through the door to light, safety and home.

There was not the usual chatter in the morning at breakfast. The mother moved quickly around the kitchen after the rest of the family, while the girl played with her food, thinking about the previous day and what lay ahead.

The sugar estate police and the local detectives were very good. There was no harsh questions, just an understanding tone throughout the session. It wasn't really a question and answer session, it was more like "Tell me what happened".

The girl was unable to describe the man well, he was black, about 18 or 20 years old, not that big, almost skinny, but tough and hard boned.

The police knew they couldn't do much. They would ask around, keep a look out.