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Caribbean Bacchanal Chapter Two

From the water's edge at the beach, the land was flat for about five hundred yards. Thousands of coconut palms has been planted in rows along the beach back to the small sand dunes which were covered in jungle.

The black boy trotted along the track between the palms which slopped away along the ground and then curved up towards the prevailing winds.

He was short for his age, strong and stringy; hard, locals used to say he was 'fit like dirt'. He was trotting in the afternoon sun to beat his father home. He hated school, he hated his father and he hated the life he was living.

He was the eldest of the family of eight which lived in a drift wood shack beside a creek, two miles from a dirt-floored village, which was 25 miles from a small town, 35 miles from the capital.

The shack was stuck on six timber logs, a year off the ground. Pieces of beach drift junk made the walls, the single room sheltered the 10. Cooking was outside over a fire.

The boy ran a little harder. He had stayed behind a school a longer than usual. He was worried that his father would be waiting for him. It was Friday, the day he had to provide his dad with any money he had been able to steal through the week. He was never given breakfast or lunch. He ate what he could get from anyone of the other 27 children in his class. He wasn't the oldest, but he was the toughest. He had to be. By bullying all the others he could eat for the day. His mother worked real hard to provide something to eat at night. Work for her was survival. Carrying water, surviving the beatings, surviving the kids, living day to day.

The boy had to provide some money on Fridays so his father could make the journey into the village to drink. It would start as a social drink and last into a binge all weekend if he could afford it. He usually used all his pay and the kids money to afford the drink.

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The boy wasn't late and he dropped down outside the front door to wait for this father. He only waited so he would not get beaten, which wasn't so bad but to watch his brothers and sisters get a beating was worse. Sometimes he would give his sisters a few cents to hand to their father so they wouldn't get beaten.

The dogs heard the tractor long before the humans and they raced down to the dirt track where they stopped and jumped around barking, barking at each other, barking because they knew the boss was coming home. Even though the man beat the dogs about the same as the kids, they didn't know any better and thought the whole world was the same. Some of the kids thought the same.

The man got off the back of the long flat-bed trailer which the tractor was towing. He was the last in the group to be dropped off after work. As the tractor turned around in a long loop and headed off, the dogs trotted after him, they knew not to get too close otherwise they would get a kick in the guts.

Without acknowledging anyone's presence the man yelled out, "Food ready yet woman?".

She just nodded and move out of the shack towards the fire to get something out of the blackened pot which hung over the coals.

"Alright, who's got something for daddy?" he said half in a snarl half in a smile to the children who had automatically lined up from the eldest to the youngest.

As he walked down the line from the youngest, each of the children tipped over their handful of money into the tough stringy hands.

When he reached the boy, the man stood staring straight at him, his black pearl eyes daring the boy to show some emotion or softness. The boy stared straight back, the same cold black pearls unflinching as him opened his hand to reveal about \$3 dollars local.

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The boy started to jerk his head away as the slap hit him full hard on the side of his face. "Boy, you call this enough?" the man said as he then grabbed his favorite stick and started to beat the boy, not hard to bruise or break bones, but hard enough to hurt. The other kids all started to yell for the man to stop, the woman just watched and kept her distance, she had been on the receiving end of his anger before; the boy was tougher than her.

"When I want money, I want money, not just some shitty little amount like this," the man screamed, the years of being a drunk and the local coward coming to the boil. "I tell ya, next time I want 20 dollars, not three".

The boy kept staring at the man, his pearls flaming with hate and revenge. His body burnt a little, but not anywhere as much as his soul; it burnt for change; it burnt for him to be in charge; it burnt for his power; it burnt for him to get back at everyone, anyone.

At 14 he left. He didn't say much. He told the others he was leaving and left. He didn't really say goodbye to his brothers and sisters. He just left with what he was standing in. He walked the 2 miles to the village and caught a ride with the head fisherman to the town.

Arriving in the town he caught the maxi-taxi with a special wave of his hand that only the locals on the route knew indicated that it was a 'long drop', "I'm going all the way to town", as opposed to a 'short drop', just along the road to the next village.

A 15 seater Toyota decked out with darkened windows, the dub dub of very loud and bass music with porno movies on board carried him to another life, the beginning to his destiny.

Having spent most of his money on the maxi-taxi into the main town, the boy walked around the village square seeking any job where the markets were in full cry. Each of the vendors had seen and heard hundred before him. Dejected he retreated to the back lanes around the markets. It began to rain. Seeing one of the vegetable vendors come around the corner, the boy sunk back into the shadows until the vendor had passed.

Like a crack of thunder the boy hit the vendor with a stick, in the back of the head splitting his skull and dropping him into the small drain right in

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the middle of the lane.

Scrambling over the man, the boy grabbed at his pockets, ripping them open. His 14 years of shit now tearing at the man's clothes. Why should you have something I don't? Why do I have to fight every day for food and shelter.

The man tried to roll away and stand-up. The boy bashed him again and again.

"Bastards have more than me."

"Where's your fucking money", he yelled. He ripped open a pocket with a few dollars and took off down the street. In the rain he would have been like any other.

Three blocks away he stopped and stood in a door-way - no one stood in the rain. He would only attract attention. Anyway the local cops were always in the bar on the drink during duty, especially in the rain. Dog and criminal stayed away in the rain.

He was safe. He checked the money - 8 dollars local. The most money he had ever seen in his life. Two doubles, twice a day for four days. The best day's work in his life.

A 'double' was sold by a 'barrow-man', so called because he had a box with the hot food attached to the front of a bicycle. The double was a small dough triangle with chick-peas inside with hot pepper sauce added over the top.

The boy saunter down to the barrow-man.

"Two doubles, go hard with de pepper", the boy said ordering extra pepper sauce.

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He had finally found a way to survive. He walked away from the market towards the jungle where he knew he could find shelter, at least for tonight.

A day later he had already used the eight dollars worth of doubles. In fact he had only eaten three doubles. He had never had a soft drink called a chubba chubba, a red sweet drink in a tubby little bottle, easily thrown away. Like most other islands the rubbish piled up everywhere, personal survival before the environment. Its only the white-boy countries who could afford to be worried about the planet.

As the boy squatted on his buttocks near a restaurant owned by a particularly ugly and large Negro, a group of boys about his age came sauntering down the street. He'd seen them before beating some old nigger in the park. He thought they were not particularly tough but there were about eight or nine of them, enough to make them tough.

As the lead boy got opposite, he suddenly turned and asked, "Ya interested in making some money?"

"Ya making joke", replied the boy, flicking his head up and away in a smart-arse dismissing way.

"Don't fuck with me" said the lead boy. He was not the leader of the pack. The leader was always two boys behind the front, just in case there was trouble. Like all good bullies and cheats he relied on others to do his bidding.

"Da ya want to make some fucking money?"

"What do I have to do?" the black boy said.

"Look, we give you some snow for cheap and you sell it and give us the back the amount we gave you, you sell it for what you can get and make a

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profit".

"But I don't have ay money to start with", said the boy who knew the cocaine trade was alive and well and run by business men.

"We'll start ya going. We give ya two hundred dollars worth and ya sell it for two hundred and twenty dollars", the bully said.

"How ya know I'll give all the money back and not just take off with the snow?"

"You fuck with us and ya dead" said the leader of the pack poking his way through the group. "Ya want in?" he said standing over the boy with a short wooden stick slapping his other hand.

The boy knew he would be beaten if he said no and 20 dollars was a feed of doubles and a chubba chubba for three days.

The leader of the pack went off around the corner to the back of the restaurant of the ugly black man and was back in a few minutes with the snow.

"The boss says ya gotta work the Breakfast Shed. Now don't come back until ya got at least 200 dollars" the leader laughed.

They all knew the breakfast shed was the hardest and roughest part of the city to sell drugs and not get beat up by a rival gang.

In fact the ugly black man knew full well he was sending the boy into someone else's territory and it was likely the boy wouldn't make it.

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"*What the shit*" the ugly black man said to himself. "*The little bastard's gunna get it if he don't sell the snow or he do sell the snow*". He laughed as he went back inside to the blackness cool of his restaurant and patted one of his girls on her nigger arse.

"Come here girl I want your ass today".

The water beside the road to the harbour stank. Rotting rubbish floated right under the outlet of the three kitchens of the Breakfast Shed. The shed itself was about 80 yards long and about 20 yards across, made out of tin with no glass windows, just great big square holes for the flies, heat and rain to come through.

At each end were three separate individually owned kitchens. Well you couldn't call them kitchens only the locals called them that. They were a small area of about 10 foot square with a wood-fired stove with two massive pots on top. One for rice, one for the special of the day.

Each kitchen was owned and run by two women, a kind of collective in which the shed and its customers were shared. You had the choice of selecting a meal from any or all of the kitchens, payable in advance.

The rest of the shed was made up of long wooden tables and benches, each seating about 20 people on one side.

By the time the boy arrived the shed was about half full at lunch time. Not only did it cater for the dock workers but so called business people and office workers come down from their air-conditioning to enjoy the 'blue food' which gets its name from the type and color of the food and the way in which it is cooked.

He could smell the food a mile away. The thought of three day's worth of doubles vanished at the sight of a pot of stemmed king fish and rise, lashed with hot sauce. In a way, the sight and smell of food sharpened his instincts. He was determined to sell the same and have a meal in the shed.

He spotted a young man, a little older than himself slowly walking along

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one of the docks next to a trading ship. Even though he was black, he didn't look like a local.

The black boy followed him for a bit and watched him go into the Breakfast Shed. Out of the shadows of the heat turned an old man who cruised past the boy.

"Want some snow?" the old man asked. Surprised by the question the boy blushed although it didn't show much. He shook his head and quickly but coolly walked away.

A short time later, the boy noticed the young man he had seen before step out of the Breakfast shed into the hot sun. The boy started walking towards the young man and as he passed he said in his coolest voice, "Want some snow?".

The boy couldn't believe his luck. "Two twenty the lot" the boy said as he quickly opened and closed the palm of his hand flashing the coke.

"Sure why not" the youth said as he swung around a corner of a nearby building. The boy automatically followed; his heart racing and his mind full of Shed food.

His life went black. He thudded to the ground, the young man beating him again with his special, a piece of hard mahogany about three feet long, skinny and dark in his hand.

The young man swung it again on the boy's lower back. He knew where and just how much pressure to exert on the down-ward motion without even thinking of it. It was calculated in his sub-conscious. The result of years of being on the street.

When the boy woke it was dark. He couldn't move, the pain unbearable and he again blacked out, alone in a alley behind the Shed.

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When he woke, the light was blinding with people saying something he couldn't understand.

Later the nurse said a local from the port had brought him in.

Lying in bed, actually it was a mattress on the floor, the boy wondered what the hell had happened. Who had hit him and why.

After a few days a man came to see him.

"Boy, you are lucky" the man said smiling slightly. "When I found you, I thought ya was dead".

"Well, its ain't" the boy said. Christ even when he spoke his body hurt.

"Well its a good thing I found ya, the other didn't want anything to do with you and wanted me to leave ya there".

The boy just lay there and turned his head away not wanting to see or talk to anyone. He thought he should have died, it would have been easier than facing the hurt and misunderstanding in his heart.

Why had life treated him this way.

Later, after a few sleeps, he ate food which was better than the stuff i the garbage at the back of the restaurant. The man cam back with a chubba chubba and the boy felt better and looked at the man for the first time.

"Who did this?" the boy asked.

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"Boy, ya was lucky it was the Red Man and not the Black Man who caught you selling coke on their dirt".

"What ya talking about?"

"Well boy ya one hell of a stupid so of a bitch, ain't ya?"

The boy looked away again, determined not to let the tears begin. It had been years since he cried.

"Ya down at the Breakfast Shed selling coke and ya don't know who's patch of dirt ya on?"

"No I wasn't"

"Well boy, The Red Man don't hurt on someone unless that someone was selling snow on his patch of dirt".

"Who's the shit is the Red Man?"

"Boy, listen before I beat ya myself. The Red Man runs the joint. Ya don't go fucking with snow at the Shed, everyone knows that".

"I wasn't selling coke", the boy flashed back, his eyes cursing the man, the Red man, the bully, the gang and the ugly nigger from the restaurant.

"Don't go getting on with me boy. Ya was selling coke at the Shed and the Red Man beat the shit out of you.

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"Look I didn't come here to argue, I came here because I thought you might want some help. Although I don't know where ya gonna find two hundred and twenty dollars from."

The boys eyes stared back with no expression, "What ya mean?"

"Well we all know where ya got ya snow. They all come looking for ya that night. The gang from Market Street, Macco's boys. They spread the word around that youse done a runner and kept the money.

"They don't know the Red man beat ya. He knew ya was new on the street and beat ya as a lesson to the others," the man said.

"In fact, Macco's Boys were shit scared coming down to the Shed. The Black Man ad Red Man had warned Macco to stay the hell off dere patch".

Fuck the boy thought, little old nigger boy down from the country set up. Now both sides are guna beat him.

The boy lay awake late that night making plans for making waves. The key was Macco. He knew he had to see him first without seeing any Red Man or the boys.

When the kindly man came about two days later the boy had gone. The nurses said, "He just up and left".

"Where to?"

"How da I's know, the little shit gave us nuthing but lip and shit. He's gunna get more licks, I'll bet ya that.....and.....," the nurse stared back with her hand on her hip, "He'll come back here in bits".

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"Look, just tell him, if he comes back, that I'm looking for him."

"Whose you?"

"Johnny the Good".

"Johnny the Good what?"

"Johnny the Good from Laventville. Anyone knows who I is. Just send the boy up to my village if he comes back".

"Your not Johnny the Good, your Johnny the Good for Nuthing," the nurse said bursting out with laughter with the others that had gathered to hear the talk.

He walked away, head down, heart down, knowing that the hospital people saw boys like the boy all the time, knowing that some of them only came back to the hospital via the morgue.

He could still hear the laughing as he walked out the front door.

"Johnny the Good for Nuthing", followed by shrieks of laughter.

By the time boy left the hospital, he was not really up to it. But the usual bed shortages meant that the staff forced him out before they really should have.

Once again out in the street with nothing, well nothing on his person, but revenge in his mind.

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The boy stood in the darkened doorway. The light rain missing him by a few inches. The light outside the restaurant across the street bounced off the road and shone a three quarters path pass his face onto the other wall in the doorway.

Music was coming from the restaurant. The main door swung open and three drunks stumbled out laughing and cursing the rain. They ran down a short distance to a car and jumped in.

The boy couldn't hear the music after the car left. The inside lights were suddenly turned off and the street became very dark, with only a light at the of the road, splashing down on the cobblestones.

Two figures came out. The boy recognized the outline of one of them immediately. It was tall and very fat, the other smaller and obviously a woman.

As the pair sheltered under a coat, they walked quickly up the road towards the light on their side of the street.

The boy moved quickly across the road after them, the large toughened meter long stick hung slightly behind his side.

He hit Macco as hard as he could and he dropped like a mango off a tall tree. The girl flinched sideways and half fell over in the wet, swearing as she did.

The boy hit him three more times across the head before the girl really understood what was happening.

"Ya bastard, ya think it easy to get one on me?" Hit one "Ya think I'd lie down like a dog and take ya shit? " Hit two. "Ya gunna remember me". Hit three.

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She let a yell as though she had just seen her dead mother with an axe in her hand.

The boy hit Macco twice more on the ground and then kicked him in the groin.

The bitch took off down the street, the boy stood over Macco and grabbed him by the collar. He was still half conscious of what was going on around him.

"Ya gunna remember me, ya big fuck. Ya the one what sent down ya boys to do me after trying to sell the snow at Breakfast shed. Well boy, ya gunna remember me for the rest of your life," the boy said.

"Ya shit, boy, I gunna get ya," Macco said, half in a daze, half in rage with the pain and being pissed off that someone had got to him on his territory.

"I told ya..... ya gunna remember me for the rest of your life ya fat shit." With that the boy sprung up and grabbed the length of wood and repeated bashed at his head, again and again.

"I told ya, ya remember me for the whole of ya life, but ya ain't gunna live it much longer."

The sound of people yelling and the bitch screaming and the running loudly in the quite street startled the boy into action. He quickly took the wad of money from Macco's pocket as his blood drained into the street.

By the time the police arrived there was a small crowd circling Macco's body looking in fascination as the body twitched its last bit of life.

The next day story hit the front pages of the local newspaper, but only one paragraph in the bottom right hand corner as the test cricket

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against the English always dominated page one. Away, said the editor at the nightly news conference, it was close to deadline and Macco was a small time businessman.

The boy didn't even think about the story being in the newspaper, it was something he never read or even bothered about. But he did want everyone to know it was him, without putting the finger on him. He knew some of Macco's boys would be after him. He would have to get tougher and maybe get some help. He wanted Macco's territory before anyone else could get in.

Sitting in a rum shop called Bobby's, he sat planning, planning the rest of his life.

Bobby's had the coldest beer in the West Indies. This had to be the biggest "word of mouth" marketing campaign in history.

At every opportunity, anyone said, "If you want the coldest beers in the Caribbean, Bobbies is it".

Bobby's bar was along a back street, no gutters and dirt sidewalks. The bar was about 15 feet long with steel mesh grills from top to bottom. Funny thing was you could easily walk around one end, where all the regular "bar" staff stood, whiling away time.

The overwhelming piece of furniture was a stainless steel glass-fronted fridge, standing 6ft high with seven doors and almost 20 feet long. Inside hundreds and hundreds of cold beer bottles stood; just at freezing temperature. When taken out and opened via an old Pepsi Cola bottle opener bolted to a wall, the beer was just turning to ice in the first half inch. Never cold enough to freeze the whole bottle, never warm enough to warrant the local custom of putting ice in the beer, which was a habit from too much hot weather and not enough fridge's.

Bobby's Bar was actually underneath his house, one of those built on concrete pillars with a kind of open space with brick walls and no glass in the windows. The floor was concrete, the seats were timber benches with simple home made wooden tables.

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The place was open from very early to whenever. In fact the official sign over the front door from the liquor licensing board was "Open - Any hour Any day", not that the police worried, they were always there drinking on duty.

If you were a regular you could help yourself to the bar in the fridge. Bobby always knew the count for everyone. If you were unknown or an irregular and untrustworthy, Bobby had one of his staff take a beer out of the wall fridge and give it to you for exchange of cash. However, the regulars helped themselves, and Bobby would tell each one of them of the amount owed at the end of each drinking session, he never seemed to make notes of who drank what, and no-one ever questioned the amount he said they owed. But he knew exactly what everyone owed.

Bobby was an Indian, an east Indian, well liked but tough as the neighborhood warranted.

He noticed the boy in the bar, it was the first time he had been in. Bobby didn't say anything to him but motioned to one of his own staff with a flick of his head sideways towards the boy, the staffer cruised over and picked up the empty beer bottle from the previous customer.

"What's happening," the staffer said.

"What's it too ya," the boy said stalling back, waiting for a reply.

The staffer turned and walked back to the bar not even saying anything to Bobby or looking at his direction, Bobby had seen and heard everything even over the din of the other drinkers.

Bobby had seen his type before, in fact about three times that week already. Smart arse kids who thought they were tough enough to get into Bobby's for a beer.

Bobby slid a large mahogany stick, about the same length as a baseball bat, out from underneath the bar. All the regulars knew what was coming and didn't change position or discussion tone as they all waited for Bobby to front the boy.

With a loud bag, Bobby crashed the stick on top of the table where the boy was sitting. The boy jumped with fright for a split second and then tried to regain his composure and adopt his 'coolest' look, while everyone fell about with laughter and verbal barbs.

"What ya doing here boy?" Bobby said glaring down at him.

"Looking for sum ting", the boy said staring him straight back.

"What ting?" Bobby said, realizing he didn't have an ordinary boy on his hands and not wanting to give any ground away, or loose face in front of his customers. Control of everything was vital if his business was going to survive.

"What's it to ya,"

"Look boy, I know everything that goes on here, I own de place, ya can't shit in here without me knowing or giving ya permission," Bobby said as the bar erupted in laughter.

"Something that I need, some ting which ya don't know about," the boy said as the bar launched into a "Woohaoo".

"I knows everthing and everyone ya needs to knows," Bobby said.

"Some ting special, I need sum ting special," the boy said with a black

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glassy stared back.

"Better come into me office boy," Bobby motioned. Two of his staff followed them into the back part of the bar into a small room covered in paper work and files and shit and mess everywhere.

"I need a shooter, and protection for about a week," the boy said.

Bobby laughed. "You and me, you and everyone," Bobby said. "It takes money, and if ya don't have the money ya don't get dem tings," slightly smart arising the boy with his country accent.

The boy pulled out a wad of money. It was not all the money he had taken from Macco the night before, he knew he couldn't flash all of it at once, but it was enough to prove that he had enough.

Bobby didn't flinch, but duly noted they boy wasn't fucking around. "Get the boy a drink."

"I'll tell ya what, boy," Bobby said. "I'll supply the shooter and the cover for a reduced price if ya deal me in with the deal." Bobby had a number of deals going at anyone time, and some of them even made money.

"I just want the shooter and the cover, I don't need no partner," the boy said. The idea had not occurred to him, but he didn't like it anyway.

"Look boy, ya have to have partners in this town, otherwise ya go down. Look what happened to Macco last night, he had no partner and he went down by some big shit hot head-kicker."

The boy looked at Bobby a half sideways look, with a cocked eye up at him, "Some big shit hot head-kicker, ya say."

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"Look boy, this ain't no one-horse one shit town, this is the big smoke, big time where all the big swinging dicks hang out," Bobby said with a half slap to the side of the boy's head.

Like a cat the boy dodged side-ways, grabbing the wooden bar and jumping to his feet. The three men were taken by surprise but stood their ground.

"Who the fuck do ya think did Macco," the boy said in a very cool and calm tone. "Some big swinging dick or some smart arse kid from a one-horse one shit town?" and he cracked the bar on the table, sending papers and drinks and old cigarette butts around the room.

"Take it easy boy," Bobby said in his most controlled voice he could muster at the time.

"Don't tell me to take it easy shit head. Do ya want to deal or do I get another big swinging dick," the boy said.

"Before we deal, how'd I know ya did Macco.

"Ya don't, but da ya think someone like me gunna claim his arse with all his brothers looking for the swinging dick who did it.

"I did it for a reason; to get the bastard back for a setup and to take control of his patch," the boy said.

"You take control of his patch, your dick is so small you can't even swing it out to take a piss," Bobby said as his boys burst into laughter.

"Listen shit head," the boy said waving the wooden bar around. "Macco lost control because he didn't get around. He just sat his fat arse in his

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restaurant while his boys ran around trying to control things.

"He didn't even know he was being ripped off by his own boys. Control. Control that's the key. Control everyone and everything and you control your destiny," the boy said with his passion burning inside him.

"You got a name boy?"

"Stop calling me boy, I'm 18."