

Lyndon Baptiste is the author of *oOh My Testicles!* and *90 Days of Violence*.
The sample below is from his latest book: *Boy Days: Short stories about Trini men*.
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Obeah

One night I see a fellar I know in a party and when he make me out, he lift up his hands and shout, like I a mile away, “A-a! Wha’ y’u saying, boy?” He throw me off a lil bit so I re’lly couldn’t remember he name, and I shame to ask, so I introduce him to a *skirt* I was *liming* with, Anna; he shake she hand, like he know she long time, and is only when he do say Keith, I *steups* and laugh and we start to talk about schooldays. We there jibbing, the vibes nice, but when Anna excuse *sheself* and gone to the toilet, he grab my shoulder and whisper, “Boy, you know who she is? She not easy! She family does dabble in *thing*.”

“You mean drugs?” I ask, keeping my eyes on the toilet.

He laugh, “You go ahead,” and some woman he was *liming* with hustle him away.

One month later, Ms. Anna and I get in one hell of a big argument. It went like this: the girl ge’ me naked, fold up m’ clothes and put them in a corner then tell me how she married and divorced.

I say, “You mean at the same time?”

She shake she head, yes.

I set my face like she ex-husband running me down with a cutlass. “Woman, you mad? I not in that!”

Anna more vex than me. She pelt my shoes and clothes behind me. She was breathing hard and only pointing at me, like a teacher who plan to cut a child tail good and proper. She disappear from the room and while I still slipping on my pants (I couldn’t find my jockey shorts) she come back in the room with two Rottweiler that resemble Satan. I jump up on the bed, bawling, and when she le’ them go, I high jump over they head, bust through the door and scramble through the house until I find the front door. Them dogs would o’ tear me to pieces if I didn’t jump from upstairs.

When I wake up next morning, I sick like a dog. A patch of my hair remain on the pillow, almost two handful. My toenails red, yellow and green, like a Rasta belt. I say, bu’ wha’ the jail is this, like I catch some kind o’ gangrene, red eye and jaundice. Plus I have a rash that looking scornful. When I show my mother she tell me go doctor. Of all people to meet as I reach downstairs is Keith. He shocked to see me.

“What you doing here?” he ask.

“I should ask you that because I living here.” I lil agitated. My skin scratching like mad.

He look at me like he couldn’t tell I was in a hurry. “Wha’ ’bout you and Anna?”

I laugh. “Boy, we done so long!”

He shocked, but looking glad. “You better watch yourself, eh, because she family does dabble with Obeah.”

I gauge him, like we playing cards and I think he have a better hand. “This Obeah thing for real?”

“A-a! People foot does turn green and yellow and all kind o’ thing.”

I bawl out. “My two foot is them colours.” I pull up my pants and show him.

He bawl too. “Yes aye! They catch y’u!” He ge’ kind o’ serious and ask if Anna had anything belonging to me.

I watch the sky and play the whole scene backwards in my head, from the time I jump over the banister to the time the two Rottweiler walk in the room, while I was pulling up my pants; I groan like a Bedford. “I think I fo’get my drawers by she, boy.”

“You think? You better check and see if you have any rash.” He pointed. “Down there!”

When I do check, I start to bawl again.

“I have to carry you by *Cornbusk*,” he say. “Bring all the money you have,” and it is the way how he say it, shaking he head, lips fold up, eyebrows raised, I know one time that *Cornbusk* was the only man who could help me. When I jump in his car, he end a call.

“I call *Cornbusk*.” He sniff in my direction. “You mash dog *two-two* or wha’?”

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Shaking my head, I check below my shoes. “No, horse!”

He smell under his arms and check below his rubber slippers. “Boy, you re’lly have a *light* on your head because y’u smelling like crap.”

I scratch my head and a clump o’ hair fall off. “Just hurry up and drive!”

Traffic was stiff to St. Joseph and Keith didn’t want to put on the air-condition. We turn off the eastern main road and drive miles up inside Maracas until we come to a lonely side street with bush on the two sides. At the end of the road it had a rotten-down galvanise fence with grass pushing through the holes. On the gate it have a drawing of a chicken, and a sign: “*Mother Cornbusk*. By appointment only. Walk with yuh candle. Walk with yuh fowl cock. Love potions? Walk with two pig stones.”

Keith pull up the handbrakes hard and say: “Right, we reach.”

We jump out and he push back the gate, and I walk in first. I taking my time because I having second thoughts. The yard small and bushy, with a dirt track leading to a ramshackle house. The track lined with bamboo poles that holding up animal skulls. Other than that, is heaps and heaps o’ beer bottles and telephone copper everywhere, and in the backyard it have a Rottweiler tied to a sapodilla tree, with branches extending over the house and front yard and sucking up all the daylight so the place looking like it late in the evening. On the lower branches, it have white sheets tie up like hammocks, as if is some kind o’ trap for spirits. I inching my way along, past a rusty fridge, worried I get tetanus, when a voice stop me in m’ tracks:

“Cease to move!”

I nearly *two-two* m’ pants because the voice dark and it evil, and it could o’ come from anywhere: the bush, the space below the house or behind me.

“You bring plenty evil here!” the voice continue, circling closer.

Mother Cornbusk appear in the gallery, a short, fat, black lady, wearing a white, white headtie and white, white dress. When I turn to run, she fly towards me and grab my face. She have a beard. I couldn’t tell if she was *ab* Indian or *ab* Creole. She wearing hibiscus flowers around her neck and rings made of copper wire on every finger. Her clothes smelling strong o’ Bugmat. *Mother Cornbusk* still holding m’ face. She shake her fist, like she rolling a dice, then suddenly open her hand and shells scatter all over the ground in front me. She scream and jump back nearly taking my face with her. She make a cross with her hands, shout, “*Do so*,” and start to laugh.

“This one powerful,” she tell Keith, “but I will deal with him.” She wipe her nose and look at me. “Wha’s your name, spirit?” When I tell her, she laugh. “So you have tricks too?”

She went down on all fours and draw a line between the both o’ we.

“I sense a woman,” she say, studying the shells and shaking up, like she getting shock, “a beautiful woman, who tell you she have no man, but she damn lie, because she damn marr’ed.” She spring to her feet, bawling, “Your name is *Egungun!*”

Mother Cornbusk tell me to wait, disappear in the bush and return holding a length of rope. Before I could make a note, she start to offload some licks in m’ tail. I start to bawl. I mus’ be freak out after the second lash because I didn’t remember hitting the ground. When I open my eye, *Mother Cornbusk* was standing up over me, eating a sapodilla. When I sit up, she laugh, throw away her sapodilla and pick up a piece o’ cable.

“I exorcise you!” She screaming, dancing around, blazing my tail good and proper.

And I bawling: “Enough, enough! I exercised! I healed! Oh gosh! Help me!”

And Keith ain’t moving a muscle.

“Get up!” *Mother Cornbusk* say. I jump; where I get the energy from, I don’t know. “You need to get back your jockey shorts,” she say, stroking her beard skilfully. Before I say anything, she raise her hand. “Do not worry. I know you cannot. Neither can you get one of her underwear.” She put her hand on my shoulder. “You need a bottle of rum. That will be three hundred dollars.”

I say, “That too expensive. I go buy it outside and come back.”

“If you leave my domain,” *Mother Cornbusk* warn, “we will have to start over from scratch.”

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I study the licks. “Bring the rum.”

She lift up her skirt and take out a sealed bottle. “Take off your jockey shorts and shoes.”

I open my eye big. I look at Keith. I look at *Mother Cornbusk*. “I could go inside?”

“No! My temple must not be defiled!”

I want the Obeah to work, so I take off my clothes, pulling down the front and back of m’ jersey to hide my privates. *Mother Cornbusk* crack the seal, take a big drink then soak my shoes and jockey shorts with rum. She hand me the bottle, three-quarter empty.

“Put on your shoes and holey jockey shorts!” she say. “Good, take them off again. Now drink! Don’t stop! Don’t open your eyes!”

I feel a spirit coming over me. I into the process. I prancing around like I warming up, my eyes halfway rollup in m’ head, and the liquor bu’ning m’ throat. *Mother Cornbusk* start to chant like a Apache-Baptist. She disappear in the bush and return with a steel pipe, but when the rum finish, I scream and pelt the bottle clean over the house. Then, the spirit overtake me and I start to dance and while I dancing, *Mother Cornbusk* beating me like a dog, but I not feeling a thing, and with every lash the pipe bending more and more. Screaming, I lif’ up the fridge like it weigh nothing and pelt it to the tiptop o’ the sapodilla tree in the backyard – yes, y’u hear me right: *on top* the sapodilla tree.

Mother Cornbusk shout, “Run home, boy, run home and do not look back, the curse will only lift if you don’t look back.”

I run home, wearing a jersey on m’ back and a jockey shorts on m’ head. My mother was washing a pot. I lift it up and drink all the water. Then I went and sleep.

Next day I healed. Tha’ Obeah thing does re’lly work, I telling y’u, I not asking y’u. Two months later, when I went a party with a *skirt* from church, I bounce up a fellar I went to school with who know Keith re’l good. He tell me how Keith and he *gyul*, Anna (the same one who le’ go the two Rottweiler that resemble Satan) ge’ lock up for beating a policeman with a pair o’ pig stones. *Mother Cornbusk*, Anna’s mother, was in hospital; a fridge had fall from a tree and break she two hand and foot. The fellar couldn’t explain my Rasta-coloured toes or my hair loss, but when I brace him ’bout the rash, he tell me it was *cow-itch*, or something so, and the rum was the remedy. But he talking crap. Tha’ Obeah thing does re’lly work.