

Paradise for white women

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Obviously. Negril has a beautiful beach and blue sea. But it's also the place where Western tourists can find a Jamaican young man for rent. We went in search of these rent-a-dreads.

'Just cop a feel.' Omar glances downward and states with a big smile: *'this is what the women come for, the big bamboo!'*

Negril is located on the extreme western tip of Jamaica, 84 kilometres from Montego Bay. The seaside resort is in essence one elongated road, with on one side the coast, and swamp with bamboo forest on the other. It was discovered by hippies and continues to accommodate the more alternative tourist. The hotels on the seven-mile beach are a kind of beach houses; no building may be higher than the tallest palm. In the brochures Negril is praised for its beautiful white sandy beach, the ultramarine sea, the live music and, this is always mentioned: *it is the best place to make friends*. The good understander knows what's meant; Negril is the hotbed of the rent a dread. Out here Jamaican boys and men are for hire for the single female tourists. Though the rent boys by no means all have dreadlocks, the term 'rent a dread' is just too catchy.

Tonight there's a concert at Alfred's Ocean Palace, on the beach. On stage a band is playing reggae music and the audience hesitantly starts dancing in the sand. It's not very crowded yet, and all the girls and women are approached by a flock of boys. One starts dancing right in front of you, another right away takes hold of you, and the next one tries it with a chat. *'Hi, where you from? I'm Fitzgerald... What's your name?'*

Omar has a different approach. He spots the empty beer bottle in my hand and gets me a new drink unsolicited. *'First you sow, then you reap,'* he explains later on. Omar opens a charm offensive and gladly states that I look good enough *'to leave the light on.'*

But I just want to talk, I tell him. *'Okay, we'll talk for a while.'* Omar is twenty-seven, but looks boyish. He likes the fact that I'm so curious and talks frankly. During the day he works on the beach; recruiting customers for a glass bottom boat. Not a really fantastic job, but this daytime job enables him to make lots of contacts for the real work: the ladies.

'Are you really for rent,' I ask. Omar grins. *'Sure. And how! I work... 5, 6 hours in a row,'* he says, and it takes a while for me get what he means. *'I work myself in a sweat; go on until we are wetter than the sea. Really! I go all the way, when I make love it's like a battlefield. I'm Bin Laden in Bed!'*

And he's not choosy either. He does everything. Omar leans into me. *'I know what women want. You know; I bow!'*

I know what this 'bowing' means and feel like patting him on the back – very well! – since the common opinion among macho-Jamaicans is that a man doesn't

go down on a woman. In dancehall whole songs are dedicated to it. Shabba Ranks sings: *'Jump around, show her you no bow'*. But Omar is not bothered. *'First you lick it, then you stick it'*, he says with a sweltering gaze.

I quickly ask him to tell me about the women. What kind of types are they? Omar sounds professional; he does all women. Beautiful, ugly, young, or old. If that's the case he just does not turn on the light. He once catered to a lady of 61 years old, who rewarded him lavishly. How lavish, I ask. Omar chuckles; *'500 US dollar'*. She could've eaten him; *'she loved me like cooked food.'* Just as I'm informing how such a transaction works, Omar looks attentively at a middle-aged, good-looking brunette walking past, a beautiful dread on her hand. Omar says: *'I'll show you'*, and calls her name. She stops, Omar walks up to her and they talk. I look on from a distance. Omar surreptitiously gives me a wink and puts an arm around the woman, who dismisses her beautiful companion with a few words. A little later Omar comes to me, the brunette is a 'date' of two years ago. And, guess what, she likes to 'go out with him' again.

Please, introduce me, I urge. I am very curious about this woman. Why is she doing this? She looks away when I shake her hand. I bring up Omar, clearly a subject that interests her. She yawns, but refuses to open her mouth otherwise. Omar seems to find it rather amusing, *'She doesn't want to talk to you.'* The brunette gives a tug with her head. Omar: *'Well, we'll talk more another time. You're staying in Kuyaba, aren't you? What's your room number?'* I answer mechanically. Omar walks away, but turns his head and says: *'By the way, do you know what my nickname is?'* He grins: *'Room service'*.

I look around me. There no longer is a female tourist on her own. Not the three young, very blonde American girls, who only just now entered the beach giggling, not even the two very big girlfriends, one of which has an almost spherical body. There is a cheerful relaxed atmosphere, there's dancing to a Marley medley. I spot quite a few male tourists without 'company', alone or in a group. I wonder why they don't mingle with the beautiful, sparsely dressed Jamaican girls, who are hanging around a bit. They hardly dance, maybe because they're wearing towering heels - in the sand! Only when I, at the bar, hear one of them negotiating with a client, I understand that they are prostitutes (later on this is confirmed by a number of men). The rule turns out to be: high heels on the beach = hooker) It is remarkable how business-like the ladies approach it. No dancing, compliments, beer, you just name your price (minimum J\$1000 = € 22.50).

But men can be blunt too, I notice the next day, when in passing I hear a piece of conversation between a grey lady and a tree-long dread, who says *'My body don't come cheap.'* It did indeed look beautiful.

Along the tidemark I walk back to Kuyaba. Out of darkness, figures keep popping up and approaching me with their hands outstretched. *'Hello, I'm doctor Fabulous, an original rastaman... I can tell you all about rastafari.'* I don't feel like talking anymore, though everyone wants to be my *friend*.

That night there is pounding on my door. The night guard wants to know if it is true that I expect a visitor, because there is a boy at the entrance. I mumble that he should just send him away. The night watchman nods approvingly, but before I close the door he subtly offers his services.

Craig sits next to his table full of bracelets, necklaces and rasta hats, he's crocheting. He looks like a picture. Three mobile phones are lying in front of him. I point at them, *'Three? Why?'* He smiles coyly. Well... On this one he is called from America and on this one from Italy, and this one from Italy. He picks up a mobile phone and shakes it; it must start ringing! Craig has been waiting for the Italian call for days, since it is from a lady with lots of money, and he is completely broke. I ask about the American. Yes, Tammy calls almost every day, but he can't ask her to transfer money. Craig gets a blurry gaze when he talks about Tammy. And takes out a couple of photos. Yes, he loves Tammy. If it weren't for her, he would be in Italy now, because the Italian wanted to take him home. Craig rotates the rings around its ring finger, one made of silver and one made of gold. The previous month they were both here, one after the other. First he wore the golden ring of the Italian, which he tucked away when Tammy came. And then he got a silver ring from her. Now he wears them both. He can't choose. He gazes at the phone and sighs. I remark that Craig is not one of those young men that chase tourists every night. He laughs loudly. Of course he does! *'That's part of this business. You want to sell something, so you're nice to the people. And then they start liking you..'*

I'm confused, but what about Tammy? Craig explains. *'What should I do in the evening? When I walk on my own on the beach in the dark, I feel so rotten that I go out again. And if you're nice to the girls, they buy something from you. Its just part of the job. I have to earn money anyway; by any means necessary.'*

'Do you ask for money?' Craig shakes his head. *'Usually they pay for your drinks, you go on trips with them and they keep you free, and sometimes you get a present, a phone, or money for the taxi. Look, I am not a gigolo. I am not saying put USD 150 on the bedside table, as prostitutes do.'*

Craig bites his nails, then says; *'But besides that I just want to be in love and have a nice relationship. Just like everybody else.'*

With Tammy or the Italian? I ask. *'They're both sweet, but Tammy...'* He does not finish his sentence and declares: *'The Italian has money'*.

Omar asks if I'm going to the concert at The Buss tonight, *'So we can continue our talk. That's what you really like to do, don't you?'*

'Oh, that's why you came visit me last tonight?' We laugh. On a beach chair nearby a lady looks at Omar and me with interest. I recognize her from the hotel and walk up to her. Susan from Scotland has been in Negril for a week. And she also has a boyfriend, who looks a bit like mine. She means Omar.

'Tell me everything', I say. Will I finally hear a juicy story from a lusty woman who comes to Negril to buy love? Susan chatters: *'Rohan is so nice, and sweet, and also very artistic. He makes woodcarvings that he sells.'*

Here on the beach? I ask. Susan nods. She saw him sitting there with his merchandise, their eyes locked. Wham! Love at first sight.

I can't help sounding a bit weary. *'Yeah yeah, so it's real love'*? Susan looks piqued.

Women in Negril seem to come in two kinds. There's the seasoned type, she actually pays for sex, but does not openly come out for it. The younger, or more attractive girls just think they're having a holiday romance. The fact that they pay for their boyfriends every now and then makes sense for them: they are tourists with money to spend, while hé is a hard-pressed boy from a country with a Third World economy. Susan should know better, for a woman in her thirties I think she is very naive. Everything she says about her sweetheart Rohan paints the picture of a rent-a-dread. Maybe I should ask Omar about Rohan? Whether he is a professional, like himself, or a more of a searching soul like Craig?

Let it be, I think. Susan is - just like 'everyone' - at the free concert, on the beach at The Buss. Glowing, a smile across her face and Rohan's arm around her waist. Craig also looks happy and relaxed. I suspect because the Italian has called. *'No, that's not the case. And I think she won't anymore. So the choice is made for me. I will continue with Tammy. I have talked to her this evening. We might get married.'*

Omar restlessly jumps from one leg to the other, while he explains about the different 'seasons', as far as the ladies are concerned. The recent season was American season, since many students come to Negril with spring break. After that comes Italian season, and the Germans and Swiss will be back soon too. When I ask, 'Is there no Dutch season?' Omar sighs. He is tired, *'nuff said'* enough talk. He wants to dance. But not around here.

Omar takes me to Love Boat, where there is hardly a tourist. We wade into a bath of loud and vibrant, raw dancehall. Mister G's Old Crook vibrates from the man-sized speakers. *Nanananananah!* A chubby girl in a tiny dress, where her breasts almost fall out, puts her hands against one of the pillars round the bar. Standing on her toes, she makes her stretched body vibrate as if she were standing on a vibratory plate in the gym. A boy slides against her phenomenal ass and starts pumping and grinding. Next to them a girl drops on hands and feet on the floor and shakes and vibrates. It's not long before an imposing hardbody climbs on top of her and starts dry humping. When the selector plays the very latest riddim, the entire place goes wild. Everyone dances; hips, asses, bellies and legs grinding. Omar leans into me. He grins, *'You feel it?'* Yes, there's it is; the big bamboo!