



ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF NOT JUDGING PEOPLE!

Once upon a time there was an old widow who lived in the mountains of Jamaica. She used to live alone in an old hut with 12 cats and three pigs. People called her the old widowed witch. Where she was living people were scared of her but there were some children who were not so afraid of her and whenever they would pass her house they would throw stones on her roof and yell “*Old Widowed Witch*”.

Ruth the old widow would shake her head and say “*Lord! Have mercy on these children*”. Most of the time Ruth would stay out at night to boil her hog food while her 12 cats would be all playing with her skirt tail. Whenever she would finish boiling her hog food she would throw it out in a drum to cool for the next morning. After she’d finished scraping out the pot she would knock the bottom to get the small pieces which had been left behind, and people, hearing the noise, would think “*what is the old witch doing at this hour of the night?*”, and others would say “*you hear the witch knocking her obeah^{*1} pot?*”

One day Ruth went to get some wood to make fire to cook her dinner. On her way back she saw a little boy coming from school but she did not recognize him. When he reached closer, he said “*Good evening ma’am*”. Ruth looked at him, smiled and said “*you look strange are from around here!*” The little boy replied “*My name is Chacksam; I came in January to live with my grandparents 'Maas Otis and Mama Zelda - anyway let me help you with the wood*”. Ruth gave him a few logs and said “*God bless you*”.

When he reached by her house he put down the wood and set off but Ruth called him back and gave him 2 mangoes and a guava. He smiled and left.

Few days later when he went to school he told his friends about the old lady he had met. They opened their mouths and whispered and said “*you talking about the old witch who lives down the road?*” Chacksam stuttered and said « *you-you-you sure that she is a witch, man! You don't know who I am talking about; I am talking about the old lady that lives alone*”.

That evening he went to see Ruth; as he knocked on her door he said:

“*Miss Ruth, Miss Ruth*»

“*Who is it?*” Said Miss Ruth,

“*It's me ...Chacksam, the little boy you gave the mangoes and the guava*”.

Miss Ruth quickly opened the door, let him in and said:

- “*you are just in time. Were you timing my pot?*”

Chacksam chuckled and said “*no ma'am but what are you cooking?*”

“*I am cooking dumplings and rundown^{*2}*»

- “*mmmh*”, said Chacksam.

Minutes later she gave him the food after they were eating, laughing and telling jokes.

- “*It's dusting up^{*3}, I have to fetch water for my grandparents. Miss Ruth do you have any more of those mangoes or guava?*”

- “*Yes look in the buttery^{*4}*” she said. He quickly ran to the buttery, took the mangoes and said, “*Ma, can I take one of the sweet sops^{*5} and a bunch of the guineps^{*5?}*”

- “*Yes, but be careful you have colic tonight*”.

Chacksam lit the ‘*kitchen bitch*’^{*6}, said good night and close the door. He ran home, fetched the water for his grandparents, took a bath, ate his dinner and went to bed.



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The next morning he was helping his grandmother peeling some green bananas when he said *“Mama, don’t say that I am nosey but why people call Miss Ruth an old widowed witch?”*

“Chacksam, I don’t know but I think it’s because she lives alone and people claim to say that she killed her husband, but that’s not true. I could remember back in the days when we were teenagers and that he was a diabetic. So, I don’t think she killed him. He died of his illness”.

Every day when Chacksam was going or coming from school he would check on Miss Ruth.

When Chacksam was about 15 years old, he and his friends were coming from a party; he was telling them about that she was a nice person and not a witch. When they reached up to her house, they saw her boiling her hog food outside .He told his friends to come but they were afraid but he managed to convince them. When they came in he said *“good night Miss Ruth; these are my friends, I came to check on you. Are you alright?”*

“Yes, I am alright, thanks for asking” and she smiled, “I was going to bake a potato pudding but I changed my mind”.

In a sad voice one of his friends said *“why did you change your mind?”*

“I am feeling tired” said Miss Ruth.

“We could help you bake it” said the rest of his friends.

Miss Ruth agreed. She gave each one of them something to do and while they were grating potatoes, mixing flour and getting ready to mix the ingredients, she began to tell them stories about her life. They laughed and talked through the whole night.

Listening to her stories made Chacksam’s friends realize what a totally different person she was! Miss Ruth was so happy to see so many children in her yard, in her kitchen that tears fell from her eyes and from that day Miss Ruth was never called the old widowed witch again.

1*obeah: A practitioner of black arts, magic, sorcery, and religion

2*dumpling:round lump of flour and fat mixed with water, cooked in boiling liquid and served with meat/chicken..

2*rundown: kind of sauce made by boiling coconut till it becomes like custard.

3*it’s dusting up: it’s getting dark.

4* buttery: larder

5*sweetsop: fruit

5 *guinep/kenep: fruit

6* kitchen bitch’: small lamp made of tin with no chimney

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