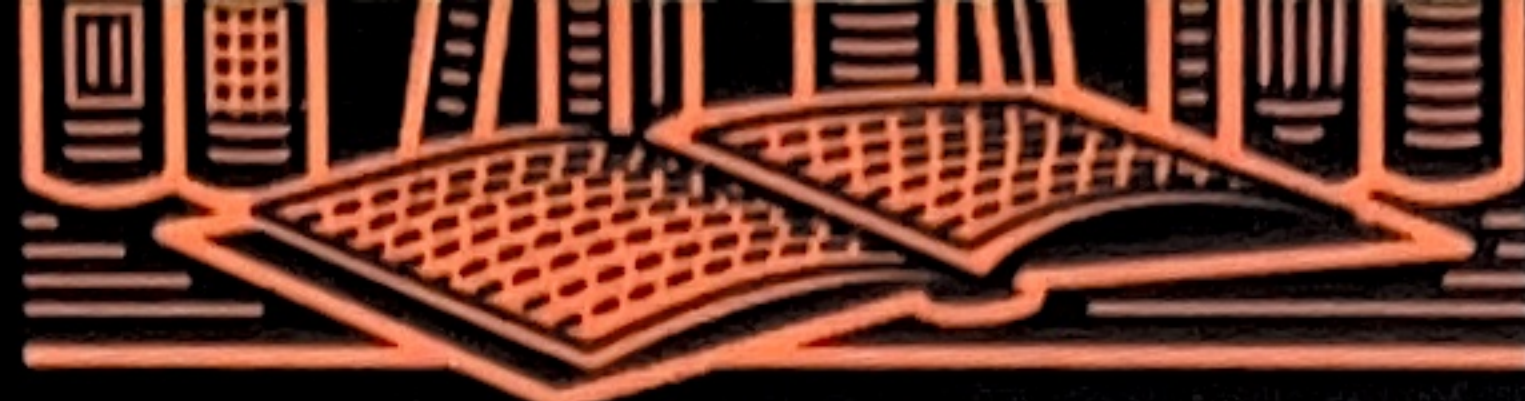




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VOODOO ISLAND

MICHAEL DUCKWORTH



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Island in the Sun

James Conway put away his business papers and sat back in his seat. He looked out of the aeroplane window down at the warm blue sea below. Far away, in the bright sun, there were the long white beaches of the island of Haiti. Behind them, he could just see the small wooden houses and the deep green leaves of the coconut trees, which were moving lazily in the soft afternoon wind.

'It looks beautiful, doesn't it?' Conway looked at the



The coconut trees were moving slowly in the wind.

woman sitting next to him. 'Very nice,' he answered. 'Is this your first visit to Haiti?' the woman asked. 'Yes, but I'm not here as a visitor,' said Conway. 'I have a building company - it's called Conway Construction. My company has offices all over the world - America, Europe, Africa. We're very big in Australia too - everyone in Australia has heard the name Conway. I'm coming to get an office here, buy some land, build a few hotels, you know. The land is very cheap here - you can buy a piece of land to build a small town on, for a few thousand dollars. Sorry, I don't know your name. I'm Mr Conway, James Conway. Just call me Conway.'

'I'm Karen Jackson.'

'Nice to meet you, Karen. What do you do? Have you got a job, or are you married?'

'I'm at Harvard University.'

'From the University? Are you a secretary there?'

'No, I'm a doctor. I'm teaching medicine.'

'A doctor! That's interesting. What are you doing here in Haiti? Are you on holiday? I know you teachers get long holidays.'

Karen Jackson was beginning to dislike the man. 'No,' she said. 'I'm going to work in the hospital at Port au Prince. And while I'm here, I'm going to do some work for my book.'



'Voodoo works, and it can be very dangerous.'

'Are you writing a book? What is it about?'

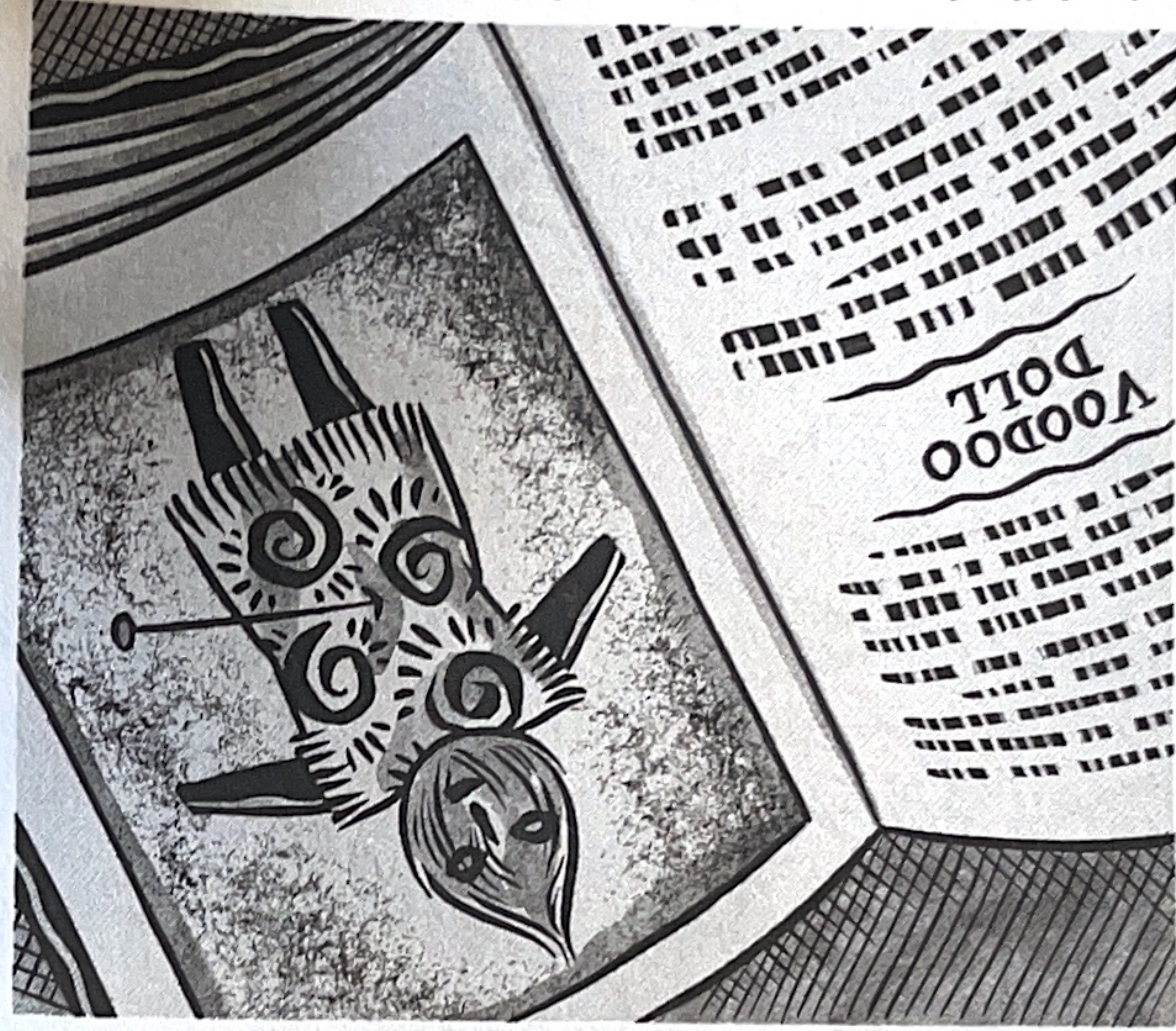
'Voodoo.'

'Voodoo?' laughed Conway. 'Are you telling me that someone is paying you to come here and write about voodoo? I know Haiti is not America, but voodoo! I thought people stopped believing in that years ago.'

'Oh, no,' said Karen. 'People still believe in it. You see, it works, and it can be very dangerous.'

'Surely you don't believe in voodoo, do you?'

'Yes, I do. We don't really understand voodoo in



'The doll's face is a coconut, and there's a pin in its stomach.'

America. Most people think it's magic. They think it can kill people.'

'That's right. I remember hearing about it. People who use voodoo get a picture of a person or make a doll, don't they? Then they put pins or knives into it, and the person feels terrible pain.'

'Yes, that's right,' Karen answered. 'I have a photograph here in one of my books about voodoo. Look, there's one of the dolls. It's not a child's doll – it's made from coconuts. You see, the face is a coconut,

and someone has drawn eyes, a nose, and a mouth on it. And look, there's a pin in the doll's stomach. A few days later the man came to hospital because his stomach hurt. He knew that someone was using voodoo against him. The pain was terrible, but the doctors couldn't find anything wrong with him. In the end, he died.'

Conway was surprised. 'So you think that was magic because there was no reason for it,' he said. 'But you're a doctor, aren't you? You don't believe in magic, do you?'

'Voodoo is more than magic. I don't believe in magic, but I know that voodoo can be very dangerous. I want to understand how it works. Here in Haiti there are still a few people who know how to use voodoo. They are called "houngans". There are still a few

"houngans" in the villages in the country. And that's why I'm here. I want to meet some of them and talk to them. Of course they aren't all bad people. They can use voodoo to help people, like doctors. But they can use it to hurt people too.

'But we're living in the modern world!'

'Yes, but the people here are very sure that voodoo is

real. Teachers, business people, doctors, everyone

believes in it . . . or they are afraid of it. And perhaps

that's why it works. After all, if you believe you are ill,

you can be ill. And if you really think you're getting

better, you can get better. If you think that someone is

trying to kill you, then you can die . . . because you are

so afraid.'

'Well, that's a good story,' laughed Conway. 'If I

need some voodoo, I'll come and see you.'

'OK,' said Karen. 'Excuse me for a minute.' She got

up and walked to the back of the plane. She was bored

and angry with Conway, because he thought he

people.

The Book of Baron Samedi

While she was away, Conway looked at the open book on her seat. There was a picture on the page which showed a black man with open eyes and bright white teeth. He was laughing, but he looked frightening and dangerous. Conway read the words below the picture: 'Baron Samedi, the strongest and most dangerous of all the voodoo houngans. No one knows who Baron Samedi is, but they believe he is both dead and alive. He lives in two different worlds. Many people are so frightened of him that they are afraid to say his name.'



Baron Samedi, the strongest of the voodoo houngans.

Conway looked at the picture. 'Baron Samedi!' he laughed. 'How can these people be so stupid? Still, it will be easy to make money if they think like children.'

A few minutes later, Karen came back. She picked up the book and put it in her bag. As she was sitting down, the lights in the aeroplane came on.

'We are going to arrive at Port au Prince airport in a few minutes. Please stay in your seats and put out your cigarettes. The time in Haiti is 3.15. It is a warm day and it is 30°C. We hope you have enjoyed flying with Air Haiti, and we hope that you will fly with us again. Thank you.'

Down below them, in the village of Bussy, not far from Port au Prince, Kee was in his small wooden house among the trees. Outside, a few brown chickens were trying to find something to eat in the garden. There was not much rain in the summer and the ground was dry and dusty. The old man Kee was sitting by the window in the front room. Suddenly he felt that something was wrong. In the garden the wind blew harder, and the dust from the dry ground flew into the air. He stood up, went to the window and looked out.

'I can feel danger,' he thought. 'Someone bad is coming.' He looked out into the trees, but he couldn't



Kee was in his small wooden house among the trees.

see anything. Then he looked up at the sky, and saw the plane just before it went behind a cloud on its way to Port au Prince airport.

3

The Building Business

After nine months in Haiti, Conway was a happy man. His business was going well, and he was making a lot of money. He had a large office in Port au Prince, a big house, and hundreds of people were working for him. He had some land near Port au Prince, and he was building a new town. There were already hundreds of new houses, and many people knew the name Conway Construction. But Conway had a problem, and he wanted to see a business friend, Jacques Remy.

The telephone on his desk rang. He picked it up.

'Yes?'

'Mr Remy is here to see you, Mr Conway,' said his secretary.

'Send him in immediately.' A few moments later,

Jacques Remy came into the room.

'Jacques, it's nice to see you. Thank you for coming. Sit down.'

'Thanks,' said Jacques. 'You said on the phone that you had a problem.'

'Yes,' said Conway. 'You helped me buy the land for the new town when I first came to Haiti. Some of the houses are ready, and people are living in them. But now I need more land.'

'You can buy land anywhere,' said Jacques.

'I know, but I want a piece of land near my houses. People will need shops, and perhaps I can build a hotel too, and some more houses.'

'What piece of land do you want?' asked Jacques.

'Well, that's the problem.' Conway took out a pencil



'I can only build the shops and houses on this hill.'

and a piece of paper, and began to draw a map. 'Most of the houses are here,' he said. 'Now, I can't build on the south or the east side of the houses because of the sea. On the north side the land is no good. There is too much water in it. So I can only build on the west side. I can only build on this hill.'

'Good,' said Jacques. 'Buy the hill and then you can build more houses on the other side too.'

'I want to,' said Conway, 'but there's a problem.' He went over to the desk and picked up a photograph. It was a photograph of a graveyard. He gave the photograph of the graveyard to Jacques. 'You see, it won't be easy. I want to build on the graveyard.'

Jacques looked at the photograph carefully. 'It's very



'I want to build on this graveyard.'

old,' he said, 'and that's good. If only a few people go there, perhaps you can buy it. But if it is new and a lot of people go there, they will be angry, and it will be difficult to buy it. Go and look at the stones. Find out how old the place is. I'll talk to some friends. Perhaps they can help.'

'Thank you very much, Jacques. I won't forget this.'

'It's nothing,' said Jacques. 'Tell me how old the stones are, and I'll ring you again in a few days.'

4

The Voodoo Man

A big lorry drove past Kee's house. It was going very fast and it made a lot of noise. Before Conway built the new town, Kee's village was a quiet place. There were only a few small cars. Now big lorries went past every five minutes, carrying things for the new buildings. Kee was a very unhappy old man. He was sitting in his small house, looking out into the garden.

Another big lorry went past the window.

He heard the sound of a car coming down the road. The car stopped near the house, and a woman got out.

She was young and well dressed. She walked up to the gate at the end of Kee's garden and waited. Kee saw her and went out of the house, down the wooden steps and into the garden.

'Hello,' she said, looking at the old man. 'Can I come in?'

'Yes, of course,' answered Kee. 'What can I do for you?'

The woman opened the gate and came up to Kee. 'My name is Karen Jackson,' she said, 'Dr Jackson. I'm an American. I'm working at the big hospital in Port au Prince, and I'm doing some work for my book.'

'I see,' said Kee. 'But why do you want to talk to me?'



Karen Jackson walked up to the gate of Kee's garden.

'I'm writing a book about voodoo,' she said. 'Everyone here talks about you. They all say you are the best houngan in Haiti. They say you are a very strong and good houngan, and that you always help people.'

Kee smiled. 'I try to help good people,' he said. 'Come into the house, Dr Jackson. Let me get you a drink and we can talk.'

Kee and Karen went into the house and began to talk. Karen told him about her life and her work, and why she was in Haiti. Kee told her about his life and talked for a long time about the old Haiti and the people he remembered.

'Everything is changing,' he said. 'When I was a young man, we lived with our families. We worked in the coffee fields. We helped each other. Friends were more important than money. People were good and kind. But everything is different now. Business people come from America and Europe and start banks and big companies. All the young men go to Port au Prince. They leave their villages and their families. They think about money all the time. They don't think about people.'

'Yes, I know,' said Karen. 'It's happening in America too. But you can always find good people if you look for them.'

'I know,' said Kee, smiling. 'You don't have to go back yet, do you?'

'No, not yet. Why?'

'There's something that I want to show you. It's a hill outside the village. I often go there when I'm unhappy, or when I want to think. It's a graveyard, but it's very beautiful there, when the warm wind blows the leaves of the coconut trees.'

5

The Graveyard

They left his house and began to walk along the road to the hill. When they arrived, they walked slowly through the graveyard. At the top of the hill, they looked down at the fields below. They could see a lot of lorries, and a lot of men were working there, building the new town. Already there were hundreds and hundreds of new houses in the field. 'The village is changing very fast,' he said. 'Soon there are going to be thousands and thousands of new houses. What will happen to our village then? Once it was a quiet place and the people were friendly. But soon there will be a

lot of new people and busy, noisy roads. I don't want to live in a place like that.'

'Can't you do anything? Can't you stop them?' asked Karen.

'Me? No. What can I do? Nothing. I'm an old man, and nobody listens to me.'

They walked on through the graveyard, and Kee said, 'My grandfather is here in this graveyard. He was my mother's father. I remember the day when he died. I cried for a long time when I saw that big dark hole in the ground, and we put his body in the grave. It was raining. I was twelve years old. My mother and father were with me, and they were crying too.'



Karen and Kee walked through the graveyard.

Voodoo Island

'I'm sorry,' said Karen.

'Oh, it was a long time ago,' said Kee. 'But my grandfather's grave was the last on this hill. After he died, they made a new graveyard on the other side of the village. That's why nobody comes here now. Nobody remembers the old people here.'

'But you do.'

'Oh, yes. I could never forget my grandfather. He taught me about voodoo, about the spirit of the rain and the spirit of the wind. You see, nothing is really dead. There's a spirit in everything, in every tree, in the sun, in the sea. If you understand voodoo, you can talk to these spirits. And there's a spirit under this cold grey stone.'

Kee showed her the stone on his grandfather's grave and Karen read the words slowly. 'Tim Atty. Born 1845. Died 1906.' Kee looked at Karen and said quietly, 'Some people say he was the strongest houngan of all, the houngan we call Baron Samedi.'

'Baron Samedi!' cried Karen. 'Your grandfather!' Suddenly she felt afraid when she heard the terrible name. She looked at the old man.

'I see you know more about voodoo than I thought,' he said. 'But don't be afraid of me. I'm just an old man who doesn't like the new world.' He smiled at Karen again.

The Graveyard



'Some people say he was the houngan, Baron Samedi.'

They stayed on the hill and talked for a long time. Then Karen looked at her watch and said, 'What? Is that the time? I'm sorry, Kee, but I must go now. I have to be at the hospital at four o'clock.' Kee got up.

'Don't worry,' said Karen. 'I can find the car — it's not far. Please stay if you want to.'

'Are you sure?'

'Yes, I know how to get back.'

'Well, then, I think I'll stay a little longer. It was very nice to talk to you.'

'Thank you for talking to me, too. I've learnt a lot today. I hope we'll meet again.'

'I hope so too. Goodbye.'

Kee watched Karen as she walked down the hill. And then he saw two men. They were young, and they were carrying lots of papers. They walked around the graveyard for a short time, looking at the graves and then at the papers. Kee went over to them.

'Good afternoon,' he said.

'Good afternoon,' the men replied.

'What are you doing here?' asked Kee.

'We work for Conway Construction,' they said. 'We're building some shops here.'

'And a big hotel,' said the other man. Kee was very



'My grandfather's grave is here.'

surprised. 'What?' he said. 'You can't do that here. This is a graveyard. You can't build houses and shops in a graveyard. It's a very important place.'

The two men laughed at him. 'Don't be stupid, old man,' they said. 'This graveyard is very old. Nobody comes here now. The people in this graveyard died a hundred years ago.'

Kee was angry. 'Don't talk to me like that,' he said. 'My grandfather's grave is here. You're not going to build shops and houses on this land.'

One of the men said, 'Yes, we are. This is Mr Conway's land. He bought it a few days ago. He's going to build shops here and we're going to help him.'

'No,' said Kee. 'That isn't true.'

'It is true,' replied the man. 'We're going to start next week. If you want to, you can go and see Mr Conway. You can talk to him. He'll tell you it's true.'

'Where does he live?' asked Kee. The men gave him a small piece of paper. He looked at it. The paper said: 'Conway Construction, 16 Rue de la République, Port au Prince.'

Kee said, 'Don't begin any work here. I want to see Conway first. I'll tell him that he can't build shops here.'

The two men laughed and said, 'OK, old man. We'll wait for you.'