

ANTHONY JOSEPH

THE FREQUENCY OF MAGIC



P E E P A L T R E E

Sixteen years after they had separated, Brenda arrives in Enterprise Village, west central of the island, on a Sunday afternoon, when men have been drinking Scotch and eating barbecued pig-tails under the shade of an avocado tree. She walks between them, interrupting their All Fours game to ask for Deacon Simmons's house. Her head is reared back and supercilious as she walks, like a woman who patrols the gardens of her estate, hand held in hand behind, inspecting the bull work that has been done. She will call the Deacon out of the shack he has been building with bachelor galvanise and crate wood, since Joan, the woman he was living with in Million Hills, get rid of him. Deacon yard overwhelm by grass that hard to kill; it growing under the floorboards; his outside toilet have a cesspit but no water pumping, so he have to use buckets of water to cash and carry shit down. He comes down into the yard, barebacked and grinning in the government sun, a middle-aged man catching his arse in Enterprise village, with nothing to show for his life, neither loot nor bounty, nor spoils of nothing besides the eight-track machine and the speaker-box cut from white plastic bucket – them same big bucket people does make souse in. Deacon icebox have orange butter growing mould, a jug of water and a slice of shark in a dish, marinating in onions and pimento. From just the sound of his slipper slapping, Brenda could tell that Deacon had nothing left but his name. Once he could charm his way through strife with grin and quiet guile, next thing you know he eating fish broth at your table, and posing for photographs in your father house, the same house Brenda father work so hard to build from tapia, grinding rockstone with his teeth. Daddy never build house for no bird-head boy to take for some open sepulchre, to walk about the yard like saga boy, with toothpick out the side of his mouth, to lick down people girl-child with he hairy cock. But the old man done talk. He watching the news.

When Deacon come in the yard, and the sun hit him in his chest, he put his hands on his hip and he ask, 'How you find me here, where you come from?' Same time the ravine dry. Blue flies buzzing around the swine pens in the neighbour's yard. A dog start to whine and bark at two white-headed Baptists on their way back from church. But after all these years, when he see Brenda, his first love, that wild and vibrant love, this woman who once tore his shirt from his back that red dusk when they were making love beside the sawmill on Jogie Road, he still feel something. So he assess her at arms' length first, he search her face for the limits of her smile, then he embrace her, her beating heart to his, and they are together again, like old fire-stick familiar, like a coil unravelling through time and finding its way back to the centre, like love that seeks again its own source, a love that never dies, but is transformed and reborn. He forgive her. She smells of sandalwood and talcum powder.

But is divorce papers Brenda bring to serve the man him, and is just so, right there in Enterprise Village, on the gravel road, on that Sunday, in the new settlement, on land the government either forget, don't care about, or abandon to poor people children, that his whole dream turn upside down, and the black and white photographs begin to fade, the cut-glass vase fall and shatter, the iron bed break and reach the floor. So Deacon delaying, asking after their children, if she have man – anything to not take the damn envelope. He know what it is. Deacon Simmons not stupid. 'And your mother, how she knee? I hear she fall out of bed and break it in three places. The farm get road yet? Cars could come in now? The water truck still bringing water or water pipe-borne now? Hurricane pass, who roof get fling off? That road was so bad before, oh gooosh, tyre used to spin, and how Alice, and Ma Quinn? You ever go back Mount Garnett? And your father, he dead yet?' But the letter have to deliver and when she put it in his hand, he bound to take it. So finally he buck and give a bow to mercy – take it, yes – and turn it over, plain envelope, no name, but inside was serious paper to sign. Poor Deacon, his bargain bucket low like a snake's shadow; he have nothing to give but faith, and Brenda not asking for nothing, but if is marry she want marry a next man, and even if that never

happen, then is so it go sometimes, like gun-mouth pants that measure but never make.

She agrees to coffee, black and sweet. They are there on his verandah when the night settles in, and the cane fields rustle gently in the distance, and the scent of burning sage and Indian indentureship, the resonance of plantation slavery, all that wrap up tight, warp and wrap up in the dirty light. He tells her how, just last week, a man drank weedicide to die, but didn't, so he ran a blade across his own neck to bone, and did, stretched out stiff in bed. One coffee becomes a reconstitution. They listen to the radio. In this village night, they will talk as old friends in the paraffin glow of his lamp, in the smoke of the mosquito coil, till it is late and he must walk her out the half mile to the main road for a taxi back south, and all the while laughing, remembering, when they were young. Two years later, when she dies from breast cancer, it is Deacon who reads her eulogy, before they put her in the ground.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Anthony Joseph was born in Trinidad. He holds a PhD in Creative and Life writing from Goldsmiths College, for which he completed a fictional biography of the Calypsonian Lord Kitchener. He lectures in creative writing at De Montford University, Leicester. In 2015 he presented *Kitch*, a documentary for BBC Radio 4, and in 2018 his *Kitch: A Fictional Biography of a Calypso Icon* was published by Peepal Tree Press. *Kitch* was shortlisted for the Republic of Consciousness Prize, the the RSL Encore award and the Bocas prize for Caribbean writing.

He is the author of four previous poetry collections: *Desafinado*, *Teragaton*, *Bird Head Son* and *Rubber Orchestras*, and a novel, *The African Origins of UFOs*. In 2012 he represented Trinidad and Tobago at the Poetry Parnassus Festival on London's South Bank. In 2019 he was awarded a Jerwood Compton Poetry fellowship.

As a musician and bandleader he has released seven critically acclaimed albums.

As a poet, novelist, musician his written work and performance occupies a space between surrealism, jazz and the rhythms of Caribbean speech and music. He is described as “the leader of the black avant-garde in Britain” and his work as “afro-blue to astro-black and what glimmers in between” – *The Times*

ALSO BY ANTHONY JOSEPH

*Kitch: A Fictional Biography of a Calypso Icon*

ISBN: 9781845234195; pp. 272; pub. June 2018, price £10.99

Combining an inventive fictional structure and the novel's investment in language with factual biography, Anthony Joseph engages imaginatively in the recreation of Kitch's world. By presenting a multifaceted view from Kitch's friends, colleagues and rivals, Joseph gets to the heart of the man behind the music and the myth, reaching behind the sobriquet to present a holistic portrait of the calypso icon Lord Kitchener.

Born into colonial Trinidad in 1922 as Aldwyn Roberts, 'Kitch' arrived in England on HMT Empire Windrush in 1948. He emerged in the 1950s at the forefront of multicultural Britain, acting as an intermediary between the growing Caribbean community, the islands they had left behind, and the often hostile conditions they encountered in post-war Britain. In the process, Kitch, as he was affectionately called, almost single-handedly popularised the calypso in Britain, with recordings such as 'London is the Place for Me', 'The Underground Train' and 'Ghana'.

Poet and musician Anthony Joseph met and spoke to Lord Kitchener just once, in 1984, when he found the man standing alone for a moment in the heat of Queen's Park Savannah, one Carnival Monday afternoon. It was a pivotal meeting in which the great calypsonian outlined his musical vision, an event which forms a moving epilogue to *Kitch*, Joseph's unique biography of the Grandmaster.

<https://www.peepaltreepress.com/books/kitch>

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