



Tan Doo Doo Prepares the House for Christmas

Tan Doo Doo was a well-organized house manager. She made lists; many, many lists. She even created rosters and charts, ha! And knew exactly what had to be done on any given day leading up to the 25th of December.

At Christmas time, the work was much more than usual, but she had a very patient and understanding son. He knew that around Christmas in particular, the lists, rosters and charts had to be followed closely. Each night before work began, Tan Doo Doo would sit opposite Sonny Boy at the dinner table and would make sure that he knew exactly what to do and how to do it. Sonny boy was expected to complete all his tasks for a given day, before he could retire to bed. Lord! Late nights in he **pwefen!** Tan Doo Doo was up late each night too, cleaning, decorating, sewing, baking, cooking and in general, preparing the house for Christmas.

Everybody who knew Tan Doo Doo knew she was a woman of order, her rules and her regulations. Considering all the work that had to get done, she would start with the roof and work her way down to the floor, then she would tend to the outside. Tan Doo Doo and Sonny Boy knew the process quite well, having adhered to it over the years.

Each year, they began by cobwebbing the ceiling, then washing the walls. Next, she cleaned the window panes, **louvers** and cupboards. She would then clean the chairs and the tables, and then she would paint the walls. Finally, she would scrub and polish the floors.

In the weeks leading up to the day she started preparing the house, Tan Doo Doo secured all her cleaning equipment, including a strong and trusty **fex broom**, made from the midribs of coconut tree leaves, coconut fibre, pieces of broken bottle, paint brushes, newspaper, sandpaper, razor blades, and more. Her cleaning agents included, ashes, sand, **pitch oil**, lime juice, soda and other improvised substances.

Sonny Boy always did the cobwebbing because over the years as she got older, Tan Doo Doo complained of getting dizzy from looking up and cobweb falling in her eyes. Even though her son never thought it necessary, Tan Doodoo insisted that all the



walls of the house must be scrubbed, not wiped, before being painted. Sonny Boy had to do that too!

Nothing but newspaper and a spritz of a homemade **concoction** would shine the panes of glasses in the windows and all the mirrors in the house, especially the one on the hat rack in the living room.

The cleaning of cupboards was a very extensive exercise, which lasted for days. That was the opportunity to throw away what was no longer needed, wipe and rearrange items, stock cupboards with the season's favorite local goodies like, nuts, jub jub, sweets and biscuits, and wash all the bottles that had to be kept to store seasonal drinks like **sorrel** and **ginger beer**. Nice!

During this process, the house was usually in disarray. Everywhere you looked you saw bottles, tins, boxes, and bags. Tan Doo Doo alone could decide what was tossed and what was kept. She needed time to think about the future of each item and its contents carefully. Only when the cupboards were thoroughly cleaned and lined with paper, did the long process of restoring its contents back begin, and with each year, it seemed to last even longer.

The one thing that Tan Doo Doo and Tan Doo Doo alone was allowed to do was clean, sand and varnish all the mahogany chairs and tables. **Wuk**, wuk and more wuk! But, it was kind of like her own little Christmas ritual. It involved scraping every inch of varnish off the big table and chairs. This is how she used the edge of a piece of broken bottle. The chairs then had to be sandpapered until she saw the original color of the wood and every inch of the furniture felt as smooth as velvet. When she was all done, she would stand back, arms **akimbo**, and admire the chairs and the big table. They came from the **great house** in the **estate**. It was her pride and joy, next to her son of course. She called the living room set **Morris Chairs**. Each year, without fail, she repeated the same line at this point: Ahhh boy eh ... dey doh make ting strong so no more. Now dat is Mr. Living Room Set! Take dat! (laughter). Like Tan Doo Doo and her table and chairs, Sonny Boy had all responsibility for painting and varnishing. Since a little boy, he always loved to paint and varnish and his hands were steady and strong.



Excitement mounted as the time came to do the floors. Together, they scrubbed and scrubbed until the floors were white and there was no trace of polish anywhere. Tan Doo Doo liked to buy the **linoleum** to cover the kitchen floor, not only for the way it looked but for the way it smelled. Linoleum had the smell of Christmas, as did the **oil cloth** she used to cover the kitchen tables.

Tan Doo Doo had a strange liking for a dark living room floor, so she would boil the powdered mahogany stain with limes and stain the entire surface. The truth is, the lighter colored wood was considered cheaper, so she had a rich dark brown mahogany floor to match her living and dining room sets. The woman had class and a reputation. Her house must look like the Great House. But how yuh mean?

Like the painting and the varnishing, Sonny Boy also assumed the role of resident polisher and polished every square foot of the floor, with mahogany polish of course. He polished by hand, then shined by hand and when Tan Doo Doo was satisfied with the shine on the floor, she would stand on a piece of **flannel** and do a slow dance with her feet all around the room. She called this "**buffing the shine**" and it meant that no one walked on the floor again without "buffing".

But wait ... how we goh forget the curtains? Hanging her newly sewn curtains was Tan Doo Doo's greatest pleasure. With each year, came a new color scheme: mint, morse green and white, burgundy, cream and gold, red, green, cream and gold. And she never, I mean never hung up the same curtains twice. Remember class and reputation!

By Christmas Eve night, all around the house on the outside would be as clean and shiny as the floors on the inside. While hanging the curtains was Tan Doo Doo's greatest pleasure, putting a fresh coat of paint on the front porch steps and **bannisters** was Sonny Boy's. Tan Doo Doo chose the color though ... red! She felt like the red steps represented a red carpet and it welcomed all to her home and indicated that very important people lived there. Tan Doo Doo eh? Steups.

By midnight on Christmas Eve each year, the work ended and Tan Doo Doo and Sonny Boy would retire to bed tired, but feelings accomplished. Before she retired to bed however, Tan Doo Doo gave the house one last inspection. She would marvel at how spotless and well organized her home was, as though she didn't spend weeks pulling



the house apart just to put it back together again. Christmas was finally here! Tan Doo Doo's house was indeed a Great House well prepared to receive all her friends, family and even the **village maco** the next day.

