



Tan Doo Doo's Christmas Drinks

There are some things Tan Doo Doo did not make a joke about. One of those things was her Christmas drinks. There were no shortcuts. You either followed the recipe and procedure, or you would be making something else, and you had better call it by a different name.

Close to her heart were her **sorrel**, **ginger beer**, **mauby** and **rice wine**. Tan Doodoo had a problem with the strange new ginger she saw around. It was very thick and clearer than the ginger she used. Tan Doodoo warned everyone that the new ginger was filled with water and chemicals and was dangerous. She did not have to worry because she planted her own. At Christmas time, she pulled the ginger out of the ground, weighed it in her hands and could tell you how many bottles it would yield. No one else's ginger-beer could compete with Tan Doo Doo's. Why? Tan Doo Doo shared her recipes to **all and sundry**, giving ingredients and methods, but never exact quantities. Ha!

Everyone found it strange that she would never be specific, she would always say: a little, or some, or about this much, or to taste, or for a few days, or when it looks ready. They knew her well and knew that she was keeping her secrets to herself. When she washed and scraped her ginger, she would slice it very thinly and lay the pieces on a tray in the sun to dry. For an entire week she left it there, turning it over regularly. By the end of the week it was brittle and would crumble to the touch.

Now, Tan Doodoo was the only person who ever owned a three-tiered **mortar**. The largest hole was used to pound boiled plantain to make **tom-tom**, the second size was used to pound ginger and the smallest for spices and seasonings. Of course, she had three different size **mortar pestles** for each hole. So, in the second size mortar, she would pound the dried ginger and sift, and pound and sift, and pound and sift until it was as fine as flour.

Tan Doo Doo would boil water and leave it to cool before adding the powdered ginger. She always said that you **draw** ginger beer, you don't boil it, so the mixture was placed in the sun, with some added spices, in a glass bottle covered with a fine net. The bottle had to be glass eh, not plastic. Only when she knew the mixture was



ready, would she strain it, sweeten and bottle it. Sometimes she strained it twice, to get it very clear and without **sediment**.

Most of the people in the village did not have the time or the patience to follow Tan Doo Doo's recipe and procedure. Most didn't care whether theirs **fermented** quickly or not. Added to that, Tan Doo Doo's ginger beer was always very strong and would burn from beginning to end. Other people's? Not so much!

Tan Doo Doo took pride in her ginger beer. It was the clearest and the strongest and lasted the longest, without changing taste. She had entered her ginger beer in a competition some years before and won the first prize. After that, many people had requested the recipe and it was from that point that her quantities would never be specific, a pinch of this, sweeten to taste, add some spices, never a half a leaf of **bay leaf** or five sticks of clove and a five-inch piece of lime peel. She would argue that whatever she added and how much, was her own private and personal business and that people must be creative. She would also defend her actions by saying that it would be boring to go visiting, and have everybody in the village ginger beer taste the same.

Her sorrel did not take as much time to prepare. Like her ginger, she planted her own creole sorrel, picked the flowers at Christmas time, took out the seeds from the red petals and cleaned and washed them. She would then put them in the sun to dry as well, just like the ginger.

Again, she claimed the length of time it spent drying in the sun, affected the taste. If Tan Doo Doo said that, no one challenged her. No one asked her to give a specific time for drying for she would only get agitated and advise them to test it, and they would know when it was properly dried. It was a matter of using common sense, and she assured them that she could not help them with that.

There was another rather strange instruction that concerned drawing the sorrel. She made it clear that you pour boiling water over the dried sorrel, you never put the dried sorrel into the boiling water. Like a chemist, she would never use an **aluminum pot** for drawing sorrel because she said sorrel was too acid, and she saw what happened when she used lime to scrub her aluminum pots. She used a wide mouth **earthenware jar** or a large glass bottle. As expected, the rest of the recipe would



read: add some spices, leave for a few days, sweeten to taste, strain and bottle. You could have asked for more but you were not going to get any more.

Another drink that she made for Christmas, was her Mauby Special. Not mauby eh, Mauby Special! Tan Doodoo boiled the **mauby bark** with orange peel and spices and bay leaf, in a small amount of water. She would then pour it all into a container of boiled water, add some aniseed and leave to cool. When it was properly cooled, she would add a very strange ingredient - rice. As Tan Doodoo would say, the amount of rice you put, would depend on the amount of mauby you were going to make. You would never be able to get her to say, for example, one cup to a gallon. What she would insist was, that it must be brown rice and she would explain that the rice would give it a bounce, and Tan Doo Doo's mauby bounced high.

After she left it for a couple days, strained it and added sugar to taste, she would bottle her mauby drink. She always left a large space empty at the top of each bottle. The observant, would see her shake the bottle before serving, so that there was **froth** at the top of the glass when poured. To Tan Doo Doo, this was important. You must have white froth on your top lip or you were not drinking her mauby. Those who complained that the drink was too bitter were reminded that the bitter was medicine to clean the blood. Depending on your state in life, Tan Doo Doo would use her **swizzle stick** to blend some milk into your mauby. That brew was good for the back, she would say.

Over the years, many had inquired of Tan Doo Doo, about the method she used in making rice wine. She would always commented that jail was involved in that and she was afraid of jail. It was described as being much too potent to be prepared without a license for brewing. For this reason, her rice wine could only be tasted at her home and no one had ever succeeded in persuading her to allow them to take a bottle home.

She had a large earthenware jar with a small mouth, which she had inherited from her grandmother who had worked at the great house on the estate that originally included her property. This was probably the secret to her wine making skills. The villagers had made up their own **legend** that, in the days of slavery, some slaves



would turn into spirits and hide in the jars from their owners and it was some of these spirits, still living in the jar, which accounted for the spirits that came out of the jar.

Every year, when Christmas came, people from all over the island, would look forward to their visit to Tan Doo Doo, to share in her special Christmas drinks, like no other, anywhere else.

