

Jamaica *Like You've Never Seen It* PG.54

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Personality is place. "You have the famous artist — me!" says famous artist Nena Sanchez in her studio. Opposite, left: "I'll take the people," says Capt. Goodlife. "They'll bless you a million times." Opposite, right: That's his dog.

steal my stuff." Juni rolls a cigarette while he talks, smokes it, remains animated. "I have a very particular guy, Chapo, a struggler. You bring your car to him; he dismounts it; you will never get your car back! That's a good interview. He walks without a shirt. He's banging the cars. He fixes things."

A group of divers arrives, impatient to hit the water. "We'll just drive around," he continues without blinking. "I know everybody. We'll go to the Banda Bao market. I'll treat you. We kill the sheep; the blood becomes like liver; we put in the pepper." He kisses his fingertips, remembrance of coagulated sheep's blood. "They kill the sheep in front of you just to show how fresh it is. It sounds weird, but" But that's Curaçao.

I'm sad I can't meet all his people yet. Juni has to take his customers to the Mushroom Forest or the Blue Room, mind-blowing dive sites that sit right around the corner. "Hallelujah!" Juni calls as I leave past desert flowers in full bloom from the recent rains. "Thank God you came!"

DRIVING EAST TOWARD TOWN AGAIN,

I pass a *landhuis* (plantation house) and a sign for the Nena Sanchez Gallery. Inside, everything is painted in explosive primary colors — tables, chairs, walls, stairs, not to mention the artist's actual paintings of women, houses, roosters. "Beautiful things!" says Nena, a raven-haired former Miss Curaçao who waves her hands when she talks. "I love colors!" Her palette makes my eyes water. Through the doorway, the world outside already looks a little muted.

Nena talks up her neighborhood, the flamingos on the salt flats below, the cathedral up the hill, old slave houses, Porto Marie beach. "Dedicate your whole story to Willibrordus," she demands. "You don't need to go to the east end. There's nothing there! The ostrich farm? That has nothing to do with us. Why do you want to see an ostrich?"

Wait, ostriches? Can I ride one? "There's Dinah Veeris," Nena says, "the lady with the garden — she's a good friend — but that's it. Go see her, and then come back here."

I go to see Dinah, the herbalist, on Saturday morning. She talks about the healing properties of island plants. But the night before, I watched Ryan's Inter Willemstad soccer team outrun the bigger, meaner Zebras and beat them 2-1. And after the game, the buoyant team owners bought rounds of Polar beer, and Ryan explained the ever-present Curaçao word *dushi*, which translates as sweet but also conjures up the spontaneous bond that forms between the people here.

So my mind is weary and wandering. And here swarms of mosquitoes are attacking my legs. After this I figure I'll go to the ostrich farm despite Nena's protests ("They belong on a

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THROW LEAVES OF THE
MATA PISKÁ IN THE
RIVER TO PARALYZE
FISH. WRITE YOUR
lover's name
ON A LEAF FROM THE
TEMETIKA TREE AND
CLOSE IT IN A BOOK. "IF
IT SENDS OUT ROOTS,
IT MEANS THE
love is mutual."

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