

women) to prepare medicines that ward off genies. She makes many friends, cooks, eats, sleeps in their beds and plaits their hair. She is very happy. Particularly when she reaches the home of the grocer Adamu Muhammad, his wife, Hajiya, and their three daughters. They are such a nice family and life with them is wonderful. Men come to court her. They bring her expensive gifts and whisper sweet nothings and Hajiya scolds her and says she must settle down with a nice man – just the one.

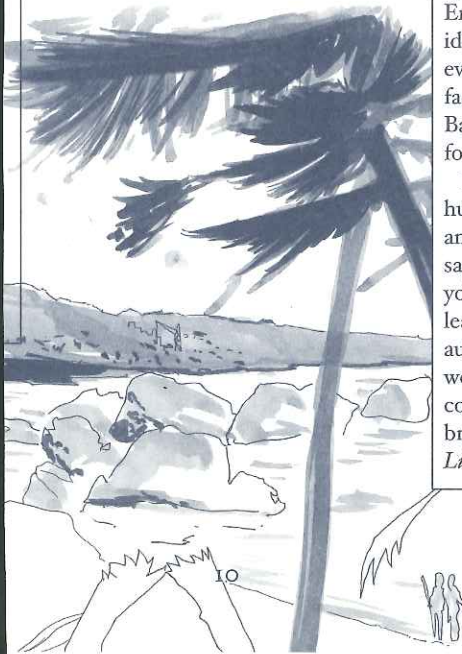
And then disaster: someone recognises Aoubakar and forces him to strip. Tissue paper falls softly from his bra to the ground. It's all over. What's left? Some heart-broken suitors. Some unexcited husbands. And thousands of posters in memory of Kawajo, treasured by admirers from Lagos to Kano.

—NINE STEPHEN

BARBADOS

STORM WATCH: LIFE
AFTER IVAN

Poolside cocktails, postcard-perfect palm trees, crystal-clear oceans – these are the images people associate with the Caribbean.



In September, however, Hurricane Ivan brought the world a different side to island life, making the news around the world for a few days, complete with dramatic footage of the carnage. And then, of course, disappearing off the international media radar just as quickly.

Grenada was worst hit and the fact the Royal Navy was called into action as a temporary operations base for the Grenadian Prime Minister, after his house and 90 per cent of all others were flattened or greatly damaged, explained just how bad things were there. Though it's small consolation to Spice Islanders, not every island suffered as badly. Antigua was untouched, the eye passed north of Tobago and here in Barbados we were lucky, too.

Moving up across the Atlantic, it seemed Ivan was on a direct collision course with us. Schools, banks, offices closed down and contingency plans broadcast on radio and TV. At the last minute, though, Ivan veered south and Barbados was spared yet again. I say again because 'Little England' (one of the island's other identities – you'll know why if you've ever visited) has been here before. In fact, when we talk about God being Bajan, it's because of our uncanny fortune in avoiding these things.

Don't get me wrong – we've had hurricanes here. In 1780, 1831, 1898 and Janet in 1955, but as my granny says, "Is a generational ting mon, you only hear bout it when deh does leave yuh by granny." So the authorities worry, but they've worried before, and those contingency plans, well, they get broadcast in between *Days of Our Lives*, *Law & Order* and *Clifford the*

Big Red Dog. And, not being overly concerned, many of us leave the emergency supermarket run until the last minute, but still grumble at the long queues and number of *other* last-minute people.

When the edge of Ivan did come, its winds whipped and uprooted some trees, knocked down the drive-in cinema screen and took off several roofs, including panels housing a retired Concorde. On the beaches, debris was strewn around and some roads had coral and stones scattered across them. In low-lying coastal areas, like the seafront restaurants in the south, there was minor flooding and the local electricity company did cut the supply as a precautionary measure for part of the day.

But compared to Grenada our damage was easy to repair, the storm surge receded, the tourists came back and by Friday everything – service, the checkout lane, the bank – seemed just as slow as before. Months later kids horse around whenever they hear thunder telling each other, "Ohh oh Hurricane Ivan is back". But with the devastation elsewhere we know we were lucky and our thoughts are with others less fortunate.

As to whether God really is Bajan, who knows? All I can say is that in the tropics, the trees, the land, the animals, the people – we're all survivors brought together on the Antillean archipelago. And after every storm, we rise no matter how hard things are, thankful to be alive