



IFE AXE Creative Designs
By *Gerardo*
Jewelry Inspired by The Orisha

Chapter One

HISTORICAL NOTES

Santeria's roots are in Africa, in the Yoruba religions native to Nigeria. It was brought to the New World by the hundreds of thousands of men, women and children who were hunted down and sold as slaves.

The African religions had to undergo severe transformations in order to survive. The changes that led to Santeria began in 1517, when Yoruba slaves had their first bitter taste of Catholicism in Cuba.

It is its Catholic content which gives Santeria its peculiar flavor. The combination results in a Santero being a devout Roman Catholic at the same time he or she is sacrificing a rooster to a cement image of Elegua enthroned behind the front door.

There are no records. There are only stories, echoes of voices long dead.

The slave is brought to the new land. No longer a human being, the slave is sold and traded like a beast of burden. If the Master is kind, the slave will eat and live to work. If the Master is not, the slave will work until the slave dies.

Night brings an old Yoruba song. A homemade drum answers. A chorus forms. More drums are brought out. The old movements are recalled. The dancing starts. Chants and dances from quarrelling African tribes join and make love to each other. The rhythms unite, transform and give birth to something new.

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The herb man looks after the sick. He sees the future. Prayers. Offerings. Sacrifices. He knows what foods the gods like, what women attract them. Enemies are killed by a handful of powder.

The white man in the black cassock comes. There is a Jesus. He was tortured and killed. His mother cries. The slaves understand grief and death.

The white god doesn't talk. The white god does not come to visit. The white god does not like the things that the earth gives with such love. No singing. No dancing. No food. No perfume. He hates the feel of soft velvety flesh and laughter in the night. The white god makes no miracles.

The old Yoruba priest teaches the young the ancient rites. Secretly. They are treasures.

Nannies croon African Apatakis. White babies fall asleep, the stories of the gods in their ears. The babies grow up. They dance. They believe.

White men have black lovers. Beautiful black women bite their ears. They learn to respect Chango. They do not provoke Elegua.

The Spanish Inquisition comes and kills and burns. They say there is only one god.

The slaves smile and lie. They worship Chango, Obatala or Oshun as they kneel in church. They believe in the white god and saints as well. The more love and respect given to all the gods, the greater their protection.

Elegua, the playful messenger of the gods, cheerfully becomes the Holy Child of Atocha. Oshosi, the fierce god of war, shrugged his shoulders and became Saint Norbert. Oshun, the hip-swinging goddess of those who know how to make love with skill and passion, became Our Lady of Charity (La Caridad del Cobre). Chango, the invincible warrior chief, the whoring god of storm and lightning, showed his sense of humor. He turns into Saint Barbara.

Everyone felt much more protected now that Chango was a warrior as well as a female Saint inside the church. No one fooled anyone. The slave owners saw that, after a religious festival (a "golpe de Santo") there was peace and harmony in the sugar plantations. Many white mothers had their child brought back to health by a black herbalist. Young women swore about the effectiveness of love philters and showed off their handsome husbands as proof. The priests

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thought about the recent slave uprisings in Haiti and the accompanying massacre of the priesthood and assured the laity that a little drumming in the night was absolutely harmless.

Santeria was born. No one really paid much attention.



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