

MANGO MOUTH

By Victor Peter-George ©22-7-2010

Chapter One

A gentle morning breeze crawls down the lush green hills and tenderly strokes the leaves of the trees, as it cools the quiet country village of Toco, a farming community peacefully resting in a valley under the protecting embrace of the Pariah Hills. The lazy Guapo River runs through Toco quenching its thirst whenever the need arises.

Toco is known island wide for the many crops its fertile land produces so effortlessly. However the sweetness of its numerous varieties of mangoes is almost legendary. So tempting is the taste of these mangoes that all of its inhabitants eagerly await the mango season. When they can sink their teeth into the juicy flesh of a mango and savour the taste as nectar runs down chin, fingers and arms.

One little girl living in Toco named Annie, is known by the villagers to have a huge appetite for the mangoes. Annie who is just 9 years old seems to know before anyone else in the village, which tree will bear the first mango and which will ripen first. Every mango season since her fifth birthday, Annie is always the first person in the village to be seen eating a mango. She also knows where the largest mangoes can be found. Therefore it came as no surprise to anyone living in Toco that Annie got the name 'Mango Mouth'. No one can recall who gave her the name or at what age she acquired it, Annie just became 'Mango Mouth'.

Mango mouth lives in one of the larger houses in Toco, with her parents, two brothers and two sisters. Her house is situated alongside the winding narrow road which runs through the center of Toco, dividing the village into two equal parts. The northern section slopes directly from the first Pariah hill until it meets the road. The southern section slopes from the road down to the Guapo River, crosses it and ascends the other Pariah hill. Mango mouth lives in the Southern section with the window to her room facing the river, looking down upon her

family's land. The land is populated with many varieties of fruit trees- mangoes included as if I needed to say, vegetable plants and livestock. This is the norm in Toco, regardless of which section you live in. The land owned by those on the northern section extends up the mountain. Those owned by those on the southern section normally covers both sides of the river. Narrow wooden bridges link both sides of the river since a few villagers live across the river and have to cross daily. A few use river boats to make the crossing, especially to deliver their produce to the trucks and vans which transports it to the markets and factories across the island. Mango mouth can open her window and view all of these activities as she stands on her bed looking out every morning.

Most mornings, whether it is school or vacation time, she will forget everything as she closely observes the daily activities of the farmers including her parents. However this morning is different, mango season is approaching. So she is looking and smelling for something special, the first sign of growing, ripening fruit. Where she got this gift or how is a mystery even to her. All she knows is that she can sense when the fruit is around even if it is on one of the trees over the river. School is on vacation so there is no hurry to move from her observation point at her window.

"Good Morning Annie", her mother Indra says as she enters the bedroom, giving her the usual tight hug and a long wet kiss on the cheek. Mango Mouth bursts into laughter instantly. She just reacts this way every morning to her mother's hug and kiss.

"Good Morning mommy" she says as she hugs and kisses her mother.

"What is this I hear, laughter before I have arrived?" her father says as he enters the bedroom with his usual wide smile.

"Yes Daddy, just warming up for you!" Mango Mouth says between laughs as she is warmed by a hug and wet kiss from her father.

"Good Morning Annie."

“Good Morning Daddy”, she replies as she hugs him tight with her eyes squeezed shut.

“Come now child let go of your daddy so he can prepare to do his work”, her mother says with a serious tone in her voice.

Mango mouth hugs him even tighter knowing her mother is only teasing her.

“Anything yet?” her father asks.

“Just something slight” she replies still hugging him very tight, “Very slight”.

“The season coming late this year.” her mother says.

“Last year this time Annie was covered in juice from head to toe.” her father responds.

Mango Mouth laughs out loud while still hugging her father and says, “I even got fat!”

“Yes and talking about fat, OH my back!” groans her father.

“Daddy!” she says, loosening the hug so she can look him in the face.

“You are getting heavy!” he replies still smiling.

“Daddy!” she says again feigning hurt.

Simon could not hold his laughter any longer; it burst out filling the entire house. The other children laugh as they hear it. If there is one thing they all miss when they are away from home, it is the sound of their father’s laughter every morning. They pray it will last forever.

“Daddy!” continues Mango Mouth between her own laughter and tears of joy.

“O.K., O.K., you are as light as a feather.” he says between his laughs.

“Time to let your daddy go Annie.” her mother finally says.

Reluctantly she releases him and sits down on the bed leaning against her mother.

“I will be going to see Gramps. Want to go?” her father asks knowing very well what her response will be.

“YES! YES!” Mango mouth screams at the top of her voice.

This day will include a river boat ride, lots of fruit to eat, grandma’s food, grandpa’s stories and swimming in the safe pool- “YES! YES!”

“Why do I always ask her this question?” her father says shaking his head.

“I have no idea.” her mother replies as they both watch Mango Mouth. She leaps from the bed unto the floor, grabs a towel and sets off full speed ahead toward the bathroom.

“Careful child there is a speed limit!” her mother shouts after her laughing as Simon sits beside her on the bed.

Chapter Two

The morning sun is still on its lazy climb in the sky between the Pariah Hills when Mango Mouth exits her house, skipping joyfully protected between her parents. She holds their hands, Simon on her right, Indra on her left. The entire family makes the downhill walk through the estate to the boat waiting at the river bank. Mango Mouth looks at her brothers and sisters walking ahead of her, as they talk to each other.

Her eldest brother Charles is head and shoulders above her father and is considered quite tall. He is serious faced, yes, to everyone but Mango Mouth. She takes every opportunity she can to jump on him kissing, tickling, pinching and rubbing his head. She pulls his feet, legs, fingers, arms and nose and look him directly in the eyes up close, making funny faces. Charles tries to be serious and ignore her but eventually he laughs and cries out to his parents for help.

“Mom, Dad, PLEASE, HELP!”

“Annie!”

“Yes Mom?” she will reply and continue what she is doing, for they never come to move her away.

“If you do not stop I will” Charles usually says.

“Will do what?” she will reply and continue her actions.

Soon they will both be laughing, tears flowing. When the laughter stops and there is a long period of silence, her parents will then check. It is always the same. Mango Mouth cuddled up next to Charles.

Andrew, her second brother wears a smile like her father but is considered the miser in the family; he will save a fraction of a cent, if it is possible. His family continually teases him about this, all except Mango Mouth; he is secretly generous to her.

“You will tell us NO, NO, almost every time but secretly give Annie gift after gift.” Ginger the eldest girl will blurt out after “too many” of his wordy reasons for refusing to give money to her.

“Gifts, which gifts?” he will reply with a confused look on his face.

“Gifts, which gifts?” Mango Mouth will echo, if she is close, with the same confused expression on her face. They will then look at each other and burst out laughing, repeating in unison, “Gifts, which gifts?” and laugh even more.

Ginger is strict and can be as serious faced as Charles. She is the only person in the family who does not “tolerate” the sometimes “crazy” antics of Mango Mouth. She disciplines her much more than her parents; however she is very protective of Mango Mouth, even over protective. Whenever she has to supervise her, she will not let her out of her sight for the briefest moment. She monitors her every movement especially when she is climbing one of the many trees on their estate.

“Be careful, Annie!”

“I am always careful when I climb, Daddy and Charles taught me how to do it right.”

“That may be so but anyway, girls should not be climbing trees!”

“Why, why, I like it and..... and even Grandpa and Granma let me do it when we visit.”

“Still.....”

“Still what, Ginger?” Annie will ask, not understanding her sister’s reason for not wanting her to climb.

“Just still.”

“Is that why you do not climb any of the trees?”

“It is not ladylike.”

“Well, I am just a little girl, remember?”

“Still.....” she replies and says no more.

Wendy is more like Mango Mouth. She is quite a tomboy, just the type of person you need when you want to be a bit “crazy”. Like jumping into the safe spots on the river fully clothed and then run home. Climb a tree and stay there for hours eating fruit while telling jokes, or climbing onto the roof of the house and do the same. Walk the road at night with the flashlight off while running from shadows and strange noises and telling scary stories in the dark bedroom.

“Years ago there was a donkey with gold teeth that would walk the road of Toco at midnight, dragging a long chain, CLANG, CLANG, CLANG!”

“I..... I..... do not believe you.”

“The donkey would stop at each house and listen to hear if any children were awake and call out their names.”

“Donkeys cannot talk.”

“This donkey could and it would call out. ANNIE, ANNIE, ANNIE!”

“Not my name, use another name.”

“If any of the children were foolish enough to answer, the donkey would say, ‘Would you like some guava jelly, tamarind stew, coconut buns, soursop ice cream or Julie mangoes?’ ”.

“Mangoes.....Julie mangoes?” she asks.

“Yes, mangoes, the donkey was smart. It offered you the things you loved the most to eat. If the child answered “Yes.”, it would say, ‘Come with me and I will carry you to a land where you can eat it all day long, all day long!’ ”

“Did..... any.....any child go.....with the donkey?”

“OOOOOOOOHH YESSSSSSSSSS! Do you know why old Ma Procupe has no children and lives alone?”

“N.....no.....w.....why?”, Mango asks.

“Her one and only son loved tamarind stew as much as you love mangoes. One night he was up very late eating tamarind stew and wanted more. The donkey stopped in front of his house and called, “Jacob, Jacob?”, he did not answer because all of the children were warned not to answer but the donkey had changed his talk.

“Jacob, would you like to eat the sweetest tamarind stew all day long?”

Jacob’s heart leapt in his chest, he looked at his empty bowl and his mouth began to water.

“Yes, I do, oh yes I do!”

“No. Jacob no!”, Annie says

“Then come with me to a place where there are bowls filled with the sweetest tamarind stews, bowls which never get empty, you can eat as much as you like!”

“Jacob could not resist this offer; he opened the door and walked out to the donkey.

“Come, come Jacob, see I have a bowl of tamarind stew here just for you.”

“Jacob came close to the donkey and bent down to pick up the bowl filled with tamarind stew. SUDDENLY, the donkey grew hands, grabbed Jacob and laughed out loud,”

“HA, HA, I CAUGHT ONE, I CAUGHT ONE!!!!”

“EEEEEEEEEEEE!!!!!!!!!!!!”, Jacob screamed and tried to escape but the donkey held him firmly.

“EEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!”, Annie screams and hides her face with a pillow.

“STOP, STOP, I DO NOT WANT TO HEAR ANY MORE, EEEEEEE!!!!!!!!!!!!”

“WENDY LISA, STOP RIGHT NOW!”, Simon’s voice booms from the corridor, it sounds like thunder in the quiet of the house.

“Yes, Daddy!”, Wendy shouts in reply.

“Stop crying Annie.”, she says to the sister.

“I..... don’t want to hear anymore.”, she says in muffled voice from under the pillow.

“Is she O.K. now, Wendy?”, her mother asks from outside the bedroom door.

“Yes, Mommy.”, Annie says removing the pillow from her face and wipes away her tears, while snuggling closer to her sister.

“Go to sleep, both of you!”, their mother says.

They giggle, become quiet and listen to the night sounds which drift through the opening in the bedroom window, soon the girls yawn.

“Goodnight Wendy.”

“Goodnight Annie.”

Chapter Three

Mango Mouth is feeling happier than usual as she skips down the winding path which leads from her house, through the estate down to the river, holding the hands of her parents, often looking up at them, then to her brothers and sisters. The leaves of the many trees and plants respond to the gentle touch of the friendly morning breeze, mirroring the happiness of Mango Mouth and her family. She does not fail to notice this, smiles even more, then hums softly. Her parents watch each other and smile, remembering the difficult delivery Indra experienced with Mango Mouth. The entire village prayed that night for both mother and child, many camped the entire night outside Mango’s house, listening for the sound of a baby crying, they prayed even more when midwife Ma Tim came out and said, “She come out feet first, de cord ‘round she neck.”, then rushed back inside. Moments later the pleasing sound of ‘Annie Mary’, Mango Mouth, telling the entire village and the world, “I am here, healthy and ready to go!”.

It therefore came as no surprise to anyone in Toco when Mango Mouth spoke clearly and walked before she was three years old. Ma Dee, the senior midwife asked Indra one day while on her regular village visits,

“Indra, that child ever creep, I racking my brain trying to remember?”

Indra smiled and replied, “Ma Dee, Simon and I asked ourselves and the other children that same question just yesterday. None of us can remember her ever creeping, but we can recall her moving around on one knee holding unto the furniture.”

Ms Dee laughed out loud and said, “That child very special, Indra, you just wait and see, you just wait and see!”

Indra and Simon remember this when they look at each other and laugh. Mango Mouth looks up and asks, “Daddy, Mommy, what are you laughing at?”

“We remembered something very special about you.”

“Me, me what is it?”

“Ma Dee said you were a very special child.”

Mango Mouth laughs and asks, “And am I?”

“Yes, you are!”, they both reply, bend down and kiss her.

The family reaches halfway to the boat when Mango Mouth stops and begins looking up into the mango trees on her left, then walks toward one of the trees looks up and points. Everyone’s eyes follow the path of her finger and they see it, mango flowers.

MANGO SEASON IS HERE!

Mango’s parents and siblings walk over, stand at her side looking up into the mango tree as she points out even more flowers high up in the tree. Almost in unison they look down at her smiling, shake their heads, then look at each other, thinking but not saying, ‘this little girl is unbelievable. How does she do it?’

“Soon, I will be eating MANGOES!”, Mango Mouth says and does a little dance as her family roars with laughter. Wendy joins in and dances with her while the other family members encourage them.

“Like everybody forget ‘bout me, eh?”, Mr Boatswain says standing with a serious face, arms folded across his chest, chewing on his morning meal. “I was waiting long, long, see nobody coming. So I walk up and what I meet dancing and singing!”

“Boa.....”, Simon begins to say but Mango Mouth stops dancing and points up into the mango tree. Mr Boatswain’s eyes follow the direction of her finger; his mouth drops open, he walks closer to the tree never taking his eyes off

the welcomed sight, for him and almost everyone in Toco, mangoes mean money for their families.

“It here?”, he finally asks, to no one in particular.

“Yes, Boatswain.”, Simon answers, “It here!”

Mr Boatswain the looks down at Mango Mouth and asks her, “Mango, you saw it first, right?”

“Yes, Mr Boatswain, I saw it first.”

“Good!”, he says stoops down, hugs her and gives her a big kiss on the cheek. Mango Mouth erupts in laughter and returns the hug; he is as close to an uncle as she can find in Toco, even though the villagers are close knit and appear to outsiders as one big family.

“My girl did it again!”

“Yes, I did it again Mr Boatswain.”

He releases her, takes a deep breath and lets it out noisily.

“Everyone ready for a boat cruise?”, he asks.

“Boat cruise?”, Charles asks, giving Mr Boatswain his usual serious look.

“Of course, Charles”

“I like it. Yes Mr Boatswain, a boat cruise, just like the one Ms. Phillip read to us in a story last term.” Mango says.

“Yes Mango, we are going to Grandpa and Granma land!”

“YES, YES!”, Mango Mouth yells out and does another dance.

Everyone laughs as Mango Mouth does her dance, arms straight out from her sides, head back, eyes tightly shut, a big smile across her face.

“Grandpa and Granma land! YES, YES!”, she sings, dancing beneath the trees.

Her parents hold hands and watch her dancing, deeply grateful for the blessing of Mango Mouth to their family.

“We have to go now Annie.”, Simon says.

“Annie!”, her mommy says when she continues to dance.

“Sorry Daddy, sorry Mommy”, she says stopping her dance, holds their hands once again, humming and skipping along as they continue their walk down to the river.

Mr Boatswain leads the group, walking in measured strides as he would when hunting in the forest which surrounds Toco. He usually spends most of his time there when not farming, walking through the dense vegetation. Since, his neighbouring farmers will tend his crops and animals if he is gone more than one day he is free to roam as he pleases. When he does return there are generous portions of fruit and meat to repay all who have helped with the farm, for he does not sell his harvest and becomes upset when anyone suggests it.

“I want to give to my friends. What is wrong with that? Tell me. Sell, sell, sell, I have enough to sell on my land. What is on God’s land is to give freely, he does the farming not me!” He will then become very silent with his arms folded across his chest and after a few minutes, walk away and go to his home. Mr Boatswain lives with his hunting dogs, Jubal, Hero and Peaches; they are three of his most prized possessions. He will talk about them for hours, with a deep passion in his voice.

Mr Boatswain looks ahead and smiles, there she rests, pulling gently on the rope which connects her to the land, his other treasure, the ‘River Queen’. The Queen, as all in Toco refer to her, is the #1 water truck and taxi in the village, people will wait for hours until she is available for use, for not only is Mr Boatswain very punctual, helpful and safety conscious, he tells stories above the roar of the motor. He speaks about his adventures in the forest with his dogs, folk tales and legends. The village favourite, of which no one tires of hearing and he of telling, relates to the time he got separated from his dogs, got confused and lost for two weeks. They were eventually united but spent another week in the forest before

being found by an army search party many miles from Toco. He makes special mention of the soldiers, "Some of them were close to tears.....close to tears, when they found us that morning."

Chapter Four

Mango Mouth releases her parent's hands, runs past everyone, stands at The Queen with her hands on her hips. She looks up at Mr Boatswain, who just arrives at her side, he winks at her, and she smiles broadly then looks at the boat.

"Good morning Ms Queenie. How are you?, Mango Mouth asks the boat.

"Oh, is that so. I am very glad to hear that. Yes, I know he treats you like a queen. Everyone is O.K. Yes I will tell them.", Mango says as she stoops close to Ms Queenie, with her ear nearer to the boat.

She stands up and says, "Ms Queenie says to tell you 'Good morning' and to let you know she is very well and ready to take you safely to Grandpa and grandma."

Everyone laughs including Mr Boatswain, as they observe the thoughtful look on her face, the same expression she wears whenever she repeats a verbal message given. Mango Mouth is always careful to repeat exactly what is said to her, if she forgets anything she returns to the sender and asks them to repeat it for her. Due to her excellent memory everyone soon learns not to promise her anything unless you intend to fulfil it, for even if many weeks pass, when she meets you again, she will greet you, "Good morning Mr or Ms X." And once you answer will say next, "Did you bring the gift you promised me?" Many mouths have dropped open and stay that way as she stands waiting, expecting to receive the gift they have forgotten about. Her parents therefore warn anyone who visits or meets Mango Mouth for the first time, no to promise her anything unless they intend to fulfil it.

"Well, good morning Ms Queenie. We are all delighted to hear you are well this morning and able to take us safely to visit grandpa and grandma.", Simon replies.

"Ms Queenie says you are very welcome thank you."

“Well then, let us get on our way. All aboard!”, Mr Boatswain says in the most authoritative tone he can muster, but with a smile on his face. He assists the family to get on board, arranges the bags and boxes in order to balance the boat, then sits next to Mango Mouth in her usual seat, next to him, she is always his first mate on these trips, checking to ensure that all is O.K. and all orders are obeyed.

“Are you ready to cast off and begin the journey, first mate?”

“Yes captain Mr Boatswain.”

“Then off we go!”

Mr Boatswain gently pushes Ms Queenie off the bank; she drifts lazily into the middle of the river, showing her ever present eagerness to begin any voyage under the guidance of her owner Mr Boatswain and his only first mate Mango Mouth. A firm tug on the cord, Ms Queenie begins her sweet humming and confidently moves forward on the road of water she has known all of her life. She has driven this road countless times always completing each voyage in safety, ensuring that both passengers and cargo arrive at their destination.

Mr Boatswain turns the throttle, Ms Queenie picks up speed as she heads up the Guapo River toward the settlers who live the farthest from the main village. The journey to grandpa and grandma should take 15 – 20 minutes if there is no reason to stop due to any obstruction in the river. Heavy rains in the hills, natural erosion or just trees grooming themselves, place various types of objects into the river, so the captains of the river vessels are ever watchful for anything different in the gentle ripples of Guapo’s surface. Mr Boatswain’s eyes constantly surveys the banks, trees, water, passengers and cargo, his ears listen attentively to Ms Queenie’s smooth humming alert for any change in her voice. However he cannot resist the opportunity every journey presents to tell another episode in the life of Asa Boatswain and his love for the forest.

Mango Mouth sits beside Mr Boatswain, her long curls blowing in the wind, a permanent smile on her face. She is enjoying again, one of her favourite things, being first mate of the vessel the River Queen, helping Mr Boatswain to guide her

up the river. He allows her to place her hand on the throttle, as he manoeuvres Ms Queenie, in her mind she is steering Ms Queenie for Mr Boatswain when he says,

“First mate, we need to go to port”

“Yes Captain, to port we go”

“First mate we need to throttle down”

“Yes Captain, throttling down”

“First mate, full stop obstruction in the water”

“Yes Captain, coming to a full stop”

“First mate, advise all passengers to please sit still while I investigate.”

“Yes Captain, all passengers please sit still while the Captain checks the river.”

Her family does all they can to prevent bursting into laughter when they see the look of pure concentration on her face when Mr Boatswain gives these commands. Her expression however quickly changes into one of complete joy when the boat is moving again, but it takes a distant second to the one she wears when eating a mango.

Soon Mr Boatswain says,

“If there is one period in my life I can never forget, is the time I got lost in that forest for three weeks, three long hard weeks!”

“Is that so Boatswain?”, Simon asks.

“Yes Simon. I will never forget I was two days up river tracking an elusive deer. Jubal, Hero and Peaches could smell him and were always restless but he was keeping ahead of us. They almost overturned Ms Queenie a few times, pulling at their leeches, nothing would settle them down, so I decided to tie up Ms Queenie and go it entirely on foot that day, first mistake. As soon as we hit land them dogs take off, had me almost sailing through the air behind them, I felt like a kite in the

wind, after falling a few times I had enough of that. I let them loose, second mistake, in a flash the dogs gone, I run after them calling, whistling the come home call but all I hear is barking that getting softer and softer. Boy I pick up my pace and run as when I ran in the village sports years ago. I could really run then, 'FLASH', they called me "D MAN FLASH". The more I run, the softer the barking becomes, so I run even faster, then I duck under a branch, crash through some bushes and go from daylight to dark night."

"Day to night, Mr Boatswain, just like that?", Mango Mouth asks.

"Yes Mango, just like that WHAP! I stand there stiff as a log, in that pitch black place, could not see my hands, it was dead silent, no sound, not even that of my precious dogs. I reach for my torchlight, turn it on and try to see where I am but it was of no use, the light could not penetrate the darkness. For the first time in all my years in the forest I get scared!"

"Did you tremble, Mr Boatswain?"

"Yes child, just like someone with a bad fever. I stood there for a long time and then I decide to retrace my steps moving backward. Suddenly I hear my baby's voices distant to my left, my right and in front of me, I do the come home whistle time after time but it was of no use, just silence. So I begin to step backward one step, two steps, three steps, then more and more but I was still in the darkness. I continue to step backward faster and faster but still I could not reach the daylight, I kept it up, suddenly I fall backward and am looking up into the night sky, a sky without stars."

"Rain was coming, Mr Boatswain?"

"No Mango, no rain, just a normal sky without any stars. I was happy to be out of the darkness, tried to see if I could recognize a landmark but it was all strange to me, plus without stars or moon I did not know where was North, South, East or West, I was completely lost. I again hear the voices of my babies but they are distant, I still whistle but they do not come to me."

"What did you do then, Mr Boatswain?"

“There was only one thing left to do, wait until daylight, when I can get up high to see around me and use the sun to find north. So I brace myself against a tree, eat some food, think about Ms Queenie, lonely there on the river, no cover, insects buzzing around her. I think about my babies out in the forest without me, no food to eat, water come to my eyes, but I believe I will find them in the morning, so I go to sleep.

When I awake, the sun is high in the sky; I never sleep past sunrise even when I am ill. I jump up, look around and realise the place very strange, it did not appear to be the same point where I went into the darkness; I climb a tree and look out, nothing familiar. I use the sun to locate north and decide to head east, the direction my babies were heading in, after walking a short distance I realise I am off course and change direction but end up off course again. I keep adjusting my course but cannot keep in the direction I want to go in.”

“What did you do then, Mr Boatswain?”

“Mango girl I stop, sit down, eat some food, pick some fruit and eat it, then fall asleep. When I awake it is daylight but the sun is just rising, I had slept an entire night. I eat some fruit again and begin to walk again but do not choose any particular direction since it made no sense; I just keep walking and walking. After how many days I do not know, I am dirty, smelly, hungry and tired; I push through some bushes and fall down a steep slope. The branches and leaves cut through my clothing slashing my body and face then thump I come to a stop, my skin is burning, my eyes are running water. I find the healing leaves my grandma Nussy taught me about and applied them to my wounds, it burns like crazy, I again eat some fruit and go to sleep.”

“What happens next, Mr Boatswain?”

“Well girl, something very good, three wet tongues awake me from my sleep”

“Yes, yes, Jubal, Hero and Peaches!”, shouts Mango Mouth.

“Yes Mango, my babies have found me, I hug them we cry together”

“Dogs crying, Mr Boatswain?” Mango asks

“Yes girl”

“Come now Boatswain”, Simon interjects, “Jubal, Hero and Peaches crying when they find you? Excited yes but crying?”

“Simon, this is my story, you were not there.”

“Yes Boatswain that is true”

“Well after we have all had a good cry, I check them over, see the cuts and bruises; I apply some healing leaves and give them lamp oil to drink since I do not know what they eat in the forest. My mind goes once again to Ms Queenie and I cry again, I have to get back to her. What I did not know was that Rufus and others who were searching for me found her and took her back home. Thanks Simon.”

“It was my pleasure Boatswain”

“With my babies now with me, I was certain I would soon be home but they who could find a trail from the edge of the universe were in the same position as me. So we wandered for days till we came to a small stream, hungry, tired and thirsty, unable to go any further we drank some water and went to sleep. I was dreaming about my days as a child, hunting, fishing, swimming, sailing rafts on the river, climbing trees, playing cricket, running in the village sports. Then I hear my old granny calling my name, “Asa, Asa, wake up boy, wake up.”, but slowly the voice changes. I open my eyes to see a man’s face with a camouflage cap on its head, it is a soldier, the head of the search party, when I look around I swear Simon, Indra, Charles, Ginger, Andrew, Wendy, Mango Mouth, the eyes of these tough soldiers were filled with tears. They give me some strange tasting food to eat, dress my wounds, feed my babies, and then carry us to a clearing where a helicopter takes us up and carries us to different hospitals. I insist that they lift up my babies first: I will not leave them behind. The best part was to see all those tired old faces from Toco coming to look at me, and crying for me, crying for what, shucks, I was alive!”

Mr Boatswain suddenly gets quiet, Ms Queenie stops moving forward and Mango Mouth quickly hugs him, kissing him on the cheek, her eyes full of tears. Her family stays silent looking at Mr Boatswain as Mango Mouth hugs him; the tough Mr Boatswain has a soft spot.

Chapter Five

Ms Queenie, under the expert guidance of Mr Boatswain and first mate Mango Mouth gracefully glides up the Guapo River. Except for Ms Queenie's constant purr and the steady parting of the water by her head, the only present sound is that of the forest dwellers, birds, mammals, reptiles and insects, busy about their morning chores. The vegetation is not silent, the thud of fruit or branch as it hits the ground, the groaning of tree limbs as they yield to a gust of wind, the whisper of leaf or flower petal as it floats to a stop on the evergreen carpet beneath the trees. Watchful eyes observe Ms Queenie's movements, careful not to expose themselves to the human occupants of the river vessel, not certain if they be friend or hunter.

Mango Mouth looks ahead and sees 'the Happiness Bend', she calls it by this name because just around it is her destination, grandpa and grandma's house. You can see the house, flower hedges and the small family garden from the bend, plus as always her grandparents waving to them. They hear Ms Queenie's voice long before she rounds the bend, grandpa says, "When your ears are in tuned with the sweet voice of Ma Nature and you live in her garden, any sound she does not make is instantly sensed. Ms Queenie's voice though regularly heard on the river is still not a natural part of the garden. My ears can hear her miles away."

Mango Mouth's heart begins to beat rapidly, she is becomes restless as Ms Queenie gets closer to the bend, her smile grows larger. She cannot wait to hug grandpa and grandma, to kiss them and breathe in their unique perfume. They smell so beautifully different from anyone else; she believes it is the smell of Ma

Nature, the person whom grandpa says is responsible for keeping order in the world. Simon and Indra look back and observe the eager look upon her face, as she looks steadily ahead of Ms Queenie, past memories of her visits to her grandparents race across her mind, each one adding to the growing feeling of excitement which fills her. When Ms Queenie smoothly navigates the bend and the house comes into view, Mango Mouth immediately stands up; Mr Boatswain gently takes her arm and sits her down.

“Sorry Captain Mr Boatswain”, she says when sitting again

“That is O.K. first mate. Please inform the passengers that we close to docking”

“Attention passenger. Attention passengers. We will be docking at grandpa and grandma soon”

Then she sees them and shouts, “Grandpa! Grandma!”, they are at the small jetty waving, everyone waves, none more enthusiastically than Mango Mouth.

“Mommy, Daddy, Charles, Andrew, Ginger, Wendy, Mr Boatswain! Do you see them! Do you see them!”, Mango Mouth continues to say, with great excitement in her voice. Her family looks back and laugh at the little bundle of joy who adds special moments to their lives every day, memories to cherish.

“Yes we do, Annie”, they say almost in unison.

As the waving continues, Captain and first mate bring Ms Queenie steadily closer to the small jetty, Mr Boatswain cuts the power, and she glides to a small thud against the old tires hanging just above the water level of the docking area. Charles tosses grandpa the anchor rope and he secures Ms Queenie to the jetty.

“All passengers may now leave the boat. Thank you for travelling with the River Queen. Please enjoy your stay”, Mango Mouth says as Mr Boatswain leans over and whispers in her ear.

“Thank you Captain and first mate for a safe and enjoyable trip”, each of her family members say as they climb unto the jetty. Mango Mouth and Mr Boatswain shake heads and double over laughing.

Mango's family members look back at her expecting her to climb onto the jetty, run past them into the arms of her grandparents but to their surprise she sits in the boat laughing, sitting next to Mr Boatswain, who then bends over and whispers something in her ear. She bursts out laughing, covers her mouth and nods acknowledgement. Very slowly Mango climbs onto the jetty laughing, covers her mouth and hides behind her parents, everyone sees what she is doing, they continue greeting with hugs and kisses. After greeting the older children grandpa says,

"Simon, Indra?"

"Yes gramps, is something wrong?"

"Yes, something is definitely wrong", he says and counts the four grandchildren, "One, two, three, four", then looks around the jetty with a puzzled look on his face, scratching his head. Grandma then counts the elder children, "One, two, three, four"

"What's the matter?", Simon asks laughing.

"I think you forgot someone", grandpa says

"Yes, you forgot someone", grandma says

Mango Mouth doubles over laughing, trying her best to cover the sound of her laughter.

"We did not forget anyone grandpa and grandma", Indra says

"That is true", the elder children say one after the other

"Well, there are only four grandchildren when there should be five", grandpa says

"Yes, five grandchildren", grandma says

Simon turns to Mr Boatswain and asks, "Mr Boatswain, did we leave anyone back in Toco?"

“Let me see”, he puts a thoughtful look on his face, after a minute says, “No, everyone got into the boat”

Mango Mouth is in tears laughing, it is also getting very difficult for everyone to keep a straight face.

“Well, where is Annie?”, grandpa asks

“Annie?”, Mr Boatswain asks looking around confused, “Isn’t she here with all of us?”

Grandpa turns, points to the elder children and says, “Look one, two, three, four no five”

“Where is she then?”, Mr Boatswain asks, looking around

Annie jumps out from behind her parents and shouts at the top of her voice.

“I AM HERE! I AM HERE!”, and runs into the waiting arms of her grandpa, hugs him tightly and kisses him, her eyes tightly shut.

“I love you so much grandpa, so so much”

He hugs her and tears fill his eyes,

“And I love you very much Annie”

“What is this no hug and kiss for grandma?”

Annie immediately lets go of grandpa and gives grandma a tight hug and kiss.

“I love you so very much grandma, so so much”

“Oh child, grandma loves you very much”, grandma says as she hugs and kisses her, tears flowing, “You always bring good tears to my eyes, good tears”. She whispers a few words in Mango Mouths ear, their eyes meet, fingers go to lips, Mango immediately lets go of grandma and races off toward the house laughing.

“Grand mama?”, Indra says placing her hands on her hips, giving grandma Tessa a serious look.

“What I do?”, she says smiling while looking at Mango speeding up the path leading to the house, “Anyway she is a growing child”

“Yes, a growing child”, Grandpa James adds and gives his wife a kiss on the cheek.

Simon, Indra, Mr Boatswain and the elder children double over laughing, shaking their heads.

“You will spoil her Ma”, Simon says, as he hugs and kisses his mother, “I take that back you have spoilt her”

Grandma Tessa ignores him and speaks to Indra,

“I found a new variety of flowers last Saturday in the garden girl, if you see those lovely coloured petals. Come; let me show them to you”, she says with a serious expression on her face, but everyone knows she is not angry with Simon.

“She is my last grandchild, and grandparents are allowed to spoil grandchildren”, she says while walking away and smiles.

Mango Mouth races up the kitchen steps, turns left and stoops down in front of the lower cupboard doors, she hesitates for a minute, excited by the thought of what type of treats grandma has made for her today. She opens the door, moves some packages and removes a tin covered with pictures of flowers, her special tin in which grandma puts treats prepared specially for her. Opening the tin she sees it is full with her favourite cookies and muffins, from grandma’s secret recipe, she takes a muffin, sinks her teeth into it, heaven. Voices are quickly approaching, so she closes the tin puts it back into its hiding place, closes the cupboard door and sits on a chair eating. Charles enters the house first and sees her.

“There she is, sitting and chewing with bulging cheeks”

Mango Mouth smiles and continues to eat; playing with her fingers, the rest of the family enters and see her.

“Annie”

“Yes mommy”, she says between chewing and swallowing

“Annie”

“Yes mommy”, she says again still chewing and swallowing

Mango Mouth is a picture of innocence sitting on the chair in the kitchen eating her muffin. Simon looks at her smiles and places some of the packages on the kitchen table, the other similarly see her and smile shaking their heads. Grandma Tessa comes over to Mango Mouth kisses her on a bulging cheek,

“Save some for later”, she say and winks, Mango winks, stands up, goes into the living room and climbs into grandpa’s lap, still chewing while listening to the conversations around her. She did not tell anyone about the feeling she had while running to the house, the familiar feeling which says ripe mangoes are close to grandpa’s house, she will look for them later. Now is time to enjoy her grandparents, especially **STORY TIME** with grandpa, a tickle and wink from him tells her the time has arrived.

Grandpa James begins,

“You ever hear the story of how people come to live in Toco?”

This is the signal for all the grandchildren to gather around and listen.

“Wait grandpa, wait!”, Ginger shouts from the kitchen where she and Wendy are helping their mother and grandma to unpack the groceries, plus prepare snacks for everyone.

“Grandpa!”, Wendy also shouts, pleading.

“James, don’t be wicked, the girls are helping me. You can wait a few minutes”, grandma adds.

Grandpa James laughs softly.

George and Andrew rush into the living room from the bedroom where they had carried the parcels their mother had bought for grandma, when she and their sisters went shopping in Pointe Grande last week.

“Women stuff!!! Why do we have to carry it?”, they protested to their mother.

“So you can prepare for when you are married”

Ginger and Wendy had a long eye watering laugh when their mother said that, George and Andrew however failed to see the humour in it.

“Women stuff!!!!!!”

Chapter Six

The forest is never completely quiet if you listen closely, insects are buzzing busily along, animals are walking or running, stepping on leaves or fallen branches, brushing against trees or plants, reptiles are crawling on the forest floor moving against the same leaves or twigs, branches are creaking as they yield to a breeze, both birds and animals are sounding out their ancient melodies, a river or stream is softly humming as it flows to the sea. If you listen even more you can hear the faint whisper of the seasons smoothly changing, breeding seasons for the animals, reptiles and insects, flowering season for the plants and trees, spawning season for the creatures in the river.

Grandpa James listens for and hears these sounds every morning when he awakes from his nightly rest. He will lie in bed listening to them before dressing, going outside taking noisy deep breaths of the morning air then returning inside with a broad smile across his face. Grandma Tessa will not disturb the quiet of the house until he returns, then it is time to begin her mourning routine, singing her favourite hymns and childhood songs, taught to her by both grandmother and mother.

Mango Mouth sits peaceful and cozy in the lap of her grandpa, his protective hug encircling her, she watches her sisters bring in drinks and snacks of grandma baked treats, placing them on the small table in the center of the room. Her sisters serve everyone as they along with the rest of the family eagerly await grandpa’s story.

“Where is Mr Boatswain, grandpa?”, Mango Mouth asks.

Simon stands up, goes outside and shouts, "BOATSWAIN!", immediately he hears, "Why you calling out my name so loud, Simon, I right here!", Mr Boatswain says as he walks around the corner of the house.

"Why do have to always move so quiet and appear only after people call you?", Simon asks.

"It is my way. Why should I let anyone know my every move?"

"Grandpa is about to tell us another of his stories, Annie wants you to her it"

"What you really mean is, my favourite girl remembered me and asked for me, right?"

Simon laughs and shakes his head, "Come inside and listen man, also grandma's treats have been served"

"What! What is this grandma Tessa, you leave out your favourite adopted son?"

Grandma laughs out loud and comes outside carrying an extra large glass of juice and a plate to match it. Mr Boatswain laughs when he sees it, gratefully accepts his gift, follows them inside and sits close to Grandpa James and Mango Mouth. He winks at her, she returns the wink and grandpa starts.

"The first time I saw what would later become Toco, was early one morning when the hunting party I was in, which included my father, uncles and a few childhood friends had crossed southern Pariah hill and entered the valley from the direction of Pointe Grande. We had been tracking deer and hog for a week, the dogs lead us steadily in this direction. It was a sight to behold, the first light of the sun was lighting up the valley as we were descending, mist was rising in circles from the river and drifting toward the land. The sun's light struck the dew on the trees, the grass, the mist which slowly drifted across the land and the gentle ripples of the river. I saw the colour of jewels everywhere; it sent a shiver down my spine, when I looked around everyone was motionless with their mouths open. Can you imagine everything sparkling? It was the type of landscape I believe every famous painter would give his arm to capture on canvas. We stood there unable to move

for, how long I cannot say, it was only when the angle of the sun changed and the colours faded that we moved. We talked about that moment every time we got together in the following years.”

Mango Mouth turns and looks at her grandpa, he has a faraway look in his eyes and is smiling, she then looks around the room, all eyes are upon grandpa, heads are nodding, tears are running down grandma’s cheeks. She looks again at grandpa, who remains silent for a long time, wiping tears from his eyes.

“We walk down into the valley and find ourselves in Eden, fruit trees are everywhere, guava, mangoes, pomcité’, pommerac, chenet, plums, cashew, pewa, soursop, papaya, breadfruit, avocados, bananas. After a week of eating preserved fruit and meat, we rushed in ate, and ate, till all we could do was roll over and go to sleep. We slept for hours, waking after noon. My eldest uncle then said when he was a small boy; he heard a tale about the native peoples, whom the European settlers called Indians, they planted gardens at various places on the islands, so they would have food to eat as they travelled from island to island. This place he believed was one of those gardens, years later we found this to be true for we unearthed pieces of pots, plates and small ornaments when we were cutting the road and building houses.”

“Like the necklace grandma has?”, Mango Mouth asked

“Oh, yes Annie. I found that when we were building your house many years ago, before your father was born; I had not yet met grandma.”

“When did you give it to her, grandpa?”, she asks again

Both grandma and grandpa look at each other and laugh out loud.

“That is another story Annie, a very long story”, grandma says as she winks at grandpa.

“What are you two keeping from us?”, Simon asks

“Oh, nothing son, we spent about two days there, the game we were tracking was long forgotten. We picked fruit to carry back home and placed a landmark. I made

up my mind that day to return and live there as did some of my friends. My father and uncles however decided against relocating here, I was sad about that, for I did not want to live far from my parents and family, but the pull of Toco was too strong. I knew I would spend the rest of my life and raise my family here, I was 16 years old, and the eldest of my friends was 18, so we had no ties to keep us away except our immediate families. It would take the six of us four years before we build the first house though we returned often to pick fruit, fish and swim in the river and stake out the land. The most difficult part was to get a road into Toco, for many years it was just a donkey and mule trail winding through the hills, with a one way journey to Pointe Grande taking two days. We had to use this to bring in the material for building the homes. The six of us lived here a few years before other people began to join us, even back then the sweetness of Toco's mangoes was well known. However the journey to market damaged much of the harvest, the worst being a rope breaking and the entire load falling down a slope or the donkey or mule going lame, we lost many loads that way in the early days.

We realised after a few years that we had not given the village and river an official name, so we held a village meeting to choose one, it was then we heard about a descendent of the native people who was visiting from one of the other islands, seeking to unite his people from all the islands in order to get some ancestral lands returned to them. A few of us met him, invited him to come here and help us with the naming of the village and river. The moment he saw the village and the trees he said, "TOCO", it was the name his ancestors called it, the river was called, "GUAPO". He told us many stories about what his ancestors did here; however the most interesting part, the most eye opening part of his visit was when he began to tell us about the European names the settlers gave to many of his descendents. Boatswain, Vidal"

"Daddy, daddy, that is our name!", Mango Mouth shouts, "That is our name!", and looks at her father who sits in shocked silence, Mr Boatswain stands up, looks at everyone, walks outside the house and sits on the steps.

"Smithson, Kelly, Tanner, Peters, Murray, Phillip"

Mango Mouth hears the surnames of villagers and her friends at school; she smiles and looks at her grandpa, who is looking steadfastly at Simon, whose expression is still the same.

Grandpa is speaking louder, so Mr Boatswain will be able to hear him clearly

“We realized then that we unknowing had returned to the same land our ancestors had used for centuries. He had not revealed this to us at our first meeting, but we were the direct descendents of the native people who had intermarried with those who settled in the islands, therefore the land did rightfully belong to us. Now I knew why the pull of this land was so strong. So Asa, now you understand why you and your pappy love the forest so much. Many of us would not accept this knowledge, refused to talk about it and as such did not pass it on to our children. I too remained silent about it, but I cannot go to the spirit world without telling my grandchildren and my son. Charles, Andrew, Ginger, Wendy, Annie pass on this knowledge to your children and your friends. Simon, I am sorry, forgive me!”

Simon stands, walks over to his father, squeezes his shoulder and rubs his head,

“All is forgiven Pa”

The sound of Ms Queenie’s voice startles them; they run outside in time to see Mr Boatswain guiding Ms Queenie in a tight turn heading toward Toco. They shout to him but he does not look back, quickly rounds the bend and goes out of sight.

“He will return, he needs some time alone”, grandpa says and walks back inside.

The older children gather around grandpa and eagerly ask him question after question about the story, he laughs going over the details again especially the names and their link to the first people. Simon listens in silence; Indra lets him do so as she does some of her own thinking. As for Mango Mouth the story is exciting, “I a child of the people Ms Phillip told us about in school. ME, me, and so is Lisa, Timmy, Ted, Alison ...” She walks out of the house unnoticed by anyone, heads down one of the trails which stamps grandpa James’s estate, her thoughts

are not upon the direction she is taking, they are on the words of her grandpa. After a few minutes she stops, looks around, realises she is not lost for she has run down here before, either chasing George, Wendy or Andrew or being chased by them. A safe swimming spot is down the trail to her right.

Then she senses mangoes, ripe juicy mangoes and begins to walk swiftly ahead, looking for the tree, suddenly he stops, just ahead of her is a fawn, nibbling on some grass, it looks so soft and innocent. Mango Mouth giggles softly, steps forward slowly, the fawn continues to eat not noticing or ignoring her as she approaches. "Deer do not come this close to the house", grandpa has said countless times, but this one has. She is now inches away, extends her hand and touches its nose, the fawn jumps back a few inches and looks at her, she moves closer, extends her hand to touch it again. Out of the corner of her eye she sees something move, freezes and turns, the fawn's mother is standing a few feet away looking at her; Mango feels no fear, reaches out touches the nose of the fawn again. Just as before the fawn jumps back a few inches, Mango giggles softly to herself, moves forward, touches the fawn, this time it turns and runs off with its mother following closely. She runs after them but they disappear down the trail. Mango Mouth stops running, feeling very disappointed about the fawn having run off, not allowing her to pet it.

"Where are you?", she shouts, "Come back. I only wanted to play. Please come back!"

She turns intending to return to the house when the familiar feeling runs through her body, Mango starts looking around, her mouth begins to water, her stomach growls. Ripe mangoes are close, she turns to her left and begins to walk up a path now overgrown with grass, after a few steps she comes into a small clearing and looks up. Before her eyes stands a tree laden with huge ripe mangoes.

Chapter Seven

The mangoes seem to glisten in the sunshine, as they sway ever so gently on their stems, the sweet aroma of their skin bound sweetness drifts ground ward tempting Mango Mouth's taste buds. Her expert eyes survey the banquet of large mangoes, spread against the table cloth of green leaves. The familiar grumble of the sack into which the juice and pulp of the fruit are destined signals to Mango Mouth it is time to eat. With smooth knowing movements, taught to her by grandpa, Simon, Charles and Andrew, she jumps to the lowest branch, hoists herself up and moves carefully from branch to branch, looking for the 'right' fruit to begin her feast. Steadily she moves higher until the object of her search appears just above her head, swaying gently, skin smooth and shining. Slowly she reaches upward, closes her fingers around the deep orange skin and pulls gently, with the faintest whisper of a crack it separates from the stem, yielding its substance to its new owner. Mango Mouth puts the mango close to her nose, draws in a deep breath, filling her lungs with the fragrance of its perfume, which tells her 'EAT!!!'.

With eye lids together, lips apart, teeth sinks into ripened skin through to the juice filled inner flesh, sweet nectar gushes out meeting excited taste buds which register the first mango pleasure of the season. Mango Mouth's toes curl, her body relaxes, she swallows smiles and then she remembers.

"I did not bring a bag. How will I carry mangoes for everyone?", she thinks, then smiles, a 'mischievous' thought crosses her mind, removing the mango from her lips she swallows all of the juice and laughs out loud. Slowly, carefully she climbs down the tree with the mango secured by her teeth, it must not fall. On reaching the ground she transfers the mango to her hands and sets off running toward the house, laughing as she goes, anticipating the reaction her plan will have on her family. She stops at the kitchen, resumes eating the mango, walks up the steps through the kitchen and sits on a chair next to Charles. He hears the smack of her lips, as mango nectar washes them and looks to his right.

"What is this?" he exclaims on seeing Mango Mouth.

Everyone turns, sees her sitting there in mango heaven, face, hands, arms and dress painted with mango juice, the look at each other and erupt in laughter.

“She has done it again”, grandpa says, “She has done it again”

Mango Mouth continues to eat her mango seeming to pay no attention to anyone, sucks the seed dry to finish her display, she looks at her family, smiles and says,

“I found mangoes”

“Is that so?” Indra says

“Oh yes, a tree filled with them”, she stands, walks to the kitchen, picks up a bag and runs out of the house saying,

“And I plan to eat them all!”

“No you will not!” Charles shouts after her, grabs a bag from the kitchen and runs outside. The other children follow Charles’s actions and dash out of the house.

“You able Pa?”, Simon asks his father as he looks at the children running away from the house.

“Are you trying to say that I am old?”

“No sir, just asking”

They also join in the chase but at a much slower pace.

“We women will stay here”, Indra and grandma Tessa says as they watch their husbands following the children down the trail.

Mango Mouth runs toward the tree as fast as she can, but she knows she cannot out run any of her brothers or sisters but it is fun to have them chase after her. Charles runs a short distance behind her and the others keep behind him, she follows the trail laughing, looking back ever so often to see her family. She turns left and stops in front of the tree looking up, the others come to a stop beside her and also look up at the tree, ripe mangoes waiting, begging to be eaten, enjoyed and savoured.

Grandpa on arriving looks up at the tree and says,

“I forgot about this tree. I planted it the year Annie was born and have never visited it since”

“I can see the evidence”, Simon says as he tests the ground under the tree with his feet, many dried seeds and seedlings litter the surface.

“You planted it for me, grandpa?”, Mango Mouth asks

“Yes to celebrate your birth”

“Grandpa?”, she asks

“Yes Annie”

“I want to share my tree with Charles, Andrew, Ginger, Wendy, mommy, daddy, you, grandma, Mr Boatswain, Ms Phillip, Ms Kelly, Karen ...”

They laugh as she goes into deep thought trying to remember the people she knows.

“Annie”

“Yes daddy”

“You do not have to name everyone, just say everyone”

“O.K. daddy, EVERYONE!”, she shouts at the top of her voice and spins around on the spot, holding her arms straight out.

“EVERYONE, EVERYONE!!”, she continues to shout.

Mango Mouth stops spinning, puts her bag down, runs grabs a branch and begins climbing

“The first one to pick the biggest mango is king, is queen!”

“You did not say start Annie”

“START!”, she says as she continues to climb

“Daddy?”, the other children say looking at Simon”

“How many times have you run off then tell her ready, set, go!”, Simon says laughing at the entire situation.

Charles grabs a branch and starts climbing, Wendy then Andrew follows soon after, Ginger however does not move, she just looks at the other children climbing

“Ginger?”

“Yes daddy” she answers looking up, “I am O.K. here”

Mango Mouth stops climbing, looks down at her sister and shouts.

“Ginger, Ginger, come up!”

The other children stop and also call out to her.

“I am O.K. down here and girls..... young ladies.....women..... should not climb trees!”

“Oh Ginger, forget about that, come up, join us!”, Wendy shouts down to her.

Ginger shakes her head signalling no and sits down under the tree, looking up.

“Charles, help her to come up, please” Mango Mouth says to her eldest brother, “Please”

“Come Andrew”, Charles says as he descends the tree, Andrew follows him down; they jump off the tree, walk over to Ginger and sit on either side of her.

“Come on, we will help you”

Ginger looks up at the tree, at her brothers and then to the ground in front of her, grandpa and Simon look on saying nothing.

“We will stay close”

“Promise no games?”

“No games”

Ginger takes a deep breath, stands up and walks to the tree, her brothers follow her, Charles kneels in front of her and cups his hands behind his back making a foothold. Andrew climbs onto the branch above, steadies himself then extends his hand down to her. She puts a foot into the foothold, holds onto Charles who stands up hoisting her up to Andrew, he takes one of her hands and she very cautiously climbs onto the branch and sits beside him. They stand up and begin to climb together as the brothers give her instructions. Mango Mouth and Wendy watch in silence as their eldest sister climbs the tree; they are proud of her. "O.K., I am high enough for today", Ginger says after climbing a few feet, "I am staying here!"

"YEAH YEAH!!", everyone shouts and clap her, she bows from the waist smiling. Two voices from down the trail join in the celebrations, grandma Tessa and Indra walk into the clearing, clapping and shouting, as they look up at Ginger in the tree.

"Is that really my eldest girl Ginger up in a tree?" Indra says, Ginger just smiles and waves.

"How?, Indra asks Simon

"I don't know. Her brothers came down from the tree spoke softly to her and right before my eyes she is climbing up the tree"

"This is truly a day of surprises" she says still looking at Ginger.

"Ready to eat mangoes while sitting in a mango tree Ginger?", Mango Mouth asks her sister.

"Yes"

"O.K. catch"

Ginger makes sure she is secure, nods her head, Mango Mouth drops a large mango down to her, she catches it and with a smile on her face bites into it. Juice gushes out spraying her face, running down fingers, arms, she begins to lick but the stream eludes her tongue, dripping onto her clothes.

“My clothes!” she shouts.

“That is the best part of eating a mango in a mango tree Ginger”, Mango Mouth says laughing as she and Charles, Wendy and Andrew bite into a large mangoes. Then she remembers,

“Oh! Catch daddy. Catch grandpa” she says and drops mangoes down to her parents and grandparents.

The forest is graced with new sounds, those of a family enjoying eating mangoes, while talking and laughing, plus the soft giggles of the girl who not only loves mangoes but is blessed with the gift for finding them where ever they will ripen every mango season.

