

Ikani's Homestead Short Stories

2 Short Tales



Ismaila Ikani Sule



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Bully And The Mangos

Ismaila Ikani Sule

CHAPTER ONE

Another day.

Life could be funny.

He'd forgotten to wash his underwear again. Martin Opapa sighed and shook his head dismally. While the Bank of Banquet's thirty-year old security guard stood at his post by the gates thinking about what lay ahead for him that day (his wife laughing at the way his underwear got rid of mosquitoes in the house), across the busy street, down a winding road, under a mango tree, six-year old Kayode Akintola was upside down. He had been tied by the legs to a branch. He was pushed and gently began to swing to and fro.

"Man, 'ow many times do I 'ave to tell you tha...gbehu! gbehu!... Sorry, man – this mango's so sweet-ee that it's taking away my H's and making me choke. Right, how many times do I have to tell you that all mangos from the trees along this road belong to the Big G Boys?"

"Sorry, Bally. I forgot, please, I forgot. Sorry. Sorry." Kayode's heart was pounding and his glasses were slipping off his face. The big boy known as Bally, leader of the Big G Boys gang, was stuffing mango fruits into his mouth and leering at him mockingly. Here was one serious bully (he was always early to work – pushing other smaller boys and girls around the school playground and after school, confiscating mangos picked from trees the Big G Boys claimed to belong to them alone). The twelve-year old always had a blue baseball cap on his head and today, he wore his old tie-dye patterned shirt and yellow, oversized boxer shorts. His toes stuck out like ugly twigs reaching out from his sandals for some cockroaches to scratch. The rest of the Big G Boys stood obediently behind their feared leader. There were two lanky brothers in their smelly clothes and one girl everyone called Miss Umu because she looked like Miss Umu the Class Three arithmetic teacher.

"Miss Umu, Coolzio, Soffa – let's go. The football match at Bollu Square began a long time ago and I want to be there to make sure I get my change from Mama Tolu for the roast maize I bought yesterday," Bally climbed onto his bicycle and hurled away the fibrous remains of the fruit he'd seized from his hapless captive. The other members of the Big G Boys got onto their own bicycles and revved their powerful engines telling all to "make way, make way Big G Boys, too big to delay". The revving stopped when their throats began to feel sore. Away they screeched!

"I want to eat my lu-u-u-u-unch! Ah, the mangoes are not even sweet!" the boy dangling from the branch bega-a-an to wa-a-ail. Yes, wa-a-ail like th-i-is, one can't help it, a cold lunch's ho-o-orrrible. The poor boy, the torture! The pain! The sour mangoes! The cold lu-u-u-u-unch!

Kayode told Abdul Raheem, Aish and Rose all about his ordeal.

"Cold lu-u-u-u-unch, poor guy!" they chorused in sympathy.

Abdul Raheem and Aish Oke were brother and sister, you see. He was nine and she was seven, you see. Rose Sa'a Sparklebrown was their neighbour. She was British, you see, and also seven years old like Aish. In fact, not only were they neighbours, but Aish and Rose were sort of related, you see. Their mothers had both been suckled at very tender ages in such a manner that made them both foster sisters in this part of the world, you see. So, you could say Rose was Aish's foster-cousin – yes, Abdul Raheem's too. The fact that the Akintolas, the Okes, the Sparklebrowns and the Wiwiwagawagas were all neighbours on the same side of the street is just the coincidental part of this story...., you see.

"Bullies," Mrs. Sparklebrown approached the children who were seated around the mahogany table in her kitchen. She had a plastic bowl tucked under her arm and she seemed to be darting from the fridge to the shelves and cupboards in search of ingredients for the pie she wanted to make. "They never stop harassing you," she continued, "Not until someone teaches them a good lesson they never forget."

"Yayh, mum!" Rose yelled in delight.

"Teach them a lesson Mrs. Sparklebrown," Kayode now felt sure he could start taking fried plantain to school for lunch without having to hide his Pokemon lunch box in the school gardener's zinc tool shed. The Big G Boys were that mean, baby.

"What are you going to do?" Abdul Raheem asked.

"Well, I'm making mango pie and I seem to have run out of mangos."

CHAPTER TWO

"Yes," Rose felt she understood, "You're going to pick mangos from those trees and when the Big G Boys come they'll be scared out of their skins of your famous growl and every boy and girl will rush and join in the struggle for mango freedom!" she and Aish yelled together.

"No," came Mrs. Sparklebrown's reply, "I'm going to let you teach them a lesson yourselves by going and getting me a basket of mangos I need for my pie."

"No-o!"

"Ye-es, because you guys always eat up my pies in a tiny fraction of the time I spend making them often forgetting to leave some for me..."

"Off to the office, dear!"

"Mm-hm, see what I was saying? I was about to suggest your dad accompany you, Rose. Now, he's nicked off again. He eats the stuff like a rabbit along with you people," Rose's mother remarked. Abdul Raheem tried hard not to laugh out loud.

"Mum, the Big G Boys will murder us."

"Not if you're smart enough to get the fruits without them catching you. Show everyone you can get them without being intimidated by these bullies."

"We will be when they grab us tomorrow at school," said Kayode. He didn't want to be a part of whatever daring scheme Rose's mother seemed to have in mind. Cold lu-u-u... Bah, enough of that!... Cold lunch was bad enough, man.

"I'll make you guys two pies and take you all out shopping if you do. What do you say?"

"We'll do it for you, madam." Rose smiled throwing a salute. Her mother smiled back. They're smart children- they'll do it, but I've still got a few tricks up my sleeve to make sure Biggie D's...no, no... the Big G Boys, that's right – to make sure they don't bug anyone else ever again.

"Do you...er... mind telling us just how you expect us to get the mangos for your mother?"

Abdul Raheem was really concerned about his health and what Betebete was going to do to Amechi in the next episode of Village Deodorant, on TV, when he found out that he had actually been the person who'd taken the stock fish and not Peter.

"We've got four bicycles and Kayode has two pairs of walkie-talkies..."

"A pair belong to big brother and sister – I told you that three times!"

"Yes, yes, Kayode, still, you can get them for this mission," said Rose full of confidence.

"'Ello, Rose, 'ello o! What mission are you talking about?" Abdul Raheem still demanded to know how she expected them to get mangos for her mother. The four children were sitting on the veranda in front of the Okes' residence watching the builders at work on the house on the other side of the street. A smirk crept up her face making her eyes glitter with the message: hyeh, hyeh have I got a plan!

"Remember Smokey and the Bandit?"

She could watch that film all day and all night given the chance – thought Kayode.

They all nodded and Rose yelled, "Hit it!"

CHAPTER THREE

An hour later. The mango trees stood in all their splendor, neatly lining the road to Kayode's school and noisily throwing mangos and leaves unto the grass beneath them.

"Who, I say, who dat?!" came a deep bellow.

Up in the tree, Kayode began to shake. "Rose, what-are-you-waiting-for?"

"There is somebody up that tree," Miss Umu (not the teacher) got off her bicycle and began to edge towards the tree the way movie heroes did when they suspected an armed villain was in the bathroom setting bombs underneath their bathtubs. The rest of the Big G Boys remained on their pedal-powered machines. The next thing they knew a girl came flying past them out of the nearby bushes. Her bicycle screeched to a halt before them so they could see the mangos in the basket attached in front.

"Hello," she said and took off.

The chase was on. Rose sped down Amala Road followed by Bally and the Big G Boys. As she zipped round a bend, Abdul Raheem and Aish went into action. It was their task to distract the pursuers enabling Rose to get away with the mangos. Kayode – he was to get down the mango tree and run for it. Abdul Raheem and his sister did their job beautifully. He led the lanky brothers Coolzio and Soffa down past the hospital, through the mountain of rubbish near Partial fuel station and then he went flying off onto the dusty road leading back to the hospital. His SuperOcycle came to a halt in a cloud of dust, he just had to see the less-skilled boys behind him come tumbling down onto the dirt before him. He took out the walkie-talkie in his pocket and brought it to his lips.

"Y'ello, y'ello, it's me Abdul. Have gotten rid of my guys, you 'ear me?"

"Got you, I'm taking care of Miss Umu right now," came the acknowledgement to his message. His sister was some 55.4378 metres (yes, that sounds about right) away from where he now casually pedaled his bicycle to the pre-arranged rendezvous site. All she had to do was gracefully but skillfully ride her KoolOcycle through some mushy gutters and into the bush where she lost the furious Miss Umu and headed her way.

"It's me, it's me – Aish and I'm done already," she announced into her walkie-talkie.

"Go to our street now! Bally's hot on my tail!" came her foster-cousin's voice.

True enough, Rose was pedaling as hard as she could – she was just six houses away from her home. She had to make it! Her heart was beating fast – Bally the Big G Boys bully refused to give up the chase, he was rapidly closing in on her. As if to some well-planned rehearsal, Aish and Abdul Raheem suddenly appeared on both sides of the big boy swerving their bicycles towards him in an intimidating manner. That didn't work, he merely kicked out at them simultaneously with his legs pushing them away like some stunts man.

"Hahahyenhhyenhha!" he began to laugh. Rose could she why – one of the neighbours was backing out his car onto the street right across her path. She wouldn't get through!

She clutched her brakes so hard that her knuckles became white. She desperately pulled back at the bicycles handles lifting the front wheel up.

"No-o-o-o-o-o-o-o!" her shout echoed down her neighbourhood street. Yes, she took off! Bally gasped as he watched his prey glide through the air, fly right over the car and tilt her

bicycle sideways in mid air. She landed with a bump, bounced twice and spun the bicycle to a sharp halt right in front of her mother standing at the front door. "Ah, Rose," said she, "The mangos, just in time. Ah, lovely, lovely, lovely."

"Nnyaaaaah!" screamed Bally. His bicycle slammed right into the side of the car and he shot through the open window on the driver's side. For some reason or the other, the first thing he shouted as he landed on the driver's lap was: "Nyeah, mehn (man)!" The driver, an elderly businessman, could only yell, "This isn't public transport!"

"Mum, we did it! We did it!"

"Mama Rose!"

"Mrs. Sparklebrown!"

The children were very excited. At last, the Big G Boys had been beaten. They'd been humiliated. Rose's mother was very pleased.

"You see, you taught the bullies a good lesson. Now we can all have some delicious mango pie."

"But," Kayode began, "They'll be out for revenge now."

"I don't think so," Mrs. Sparklebrown told him, "I spoke to his parents a few minutes ago and is he going to be in hot water when he gets home. His bullying days are over!"

"Yayh!" they all screamed in delight.

"Now it's pie time."

...Er...THE END.



Guava Palaver

Ismaila Ikani Sule

Everyone in the neighbourhood knew the 'Guava-man'. Everyday he'd sit on his short wooden bench in front of Mallam Bala's shop. You could tell it was the Guava-man approaching when you sighted the casually dressed gentleman carrying a bench in one hand and a black plastic bag of the fruits he was named after in the other. Shoppers at Mallam Bala's little shop facing the Cassava Polytechnic campus would make way for him to pass by and place his bench down at his favourite spot. He was actually a handsome fellow - hair neatly cut, sparkling white kaftan and trousers like he'd just put them on minutes after washing them, and the kind of smooth fair brown skin mothers wished their daughters could have by rubbing honey on their faces each morning. He'd greet the shoppers, sit on his bench and began to eat the guava fruits from his bag. This daily routine lasted from four o'clock every evening till the sun began to set just a few minutes after six. Greet, sit, scrunch, munch, burp, "Hmm, that lady cheated me - this one's too small for the money I paid for it. First a ban on lizard soup, now expensive guavas. ~Tchiw(hiss)!~ What a world!", chew, chew, chew. Mallam Bala's customers would smile at the Guava-man - yes, he was 'ooo-weee-gi-wee-gi' in the head allright ('nuts' according to one foreigner's interpretation).

Lateefah was certainly the inquisitive type. At ten years of age she'd probably already asked a million questions already... most of them annoying things to her father like "Baba (father), if you're a man, how come you yell out in pain when lifting the lid of a pot of cooking food while mama doesn't", "Did 'Baba' come from that black sheep song taught in English class?" or "If we put our minds to it, we could achieve anything we wanted in this life". That last one was crazy talk - he still hadn't succeeded in shutting her up! Ooh, this was all because he insisted on showing off his baby at his graduation ceremony with her mother. She must have somehow picked up this bad habit from those no good 'know-it-all' academicians at that early age. He was driving her back home from school because her mother had to go visit some relative at the hospital. Engineer Uneku, as he liked to be called (he was actually a dentist), drove his Volvo carefully home clenching the steering-wheel tightly as he listened to his daughter go on and on about the discoveries she'd made at school today, particularly the fact that mosquitoes were parasite-spreading bloodsuckers. "I can't believe Mimi's father gave her an expensive new dress instead of economical rubber bathroom slippers like you got me, Baba. I ought to advise him to be as clever as you are." Ah well, Mimi - mosquito, what was the difference? "Mah friend look where you dey drive!" someone yelled at him in pidgin English to watch where he was driving. "Shaddap," he shouted back, "Is it my fault my daughter's talking?" Yes, life goes on.

Mallam Bala sold his last loaf of bread. Scrunch! "Na wa o", oh boy, he wondered, "Just how many guavas could one eat. At least the Guava-man was good for the tourist attraction - a few silly girls trying to get him to marry them before giving up on the virtually impossible task (all he thought about was his work, consuming bags of guava fruits daily) and buying some soft-drinks instead. The sun was setting now and he knew his neighbour on the bench would soon be leaving. The poor chap, how'd such a good-looking able young man land in such a predicament. "I love guavas. No need to think out loud, you could have just asked me." The shopkeeper was startled for a while but then composed himself and set about tying small bags of sugar for those customers who couldn't afford to purchase an entire packet. It was a shame to watch someone wasting his life away over a bag of guavas. "Hey man, fruits are good for you!" Thinking out loud again...

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"Most definitely."

Mallam Bala turned back to his work and thought no more about that man.

"Good, mind ya own business!"

He tied the bags of sugar and arranged them in small piles. Sam sam, no way, these bags were going for ten naira each!

"What! That's broad day robbery!"

"Okay, enough you bat!" Mallam Bala exploded, "You can tell me to mind my business, don't tell me how to run it!"

"Ah-ah, is that the way to talk to customers?! Such rudeness!"

Mallam Bala looked up at the man who had just walked into his shop.

Engineer Uneke had had a brilliant idea! No child could resist sweets! Buy Lateefah some and she'd stop questioning him me about the odd nature of his pot-belly and how it was unfair to her mother to see her handsome prince walking around with a noticeable bulge falling over his belt buckle. What on earth were these women talking about? Ah, (slapping the tummy pat! pat! padt!... Ooh, that hurt, hope don't get an indigestion!) this was a sign of a successful man, baby! He'd brought the Volvo to a dangerous halt in front of the Cassava Polytechnic, almost running two students over, and marched off into the first shop he saw. So why did the shopkeeper insist on selling those small bags of sugar for ten naira each?

"Oh, excuse me, sir, " the man apologised to him, "And you're looking for...?"

"Hmm, oh yes, can I have that packet of sweets, please?"

"Ah, Sugar Bellies. That'll be five hundred naira for a packet," Mallam Bala gave a warm smile, the type that provided proof of his many years of excellent customer service and...

"Five hundred naira for a packet of sweets?! What do you take me for, my friend, a gullible student?! I graduated years ago, I'll have you note!"

"Oh really, and just what did they teach you that leads you to believe we're still using the same prices from the nineteenth century?"

"Yeyh, abomination! How dare you insult me like that, I'm probably younger than you are!"

"Then respect your elders!"

"Call yourself a shopkeeper? You're the kind of person letting down our national football team, selling sweets and sugar at such prices and putting up posters of rival countries' teams in your shop!"

"In case you haven't noticed, sir, that's a poster of an American ice-hockey team!"

"I knew you weren't supporting our boys!"

Someone burst into the shop at that moment, interrupting the manly exchange of words with loud sobs enough to scare away those meowing cats from your bedroom window at night. It was the Guava man, he was on his knees crawling towards the men with his hands outstretched in search of help and tears gushing down from his eyes.

"Ooh, please, I confess, I confess," he wailed and sobbed, "I'm a fraud! A fraud! I pretend to be 'ooo-weee-gi-wee-gi' in the head, but actually I'm nothing but a pick-pocket! I deceive people into believing I'm just a good-looking guy who cares for nothing but guavas while I cut holes into your customers' pockets!"

At this point he threw himself to the floor grabbing hold of Engineer Uneke's legs tightly. "Just please, make her stop! I can't take anymore of the grueling interrogations! I can't, can't, can't, can't! I confess, I confess!"

"Oh no!" Uneke suddenly realized it, "I forgot to lock the doors! She's loose!" He kicked away

the man groveling before him when he tried to blow his nose on his trousers and dashed out of the shop. Luckily, his daughter hadn't made it into the polytechnic campus or else something could have happened. Grabbing her by the hand, they walked back into Mallam Bala's shop bought the packet of sweets and the ice-hockey team poster (she decided she liked it because it looked like the future of underwater expeditions and she would like to study the pictures more closely). Away they then drove off home. Home to Mama, Lateefah's mother - her father's wife (who else?). Home to supper, most importantly!

The Guava-man? Oh, the police took care of him - he was actually Don Weegi, the one-time notorious tomato smuggler wanted all over the country.

Mallam Bala continued with his business and soon became rich enough to start his own sugar processing company - he was very glad (although once he got an anonymous letter about his lack of patriotism when it came to football).

Engineer Uneku and Erinyo, his wife, both watched gratefully as their daughter grew, matured and asked less questions. Lateefah became a whiz kid with her own private computer and software company - G!Star & Moon Systems (makers of the popular Guava computers).

So, should you have an inquisitive daughter, don't be too harsh on her. We're all human, encourage her positive curiosity and watch as her knowledge and usefulness to society blossoms... especially when it comes to getting rid of the menace of fruit-gobbling pick-pockets in our midst

THE END