

The Little Mouse *Solamae*



Linda Cardinal Schneider

The Little Mouse

Solamae



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WRITTEN BY LINDA CARDINAL SCHNEIDER

lschneider@Solamae.com

EDITED BY ANTHONY HESS

ahess@Solamae.com

COVER DESIGN & ILLUSTRATIONS BY

RUDDY CASTILLO

rcastillo@Solamae.com

JACQUELINE GOODMAN

jgoodman@Solamae.com

WEBSITE DESIGN BY

WILLIAM ALZATE

walzate@Solamae.com

ANGELA ALTMANSHOFER

aaltmanshofer@Solamae.com

MEET THE CHARACTERS ON THE WEBSITE

www.Solamae.com

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“Throw off the bowlines, sail away from the safe harbor.
Catch the trade winds in your sails.
Explore. Dream. Discover.”
Mark Twain

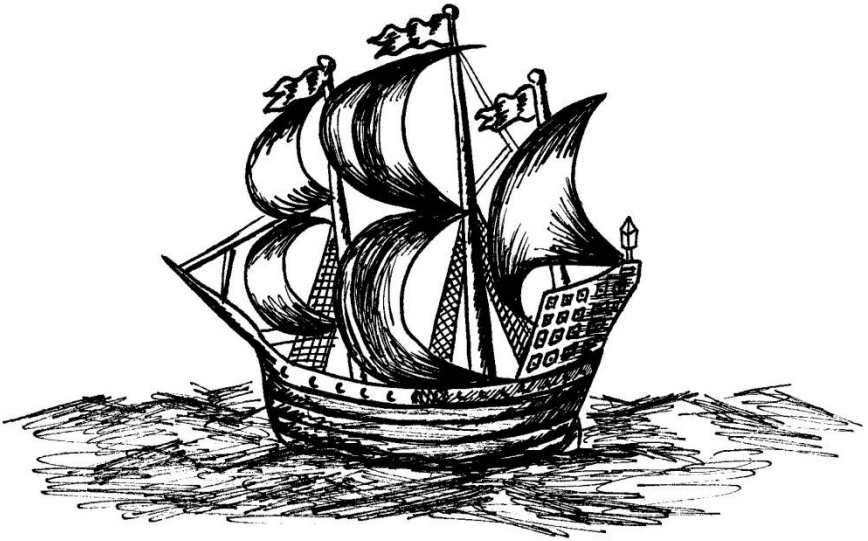
Dedication

**TO ALL THE CHILDREN OF THE WORLD
AND FOR THE CHILD WITHIN EACH OF US**

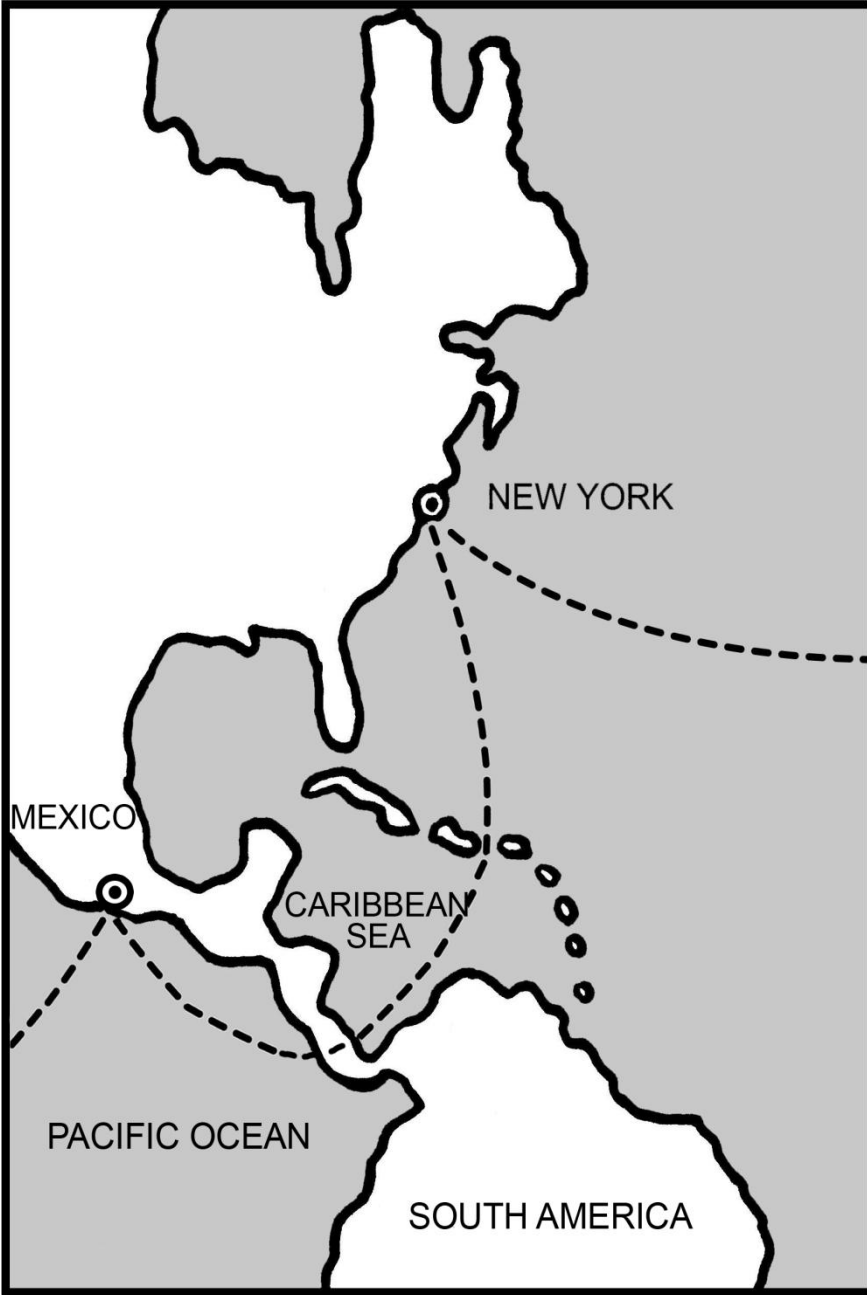
<i>Chapter</i>	<i>Page</i>
All Aboard	1
A Beautiful Day	7
The Night Launch	10
Squall	14
The Jump Up	18
Bingo	22
The Shack	27
Conch Fritters	31
Take A Day	36
Poppers	39
Danger	43
Sailing	46
Locks and Gates	49
Sargentos	52
Daydreams	56
Memories	59
The Little Wolf	64
Seven Tios	69
The Lesson	73
Vanished	76

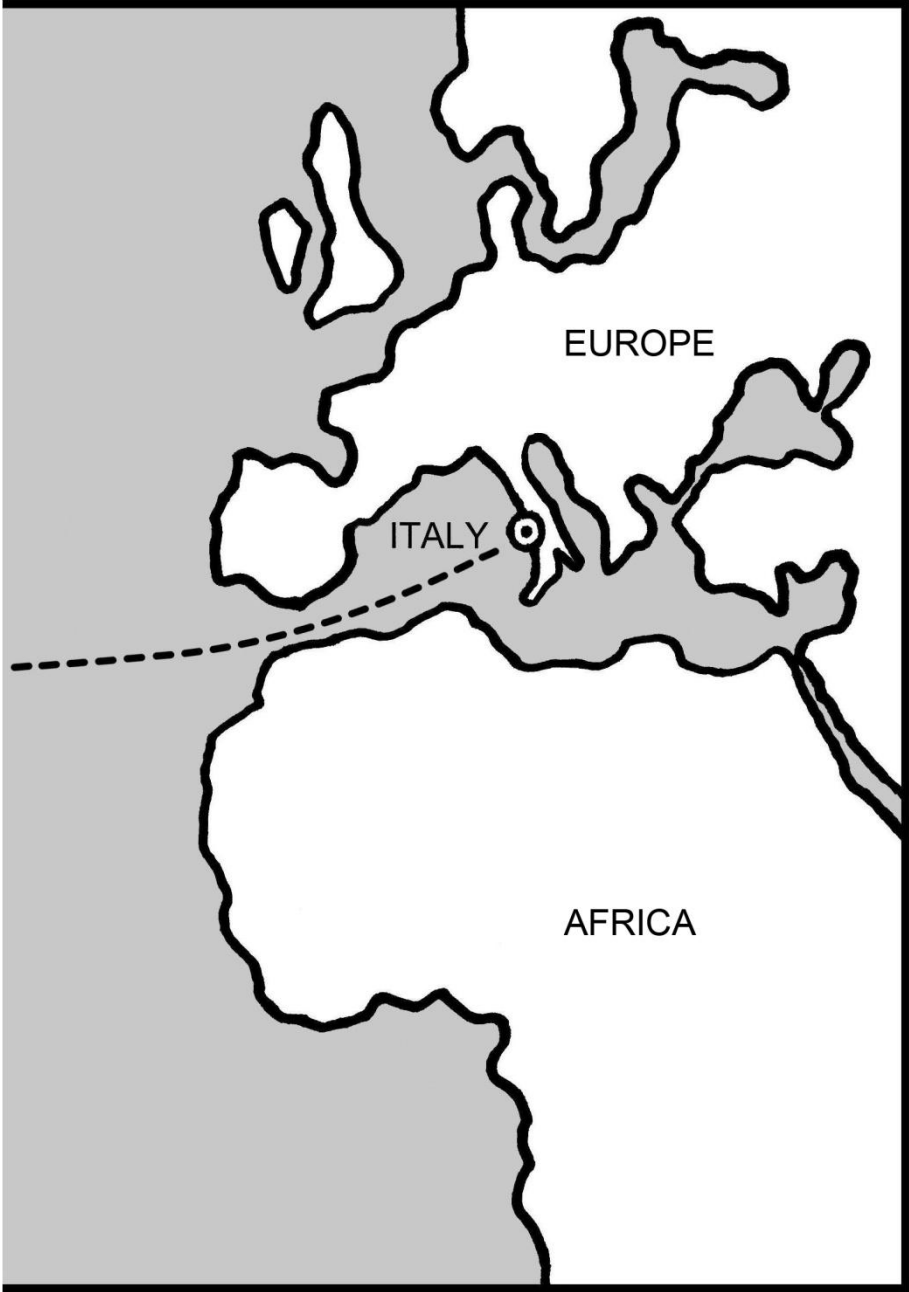
<i>Chapter</i>	<i>Page</i>
The Lady	80
Chastised	85
Harmony	88
Beautiful Puebla	91
Festival	95
Lucky Day	99
Volcanoes	103
Smoke and Ash	107
Miskitos	111
Mercy of the Sea	116
The Storm	121
The Meeting	126
The Galapagos	130
Expeditions	135
A New Day	140
Espanola	145
Honor	148
Dilemma	153
Change	157
A Mouse's House	161

Volume II



The Caribbean & Central America





Introduction

One morning about ten years ago, in a half awake-half sleeping state, the words “The Little Mouse Solamae” came to me. I didn’t know what I was supposed to do with those words. Who was this Solamae and why had she been given to me? What was I supposed to do now that she had skittered into my head? She crawled around in there making herself completely at home and taking her sweet time unfolding her story for me.

Now that I know her very well, I believe she is quite worthy of being introduced to all of you. That is why I have written her story for her, so that every boy and girl can have the pleasure of getting to know this brave little mouse. Her wonderful, ‘round-the-world adventures, her enduring spirit, and her strength of will to always do the right thing, is guaranteed to be a source of inspiration and entertainment for each of you for many years to come. I invite you to read along as Solamae follows her larger-than-life dreams and as she sweeps others up into believing in themselves.



All Aboard



Solamae and her pal Puppino were once again settling in on the ship. They were relieved to be back with the Bigs. “We made it just in time, didn’t we Puppy?” The letter from Solamae’s parents had just arrived; she would meet her parents at the next port after a year of searching. “I’m so happy! I can’t wait for you to meet them, Puppy.”

They spent the rest of the evening with the Bigs. There was so much to tell about their visit to New York and they wanted to hear all about how everyone else had fared and what they had done in the busy city. Reminiscing about the adventures they had in New York would help Solamae keep her excitement under control.

Otherwise, she was likely to burst from the anticipation of seeing her parents again.

Puppy told about meeting Dan and Buddy on the sidewalk in front of the Department of Information. “Solamae and I were walking down the street when we noticed a blind man walking with his dog, ‘Buddy,’ and I asked them for some help. We made friends with them.” She told about the ferryboat ride that Dan had generously arranged on the Fourth of July and how Solamae had described the fireworks in detail, thus giving Dan the opportunity to “see” them for the very first time.

Solamae was anxious to tell the Bigs all about the day they found Aunt Irish’s house with the help of all of their new friends in the city. “We searched for hours to no avail and then, quite by accident, we met Aunt Irish’s dog in the park. He led us to her house, but she was away on a trip.” Solamae was hoping that the Bigs would know where Aunt Irish could be found, but they didn’t have any information to offer her.

Puppy told some stories about Hector, the handsome terrier she had met in the park. Her eyes



twinkled like Christmas lights whenever she mentioned his name. Everyone could tell that Hector and Puppy were more than just friends. “He’s waiting for me to come back,” Puppy sighed wistfully. She was feeling a little bit self-conscious and wanted to change the subject, “Tell us what all of you have been up to in the city.”

All six of the little Bigs answered at once, “Pee Wee got lost, again!” They had all gone together to see the Empire State Building. Pee Wee was fooling around in the elevator, pressing all the buttons and making the elevator stop on every floor. One by one, each of the little Bigs got off and took a different elevator straight to the top. They were tired of Pee Wee’s foolishness and they were eager to see the view from the top of the building.

Pee Wee couldn’t get enough of his joy ride; he played with the elevator for hours on end. By the time he arrived at the top floor, the rest of the Bigs were already on their way back down, sure that they had missed his arrival. “Somehow, he managed to find his way back to the ship,” Mrs. Big added. “He used the compass we

gave him for his birthday, but I think his guardian angel was also with him that day.”

Pee Wee was hard pressed to be let out of anyone’s sight for the rest of the time they spent in New York; he couldn’t get a moment to himself. Most of the responsibility for keeping an eye on Pee Wee fell upon Ustabe because she was the eldest of the little Bigs. Although she had just about given up on changing his bad habits, she concluded with “We don’t think he is cured of it. We believe he was just born like that!”

Solamae had been counting heads the whole time; she wanted to make sure everyone else had made it back to the ship safely. She had learned this from watching Mrs. Big, who would lovingly account for each of her children at every bend in the road. Ustabe was there sporting her oversized nose, Pee Wee was wearing his aviator glasses, Mighty’s big brown eyes couldn’t be missed, and neither could Teeny’s big blue eyes. Mini was there and so were her tiny little feet, as was Wanabe, whose gigantic feet seemed to grow bigger every day, and she could not be overlooked. Now there was Puppy



to count, as well. Solamae counted on her fingers to make sure all her friends were safe and accounted for. All the while, Mr. and Mrs. Big were keeping watchful eyes on all of them.

This was to be the third leg of their voyage since Solamae had joined the family and although they were leaving behind some good friends, none of them were sorry to get out of the hustle and bustle of New York, New York, the city that had almost swallowed them up. No one knew what their destination would be, but surely it had to be less hectic than New York. Besides, once Solamae and Puppy were reunited with Solamae's parents, their sailing days might be over forever.

After Solamae took an inventory of her friends she suggested, "Let's all get some rest now; tomorrow we will begin what could be our last voyage together." Solamae didn't know what her parents had in mind for her future. She had mixed feelings about it. She hoped her parents would not ask her to give up sailing forever. She and Puppy already had a list of people and places that they were planning to return to someday.

The Little Mouse Solamae

The ship had sailed away from the dock without anyone noticing during the family's happy reunion. It had already reached the high seas. For tonight, everyone was happy to be back at sea, and to be rocked to sleep by the gentle motion of the waves. Sailing was in their blood now and they were all ready for the new adventure that was about to begin.



A Beautiful Day



It was the most beautiful day on earth and Solamae and Puppino were at their favorite place, way out on the point of the ship, the bowsprit. There wasn't even a ripple in the water and the air was so still; it was a perfect day at sea. There were no birds hitching rides in the rigging, no fish breaking the glass surface of the water and it was getting hotter by the minute.

They had been out there on the point ever since the sun came up that morning. The magnificent red sunrise was so beautiful that it had taken their breaths away. The sight of the rising sun was the only thing that could have replaced Solamae's thoughts about her family. They had been having so much fun that neither of them noticed that the day had taken on an eerie calm.

The Little Mouse Solamae

“Hey Puppy, let’s go below and get a drink and then let’s see what the Bigs are doing, they have been awfully quiet all morning.” Solamae’s heart was overflowing with the anticipation of seeing her family again, but their reunion was about to be interrupted by an unexpected event. On their way to the Big’s house, they passed some sailors who were all huddled up and talking scuttlebutt. Puppy heard them whispering something about “bad signs” but she just passed it off to superstition.

When they got to the Bigs, all the little Bigs were talking scuttlebutt too! Puppy decided to tell Mr. Big about all of the rumors that she had overheard the sailors whispering. “Red sky at night, sailor’s delight. Red sky in the morning, sailors take warning!” Just then it occurred to Puppy that the sky had been a brilliant red that morning, and her skin immediately was covered all over in goosebumps. Suddenly, Solamae realized what that sign meant, and it spelled trouble. The little Bigs said that they had heard the sailors talking about ducking into a safe harbor on the west side of the islands, where the



cruise ships anchor. That is, if they could get there in time. It seemed there was a hurricane coming!

Solamae was pouting about being late to meet her parents at the next port, as they had requested in their letter. “Why do we have to duck into a safe harbor Mr. Big? We could sail right through that storm and be there ahead of time.” Mr. Big was being patient with Solamae because he knew how important this was to her. After all, it had been a year since she had received any news at all about her parents. Now that the letter had arrived, at least Solamae knew that her parents were okay.

“A hurricane is not just any storm, Solamae, we will be lucky to get to a safe harbor and out of its way.” Mr. Big knew that Solamae liked having her way and Solamae knew that Mr. Big was right about the storm. Since all the other Bigs were resigned to waiting, Solamae decided to grin and bear it too. They made a plan to go back up on deck after dinner and watch as the storm approached. Hopefully, they could outrun it and get to safety.

The Night Launch



Puppino was still gnawing on a big soup bone after dinner when the ship began rocking from one side to the other and her bone started sliding back and forth across the floor. Everyone laughed at how funny she was, chasing her bone around the cabin. Try as she might, the bone would slide out of her reach just as she was ready to pounce on it.

All of the little Bigs were trying to help Puppino corner her bone. They were laughing and squealing so much that they just bumped into each other, knocked each other down, and wound up in one big pile of little Bigs. Finally, Mr. Big snared the bone. “I think we better go above now, the weather is taking a turn for the worse. We better batten down all the loose things before we go.”



Just then, Mrs. Big's baking pans flew off the shelf and made a big racket when they crashed to the floor. "Batten down! Batten down!" hollered Mr. Big. Everyone scurried around grabbing everything off the shelves and tucking all of it neatly away. Solamae whispered to Puppy, "So that's what 'batten down' means. I guess we still have a lot to learn about being sailors." Little did they know how much they were about to learn from the great sea that they now called home.

Once on deck, they found the sky so dark that it almost seemed like nighttime. The wind was blowing fiercely and the waves were crashing over the sides of the ship. Solamae and Puppy decided that they'd better not risk going out on the bowsprit to watch the storm approach. "It's a little late for that anyway," said Solamae "I think the hurricane has already arrived." Puppy quickly agreed, "We might get washed into the sea and drown if we try that."

Instead, everyone huddled up under a lifeboat to watch what was going on. They were still in the deep channel between the islands when Puppy thought she

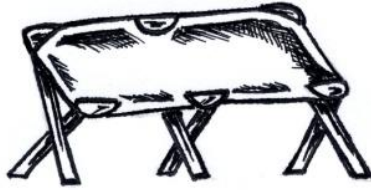
spotted something unusual in the water. Everything was so dark that it all seemed to blend together, but Puppino had good night-vision and she was sure that she had spotted a person in the water, where the dark sky and the dark sea met. “How can we let the sailors know that there is someone in the water, Solamae? We have to help.” As usual, Solamae had a plan. “Let’s throw a life preserver over the side. The sailors will think that one of them did it. It will be sure to get their attention.”

Mr. Big thought it was a solid plan, so he organized all the little Bigs and with one hearty “heave-ho,” the life preserver plopped into the sea and began drifting toward the person who so desperately needed it. “Man overboard! Man overboard!” The cry was coming from the loudspeaker. “Starboard! Starboard!” All of the sailors gathered on the right side of the ship, ready to pluck this unlucky person out of the sea. “Coming about!” was the next announcement to blare out of the loudspeaker. The ship took a hard right turn and aimed directly at whoever it was that was now waving frantically from the water.



As the ship grew nearer, they could see a young man. He was sitting on top of a small overturned boat and he was holding on for dear life and calling out “HELP, HELP!” The life preserver had finally reached him. The ship’s crew instructed the young man to grab onto the life preserver and then they pulled him out of the angry sea. Wow!

Squall



And there he was, a handsome young native, standing before them at the foot of the lifeboat that they were hiding under. Solamae winked at him and put a finger across her lips, signaling him not to tell that they were hiding there. He winked back at Solamae and the others who were giggling with joy that he had been saved. “See you below,” he whispered. He was still dripping salt water all over the deck of the ship. Then the sailors took him down to the galley for some dinner and a long drink.

Everyone scurried below. They didn’t want to miss the tale he would tell about what had happened to him and how he almost drowned that day. When they found him he was resting on a cot near the entrance to the Bigs’



house. The Bigs made a circle around the cot and got comfortable. Of course, noisy Ustabe didn't hesitate to begin firing questions at the young man. "What in the Sam Hill were you doing out there?" "Me supposed to pick up da tourists from dat island and return dems to da cruise ship. Dis my job. Den da sea took da launch-boat an overturn it."

He did have a very unusual way of speaking, which the Bigs quickly coined "Island Talk." Not long into his tale it became clear that they would have to make an effort to understand him. The little Bigs were too curious to wait there turns. "What is your name?" "Where do you live?" "How old are you?" "Where is your family?" Solamae could tell that he was very shy and a little overwhelmed at all the attention. And all the questions! "We are the ones who saved your life. Puppino, with her excellent night vision, spotted you way out on the horizon." Pee Wee chimed in, "We want to be your friend and learn all about you." "Me con never repay you," said their new friend. He looked so sad, just like a motherless child.

The Little Mouse Solamae

As the night wore on, they learned all about him and how alone he had been before meeting the Bigs. His parents had died when he was just a little boy and he had been passed around from one “auntie” to another, but he had never found a home to call his own. He wound up working on the cruise ships when he was just a teenager. He had made a good life for himself as a sailor, until that fateful night, when his launch-boat overturned. “Me name bees Stafford, but dems calls me ‘Squall.’”

Mini felt like flirting with the handsome young man. “What a cool name. What does it mean?” “Well, a squall bees a storm dat comes up outa’ nowhere.” “Just like you did!” Mini was trying to be flirty, and she reached for Squall’s hand and she held on tightly. Squall was so happy to have this nice family care about him.

Mrs. Big understood how indebted Squall must be feeling, so she explained to him all about Solamae’s quest to find her family and how Puppino and Solamae were so much alike. She told Squall “They haven’t been friends for a very long time, but it’s as though they were cut from the same cloth. They both like helping others.



Puppino is devoted to Solamae. It's very nice to see, and we all are learning a lot from the two of them.”

Squall slept well that night, knowing that he had finally found a family to belong to. He wanted to stay with them forever. He made a wish before falling asleep. Little did he know that his wish would come true before morning.

The Jump Up



The weather had calmed down by the next morning. The ship had made it through the storm in the safety of the harbor. The storm had passed while they talked the night away. Now Squall was no longer the center of attention. He liked it better that way, but he was soon to become an important part of the Big family.

Squall got up early and went to the galley for breakfast and some scuttlebutt with the ship's crew. When he returned, he told everyone what he had learned. His ship had departed without him! Now what? "Why don't you try to get a job on this ship?" Mr. Big suggested, "Then you can stay with us." Squall immediately went to find the captain of the ship. Captain Julian was a kind man; he would understand Squall's predicament. Mr. Big was sure that the captain would help Squall.



Solamae, Puppy, and all the little Bigs were following closely behind him. They didn't want to miss a thing when it came to Squall; he was everybody's favorite. There was lots of paperwork for Squall to fill out and lots more questions for him to answer. When it was over, Captain Julian hired Squall right on the spot. He was very impressed with Squall's many years of experience as a sailor. Everyone cheered "Yippee! Yippee! You can stay!" They all scurried back to tell Mr. and Mrs. Big the good news.

Squall looked so handsome in his new uniform. He worked the rest of the day organizing the ropes and tying down the sails on the deck of the ship's rigging. By evening, he had everything ship-shape and Captain Julian was very pleased.

After dinner in the galley, Squall visited with the Bigs and shared all the news he had learned from the rest of the crew. It was not good news for Solamae. They would not be stopping at the next scheduled port of call. Captain Julian said he had to make up time so that the cargo would not spoil before they reached their final

destination. They would set sail in the morning and Solamae's parents would be left standing on the dock without her. Once again, Solamae would have to try to make the best of it.

As the sun rose and the ship left the safety of the harbor, Solamae found herself sitting alone way out on the bowsprit. She was thinking about her mother and father and how close they had come to seeing one another. Puppy joined her and they talked for a while. "Well, at least you know that they are okay." Puppy was trying her best to console Solamae, "Maybe we can meet them on the way back."

Solamae didn't want to think about her dilemma for a while, "Last night, Squall told me that the ship was headed for the Grenadine Islands, where he lives. We can spend a few days there while the cargo is being unloaded. He is planning to show us around and to introduce us to some of his friends. It will be great fun." A little fun was what everyone needed just then.

The rest of the trip was quiet and uneventful. It gave everyone a chance to rest up from all of the



excitement. After all, they had experienced a great deal in a very short time. They had dodged a hurricane, saved a life, and they were all still trying to get over the disappointment of missing Solamae's parents.

Squall helped them pass the time. Every night, after he finished his work, everyone would gather around him to hear stories about the island that he lived on. As it turned out, Squall could spin a good tale, and they could hardly wait to get there. "When da moon she's full, dems calls for de 'jump up'. Dat bees all night." Puppy cocked her head from side to side as though she were trying to unscramble the words that Squall had spoken. "Dems dat miss da jump up miss a big part of dems life."

"O.K., O.K. Please tell us what a jump up is." Solamae politely inquired. "Dat bees music and dancing on da beach an jumpin' up to try to catch da moon, 'till da moon disappears in da mornin' and dems build giant bonfires to light up da beach." The little Bigs giggled with anticipation. This was going to be more fun than they could ever have imagined.

Bingo



After a few days of peaceful sailing, they got their first look at the Pitons. Squall had told them that the Pitons looked like pointed mountains poking up out of the sea. Surely, no one could live on them, they were way too steep to climb, but they were beautiful, dark grey against the glistening clear water. Squall had told them that this island was paradise.

When the ship docked at the island, they all ran ashore to get the fresh tropical fruits: bananas, mangos, pineapples, and the homemade ice cream that Squall had told them about. Solamae was happy once again, “Squall was right, this *is* paradise! And tonight is a full moon!! Let’s meet on the beach later for the jump up.” They all took off in different directions to discover the island with



their dripping ice cream cones in hand. “Ice cream makes everybody happy,” Puppy was heard to observe.

Solamae and Puppy had Squall all to themselves for the whole day. For their first stop, he took them to his church. “Dis bees da Church of da Miracles.” He explained how people would come from all over the Island in order to pray for miracles. The way Solamae saw it, she already had *her* miracle; she had been assured that her parents were fine.

Then they passed the house of Mr. Seafus Dayvus, a grandfatherly gentleman who cooked dinner for any of the tourists who wanted to experience authentic island cooking. He was standing in the doorway with so many grandchildren hanging on to him that his body was practically covered with kids. Squall explained that cooking dinner for the tourists was how Mr. Seafus Dayvus supported himself and all those grandchildren. He was famous for his conch fritters and his delicious desserts made from the tropical fruits, which grew on trees right in his own back yard.

On the way back to the beach, they met up with two friends of Squalls,' Bingo and Tony. Bingo was little and Tony was big, although they were the same age. They looked poor and dirty in their ragged clothes and they weren't wearing any shoes. Squall whispered, "Dems live in da orphanage. Dems run away every full moon, for da jump up." Solamae looked worried, and she smelled trouble. "Don' you worry none, days goes back in da mornin.' Nobody even miss dems, if day doos, day just let dems go anyway. Day knows dat Bingo and Tony comes back, where else days gonna go?"

Everyone gathered at the beach as darkness fell. They all got acquainted with Bingo and Tony and exchanged stories about their discoveries on the island that day. Mighty and Mini had flown kites with some kids they met in the park. Pee Wee had gotten lost, as usual, but he found his way back to the beach just in time for the jump up. Ustabe, Wanabe, and Teeny had spent the whole day on a bus tour of the entire island. They were now experts and they promised to show everyone else around the island the following day. Mr. and Mrs.



Big had a restful picnic way up on the top of the hill which overlooked the lush tropical farmlands and the beautiful harbor.

Just about then, Bingo lit himself a cigarette! “What in the Sam Hill are you doing?” shouted Solamae; she learned that from noisy Ustabe. “Are you crazy, or just a juvenile delinquent?” Bingo looked surprised, he had been smoking cigarettes all of his brief life and nobody ever cared enough to scold him about it before this. Bingo stuck his chin out defiantly and bluntly replied, “I smokes.”

“Well, we were wondering why you were so small for your age and now we know why. Didn’t anyone ever tell you that smoking cigarettes would stunt your growth? Not to mention that cigarettes make you stink!” Solamae kept going on with her speech; “Do you want to get sick and die?”

Bingo looked worried, “Mees gonna die?” Puppy chimed in at that point. She had heard enough and she couldn’t keep quiet about it any longer, “Yep, if you keep smoking dem cigarettes, you is gonna die, sure enough!”

The Little Mouse Solamae

Bingo never, ever smoked another cigarette after that day.



The Shack



The island dogs all thought that Puppy was a celebrity, so she was given special status among them. They were sure that Puppy was a native just like them, not only because she now spoke “Island Talk” so well, but also because Bingo was constantly at her side. Puppy couldn’t shake Bingo loose; he followed her everywhere she went. Puppino was the head dog on the island before the jump up ended and now that she had mastered Island Talk, she had become the official interpreter for the Big family.

The Bigs gathered together on the beach as morning was breaking. The music and the excitement of

the jump up were finally coming to an end. The smoke from the bonfires was gradually drifting away. Mrs. Big wanted to express her concern for Tony, the larger of the two boys from the orphanage. She wasn't worried about Bingo any longer; she knew he would be fine as long as he didn't smoke cigarettes. It was Tony who had her attention, "He is so quiet and he seems so sad and alone" she thought.

Solamae suggested that Puppino have a talk with Tony since she had done such a good job with Bingo. Everyone else held hands and made a circle around Tony and Puppy just to show their support. All the Bigs were there, as well as Squall, Solamae, and Bingo. They were like one Big happy family already but no matter how hard Puppy tried to get Tony to talk about his feelings, he wouldn't or he just couldn't.

Solamae had another bright idea. She stepped into the center of the circle and took Tony's hand, "Would you like to have dinner with Mr. Seafus Dayvus tonight?" Solamae was thinking that it would do Tony good to be with other kids his age and to feel like a part



of a family. As usual, her good intentions were right on target and Tony immediately said ‘yes.’ Squall made the arrangements for everyone to meet at Mr. Seafus Dayvus’ house. In the meantime, they went their separate ways to explore the island and to try to get some rest.

Mr. and Mrs. Big headed back up to the top of the hill to relax and enjoy the view. Mighty and Mini went to find the kids they had flown kites with yesterday. Pee Wee went with Ustabe, Wanabe, and Teeny for a tour of the island. Pee Wee was counting on them so that he wouldn’t get lost again. That left Solamae, Puppy, Tony, and Bingo in Squall’s care.

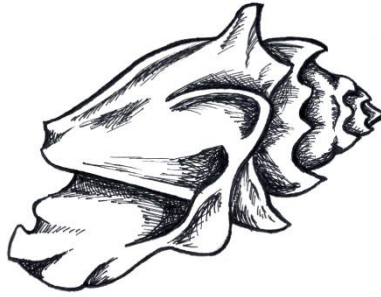
They came upon a rickety old shack and Squall announced, “Dat bees mees parents’ house when mees was but a lil’ chile.’ Less step inside and rest dere.” It was all ramshackle and quite rundown inside, but the good memories crowded in on Squall and made him smile just the same. He told stories about his handsome father, his beautiful mother, and his happy early childhood. It was the first time he could remember how

good life had been during the short period he had his parents with him.

Then came a knock on the door! Then an even louder one! Then an even louder one...BANG! BANG! Someone shouted, “Open up.” It was the authorities; they finally missed Bingo and Tony when they hadn’t shown up at the orphanage that morning. “Let’s run out the back door and go straight to Mr. Seafus Dayvus’ house.” Solamae was determined not to let them take Bingo and Tony back to the orphanage. The five of them scurried up the hill leaving the authorities and Squall’s happy memories behind.



Conch Fritters



When the Big party arrived at Seafus Dayvus' house, they found all of his grandchildren out in the yard. They were making preparations for dinner that night. The little ones were up in the trees picking tropical fruits for the desserts. The older ones were in charge of removing the conch from their beautiful pink shells with a hammer and a screwdriver. They would poke a small hole in the shell and the conch meat would slide right out. Squall explained the process to Solamae and Puppy. He said that without those tools it would otherwise be impossible to get the conch to let go of her shell. "Da conch she ducks back in her shell an' she slams da door close, jes' like a turtle doos."

The Little Mouse Solamae

Bingo scurried up one of the trees just like a squirrel. He wanted to help the little ones pick fruit. Tony was already cleaning conch meat; they were both happy to help. Tony was a fisher boy. He had worked on the docks cleaning conch for the tourists for fifty cents each, but that was before the authorities took him to the orphanage. He missed his old life so much and he dearly wished that he could somehow return to fishing. The way Tony saw things, he could easily earn enough money to take care of himself and Bingo too, but the authorities had other ideas for the two of them.

Each time Tony slid a conch out of its shell he would remove what looked to be a clear string from the conch meat and then he would slurp it up like a strand of cooked spaghetti. “What in the Sam Hill are you eating? Yuck!” Solamae yelped. Tony shared every other one with Bingo who was grinning from ear to ear. “Dat de ‘pezza.’ Dat make you strong.” Bingo flexed the muscles in both of his skinny arms as he spoke. Puppy wanted to try it next. She loved seafood. Soon, everyone was enjoying raw conch pezzas and bragging about their



muscles. They didn't seem to mind that their banquet was part of the internal organs of the conch!

The little kids were using the empty conch shells as horns by blowing into the pointed end, covering and uncovering the hole left by the hammer and the screwdriver. All of this racket brought Seafus Dayvus out of the kitchen. "Come chilin' dinner bees ready." The little ones immediately gathered up the fruit they had picked from the trees, filling their baskets to the brim and everyone went inside to enjoy the wonderful island meal Seafus Dayvus had prepared for them.

There were too many grandchildren to count and the table was full of laughter and the aromas of good food. The fluffy, round balls of conch fritters were "Yummy- yum," and when the dessert was served, "Wow-Wee" they all chorused. A colorful platter of tropical fruits served with homemade ice cream made everyone even happier. Bingo and Tony already felt like a part of the family.

Then came that dreaded knock on the door, Bang! Bang! "Open up." Seafus Dayvus smiled and got up from

the table “Don’ you worry none,” he calmly stated as he went to open the door. An eerie silence filled the room. Everyone shivered with fear. Bingo and Tony slid under the table to hide from the authorities. “Yassa,’ day bees here,” Seafus Dayvus admitted when he was questioned about Bingo and Tony. Everybody at the table gasped and they all started grumbling, “I can’t believe he told on us” Tony was practically in tears. Squall whispered, “Shush, it O.K.” He knew what Seafus Dayvus was up to, but he couldn’t start explaining just then.

A long conversation later, and Bingo and Tony were released into the care of Seafus Dayvus, their new grandfather! As it turned out, all of the other grandchildren had been orphans too, but that was before they met Seafus Dayvus and became his grandchildren. What a lucky day it was for Bingo and Tony, a day that no one would ever forget.

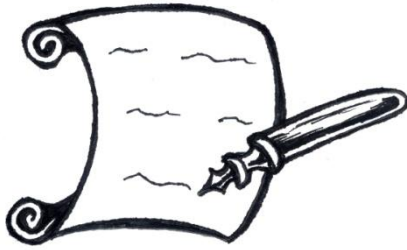
The Bigs went for a walk after dinner. Squall, Solamae, and Puppy stayed behind to make sure that Bingo and Tony were comfortable. After all, it had been day full of surprises for them and now their life was



going to be so different, and so much better. They had a new home, a new family, and a whole new life. Once the goodbyes were all said and done, Squall led Solamae and Puppy back to the ship. They walked quietly, satisfied that they had once again worked their magic. Helping Bingo and Tony out of their predicament and leading them to a happy new life, with Squalls help of course. Together, the three of them made an unstoppable team. They were a force to be reckoned with. There was no telling how much they could accomplish now that they were united.

On the way back, they passed Squall's old house again. He stopped to gather up his happy memories and he tucked them all away in his heart. He would carry them with him everywhere he went from that day forward. As they walked along their way, the threesome couldn't help but wonder; was it the pezzas that had made them so strong, or just their good intentions, as always?

Take a Day



Solamae, Puppy, and Squall were the first to arrive back at the ship. Squall was scheduled to ready the deck to set sail in the morning. They were expecting to find the rest of the crew busily scurrying around, but all was quiet and the ship was deserted. As far as they could tell no preparations had been made for the morning departure that had been scheduled. They called out for Captain Julian, but he was nowhere to be found.

One by one, the rest of the Big family arrived. It seemed they were alone on the ship now with only Squall to help them figure out where all of the others had disappeared to. Squall called a family meeting and everyone gathered around him to listen to his plan.



“First thing, we doos the work, so Captain Julian bees happy when him come back.”

It was a quick education for little Bigs who were each assigned different tasks by Squall. Mighty was the obvious one for the ropes, and Solamae could help with that since Mighty had already shown her how to tie knots. Since her big feet might get tangled in the ropes, Wanabe was assigned to swab the deck instead. She couldn't possibly slip on the wet deck with those big feet to steady her. Since Pee Wee was so small, he could fit into the tight spaces to polish the brass. Teeny would be Pee Wee's helper for that task. Ustabe was assigned to fold the sails, and Mini could continue to spend her time flirting with Squall. Puppy just clowned around, entertaining everyone while they worked.

Down below, Mrs. Big was busy baking Joe Frogger cookies for the long voyage ahead. Mr. Big was writing a letter to Solamae's parents explaining why they hadn't made it to the port in time to meet them. With everyone helping out, the work was finished ahead of schedule. It was now time for Squall to announce the rest

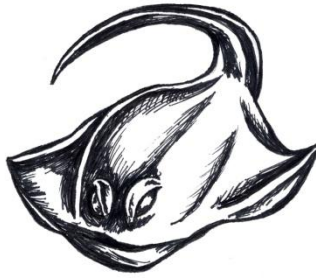
of his plans and to find out what was going on. Everyone gathered around Squall, who had some really great news. “Mees find a note from Captain Julian; him says ‘Take a day!’”

Puppy cocked her head from side to side. “What dat mean?” She was clearly getting better at Island Talk. “Dat means we play tomorrow!” Everyone cheered at the same time, “Yippee Yaaaah, Yippee.” The work was done, and there was all kinds of fun waiting to be had on the island the next day. They stayed up late that night, each planning their own brand of fun for the following day.

Squall had a friend named Leo, who owned a small motorboat. Maybe Leo would take Solamae, Puppy, and him out to the flats, where they could snorkel and dive. “Dis what we doos for fun,” Squall announced proudly. “It does sound like fun,” said Solamae, who was always ready to learn something new.



Poppers



As soon as first light arrived in the morning, everyone went off in a different direction. Puppy was already down the road getting after the goats that were tied up in the islanders' yards and chasing the chickens that walked around freely. Squall and Solamae caught up to her and off they went to find Leo's house.

When they arrived at Leo's, they found him on the dock behind his house. He was preparing his boat for a day at sea as though he was expecting them. "Mees got plenty lunch, plenty gas, and plenty fun for everyone. Come aboard." And off they went, backwards! "You forget how to steer da boat?" Squall was laughing; he knew that Leo could navigate even if he were blindfolded. "Mees jez play joke on you," Leo teased as

he turned the boat around and masterfully navigated his way out of the harbor. He knew every rock and low spot in the harbor by heart.

The water was crystal clear and getting deeper. Leo estimated that it was, “Maybe twenty or thirty feet right here.” But it was so clear that you could still see the bottom. They felt like they were flying through the air with nothing between the boat and the bottom of the sea until a huge stingray went swimming by. She was bigger than the boat and she appeared to be flying gracefully through the water as she flapped her big black wings.

Squall started banging on the side of the boat. “What in the Sam Hill?” Solamae just loved saying that. “Mees callin’ dem poppers.” Puppy didn’t say a word. She didn’t even have to. Everybody knew what it meant when she cocked her head from side to side, except this time her eyes were blinking and that made her look comical and appear completely confused.

Just then, three dolphins popped up out of the water. They were smiling and playful, squirting salt water on everyone through the blowholes on the tops of



their heads. They had heard Squall calling them and they came to investigate. They wanted to play. The ‘poppers’ followed the boat until it reached the flats where the water was too shallow for them. Then they waved goodbye and cackled some sounds that meant, “We love you,” and off they swam. They would be back to play another day.

The flats were alive with sea creatures. You didn’t even need a mask and snorkel to see them. You could just reach into the shallow water and pick up a starfish with your bare hands. There were colorful tropical fish swimming by, and thousands of pretty shells to look at. Squall caught some lobsters to bring back to the ship for dinner. “This is truly paradise” everyone readily agreed.

Puppy was a natural swimmer. She was heading for a small, uninhabited island not far from where Leo’s boat was anchored when Solamae stopped her. “Wait for me!” Puppy taught Solamae how to do the ‘doggie paddle,’ and they both swam off. The island was rich with palm trees, so the two of them settled in under the shade and waited for Leo and Squall to walk the boat in.

When they arrived, they all pulled the boat up onto the beach and began unpacking the scrumptious lunch that Leo had prepared for them. They had lobster salad sandwiches made from Leo's catch the day before. They were served on homemade island bread. For dessert, they had little apple tarts, a specialty from the bakery on the main island. Solamae couldn't remember having a more delicious lunch, even at her home in the palace.

They built a small bonfire and sat around telling stories and getting to know Leo until it was time to go at day's end. "Maybe we will see the poppers again on the way back." Solamae was hopeful, but Leo told them "No, deys in da deep-water now. It bees dere feeding time." Dusk was settling on the island; it was time to head back to the ship. Hopefully, Captain Julian and the crew would all be there when they got back.



Danger



Later that evening, after all the lobster that Squall caught was devoured at dinner, Squall headed to Captain Julian's cabin for the evening report. He returned in short order with surprising news. Captain Julian had decided to try to make up lost time by going through the Panama Canal instead of going the long way around the tip of Argentina. He admitted that he had not traversed the Panama Canal before now. It would be a first for him, and for his crew, as well as for the ship. It would require strict attention to detail and expert navigation. It would be risky and they would have to put their trust in the people who operated the locks and dams at several points during their journey.

This news made everyone extremely nervous. Even the Bigs, who were seasoned sailors, were shaken by the news. Mr. Big said, “If the ship could talk, I am sure she would voice her concern, too.” Squall quickly gathered everyone around in an effort to calm them. He decided to give them a history lesson; this would surely take their minds off the danger that was looming over them.

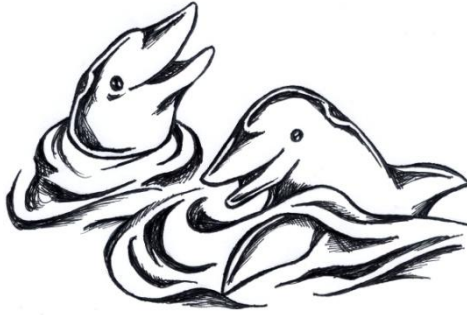
They were an inquisitive bunch. Of course Solamae was the first to start firing questions at Squall. “What in the Sam Hill is a Panama Canal?” Squall explained, “It bees a way to connect two oceans, the Atlantic and the Pacific.” Solamae was overcome with worry. After tomorrow, there would now be *two* oceans separating her from home. It seemed as though she was getting farther and farther away from her parents. Puppy called her attention back to Squall, who was deep into the history of the Panama Canal. “Listen to him, Solamae, it’s very interesting. We will have a good story to tell your parents when we finally find them.”



Squall went on until midnight, answering questions and trying to put the danger aside. Puppy was right; it turned out to be an educational glimpse at the past one hundred years or so, ever since the construction of the Panama Canal began in 1881. It had taken over thirty years and the efforts of several countries to complete the construction. It was finally opened on August 15, 1914. Simply put, it created a new passage across the Isthmus of Panama, shortening the journeys of sailors like Captain Julian and his crew. It was intended to promote tourism, generate jobs, provide drinking water, and contribute to the development of shipping, and it had served people well for the past one hundred years.

“Captain Julian says it take a full day to reach the entrance from here. He says we need be at the entrance at daybreak.” It would be a nine-hour journey from the time they entered the canal until they reached the Pacific Ocean on the other side. “Bees best if we have daylight all da way across.” Solamae went to sleep, comforted by Squall’s words and Puppy’s company. One thing was certain, she was about to experience a big part of her life.

Sailing



Solamae was awake long before dawn the next morning. She was looking forward to a peaceful day of sailing so she might collect her thoughts and restore her courage for the adventures that awaited her. She lay in her bed quietly reminiscing about her comfortable life at the palace. She hadn't had a care in the world until that ill-fated night when she was awakened by her mother's frantic orders: "Run, Solamae! Run!" She could still hear her mother's words. "I didn't even have a chance to say goodbye," she whispered sadly.

Puppy stretched, yawned, and opened her eyes. She was not going to tolerate Solamae's melancholy



mood. Determined to cheer Solamae up, she suggested, “Let’s go up on deck and greet the day, Solamae.” “O.K. Puppy, let’s go and see what kind of a day we have.” Solamae was ready to shed her bad humor.


The ship was just pulling away from the dock when they reached the deck. Squall had been at his post ever since first light. He was leaning over the railing waving to someone. It was Leo, come to say goodbye. He was in his little boat, motoring alongside of the ship. He escorted them out of the harbor until they reached the deep water. Then he banged on the side of his boat, just as Squall had done the day before. He hollered out to them, “Mees calls da poppers for say goodbye to you.”

The dolphin showed up in a flash, smiling and showering the ship with seawater. The threesome waved and threw kisses and many thanks to Leo until he was out of sight, but the poppers stayed with them. So Solamae and Puppy made their way out onto the ship’s point where they could see the poppers better. They were swimming back and forth in front of the ship, smiling and clowning around, as was their habit. They would dive

deep into the water and then pop up in an entirely different spot.

The sea was kicking up and its mist that was spraying their faces smelled delicious. The seawater tasted just like the lobster they had eaten for dinner the night before. The ship was bouncing up and down as it hit the waves. The bowsprit almost reached into the water on the way down and the poppers would jump up and use their flippers to shake hands with Solamae and Puppy. They squeaked their love sounds and squirted seawater on the giggling twosome. This went on all day until feeding time, when the poppers finally squealed, “Goodbye, we love you, and we will see you again.”

Solamae’s spirit had been renewed. The delightful fresh air and the exciting sailboat ride were just what she needed to help her shake off her scary memories. She was ready for the Panama Canal and the big adventure that was about to begin. The ship had arrived at the entrance to the canal. Squall helped to set the anchor; they would wait for morning to begin the next part of their journey.



Locks and Gates



That night before bedtime, Squall continued with his history lesson. Everyone was happy to have something else to think about and Squall was glad that he could help them to take their minds off their fears. If he was anxious about tomorrow's crossing, he certainly didn't let it show. Mini sat right next to Squall as he spoke and she didn't take her eyes off him the whole night.

Squall began by telling his new family that they were about to experience one of the greatest engineering wonders of the world. He explained that during their fifty-mile journey from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean tomorrow, they would pass through a complex system of

drains and locks that had been designed to raise the ships that traveled in the canal to eighty-five feet above sea level. This would allow them to cross *Lago Gatún* (Lake Gatún) which is situated on part of the canal route. Then the ship would be lowered to sea level once again before they reached the Pacific Ocean on the other side.

The lock chambers are massive concrete structures and there are three sets of them to navigate along the route. Each lock is about two miles long with as little as two feet of space on either side of the ship. Maneuvering the ship through these locks would require great skill on the part of the operators and this is where Captain Julian and his crew would have to turn over control of the ship and put their trust in strangers. This idea didn't sit too well with the Bigs who were already more than a little nervous about the trip.

Solamae interrupted Squall to tell the Bigs about how Puppy had first learned to trust. Solamae had learned to get her sea legs under her by watching the sailors, and once she had learned, she taught Puppy by promising to hold on to her tail until she could get her sea



legs adjusted. This was an important lesson that the two of them would never forget: that was how to trust, especially when you are doing something for the very first time. Now it was time to put that lesson into practice once more.

Solamae's story seemed to quiet everyone's nerves, so Squall continued with his history lesson for a little while longer. It would take about fifty million gallons of water to fill each chamber of the canal. The water is moved by gravity in as little as eight minutes, creating significant turbulence. Everyone gasped! The gates must hold back the weight of the water because a failure could unleash a flood.

Once again, the Bigs began to tremble. Squall assured them that the whole process of locking a ship was controlled from one central control room, "No worries. Remember dees mens been doin' dis fer one hun'ert years." Puppy added "Now it bees bedtime" and Solamae chimed in saying, "Tomorrow is going to be a big part of our lives."

Sargentos



Mrs. Big hadn't finished packing the lunches when the announcement came blaring over the loudspeaker, "All hands on deck. All hands on deck." It wasn't even daylight yet, but everyone was already awake. There was so much excitement in the air that they all had forgotten to be scared. Solamae's little speech about trust and Squall's history lesson had worked wonders to calm their fears. They were planning to spend the day sightseeing from the deck of the ship. Like the millions of tourists before them, they didn't want to miss a minute of the spectacular sights that awaited them.

Squall pulled the anchor up while the rest of the crew raised the sails. Captain Julian was at the helm



wearing his big bright smile. He was aiming the ship directly at the entrance to the Panama Canal. The excitement almost boiled over at that moment. The time had finally come! The entire group was laughing and squealing with delight and trying their best to catch their breath.

The operators waved them in and very shortly they arrived at the first set of locks. The whole maneuver took less than an hour and they were out of the lock and sailing on *Lago Gatún*. “That was easy,” Solamae remarked. “Nothin’ to it,” added Puppy. They could all let go of each other now that the scariest part was over. Everyone settled into their favorite spots to relax and enjoy the view. Solamae and Puppy headed for the bowsprit without further delay.

Gatún Lake was full of small boats; most were fishermen in open bass boats. They were gliding quietly through the water at the lake’s edge with only one or two serious anglers per boat. They were fishing for Peacock bass. According to Squall, it was a much-coveted delicacy that the native people called “*Sargentos*.”

Solamae could tell that these fishermen meant business; there was no talking or joking among them at all. Even their electric motors were silent in respect for the art of fishing.

One fisherman in particular caught Solamae's attention. He was certainly catching a mess of *Sargentos*. Solamae noticed that every once in a while he would gently return one of his catch to the lake. She asked Squall to tell her what the reason for that practice could possibly be. "Dems 'catch and release' da baby fish so dem can grow up in da lake were deys belong." Solamae just smiled. The thought of that practice pleased her very much.

That nice thought, combined with the beauty of the surroundings and the delightful sailing conditions of the day sent Solamae's imagination soaring. She secretly wished she could meet that fine fisherman and get to know him better. She liked him already. Just watching him fish made her feel peaceful and content.

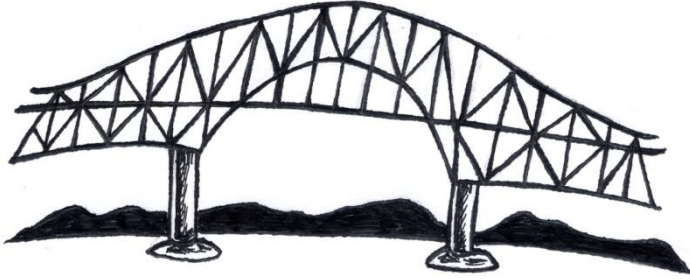
Solamae learned a lot about fishing that day. She noticed that a fisherman would select the largest minnow



from his bait bucket and set it on his hook. There was no sound when he cast his line out and he would pull back on it just before it hit the surface of the water with a “plip!” His cast was expertly directed to land under floating vegetation, around trees, and submerged logs. Almost immediately, a strike! Then a splash, and then the coveted Peacock bass would appear, breaking the surface of the water with a series of leaps and bounds.

Solamae pictured the kind of life she thought this angler might have. He would probably bring his catch home to his children, maybe to his grandchildren, and maybe to another family like the Bigs, a family who secretly shared his house. Then he would take all of his children and his grandchildren out on his boat and teach them how to fish. She murmured dreamily aloud, “He must be a very nice man.” This roused Puppy out of her own daydream, which of course, included a whole *Sargento* just for her to enjoy!

Daydreams



Solamae was thinking out loud again. “Who would have believed that the day was going to turn out so wonderfully? Yesterday we were all scared to death and today here we are enjoying ourselves and behaving just like tourists!” Just then, Pee Wee arrived to tell them that lunch was being served in the cool shade under the lifeboat. Mrs. Big had prepared a picnic. Everyone felt as though they were on a vacation cruise ship. They “ooowwed” and “ahhhd” at the beautiful scenery while they ate their yummy lunch. Then they rested up so they would be ready for the most exciting part of the day.



Solamae's thoughts drifted back to the fisherman. She wondered if he was frying up his catch right about now.

Squall had told them that the highlight of the trip would come near the very end when they went under the "Bridge of the Americas," a span that connected North and South America, and then out into the Pacific Ocean. It was time for the excitement to begin again; there were two more locks remaining to travel through before they would encounter the spectacular bridge. If things went as well as they had gone the first time, they would be sleeping on the Pacific Ocean that night.

The ships were lining up to enter the next two locks. They would all pass through the locks together, as a group. The cruise ships, the freighters, and the large private yachts were all heading to the same destination. The passengers on the cruise ships were waving to the people on the other boats. The people on the private yachts were sounding their horns and waving back.

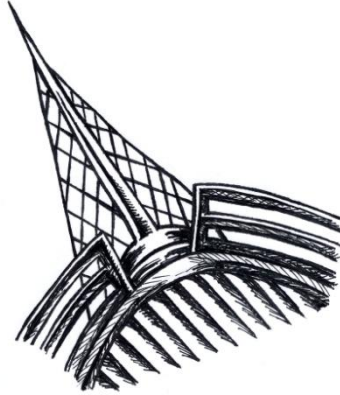
They were all in the hands of the expert operators now. They were sliding through the last of the locks as smoothly as if they were on a conveyer belt. Suddenly,

cheers rang out “Hooray! Hooray!” The majestic bridge had been spotted on the horizon. It formed an arch over the Panama Canal that glistened a reddish gold in the reflection of the sunset. Maybe this beautiful bridge was a symbol of what awaited them on the other side. Suddenly, everyone was filled with the anticipation of the days to come.

Squall told the family that he had overheard the other sailors talking about all the different stops that had been scheduled by Captain Julian. The rumor had it that the first stop was going to be a city named Acapulco in the country of Mexico. Solamae hoped that it would not be as busy as the city of New York. “It sounds exciting though.” Puppy was thinking about her stomach as usual, “I hope we get to sample some of their food,” she murmured wistfully. Tonight at the evening report, Squall would find out if the scuttlebutt he had overheard earlier in the day was indeed true.



Memories



According to Captain Julian's evening report, they would run north from the canal, up the western coastline of Central America, to Mexico. He planned to dock at the port of Acapulco on the southern tip of the country in order to take on more cargo. Since it would take several days to load this cargo, the Bigs would have a chance to go ashore and explore.

Once the cargo was loaded, Captain Julian planned to head south again, making several more stops along the way in order to pick up additional cargo. The destination for all this cargo was unknown, but one thing was for

sure, the ship was going to be overloaded and heavy, causing it to ride low in the water.

For now, they could relax and enjoy another full day of sailing. Solamae called out to Puppy, “Let’s go!” Puppy didn’t even hesitate; she knew exactly where they were headed. Both of them had become avid sailors, and there was nothing they enjoyed more than riding the waves in their special place, out there on the bowsprit. When they were out there on the ship’s point, it was just as if they were flying.

The two friends had become so close that they could almost read each other’s minds. “There is nothing better than having a good friend,” Solamae exclaimed out of the blue. Puppy readily agreed, “It is the most wonderful thing on earth.” Puppy loved hearing the story about when she and Solamae first met. “Tell it again, Solamae. Pleeeeeeease.”

Solamae began by describing the beautiful mountain in Italy that she was attempting to climb after being sent ashore carrying Mrs. Big’s special cookies. She told Puppy that, at that moment, she didn’t know



which way to go or what to do, and it was getting dark quickly. That was the moment that she heard her father's voice and she was immediately reminded that all she had to do was lay her head down and go to sleep; everything would be fine in the morning, and so it turned out to be.

That next morning Beanie woke Solamae up. He was casually traipsing through the woods with no specific purpose, as was usual for him. They practically bumped into one another and they soon became fast friends. "Then what happened, Solamae?" Puppy could hardly wait for the part about how she and Solamae met for the very first time. "Well, I spent a long time with Beanie and his family. He introduced me to many of his friends. When we go back to visit Beanie, I want you to meet the Owl and the Fox. They are two of Beanie's most important friends."

"What happened around the fireplace, Solamae?" "Ah, yes," Solamae continued, feeling very proud of that day. "It was a cold and cloudy day. All of the Beanies had gathered around the fireplace to select a name for their new baby girl. I was the one who thought to give

her the name of my imaginary friend from home, ‘Johari.’ I guess my friend is still waiting for me back at the palace.”

“Then what happened, Solamae?” Puppy wanted her to hurry up and get to the part about how they first met, but Solamae was drawing the story out. It seemed as though she enjoyed remembering as much as Puppy did. “Well, I spent some more time with the Beanies and one day”... Puppy was getting impatient, “Didn’t you have to go find the Bigs to get any news they might have about your family?” Puppy knew this part by heart and she loved hearing Solamae describe how excited they both were when they first met at the very same spot on the mountain where the story had begun.

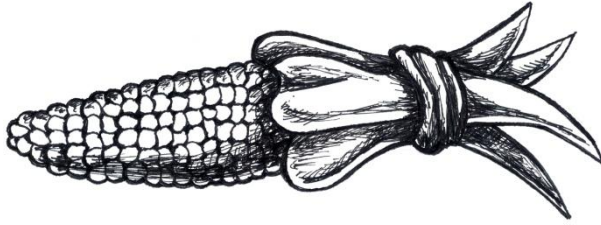
“Yes, Beanie was seeing me off. He had headed home, but he returned in an instant, with you! You were all wrapped up in his jacket and you were yelping and squirming. When I opened Beanie’s jacket, he was so excited he could hardly speak a word, and you were licking my face and clowning around, but that was a long



time ago! But you still are licking my face and clowning around, just like you did when we first met.”

Puppy was content, but if it hadn’t been that it was dinnertime, she could have listened to Solamae tell the story all over again right then. Anyway, they had a big day to get ready for. Tomorrow morning they would be in Mexico.

The Little Wolf



When morning finally arrived, and breakfast was finally finished, Squall had completed his research on Acapulco at last; it was time to go exploring. “Come. Follow me. Me tells you ‘bout it on da way.” That was all Squall said before he headed up to the deck with a line of Bigs in tow. They had three days to spend exploring Acapulco, Mexico, before the ship would be completely loaded and ready to head south again. This was going to be so much fun.

The Bigs marched down the gangplank in single file. Then, as usual, everyone went their own way, on their own journey of discovery. Solamae and Puppy tagged along with Squall, who seemed to be focused on a serious mission. “Where are we going?” Solamae’s curiosity had gotten the best of her. “Tell us about



Acapulco, Squall.” Squall began his report by telling Solamae and Puppy that they were about to visit the famous Bay of Acapulco, where tourists come from all over the world to vacation at the beautiful beaches. “How many beautiful beaches are there?” Puppy had picked up Solamae’s habit of asking too many questions. “Da whole bay bees lined wit’ beautiful beaches, too many beaches, no mon can count dem all!”

Before they could think of any more questions, they had arrived at the first beach on the northern side of the bay. Squall’s mission was to visit every beach on the entire bay; he had it all mapped out, all the way to the southernmost tip of the bay. According to his calculations, three days would be enough to make it there and back to the ship in time to set sail again.

The beach was full of tourists. The water was calm, crystal clear, and very inviting. “Let’s take a dip and cool off before we go on.” Solamae was anxious to taste the Pacific waters. “This is great! You were so right, Squall. I hope all the beaches are this nice.” Puppy was ready to move to the next beach. She was hoping for

some lunch, “Let’s just walk along all the beaches to the south side.” So, off they went, refreshed by the pleasant waters of the Pacific.

Suddenly, an unidentified voice rang out, “*Dónde vives?*” No one had noticed her approach, but there she was, walking along the beach beside them as though she had been there all along. She spoke loudly, “*Dónde estás tu casa?*” she demanded. She appeared to be about ten years old. She had dark, tanned skin and long, black, curly hair. She was skinny with spindly arms and legs, but she sure wasn’t shy. “What did you say?” They all asked her at once. “Oh,” she replied, “I just assumed you were Mexican, like me.”

Squall cleared his throat before he spoke. He was trying to form a sentence that the little girl might understand. It was obvious that she spoke Spanish and English, but Squall wasn’t so sure that she would understand his “Island Talk.” Then she blurted out, “*Dónde vives?* It means ‘where do you live’? *Dónde estás tu casa?* It means ‘where is your house’?”




Squall tried his best to answer the little girl's questions. "Me bees from da islands in da Caribbean Sea. Dems lives on da ship we travels on." The little girl took her time sorting out the information that had been given to her, and then she just bluntly asked them, "Do you want to be friends?" Solamae was delighted; she liked this little girl already. She seemed self-assured and she certainly wasn't afraid to ask for what she wanted. Solamae gladly accepted her offer of friendship and she introduced herself, Puppino, and Squall, which pleased the little Mexican girl very much.

Puppy asked her what her name was and they were astounded at her answer. "*Guadalupe Rosita Josefina De La Cruz Muñoz Quintana*." They all responded in one voice. "WHAT IN THE SAM HILL?" It took a long time for her to explain the meanings of all those names. "*Guadalupe* (gwah-da-LOO-pay) means 'Little Wolf,' *Rosita* means 'Little Rose,' *Josefina* means 'God's Generosity,' *De La Cruz* means 'Of the Cross.' *Muñoz* is my mother's last name, and *Quintana* (Keen-tan-a) is my father's last name." When she was finished, she added,

“My friends call me ‘Lupita.’” They all gave big sighs of relief. “Well then,” Solamae remarked, “we are happy to be considered amongst your friends so we don’t have to pronounce that long name.” Puppy wasn’t too confident in her powers of interpretation, but she had learned one new phrase in Spanish: “*Dónde vives, Lupita?*”

Lupita smiled broadly. She did look a bit like a little wolf with her big grin, and her mouth full of beautiful white teeth, “I will take you there right after lunch.” Puppy’s ears perked up, “Lunch?” She had forgotten all about her stomach in the excitement of meeting Lupita. “Yes, my Uncle ‘*Tio*’ is a vendor on the next beach. He will give us roasted corn on the cob.” None of them knew that *Tio* means Uncle in Spanish and that Lupita was about to play a joke on all of them. She called all of her Uncles “*Tio*.” Puppy had immediately picked up the pace, “We have been looking forward to sampling your Mexican food for a long time.”



Seven Tios



The moment that they arrived at the next beach, Squall suggested another dip in the warm waters. He had promised himself that he would swim in every single beach on the Bay of Acapulco. Besides, according to Lupita's Uncle *Tio*, the roasted corn wasn't quite ready. They settled down in the shade of the palm trees after their refreshing swim. The delicious aroma of sweet roasted corn was wafting through the palm fronds. Uncle *Tio* certainly knew how to increase one's appetite. Then, he called out, "*Maíz! Listo!*" (Corn! Ready!) and then everyone on the beach ran to get in line.

One by one, *Tio* would remove an ear of sweet roasted corn from the grill, pull back the husks exposing the delicious golden kernels, and smear the whole thing with a generous portion of mayonnaise before handing it to the next hungry person in the line. Lupita had taught her new friends how to say ‘thank you’ to Uncle *Tio* in Spanish: “*gracias.*” No extra words were wasted; they were all way too hungry to talk. Puppy was rubbing her belly, “I want to eat Mexican food for the rest of my life.” Everyone else laughed, but they all agreed with her.

“Let’s go to my house now, my students will be arriving at three o’clock,” Lupita said matter-of-factly. “Students? You’re only ten years old. You couldn’t possibly be a teacher.” Solamae rightly observed. “No, I’m not a teacher, but I am a straight-A student. I teach the poor kids who live in the city. They don’t get to go to school because they have to work. My mother doesn’t know that we meet in the basement of our house every day, right after they finish their work. I like helping them, but my mother doesn’t approve.”



Solamae didn't like the sound of that. Although she was known to be a bit of a rebel herself, she knew that it was wrong to do something against your mother's wishes. Lupita added, "She's never home anyway. Our housemaids know all about it and they gave me permission to use the basement."

Lupita was proving to be every bit as strong-willed and pugnacious as Solamae had first suspected. She spoke to everyone all along the way to her house. She laughed, danced, and told funny jokes the whole way home. Everyone loved Lupita and it appeared that she could accomplish anything she set her mind to. "Let's stop at my Uncle *Tio's* grocery store, he will give us ice cream."

The threesome was beginning to wonder just how many Uncle *Tios* Lupita had when she offered up the answer. "I have seven Uncle *Tios* and forty-nine cousins!" Squall was the curious one this time, "How it bees dat all your uncles' name's da same?" He couldn't believe that anyone could have such a large family to begin with. Lupita was a lucky girl indeed. "They don't

all have the same name; I have *Tio Pedro*, *Tio Jose*, *Tio Carlos*, *Tio Juan*, *Tio Paco*, *Tio Jesus*, and *Tio Ignacio*. ‘*Tio*’ means ‘uncle’ in Spanish!” Lupita was so delighted; her little joke had made everybody laugh at themselves. She didn’t know that the joke was really on her because now all her friends knew just how full of mischief Lupita could be. The more Solamae came to know Lupita the better she liked her.



The Lesson



There were five little Mexican girls and two little Mexican boys waiting for Lupita when she and her new friends, Solamae, Puppino, and Squall, arrived at her house. They were all seated around a big table in the basement, just as she said they would be. In the basement kitchen, the housemaids were making a Mexican chocolate milk drink and sweet chocolate cookies for them. These chocolate goodies would be a reward for the boys' and girls' hard work on their studies. There was a composition notebook and a pencil at each child's place. Lupita had saved up her allowance to buy them.

Without any formalities, Lupita plunged right into her lesson. She took full charge as she captivated her students with the English language. She pointed to her

head and the class erupted, “*cabeza*.” “*Sí*, Yes,” she gleefully responded, “head,” and she named the letters in English as she wrote them on a small blackboard “H-E-A-D.” Lupita giggled as she drew a funny picture of a human head next to the word on the blackboard. Then, she instructed her students to copy into their notebooks what she had just written on the board. She pointed to her eye and the class responded again, “*ojo*.” E-Y-E instantly appeared on the blackboard. Again, the children were instructed to draw an eye next to the English word that they had dutifully copied into their notebooks. “*Nariz*, nose, *boca*, mouth, and *oreja* means ear.”

Lupita used her original teaching method to cover all the body parts and then she instructed her students to study them at home because she would be giving them a test when they arrived the following day. “You forgot one,” Solamae called out as she pointed to her belly button and everybody roared, “*om-bli-go!*” Even the housemaids had joined the chorus; everyone was laughing and making friends over cookies and milk.

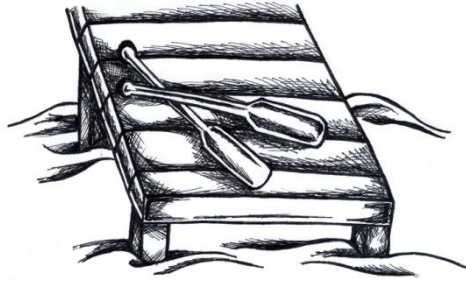


Lupita was very pleased with the progress her students had made that day.

Not even a cookie crumb was left, but the true reward was yet to come. The housemaids were bustling about in the basement kitchen. They were preparing dinner for Lupita's new friends and for the poor kids from the city, too. The sweet aroma of a special Mexican sauce called "*mole*" (Mo-lay), which was made from about one hundred ingredients, including more chocolate, wafted through the basement. Solamae, Puppy, and Squall were in the great room with Lupita and her seven little students. They were learning a new game from the Mexican kids.

Lupita was so happy. This was her own little family, designed especially for kids who had no parents, and that would certainly include everyone who was present in the great room that night. She had created a happy place in the small basement. Small, but it was large enough to fill the hearts of all of her friends. As a matter of fact, Lupita's own heart was so full that, it too, was about to overflow.

Vanished



Lupita was yawning widely when she came down the stairs to the basement early the next morning. Her hair was all frizzy and she looked just like a sly little wolf. She was up to her mischief again. Solamae, Puppy, and Squall were still asleep. “Wake up everybody. Let’s go fishing.” Solamae immediately thought of the fine fisherman she had carefully observed fishing in the Panama Canal a few days ago. “Can we fish for *Sargentos*?” Lupita just laughed, “No silly, they swim in fresh water. We are going fishing in the ocean!”

Squall was grumpy because he wanted to continue with his beach hopping. “Come on Squaaaaal, we can take one of my Uncle *Tio*’s boats. We can go fishing and



exploring and be back before lunch; then you can continue south along the beaches if you want to.” Lupita could be so convincing when she wanted to be, which was most of the time. Squall agreed; he really did like fishing and boating more than anything else. Solamae agreed. She really wanted to try her hand at fishing, and Puppy was always agreeable to her plans, whatever they turned out to be.

They grabbed some leftovers from the night before and set out on foot while devouring them. That took care of breakfast. There was no need to worry about more; they would be back in time for lunch at Uncle *Tio*’s taco stand on the beach. At least that was the plan. There was no need to check the weather report either since they would be staying close to the coastline. At least, they were planning to. They didn’t see a need to bring foul weather gear either; they were only planning to be gone for a couple of hours: just a couple of hours. That was the plan.

When they didn’t return by dark that night, the whole town began searching for them. Lupita’s students

had waited in the basement for three hours before giving up and heading home disappointed and disheartened. She had never missed a lesson before this, especially on a day when a test was scheduled to be given. Something terrible must have happened. The housemaids had done their best to comfort the poor children, but they too were awfully concerned about Lupita and her new friends.

All seven of the *Tios* were out on the water in boats of various shapes and sizes. They were shining spotlights on the water, sounding their horns, and calling out, “Lupita, Solamae, Puppino, Squall; where are you? Lupita, Solamae, Puppino, Squall; where are you?” However, they were losing hope as the night wore on and no one answered their calls. Earlier that morning, a squall had blown in from the Pacific without any warning; it was possible that the foursome had been caught in the storm. They certainly were not prepared for bad weather conditions with only the clothes on their backs and with no provisions. Worst of all, they had forgotten to bring the oars for the boat.



The *Tios* called a meeting; they would have to widen their search. The time had come to call the Coast Guard for help. The officials could calculate where the current had taken the foursome in case their engine had failed. *Tio* had found the oars for his little boat lying on the dock after *Lupita* took off with her friends, so there was no way for *Lupita* or her friends to control the direction the boat was traveling. They were at the mercy of sea.

Things were not looking good for *Solamae*. One more day and the ship would be heading south without her. How would she ever catch up to it? The *Bigs* would be worried sick, *Squall* would probably lose his job, and *Solamae* would never be able find her family. Whatever could have become of her and her friends? They had simply vanished.

The Lady



Panic had spread over Lupita's hometown when she wasn't found by morning. Everyone was talking about the missing foursome. Lupita was well known by all of her neighbors. They admired her for her good works with the poor and they cherished her for the love that she generously spread among them all. Everyone who owned a boat was out on the water, searching for Lupita and her friends. Those who remained on land were operating shortwave radios, keeping in contact with the local boat captains, and updating them on the progress of the Coast Guard's search. The townsfolk were able to monitor the information that the helicopter



pilots radioed to Coast Guard headquarters and they would direct the local boat captains accordingly.

One of the helicopter pilots squawked over the radio that he had spotted a yellow umbrella on an uninhabited island south and a little west of the bay. His transmission was breaking up and the significance of the umbrella was not clear, but Lupita's neighbors thought it was worthy of investigation, so they sent the nearest boat to that location. It was one of Lupita's *Tios* and two of her cousins who finally discovered her and her friends. They were huddled under the yellow umbrella waiting for a miracle to save them.

It was the yellow umbrella that had caught the explorers' attention the day before and caused them to beach the boat just before the storm blew in. They had seen a pretty woman standing under the umbrella. She was waving them in, but by the time they reached the shore, she was nowhere to be found. The umbrella had sheltered them from the rain, provided them with a tent for the night, and shaded them from the blistering sun all morning. The yellow umbrella had saved their lives. Had

they not stopped to have a look at it, they would have run out of gas in the middle of the storm and they would have been blown out into the open sea. They realized that when they tried, unsuccessfully, to start the engine once the storm had passed the day before.

Lupita, Solamae, and Squall were speechless when they learned of the commotion they had caused back in town. Puppy had only one thing to say, “I’m hungry.” Uncle *Tio* reassured them, “Okay, let’s go. I’ve got food for you on the boat.” Uncle *Tio* never went anywhere without the proper provisions. He lectured the carless foursome about it until they promised that they would never do that again.

Solamae suggested that they bring the yellow umbrella back to the ship with them, “Even though this yellow umbrella is faded, tattered, and torn, it managed to protect us. It is our banner of survival.” Squall hesitated; he had second thoughts about taking the umbrella, “Dat lady gonna need her umbrella for shelter her.” Both of Lupita’s cousins reacted with surprise. The younger of the two cousins asked, “What lady?” The



older boy added, “No one has lived on this island for years.” Uncle *Tio* set them all straight, “It was your guardian angel who saved you. The yellow umbrella just kept you comfortable until we could find you.”

Tio radioed ahead that Lupita and her friends had been found. They were all safe and were heading back on his boat with their disabled boat in tow. The whole town exploded in cheers, church bells rang, and celebrations sprang up in all the neighborhoods. The merriment that was happening in the town could be clearly heard blaring out over Uncle *Tio*’s radio. Before long, the fiesta had spread onto the deck of Uncle *Tio*’s boat too. Solamae, Squall, Puppy, Lupita and her cousins danced and sang Spanish songs during the rest of the trip back to town. Even Uncle *Tio* joined in the festivities. He had a beautiful, deep, voice and he sang out with a thunderous boom that spread out across the open sea.

Solamae, Squall, and Puppy would have to hurry back to the ship if they were going to make it in time for the departure. They slipped away without being noticed as soon as Uncle *Tio* reached the dock, leaving Lupita at

the center of everyone's attention. Lupita didn't mind; she had grown accustomed to being in the middle of things. Her only hope was that her students would wait for her. After all, she had an English test scheduled for them. Her new friends promised never to forget her. How could they? No one could ever forget a girl as wonderful as *Guadalupe Rosita Josefina De La Cruz Muñoz Quintana*; nicknamed Lupita!



Chastised



On the walk back to the ship, the reality of the fishing expedition was setting in. Solamae commented, “I bet the Bigs will never be able to top our story.” Squall added, “It not every day me see ‘han angel.” Puppy chimed in saying, “Wait till we tell them about Lupita and her Mexican food. I’m sure going to miss them both.” Things were slowly returning to normal for the threesome. By the time they reached the ship, their clothes were dry and no one would ever have guessed what an ordeal they had experienced on their trek around Acapulco Bay.

No one except Mr. Big, that is. He had overheard the Coast Guard squawking about the search for the missing sailors over the short wave radio. It hadn’t taken

him long to figure out that it was Solamae, Puppy, and Squall who were in danger. His eyebrows hadn't unwrinkled for the past hour and he was lecturing Solamae and Puppy about their carelessness. All the while, he was pacing back and forth and voicing his displeasure with them. It was lucky for Squall that he had to report to work; he was spared his portion of the scolding, but Solamae and Puppy had to endure it. Puppy's ears were down and Solamae's face was covered with guilt. "We promise never to do that again," Solamae whined. "We're so sorry." Puppy begged Mr. Big, "Please forgive us?"

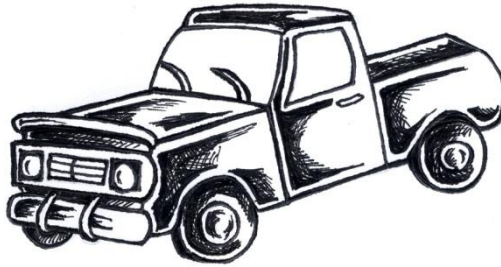
Mrs. Big tried her best to explain, "It's only because we care about you." Solamae and Puppy had to admit that it was better to be cared for and to suffer being reprimanded than not to have anyone care at all; they both knew how lucky they were to have Mr. and Mrs. Big watching over them. Then Puppy remembered, "But we did have our guardian angel to help us out." "Yes you did," Mr. Big admitted, before continuing with his tirade. "Good sailors never go out to sea without



provisions and without being prepared.” Then he was silent, but his furrowed eyebrows let them know how serious their offense had been.

Solamae and Puppy retreated to the bowsprit to escape the silence that had filled the house. It seemed that no one was impressed with their adventure. The little Bigs were all mad at them, stating only that they had to bear the anxiety that had filled the house ever since the threesome were reported missing. “What should we do? How can we make it up to them, Puppy? It was unfair of us to make them all worry so much.” Puppy tilted her head from side to side. She had a dumbfounded look on her face. After all, she was just a young puppy and she didn’t have much experience with such things. One thing was for sure though, she knew right from wrong and she had to agree that they were in the wrong. “I’ve got an idea; we should ask Mrs. Big what we could do to make it up to our friends.” They went below, not quite sure what they were going say to convince Mrs. Big to help them. Neither of them had any idea what a surprise awaited them when they got there.

Harmony



Lupita had arrived! Squall had spotted her waving to him from the dock. She asked him to bring her below to meet all of the Bigs. When Solamae and Puppy got there she already had the whole family engaged in the exciting story about their expedition. She was an excellent storyteller. Lupita answered all their questions and she made it clear that she was sorry for putting Solamae, Puppy, and Squall in harm's way. She took full responsibility for her poor decisions. The Bigs liked her right away. She told them about the work she did with the poor kids from the city and about the afterschool program that she had designed. Once they came to know her better, everyone liked her even more.



Each of the little Bigs admitted that they could understand how easy it would be to forget about safety when in the company of someone as enchanting as Lupita. Solamae and Puppy were amazed at how easy it had been for Lupita to win back their friends. She told Solamae that she realized she had caused trouble and that she had come to try to smooth things over for them. It had worked very well; no one could possibly resist Lupita's charming ways.

Before Lupita left, Squall came below to tell everyone that during the evening report, Captain Julian announced that there had been a delay in their departure. They would be spending an extra day in Mexico. Lupita suggested that all of the Bigs join her and her family for the trip to *Puebla* that they had been planning for the next day. *Puebla* was the town that was responsible for creating the wonderful chocolate sauce called "*mole poblano*" (Mo-lay Po-blan-o) named after the town of *Puebla*. Lupita told them that there was festival planned in *Puebla* for the next day and that they could join her and her family for the trip. Mr. and Mrs. Big immediately

agreed when they heard that. They loved festivals and they wanted to sample all of the Mexican food that Lupita had told them about.

It was just that easy! All was forgiven and they were all friends once again. The plans were drawn; Uncle *Tio* would pick them up at the dock early the next morning for a wonderful day at the festival. Everyone was buzzing around getting their things together for the trip and giggling and squealing with delight. It was doubtful that anyone would get much sleep that night with all the commotion that was going on. None of them had ever been to a Mexican festival before.



Beautiful Puebla



The next morning it was still dark when Uncle *Tio* pulled up to the dock. Mrs. Big counted heads as everyone climbed into the bed of his pickup truck. She handed up her special cookies, freshly baked just last night just for the trip, and then she and Mr. Big climbed in. They were busy lecturing Pee Wee not to get lost again when Uncle *Tio* suddenly broke into song. His beautiful deep voice filled the fields and valleys throughout the entire countryside. Soon after, everyone joined in the singing. Two hours later, when they arrived in *Puebla*, they were all still singing Mexican folksongs. The city was abuzz with activities. Music and laughter

filled the air and the aroma of *mole* sauce drifted up and down the avenues.

Pee Wee was already lost! Mr. and Mrs. Big were looking everywhere for him. He was in so much trouble and he didn't even know it. His mom and dad were so mad at him that they forgot all about being worried. Would Pee Wee get a spanking or not? Would they find him or have to keep looking all day long? All of a sudden, there was a big ruckus where Uncle *Tio* had set up his taco stand. Pee Wee was back! He had followed some tourists to another stand for some roasted corn. Ustabe caught him; he had mayonnaise all over his face. She grabbed his ear and marched him back, kicking, and squalling all the way. He was in for it!

Pee Wee was spared a spanking, but he did get a harsh lecture from both his father and his mother who promised him that, "The next time..." They always said the very same thing: "The next time," but they never could bring themselves to spank him or any of their children for that matter. They were always so relieved



that their children were safe that they easily forgave their misbehavior.

In the meantime, Lupita and her seven *Tios* and forty-nine cousins were organizing a tour of the beautiful city of *Puebla*. They would go on foot, which presented quite a challenge for everyone. How would they ever be able to keep everyone together in a group? And who would mind the taco stand while they were gone? Uncle *Tio* remembered a friend of his, *Paco*, who lived in *Puebla*. Surely, *Paco* had taken the day off from his work to attend the festival. Hopefully, he would be free all day. After all, *Paco* means “free!” Maybe he would mind the taco stand in exchange for a portion of the profits. They would break up into small groups and meet back at the taco stand in time for the festival to begin. That was perfect!

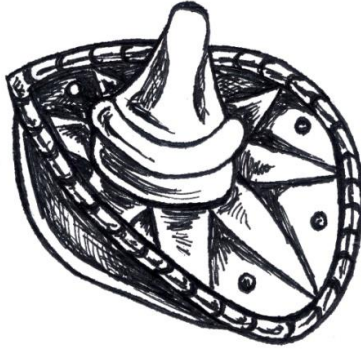
Each of the seven *Tios* would head a group and he would be their sightseeing guide. The *Tios* knew their way around the city and each one had his favorite place to show off. This way, the family could cover all the sightseeing spots in one day; they could all compare

notes at the end of the day so no one would miss out on any of the sights.

When *Paco* arrived, the Bigs decided to split up and join different groups so that they could share their memories with each other later on. Squall, Solamae, Puppy, and Lupita decided to go with the Uncle *Tio* who had rescued them the day before. Mr. and Mrs. Big took Pee Wee with their group; they were not going to let him get out of their sight again. Ustabe, Mighty, Wanabe, Teeny, and Mini each went with separate groups. Mini didn't like that idea. She wanted to be near Squall, but Mrs. Big convinced her that preserving the memories for the group was more important, so she agreed to make the sacrifice, and off they all went in different directions. Beautiful *Puebla* was waiting to greet them.



Festival



Uncle *Tio* was busy telling his group about all of the fun activities there were to experience in *Pueblo*: “The African Safari Zoo, the Amparo Museum, and the pyramid of Cholula are just a few.” Then they came upon his favorite spot, the *Capilla Del Rosario*, (The Chapel of the Rosary). It was a huge church, which, when they entered, they discovered that it was more like a cathedral. It was richly decorated and it was full of paintings and woodcarvings of all of the different saints that the Mexican people honored. Solamae, Puppy, and Squall gasped at the splendor of it all; it was simply divine. Even Lupita was speechless!

They stared up at the high ceilings, painted in silver and gold, until their necks hurt and they marveled at how much care had been given to decorating this magnificent work of art. “It must have taken years to build this church,” Solamae exclaimed. “Yes, they began in the late 1500s,” Uncle *Tio* answered, “and there are many more throughout *Puebla* that are just as beautiful.” No one was in a hurry to leave, even with all of the excitement building up outside. They sat quietly for a long time, taking in the grandeur and reflecting upon the love that they imagined the Mexican people who built it must have had for this church. As they left, Squall said, “Me never bless me eyes on a ting so beautiful.”

The city was amazing; it was as big and as busy as New York. “But much cleaner,” Puppy exclaimed. *Puebla* was a modern city, in sharp contrast to the old world churches and structures that glorified it throughout. They passed several outdoor markets selling *Talavera Poblana* (their beautiful pottery) and then they turned onto *Calle de los Dulces* (Candy Street), which was lined with candy shops selling *dulces de camotes* (Mexican




candies made from yams). They were quite delicious! Solamae and Puppy immediately thought of Sissy's candies. They asked the candy shop owner for the recipe and they told him that they would add it to Sissy's recipe box. He said he would be honored to have the traditional Mexican candy included in Sissy's collection.

Energy and excitement filled the air. It had been building up all day, and now it was time to start the festivities. People were pouring into the streets wearing their colorful costumes, singing, and dancing. Everyone met up back at Uncle *Tio*'s taco stand just in time for the performance. Five beautiful Mexican ladies and five handsome Mexican men were on the stage; they were waiting for the music to begin. The men wore tailored suits that were embroidered with silver and big hats with brims as wide as flying saucers! The ladies wore long colorful skirts that sparkled in the sunlight. Their long black hair was braided with bright ribbons and when the music began they glided across the stage, singing about beautiful *Puebla*, smiling and twinkling like Christmas

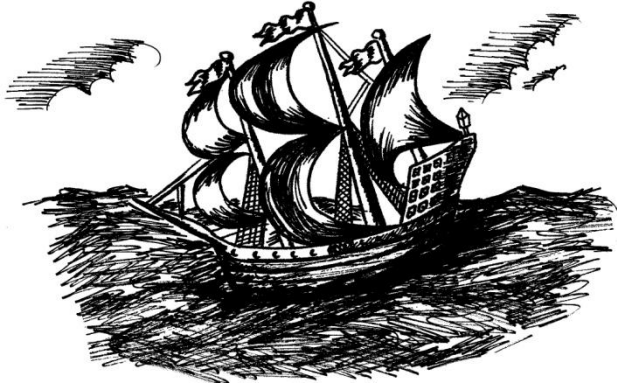
tree angels, each *señorita* with a handsome gentleman on her arm.

The dancers next performed The Mexican Hat Dance. It was just as joyous and colorful as the *Pueblo* dance. The gentlemen threw their hats onto the floor and each couple danced in a circle around the man's hat. The ladies waved their colorful skirts and flirted with the men until the end of the dance when they returned the hats to their partners' heads. The performance went on for hours; it was now getting close to dark and close to the time to head home. Everyone made a beeline to the vendors for some Mexican food to enjoy on the trip back.

It was all over, just that quickly. The day had come and gone like a movie played at high speed, but the memories would last forever. The *Tios* were wise when they separated into small groups, now the Bigs would have something to talk about and to share with one another on their long journeys. Their memories were as precious as diamonds for each one of them to cherish and to share.



Lucky Day



The ride home was quiet, except for an occasional “M-m-m-m” coming from the group as they devoured the Mexican delicacies they had purchased at the vendor’s stands before leaving *Pueblo*. Everything they ate was covered in *mole poblano*. They were full of delicious Mexican food and wonderful memories and they were tired from the whirlwind tour of *Pueblo*. Solamae, Puppy, and Squall were feeling a little sad to have to say goodbye to Lupita for the second time. It seemed that all of the Bigs now felt the same way; they had made so many new friends in such a short time that goodbye was a little difficult to bear for all of them. Lupita could sense

the sadness, so she spoke up: “It was my luckiest day when I met Solamae, Puppy, and Squall walking on the beach. I will never forget any of you.” They all replied in unison, “Us too!” Uncle *Tio* pulled away from the dock as the Bigs boarded the ship. Somehow, it was understood by all that they would be seeing one another again someday.

Things quickly returned to a normal routine. The next morning Squall was at his post on deck, Solamae and Puppino were out on the ship’s point where they had been since the ship sailed out of Acapulco Bay earlier that morning, and the Bigs were sleeping late. By lunchtime, they would know where the ship was heading and what they could expect at their next stopover; Squall would tell them about Captain Julian’s morning report. This meant that the Bigs didn’t have to spend so much time spying on the sailors in order to find out information about their course. They now had their own sailor to bring them the news straight from Captain Julian’s lips.

Things became a little rough on the ship when they reached the high seas. Solamae and Puppy decided to go



below and wait for Squall and for lunch. Mr. Big had that worried look on his face. The ship was already riding low in the water due to the extra cargo that had been loaded the previous day; how much more could it hold? Squall arrived and he put Mr. Big at ease; “Captain Julian say we goin’ to dock at the port of *Managua* in *Nicaragua* for one day.” That news made everybody excited. They were looking forward to more adventure and discovery. “We be loading some important passengers for da short trip to *Costa Rica*. We gonna drop off da passengers in *Costa Rica*, den we go back da same way we come, tru’ da Panama Canal, den we deliver da cargo an we bees on our way.”

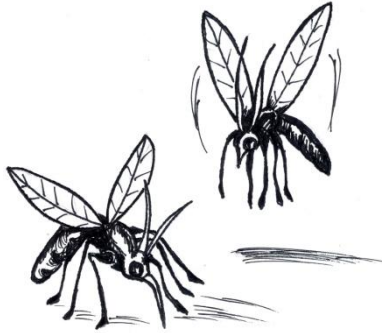
That news sat well with Mr. Big; a few more passengers couldn’t weigh very much. Anyway, it would only be for a short leg of the trip, they were only going to be on board until the ship docked in *Costa Rica*. According to Captain Julian, they would not be out of the sight of land or back on the high seas until after the passengers disembarked. Surely, everything would be

just fine. Captain Julian would never overload the ship, no matter how important these passengers were.

Now that Mr. Big was relaxed again, the little Bigs began planning to go ashore when they reached *Managua*. Solamae and Puppy returned to their favorite place on the ship, the bowsprit, to enjoy a day or two of sailing. Squall had promised to find out more about *Nicaragua*; he was proving to be a wonderful big brother to Solamae and Puppy and he was invaluable to the Bigs. Squall had worked his way into all of their hearts without even trying.



Volcanoes



Everyone gathered around Squall again that evening to hear all about the information he had gathered from Captain Julian's evening report and from what the sailors were saying that they could all look forward to discovering in *Nicaragua*. According to Captain Julian, there was an impressive chain of volcanoes that lined the western coast of *Nicaragua*. The port of *Managua* is situated right in the middle of the chain. Some of these volcanoes were still active and the thought of their spectacular eruptions frightened the Bigs.

Most of the scuttlebutt was about a festival that was going to be held on *Ometepe* (O-me-tep-e) Island, the very next day. *Ometepe* Island was situated in the

middle of Lake *Nicaragua* and it had two volcanoes on it. *Concepción* (Con-cep-ci-ón) is one of two volcanoes and it is active! The other is *Maderas* (Ma-der-as) but it is peaceful. They are known as the Twin Volcanoes. The site had been chosen to represent the Miskito Indian Tribe's long, unsuccessful struggle to maintain their land. The few Miskitos who remained in the Community Nation of *Moskitia* (Mo-ski-ti-a) would travel from their homes on the eastern coast of the country with their leader, *Wihta Tara* (The Great Judge).

The Miskitos were small, wiry people, like little mosquitoes, who had fought hard to keep their culture. They would pray to the forces of nature to help them maintain their land and to bring peace and prosperity to the Miskito Indian Tribe. Solamae and Puppy both said they would help the Miskitos pray, but the Bigs weren't so sure they wanted to get that close to an active volcano. They had come to love festivals though, and they decided to give the idea a second thought. Squall was busy telling the Bigs that volcanoes always give a lot of warning before they erupt when Solamae interrupted, "Come on,




and don't be afraid. You might not get another chance to see a volcano up close." Solamae had no idea how untrue her words would soon prove to be.

Puppino convinced the Bigs to come along, "I can teach you how to do the doggie paddle; I taught Solamae how to swim when we went out on the boat with Lupita. We can swim out to *Ometepe* Island and meet the little Miskitos!" Normally, the idea of swimming in a lake, especially one as big as Lake *Nicaragua*, would have been out of the question for the Bigs, but they were becoming more and more adventuresome now that Solamae had entered their lives. Squall suggested taking a life preserver along; the whole Big family could fit on it, just in case. Squall was a strong swimmer; he could deliver the whole family safely to the island to meet the little Miskitos.

What a comical sight they would be; Seven little Bigs, Mr. and Mrs. Big, and Puppino all sitting atop a life preserver that was being towed across the lake by Squall. The thought of it made them all laugh. It also comforted

The Little Mouse Solamae

them, and filled their heads with sweet dreams of little Miskitos all night long.



Smoke and Ash



Solamae and Puppy were again on the bowsprit before first light the next morning. The sun was rising as they approached the port of *Managua* where they could see a heavy mist covering the tops of the volcanoes like a thick, grey blanket. “This doesn’t look too good,” Solamae pondered. “It smells smokey,” Puppy noted with a worried tone. Just then, Squall called to them. He had finished his work and he was anxious to get started on the trip. “We bees ready to go soon.” He didn’t seem at all concerned. “Don’ worry none, dem volcanoes smolder an dems spew ash all da time.” “Let’s go below and prepare the Bigs so that they won’t be alarmed when they see the smoke,” Solamae suggested.

Everyone was scurrying about getting ready when the twosome arrived with the news. Mr. and Mrs. Big decided that Squall knew best; surely, he would warn them if there were any dangers. Besides, they didn't have the heart to disappoint the little Bigs with a sudden change of plans; they were all too excited about meeting the Miskitos. Most of them had overcome their fear of making new friends a long time ago, thanks to Solamae and Puppy.

As soon as the ship docked, they were off on their adventure, chattering along the way. Teeny and Wanabe were stuck together like glue; they had been the last to gain their confidence. Solamae wondered if they were having doubts. She walked along behind them, trying to hear what they were saying. Teeny asked Wanabe, "Do you think the Miskitos will like us?" Solamae caught up to them and answered for Wanabe, "Well, they have no reason not to; we are peaceful and friendly and we've come to help them." That almost reassured Teeny. "I guess so," he said, but he still sounded a little unsure. Solamae inquired further, "What do you think, Wanabe?"



She replied, “I guess so too.” But it was as though she were trying to convince herself.

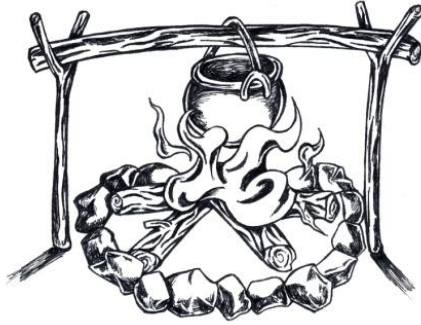
The time for worrying had passed. They arrived at the lake and now all of their attention had to be focused on learning to swim. Puppy put on quite a show for them and, little by little, they ventured further from the shore and closer to *Ometepe* Island. As they dried themselves in the warm sun that had burned the mist away, they could hear beautiful soft music and the strange sounds of the Miskito language. It was very much like when you click your tongue on the roof of your mouth.

Solamae looked over toward Teeny and Wanabe, who were huddled together in deep conversation. She thought they must be worrying again so she decided to go and talk to them some more about their fears. As she approached the twosome, she realized that they were actually talking with three children who had come to greet them. They were little Miskitos! “We are going to have lunch with the Miskito Tribe,” Teeny proudly announced. Wanabe called to Mr. and Mrs. Big, “The Miskitos have come to invite us to lunch!” Solamae

could tell how relieved and happy that made Teeny and Wanabe by the excitement in their voices. All their fears had simply melted away.



Miskitos



Solamae delivered the news to the three little Miskitos; Mr. and Mrs. Big had accepted their invitation to have lunch with them and the rest of the members of their tribe. With that, the bushes behind them exploded with laughing, cheering, and clapping little Miskitos. No one had noticed them hiding in the bushes before that moment; they had a way of blending right in. The three scouts had been sent out ahead of the group. Their mission was to find out whether the Bigs liked them or not. Wanabe echoed Solamae's words, "We have no reason not to like you." Teeny had to admit, "We were afraid that you wouldn't like us!" Both Wanabe and Teeny had finally learned that others can be just as worried about being accepted as they had been. Solamae

reminded them all that worrying about being accepted was just a big waste of time.

One of the three scouts asked, “Do you want to learn the Miskito game?” Everyone squealed with delight, “Yes, yes, Please.” It turned out that the game was the Miskito’s version of ‘Hide and Seek.’ The Miskitos would hide and it would be up to the Bigs to find them. Teeny spotted a skinny Miskito leg under a bush, but when he reached out to tag it, the agile little Miskito sprang up and landed in a nearby bush. His feet had barely touched down when he popped up again. With that, all of the other Miskitos began popping up and bouncing from bush to bush, just like little rubber balls. Their skinny little legs were like elastic bands. Their black hair and slanted eyes made them look just like mosquitoes flying through the air!

It was time for lunch and not even one of the little Miskitos had been tagged. Mr. and Mrs. Big had been assigned the job of judging the game; they declared the Miskitos the winners. What the Bigs didn’t know was that they would have to climb to the top of the



Concepción volcano where the elders of the Miskito tribe were holding a ceremony with their leader, The Great Judge *Wihta Tara*. They all followed the Miskitos, up, up, up, and when they had almost reached the top, it became too steep for them to climb any further. The Miskitos weren't having any trouble; their little rubbery legs allowed them to go straight up, even upside down! One of the scouts noticed that the Bigs were struggling and might not make it to the top, "Don't worry, there is a handrail you can hold on to, it was built for the tourists who visit the volcano; look over there." He pointed in the direction of the railing and the Bigs scurried straight the top with no trouble at all; they were all so hungry and no one wanted to miss lunch.

On the plateau it was still and quiet. The Miskito tribe had formed a circle of prayer. The Great Judge *Wihta Tara* was in the center of the circle. He invited Mr. Big to join him in the circle. This was very different from anything the Bigs had ever experienced, but they had learned to try new things from Solamae. Mr. Big approached The Great Judge *Wihta Tara* and said, "We

are here to help you pray for your land.” The Great Judge bowed his head and then he spoke his prayer in the native language of the Miskitos. The Bigs each prayed their own prayer so that the Miskitos might maintain a foothold on their land. Then there came an unexpected surprise. The Great Judge *Wihta Tara* invited the entire Big family, including Solamae, Puppino, and Squall, into the center of the circle and the whole Miskito tribe prayed for them!

After that, they ate the most delicious foods, which were prepared and served by the Miskitos. They were not able to identify what they were eating, but it didn’t matter, it was delicious just the same. At the end of the day, Mr. Big thanked Solamae for coming into their lives and for showing them how to experience new things. “The world has opened up to us ever since we met you, Solamae.”

The Miskitos followed the Bigs down to the shoreline and waved goodbye to them until they were safely back on the other side of the lake. Squall reminded them to hurry, “Da ship be leaving da dock at dusk.” He



didn't want to miss Captain Julian's evening report; he was hoping to discover who those important passengers were going to be.

Mercy of the Sea



As soon as they boarded the ship, Squall left for Captain Julian's evening report. Solamae and Puppy followed him; they were anxious for news about the new passengers. A porthole had been left open and they could hear Captain Julian warning the crew members to take extra care of Professor Frumpstern and Professor Zieghead, the two important passengers who were now in their care. "We must deliver them to *Costa Rica* safely so that they may continue their important work," Captain Julian informed the crew. "They are both scientists who are traveling around the world on a research expedition."

Solamae peered into the porthole; she was trying to get a firsthand look at the odd couple. Professor



Frumpstern appeared to be very stern, just as his name implied. His clothes were all wrinkled and frumpy, as though he had traveled around the world wearing them. Professor Zieghead appeared to be a little dizzy-headed. He was always fidgeting, as though he were looking for something. “Where are my glasses?” Professor Frumpstern answered him impatiently, “They’re right there on the top of your head, where they always are!”

“Hummmm,” Solamae muttered, “It’s going to be difficult to keep these two out of trouble!” At that moment, Solamae could not imagine how much trouble the odd couple of professors would keep her and the Bigs out of, or how important they would become on this journey. She and Puppy rushed back to tell the Bigs what they had heard and seen and to wait for Squall to bring the rest of the news about their supposedly short journey. But Squall did not return. Instead, he remained on the deck of the ship, preparing for an early departure. Captain Julian had made a last minute change in his plans because of an approaching storm. He thought it might be

best to leave port while it was still light in order to get through the deep channel before the storm arrived.

They were just pulling away from the dock when Solamae and Puppy finally found Squall. He told them the rest of the news about the last minute change, so they could go and tell the Bigs. He was not so sure that Captain Julian had made a wise choice in trying to outrun the storm; the memories of his two near mishaps were still fresh in his mind. He was anxious to hear what Mr. Big thought about it. But Mr. Big did not share Squall's concern; instead, he was relieved. He was thinking only about the fact that they were already overloaded with cargo. "Two passengers couldn't possibly weigh that much more."

They lumbered away from *Managua*, riding dangerously low in the water. It wouldn't take much for the waves to come crashing over the deck if the sea got rough. Squall had a bad feeling about this supposedly "short journey," and it wasn't long before his fears became a reality. They had reached the deep channel. The crew had just finished raising all the canvas to full



sail. It was the captain's orders, as he was trying to gain speed. Suddenly, a strong gust of wind caught the mainsail and snapped the mast off! The mast and mainsail came tumbling down and landed on the deck, tearing the sail to shreds along the way. The panicked crew scurried around, trying to contain the sail before it blew overboard. What they didn't know was that the force had also snapped the tiller completely off! It was now resting on ocean floor.

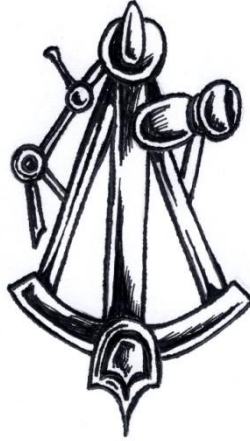
"All hands on deck! All hands on deck!" came blaring over the loudspeaker. The Bigs thought that must mean them too, so they immediately went up on the deck of the ship, but it was rocking back and forth out of control and they were in the middle of a flurry of commotion. Huge surges of water washed over the deck each time a wave broke. Mr. Big shouted, "Go below, we can't afford to take a chance on you being washed overboard."

Captain Julian was at the helm. He was trying unsuccessfully to get the ship under control, but he could not steer it without the tiller. The wind and sea had

declared mutiny on his ship. They were destined to ride out the storm aimlessly. There was no way to predict the direction the ship would be blown or where the treacherous waves would carry them. Squall was worried about Solamae and Puppy; he tried to get them to go below with the Bigs where they would be safe. “Nooooo, we want to help,” shouted Solamae. Squall pleaded with them, “Please go. Nothin’ nobody can do now but hold on. We is at da mercy of da sea!”



The Storm



Everyone huddled below as the ship was tossed about by the angry sea all night. There hadn't been time to batten down before the storm caught up to them and rendered their ship useless. They were under attack! Squall was correct; all anyone could do now was to hold on. The most they could do was to attempt to capture things as they flew off the shelves and try, somehow, to secure them. They worried about Squall who had remained on deck. As always, he was living up to his reputation as a devoted crew member. They feared for Captain Julian and all of the other sailors who had now

been in danger for so many hours. Solamae and Puppy were commenting on the two professors who had been taken aboard in *Nicaragua*, “What must they be thinking right about now?” Solamae wondered aloud. They did not appear to be seasoned sailors like Solamae and her friends were.

Conditions grew worse as the storm continued its assault on their ship. Captain Julian had to lighten the load in order to prevent the ship from broaching and tumbling everyone on board into the sea. He ordered the crew to throw the cargo of food overboard. He had hoped to preserve it, but the hungry sea was destined to be their uninvited dinner guest this night. The storm had seized them and had unleashed its fury upon them. It had pillaged and plundered their goods and supplies. The storm gradually passed, leaving them wrung out and struggling for survival. No one on board had gotten any sleep. They were tired and they were still in big trouble.

Suddenly, there was a loud creaking, grinding sound coming from below. The ship lurched and came to a dead stop in the water. It listed toward the starboard



side, then to port, and came to its final rest tilted slightly on its left side. The ship had run aground! As morning approached and provided some light, Mr. Big announced that they could all go up on deck to check on the crew and to survey the damage. Solamae and Puppy were the first to reach the deck of the ship and what they saw left them both speechless.

The sun was burning a hole in the dark, still stormy sky, but the mist hadn't lifted and it gave everything a ghostly appearance. The deck was littered with food and debris as was the sea surrounding the disabled ship, which was now stuck in the middle of nowhere. Birds, seals, and all sorts of sea life were arriving to devour the tasty samples that littered the waters around the ship. Squall and the crew looked disoriented and bewildered, but otherwise okay. Everyone was on deck and accounted for, except for the two professors. They hadn't been heard from since the storm began.

Captain Julian ordered an immediate search of the entire ship. He wasn't about to be known as the captain

who had lost any of his passengers. Besides, he would need their help in order to identify the land masses he had spotted with his binoculars. It appeared as though they had landed on an uninhabited planet! Professor Frumpstern was promptly located. He was sitting at his desk in his stateroom, where he had spent the entire storm hard at work. He had been working with his sextant and reading the stars that were visible from his porthole. He had discovered the location of the ship and was just about to announce it when the crew brought him on deck. Professor Frumpstern proudly announced, "We are at Latitude 0° and Longitude 90° west!" Captain Julian was not impressed, "Perhaps you can use that sextant to locate your traveling companion, Professor Zieghead?"

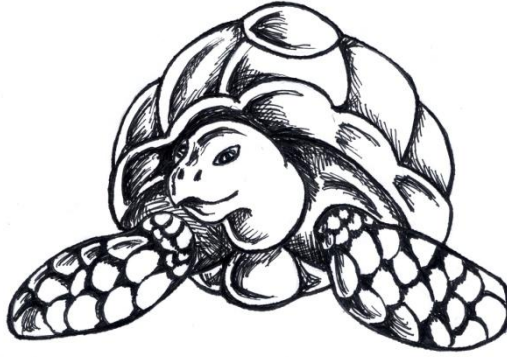
"Better yet, I can take you to him; he has been crawling around on his hands and knees looking for his glasses for hours. He thinks that they flew off of his head in the storm, but they're right there on the top of his head, where they always are!" Professor Frumpstern had been too preoccupied with his own important task to be



concerned about Professor Zieghead's constant waste of time looking for something that was right in front of him. Well, right on top of him, anyway.

This reminded Solamae of her first impression of the scientists, "I knew it would be difficult to keep these two out of trouble." She and Puppy had a good laugh and that helped to lift their spirits as well as to lighten the gravity of their dilemma. Now, it would be up to Captain Julian to try to get them out of the mess they were in and to come up with a solid plan for their survival.

The Meeting



Now that everyone had been accounted for, Captain Julian called a meeting. He wasn't sure what his plan of action should be; he was afraid that the situation was hopeless. He invited the two professors to attend the meeting hoping that something in their scientific backgrounds would help him solve the many problems they were all now facing. Once again, Solamae and Puppy followed Squall to the meeting. They peeked into the porthole to watch and listen to what was going on. Captain Julian requested that the professors offer any suggestions that they could think of to help get them out of their predicament. "Our ship is aground, our mast and



mainsail are useless; we have no rudder, and no way of getting the supplies that we need to fix everything. We don't even know where we are!"

Professor Frumpstern gasped, "What do you mean? I already told you exactly where we are. As I said before, we are at Latitude 0° and Longitude 90° west." Responding to the calculations that Professor Frumpstern had so laboriously made, Professor Zieghead snipped, "That would put us in the middle of the *Galapagos* Islands." He could be such a know-it-all at times. He loved nothing better than to show off his knowledge. Solamae thought that he looked comical with his glasses perched there on the tip of his nose. He went on to scold Captain Julian, "I would say that you have broken the law, my good Captain." Squall tried his best to defend Captain Julian, "Dis bees an accident, professor! Captain don' mean to break no laws. What laws you talkin' 'bout an-a-ways?"

"These are no ordinary islands," Professor Zieghead explained. "They are home to some of the strangest life imaginable; creatures found nowhere else

on earth. There are over five hundred species of fish that dwell in the sea along with garden eels, marine iguanas, sea lions, seals, and whales. These islands are home to giant tortoises, land iguanas, and millions of different birds, and they are all protected, which means it is illegal to feed them!” This time Captain Julian defended himself, “But, I didn’t intend to feed the wildlife; I was only trying to save our lives!”

Professor Frumpstern interrupted; he could see how upset the captain was becoming at being accused of breaking the law. It was apparent to him that this captain had meant no harm; he was not one of the bandit pirates who had plundered these islands, hunted the tortoises, and harvested whales in the past. “I think it might be time for a geography lesson. Let’s gather everyone on deck and we will begin with the history of the *Galapagos* Islands. Then we can make a plan for the best way to proceed.”

Solamae was happy to hear about the lesson; she wanted to understand where they were and what was happening. “Let’s go tell the Bigs to come back up on



deck to hear Frumpy and Ziggy's lesson." Puppy and Solamae laughed at the new names Solamae had made up for the professors. On the way to the Bigs, they noticed that the sky was blue, the clouds were gone, and the sun had burned away the mist. They could make out land masses in the distance, "Where in the Sam Hill are we?" Solamae exclaimed. "I think we did land on another planet!"

The Galapagos



Once everyone was gathered on the deck of the ship, Ziggy began with the history of the islands. “If we are to be successful, it is important to understand how these islands came to be situated in the middle of the Pacific Ocean.” He explained that the islands had been formed by volcanoes in prehistoric times. “This is a volcanic hot spot that is ever-changing and growing. The smoldering volcanic rock is constantly simmering below the ocean. When the pressure gets too much, they can explode, spewing a river of red hot lava as much as seven miles high.” The Bigs trembled at the thought of it, but it was hard to be scared when Ziggy looked so funny with his glasses perched on the tip of his nose. He was



holding his nose up to keep them from falling off and this made him appear to be a little snobbish.

Frumpy consoled them once again, “Don’t worry; I think we are near the island of *Isabella*.” He passed around Captain Julian’s binoculars, “Look, it is shaped like a seahorse; it must be *Isabella*, which is located on the southern tip of the archipelago.” Everyone asked in unison, “The What?” Frumpy answered simply, “A large group of islands. This chain of islands was discovered by the Spaniards when they ran aground here in 1535 A.D. Strong currents took hold of their ship just it did ours. The Spaniards called them ‘the Islands of the Tortoises.’”

Ziggy took over again, explaining to the worried crew that the actual hot spot, the source of the eruptions, was located much farther north. *Fernandina* Island is the youngest and the closest island to the hot spot. It was formed 30,000 years ago. This island, *Isabella*, was formed about one million years ago.” “Wow!” everyone exclaimed at the same time. “That’s nothing; *Espinosa* Island is three and a half million years old! It is the oldest island in the chain. *Espinosa* is located the farthest south

of the hot spot. It is actually dying, but new islands are constantly being formed. The islands move about one to two inches a year in a southeasterly direction, changing as they go along.”

Frumpy added, “There are four currents, both hot and cold, that cross the equator and provide a home to bizarre, supernatural creatures that live in the sea. These creatures look like glass sculptures that are seemingly lit by neon beacons of color.” With that, Solamae noted, “I knew we were on another planet!” Everyone felt better after having a good laugh at Solamae’s comment, and that helped to calm their fears.

Frumpy cleared his throat; he was trying to get everyone’s attention back on his history lesson. “The storm has taken us 600 miles away from the coast of South America to this chain of over 100 islands of all shapes and all sizes. But, let us start right here where we landed. *Isabella* Island is green with vegetation and home to a family of 5000 of the largest tortoises in the world, some weighing as much as 550 pounds! They live for about 150 years and they can survive for months without



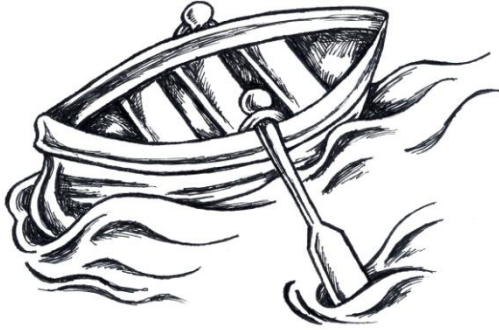
water. They have an unspoken agreement with the little finches on the island. The tortoises rise up allowing the birds to remove skin parasites on their bellies. It's a symbiotic relationship." The entire crew responded at once, "A What?" It pleased Frumpy to see that they were paying attention, "A sym-bi-ot-ic relationship is one that is of benefit to both parties. In this case, the tortoise gets his skin cleaned and the finch gets to eat her supper."

Captain Julian was growing impatient with Professor Frumpstern's lecture. "How is this history lesson going to help us survive?" Frumpy appeared disappointed at Captain Julian's unconcern. "Well, my good man, first you must learn what each island can provide, and then you will know where to travel to get what you need." Captain Julian was becoming annoyed, "Travel? In case you haven't noticed, professor, we're not going anywhere. We are stuck on a reef!" Frumpy continued right on with his lesson. "I suggest that you form several scouting expeditions made up of your crewmen, as many expeditions as you have lifeboats to accommodate. As I told you earlier, *Isabella* is green

with vegetation; that means you will find wood there. From that wood, you can fashion a new rudder, but water is scarce there, so you will have to send the men south to the island of *Santa Cruz*. It is teeming with life and fresh water pools. The rest, you will learn as you go.”



Expeditions



Captain Julian wasted no time assigning tasks to the crew. There were to be five crewmembers to a lifeboat for each expedition going ashore, except for Squall. He would go south to *Santa Cruz* on his own. Captain Julian knew that he could depend on Squall; he was strong and brave. He could row the lifeboat all the way to *Santa Cruz* with no trouble at all and he would arrive there with plenty of energy left to carry the barrels of fresh water that he would fill on the island and then row them all the way back to the ship. Squall could be trusted to return to the ship with a boatful of life-saving drinking water.

The others were assigned to gather whatever food and wood they could find on *Isabella* Island. Those who remained on the ship would begin repairing the mainsail and would fish from the deck of the ship. It appeared that all of the food that had been dumped overboard was now proving to be fine fish bait. It had coaxed delicious looking snapper and grouper close enough to the deck to be scooped up with a net by the hungry crewmen.

In the meantime, Mr. Big had called his own meeting. He and Solamae, Puppy, Pee Wee, Mini, Mighty, and Teeny would go with Squall. They wouldn't take up much room in the lifeboat and they could help scout out the water source for Squall once they reached *Santa Cruz*. Ustabe and Wanabe would stay onboard to help Mrs. Big with the cleanup and to try to salvage enough ingredients for a batch of Joe Frogger cookies.

Just then, Captain Julian blew the whistle and everyone scattered in different directions to begin their assigned missions. Ziggy and Frumpy had succeeded in returning a sense of unity and purpose to the crew. Everyone was determined to find a way out of the



predicament that they were in; they no longer felt lost and hopeless. They were certain to recover under the direction of Captain Julian and the two professors.

By noon, Squall and the Bigs were in sight of *Santa Cruz* Island. As they approached the island, they spotted about five hundred pink flamingos darting away from the shore. “Dems from da Caribbean, where I lives,” Squall proudly announced to the group. The sun was bearing down on them, and they were hot and thirsty like never before. Squall instructed them to whistle if they located fresh water and to “keep whistling until everyone reaches you. The first thing we all need is a good long drink of cool fresh water.”

Each team would take a different section of the island and begin searching for water. Mini wanted to stay with Squall; she was pretending to be delicate and she whimpered in an unconvincing voice, “Oh, I am wilting.” Everyone knew that she just wanted to flirt with Squall. She whispered to Solamae, “I hope I can be the first one to find water for Squall,” she sighed while batting her eyelashes and smiling coyly. “You very well might be,”

Solamae responded. She thought it would be a good idea to give Mini some encouragement. Solamae knew that the more Mini could accomplish, the less attention she would need in the future.

After two hours of scouting, no fresh water had been located. The teams had occasionally crossed paths with one another, but they were all too tired and too thirsty to waste words. Instead, they just listened intently for the whistle signaling that water had been found. *Santa Cruz* was swallowed up by forests and giant cactus which provided homes for hawks. They searched the brush and in between the trees, next to rocks, and low places on the ground-anywhere that there might be a trickle of water.

Suddenly, Puppy lifted her head and quickly wiggled her nose back and forth. She and Solamae had teamed up earlier. “Solamae, I’m sure that if we go that way,” and she pointed to a big hill with her nose, “we will find a waterfall. I can hear it and I can smell the mist.” Just then, Squall and Mini passed them; Solamae winked at Mini and pointed to the hill. Mini grabbed Squall’s hand, “Come this way, Squall.” She tugged at



him insistently. “I’m sure, I’m sure!” she added, excited at the thought of becoming a hero in his eyes.

Solamae and Puppy stayed a good distance behind Squall and Mini as they headed for the hill. They were sure that they would soon hear the welcome, long awaited whistle announcing the location of the life-saving water. Squall blew on his whistle before taking his first drink. It was only a minute or two before everyone appeared at the waterfall and had their first delicious drink. They gathered under the waterfall for a cool refreshing shower before filling the barrels and heading back to the ship and to their thirsty captain and crewmates. It was Puppy’s good nose that found the water, but it was Mini who got all the credit, and that day she received all the attention that she needed.

A New Day



It was near dark when Squall, Solamae, Puppy and the Bigs arrived back at the ship. The day was almost over, and a new day would soon be dawning. The crew gave a loud cheer for Squall when they spotted the lifeboat full of water that he was bringing to them. They immediately escorted him to the galley where the cook had prepared snapper and grouper fillets for him and the crew to enjoy. Squall brought some fish back to the Bigs, but they had already devoured their own feast-a freshly baked batch of Joe Froggers. For the remainder of the evening, no one mentioned the fact that they were still



stuck on a reef. It was just nice to rest and relax for a while.

The next morning brought another planning meeting. The two professors had some new information to share. “Every three to ten years *El Nino* brings tropical downpours to the islands,” Ziggy informed the captain and crew. “According to the calculations we have made, the rainy season will soon be upon us. The ship will float off the reef, unassisted, as the tide rises.” It was urgent that they get the mast repaired and fashion a new rudder from the wood they had gathered on *Isabella* Island the previous day. Otherwise, they would again find themselves aimlessly adrift and in danger of running aground. They had been lucky not to suffer any damage to the hull of the ship, but they could not count on their luck to hold out if they should run aground again.

According to Frumpy, “The islands will burst with color when the rainy season arrives. Cactus pads will flush with golden yellow blooms.” Ziggy told them about the naturalist, Charles Darwin, who discovered this constantly changing physical world in 1835, when he was

just twenty-six years of age. “The young Darwin had foraged deep into the enchanted forests and collected and preserved everything possible. From this, he decided that the *Galapagos* Islands were a Garden of Eden.” It was the mockingbirds that had enlightened Darwin to the ever-changing islands. From island to island new life was being made. “It was here that Darwin caught his first glimpse of the evolution of life. He later formulated the theory of the “Origin of Species,” noting that different species developed the physical characteristics necessary for their survival as their environments changed. Many have evolved into very different creatures than they were originally.”

Frumpy described how the little finches began to use tiny branches as tools for probing insects and grubs out of the tree branches. Phoenix-like flightless cormorants with scruffy wings now hunt below the ocean. They cannot fly, so they bring seaweed to their nests. Dark-rumped Petrels nest in the cracks of dried lava where short-eared owls and frigate birds wait for them to leave their nest in search of food, only to become



food themselves. Red-throated male frigate birds inflate the pouches under their necks to attract the females. They let the females rest their heads on these soft red pillows.

Everyone was captivated by the stories that Frumpy and Ziggy shared with them. When the Captain blew his whistle, signaling the start of the workday, Solamae, Puppy, the Bigs, and the entire crew groaned; they didn't want the stories to end. "Today we must get an early start," Captain Julian firmly stated, "we have serious business to attend to. Squall, I need you to row all the way to *Espanola* Island on the southern tip of the *Galapagos*. I need the rest of the crew to remain on deck to work on repairing the mast and mainsail and to begin building the new rudder. We must complete those tasks before the rains come and release us from the reef."

Squall immediately readied the lifeboat. He stocked it with some fish for lunch and enough water for the trip to *Espanola* and back; he could not count on finding fresh water on the island. Squall wasn't sure what to expect when he got there as Ziggy and Frumpy had not gotten that far along with their lesson when Captain

Julian had interrupted them. The Bigs were already on board the lifeboat with their Joe Froggers. There was nothing they could do to help with the tasks on the ship that day and they were sure that Squall would need their assistance with whatever he was to encounter on *Espanola* Island.



Espanola



It was intended to be an outing, an adventure, a family day spent off the ship. The entire Big family was eagerly heading for new and exciting discoveries. The only instruction Squall had received from Captain Julian was to “collect as many eggs as you can gather up and bring them back to the ship by nightfall.” That shouldn’t be too hard, everyone agreed. They were all relaxed; they spent most of the trip singing the Mexican folksongs that they had learned from Lupita. Mrs. Big was settled under her parasol trying to protect her fair skin from the hot sun. The others were already quite tan and didn’t have to worry about getting sunburned.

Squall caught a glimpse of *Espanola* off in the distance and he remarked about the beautiful beaches he saw there. As they grew closer to the island Solamae exclaimed, "I see some poppers! They are riding the waves, skipping and jumping playfully to the shore. Look everybody; see how they sneeze the extra salt water out of their noses." Squall quickly corrected her, "Dems not poppers, dems sea lions." The beach was lined with them and their pups, newborn babies all comfy in their soft beach homes. Several beach master males stood guard, ready to fend off any intruder, while the young surfers frolicked in the waves. "We best go a lil' more south," Squall observed, "don' wan start no trouble wit dem big boys."

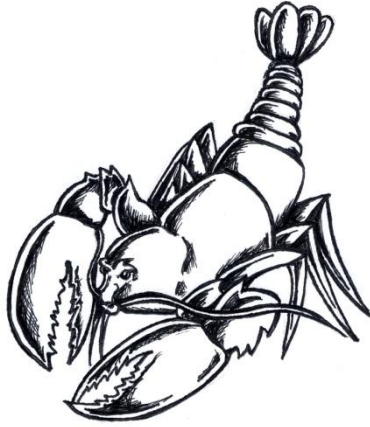
They quietly motored around the tip of the island, searching for a place to beach the boat. Suddenly, they came under attack! Thousands of giant Waved Albatrosses that had been mating on the island were now giving Squall and his party of intruders fair warning; "Go away or we will carry you out!" The Albatrosses were majestic in flight; they had seven-foot wingspans with



delicate patterns like tiny needlepoint stitches on their feathers. The sky was dark with huge birds ready to defend their eggs. The carefree mood the group had enjoyed on the trip south quickly changed; they would have to come up with a safer plan to invade the beach and collect the eggs to take back to the ship.

Puppy thought she had such a plan; “If we beach the boat just a little farther south, out of the bird’s sight, they will believe that they have scared us away. We can make a decoy out of palm fronds and float it back to their beach. While the birds are busy trying to chase away the decoy, we can gather some eggs from their nests. They will never know we are there.” Everyone thought that was brilliant! “Let’s get to work,” they all agreed. The plan worked so perfectly that they repeated it several times without fail. By that afternoon, they had collected a boatload of eggs and were heading back to the ship. What they could not have foreseen was the trouble they would find themselves in when they arrived there.

Honor



Frumpy and Ziggy were pacing the deck of the ship when Squall and his crew arrived. The two professors were not pleased with what they saw on the lifeboat. They were demanding some answers even before Squall could unload his cargo of eggs. Ziggy asked, “What did these birds look like? What did you notice about them?” Frumpy commanded, “Tell us everything you remember.” Squall described the delicate pattern on the wings of the birds, their huge size, and how they tried to defend their nests against him when he first arrived on *Espanola* Island. Then he remembered



something strange; “Dem birds made a clackin’ sound wit dem’s beaks, like lil’ kisses.”

“Do you know what you have done, young man?” Frumpy was beside himself with worry. Ziggy was angry; he scolded Squall, “Go and fetch Captain Julian, you are in big trouble, young man!” Solamae, Puppy, and the Bigs were listening to every word. They were worried that Squall was going to lose his job, but they still didn’t understand why or what he was being accused of. Captain Julian immediately came to Squall’s defense when he arrived, “I ordered Squall to collect those eggs, now what is the problem?”

Ziggy reminded the captain that he had already broken the law once by feeding the wildlife, “This time you have committed an even graver crime!” Squall felt that he had a duty to defend his captain, “Capin’ Julian a good mon, he don’ commits no crime. I takes da eggs, not Capin’ Julian.” Frumpy tried to settle everyone down by calmly explaining some facts. “The Giant Waved Albatross, the true owners of the eggs, are a protected species. They mate for life and they can live for

approximately fifty years. They can spend as long as six months in the air.” Pee Wee was astonished. He whispered amongst the others about the bird’s unbelievable ability to fly for six months! Frumpy went on, “The clacking sound you heard, young man, marks their mating ritual. There are twelve-thousand breeding pairs of albatrosses residing on *Espanola* Island. It takes both parents to incubate their single egg until it hatches after two months. Furthermore, each pair only produces one egg per year!”

Captain Julian had had enough of the professor’s accusations, “If there are twelve thousand of them they won’t miss the few eggs that we need for our own survival. I refuse to let my crewmen starve.” Just then, a squall blew in bringing a hard rain and a strong wind along with it. They would have to think fast now and quickly attend to the ship. There was no more time to consider right from wrong. Ready or not, the rainy season was upon them.

The crew rushed around, each one attempting to complete his assigned task before the ship drifted off of



the reef and out to sea. It rained hard for the next two days, hampering the crew's progress on the mast. The mainsail was patched up and ready to be hoisted up the mast as soon as it was readied. Squall attached the new rudder. He wasn't going to let a little rain stop him from getting into the water; he figured that, either way, he was wet. Captain Julian instructed Squall to go ahead and set an anchor while he was in the water just in case the tide rose. After he attached the rudder, and set the anchor, he brought up enough lobsters for the captain, the entire crew, and the two professors to enjoy!

During the crew's dinner, Captain Julian made a speech honoring the crew for all their hard work. He toasted Professor Zieghead and Professor Frumpstern, giving them all the credit for calculating the whereabouts of the ship and honoring them for working out such a solid survival plan. Squall received special mention for the duties that he had tirelessly carried out. In turn, both of the professors toasted Captain Julian, expressing their admiration for him and honoring him for his determination and for his talent as a fine captain. There

were no more accusations about right or wrong. The two professors made no comment about the wildlife being protected; they could not deny that the delicious lobster omelets they were now enjoying were a big part of the reason they had survived. So far, they had been able to adjust their attitudes to the rigorous conditions that they found in their new environment. Only time would tell if the two scientists were up to the challenge of becoming good sailors.



Dilemma



Once the dinner and toasting was finished, Squall delivered some lobster and some of the contraband eggs to Mrs. Big. “Oh, thank you Squall, I will be able to get several batches of Joe Froggers from just one of these huge eggs. This will be enough to last us until we reach the next port.”

Solamae had been asking Mrs. Big about her parents on a daily basis. Maybe she could get word to them in time to meet Solamae at the next port. “Will you please try to find out where we will be heading once we get the ship back in shape? I would like to be able to reassure Solamae.”

Squall promised to find out what Captain Julian's plans were at the next meeting in the morning, but he had his own idea as well. "Me thinks we be go'in back east to deliver dems professors to *Costa Rica*. Me don' know what Captain gon' do den, we got no cargo left to deliver. Must be gon' pick up more cargo some 'ers." Mrs. Big agreed about the Captain most likely heading straight to *Costa Rica* to drop off the professors, but she didn't think there would be time to get that message to Solamae's parents before they arrived there.

"Squall?" Something had caught Mrs. Big's attention, "Squall, do you feel that? I think the ship is moving!" Squall ran back up to the deck of the ship where he discovered the captain and the rest of the crew attempting to get the ship under control. The knot that had been used to tie the anchor line to the deck of the ship had come loose. At the same time, the tide had risen enough to allow the ship to float off the reef. They were free, but they weren't ready. The mainsail was still below. Captain Julian was trying to sail the ship with only the new rudder to rely on. He instructed the crew to



hoist the smaller sails instead of attempting to make the final repair of the mast. They could complete the repair more easily with the morning light. For now, they could limp along using the little wind the smaller sails could capture. Their anchor was left behind on the reef, so they had to keep moving toward the open sea to avoid running aground again.

While it seemed a little grim on deck, there was a party going on below. Solamae was at the center of everyone's attention. They would find out what the Captain's plans were in the morning, but it was clear that she was finally going to have the opportunity to see her parents again. The celebration continued into the night for Solamae and the Bigs. "I'm so happy," She was heard to exclaim, over and over again.

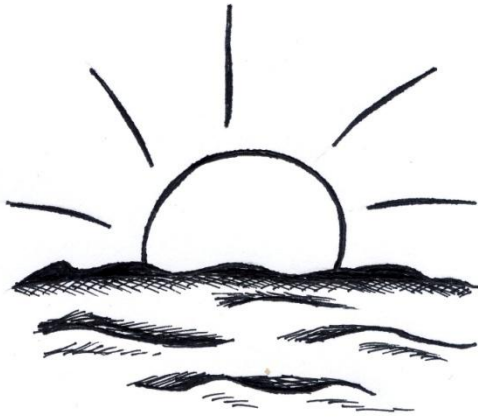
Solamae and Puppy made their way out to the bowsprit before first light the next morning. The ship had sailed toward the east all night, but it was moving so slowly that they could still make out the *Galapagos* Islands in the distance behind them. Squall joined them for a while. The ship was heading directly into the bright

sunrise. “I feel like a new chapter in my life is about to begin,” Solamae murmured.

Squall told Solamae about Mrs. Big’s plan to try to get word to her parents so that they could meet her at the next port. “Squall, do you think my parents will let me continue my new life as a sailor?” Solamae reminisced about all of the adventures she had had ever since she was hurried out of the palace over one year ago. She wanted to return to the palace, but she also wanted to see all of her new friends again. She sorely missed her parents, but at the same time, she missed the friends that she had made over the past year. Maybe Mrs. Big would know the right thing to do about her dilemma. For now, it was time for the meeting to begin. The results of this meeting could very easily determine her fate for her.



Change



The two professors were just leaving the captain's quarters when Squall arrived for the meeting. Solamae and Puppy were peering through the porthole, eager for any hint of a plan. They noticed how happy Ziggy and Frumpy seemed as they shook hands with Captain Julian just before leaving. What was going on? Was there a change in plans? Were they sealing some sort of a deal?

Captain Julian instructed the crew to drop the small sails that had carried them away from land. "We are far enough out to sea and in no danger of running aground again. We can drift with the current while you

complete the repair of the mast and hoist the mainsail. The current is strong today; we must work fast! Hopefully, we won't drift too far south of *Costa Rica*." The meeting ended without uncovering much else about the Captain's intentions beyond the next stop. It was obvious that they were going to *Costa Rica*, just as everyone had predicted, but what then?

Solamae had a strange feeling that somehow, deep down, she already knew what was to come. She had a hazy memory of a dream from the night before. She felt that she had to return to the bowsprit, alone, and just stay put there until it revealed itself to her. Puppy didn't like being separated from Solamae; she had been by Solamae's side since the day they had met. She stayed close enough to keep a watchful eye on Solamae, but far enough behind her to give her the privacy that she had requested.


Solamae made her way out to the bowsprit to try to clear her head and make room for her dream to reappear. Suddenly, she remembered that she had dreamed about a little sea bird the night before. The little sea bird told her



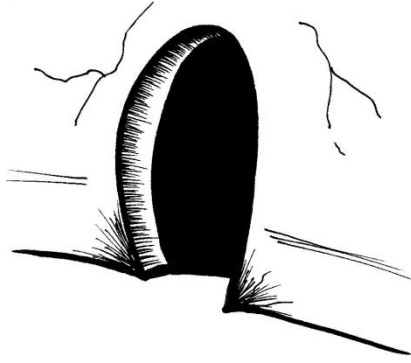
that “news will be delivered on the left leg.” The little bird added, “Some of the news will be good, but there is also bad news on the way.” Solamae was so anxious for news about her parents that any news, good or bad, would be better than no news at all.

Solamae was dismayed; she couldn’t decide if she should look to the left or to the right. She was struggling to figure out what her dream meant when the little sea bird from last night’s dream landed on her shoulder. It was standing on one leg, its right leg! The little bird was holding its left leg up to Solamae, “Did you hurt your leg, little bird?” Solamae said, “Let me see it.” While examining the little bird’s leg, Solamae notice that it had paper, like a splint, wrapped all the way around it. The paper was tied with a piece of red thread. The bird kept showing its left leg to Solamae as though it wanted her to remove the splint. “Okay, I’ll help you take it off.” Solamae pulled the string and grabbed hold of the paper before it blew into the sea. With that one motion, the little sea bird flew away and Solamae remembered her dream; “News will be delivered on the left leg.”

She ran to find the Bigs, clutching tightly in her hand what she hoped would be news about her parents. Just then, the mainsail was raised and it filled with an easterly breeze. “Coming about,” Captain Julian shouted as the ship veered to the left. “Full speed ahead,” he ordered. And just like that, they were heading straight for *Costa Rica*. Soon, Solamae would solve the mystery of her parents’ whereabouts. Or so she hoped...



A Mouse's House



The note was from Solamae's Aunt Irish. Buddy's friend from the docks in New York had visited her at her brownstone after she had returned from her trip. Buddy's friend told Aunt Irish that Solamae had been there looking for her earlier that month and that she left on a cargo ship. She was heading for the Caribbean Sea, supposedly to meet her parents. He helped Aunt Irish trace the route that the cargo ship was supposed to be taking. They decided that Aunt Irish might be able to get to *Costa Rica* in time to meet Solamae's ship during the stop that had been scheduled in order to drop off the two professors.

Aunt Irish then traveled to *Costa Rica* and waited there to meet Solamae's ship. She wanted to bring Solamae back to New York to live with her until Solamae could return to her home in the palace. She left *Costa Rica* fearing the worst when the ship mysteriously disappeared in the storm, but not before writing a note and sending it out to sea attached to the little bird's leg. She was hoping that the little sea bird could find Solamae's ship, wherever it was, and deliver the news to her.

The note explained everything that had happened. It turned out that Solamae's parents had not been there to meet her at the port in the Caribbean as they had promised in their previous letter. It was not the hurricane that had prevented them from being there; it was what was going on at the palace back home. The king and queen from a nearby country had carried out a *coup d'état* (a struggle for power) over the palace and the entire kingdom. For a while, it seemed as though their attempt was going to be successful. Their armies had overthrown the monarchy and they had moved into the



palace with all of their heirs. Then, the queen decided to have all the palace mice exterminated! She was very mean and she didn't want to share anything she had, not even a crumb of food. Although she would never admit it, she was secretly terrified of mice.

Solamae's parents went into hiding. They knew that they would not be able to travel to the Caribbean to meet Solamae's ship because of the rebellion that was now taking place in the kingdom. The people wanted their former king and queen to return to power. Solamae's parents felt that they had to help restore the palace monarchy. Their hiding place was being used as the communication center for the rebellion, but it was not yet safe for Solamae to return. There was an imminent threat of arrest, and there was a war going on.

Solamae had her answer; she could continue her new life as a sailor, for now. That was the good news. The bad news proved to be more unsettling than Solamae could bear. She buried herself in Mrs. Bigs arms, and cried and cried with worry for her parents. "They are in

the middle of a war!” Solamae cried out, “I *have* to get home to help them. Their lives may be in danger.”

Mrs. Big tried to console Solamae with the latest scuttlebutt, “Did you know that we are now on a scientific expedition?” Solamae looked up; she was dumbfounded, “What?” She dried her eyes and listened in amazement to what Mrs. Big had to say. “Professor Frumpstern and Professor Zieghead have commissioned our ship to take them on the last leg of their research expedition!” The entire Big family, in addition to Puppino and Squall, had all gathered around and tried to console Solamae. As for the others, cheers erupted after Mrs. Big delivered the news about the two professors.

Frumpy and Ziggy had earned everyone’s respect; they had been accepted as seasoned sailors because of their invaluable help during the storm and the near tragedy that followed. Everyone agreed that the two professors had actually made it fun to be stranded in the *Galapagos* Islands. The entire group all now felt empowered with the knowledge that they had gained from the professor’s lectures as well as from the new



things that they had learned about survival after the storm. It had been sort of dull, going from one port to the next, picking up and dropping off cargo. That is, until Frumpy and Ziggy had arrived. Now, life was interesting; every day brought the promise of some new knowledge and a better understanding of the places that they visited.

Once again, Solamae would have to rely upon her courage and her winning, sky's-the-limit spirit, just to make the best of things. She knew that her parents would protect themselves, just as they had always protected her, but even so, she felt the need to see them, to be sure that they were all right. She was hoping that the palace monarchy would be restored soon, but she was determined to keep trying to return to her former home at the palace come what may. In the meantime, her home would continue to be the mouse's house that she had discovered below decks with the Bigs, a place where she was loved and appreciated. She hoped that Squall would continue to be with them from now on. He had become a big brother to her and Puppy and to all the other little

Bigs. Squall had thus become an important part of the family.

Solamae and Puppy returned to the bowsprit, and they sailed away peacefully with the sun setting behind them. What they couldn't know at that moment was the route the ship would be taking after the stop in *Costa Rica*. Not even Captain Julian knew that; it was an important part of the agreement the two professors had made with the captain. They would inform him of the next stop in their journey only after the completion of each leg of the trip. Those were their terms; *that* little detail had not been negotiable.

Solamae tried to figure out what the two professors were up to. "Do you think they are on a secret mission, Puppy?" Solamae wondered. Puppino cocked her head and considered the alternatives. "Maybe they're spies!" Puppino offered. In any case, Solamae had been right. A new chapter in her life was about to begin. For now, Solamae was safe and secure with her companions, but she was still anxious about her parents and the fate of their kingdom and of her former home at the palace.



Solamae would have a great deal of time to plan her next moves as the warm water peacefully carried the ship towards *Costa Rica*. However, there was a big turn of events in store for Solamae and her friends; events that were likely to change all of their lives.

The Author

Linda Cardinal Schneider

Born in Miami, Florida and raised in Asbury Park, New Jersey, Ms. Schneider has lived in Miami since the early 1960s. Ms. Schneider moved to North Carolina in 1980, where she subsequently took up the study of horticulture. Until 2000, Ms. Schneider operated a large Christmas tree farm and ornamental plant nursery specializing in choice and rare flowering trees. Following that, Ms. Schneider returned to Miami where she currently resides.

Ms. Schneider retired in June 2007. She is presently pursuing a master's degree at Barry University. Among Ms. Schneider's accomplishments during her first year at Barry University was her essay, "The Path to Silence: The Uses of Meditation," which tied for first place in the Sigma Tau Delta International English Honor Society Writing Contest and which was published in *What Oft Was Thought*. Additionally, Ms. Schneider was named Website Editor for Barry University's Newspaper, *The Buccaneer*, where she also served as a staff writer. She is a member of the Sigma Tau Delta International English Honor Society, Phi Beta Delta, Delta Epsilon Iota, and Alpha Chi Honor Societies.

Acknowledgments

I would like to welcome Angela Altmanshofer and Jacqueline Goodman. Angela has done an outstanding job enhancing the website and making it more interactive and fun. Jacqueline's illustrations have brought the chapters to vivid life in Volume II of *The Little Mouse Solamae*. I extend my deepest gratitude to both of them; they worked tirelessly under a rigid deadline. Their enthusiasm for the project is greatly appreciated.

My heartfelt thanks to three great long-time friends: Anthony Hess, for his selfless hours of editing Solamae's narrative. Mr. Hess is an educator of longstanding service to his community. Ruddy Castillo, for his originality in bringing Solamae and her friends to life on the website as well as in the books. Mr. Castillo is a graphic artist of the highest order. Finally, William Alzate, for his perfectionism in creating the original, inspiring interactive website for The Little Mouse Solamae and her friends. Mr. Alzate is a supremely talented computer engineer.

Good friends are among life's greatest gifts. I have been richly blessed to have all of these friends in my life. Thanks to them, Solamae and her companions will continue their adventures for many years to come. I will be eternally grateful to each of them for selflessly sharing their great talents.



Linda Cardinal Schneider
Author

The Little Mouse Solamae

The Little Mouse Solamae is an optimistic story, written to celebrate the joys of childhood and to help children and families deal with the challenges of growing up. The protagonist is a displaced little mouse who, after an unexplained separation from her family, travels the world looking for them.

This second volume in the series takes the plucky little mouse from islands in the Caribbean to Central America. Solamae faces many challenges during her exciting adventures as well as during her thrilling misadventures with the new friends she encounters. She overcomes adversities with a winning sky's-the-limit spirit, all the while embracing the belief that she is capable of helping others out of their dilemmas as well. Her strong faith in herself is coupled with her faith in a higher power.

As the reader follows Solamae's larger-than-life dreams and discovers how she sweeps others up into believing in themselves as well, children are given the opportunity to pursue spiritual and personal growth. The story allows children to experience decision making and its consequences while educating them to contribute to the advancement of knowledge and values; it encourages the refinement of the human spirit in society.

The book is guaranteed to be a source of inspiration, entertainment, discovery and learning for children and young adults. The protagonist's wonderful, 'round-the-world adventures, her enduring spirit, and her strength of will to always do the right thing, combines innovation and social relevance, promoting childhood literacy and life-long reading without sacrificing youthful curiosity. This rich, colorful series will teach and inspire children of all ages, for many years to come.

Solamae's heart was filled with the anticipation of seeing her family again, but their reunion was about to be interrupted by an unexpected event. On their way to the Big's house they passed some sailors who were all huddled up and talking scuttlebutt. Puppy heard them whispering something about "bad signs" and she decided to tell Mr. Big what she overheard the sailors whispering: "Red sky at night, sailor's delight. Red sky in the morning, sailors take warning!" Just then, it occurred to Puppy that the sky had been a brilliant red that morning and her skin got covered in goose bumps all over. Suddenly, Solamae realized what that sign meant and it spelled trouble.

