WHEN LIFE GIVES YOU MANGOES

KEREEN GETTEN

PUSHKIN CHILDREN'S

Pushkin Press
71–75 Shelton Street
London WC2H 9JQ

Copyright © 2020 Kereen Getten

When Life Gives You Mangoes was first published
by Delacorte in the United States, 2020

First published by Pushkin Press in 2020

1 3 5 7 9 8 6 4 2

ISBN 13: 978-1-78269-264-5

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without prior permission in writing from Pushkin Press

Designed and typeset by Tetragon, London
Printed and bound by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon, CR0 4YY

www.pushkinpress.com

For Tristan,
and the kids who dream

Chapter One

There is a new girl arriving in Sycamore. Her hair is in two Afro buns with big white bows, and she is wearing cat's-eye sunglasses, like a celebrity. That's according to Gaynah. I haven't seen her yet, but Gaynah says she saw her get off the city bus by the roundabout with a woman that looked like her mother, and they are heading up the hill.

The entire village is buzzing. This is the most excitement we have ever had, and no one wants to miss seeing it for themselves. Within minutes all the kids are gathered at the edge of the road, waiting for the new girl. Everyone is speculating on why she is here and what might be wrong with her.

New people don't come to Sycamore. Not since the witch doctor episode. The last time someone new

came here, it was two tourists with video cameras. They were driving to the Bob Marley museum and got lost. But we suspect they were some of the diehard fans who were desperate to meet Eldorath, my uncle, the man who sees ghosts.

It's the story that brought shame and fear on the community. Pastor Brown was the most vocal. He said any man who claims to see ghosts is not a godly man, that my uncle was inviting evil to our community. So Eldorath was given a new name: the witch doctor.

Tourists thought differently. My uncle was a tourist attraction. They wanted to know if he could see their mother, their father, their best friend who had passed. Uncle Eldorath wasn't easy to find, though: his house was way up on the hill, and he rarely left it. Pastor Brown told us to never give anyone directions.

When they couldn't find him, they gave us sweets as a thank you for helping them get on the right road. Gaynah saw this as an insult and threw hers in the bush.

'Do they think I've never seen sweets?' she said in complete disgust. 'My brother sends me American sweets every month.'

The new girl would be the second stranger to ever venture up Sycamore Hill in the last year. And no

one can stop talking about it. If this is true and a girl really is coming here, then it could change our entire summer.

Nothing exciting ever happens here. Some of the adults pick fruits from the fields to sell, while some work out of town in the big hotels. A few, like Papa, go fishing early in the morning. If they catch anything, they sell it at the market in town. I used to go with him to catch an early surf. Now that I don't surf any more, there's not much to do except laze around by the river and play a few games. Most days, though, this is what we do. Sit around waiting for something to happen.

That's why a new girl has us all so excited. Where is she from? Why is she here? Is she real or is she an alien? Gaynah said she saw an alien once down by Ms Gee's guava tree. The alien had eight legs and three eyes and told her not to tell anyone because humans might hurt her. Of course, Gaynah being Gaynah, she told everyone she saw.

'Are you sure she's real, this girl?' I ask, pushing away the curly fringe I thought was a good idea this morning.

Gaynah's big brown eyes widen with shock that I could ever question her. She flicks her long,

straightened hair, which will have reverted to curly by the end of the day.

It's not that I don't believe there could be a new girl. It's just that Gaynah has a way of being in the middle of every drama on the hill. Usually the drama has already happened by the time she tells us, so we never actually get to witness it. The new girl could be real—chances are, she isn't—but it's summer and we have nothing else to do.

It would be nice to have someone new. Maybe this new girl will know some new games we can play, or have stories about where she came from. Maybe she will speak a different language or have a talent she can teach us. I get a little excited thinking of the possibilities.

It's midday, and the sun is at its hottest. It burns my skin as though someone is holding my arm over a fire. There is no shelter here like there is up at the house. On the roadside, the scorching heat has no pity on us.

I wipe sweat off my forehead and flick it on to the ground. Gaynah grimaces, as if the very sight of me disgusts her.

'She's not just any girl,' she retorts in her usual snooty voice. She adjusts her little crossover bag that

I feel Gaynah stiffen beside me. 'But you'll miss the new girl.' She pouts, because Gaynah thinks pouting gets her anything she wants.

Calvin doesn't answer her. Maybe he doesn't hear, or maybe he does but doesn't care to meet the new girl.

'I'll tell him about the new girl at the game tomorrow,' I say, feeling a little sorry for her. The game is 'pick leaf', and all the kids on the hill play it every summer.

Gaynah snorts. 'If you remember.'

'Really?' I say through clenched teeth.

Mama tells me I must think before I have an outburst. 'If you pause for five seconds, you will have a completely different reaction,' she says. So I count as Gaynah fidgets with her bag and smooths the blue dress she is wearing.

One.

Two.

Three.

'Well, it's true. Everyone knows you don't remember anything.'

That's not true. I remember some things. I remember when Gaynah is a good friend and when she is not. I remember what happened a few weeks ago, even last month. Even some things last year.

I remember that my name is Clara Dee-Henson, and I remember I am twelve years old. I know I live on a small island that tourists call exotic. I know I used to love surfing every morning while Papa went fishing, but I don't do that any more. Something happened that made me forget everything that happened last summer.

Sometimes the memories come back to me in drips, like a tap that won't turn off no matter how hard I try. Sometimes Mama fills in the blanks. She'll say, 'You spent the summer down at the river' or 'You went to the beach with Gaynah, do you remember?' She'll tell me small details, like what I was wearing, what time we left for the beach, how we had a nice snapper for dinner that Papa had caught on his fishing trip. Sometimes those memories stick so fast, I think they're mine, but they're not. They are hers.

Sometimes, like now, Gaynah uses my memory lapse to remind me that I'm not like everyone else. That I'm different. She frowns at me. 'You're not going to cry, are you?'

'No.'

Four.

Five.

She sighs, standing up. 'You're such a baby, Clara. You cry about everything.' She circles her finger beside her head.

I'm on my feet before I know it. 'I am not crazy!' I scream.

Everyone looks over at us, and the busy chatter stops.

I try to think of something smart to say, something that will put her in her place, but nothing comes to mind, so I push her out of the way. I don't wait to see if she fell over and dirtied her pretty blue dress. Instead, I run up the hill before anyone can see the tears brimming in my eyes.

'Don't you want to see the girl with the bows in her hair?' she calls after me in a sickly-sweet voice that is meant to upset me even more.

'I don't care if her hair is on fire!' I scream, marching up the hill. 'And your dress looks like it was made by an old lady.'

Mama was wrong. Counting doesn't work.