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Memoir Excerpt from *Ma Grand Mère*

Ki Moun Ki ni Pisa? Who has Pee?

Excerpt: CHAPTER 3

The farther we went from the village, the more interesting the walk became. Fresh-fallen, yellow almonds littered the path, lizards of all kinds scuttled freely; the larger ones trolled across my steps as if to make a turf statement. Birds of different colors and tones flew low, their chirps loud and bold. I should have known. Large, half-eaten guavas and occasionally pecked mangos explained the joy and freedom of spring-time animals.

The ladies walked at a hurried pace. My short strides prevented me from engaging in the wonder of the trail. But on occasions, I indulged and scooped what was left of a bird-eaten mango or guava. Always a delight.

“Ti moun, fais entansion. Be Ka-yah-full,” cautioned one of the old women.

That was Da D. I had stooped to rescue a stray guava. A tiny hole revealed the bright pink inside. I wiped it on my cotton shorts, bit off the bird-eaten portion, closed my eyes, and sank my teeth in the fruit. I felt lucky.

With my favorite bend approaching, I tingled with joy. Around that bend, the sea hugged the sky. Waves rumbled, wind rustled, and the tussle between them drowned all other noises. Conversations, chirps, voices, all silenced, and my excitement peaked.

We got closer and a harsh, rusty smell charged us. A combination of fish, shells, and seaweeds bathed in salt. The sea always oozed that odor. Yet, thoughts of hopscotching on its shores consumed my imagination. I always enjoyed those leaping moments. Another advantage of going out with old women.

We reached the shore three miles from the village. A charming sight. The orderly arrangement from the seashore to where plants grew amazed me. Pebbles the size of tennis balls lined the space where huge waves crashed and rolled back. Next, a row of boulders the size of soccer balls, and some large enough to serve as picnic tables. Then, a row of grass, seaside grapes, and finally, a row of coconut trees like soldiers on duty.

Granny and her entourage stayed clear of the water, no one trusted the crashing waves. My eyes lit up at the sight of smooth, white, stones with interesting shapes, scraps of coral, seashells, and coconut shells, things that would soon compete for space in my pockets.

I waited for the opportunity. First, the squad needed to secure a place sheltered by seaside grape trees to set their baskets that stored their roasted meals and changes of clothes.

They surveyed the shore for the best hunting spot for the crab, touloulou. Why waste time hunting such a small creature, I thought. My thoughts had no place among grown women’s plans. With Easter approaching, touloulou could not skip the menu.

Having secured their prized possessions, the women clambered up and between the smooth, giant stones. I leaped on top of them, carefully balancing my mere eighty pounds. This was far better than tailing the old women.

They collected dry coconuts, and wood that the sea had battered and left white, and I collected shells, small colored stones, and sticks with odd shapes. I drifted for a moment, wondering if Sally had that much fun.

By now each woman had her satisfied share of *whose-its and what's-its* and my pockets popped with *thing-a-ma-bobs*.

“Vinir pas ici! Vinir! Vinir, Over here! Come here! Here,” yelled Ma Ost, over the vibration of crashing sea waves, convinced that she had found a spot that met their agreed upon criteria for finding the most touloulou. She signaled the squad to a shaded spot, sheltered by both coconut and seaside grape trees.

The crab, known for its black and red back with one large and one small gundi, or claw, favored such protected spaces.

As usual, Ma Oz and granny follow the lead of Ma Ost. We started – well the squad started their touloulou search and I got excited.

I learned where to look. The crabs left a gentle indentation in the sand. An indication that one had just gone beneath the surface. My turn to prove to the ladies this ten-year-old knew more than how to play with leaves, stones, and shells. I used my index finger to follow the hole in the dark sand and instantly the witty crab latched onto my finger.

My squeal startled the women. The frightened crab fell off, but the blood followed.

Then came the voice of the advisor, Ma Ost, “Ki moun ki ni pisa? Who has pee?”

“Moin ni, I have,” replied Ma Oz, as if thinking through to make sure.

This declaration led to my banter with the know-it-all-women.

Ma Oz positioned her rear mid-air, high enough for me to follow her instructions. “Méh té la men ou. Put your hand,” she advised. She had directed me to place my hand where her falling pee could make contact. “Chen doit ou la. Chyle, keep your hand in place,” she chided.

Granny and her friends babbled instructions in rapid succession in their favorite language, and I cared less. Pain or no pain, this disgusting slush would not hit my finger. I did not know or care who said what. Instead, I kept pulling and pushing my bleeding finger. The accompanying stench emboldened me. I stood my ground by pulling my hand backwards whenever she released a gush.

Chapter 3: Ki Moun Ki ni Pisa? - Who has Pee?

“Ti moun, pisa moin ka fini,” Ma Oz said with frustration. With the announcement that her pee was running low, granny no longer tolerated my hesitancy. She placed her firm, large hands on my hand. I closed my eyes. She shoved my crab-bitten, bleeding finger where the last bit of Ma Oz’s disgusting ammoniac slush could hit my finger.

I squealed one more time. This time from a combination of disgust, fear, and contempt. I opened my eyes. Yep! The bleeding had stopped.

The wisdom of old heads once again prevailed.