

## WINKY AND THE SAPODILLA TREE

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The tree was so laden with sapodillas that the branches bowed down under the weight. The fruits were large and brown and tempting, and with little imagination you could see the rich syrup, just settling there under the skin. Some of the fruit were bat-bitten and the juice had turned to sugar, with the black currant-like seeds sticking out. It hurt the heart to watch the over-ripe sapodillas that had fallen under the tree.

But nothing could be done about that for the real trouble with the sapodilla tree was that it grew just outside Mr. Farfan's window. Mr. Farfan was no humble giver. In fact, he was the biggest 'no' man we ever knew.

However pleadingly you would ask for a sapodilla it was always no, no, no with Mr. Farfan. Then he would wonder why the young generation was growing up so lawless and greedy and he would say that in his day a child would never be asking for sapodillas.

When he was in a bad mood, and we were a little stubborn, he would pull out the big stick from behind the door and have us running, screaming down the road.

Winky and I decided not to ask Mr. Farfan for



any sapodillas any more. I said he could stay there and rot with his old sapodillas! Winky said so, too. So I was surprised when one day Winky came home panting, his hat full of ripe sapodillas.

“Where you get them?” I asked.

“Don’t know?” he grinned.

I was astonished.

“He give you?”

Then I realised how silly I had been. Mr. Farfan would sooner give his soul away than his sapodillas. There was only one explanation to it. Winky had got up early that morning and raided the sapodilla tree.

It was a long time before I could persuade Winky to take me on one of his early morning visits. I had to bribe him with all kinds of things and make all sorts of promises to him. Eventually he gave in for my brand new spinning top.

Still, he was very nervous about taking me along. I was not the sort of partner he liked to have when it came to these things. I was not cut out for Winky’s role. I was a little timid and seldom efficient. Not so Winky. He would raid anything at the shortest notice—and he would be so composed you would not think anybody objected.

“Orright,” he said, sizing up the top I offered him. “Orright, we’ll go. But for Christ sake take things easy. If you make Farfan ketch we, is sure jail.”

The morning was just right when we went. Not too dark, not too bright. Everything was as still as a cemetery.

Winky was to climb and pick the sapodillas and I was to remain under the tree catching and putting them in the bag. That was all. I felt a little disappointed that there was nothing heroic about it.

Winky sent down the first one and it slipped through my fingers and burst on the ground. I could hear him fuming in the branches above.

“What is one sapotee!” I cried, hurt.

“You’ll know,” he said softly but acidly. “Make them fall and wake up Farfan and you’ll know what is one sapotee!”

We got over that and things began to go smoothly. I was catching better and better, I was even catching some like an expert—with one hand. Whenever Winky saw me doing that he turned a sour eye on me.

But we were getting through fine and soon our bag was almost full of sapodillas. I told Winky so.

“Okay. Right. I’ll send down these last few quick. Ketch them good, eh,” he said.

And then all at once he seemed to stiffen and look pale. I was taken aback. I called up at him.

“What happen?”

He looked at me and then looking towards the house he seemed to wilt with fear. He looked at me again and trembling like a leaf his mouth formed the word:

*“Farfan.”*

Pell-mell I raced down the road.

The day had cleared when I decided to take a walk back. I was worried. I had been sitting at home all the time waiting for Winky. I was waiting to hear the whole epic. Of course, I knew he would not be caught, but I wanted to hear just how he got away.

Almost every day Winky added a new chapter of heroism to his life. It was not so much what he did but the way he told it to you. I always felt that Winky would grow up to write thrillers some day. He had such a way of telling things! Although you might have been there when it happened, it was always a new joy to hear Winky relate the event. I knew this would turn out to be a real masterpiece.

That is why I waited so anxiously for him to come.

But he was long in coming. The minutes turned to hours and the day dawned full and still he did not arrive. Then it came to me. It came to my head as clear as crystal. As soon as I had fled and Mr. Farfan had come outside, Winky had jumped down from the tree, had taken up the bag and dashed *up*—not down—the road.

The cheat! He had gone to the black-sage patch, where he usually hid things and was swallowing down as many sapodillas as he could swallow and hiding the rest!

So I got up, not worried anymore but angry. Angry and fuming. After all, what had happened was not my fault. *I* had not made Mr. Farfan open the door and come outside!

I walked up the road, anger burning inside me. I was going straight to demand my share. I was not going to let Winky take my share of the sapodillas just because he was bigger than me.

Mr. Farfan's door was open when I passed before the house. Timidly I glanced in. Then I held my head straight and walked past.

"Morning Ken," I heard after a few more steps.

I started. As I looked, there under the sapodilla tree was Mr. Farfan, his stick in his hand and the bag of sapodilla before him.

He was looking across at me and smiling.

"You's like a few sapodillas?" he dipped his hand in the bag. I was dumb-founded. My eyes travelled from him to the sapodilla tree, then up the sapodilla tree.

"You want a few sapotee?" he asked again, getting up.

But I had already taken off. I ran with everything I had in me and as I ran the tears streamed down my face. I did not know why I was crying. Perhaps it was because of the way Winky looked at me from up in the branches that my heart melted now.

I remembered Mr. Farfan's big stick. The thought of it made me weak. I had to stop running and walk the rest of the way home. I could not get Winky out of my mind. I knew it was going to take more than Superman's courage—coming down from that sapodilla tree.

I was sitting at home still crying, when I heard a voice outside. I got up in time to see Winky bounding into the yard.

“Get away!” I cried in welcome, wondering how he brought it off.

“None for you!” he said grinning.

It was then I noticed the basketful of sapodillas.

But at the moment I was not interested in sapodillas. I wanted to know how he had got away from Mr. Farfan.

“He didn’t ketch you?” I asked.

“Ketch me for what?” Winky said.

Then he burst out laughing.

“The man call you and you run,” said Winky.

I looked at him, puzzled.

He laughed and laughed and then, unable to keep it any longer, he told me the whole truth. I was stunned.

Until now, not even the slightest suspicion had dawned on my mind that Winky had been continually making a fool of me.

Lately, he and Mr. Farfan were the best of friends.