



ADVENTURE

Al Ramsawack

The cigals were shrieking in the poui tree. Basdeo crept silently between the other trees, his eyes searching for the noisy insects.

"Basdeo, what you doing, walking like a thief so for?" his mother shouted from a window in the barrack.

Basdeo turned around.

"Mama I only tryin to ketch a cigal for Rookmin," he said.

"Leave de poor cigal alone," she said. "The cigal calling rain."

She told him to get the axe and chop up wood for the fire, and when he was finished with that to fill the barrel with water before his father came in from the field.

The cigals were hushed by the talking and Basdeo hurried to the side of the barrack where Rookmin was hiding behind a cluster of dasheen bush. She followed him to the wood pile and looked on as he began to chop the wood.

Someone whistled him from the road and Basdeo put down the axe. Sonnyboy and Winston were standing there, bamboo rods across their shoulders.

"We going for fish in the pond," Sonnyboy whispered.

Basdeo looked around but his mother was inside. Quietly he put down the axe and ran off with the two boys down the gravel road, past the stable near the Samaan tree.

They cut through a narrow track in the cane and came out on the bank of the Malgretoute pond.

It was crop time and the cane on the far bank had been cut. Already young green shoots—ratoons they were called—were growing out into new tree. The sun was very hot.

A large bamboo patch near the water provided shade and the boys sat down here. Hooks were baited and the lines thrown into the water. But the fish did not bite and the boys were impatient.

They stuck their rods into the mud at the edge of the water and went off behind the bamboo patch for cane to suck. The canes here were tall, some as high as 15 feet. Winston pulled a stem to the ground and it broke off from the root with a loud "Crack!"

Immediately a voice shouted to them:

"Aye you rascals! Stop right there you little thieves! I'll catch you this time!"

The estate overseer, high on his horse, was coming towards them. They didn't wait. They could hear the horse's hoofs as they ran down a track and out into a grassy clearing where there were mango and coconut trees. Sonnyboy and Winston ran faster than Basdeo and were soon safely hidden in the cane.

Basdeo felt himself being dragged from behind by the overseer who pulled up on the horse.

"Why you all don't stop stealing the crop?" he said. "Only breaking the cane! Breaking the cane!!"

With Basdeo held firmly he galloped off to the estate house, past the weighing scale where animal carts and trucks with cane were lined up.

In a flash he saw the tall black lift take hold of the bundles of cane and place them on the train wagons for hauling to the sugar factory. He hoped his father was not there.

"Watchman!" shouted the overseer.

A man in brown khaki clothes and tall boots came out.

"Lock up this little thief in the store room for me," he ordered. "I will deal with him later."

The watchman pushed Basdeo inside an old building next to the stable. He slammed the door and locked it. It was very dark and Basdeo was very frightened. He saw a small light at the far end of the room and stumbled over saddles and donkey blankets towards the light which revealed a single window.

Moments later he jumped through to the ground outside and started to run.

“Come back here!” shouted the watchman. “Come back here, you devil you!”

But Basdeo ran behind the stable and down towards the train lines. A long train of loaded cane wagons had just started moving slowly along the lines towards the sugar factory at Ste. Madeleine. The black smoke of the engine was curling back towards the stable as Basdeo ran, closely followed by the watchman.

As the last wagon passed close to him Basdeo stretched forward, held the iron bars and pulled himself up the siding to the top of the wagon. Panting, he sat down on the cane and tried to catch his breath.

The train raced on and the watchman, shaking his fist, looked smaller and smaller in the increasing distance. The train increased speed and took him away, away from the angry watchman. He was safe, but he was also going in the opposite direction to home.

He saw two chimneys of the sugar factory, dark and puffing, and he knew he would have to jump off soon. He suddenly felt afraid.

“I should have stayed home and cut the firewood,” he said miserably. And what would his father say when there was no water to bathe?

Before the train came to a stop Basdeo climbed down the siding and hopped off. He was miles from home and began to run back as fast as he could.

It was dark by the time he reached home. He was tired and sweaty and afraid of the scolding he was bound to get. Softly he crept behind the barrack and listened. His mama was sitting on the steps with Rookmin in her lap. She looked worried. His father was rocking in the sugar bag hammock. He looked angry. Bravely Basdeo went towards them. Better get it over with quickly, he thought to himself.